

An Ironside Expository Commentary

ACTS

H. A. IRONSIDE

 **Kregel**
Academic & Professional

Acts: An Ironside Expository Commentary

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Scripture quotations marked RV are from the Revised Version of the Holy Bible (Church of England, 1885).

Scripture quotations marked WEYMOUTH are from *Weymouth's New Testament in Modern Speech* (1903).

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PREFACE

The volume now in the reader's hands consists, as in the case of many recent books of mine, of addresses delivered at the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. These were stenographically reported and edited for publication. Because of the fact that they were given to ever-changing public audiences, there are, of necessity, occasional repetitions, which, I trust, will be overlooked and will not weary the reader. Sometimes these may help to give emphasis to the truth set forth. I am firmly convinced that in these days of departure from the faith in so many different ways, we need to give greater attention than ever before to the divinely inspired record of the early days of the church and the beginning of its worldwide missionary program.

Praying that the blessing of God may rest upon the printed message in an even larger measure than when given orally, this book is sent forth with an earnest desire that it may prove helpful to many readers.

H. A. IRONSIDE

LECTURE 1

INTRODUCTION

Acts 1:1–11

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: and, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you [or it might be rendered—ye shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you]: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria,

and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. (vv. 1–11)

The book of Acts is the story of early day Christianity. This book gives us a great many principles that should guide us in Christian effort at the present time. One is reminded of the Lord's word to Moses when He commanded him to build the tabernacle: "Look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount" (Exod. 25:40). God has given us in the book of Acts a pattern of Christian testimony, missionary effort, world evangelism, and building of Christian churches—a pattern that we would do well to follow. Certainly we can be assured of this: the closer we come to ordering all things according to this holy pattern, the greater blessing will attend our efforts.

The title of this book as given in our English Bibles is, of course, not inspired. These titles have been added to the books by editors. Sometimes they seem to have been given with great exactness; in other cases we may question their propriety. Actually this book does not contain the acts of the apostles as a whole. The fact of the matter is, very few of the apostles are even mentioned in it, and so far as their acts are concerned, the book is largely limited to the ministry of two of them—Peter, who was one of the Twelve, and Paul, who was an apostle of a different order altogether and not one of the Twelve. He did not know our Lord on earth but received his commission directly from heaven. Actually the book might be called, as others have suggested, *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*, or, if you will, *The Acts of the Risen Christ Through the Holy Spirit Working in the Church Here on Earth*. In this book we have brought before us in a wonderful way the work of that promised Comforter who came to earth to witness to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and to convince men of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

It is always well, in beginning the study of any book, to have an outline of it in mind. The Acts divides readily into two main parts. In chapters 1–12 we have the activity of the apostle Peter; in chapters 13–28 the activity of the apostle Paul. The first division is readily subdivided. In chapters 1–7 we have the transitional period in which God was still largely occupied with His earthly people Israel before the Word began to go out to the Gentiles. When I use the

term *transitional period*, I always like to explain what I mean. There was no transitional period in the mind of God. At the moment the work of Christ was accomplished, salvation was ready to be offered to all men everywhere, and we shall see in this portion that before He ascended into heaven our Lord bade His disciples go to the uttermost part of the earth with the gospel. But God is very gracious. He takes into account how slowly we apprehend things, and so He bore patiently with His disciples and the early Christians for years while they confined their ministry exclusively to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The second subdivision includes chapters 9, 10, and 11, in which we have the ministry going out to the Gentiles. In chapter 9 we have the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and his commission as the Apostle to the Gentiles. In chapters 10 and 11 we have the apostle Peter going to the house of Cornelius and thus bringing the gospel to the first Gentile family.

Now let us look at these opening verses. Notice the way Luke introduces the book: “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach” (v. 1). This tells us at once that the book of the Acts is, if we may so say, volume two. This author has written an earlier volume, and the story begun in that volume is continued in this one. What is that earlier volume? We have no difficulty in determining that, for we have another book in the Bible which is also addressed to this man Theophilus. If you will turn back to chapter 1 of the gospel of Luke, you will read this in the four opening verses: “Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.” This shows us that the gospel of Luke is “the former treatise” to which our author refers as he opens the book of Acts. In the gospel of Luke we have the things that Jesus began to do and teach, and in the Acts we read of the work He continued to do, after His ascension to heaven, through the work of the Holy Spirit here on earth.

Who was this man Theophilus? We might wish we had fuller information regarding him. We merely have his name. It is mentioned twice, but in such a way as to give us some suggestions at least regarding his station in life. He is called in the introduction to Luke, “most excellent Theophilus.” The words translated “most excellent” were used only in addressing a Roman official, generally one set over a country. This man Theophilus was evidently an official of the Roman empire, probably a governor of a province, who had an interest in the story of our

Lord Jesus Christ. So Luke addressed his gospel to him and gave him his full title, “most excellent Theophilus.” When he writes his book of Acts he addresses the same person, but you will notice he omits the “most excellent.” He simply says, “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus.” That may be more significant than we think. I like to think it means that this Roman official, as a result of reading the gospel of Luke, had come to such definite knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ that he had openly proclaimed himself a Christian; and perhaps because of that he had either resigned or was dismissed from his office and so was no longer addressed as “most excellent” but simply as a brother in Christ. His name itself is significant. “Theophilus” means *a lover of God*.

Notice the order of the verbs here. “Of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.” *Doing* should always come before *teaching*. If there is anything that we as servants of Christ need to keep in mind, it is this: there will be no more power in our messages than there is power in our lives. It is as we live for God that we are fitted to speak for God. We are called upon to do before we teach. We have that in the Old Testament. We read of Ezra, “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (7:10).

Do you know why there is so much powerless preaching today? Because there is so little walking in obedience to the Word of God. If you and I would be witnesses for Christ, we must be careful to see to it that we do before we teach; in other words, that we obey the Word of God ourselves before trying to instruct others. If the Word of God has no power over our own lives, we cannot expect to have power over other lives. If we are selfish, proud, haughty, egotistical, carnal, worldly, or unfaithful to the truth we know, we cannot expect others to be blessed by the message we proclaim. A holy minister is a tremendous weapon in the hand of God. An unholy minister is a disgrace to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our blessed Savior has set us the perfect example. He came to do and then to teach. Is it not a striking thing, for thirty years His ministry consisted largely in doing! He lived before the Father for thirty years and during all those years there was not a flaw in His life. Then at the appointed time He went forth to teach, and now that He has ascended on high, He is still doing and still teaching through the power of the Holy Spirit in men of God sent forth to carry His message to a lost world.

Luke speaks in verse 2 of the period between the Lord’s resurrection and His ascension, during which He instructed His disciples. Luke says, “Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen.” That expression, “he

was taken up,” occurs four times in this chapter. Look at verse 9, “He was taken up”; verse 11, “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven”; and then in verse 22, “Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.” Do you believe that? The Holy Spirit has mentioned it four times here. What does it imply? Our Lord Jesus came forth from the grave, the resurrected Man with the same body that was crucified on Calvary. The body that was laid in Joseph’s new tomb was raised from the dead in resurrection power. In that body He appeared to His disciples, and during the period of forty days gave them necessary instructions as to His program of what they were to do in the months and years to follow. Then when the forty days were ended, He was taken up in His physical body, and He sits in heaven today on the right hand of the Majesty on high in the very body that once hung on Calvary’s cross.

That is the teaching of the Word of God. This is the Christ—not some spirit-being altogether different from us but a real Man in the glory at God’s right hand. “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5–6). And, oh, the blessedness of knowing that that Man is concerned about us, that His tender, loving heart is exercised about the trials that His people are going through. “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15); and “he is able to succour them that are tempted” (2:18).

He, our blessed, adorable Lord Jesus, was taken up, but before He was taken up He gave commandments unto the apostles He had chosen. He put before them His program and told them what He wanted them to do when He should go back to heaven. There is nothing haphazard about what their Master expected. “To whom also he shewed himself alive after his [resurrection] by many infallible proofs” (v. 3a). When Luke wrote this many of the people who knew the Lord Jesus on earth were still living. They could back up his testimony and say, “Yes, we saw Him and handled Him. We know He was in the same body and was the same blessed Savior who died for us on Calvary.”

“Being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (v. 3b). He was the rejected King. His own people said, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14).

When Pilate said, “Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). But God owns His kingly title and He has taken Him up to glory and He is seated there on His Father’s throne, waiting until “his enemies be made his footstool” (Heb. 10:13). God calls upon

a world of rebellious sinners to own His authority and thus recognize even now the claims of the kingdom of God. That kingdom will not be set up in full display until Christ returns to earth, but at the present, during His absence, all who believe on Him have been brought out from the authority of Satan into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. Wherever the message of His love goes and men recognize Him as Lord and King, we have the expression of the kingdom of God in its present mystical sense. It is called in Matthew's gospel the kingdom of heaven. When the Lord comes back, He "shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend" (Matt. 13:41). Though rejected by the world, He is the absent King and the one we gladly own as our Savior and our Lord.

But now as they went forth to witness, it was not to be in their own power. We are told in verse 4, "Being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me." The promise of the Father was the promise that the Holy Spirit should come to earth to endue redeemed men and women with divine power that they might go forth and proclaim the gospel. Our Lord Jesus Christ had told His disciples of the coming of the Comforter. He had told them not to hurry, not to run before they were sent, but to abide in Jerusalem until that Blessed One, who is the third person of the Godhead, should come to earth. He was to fill them, baptize them, and then thrust them forth to carry the gospel to all men everywhere.

There is no other way of explaining the marvelous results of the apostles' preaching than this—they were endued with the power of the Holy Spirit of God. Just as there was a definite time when God the Son came to dwell on earth for a limited period and Jesus was born in Bethlehem, so there was a time when God the Holy Spirit came to earth not exactly to become incarnate but to indwell believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and to empower and preserve them. Christ was born in Bethlehem exactly in accordance with Old Testament prophecy; the Holy Spirit came to earth on the day of Pentecost exactly as foretold in type in Leviticus 23 and in accordance with the promise of the Lord Jesus.

He said, "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (v. 5). Those to whom our Lord spoke had already been baptized with John's baptism, but they needed this baptism of the Holy Spirit to fit them for their service and, as we shall see later, to unite into one body those who had been hitherto separate units though all children of God. But this was part of the special revelation given to the apostle Paul.

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt

thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (v. 6). He had spoken of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Of course, they as Jews knew from the Old Testament prophets that the day would come when their people would be restored to their land and, as a regenerated nation, be the means of blessing to the whole earth. “Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” (Isa. 27:6). They were looking for the coming of the kingdom and the restoration of Israel, and so they put the question to the Lord—a most sensible question to them, though we may not think so. We do not have the background they had. “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Did the Lord say, “No, you have lost your chance. These Old Testament prophecies are canceled and never will be fulfilled”? Did He say that? No, indeed.

He simply said, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (v. 7). I wish we could always remember that. The kingdom of God has not yet come, but someday it will be set up on this earth, and men are still trying to figure out the exact time when that will take place. Men persist in endeavoring to ferret out that which is the Father’s own secret, and so they attempt by various ways to find out when the King will come. But to all such our Lord says: “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” Someday He will make everything plain. When God’s time comes, prophecy will be fulfilled to the letter. Jesus Himself said, “Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matt. 24:36).

But while it was not for them to know the time when the kingdom will be set up, there was something they might know: “Ye shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem [now notice the order—Jerusalem, the very city where Christ was crucified, in the eyes of God the most wicked city on earth; there the grace of God was to be first manifested], and in all Judaea [the province of which Jerusalem was the capital], and in Samaria [the next province, where there lived a mixed people whose religion was a mingling of Judaism and idolatry], and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (v. 8, author’s translation). That is the divine program laid down at the very beginning. How slow the church has been in carrying it out!

“When he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel [two glorious beings from heaven itself]; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus” (vv. 9–11a). (Oh, I love those three

words—“this same Jesus.” Don’t you? No change in Him—nineteen hundred years in the glory haven’t changed Him in the least.) “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (v. 11b).

LECTURE 2

THE WAITING PERIOD

Acts 1:12–26

Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of

blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (vv. 12–26)

As we closed the previous address, we stood in spirit with the disciples on the Mount of Olives looking after Jesus as He went up, His great commission still ringing in our ears, His words to the apostles still before us. “Ye shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (1:8, author’s translation). There was the divine program for the evangelization of the world. There was no cutting it up into separate little dispensations, as some imagine, but the Lord laid out the whole program from the beginning. They were to start at Jerusalem, in God’s eyes the guiltiest city on earth, where in spite of Christ’s testimony and the fact that they were witnesses to His mighty work, even the raising of Lazarus from the dead, they cried in Pilate’s judgment hall, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him” (John 19:15). The Lord Jesus bade them begin at Jerusalem and tell them of God’s grace, even for the guiltiest and the worst. Then when they had told the gospel story there, they were to go to the surrounding country of Judea and then move on to Samaria (to that mixed people who were hated by the Jews and hated the Jews in return). They were to tell them that the Lord Jesus was the Savior for them, that He had died, risen, and was waiting to forgive all who would put their trust in Him. Then nothing was to hold the messengers back, but they were to go on to the uttermost part of the earth. That was the commission. They were slow in carrying out this commandment of the Lord. But as the years have gone on, Christian hearts have taken courage, and the work of world evangelization has progressed in the order given.

We saw Him ascending to glory. Four times in this chapter we noticed the

expression, “He was taken up.” Let us never forget that. He, this very same Jesus, was taken up—and in the same body that was once crucified but raised from the dead and is now glorified—and sits exalted at the Father’s right hand, the Man in the glory. We heard the voice of those two wondrous beings who appeared and said, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (v. 11).

And so the heavens were closed and there was committed to the church the commandment to carry the message of the Evangel into all the world. First Jesus had said, “Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). The new dispensation was to be ushered in by the coming of the Holy Spirit, ten days later.

We are now considering those intervening ten days, and we notice how the disciples occupied them. First, in verses 12–14 we find them given to prayer and supplication. We read that they returned to Jerusalem “a sabbath day’s journey” (v. 12). That is, a short distance over the brook Kedron.

“And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room” (v. 13a). Possibly this was the same upper room in which they had observed the Passover, though we cannot be absolutely certain. There the eleven disciples had their abiding place. “Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James [distinguishing him from Iscariot, the traitor]” (v. 13b). We are told they continued in prayer and supplication, and they were not alone: “with the women [the godly women], and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (v. 14).

Here are several things of interest. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was there, but you will notice they were not praying to Mary nor were they burning candles to her. They were not addressing themselves to her, nor asking her for any blessing. But Mary, the mother of Jesus, was kneeling with the Eleven and the women, and all together they prayed to the Father. The church of God wandered far from that in the centuries that followed when it exalted Mary almost to the place of a female divinity. Over the portals of a church in South America there is an inscription in Spanish that translated into English reads, “Come unto Mary, all ye burdened and distressed with your sins, and she will give you relief.” Our blessed Lord used those words of Himself when He said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). They have put the mother in the place of her Incarnate Son.

It is an interesting fact that this is the last time in the Bible we read of Mary,

the mother of Jesus. From this time on she passes out of sight, she takes her place with the rest of God's people who were waiting for Pentecost and for the evangelization of the world to begin. She passes quietly off the scene in her womanly place, probably to find a home with the apostle John in accordance with the words of the Lord Jesus, for you will remember the Lord committed her to him. He said, "Woman, behold thy son!" (John 19:26), and to John, "Behold thy mother!" (v. 27).

Then, notice the brethren of Jesus were in this prayer meeting, and you will remember when He was here on earth "neither did his brethren believe in him" (John 7:5). The members of His own household, brought up side by side with Him, did not believe. They could not believe their brother Jesus could be the Anointed of Jehovah and the One of whom the psalmist had sung and the prophets had prophesied. But now that Christ was risen from the dead, His brethren believed in Him, and a little later on we see His brother James as one of the most prominent disciples in the city of Jerusalem.

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication. What a beautiful picture! This was the preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit. But do not misunderstand. The coming of the Spirit did not depend on their prayer. It had been predicted of old that He must come on the Day of Pentecost. But that being a settled thing in the mind of God, He moved on the hearts of His people that they might be in a prayerful attitude. They were to be endued with power and, you see, when God is going to do some great thing He moves the hearts of people to pray. He stirs them up to pray in view of that which He is about to do so that they might be prepared for it. The disciples needed the self-examination that comes through prayer and supplication, that they might be ready for the tremendous event which was about to take place, the coming to earth of God the Holy Spirit to dwell in believers and empower them to witness for Him.

In verses 15–26 we have the last official act of the old dispensation. The apostles were mourning the loss of one of their number. There were now only eleven and God had chosen twelve. Twelve in Scripture is the number of perfect administration, and Jesus had said, "Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). But there was one lacking. Would there be an empty throne then? Would there be one less? No. God had provided for that. I know some people think the apostles made a mistake in electing a successor to Judas and that God meant the apostle Paul to be the twelfth. But Paul is never linked with the Twelve. In fact, there are twelve apart from him.

The Twelve are to have a special place in the coming kingdom in connection with administering the affairs of Israel. Seated upon twelve thrones they shall judge the twelve tribes. Paul had a unique ministry and will have a special place in the coming kingdom. How then were they to fill the vacancy? Peter evidently acted as the Lord instructed before His ascension. He had told them many things pertaining to the kingdom of God. He explained to them what He wanted them to do, so they were not left to guess at the mind of the Lord. Peter acted in full accord with the instruction received when he stood before the disciples, about 120 of them, and said, “Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry” (vv. 16–17).

What a pitiful thing that was! Here was Judas who for three-and-a-half years had belonged to that apostolic company. He walked with Jesus, heard the teaching of Jesus, saw the same marvelous miracles, yet all the time this man was out of harmony with the rest. Jesus, who knew the hearts of men, said as He looked upon them, “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (John 6:70). He did not say, “One of you is in danger of becoming a devil.” He knew one of them did not believe, had all the time treasured traitorous thoughts, was corrupt and utterly untrustworthy, yet he had walked with the rest of them, was numbered with them, and obtained part of their ministry. How that ought to speak to us!

It is not enough to take the Christian name, become members of Christian churches, submit to the ordinance of baptism, participate with believers in the Lord’s Supper, or give of our money to further the affairs of Christ—we need to be sure we have definitely opened our hearts to the Lord Jesus, that we have received Him as our own personal Savior. Judas failed here. I believe Judas thought of Christ as the promised Messiah. I believe Judas thought Jesus would declare Himself King and manifest Himself in the overthrowing of the Roman government. It is one thing to think of Him as Messiah; another to trust Him as one’s own Savior and receive Him as one’s own Lord. Judas failed there.

Let us be warned therefore and make sure ours is not just an intellectual recognition that Jesus is God’s Son, the rightful King and Savior of sinners, but that He is our Savior and our Lord. “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart [truly believe] that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom. 10:9). But He says, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?”

(Matt. 7:22). Jesus will say to them, “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (v. 23). Of His own He says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish” (John 10:27–28). Notice that He says of His own sheep, “I know them.” He says of those who are lost, “I never knew you.” He will never say to any in that day, “I used to know you,” but “I never knew you,” for they will be manifested then as never having been born of God.

Then in the eighteenth verse we have the sad end of Judas, so far as this life is concerned. “Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.” In the Gospels we are told Judas was overtaken with remorse. Matthew says, “Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself” (Matt. 27:3). Ordinarily, the word for repentance implies a true change of mind, but the word used here simply means Judas was filled with remorse. When he realized what he had done, he was stricken with horror and brought the money to the chief priests and elders and threw it down, crying, “I have betrayed the innocent [One]” (v. 4a). And they, cold, calculating, religiously hardened, answered with indifference: “What is that to us? see thou to that” (v. 4b). Judas fled from them, and we are told he hanged himself. They were so religious and punctilious they said, “It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood” (v. 6), but thereupon used it to purchase a plot of ground in which to bury strangers, those who did not have relatives to claim them.

Some think we have a contradiction here. The gospel says Judas went out and hanged himself (Matt. 27:5). The book of Acts says, “Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out” (v. 18). There is no contradiction. Peter is simply giving us further information. I think even as I read the words I can see the horrid picture. Judas, driven distracted by the awful sense of his guilt, filled with remorse for what he had done, rushes out. He sees a tree perhaps on the edge of a cliff, nooses himself to it, and leaps into space. His body is torn asunder and the horribly sickening spectacle lies there for all to see, the end, so far as earth is concerned, of the man who sold the Savior for thirty pieces of silver!

I know people who are selling Him for less than that! I know people who are selling their hope of heaven for a little worldly pleasure. I know some who are selling the Lord for the satisfaction of fleshly lusts and carnal indulgences! Judas sold Christ for money. What are you selling Him for, unsaved friend? At whatever price, it is a bad bargain. You are bound to lose out in the end. Judas lost out in

this life. “What about the life to come?” you ask. Can we follow him out into eternity? Yes, with the aid of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ we can follow Judas beyond the tree where he hung, where his body burst asunder. Jesus said, “It had been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matt. 26:24). What does that mean? It means unending judgment to the utmost limits of eternity. If a time ever came when Judas repented, terrible though his crime, then it would have been a mercy that he had been born. But Jesus said, “It had been good for that man if he had not been born.” For him there was only an absolutely hopeless eternity, as there is for all who reject the Lord Jesus Christ. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). The wrath of God abideth . . . abideth . . . abideth on him!

Now Peter, divinely guided, remembers two passages of Scripture, and, as you will notice, he quotes from the Septuagint version Psalm 69:25, referring to the betrayal of Christ, “Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein” (v. 20). Peter says that is fulfilled. And in Psalm 109:8 is another passage, “Let another take his office” or, as translated here, “his bishoprick” (v. 20).

So Judas, lost, forfeited everything. Now somebody else must take his place among the Twelve. “Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John [that is when the little company began, when they found each other], unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection” (vv. 21–22). In other words, the number of the Twelve must be complete, so they set forth two—Joseph and Matthias—“And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (vv. 24–25). The place of the utterly lost and ruined! So they gave forth their lots and the lot fell upon Matthias. He was numbered with the eleven apostles, thus making the Twelve. Does somebody object to the manner of his election? It was the Old Testament method. In the book of Proverbs we read, “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Prov. 16:33). This was the last of the Old Testament economy; the new economy began on Pentecost. And so we read in chapter 2, verse 14, “Peter, standing up with the eleven.” That includes Matthias to make twelve. And in Acts 6:2 we read “the twelve called the multitude”—so God Himself applies the term *Twelve* to the Eleven and Matthias. The Twelve who are to sit by and by on the twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

LECTURE 3

THE MEANING OF PENTECOST

Acts 2:1–21

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost [Spirit], and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (vv. 1–21)

We are to consider now the next great event following the marvelous things recorded for us in the Gospels. First, there was the incarnation of our Lord Jesus. God became Man for our redemption—the coming to this earth of God the Son to unite man with Deity. Then Calvary, the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ, when He gave Himself a ransom for all, to put away our sins. Next, the physical resurrection of the Savior. Now we have Pentecost, the coming of another person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, to dwell in the church on the earth and to empower believers to carry the message of grace everywhere.

Notice the opening words, “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (v. 1). At that time the believers in Jerusalem numbered about 120 and they could all be together, and—more important—they were all of one accord. But do not make a mistake. Pentecost did not come because they were of single unity and in one place. They were there expecting Pentecost, in obedience to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Pentecost was a predetermined epoch in the mind of God and the Word of God. It had been settled from all past ages just when the Holy Spirit was to descend and take up His abode with the people of God on earth. The Lord Jesus had said that the Father would send the Comforter and “He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (John 16:15). He also said, “Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

The Holy Spirit was to introduce a new dispensation and God had definitely settled the time when that dispensation would begin—the day of Pentecost. If you turn back to Leviticus 23 you learn there of Israel’s ecclesiastical or sacred year with the great festivals that belonged to it, among them the Passover in the spring (on the fourteenth day of the month Nisan), answering to the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now when Passover came He died—that is, the appointed Passover. He observed Passover on the evening before His death. The Jewish day began with the evening of one day, as we would count, and went on to the evening of the following day. So on the first evening Jesus ate Passover with His disciples and before the next evening He died, the spotless Lamb on Calvary. “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:7–8).

Then if you follow on in Leviticus 23 you will see that on the morrow after the Sabbath they were to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits. Now we are told Christ has been raised from the dead and “become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20). So just as Passover typified the death of Christ, the firstfruits typified His glorious resurrection, the firstborn from the dead.

Again referring to Leviticus 23, we read in verses 15–16, “Ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering [that is, the firstfruits]; seven sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.” Now, fifty days had to elapse from the offering of the firstfruits until the feast of Pentecost. Pentecost really means the fiftieth day, so God had ordained that this feast should be observed in Israel as the type of the beginning of a new dispensation when a new meat offering would be offered to the Lord: “Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves . . . baken with leaven” (v. 17). These could not typify our Lord because they had leaven in them, and leaven is a type of sin and He was the sinless One. But they do typify those who through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ are presented to God a new creation, Jew and Gentile, sinners in themselves, but their sins judged in the light of the cross of Christ. Therefore, Pentecost was the beginning of a new age, that of the church, the body of Christ.

When the day of Pentecost came, the apostles, in response to the command of the Lord Jesus, were with one accord in one place. Just where was that one place? It is not as easy to decide as one might think. A good many take it for granted it was in the upper room where the 120 gathered for prayer, but when we turn back to Luke (which is the first part, if I may remind you, of which Acts

is the second part) we read, “And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God” (Luke 24:52–53). They abode in an upper room, but day after day they went to the temple, and in the temple courts, where there was a great deal of liberty, they gathered together to praise and bless the Lord. Different groups met among themselves. There a group of Sadducees with their teacher, and here a group of Pharisees with their instructor. The disciples came there to praise and bless God. It may very well have been there that the Holy Spirit came. That may also account for others assembling there and hearing all that was going on. On the other hand, the upper room may have been in a public place, and the sound as of a rushing mighty wind may have commanded the attention of the people and caused them to flock to that upper room. Personally, I feel the likelihood that it was in the courts of the temple that they were gathered when the Holy Spirit came.

“They were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind” (vv. 1b–2a). The Lord Jesus had used wind as a type of the Holy Spirit in speaking of the new birth: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). So to these believers came the sound as of a rushing mighty wind. The Holy Spirit could not be seen, but His presence could be felt and heard. “And it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them” (vv. 2b–3). The people looked on in amazement. What looked like fire, however, was not fire; it was the visible manifestation of the descent of the Holy Spirit. Just as when the Lord Jesus Christ came up from His baptism in the Jordan and the Holy Spirit was seen descending like a dove and lighting upon Him, so now tongues like as of fire were seen resting upon the heads of the disciples. Doubtless these tongues had special meaning. The hour had come when God was to lift from men the curse of Babel. At Babel God so confounded and divided the one language that men found themselves speaking in many languages. Now the Holy Spirit had come with power to enable His messengers to witness in many tongues to the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“And they were all filled with the Holy [Spirit], and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (v. 4). Immediately they were all filled. The Holy Spirit came on Pentecost for two purposes. He came to usher in the new dispensation, to baptize into one body all believers. Were they not the children of God? Yes, but they were just so many units. But now when the Spirit of God came they were all baptized into one Spirit, one body. More than that,

they were empowered for testimony. The Spirit had come to take of the things of Christ and reveal to believers the things of God and to unctonize them as they went forth to proclaim the gospel to others. This is for all nations. There is not a hint here that this is to be confined just to Israel. God gave these Jewish disciples power to present the Word in the languages of all the people who had come to Jerusalem to keep the feast of the Lord.

We read, “There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language” (Acts 2:5–6). The question has been raised whether the miracle was in the disciples’ speaking different languages or in the ears of the hearers, so that the apostles all spoke in their native Galilean tongue but the people heard in their own languages. Verse 4 makes this very plain. “[They] began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” These Galileans who may never have learned any other language than their own now suddenly found themselves so laid hold of by the Holy Spirit that their tongues were loosed and they began to speak and preach intelligently in the languages of the people gathered there to listen. These people, amazed, murmured to one another, saying, “Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?” (vv. 7–8). Then you have a long list of the different people represented there. Most of them were Jews, many were proselytes, and there were others not listed among either. The last to be mentioned are Cretes and Arabians. These were probably Gentiles, and, yet, as they listened they said, “We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God” (v. 11). No wonder they marveled.

But still others there listening to the apostles couldn’t understand; they heard what seemed gibberish to them. They said, “These men are full of new wine; they are drunk, uttering nonsensical sounds that mean nothing.” This situation was illustrated very clearly to me some years ago in San Francisco when a group of us were in the habit of going down to the worst part of the city every Saturday night where hundreds of sailors from the ships in the harbor would pass. We held a street meeting from eight o’clock until midnight, speaking to all classes of men. One speaker, now a missionary in Argentine Republic, was a Spaniard by birth yet spoke fluently French, Italian, Portuguese, and other languages. When he would see a group of French seamen passing (the name of their ship upon their caps), he would suddenly call out to them in their own language and speak to them for perhaps twenty minutes. Then, as he sighted a group of Portuguese sailors (easily distinguished by their uniforms), he would swing over

and talk to them in Portuguese, and they would gather in close. Later he might speak to a group of Spaniards or Mexicans and then perhaps to some Italians. There was rarely a Saturday night when he did not speak in all of these different languages. More than once I have seen persons come up and say, “What is the use of listening? He is drunk. You can’t understand a word he says!” They did not know the language, and that is the way it was on Pentecost. Peter and his companions were not acting strangely—that wasn’t the point. But as they spoke in different languages, those who couldn’t comprehend came at once to the conclusion that they were drunk.

“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day [that is, just nine o’clock in the morning, and ordinarily folks did not get drunk so early]” (vv. 14–15). But this which is taking place today, this power, this manifestation, this Spirit that is working, “this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (v. 16). He quotes most accurately from the Old Testament prophecy, which you will see, if you will turn over to the book of Joel and read carefully, refers to the beginning of the millennium. It has reference to the time when God will pour out His judgment on the nations and when the Lord Jesus will come the second time and establish His kingdom here on earth and the Holy Spirit is to be poured out on all flesh. But Peter quotes that part referring to setting up the kingdom in power and glory, and he says to those finding fault and objecting, “This is the same thing that will take place then. *This is that* which was spoken of by the prophet Joel.”

There is a great deal in the prophecy which yet remains to be fulfilled, but Peter is saying that that same Spirit who was working on Pentecost that day is the Spirit who by and by will be poured out upon all flesh. Joel says, “It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh” (2:28a). Notice the universality of this. This is something for the whole world in that glorious millennial day, and today this coming of the Holy Spirit, this Pentecostal blessing, is for the whole world. I wonder sometimes at those who tell us that God endued only Israel with such power. He was contemplating the untold millions of Gentiles—those already born and those to be born down through the centuries—when the Spirit of God had come with the message for all of them. “I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (v. 28). The coming of the Spirit of God takes hold of a man or woman and gives them an illumination they would not ordinarily have. He opens up

to them the Old Testament and reveals the things to come and gives them an understanding of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ and its effects upon human sin and human needs.

“And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (v. 18). To prophesy is to proclaim the truth of God, but you will see how the prophecy from Joel has not all been fulfilled. “Blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.” Joel’s prophecy carries us on to the coming of the Lord, when He will establish His kingdom and put down all iniquity. But the same Spirit who will work then is the One who came on Pentecost and has been working in power the last 1,900 years, and it is He who enables servants of God to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, for we read, “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered.” Do not try to limit that “whosoever.” It is the same “whosoever” that is in John 3:16. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here the message is stated in a different way but the meaning is the same.

“Whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered.” And so the Spirit of God has come, the Comforter is here and the saints of God have received the Spirit and have thus been baptized into one body and in the power of the Spirit are called upon to go forth and proclaim the gospel message to the ends of the earth. Have you called on the name of the Lord? Have you trusted Christ as your own Savior? Then doubt not, but accept the words of the Holy Ghost Himself, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered.”