

THE THREE “PENTECOSTS” AND THE MISSIONARY MOMENTUM OF THE  
CHURCH IN ACTS

A TEACHING OUTLINE

by

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### SESSION ONE: INTRODUCTION AND THE JERUSALEM PENTECOST

#### INTRODUCTION (Acts 1:1-11):

1. In this age of globalization, where world economies are interdependent and we are more aware than ever of events in the rest of the world, many Christians still see their faith as a private and largely local affair.
  - a. While Christians enjoy the benefits of personal salvation, they see those blessings as relevant only to their “private” lives—in their families and in their local communities.
  - b. The church today needs to recapture its sense as a global movement, rather than as a local institution.
  - c. Though God continues to do new things in the church, it is in its earliest history, the book of Acts, that we find the enduring patterns that guide today’s church in rediscovering its global mission.
2. The book of Acts continues the story of Jesus that was begun in the gospel of Luke.
  - a. Like Luke’s gospel, the book of Acts is addressed to “Theophilus.”
    - i. The title “most excellent” (Luke 1:3) indicates that Theophilus was someone of important social standing.
    - ii. Theophilus may have been someone who supported Luke in his missionary endeavors, or in the writing and the publication of his two volumes. He may himself have been a young Christian who needed more instruction about Jesus and the early foundations of the church.
    - iii. Some believe that Theophilus was not yet a Christian, but rather a member of Rome’s intelligent middle-class whom Luke was attempting to win over to, or at least make more favorable toward, Christianity (Bruce, cf. Schnabel).
  - b. Since Luke’s Gospel was about “all that Jesus began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1), the book of Acts describes what Jesus continued to do and to teach through the church that represents him on earth.
    - i. Both in the Gospel and in Acts, Luke shows how the resurrected Christ illuminated the minds of the disciples to understand the full significance of his ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation (Luke 24:27, 45-47; Acts 1:3).

- ii. Luke emphasizes the continuity between the ministry of Jesus and that of the church (Marshall). The “kingdom of God,” which was the focus of Jesus’ ministry, continued to be proclaimed and demonstrated through the church.
- 3. The book that we call “The Acts of the Apostles” might be more appropriately named “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.”
  - a. Almost every chapter in Acts mentions the work of the Holy Spirit – some 56 references (Fitzmeyer).
  - b. Jesus’ instructions before his ascension, like his entire ministry, were given “through the Holy Spirit” (1:2). Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit, and at the same time is the one who baptizes with (1:5) and pours out (2:33) the Holy Spirit. This interdependence demonstrates the mutuality of the work of the Trinity.
  - c. Here, before his ascension, Jesus tells his disciples to anticipate a “baptism with the Holy Spirit.”
    - i. The Holy Spirit is the “power from on high,” the gift promised by the Father, (1:4-5; Luke 24:49).
    - ii. The imagery of a “baptism” powerfully illustrates the Spirit’s all-encompassing role in the disciples’ ministry. “The Spirit is behind all that the witnesses will do or proclaim.” He will be the “dynamo that activates their testimony” (Fitzmeyer).
- 4. The book of Acts casts a vision for the church during the interim between Jesus’ ascension and his next visible appearing (*parousia*) (1:6-11).
  - a. The disciples’ question of verse 6 (“Lord, are you *at this time* going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”) was a natural one to ask of their resurrected Messiah, but Israel’s restoration would not come in the manner that they had anticipated.
  - b. Jesus did not tell them to abandon their hopes, but to focus on the mission assigned to them during this interim period.
  - c. They were to assume a new role as *witnesses* of Jesus through the power of the Spirit.
    - i. The apostles were uniquely qualified as eye witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. In Acts, the word *witness* is used almost as a technical term for the Twelve (for example, 1:22; 4:33; 10:41; 13:31).
    - ii. Paul, who also experienced the resurrected Christ, testified as a witness (18:5; 20:24; 23:11; 26:16, 22).
    - iii. Antipas, who bore testimony to Jesus through his faithful death, is also a witness (Rev. 2:13).
    - iv. All those who, through faith, experience the resurrected Christ qualify as witnesses. Witness defines the identity of both individual believers and the believing community. The emphasis here is not on “giving testimonies,” but

on being a community that experiences Christ and bears witness to that experience (Guder 1985).

- d. The sequence of Acts 1:8 –“in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”—is significant.
  - i. It serves as an outline for the book of Acts. In this series, we’ll be looking at the ground-breaking witness-bearing in each of these contexts.
  - ii. Jerusalem is where Jesus finished his work, and is at the center of the Jewish expectation for the restoration of Israel. The book of Acts presents the church as fulfilling the promises to Israel.
  - iii. The next frontier, “all Judea and Samaria” (the two are grammatically linked here), represents the reuniting of northern and southern Israel, the healing of ancient rifts.
    - Ezekiel 37:15-22 – Reuniting the two sticks.
  - iv. “To the ends of the earth” shows that the new epoch of salvation history, foreseen in Isaiah 49:6, has begun.
    - “In a revolutionary step forward in salvation history, the centripetal direction of salvation history was now being turned around into a centrifugal movement outward into all the world” (Guder 1985, following Blauw).
    - 1. Some think that “the ends of the earth” refers to Rome, because that is where we find Paul at the conclusion of the book of Acts. The phrase is used that way in some Jewish literature (Fitzmeyer).
    - 2. More likely, however, it does not refer to a specific location, but to the universal extent of God’s reign and of the Christian mission. This also corresponds to the conclusion of Acts, which, like the mission, is open-ended (Acts 28:31; Schnabel).
- e. Jesus’ ascension becomes both a visible reminder of his exaltation (Acts 2:33), and a hopeful “pledge of the coming consummation of glory” for disciples of all ages. In these in-between times, the disciples anticipate the empowering by the Holy Spirit, who is given as a guarantee of the full inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14; Bruce).

#### STAGE ONE: BEARING WITNESS IN JERUSALEM (Acts 2:1-47):

- 1. The *time* and *manner* of the out-pouring of the Spirit in Jerusalem (2:1-13).
  - a. The feast of Pentecost (“the fiftieth day”):
    - i. Pentecost was a farmer’s feast. Originally a day of first fruits, it “came eventually to be understood as the feast at the end of the harvest” (Fitzmeyer). Given the agricultural imagery used in many of Jesus’ parables, it was appropriate that the first great in-gathering should take place on that day.
    - ii. Because of the time of the year, Pentecost also became commemorative of the giving of the Law at Sinai, perhaps seen as an annual renewal of the covenant.

- Because the pouring out of the Spirit demonstrated God's faithfulness to his covenant with Israel, it is also fitting that it should happen on that day.
- iii. Because of the festive occasion, "there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven."
    1. The list of nations resembles similar lists in both Jewish and non-Jewish literature. The sweep is, generally, from east to west, encompassing the world as it was known at that time.
    2. Although they were Jews, the presence of people from all over the world symbolized God's intention for his witnesses to go "to the ends of the earth." Some of these visitors no doubt did become, in fact, the first witnesses to the nations from which they came.
  - b. The "sound like the blowing of the mighty wind":
    - i. Like God's descent onto Mount Sinai, the Holy Spirit descended with a loud noise (Exodus 19:16-19).
    - ii. In both Hebrew and Greek, the word that means "spirit" also means "wind" or "breath." The symbolism of wind would not have been lost on "people rooted in the Old Testament experience of God" (Guder 1985). The Lord spoke to Job out of a whirlwind (Job 38:1). The breath of God brought life to the first human (Gen. 2:7), as well as to the dry bones in the valley of Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 37:9-14). Now a fresh revelation and life from God had arrived.
    - iii. In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus himself compared the coming of the Spirit to a wind which remains under divine—never human—control (John 3:8).
  - c. The "tongues as of fire" both continue the Old Testament imagery of God's presence and point to a fresh work of God at this crucial turning point.
    - i. Encounters with God in the Old Testament often involved fire. We think of the smoking firepot and blazing torch that sealed God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:17-19), Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3), the pillar of fire that led Israel through the wilderness (Ex. 13:21-22), the fire on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16-19), or the fire that consumed Elijah's sacrifice on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:38).
    - ii. "This fire, however, reveals itself as flames burning over each individual's head. ... [T]he presence of God is distributed here throughout his people, those who are to be his witnesses. This is an important expression of the great turning point in salvation history brought about by the gospel events. Now the movement is outward to the world.... There is but one fire, and the entire body bears the same message and serves the same Lord. But each individual, as a flame-bearer, is a witness" (Guder 1985).
  - d. The "other tongues" with which the disciples spoke highlight God's desire that his voice be heard and understood by speakers of every language.
    - i. Whether the miracle was in the speech of the disciples or in the hearing of the listeners, these tongues were intelligible foreign languages. In this, they seem to differ from the gift of tongues spoken of in 1 Corinthians.

- ii. This event demonstrated the “fundamental translatability of the gospel.” From the outset, God intended the message to cross linguistic and cultural barriers (Guder 2000, following Lamin Sanneh).
    - iii. It is better to understand the group gathered in 2:1 as referring to those assembled in 1:15, and not just to the reconstituted group of twelve apostles of 1:26. The whole community is pictured as receiving the Spirit and bearing witness to God’s mighty works. This becomes a model for the church today as we bear witness to the nations of the world. The message is delivered through multiple cultural forms, but the content—the mighty works of God—remains trans-cultural.
  - e. As meaningful as the symbolism is, this entire scene still cries out for explanation. The question posed in Acts 2:12—“What does this mean?”—opens the door for Peter’s clarification. God’s amazing work always cries out for explanation, and God’s witnesses should always be ready to deliver it (1 Peter 3:15).
- 2. The apostles bear witness to the resurrected Jesus in Jerusalem.
  - a. A New Age is Announced (2:14-21)
 

As the spokesman for the Twelve, Peter offers an alternative explanation to the mocking suggestion of drunkenness. The outpouring of the Spirit should be recognized as the faithfulness of God to his promises.

    - i. Peter announces that the outpouring of God’s Spirit is an *eschatological* gift.
      - 1. Peter actually alters the wording of Joel from “After this” to “In the last days.” Not merely a new age, but a final consummation, is being inaugurated.
      - 2. The speaking in other tongues may be loosely identified with the predicted “prophecy,” but a more widespread fulfillment, including “visions” and “dreams” is anticipated. This Pentecost is only the beginning.
    - ii. Peter announces that the outpouring of God’s Spirit is a *universal* gift.
      - 1. God’s Spirit is poured out on “all people;” literally, “all flesh,” that is, all kinds of people. Although even Peter may not have realized it, this anticipates taking the witness of Jesus to the Gentiles.
      - 2. All human beings—male and female, young and old, free and slave—receive God’s Spirit and are empowered by him for witnessing.
      - 3. “And *everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (“The Lord,” though referring to Yahweh in Joel’s prophecy, refers here, as throughout Acts, to Jesus, who is proclaimed as Lord and Christ.)
  - b. A New King is Proclaimed
    - i. The Apostolic Announcement (2:22-24)
      - 1. Like a king’s heralds, the apostles proclaimed the Messiah-ship of Jesus. The sermon here is consistent with the pattern of the apostles’ preaching, which has been called the *kerygma*, or the “herald’s message,” found throughout the book of Acts.

2. Jesus did miracles (v. 22). This was undisputed. The question, as in v.12, is, “What does this mean?” His detractors claimed he was a sorcerer, but Jesus claimed that his miracles heralded the arrival of God’s reign. Jesus’ miracles showed what the world would be like when God’s will is done on earth, as it is in heaven (Matt. 4:23; 6:10).
  3. Jesus died on a cross. Although it was the “lawless men,” the Roman soldiers, those “who were outside the range of the law received by Israel” (Bruce), who drove the nails, it was the people of Jerusalem, whose members were swollen due to the Passover feast, who had demanded it. Though Luke does not explain its atoning significance here, he includes Jesus’ death as part of God’s saving work.
  4. God raised Jesus from the dead. Peter did not try to prove this, but simply proclaimed it as a witness. This becomes the heart of the heralds’ announcement. God has overturned the sinful actions of humanity, for the sake of saving humankind.
- ii. The Prophetic Predictions (2:25-35)
1. After his resurrection, Jesus had opened the disciples’ minds to understand the prophetic witness about him (Luke 24:26, 32, 45-47). In speaking to a people of Hebrew heritage, it was essential to draw the lines of continuity between God’s saving works in the past and his new and final saving work through Jesus.
  2. The Jews already believed that many of the Psalms, particularly the “royal psalms,” spoke prophetically of the Messiah (Larkin). To many of the Jews, the crucifixion would be a stumbling block to faith. Peter shows that a crucified and resurrected Messiah fulfilled Israel’s hopes.
  3. David himself could no longer sit on the throne, but one of his descendants could—and has there been seated! Verses 32 and 33 answer the question of verse 12, “What does this mean?”
- iii. The Compelling Conclusion (2:36)
1. At Jesus’ baptism, and again at his transfiguration, God declared Jesus to be his “beloved Son.” Through the resurrection, God declares his Son to be both “Lord” and “Christ.”
    - a. By calling Jesus “Lord,” Peter was proclaiming Jesus’ divinity. The apostles’ did not hesitate to apply Scriptures referring to Yahweh directly to Jesus.
    - b. By calling Jesus “Christ” or “Messiah,” Peter acknowledged that Jesus is God’s agent to fulfill the hopes of the people of Israel.
  2. There is a fundamental conflict between humanity’s sinful actions and God’s saving purposes. “They were not trifling with a Galilean carpenter, but God!” (Ogilvie, cited by Larkin). This realization provokes the people’s question (v. 37), as well as Peter’s call to repentance.

- c. A New Promise is Received (2:37-41)
  - i. A Desperate Question (v. 37)
    - 1. Clear communication had taken place. Peter had not “tickled their ears,” but he had spoken and they had understood.
    - 2. With understanding came conviction.
    - 3. Some have used the guilt of crucifying Jesus as an excuse for anti-Semitism. We cannot, however, look at the guilt as belonging to the Jerusalem crowd alone. As Isaiah said, “he was crushed for our iniquities,” “by his wounds we are healed,” “each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5-6). The Apostle Paul emphasized that Jews and Gentiles are equally guilty of sin—and equally eligible for justification through faith in Christ (Rom. 3:9-10, 21-24).
 

“With Peter’s first audience, we must return to the scene of the crime, the cross. We must face up to our guilt before almighty God, the Judge. We must throw ourselves on his mercy, asking, *What shall we do?*” (Larkin)
  - ii. A Hopeful Reply (v. 38-39)
    - 1. Peter’s reply was “unspeakably reassuring” (Bruce). Even though they had crucified God himself and rejected their Messiah, there was still hope.
    - 2. “Repentance and baptism for the remission of sins” was a message that many in the crowd had heard before—from John the Baptist (Mark 1:4).
      - a. Repentance is an important theme to Luke, found far more often in his writings than in those of the other evangelists. John’s gospel does not even mention it. It means a change of mind that results in a changed life. It is not just emotional shame, but real change.
      - b. Baptism in water is a public declaration of one’s faith and repentance. In the New Testament, it is inseparable from conversion.
    - 3. Peter introduces two new elements, not preached by John the Baptist, into the formula:
      - a. Baptism is “in the name of Jesus.” Jesus, who has been declared to be both “Lord and Christ,” is the unique source of forgiveness and salvation (Acts 4:12). Baptism has meaning through its connection to Jesus. Baptism is “into Christ” and “into his death” (Romans 6:3); those baptized are “clothed with Christ.” (Gal. 3:26-27), they are buried with him in baptism—this transforming work always taking place “through faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:12-13).
      - b. After seeing the Spirit poured out and explaining that the Spirit was ushering in a new era prophesied by Joel, Peter’s instruction reaches a climax in the promise that these new believers, too, could receive the Holy Spirit as a gift.
    - 4. Because the Spirit was poured out on sons, daughters, old men, servants, and women in this new era of “the last days,” it was a universal promise. Since these “last days” continue, this promise was not limited to those

gathered that day, it is for their children, for the whole scattered house of Israel and the promise here even foreshadows the inclusion of the Gentiles into the Israel of God (Fitzmeyer). “Now we have come full circle. The salvation promised by Joel—that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved—is accomplished by Jesus” (Larkin).

- iii. A Believing Response (v. 40-41)
  - 1. The invitation awaits a response. It is not a message that can be ignored. The faithless generation of Israelites that had wandered in the desert had been called a “crooked generation” (Deut. 32:5). Would this generation continue the resistance of their forefathers, or would they receive God’s fresh outpouring of his Spirit?
  - 2. As always, the response was mixed. Those who accepted his message were baptized. Some did not accept, but about three thousand did.
  
- d. A New Community is Born (2:42-47)
  - i. This community had been “conceived” in the calling of the Twelve, in the sending of the seventy-two, and in the gathering of the one hundred twenty.
  - ii. Now it bursts forth on the scene as a powerful public reality.
  - iii. The message of salvation in Christ is not only to be received individually, but to be celebrated and lived out “corporately”—as a body, an image used especially by Paul to express both the church’s relationship to Christ and the inter-dependence of its members.

## THE JERUSALEM PENTECOST AND MISSION TODAY

1. Like the early disciples, we need to understand our identity as witnesses of Jesus. This witness should reflect our experience of salvation as well as the power of the resurrection in our lives today.
2. The Holy Spirit is the initiator and power for mission. Believers must seek, wait for, and submit to the Spirit’s leading and live in utter dependence on him.
3. The gospel is translatable into every language and culture. Witnesses who go to other cultures must dedicate themselves to observing and understanding that culture for the purpose of living out the gospel incarnationally in that context. Even those who remain within their own culture must keep their fingers on its pulse, understand its movements and trends, understand the languages of the generational, class, and ethnic sub-cultures, so as to be able to testify to the mighty acts of God in forms comprehensible to all.
4. The Spirit-led witness testifies to Jesus. He is the message of salvation. Using the Scriptures, Peter helped the Jews redefine their Messianic expectations so that they could accept Jesus as “Lord and Christ.” We must also understand people’s

presuppositions so that we can present Jesus to them, both through contrast and comparison, in a way that they will understand his relevance to them.

5. The gospel of Jesus Christ must be presented in a way that leads to conviction of sin, and at the same time offers hope for forgiveness and power for transformation. All can receive these through repentance and baptism in his name with the assurance that the promise is for all whom the Lord our God will call.
6. Just as the promise is for hearers today, so is the decision. We seek to persuade them to trust God to save them and, in so doing, save themselves. Just as Peter's testimony made clear the choice to the people of that generation, so God calls his witnesses today to make the choice clear to those of our day.
7. Discipleship is lived out in the community of believers. These communities bear witness especially through the love that exists within them. This love is a fruit of the Spirit who indwells participants individually and the community corporately. This witness, under normal circumstances, wins the favor of those who observe it and leads to the multiplication of those who participate in the believing community. Facilitating the formation of witness-bearing communities is an essential task of missions today.

## **SESSION TWO: THE SAMARITAN PENTECOST**

### REVIEW AND TRANSITION

1. The book of Acts defines the role of God's people in the "in-between" times – the time between the incarnation of Jesus and his reappearing. That role is that we are witnesses of Jesus.
  - a. The commission given to the apostles in Acts 1:8 becomes relevant to all believers as they bear witness to their daily experience of the risen Christ.
  - b. Acts 1:8 defines an order of priority for this witness, and the book of Acts follows this order. The order stems from both practical and theological considerations.
    - i. It was fitting that they begin where they were—in Jerusalem. Witness bearing always begins in the immediate life situation of the witness. But it doesn't stop there; it proceeds outward into new, more challenging situations which demonstrate the reconciling power of the gospel.
    - ii. Without Jesus' instruction to remain in Jerusalem, however, the disciples probably would have returned home to Galilee. Jerusalem was a royal city, and where Israel's restoration should take place. It is fitting that the witness began there and, again, spread outward to demonstrate the universal reach of God's reign and the all-inclusiveness of the new Israel.
  - c. The power to bear witness does not lie in the witnesses, but in the Spirit who, himself, bears witness to Jesus (John 15:26). The Spirit himself is "the promise of the Father" for whom the disciples were to wait.

2. The Jerusalem Pentecost of Acts 2 records the pouring out of the Spirit on the Jewish people, and anticipates a broader outpouring.
  - a. The outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost was the “first fruits” of the empowerment of God’s people by the Spirit that Joel had anticipated.
  - b. The Jews present in Jerusalem represented “every nation under heaven.” Joel prophesied that God would pour out his Spirit on “all people,” that “*everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,” and Peter proclaimed that the promise is for “all who are far off—all whom the Lord our God will call.” The Jerusalem Pentecost was just the beginning.
3. The subject of the Spirit’s testimony through the apostles was the risen Christ. Neither the Spirit nor the apostles preached themselves, but Jesus.
  - a. The apostles’ message not only identified Jesus as the Davidic king, but as “Lord”—he was identified with Yahweh himself.
  - b. The people responded to the preaching through repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus. Thus they were assured of forgiveness and of participation in the gift of the Holy Spirit. They expressed the joy and the unity brought about by these gifts through corporate fellowship.
4. In the narrative that follows in the book of Acts, the believers continued to bear witness in Jerusalem.
  - a. They bore witness through a new community that demonstrated genuine concern for one another (2:42-47; 4:32-37; 6:1-7), and which confronted evil when it entered their midst (5:1-10).
  - b. They bore witness through signs and wonders done in the name of Jesus (3:6, 16; 5:12-16; 6:8).
  - c. They bore witness through the public proclamation of the message of Jesus (3:11-26)
  - d. They bore witness boldly in the face of persecution (4:5-13, 19, 29; 5:27-32, 40-42).
5. Stephen became the first to bear witness of Jesus through his death, hence the title *martyr* (6:8-7:59).
  - a. Stephen was representative of the Diaspora Jews who seemed to grasp, more quickly than those of Judea, the universal scope of the Good News.
  - b. Stephen’s proclamation in Acts 7 demonstrated how God’s presence and work among his people—through Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses—was not limited to the land of Palestine, and how the nomadic tabernacle was a more fitting symbol of God’s presence than Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem had been.
  - c. Stephen’s speech prepared the way for a fresh movement of God’s Spirit, as the witness extended beyond Jerusalem.

## STAGE TWO: BEARING WITNESS IN ALL JUDEA AND SAMARIA (Acts 8:1-25)

1. The Gospel Breaks Out Of Jerusalem (8:1-4)
  - a. The Persecuted Become The Scattered
    - i. The opponents were not satisfied with Stephen's death. They took courage from killing him to embark on a more general persecution. This could take a variety of forms—from social ostracism to beatings to confiscation of property (Larkin). Here imprisonment, often at the hand of Saul, is specifically mentioned. (In retrospect, we can see that God, in his sovereignty, was already using Saul as his instrument to spread the gospel, even before Saul's conversion.)
    - ii. Luke's statement that "all except the apostles were scattered" is hyperbole. We see in Acts 15 and elsewhere that a viable fellowship remained in Jerusalem. Since the apostles were not targeted, the persecution was probably aimed at the Hellenistic believers of whom Stephen was a part (Bruce).
    - iii. "Judea and Samaria" are linked together here, just as in Acts 1:8. It appears that Luke is intentionally marking the next stage of witness-bearing.
    - iv. The fact that the disciples had not reached out beyond Jerusalem before this point does not necessarily mean that they had been disobedient to the commission. Luke doesn't imply this (Larkin). More likely, they were obeying – as far as they understood to that point. They had heard the commission with "Old Testament ears;" they could only conceive of a centripetal mission, where the church would be a showcase for God in Jerusalem; they expected God to bring the nations to them (Osborne).
  - b. The Scattered Become The Proclaimers
    - i. This persecution was to be expected. Jesus had warned his disciples that they should expect to be persecuted, just as he was. He had told them not to be afraid, but to bear faithful witness (Matthew 10:17-34). As Peter later reminded believers under persecution, there was nothing "strange" about what was happening to them (1 Peter 4:12).
    - ii. The disciples fled Jerusalem, but they did not flee in panic. They recognized the opportunity afforded to them, and they "preached the word wherever they went" (8:4).
      1. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," and that dynamic continues to work today (Larkin).
      2. They were "evangelizing" as they went – they word they proclaimed was "Good News." In verse 5, we see that the focus of that Good News was Jesus Christ.
2. The Gospel Breaks Into Samaria (8:5-13)
  - a. The Context of the Mission (8:5)
    - i. The Evangelist – Philip
      1. He was one of the Seven chosen in Acts 6 to serve the Hellenistic Jewish widows. Because these servants were chosen from within the Hellenistic Jewish community, Philip would himself have been a Hellenistic Jew, not

a native of Palestine. He was judged by the community to be “full of the Spirit and wisdom” (6:3), and exercised administrative as well as evangelistic responsibility.

2. Philip was Christ-like in his ministry of several levels; his ministry at tables, his proclamation of the kingdom of God, his mighty miraculous deeds, the exorcisms and healings, all point to an emulation of the ministry of Jesus (Dobbeler, cited by Schnabel).

ii. The Evangelized – The Samaritans

1. “Samaria” could refer to the region or to the city from which the region took its name. Since Luke records that Philip went to “a city” in Samaria, this was probably not the capital itself. The people were viewed as “Samaritans” however, and this is what is important for understanding how they were viewed by the Jewish community.
2. The Samaritans lived in a region that had been resettled by both Jews and people from other parts of the Assyrian empire following the exile of northern Israel. Though there was a presence of Greek and Roman pagan worship, the Samaritans largely followed the Jewish Torah, but rejected the rest of the Hebrew Bible. On Mount Gerazim they built a rival temple to the one in Jerusalem, which the Jews destroyed about 100 years before Christ.
3. Because the Jewish majority could not separate Samaritan worship and paganism, they refused to have dealings with them. John put in plainly in his gospel when he explained the reason for the Samaritan woman’s surprise at Jesus’ request for a drink. He notes simply, “For Jews do not associate with Samaritans” (John 4:9).
4. Luke, who is the only one of the Synoptic evangelists to mention Jesus’ dealings with Samaritans, views them, like the Jews, as capable of both piety and sinfulness. “The Good Samaritan” is the hero of one of Jesus’ most well-known parables (Luke 10:30-37), and the one leper who returned to thank Jesus was a Samaritan (Luke 17:11-19). But at least one Samaritan village refused to welcome Jesus. The disciples displayed a typical Jewish attitude toward Samaritans; they were ready to call down fire to destroy the Samaritans, but Jesus rebuked them (Luke 9:52-56).

b. The Communication of the Christ (8:5, 12)

- i. Philip proclaimed “Christ” or “the name of Jesus Christ.” Not only did he emulate Jesus’ example, Christ himself was the subject of his preaching. This is consistent with the other examples of preaching that we have in Acts.
- ii. Philip’s preaching of “Christ” as “Messiah” indicates that the Samaritans were worshipers of Yahweh (Schnabel). Instead of a Davidic king, however, they anticipated the return of “a prophet like Moses,” whom they called “Taheb,” the “Returning One” (Fitzmeyer) or “the Restorer” (Larkin). Their image was more of a teacher than a ruler (Marshall). The Samaritan woman looked for the Messiah to come and “explain everything,” to settle all of the religious confusion (John 4:25). Just as Jesus told the woman, “I who speak to you am

- he” (John 4:26), Philip preaches that the Returning One has returned; the Restorer has come and restoration can now be experienced.
- iii. Luke also records that Philip “preached the good news of the kingdom of God” (8:12). This was the message preached by Jesus, and was the content of the apostolic proclamation throughout Acts (14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23)
- c. The Confirmation of the Kingdom (8:6-8)
- i. Philip’s performance of miraculous signs both emulated the ministry of Jesus (2:22), as well as duplicating what the apostles had been doing in the Jerusalem ministry (2:43; 4:30; 5:12).
  - ii. The effect was twofold:
    - 1. The Samaritans paid close attention to what he said. The signs confirmed the message that Philip announced. The preaching of the Christ was essential to the Samaritans’ salvation. The miraculous signs drew attention to and confirmed this message.
    - 2. There was great joy in the city (8:8). As in Jesus’ ministry, the miracles were signs that a greater reality was breaking in—the kingdom of God. It was Luke who recorded Jesus’ words, “If I by the finger of God drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Luke 11:20).  
 “The deeds themselves were simply doing what ought to be done under God’s reign. They also point to what God intends the world to be like when God’s reign comes. They represent what God fully intends to bring about at the world’s consummation, when all that creation was envisioned and imagined to be is made finally true” (Guder et al.).  
 The signs produced hope, and hope produced joy in the Samaritans.
- d. The Conversion of the Samaritans (8:9-13)
- i. The conversion of the Samaritans is contrasted with their previous seduction by Simon.
  - ii. Their response to the good news of the kingdom was to believe and be baptized. Simon himself believed and was baptized.
    - 1. Luke doesn’t work out a theology of faith or baptism; he simply reports that they are the responses to the proclamation of the kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ.
    - 2. John especially links belief to “the name” of Jesus (John 3:18; 20:31; 1 John 3:23; 5:13), and in Acts baptism is “into the name” (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; cf. Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 1:13). In Hebrew thought, “the name” stands for the person himself. Both faith and baptism are inseparably rooted in the person of Jesus and his saving work. They derive their significance in conversion through their relationship to him.
  - iii. Repentance on the part of the believing Samaritans, who were liberated from the seduction of Simon, is inferred. Simon’s repentance, however, later comes into question.

3. The Gospel Breaks Down Barriers (8:14-25)
  - a. While the church at Jerusalem may have been “a conservative body which was never responsible for new ventures itself” (Marshall), they are quick to respond to this advance of the gospel by sending Peter and John. There doesn’t seem to be a spirit of skepticism, but of acceptance and an eagerness to confirm the Samaritans’ faith.
  - b. The delay in the Samaritans’ receiving the Spirit is problematic, but actually provides an opportunity for the apostles to affirm this latest advance. Therein lies the most likely explanation to the question.
    - i. The clear teaching of the New Testament is that “the giving of the Spirit is the birthright of every Christian, received at conversion. . . . Therefore the Samaria experience must be viewed as extraordinary, not normative” (Larkin; Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:9, 15-16; 1 Cor. 12:3, 13; Gal. 3:2-3).
    - ii. Nothing in Luke’s record indicates that the Samaritans’ faith was defective. If the Samaritan experience is extraordinary, we must conclude that God had a purpose in withholding the Spirit from the Samaritans for a short season.
    - iii. The most likely explanation lies in the way in which the Samaritans did, finally, receive the Spirit—by the laying on of the apostles’ hands (8:17-18).
      1. The laying on of hands expresses a bond and an endorsement, or a legitimization (1 Tim. 5:22).
      2. There was a danger that some Jewish Christians might not accept the Samaritan Christians as being of equal standing. There was also a danger that the Samaritans might have felt inferior to or, at the other extreme, claimed autonomy from the Jerusalem church (Schnabel).
      3. By sovereignly choosing to delay the giving of the Spirit to the Samaritans, God broke down all of these barriers and led the church united into a new stage of salvation history—a reuniting of north and south, of “all Judea and Samaria,” of the whole house of Israel, under one king (cf. Ezekiel 37:15-19).
 

“If God had not withheld his Spirit until the Jerusalem apostles came, converts on both sides of the cultural barrier might have found Christ without finding each other” (Larkin).
  - c. Simon’s offer to purchase the apostles’ authority (8:18-24) is not as significant from the point-of-view of salvation history, but does illustrate the practical obstacles that often accompany the proclamation of God’s kingdom.
    - i. When the kingdom comes with power, as it must inevitably come (Mark 9:1), there will always be people who are attracted to the power, instead of to the kingdom.
    - ii. In light of Simon’s previous influence, he probably viewed the authority to give the Spirit as a way of continuing to exercise influence over people, whether as a means of financial gain, or to assure his personal prominence.
    - iii. Peter’s response is swift and decisive. Simon’s offer didn’t come from a simple misunderstanding, but because his heart was not right (8:21). Such a heart can only stand condemned.

- iv. There remained, however, a hope for Simon's evil heart—repentance. The Samaritans' repentance had been evidenced by breaking their allegiance to Simon. Now Simon had to repent of his own idolatry—the idolatry of promoting self, of wielding influence, of exercising control over people.
  - v. It is unclear whether Simon genuinely repented, or if he was merely trying to escape the condemnation that Peter had pronounced. We prefer to think that he, too, experienced forgiveness. Later traditions about a Simon Magus who continued to oppose the apostles' work indicate that the witnesses continued to confront this kind of person wherever they proclaimed the kingdom. We should not be surprised when we encounter such obstacles today. Neither should we think that such obstacles can overcome the Spirit-empowered witness.
- d. Peter and John not only acknowledged the legitimacy of Philip's work, but themselves began to preach the gospel "in many Samaritan villages." The Samaritan Pentecost had broken down the barrier between Jew and Samaritan. The house of Israel was reunited.

#### THE SAMARITAN PENTECOST AND MISSION TODAY

1. Just as the persecution against the Jerusalem church turned out to be an opportunity for the greater expansion of the gospel, we need to constantly be looking for new opportunities when confronted with obstacles. Missions is largely about discovering what God is already doing or wanting to do, and joining him in that work. Discovering God's new works does not invalidate what we have done in the past, but views our previous experience as preparation for even a fuller expression of God's kingdom.
2. Along with this, we must not always expect God to work according to our predefined strategies, but follow the often-spontaneous leading of the Spirit.
3. We should seek to discover the racial, ethnic, social, or personal prejudices that are within our hearts, and never allow them to determine who we do or do not try to reach with the gospel.
4. Proclamation of the good news is indispensable to faithful witness. The church's fellowship and service are authentic forms of witness, but they are insufficient without proclamation.
5. Proclamation of the good news must always be centered on Jesus Christ. Different dimensions of his multi-faceted nature will be emphasized depending on the history, culture, and worldview of the people, but the message must always be a true and authentic witness of Jesus.

6. We should not be intimidated by local celebrities, nor by competing belief systems, idolatry, or sorcery (Schnabel). Instead, we should expect demonstrations of God's power in ways that will break down strongholds. These demonstrations of power must always be accompanied by the Christ-centered good news.
7. Along with demonstrations of God's power through miraculous signs, all of our actions should demonstrate the reality of God's reign and the hope that it provokes.
 

“Our responses of compassion and service, like our actions for peace and justice, are deeds of authenticity and therefore signs that the reign of God is present now in our world and is on the way as its future” (Guder et al.).
8. Faith, repentance, and baptism are the initial response to the preaching of Christ. Though mass conversions may remain the exception, evangelists should be prepared for them and be ready to welcome and further disciple large numbers of new believers (Schnabel).
9. The reconciling power of the gospel should result in the visible unity of believers from previously hostile or resentful individuals and groups. The common Spirit indwelling all believers is both the motivation and the means for achieving this visible unity (Eph. 4:3-4).
10. While the kingdom always comes with power, we should beware of the tempting allure of power, both for ourselves as witnesses and in those to whom we witness. Cultural celebrities, traditional leaders, or “opinion leaders,” such as Simon was, are not always the best candidates for leadership in the new Christian community.

### **SESSION THREE: THE CAESAREAN PENTECOST**

#### INTRODUCTION AND TRANSITION

1. Jesus' commission to his disciples to “be my witnesses” was first fulfilled in Jerusalem (Acts 2), and then “in all Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:25).
  - a. The beginning in Jerusalem demonstrated the fulfillment of God's promises to David, and the extension into “all Judea and Samaria” symbolized the reuniting of divided Judah and Israel.
  - b. Both of these significant events were accompanied by extraordinary outpourings of God's Spirit, while at the same time affirming God's promise to pour out his Spirit on “all people” (Acts 2:17).
  - c. Although these two events are not parallel in every respect, the significance of the Samaritan outpouring represents a “second Pentecost,” as the witness expands just as Jesus had anticipated (Acts 1:8).

- d. There remained a third, as-yet unfulfilled, stage; another transition that would again demand a clear movement of God’s Spirit before the witness would be carried “to the ends of the earth.”
2. When Philip left Samaria, the Spirit continued to move in this direction.
    - a. “An angel of the Lord” led Philip to preach the gospel to an Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-39). Though he was probably already a convert to Judaism, he was ethnically distinct from both Jews and Samaritans, and he lived outside “the land” which had formed so much a part of Israel’s identity. His conversion to Christ and his return to his home in Africa must surely be understood as an initial step towards “the ends of the earth.”
    - b. In the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a former persecutor, God was preparing someone to carry his “name before Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Through the ministry of Saul, who became Paul, God would demonstrate his grace toward all peoples.
    - c. Before the baton of momentum was passed to Paul, however, it was fitting that the next step—“to the ends of the earth”—should be taken by someone who had already been instrumental in bringing the witness “to Jerusalem” and to “all Judea and Samaria.” God chose an evangelist who had announced the gift of the Spirit at the Jerusalem Pentecost, and through whom God had given the Spirit to the Samaritans. He chose once again to work through Peter.

STAGE THREE: BEARING WITNESS “TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH” (Acts 10:1 – 11:18)

1. The Call to Cornelius (10:1-8)
  - a. Cornelius was a commander at Caesarea, a primarily Gentile city, which was the residence of the Roman proconsul. As a centurion, Cornelius would have commanded between sixty to one hundred men and may have also had administrative responsibilities which brought him into contact with the Jewish population (Larkin, Fitzmeyer).
  - b. In verse 2 we see his character. He is “devout”—religiously sincere, but so were many pagans. By saying that he is “God-fearing,” Luke wants us to understand that he had accepted Jewish monotheism, kept the Old Testament ethical code, and even observed many Jewish customs. He had not, however, submitted to circumcision and would have been viewed as outside the Jewish community, still regarded as ritually unclean (Larkin).
  - c. The angel that appeared to Cornelius in a dream evoked terror—he was not a baby-faced cherubim—but spoke words of comfort. The terminology here speaks of worship—Cornelius may not have taken part in the Jewish sacrifices, but his prayers and genuine piety went up to God as acceptable worship.
    - i. Psalms 141:2 – “May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.”

- ii. Paul describes the offering of the Philippians as “a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (Phil. 4:18)
    - iii. Pious acts do not earn God’s favor, but they do evidence a heart that is ready to receive God’s gift of salvation (Bruce, Fitzmeyer). Cornelius’s immediate obedience is model of “the kind of faith that will truly receive salvation” (Larkin).
  - d. The angel did not tell Cornelius about Jesus, but rather told him to send for Peter.
    - i. This is similar to God’s instruction to Saul to go to Damascus and to wait to be told what he must do (Acts 9:6).
    - ii. God may prepare the way for the gospel through visions and dreams, through signs and wonders—but he has chosen to bring the saving message *incarnationally*, through human messengers.
    - iii. We need always to remind ourselves of this, whether we are tempted to wait for some extraordinary experience before responding to the gospel, or are believers who have failed to bear witness, thinking that perhaps God will find another way to save people (Larkin).
2. The Challenge to Peter (10:9-16)
- a. Peter may have resisted the instructions of the voice, but the fact that he was in prayer shows that his heart was in a condition to receive the message. This was not a ritual Jewish prayer, as noon was not a traditional “hour of prayer,” but Peter’s time of personal communion with God.
  - b. Peter fell into a “trance.” The word used, from which we derive our words “ecstatic” and “ecstasy,” is used in the Greek Old Testament to refer to the deep sleep that came upon Adam when God created Eve and upon Abram when God made his covenant with him (Gen. 2:21; 15:12; Fitzmeyer). This experience was not induced by Peter’s overactive imagination. In fact, what God revealed to Peter was beyond his imagination. This was a vision sent from God, at his initiative.
  - c. The sheet that descended from heaven contained an assortment of animals that were both acceptable and unacceptable by Jewish standards. This would come to symbolize for Peter the freedom of association between Jew and Gentile. But at first, Peter is offended by the suggestion to “Get up, kill and eat.”
    - i. He may have even viewed this vision as a test of his loyalty (Larkin), and refuses in the strongest possible terms.
    - ii. God’s command, repeated three times, prepares Peter for what is to come. He is free to enter a Gentile home and to eat what is set before him. It would be but a short step to realize that if Gentile food was clean, then Gentiles themselves were “clean” also (Marshall).

3. The Crossing of the Lines (10:17-48)
  - a. Jews and Gentiles cross social lines (10:17-33).
    - i. Cornelius's delegates arrive at the house where Peter is staying, but hesitate to enter. They have come this far, now Peter must go to meet them. Even after seeing the vision, the Spirit must speak explicitly to him.
    - ii. The instruction "do not hesitate" (NIV) may have the sense "without doubting" (cf. ASV; KJV; NASB). But it may go even deeper, to mean "without making distinctions" (Larkin, citing Marshall and Stott). Peter will understand the vision and God's will for the church if he can move beyond making distinctions between clean and unclean, between Jew and Gentile.
    - iii. It might be acceptable for a Gentile to enter a Jewish home, but for a Jew to enter a Gentile home was considered a source of defilement (Fitzmeyer; Bruce). Peter made a small step in inviting the men to stay as his guests, and even a larger one by accepting their invitation to go to the home of Cornelius.
    - iv. Cornelius seems to have had no doubt that Peter would arrive. He had gathered his relatives and close friends. He knew that the message that was coming was not something to be received privately, but would have transforming significance for all of his relationships, so he wanted to include all those who were dear to him.
    - v. The cross-cultural encounter produced awkwardness in the first meeting between Cornelius and Peter.
      1. Cornelius received Peter in terms of his own culture, as one welcoming a holy, perhaps divine person. Although a God-fearer, he was not completely free from a pagan worldview (Schnabel).
      2. Peter reacted as a Jew, rejecting any semblance of worship to anyone other than Yahweh.
      3. The short trip to Caesarea was not geographically "the ends of the earth," but at the time it must have seemed that way to Peter. Peter admits that this is something new for him, but he was willing to go beyond his comfort zone. Through reflecting on the rooftop experience, he made the leap from not calling any *food* unclean, to no longer considering any *person* to be off-limits.
    - vi. Cornelius recounts his vision. The repetition highlights that the Gentile mission came about as a result of God's initiative (Larkin).
  - b. The gospel and the Spirit cross a new frontier
    - i. Peter's Proclamation (10:34-43)
      1. The Universal Acceptance of God
        - a. Peter's transforming experience coupled with Cornelius' testimony had convinced him of a previously undiscovered truth. Peter's earlier understanding had been defective, but not invalid.
        - b. What Peter has learned is that God does not "show favoritism." Literally, he does not "receive the face." This expression reflects an ancient Near Eastern practice. In greeting a superior, one would bow low. If the superior lifted the face of the supplicant, it would mean that the person had been fully accepted. So why would Peter say that

God does *not* “receive the face”? In this case, there were two supplicants—Jew and Gentile. God does not lift the face of one and reject the other. He accepts all “*from every nation* who fear him and do what is right.”

- c. This does not imply a universal salvation apart from faith in Christ. Cornelius himself was a man who “feared God,” was “devout,” and gave gifts to the poor. If anyone qualified as one who “fears God and does what is right,” it was Cornelius. Yet, as the story is told in Acts 11, the angel had told Cornelius to send for Peter who would “bring a message through which you and all your household will be saved” (11:14). Cornelius and his family, though good people, were not yet saved and still needed to hear the Good News of Jesus.
  - d. Grammatically, the emphasis in verse 35 is on “from every nation.” It was God’s eagerness to accept people from every nation that was so startling to Peter, and that was such Good News for Cornelius.
2. The Universal Lordship of Jesus
- a. Cornelius had no doubt heard of Jesus, but he did not understand the significance that this itinerant Jewish rabbi held for him and his family. Now Peter proclaims Jesus to him as “Lord of all.”
  - b. The mission to the Gentiles is not a departure from the restoration of Israel, but a natural progression of it. Since Israel’s Messiah is “Lord of all,” the good news is for all.
  - c. Jesus’ announcement of the “good news of peace,” fulfills Isaiah 52:7—“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of them who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”
  - d. Peter found it important to proclaim the Good News as demonstrated in Jesus’ ministry. The Gospel does not only include the “death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus,” but the kingdom that he inaugurated in his ministry. Recall that Philip preached “Christ” and “the kingdom of God” to the Samaritans. Jesus’ good deeds, healings, and deliverances were all signs of the kingdom, evidence that God was with him, and that he is “Lord of all.”
  - e. Death by “hanging on a tree,” an expression commonly used to refer to crucifixion (Fitzmeyer), was shameful (Deut. 21:22-23), but God removed the shame by raising Jesus from the dead.
3. The Universal Scope of the Testimony
- a. Peter offers himself, his fellow apostles, the believing community, and Scripture as *witnesses* of Jesus’ ministry, and also of his death and resurrection (v. 39-43).
    - i. As witnesses, their commission is to “bear witness,” which is, simultaneously, “announcing good news.”
    - ii. Paradoxically, the testimony that Jesus is “judge of the living and the dead” is Good News because “everyone who believes in him

receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (v. 42-43). The world’s Judge is also its Savior. That is Good News.

- b. Peter recalls the command of Jesus to be his witnesses “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus’ right to issue this command is based on his universal authority that he claimed in Matthew 28:18, and that Peter had proclaimed to Cornelius—Jesus is “Lord of all” (v. 36).  
“When the shattering good news ‘Jesus is Lord of all people’ is heard and heeded, the church is liberated from its cultural parochialism, set free to witness ‘across the tracks’ and across the world” (Larkin).

ii. The Spirit’s Confirmation (10:44-48)

1. There can be no doubt that, as Peter had just announced the necessity of belief in Jesus (v. 43), that “all who heard the message” simultaneously believed it.
2. To confirm that the Gentiles’ gift of the Spirit was fully equal to that of the Jews, God sent the same manifestation that he had sent at the Jerusalem Pentecost—“speaking in tongues and praising God” (v. 46, cf. Acts 2:4, 11). It was this manifestation that served as irrefutable and convincing proof to Peter, his fellow Jews, and ultimately, to the Jerusalem believers (10:45, 47; 11:15-18), that God had accepted the Gentiles.
3. Once again, God’s initiative is emphasized—Cornelius and his family must have been just as astonished as were Peter and his fellow Jews.
4. Since Cornelius and his household had obviously been accepted by God, and participated in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, it was evident that they should also receive water baptism “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” just as those at the Jerusalem and Samaritan “Pentecosts” had done (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 15). This further emphasized their corporate solidarity with the entire Christian community—they all participated in “one baptism” (Eph. 4:5).
5. We should not be overly concerned with the order of the various components in the experience of receiving salvation—faith, repentance, baptism, forgiveness of sins, receiving the Spirit—because it troubled neither the Jewish believers nor Luke. “Gentiles are baptized, because that is part of the process by which one becomes a Christian” (Fitzmeyer), as are all of the other components. The varying order which we see in Acts and in subsequent Christian experience is testimony to the sovereign working of God. As Jesus had taught Nicodemus, “The wind (*pneuma*) blows wherever it pleases. . . . So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (*pneuma*)” (John 3:8).

4. The Conversion of the Church (11:1-18)

- a. This is a story of conversion, but it is no ordinary conversion story (Fitzmeyer). On one level it is the story of the transformation of Cornelius and his household,

- but on a deeper level it is about the continuing transformation of the church, as it comes to more and more closely resemble the kingdom of God.
- b. Conversion, like discipleship, always comes at a cost. In retrospect, the price is seen as miniscule, in light of the wonder of the transformation received. But at the time, it is risky and painful, because it involves the abandonment of the familiar and embarking by faith on a road whose final destination is unclear.
  - c. Some believers in the Jerusalem church objected, not to the Gentile's conversion, but that Peter had "gone into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them" (11:3). Peter had even accepted the invitation to remain in Cornelius's house for a few days (10:48). There was no way that he could ensure that all that he ate and touched conformed to Jewish standards of purity. Those who objected are called "circumcised believers," not because the others in Jerusalem were uncircumcised, but because their identity as Christians had not yet eclipsed their identity as Jews.
  - d. Peter relates his experience at Simon's house to the Jerusalem believers, but it was the coming of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his household that was decisive. The emphasis in the retelling is on the presence of the Holy Spirit, not on the speaking in tongues, which served, in this case, as external evidence of the internal reality.
  - e. Before his ascension, Jesus had promised that they would be "baptized with the Holy Spirit" "in a few days" (Acts 1:5). That was accomplished at the Jerusalem Pentecost. Now Cornelius and his household experience their own "Pentecost" as they become co-heirs of the same gift.
  - f. This was God's doing, and this conclusion was not lost on either Peter or the Jerusalem believers (11:17-18). Because it was God's doing, the only response is to praise him for what he has done, and to join him in what he is doing, making his salvation known "to the ends of the earth" (cf. Isaiah 49:6).

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

1. Jesus' commissioned his disciples to be his *witnesses*, and this motif is seen in the three texts we have studied and throughout the book of Acts. In fact, "The concept of witness . . . describes the essence of the Christian experience from Easter onward" (Guder 2000).
2. The order that Jesus detailed in Acts 1:8 becomes an outline for the book of Acts, and designates three stages in the new epoch of salvation history that was inaugurated with Jesus. Each stage is marked by its own "Pentecost," a unique outpouring of the Holy Spirit that marked God's approval on the advance of the mission across new frontiers. Each stage is instructive for the church today, as we continue to bear witness of Jesus.
  - a. From Jerusalem the "geographical magnetic point" of the previous epoch, God's Spirit "exploded the geographical orientation of God's work in history in all directions, into all the world" (Guder 2000).
    - i. As witnesses to Jesus, we must begin where we are. Who are those who are most likely to observe us as we live out the witness to Jesus in our lives?

- Among whom do we have the greatest credibility? How will we present the gospel to those who already trust us?
- ii. Our vision must not, however, be limited to our “Jerusalem.” We must recognize that God’s vision is greater, and he wants ours to be as well. We need to be ready to respond to the Spirit as he moves us “in all directions, into all the world.”
- b. In “a city in Samaria,” “all Judea and Samaria” was reunited under a Messiah who was both Teacher and King.
    - i. A fresh movement of God’s Spirit was needed to move the witnesses to those who were, in fact, their own kin.
    - ii. We need to look for our “Samaritans.” Where are the places and who are the people who are so similar to us, yet to whom we have difficulty relating? What stereotypes do we need to overcome in order to go to them? How can we manifest God’s kingdom so that they are convinced of the credibility of our witness?
  - c. In going to Caesarea, Peter went to what seemed to him to be “the ends of the earth.”
    - i. We may doubt whether the disciples who heard Jesus’ commission in Acts 1:8 understood at the time what it meant to go “to the ends of the earth.” They certainly had no idea how they would get there. They embarked on a process of discovery as the Spirit prompted them and they responded in faith. At different stages, they may have thought of Caesarea, or Antioch, or Rome, or Spain as “the ends of the earth.” But when they reached there, they discovered that the ends of the earth lay yet before them.
    - ii. Even as the conclusion of the book of Acts is open-ended, so the mission of the Jesus’ witnesses remains today. Following new movements of the Spirit and discovering deeper aspects of the gospel does not mean that our previous testimony has been illegitimate. God accepts both individuals and the church at our present level of maturity and, as we obey, moves us toward a more perfect obedience.
    - iii. “We are still discovering the meaning of ‘all the world’ today” (Guder 2000). We are still discovering new “ends of the earth.”
      - a. We are discovering unreached people groups, the *ethnē* who Jesus commissioned us to disciple. Sometimes they are small groups, cut off from the witness that may surround them, but yet be incomprehensible to them because it has not been translated into their language and in terms of their worldview. Sometimes they are large groups who have not heard the testimony because of political barriers, or because Christ’s witnesses have been too intimidated by walls of religion, culture, and difficult living conditions.
      - b. Through tragedies such as the genocide in Rwanda, we are discovering that not all nations that have been “christianized” have been “disciple-ized.” A new, authentic testimony for Jesus is needed in such places.

- c. We are discovering how far Western Europe and North America have moved from their Christian past, if in fact they were ever truly, as a whole, made disciples. Disciples of Jesus find themselves in a cross-cultural situation, in which we are called to be faithful witnesses.
  - d. We are discovering that global mobility has brought “the ends of the earth” to our doorsteps. The cities of the world, in particular, contain a host of large ethnic communities. Many members of these communities are isolated from Christian witness that may be geographically near but, linguistically and culturally, as far away as “the ends of the earth.”
3. The testimony for Jesus can only maintain its momentum if it goes forth in the same power in which it was conceived—in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- a. Like the disciples in the upper room, we should wait expectantly and prayerfully for new movements of the Spirit.
  - b. We must, like the early disciples and through the Spirit, bear witness of Jesus—keeping his saving work and his inaugurated kingdom as the center of our testimony.
  - c. We should expect demonstrations of the power of God’s Spirit, both through miraculous manifestations and through humble service, as signs of the in-breaking kingdom.
  - d. We should go obediently, wherever the Spirit leads, even to people and places that have seemed off-limits, even “to the ends of the earth.”

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