

Route Sixty-Six

Part Forty-Four

Acts

A Baptized Church

(John 5:39; John 16:7)

With Study Questions

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Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you (John 16:7).

Introduction

Having moved my daughter to Dallas, we took an informal tour. We were in the company of a young man who had amassed a great deal of knowledge regarding the Kennedy assassination. I am old enough to remember where I was when Kennedy was shot. I have watched movies and documentaries about it. I've read numerous articles.

But I had never actually been to the specific location. We parked at the book depository and my young friend pointed out the window from where Oswald took the shot. We saw the markings in the street indicating exactly where Kennedy was on that fateful moment. We stood on the grassy knoll. I was fascinated.

At the same time, we were merely looking at a building, a street and little park. Yet I was enthralled.

I had a similar experience when I stood in the church where John Calvin preached. While in Europe we must have viewed a hundred churches and cathedrals. But when I entered Calvin's church, I recall just sitting and staring at the pulpit. I have read Calvin's opinion on probably every verse I have ever preached on for thirty years. I have become very acquainted with his life, ministry and theology.

In one respect we were just in another beautiful church. Yet I found myself moved by the occasion because I knew the history.

We have just spent four weeks with a survey and analysis of the special emphasis found in the four Gospels. We will soon examine a series of letters (epistles) written to churches and individuals. A great deal of what we read when we open the New Testament is someone else's mail on

how they are to respond to some event or an attempt to encourage a certain behavior. Acts (or the Acts of the Apostles as it is often called) is a unique book in the New Testament.

Though written to an individual (Theophilus-Acts 1:1), it is not so much instruction, guiding Theophilus in ministry (as with Paul's epistles to Timothy), as much as it is a historical account—a narrative—a part two of Luke's Gospel. Acts forms a bit of a bridge between the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. Acts provides historical background for the remaining twenty-two books in the Bible.

What we see as we open this transitional book is something that has been a source of confusion for the history of the New Covenant church. It opens with the ascension of Christ followed by a remarkable event during a Jewish feast day called Pentecost (Feast of Harvest or Feast of Weeks). In this event we read of a rushing wind and divided tongues, as of fire, sitting upon each person (Acts 2:1-4). We also read of the miraculous ability to speak a foreign language.

Whether or not these types of phenomena are a reasonable/biblical expectation for the church through history has been a source of many a controversy. It may be asked this way: are the events recorded in Acts part of the applied work of redemption or the accomplished work of redemption?

The accomplished work of redemption, as the word suggests, is something accomplished and not something we would expect to continue. For example, there is general agreement that the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ fall under this category of accomplished. But what about the events of Pentecost? Are rushing winds and tongues as of fire a reasonable/biblical expectation extending perpetually through history? If not, why not? If so, why does it so seldom (if ever) happen?

At our close, we will seek to answer that question. But first, a quick survey of Acts.

Survey of Acts

What we do see in Acts, at least in seminal form, relates to what Jesus taught in John 16:7. It will be to the advantage of the church for Jesus to “go away” at least physically, that He might ever be with His church spiritually. His ministry is not constrained to His physical, geographically

limitations. It will have been fifty days since His resurrection. For forty of those days He presented Himself to them, then He would have them “tarry” for ten days at which time He would baptize them with the Holy Spirit (again, a source of great confusion and controversy). There is general agreement that the theme of Acts is found in the eighth verse of chapter one.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

This baptism (something that produced signs/miracles that were mocked-Acts 2:13) is accompanied by a great sermon by Peter where he indicates that these events were prophesied in the Old Testament, mainly by Joel. Joel’s prophecy highlights the cataclysmic events surrounding the end of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New Covenant (sun to darkness, moon to blood, etc.). Peter teaches that Christ has taken David’s throne (Acts 2:30). The Spirit was powerful in Peter’s sermon and the people “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37) and asked what they should do.

Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38, 39).

It is here that we see the church begin to grow as they

they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:42).

We continue to see the Spirit working mightily as Peter and John engage in healing and teaching. It is having such an effect that they are commanded to stop but realize they must defer to the higher authority.

But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge (Acts 4:19; see 5:29)

The beginnings of the New Covenant church are a hotbed. The persecution is intense, and the prayers are made for boldness (Acts 4:29). Deceit within the church finds little tolerance from the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11) and turmoil within the church results in (it is commonly argued) the beginning of the diaconate (Acts 6:1-11).

One of the great early deacons is Stephen. He presents a powerful and beautiful sermon resulting in his being the first public New Covenant martyr. Addressing an apostate church, Stephen concluded his sermon with words that today’s church should take to heart. He addressed his listeners as those

who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it* (Acts 7:53).

Woe to the church that allows their Bibles to become a mere religious fashion accessory.

The early portions of Acts have Peter as the central figure. With the martyring of Stephen, we see a new character introduced. Saul of Tarsus was there, consenting to the death of Stephen.

As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison (Acts 8:3).

We read of both good and bad as Acts continues. Simon the sorcerer thought he could pay money for power. The Ethiopian eunuch comes to faith through the ministry of Philip (Acts 8). As we reach chapter 9 we are re-introduced to Saul, “**still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord**” (Acts 9:1).

Saul finds himself encountering Christ on the road to Damascus. He will now become the primary human instrument in the hands of God through Acts. Though in chapter ten, Peter is taught a great lesson regarding the international nature of the New Covenant church in a vision and an encounter with Cornelius.

Acts continues to record the advancement of the church along with persecutions, imprisonments and beatings of Peter and Paul and Paul's three missionary journeys where we read of the beginning of so many churches. It is to these churches that we will see Paul write letters, which we will turn our attention to in due time.

We read of the Jerusalem Council where the leaders of the church gather together to establish unity in their approach to a church that is now international in nature (Acts 15). We read of the wonderful conversions of Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16).

We read of the ministry of Paul and Silas and how they disrupted the religious practice and commerce of towns they would enter. Paul addresses the sophists at Mars Hill in his preaching regarding "**The Unknown God**" (Acts 17:23). As we continue to read Acts, we see the ministry continue to grow while at the same time being resisted. Paul will not hesitate to preach the "**full counsel**" (Acts 20:27). He also warns the church that all the church's enemies will not come from without, but within as well.

**Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.
29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock (Acts 20:28, 29).**

As Acts comes to a close, the focus is upon Paul's arrest and trial. He appears before governors and kings, and eventually appeals to Caesar (Acts 25:11). After incidents upon the ship in his journey to Rome, Paul spends his last couple of years (Acts records about thirty years of church history) under house arrest in Rome.

But let us conclude by answering our earlier question. To what extent should we view the miraculous events of Pentecost as a reasonable/biblical expectation continuing in the church-especially as it relates to the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

A Baptized Church

Though worthy of an entire class, it must at very least be recognized that some of the events recorded in Acts were unique events that we should

not view as extending past the era of the Apostles. Jesus, in His instruction regarding the sending of the Spirit (speaking to His apostles) said:

These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you (John 14:25, 26).

The sending of the Spirit enabled His followers infallibly remember and declare all that Jesus taught them with He was still with them in the flesh. Jesus has never been with us in the flesh. He has ascended. The Spirit doesn't bring to our remembrance things Jesus taught us while He was with us. The Spirit gives that infallible message through the Apostles, which has been recorded in Holy Scripture.

It is the full and complete message necessary for redemption. This is why the Holy Spirit was not sent until Jesus was glorified (John 7:39). That the entirety of the accomplished work of redemption would be deposited in His church via the Old and New Testaments.

What we read of in Acts is the baptizing of the church. It begins in the upper room when Jesus breathes on the Apostles (John 20:22). It comes in full force at Pentecost (Acts 2). It continues through Acts. Even into chapter nineteen where they had not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit falls upon the church in phases throughout the ministry of the Apostles.

We are to understand ourselves as part of a baptized body.

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴ For in fact the body is not one member but many (1 Corinthians 12:12-14).

Paul now begins his “**body**” illustration (the foot speaking to the hand, etc.), but not until he makes a critical point – that by one Spirit all the members of the church have been baptized into one body. To suggest that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a subsequent experience is to tear Paul's unity argument asunder. There is no notion allowed in Paul's argument

that some had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and others hadn't. The glue for Paul's argument is the assertion that **"by one Spirit (they) were all baptized into one body"**.

It would be best to understand the baptism of the Holy Spirit as something poured out on the church as an organism—a body. This what we see through Acts. And when we, by the grace of God, become part of that organism we are made to drink into that one Spirit. So, it is not me, on an island (or tarrying in prayer) waiting to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. When God grants me faith and I am brought into the church of Christ—the body of Christ—I become part of a baptized body.

This may be illustrated by thinking of people in a pool (the church) and others outside the pool (the unconverted). The pool is the baptized organism. The people outside the pool don't make their own pools or seek to splash water on themselves. When, by the grace of God, they enter the pool they enter a baptized body enjoying all its graces.

So how does one know they are truly part of that baptized body? Or further, what marks out the church as a true baptized body? How do you know, if you jump in the pool, that you will land in water rather than cement? For one, it holds the word of the triune God to be the true word of God. That is the initial work of Christ in sending His Spirit. And, like the remainder of Scripture, the true church will ever highlight the central figure of redemption. The focus of Acts, and all true churches, is the person and work of Christ, the only **"name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"** (Acts 4:11).

And finally, the recurring message in Acts, the message of a Spirit Baptized body, is that **"God raised [Jesus] from the dead"** (Acts 13:30). One can barely get through a chapter of Acts without Luke recording that central message (2:14, 24, 30; 3:15; 4:10; 10:40; 13:34, 37; 14:31). This is the message which begins in Jerusalem, reaches Judea and Samaria and then to the **"end of the earth."** As Peter preached:

And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:42, 43).

Questions for Study

1. How is Acts different from other books in the New Testament (pages 2, 3)?
2. Define the difference between the accomplished work of redemption and the applied work of redemption (page 3).
3. Why would it be advantageous for Jesus to “go away” (pages 3, 4)?
4. What does Joel’s prophecy predict (page 4)?
5. How did people response to Peter’s sermon? What did Peter tell them to do? Have you done this (page 4)?
6. When is it right to disobey human authority (page 5)?
7. What was Paul/Saul like before meeting Christ (page 5)?
8. How will the church be attacked (page 6)?
9. Discuss and define the baptism of the Holy Spirit (page 7).
10. What is the central message of a baptized church (page 8)?