

Acts 1 Exegetical Meditation



Written as a kind of sequel to his gospel, St Luke pens what comes to be known as the *Acts of the Apostles* in order to give a sketch of the power of the Holy Spirit. This is not a thorough and detailed account of the first thirty years after Christ's Resurrection and Ascension by any stretch, but rather an attempt to simply reveal Christ's relationship with His Church through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1 Breakdown: Address to Theophilus- 1:1-5 Ascension of Jesus- 1:6-12 Matthias Chosen- 1:13-1:26

In Acts 1 the reader sees that Luke's overarching goal was to tell the truth about who Jesus is, and how we come to know who He is through the Holy Spirit's operation within the apostolic Church. The gospels record a few different accounts of these "proofs" (Acts 1:3), in which Jesus appeared to the apostles. We do not know if these were all of them, but that is mostly irrelevant. What is essential to understanding Luke's declaration to Theophilus is that for forty days Jesus appeared to them and **"spoke about the kingdom of God"** (Acts 1:3). The "kingdom of God" is a term that traditionally was understood as synonymous with the Church. In particular, it is the term used by the saints to highlight the Church's unity on Earth and in Heaven. The point is that St Luke reveals that Christ was making known His will regarding those things that pertained to the Church. Whether it was the Church's sacramental economy,

its governance, its hierarchy, or its plan of evangelization, Jesus was definitely talking to the Apostles about what the Church is— ie. His Bride.

Immediately before Christ's homecoming to the right hand of the Father, He responds to the apostles' questioning regarding the restoration of Israel with the fact that the Holy Spirit is coming to help you (Acts 1:8). He states that this Spirit will make them "**witnesses.**" This word *witness* is used later on in the choosing of the twelfth apostle. The apostles understood that they needed to replace Judas's office because the office itself was eschatologically symbolic of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The only characteristic that was necessary for the election of the twelfth apostle was that he was a "witness" of Jesus's ministry from His baptism up until His resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:22). In a sense, the reader can glean that the apostles understood that this person needed to have the credibility of an eyewitness testimony to argue for Jesus's divinity **and** His masterplan for the restoration of Israel. Matthias is thus chosen through the casting of lots (traditionally a trustworthy practice that determined God's will) and now they are ready to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost—to launch them into their mission.

The Holy Spirit is Christ's response to the confused apostles regarding how Israel will be restored. It is not for the apostles to know the mystery. However— ironically— God uses them to bring the mystery into being. It is kind of like Jesus saying "Look, I won't tell you how, but I will show you how." In the apostolic Church, the Holy Spirit is alive. The Holy Spirit is the power at work within the whole Church, but in particular, it works through the apostles and their successors' leadership to bring about the reunification of Israel. It is not like God has forgotten Israel in His attempt to use His apostolic Church to reach out to the Gentiles. As St Paul makes clear in his letter to the Romans, the conversion of the Gentiles is like an ingrafting into Israel. In fact, St Paul affirms that in the end "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26). This reunification of Israel is one that happens through conversion to the new Israel—the Church; but the new Israel and the old Israel have the same eschatological unity.