

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 341
Series: The Primal Church - Acts Chapters 1-8
Verses: Acts 1:1-5
Topic: Water and Spirit
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[Having just finished our series on John 12-21, which has taken most of this year, we will now turn to Acts chapters 1-8 "The Primal Church". This new series will look at how the Holy Spirit works among adventurous faith-filled Christian communities. The John 12-21 series should be available as an ebook within a week or so, my wonderful wife Minda is undertaking the long task of compiling it at the moment. Please ask your friends to subscribe to Eternity-DBS for this new series. See links at the bottom of this email.]

Acts 1:1-5 WNT My former narrative, Theophilus, dealt with all that Jesus did and taught as a beginning, down to the day on which, (2) after giving instruction through the Holy Spirit to the Apostles whom He had chosen, He was taken up to Heaven. (3) He had also, after He suffered, shown Himself alive to them with many sure proofs, appearing to them at intervals during forty days, and speaking of the Kingdom of God. (4) And while in their company He charged them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promised gift. "This you have heard of," He said, "from me. (5) For John indeed baptized with water, but before many days have passed you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

This is the beginning of Luke's second book. The first was his gospel; the second is Acts, his account of the life and ministry of the apostles. His audience is one "Theophilus" which means "friend of God", and is probably a general term of reference like "dear Christian reader", but Theophilus may also have been the actual name of a Roman official. Luke connects Acts with Luke in the first two verses above.

"after giving instruction through the Holy Spirit to the Apostles whom He had chosen," – This is the first mention of the Holy Spirit in Acts – and "first mentions" have a special and significant place in Scripture. This verse tells us that Jesus speaks through the Holy Spirit to His chosen ones and gives them commandments and instructions for the apostolic task. This becomes a theme throughout Acts as Jesus, speaking through the Spirit directs Peter, Stephen, Phillip, Ananias, Paul and Barnabas, the elders and prophets at Antioch and many others in the task of spreading the gospel.

"He was taken up to Heaven." Today Jesus is in Heaven at the right-hand of the Father and will remain there until "all His enemies are made a footstool for His feet". (Acts 2:35, Hebrews 1:13, 10:13) Jesus ascension into Heaven was a spiritual mop-up operation after the cross, in which He went through the spiritual realms and dealt with any hostile spiritual powers there and "taking captivity captive" (Ephesians 4:8-13). With the cross, resurrection and ascension the pagan spiritual realm of taboos,

curses and spells was dealt a mortal blow. Satan was stripped of his powers (Colossians 2:13-15) Christ became superior to all principalities and powers (Ephesians 1:19-21) and Christians, by grace, were also seated with Him in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6,7).

[For a full article on the ascension see: <http://www.aibi.ph/aibi/ascension.htm>]

“He had also, after He suffered, shown Himself alive to them with many sure proofs, appearing to them at intervals during forty days.” The forty days transition period is covered in a tantalizingly small number of verses in the gospels. Very little of Jesus’ teaching during this time is recorded though Luke says that He continued to teach them “about the Kingdom of God”. The main purpose of this time seems to have been to convince the early Christian community of His resurrection and to prepare them for service and witness. The phrase “many sure proofs” testifies to the fact that Jesus always appeared to a number of people at once, in ordinary circumstances such as fishing trips or walking along a road. This was not mass hypnotism, or personal delusion. It was inter-subjectively testable evidence confirmed by two or three eye-witnesses on each occasion.

“and speaking of the Kingdom of God.” The Kingdom of God is present where God reigns and produces righteousness, peace and joy through the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17) The Kingdom is not a nation, church or denomination but is Christ’s personal presence in the midst of a community of believers – even if it is only two or three persons. (Matthew 18:20). (The Kingdom of God is extensively discussed in a previous Eternity-DBS series on The Kingdom of Heaven which is available as an ebook from <http://www.aibi.ph/kingdom/>)

“And while in their company He charged them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father’s promised gift.” Throughout Scripture the Holy Spirit is called “the promise” (Acts 2:33, Galatians 3:14, Ephesians 1:13) and is God’s amazing gift of Himself to those that love Him. The Holy Spirit is the new wine of the New Covenant and is that which the prophet Joel foretold – a Spirit-filled community where even the least are able to have dreams, visions and prophecies and where salvation is freely available to all who call on God. (Acts 2:16-21)

"This you have heard of," He said, "from me. (5) For John indeed baptized with water, but before many days have passed you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Jesus is speaking of a new baptism for the apostles. They had all been baptized by John in the Jordan, and many, if not all, had themselves baptized disciples in Jesus’ name. (John 3:22-30) But this was not what Jesus was referring to when He spoke of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit baptism was something that was to be sent directly from God, not something that the disciples had done in the Judean countryside.

While there is a close relationship between water baptism and Spirit baptism but there is also a clear difference that is pointed out by Jesus: “For John indeed baptized with water, but...” – the “but” is important, it denotes another kind of baptism. Both baptisms are immersions, one in water, the other in the presence and person of God. Ideally they should occur together as they did at Jesus’ baptism.

However for the apostles they were some years apart, and this may also have been the case for some Ephesian disciples. (Acts 19:1-7) The baptism in the Holy Spirit opens up heavenly realities to ordinary Christians just as the heavens were opened for Jesus. It results in an overwhelming perception of the glory of God, which may be expressed by such gifts as prophecy or tongues. I am aware that some of you may hold to a conservative evangelical theology, which sees the baptism of the Holy Spirit at conversion. John Stott puts this view well in his small book "The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit". I personally held that same view for many years but have become convinced of the charismatic interpretation as a better explanation of the Scriptures.

Without the baptism in the Holy Spirit Christianity is just another first-century philosophy – dependent on reason and argumentation. The fact that God anoints us with Himself is very radical. It means that true Christians will be an entirely new order of humanity with a new degree of holiness, wisdom, power and love that far outstrips Judaism, Buddhism or the New Age.

Jesus said that we are to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:24) and among other things this means that we are to be Spirit-directed, bible-believing Christians. We need both heavenly truth and heavenly anointing. Let us summarize today's points: Jesus speaks to His chosen ones through the Holy Spirit, giving them instructions and commandments about their calling and empowering them through the baptism in the promised Holy Spirit.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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