

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You have guided Your people for centuries through the perils of life, and more than that, You have guided them through the ultimate trial of death, and given them the gift of life eternal. As we continue to experience the ups and downs of daily life, remind us that eventually, we face our journey through death either with You or without You. May we therefore chose to keep close to You in every circumstance of life, and remain mindful of our eternal destiny. AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: TRANSPORT

**1. For yourself**

*Pray about any journey you take regularly in the course of your work or everyday life. Pray for God's blessing on your daily travel, and for safety*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Pray for any relatives or friends who regularly face difficult or complex journeys; pray that God will protect and bless them as they travel*

**3. For the church and its work**

*Romans 10 (10:14,15) describes how the Gospel must travel from one person to another and from one place to another so that the message of the Gospel be spread abroad. Pray that the church today may fulfil this call, and pray that people who come to church may be willing to do what God requires of them*

**4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)**

*Pray for the transport systems you most frequently use, whether on land, sea or air*

### Meditation

Learn to live a little more  
for Christ is there within each fragment of life  
and He has more to show you.

Learn to love a little more  
for Christ has demonstrated perfect love  
and given it up for you

Learn to trust a little more  
for Christ has given you every good reason  
to lean on Him each day

Learn to hope a little more  
for Christ has gone before you into heaven  
from where He calls to you

Learn to strive a little more  
for Christ has done more than you can ask  
for you and for your blessing

Learn to smile a little more  
For Christ has promised he will not withdraw  
The many blessings of your faith

Learn to walk in faith a little more each day  
and You will know the presence of Your Saviour  
all the more, and, of course, forever more.

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# Bible Study

## Bible passage – Acts 1:1-5

<sup>1</sup> In my earlier book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup> before the day He was taken to heaven, having given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After His suffering, he showed Himself alive to these men through much credible evidence, and He appeared to them over a period of forty days and told them about the Kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> While eating with them, He ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father; He said,

‘This is what you have heard me pledge; <sup>5</sup> John baptised with water, but in a few days time you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.’

## Review

***Luke introduces his work to Theophilus, the man who commissioned it, explaining that it has been written in two parts. The Gospel comes first, revealing Jesus’ life and teaching, and after this comes the record of the ‘Acts’ of the Apostles, possible only through the ‘baptism with the Holy Spirit’ as promised by Jesus.***

The ‘Acts of the Apostles’ is remarkable and unique. We have in our possession four great Gospels, each one describing Jesus’ life and ministry from an important perspective, but there is only one book giving us a comprehensive story of what happened after Jesus died. The many different letters of Paul and the Apostles help us fill in a few historical details, but the book of the ‘Acts of the Apostles’ (from now on, called ‘Acts’) is an invaluable record of the birth of the Christian church and its earliest days.

The first words of Acts remind us that it was written by Luke to accompany his Gospel. Both were written for someone named Theophilus (Luke 1:3 Acts 1:1), who was perhaps a famous person or someone who was a ‘lover of God’, which is a straightforward translation of the Greek word ‘theophilus’. Even if Luke originally wrote both his Gospel and Acts for one person, it still seems likely that he knew it would one day become the property of the church. So now that it has become Scripture, it speaks to all of us who are ‘lovers of God’.

The most remarkable thing about the opening of the Gospel of Luke and Acts is their breadth of vision. Here, Luke tells us that his first work, the Gospel, was about ‘*all that Jesus began to do and teach before the day He was taken to heaven*’ (1:1,2). This is in itself a staggering thought, for the Gospels themselves say that no book could ever contain everything Jesus said and did (John 20:30). However, Luke focuses here not on what Jesus said and did before His death, but after it. When Jesus died, the disciples first endured the great shock of losing the One in whom they had placed their trust, but this was nothing compared to the shock of discovering that he had been raised from the dead! All the Gospels say that the disciples had great difficulty in believing that Jesus really was alive, for example, Luke says they did not believe the women who first saw the empty tomb because ‘*their words seemed to them like nonsense*’ (Luke 24:11). For this reason, Luke now summarises the important evidence that eventually persuaded the disciples to believe that Jesus had indeed risen and was in a position to fulfil every one of God’s promises.

The first evidence Luke records is the fact that Jesus appeared to the disciples and ‘*gave instructions through the Holy Spirit*’ (Acts 1:2). All the Gospels tell us that Jesus appeared to His disciples on a number of occasions, and proved to them that he was alive, for example, by eating food (Luke 24:36-50, see also John 21:1-15). His eating of food left an indelible impression on the minds of the early disciples, and Luke refers to it here (1:4). Most important of all, Jesus proved He was alive through a series of miraculous events. He appeared to two disciples on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:13-35), He met the disciples by the shores of Galilee (John 21:1-18), and perhaps most significantly, He commanded the disciples to do God’s work in the world (Matthew 28:19). To Luke, this all added up to ‘*much credible evidence*’ (1:3), facts that were doubtless poured over by the disciples in those precious days.

In God’s great plan of things, however, the life of Jesus was not just a spike of heavenly activity in the mundane life of planet earth. It was the springboard for much more, indeed, for the unleashing of God’s power into the world by means of His Holy Spirit. Jesus had indeed explained God’s Kingdom to the disciples (Acts 1:3), but in all that He said and did, He left the disciples with the promise that God was about to do a new work in the world by means of the Holy Spirit. Luke summarises the promise in this way, ‘*John baptised with water, but in a few days time you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit*’ (Acts 1:5). Now in his Gospel record, Luke tells us that John the Baptist said just this, ‘*I baptise you with water, but one more powerful than I will come ... He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire*’ (Luke 3:16), but his Gospel

says little more about the Holy Spirit. We have to go to John's Gospel to read more about these things, for example, when Jesus tells the disciples at the Last Supper *'but the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you'* (John 14:26).

In this way, Luke pinpoints the truth about God's priority after the Resurrection. He intends to work in the world from now on through those who have faith in Jesus and receive the outpouring of His Holy Spirit for the task. So although there are a few more features to the story before this can happen (Acts 1:6-26), we already know from these few verses that the book of Acts is to be a story not just of work of the Apostles, but the Acts of the Holy Spirit!

## Going Deeper

- Notes on the translation of the passage
- The difference between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts
- The overlapping time, a time of waiting and of learning
- The teaching of Jesus between His Resurrection and His Ascension
- The 'suffering' of Christ
- The promise of baptism with the Holy Spirit

### **Notes on the translation of the passage**

V4 ***He ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father; He said, 'This is what you have heard me pledge ... (PHA)***

#### Other translations:

*'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which You heard me speak about ... (NIV)*

*He ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. 'This,' He said, 'is what you have heard from me ...' (NRSV)*

Verse 4 is ambiguous, and unclear about the point at which Jesus' 'speech' begins. It could be at the beginning of verse 4, or towards its end. I reckon that on the whole, the passage is about the pledge of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit, so my translation limits the quote of Jesus' words to this specific promise.

V5 ***'baptised with the Holy Spirit'***

This phrase can also be translated as 'baptised in the Holy Spirit', but it would be foolish to imagine that the difference between 'in' and 'with' makes much difference. We understand what it means to be blessed by this 'Holy Spirit' baptism through Jesus, who is the source of this blessing.

### **The difference between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts**

If you read the first three verses of the Gospel of Luke and compare it with the first verse of the book of Acts, Luke's the differences between the two books becomes clear. The Gospel is about what Jesus *'began'* to do, and the book of Acts is about what he *'continued'* to do in the power of His Holy Spirit. The book of Acts begins by describing the days between Jesus' Resurrection at His Ascension, and it is not surprising that the next passage we study describes Christ's Ascension (1:6-13). It then points forward to the rich story of what the Apostles will do through the empowering of the Spirit.

If we look at both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts as one great work following another, then I suggest that they present a balanced view of Christian faith. Together, they highlight not just the teachings of Jesus but also the empowering of the Holy Spirit, through whom we are able to do what God requires and also receive the blessing of His comfort and love. Too many Christians today focus on what it means to learn more of Christ, and many need to accept that they cannot do this in their own strength. Their lives lack power because they do not know the Holy Spirit.

### **The overlapping time, a time of waiting and of learning**

Clearly, Luke thought of the time between the Resurrection and the Ascension as a time of overlapping. It spanned the time between the life and ministry of Jesus and the coming work of the Holy Spirit. He describes this as a time in which the disciples received instruction personally from Jesus (1:2) and in which they received constant assurance through Jesus' physical presence (1:3). He also describes this as a time of waiting for the Holy Spirit (1:4). The overall impression we are given here matches all that we have

discovered about God's purposes in the world as describes by both Luke's Gospel and the book of Acts. The teaching of Jesus goes hand in hand with the empowering activity of the Holy Spirit if it is to be effective both in the believer and also in action within the world. Moreover, waiting for the Holy Spirit is never without purpose, for this is when the disciple must learn the teachings of Jesus, and become grounded in God's eternal Word. The world will be changed when disciples of Jesus do God's will accurately because they know it, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, and not by means of their own resources.

### ***The teaching of Jesus between His Resurrection and His Ascension***

Luke tells us that in the time between the Resurrection and the Ascension, Jesus' main aims were to prove to the disciples that He was alive, teach them about 'the Kingdom of God' (1:3), and ask them to wait for the Holy Spirit (1:4). What then did Jesus teach the disciples about the Kingdom of God in this time? We rely of course on the Gospel records. Matthew reports the Great Commission, to '*go into all the world to make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*' (Matt 28:19). Mark describes Jesus urging the disciples to do just this, but adds a some other comments about the nature of Christian mission and its dangers (Mark 16:15-18). Luke tells us the wonderful story of the Emmaus Road, and within that describes Jesus teaching the disciples about the meaning of Scripture, especially the prophets (Luke 24:27,44). John's Gospel concludes with Jesus teaching Peter about the significance of love and his role in pastoring the early church (John 21:15-18). Put all this together, and it makes a valuable compendium of Jesus' 'teaching' within this post-Resurrection time.

### ***The 'suffering' of Christ***

In verse 3, Luke uses a powerful word to describe the end of Jesus' life, he calls it '*His suffering*' (1:3), and the Greek verb he uses is 'pascein' from which we get the term 'paschal', as in the expression 'the paschal lamb', a phrase which describes Christ's suffering on the Cross. Of course, our understanding of the meaning of Christ's suffering is profoundly influenced by the prophet Isaiah, and his famous prophecy about the suffering servant who went '*like a lamb to the slaughter*' (Isaiah 53:7f.). This same Greek word, 'pascein' is found throughout the Greek translation of the Old Testament of Isaiah 53, and from the way he uses the word here, it seems likely that Luke knew this. The sufferings of Christ are for the redemption of all who will have faith in Christ. But as Luke points out here, they are the necessary background for the revelation of the risen Christ (1:3), and to understand Christ's sufferings and their meaning is part of the spiritual journey we must make if we are to be ready for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

### ***The promise of baptism with the Holy Spirit***

Here in this passage, the phrase 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' is not defined or analysed in any way. Luke simply states that this is what Jesus wants for those who follow Him. At the time Luke said this, the only Scriptural background to this idea was to be found in the words of John the Baptist (see above, Luke 3:16). John clearly baptised people with water for the repentance of sins, and envisaged a new baptism performed by Jesus not with water but with the Holy Spirit.

What then does this mean for Christians today who receive water baptism in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? What does it mean for Christians who claim a second experience of faith in which they receive the 'baptism with the Holy Spirit' at a later date than their water baptism? At best, we must accept that the full meaning of Christian baptism, however administered, must include the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. There are plenty of passages within the letters of the New Testament that describe baptism (Romans 6:3f. Galatians 3:27, Ephesians 4:5, Colossians 2:12, 1 Peter 3:21), and it is worth remarking that few of them mention water (only 1 Peter) and most of them mention the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer (Romans, Ephesians, Colossians).

No passage of Scripture places conditions on what all this might mean, but Jesus clearly taught that true baptism is indeed a spiritual thing, which celebrates the 'new life' believer, or being 'born again' (John 3:3,16). The best way to understand what happened in the life of the early church, with reference to both baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit, is to read the book of Acts, and become familiar with what happened in those early days of the Christian church. If we do this, then we will find there is little place for rigid dogma on the details either of baptism or of what we mean by the work of the Holy Spirit. One depends on the other and both are a necessary part of the journey of Christian faith.

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## **Discipleship**

### **Application**

### ***The Gospel of Salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit***

There is a tendency among some churches today to emphasise the life of Jesus and His teaching but to do this at the expense of all He continued to do in the life of the early church through His Holy Spirit. The opening words of our passage today remind us that both are important, because the one leads on to the other. The Gospel of Luke is connected to the book of Acts of the Apostles, and we need both to get this full picture of God's work of salvation.

There are too many opinionated ideas about the work of the Holy Spirit today, developed from personal experience but not from a good understanding of Scripture. So we must cut to the chase and accept unreservedly that the Holy Spirit is an essential part of our understanding of God. There is only one Lord and Father, there is only one Saviour Jesus Christ, and there is only one Holy Spirit, who all work together to do God's will. Any divisions we make today between Christians on the basis of their supposed theology, such as those between 'traditional', 'charismatic', 'evangelical' or 'high church' are ultimately irrelevant from the perspective of heaven. God works through all those who profess Christ as Lord and allow him to work through His Holy Spirit in the world, in the same way He has already done through the early disciples of the Christian church, as recorded in the book of Acts. Our duty is to explore what God is doing today in our midst by the Holy Spirit, to seek the baptism in the Holy Spirit that Jesus Himself has promised us, and to use the gifts that the Holy Spirit manifestly gives us so that we can both worship God and do God's work in the world.

### ***The importance of signs and wonders***

Jesus appeared to the early disciples miraculously in order to prove to them that he was alive after the crucifixion and after he had been truthfully killed and buried. Now that this proof has been given, it is up to us to receive the testimony of the disciples that this is true, and that Jesus is alive as they have claimed. How blessed we are if we can accept such a testimony, believe, and know the risen Lord for ourselves!

Nevertheless, if we look at the way God is at work throughout the world today, it seems that there are times and places where He must reveal Himself in further dramatic ways if He is to be made known. We should be grateful for this, and accept that His works of power are given to show people that He is indeed God and He is at work in His world. We should not need to seek such demonstrations of God's power and love because we already have the testimony of the disciples, but we should be profoundly grateful that God works in these signs and wonders and we should always be ready to receive them.

### Questions for groups

1. What is most important for the Christian, the teachings of Jesus or the work of the Holy Spirit?
2. At a time when Christians who believe in the work of the Holy Spirit are often labelled as 'charismatics', how can we make sure that the whole church recognises both the teachings of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit?
3. Why is it sometimes necessary for us to wait in order to do God's work? Why did God wait for a period of time after the Resurrection before sending His Holy Spirit on the disciples?

### Discipleship challenges

- *What is the evidence upon which you base your faith? Think about this for a little while, and write down a list of answers to this question. If you are you as you study further in the book of Acts, and amend it is necessary.*
- *If you are unsure about what it means to be 'baptised with the Holy Spirit', seek out someone of pastoral responsibility within the life of your church to discuss this. Make sure that you read and understand the first two chapters of the book of Acts before doing this.*

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## **Final Prayer**

Lord God, you came in Jesus Christ to save the world, and you came as the Holy Spirit to empower the disciples. Come among us who are your people today, so that we may do great works of power in Jesus' name to the glory of God. Come and revive our spirits by dwelling amongst us in this way, we pray, AMEN

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