Pentecost 1

Recently I attended a teaching series on the book of Acts. Some of it was good and some not so good. When I complained to God, He encouraged me to teach Acts better, not allowing what I knew to fade away. This teaching is the beginning of a series on Acts, focusing on some common misconceptions that need correction so that the revelation is understandable, logical, and practical. Although I am not a scholar on Acts, because of Providence and curiosity, this series should have some valuable insights.

**Introduction**

The title of the book we call “the Acts of the Apostles”, is not the same in all the ancient texts. Some say, “the Acts of the Holy Spirit”, while some say, “the Acts of the Apostles”. Others say only “Acts”, while some have no title. The title “the Acts of the Apostles” sounds good, but is it - the acts of the apostles? In other words, is it all the acts of all the apostles? No. Is it “all the acts of the Holy Spirit” during this time? No. Perhaps the best title (If there is to be one) is “Acts”, which in Greek is *praxeis*, meaning, “practices”. I favor this title best because the book highlights godly and ungodly practices in early church history. We will focus on many of these.

The book is addressed to “Theophilus”, from the Greek for God, *theos*, and *phileo*, meaning to love as a friend or be emotionally attached to someone. This leads to two possibilities. Acts could be addressed to an individual, perhaps a wealthy patron named Theophilus, who supported the church and wanted clarification on the faith he embraced. This could be indicated by the beginning of the gospel of Luke.

Luke 1:1-4

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an orderly account about the things that have been fulfilled among us,

just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word passed them on to us,

it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write to you in order, most excellent Theophilus,

so that you can come to fully know the certainty of the things about which you have been told.

The second option to whom Acts could be addressed is the Church as a whole – those who love God with an emotional connection to Him. This seems much more likely than to an individual considering that the gospel of Luke plus Acts totals over 27% of the New Testament! Luke wrote both. If you will, Acts is the gospel of Luke, part 2. Luke ends at Christ’s ascension which is basically where Acts begins.

Luke the writer, was primarily a Greek speaker – either a former Gentile or Hellenized (Greek-speaking) Jew. He was a physician (Col. 4:14) and a systematic thinker (Luke 1:1-3). He traveled with Paul (Phil 1:24) and was with him at the end of his life (2 Tim. 4:11). Although he had experienced much of what Acts records and had heard the gospel and church history from other witnesses, he still wrote by revelation – “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the holy spirit”.

There are three “we” sections in Acts: 16:10 – 16:18 approx. 49 AD

20:4 – 21:19 approx. 54-57 AD

27:1 - 28:30 approx. 59-62 AD

These are the historical sections where Luke participated. Incidentally, he is acknowledged as a first-rate historian by most scholars. Considering the gospel also, he covered roughly 60 years of crucial history with ample political, geographic, and cultural documentation.

**The Promise of the Father**

Jesus commanded the apostles to “wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, you heard about from me”. Jesus had foretold of the coming of the holy spirit many times (Matt 3:11, Luke 24:49, John 7:39, and 15:26). The apostles asked Jesus “Lord, is it at this time you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Some consider this a silly question because in retrospect, not only has the kingdom never been restored but the nation of Israel itself was barely restored in 1948. The reason that the apostles query was spiritually sharp and scripturally astute is that in the Old Testament, the spirit is foretold to come and be associated with some specific things.

Is. 32:15-18 REV

until the spirit is poured on us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is considered a forest.

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness and righteousness will remain in the fruitful field.

The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.

My people will live in a peaceful habitation, in safe dwellings and in quiet resting places.

Notice that the spirit is foretold to come, and the wilderness becomes fruitful, with justice, righteousness, peace, quietness, confidence, peace, safety, and rest. The spirit causes big changes!

Joel 2:28–32

It will happen afterward that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams.  Your young men will see visions.

And also on my servants and on my servant girls in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood, fire, and pillars of smoke.

The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes.

It will happen that whoever will call on the name of Yahweh will be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as Yahweh has said, and among the remnant those whom Yahweh calls.

Joel foretells that when the spirit comes, it will be manifested in many ways by many people. There will also be mind-blowing celestial and terrestrial signs. There will also be a mighty battle and judgment.

Joel 3:1-2, 9-10, 12, 14, 17, 18, 20

For behold, in those days and in that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,

I will gather all nations and will bring them down into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will execute judgment on them there for my people and for my heritage, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations. They have divided my land,

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Stir up the mighty men. Let all the warriors draw near. Let them come up.

Beat your plow blades into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say, “I am strong.”

Let the nations be roused and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for I will sit there to judge all the surrounding nations.

Multitudes, multitudes in the Valley of Decision! For the day of Yahweh is near in the valley of decision.

So you will know that I am Yahweh your God, dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain. Then Jerusalem will be holy, and no strangers will pass through her anymore.

It will happen in that day that the mountains will drop down sweet wine, the hills will flow with milk, all the brooks of Judah will flow with waters, and a fountain will come forth from the house of Yahweh and will water the valley of Shittim.

But Judah will be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation.

Joel says the spirit will come and a great battle and judgment will occur at Jerusalem. The ungodly are destroyed, Israel will prosper abundantly and be inhabited with blessing forever! Back to Acts 1. This is the reason why the apostles’ assumption of judgment and the millennial kingdom after the spirit is poured out is logical. Did it happen? No. Has it happened yet? No. So, what were they missing?

**The Mystery**

God made the universe for the earth, the earth for man, and man to fellowship with Him. Regrettably, Adam and Eve rejected God’s love and plan. Despite that, God planned restoration of all that they lost by sending by a redeemer who would win back God’s dream of a family. Speaking to Satan at the time of the original sin, God foretold:

Gen. 3:15

I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.

God foretold that Satan would bruise (or “crush”) the seed of the woman’s (the redeemer’s) heel, while the redeemer would bruise (or crush) Satan’s head. The redeemer would take a mighty blow from Satan, seriously affecting him, but Satan would experience a much greater blow affecting his head – where planning and desires live. And as we know, when the head is crushed, life itself is crushed and over. This plan for redemption depended on God providing a “seed of the woman” who would defeat Satan despite being attacked by him.

Although he inspired His Old Testament prophets to see and foretell Christ’s service and glorious end, God was mute on how it would happen.

1 Cor. 2:6-8

However, we do speak wisdom among those who are mature. But not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

But we speak God’s wisdom that was kept in a sacred secret, and that has been hidden, which God decided in advance before the ages for our glory,

which none of the rulers of this age knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

God specifically withheld what Christ would accomplish by his death and resurrection so that Satan, blinded by hate, would unwittingly offer the perfect sacrifice on behalf of mankind’s sins and redeem creation. This was the figurative “crushing of the heel” for the seed of the woman, the one conceived by God in Mary’s womb, the only begotten son of God, our savior Jesus Christ.

It was not that God was unable to communicate with the Old Testament prophets regarding future events. He foretold dozens of truths about Jesus’ first coming. He also foretold dozens of truths about his second coming - the spirit poured out, the battles around Jerusalem, judgment, and the kingdom of heaven restored on the earth. What God never told anyone until the apostle Paul well after Pentecost, was the grace would be shed on the believers of Christ’s church between his first and second coming.

Timeline

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Eph. 3:1-4

For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—

Surely you have heard of the administration of the grace of God that was given to me for you,

and that the sacred secret was made known to me by revelation, as I have already written about briefly.

So when you read this, you will be able to understand my insight into the sacred secret of Christ,

Sadly, it seems that the truths in these verses are almost unknown in the Christian church today. Let me point them out so that they are clear. Look at the phrase “the administration of the grace of God that was given to me for you”. This means that God gave the time between Christ’s first and second coming to the apostle Paul, calling it “the administration of the grace of God.” It’s not that God gave the “time” to Paul, He gave him the insight into the information that was previously withheld as a “sacred secret” regarding that time. And this “was given to me [Paul] for you [the church]. Why was Paul given this insight?

1 Cor. 2:12

Now we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit that is from God, so that we can know the things that were freely given to us by God.

The believers in “the administration of the grace of God” need to understand “the things that were freely given to us by God.” The previous administrations (or spiritual time-periods) were characterized by works. This new period is characterized by grace – the unmerited favor of God. The administration of law could be defined by the word “do” – do the sabbath, do worship God, do not kill, steal, lie, take God’s name in vain, etc. The mystery administration is defined by the word “done”.

Heb. 10:14

For by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are being made holy.

Do you want to be perfected? Good news! It’s done! What Christ did lasts “for all time”! You can’t add more than God “freely gave “us. You can’t take away from what Christ accomplished for us. Why? Because it’s “done” – “for all time”! It takes the spirit of God, practice, and time for saints to believe these truths. Nevertheless, our inability to easily believe the enormousness of God’s grace in Christ does not negate its truth. What God has given us in Christ is so stupendous, that had Satan known what it would be, he never would have crucified Christ, choosing to deal with one spirit-filled person than a multitude of born-again ones! And that’s another incredible grace reality – being born again. The believers in the law time were servants, now we are born again ones with incorruptible seed – God’s spirit! The grace administration saints are blessed with that starting on Pentecost. We can go on and on, but you should be getting the point. Before Pentecost God did the best He could do for mankind without Christ’s death and resurrection. From Pentecost on, God’s mystery – His sacred secret – began to be partially lived but not understood until God gave the understanding of it to Paul and he began teaching and writing it in the church epistles.

Eph. 3:4,5,8,9

So when you read this, you will be able to understand my insight into the sacred secret of Christ,

which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit,

To me, who am less than the least of all the holy ones, this grace was given so that I could proclaim the good news to the Gentiles about the unsearchable riches of Christ,

and to bring to light for everyone what is the administration of the sacred secret, which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things.

Why did the apostles think that immediately after the spirit was poured out there should be judgement and then the millennial kingdom? Because that’s what the scriptures seemed to indicate because the mystery – the details of the grace period between Christ’s two appearances – was a secret, a mystery – until Paul got the revelation. They asked a great question that we, with hindsight, know was misplaced.

Acts 1:6

Now when they had come together, they asked him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

What was Jesus’ response? Was it “Yes, it’s time.”? Or was it “No, not yet.”?

Acts 1:7

And he said to them, “It is not for you to know times or dates that the Father has set within His own authority.

In other words, it’s not for the apostles to know the details of “the administration of the sacred secret, which for ages has been hidden in God.” Guess what? You’d better sit down. Hold on tight. Jesus answered the question by explaining that God knows, we don’t. That means … Jesus didn’t know! Are you still there? Should I call 911? For some of us, this is a hard thing to grasp. Jesus didn’t know everything. Eph. 3:5 says regarding the mystery:

Eph 3:5

which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit,

Ephesians was written while Paul was in prison about 60AD. Acts 1 took place 27AD - 30AD, roughly 30 years before. So, if the mystery “was not made known to people (Jesus and the apostles fit into that group) in other generations (Jesus and the apostles fit into that group, too), then Jesus and the apostles didn’t know the specifics of what was coming because “the Father has set [it] within His own authority.”

This shocks most people. Most of us have this idea that Jesus knew all the future events and was leading the apostles through them. This is not substantiated by the scripture. Jesus didn’t know everything. No one does – except God. And if He ain’t telling – we ain’t knowing!

1 Cor 13:9, 10, 12

For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part,

but when the Completeness comes, that which is in part will be done away.

For now we see in a mirror, darkly, but then face to face. Now I know only in part, but then I will know fully just as also I was fully known.

My flesh doesn’t like these verses. I want to know everything. ASAP. From the start to the finish. And be knowledgeable of the contingencies and consequences. Let’s say I go into the bank to get a business loan and they ask for my business plan and I say, “I know only in part”. Guess what? I’m leaving empty-handed. Let’s say I’m trying to pass a test in school and I write on the paper, “I know only in part”. Better clear the calendar because I’ll be taking that class again!

“I know only in part” does not cut it in many worldly situations, but it is the reality we must face as imperfect people in an imperfect world. We can’t know everything. Did it stop Jesus and the apostles? No, because the key is not knowing everything about the future but Knowing God and knowing what you need to do… and doing it!

**Knowing and Doing**

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the holy spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth.

The apostles asked, “Is it judgement and kingdom time?” Jesus responded “Only God knows. But you guys do what you’ve been told to do.”

1. Stay in Jerusalem.
2. Receive the promised spirit.
3. Be witnesses everywhere.

And then he was gone! Up, up, up, up…gone! Wow! Words hardly describe the amazing wonder of that event. Can’t wait to see the video!

Let me say another shocker. We today know more than they did! How do I know that? Two reasons: 1. We know the mystery and they did not. 2. Hindsight is 20-20. We know that in about 10 days after the ascension the spirit would come at Pentecost in Jerusalem and the Church of Grace began with a mighty bang! We have the whole book of Acts to know how the story turns out. They thought that Jesus was about to set up Armageddon and then the millennial kingdom, until Jesus said, “We don’t know”, i.e., “We know only in part”. So, what did they know? Not much… except for the three things he told them to do, and that was enough.

Here's an important lesson. Knowledge is important in the church, but it is too often overemphasized in the western Christian church today. This is due to zealous teachers and preachers who like the sound of their voices and seem to want to addict others to them. You will notice that the apostles knew less than we do in Acts 1. Yet they did great because they did what they knew to do. A lot of knowledge is not necessary to be successful as a Christian. Obedience and trust is. It’s knowing what God wants you to do and doing it. Jesus’ advice to the apostles was, “Forget about what you don’t know and do what you do know.” They did and it changed the world.

Many times Christians (me included) will do nothing because we don’t know everything. Let me share an ancient custom that illustrates this reality.

Ps. 119: 105

Your word is a lamp to my feet, yes, a light for my path.

In the ancient world, there were no incandescent or neon lights. At night they had oil lamps. The amount of light they gave out was very little compared to our modern standards. Can you imagine trying to walk down a path at night using the lamp below?



All you could see would be a weak circle of light around yourself. If you allowed yourself to be intimidated by what you couldn’t see, you’d go nowhere. But the answer is simple. You take a step forward and the light moves forward too. When you see an obstacle, you can avoid it, but only if you are moving forward so that it’s illuminated by the lamp. People traveled all the time using oil lamps at night for centuries. The principle of moving forward with the lamp was well known.

Ps. 119 uses the analogy that God’s word is like a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. God’s word to the apostles in Acts 1 was not an overhead LCD 500-watt light. It was an oil lamp worth of light. But as they did it, Acts 1 became Acts 2. Then as they walked forward on Acts 2, it became Acts 3. You get the drift.

We need to walk out on the light God had given each of us. Forget about what you don’t know. Forget about obstacles that might be out there that you can’t see. As you walk forward, you’ll know more and the light will spread further. This is the Christian walk. One step at a time with God on what He has told you, whether it’s scripture or personal guidance. As you step forward, God will be there to help with the next step to reveal the obstacles and provide more guidance.

Want to do things with God? Here’s a tip. He doesn’t need “smart” people, who think they need to know everything. He needs meek, obedient people who will trust Him.

What has God shown you to do? Don’t worry about what you don’t know. Walkout step by step on what He’s asked you to do. What a blessing and adventure to walk with the Living God!