

## **Acts of the Apostles – Acts of the Holy Spirit**

### *New Testament Survey – Lesson 14 (Part 1)*

There are as many views on the Holy Spirit as there are churches. For some, the Holy Spirit is responsible only for inspiring Scripture and then quickening the heart to understand it. For others, the Holy Spirit is a force that comes upon a believer and is manifested by speaking in an unknown tongue (the “tongues of angels”). Still others see in the Holy Spirit a miracle-working agent that heals the sick, gives the blind sight, and the lame an ability to walk. Some “sense” the Holy Spirit as a voice inside them that informs their life decisions. Others are not certain about the Holy Spirit and consider it something that seems to have no role in their life. For some, it is not one choice or another, but a combination of multiple roles for the Spirit.

As I reflect on the four-plus decades when I have contemplated these questions, I realize that I have found many solid Christian friends in each camp, and yet when I am pressed as to which one I choose, I must always respond, “Not quite any of those!”

I took a course on the Holy Spirit where we explored a good many views. Our professor was adamant about his own conclusions, and our class exploration was not one of examining the strengths and weaknesses of the views. Instead, we focused on why any view other than his was wrong. I did not share my professor’s views, but his approach was very helpful to me because it forced me to examine the Scriptures carefully to inform my opinions. My approach then, and I hope my approach today, was to try and determine what Scripture teaches, and then to see how it might apply to and affect me today.

The approach I used made good sense to me in 1980. It still makes sense to me in 2013, 33 years later. It is that approach I would like to share with you in this class as we consider the acts of the Holy Spirit in the book we commonly call “The Acts of the Apostles.”

This fits well in our class schedule not only because we are now studying Acts, but also because we have just finished John! My study and assessment of the Holy Spirit centers on teaching in the Gospel of John, followed then by the history and apostolic understanding found in Acts. That is not to say that the Holy Spirit is missing from Matthew, Mark, or Luke. But in John we find the teaching more fully set out. Our review of the synoptic gospels’ teaching on the Spirit is much briefer.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE GOSPELS

Matthew speaks of the Holy Spirit in reference to Jesus when quoting John the Baptist:

I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt. 3:11).

Matthew also has the Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove (Mt. 3:16) and leading Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted (Mt. 4:1). Matthew wrote of Jesus teaching that the Spirit would speak through the apostles as they were hauled before rulers for teaching about Christ (Mt. 10:20). Matthew was clear that the Spirit was upon Jesus (Mt. 12:18) and that Jesus performed his miracles by the Spirit (Mt. 2:28). He warned against blaspheming the Holy Spirit as the unforgivable sin (Mt. 12:31-32). The Holy Spirit was involved in the prophetic inspiration of King David (Mt. 22:43), and was a part of the baptismal instructions Jesus gave after his resurrection (Mt. 28: 19).

Mark contains many of the same references to the Spirit as Matthew. There is nothing in Mark that sets it apart as distinct.

Luke adds several other references to the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist was “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (Lk. 1:15). The Holy Spirit came upon Mary and that is how the virgin conceived a son and gave birth to the Christ child (Lk. 1:35). In the nativity stories, several were drawn to sing praise to God being “filled” with the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:41, 47, 67). The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would see the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit confirmed that he was the Christ child (Lk. 2:25-27). Jesus ministered in the “power” of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 4:14); he preached as the Holy Spirit directed (Lk. 4:18); and he prayerfully rejoiced in the Holy Spirit (Lk. 10:21). Jesus assured his apostles that the Father would give the Holy Spirit to them (Lk. 11:13). Beyond that, Luke used many of the same references to the Spirit that we find in Matthew or Mark.

John, however, set things out in a different fashion. While John includes some of what the synoptic Gospels included (i.e., the Spirit descending as a dove at the baptism of Jesus, and Jesus as one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit – Jn. 1:32-33), he also includes more. In the Nicodemus story, Jesus recounted that one had to be born “of water and the Spirit” (Jn. 3:5). God had given Jesus the Spirit “without measure” (Jn. 3:34).<sup>1</sup> John specified that the Spirit “gives life” (Jn.

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<sup>1</sup> A small minority of scholars interprets that verse to mean that Jesus gives the Spirit to believers without measure.

6:63). These are all-important passages, but again they are not the ones that we focus on in this lesson. Our focus comes principally from the final lesson Jesus gave his apostles immediately before his betrayal. In that discourse, found in John 14-16, we find Jesus speaking prophetically and plainly about the coming Holy Spirit and the church. The passages are set up by John 7:37-39 where something important is set out:

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John draws a very clear line that the Spirit was *not* given to the apostles at that point in time. It helps explain why the apostles really had no clue about much of what Jesus said. In fact, in the final discourse, Jesus begins by telling his apostles that he is going away to prepare a place for them, but would return.

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also (Jn. 14:1-3).

Jesus was not saying he was going to become a celestial homebuilder, but rather was headed to the cross, for it was on the cross that he “prepared a place” for us.<sup>2</sup> In the context of this, even as Jesus explained the apostles “knew the way” to where he was going, they were clueless about what he meant. Thomas said, “We do not know *where* you are going! How can we know the way?” (Jn. 14:5). Jesus replied that he was the way. The apostles *knew* Jesus, so they knew *the way* even though they did not realize it.

Here we see at the beginning of the discourse, a group that was lost in a sense of “understanding.” They were clueless, and that is explained because the Holy Spirit “had not been given” yet.

Over the next three chapters, we read Jesus detailing clear promises about when the Holy Spirit would come, what the Holy Spirit would do, and how it would

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<sup>2</sup> It is popular for people to think that during this delay between the ascension of Jesus and the second coming is part of his “mansion-building” activity. Nothing in Scripture teaches that. The God who made the universe in seven days does not have an incomplete heaven needing more construction! Jesus spoke in the present tense that as of that moment there already were plenty of rooms in his Father’s house: “In my Father’s house **are** many rooms” (Jn. 14:2).

affect the actions of the apostles and others. We take these one at a time and examine them closely. By so doing, we will prepare ourselves to venture into the book of Acts and examine *every action* of the Holy Spirit. What might seem “amazing” to some, but should rather be termed “confirming,” is how the Acts passages illustrate that Jesus’ promises came true. In lawyer terminology, the fulfillment detailed in Acts is “on all fours” with the promises in John. In other words, it fits perfectly.

We focus on each of these promises carefully.

## THE PROMISES IN JOHN

(1) *The Spirit is a “helper” who would be in them (Jn. 14:16-17).*

The first expressed promise of Jesus on the Spirit is found in John 14:16-17.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

To best understand this promise, we need to carefully consider several words used. First, Jesus says that the Father *will give* the Holy Spirit. This is a future tense verb. It is something that will happen, but has not yet. Second, Jesus calls the Spirit “another Helper.” To understand why he says “another” we need to first understand what a “Helper” is.

The Greek word used for “Helper” is *parakletos* (παράκλητος). It is a composite of two words meaning, “one called alongside.” This is an unusual Biblical word. No other New Testament writer uses it but John. Similarly, it is not found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the “Septuagint”). A very similar and related word is found once in Job 16:2 (*parakletor* – παρακλήτωρ). There it is generally translated “comforters.”<sup>3</sup> An Egyptian Jewish writer contemporary with John (Philo) consistently used *parakletos* to refer to an advocate, or someone who spoke before rulers on behalf of an accused.<sup>4</sup> This same sense seems to permeate the other contemporary usage. When the Latin writers translated *parakletos* into

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<sup>3</sup> This is where the King James Version, Luther, and Wycliffe get their translation of “comforter.”

<sup>4</sup> “Παρακαλέω,” Kittel, Gerhard, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans 1965), Vol. \_\_\_, at 773.

Latin, they often used the noun *advocatus*, from which we get “advocate.”<sup>5</sup> They also would use the Latin for “consolatory (*consolatorium*).”

All of this makes it quite difficult to tie down precisely what John means. Is Jesus speaking of one who would comfort and console? (KJV, ASV). Does he mean a Helper? (ESV, NASB, NKJV). Does he mean a counselor? (RSV). Or does he mean an “advocate”? (NIV, NRSVCE). All of these words carry the core idea behind the composite *parakletos* in the sense that all these are ones “called alongside” to aide, comfort, advocate for, and counsel. Perhaps we are best leaving John’s word to mean that, which is basically what the ESV/NASB/NKJV do in translating the word “Helper.” (The New Jerusalem Bible simply uses the Greek word instead of translating it. “I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you for ever.”) A helper comes along in life and can fill the role necessary, be it advocate, counselor, comforter, or simply friend.

Here we can now return to Jesus’ statement that the Holy Spirit would be “another” Helper. Why “another”? Because Jesus himself was and is a *parakletos* to the apostles, and indeed to all believers! We see this implied in John’s Gospel and expressly stated in his first epistle where he wrote,

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate [*parakletos* - παράκλητος] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

After this assurance that another Helper would be sent, Jesus specified that the coming Helper would be with them “forever.” This was not a situation where the Holy Spirit was coming for an occasion or event. As a Helper, he was coming to stay!

John then adds that the Helper is the “Spirit of Truth.” This expression might mean the “Spirit who communicates truth” or the “Spirit that proceeds from truth” or even the “Spirit that is truth.” It is noteworthy that John inserts this in his Gospel when he has carefully recalled and told Jesus’ claim just verses earlier to be “the truth” (Jn. 14:6). Jesus is also “full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14), and the giver of “grace and truth” (Jn. 1:17). When talking to the woman at the well, Jesus predicted the coming hour when people would worship “in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:23). As John recorded this discourse by Jesus, it is clear that the Spirit is wrapped up in Jesus as both are wrapped up in truth.

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<sup>5</sup> This is true in some copies of Jerome’s Vulgate. In other copies, the Vulgate simply transposed the Greek *parakletos* into Latin letters as *paracletum*.

Next John notes an exclusive aspect of the coming Spirit. The world that neither sees nor knows him cannot receive him. The apostles, however, *know* the Spirit, even if they were unaware of it! They *know* the Spirit because they know Jesus. Jesus, full of the Spirit, was their companion and Helper, and because of that, Jesus can confirm that the Spirit “dwells with you.” The difference, however, is that the Spirit would soon be *in* them, not simply *with* them through the person of Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

Our first informative promise about the Holy Spirit contains the following:

- (a) A future gift,
- (b) A Helper in the same sense as Jesus walked with his apostles,
- (c) A permanent Helper, not a temporary one,
- (d) Closely entwined with Jesus as truth,
- (e) Exclusive in some way to the presence of the Spirit in the world,
- (f) Who would be *in* the apostles as opposed to simply with them in the person of Christ.

We now consider later in the dialogue when Jesus returns to this subject.

## *2. The Spirit will bring recollection and teach importance (Jn. 14:26).*

In this second promise, right on the heels of the first, Jesus adds,

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 (Jn. 14:26).

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<sup>6</sup> Before we leave this section of John and this first informative promise of the Spirit, we note what happens a few verses later. In John 14:18, Jesus notes that the apostles would not be left “as orphans,” but that he would “come” to them. Looking back through the lens of history, we can readily understand this as some time between his departure (crucifixion) and the giving of the other Helper, the Holy Spirit (Pentecost). In this sense, Jesus notes that after that, the day would come when the apostles would “know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (Jn. 14:20). If that is a reference to the coming Spirit, then we can add to the checklist that the Spirit would unlock knowledge about the relationship of God the Father, the Son, and the believer. While scholars debate whether Jesus is referencing the day the Spirit comes, one thing is certain. The apostles did not understand that relationship at the time Jesus spoke these words! The text shows the exact opposite!

Again, Jesus references the Holy Spirit as the “Helper” that the Father “will send” but this time John adds, “in my name.” We have discussed in a previous lesson on John how he used the Hebrew idea of “in the name.” That is relevant here as well. The Hebrew language had prepositions that often amounted to simply adding a letter or two to the noun at issue. The addition of the preposition often created a significant change to the meaning and thrust of the noun. We see that in the Hebrew word for “name.” There is a Hebrew structure where the letter “b” is added to the word “name.” When that is done the word is *b’shem* (בָשֵׁם). This literally means, “in the name of,” but it carries the impact of “on behalf of.”<sup>7</sup> In this sense, Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit is sent on his behalf. It is another way of saying that the Holy Spirit becomes *another Helper*.

Jesus then specified ways in which the Holy Spirit would perform his role. He would “teach” and “bring to remembrance” (or “remind”) the apostles of those things Jesus had said. This certainly would have been a reassurance to me if I had been there at the time! Had I been an apostle, I am not certain I would trust my memory, much less my understanding of what had transpired over the last three years. This promise is one of the bases for understanding the authority of Scripture. The idea that the apostles had the Holy Spirit to teach and remind, gives a credibility to Scripture that exceeds the writings of humans alone.

Our second informative promise adds the following:

- (a) The Father will send,
- (b) He will teach, and
- (c) He will remind.

### 3. *The Holy Spirit will bear witness to Jesus (Jn. 15:26-27).*

The third enumerated promise about the Spirit that Jesus detailed in this discourse is found in John 15:26-27.

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

Here we see Jesus and John repeating the idea of the Holy Spirit as the Helper, and the Spirit of truth. But Jesus and John add another facet to what Jesus said earlier the Father would “give.” This time Jesus says that Jesus would be sending the

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<sup>7</sup> Shachter, Haim, *The New Universal Hebrew English Dictionary*, (Yavneh 1984), vol. 2, at 765.

Spirit *from* the Father. This is another area of John where the lines blur between the work and even identity of Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit. John, a good Jew who would have repeated thrice a day the Old Testament mantra that “God is one” (Dt. 6:4), clearly understood that Jesus and God were truly “one,” even as they were in some way separate. So we can hear Jesus declare that the Father would “give” (Jn. 14:16) or “send” (Jn. 14:26) the Spirit, and in the same discourse proclaim that he (Jesus) would send the Spirit.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus then adds the important insight that the Spirit will “bear witness” about Jesus. This is something the Spirit will do with the apostles as Jesus added, “you will also bear witness.”

So here we see the following additions to the promises about the coming Holy Spirit:

- (a) Jesus will send the Spirit,
- (b) The Spirit will bear witness about Jesus, and
- (c) The apostles will share in that work of the Spirit.

#### *4. The Spirit will convict the world (Jn. 16:7-11).*

In his fourth clear reference to the coming Holy Spirit, Jesus promised,

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 go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Here we see more clearly the tie between Jesus dying for the sins of the world/being raised in righteousness/ascending to heaven in glory and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would not come until after Jesus’ work. We might say, “But couldn’t the Spirit have come anyway and attested to Jesus as the Son of God?” After all, in a sense is that not what the Spirit did when he descended as a dove and the voice was heard, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Lk. 3:22)?

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<sup>8</sup> “Send,” the Greek word *pempo* (πέμπω) is used by John to describe the Father’s sending as well as Jesus’. It is also the word used in this same discourse to describe how the Father had sent Jesus (Jn. 14:24).

We understand the answer to that question better when we examine this promise of Jesus through to its end. The way that the Spirit will bear witness to Jesus is detailed in the promise/explanation that the Spirit would convict the world concerning sin in its unbelief, concerning righteousness in Jesus' ordeal and ascent to the Father, and concerning judgment in the effect of Jesus' actions. As that is the way the Spirit will come bear witness to Jesus, it mandates that the Spirit cannot come *until* Jesus finished his work and ascended to the Father. Then Jesus and the Father could rightly send the Spirit to do this most important work.

Interestingly, here Jesus does not reiterate the “Helper” is the Spirit as he has previously. In part that may be simply because it is understood. There is also the point being made, however, that this is a way that the Spirit is indeed a “Helper.” The Spirit helps by convicting the world and bringing forth faith!

We also note here that once again Jesus points out Jesus himself would send the Spirit, just as much as he pointed out earlier the Father would. This language emphasizes the teaching of Jesus earlier in John that Jesus was doing the works of the Father. The works of one were the works of the other (Jn. 5:36).

Here we have the following important promises about the coming Spirit. We can expect him to:

- (a) Come and convict the world about sin and unbelief,
- (b) Come and convict the world about righteousness and the work of Jesus before the Father,
- (c) Come and convict the world about judgment upon the world and its sinful state.

#### *5. The Spirit will guide into truth (Jn. 16:12-15).*

The final express promise about the Holy Spirit in this final discourse is found in John 16:12-15.

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Here we have some direct information promised, as well as some by inference. First, we see the inference that the Holy Spirit will deliver the message and

teaching that Jesus had for his church. Jesus explained that while there was still much he had to say, the apostles were not in a position to bear them at that time. While the Greek word for “bear” can find its expression in the stress or emotional involvement in a matter, the core idea is simply that of carrying.<sup>9</sup> This is the word John used for Jesus carrying his cross (Jn. 19:17). John also used it to describe the Jews who “picked up” stones to throw at Jesus (Jn. 10:31). The woman at the tomb encountered Jesus and thought he was the gardener. John used this word to describe the woman’s question whether the gardener had “carried away” the body of Christ (Jn. 20:15). So Jesus may not have been referring to some emotional fragility of the apostles. We can assume they were not in the place to be able to carry the rest of his message to them. Over time, that message would come to them through the Holy Spirit.

In this sense the Holy Spirit would “guide” them into the truths of Jesus. Jesus does not say that the Spirit would turn them into puppets and pull their strings to make their pens write the right words for Scripture, nor the right decisions for the church. But Jesus assured them that the Spirit would be at work to *guide* them in the matters of Jesus. The Greek word for “guide” (*hodegeo* - ὁδηγέω) means,

To assist in reaching a desired destination...To assist in acquiring information or knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

This will involve the Spirit declaring the message of Jesus, including things to come. His work will not be to glorify the Spirit; it will be to glorify Christ. He will take the things of Jesus and declare them to the church. The Spirit will guide into truth and declare the message of Jesus in victory, worthy of glory, honor and praise.

In this final promise, we can add to our ongoing checklist about the work of the Spirit the following:

- (a) The Spirit will add to the teachings of Jesus for those in his Kingdom,
- (b) The Spirit will guide into truth,
- (c) The teaching and message of the Spirit will be consistent with that of Jesus,

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<sup>9</sup> “βαστάζω,” Kittel, Gerhard, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans 1965).

<sup>10</sup> “οδηγέω,” Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (U. of Chi. 1979), 2d Ed.

- (d) The Spirit will glorify Jesus by taking what is his and making it known to his followers.

## CONCLUSION

Words of Jesus found in John are the key that open our understanding of the Holy Spirit. Jesus explained very clearly the role of the Holy Spirit. In part two of this lesson, we will walk through the book of Acts, examining the passages that reference the Spirit. As we do so, we will see Jesus was dead-on in his prophetic promise. The Spirit does exactly what the checklist from John promised he would do.

Interestingly, if we work backward into the other synoptics, we find the words of Jesus continue to ring true as to the work of the Spirit. In fact, we can go back into the Old Testament and see the Spirit at work to the same purposes there as well. But that is for another lesson!

## POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“...he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (Jn. 16:8).*

I live under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. I am thankful for the conviction of the Holy Spirit. I am all too acutely aware of my sins and shortcomings. I know my righteousness does not elevate me to the presence of God. And I know that this world lives under a power that needs judging. The recent bombings in Boston teach that much too well. So I am thankful for the conviction of the Spirit that my sin has forgiveness through faith in the Son. I am thankful for the Spirit’s conviction that Jesus ascended to the Father – that he has the righteousness needed to reign on eternity’s throne. I am thankful that the ruler of this world is judged and condemned, and I long for the day when my faith will be sight.

2. *“...the Father... will give you another Helper” (Jn. 14:16).*

I need this. I need help. This life is too difficult for me to make it alone. There are difficulties, stresses, challenges, obstacles, hurts, sins, enemies, and sorrows galore. I need Jesus, in a very real and tangible way. Jesus did not leave me (or you!) to live through this life alone. He and the Father have sent the Spirit as a constant Helper. There is a way through the difficulties of life. There is a lifting of the burdens and stresses with the peace of Christ made known by the Spirit. The challenges and obstacles

are met with the Spirit of power! The hurts are comforted, the sins forgiven, and the enemies have no ultimate power or chance. Sorrows will turn into joys. These are the gifts from the ever-present Helper, who takes what is Jesus' and makes it real in our lives! Thank you God for the Helper!

3. “*...He will glorify me*” (Jn. 16:14).

Jesus did not draw boxes around the Spirit to limit how the Spirit would or would not work. We risk our debates over tongues, over miracles, over gifts, and other aspects of the Spirit becoming major distractions from what the Spirit is truly about. The Spirit is not about making the Spirit the center of attention. The Spirit is about magnifying Christ. Jesus did not detail *how* the Spirit would work, he detailed *what* that work would be and its purpose! This was the focus of Jesus and it should be ours as well.