

Episode #1108 Acts 1 Part 3-The Kingdom Now?

I. Acts is unique in the New Testament. Rather than the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, it focuses on what came after, when the Lord had ascended back into heaven. The Lord left His disciples with many commands to carry out, and Acts tells us how they did them.

II. The Kingdom Now? Acts 1:5-8.

- A. Verse 6. Now the disciples ask if the Lord will at this time restore the kingdom to Israel. Restore here means to establish, and kingdom means not just a territory to rule over, but rather the right to rule and to govern. Israel's right to rule themselves had been taken away from them by the Roman government. They wanted to know if the Lord was even then going to establish His kingdom rule over both Israel and all the earth. I do not believe the importance of this question can be overestimated. This question provides for us a backdrop against which all the rest of the book of Acts must be measured. The answer to this question that the Lord gives will reveal the truth to us of all that comes after.
- B. Verse 7. According to popular theology, the Lord should have answered something like, "Don't you understand? This kingdom that I have been preaching is not a physical kingdom, but is a spiritual kingdom in your hearts."
 1. If this was true, then there could be no better place than here for the Lord teach this. But instead of correcting them, He assumes that there will be such a visible, earthly government, and that the only question is when this will take place.
 2. Notice this carefully, for there are many who dare to claim that there never will be a physical government of God over the earth. Christ assumes that sovereignty will be restored to Israel, established by God. The only question is when.
 3. It is amazing to me how little credit men give both the disciples, and the Lord Himself. If the disciples had lived day and night with the Lord for three years, and yet in all that time had not yet understood what the kingdom He spoke of was all about, then they must indeed have been the dumbest of men. If the Lord had failed in three years to teach His closest disciples what His teaching was regarding the very central topic of His ministry, then He must have been the very worst of teachers. I do not believe that either of these things was true. The Lord is THE Teacher, Whom God sent to teach the world about Himself. He could not fail to communicate when He wished to do so. The disciples were uneducated men, yet they were not total dullards or idiots. They were average individuals, with an average individual's understanding. When taught by the greatest of Teachers, they must have had enough intelligence to understand the basic points of what He was saying.
 4. How men can imagine that four years in a Bible college or another four years in a Seminary can give them a greater insight into the things of God than three years being taught by God Himself is beyond me.
 5. Some justify this attitude by pointing to incidents in the gospels where the disciples failed to understand what the Lord Jesus was telling them.
 - a. Mark 8:17-21. Clearly the Lord was admonishing them for failing to understand, indicating that they really had no excuse not to. They

didn't understand because they didn't truly consider the signs and their signification.

- b. Luke 9:44-45. Here we read that the disciples did not understand, yet we also read that "it was hidden from them." The only way those who are taught by Christ Himself can fail to understand is if He chooses to hide the truth from them. That is what the Lord did here.
 6. Could it be that He allowed such ignorance to continue even up to Acts 1:6? Luke 24:45. Their understandings were opened, and these men understood the truth. They were not wrong about the nature of the kingdom the Lord had been preaching. Rather, it is teachers and expositors today who are mistaken.
 7. Now according to most dispensational theology, the Lord should have answered the disciples, "Israel has been set aside since the cross, and all nations will now be dealt with equally." Yet this is not what the Lord does at all. Instead, He refuses to answer the question. Was the government about to be given to Israel at that time? The Lord allowed His disciples to continue thinking that might be the case.
 8. It is easy for us to look back on this event almost two thousand years later and answer, "No, the Lord was not about to restore the government to Israel at that time." And of course, we would be right. Yet the Lord did not tell the disciples this. Instead, He left the question open. The rest of the book of Acts will proceed with this unanswered question looming over everything.
- C. Verse 8. He turns their focus back to the task He had for them to do.
1. Power is the Greek *dunamis*, and speaks of that great power from God that they received to work mighty miracles. They should focus on this, and leave when the kingdom would come to the Father.
 2. The reception of power is linked up to the Holy Spirit coming upon them. "The Holy Spirit" has the definite article *the* in front of it in Greek, so the person of the Holy Spirit is meant. Yet He is linked to His power coming upon them.
 3. Now they are given their marching orders. They are to be witnesses in a set order: Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Earth is the Greek *ge*, which can mean earth or land, Matthew 2:6 versus Matthew 5:18. We have to determine which is meant from the context. Some have argued that this verse means the uttermost part of the land of Israel. Yet Luke 24:47.
 4. The word is nations, *ethnos*, and there can be no question but that it means nations of the earth, far beyond the land of Israel. One could argue that the disciples Christ was talking to here really didn't venture far outside the boundaries of the land of Israel. Yet as we continue throughout the book of Acts, we will see that the word did go out far beyond the borders of Israel, carried largely by Paul and his companions. But God counted this as fulfilling this commission. Mark 16:20.

III. The Lord's departure. Acts 1:9-11.

- A. Acts 1:9. This was a sad but necessary time for them. John 16:7. He assured them that His leaving was an advantage to them, for when He left He would send them the Holy Spirit. He did send that Spirit, as we will see in Acts 2. John 16:8. He still has not sent the Spirit to do this work. What an advantage for the world will it be then!

IV. Conclusion: The Lord Jesus Christ was asked by His disciples a very important question: was He going to bring His kingdom to earth at that time or was He going to delay it? The Lord did not answer like many modern-day theologians would have liked Him to answer, but rather refused to answer. He assumed there is going to be a physical kingdom on earth someday, and the only question is when? Those who refuse to believe in a literal kingdom on earth are simply ignorant of the teaching of Scripture, that there is going to be a government of God on earth. 2,000 years later we know that He was not going to restore the kingdom at that time, but the book of Acts proceeds with the question hanging over them: was He going to restore the kingdom at that time or not? We need to keep this question in mind as we proceed with the study of this important book.