

The Seed of Apostolic Power

Acts 1:4-8

I. Contrasting Themes in verses 4-8

1. Together vs. Scattering

They are “assembled together” in verse 4 and in verse 6 they “come together”. On these occasions they are with the Lord Jesus. The final contrast comes at the end of verse 8 when Jesus says they will go “to all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” This is certainly a foretaste of what the church will go through in the book of Acts. (The first outline on the Background Work paper below points out this developing theme of togetherness that ends with their scattering.)

Whether God’s people are willing or unwilling, they will be scattered to spread the light of Christ to the ends of the earth. If God left it up our decisions and comforts it would never happen. God’s providence used persecution to scatter His people in Acts.

2. The Wait vs. The Time

Jesus tells them to “wait” in Jerusalem for the Promise of the Father. This is contrasted with the Apostle’s desire to know the “time” of Israel’s restoration. Observing this contrast helps us to see that the Apostles did not fully understand what they were waiting for. They thought their stay in Jerusalem would be the time in which the Jewish nation of Israel would be restored. They thought the restoration of a Jewish nation was the coming Promise of the Father. (notice the C-sections in the outline for details) But the Father’s Promise was *not* a restoration of a Jewish Israel within a Jewish Jerusalem. The Father Promise was a re-creation of Israel through the Holy Spirit that would expand throughout the world, including believing Jews and Gentiles.

I do not think that Jesus’ response to their question affirms that they had the right understanding of Israel’s restoration. Instead, in addition to their immature Jewish understanding of “Israel’s restoration”, they were seeking to know about God’s timing which is always hidden. Later the men of Israel will be “cut to the heart” and 3,000 would join the New Covenant people of God, leaving the old Israel behind (Acts 2:41).

3. Know A Season vs. Ignorance of Seasons (knowing the season & having authority)

The contrast between “the wait” and “the time” is highlighted by another contrast between in the two statements of Christ. In the first statement Christ says, “not many days from now” they will be baptized. He is saying that very soon, in a near season, they will be baptized by the Holy Spirit. Yet in the second statement (v.7) Christ says “it is not for you to know times and seasons”. In the first statement Christ seems to give them a season, telling them when they will be baptized. In the second statement Christ says they are not to know the seasons that he Father has put under His own authority.

I think the contrasting emphasis may be on *authority*, implicitly in verse 5 and explicitly in verse 7. God’s timing of restoring a Covenant People to Himself, and the stages of that restoration, is put under His own authority. This refers to the growth of the church, which only God knows. In this sense, and for this reason, the Apostles were excluded from this information. The Apostles, nor the church today, knows how or when God will bring a massive conversion of people to the church, or even prune people out of the church. (See Romans 11)

Nevertheless, the Apostles will be given the authority of the kingdom of God. Their doctrine and sacraments will set the boundaries for the kingdom. They will have the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 16:19). They will receive the “baptism” and

“power” of the Holy Spirit (v.5,8). Therefore, since this kingdom authority is put to them, *then they have a right to know that season in which this kingdom will be inaugurated*. So far this is the only way I can reconcile the fact that Jesus’ first statement (v.5) gives them a season in which God will do a work to them – whereas Jesus’ second statement (v.7) says they are not to know about seasons that are put under the Father’s authority. In the former, the inaugural kingdom authority is given to the Apostles, evidenced by Christ telling them the season of that inauguration. In the latter, the Father’s seasons of restoring His New Israel is under His authority. We plant and water the Apostolic seed of the kingdom, but God gives the increase. (I Cor.3:7)

Likewise, it our responsibility and authority to declare the Apostolic truth and doctrine of Christ. Therefore we can say that “now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation” (II Cor.6:2). But the timing, the times, and the dates of when God will bring revival, reformation, or engrafting and pruning – it is all under the Father’s authority.

II. Developing Themes in verses 4 – 8

1. Don’t Depart Jerusalem to Witnessing in Jerusalem

The passage begins in verse 4 with Jesus telling them “not to depart from Jerusalem”. As the passage develops the Jesus tells them that they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem. “The disciples might have been tempted to return to Galilee (Jn. 21 indicates that this did in fact happen), but Jerusalem was the divinely intended scene for the giving of the Spirit; the place where Jesus was rejected was to be the place where fresh witness to him would begin.” (from I. Howard Marshall’s commentary on Acts)

I would tie in Romans 5:20 “where sin abounded, grace abound much more”. Jerusalem was the location of the abounded sinfulness of murder Jesus. From that location grace would flow out to the rest of the world.

2. From “baptism” to “power”

In Jesus’ first statement He says that they will be baptized by the Holy Spirit. The passage progresses with Jesus saying that they will receive the power of the Holy Spirit. As I’ve suggested in the Option 2 outline on the Background page below, I think that this shows an *initial* filling of the Holy Spirit and a *mature* filling of the Holy Spirit – corresponding to the initial 3rd Day and mature 5th Day fillings in the creation account. If the creation days are truly reflected in these passages, then we can see that verses 1-3 reflect the days of creation as well as verses 4-8.

Just as verses 1-3 contains the “Seed of the Apostolic Kingdom”, we see verses 4-8 contain the “Seed of Apostolic Power”. I can’t help but observe what I see, and thus I am of the opinion that both of these seed-passages reflects the 7 days of God’s initial creation. I’ll leave it to you to judge whether this is a legitimate reflection of what the text is saying. (See the “The Seed of the Kingdom” page and the “Background Work” page below.) But whether readers agree or not with my creation observations should not prevent one from seeing the tightly packed theme of development and maturity in this passage. From the initial baptism to the enduring power of the Holy Spirit the Apostolic church will be strengthened forever.

* Notice the Trinity is in these verses. God the Son is commanding the Apostles. God the Father’s Promise is coming. That Promise is the baptism of God the Spirit.