

Acts 1:6-8

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Context

- ❖ Acts 1:6-8 is part of the introduction to the Book of Acts and forms a bridge between the Gospel of Luke and this second book, written by Luke, the companion of the apostle Paul.
 - “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven” (vs. 1-2).
- ❖ The next summary is important for the understanding of the whole Book of Acts:
 - “... after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” (vs. 2-3).
 - The disciples (apostles) are going to carry out the “instructions” Jesus has given. These instructions are about the “kingdom of God.”
 - These instructions are given through the Holy Spirit (compare Jon. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13).
- ❖ Vs. 4 and 5 are the transition to the theme of the kingdom of Israel
 - “On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”
 - Now Jesus mentions John the Baptist. This reminds the disciples of Luke 3:16-17. In his gospel, Matthew summarizes the preaching of John the Baptist: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt. 3:2) and the preaching of Jesus Christ: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt. 4:17).

- ❖ This background is necessary to understand the question of the disciples in vs. 6 about the “Kingdom to Israel”.

Form and structure

- ❖ The disciples of Jesus ask him a final question, before the Lord is taken up into heaven:
 - Vs. 6: “So when they met together, they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’”
 - This question has three aspects, three questions in one:
 1. “Lord, are you?”
 2. “At this time?”
 3. “Going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”
- ❖ The Lord answers all three questions (vs. 7-8): “He said to them:”
 1. “At this time?” : “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”
 2. “Lord, are you?” : “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses.”
 3. “Going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” : “In Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
- ❖ Note the Trinitarian approach:
 1. Father;
 2. Holy Spirit;
 3. Lord Jesus Christ.
 - This Trinitarian approach is always important when we think, talk and teach about the church of Christ (see also Rev. 1:4-5; Eph. 3:14-19).
- ❖ This answer of Jesus provides also a sort of index to the Book of Acts:
 1. “In Jerusalem” = Acts 1:12-8:4;
 2. “and in all Judea and Samaria” = Acts 8:5-9:43;
 3. “and to the ends of the earth” = Acts 10:1-28:31.
 - Each (cultural) border-crossing is accompanied by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit:
 1. The Pentecost = Acts 2:1-13;
 2. The Samaritan Pentecost = Acts 8:14-17;
 3. The Heathen Pentecost = Acts 10:44-47.

Exposition

Verse 6

- ❖ The question the disciples are asking is one of great expectation!

- It is about restoration of the Kingdom to Israel!
 - The disciples knew the promises given through the prophets about this restoration (Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 33:15-17; Ezek. 37:24-27 and also Ezek. 36:24-28 a.o.).
 - These promises speak of peace, justice, love, forgiveness of sins, mercy, and faithfulness. It is kingdom of reconciliation.
- “At this time?” Are you going to restore the Kingdom in these days? Now? During our lifetime? Shall we be witnesses of the restoration?
- Remember that the disciples went through an emotional roller-coaster. Before the crucifixion of the Lord, they had great expectations. Listen to the two men on the road to Emmaus: “but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place” (Lk. 24:21). Their hope vanished when Jesus was crucified and died on the cross. But Jesus made himself known to them: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Lk. 24:32). Again great expectations!

Verse 7-8

- ❖ General remark: the Book of Acts is self-explanatory. For instance, if you want to understand “the times and dates”, discover the life of the apostle Paul.
- ❖ “It is not for you to know.” The disciples wanted to know the date or the moment. That is not important as it could distract the disciples and apostles from their mission. And as we all know, we can’t oversee our own lifetime, nor the history of the church in one place, let alone the church, the lives of people worldwide. We can’t, because we are vulnerable people. The only one who does have the overview is God alone.
- ❖ “The times or dates.” “Times” are the periods of time, days, years, even centuries. “Dates” are the right moments. Consider the apostle Paul: he often had to wait before he could set out on a mission. After his conversion (Acts 9), he went to Arabia (Gal. 1:17), a period of which we don’t know much. He went back to his hometown before Barnabas called him and took him to Antioch (Acts 9:25-26). And Paul has been imprisoned for several years during which he could not preach publicly. On occasion, doors were opened (Acts 16:6-10), as when in a dream he saw a man calling from Macedonia.
 - Chronos (= time) = **an indefinite period of time during which some activity or event takes place**¹;
 - Kairos (= date) = **a point of time or period of time, *time, period***, frequently with implication of being especially fit for something, and without emphasis on precise chronology².
- ❖ “The Father has set by his own authority.” When Jesus speaks of the Father, he is pointing to two aspects of the fatherhood of God:
 1. Relationship. You are his children!
 2. Origin. He is the Creator, Father of all creation (James 1:17; Eph. 3:14-15).
 - Tithèmi (has set) = **to assign to some task or function, *appoint, assign***³.

¹ BAGD, p. 1092.

² BAGD, p. 497.

- Exousia (authority) = **potential or resource to command, control, or govern, capability, might, power.**⁴
 - This means that the apostles should expect everything from the Father. The first they do is pray (Acts 1:14).
- ❖ “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; ...”
 - The disciples asked: “Lord, are you?” Jesus answers: “But you”!
 - Dunamis (power) = **potential for functioning in some way, power, might, strength, force, capability.**⁵
 - What kind of power do they receive? You should think of capabilities to witness: wisdom and knowledge, faith and hope, boldness and love.
- ❖ “... and you will be my witnesses...” A witness will appear in court. The apostles did appear before judges in the Jewish Sanhedrin and Roman courts, especially the apostle Paul. He was put on trial and finally appealed to the emperor and travelled as a prisoner to Rome.
 - Martyr (witness) = **of witnesses who bear a divine message.**⁶
- ❖ “... in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
 - Jews, descendants from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were living in Jerusalem and Judea. There was enmity between the Samaritans and the Jews (John 4). The Jews had to learn that from now they had to share their privileged position as the beloved nation of God with all the other nations.

Application

- ❖ Jesus commissioned his apostles to be his witnesses. There is a difference between them and the church nowadays. They have met and seen Jesus with their own eyes. An exception is the apostle Paul, but he had his own revelation of the risen Lord. In addition to this, Jesus promised his disciples to be with them “to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). The church is still a witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ today.
- ❖ First of all the church should pray, because the times and the dates are set by God, the Father, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. One common mistake is that the church first makes its plans and then starts to pray, but it should be the other way around.
 - What is true for the church is also true for the personal lives of Christians. Especially when Christians meet hardships, such as persecution and disappointment, it is important to know that the Father has set the times and the dates.
- ❖ The ends of the earth are nowadays not only remote areas or the unreached peoples, but also the large cities, where people from all over the world meet.

³ BAGD, p. 1004

⁴ BAGD, p. 352.

⁵ BAGD, p. 262.

⁶ BAGD, p. 619.

- ❖ The first recipients were persecuted for their faith. But even if they had to die for their faith, they could still have a living hope. Death is not the end, but a new beginning of life. Not even death, or the worst persecution, could take this hope away from them.

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