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| The Holy Spirit |
| In the Book of Acts |
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# Introduction

The book of Acts is the powerful account of the men and women who did extraordinary things for God. This group of radical Christians started a movement that continues today. They were fearless, obedient, and unwavering even in the face of ridicule, assault, and in some instances, death (Laurie, A Radical Difference 2007). This relatively small group of New Testament Christians did not accomplish these things by their own power, but through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, as revealed in Acts, is the fulfilled promise of Jesus, given as a gift to Jews and Gentiles, for the purpose of building the Church by empowering and enabling God’s people to carry out their mission of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

# The Promise of the Holy Spirit

Prior to His ascension, Jesus assured the apostles that they would receive a gift from the Father. He told them that they would baptized by the Holy Spirit, and that they would receive power when they Holy Spirit came on them. He instructed them not to leave Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father. The apostles did not fully understand, but after Jesus ascended, they returned to Jerusalem in obedience and continual prayer (Acts 1:4-14, NIV).

# The Purpose of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, being a gift from the Father, had been given to the Old Testament saints as well. The Father gave the Spirit previously as a teacher (Job 32:8, NIV), guide (Ps. 143:10, NIV), for man’s empowerment (Num. 11:17; 25-29, NIV), and ability to speak for Him (2 Chr. 24:20, NIV). In addition, the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus for His ministry (Luke 3:22, NIV), Jesus was the mediator of the Spirit (Luke 24:49, NIV), and the instructions that Jesus gave to the apostles before His ascension were given through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2, NIV). Because the Father is unchanging (Mal.3:6, NIV), it is not surprising that the Holy Spirit would work in much the same way in the lives of the New Testament saints (Deffinbaugh 1997, 18-27). Jesus declared that the Holy Spirit would come on them so that they would receive power to be His witnesses to the whole world (Acts 1:8, NIV). The Greek word used in this passage for power was *dunamis*, meaning explosive power, like dynamite (Laurie, Power for a Purpose 2010). This was the kind of power that would enable the apostles to boldly complete the mission He had given to them, and so necessary to their calling that they were not permitted to leave the city until they had received it. In Acts, the gift of the Holy Spirit would be the enabling spirit that gave power for testimony (Bock 2007, 7).

# The Holy Spirit in the Church in Jerusalem

On the day of Pentecost, 50 days after Passover, the apostles were together in one place. A sound like rushing wind filled the place, and the appearance of what looked like tongues of fire rested on them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and were enabled to declare the wonders of God in other tongues so that those who gathered there for the feast from other nations were able to understand (Acts 2:1-11, NIV). It is likely that they spoke of Christ, redemption through Him, and the gospel of grace (Henry 1662-1714). Peter, being filled with the Spirit, testified, and called for repentance and baptism, and 3000 were added to the Church that day. (Acts 2:14-47, NIV).

The same Peter, who prior to Pentecost denied even knowing Jesus, now healed a man crippled from birth. He was arrested and boldly testified to the Sanhedrin regarding Jesus, refusing to be quiet in response to their threats. After his release, he gathered with the others to pray, and they were again filled with the Spirit and boldness (Acts 3:1-4:31, NIV). The transforming power of the Holy Spirit was on display through Peter, who was no longer afraid (Laurie, Power for a Purpose 2010).

The new church experienced rapid growth and held everything in common. When a couple named Ananias and Sapphira conspired to deceive the apostles regarding their financial contribution to the church, they are judged as liars to the Spirit, and they die (Acts 5:1-10, NIV). They had violated the unity of the Spirit-filled assembly, and their judgment proved to all that God was working to preserve and protect the community and the message. (William J. Larkin 1995).

The apostles continued to witness, perform miracles, testify with the Holy Spirit, face persecution and assaults, and rejoice in their trials. As the church grew, only Spirit filled leaders were appointed to handle the church’s responsibilities (Acts 5:12-6:7, NIV). One such leader was Stephen, who was accused of blasphemy because the leaders could not contend with his wise words spoken in the Spirit. Stephen testified boldly through the Spirit at the very moment of his death. The stoning and martyrdom of Stephen ushered in a great persecution and scattering of the church, which caused the gospel to be preached outside of Jerusalem (Acts 6:8-8:4, NIV).

# The Holy Spirit in the Church in Judea and Samaria

Philip went to Samaria, preaching, healing, and baptizing new believers there and they also receive the Holy Spirit. It is here that a sorcerer attempts to purchase the ability to impart the gift of the Spirit, and is strongly rebuked. The Holy Spirit then guides Philip to an Ethiopian eunuch, who receives the good news of the gospel and is baptized. It appears that the Holy Spirit had also prepared the eunuch for the message, as evidenced by his immediate response to the gospel (Deffinbaugh 1997, 127). Suddenly, the Spirit snatched Philip up, miraculously transporting him to another town where he continued to preach the gospel (Acts 8:5-40, NIV). The direction of the Spirit was common in Acts, and lead the outreach (Bock 2007, 526).

Meanwhile, Saul, a persecutor of Christians, journeyed to Damascus to imprison believers. The Lord appeared and spoke to Saul, convicting him of his sin. Saul was blinded, and led into town where the Lord sent the disciple Ananias to meet him. Ananias laid hands on Saul, and he was healed of His blindness and received the Holy Spirit. Immediately, the former persecutor began to preach that Jesus is the Son of God. The transforming power of the Holy Spirit is exhibited again in the conversion of Saul, a man who had previously witnessed and agreed to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1a; 9:1-22, NIV) (Laurie, Power for a Purpose 2010).

Peter received a vision from the Lord, teaching him that what God calls clean, no one should call unclean. Cornelius, a Gentile, summoned Peter to his home to hear the gospel. According to the law, a Jew defiled himself by associating with a Gentile, but Peter understood the message from his vision and began to teach them. While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and all who were listening (Acts 10:1-46, NIV). Prejudice had been practiced in the name of purity, but the Holy Spirit did not discriminate, and the gospel was then taught to the Jews and the Gentiles through the confirmation of the Spirit (Deffinbaugh 1997, 184).

The church multiplied, and the apostles continued to prophesy and preach boldly through the Holy Spirit in the midst of persecution, and God protected them (Acts 11:19-12:24, NIV).

# The Holy Spirit in the Church in Roman Civilization

The church in Antioch worshipped and fasted. The Holy Spirit spoke to them and instructed that they set apart Barnabas and Saul for missionary work. The church commissioned them and the Holy Spirit sent them out on Saul’s first missionary journey. They boldly preached the gospel to the Jew first, then to the Gentile, filled with the Holy Spirit and performing miracles. Saul is now called Paul. When Paul was opposed by a sorcerer, he was filled with the Spirit and the sorcerer was blinded, causing others to believe. Because of his fearless delivery of the gospel, Paul was stoned almost to the point of death, proving once more the thoroughness of his conversion. Even persecution did not stop the spread of the gospel or discourage the disciples, indicating the enabling power of the Spirit (Bock 2007, 466). Great numbers were added to the Church and elders were appointed. Paul gave direction and encouragement to the newly formed churches on his journey back to Antioch, teaching them to persevere through persecution in the ongoing joy of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13-14, NIV).

On the second missionary journey, the Holy Spirit directed Paul’s destination by preventing him from going to Asia. In Philippi, Paul cast a spirit of divination out of a girl which lead to the arrest and beating of Paul and Silas. In jail, they praised the Lord and sang hymns. A miraculous earthquake opened the cell and provided opportunity to witness to the jailer and his family. In the midst of mysterious cults, Paul not only proclaimed the gospel, but vigorously defended it in the power of the Holy Spirit (Hanegraaff n.d.). In response to the opposition Paul endured through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord assured him of his safety. They journeyed on, planting churches and persuasively preaching Jesus Christ and His resurrection before returning to Antioch (Acts 15:36-18:23, NIV).

On the third missionary journey, in Ephesus, a Christian Jew was instructed regarding the necessity of the baptism of the Spirit, and went on to vigorously defend Jesus Christ to the Jews. Paul also met some disciples who had not received the Spirit. He imparted to them the Holy Spirit, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Paul continued to minister to Jews and Greeks for two years in Ephesus, and miracles and revival spread widely in this province of Asia. Paul is then compelled by the Holy Spirit to return to Jerusalem where he began his long journey to Rome. He bid farewell to the Ephesian elders and reminded them that they were appointed as overseers by the Holy Spirit. He exhorted them to be on guard against wolves, and commended to the faithfulness of God, comforted by knowing the Holy Spirit indwelled them as well (Deffinbaugh 1997, 352). On the way to Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit spoke through a prophet to warn Paul of the persecution that lay ahead for him (Acts 18:24-20:38, NIV). It is not expressly stated here, but Paul likely believed the Spirit spoke to them of his coming persecution more for their benefit than his own. Paul’s ministry was marked by suffering, and he was willing to die in to promote the gospel of Jesus. The revelation was not meant to prevent Paul from going to Jerusalem, but to lend weight to his last words to this church, and incite them to pray for Paul. In fact, it was persecution, coupled with the enabling of the Holy Spirit in Paul which advanced the gospel (Deffinbaugh 1997, 357-358).

Paul was indeed arrested in Jerusalem, and he gave his defense of the gospel through the Holy Spirit to the crowd, the Sanhedrin, then to the Roman governors Felix and Festus, and finally to King Agrippa. He appealed to Caesar knowing he would make his way to Rome in the protective custody of the Romans. The transfer to Rome was filled with peril and the Lord sent an angel to encourage Paul and convey a promise of safety. He ministered, in chains, to those who traveled with him. After being shipwrecked, Paul was bitten by a snake a suffered no ill effects, and he miraculously healed a man with dysentery. After his arrival in Rome, he preached the kingdom of God and boldly taught about Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit without hindrance for two whole years (Acts 27:1-28:31, NIV).

# Conclusion

The presence and activity of the Holy Spirit is evident in Acts. It had been promised by the Father and mediated by Jesus. The Holy Spirit was the key to the renewal and mission of God’s people in Acts (Bock 2007, 37). The Church was persecuted and scattered, but the Spirit commissioned, directed, and enabled so that Jesus was preached throughout Judea, Samaria, and Roman territories where churches were established and encouraged. The Spirit was responsible for the unity and protection of the Church, and the judgment of those who would come against it (Bock 2007, 37). Through these events we see that the Holy Spirit was necessary and responsible for enabling and empowering God’s people to complete their mission of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

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