



Walking with the Spirit through the Book of Acts

Pastor Michael Cranford

Copyright © 2024 Michael Cranford

Schedule

- April 7 The Holy Spirit
- April 14 Acts 1:1-9
- April 21 Acts 1:10-2:11
- April 28 Acts 2:12-47
- May 5 Acts 3
- May 12 BREAK (Mother's Day)
- May 19 Acts 4



The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

1. The ascent is a tangible sign and motivation for the church to wait for the Spirit and embrace its mission.

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. (Acts 1:9; NIV)



The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

2. The ascent typifies the same vision as Elijah's transition and the start of Elisha's ministry.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?"

"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied.

"You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not."

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two. (2 Kings 2:9-12)

The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

2. The ascent typifies the same vision as Elijah's transition and the start of Elisha's ministry.

“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.” (Mal 4:5-6)



The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

3. The ascent of Jesus sets up the fulfillment of a key Messianic passage in Ps 110:1.

The LORD says to my lord:

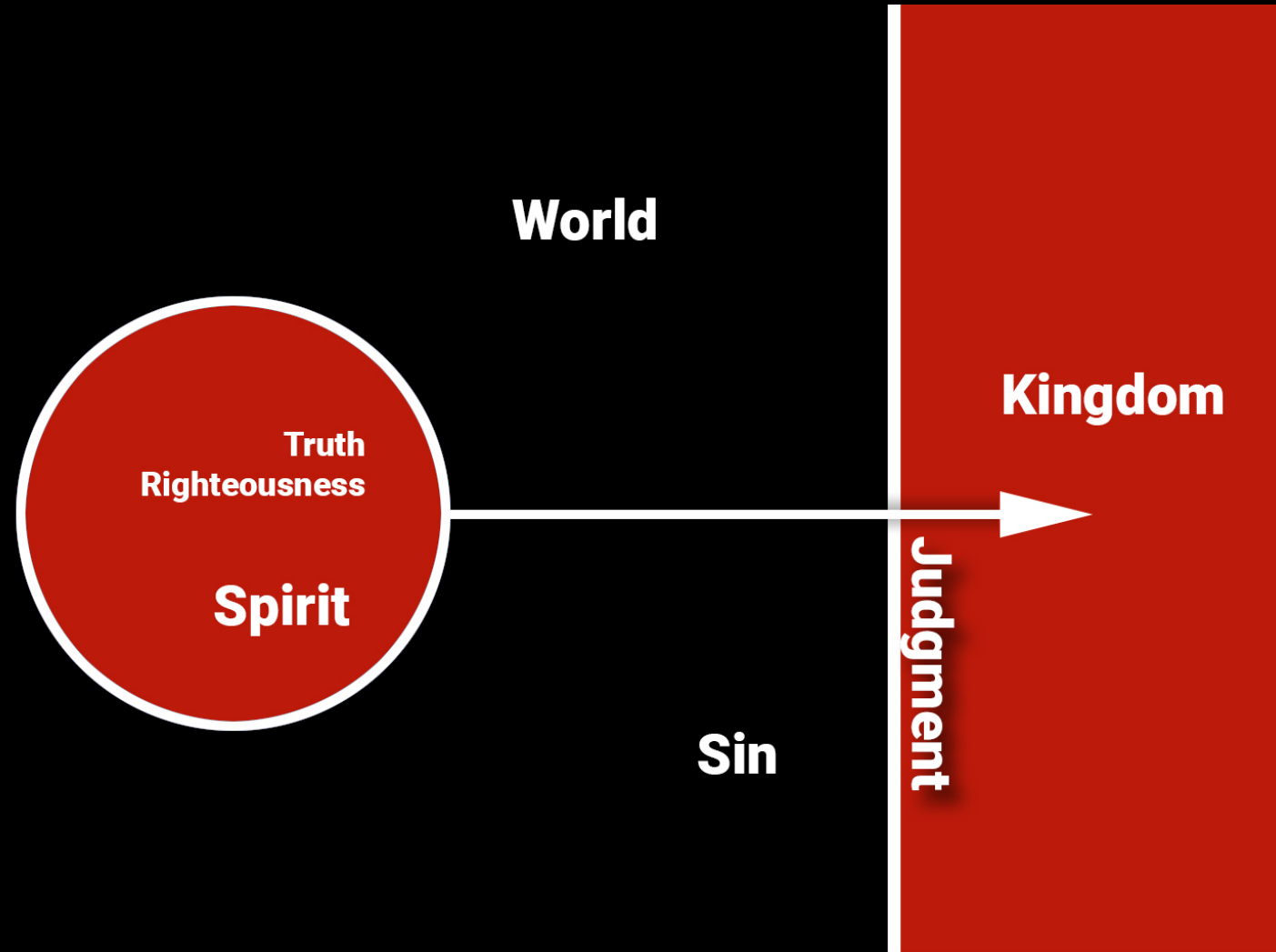
“Sit at my right hand

until I make your enemies

a footstool for your feet.” (Ps 110:1)



The ascent and return in God's prophetic plan



The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

4. The gospels reveal that the ascent was always something anticipated.

Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (John 20:17)



The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

4. The gospels reveal that the ascent was always something anticipated.

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.” (Matt 25:14-19)



The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

4. The gospels reveal that the ascent was always something anticipated.

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” (Matt 24:37-39)



The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

5. The ascent sets us the return of Christ (in similar fashion as his departure), in fulfillment of key end-times prophecies such as Daniel 7 and Luke 21:27.

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” (Dan 7:13-14)



The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

5. The ascent sets us the return of Christ (in similar fashion as his departure), in fulfillment of key end-times prophecies such as Daniel 7 and Luke 21:27.

“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:27-28)



The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

6. The angels (Acts 1:10) seem to be the same two who provide insight to the disciples at the empty tomb (Luke 24:1-7). Here they perform the same function: providing an explanation of what happened so that there isn't fear or confusion (Acts 1:11).

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:10-11)



The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words. (Luke 24:1-8)



The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

7. The disciples are at the Mount of Olives when this occurs (see Acts 1:12). That Jesus is going to return in the same fashion is a fulfillment of Zech 14:4, a prophecy for the coming of the Lord at the end of the age. He appears as a man at the Mount of Olives.

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. (Acts 1:12)



The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

7. The disciples are at the Mount of Olives when this occurs (see Acts 1:12). That Jesus is going to return in the same fashion is a fulfillment of Zech 14:4, a prophecy for the coming of the Lord at the end of the age. He appears as a man at the Mount of Olives.

Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. (Zech 14:3-4)



Choosing a replacement for Judas and the ongoing witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:12-26)

1. The disciples are pictured as faithful Jews who kept the sabbath. (Acts 1:12).

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. (Acts 1:12)



Choosing a replacement for Judas and the ongoing witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:12-26)

2. The disciples numbered 120 people at this time, and Luke notes that this includes some of the women and the brothers of Jesus (i.e., the children that Mary and Joseph had after Jesus' birth). (Acts 1:13-14)

When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. (Acts 1:13-14)



Choosing a replacement for Judas and the ongoing witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:12-26)

3. The betrayal of Judah would be seen as a matter of shame and disrepute in ancient culture. Luke makes sure his readers understand that this shame does not reflect on Jesus or the church. (Acts 1:15-20) The resolution is to replace Judah and restore the witness of the twelve disciples.

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, “Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”



Choosing a replacement for Judas and the ongoing witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:12-26)

(With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

“For,” said Peter, “it is written in the Book of Psalms:

“May his place be deserted;

let there be no one to dwell in it,

and,

“May another take his place of leadership.” (Acts 1:15-20)

Choosing a replacement for Judas and the ongoing witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:12-26)

4. The criteria was to select someone who had been there as part of Jesus' earthly ministry and witnessed his resurrection. Someone in that position would be able to provide an eye-witness testimony of everything that had happened. Paul (for example) would not qualify for this kind of testimony. (Acts 1:21-22)

“Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.” (Acts 1:21-22)



Choosing a replacement for Judas and the ongoing witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:12-26)

5. The disciples used lots (i.e., flipping a coin) to choose between two equally qualified men, with the hope and expectation God would control the outcome. (Acts 1:23-26)

So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:23-26)



Side topic: The use of signs (lots, fleeces, etc.)

1. Casting lots is something that happens in ancient culture, the same way we might flip a coin or roll dice to determine a random outcome. But in the case of the Old Testament, it occurs on occasion with the expectation that God will affect the outcome for his purposes. (Joshua, in particular, uses this method on numerous occasions.)

“After you have written descriptions of the seven parts of the land, bring them here to me and I will cast lots for you in the presence of the LORD our God.” (Joshua 18:6)



Side topic: The use of signs (lots, fleeces, etc.)

2. Gideon is famous for confirming God's orders by asking God to show a sign through a fleece.

Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised— look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew." **That night God did so.** Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew. (Judges 6:36-40)

Side topic: The use of signs (lots, fleeces, etc.)

3. Despite these examples, the primary way God directs us in our decision making is by commanding us to obey his word.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matt 7:24)

I hold fast to your statutes, LORD;
do not let me be put to shame.

I run in the path of your commands,
for you have broadened my understanding. (Ps 119:31-32)



Side topic: The use of signs (lots, fleeces, etc.)

4. God also directs us to make decisions in accordance with wisdom. Wisdom is principled and conservative decision-making, striving for outcomes that make sense, preserve life, and honor God. It is contrasted with foolishness, which includes decision-making that leads to destructive and harmful outcomes. Wisdom often comes from loving (parental) instruction and sound advice.

The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice. (Prov 12:15)

Listen, my son, accept what I say,
and the years of your life will be many.

I instruct you in the way of wisdom
and lead you along straight paths.

When you walk, your steps will not be hampered;
when you run, you will not stumble. (Prov 4:10-12)

Side topic: The use of signs (lots, fleeces, etc.)

5. After the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2, things like lots are not used again in any decision-making. Instead, we see the Holy Spirit as a guide for life, transforming people so that they will make wise and godly decisions. On occasion, when the issue is not holiness or wisdom but rather needing information, the Spirit provides specific instructions or prevents specific actions. This only occurs in the context of ministry, however.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (Acts 13:2)



Side topic: The use of signs (lots, fleeces, etc.)

5. After the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2, things like lots are not used again in any decision-making. Instead, we see the Holy Spirit as a guide for life, transforming people so that they will make wise and godly decisions. On occasion, when the issue is not holiness or wisdom but rather needing information, the Spirit provides specific instructions or prevents specific actions. This only occurs in the context of ministry, however.

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. (Acts 16:6)

“I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.” (Acts 20:23)

Pentecost, speaking in tongues, tongues of fire: The Spirit's power and baptism

1. What happened at Pentecost was a fulfillment of Jesus' promise of the coming of the Spirit, after his departure.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4; NIV)



Pentecost, speaking in tongues, tongues of fire: The Spirit's power and baptism

2. The unique characteristics of this event suggest this is not the normal experience of people who receive the Holy Spirit. Rather, it seems a deliberate sign to ensure that the start of the church is framed with unmistakable meaning.

a) The Spirit is given in a way that is unmistakably supernatural but with a clear manifestation in the physical realm. Whatever it means, possessing the Spirit, it has power and significance in the real (physical) world.

b) Having tongues accompany this brings the unmistakable message that the work of the Spirit is intended for the entire world, not just Jews in Palestine.



Pentecost, speaking in tongues, tongues of fire: The Spirit's power and baptism

- c) The use of tongues typifies the idea that the work of the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to spread a message. This is not power for its own sake, but to complete a mission that was started by Jesus. Average, everyday people are now empowered for the same kind of ministry: to deliver the same message of the kingdom.
- d) The work of the Spirit comes in direct fulfillment of not only Jesus' promises, but other Old Testament prophecies of the final age leading to the kingdom (see Acts 2:17-21). This event, therefore, connects the past to the present, and the present to the future. The same Spirit who begins this age will end it. The final age (leading to judgment and the kingdom) is upon us.

Pentecost, speaking in tongues, tongues of fire: The Spirit's power and baptism

- e) The use of tongues and flames of fire shows that the work is deliberately individualized, though the work itself is for all of us. Each person has the same power but not necessarily the same words.
- f) Fire is prophetically associated by John in connection with the kind of baptism that Jesus was bringing (Luke 3:16). The nearest reference that indicates the significance of fire seems to be Jesus' teaching in Luke 12. Fire represents purification and refinement. His people therefore have this as a component in their ministry.



Pentecost, speaking in tongues, tongues of fire: The Spirit's power and baptism

“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!” (Luke 12:49-50)

g) The scene at Pentecost is radically different than anything seen in the Old Testament and signifies a power never before seen on earth. A full understanding of what it means is not yet evident but becomes increasingly so through the book of Acts.

