

Walking with the Spirit through the Book of Acts

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Who is the Holy Spirit?

1. The Spirit is God

³ But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back *some* of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why *is it* that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.” (Acts 5:3-4; NASB)

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

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” (Matt 28:19; NASB)

2. The Spirit is advocate

¹⁶ I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may be with you forever; ¹⁷ *the Helper is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know *Him*; *but* you know Him because He remains with you and will be in you. (John 14:16-17; NASB)

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while remaining with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all that I said to you.” (John 14:25; NASB)

⁷ But I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I am leaving; for if I do not leave, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. ⁸ And He, when He comes, will convict the world regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment: ⁹ regarding sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰ and regarding righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you no longer *are going* to see Me; ¹¹ and regarding judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

¹² “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* at the present time. ¹³ But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take from Mine and will disclose *it* to you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine; this is why I said that He takes from Mine and will disclose *it* to you. (John 16:7-15; NASB)

3. The Spirit is our guide through the journey of life

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. ¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, ²⁰ idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Now those who belong to Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let’s follow the Spirit as well. (Gal 5:16-25; NASB)

But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18; NASB)

They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, after being forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. (Acts 16:6; NASB)

²² And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that chains and afflictions await me. (Acts 20:22-23; NASB)

After looking up the disciples, we stayed there for seven days; and they kept telling Paul, through the Spirit, not to set foot in Jerusalem. (Acts 21:4; NASB)

4. The Spirit is a source of power for His purposes

So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (Gal 3:5; NASB)

and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. (1 Cor 2:4; NASB)

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. ⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (1 Cor 12:4-11; NASB)

The Holy Spirit in Today's World

1. Conviction about sin / virtual spaces and flexible morality
2. Focus on the material (bodily comfort) / detachment from the true self (spiritual)
3. Focus on the moment (pleasure) / detachment from judgment (destiny)

What is the Book of Acts?

Acts is part 2 of a two-part history.

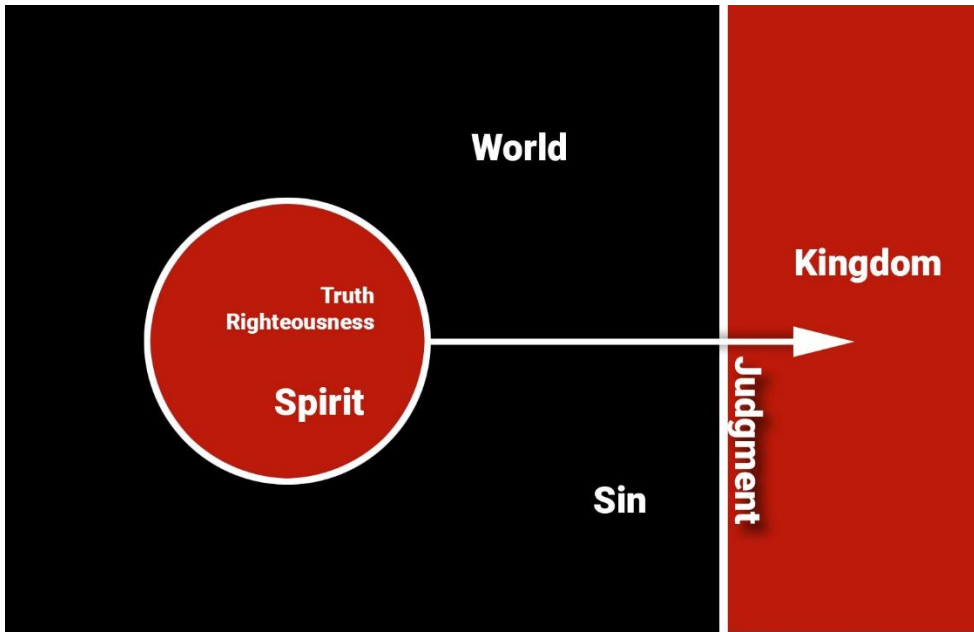
In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. (Acts 1:1-2; NIV)

What part does the Holy Spirit play?

Acts presents the account of the first witnesses to the Spirit-empowered life.

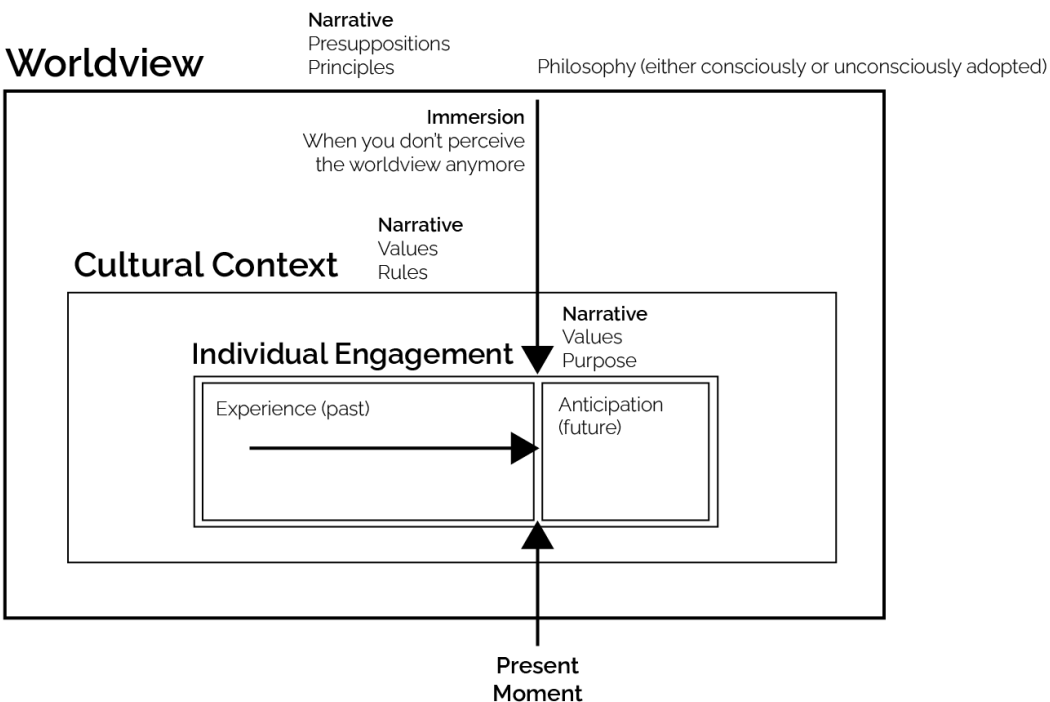
Acts 1 and the framework for the work of the Spirit

1. Christianity is based in a tangible reality—the proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. (Acts 1:3a; NIV)
2. The Christian life and mission have a forward view—the Kingdom is the conclusion to the journey that begins in Acts and concludes with this end of this present age. The Kingdom is present and future.
He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3b)



- Acts reminds us that the gospel is in tension with culture, that we need to be strategic and we need to rely on the Holy Spirit. Jesus predicted we would have trouble in this world (John 16:33)—so the apparent challenges to the gospel in Acts (and in our lives) are expected.

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.” (Acts 1:4)



4. Acts is based on a radical shift in human existence that comes through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is metaphorically identified as baptism. Baptism means change, transition, and death as a gateway to new life.

“For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:5)

John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Luke 3:16)

5. Acts reveals a time frame between the giving of the Spirit and the end of the age (the arrival of the Kingdom), and deliberately avoids any explanation for how long that time will last.

Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” (Acts 1:6-7)

6. Acts reveals the Holy Spirit as our source of power. This is not power for its own sake, but to fulfill our purpose in this life. Our purpose is nothing other than his purpose.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses ...” (Acts 1:8a)

7. God's purpose is realized throughout the world. The work of the Spirit is not limited by time, space, ethnicity, or any other human characteristic. It is powerful across the centuries. It is the same power today, in this corner of the world, that it was then.

"...in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8b)

8. The beginning of this work is specifically indicated by Jesus visibly transitioning his ministry to the church by leaving the earth in plain sight. This image bring closure and implies that we need to focus our eyes on what lies ahead and do what he says.

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

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. (2 Kings 2:11)

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

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "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 1:9-11; NIV)

1. The ascent is a tangible sign and motivation for the church to wait for the Spirit and embrace its mission.
2. The ascent typifies the same vision as Elijah's transition and the start of Elisha's ministry.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ "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."

¹¹ 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. ¹² 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)

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)

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)

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.

¹³“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. ¹⁴He 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)

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

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).

While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. (Luke 24:4)

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)

³Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. ⁴On 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 Judah 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)
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)

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.
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)

²¹ "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, ²² 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)

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)

Side topic: The use of signs (lots, fleeces, etc.) in decision-making

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)

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

³⁶ Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised— ³⁷ 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." ³⁸ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

³⁹ 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." ⁴⁰ That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew. (Judges 6:36-40)

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)

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.

¹¹ I instruct you in the way of wisdom
and lead you along straight paths.

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

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)

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

9. 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. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All 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)

10. 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.
 - 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.

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.

"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.