

# *The New Testament* **Strategy** *of the Spirit*



An Acts 1:8 Model for 21st Century  
Church Planting in Africa

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**DENZIL R. MILLER**  
**MARK R. TURNEY**



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for 21st Century Church Planting

Denzil R. Miller

Mark R. Turney

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## Preface

As directors of the Act in Africa Initiative,<sup>1</sup> Mark Turney and I have been privileged to travel across Africa meeting with Assemblies of God pastors and church leaders in national missions mobilization conferences known as Acts 1:8 Conferences. To date, we have conducted 51 such conferences in 37 African countries.

During these conferences, we have been afforded the opportunity to sit with national church leaders and discuss their missions and church planting plans. We have consistently been amazed at the faith and vision of these gifted leaders. Much of what is written in this book we have learned from these extraordinary men.

This book was originally produced as two lectures (one by Mark and the other by me) presented at the West Africa Assemblies of God Alliance 2017 Conference held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on August 1-5, 2017. The book contains original information; however, much of what is written here is taken from three of my previous books, *Empowered for Global Mission* (2005) *The 1:8 Promise of Jesus* (2015), and *Missionary Tongues Revisited* (2016).

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<sup>1</sup> Website: [www.ActsinAfrica.org](http://www.ActsinAfrica.org)

## Preface

While this book was written for African leaders, missionaries, and church-planters, it contains timeless principles revealed in Scripture. It is therefore applicable to anyone desiring to launch a church planning movement in any culture.

We would love to hear your comments on the book. You can contact us at [ActsInAfrica@agmd.org](mailto:ActsInAfrica@agmd.org).

— Denzil R. Miller

## Introduction

The God we serve is a missionary God, and as such, He tenaciously pursues His redemptive mission. This is, in fact, the central theme of all Scripture. The Bible tells the story of the Creator's relentless quest to redeem the nations. The God of eternity has acted in time to save the world from certain self-destruction. He did this by "invading" human history and giving "his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The Bible further emphasizes that God has mandated all who follow Him to join Him in fulfilling His mission. He has dispatched His missionary people to announce the good news about His kingdom reign "in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). Jesus commissioned His church to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18-20; ref. Mark 16:15; Luke 24:48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). Now, twenty centuries later, the mission remains. It will continue until Christ returns.

With this in mind, it is important that we ask, "What is our role in fulfilling God's mission?" We must further ask, "How are we to go about fulfilling that role?" and "Is there an authoritative model that we should follow?" The answer is, *Yes, there is an authoritative model*. Jesus first presented the model in His own life and ministry. Then, as He was concluding His earthly mission, Jesus charged His disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). In other words, Jesus was transferring

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His mission to His church. The book of Acts is the story of how the early disciples continued Christ's redemptive mission in the power of the Holy Spirit. In doing this, they created a lasting model of how we should continue God's mission until Jesus returns.

The Africa Assemblies of God have now entered into the seventh year of their Decade of Pentecost<sup>2</sup> emphasis from 2010 through 2020. At the beginning of the decade, the church reported 16 million adherents meeting in 67,000 local assemblies in 50 countries in Sub-Sahara Africa and the Indian Ocean Basin. By January 2015, their numbers had reached 18 million adherents meeting in 80,000 local churches. During these same years, in Acts 1:8 Conferences across the continent, 31 national AG churches have committed themselves to planting 49,612 new churches by the end of the decade. At the present growth rate, by the end of the decade, the Africa AG will reach 20,000 million adherents meeting in 93,000 local churches.

It is goes without saying that these goals will never be achieved without a well thought out and well-executed plan of advance. The time has come for Africa AG churches to reevaluate what they are doing. We must honestly ask ourselves, "Is our plan working? Is it achieving the desired result?" We must further ask, "Is our strategy biblical? Is it of heavenly or earthly origin?"

The founding fathers of the Assemblies of God used godly wisdom when they declared the Bible to be the movement's "all sufficient rule for faith and practice."<sup>3</sup> As twenty-first century Assemblies of God ministers, we must hold fast to that

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<sup>2</sup> Website: [www.DecadeofPentecost.org](http://www.DecadeofPentecost.org)

<sup>3</sup> General Council of the Assemblies of God "Statement of Fundamental Truths," Statement 1: "The Scriptures Inspired, <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths#1>, accessed 5 May 2017.

declaration. We would do well to base our own evangelism, church planting, and missions efforts firmly on God's revelation rather than in man's wisdom.

Regrettably, however, many in the church today have adopted extra-biblical models to structure their missions programs. These church leaders often look to corporate or political models for guidance. As a result, they often lead their missions programs as if they were directing a corporate marketing program or political campaign. Since we are pursuing God's mission, we must be careful to use God's methods.

In this book, we will examine such a biblical model. We will do this by boldly stepping into the book of Acts to carefully inspect the mission model it presents. In Acts, we will discover that the Holy Spirit was the Chief Architect of the church's strategy, a strategy we are calling the New Testament "Strategy of the Spirit." We will further discover how the Holy Spirit empowered and enabled early church to carry out its missions mandate.

In Chapters 1 and 2, we will identify and explain Jesus' final promise to His church found in Acts 1:8. In that promise He told His disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Then, in Chapter 3, we will explore how, in the book of Acts, Paul went about implementing the model in the church in Ephesus (Acts 19). Finally, in Chapter 4, we will apply our finding to twenty-first century church planting and missions.

Let's now look at the missions model that Jesus presented to the church in Acts 1:8.



## Chapter 1

# The Acts 1:8 Model Identified

While the whole Bible is pertinent to the topic of missionary strategy, the book of Acts is especially relevant. This New Testament book, more than any other, presents a lasting model for missional ministry. It reveals how the apostles and early disciples went about obeying the Great Commission. It further reveals their remarkable success.

To fully grasp the message of Acts, one must understand why Luke wrote the book. He wrote to call the church of His age—and ultimately the church in every age—back to its Pentecostal and missionary roots.<sup>4</sup> By telling his readers how the church began, and how, even in the midst of severe persecution, they triumphed in the power of the Spirit, Luke hoped to encourage them to do the same. He wanted them to know that any church can be a force in the earth if they, like those first disciples, will remain committed to God and His mission and be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Luke further wrote to show his readers that this divine

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<sup>4</sup> In the book, *Empowered for Global Mission*, Denzil R. Miller discusses at length how one can determine Luke's purpose in writing Acts (pp.25-53).

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empowering comes from a powerful spiritual experience known as the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5; 11:16).

Luke thus wrote to present a universal missionary strategy, one that can be applied in every culture and in every age until Jesus returns. It is a strategy that Jesus himself used in mobilizing His first disciples for world missions. And is a strategy that we, as heirs of Christ's mission, are expected to imitate today.

The book of Acts answers questions like these:

- What were the core values and priorities of the first believers?
- What motivated them to do what they did?
- What were the secrets of their amazing evangelistic and missionary successes?
- What were the essential experiences and common practices of the first church?
- What challenges did they face, and how did they address those challenges?"

Thus, Acts is more than just a historical record of what happened in the early church. Luke wrote the book as a divinely-inspired strategy for carrying out the church's God-given mission. Acts was thus written as a lasting model of how the kingdom of God must advance in the power of the Spirit until Jesus comes again.

Acts 1:8 is the key to interpreting and understanding the missions model presented in the book of Acts. This pivotal verse introduces a pattern (or motif) that is repeated throughout the book. We call this pattern Luke's *empowerment-witness motif*. Jesus spoke of empowerment when He said, "You will receive *power* when the Holy Spirit comes upon you..." He spoke of

## Chapter 1: The Acts 1:8 Model Identified

witness when He added, “...and you will be my *witnesses* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (emphasis added). Here, then, is the pattern repeated throughout Acts:

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**The Empowering of the Holy Spirit →  
always results in → Missional Witness**

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Figure 1

A thoughtful reading of Acts reveals that, without exception, *every* outpouring of the Spirit resulted in powerful missional witness. Or to put it another way, *every* evangelistic and missionary advance of the church recorded in the book of Acts is preceded by one or more outpourings of the Spirit.

The good news is that the promise of Acts 1:8 still applies to us today. Jesus promises us the same power He promised His first disciples. Like them, we too can receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us. And like them, we can be Christ’s Spirit-empowered witnesses at home and to the ends of the earth.

Tragically, however, many in today’s church have missed the message of Acts 1:8—and thus the meaning of the entire book of Acts. This sad state of affairs includes both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals. Non-Pentecostals miss the meaning of Acts 1:8 because, even though they accept it as the key verse of the book, they stress the second half of the verse, which deals with the geographical expansion of the church, while ignoring the more important first half of the verse, which deals with empowerment for witness.

## Chapter 1: The Acts 1:8 Model Identified

Pentecostals, on the other hand, have often missed the empowerment message of Acts 1:8. In their zeal to emphasize the speaking in tongues of Acts 2:4, they have often ignored the empowerment for witness emphasized in Acts 1:8. While Pentecostals must hold tight to their doctrine of “initial physical evidence,” they must watch lest they miss the primary purpose of Spirit baptism—empowerment for missional witness. One can only properly understand and apply 2:4 when he or she interprets its message in light of 1:8.

This is especially true concerning the speaking in tongues that accompanied the disciples being filled with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Interpreted apart from 1:8, the experience of 2:4 loses much of its meaning and significance. When we try to define Spirit baptism in terms of 2:4, to the exclusion of the promise of 1:8, believers are filled with the Spirit with no clear understanding of why Christ has filled them. Speaking in tongues thus becomes an end in itself rather than the sign of a greater end.

However, when we interpret 2:4 in light of 1:8, we realize that being filled with the Spirit and speaking in tongues is about Spirit-anointed witness. Tongues is more than simply the initial physical evidence of Spirit baptism. They are a confirmation, a sign, and an enablement of the Spirit’s empowering for mission. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is given to empower us to speak for God as the Spirit empowers and enables us.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus symbolically performed a “marriage ceremony.” He indivisibly joined the power of the Spirit to the mission of God. “You will receive power,” He said, “and you will be my witnesses.” Yet, in most churches today a great “divorce” has taken place—and few seem to have noticed. The power of the Spirit has been divorced from the mission of God. However, if we

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are to accomplish God's mission in our time, we must reunite these two powerful spiritual truths, just as Jesus did in Acts 1:8.

We will talk more about these issues in the next chapter.



## Chapter 2

# The Acts 1:8 Model Examined

Let's now take a closer look at Acts 1:8 to see how this promise of Jesus serves as the foundation of the missions model presented in Acts. Understanding this promise will help us to understand the missionary “Strategy of the Spirit” to be discussed in Chapter 3. In this chapter, we will examine the promise in six ways. We will discuss the *nature* of the promise, the *recipients* of the promise, the *time* of the promise, the *purpose* of the promise, the *scope* of the promise, and finally, *appropriating* the promise.

### **The Nature of the Promise**

We can summarize the essential nature of the gift of the Holy Spirit in two words, *priority* and *power*.

Jesus emphasized the *priority* of the promise by making it part of His final “marching orders” to His church (Acts 1:4-8). This divine empowering would enable them, and all who would follow them, to be Christ’s witnesses at home and to the ends of the earth. It is the same with us today. Like Jesus, we must make this experience a priority in our own lives as well as in the lives of those we serve. Only then will we have the necessary power to be Christ’s witnesses to all nations.

Further, Jesus’ Acts 1:8 promise is a promise of missional *power*. The coming of the Spirit certainly imparts blessing and

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purity into the lives of its recipients. However, neither of these are the primary purpose of the experience. The promise of the Spirit is a promise of power to proclaim Christ “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

The opening chapters of Acts present the experience of the Spirit in two ways. First, the Spirit *comes upon* the disciples; He then *fills* them. Jesus promised, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has *come upon* you.” This promise was first fulfilled in Acts 2:3 when the 120 disciples “saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and *came to rest on* each of them.” These *tongues* of fire were symbolic of the Spirit’s coming upon believers to empower them to speak for God. This coming upon metaphor is repeated through Acts.

Once the Spirit had come upon the 120 at Pentecost, He entered into them and *filled* them. Jesus had promised them, “He lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:17). Their filling with the Spirit was a total permeation of their beings. Just as water fills every cell of a sponge, the Spirit filled every part of their being—spirit, soul, and body. They were transformed from the inside out. The Spirit wants to do the same with us today.

### **The Recipients of the Promise**

When Jesus promised, “*You* will receive power,” He was speaking to His disciples. Jesus had already cleansed, called, and commissioned these men and women (John 15:3, Mark 3:13-19, Matt. 28:18-20). Later, after He arose from the dead, Jesus appeared to them and “breathed on [into] them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22). Further, these disciples had left all to follow Jesus (Luke 18:28), and they had fully committed themselves to obeying His command to take the gospel to all nations. Yet, for all of this, they still lacked the power they needed

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to be Christ's witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." These disciples serve as models of all believers of all ages until Jesus comes again. Every follower of Jesus, no matter how talented or committed he or she is to God's mission, must be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Immediately after the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter explained that the promise was universal, that is, it is for all of God's people. Quoting Joel, Peter declared, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit *on all people.*'" (Acts 2:17, emphasis added). At the conclusion of his message, Peter universalized the promise to include "everyone whom the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). The empowering of the Spirit is thus a promise for every true follower of Jesus. Any Christian who wants to be fully used by Him to spread the message of God's love to their neighbors or to the multitudes around the world, can, and must, be empowered by the Spirit.

### **The Time of the Promise**

When does one receive the promised power? Jesus said that we receive it "*when the Holy Spirit comes upon [us].*" Note the sequence of events at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). First, there came from heaven "a sound like the blowing of a violent wind," indicating that the Spirit had come to move among men and women in new and powerful ways. This was followed by "what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them," indicating, among other things, that the experience was both corporate and personal.

The Spirit, then, entered into them and "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." As a result of this powerful infilling, "they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."

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Finally, and importantly, the newly Spirit-baptized disciples immediately began to witness with great power and impact, as Jesus had promised. This pattern established at Pentecost is a model of how the Spirit will come upon believers until Jesus returned.

After Pentecost, never again do we hear the sound from heaven, nor do we see the tongues of fire. However, three primary elements of Pentecost are repeated throughout the book of Acts:

- The Holy Spirit comes (or falls) upon disciples.
- The Holy Spirit fills and empowers disciples.
- The disciples speak prophetically and witness for Christ as the Spirit enables them.

Jesus' promise of Acts 1:8 is still in effect today. We, too, should expect the Spirit to come upon us, fill us, and enable us to speak powerfully for God.

### **The Purpose of the Promise**

The purpose of the Acts 1:8 promise is clear. Jesus' words were explicit: "You will receive power...and *you will be my witnesses.*" This is what happened on the Day of Pentecost. The 120 were filled with the Holy Spirit, and "began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). Peter then stood and spoke by the Spirit a second time. This time he spoke the common language (v. 14). In accordance with Jesus' promise, Peter spoke powerfully about Christ. As result, 3,000 people were saved and added to the church. The first speaking (tongues) was the Spirit-inspired *sign* of Spirit baptism; the second speaking (Peter's message) was the Spirit-empowered *product and purpose* of the experience as foretold by Jesus in Acts 1:8.

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The missional purpose of Jesus' promise is repeatedly emphasized throughout the book of Acts. Each time the Holy Spirit came upon believers, He came with a purpose. Without exception, His coming *always* resulted in powerful Spirit-anointed missional witness.

There is no greater need in the church today than to reclaim the true purpose of Spirit baptism. A return to the Acts of the Apostles model requires a return to the priority and purpose of Spirit baptism. Only then will the church be fully equipped to complete the task of taking the gospel to the yet-to-be-reached peoples of Africa and the world.

### **The Scope of the Promise**

When Jesus issued His Acts 1:8 promise, He had in view both “the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8) and the “end of the age” (Acts 1:6-8, ref. Matt. 28:20). Our mission is to proclaim the gospel to the whole world until Jesus returns (Matt. 24:14). From beginning to end the Bible presents God as being a missionary God. His purpose has always been to call unto himself a people from every nation, people, tongue, and tribe (Rev. 5:9). Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8 reminds us that, in this Age of the Spirit, God has provided His people the supernatural enablement they need to effectively participate in God's mission.

The geographical progression that Jesus presented in Acts 1:8 is instructive. He said that we would be His witnesses in, “Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” In other words, we must begin where we are, and not relent until we reach “the remotest parts of the remotest part of the earth.” In defining the scope of the promise, it is important to note that Jesus three times used the coordinating conjunction, *and*, rather than the sequential conjunction, *then*. He told His disciples

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that they would be His witnesses “in Jerusalem, *and* in all Judea, *and* Samaria, *and* to the ends of the earth.” He did not say that they would be His witnesses “in Jerusalem, *then* in all Judea *then* Samaria, *then* to the end of the earth.”

This is a significant distinction because it highlights the fact that we are to fulfill the Acts 1:8 mandate simultaneously, rather than sequentially. In other words, we are not to wait until we have reached our Jerusalem before we begin to reach out to our Judea. And, we are not to wait until we reach our Jerusalem and Judea before we begin to reach out to our Samaria and to the ends of the earth. We are to reach them all at the same time. Further, we are to continue reaching out until we arrive at the end of the age. Only then will the mission be completed.

### **Appropriating the Promise**

We now come to what is possibly the most important issue of our study, that is, the issue of appropriating the Act 1:8 promise of Jesus as our own. A proper understanding and a personal receiving of the promise are the key to fulfilling the Commission of Christ. Therefore, one must ask, “Exactly how does one go about receiving the Holy Spirit?” In Luke 11:9-13, Jesus has given clear instructions on how to receive the promise. He said,

“And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

## Chapter 2: The Acts 1:8 Model Examined

To the question, “How can one receive the promise of the Spirit?” Jesus answers, you receive by simply asking in faith. God will freely give the Holy Spirit to those who sincerely and believingly ask. It is helpful to break down the process of receiving the Spirit into three simple “faith steps”:

*1. Ask in Faith.* Simply and sincerely, present your request to God, believing that He will hear and answer your prayer. Remember, God is more anxious to give you the gift of the Spirit than you are to receive it. With this in mind, sincerely and confidently pray this prayer:

“Lord, I believe your promise. I believe that if I ask for the Spirit, You will give me the Spirit. So, right now, in Jesus’ name, I ask You, give me the Holy Spirit, and empower me as your witness.”

As you pray, believe that God is hearing and answering your prayer. Believe that, at this very moment, He is filling you with His Spirit. Be aware of what God is doing for you and in you. You will begin to sense the Spirit’s presence as He comes upon you, just as Jesus promised.

*2. Receive by Faith.* Receiving the Spirit is a bold, present-tense step of faith. It occurs the moment the promise is fully believed and boldly acted upon. Jesus promised, “Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” This act of faith can be compared to Peter’s step of faith when he, at the command of Jesus, stepped from the boat and began to walk on water (Matt. 14:25-32). His bold step of faith resulted in a miracle! Once you have sensed the Spirit’s presence within, pray and truly believe this simple prayer, “I am now full of the Holy Spirit.” Consciously sense His presence inside.

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3. *Speak in Faith.* Now, speak as the Spirit enables (Acts 2:4). Allow the Holy Spirit to gush forth from deep inside, from your “innermost being” (John 7:38). As He does, cooperate with what He is doing. Yield to Him your vocal organs and lips. You will begin to speak words in a language you have never learned. When this happens, don’t be afraid. God is empowering you to be His Spirit-anointed witness. Jesus is graciously fulfilling His Acts 1:8 promise in your life! Now, yield yourself more and more to the Spirit. Let the words flow. Continue to speak, believing God with all of your heart, holding nothing back, fully trusting God to do His part. Praise the Lord! You have been baptized in the Holy Spirit, and you have been empowered as Christ’s Spirit-inspired spokesperson.

Now expect the Spirit to come upon you again and again. Sometimes He will come upon you while you are worshipping or praying. On those occasions, you may speak in tongues as the Spirit enables you. On other occasions, the Spirit will come upon you while you are out in the world. On these occasions, He will enable you to speak persuasively in your own language and tell people about Jesus. Either way, it will be the Spirit who anoints and enables your speech.

In the next chapter we will observe how Paul applied the Acts 1:8 missions model in his missionary ministry.



## Chapter 3

# The Acts 1:8 Model Applied

In the last chapter, we learned how, in Acts 1:8, Jesus laid down a grand strategy for world evangelization. In His final words before ascending into heaven, He told His disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (v. 8). The remainder of the book of Acts is an exposition and application of this grand strategy. The strategy was to remain in effect until He returned from heaven (v. 11).

In the last chapter, we further expanded on Jesus’ Acts 1:8 model of mission. In this lesson, we will examine how Paul implemented this Acts 1:8 strategy in the Roman city of Ephesus (Acts 19:1-11). In doing this, we will discover that Paul’s strategy was an imitation of the strategy that Jesus used in mobilizing His church in Jerusalem. Finally, in Chapter 4, we will apply this New Testament “Strategy of the Spirit” to our own missionary and church planting efforts today.

### EXEMPLARY MINISTRY IN EPHESUS

Paul’s ministry in Ephesus holds a special place in Luke’s grand design for writing Acts. It occurred during the apostle’s third and final missionary journey, and it represents the book’s last record of Paul’s evangelistic ministry. In Acts, Luke names six

regions<sup>5</sup> and fourteen cities<sup>6</sup> Paul visited during his third journey. However, it is only in Ephesus that Luke gives a detailed account of the apostle's church planting efforts. It appears that Luke wanted to highlight the significance of Paul's work in Ephesus. Scholars have described the apostle's ministry there as "the chief achievement of Paul's missionary career"<sup>7</sup> and "the climax of his missionary work."<sup>8</sup>

Further, in the Ephesian story, Luke presents the clearest and most comprehensive example of the strategy Paul used in his missionary work. Writing as a divinely-inspired missiologist, Luke outlined, in narrative form, Paul's missionary strategy. It is meant to be a lasting strategy for church planting and missions.

Let's now look at how Paul applied this strategy to plant the church in Ephesus and in all Asia Minor. We will first look at what Paul did, then how he did it, and finally, we will apply our findings to our church planting efforts today.

### **The Ephesian Outpouring**

Paul arrived in Ephesus with a well-defined goal and a clear strategy. This goal is revealed in Acts 19:10 where Luke says that after just two years, "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." Paul's strategy for accomplishing that goal becomes clear through a thoughtful

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<sup>5</sup> Galatia, Phrygia, Asia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Greece

<sup>6</sup> Ephesus, Philippi, Troas, Assos, Mitylene, Kios, Samos, Miletus, Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Tyre, Ptolemais, and Caesarea

<sup>7</sup> Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield, ENG: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, vol. 2, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1994), 236.

examination of his ministry in Ephesus found in verses 1-10. With this in mind, let's look at what Paul did in Ephesus.

When Paul arrived in the city, he found twelve disciples. These men were likely leaders in the emerging church in Ephesus. He immediately asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Why would Paul ask such a question? He was seeking to discover if these men were spiritually equipped to participate in the mission of reaching Ephesus and Asia with the gospel. Paul could have had in mind the words of Jesus: "Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49; ref. Acts 1:4-5, 8).

After a brief conversation, Paul laid his hands on the twelve disciples, and "the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied" (v.6). The phrase, "the Holy Spirit came upon them" reminds us of Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8 where He said, "You will receive power *when the Holy Spirit comes on you*; and you will be my witnesses..." This insight helps us to know what is happening in this passage. The Holy Spirit "came upon" these men just as He had come on the disciples at Pentecost, to empower them for witness "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

As soon as the Holy Spirit came upon and filled the Ephesian twelve, "they spoke in tongues and prophesied," just as the Jewish Christians had done at Pentecost and the Gentiles had done at Caesarea (v. 6; ref. 2:4; 10:46). According to Luke's teaching in Acts, one can expect two normative results when he or she is baptized in the Holy Spirit. The first result is speaking in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance. This is the "initial physical evidence," or "normative missional sign," that one has been empowered to speak for Jesus. The second result is Spirit-empowered witness. As mentioned in our last lesson, both of these results are a direct

fulfillment of Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8: "You will receive power...and you will be my witnesses."

### **The Ephesian Campaign**

Too often, when we read this account of the twelve Ephesian disciples receiving the Holy Spirit, we stop reading at verse 6 where it says, "the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied." It is critical; however, that we examine what happened *after* they spoke in tongues and prophesied. If we will do this, we will discover that the twelve disciples' receiving the Spirit was the divine spark that ignited the Ephesian Campaign.

This evangelistic and church-planting campaign took place over a period of about two years and resulted in "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia" hearing the gospel (v. 10). What an amazing accomplishment! In just two years, everyone in Asia—even those of various cultures and ethnic backgrounds—heard the good news. In addition, many churches were planted. This number likely included the seven churches of Asia mentioned in Revelation 2-3. Church history reveals that Asia became a center of Christian witness for many years. All these accomplishments testify to the effectiveness of Paul's Ephesian strategy.

#### **"STRATEGY OF THE SPIRIT"**

Luke includes the story of Paul's ministry in Ephesus as his most complete example of Paul's missionary strategy. It, in effect, sums up his missionary strategy demonstrated in his First and Second Missionary Journeys. Paul used this strategy to reach all of

Roman Asia with the gospel of Christ in just two years.<sup>9</sup> We would do well to understand and employ this strategy in our own missionary and church planting efforts today.

In the Ephesian Campaign Paul’s strategy included three key “pillars,” as follows:

### **Pillar One: Empowering**

The first pillar of Paul’s missionary strategy was empowering. This empowering was twofold. It first involved *empowering of the missionary* himself. It then involved the *empowering of the church* or churches being planted. Let’s look at each of these essential elements.

Paul entered Ephesus full of the Holy Spirit. He thus ministered as a Spirit-empowered witness in accordance with Jesus prescription in Acts 1:8. Throughout Acts, Luke offers examples of Paul’s Spirit-empowered ministry. Paul, however, understood that it was not enough for him alone to be full of the Spirit. He knew that, if the work was to prosper, the churches he planted must also be Spirit-empowered.

Therefore, upon arriving in Ephesus, Paul’s first order of business was to ensure that the believers in that city were baptized in the Holy Spirit. That is why he asked the twelve disciples, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And that is why he immediately prayed with them to receive the Spirit. This concern of Paul’s surely remained throughout the entire Ephesian

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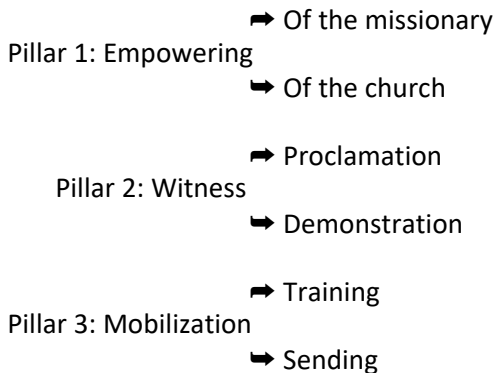
<sup>9</sup> Paul summarizes his strategy in Romans 15:18-19: “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.” (See also 1Cor. 2:1-5 and 1Thess. 1:5-6.)

Campaign. Paul must have persisted in his insistence that all of those who were being added to the church were empowered for witness. It is also likely that Paul instilled in his disciples this same passion to see their converts empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Thus, the two essential aspects of the first pillar of Paul's missionary strategy are the empowering of the missionary and the equally important empowering of disciples in the church being planted. This twofold empowering thus laid the spiritual foundation for the emerging missionary work of the Ephesian church. Thus empowered, the church in Ephesus would become a powerful center of missionary activity, reaching into every corner of the province. I have charted Paul's strategy of the Spirit in Figure 2 below.

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Figure 2  
**THE NEW TESTAMENT "STRATEGY OF THE SPIRIT"**  
Acts 19:1-20



## **Pillar Two: Witness**

The second pillar of Paul's missionary strategy was witness. This is to be expected, since bold witness is the spontaneous result of ones being baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 4:31). As with empowering, witness also has two components: proclamation and demonstration (Figure 1).

First, Paul bore witness to the gospel through powerful *proclamation*. This proclamation of the gospel began when the twelve "spoke in tongues *and prophesied*." Using Acts 1:8 as our interpretative key, we understand that their prophesying was in the form of Spirit-empowered proclamation to the lost, as was Peter's prophetic proclamation on the Day of Pentecost.

Luke tells us that Paul then "entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God" (v. 8). In Acts to proclaim the kingdom of God is equal to proclaiming the good news about Christ (Acts 8:12; 28:23, 31). Paul's ministry in Ephesus reminds us of the ministries of Jesus and the apostles in Jerusalem, who daily taught and preached in the temple (Luke 19:47; Acts 5:42).

Paul's teaching concerning the kingdom of God further reminds us of Jesus post-resurrection ministry when for forty days He spoke "of the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Jesus' primary kingdom themes during this time were the global mission of the church (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8) and the need for the empowering of the Spirit to accomplish that mission (Matt. 28:20; Mark 16:17-18; Luke 24:49; John 20:22; Acts 1:8). Paul certainly must have also emphasized these same kingdom themes in his teaching ministry in Ephesus. In addition to proclaiming Christ in the synagogues, Paul taught "publicly and from house to house,

solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (20:20-21).

Paul’s spoken witness in Ephesus was accompanied by powerful *demonstrations* of kingdom power through signs following (vv. 11-20). Thus, this second pillar of Paul’s strategy of the Spirit, like the first, has two components, the proclamation of the gospel and a demonstration of its power through accompanying signs. No doubt, the witness of Paul’s newly Spirit-filled colleagues included the same two components.

### **Pillar Three: Mobilization**

The third pillar of Paul’s missionary “Strategy of the Spirit” was mobilization. Once the church had been empowered by the Spirit—and as the gospel was being preached—Paul began mobilizing the church for regional missions. This mobilization is indicated in verse 10: “This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.” Without leaving Ephesus, Paul reached the entire province of Asia with the gospel in just two short years. This could only have been accomplished by effectively mobilizing the disciples in Ephesus.

Paul mobilized the Ephesian church in two ways, training and sending (Figure 1). First, Paul *trained workers and church planters* in the rented school of Tyrannus (v 9). There seems to be a clear cause-and-effect relationship between Paul’s leadership training and the fact that in the space of only two years everyone living in Asia heard the word of the Lord. The school’s curriculum likely included a strong practical emphasis on church planting and evangelism. The atmosphere of the school must have been saturated with the presence of the Spirit.

Paul’s training procedure also seems to have included on-the-job mentoring. This is hinted at in verses 8 and 9, where Paul

included the newly Spirit baptized disciples in his evangelistic ministry. This mentoring relationship is further evidenced by the way that he remained in close company with the disciples in Ephesus (v. 9; 20:1, 17-18). Paul presumably mentored his students in his missionary methods. He later wrote Timothy in Ephesus, and instructed him, “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim. 2:2).

Once the believers had been trained—or more likely, while they were yet being trained—Paul sent them into every corner of the province to preach the gospel and plant Spirit-empowered missionary churches. Doubtlessly, they employed the same missionary strategy as their mentor. The application of this strategy resulted in a spontaneous multiplication of churches throughout the entire region (v. 10). It is also clear that Paul’s strategy included reaching people from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, for Luke says that “both Jews and Greeks” were presented the gospel.

### **The New Testament “Strategy of the Spirit”**

Paul’s strategy for Ephesus and Asia Minor was not original with him. It was part of a larger New Testament “Strategy of the Spirit.” Paul was simply following the example of Jesus when He sent His church into the world.

Jesus mobilized His disciples by *training* them and *sending* them out (Mark 3:13-15). As they went, they were to *preach* the gospel and to *demonstrate* its power with signs following (Mark 16:15-18). Before they did any of this, however, they were to wait in Jerusalem to be *empowered* by the Spirit (Acts 1:4-8). This empowering occurred on the Day of Pentecost and on many other occasions in Acts. Paul, in his Ephesian campaign, was simply

### Chapter 3: The Acts 1:8 Model Applied

“working the plan.” In other words, he was following the example of Jesus in sending His church into the world.

In the next chapter we will apply these truths we have learned to our own missionary and church planting efforts.



## Chapter 4

# Lessons Learned

We can learn many important lessons from our investigation of Jesus' Acts 1:8 promise and from Paul's Spirit-empowered ministry in Ephesus. In this chapter, we will focus on three of those lessons.

### **Be Empowered by the Spirit**

From our study, we learn that missionaries, church planters, and other church leaders must never presume to do the work of God in their own human strength or ingenuity. On the contrary, as did Jesus and then the apostle Paul, they must minister in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. According to the book of Acts model, this divine enablement comes when one is filled with and empowered by the Spirit of God. It remains as one daily walks in the Spirit.

We learn further that any new church plant, if it is going to become a center of effective missional outreach, must have within itself the vitality and spiritual dynamic necessary to achieve that goal. Therefore, as with the apostle Paul in Ephesus, a missionary's or church planter's first order of business is to see that the church is empowered by the Holy Spirit. This aim can be achieved by ensuring that those who are led to Christ are immediately led into Spirit baptism and taught how to live the

## Chapter 4: Lessons Learned

Spirit-filled life. In addition, the new converts must be thoroughly trained in the biblical theology of missions and effective missionary practice.

### **Employ a Biblical Strategy**

Another important lesson we can learn from the Acts of the Apostles model is the importance of employing a biblically based, Spirit-guided strategy in doing the work of missions. In Ephesus, Paul was guided by such a strategy. It was a strategy based on divine precedent, rather than human ingenuity, and on Spirit-inspired rather than humanly conceived goals. Paul was merely following the strategy used by Jesus in founding and mobilizing His church for global missions.

Paul further aimed at scattering Spirit-empowered missional congregations throughout all of Asia Minor. Each of these congregations would have within itself the vision and spiritual vitality it needed to plant other visionary Spirit-empowered churches. In this way, churches would be multiplied throughout all of Asia Minor, and the gospel would be proclaimed in power to all who lived there—both Jews and Gentiles.

Today we must move with the selfsame divinely imparted wisdom and purposefulness as did Jesus and Paul. Certainly, we must strive to “get people saved.” However, we must realize that evangelism, as necessary as it is, is not in itself sufficient. We must plant Spirit-empowered missionary churches—churches where these new believers are filled with the Spirit, disciplined in the ways of Christ, trained to effectively advance the kingdom of God, and then mobilized and sent out to do the same in places near and far.

## Chapter 4: Lessons Learned

### Move with Intentionality

Finally, in all that we do we must move with deliberate intentionality. Too much missions activity is done without clear purpose. Too much is assumed. We cannot assume that people will come simply because we open the doors of a new church. We cannot assume that people are being born again just because we are leading them in the “sinner’s prayer.” We cannot assume that believers are being truly empowered by the Spirit simply because they exhibit some outward physical manifestation. We cannot take it for granted that the church we are planting will be Spirit-empowered just because it belongs to a Pentecostal or charismatic fellowship of churches. We cannot assume that the new church plant will have missionary vision and zeal, simply because it is planted by a missionary or church planter with such qualities. On the contrary, we must have a clear idea of what we want to accomplish, and we must know how we will go about accomplishing our aim.

Intentionality must mark every decision and every move we make. We must personally seek God’s face with the intention of being filled (or refilled) with the Spirit. We must preach the gospel with the intention of seeing the lost repent and be truly born again. We must pray with believers with the intention that they be truly empowered by the Spirit of God. We must plant churches with the studied intention that they become Spirit-empowered missional churches.

And all along, we must intentionally pass on our vision and strategy to the leaders whom God raises up in the churches. We must then mobilize the church with the focused intention of reaching our city, country, region, and the nations with the gospel. This is what Jesus did, and it was how Paul reached all of Asia with the gospel in the space of only two years. This is what we must do today.

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Spiritual Discovery*

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# *The New Testament Strategy of the Spirit*

An Acts 1:8 Model for 21st Century Church Planting in Africa



**The Book of Acts** tells the exciting story of how the early disciples carried out Christ's redemptive mission in the power of the Holy Spirit. In doing this, they created a lasting model of how the church should continue until Jesus returns. In this book, veteran missionaries Denzil R. Miller and Mark R. Turney assess and commend this model. They do this by taking the reader into the book of Acts to

carefully inspect the mission model it presents. They note how the Holy Spirit was the Chief Architect of the church's missions strategy, a strategy they call the New Testament "Strategy of the Spirit."

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**The Authors:** Denzil R. Miller is director of the Acts in Africa Initiative, a ministry aimed at bring spiritual and missional renewal to the African church. Mark R. Turney serves as associate director of the ministry. Both have travelled extensively throughout Africa conducting Acts 1:8 Missions Mobilization Conferences for Assemblies of God national churches.

