

The Journey of the Spirit in Acts

“They...went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).

The Book of Acts, in its entirety, is the unfolding of a multiple-missionary journey. Destination: the ends of the earth. Nothing short of accomplishment was sufficient. A pivotal problem encountered today is getting the church to do the same. We need to go back to the beginning of the journey; in the Book of Acts.

The primary purpose, plan, principle, or program, pertaining to power to reach the world is prefaced upon Acts 1:8. The rest of Acts portrays progress. Acts 1:8 is not only a command. It is a promise! The term “power” is used twenty-nine times in Luke-Acts, with most references clearly associated with doing miraculous or supernatural acts. It is derived from *dynamis* which means “to be able” or “to have strength.” Fernando said, “The heart of the power of Pentecost in Acts is power for ministry” (1998, 94). It enables, empowers, and equips us to serve. This Pentecostal power can still be experienced. The church is crippled without it.

The Spirit is the driving, dynamic, directive force behind every missionary journey: Philip’s, Peter’s, Paul’s, and all who follow after them. They, like us, received their missionary manifesto from Acts 1:8. Henry Martyn said, “The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions, and the nearer we get to Him the more intensely missionary we must become” (Gangel, 1998, 22). The Holy Spirit is the key to the entire missionary activity: at work in the call, sending, and sustaining of missionaries.

Some writers divide the Spirit’s journey throughout Acts into six parts. Each traces the expansion of the church into new areas and ends with a verse highlighting how successful the journey was. This approach is represented in the following table:

Acts 1 – 6:7	The Journey Begins	Acts 6:7
Acts 6:8 – 9:31	Philip’s Journey	Acts 9:31
Acts 10:25 – 12:24	Peter’s Journey	Acts 12:24
Acts 12:25 – 16:5	Paul’s First Journey	Acts 16:5
Acts 16:6 – 19:20	Paul’s Second Journey	Acts 19:20
Acts 19:21 – 28:31	Paul’s Third Journey	Acts 28:31

Amazingly, almost all the early disciples were available to be appointed, armed, and anointed by the Holy Spirit to actively, aggressively, and ambitiously advance the gospel. With the Spirit’s help, they accomplished their mission. The same power and potential is accessible today. Disciples were first called “Christians” at Antioch. From a small band of church leaders, the Spirit asked for the best they had to offer, and Barnabas and Saul stepped forth to take up the missionary mantle; clothed in the Spirit.

Available: Paul's journey in missions started long before Acts 13. It began with a question, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6, *NKJV*). He later explained his vision was to "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me....I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:18-19).

Appointed: "The Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2, *ESV*). Paul operated in line with the Spirit's call/appointment, and ongoing direction, which is always in line with the over-arching principle "to the ends of the earth."

Armed: They received power from above, were equipped for spiritual warfare, and operated in the gifts of the Spirit; the power tools of the apostolic church. They were privileged with a perpetual, powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives and ministries. The Spirit empowered them for effective service in God's kingdom. "The power promised at Pentecost is still the equipment and enduement of the militant church" (Simpson 1996, 95). The disciples took Jesus at His Word and marched triumphantly throughout the known world. Others testified, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too" (Acts 17:6, *NKJV*).

Anointed: "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay...until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The anointing Jesus applied to Himself in Luke 4:18 was transferred to the early church, and now to us. The Spirit enables the church to fulfill its global mandate as anointed witnesses. "My witnesses" is a recurring theme throughout Acts with the words "witness" or "witnesses" occurring thirty-nine times. The anointing gave them the right words to testify, preach, and prophesy. "...When the Spirit comes on you; you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). This expresses our own inadequacies. We are ineffective, left to our own abilities and power. God never deserts us to our own resources. The Spirit's power always precedes and accompanies extensive evangelism.

Active: The Acts-missionaries were tactical and deliberate. They were men and women of action. Acts shows what the evangelistic, missions-minded church should be like, not only in the first century, but every century. They were not merely involved in activity. They did not—as the cliché suggests—just go around in circles. They went in ever-widening circles. "The direction was of primary importance: Beginning from where you are at this moment, take the message of Christ outward, like ripples caused by a pebble thrown into a pond, not stopping at just your city or state but moving on beyond regional influence to the very 'ends' of the earth. In other words, reach it *all*" (Barton, 1999, 10). A common problem missionaries create is placing immediate emphasis on reaching all. They rationalize that since Jesus is coming soon, the harvest is now ready, and the night is coming that no man can work, that churches need to be

started sporadically. They rush feverishly around nations chasing leads and establishing weak links. A deliberate strategy of building strong indigenous churches in key locations is needed. Serving as Jerusalem or the mother church, they can then branch off into daughter works and preaching points. Foundation is important to success. Paul reached prominent centers with the gospel, appointed leaders, and visited occasionally to strengthen the works (Acts 15:41). Paul selected such locations on major trade routes and in populous areas so the church would continue to multiply. Another calamity in church planting—which is a very effective evangelistic method—is to stay too long or not long enough. Either is equally detrimental to establishing growing churches.

Evangelism is the priority that dominates the Book of Acts. It sets the pattern or pace of how the church should spread the gospel until Jesus returns. The Spirit was also active in every step and aspect of ministry. Each conversion was a result of the Spirit’s drawing.

Here’s a short list of the activities of the Holy Spirit in Paul’s journeys:

Separates	Acts 13: 2
Confirms the call	Acts 13. See Acts 9:15
Sends	Acts 13:4
Supplies boldness	Acts 4:9-13, 31; 13:9-11
Defeats Satan	Acts 13:9
Directs in decision making	Acts 15:28
Forbids; provides spiritual roadblocks	Acts 16:7
Prohibits	Acts 16:7
Selects Overseers	Acts 20:28
Fills	Acts 13:52
Unfolds Vision	Acts 18:9-10
Enables one to do extraordinary miracles	Acts 19:11-12
Baptizes	Acts 19:1-6
Compels, warns, prepares	Acts 20:22-23; 21:4, 11
Speaks truth	Acts 28:25

Aggressive: It is shocking that the contemporary church—at times—is so passive, reactive, tolerant, and reclusive. That is a far cry from the militant, strategic, conquering, outgoing, proactive group that traversed the pages of the Book of Acts. The Holy Spirit is a spiritual travel agent. He maps out our itinerary, and selects the best places and people for us to meet. He knows what’s best, prepares the way, and sees the big picture (Bickel and Jantz 2004, 111).

Advancing: The essential motivation of every encounter in Acts was “to the ends of the earth.” The watchword for every step was “farther on” (Simpson 1996, 95). There was, and is, always a region beyond (2 Corinthians 10:16). This author is constantly telling Bible school students and

ministers “Ghana and beyond.” “Everywhere Paul found himself, no matter how long he remained, was merely a step to somewhere else....He was a man compelled to reach out to the lost, and he could not rest from that burden for long” (MacArthur 1996, 79). Even at Rome he was making plans to journey on.

Ambitious: They had one paramount aspiration; “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9). The challenge of the church today is to develop congregations with a global-mentality modeled by the church at Antioch. Such churches are not limited or restricted to North America, but should be from everywhere to everywhere.

Accomplished: Acts traces the progress of the advancing Church along the road from Jerusalem, via Antioch, all the way to the heart of the empire—Rome. At every curb in that road, at every evangelistic initiative, the Spirit served as the Director, and victories were won. How? Paul, “witnessed by works which were empowered by the Spirit and by words which were inspired by the Spirit” (Stronstad 1998, 81). The Word and power go hand-in-hand in evangelism. Ministers declare the knowledge of God and demonstrate the power of God. Balance is needed. Here is an example—one of many—from Paul’s journeys: “Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord” (Acts 13:11-12). “The Spirit in Luke-Acts is a power enabling believers to see things they would otherwise not see, speak words they would otherwise be unable to speak, and perform mighty deeds that would otherwise be beyond their abilities” (Michaels 1988, 560). The work Jesus began is carried on through his disciples: “...Jesus of Nazareth...mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (Luke 24:19, *KJV*). Paul summarized his missionary journeys with these words: “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, but as it is written, ‘Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand’” (Romans 15:18-21, *ESV*).

T. J. Bach once said, “The Holy Spirit longs to reveal to you the deeper things of God. He longs to love through you. He longs to work through you. Through the blessed Holy Spirit you may have: strength for every duty, wisdom for every problem, comfort in every sorrow, joy in overflowing service” (Gangel 1998, 22).

Study Questions

1. Describe Paul's vision. _____

2. Describe your vision. _____

3. Christians were a small group of followers. From this group what did the Holy Spirit ask?

4. What do the six parts of the Spirit's journey trace for us? _____

5. How were the Acts missionaries armed or equipped? _____

6. What word represents a recurring theme throughout Acts? _____

7. What does the anointing do for us? _____

8. What was the purpose of the Acts missionaries being equipped? _____

9. What is a common problem missionaries create in church planting? _____

10. Explain what is meant when one suggests that the church expanded in ever-widening circles. _____

11. What is the Spirit's over-arching principle or destination in the Book of Acts? _____

12. Outline the missions or evangelism strategy used by Paul. _____

13. What priority dominates the Book of Acts? _____

14. List ten activities of the Holy Spirit in Acts.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____
- 7) _____
- 8) _____
- 9) _____
- 10) _____

15. Explain what is meant by the church being aggressive rather than passive. _____

16. How does the Spirit act as a supernatural travel agent? _____

17. What was the paramount ambition of the Acts missionaries? _____

18. Outline how the Word and power go hand-in-hand. _____

19. According to J. R. Michaels, what does the Spirit enable us to do? _____

20. According to T. J. Bach what does the Holy Spirit long to accomplish in and through us?

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Additional Notes
