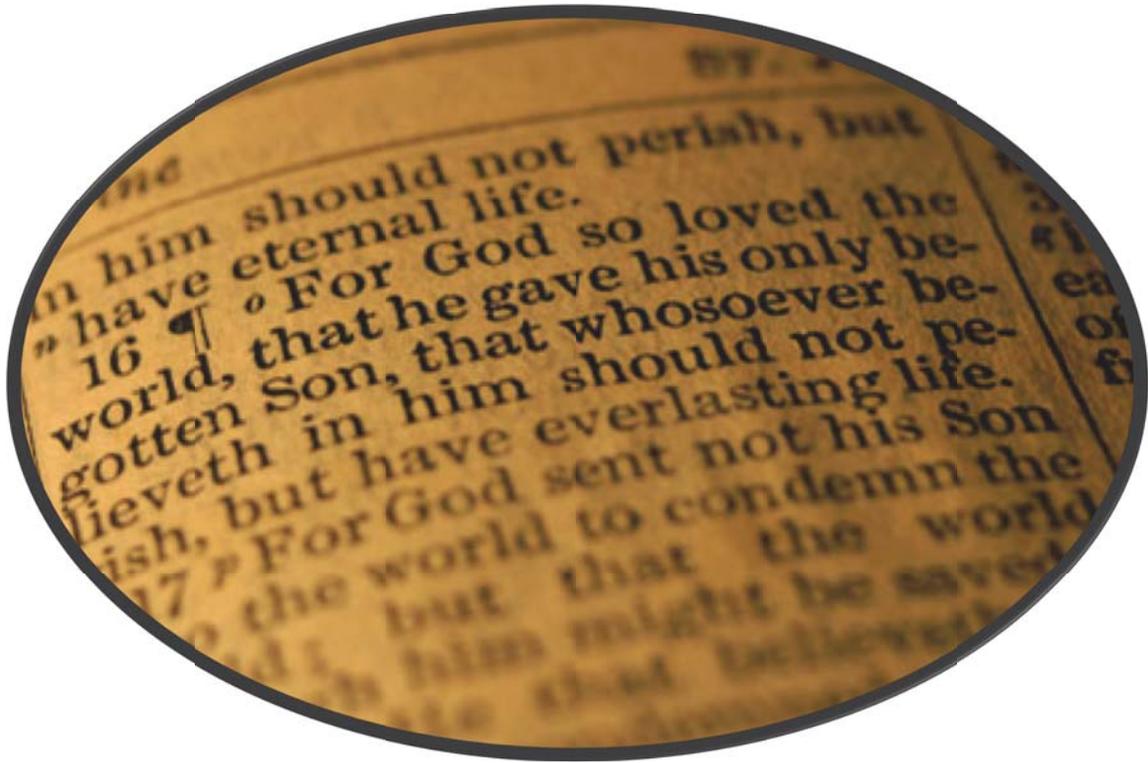


THE HEART OF GOD

THE COVENANT PEOPLE



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets,

He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24.27

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Heart of God: The Covenant People
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Introduction to *The Covenant People*

The book of Acts records the ongoing work of our Lord Jesus Christ as He, by His Spirit, brings His Kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. The Spirit provides the power for Kingdom living to the people of God's covenant, giving them power to be transformed into the image of Christ, and turn the world rightside-up for Him.

From Jerusalem to Rome, communities of God's New Covenant people began springing up wherever the Good News of the Kingdom was proclaimed. This was the real deal, and it is today still. From these first believers we have much to learn about being God's covenant people today.

The Heart of God studies provide a road map through the Scriptures, unfolding key unifying threads and following the development of those matters closest to the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ, from Genesis to Revelation. Through all our study we'll see how the Scriptures lead us to Jesus, and how He, in turn, brings into the presence of our heavenly Father and His Kingdom. There, as we encounter God and His glory, the Spirit can transform us increasingly in to the very image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We're pleased to provide *Scriptorium* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity with the Lord.

Please visit our website, www.ailbe.org, to discover the many other resources available to serve your needs. The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Visit our website also to subscribe to our worldview study *ReVision*, our devotional newsletter *Crosfigell*, and our worldview newsletter *The Week*.

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1 Acts 1 and 2

Read and meditate on Acts 1 and 2.

The New Covenant burst onto the human scene on the first Christian Pentecost. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' reign on earth began in earnest, and the Church was birthed as a sign and outpost of that coming rule and domain.

For reflection

1. Meditate on Acts 1.1-8. What did Jesus do to further prepare His disciples for the coming of the Kingdom and the New Covenant? What does this suggest about the place the Kingdom of God should have in our lives in the community of God's covenant?
2. Jesus instructed His disciples to "wait" for the promised Holy Spirit. How did the disciples interpret that instruction? What did they do as they *waited* on the Lord? What do we learn from this to guide us in seeking and advancing the Kingdom of God?
3. When the Spirit finally came (Acts 2), Peter connected this with the promises of the Old Testament concerning the "last days." How does Peter's sermon help us think about passages such as Micah 5.1-8? How should these Old Testament texts guide our thinking, planning, and living today?
4. Peter proclaimed the Good News of Jesus in Acts 2.14-39. Summarize the Gospel he proclaimed. How does this guide us in thinking about sharing the Gospel with people in our [Personal Mission Fields](#)?
5. How did the people respond to the preaching of the Gospel in Acts 2.40-47? Should this guide us as we think about how we should be the community of the covenant in our day?

Summary

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit marks a watershed in human history. From that time forward, everything has changed. The Kingdom has come. The Church is planted. Life-transforming power is unleashed and roaming about the earth, looking to connect with the Gospel lived and proclaimed for making all things new. What is your role as a witness (Acts 1.8) in these last days?

Closing Prayer

Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples!
Shout to God with the voice of triumph!
For the LORD Most High *is* awesome;
He is a great King over all the earth.
He will subdue the peoples under us,
And the nations under our feet.
He will choose our inheritance for us,
The excellence of Jacob whom He loves.
Selah
God has gone up with a shout,
The LORD with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God, sing praises!
Sing praises to our King, sing praises!
For God *is* the King of all the earth;
Sing praises with understanding.

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God reigns over the nations;
God sits on His holy throne.
The princes of the people have gathered together,
The people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth *belong* to God;
He is greatly exalted.

Psalm 47

2 Acts 3 and 4

Read and meditate on Acts 3 and 4.

The reality of the Kingdom became immediately apparent in Jerusalem. Suddenly, a new community began to emerge, doing things the city of Jerusalem had never seen before. The promises of God's covenant began to be lived realities, and all could see the undeniable effects of Jesus having risen from the dead and ascended to heaven.

For reflection

1. How many different aspects of God's covenant and Kingdom can you see represented in the healing of the lame man in Acts 3?
2. The religious leaders of Jerusalem could not deny that a great miracle had occurred. Still, they tried to stop the proclamation of the Gospel. Why? What does this suggest about the power of sin? What does it teach us to expect as we work to make the Good News known?
3. Review Acts 1.8. How can you see this promise being fulfilled in the incident involving Peter, John, the lame man, and the religious leaders?
4. How did the covenant community respond to the threat made against Peter and John? What does this suggest about the role of prayer in the life of the covenant community?
5. The first efforts to stop the proclamation of the Gospel only strengthened the resolve of the covenant community. How did the Spirit manifest His power in them, to make them even more a sign and outpost of the Kingdom of God?

Summary

The covenant community of the people of God thrives on prayer, obedience, and the power of God's Word and Spirit. God's people living out God's redemptive work bear fruit for God's glory, as all three of the unifying threads of revelation come together in the Body of Christ. How would you describe the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the covenant community?

Closing Prayer

O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, make haste to help me!
Let them be confounded *and* consumed
Who are adversaries of my life;
Let them be covered *with* reproach and dishonor
Who seek my hurt.
But I will hope continually,
And will praise You yet more and more.
My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness
And Your salvation all the day,
For I do not know *their* limits.
I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD;
I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only.
O God, You have taught me from my youth;
And to this *day* I declare Your wondrous works.

Psalm 71.12-17

3 Acts 5 and 6

Read and meditate on Acts 5 and 6.

A problem arises and is resolved; the Word increases; threats increase; more problems, but more power, and more growth in the Word of God: We begin to see a pattern developing for the covenant people as they carry out their mandate and mission in the world.

For reflection

1. How would you describe the problem that arose in the covenant community in Acts 5? Why was it necessary for the consequences of this situation to be so dire? Can you see any similarities between this situation and what Joshua and Israel faced in Joshua 7? Explain.
2. How do you see that the Spirit of God blessed this act of discipline (Acts 5.11-21)? What is the role, and what is the promise, of church discipline, when practiced correctly within the covenant community?
3. The disciples of Jesus clearly did not obey what the religious authorities commanded them (Acts 5.22-42). How did they justify their actions? What do you suppose they expected to have happen to them? How is it evident that the Lord was keeping watch over His people?
4. Summarize the problem that arose in Acts 6.1-7. Why was it important that this situation be resolved? What was the impact of the way this problem was resolved?
5. Stephen is described as a man full of faith, power, and the Holy Spirit (vv. 5, 8). How was that apparent? That is, how did others see his faith, and the power of the Spirit in him? How should Stephen's example serve us?

Summary

The Spirit of God brings power for unity to the Body of Christ, but that unity sometimes comes at a price. Sin in the covenant community must be dealt with if the blessings of God are to rest upon His people. Church discipline and sacrificial service create channels of grace and truth for binding the members of the community together and fitting them for their witness in the world. What seems to be keeping churches today from having the kind of powerful witness we see in this first covenant community?

Closing Prayer

Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised
In the city of our God,
In His holy mountain.
Beautiful in elevation,
The joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion *on* the sides of the north,
The city of the great King.
God *is* in her palaces;
He is known as her refuge.
For behold, the kings assembled,
They passed by together.
They saw *it*, *and* so they marveled;
They were troubled, they hastened away.
Fear took hold of them there,

And pain, as of a woman in birth pangs,
As when You break the ships of Tarshish
With an east wind.
As we have heard,
So we have seen
In the city of the LORD of hosts,
In the city of our God:
God will establish it forever.

Psalm 48.1-8

4 Acts 8-10

Read and meditate on Acts 8-10.

Having become established in Jerusalem, it was now time for the covenant people to launch out into new areas. Once again, God used an unlikely means to begin scattering the seed of the Gospel to Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth.

For reflection

1. The martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7) emboldened the religious leaders of Jerusalem to a more systematic and violent attempt to stop the preaching of the Gospel (Acts 8.1-3). Jesus had promised that such persecution was to be expected (cf. Jn. 15.18-25; 16.33). Why? What is it about the Gospel and the people of God that provokes people to oppose them?
2. Why did Peter reject Simon's request (Acts 8.14-25)? Is there a danger still today of wanting to serve the Lord for selfish gain? Explain.
3. Briefly summarize the process whereby Saul of Tarsus came to believe in Jesus. How should his conversion encourage us as witnesses for Christ today?
4. Meditate on Peter's vision in Acts 10.9-16. This vision had a direct connection to the Law of God. Its purpose seems to have been twofold: First, to override all elements of the Law of God that related to Israel's special status as an ethnic people set apart to the Lord. This had been from the beginning a temporary stage in the unfolding of God's covenant, so whichever of the Old Testament laws pertained *uniquely* to Israel as an ethnic people were abolished, especially those laws that related to diet, sacrifices, priests, and the like (cf. Heb. 7-9). Second, this vision opened the door for Peter to go among the Gentiles with the Good News of Jesus. Why do you suppose God chose this means of revelation to prepare Peter for his mission to Cornelius? Should we look to such revelations as normative for us? Why or why not?
5. Summarize Peter's message to Cornelius. What did his proclamation of the Good News of Jesus include?

Summary

By various means, God opened the door for the covenant community to spread beyond Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and the Gentile world in Caesarea. Can you see any parallels here with the book of Joshua? We remember that Joshua (whose Hebrew name is the equivalent of the Greek, Jesus) delivered the people of Israel *into* the *promised* land. Now we see Jesus delivering God's covenant people into the promises of the New Covenant (Acts 1.8). Why should we expect to discover some similarities between these two epochs?

Closing Prayer

The LORD reigns;
Let the earth rejoice;
Let the multitude of isles be glad!
Clouds and darkness surround Him;
Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of His throne.
A fire goes before Him,
And burns up His enemies round about.
His lightnings light the world;
The earth sees and trembles.
The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD,

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At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.
The heavens declare His righteousness,
And all the peoples see His glory.
Let all be put to shame who serve carved images,
Who boast of idols.
Worship Him, all *you* gods.
Zion hears and is glad,
And the daughters of Judah rejoice
Because of Your judgments, O LORD.
For You, LORD, *are* most high above all the earth;
You are exalted far above all gods.

Psalm 97.1-9

5 Acts 11-14

Read and meditate on Acts 11-14.

The more the Gospel spreads, the more those who oppose it strive for its undoing. The enemies of the Gospel can be violent, but they can also be subtle. The covenant community needs to be able to stand firm against all violence, and be vigilant against the lies and half-truths that threaten to undermine the truth that is in Jesus.

For reflection

1. Describe the problem that arose in Acts 11.1-18. What did Peter need to clarify? Why? Why was it important that Luke recount this story before proceeding into the rest of his account in Acts 11?
2. Barnabas “saw” the grace of God in Antioch. What did he see that persuaded him that the Spirit of God was at work there?
3. Describe the role of the Spirit of God in Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 13, 14). How did He prepare the covenant people for this new aspect of their mission? What evidences of His power at work in Christ’s witnesses do you see? What kind of leaders did the Spirit use to further this aspect of the covenant community’s mission?
4. In what ways was Paul’s synagogue preaching different from how he preached to Gentiles (cf. Acts 13.13-41 with Acts 14.8-18). What differences do you note? What similarities? What lesson can we take away from this?
5. Meditate on Acts 14.21-28. The church established in Jerusalem launched the Gospel into new areas, where new churches became established. Why were *elders* appointed in those churches? Do you suppose the duties of these elders were similar to those of the elders in Old Testament Israel? In what ways? What do you suppose life was like in these new covenant communities?

Summary

Precisely as Jesus had promised, His Spirit led His witnesses to take His Gospel toward the ends of the earth. The book of Acts is meant to validate Jesus’ instruction in Acts 1.1-8 and to establish a kind of template for the ongoing work of Christ in bringing His Kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. So far, from what we’ve seen in the book of Acts, what seem to be the most important aspects of that template for churches today?

Closing Prayer

Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is*
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.

Psalm 133

6 Acts 15-17

Read and meditate on Acts 15-17.

As the covenant community continued to grow and expand, new needs and opportunities arose, requiring skilled leadership and bold action. Internal conflicts had to be resolved, as doors opened on new frontiers for the expansion of the Gospel and Kingdom of God.

For reflection

1. Who were the participants in this first council in Jerusalem (Acts 15)? What was the issue? How did they resolve it? How did they use this issue to strengthen the unity of all the covenant communities?
2. Paul and Barnabas split over the matter of John Mark. The division between them was deep, but we can believe it was respectful. Each simply took the mission of the covenant community in a new direction, with new people in tow. How can you see from 2 Timothy 4.11 and Philemon 23, 24 that God used this division to further the ongoing work of Christ?
3. What potential obstacle to the Gospel did the demon-possessed girl of Acts 16 pose? Why was Paul adamant about stopping her? In what ways did her *true* report about the apostles threaten the integrity of the message they proclaimed?
4. What can we learn from Paul about taking the Gospel into new communities (Acts 16, 17)? How should we proceed? Where should we look for open doors?
5. Meditate on Acts 17.32-34. Paul typically received three different responses to his preaching, and we see all three of them here. What are they? How should we respond to each of these?

Summary

Wherever the Gospel expands, we can expect challenges and opportunities. How should we prepare for the challenges? For the opportunities? What can we learn from the Christian leaders of Acts 15-17 about how to keep in step with the Spirit as we seek the progress of Christ's Kingdom and ongoing work?

Closing Prayer

Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
Give to the LORD glory and strength.
Give to the LORD the glory *due* His name;
Bring an offering, and come into His courts.
Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness!
Tremble before Him, all the earth.
Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns;
The world also is firmly established,
It shall not be moved;
He shall judge the peoples righteously."
Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
Let the sea roar, and all its fullness;
Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it.
Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the LORD.
For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth.
He shall judge the world with righteousness,

And the peoples with His truth.

Psalm 96.7-13

7 Acts 18-21, 27, 28

Read and meditate on Acts 18-21, 27, and 28.

The book of Acts concludes with Paul arriving in Rome. The Gospel has gone from Jerusalem and Judea, through Samaria, into the Gentile regions, and to the uttermost part of earth, just as Jesus had promised. But Acts is merely a template for all generations of the covenant people of God for how they must continue the work He began, and which the apostles furthered in their generation.

For reflection

1. Summarize Paul's work of bringing the Gospel to the Corinthians. In what ways does his work here recapitulate all his previous efforts? How does it expand on these?
2. In what ways was Paul's ministry in Ephesus different from what we've seen previously? Look at Paul's message to the elders of the churches in Ephesus (Acts 20.17-38). What did he expect them to do? What should they have learned from his example? Do churches need elders like this today? Explain.
3. Why did Paul agree to take the vow in Jerusalem? Were the church leaders wrong in suggesting he do this? Why or why not?
4. Describe Paul's demeanor during and after the shipwreck (Acts 27, 28). How does God use His people in crises of various kinds to open doors for the Gospel? What can we learn from Paul about making the most of such opportunities?
5. What was Paul's message to the Jewish leaders in Rome? What do we learn from him, in Acts 28 and elsewhere, about using the Scriptures in evangelism? About accommodating our message to our hearers? About the place of the Kingdom of God in the Gospel?

Summary

God's glory, God's people, God's work of redemption: In the book of Acts these unifying threads of revelation become the unifying components of the covenant people of God. The Spirit of God provided the power of God to accomplish the mission of God in furthering the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom, even in the face of various kinds of opposition. How should the book of Acts encourage churches in our day?

Closing Prayer

Blessed *is* that man who makes the LORD his trust,
And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.
Many, O LORD my God, *are* Your wonderful works
Which You have done;
And Your thoughts toward us
Cannot be recounted to You in order;
If I would declare and speak *of them*,
They are more than can be numbered.
Sacrifice and offering You did not desire;
My ears You have opened.
Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.
Then I said, "Behold, I come;
In the scroll of the book *it is* written of me.
I delight to do Your will, O my God,

And Your law *is* within my heart.”
I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness
In the great assembly;
Indeed, I do not restrain my lips,
O LORD, You Yourself know.
I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart;
I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation;
I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth
From the great assembly.

Psalm 40.4-10

For reflection or discussion

1. What do we learn from Acts about the role of the Holy Spirit in the ongoing work of Christ?
2. What do we learn about our own role in that work, and how we should fulfill it?
3. How did the communities of God's people stand out as distinct from the communities around them?
4. What kinds of challenges can we expect to face as we pursue the ongoing work of God's covenant? How can we prepare for these? What should we do in responding to them?
5. What are the most important lessons for you from this brief survey of the book of Acts?

Glory to Glory

We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ *from* the glory we encounter in God's Word *to* the way we live for His glory in the world (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

What have you encountered *of* God's glory in our readings and meditations in this week's studies? That is, how has He shown Himself *to* you more clearly?

How do you expect this *experience* of God's glory to help you *live more consistently for* His glory in the daily details of your life?

What have you learned about yourself from this week's study to help you in knowing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom? To equip you for serving Christ in your [Personal Mission Field](#)?

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Thank you.