

Session 21: Acts 1:1-8

- **The theme of the book of Acts is the Kingdom of God.** This can be seen in that St. Luke, who is the instrumental author of Acts, used the literary device called an *inclusio*, by which a particular theme or topic begins and ends a letter or book. Specifically, at the beginning of Acts, St. Luke refers to Christ having appeared to His disciples during the forty days prior to His Ascension “speaking of the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3)”, while at the ending of Acts, St. Luke refers to St. Paul, who is under house arrest in Rome, “preaching the Kingdom of God (Acts 28:31)”.
- **Recall that the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of David brought to fulfillment. In this Kingdom, Jesus, Who, following His Ascension, reigns eternally from His kingly throne at the right hand of the Eternal Father in the heavenly sanctuary, is not only the Son of David in His human nature, but also the 2nd Person of the Most Holy Trinity in His divine nature, as He is the Man-God or God-Man.**
- **Also, recall that the Kingdom of God/Kingdom of David is the Church, in which there is a king (Christ), a *gebirah* (Holy Virgin), and an *al habayith* (pope). And thus, the theme of Acts is the Church, beginning with her birthday at Pentecost.**
- Though somewhat of a simplification, Acts can be divided into two basic sections, with Acts 1-12 describing the ministry of St. Peter, and Acts 13-28 describing the ministry of St. Paul, who was accompanied on some of his missionary journeys by St. Luke, who is the instrumental author of Acts.
- When the Apostles ask *when* the Kingdom will be restored to Israel (Lk 1:6), Christ refers to *how* it will be restored (Acts 1:7-8). **Precisely, the “kingdom” will be “restored to Israel” through the preaching ministry of the Apostles, as can be seen by the sequence of Jerusalem →Judea →Samaria →ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).** This was a theological road map of the Kingdom of Israel under King of David at its height, with Jerusalem as David’s capital, Judea as the land of David’s tribe, Samaria as the land of the ten northern tribes of David’s nation, and the ends of the earth as the lands of the gentiles, who were David’s vassals. This also indicates the structure of Acts, which follows the sequence of Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), Judea and Samaria (Acts 8), and the ends of the earth (Acts 9-28), which is the mission to the gentiles (nations), beginning with the conversion of Saul/Paul, who will be the apostle to the gentiles (Acts 9), and ending with Paul preaching in Rome, which is the capital of the gentile world (Acts 28).
- After commissioning the Apostles as His royal emissaries, Christ ascends to Heaven, where He sits enthroned at the right hand of the Eternal Father, **thus beginning His kingly reign over the entire earth through the Kingdom/Church.**
- **Pentecost (Act 2) is a reversal of Babel (Gen 11).** At Pentecost, the people are “amazed” and “perplexed” *because they can understand* the Apostles’ preaching, even though they come from all parts of the known world. In contrast, at Babel, the people were “perplexed” *because they could not understand* what each other was saying. **Essentially, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, overcomes the division caused by sin, unifying mankind in His Kingdom/Church through the preaching ministry of the Apostles.**

- Following Pentecost, the Spirit-inspired preaching of St. Peter causes the crowd to be “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37). **This is an example of prevenient grace, moving an unbeliever to faith, expressed by repentance (Acts 2:38), which then leads to the sacrament of faith, which is Baptism (Acts 2:38), by which one receives sanctifying grace, by which one receives the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).**
- After Baptism, these early Christians “steadfastly held to the Apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Specifically, they held to doctrinal catechesis (Apostles’ teaching). They held to interpersonal communion and support (fellowship). **They held to the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy (breaking of the bread).** They held to praise and petitions (prayers).
- The Apostles, and the Church today and for all times, preaches salvation only in and through Jesus, Whose very Name means “salvation” or “God saves”, as St. Peter said, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).” **Thus, there is salvation only in and through the Person of Christ, Who alone is Savior.**
- Foremost among the persecutors of the first Christians were those Jews who persisted in their obstinate rejection of Christ. The lightning rod for this violent persecution is Stephen, deacon and martyr, who delivered a politically-incorrect sermon, lambasting the unbelievers as “stiff-necked”, “uncircumcised in heart and ears”, and “always resisting the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51). As Stephen was about to be stoned to death for preaching the Gospel, he saw a vision into Heaven, with Jesus *standing* at the right hand of the Eternal Father (Lk 7:55). **Note that Christ is standing, rather than sitting,** in honor of His faithful martyr Stephen, as kings used to get off of their thrones to honor someone coming into his throne room.
- Stephen’s martyrdom unleashes a wave of violent persecution against the Christians, forcing them out of Jerusalem. However, God worked it for the good, as it forced the Apostles to begin ministering in Samaria and to the ends of the earth for the spreading of the Kingdom/Church.