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PROMISES OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT
LESSON 5: The Promise of Empowerment

Scripture:

Acts 1:8 (NKJV) "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Biblical Context

Acts 1:8 is one of the most important promises in the entire New Testament. It is not just a personal encouragement it is God's command and supernatural power that launched the church of Jesus Christ. To understand what this promise really means, we need to look at what was happening when Jesus said it.

The Setting: Between the Resurrection and the Ascension

Jesus spoke these words during a very special forty-day period after His resurrection and before He returned to Heaven. After rising from the dead, Jesus appeared to His disciples many times eating with them, teaching them, and proving He was truly alive (Acts 1:3).

During this time, Jesus kept teaching His disciples about the Kingdom of God. He was preparing them for a huge mission they would have to carry out without Him physically present. They were gathered in Jerusalem, where Jesus had told them to stay and wait (Acts 1:4).

The disciples were still thinking small. They asked Jesus, "*Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*" (Acts 1:6) - basically hoping He would overthrow the Roman government and make Israel a powerful nation again. Jesus gently corrected them. That kind of political timeline was in the Father's hands, not theirs. What they needed to focus on was something much bigger: a worldwide mission powered by God Himself.

That is the moment Jesus gave them the promise of Acts 1:8.

The Disciples: Regular People, Impossible Task

The disciples who received this promise were ordinary people. They had no political power, no money, no social status, and no formal religious training. Their leader had just been publicly executed. They had scattered in fear, and Peter, their most prominent member, had denied even knowing Jesus three times.

Now Jesus was telling them to take the Gospel to the entire world. By any human standard, this was impossible. The gap between who they were and what they were being called to do was enormous.

Jesus knew that. That is exactly why He did not just give them a mission and walk away. He gave them a promise: "*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.*" He was not asking them to do the impossible on their own. He was promising them God's own power to make it happen.

The Background: This Was Not a New Idea

This promise had been building for centuries. The prophet Joel had predicted that God would pour out His Spirit on all kinds of people, sons and daughters, old and young, servants and free (Joel 2:28-29). Isaiah spoke of the Spirit resting on God's Servant (Isaiah 61:1), and Jesus quoted that very passage at the start of His ministry (Luke 4:18-21).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus repeatedly promised the Holy Spirit would come. In John 14:16-17, He called the Spirit "*another Helper*" who would stay with them forever. In John 16:7, He said it was actually better for them that He leave, because then the Holy Spirit would come. In Luke 24:49, just before ascending, He told them to wait in Jerusalem until they received "*power from on high.*"

Acts 1:8 is the final version of that promise and Acts 2 shows it being fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came with wind, fire, and supernatural boldness that changed the world.

Explanation of the Verse

Acts 1:8 — "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*"

This one verse is a promise, a commission, and a roadmap all at once.

1. "*But you shall receive power...*"

The word "*but*" is a redirect. The disciples wanted political power. Jesus pointed them toward something greater: spiritual power.

"*Shall receive*" is not a maybe, it is a guarantee. Jesus was not saying "you might receive power if you do everything right." He was declaring with full authority: "you will receive it."

The word for "*power*" here is the Greek word *dunamis*, the root of our English words "dynamite" and "dynamic." This is not human strength or natural talent. It is supernatural, divine energy, God's own power made available to people through the Holy Spirit.

This power is not for personal fame or private spiritual enjoyment. It is mission power given specifically to make believers effective witnesses for Jesus Christ.

2. "...when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..."

The source of the power is the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, co-equal with the Father, and the Son, and the active presence of God in the world and in every believer.

"Come upon you" describes the Holy Spirit arriving from God and resting on the disciples. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came upon specific people judges, kings, prophets for specific tasks. Now, through this promise, the Spirit would come upon all believers as a permanent, empowering presence.

This was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). The Holy Spirit came with wind and fire, and the results were immediate: the disciples spoke in other languages, Peter preached with incredible boldness, and about 3,000 people were saved in one day. The same Peter who had denied Jesus three times out of fear now stood before thousands and proclaimed the risen Christ without hesitation. That was the Holy Spirit's power at work.

3. "...and you shall be My witnesses..."

The word "*witnesses*" comes from the Greek word "martyres" it is the same word we get "martyr" from. A witness is not someone who wins arguments or performs religious rituals. A witness is someone who personally testifies to what they have seen, heard, and experienced.

The disciples were not being sent to promote a religion. They were being sent to tell people what they personally knew about Jesus His life, death, resurrection, and lordship.

The word martyres also hints at cost. Many of the first witnesses literally died for their testimony. The promise of the Holy Spirit's power was not a promise of safety or comfort, it was a promise of divine strength to keep testifying no matter what it cost.

Notice also the word "*My*" witnesses. They were not witnesses to a system or a tradition. They were witnesses to a Person: Jesus Christ. That Christ-centered focus is still the heart of genuine Christian witness today.

4. "...in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Jesus describes four expanding circles of witness — from the immediate and local to the global:

Jerusalem - Start where you are. This was the disciples' own city, where the risks were greatest. God's mission always begins at home your family, your neighborhood, your school, your community.

Judea - The surrounding region. These were people who shared the disciples' language and culture. This represents your extended community, people beyond your immediate circle but still within your cultural reach.

Samaria - The uncomfortable territory. Jews and Samaritans had deep ethnic, cultural, and religious hostility toward each other. By including Samaria, Jesus was pushing His disciples

past their comfort zones and prejudices. Every believer has a "Samaria", or a group of people they might naturally avoid. The Holy Spirit's power is given to help us cross those barriers.

The ends of the earth - The ultimate goal. Jesus' vision was never just local or national. The Gospel is for every person, in every nation, speaking every language, from every background, in every generation until He returns.

Together, these four markers show that the Holy Spirit's power is not for private spiritual experience. It is for public, world-changing witness locally, regionally, cross-culturally, and globally.

Contemporary Summary

The promise of Acts 1:8 is not just ancient history. It belongs to every believer in every generation including ours.

The world today is complex and often hostile to the message of Christ. Secularism, social media noise, moral confusion, and in many places outright persecution make effective witness feel just as impossible today as it did for those first disciples in Jerusalem.

But the promise has not changed: "*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.*"

The same Holy Spirit who turned frightened, ordinary disciples into world-changing witnesses lives in every born-again believer today. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11), that gave Peter the boldness to preach to thousands (Acts 2), that gave Stephen grace to forgive the people killing him (Acts 7:60), that kept Paul going through beatings, shipwrecks, and prison (2 Corinthians 4:8-9) — that same power is available to you.

This lesson challenges every believer to ask three honest questions:

Am I depending on the Holy Spirit or on my own abilities?

Every generation is tempted to substitute programs, personalities, and clever strategies for the raw power of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:8 reminds us that effective witness is not the product of human effort it is the fruit of divine empowerment.

Am I witnessing in my Jerusalem?

Before dreaming about reaching the world, are you faithful in your immediate context your family, your school, your neighborhood? The Holy Spirit empowers witness that starts right where you are.

Am I crossing my Samaria?

Every believer has a "Samaria" a person, group, or community that feels uncomfortable or beyond their natural reach. The Holy Spirit's power is given specifically to help us cross those barriers with the love and truth of the Gospel.

Acts 1:8 is not a promise for passive, comfortable Christianity. It is the promise of supernatural power for supernatural mission the guarantee that the God who calls you to witness will never send you out alone.

Discussion Questions

1. Jesus promised His disciples the Holy Spirit's power before sending them out. Why does empowerment need to come before the mission? What happens when believers try to fulfill the Great Commission without relying on the Holy Spirit?
2. The word "witnesses" comes from the Greek word martyres, which also gives us the word "martyr." What does that tell us about what genuine Christian witness really looks like? What might it cost believers in your community to be faithful witnesses today?
3. Jesus described four expanding spheres of witness: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Who or what represents your "Jerusalem" your immediate mission field? Who represents your "Samaria" the people that would take you out of your comfort zone to reach?
4. The disciples were ordinary, uneducated, and previously fearful people who became bold witnesses through the Holy Spirit's power. How does that encourage you personally? What fears or limitations does the promise of Acts 1:8 speak to in your own life?
5. Acts 1:8 was dramatically fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. How do you think this promise is meant to be experienced in the church today? What practical steps can believers take to more fully depend on and operate in the Holy Spirit's power?

Memory Verse

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
Acts 1:8 (NKJV)

Write it. Memorize it. Live it.

STUDENT WORKSHEET

Lesson 5: The Promise of Empowerment

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
Acts 1:8 (NKJV)

Name: _____ Date: _____

SECTION A: MULTIPLE CHOICE

Circle the letter of the best answer.

1. When did Jesus speak the words of Acts 1:8?
 - A. During the Last Supper, the night before His crucifixion
 - B. During the Sermon on the Mount, early in His ministry
 - C. During the forty days between His resurrection and His ascension into Heaven
 - D. During His baptism in the Jordan River

2. What question did the disciples ask Jesus right before He spoke Acts 1:8?
 - A. "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples."
 - B. "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"
 - C. "Lord, which of us will be greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"
 - D. "Lord, how many times should we forgive someone who sins against us?"

3. The Greek word for "power" in Acts 1:8 is **dunamis**. What does it refer to in this verse?
 - A. Political authority and influence over governments and leaders
 - B. Physical strength and military ability to defeat enemies
 - C. Supernatural, divine energy given by the Holy Spirit to enable effective witness for Christ
 - D. Natural human talent, intelligence, and leadership skills

4. Which of the following correctly lists the four geographic spheres of witness Jesus named in Acts 1:8, in order?
 - A. Rome, Greece, Asia Minor, and the ends of the earth
 - B. Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, and all the nations
 - C. Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth
 - D. Samaria, Jerusalem, Egypt, and the Mediterranean world

5. Why was the inclusion of "Samaria" in Jesus' commission significant?
- A. Samaria was the wealthiest and most powerful region in the ancient Near East
 - B. Samaritans were under Roman military occupation and considered enemies of the state
 - C. There was a long history of ethnic, cultural, and religious hostility between Jews and Samaritans, making this a deliberate call to cross cultural barriers
 - D. Samaria was physically unreachable without a miracle from the Holy Spirit
6. The Greek word for "witnesses" is *martyres*, which gives us the word "martyr." What does this reveal about the kind of witness Jesus was calling His disciples to?
- A. That witnessing is mainly about defending Christian doctrine in public debates
 - B. That genuine witness involves personal testimony to what one has seen and experienced, and may come at great personal cost
 - C. That only those willing to die for their faith qualify as true witnesses
 - D. That witnessing is a gift given only to ordained ministers and professional evangelists

SECTION B: TRUE OR FALSE

Write "TRUE" or "FALSE" on the line.

1. _____ The promise of Acts 1:8 was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit came upon the 120 disciples gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem.
2. _____ Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit's power would protect them from all suffering, persecution, and hardship.
3. _____ The prophet Joel predicted centuries before Acts 1:8 that God would pour out His Spirit on all kinds of people — sons and daughters, old and young, servants and free — which was fulfilled at Pentecost.
4. _____ The four geographic spheres in Acts 1:8 — Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth — serve as the organizational outline for the entire Book of Acts.
5. _____ Acts 1:8 teaches that the Holy Spirit's power is given mainly for private personal spiritual enrichment, rather than for public witness and mission.

SECTION C: PERSONAL REFLECTION

Answer in 3–5 sentences.

Acts 1:8 promises supernatural power for the purpose of being a witness for Jesus Christ. Honestly evaluate your own life. In which sphere Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, or the ends of the earth do you feel most called to witness right now? What is one specific, practical step you will take this week to be a more Spirit-empowered witness in that sphere?
