

Lessons for Living in a Pagan Culture

— Meditations on Acts —

James R. Hughes, 2024 [[Other publications](#)]

Unless otherwise noted, direct Bible quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).
References from the NIV are from the 1984 edition.

[Note: it is planned that this document will be updated weekly (usually on Friday) with an additional entry as it is included in our congregational bulletin.]

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1. Acts – An Historical Account

(Acts 1.1-2)

During the ‘Enlightenment’, Scientific Revolution, and Industrial Revolution it became fashionable to question the accuracy of the Bible’s historical sections. This included attacks on Luke’s account in his Gospel and in Acts. Some claimed that Luke did not identify historical figures correctly or that he used incorrect terminology. In the late 19th century and during the 20th century archeological discoveries (e.g., stones found with engraved titles of Roman government officials) vindicated Luke’s account. Today, the claim that Luke did not present an accurate historical account is unsupportable—except that people continue to question his reports of the miracles performed by Jesus and his apostles.

We are not told much about Luke in the Bible. We know that he was a friend of Paul (Col 4.14) and that he travelled with Paul during two of his missionary journeys. But we don’t know where he was born or grew up. Eusebius (c. 260-c. 340) mentions Antioch. Others suggest Philippi, since he may have been known there and was not jailed with Paul and Silas (Acts 16.16, 19). Also, we don’t know whether he was a Jew by birth or a Gentile. Internal evidence in his Gospel and in Acts, shows that he had an extensive knowledge of practices in Judaism. This may indicate that he was a Jew. However, it also may indicate that, as a converted Gentile, he had a keen interest in the OT and learned quickly. That he was intelligent is evidenced by the fact that he was a physician (Col 4.14) and by his sophisticated use of the Greek language. His Greek vocabulary is extensive, rivalling that of secular writers of his day, and larger than that of any other NT writers (about 30% of the unique words in the NT occur in Luke’s two books). At times, he uses rarer linguistic forms (e.g., optative mood, verbal adjectives), indicating advanced skills. He also exhibits knowledge of classical writings in grammatical constructs, such as figures of speech, and through his use of literary techniques, such as the inclusion of a prologue. Regardless of his native ethnicity, he had the same vision Paul had—to bring the Gospel to the Gentile world.

Luke had an ability to do historical research (Lk 1.1-3) and to present an historical account in an orderly, detailed, and interesting manner. That he was a good storyteller is evidenced by his use of suspense, irony, and humour. We find examples of humour in the account of the servant girl Rhoda leaving Peter standing at the gate of the domestic compound (Acts 12.13-14) and of Eutychus falling asleep and out of a window as Paul droned on (Acts 20.9). His attention to detail is exhibited by his use of specific correct titles for Roman and Greek officials and his exact descriptions of nautical procedures during a storm (Acts 27.13-38). The inclusion of this detail contributes to the historical accuracy of the accounts and heightens the suspense of the history he is relating.

Luke was a participant with Paul in two of his missionary journeys and was with him during his imprisonments in Caesarea and in Rome (Acts 28.14-16; Phm 24; 2 Tim 4.11). It was likely that during the first two years of Paul’s imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28.30) Luke wrote Acts from information he had gathered during his travels with Paul. During his time in Palestine (Acts 21.3-27.1), he would have had an opportunity to meet with Jesus’ believing half-siblings (including James and Jude) and his mother Mary. In the early chapters of his Gospel, Luke records material about Jesus’ early life which neither Matthew nor Mark report. He would also have been able to obtain firsthand accounts of the ministry of Jesus from the apostles (Acts 21.18) and then information about the advancement of the early church from Philip (Acts 21.8), and probably from Cornelius (Acts 10.1-48; Acts 21.8) and Agabus from Antioch (Acts 11.28) who were in Caesarea (Acts 21.10) when Luke was there. He would have also learned from Paul about his conversion and early ministry before he joined Paul in Troas (Acts 16.11). From that point, much of what Luke reports in Acts would have been from his own eyewitness recollection. The abrupt ending of Acts, with Paul waiting in prison for his trial before Caesar, appears to indicate that Luke completed Acts in, or about, 64 AD, and then dispatched it to his friend Theophilus.

We defend the authority of the NT books by referring to them as having *apostolic* authority. But only three

of the original twelve disciples, who were also apostles (Matthew, John, and Peter), authored books of the NT. Two of the books (James and Jude) were written by Jesus' half-brothers who did not believe that Jesus is the Messiah before his resurrection (Mk 3.21; Jn 7.5). However, they later became defenders of the truth and were viewed as equivalent to apostles. It is generally believed that Mark recorded what he heard from Peter and thus under Peter's apostolic authority. The rest of the NT, other than Luke's books, was written by Paul, who was a later appointed true apostle of Jesus (2 Cor 11.1-33). So, Luke, who was neither an eyewitness of Jesus' earthly ministry nor an apostle, wrote his two books (which make up over 25% of the NT) under Paul's apostolic authority. So, we can be sure that Acts was written under the direction of the Holy Spirit (2 Pt 1.21) and that it is God's word for our generation.

Luke was blessed by God with skills required to serve as an accurate historian. We should be thankful that Luke was careful to report accurately events from what he and other eyewitnesses observed during the early life of Jesus, the three years of Jesus' earthly ministry (what he did and taught), and the first thirty years of the expansion of the NT Church. Thus, as we begin our studies in Acts, we can be confident that we have before us an accurate historical account of selected events in the life of the early NT Church. Let us pause and pray that we will learn from this book about how the Church should live in a pagan culture, twenty centuries after it was founded.

2. Acts – A History to Encourage Gentiles

(Acts 1.1-2)

Luke directed and dedicated his two books (his Gospel and Acts) to a person named Theophilus. It seems that this person was more than a mere associate of Luke. He may have been a personal friend, since Luke took considerable effort (Lk 1.3) to provide him with confirming information about the "certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Lk 1.4). Speculation has been offered about who Theophilus was. It appears that he was a believer, or at least one having knowledge about Christ and the Gospel, before Luke authored his books (Lk 1.4). It has been suggested that the etymology of his name ('lover of God') indicates that Luke used a pseudonym, like Gentile seekers associated with synagogues were called 'God-fearers' (Acts 10.2), because they had not completed the steps of a proselyte converting to Judaism—which for a male would have had to include circumcision. Because Luke refers to Theophilus with the honorific, 'most excellent', he was probably an official of rank in the Roman government (compare, Acts 24.2; Acts 26.25), even possibly one among Caesar's household (Phil 4.22).

An interesting suggestion is that Luke used a pseudonym to avoid calling attention to a high-ranking Roman official. Thus, it has been proposed, that he was Flavius Clemens, the cousin of Domitian who later became emperor. Clemens served as consul in 95 AD during Domitian's emperorship. Clemens was married to Vespasian's daughter. He was executed shortly after the conclusion of his consulship, in April 95 AD, on the charge of atheism. A Roman historian (Cassius Dio) who lived in the next century, indicated that the charge was because Clemens had gone over to 'Jewish opinions'—in the early years of the NT Church, Christianity was viewed as sect of Judaism. He may have been a secret Christian (like Nicodemus was for a time) and an early Christian martyr. However, some Jewish historians claim that Clemens was a convert to Judaism.

Despite the uncertainty about Theophilus' identity, it appears that Luke wrote his two books with the express purpose of addressing a Christian Roman patron. It may be that Luke intended for Theophilus to function as a sponsor who could finance the high cost associated with publishing books in those days and advance the dissemination of his books to a wider audience. If this is the case, then it would provide support for the belief that Luke's Gospel and Acts are directed primarily to a Gentile audience with the goal of introducing them to a history of Jesus and of the early expansion of Christianity around the wider Mediterranean world ("to the end of the earth", Acts 1.8).

We cannot establish definitively if Luke authored his books (or at least, Acts) primarily for a Gentile audience. Evidence supporting the view that he did, is provided by the way he defines and describes Jewish customs and practices (Lk 1.9; Lk 2.27, 42; Acts 21.21-26, 29). He also traces Jesus' genealogy (Lk 3.23-38) to Adam, the father of all mankind, not just to David or Abraham (Mt 1.1). This would have been used as part of the polemic that God is the creator of (Acts 17.26, 29), and sovereign over (Acts 17.13-31), all mankind. In addition, much of Acts focuses on the evangelistic efforts of Paul, who stated that he was the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 2.8-9; Eph 3.8; 1 Tim 2.7).

Once the account of the preaching of the Gospel expands beyond Judea, Acts presents a picture of general animosity to the Gospel and rejection of it by the Jews (e.g., Acts 13.45, 50; Acts 14.2; Acts 17.5; Acts 18.6). In contrast, Acts highlights instances of the reception of the Gospel by Gentiles—the Ethiopian (Acts 8.26-39); Cornelius, his family, and friends (Acts 10.33); preaching to Gentile Hellenists in Antioch who became believers (Acts 11.20-21) and the disciples there were the first to be called 'Christians' (Acts 11.26); and the reception of the Gospel by some of the polytheistic Athenians (Acts 17.34). Also, the council held in Jerusalem indicates that the Church leaders were concerned about making it easier for Gentiles to be incorporated into the Church without imposition of the burdens of the ceremonial aspects of the law (Acts 15.1-35).

Luke's presentation of the impact of the Gospel on the Mediterranean world is balanced. He indicts unbelieving Jews who persecuted Paul and his ministry partners, pagans such as the riotous crowd at Ephesus (Acts 19.21-41), and Roman officials who persecuted the evangelists (Acts 14.5; Acts 16.19-24). But he also indicates that Jews and Gentiles were being converted (Acts 14.1; Acts 16.14; Acts 17.34). The Gospel is inclusive since anyone can be an heir of the promise made to Abraham, as Paul states (Gal 3.28-29).

We cannot be certain that Luke targeted Acts to a Gentile audience, such as Christians in Rome. But we can be certain that he intended to demonstrate the triumph of the Gospel. Even when faced with what might appear to have been unmovable obstacles, the Gospel advanced among the Gentiles as the chosen apostles carried its message from Jerusalem and Judea, to Samaria, and beyond (Acts 1.8). It progressed from its first reception in Antioch, a leading Gentile city in the eastern portion of the Empire, to Rome, the leading city of the western portion of the Empire. Acts ends with Paul spending two whole years "proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28.30-31). The readers of this series of *Lessons for Living in a Pagan Culture* will be mostly of a Gentile background. We are the beneficiaries of the triumphant work of the Holy Spirit as he drove forward the early advance of the Gospel into Asia (western Turkey) and Eastern Europe. Praise God that the Gospel is still going forward to the end of the earth!

3. 'Acts of the Apostles' (Acts 1.2-4, 13)

During the forty days (Acts 1.3) after his resurrection in which Jesus remained on the earth, "he presented himself alive" to the disciples as he met with them multiple times. The disciples to whom he appeared included more than just the remaining eleven apostles, after Judas' betrayal and suicide (Acts 1.21-22). However, Luke specifically identifies the disciples whom Jesus had chosen and appointed as apostles (Mk 3.14-19). During those forty days, Jesus expanded on the training he had given to the disciples during his three years of ministry. The purpose of this additional instruction was to complete their training so that they would understand how he was the fulfillment of the OT Scriptures (Lk 24.27, 44-45). They needed to understand how his sufferings, death, and resurrection were a necessary part of his coming into the world (Lk 24.46) so that he could bring repentance and forgiveness of sins to the nations (Lk 24.47). His purpose was to establish a worldwide everlasting spiritual kingdom (Dan 2.44-45; Dan 4.3), not to set up a temporal Jewish kingdom in a small territory at the edge of the Roman Empire, as they thought (Acts 1.6).

Luke reports that during those forty days of his post-resurrection appearances Jesus also gave commands to the apostles (Acts 1.2). In his opening words in Acts, Luke does not reiterate what those commands were. However, we can identify the core message of the commands from the conclusion of Luke's Gospel and the parallel sections of the other three Gospels. He told the disciples to "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation." (Mk 16.15). They were to make disciples of the nations, baptizing them in the names of the Trinity, and teaching them to keep Jesus' commands (Mt 28.19-20). They were being sent out to the entire world, as Jesus was sent into the world (Jn 20.21), to be witnesses to all that Jesus had done and taught (Lk 24.48). Luke provides a summary of these commands, which is that the apostles were to carry the message of the Gospel "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1.8). Later, Peter, the leader of the Church in Jerusalem at that time, stated that they were to "preach to the people and to testify that [Jesus] is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10.42).

Another command which the apostles were given by Jesus before he departed for heaven, was that they were to return to, and remain in, Jerusalem until they had been clothed (anointed) with power from on high (Lk 24.49; Acts 1.4-5). Their receipt of this power would occur fifty days after Jesus' resurrection and ten days after his ascension. We see the fulfillment of this promise in Acts 2.2-4. One of the reasons they were to return to Jerusalem was so that a replacement apostle for Judas could be identified—which we read about later Acts chapter 1. Another reason was so that the Gospel would be presented first to the citizens of Jerusalem (Acts 1.8) and the NT Church could be established first among believing Jews (Acts 2.47), God's ancient covenant people. Then, the Church would be expanded to include Gentiles, to fulfill the promise that God would call the Gentiles into his covenant community (Gen 12.3; Gen 18.18; Gen 22.18; Ps 22.27-28; Is 2.1-2; Is 49.6; Is 66.18-19; Lk 2.30-32).

Acts has traditionally been referred to as the 'Acts of the Apostles'. Ancient manuscripts of Acts usually include the title (ΠΡΑΞΕΙΣ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΩΝ, 'acts of apostles') before the hand-written text of the narrative. An example, of this practice is seen in the single-page Greek majuscule (uppercase) [manuscript](#) of a portion of Acts (Acts 6.1-8) contained in the library collection in a university in the Netherlands. Likewise, printed editions of the Greek NT, from which we obtain our translated English versions, usually include the title. The first recorded reference to the book by this title is attributed to Irenaeus (c. 120–c. 200 AD) who was bishop of Lugdunum (Lyon) in Gaul, which included the territories of modern France and Belgium.

However, in Acts, we find that details of the acts of only two of the original twelve apostles are recorded. Peter is prominent in the first twelve chapters. John is also mentioned as he accompanied Peter (e.g., into the temple precincts, Acts 3.1). Other than their names being listed (Acts 1.13), there are only brief references to the other individual original apostles (e.g., Acts 12.2). There are also collective references to them (e.g., Acts 15.2). But after chapter 15, which recounts the council in Jerusalem, and the delivery of the council's decision (Acts 16.4), the original apostles are no longer mentioned.

Saul appears on the scene in Acts 7.58 as an antagonist to Christ and persecutor of Christians. From chapter 13 onward, the account in Acts focuses primarily on the ministry of Saul, as Paul—Acts 13.9 records his two names. As we know from elsewhere (primarily in 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians) Paul defends his appointment to the apostolic office by a special miraculous appearance of Jesus (Acts 9.1-19) and a personal call from Jesus (Gal 1.15-16).

Acts does recount the acts of apostles—but only of three named ones. We can derive two lessons from this. First, the work of advancing of the Kingdom of Christ has often been undertaken by men and women whose names are lost in the shadows of history and are known only to God. Being prominent (a Peter or a Paul) in the work of the Church should not be our goal. Our goal should be to serve our Lord faithfully. Second, as some have suggested, Acts should probably be called 'The Acts of the *Holy Spirit*'. It was the Holy Spirit, working behind his human instruments, who carried the Gospel message from Jerusalem and opened

Eastern Europe (Acts 16.9-10) and the world to the Gospel.

4. The Holy Spirit (Acts 1.2)

We concluded the previous meditation noting that it was the Holy Spirit, working behind his human instruments, who carried the Gospel message from Jerusalem to the world. The work of the Holy Spirit is mentioned at least forty times in Acts. Actions attributed directly to him include:

- Guiding the authors of the OT (Acts 1.16; Acts 4.25; Acts 28.25).
- Communicating directly to believers (Acts 1.2; Acts 8.29; Acts 10.19; Acts 11.12, 28; Acts 15.28; Acts 20.23; Acts 21.4, 11).
- Endowing (filling, baptizing) believers with gifts and power (Acts 1.5, 8; Acts 2.4, 33, 38; Acts 4.8, 31; Acts 5.32; Acts 6.3, 5, 10; Acts 8.15, 17-19; Acts 9.17; Acts 10.44-45, 47; Acts 11.15-16, 24; Acts 13.9, 52; Acts 15.8; Acts 19.2, 6).
- Comforting believers (Acts 9.31).
- Anointing Jesus (Acts 10.38).
- Setting individuals apart for service (Acts 13.2, 4; Acts 20.28).
- Performing miracles (Acts 8.39).
- Directing the work of evangelism (Acts 16.6-7; Acts 19.21; Acts 20.22).

In addition, Luke reports instances of people sinning against the Holy Spirit (Acts 5.3, 9; Acts 7.51, 55).

We cannot develop a full doctrine of the Holy Spirit from Acts alone. But we can identify some dimensions of his person and character. The Holy Spirit:

- Is a distinct volitional person (Acts 15.28; Acts 16.7), not a force, or an emanation or mode of God.
- Communicates with humans through direct messages (Acts 8.29) and indirect methods such as visions (Acts 10.19).
- Has divine knowledge and wisdom which he imparts to humans (Acts 1.16).
- Can be sinned against (Acts 5.3), indicating that he is God since sin is breaking God's law (Ps 51.4).
- Has sovereign rights over the lives of human beings (Acts 5.9).
- Has the power of God to act directly in the world and not just through second causes (Acts 5.3, 5; Acts 8.39).
- Is commissioned and sent by God the Father (Acts 2.33) and by Jesus, the Son of God (Acts 1.2; Acts 16.7).
- Works in and through Jesus (Acts 2.38; Acts 10.38).

The final two items in the list above, indicate that the Holy Spirit represents Jesus to mankind, and Jesus represents the Holy Spirit. This bidirectional relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit demonstrates that there is total agreement between these two persons of the Trinity. However, this agreement extends to the Father as well. Within the Godhead, there is a tripartite relationship. We do not have a common English word to describe this complex relationship. During the early Middle Ages, Greek theologians used a term (*perichoresis*) to describe how the three members of the Trinity work lovingly together with a common existence, will, and purpose. Western theologians coined a Latin word (*circumincession*) to describe this relationship. Both terms can be understood as working with, in, among, and around one another.

In OT times, the Holy Spirit came upon believers and unbelievers (e.g., Num 24.2; Judges 3.10; Judges 11.29; 1 Sam 10.6; 2 Chron 20.14) so that they were empowered to prophesy or to serve God in another extraordinary way. During Jesus' ministry only a few people are described as having the Holy Spirit upon them. Jesus himself was identified as being blessed by the Father through the presence of the Holy Spirit (Lk 3.22). This was a fulfillment of OT prophecies which indicated that he is the Messiah (Is 11.2; Is 61.1-2; Mt 12.18; Lk 4.18). Mary (Lk 1.35) and Simeon (Lk 2.25) appear to be the only others blessed in this

manner before Pentecost. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, none of the disciples are described as having the Holy Spirit upon them.

Jesus tells the disciples that they will receive power as the Holy Spirit comes upon them (Acts 1.8). From that point, there are numerous instances of the disciples being endowed with the presence of the Holy Spirit. Some of these instances are associated with extraordinary actions on the part of the recipients such as when the apostles miraculously spoke in foreign languages (e.g., Acts 2.4). However, the gift of the Holy Spirit coming upon a person appears to take on a new dimension within the NT Church context. We will explore this idea later in this series of meditations when we consider Acts 1.4-5.

OT believers in the coming Messiah were indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Ps 51.11; Ps 143.10), just like post-resurrection believers are. There is no possibility of salvation without the Holy Spirit working in the heart of a person. However, there appears to be a fuller or heightened aspect to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon believers since Pentecost (Joel 2.28; Acts 2.16-21), even when they are not apostles performing miracles. The giving of the Holy Spirit is God giving himself to believers. In the NT Church, all believers have a fuller understanding of God's person and attributes (e.g., the Trinity) and the mystery of salvation that was veiled in OT times (Rom 16.25)—how God worked salvation through the incarnation and the death and resurrection of Jesus, and how he has called Gentiles into the covenant community. Also, NT believers are empowered to live in obedience to God's law (Jer 31.33) and to be witnesses to the Gospel in ways that OT believers were not.

5. Resurrected Presence

(Acts 1.3)

Acts 1.3 provides the only record of the time that passed between the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus. Luke tells us that it was forty days. No reason is given for why it was *forty* days. But it is a period that may have an association with the duration of Jesus' temptation (Lk 4.2) and Elijah's time on Mount Horeb (1 Ki 19.8). During these forty days, Jesus "presented himself alive" to the disciples as he met with them multiple times. He had two objectives: 1) To demonstrate the reality of the resurrection. 2) To complete their training so that they could carry the message about the Kingdom of God to the world.

The multiple appearances of the risen Lord had a purpose. If he had appeared to only a few disciples or only once to the original disciples, questions could have been raised about the truthfulness of the report and whether they might have succumbed to a personal or mass delusion. With multiple appearances, there was an opportunity for doubters to be convinced that Jesus really had been raised from the dead, as with his demonstration to Thomas (Jn 20.24-28).

The inhabitants of the first-century Greco-Roman world clung to superstitions about gods performing supernatural acts. Nevertheless, when presented with an account of a true miracle—the resurrection of Jesus who had really been dead—they were cynically sceptical (Acts 17.32; Acts 26.23-24) just like many people of our day reject the miracles in the Bible. Therefore, it was necessary that Jesus' resurrection be confirmed with multiple convincing proofs given to numerous dependable witnesses. Luke does not inform us in Acts what those proofs were. We can surmise that it included Jesus showing witnesses the remnants of the wounds on his body resulting from the crucifixion (Jn 20.27) and performing miracles (Jn 21.6). He likely also presented arguments for why a resurrection is not an impossibility for God (Gen 11.6; Lk 1.37; Acts 26.8; Heb 11.19) and why it was necessary for him to rise from the dead in order to fulfill OT prophecy and to conquer death (Lk 24.25-27).

We are not informed of the total number of times that Jesus appeared to people after his resurrection. However, he appeared to his disciples collectively at least three times (Jn 21.14) and he had appeared to Peter individually (Lk 24.34) and later to two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24.13-32). Paul

informs us that Jesus also appeared to more than five hundred people at one time (1 Cor 15.6), many of whom were still alive when he wrote about this appearance. Neither Paul nor Luke informs us of when Jesus appeared to this large crowd. It could have been in Jerusalem, to a crowd that gathered at the time Jesus commissioned the apostles (Mt 28.16-18) or at his ascension (Acts 1.6-9).

Paul also reports of a private appearance to James (1 Cor 15.7). This James was likely not one of the original disciples but probably a half-brother of Jesus. He did not initially believe that Jesus is the Messiah (Mk 3.21; Jn 7.5), but later believed (Acts 1.14). It may have been this special appearance of Jesus to James that convinced James that he is the Messiah. If so, we can imagine the meeting as Jesus in his glorified body appeared to James and encouraged him to believe. This is a clear indication of the love Jesus had for his own human family. It is reported by early Church historians that James later became the bishop (elder/pastor) of the Jerusalem church.

It is interesting that neither Luke (in his Gospel or in Acts) or Paul (in 1 Corinthians) reported the appearances to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20.14-18) and the collected women (Mt 28.9-10). These appearances are likely not mentioned by them because the witness of women in the ancient world had little legal standing. By excluding these instances, they were not supporting the prevalent view that a woman's testimony was worthless. But referring to the appearances of Jesus to eyewitnesses whom Gentile unbelievers could not respect was not going to decrease the scepticism of the doubters in Corinth or Rome.

It was essential that the resurrection be proved infallibly to the apostles so that they could serve as dependable witnesses to the fact (Acts 1.8, 22; Acts 2.32; Acts 3.15; Acts 5.32; Acts 10.39-41; Acts 13.31). During the decade or two following the ascension of Jesus, none of the NT books existed. Therefore, there was not yet a written record about the life of Jesus, his death, and his resurrection. This would only become available after the Gospels were written. Thus, the apostles were able to speak with confidence to the early converts in the congregations which they were founding, because they had personally been with Jesus through his ministry on earth and had seen the risen Lord Jesus.

Jesus not only gave the apostles proof of his resurrection but continued to teach them about the Kingdom of God. We are not told what additional he taught them that he had not already taught them during the three years of his ministry. However, we can surmise that additional instruction helped them understand how his death and resurrection was the fulfillment of the OT Scriptures (Lk 24.27, 44-46) so that he could bring repentance and forgiveness of sins to the nations (Lk 24.47). He likely also informed them that his purpose was to establish a worldwide everlasting spiritual kingdom (Dan 2.44-45; Dan 4.3), not to set up a temporal Jewish kingdom in a small territory at the edge of the Roman Empire, as they thought (Acts 1.6). Jesus completed his ministry on earth during those forty days. But his work did not end. It would be advanced as the apostles began the task of carrying the message of the Kingdom of God to the world.

6. Post-Resurrection Bodies

(Acts 1.4)

If you read Acts 1.4 in the ESV you will note that the translation has the words, "while staying with them". The NASB has "gathering them together". The NKJV and KJV have, "being assembled together with them". The NIV has, "while he was eating with them". The ESV has a footnote, "while eating with them". The Greek word that Luke uses, which underlies these various translations, occurs only once in the NT text. Therefore, determining a good translation of the word in this context is not simple since we have nowhere else in the NT which we can use as a comparison.

Bible lexicons suggest four possible meanings for the word—'lodging with', 'gathering with', 'assembling with', and 'eating with'. The translations cited above cover the spectrum of these options. The ESV's main translation appears to be based on the idea that the word used by Luke is related to a very similar word (not

used in the NT) which means to ‘live in fellowship with’. The NIV’s (and ESV’s footnote) translation appears to be based on a parsing of the compound word which Luke uses, which could be understood as ‘sharing salt with’, which can be interpreted as ‘eating with’.

We should not get bogged down in a debate about which is the ‘correct’ translation since the primary message which Luke is communicating is that Jesus spent an intimate time with the disciples during the forty-day period after his resurrection and before his ascension. However, we can derive a key lesson from a consideration of the different translations and use Luke’s statement to provide a possible hint of what our resurrected bodies will be like.

Since most Christians cannot read the Bible in its original (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) languages, we are dependent on using translations for our study of God’s word. We therefore need to be aware of challenges associated with translation. For example:

- Source words in any language can have nuanced shades of meaning and should be translated into another language using different words, depending on the context; for example, ‘evil’ in Hebrew can be translated as ‘evil’ (Gen 6.5), ‘grievous’ (Dt 6.22), ‘calamity’ (Is 45.7), or ‘wild’ (Ezk 34.25).
- We should not make claims that translations are word-for-word. People who make such claims are often ignorant of the nature of translation, including: the difficulty of translating idioms, the existence of verb forms in source languages not found in target languages, and word order variation across languages for emphasis. There cannot be an exact word-for-word equivalent when translating from one language to another, or translation would be merely simple symbol replacement and easy to automate.
- No translation can ever be the final one in any ‘living’ language. The meaning of words change, new words are created or borrowed from other languages, and words become obsolete.
- Theological biases can be introduced into translations.

Therefore, it is wise for us to use multiple translations when conducting an interpretive study of the Bible. And we should avoid being dogmatic about the rendering of a particular verse where reliable translations vary widely.

Keeping in mind this brief consideration about dogmatism over translation, it is interesting to note the implications of NIV’s and ESV’s footnote translation of the word Luke uses. Their translation may permit us to speculate on the nature of believer’s post-resurrection bodies.

We must believe that Jesus’ resurrected body is an actual physical body (Mt 28.9; Lk 24.39; Jn 20.27) although glorified. We also must believe that we will be granted bodies of the same nature as Jesus’ at our resurrection (Rom 6.5; Phil 3.20-21). That Jesus did eat food in his resurrection body is stated by Luke (Lk 24.42-43) and hinted at by John (Jn 21.12). Since he ate food with the disciples during that forty-day period, this may tell us something about the physical nature of the everlasting new paradise. Jesus ate food in his resurrected body. He invites his people to attend a banquet in heaven (Rev 19.9) and John saw the restored tree of life in the new paradise from which the saints could eat (Rev 22.2). Therefore, we can expect that in the new paradise we will be able to eat food in our resurrected bodies.

Eating food in our current realm is required to sustain life and there are waste products to process after we have extracted energy from food. So, we cannot use the current state as a model for how things will be in the new heaven and earth. Adam and Eve (and the animals) were instructed to eat food from the plants in the garden of Eden (Gen 1.29-30; Gen 2.9). Yet, in that perfect state, before Adam sinned, there would have been no deleterious decay and permanent increase of entropy. This implies that in the original paradise physics and chemistry operated differently than they do for us. So, we can legitimately infer that in the new heavens and earth, physics and chemistry will be different from what we experience now. For example, God may operate the new creation with different ‘laws’ of physics by continually removing waste energy (e.g., heat caused by friction as we walk around) and injecting new high-order energy (e.g., light; Gen 1.3;

Rev 21.23; Rev 22.5). Regardless of how the physics and chemistry will operate, we can be certain that heaven will be more glorious than we can currently conceive (2 Cor 12.2-4). Let us not be sceptical about what God can do. Rather let us rejoice in the promise of the new physical heaven and earth in which believers will dwell with post-resurrection physical bodies.

7. Baptism with the Holy Spirit

(Acts 1.4-5)

Jesus ordered the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they had been baptized with the Holy Spirit. He gave this command for at least the following reasons:

- The Gospel would be presented first to the citizens of Jerusalem (Acts 1.8) so that the NT Church could be established first among believing Jews (Acts 2.47), God's ancient covenant people.
- The apostles needed to learn patience and obedience before they acted ("wait for the promise of the Father"; Acts 1.4), so that they could work with the understanding that the advancement of the Gospel would be in accord with the timing of the Father. A lesson we all need to learn.
- They would be clothed (anointed) with power from on high (Lk 24.49; Acts 1.4-5) to fulfill their role. They received this anointing (baptism) on Pentecost (Acts 2.1-47), fifty days after Jesus' resurrection and ten days after his ascension.

What it means to be "baptized with the Holy Spirit" has been intensely debated in the evangelical Church since the 1960s, following the advent of the Charismatic Movement. What it means is not simple to discern from where the term is used in Acts (Acts 1.5; Acts 11.16; see also, Mark 1.8; Acts 10.47). However, it is evident that the term does not mean the Holy Spirit's work of converting a person's heart so that he can believe in Jesus as saviour. The Holy Spirit comes upon all believers (e.g., Acts 2.33, 38; Acts 10.45; Acts 11.15). Paul states that believers have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them (2 Tim 1.14), are baptized into Christ's body through the Spirit (1 Cor 12.13), are empowered by the Holy Spirit (Rom 15.13), and are sealed with his presence (Eph 1.13). And Peter indicates that the Holy Spirit rests upon all who are insulted because of their faith in Jesus (1 Pt 4.14). Also, the disciples had already received the Holy Spirit before Pentecost when Jesus breathed on them (Jn 20.22).

So, if every believer has received the Holy Spirit, then what could Jesus mean when he says that the disciples would be 'baptized with the Holy Spirit'? It is evident that in Acts most, or even all, of the instances where believers are endowed with the Holy Spirit, this endowment is accompanied with extraordinary actions. We use terms such as 'supernatural' or 'miraculous' to refer to these actions. Examples include the apostles and others miraculously speaking in foreign languages which they did not know prior to their being anointed with the Spirit (Acts 2.4; Acts 10.46; Acts 19.26). Similarly, the apostles performed signs and wonders (Acts 2.43). Peter and Paul healed the lame and sick and cast out demons (Acts 3.1-11; Acts 8.5-7; Acts 9.32-34; Acts 14.8-10; Acts 16.16-18; Acts 19.11-12; Acts 28.8-9). Peter and Paul even restored dead persons back to life (Acts 9.36-42; Acts 20.9-12). There are also instances of miracles being used as judgement (Acts 5.5, 10; Acts 13.8-11).

The accounts of the miracles in Acts often include statements about people coming to faith in Jesus as a result of observing the miracles. This indicates that they were sign miracles (Mk 16.20), being used to attest to a divine endowment on the Church and to the authority of the apostles as the NT Church was being established.

Paul deals with the abuse of the sign gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12.1-8; 1 Cor 14.1-25). This indicates that these gifts were not confined to the apostles. This is also evident from examples in Acts of the endowment on others of at least the gift of being able to speak miraculously in a previously unknown foreign language (Acts 10.46; Acts 19.6). Until the NT was completed and the apostles had done the initial work of laying

the foundation for the NT Church (Eph 2.20) the sign gifts were used by the Holy Spirit to build the Kingdom of God.

There is considerable debate in the broader evangelical Church about whether the baptism of the Spirit, which endows miraculous gifts, was a temporary phenomenon or has a continuing role within the NT Church. During the patristic period, it was generally accepted that these gifts were no longer present in the Church. For example, John Chrysostom (349-407 AD), writing on these verses in his [Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians](#) says: “This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place. And why do they not happen now? Why look now, the cause too of the obscurity hath produced us again another question: namely, why did they then happen, and now do so no more?” The principal Reformation leaders (e.g., Luther, Calvin, Knox) also believed that the miraculous gifts were no longer present in the Church. Commentators within the Reformed tradition have generally taken the position that the miraculous gifts which Luke and Paul refer to were signs of the presence of the true apostles (2 Cor 12.12), and that they ceased after the apostolic age.

Regardless, we should not become engrossed with the supernatural dimension of being “baptized with the Holy Spirit”. Rather, we should focus on the spiritual dimension. When the Holy Spirit baptizes an unbeliever, he becomes convicted of sin and judgement (Jn 16.8-11), is effectually called to receive the Gospel (Eph 1.17-18), is baptized into Christ (Acts 2.38), and endeavours to live through the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5.22-25). Calvin makes an appropriate observation, “We are not in vain baptized with water by men, because Christ, who commanded the same to be done, will fulfil his office, and baptize us with the Spirit.”

8. A Question about Kingdom Restoration

(Acts 1.6-7)

Luke now briefly describes the last conversation of Jesus with the disciples as he met them on the Mount of Olives (Acts 1.12). This was moments before his ascension (Acts 1.9). At this meeting, the disciples asked, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Jews at that time had an expectation that an anointed king, descended from David, would arise and establish a permanent kingdom in Israel which would not be subject to an overlord nation like Rome (Ps 10.16). Some even hoped that this re-established kingdom would rule over all the other nations of the earth (Ps 2.10-12; Dan 2.44-45).

From their reading of the OT, the disciples likely expected that the promised Messiah-king would have divine attributes (Ps 24.7-9; Is 9.6-7). They may not have understood fully that this person would be the God-man. However, Jesus had demonstrated that he is God through the sign miracles which he performed and finally through the miracle of the resurrection. In addition, the disciples came to understand that he was the promised Messiah-king. In his human nature, he was a descendant of David (Mt 1.1-17; Lk 3.23-31), born in Bethlehem (Mic 5.2; Mt 2.4-5). John the Baptist had declared that the kingdom was at hand (Mt 3.2). And Jesus stated that the kingdom had arrived (Mt 12.28; Lk 11.20; Lk 16.16) and acknowledged that he is a king (Jn 18.37).

During his ministry, of just over three years, Jesus often spoke about the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven and its imminent coming (Mt 16.28). However, the disciples generally misunderstood him. They did not realize that he was teaching about a spiritual kingdom which is not bound by time or place (Jn 18.36). Also, Jesus had continued giving them instruction about the Kingdom of God during his last forty days on earth (Acts 1.3). So, it is not surprising that they thought that their resurrected Lord would bring about the realization of a restored temporal kingdom for Israel. Their question indicates that they expected that Jesus would divinely intervene to overthrow Rome’s rule over Israel and establish a glorious kingdom

ruled from Zion in Jerusalem (Ps 2.6; Ps 48.2).

The disciples had not yet realized that the kingdom had already been established. At the death and resurrection of Jesus, Satan's kingdom—his temporary reign over the earth (Mt 4.8-9; Mt 12.26; Rev 2.13)—was defeated (Rev 12.9). Paul tells us that since Jesus completed his role as redeemer, his reign is now absolute (Phil 2.9-11). John also informs us that Jesus rules over this world (Rev 11.15). The worldwide Church—the new Israel (Gal 6.16)—is the current earthly manifestation of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus. From his throne in heaven, Jesus rules now in the hearts of his new covenant people still on the earth. As the Gospel goes forth and more people are converted, the Kingdom of Jesus is growing in extent and number among all nations. This great movement began with the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 1.8; Acts 2.2-4). Jesus also governs all the nations of this earth today through his providential sovereignty over all that transpires.

Even though the Kingdom of God is here now, many people are still looking for a restored kingdom of Israel in Palestine. They misunderstand the fulfillment of biblical prophecies and claim that Jesus is going to establish a one-thousand-year reign on this earth. They claim that a new temple will be built in Jerusalem, that a human priesthood will be restored, and animal sacrifices reintroduced. They also claim that Jesus will reign over an earthly kingdom from Jerusalem, which will come to an end after a great battle against an army lead by Satan after he has been released from prison for a season. This end-time model is not what is taught in Scripture and is a modern equivalent of the disciples' expectation that Jesus would establish an earth-based kingdom. Jesus reigns now. His kingdom has been established. The thousand years mentioned in Revelation (Rev 20.1-7) is to be understood as figurative. It represents the entire time of this earth between the resurrection of Jesus and his second coming. We know that the 'thousand years' is figurative, because it occurs in the context of many figurative illustrations (e.g., 'key', 'bottomless pit', 'great chain', 'dragon', 'ancient serpent', 'beast', and a mark on the foreheads and on the hands). The larger context of Revelation, which is a book of revelatory visions described in a figurative form, also implies that the 'thousand years' is to be understood figuratively. And all of the other occurrences of the specific phrase 'thousand years' in the Bible are figurative (Ps 90.4; Eccl 6.5-6; 2 Pt 3.8), do not have a literal sense, and are a hyperbolic means of referring to a 'long time'.

It is sometimes suggested that the disciples asked the wrong question about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. But Jesus does not rebuke them for the purpose of their question. Jesus' answer (Acts 1.7) implies that the kingdom *will be* restored to Israel, but they were not to ask *when* this will occur. So, how can this be? How is it that the kingdom exists now and Christ reigns now, and yet the kingdom will be restored to Israel? We encounter in this question 'the already' and 'the not yet'. The Kingdom of Jesus is here now, but it also is not yet. Jesus reigns now, but his reign is not yet complete. This tension arises because we are in the time between the two comings of Jesus. When he comes the second time he will establish a kingdom on a physical earth—not on this current earth, but on a new earth (2 Pt 3.10-13; Rev 21.1). It will be governed from the new Jerusalem (Rev 21.2). In this visible manifestation of an earthly reign, all Israel will be present. That will be the true Israel, the spiritual seed of Abraham drawn from all nations on earth (Gen 12.3; Gen 18.18; Gen 22.18; Rev 7.9) who will inherit the new earth (Mt 5.5) as an everlasting paradise (Rev 2.7).

9. End-time Date Setting

(Acts 1.6-7)

The disciples asked Jesus if he would restore the kingdom to Israel "at this time". Jesus' answer implies that the kingdom *will be* restored to Israel, but they were not to ask *when* this will occur. As we noted in the previous meditation, the kingdom will be restored to Israel—the spiritual seed of Abraham. However, the way it will be restored is not as the disciples thought. Jesus was not going to overthrow Roman rule and establish an independent kingdom ruled from Jerusalem. Likewise, many misunderstand kingdom

prophecies and believe that Jesus is going to establish a Jewish kingdom in our near future, with Jerusalem at its epicentre, which will last for one thousand years. The Kingdom of Jesus has already been established as the Church and will be manifested in a physical form with the creation of the new heaven and earth at his second coming.

Believing that the kingdom would be restored, the disciples' obvious question is *when?* This is the same question that has been asked probably by every believer since then—when will Jesus establish the visible physical form of his reign? Or, when will he return? The disciples had already asked a similar questions. “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Mt 24.3). We might think that since Jesus had given them an earlier detailed answer to their questions, they would not ask again about the timing. But the question they ask does not indicate that they were blockheads. By this point they were convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. But the circumstances had changed—the resurrected Lord stood before them. So, in their minds it was logical that the kingdom would now be restored. So, Jesus again addresses the question of the timing of the end of the age, his second coming, and the establishment of his everlasting reign in a restored physical paradise.

The first time they asked the question, Jesus stated, “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” (Mt 24.36; Mk 13.32). He indicated that the timing of the end of this realm was established by the Father and could not be known by creatures and was even hidden from his human nature. The second time they asked the question, Jesus again stated that the timing was fixed by the authority of the Father. The Father is mentioned only two times in Acts (Acts 1.4; Acts 1.7). Both times, Jesus indicates that events unfold in this realm according to the Father's eternal decrees. The second time, Jesus tells the disciples that it is not for them “to know times or seasons”. But he did not indicate that he also did not know when the end would be. In his post-resurrection glorified state, the veil over the infinite divine knowledge has been lifted and Jesus knows all in his human nature.

Twice, Jesus told his disciples that they were not to inquire into the secret counsels of God with an attempt to determine when the end of time would arrive. His message has not been heeded by many Christians for the past two thousand years. Around 1000 AD, a great millennial fever swept through Europe and today there are prognosticators who lineup current events and inform us that the return of Jesus is imminent. However, clear statements in the Bible tell us that:

- Current events such as wars, famines, and natural disasters are not to be construed as signs of the end (Mt 24.6-8).
- The return of Jesus will be when people *least* expect it (Mt 24.44), and they have been lulled into a false peace and security (1 Thess 5.3) and believe that everything is going smoothly.
- Not even Jesus, in his human nature, knew the day or hour, so it is utter foolishness to think that anyone can predict when Jesus will come again.
- Christ's return will occur like the coming of an unexpected thief in the night (1 Thess 5.2; 2 Pt 3.10; Rev 16.15). We are always to watch because we “know neither the day nor the hour” (Mt 25.13).
- We must constantly be on guard, waiting expectantly for his return—which could be in the next few seconds, tonight, or at any time in the future. This should engender keen anticipation, keep us from becoming complacent and indifferent, and prevent us from living like the pagans around us.
- The Gospel must be “proclaimed throughout the whole world” before the end will come (Mt 24.14).

Mankind is given no advance information by which to forecast the return of Jesus and is not to seek it. If we knew for certain that Christ was going to come on a particular date in the future, then there would be a compelling tendency among men, including Christians, to put off serious attention to the state of their souls and how they will stand before God on the day of judgement.

End-time date setting is sinful. It is a desire for forbidden knowledge. God established a test to determine

the truthfulness of a pretend prophet. If a prophet speaks about the future, and what he says does not come true, then he is a false prophet (Dt 22.18). We should no longer listen to anyone who makes end-time claims because he is teaching falsehood.

However, in denying knowledge to mankind about *when* Jesus will return, God does not withhold the fact that he *will* return. The angels standing as honour guards at Christ's ascension tell the disciples that he will return in the same manner as he left (Acts 1.11). Paul tells us he will descend from heaven accompanied by an archangel's shout and a trumpet blare (1 Thess 4.16). And Jesus states, "Behold, I am coming soon" (Rev 22.12). He is coming soon to wrap up history, open the graves, execute judgement, and renovate the created order. Are you prepared to meet him?

10. Witnesses to the World

(Acts 1.8)

After Jesus appointed the twelve apostles (Mt 10.2), he sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven and to perform sign miracles (Mt 10.7-8). These would demonstrate that the age of the Messiah had arrived. However, he added to his instruction that they were not to go among the Gentiles or Samaritans, but to focus their ministry on "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 10.5-6). Until such time as the Jews, as a people, rejected their Messiah, kingdom membership was primarily offered to the physical seed of Abraham. Nevertheless, during Jesus' ministry on earth, there were some Samaritans (Jn 4.1-42) and Gentiles (Mt 8.5-13; Jn 12.20-21) who showed an interest in knowing about the true God. Jesus did not turn them away but welcomed them into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus anticipated that the Jews, as a people, would reject him (Mt 23.36). They did this when their leaders declared, "We have no king but Caesar" (Jn 19.15), and the crowd shouted "Crucify, crucify him!" (Lk 23.21). They were given a wonderful opportunity to receive the light of the world but rejected it (Jn 1.11). Thus, Jesus indicated that they in turn were rejected by God (Mt 21.18-19; Mt 23.38; Lk 13.6-9). Likewise, Paul states that the wrath of God has come upon them (1 Thess 2.15-16). The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (in 70 AD) is a clear sign that God has stopped dealing with the Jews as a nation. This of course does not mean that individual Jews cannot come to Christ just as any other sinner can turn to him for salvation (e.g., Mt 23.39; 2 Cor 3.14-16; Eph 2.11-18).

Jesus taught that following the Jews' rejection of himself as their Messiah, the Gospel would be formally opened to the Gentiles (Mt 8.11-12; Mt 21.28-46). When Paul was in Corinth the Jews opposed him and became abusive. After shaking his clothes in protest, he said "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." (Acts 18.6; see also Acts 28.25-28). That the Gentiles would be called into the covenant community (the Church) was not a new concept which arose because of the Jews' rejection of Jesus. It was what God always intended from the first when he drew out of the world his covenant people. When he enacted the covenant with Abram, he told him that all nations on earth would be blessed through him (Gen 18.18) and through his offspring—the Messiah (Gen 22.18). Similarly, the Prophets and the Psalms predicted that the nations would be brought into the covenant community (Is 19.16-24; Is 66.18-19; Jer 3.17; Ps 22.27; Ps 45.12). So, the last thing Jesus is recorded as saying before he left this earth, was that the time had arrived for the Gospel to go out to the nations. The fulfillment of the Messiah's mission to the *world* (Jn 3.16) began on Pentecost when the apostles received power from the Holy Spirit.

Jesus indicated that the apostles were to be witnesses. He certainly included in the use of this term their being eyewitness to the reality of his resurrection. However, he likely intended to convey more. Essentially the same Greek word is translated in other places as 'testimony'. They were to proclaim the Gospel as a testimony (witness) to the nations (Mt 24.14). That is, they were to bear witness to the truth of Scripture and to Jesus as the Redeemer. Also, the word translated as 'witness' or 'testimony' is the word from which we obtain the English word 'martyr'. Thus, being a witness for Jesus will often include suffering persecution

because of a testimony for Christ (Mt 10.18; 2 Tim 1.8).

The apostles were to be witnesses as they carried the message of salvation from Jerusalem. It has been noted by commentators that Jesus identifies three steps in their mission, which correspond to major sections within Acts. The initial work in Jerusalem is covered in Acts 2.1-8.3. That stage ends temporarily with the Jews, including Saul (Paul), persecuting Christians in the city and driving many away from the city. The second stage covers mission activities in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8.4-11.18). There is territorial overlap in the mission focus in the latter part of chapter 11 and in chapter 12—Jerusalem, Judea, and Antioch. Chapter 13 opens with work in Antioch and the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas to begin carrying the message of the Gospel beyond the eastern end of the Mediterranean. The book closes with Paul under house-arrest in Rome.

The Gospel reaching “to the *end* of the earth” (Acts 1.8; Is 66.18-19) is not recorded in Acts. The mission assigned to the apostles was not yet complete. When Paul was in Corinth, he had plans to visit Spain after passing through Rome (Rom 15.24, 28). Some of the church fathers (e.g., Clement of Rome who died c. 100 AD), claim that Paul made it to Spain after being released in Rome. One modern historian believes that Paul preached in Spain for a couple of months, but with little success. The Church in Spain experienced substantial growth in key urban centres after Constantine’s Edict of Milan in 313 AD, which allowed for the open practice of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire.

The Gospel had spread throughout of the Roman Empire (including north Africa and Britain) by the end of the 3rd century and was expanding into northern Europe by the 8th century. Also, historians believe that the Gospel reached India and China long before Europeans arrived in the East in the mid-to-late Middle Ages. For example, Marco Polo reports in about 1300 AD of having encountered Nestorian Christians in what is now western China. And there is a consensus that Orthodox Eastern Christian communities had been established in Malabar (southwest India) by 600 AD at the latest. Today there is not a single country on earth in which there is not at least one true believer in Jesus Christ. And the percentage of the world’s population which is identified as ‘Christian’ continues to increase—despite declines in the West. Jesus’ command was also a prediction and a promise. The mission given to the apostles has reached the end of the earth.