

Acts 1:6-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/acts/acts-1/acts-16-8/>

The disciples ask Jesus if He will establish His kingdom in Israel now. Jesus answers that God has set that time in the future, and it is not for them to know it. Their job is to first wait for the Spirit to come to them, then to tell the world about Jesus's death and resurrection.

Jesus, preparing to return to Heaven, has just told His disciples that they were to stay in Jerusalem to await the Holy Spirit, whom God would send to them to help them. But it was unclear to the disciples that Jesus was about to leave earth. He was crucified forty days before, and was resurrected three days later. In their understanding, they had already lost Him, and now He had returned. They now understood that the scriptures required that Jesus be crucified and raised again, because Jesus had taught them this from the scriptures, while teaching them over forty days' time (Luke 24:45-49).

But the disciples still anticipated that Jesus would establish a physical kingdom in Israel, with Himself as the king, as was prophesied in the Old Testament (Daniel 2:44, Dan. 7:13-14, Zechariah 14). They reasonably expect the victorious Jesus, who has stated that "all authority" was granted to Him, to rule from Jerusalem and crush the Roman empire, establishing a forever kingdom. For their entire lives, the disciples have lived in submission to the occupying force of Rome; they have looked to the promises of God in the Scripture which explain that one day God will restore Israel and that His messiah will reign forever.

The eleven faithful disciples were from Galilee, which was the seat of resistance to the Romans. Gamla, the headquarter city for the Zealots, was only a few miles from the fishing villages on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, including Capernaum. The disciples have tremendous passion to see Israel restored. They gave their lives to that cause. A constant theme of Christ's teachings was about the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven. About who would enter into it, who would inherit it, and who would not be allowed entry. Now that Jesus died and resurrected in obedience to the Father, He has inherited authority over the earth (Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 1). The disciples, rather understandably, think the next step is for the Kingdom of Heaven to be physically brought to earth:

So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

Jesus's reply is that, *It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.*

Jesus redirects their zeal to spreading the spiritual kingdom throughout the entire earth. However, He does not correct their understanding regarding a physical kingdom, making it clear that there will, in fact, be a physical return of Jesus, and that He will set up a physical presence in Israel, and restore the kingdom to Israel. Here, Jesus merely clarifies that it was not for the disciples to know when that would occur. Their business was to be His witnesses in all the earth.

One day, Jesus will restore His kingdom to Israel. He has inherited the entire earth in reward for faithful obedience. And He will reestablish the throne of David in Israel (2 Samuel 7:13). But establishing it is not part of God's program just yet. Jesus' reply makes it clear that there will be a time when He will restore the *kingdom to Israel*. However, Jesus says explicitly that it is not for the disciples to know when. It is clear however that Jesus will return and restore the kingdom. We will see in chapter 3 that Peter's understanding is that if Israel will repent, Jesus will promptly return and restore the kingdom.

This is similar to what Jesus already told them during His ministry. A few days before He was betrayed and crucified, Jesus was with His disciples on the Mount of Olives, the same location as here in Acts 1, just before His ascension. Some of the disciples asked Him, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" (Mark 13:4).

Jesus lists many signs that will indicate the coming end times, but He is very clear that we cannot know when they will happen, "But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Mark 13:32).

In that dialogue, He also expressly states that "The gospel must first be preached to all the nations" (Mark 13:10). He will repeat this point to them now, giving them what they must focus on, rather than the physical restoration of the Kingdom and the end times. Those days will come, Jesus assured them, and God will restore creation and establish a forever Kingdom with Christ as King, but it isn't for us to know when the end will happen, only that it will.

Jesus turns the subject back to what the disciples need to prepare for, that they *will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon them*.

The *Holy Spirit* will empower them. To do what? To preach the gospel (good news) about Jesus. Christ tells them, *you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*. This is a similar command to the verses known as "The Great Commission," (Matthew 28:18-20). These commands summarize the job given to all believers in Jesus, until He returns. It continues to this day. Christ was not yet establishing His Kingdom physically on earth. That was only for God the Father to decide *by His own authority*. Jesus' kingdom was still not of this world (John 18:36). The work of the disciples was to fill that spiritual Kingdom with spiritual citizens.

The disciples were to be Jesus's *witnesses* in *Jerusalem*, to the Jewish people, *in Samaria*, to those who were half-Jewish and half-Gentile, and *in all Judea*, the full population of the Jewish people, *and even to the remotest part of the earth*, to all peoples everywhere. All Jews, all Gentiles, all peoples as far as the *remotest part of the earth*, were to hear from Christ's *witnesses* what He had taught, how He died, and that He had resurrected to free humankind from sin and to give them an everlasting relationship with God.

The Greek word translated *witnesses* is a noun with the root "martys," from which we get the English word "martyr." All believers have the job of being a martyr, in the sense of living their lives sacrificially, laying down their lives in service to Jesus. Some will lose their life physically.

All are to lose their lives spiritually, to die that they might live. As Jesus said: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25).

By appointing His followers as *witnesses*, Jesus is commanding them to lose their lives for the sake of His kingdom. It is in this way that Jesus’ kingdom will come to earth during the age the Holy Spirit will inaugurate, through the agency of His followers walking in the power of the Spirit.

At the point of Christ’s ascension into Heaven, Christianity (which, at the time, was initially called “the Way”) is basically a Jewish sect of maybe a few hundred people. But by the end of Acts, within a matter of a few decades, Christianity is a vast movement sweeping across the Roman Empire. People from all walks of life, Jews and Gentiles alike, become a part of it through faith. This took place because the apostles heard Jesus’ command and followed it. God’s plan to restore the earth is being executed through His people, walking in faith, obeying His commands.

Biblical Text

“So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;⁸ but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”