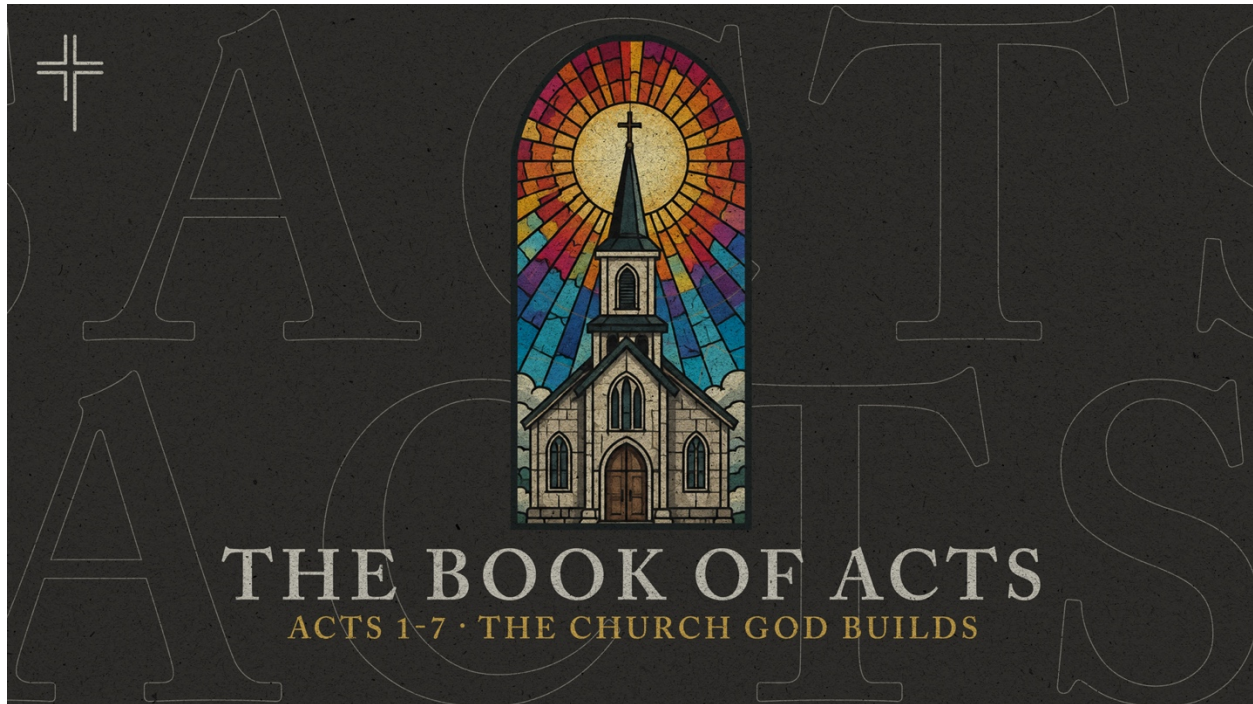




IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH
SERIES: THE CHURCH GOD BUILDS
SCRIPTURE: ACTS 1:1-11
DATE: SEPTEMBER 13, 2026

INTRODUCTION

This morning, we begin a new series through the book of Acts. We have entitled the series, "The Church God Builds."

It may be easy to think that the book of Acts is primarily about what the apostles did after Jesus ascended to heaven. After all, some English translations of the Bible title the book "The Acts of the Apostles." Yet, what will become evident as we study the book is that God is building His church through the efforts of the apostles and many other faithful witnesses. God is the main actor.

God's mission did not end with Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. His mission continues through the church. Acts will demonstrate for us how the church began, how the gospel message spread, and how God continues to make Jesus known through the Holy Spirit working through willing and obedient believers.

Text

Acts 1:1–11

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

4 And while staying^[a] with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

The Ascension

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Explanation

Background

The book of Acts was written by Luke, the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke. Both books are addressed to a man named Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). We do not know much about Theophilus other than that his name means “lover of God” and that Luke refers to him as “most excellent” in his Gospel. Some scholars have suggested that he may have held a position of high social status and possibly supported Luke’s writing.

Luke explains that in his first book, the Gospel of Luke, he “dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.” The Gospel records Jesus’ birth, ministry, teaching, death, resurrection, and a brief account of His ascension.

It is significant that Luke describes his Gospel as recording what Jesus *began* to do and teach. The implication is that Jesus’ work did not end with His ascension. He continues to work, though He now does so from heaven through the Holy Spirit and through the witness of His people.

Acts refers to Jesus’ twelve disciples as “apostles,” a word that means “sent ones.” During His earthly ministry, Jesus intentionally chose and appointed these men for a unique role. Mark tells us that Jesus called them to Himself so that “they might be with him and he might send them out” (Mark 3:13–14).

Jesus gave the apostles a unique position of leadership and authority in the early church. He also prepared them for His departure. In John 16:12–15, Jesus said,

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

With these words, Jesus was preparing the apostles for what would come after His departure. The Holy Spirit would continue to guide them in truth and equip them for their unique role in the establishment and leadership of the early church.

After His Resurrection, Jesus Appeared to the Apostles

Acts 1:3 tells us that Jesus appeared to the apostles for forty days after His resurrection. During that time, He gave them many proofs that He was alive and spoke to them about the kingdom of God.

The Gospels record a number of these appearances. In Luke's Gospel, Mary Magdalene and other women were the first to discover the empty tomb and hear that Jesus had risen (Luke 24:1–12). Later that day, Jesus appeared to two men on the road to Emmaus. At first, they did not recognize Him, but when He

revealed Himself to them, their eyes were opened. They later said that their hearts burned within them as He spoke to them about the Scriptures (Luke 24:13–32). That same evening, Jesus stood among the disciples. He ate with them and taught them that His death and resurrection fulfilled what had been written in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Luke says that He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45).

Other appearances are recorded as well. John describes Jesus appearing to seven disciples and restoring Peter after Peter's previous denials (John 21). Paul writes that more than five hundred people saw the risen Christ and that He also appeared to James, Jesus' brother (1 Corinthians 15:6–7).

Jesus presented Himself alive to His followers by “many proofs.” The resurrection was a historical event witnessed by numerous people over an extended period of time.

The Disciples Must Wait for the Holy Spirit

Jesus had already taught His disciples that they would receive the Holy Spirit after His departure. This was not a new plan but part of God's design. John the Baptist, the one who announced Jesus' coming and even baptized Him, had said that while he baptized with water, Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16).

Jesus also taught His disciples that the Spirit would be their Helper (John 14:16). The Spirit would teach them and remind them of Jesus' words (John 14:26), guide them into truth (John 16:13), and empower their witness so that people might be convicted concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). Jesus even told His disciples that it was to their advantage that He go away. Through His departure, He would send the Holy Spirit to them (John 16:7).

As the time for His ascension approached, Jesus commanded the apostles to remain in Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father. Pentecost was approaching, and Jews from many different regions would be gathered in Jerusalem. This would soon provide a remarkable opportunity for the gospel to begin spreading to the nations (Acts 2:8–12, 37–41).

For the moment, however, the apostles had to wait. They remained in Jerusalem, devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14), and eventually replaced

Judas Iscariot with Matthias, a man who had also been a follower of Jesus from the beginning (Acts 1:21–26).

Before they could begin the mission Jesus had given them, they first needed to wait for the power that only the Holy Spirit could provide.

“Will You at This Time Restore the Kingdom to Israel?”

Understandably, the disciples had questions. They asked Jesus, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

This question reflected a common expectation among the Jewish people that the Messiah would establish an earthly kingdom and overthrow Roman rule. In many ways, the disciples had been asking some version of this question throughout Jesus’ ministry. After all, one of Jesus’ primary messages was that the kingdom of God was near (Mark 1:14–15).

Now Jesus had died and risen from the dead. If death could not stop Him, what could? Why would He not now establish His kingdom on earth? While the disciples’ question is understandable, it also reveals several misunderstandings.

First, they were asking about something the Father had not revealed to them.

Jesus tells them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.” Jesus had previously told His disciples something similar: “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (Matthew 24:36).

There are some matters God has chosen not to reveal to us. The timing of Christ’s return is one of them. Rather than giving His disciples a date or timeline, Jesus redirects their attention to the task He has given them.

Second, they misunderstood the nature of the kingdom.

God’s kingdom will one day be fully realized on earth. Revelation 21 describes the coming of a new heaven and a new earth where God will dwell with His people. But the kingdom was not going to be established at that moment through the political overthrow of Rome. Until Christ returns, God’s kingdom advances as the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of people and brings them under the reign of Christ.

The disciples were expecting Jesus to remain physically present and establish an earthly kingdom immediately. Instead, Jesus was about to ascend, send the Holy Spirit, and commission His followers to spread the message of the kingdom throughout the world.

Third, they misunderstood the scope of the kingdom.

The kingdom was not intended only for Israel. Jesus tells them that when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, they are to be His witnesses “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

We should notice the expansion in Jesus’ words. Jerusalem was their city and the center of Jewish life. Judea and Samaria expanded their mission into the surrounding regions. “The end of the earth” expanded the mission in every possible direction.

The kingdom of God would have no ethnic, geographic, or cultural boundaries. The message of Christ was to go to all nations. Acts 1:8 essentially provides the outline for the entire book of Acts. The gospel begins in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), spreads roughly into Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12), and continues outward toward the nations (Acts 13-28).

Jesus’ Ascension

Having answered the disciples, Jesus then ascended to heaven. With the apostles “looking on,” Jesus “was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” Luke seems to emphasize that the apostles were eyewitnesses to this event. They watched Jesus ascend. He was taken “out of their sight,” and they continued “gazing into heaven as he went.” To be clear, the disciples saw Jesus leave the earth.

This may seem obvious, but it is theologically significant. Jesus did not rise from the dead only to die a second time. Nor should we think that Jesus remained on earth in some spiritual form, able simply to move between heaven and earth as He pleased. Jesus rose bodily from the grave, and He departed bodily from the earth. He physically ascended into heaven.

The ascension is therefore another important confirmation that Jesus truly lives. The apostles were eyewitnesses not only to the risen Christ but also to His bodily departure from the earth.

Jesus Will Return the Same Way He Ascended

It must have been an incredible sight to watch Jesus ascend into heaven. The ascension appears to have happened quickly. Once Jesus disappeared from their sight, however, the disciples continued standing there and looking upward.

Then, quite suddenly, two men in white robes stood beside them. Their appearance and clothing indicate that they were angels. They said: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Their message emphasizes several important truths. First, Jesus was truly gone for the time being. His earthly ministry had ended, and He had departed from the earth. Second, His departure would not be permanent. Jesus would return. The disciples did not know when He would return, but they knew that He would. Third, waiting for Jesus’ return did not mean doing nothing. The disciples were not to spend their lives standing around and looking toward heaven. They were first to wait for the Holy Spirit, and then they were to become Christ’s witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

The proper response to Christ’s ascension was not passive speculation about His return. It was active obedience to His mission. Waiting for Christ does not mean idleness. It means faithfully serving Him until He comes.

Discussion Questions

- Why is Jesus’ ascension important? Why do you think it was necessary for Jesus to leave the earth bodily?
- Do you see any significance in Jesus ascending forty days after His resurrection rather than immediately after rising from the dead?
- What stands out to you about the apostles in Acts 1:1–11?
- What evidence from our passage supports the reality of Jesus’ bodily resurrection?
- Where do we see the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this passage? What can we learn about their distinct roles?
- Why did Jesus command the apostles to wait for the Holy Spirit before beginning their mission?

- In what ways do Christians today depend upon the Holy Spirit to accomplish Christ's mission?
- Can you recall examples from Acts where the apostles served as witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and toward the ends of the earth?
- What does the promise that Jesus will return "in the same way" teach us about His second coming?
- How should the promise of Christ's return affect the way we live and serve today?

Conclusions or Applications

WE ARE HIS WITNESSES

Christianity is all about Jesus. Thus, the Holy Spirit is about making Jesus known. Christians, too, should be all about making Jesus known.

The word "witness" refers to a person who tells others about what they have seen, heard, or experienced. The Christian witness began with the apostles, who were eyewitnesses and who heard Jesus firsthand. As we trace through the book of Acts, we see that they took this responsibility seriously.

- Acts 2:32 – "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses."
- Acts 3:15 – "...the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses."
- Acts 4:20 – "For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."
- Acts 4:33 – "And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus..."
- Acts 10:39–42 – "And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead."

They undeniably knew that Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended to the Father. They were utterly convinced that their mission in life was to make Jesus known.

Christians today have the same purpose. While we are not eyewitnesses in the same way the apostles were, we have the faithful record in Scripture of what they saw and heard. We can bear witness to Jesus with the same confidence that the apostles demonstrated.

But in addition to the command to bear witness, Jesus also provided the power necessary for effective witness. In fact, it is interesting to note that the apostles were not to begin their mission of witnessing until the Holy Spirit had come upon them. They needed the Spirit's power to bear witness effectively. Acts stresses this part of witnessing as well:

- Acts 4:7–12 – When Peter is questioned about the healing of the lame man, Luke specifically says, “*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...*” Peter then boldly proclaims Jesus to the religious leaders:

“Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well... 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 5:32 – “And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

Our confidence in witnessing is not driven by our persuasiveness, clever tactics, or perfect opportunities. Rather, our confidence in witnessing is grounded in the faithful eyewitness testimony preserved in Scripture, our personal experience of the saving work of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit to make our witness effective.

We bear witness to Jesus, but we do not bear witness alone. We have the testimony of Scripture, the reality of Christ's work in our own lives, and the power of the Holy Spirit working through us.