

You Will Be My Witnesses (Acts 1:1-12)

Introduction: *The first thing that Jesus continues “to do and teach”*

1. The principle of witness (v. 1-3)

“Luke’s history is unsurpassed in respect to its trustworthiness. . . . Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements trustworthy . . . this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians” (William Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discoveries on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], p. 81). **Lesson:** Today, religion is reduced to personal experience and preference, what works for me, what helps me, what means something to me. But Christianity is public, historical religion. It’s not based primarily on an idea or a philosophy. It doesn’t rest on someone’s ideas about God, or the message of an angel. It is public, and it is historical. All its main figures led very public lives, did public miracles, influenced very large numbers of people and often whole nations. Christianity of course involves high ideals and personal experience, but it is rooted and grounded in the great events of this world.

2. The power of witness (v. 4-5, 8)

Jesus says, you’re going to be my witnesses to the ends of the earth; but that doesn’t mean that they’re to go right out. The Holy Spirit is the one who makes the witness of these people powerful and effective. **Lesson:** We’ve had disagreement over the gifts of the Spirit; but on this much we should all be agreed: A key element of the presence of the Holy Spirit in anyone’s life is a powerful witness to Jesus Christ. The Spirit enables God people to bear witness.

3. The practice of witness (v. 6-8)

Many people think that witnessing means just telling my story, but not the main part or the most important part. Witness is a legal word. God brings the idols of the nations into his court and charges them with falsehood, calling for anyone who can bear witness to their deeds. Then God says, “You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “that I am God” (Isa 43:9-12). “Apart from me there is no God. Who then is like me? Let him . . . foretell what will come. . . . You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?” (Isa 44:6-8). **Lesson:** We are called to testify of the words and deeds of the living God in history, what he has promised and fulfilled, the reality of his salvation in the earth. All we are and what we do and what we say does testify to others. You may be giving a true testimony or a false testimony; but if you’re a Christian, you are representing Christ to the world one way or another.

4. The people of witness (v. 7-8)

These disciples long for their Jewish people to return to God and to enter Christ’s kingdom; though for now, “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (Matt 21:43, see 8:11-12). Jesus raises their eyes to the ends of the earth and says, “There is your destiny.” **Lesson:** the church has always been reluctant to go. What about us and ours? They didn’t want to be a missionary church so they had to be poked and prodded by persecution. Yet Jesus does teach them and lead them out. What about us?

Conclusion: *Stop gazing and start going (v. 9-12)*

Don’t worry about the times and seasons which aren’t for you to know. Don’t just stand gazing at the sky waiting for the Lord to return. It’s time for you to get on with the work; and then at last there will be joy at the return of Jesus.

Interpreting Prophecy (Micah 3:9-4:4)

Introduction: *A century and a half of confusion*

Prophecy has provided the church with more than a fair share of problems in interpretation, and generation after generation of conflicting interpretations have left the church jaded like the village of the boy who too many times cried wolf. Why is prophecy so difficult for us? Why is it subject to such disagreement?

1. Predictions may be contingent (3:9-12, cited in Jeremiah 26:18-29, see Jer 18:7-11)

People think that prophecy is all about the future, but it’s all about the present. God says to Nineveh (Jonah 3:5-10), you’re dead in 40 days. The king understands, calls for repentance and says in verse 9, *Mi yodea?* Who knows? Even when God *swears* something will happen or makes a covenant, the message is, get with the program, or he may fulfill his word in a way you do not anticipate.

2. Predictions may be poetic (4:1, see Psalm 22:12-18)

Psalm 22, does David—or Jesus—literally have bulls encircling him? Has his heart actually melted within him and are *all* his bones actually out of joint? No, that’s figurative or symbolic language for the *people* around him, and for the *emotional* state of his heart. Well, we ask, did they literally wag or shake their heads at him? Yes they did. Did they pierce his feet and hands and cast lots for his clothing? David only poetically, but Jesus literally. This makes interpreting poetic prophecy very difficult. There are things that are literal, things that are not literal, and things that may have more than one layer of meaning or fulfillment. Even Biblical prose is often full of poetic language, just like in English. See Ps 57:4, Isa 14:23, 49:2, 5:13, 10:21, 58:12.

3. Predictions may be hyperbolic (4:4, see Zephaniah 1:2-4)

Prophecy often includes statements about “every one” (v. 4) or “everlasting desolation” (Jer 25:9), and “forever” (Isa 32:14), but this is clearly hyperbole (see Ps 74:1-2). Hyperbole can also be used in prose, of course (Deut 1:10, 1:28).

4. Predictions may be compressed (4:1-5:15, see Hebrews 1:2)

Consider again the many-faced prophecy of the future in this section, universal worship (4:1-2), universal obedience (4:2b), universal peace (4:3-4), Jewish restoration from exile and returning to worship the Lord (4:7-10), Messianic rule (5:1-4), and the saints’ victory (5:5-15). This is to take place in the “last days,” which is quite a long period of time (Heb 1:2, 1 Cor 10:11, Dan 2:28-44).

5. Predictions may be progressive (4:1, 4, see Isaiah 9:6-7)

“Of the *increase* of his government and peace there shall be no end” (Isa 9:6-7). The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which starts as the smallest of all their seeds and grows to be a tree, greater than all. It’s like a little bit of leaven that’s put into a great mass of meal until it’s all leavened (Matt 13). We are not to wait but to live now in the light of these future realities. “Everyone who has this hope purifies himself. . . .” (1 Jn 3:3).

Conclusion: *Living in future kingdom realities now.*

Former enemies in WW II, Mitsuo Fuchida and Jacob DeShazer rejoiced in the deep bond of love that had replaced their former hatred. They agreed to join together in evangelistic work, and their swords were truly beaten into plowshares to raise a harvest for the kingdom of God (Don Stephens, *War and Grace: Short Biographies from the World Wars*, pp. 117-152; cited in Richard Phillips, *Jonah & Micah*, pp. 235-236).