

## The Commissioning of the Apostles

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Freddy Fritz / General

Turning the World Upside Down / Apostle; Commission; Kingdom of God / Acts 1:6–8  
Acts 1:6-8 shows us that the mission that Jesus gave his apostles began with his commissioning of them.

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## Introduction

Luke wrote two books. The first book is called *The Gospel According to Luke*. His second book is usually called *The Acts of the Apostles*.

The two books together are part one and part two of the same story of Jesus. Luke said in [Acts 1:1](#), “In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,” and the clear implication is that his second book—*The Acts of the Apostles*—is about what Jesus *continued* to do and teach.

So, like *The Gospel According to Luke*, the Book of Acts is really about Jesus.

Last week, I asserted that the start of Acts tells us what is the most urgent question of our day, and that is, “Who is Jesus?” The entire Book of Acts tells us about who Jesus was and what he continued to do and teach.

Luke tells us that Jesus “presented himself alive to [the apostles] after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” ([Acts 1:3](#)).

During the forty days between Jesus’ resurrection and his ascension into heaven, the topic of his teaching was about “the kingdom of God.”

Jesus also told his apostles that they were “not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me’ ” ([Acts 1:4](#)). That promise was the Holy Spirit, who was given to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, which was ten days after Jesus’ ascension.

Those fifty days (forty days of teaching from Jesus and ten days of waiting for the Holy Spirit) were not days of inactivity.

During those fifty days, Jesus was equipping his apostles for their upcoming mission.

The first part of that upcoming mission tells us about Jesus commissioning his apostles.

Some of you may recall *Mission: Impossible*, which was an American espionage television series that aired on CBS from September 1966 to March 1973. It was revived in 1988 for two seasons on ABC. It also inspired the series of theatrical motion pictures starring Tom Cruise beginning in 1996.

*Mission: Impossible* chronicled the exploits of a small covert team of secret government agents, known as the *Impossible Missions Force*, and their sophisticated methods of deceiving, manipulating, and thwarting hostile Iron Curtain governments, third-world dictators, corrupt industrialists, and crime lords, among others.

Early in each episode of the show, the following statement was given to the leader of the *Impossible Missions Force*: “Your mission, should you choose to accept it,” and this was then followed by a description of the team’s mission. The following statement was added, “As always, should you or any of your IM force be caught or killed, the Secretary will disavow any knowledge of your actions”, or words to that effect.

I don’t recall watching any episode of the *Mission: Impossible* TV series. And I know I have not seen any of the *Mission: Impossible* movies.

What has stuck with me though are the words, “Your mission, should you choose to accept it.” In the TV series and the movies, the team always completes its mission.

It seems to me that Jesus did something similar with his apostles.

You recall that we are studying the Book of Acts in a sermon series that I am calling “Turning the World Upside Down.” (That title comes from a book by commentator Roy Clements.)

Jesus was sending his apostles into the world to turn it upside down. They were not going to be like the *Impossible Missions Force* by using sophisticated methods of deceiving, manipulating, and thwarting hostile governments.

The methods of Jesus were entirely different. Jesus was sending his apostles into the world to tell people the good news of how sinners can be reconciled to a holy God.

So, as Jesus was getting ready to ascend into heaven, we learn about his commissioning of his apostles.

## Scripture

Let's read [Acts 1:6-8](#):

**<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup> He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> 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.”**

## Lesson

[Acts 1:6-8](#) shows us that the mission that Jesus gave his apostles began with his commissioning of them.

Let's use the following outline:

1. A Mistaken Understanding of the Kingdom of God (1:6)
2. A Correct Understanding of the Kingdom of God (1:7-8)

### I. A Mistaken Understanding of the Kingdom of God (1:6)

First, Jesus' apostles had a mistaken understanding of the kingdom of God.

During the forty days that Jesus was with his apostles, his teaching centered on two main topics. The first topic was the kingdom of God. The second topic was the Spirit of God.

Jesus surely told his apostles how these two topics were related to each other since there was so much teaching by the Old Testament prophets about this.

John Stott summarizes the teaching of the prophets:

When God establishes the kingdom of the Messiah, they said, he will pour out his Spirit; this generous effusion and universal enjoyment of the Spirit will be one of the major signs and blessings of his rule; and indeed the Spirit of God will make the rule of God a living and present reality to his people (e.g. [Is. 32:15ff.](#); [35:6ff.](#); [43:19ff.](#); [44:3](#); [Ezk. 11:19](#); [36:26–27](#); [37:11ff.](#); [39:29](#); [Joel 2:28–29](#)) (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 40).

Jesus had been teaching his apostles about the kingdom of God.

He also taught them about the Holy Spirit who would be arriving shortly.

So, it is understandable to read in [Acts 1:6](#), **“So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ ”**

I think that Jesus was pretty disappointed. After spending so much time with his apostles, they still did not have a correct understanding of the kingdom of God.

John Calvin famously said of the apostles’ question, “There are as many errors in this question as words” (John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1 [Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010], 43).

John Stott unravels the problem in the apostles’ question. He writes:

“For the verb *restore* shows that they were expecting a political and territorial kingdom; the noun *Israel* that they were expecting a national kingdom; and the adverbial clause *at this time* that they were expecting its immediate establishment. In his reply (7–8) Jesus corrected their mistaken notions of the kingdom’s nature, extent, and arrival” (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 41).

So, following Stott’s outline, let’s move on to the second point.

## II. A Correct Understanding of the Kingdom of God (1:7-8)

And second, Jesus gave a correct understanding of the kingdom of God.

I had thought about simply setting down what I believe is a correct understanding of the kingdom of God.

However, I am aware that there are two general views about the kingdom of God. One is a “Reformed” view and the other is a “Dispensational” view. I hold to the Reformed view.

Another reason I thought it would be helpful to make the difference clear is because of what is going on in Israel at present in the war with Hamas. I believe that there is widespread misunderstanding about the current land and nation of Israel.

Over the years, I have been most helped by the view of Dr. John R. W. Stott. Before going on to state what I believe to be a correct understanding of the kingdom of God, I would like to give you a rather lengthy quotation from Dr. Stott’s commentary. He writes:

In the exposition of these verses [verses 7-8], I am following what may justly be termed the “reformed” perspective, namely that the New Testament authors understood the Old Testament prophecies concerning the seed of Abraham, the promised land and the kingdom as having been fulfilled in Christ. Although Paul does predict a widespread turning of Jews to Christ before the end ([Rom. 11:25ff.](#)), he does not link it with the land. Indeed, the New Testament contains no clear promise of a Jewish return to the land. I fully recognize that the “dispensational” view is different. It holds that the Old Testament promises relating to the Jewish occupation of the land will be (in fact, are already being) fulfilled literally, and that in the New Testament this is indicated by [Mark 13:28ff.](#) (the blossoming of the fig tree, symbolizing Israel) and [Luke 21:24](#) (the trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled,” implying that after this period Jerusalem will be rebuilt). In the dispensational view, therefore, the apostles were correct to ask about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, for it will one day be fully restored to them (probably during a literal millennial reign of Christ on earth). In this case, what Jesus rebuked them for was not their expectation of a national kingdom but only their desire to know “times and dates,” together perhaps with their consequent lack of concern for world mission (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 41).

So, now you know where I stand. I uphold what is known as a Reformed view regarding the kingdom of God.

Let us now examine Jesus' correct understanding of the kingdom of God.

#### A. The Kingdom of God Is Spiritual in its Character (1:8a)

First, the kingdom of God is spiritual in its character.

Before we go further, let me define the "kingdom of God."

When we use the term "kingdom" we think of a territory, a place. So, the "Kingdom of Great Britain" was a sovereign country in Western Europe from 1707 until 1801. The Bible also talks about the "kingdom of Israel" ([1 Samuel 15:28](#); [24:20](#)) and the "kingdom of Judah" ([2 Chronicles 11:17](#)). Both of those kingdoms had clearly defined geographic boundaries.

The "kingdom of God," however, is not territorial. You cannot locate it on a map.

This is what confused the apostles. They still believed that Jesus was going to establish a political kingdom in the territory of Israel.

That is why Jesus spoke about the Holy Spirit in his reply. He said in verse 8a, **"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."**

You see, political kingdoms are established by military power. But the kingdom of God is established and expanded by Holy Spirit **power**.

Commentator James Montgomery Boice tells us that the Greek word for **"power"** (*dynamis*) entered the English language when the Swedish chemist and engineer Alfred Bernhard Nobel (1833–96) made the discovery that became his fortune. He discovered a power stronger than anything the world had known up to that time. He asked a friend of his who was a Greek scholar what the word for "explosive power" was in Greek. His friend answered, "Dynamis."

Nobel said, "Well, I am going to call my discovery by that name." So he called his explosive power "dynamite" (James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997], 25).

That is the word that Jesus used when he talked about **"power"** from the Holy Spirit. The **power** that Jesus was talking about was the explosive, life-changing power of the Holy Spirit.

So, what is the “kingdom of God”? The kingdom of God is “the rule of Christ set up in the lives of his people by the Holy Spirit.”

As John Stott notes, the kingdom of God “is spread by witness, not by soldiers, through a gospel of peace, not a declaration of war, and by the work of the Spirit, not by force of arms, political intrigue, or revolutionary violence” (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 42).

The Holy Spirit applies the work of redemption to every elect person.

That person is born again and is radically transformed by the Holy Spirit.

That person submits to King Jesus and lives in obedience to him.

His great desire is to do what King Jesus commands him to do in his word.

So, first, the kingdom of God is spiritual in its character.

#### B. The Kingdom of God Is International in its Membership (1:8b)

Second, the kingdom of God is international in its membership.

The apostles thought in terms of the nation of Israel. They wanted to know if Israel would be restored to prominence.

Jesus, however, corrected their misunderstanding.

Jesus said in verse 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.”**

The mission would indeed begin in Jerusalem. The apostles would need to wait there for the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Then they would move from **Jerusalem** to **all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**

When I was in a Missions class at seminary, I remember a professor talking about the difference between missions in the Old Testament and missions in the New Testament.

He said that in the Old Testament the mission operated by a *centripetal force*. All the nations were to come to the temple in Jerusalem to worship God. They were drawn to the center. To worship God, people had to become Jews.

However, in the New Testament the mission operated by a *centrifugal force*. That is, the mission now moved outward from the city of Jerusalem. It was no longer requisite that people become Jews. Rather, people all over the world submit to the rule and reign of Jesus as the Holy Spirit changed lives.

Jesus' mission to the apostles was to take the message of the gospel to the nations, that is, to the peoples of the world.

In fact, Jesus' mission is given in all four Gospels in addition to being given here in [Acts 1:8](#). Jesus commissioned his apostles for their mission in [Matthew 28:16-20](#), [Mark 16:14-18](#), [Luke 24:44-49](#), and [John 20:19-23](#).

Jesus' mission will be fulfilled when a great multitude that no one can number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, will stand before the throne and before the Lamb of God ([Revelation 7:9](#)).

So, second, the kingdom of God is international in its membership.

### C. The Kingdom of God Is Gradual in its Expansion (1:7-8)

And third, the kingdom of God is gradual in its expansion.

After the resurrection of Jesus, the apostles thought that Jesus was going to establish his kingdom at that time. That is why they asked him in verse 6, "Lord, will you *at this time* restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Jesus said two things in response to this part of their question.

First, he said in verse 7, "**It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.**"

God has a timetable for all that has yet to unfold.

He is going to send Jesus back to earth again.

But even Jesus did not know when his Second Advent would take place, as he had earlier told his apostles, "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" ([Mark 13:32](#)).

Until the return of Jesus, the apostles were to get on with the mission that Jesus was giving to them.



And that brings us to the second thing that Jesus said in response to their question. Jesus said in verse 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.”**

The apostles would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. That would happen on the Day of Pentecost, which was ten days after Jesus’ ascension into heaven.

Between the Day of Pentecost and the Second Advent of Jesus, the apostles were to be witnesses to Jesus’ words and deeds.

The words and deeds of Jesus would continue until the return of Jesus.

You know what happened to the apostles. On the Day of Pentecost, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. And they began preaching and teaching the good news about Jesus. About 120 people were followers of Jesus on that day.

In just 30 years, the apostles had so successfully carried out their mission that the apostles were accused of turning the world upside down ([Acts 17:6](#)).

Researchers believe that Christianity grew rapidly in the first three centuries. By the time Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, it was estimated that over 50% of the people living in Roman territories were professing Christians.

Today, almost 1 out of every 3 people living on Earth professes to be a Christian.

Now, there is still work to be done. The mission is not yet complete.

Jesus said to his apostles in [Matthew 24:14](#), “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

The Greek word for “nations” (*ethne*) refers to “people groups.” Not all people groups have heard about Jesus. So until that happens, we still have work to do.

## Conclusion

Now, we recognize that Jesus commissioned his apostles with the mission of proclaiming the good news of salvation.

However, there are no longer apostles today.

But the mission continues.

You are not an apostle. I am not an apostle.

But we are disciples who follow the teaching of the apostles.

You and I are to witness to people around us about the person and work of Jesus.

We are to carry on the mission that was given to the apostles and that must be completed before Jesus can return.

So, I want to close with the words of David Platt who wrote, *Something Needs to Change: An Urgent Call to Make Your Life Count*:

God's call is for every one of us. Whether you're a teacher or trout-poop expert, a business professional or stay-at-home parent, a student or retiree, God has created your life to count in a world of urgent need. So don't underestimate the part God is calling you to play, starting right where you live. Realize that God has you where you are for a reason. You are not in your city or community by accident. You are in your job, your school, your neighborhood, or your apartment complex with the gifts, skills, abilities, and resources you possess by divine design. God has sovereignly given you unique opportunities for the spread of gospel hope in the world around you (David Platt, *Something Needs to Change: An Urgent Call to Make Your Life Count* [The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition], 195).

Friends, the mission that was given to the apostles continues today through you and me. Make your life count. Amen.