



The Life & Teachings of Paul #1 - Acts

by Ronald L. Dart

With this tape we begin a Bible study series in the epistles of Paul.

In all the years that I have taught the Bible (in college and elsewhere), the *Epistles of Paul* was *easily* the most popular course I ever taught; and the reasons for it are kind of interesting when they come back from students. One came up to me, for example, and said that the *Epistles of Paul* class “did more to change my life than any other course of study that I’ve ever had.” Another said that it was in the process of going through the *Epistles of Paul* class (which was, in this fellow’s case, some two years after he’d been baptized)...in “going through the *Epistles of Paul* class”, he said, “is where I *really* got converted.” So the epistles of Paul, and the study of the epistles of Paul, has always been of *special* interest. And, of course, one reason why it’s interesting is because it answers a lot of difficult questions. Peter, for example, writing about the apostle Paul in his letter, said:

2 Peter 3

AKJV

¹⁵ And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given to him has written to you;

¹⁶ As also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction.

That comes from Second Peter 3, verses 15 and 16. It’s especially interesting to read Peter’s comment, and many people have commented that, “Well, he’s not really saying that Paul’s letters are hard to *understand*. What he’s saying is that Paul is *writing about* subjects that are hard to understand.” Do you follow me? So, the question really, though, doesn’t matter. The end result is that, oftentimes in reading Paul’s epistles, people sometimes understand them and sometimes they don’t; either because the subject is too hard or because Paul doesn’t explain it very well. I think there may be a more important reason for it than that. It’s something we’ll have to get into a little bit later.

Another reason why the epistles of Paul has been a popular course is because you are *literally* reading someone else’s mail. These are *real* letters, written by *real* people to *real* people, with *real* conflicts and *real* problems and *real* confusion and *real* difficulties that Paul is trying to solve. And letters are always the best history, because here a person is writing, not to posterity, but to his contemporaries about contemporary problems; and, as a result, letters have a tendency to be more honest. Or, if the person is being dishonest in the letter, you still get a feeling for what he’s trying to say. They are *real*; whereas oftentimes a historian later writing *about* history puts in his interpretation, explains it his way, takes you along this theme or in that direction or the other direction. But, in any case, they just don’t have the power of letters.

And then the fourth reason why I think the epistles of Paul are especially popular, as a class, is the man Paul himself. He’s an incredibly intense and complex man. The epistles of Paul are in a sense the record of *his own* conversion. And I think this is one of the reasons why so many people become more deeply

converted when they read through the epistles of Paul. For we are here dealing with a real man struggling with his *own* nature and his *own* problems—a man who does not try to cast himself in a better light than he really is, a man who confesses his weaknesses and his problems—but at the same time a man with an *incredible grasp* of the theology of Jesus, and an *incredible* capacity for expressing and explaining and developing that theology for his readers. He has easily been the most *influential* theologian in the history of the Christian church. No one, I know, will argue that.

In looking at the epistles of Paul, we must begin our study, not with one of Paul's letters, but with the Book of Acts. There are two major gaps in knowledge that contribute to misunderstanding Paul's epistles. First is ignorance of the Old Testament. Paul had studied at the feet of Gamaliel. He was an Old Testament scholar. (Of course, you couldn't very well be a *New* Testament scholar when there was no New Testament.) The Holy Scriptures (that is, the Old Testament as you and I would call it) are the foundation of Paul's work, the foundation of his letters. In the Book of Romans, for example, he quotes *directly* from the Old Testament no less than *56 times* in the few chapters of that book. The Old Testament, therefore, forms a dominant part of his writings. It is the complete backdrop of his education. It is, of course, the foundation of his religion; and everything Paul says is built upon that foundation. And when you don't know anything about it, as far too many Christians do not, you're bound to have some problems when you go through the epistles of Paul. Now, I can't rectify that problem overnight for my listener, but I can point out some things about it as we go through the epistles of Paul.

The other major gap in knowledge that contributes to misunderstanding Paul's epistles is the superficial grasp of the Book of Acts most people have. Actually, the reason for it is probably because Acts is such easy reading. There's really no difficult passage; there's very little that is difficult to explain. There's almost nothing that you can't at least understand as you read over it the first time. It just breathes across the top and it's all there. The problem is, because it *is* easy reading, a lot of people do not study it carefully; and in the process miss a lot of nuances of meaning, a lot of historical concepts, a lot of background information that are absolutely essential—not only to understand the epistles of Paul but to understand what in the world happened to the New Testament church in the first century, the second century, and the third. Without Acts, much of what has taken place in the church would be incomprehensible.

Now, the title of the book, *Acts of the Apostles*, is a little bit misleading. In the first place, it sounds like a general history of the early church. And if you were to ask many people, "Well, what's the Book of Acts all about?", most of them would probably tell you, "Well, it's just early church history. It's the history of what happened to the church right after the ascension of Jesus and as we began the growth of the church and it spread abroad from Jerusalem." You know, if someone had set down (say along about AD 65) to write a history of the church—from the ascension of Christ until that period of time—can you think of some things that you would like to know? Are there some questions you would like to ask? How would you organize such a history? How would you develop the concepts of what was going on in the church at that time?

Now, when you go back and look at the Book of Acts as a history of the early church, it is really a very inadequate document. There are *many* things that happened that are not explained. There are doubtless many things that happened that are not even *included*. We have a lot of things that, if we were to stop and pause as we make our way along through the first and second and third chapter of the Book of Acts, that we would like to say, "Well, what happened here, and what happened there." And, for example, how many little churches were there in Jerusalem in the weeks immediately following Pentecost? Surely all 3000 of those newly baptized people didn't meet together every week. What happened to those people? How many of them were still around a week later, and two weeks and three weeks later? Would you care to know that? And as the church developed and the problems of serving the widows in the church arose, and they ordained men to office to help in the church; would you like to know a little more specifically how that was done, and how they actually went about it, and how the church was structured, and did they have a hierarchy, and who was really in charge, and how'd they make it work?

There are *so many* questions that a *history* of the church from AD 31 to AD 65...It would be a bigger volume than the Bible, if you had the things that you *wanted* to know.

Well now, if it *wasn't*, then, a general history of the early church...(and there is, indeed, too much missing of things that we would like to know). If it isn't that, what is it? Well, is it the acts of the apostles, then—just sort of a general description of some of the things the apostles did—as the title implies? Well, the problem is that we are told *absolutely nothing* about the acts of most of the apostles. We hear a little bit about Peter, we hear something about James, and then we hear this Johnny-come-lately Paul; but of the majority of the apostles we hear absolutely nothing. What did they do? Where'd they go? Did they stay in Jerusalem? Did they go somewhere else? Did they preach to people? Did they separate up into twelve churches? There are *hundreds* of questions that any one of us could ask about this.

Okay, well if it wasn't that, then what was it? Well, if we stop and pause and say: Well okay, Luke wrote the Book of Acts with a definite purpose in mind. Well, that makes sense, doesn't it? In other words, when he sat down and began to write it he had a theme, he had an approach, he had a direction that he was going. As far as we know, the first Christians were all Jews or circumcised Gentile converts. There may, of course, have been a few exceptions here and there; but more or less this was the case; because all of the work had been done in Judea, and around Judea, and up in Galilee among Jews. And the preaching that was done was done in synagogues. And while a Gentile was doubtless present here and a Gentile present there, most of the Gentiles they met were circumcised proselytes of the Jewish religion. We also know that New Testament writers (as did Jesus himself) expressed that salvation is of the Jews. It is a phenomenon that takes place in and among the Jewish people. Jesus himself said, "I am not sent but to the house of Israel" [**Matthew 15:24**]. He was reluctant to even heal a woman up in the Syro-Pheonician area [**Mark 7, Matthew 15**].

In spite of Jesus' commission, even the apostles saw their mission solely in terms of *a mission to Israel*. Christianity was, unless something changed, destined to become just another Jewish sect. Oh, there were plenty of those already. And it may have been the *best* of the Jewish sects, but nevertheless it would have been Jewish. For the Jewish Christians saw the worship of the true God as a *national* religion. It was *their* national religion. The religions of all the other nations were the pagan religions, they were the false religions; and Gentiles were expected to go in the direction of false religion. It was the Jews who had the truth. The fact of the matter is there were many early Christians who did not believe that the gospel should even be *preached* to Gentiles, much less whether Gentiles could be converted or baptized without being circumcised.

The Book of Acts, then, is in a sense the record of the transition of Christianity from a Jewish sect to a universal religion. I saw an interesting article in a newspaper not long ago. A Jewish scholar (a rabbi, I believe) had written a book in which he accepted the resurrection of Christ, of Jesus. I have to make the correction from the word "Christ", because he did not accept Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. Now, I know many of you will be saying, "What? I mean, how can he accept the resurrection of Jesus and deny that he was the Messiah?" It was rather interesting; I had that reaction myself at first until I read the article and I saw immediately what the man was driving at. He did not deny that Jesus was sent by God. He did not deny necessarily that he was the *son* of God. He accepted the divine nature of Jesus' mission. But he believed that Jesus was come to be a light to the Gentiles and to take God's religion, which he had previously only given to the Jews...to take God's religion to the Gentiles; and that God raised him from the dead as a witness to the Gentiles, *not* as the Jewish Messiah. Interesting. The reason why he accepted the resurrection? He felt it was historically and intellectually *impossible* to deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the face of the phenomenon of Christianity. How could a group of discouraged, dispirited fishermen from Galilee launch the greatest religious evangelistic movement the world has ever known if Jesus had not been raised from the dead? Intellectually, he solved his problem. Of course, we understand that when that same Jesus returns he will indeed fulfill the prophecies that the Jews perceive to be the prophecies of the Jewish Messiah.

Now, since Paul was really the prime mover in the transition from a Jewish religion to a world religion—an international religion, a universal religion—it is only natural that the Book of Acts is focused on his ministry and the events leading up to his ministry. For truth to tell, as you read the Book of Acts, you find even in the early chapters only the barest information is given. It's just enough to give you a cohesive feeling for what was going on—that there was a continuity, that what happened to Paul grew out of, but was not necessarily dependent upon or brought into being by, the existing religion, the existing church in Jerusalem. And so we must...if we're going to understand Paul's epistles, we must adopt the perspective of Luke (and Luke, indeed, is universally accepted to be the writer of the Book of Acts), and we must examine this book with the view of trying to understand what was going on, what was the meaning of all of this, what was the *foundation* of the early Christian Church, and how was that transition made from a Jewish sect into a universal religion.

Now, as I've said, Luke is universally acknowledged to be the writer of the Book of Acts. The style is so much the same as his earlier letter that he wrote to Theophilus which you and I call the Gospel According to Luke. Luke was unquestionably a Gentile. He had knowledge of everything that took place from the very beginning, as far as Christ's gospel. He also, though, brought to his account the skills of a...a scientist, if you will—the organizational approach, the organized development of a history—and he approached it, not merely as an eyewitness (for the other three were eyewitnesses, they were apostles, they had this particular perspective). Luke, on the other hand, wrote not merely as an eyewitness, but as an eyewitness who had also collected the accounts of all sorts of eyewitnesses, and had taken in hand to sit down and write a treatise—an organized, developed, *historical* document—which describes the ministry of Jesus from *his* perspective. Then, later, he will write to the same gentlemen to whom the original document was addressed, a Greek. Luke, himself a Greek, writing *to* a Greek, penned what we call the Acts of the Apostles. He did this around 63 to 64 in Rome, during the period of time of Paul's first imprisonment. And so, in order to understand Paul's epistles, we'll now turn first of all to a study of the Book of Acts. We'll make our way carefully through the Book of Acts until we find ourselves at the point where the first of Paul's epistles was written; and then we'll pause and study that epistle. Now take your Bible and turn to the first chapter of Acts, verse one.

Acts 1

KJ2000

¹ The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

² Until the day in which he was taken up, after he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

³ To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God[.]

This is rather interesting, I think, because here is the resurrected Christ. He is a spirit being who manifests himself in physical form. We know that he was able to walk through a wall, for example—where all the doors in the room were closed and yet, suddenly, there he was in the room. We also know that men were able to touch him and feel his flesh, and that he was apparently able to sit down and eat a meal with them if he so chose. And for another 40 days, even when he'd been with them for 3 ½ years, he still stayed with them and taught them of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. This question of the Kingdom of God was a difficult one, I gather, for them to grasp; for after having taught it for 3 ½ years, and then having taught it for 40 days longer, it appears the disciples *still* did not really grasp what it meant. It is a testament, really, to the power of preconceived ideas—when you have an idea in your head and it is so firmly ingrained in you and has been from the time you were a little boy. It's not that easy to get that idea out of your head and to substitute for it something really quite different from what you thought was there.

Well, the apostles had, from the time they were little boys, had been taught certain concepts about the Messiah, the Kingdom of God, the establishment of that kingdom, of what Messiah was supposed to do. His death came as a total shock to them, but then when he was resurrected they thought, “Well, maybe

now we're going to go get swords and what have you, and go charging off to take the Kingdom of God." So he continued to teach them for 40 days the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, which indicates that... (Between the time of his resurrection and the day when the Holy Spirit was given there were 50 days—the 50 days of the Pentecost season.) He ascended into heaven some ten days prior to Pentecost and the giving of the Holy Spirit; which is in itself, I think, rather interesting.

Now, when we stop and think about this for a moment: Why do you suppose that Jesus, when he was with them for 40 days, and he was caught up into a cloud out of their sight (as we will momentarily read)... why didn't he send the Holy Spirit to them the *very same day*? He could have. Why not the next day? Or perhaps the day after that? Why not maybe on the next intervening Sabbath? Why wait *10 more days*, and then on the Day of Pentecost—a day rich in meaning, *highly* significant to Jews all over the world—give them the Holy Spirit on that particular day? Now, you may say, "Why is that a big question?" Well, it's a big question because most of the professing Christian world, it seems today, does not believe that we should keep the holy days. Oh, to be sure, probably half or better (or more than half) of the existing Christian world *does* keep Pentecost. That may come as a surprise to some Baptists and other Protestants; but if you are acquainted with Roman Catholics and Church of England people you may realize that they observe a thing called Whitsunday (in England) which happens to be Pentecost Sunday—observe it regularly, observe it every year. The Catholic church has observed it for centuries.

Now, it's only logical, of course: Why in the world would the early church *not* observe Pentecost? After all, it was *the day* when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church. But think about this for a moment: If it had been Jesus' intent to *do away* with the holy days, why on earth would he so reinforce Pentecost by giving the Holy Spirit on that day? Because he waited *ten days* after his ascension to do this. It had to be significant. It could not have been an accident; it was purposive, and it profoundly reinforced Pentecost. Now, you'll find Paul keeping Pentecost; you'll find Luke making references to it later in this very document. And some people have said, "Well, I know Paul said that he was hastening to be at Jerusalem by Pentecost, but the only reason he was doing that was because there would be so many Jews there, and it would be a beautiful opportunity to preach the gospel to them." Amazing. With most of the professing Christian world keeping Pentecost century after century after century after this period of time, why on earth do we need to argue that Paul did *not* keep Pentecost? I don't know. I have no idea why we have to, unless it is because we want to get rid of the *other* holy days. Because when you find Jesus being crucified on Passover, and called "our Passover", and reinforcing the Passover, the meaning of the Passover and everything connected with the Passover; and then you find him giving the Holy Spirit on Pentecost; wouldn't you think that strange that he would have done this if it were his intention to *abolish* the holy days?

Well, someone might say, "Yes, but he was *fulfilling* the meaning of these days. And not one jot or one tittle was to pass from the Law until everything was fulfilled [Matthew 5:18]; and that, having been fulfilled, they can be done away with." The curious thing about that is that the church continued to observe those things that had been fulfilled. Those are recorded in your New Testament and in history. For the *longest* period of time, the church continued to observe "Passover Sunday". And, in fact, Latin churches to this day observe Passover Sunday. Did you know that? Because, you see, Easter in the Latin languages is *Pasca*, which is derived directly from the Greek *Pascha* [πάσχα, Strong's G3957], which is derived directly from the Hebrew word for Passover [*Pesach*, פֶּסַח, Strong's H6453]. Yes, that's right. "Easter" is a Germanic word. It's not a Latin word. It's not a Greek word. It has no origins anywhere in the Bible. It's a German word, and it actually is derived (apparently anciently) from the old Astarte—one of the ancient pagan goddesses. No connection with the Christian religion, at all. And so, consequently, a few generations later, when a big controversy arose in the church over whether or not they should observe Passover on Sunday in connection with the vernal equinox, or whether they should observe Passover on the 14th day of the first month with the Jews, it split the church. We have a pope in Rome excommunicating Eastern Christians for observing Passover with the Jews.

Now, it is curious beyond belief to me that people will want to argue that, but argue it they do. The funny thing about it is that Christians continued to *keep* the holy days which were fulfilled, and did *not*

keep those that had not yet been fulfilled: Trumpets and Tabernacles. (At least they offer no suggestion of how they were.) And so, Jesus taught his disciples for 40 days. Verse 4, now, of Acts 1:

Acts 1

KJ2000

⁴ And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, you have heard of me.

⁵ For John truly baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

⁶ When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

And, as I said, it is astonishing that they would ask that question. After having been taught for 3 ½ years, then having been taught for 40 days the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, and still asking *this* question.

Acts 1

KJ2000

⁷ And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in his own power.

And that's simple enough. Anyone ought to be able to understand that: It's not for you to know the time. He said,

Acts 1

KJ2000

⁸ But you shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, [...]

Now that's interesting. For the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. The Samaritans were a heathen race to them. They even had, in some ways it seems, a more vehement dislike of the Samaritans than they did of other Gentiles at-large. And that is a most curious phenomenon.

Interestingly enough, the Samaritans were more like the Jews in their religious observances than the worshipers of Dagon, or Ashtaroath, or Moloch, or other pagan gods, or the gods of the Romans. Because the Samaritans, you see, were the people who were brought back into the region of Samaria by the king of Assyria after the original Israelites had all been carried captive. These people were brought in here; they were a people of mixed blood. They brought back, then, with them priests in order to teach them the religion of God [**2 Kings 17**]. They had a Pentateuch, their own version we call the Samaritan Pentateuch, of all of the first five books of the Old Testament. They observed the Passover. They went up on the mountain up in their part of the country and sacrificed animals up there—for generations, for hundreds of years. In fact, they were still doing it in this century. Funny, isn't it, that oftentimes we are more hateful and more distrustful of people who are more like us, or closer to us. Perhaps it's because we perceive them as posing more of a threat to us than people who are more distant, I don't know. But the Jews had this terrible antipathy toward the Samaritans. So Jesus went on to say,

Acts 1

AKJV

⁸ [...] you shall be witnesses to me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, [...]

Which was shocking enough. And then he went on to say,

Acts 1

AKJV

⁸ [...] and to the uttermost part of the earth.

Now, that's clear enough. The disciples understood that they were sent into the whole world. Jesus' commission given to them:

Matthew 28

NKJV

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations[....]

And the word for "nations" is the word for Gentile [*ethnos*, ἔθνος, Strong's G1484]. So it's hard to understand how they could have missed this *extremely* important part of their commission. I don't even know that they did miss it, but it surely took them a *long* time to get around to implementing it. Verse 9:

Acts 1

AKJV

⁹ And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

What an experience that must have been. They couldn't have been *totally* unprepared for it; he must have explained what was going to happen. But I don't know of anything that could prepare you for standing and watching a person rise up into the air, right in front of your eyes, and disappear into a cloud above.

Acts 1

AKJV

¹⁰ And while they looked steadfastly [...]

I imagine they were steadfast. They were probably rooted to the ground. They were probably unable to move.

Acts 1

AKJV

¹⁰ And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

¹¹ Which also said, You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven.

Now, that also is a very clear statement. It is a clear statement that Jesus Christ *will return*, that he will come back just in the same manner as they saw him leave: Whereas as he left his feet lifted off the Mount of Olives and he disappeared into a cloud, he will come with clouds and appear out of clouds and descend and put his feet back on the Mount of Olives in the same place he left. Startling, isn't it, to realize that many Christians do not believe that Jesus Christ will literally return to this earth?

Acts 1

AKJV

¹² Then returned they to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey [*Not very far.*].

¹³ And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where stayed both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

That's a lot of people living in that upper room. It must have been of fairly good size.

Acts 1

KJ2000

¹⁴ These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

¹⁵ And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about a hundred and twenty,)

¹⁶ Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David spoke before concerning Judas, who was guide to them that took Jesus.

¹⁷ For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

¹⁸ Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his insides gushed out.

¹⁹ And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; since that field is called in their proper tongue, Akeldama, that is to say, The field of blood.

²⁰ For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his office let another take.

²¹ Therefore of these men who have accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

²² Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

Now, this is a very important scripture from a *lot* of different perspectives. In the first place, it seems very evident that the number of apostles was supposed to be fixed at 12, not 13 and not 11—that there were to be 12 individuals who were to be responsible for being (very specifically) “witness[es...] of his resurrection”. Now, that is, I think, an important concept from a lot of different perspectives. Not that, perhaps, another person might not be an apostle at another time; but the original 12 apostles (and there were to be 12, for Jesus had actually said of them that they would be...

Matthew 19

AKJV

²⁸ [...] sit[ting] on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

So that 12 is a very important, very significant, very limited number. And since Judas was *totally disqualified*, one person (not two) had to be selected to take his place. There were, indeed, two people apparently fully qualified to become that twelfth apostle, but only one of the two was named. It says in verse 23:

Acts 1

AKJV

²³ And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

²⁴ And they prayed, and said, You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which of these two you have chosen,

²⁵ That he may take part in this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

²⁶ And they cast their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Now, we're going to have an interesting question that will arise in time to come: How many more apostles were there? How many more apostles *could* there be? Well in the sense—in the meaning—of these 12 apostles, there could never be but 12. In the sense of the *authority* that was granted to these 12 apostles, there could never be but 12. In the sense of all the commissions that were given to them—including binding and loosing, including the making of ministerial decisions, including the retention of sins—there could never be but 12. And particularly in the sense of the original 12 witnesses of Jesus' resurrection, there were to be 12 and *only* 12. How, then, could Paul later claim to be an apostle? Well, he was going to be a witness of Jesus' resurrection, because he was going to spend time with the resurrected Christ. He was actually going to be himself taught by him, converted by him, spoken to by Jesus, and to see the Lord Jesus Christ himself. This seems to be a *fundamental* requirement of an apostle: that he has *seen* the resurrected Jesus. No one else can properly or accurately claim that title. Verse 26:

Acts 1

KJV

²⁶ And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Now for the second chapter of Acts, verse one:

Acts 2

AKJV

¹ And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Frankly, I think very few Biblical expositors would argue that they weren't there to keep the Feast of Pentecost; the wording is all wrong. It doesn't say, "Now, it *happened* to be the Feast of Pentecost and they all *happened* to be in the same place." The wording is, "when the day of Pentecost was *fully come*". The impression is that the coming of this day had some importance. And they were *all*...not part of them or even most of them, but *all* of them were together and they were all together with one accord. Does that mean they were not together with one accord the previous day, or the day before, or the day before that? Well, of course, they were in agreement. They were there with one purpose that day, though, and the purpose was to keep the Feast of Pentecost. As I explained earlier, with most of professing Christianity keeping Pentecost throughout most of their history, it is a little dumb to argue that the early church didn't keep it. After all, these people who are here in this upper room on this day had kept Pentecost *every year* of their lives until this day. Why on earth would they not be observing it *this time*? Where is the instruction in any of Jesus' teachings to the contrary? Well, of course it isn't there. We know Jesus kept the holy days. We know that he went down to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. We know he went to keep the Passover according to the customs; and naturally, obviously, *must* have kept Pentecost—one of the three *big* pilgrimage festivals in Israel [**Exodus 23, 34; Deuteronomy 16**]. It seems plain enough. It hardly seems worth the argument; yet for some reason some people keep wanting to find some other explanation for why these people were here on this day. But as I pointed out, it would be a terrible oversight for Jesus to give the Holy Spirit on that day when it was his intent to *abolish* that day. Rather he *reinforced* it by giving the Spirit on this day. But now on in verse two:

Acts 2

AKJV

² And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

Now follows an event *unparalleled* in history. The modern “tongues” movements or “charismatic” movements can boast nothing even in the same ballpark as this particular event. For this one had an outward physical manifestation that has never been repeated: the sound of a rushing mighty wind filling the entire house where everyone was and the appearance—actually a visual manifestation—of distributed tongues of fire in the room. That must have made literally every hair on their body stand straight up when they saw it.

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⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues [languages], as the Spirit gave them utterance.

I think it’s important for us, as we come to this verse, to translate the word “tongues” as “languages”. Why? Well, there’s a mystique somehow that’s gotten built up around the word “tongues”, and the gift of tongues, and the manifestation of tongues; and we need to understand that the Greek word for “tongue” [*glóssa*, γλῶσσα, Strong’s G1100]—which has to do with that organ that sits there in your mouth and tastes things and you stick out at people if you are mad at them—this organ of ours in our language was the same word that they used for “language”. In other words, one spoke in the Greek tongue, the Latin tongue, the tongue of Mesopotamia, the tongue of Egypt, and so forth. These were languages. And so consequently, that’s what the word means as he uses it in this context. It can mean a tongue like is in one’s mouth; it can mean the tongue of an inlet of a sea; but used in context this way, with speech, it has to do with languages. So...

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³ [...] there appeared unto them separated tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other [languages], as the Spirit gave them utterance.

⁵ And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

⁶ Now when this was sounded abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because every man heard them speak in his own language.

Interestingly enough, the King James version even translates it “language” in this point. It doesn’t use the word “tongue”; every man who was present heard these men speaking in *his own* language. Now, that’s a very important consideration; because most of the time when you go to a charismatic church, should someone begin to speak in tongues, the chances are there will be no one in that room who has the faintest idea what the person is saying. There won’t be a person there from Germany who will hear him and understand him in German. There will not even be a person likely there who can understand him in Swahili or Arabic or even Hebrew. These tongues that many people who are charismatics claim to use are supposedly the tongues of Angels, I suppose, or a prayer language, or something that they use to speak with God—for only God understands it. But that’s not what’s going on here. What’s going on here is that these people spoke in languages that men who were listening to them understood as *their own* language.

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⁷ And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

⁸ And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

Interesting. These were Jews. They had been born in other places around the world such as Phrygia or Pamphylia or Egypt or Libya; some of them even perhaps in Rome or elsewhere. And they spoke the language of the country in which they were born. And they sat there and they heard these men and they said, “Wait a minute, wait a minute, this is impossible! These men are Galileans. By the cut of their clothes and by the look of them...and we know who they are, they basically are Galilean *fisherman*. They’re not educated. They’re not learned men. This is amazing what’s going on here. How do we hear every man in our own tongue wherein we were born?”

Now, many people have discussed this phenomenon and wondered whether or not the miracle was in the speech or in the hearing; and there’s really no way for us at this late juncture to really know whether the men stood up there, for example, and spoke their own language; but you, the listener, sitting out there and listening to them didn’t hear that. What you heard was *your* language. It’s an interesting theory, but it has to remain a theory in the absence of anything to the contrary. The main point is that communication was going on here between human beings. That is the important thing to understand about what happened in the second chapter of Acts, and it’s important for more reasons than merely some attempts to set aside the modern charismatic movement. That’s another subject entirely. What is happening here with the gift of tongues is that Peter and James and John and the others who were present were being given the gift of communication to people of other languages and other nations. Notice what it says:

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⁸ [...] we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

⁹ Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

¹⁰ Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, [...]

Notice we’re not just dealing about Libya, were talking about the parts around Cyrene in Libya—a very specific, *local* dialect. Isn’t that fascinating?

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¹⁰ [...] and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

Both were hearing these things. By “proselytes”, it just simply meant Gentiles who had gone through the right of circumcision and had joined themselves to the synagogue. Cretans were there—people who spoke the language of Crete. People who spoke Arabic were there—Arabians.

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¹¹ Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

Marvelous. How clear, how plain. These men were standing there communicating in Arabic, in Latin, in Greek, in the dialect of Libya around about a certain narrow area. They were speaking in all these dialects miraculously, and they were communicating a specific message to their listeners. Their listeners not only understood the language, they understood what they were talking about. And they can *tell us* what they were talking about. They were talking about “the wonderful works of God”. Now, does that not mean that the listeners *understood* the words? Why, certainly; that’s the whole point of this passage. And whenever you understand Luke’s purpose in writing this book, he is trying to express to a generation much later than the ones that we’re reading of right here. In fact, Luke was writing some 30-odd years later than this particular time. He is trying to express to them the transition, the effort that God made; and, perhaps without realizing himself, really underlining for us in this last generation how

difficult it was for God to reach the minds of these Jews with the necessity of laying aside their Jewishness and going to the world. Not only did Jesus tell them that they were to be witnesses to him in Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world: “Alright, you’re witnesses. Now here is the gift of languages *to enable you to go.*” Now, I suppose someone could have had an excuse. Someone could have said, “Well, I know that Jesus said we’re supposed to go down into Egypt, but I don’t speak Egyptian.” “I’d *like* to go over into Libya, and I’d *like* to take the message there, but I don’t speak Libyan.” “It would be wonderful to go to Rome, but my Greek is *awful.*” All those excuses dissolved into so much dust on the ground after this day. And the *whole point* of what was done here was to lay upon their minds and their consciousness (along with the gifts to do the job) the necessity of going not to Judea, not merely to Samaria, but to the uttermost parts of the world. What do you have to do to convince people?

Now, this event was different in every way from the modern manifestation of tongues and speaking in tongues in the charismatic movement. How? Overt, physical manifestations of a rushing mighty wind; the visual manifestation of distributed tongues of fire; and the gift of known languages in abundance—for the purpose of communication with other people. I’m still waiting... I’ve heard stories that there are people who have been given the gift of French, or the gift of some African dialect; but somehow those things keep escaping documentation. Still waiting for God to give someone the gift, to make it possible for him to communicate, in a language that he has never learned. Well, they heard it all. Verse 12:

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¹² And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What means this?

Then, of course, there were some of those who stood by and...

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¹³ Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

“What do you expect, they’ve been drinking.”

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¹⁴ But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said to them, You men of Judaea, and all you that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known to you, and listen to my words:

¹⁵ For these are not drunken, as you suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

¹⁶ But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel[.]

Thus Peter introduces what, I guess, will be termed the first sermon by a Christian apostle. We’ll go into this on the next tape—to try to explain in a little more detail this sermon, the elements of it, why they are important, and what they have to do with the Christian gospel. I think you’ll find it surprising.