

# GOD *REVEALED*



**Part 7**  
**The Mission of Jesus**

God Revealed, Session 7  
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Written by George Stagg. Artwork by Wil Springer.

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All Bible references and quotations, unless noted, are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

# God Revealed: An Overview

## God Revealed?

Who is God? How can we know God? If we believe we have come to know God, how do we know we have found what is truly God? How can we be sure that we simply didn't have some personal emotional experience?

All civilizations around the world have possessed an awareness of the existence of God. These civilizations have expressed their awareness through varieties of ritual, prayer, and service. Some civilizations have produced written texts containing conclusions about what they believe God to be. Religious expressions are evidence of a common awareness of God's existence. However, which expressions are true? Even if we only take the three major world religions, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and not the thousands of other religions, we are still stuck with the problem of reconciling these three religions and their expressions. All three of these faiths believe in God's existence and that God can be known. They do not agree on foundational points about God's character, what God is doing, and what God desires of people. While God may be known, it doesn't seem that knowing God is simple and straightforward.

How can we know that proposed knowledge of God is true? How could we know this knowledge is truly of God? It seems to me that we should ask a few questions of any religion proposing to possess knowledge of God.

1. For what purpose have humans been created?
2. Why are there evil and suffering in the world that ruin and interrupt our happiness, potential, and destiny?
3. Where did evil come from?
4. Can people overcome evil and find their purpose? Can we find happiness?
5. How can we know that the answers to these questions are true?

# Why Read the Bible?

For thousands of years, the Bible has provided cultures around the world with substantive and convincing answers to these persistent questions. When read as intended, readers find a strong connection with its message to their experience. However, the Bible's misuse has been many peoples' negative experience, including...

- the support of racism and chauvenism
- its use as a science textbook
- the support of genocide
- justifying homophobia
- the elevation of religious authorities above legal authority
- twisting its message for fraud and personal gain
- justifying paying women less for the same work as men
- the support of unjust wars, and many other evils

This series seeks to correct much misuse by clearly unfolding the Bible's primary message. We're going to let the text speak for itself and let the text challenge us with its conclusions. To do this, accurate interpretation is necessary. Contrary to common assumptions, accurate interpretation is not only necessary, it is quite possible. It simply requires a set of skills no longer taught in most school experiences. This series will help us learn these skills.

*God Revealed* will unfold the message of the Bible according to the original authors' intents as expressed in the text. To do this, we will use the authors' literary devices and structures that guide us to their intents. Using this approach, we will see how the Bible's books, characters, and events contribute to that overarching message. In this way, we will come to an accurate understanding of the Bible. As a result, we will know the Bible's contributions to the answers above and let it, rather than someone's misguided agenda, challenge us to know God.

# The Mission of Jesus

While Jesus was on earth, he began preparing his disciples for the work they would do upon his resurrection and ascension into the heavens. The disciples were never really clear as to what it would be. For that matter, the disciples were never really clear on the fact that Jesus would die, be raised from the dead, and then ascend again to God the Father. But Jesus knew what he was doing and spent a good deal of his time preparing them for the next stage of his plan. As we saw in the last session, Jesus sent them out to preach to the towns and villages in Israel. Jesus commanded them to proclaim the coming kingdom of God. In his last days with his disciples before his death, Jesus instructed them in disciplines they would need to carry out the work he called them to do. However, he was not clear as to what that work would be. As we will see, through his followers, Jesus will continue to fulfill the promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David that God gave centuries earlier.

## Study the Scriptures

### **The Unfolding of God's Plan in Christ**

- Matthew 16:13-20
- Matthew 28:16-20
- Luke 24:44-49
- Acts 1:1-11, 6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 16:5, 19:20, 28:31

### **The Building of the Church**

- Acts 2:42-47
- Acts 13:1-14:28
- Acts 20:17-38

### **Think Through the Questions:**

1. How does Christ's work to "build His church" progress through the end of Jesus' time on earth and into the book of Acts?
2. How would you describe the role of the Holy Spirit?
3. What does the author of Acts emphasize as the book unfolds?
4. How would you describe the local churches in the readings?



## Commentary

Upon the apostle Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God, Jesus told his disciples that he was going to build his church. The foundations of the church would be Peter's (and the other apostles') proclamation of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God. But what does *church* mean? The term *church* literally means an assembled gathering of people. The statement simply means that Jesus was going to build a community of people around the proclamation that Jesus was the Promised Child and Messiah. If we remember God's promise to David, we can recall that God told David that his descendant would build God a house, a family (2 Samuel 7:13). This assembly of people, God's family, would grow and expand and overrun Hades (the place of death). This family of God would be a force in the battle against the serpent and his evil.

Just before his ascension, Jesus commended his apostles to a specific work. The gospels of Luke and Matthew emphasize different aspects of Jesus' final words. Matthew emphasizes Jesus' command to make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them, and instructing them to observe Jesus' teachings. The rite of baptism was actually a renaming ceremony. Jesus' apostles were commanded to baptize disciples into the names of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Just as a bride changes her last name to her husband's last name in marriage and forms a new family in the husband's name, in baptism disciples of Jesus take on the names of each member of the Triune God and become a member of God's family. They then carry out Jesus' commands. Luke emphasizes Jesus' instruction to the apostles to be witnesses of Jesus' death and resurrection, which proved he was the Messiah of Israel and the future King of all the nations. Jesus commands them to wait in Jerusalem until they have received power from God to accomplish this work. From both Matthew and Luke, we can simply describe the work of the apostles as proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations in the power of God, baptizing those who believe in that gospel into the family of God, and instructing them to follow Jesus.

The book of Acts is the second book in a two-volume collection by Luke. The Gospel of Luke is the first book in the collection. The conclusion of the Gospel of Luke and the beginning of Acts serve as textual connectors of the two books. In the introduction to Acts, Luke

describes his first book as dealing with “all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.” Upon Jesus ascension, the apostles asked Jesus if he was going to set up his kingdom at that time. Telling them that it was not for them to know the timing of the grand works of God, Jesus then tells them what they are going to be doing. Luke then summarizes the commands Jesus gave the apostles, which he had already recorded at the end of his gospel. Jesus instructed them that they would be Spirit-empowered witnesses of him in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, the city in which Jesus was killed and resurrected, and the city in which Jesus would eventually establish as the capital of his eternal kingdom. Judea and Samaria were the regions around Jerusalem. In summary, the book of Acts is the record of the things Jesus *continued to do and teach* through the power of the Holy Spirit working through the apostles. The apostles were to make disciples of the nations by being witnesses of Jesus, baptizing those who believed into the family of God, and instructing those disciples to follow Jesus.

Acts unfolds in a rather systematic and simple way. Authors of biblical narratives, like Acts, often use repeated phrases to indicate the structure of the text. We saw this in the book of Genesis with the repeated phrase, *these are the generations of*. This intentional structure serves as a major indicator of the author’s intent for the book. Luke uses repeated phrases in five summary statements that divide the book into six parts. These repeated phrases are as follows:

- Acts 6:7 *And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.*
- Acts 9:31 *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.*
- Acts 12:24 *But the word of God increased and multiplied.*
- Acts 16:5 *So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.*
- Acts 19:20 *So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.*

These five statements are also organized geographically, beginning with Jerusalem and going to the nations.

- Acts 6:7     The expansion of the gospel and church to Jerusalem
- Acts 9:31    The expansion of the gospel and church to Judea and Samaria
- Acts 12:24   The expansion of the gospel and church to Antioch
- Acts 16:5     The expansion of the gospel and church to Asia Minor
- Acts 19:20   The expansion of the gospel and church to the Aegean Area
- Acts 28:31   The expansion of the gospel and church to Rome, the capital and hub of the world

There are three things emphasized by Luke in this structure. First, Luke is concerned with the increase in the *word of God/Lord*. The *word of God/Lord* is the gospel message of Jesus Christ. It is the content of the apostles testimony. Second, Luke is concerned with the *building up/strengthening of the church/churches*. The churches were local gatherings of God's family into which the believers were baptized. Third, the *number of disciples multiplied*. These things then are the primary subjects of the book of Acts. When we take Jesus' initial statements in regards to the Holy Spirit and see throughout the book of Acts the Holy Spirit's role in carrying out the work of Jesus Christ, we can summarize the book of Acts as follows:

*Acts is the record of the Holy Spirit's work in the apostles to expand the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, make disciples, and establish local churches from Jerusalem to the nations.*

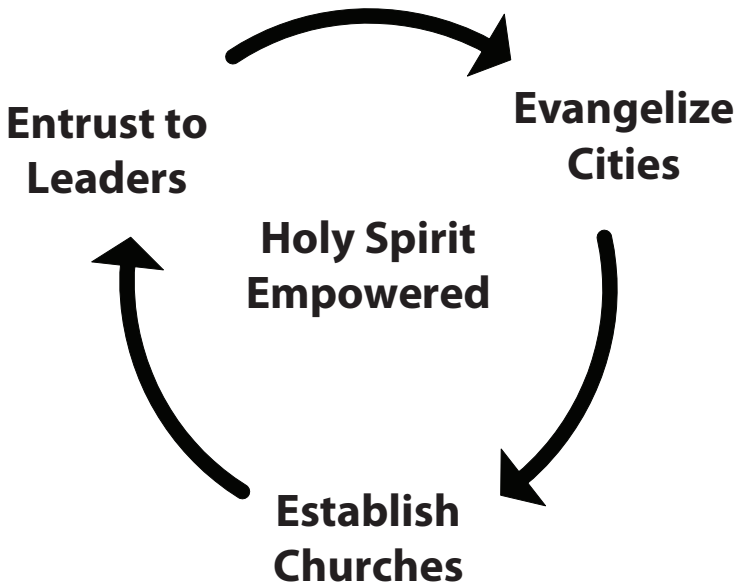
At the beginning of his Gospel, Luke explains that his record of the things fulfilled by Jesus consisted of those things "taught" in the churches (Luke 1:4). The term "taught" in the original language is *katēchéō*, which means to instruct and is the origin of our word *catechism*. There is an implication of ordered instruction in Luke's writings. To know what this instruction is, we must look at the author's intended message, which we have determined for Acts. Therefore, the primary teaching we are to get from Acts is as follows:

The mission of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit is the expansion of His gospel to the nations, making disciples of believers, and establishing those believers in an ever-expanding global network of local churches.

Luke also gives us a sense of what these local churches were like as they expanded from Jerusalem to the nations. Luke portrays the church in Jerusalem as a very tight-knit community acting as a real family would—sacrificing what they had for the good of the whole family of God. The church in Jerusalem was a joyful and grateful community that worshipped, prayed, and ate together. The power of this generous family dynamic within the church resulted in many additional people believing in the gospel and being added to the church. Luke records that the source of this dynamic life was the church's devotion to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to breaking bread together (which was a reference to the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

The Holy Spirit directs Paul and Barnabas to take the gospel from Antioch into Asia Minor, which is the first effort to expand the gospel beyond the immediate area around Judea. In Acts 13-14, we see Paul and Barnabas move into cities, preach the gospel, and gather those who believed into churches. If we are to think that these churches were to grow up to be like the church in Jerusalem, which I believe is the intent, then these churches would be growing and expanding in their regions as well, causing many people to believe in Jesus and become a part of God's family. At the end of the first trip, they circled back to the cities they had visited and appointed elders in each of the churches (Acts 14:23).

In a story recorded in Acts 20, we get a picture of the role of these elders. Paul takes an opportunity during his travels to gather the elders from Ephesus for a final farewell meeting with them. In this meeting, Paul gives them very specific instructions regarding their work as elders. They were to do the following things: 1) be alert and pay close attention to themselves and church in order to properly care for the church, 2) protect the church from people, including themselves, that would divide the church and pull people away from the church, and 3) protect the church from false teaching that would also draw people away from Christ and the church. As we can see, after Paul started the churches, he appointed elders to shepherd the churches so he could move on and start more churches. The churches he started would then grow and influence their surroundings. They would also support Paul's ongoing work of taking the gospel to new cities and regions. This pattern continues throughout the book of Acts and can be simply described in the following chart:



This chart then simply describes the mission of Jesus Christ. Under the power and direction of the Holy Spirit and in constant expansion to the nations, the apostles proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ and established believers into local churches that would continue to expand the gospel in their region and support the expanding work of the apostles.

How does this fit into the promises God gave to Abraham and David? We see that the Promised Child, Jesus, is not only bringing blessing to Jerusalem, but to the nations. What is the blessing? The blessing is the opportunity to be in God's family and be delivered from the penalty of sin, which is death. The blessing is the opportunity to be a citizen in God's eternal kingdom, ruled by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has defeated death and whose kingdom is expanding throughout the world through the proclamation of the gospel and the establishing of churches through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. This Jesus will culminate his work upon his return and establish His kingdom forever after the message of his gospel is proclaimed to every nation.

## Read and Reflect on Key Quotes:

The following quote is from Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart in their book *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. This book, which is in its third printing and has sold over 1 million copies, is a tremendously helpful book for all readers of the Bible. In a plain and straightforward manner, Fee and Stuart help readers of the Bible interpret and apply the various types of literature the Bible uses to communicate its message. I highly recommend this book.

### **Luke's Purpose**

We must be careful that we do not move too glibly from this overview of what Luke did to an easy or dogmatic expression of what his inspired purpose in all of this was. But a few observations are in order, partly based also on what Luke did not do.

1. The key to understanding Acts seems to be in Luke's interest in this movement of the gospel, orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, from its Jerusalem-based, Judaism-oriented beginnings to its becoming a worldwide, Gentile-predominant phenomenon. On the basis of structure and content alone, any statement of purpose that does not include the Gentile mission and the Holy Spirit's role in that mission will surely have missed the point of the book.

2. This interest in "movement" is further substantiated by what Luke does not tell us. First, he has no interest in the "lives," that is, biographies, of the apostles. James (the son of Zebedee) is the only one whose end we know (12:2). Once the movement to the Gentiles gets underway, Peter drops from sight except in chapter 15, where he certifies the Gentile mission. Apart from John, the other apostles are not even mentioned, and Luke's interest in Paul is almost completely in terms of the Gentile mission.

Second, he has little or no interest in church organization or polity. The Seven in chapter 6 are not called deacons, and in any case they soon leave Jerusalem. Luke never tells us why or how it happened that the church in Jerusalem passed from the leadership of Peter and the apostles to James, the brother of Jesus (12: 17; 15:13; 21:18); nor does he ever explain how any local church was organized in terms of polity or leadership, except to say that elders were appointed (14:23).

Third, there is no word about other geographical expansion except in the one direct line from Jerusalem to Rome. There is no mention of Crete (Titus 1:5), Illyricum (Rom 15:19-modern Croatia and

Yugoslavia), or Pontus, Cappadocia, and Bithynia (1 Pet 1:1), not to mention the church's expansion eastward toward Mesopotamia or southward toward Egypt.

All of this together says that church history per se was simply not Luke's reason for writing.

3. Luke's interest also does not seem to be in standardizing things, bringing everything into uniformity. When he records individual conversions there are usually two elements included: gift of the Spirit and water baptism. But these can be in reverse order, with or without the laying on of hands, with or without the mention of tongues, and scarcely ever with a specific mention of repentance, even after what Peter says in 2:38-39. Similarly, Luke neither says nor implies that the Gentile churches experienced a communal life similar to that in Jerusalem in 2:42-47 and 4:32-35. Such diversity probably means that no specific example is being set forth as the model Christian experience or church life.

But is this to say that Luke is not trying to tell us something by these various specific narratives? Not necessarily. The real question is, What was he trying to tell his first readers?

4. Nonetheless, we believe that much of Acts is intended by Luke to serve as a model. But the model is not so much in the specifics as in the overall picture. By the very way God has moved him to structure and narrate this history it seems probable that we are to view this triumphant, joyful, forward-moving expansion of the gospel into the Gentile world, empowered by the Holy Spirit and resulting in changed lives and local communities, as God's intent for the continuing church. And precisely because this is God's intent for the church, nothing can hinder it, neither Sanhedrin nor synagogue, dissension nor narrow-mindedness, prison nor plot. Luke, therefore, probably intended that the ongoing church should be "like them," but in the larger sense, not by modeling itself on any specific example.<sup>1</sup>

# Think Through the Issues

We live in a time where everyone is an activist with a personal mission to change the world. Some want to eliminate homelessness and poverty. Others want to save the earth from further environmental harm which threatens everyone on the planet. Others believe that the way to human flourishing is through politics and government and hope to establish laws and structures to create an ideal state. Yet others believe that education is the solution to all of our troubles. The list could go on and on in terms of what we as humans can do in order to make the world a better place. Many, if not most, of these ambitions and desires are well-intended and in and of themselves are great ideas and great works that could bring much good to the world. However, if Jesus is the Promised King who is working to build his church and establish his kingdom in order to establish peace and destroy evil, what should all people be doing?

## **Issue: Other Missions and Agendas**

### **Think Through the Issue Before Discussion:**

1. What do you think every person should do to be on mission with Jesus?
2. From the passages described above, what should local church involvement be like? If you have been involved in a church, does this describe your experience?
3. To what extent do you believe other causes are important and necessary?
4. How do you think other causes can integrate with what Jesus is doing?
5. When can other causes become distractions to what Jesus is doing?

### **Respond to the Questions Below:**

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# Dinner Table Discussion Guide

## Meal 1: What is Church?

Read Matthew 16:13-20

1. What do you think Jesus meant by “church?”
2. How is this different from how people think of “church” today?

## Meal 2: Making Disciples

Read Matthew 28:16-20

1. What did Jesus tell his followers to do?
2. What are disciples?
3. How do you think disciples and churches fit together?

## Meal 3: The Holy Spirit

Read Acts 1:1-11

1. What did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would do?
2. Why do you think the disciples needed the Holy Spirit to do the work Jesus gave them to do?
3. What do you think the Holy Spirit is still doing?

## Meal 4: Life in the Church

Read Acts 2:42-47

1. Describe what life was like in the Jerusalem church?
2. Why were the people of this church so joyous, thankful, and generous?
3. What things do you see in your church that are like Jerusalem?
4. What things do you think your church could improve in?

# Sermon Notes