

BIB204 NT2 Early Church

Unit 1

Introduction and Course Overview

Presented by the



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Hello. This is NT2, The Early Church. In this course, we will be looking at the history of the early church and the correlation of the New Testament documents with the early church, as far as we can push it because some of the letters or documents of the early church cannot be located chronologically or historically within the Book of Acts. That's the general overview of what we will be doing. We will get more detailed as the course unfolds. The first thing I want to talk about is the correlation of the prologue of Acts 1 with the prologue of the Gospel of Luke. So I'm going to have you, if you would, open your Bibles to Acts 1 and hold your place there and please open up to Luke 1. And I'm going to read from Luke 1 first.

So in the prologue of Luke 1, we read, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." So he gives a rationale as to why he's going to write the Gospel that bears his name. But as I mentioned in earlier segments, Luke doesn't just write the Gospel of Luke. He also writes Acts. So he writes a two-volume work. We know this primarily from the content of the prologues in both books. We just read the one in Luke 1.

Now, if you would please turn to Acts 1, you read sort of a similar prologue in terms of it being an introduction to the document. It says in Acts 1:1, "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt 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. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'"

So you have Luke 1:1-4 and you have Acts 1:1-5. And there is actually another connecting text to both of these, and that can be found in Luke 24. So please turn with me there. You can leave Luke 1 alone. And so when we read Luke 24, at the very end, we see in verse 45... Well, I'll start with verse 44 just for completeness. It says, "Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.'" So if you look at verse 49 there in Luke 24, you can link that. You can leave that now. 24:49, you can actually link that to verse 4 of Acts 1. "And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father." And that's where the language coincides. And so you have a link there. You have prologues of both books and you've got Luke 24:44-49 and following. So that is kind of the link between Luke and Acts.

Now, we're dealing with the early church. This is the origin story, if you will, of the early church. It starts off with Jesus instructing the apostles for 40 days after his resurrection. We do see that in verse 3 of Acts 1, "He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during

forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.” The apostles that he had chosen, at this point, they number 11 because Judas is no longer one of their number. Judas betrayed his Lord and he committed suicide. And we’re going to read about that as we get into chapter 1. Of course, just prior to the ascension, the apostles want to know if Jesus is going to restore the kingdom to Israel at this time. He refocuses their attention on the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit coming upon them so that they can be witnesses to him in Judea, in Samaria and Galilee, and towards the ends of the earth. And then he ascends. He tells them that it’s not for them to know the times or the seasons of the restoration of the kingdom because that’s in the Father’s power. You see that in verse 7 of chapter 1. And then he ascends into heaven. A cloud receives him from their sight. And they are chided by two angels. “Why are you standing there looking into heaven? Jesus is going to return in the same manner that you saw him go into heaven.” That’s Acts 1:11.

They return to Jerusalem. It’s about a Sabbath day’s journey away. They go to the upper room. I’m summarizing the very next section, of course, which runs from Acts 1:12 all the way to verse 26. So I’m just going to summarize it and do some reading on the spot. I’m not going to read the whole thing. So they go back to Jerusalem. They go to the upper room where they were staying and we’re told who they are: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas the son of James. And there were women there and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. Peter gets up. In those days, it’s only about 10 days from the ascension of Christ to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon these believers at Pentecost. So in those days, Peter gets up in the community. They’re about 120, we’re told. And he basically expresses the need for someone to replace Judas because Judas has committed suicide, his carcass has fallen on the ground and burst open, and the field where he fell was called the Field of Blood. “But we need someone.” Verse 21, he says, “So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” So that’s stipulated that one of these sent ones, one of these apostles, these *apostoloi*. *Apostoloi* plural, *apostolos* singular. And the Hebrew term is *shalach* meaning sent one, someone who’s sent. So they have to choose between two men: Joseph who is called Barsabbas and also called Justus, and Matthias. So they pray, they cast lots, and Matthias is picked and he takes Judas’ place and he’s numbered with the eleven.

Ten days later, Acts 2, we’re told that the day of Pentecost arrived and they were all together in one place. “And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind. It filled the entire house where they were sitting.” Divided tongues of fire landing on everyone and people begin to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gives capacity. And of course, they hear this phenomenon. Those who were around them, that is. We read in verse 5 of chapter 2, which is where we are now, that there were devout men from every nation under heaven. Yes. That is, they were diaspora Jews. They were proselytes. Probably not God-fearers. Proselytes are those Gentiles who have submitted to the rite of circumcision and have kept the Law of Moses for a certain length of time and have offered sacrifice to signify their entrance into the traditions of Israel, Judaism. So they are there, but here the main description is that you have Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. So you have diaspora Jews who are there. Why are they there? Well, they’re there for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They’re there for Passover. They’re there for the seven Sabbaths which culminate in the Day of Pentecost. “We shall keep seven Sabbaths.” This description of the festivals is given in the Book of Leviticus. So they’re there for the yearly festival and they are completing Pentecost. After Pentecost, they get to go home.

So right at the cusp of their soon departure back to their respective abodes as diaspora Jews, you have this phenomenon of people speaking in other languages, which happen to be the languages that these diaspora Jews grew up with. And that's what we read in the next few verses, starting in verse 6. "And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?'" So they recognized the accent. "'And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.' And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others mocking said, 'They are filled with new wine.'"

So they are amazed. They don't know what to make of Galileans who were generally considered to be uneducated, the people of the land, rural folks, if you like. So they didn't have much regard for them, and all of a sudden, they hear these people speaking in languages that they've never learned on the cusp of the time period where they return back to their respective lands, places of residence. So this is strange. So there's a division in that group. Some say, "This is amazing." Others say, "They're drunk." So Peter gets up and he stands up with the eleven and he says, "We're not drunk. This is what was prophesied by the prophet Joel." And that's what we see in the next section. Let's look at it.

Verse 14, Peter stands with the eleven. He lifts his voice. He says, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It is only the third hour of the day. This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel." And he goes ahead and he cites from the Book of Joel that God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh, that sons and daughters would prophesy, young men would see visions, old men would dream dreams. He would pour out his Spirit. They would prophesy. He would show wonders in the heavens above, signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. And the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood. He runs down this prophecy probably from the instruction that the resurrected Christ gave him. This is where Peter is getting this. Peter could not have arrived at this insight on his own. So the early church is informed (here's the point), the early church is informed about God's plans and purposes in the resurrected Christ via his direct instruction for the past 50 days, because even as they are praying and waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit, what they have learned is being grounded in them. It's being further implanted in their hearts, particularly with these apostles.

And so Peter gives this message about Jesus of Nazareth. He quotes Psalm 16. Take a look at verse 25 of chapter 2. "For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'" Then he says in verse 29, "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades."

When Peter is saying this textbox, when Peter is saying this, he probably doesn't use the term Hades. That's Luke's term. Peter is probably speaking in colloquial Aramaic. He would have used the term Sheol,

which is exactly the term that David uses in Psalm 16. “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption.” So he concludes, “He was not abandoned to Hades (Sheol), nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses to that.” And then he brings in Psalm 110:1. “The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” That’s verses 34 and 35. And then Peter concludes, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

And these guys are getting ready to go home. These devout men from every nation under heaven. Diaspora Jews. But when they hear that, they are cut to the heart, it tells us. And they ask what they are supposed to do, and Peter says, “Repent and be baptized every one of you,” which is in keeping with the ministry of John the Baptist, come to think of it. What does John the Baptist do in his early ministry? He preaches a baptism of repentance preparatory to the coming of Messiah. You’ll notice that in the run-up to the selection of a replacement for Judas, Peter states that that person has to have the following qualifications. That person has to have been going in and out with us from the baptism of John up until the day that Jesus was taken up, has to have been an eyewitness, a participant in the ministry of Jesus Christ as a result of Jesus’ direct choice, or potential direct choice, I should say. Mathias and Joseph called Barsabbas both fit that description, but in the Lord’s economy and sovereign purpose, he chooses Mathias.

And so when Peter tells these folks what they are to do, verse 38, he says, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” We are to see that as being in line with the forerunner ministry of John the Baptist. It is the next step logically. Verse 39, “For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” That day, verse 41, there are about 3000 souls and they are not going home for a while. In fact, they don’t start returning home until the martyrdom of an individual by the name of Stephen and the subsequent outbreak of persecution against believers in Jerusalem. So that that scatters them into Judea, the surrounding Judean region. It scatters them into Samaria where evangelization of the Samaritans takes place primarily through Philip and buttressed by Peter and John. It will eventually spread into Galilee and further points north, but Luke will break up his narrative in this historical description and he will pick it up again in chapter 11:1-18 where we find out that Jews had continued being scattered and they made their way back to their respective homes in Cilicia, in Antioch in Syria, on the island of Cyprus, and other points, Cyrene. And for those folks who are closest to the Palestinian boundary, they are still talking to Jews by the time you get to Acts 11, but then at some point, they suddenly start talking to Gentiles. So we’ll do a follow-up with this in the next segment.