

A summary of Acts 1:1-26

- 1. Jesus presented Himself to His disciples (Acts 1:3; Matthew 28:9-10,16-20; Mark 16:12-20; Luke 24:13-53; John 20-21; 1 Corinthians 15:5-7).** Jesus presented Himself to His disciples for forty days, speaking to them about the kingdom of God, training them to know Him, His presence and His speaking. However, the disciples had to hear Him and respond to Him. In Acts 1:2-11, He appeared to the eleven apostles whom He had first chosen early on in His earthly ministry. They were indeed privileged to witness His ascension. Yet He also appeared to other brothers. In 1 Corinthians 15:6, He appeared to more than 500 brothers, then to James the flesh brother of the Lord, and then to all the apostles (other than the first ones). This indicates that Jesus took many opportunities to present Himself to His disciples. During His appearing, He spoke to them concerning the kingdom of God, which is a realm of the Spirit and the Triune God, such as in Acts 1:3. Moreover, the apostles listened to His speaking to stay in Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit. They listened and responded to Him. What about us? When was the last time that we heard the Lord speak to us? When was the last time the Lord gave us an order or a command, for example, to preach the gospel with the saints after the Lord's day meeting? Did we respond? When was the last time we saw Christ in the brothers and sisters? We also must seize every opportunity to hear the Lord speak to us. For example, do we pursue the Bible with the saints? When we pursue the Bible, the Lord may speak to us concerning His kingdom, through the saints. If we do not pursue the Bible, we will not know the Lord that well and we may not hear Him or respond to Him.
- 2. The promise of the Spirit (baptized in and being filled with the Spirit) is fulfilled through the continual corporate prayers (Acts 1:4-5,13-14).** Jesus commanded His disciples to stay in Jerusalem till they would receive the promise of the Father, which was the Holy Spirit. They not only would receive the promise, but they would be baptized, or immersed, or filled with the Holy Spirit. How was this promise going to be fulfilled? By the disciples sitting around in their homes, waiting for a miracle to happen? No. Every promise that God makes to us, depends, on the one hand, on Him. He is the source, the giver, as well as the Accomplisher. However, for the promise to be realized in our experience and in the church life, we need to have a living that cooperates with the Giver of the promise. This kind of living, as we see in Acts 1, is a living of continual corporate prayers, engaged in by about 120 brothers and sisters, for ten days. They stayed together, presumably ate and drank together, and prayed together, corporately, not just individually. Yes, we may, and should, touch the Spirit individually, and we will experience the Lord's presence. But to be baptized, or filled, with the Spirit, depends on the continual (not giving up, persistent) corporate prayers. It is in such prayers that the "power" of the Holy Spirit will be transmitted to us, and to the church (Acts 1:8). The Greek word for power, *dunamis*, is the same Greek word used in Philippians 3:10, where Paul refers to the "power of Christ's resurrection." It is through the corporate prayers that such a power can be experienced. We need "power" to be Jesus' witnesses, or martyrs, that is, to live a crucified life. The more corporate prayers we have, the more power we may have. It is not easy to go out to preach the gospel. For example, how many go out Sunday afternoon to preach the gospel? Do we preach the gospel to our friends and classmates during the week? When was the last time we preached the gospel? We need to have a living that preaches the gospel, through more corporate prayers. Therefore, we need to treasure the corporate prayers, perhaps even more than our individual prayers, for such prayers will even bring in the one accord, to the point where we are one with the church. We know the brothers and sisters, we know the needs of the church (each brother and sister), and consequently we may even know God's need.
- 3. What did the disciples pray for? (Luke 6:12-16; Matthew 9:37-38; Matthew 10:1; Acts 1:22).** To pray continually for ten days is quite a challenge. We may even be hard pressed to pray for one minute, let alone ten days! What did the disciples pray for? The Bible does not say, but we may venture to say, through the help of precedents established in other passages of the Bible, that they may have prayed for the continuation of the ministry and apostleship that had been given to Judas. For example, we see in Luke 6:12 how Jesus prayed all night before choosing the twelve apostles. His prayer resulted in an action or an execution of the Father's will. In Matthew 9:37-38, Jesus told His disciples that the harvest was plentiful, but the laborers were few, and that they needed to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest. Then in Matthew 10:1 (the next verse). Jesus called to Himself His twelve disciples and gave them authority to

cast out unclean spirits and heal every disease. We know from Luke 6:12 that He had prayed before calling them. Therefore, His prayer to the Father would naturally have been focused on the choosing, calling and sending out of His disciples. When we pray corporately as the church, we also may pray for specific burdens and needs, which may then result in an action or a response to the Lord's speaking to us.

4. **We sometimes ask the Lord what He will do for the church, but the Lord may instead tell us to be His witnesses (Acts 1:6,8).** The disciples asked the Lord whether He would restore the kingdom to Israel (v.6). This is actually a very good question. They asked (prayed to) the Lord, and the Lord answered them. We should always have the freedom to ask the Lord anything. The Lord will answer us. We may ask what the Lord will do for such and such saint, or how He will bless the church. However, His answer may be different from what we expected to hear! In His answer, the Lord told them that they would receive power, and that they would be His witnesses, beginning with Jerusalem, and eventually to the uttermost parts of the earth (v.8). The Greek word for "witnesses" is *martus*, which means "martyr," or someone that is willing to deny Himself and live a crucified life. We want the Lord to do many things for us, but the Lord wants us to deny ourselves! To be His witnesses is not just to speak for Him on Sunday morning, but to have a living or a testimony that matches Him. To live such a kind of life, we need "power," not power to perform miracles, but power to deny ourselves, to listen to Him, to His commandments, and to obey Him. Such power, as we have seen, may be transmitted through the corporate prayers. Such a living may even lead to an "apostleship," which means "to be sent out." Jesus sent out the eleven (later twelve) apostles to begin to testify in Jerusalem, but not to stay there, but to go out to other localities. Eventually, such a crucified living of being a witness may result in a ministry of apostleship to preach the gospel in other places to raise up the church life there.
5. **If we live a life of ascension, we may inspire others to pray corporately (Acts 1:9-11).** Jesus ascended to the Father in the presence of His eleven apostles. They actually witnessed Him rising and being received in a cloud. What a marvelous miracle! How we would like to have been there! It pleased the Lord to allow His disciples to witness such a glorious event. We were not there to witness it. But Jesus will return on day in the same way as He departed, on the Mount of Olives, publicly, and this time, everyone will see Him return, including those who do not believe in Him. However, for Him to return, the church must grow, we must grow, and we must know Him and listen to Him and live a crucified life, a life in ascension, through corporate prayers. If we live such a life, other brothers and sisters may be attracted to also pray, just as the Lord's physical ascension may have been a catalyst to the prayers of the eleven apostles and other disciples.
6. **Corporate prayers may put the ministry of the word into the brothers and sisters (John 20:22; Acts 1:15-22).** Jesus had already breathed His Spirit into His disciples (John 20:22). That is why Peter could stand up in Acts 1:15, and speak. However, his speaking in such a rich manner, quoting two verses from the Old Testament (Psalm 69:25; 109:8), may have been the fruit of the corporate prayers. There is no record of Peter praying in the four Gospels, and the one occasion when he was asked to pray, he fell asleep! Neither did he quote any Old Testament verses. However, in Acts, he is very bold and filled with the word. This may tell us that the corporate prayers may bring the ministry of the word to the saints. The more we pray, the more filled with the word we will be, and, more importantly, the more the Lord can speak to us through His word. Through the corporate prayers, may each one of us "fulfill the ministry" that the Lord has given us (Colossians 4:17). We need to grow in order to develop a ministry (or service).
7. **Corporate prayers may bring in the Lord's leading (Acts 1:23-26).** Two brothers, Joseph called Barsabbas (or Justus) and Matthias were proposed by the saints in Acts 1 as possible replacements of Judas Iscariot's ministry and apostleship. Lots were eventually drawn, and the choice fell on Matthias. However, such a process was not an arbitrary one, according to the personal preferences of different brothers and sisters. Rather, through continual prayer, they already had the leading of the Holy Spirit to propose two brothers. Their prayers brought in the one accord to then cast lots (or "vote," to use a modern, secular term), but such a "voting" was under the leading of, and sanctioned by the Holy Spirit. We may say that this exercise should be a foundation for the church in Montreal. First, we pray corporately for a certain burden, for example, the location of a picnic, or of an apple picking outing. If we are still not clear after prayer, we may ask for a "show of hands." The Lord may honor such an exercise, and bless the church through it.