



David Macioch
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While staying with them, Jesus ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:4-8)

Just what was the power that Jesus promises to the disciples here, during the period after his resurrection but before his ascension? Let us retrace some steps and try to find out. At the end of Luke's Gospel (24:49), Jesus says, "And see, I am sending you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." However, there is no explicit antecedent in Luke for just what this promise might be. The closest one might get is "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (11:13) The Spirit will provide their needs. Perhaps another inference can be made from Jesus' warning concerning the coming persecutions his followers will undergo after his departure. As he warns them that they will be arrested, hated, and called to account because of him, he tells them, "This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance, for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict." (21:13-14) The Spirit, the Paraclete, will take the place of the counsel for the defense. It is certainly NOT temporal or worldly power that is meant, as is made clear when amazingly, as late as the time between the Last Supper and Jesus' arrest, the disciples make time to debate which of them was the greatest, or who would have the most "power" in this new "kingdom" Jesus had been proclaiming. He tells them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. BUT NOT SO WITH YOU; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves." (22:25-26) Not political but spiritual power will be provided to them.

The gift of power they will receive from the Holy Spirit through the Father will embolden them to witness to Christ, It is not power to be used to control others, but to serve others. The witness they are called to give is at first among their own people (Jerusalem), then those near but yet separated (Samaria), and finally to all other peoples (the ends of the earth). This mission is not confined to their lifetime, as the restoration of Israel will come at an unknown time, but rather *from now on*, for all disciples to effect the reality of Jesus redemptive work for others, to proclaim the covenant relationship with God the Father. The power will enable them to do things in a way they could not do by themselves, whether it be preaching, healing, teaching, or evangelizing. The "light to the nations" that Israel was always intended to be can now be carried on and furthered through the disciples, empowered by the Holy Spirit. However, before undertaking the task ahead, they are ordered to wait (Acts 1:4), gather together as a community and pray (Acts 1:12-14). All of us who have been baptized are called to follow in the footsteps of the first disciples, to pray within the Christian community to receive the gifts of the Spirit, and to then go out and use them to bear witness to the kingdom Jesus Christ preached.

Father in heaven, just as your Son Jesus commissioned his disciples some two thousand years ago, promising them the gift of your Holy Spirit, we would ask that we can be regarded in the same way, Spirit-filled disciples who are witnesses to all your Son taught, spreading this Good News to others who do not know his Word. Only through your empowering gift of the Spirit can we do this. Let this Spirit be among us today. Amen.