

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 7, Acts 1-2

6-Min. Video Overview

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You know, when you think about how a global movement gets started, what comes to mind? Probably something big, right? A huge event. But a lot of the time, it's not like that at all. Sometimes, it starts in a quiet, uncertain room.

And today, we're going to dive into the story of one of those days. A day that, believe it or not, launched a world religion. So the mission? It was all laid out in just one sentence.

But what a sentence it was. A small group of followers was told they would be witnesses not just in their hometown, but to the ends of the earth. I mean, talk about a global ambition, right? Absolutely massive.

Okay, but here's where it gets really interesting. There's this massive disconnect. Because the team that got this mission? They weren't some elite special forces unit.

Not at all. They were a small, pretty confused group of people hiding behind a locked door. They seemed completely unprepared for what was ahead.

So you have to ask, right? How does a group like that go from hiding out in a room to literally changing the world? Well, the answer isn't just about them suddenly getting brave. Nope. It's about a clear plan and a source of power they never saw coming.

All right, first things first. We have to get this. The mission came with a plan.

It wasn't just some vague, hey, go change the world kind of command. It was actually a strategic blueprint for how this thing was going to grow. And get this, this single verse from the book of Acts basically gives you the entire geographical outline for the rest of the story.

It's like a strategic roadmap. It starts small, right where they are in Jerusalem. Then it expands out to the regions next door, Judea and Samaria.

And then, bam, it explodes outward to the ends of the earth, step by step. But, you know, a plan, even a brilliant one, is kind of useless if you don't have the power to actually pull it off. And this mission, it was impossible for them to do on their own.

Which brings us to the next piece of the puzzle, the promise of power. And this is absolutely crucial. Their very first instruction wasn't go.

It was wait. Seriously. They were told to stay put right there in Jerusalem until they received this promised power.

Why? Because this was a mission they just could not do on their own steam. So their main prep work wasn't a bunch of strategic maneuvers. It was prayer.

So what was this promised power? Well, the Bible calls it the Holy Spirit. And that's basically the term for God's personal presence and power actively at work in the world. But here's what's so fascinating.

The source material describes it as a foretaste of the age to come. Think about that. It's like getting a free sample of the future, a little preview of what the world will be like one day when everything is finally made right.

And to make this idea, which is pretty abstract, more concrete, the New Testament uses, well, it uses business language. How about that? This foretaste is described as the first installment on a purchase or a down payment that guarantees a future inheritance. So it's not just some fake feeling.

It's the real tangible beginning of a future promise being delivered right here, right now. So they waited for 10 days. They waited and prayed.

And then that promise arrived. And it didn't just show up quietly. Oh, no.

It happened in this incredibly dramatic, chaotic, and totally unforgettable way right in the middle of a huge Jewish festival called Pentecost. Three things happened that you could see, hear, and experience. First, there was a sound, like a crazy rushing wind that just filled the house.

Second, they saw something that looked like tongues of fire that came and rested on each person. And third, and this is a big one, they all started speaking in languages they had never, ever learned before. Okay, so the wind and the fire, those were classic signs of God's presence in the Bible.

People would have recognized that. But the speaking in other languages, that was the game changer here. This wasn't just some random babbling.

No, it was the very specific divine power they needed for a mission that was designed to cross every single cultural and language barrier on the planet. And this is where we see this incredible reversal of an old, old story. Remember the Tower of Babel from the Old Testament? That's where human pride led to God confusing everyone's language and scattering people, dividing them all over the world.

Well, Pentecost is the exact opposite of that. It's the undoing of Babel. Here, the Spirit makes language understood, not to divide, but to gather and unite a brand new community from all those scattered nations.

Division is literally being undone. So as you can imagine, all this commotion drew a crowd, and these people were completely bewildered. I mean, what on earth was going on? And that confusion, that question, what does this mean? It set the perfect stage for the very first Christian sermon.

This is when the apostle Peter stands up, and he connects this bizarre event directly to something they all knew, the ancient Jewish scriptures. He quotes the prophet Joel, who

predicted a day when God would pour out His Spirit on everyone, not just special people like prophets or kings, but on all people. And Peter's message was just stunningly simple.

He basically says, you know that thing Joel talked about? Yeah, this is it. This is that day. But then he makes his most radical claim.

Joel's prophecy said that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. So Peter, standing in front of this Jewish crowd, redefines who the Lord is. He makes the case that the risen and exalted Jesus is the divine Lord that the prophecy was pointing to all along.

I mean, what a moment. And the response to this? It was immediate. It was staggering.

In just one afternoon, you have the supernatural event, you have the sermon explaining it, and together, they give birth to a totally new kind of community. How many people? Three thousand. That's the number of people who responded to Peter's message and were baptized on that single day.

So in just a matter of hours, that small, scared group hiding in a room? Yeah, they weren't so small anymore. In this new community, it was immediately defined by four key things they did. First, they were devoted to the apostles' teaching, you know, the story and commands of Jesus.

Second, they had this deep fellowship. They were always eating together. Third, they prayed constantly.

And finally, and this is a big one, they shared their possessions, sacrificially, with anyone who had a need. What this shows us is that the spiritual event had real, tangible, social results. It wasn't just a feeling.

It created a community that was defined by this radical unity, where people mattered way more than stuff. And you have to understand, this was a completely countercultural way to live in the Roman Empire. But the story, it doesn't just end there.

The book of Acts, where we get this whole story, is intentionally open-ended. It's really cool, actually. It tracks the mission from Jerusalem all the way to Rome, the very heart of the empire.

And then it just stops. The implication is pretty clear. The mission is still going.

The story opens right into our future. So that leaves us with one last big question to think about. If that very first Pentecost was the launch of a community that was meant to be a living, breathing foretaste of the age to come, like a little sample of the future, here in the present, then what is that community supposed to look like in our world today?