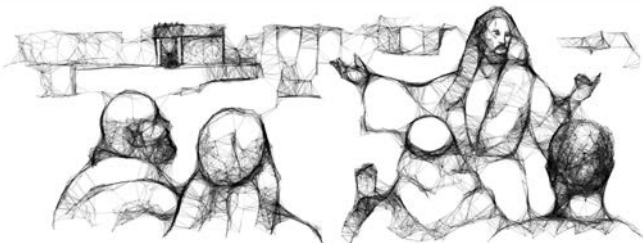


# You Will Be My Witnesses



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Acts 1:6–8, Luke 24:25, Luke 24:44–48, Deut. 19:15, Acts 1:9–26, Prov. 16:33.*

**Memory Text:** “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 1:8, NRSV*).

Jesus' mission on earth was finished. God soon would send the Holy Spirit, who—ratifying their efforts with many signs and wonders—would empower and lead the disciples on a mission that would reach the ends of the earth. Jesus could not stay with them forever in human flesh. Not only did His incarnation impose upon Him a physical limitation in the context of a worldwide mission, but His ascension and exaltation in heaven were necessary in order for the Spirit to come.

Until Jesus' resurrection, however, the disciples did not clearly know these things. When they left everything to follow Him, they believed that He was a political liberator who would one day drive the Romans out of the land, reinstate David's dynasty, and restore Israel to its past glory. It was not easy for them to think otherwise.

This is the primary issue of Jesus' final instructions to the disciples in Acts 1. The promise of the Spirit comes in this context. The chapter also describes Jesus' return to heaven and how the early church prepared itself for Pentecost.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 7.

## The Restoration of Israel

There are two kinds of Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, one that anticipates a kingly Messiah who would rule forever (*Ps. 89:3, 4, 35–37; Isa. 9:6, 7; Ezek. 37:25; Dan. 2:44; 7:13, 14*), and one that predicts that the Messiah would die for the sins of the people (*Isa. 52:13–53:12; Dan. 9:26*). Such prophecies do not contradict each other. They just point to two consecutive phases of the Messiah's ministry: first He would suffer, and then become King (*Luke 17:24, 25; 24:25, 26*).

The problem with first-century Jewish Messianic expectation, however, was that it was one-sided. The hope of a kingly Messiah who would bring political deliverance obscured the notion of a Messiah who would suffer and die.

At first, the disciples shared this hope of a kingly Messiah. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah (*Matt. 16:16, 20*) and were sometimes caught bickering among themselves about who would sit on either side of Him when He was enthroned (*Mark 10:35–37, Luke 9:46*). Despite Jesus' warnings about the fate that awaited Him, they simply could not understand what He meant. So, when He died, they became confused and discouraged. In their own words, "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (*Luke 24:21, NIV*).

**Read Acts 1:6.** What does this question say about what they still didn't understand? In Acts 1:7, how did Jesus answer them?

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If Jesus' death represented a fatal blow to the disciples' hope, the resurrection revived it, raising their political expectations perhaps to an unprecedented level. It seemed natural to conceive of the resurrection as a strong indicator that the Messianic kingdom would finally be established.

In His reply to their question, however, Jesus gave no direct answer. He did not reject the premise behind the disciples' question of an imminent kingdom, but neither did He accept it. He left the issue unsettled, while He reminded them that the time of God's actions belongs to God Himself, and as such it is inaccessible to humans.

**According to Luke 24:25, what was the real problem of the disciples? Why is it easy to believe what we want to believe, as opposed to what the Bible really teaches? How can we avoid this trap?**

## The Disciples' Mission

**Read** Acts 1:8. Instead of indulging in prophetic speculations, what were the disciples expected to do?

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There are four important elements in this passage concerning the disciples' mission:

1. *The gift of the Spirit.* The Spirit always had been active among God's people. According to the prophets, however, there would be a special endowment of the Spirit in the future (*Isa. 44:3; Joel 2:28, 29*). As Jesus Himself was anointed with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit was already at work during the time of His ministry (*Luke 4:18–21*) but officially was not inaugurated until Christ's exaltation in heaven (*John 7:39, Acts 2:33*).

2. *The role of witness.* A witness is a firsthand account. The disciples were fully qualified to give such a witness (*Acts 1:21, 22; 4:20; compare with 1 John 1:1–3*) and were now commissioned to share with the world their unique experience with Jesus.

3. *The plan of the mission.* The disciples were to witness first in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth. It was a progressive plan. Jerusalem was the center of Jewish religious life, the place where Jesus had been condemned and crucified. Judea and Samaria were neighboring areas where Jesus also had ministered. The disciples, however, were not to limit themselves to this locale alone. The scope of their mission was worldwide.

4. *The orientation of the mission.* In Old Testament times, it was the nations that should be attracted to God (*see Isa. 2:1–5*), not Israel that should "take" God to the nations. The few exceptions (for example, Jonah) do not invalidate the general rule. Now the strategy was different. Jerusalem was still the center, but rather than staying and building roots there, the disciples were expected to move out to the uttermost ends of the earth.

**Read** Luke 24:44–48. What was the core message that the disciples should preach?

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In the forty days He spent with the disciples after the resurrection (*Acts 1:3*), Jesus must have explained much truth to them about the kingdom of God, even if there was still much they didn't understand, as their question in Acts 1:6 showed. They were familiar with the prophecies but could now see them in a new light, a light shed from the Cross and the empty tomb (*see Acts 3:17–19*).

## He Will Come Again

**Read** Acts 1:9–11. How does Luke portray the ascension of Jesus? What is the significance that there were two angels speaking to them (see *Deut. 19:15*)?

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Luke’s account of the ascension is rather brief. Jesus was with the disciples on the Mount of Olives, and while still blessing them (*Luke 24:51*), He was taken up to heaven. The language, of course, is phenomenological; that is, the scene is portrayed as it looked to human eyes, not as it really was. Jesus was leaving the earth, and there is no other way to do so in a visible form than by going up.

The ascension of Jesus was a supernatural act of God, one of many all through the Bible. This is implied by the way Luke describes it, with the passive *epērthē* (“He was taken up,” *Acts 1:9, NKJV*). Though used only here in the New Testament, this verbal form is found several times in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), all of them describing actions of God, which suggests that God Himself was the One who took Jesus up to heaven, as He was the One who raised Him from the dead (*Acts 2:24, 32; Rom. 6:4; 10:9*).

After Jesus already had been hidden by a cloud, Luke reports—only in Acts—the episode of the two figures dressed in white who stood beside the disciples. The description coincides with that of angels in their bright robes (*Acts 10:30, John 20:12*). They came to assure the disciples that Jesus would come back the same way He had gone up, and it is also only Acts that informs us that Jesus went up “before their very eyes” (*Acts 1:9, NIV*).

Thus, the visible ascension became the guarantee of the visible return, which also will happen in a cloud, though “with power and great glory” (*Luke 21:27*), no longer as a private event, as “every eye will see Him” (*Rev. 1:7, NKJV*), and He will not be alone (*Luke 9:26, 2 Thess. 1:7*). The glory of the Second Coming will far exceed that of the ascension.

**How can we learn to keep the reality, and promise, of the Second Coming always before us? How should this great truth impact all areas of our life, such as finances, priorities, and moral choices?**

## Preparing for Pentecost

In His reply in Acts 1:7, 8, Jesus made no commitment with regard to time. Yet, the natural implication of His words was that right after the Spirit came and the disciples completed their mission, He would return (*see also Matt. 24:14*). The angels' remark (*Acts 1:11*) also did not answer the question as to when the kingdom would come, but it could be understood as if it would not be long. This seems to explain why the disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (*Luke 24:52*). The promise of Jesus' second coming at an unspecified time, which should give them extra encouragement for their mission, was taken to mean that the end was close at hand. Further developments in Acts will demonstrate this idea.

**Read** Acts 1:12–14. Who else was in the upper room, and how did they prepare themselves for the coming of the Spirit?

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Having returned from the Mount of Olives, the disciples gathered in the upper guest room (in Latin, *cenaculum*) of a two-story private house in Jerusalem. Some women followers (*Luke 8:1–3, 23:49, 24:1–12*), as well as Jesus' mother and brothers, were there with the disciples.

Jesus' brothers (*Mark 6:3*) were either younger sons of Joseph and Mary (*Matt. 1:25, Luke 2:7*) or, more likely, sons of Joseph's first marriage, in which case Joseph would be widowed when he took Mary for his wife. Their presence among the disciples comes as a surprise, as they had always been rather skeptical toward Jesus (*Mark 3:21, John 7:5*). Yet, the resurrection and Jesus' special appearance to James (*1 Cor. 15:7*) seem to have made all the difference. Later on James apparently would even replace Peter in the leadership of the Christian community (*Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 2:9, 12*).

Constantly in prayer (*Acts 1:14*), and constantly in the temple praising God (*Luke 24:53*), they all were no doubt involved in a time of confession, repentance, and the putting away of sin. Even if in their minds the coming of the Spirit would immediately lead to Jesus' return, their spiritual attitude was in full harmony with what was about to happen, as the Holy Spirit comes in response to prayer.

**In our daily choices, what are ways we help prepare the way for the work of the Spirit in our lives?**

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## The Twelfth Apostle

The first administrative action of the early Christian community, which numbered about 120 believers (*Acts 1:15*), was to choose a successor to Judas.

**Read Acts 1:21, 22.** What qualifications was the successor to Judas expected to have? Why would these be so important?

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The need was for a witness of Jesus' resurrection (*compare with Acts 4:33*); this is crucial because time and again the resurrection is viewed as powerful evidence for the Messiahship of Jesus and the truth of the whole Christian faith.

The choice, however, was to be made from among those who had accompanied the apostles throughout Jesus' ministry. Paul would later insist that, despite not having been with the earthly Jesus, he was nevertheless entitled to the apostolic office because his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus qualified him to bear witness to His resurrection (*1 Cor. 9:1*). Though admitting to be as "one untimely born" (*1 Cor. 15:8, ESV*), Paul refused to consider himself less qualified than the other apostles (*1 Cor. 9:2, Gal. 2:6–9*). Only the Twelve and Paul, then, were "apostles" in the technical, authoritative sense (*Acts 1:25, 26*); yet, in its basic, general sense as envoys or messengers, the term also could be used for other gospel workers (*Acts 14:4, 14; Gal. 1:19*).

**Read Acts 1:23–26.** How was Matthias chosen?

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The method they used to choose Matthias may seem strange, but the casting of lots was a long-established way of making decisions (*for example, Lev. 16:5–10, Num. 26:55*). In addition, the choice was between two previously recognized candidates of equal qualifications, not a step into the unknown. The believers also prayed to God, believing that the result would reflect His will (*compare with Prov. 16:33*). There is no evidence that the decision was ever challenged. After Pentecost, the casting of lots became no longer necessary due to the direct guidance of the Spirit (*Acts 5:3, 11:15–18, 13:2, 16:6–9*).

**If someone were to come to you and ask, "How can I know what God's will is for my life?" what would you answer, and why?**

**Further Thought:** “The whole interim period between Pentecost and the Parousia [Second Coming] (however long or short) is to be filled with the world-wide mission of the church in the power of the Spirit. Christ’s followers were both to announce what he had achieved at his first coming and to summon people to repent and believe in preparation for his second coming. They were to be his witnesses ‘to the ends of the earth’ ([Acts] 1:8) and ‘to the very end of the age.’ . . . We have no liberty to stop until both ends have been reached.”—John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), p. 44.

“The Saviour’s commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers in Christ to the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister. All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come are put in trust with the gospel. All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 822.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① Acts 1:7 recalls Mark 13:32: “Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (*ESV*). Ellen G. White says: “There will never again be a message for the people of God that will be based on time. We are not to know the definite time either for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or for the coming of Christ.”—*Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 188. She adds: “Any one who shall start up to proclaim a message to announce the hour, day, or year of Christ’s appearing, has taken up a yoke and is proclaiming a message that the Lord has never given him.”—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Sept. 12, 1893. What is the relevance of such statements for us today?
- ② Someone once said: “God needs witnesses more than lawyers.” What do you think of this statement?
- ③ What was the role of prayer in the early church? Is it a coincidence that at almost every decisive moment in its life, we find a reference to prayer (*Acts 1:24; 8:14–17; 9:11, 12; 10:4, 9, 30; 13:2, 3*)? What is the role of prayer in our lives?

## “I Want to Kill People”

By ANDREW McCHESNEY, Adventist Mission

Li Fengyan’s cellphone rang sharply.

“Mom, I am miserable,” said the voice on the other end. It was Fengyan’s daughter-in-law, Yang-yang. She was crying hysterically. “My life is so hard. I don’t know what to do.”

Worried, Fengyan brought Yang-yang to her home, and the two began to talk. Yang-yang spoke of hearing voices that commanded her to act violently. “I want to beat people. I want to kill people,” Yang-yang said. “Hide your knives. If I just see a knife, I will kill someone.”

Fengyan called her pastor at the Tokyo Chinese Seventh-day Adventist Church. Pastor Yu Chuanfu was leading the evening prayer meeting, but he came to her home and prayed and read the Bible with Yang-yang.

Yang-yang liked the prayers and the Bible, and she began to read the Bible regularly as she stayed with her mother-in-law for a while. She also read books by Ellen G. White. The voices ceased, and she started to smile. She started to attend Sabbath services at the Tokyo Chinese church.

Yang-yang’s husband was amazed at the change in his wife. He started going to church with her and his mother. A year later, they were baptized.

Then Yang-yang’s own mother fell ill, and doctors didn’t know what to do. Yang-yang asked church members to pray. She told her mother to throw away the family’s Buddhist idol and trust God instead. As the church members prayed, her mother made a miraculous recovery.

“Before the prayers, her mother did not believe in Jesus,” Fengyan said. “But after the prayers, she believes in God.”

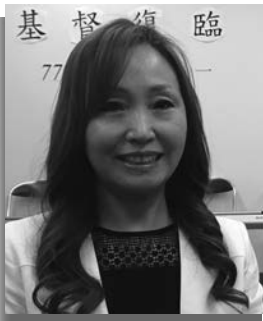
The mother got rid of the idol and, several months later, she and her husband were baptized. And that’s not all. Yang-yang and Fengyan have been telling relatives back in China about God, and several have started attending Adventist churches there.

Fengyan, 53, credits God and the Tokyo Chinese church for the transformation of her family. “Every Sabbath we have a place to worship,” she said.

Eight people have been baptized into the Tokyo Chinese church because of her influence.

The Tokyo Chinese church, the only Chinese-speaking Adventist church in Japan, opened with about five members in 2012 through the support of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Today, the church is overflowing with 50 members and is planning to double the size of its sanctuary.

“Pray for us as we grow,” Pastor Yu said.



Watch LI FENGYAN, left, sing in the church at: [bit.ly/want-to-kill](http://bit.ly/want-to-kill)