

Chapter 28: We Are Witnesses

Reading Outline:

- Acts 1-5
1. Introduction to the Book of Acts
 2. Jesus' Forty Day Ministry
 3. Calling a New Apostle
 4. Day of Pentecost
 5. The Church in Jerusalem
 6. Peter and John Heal a Lame Man
 7. Peter and John Before the Jewish Leaders
 8. All Things in Common and the Consequences of Lying
 9. Apostles Continue the Miracles of Jesus
 10. Neither Prison nor Persecution Deter Apostles
 11. Conclusions

1. Introduction to the Book of Acts

The Book of Acts was written by Luke, the beloved physician and missionary associate of Paul, as the second volume to accompany his Gospel (see Acts 1:1). He addresses his writings to "Theophilus."

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"Both accounts [Gospel of Luke and Acts] are addressed to Theophilus, a prominent personage of the period who, since Luke's writings are addressed to Gentile or Roman readers, may have been a distinguished citizen of Rome."¹

The Life and Teachings of Jesus and his Apostles (Institute) Student Manual states,

"The book of Acts provides us with our principal view of the Church of Jesus Christ during its formative years. It forms a unique bridge between the life and teachings of Jesus on one hand and the writings and labors of the Savior's apostles on the other... We see the infant church and its leaders struggling with the problems encountered when the new revelation in Christ is thrust against the time-honored traditions of the Jews. Are gentiles who enter the church bound by the Mosaic restrictions? Do Jews who become Christians continue to be subject to the law of Moses? What is the status of the law of Moses now that Christ has atoned for men's sins? These and other problems are wrestled with and solved by divine revelation."²

The time of the writing of Acts by Luke is in dispute with Bible scholars.

Richard Lloyd Anderson states,

"Since Luke is obviously a skilled literary artist, the sudden close of Acts is a major clue. The story is dramatically set with Paul's appeal to Caesar and thrilling trip to Rome-and then ends with Paul waiting for his

trial. An impressive number of liberal and conservative scholars continue to insist that the suspended climax in Luke simply shows that the date of writing (60-62 A.D.) is also the date of writing.”³

Joseph B. Romney has provided an outline of the book of Acts that serves to highlight Luke’s writings:

“I. The Ascension of Christ and the Reorganization of the Twelve (Acts 1).

- A. Ascension of Christ (Acts 1:1-11)
- B. Reorganization of the Twelve (Acts 1:12-26)

“II. Preaching in Jerusalem, Samaria and Judea (Acts 2-8)

- A. In Jerusalem (Acts 2-7)
 - 1. Pentecost (Acts 2)
 - 2. Preaching and persecution (Acts 3-7)
 - 3. Organizing according to the principles of sacrifice and consecration (Acts 4:31-5:11; 6:1-7).
- B. In Samaria and Judea (Acts 8)
 - 1. Samaria (Acts 8:1-25)
 - 2. Judea (Acts 8:26-40)

“III. Preaching “unto the uttermost parts of the earth” (D&C 58:64; see Acts 9-28).

- A. Opening of preaching to Gentiles (Acts 9-12)
 - 1. Conversion of Paul (Acts 9)
 - 2. ‘Conversion’ of Peter (Acts 10)
 - 3. Preaching in Jerusalem and Antioch (Acts 11-12)
 - 4. Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15)
- B. Missionary Journeys of Paul and His companions (Acts 13-21).
 - 1. First journey (Acts 13-14)
 - 2. Second journey (Acts 16-18)
 - 3. Third journey (Acts 19-21)
- C. Paul’s defenses (Acts 21-28)
 - 1. At Jerusalem (Acts 21-23)
 - 2. At Caesarea (Acts 24-26)
 - 3. At Rome (Acts 17-28).”

Reference⁴

Robert J. Matthews states,

“The major portion of Acts deals with Paul and his travels and does not equally represent the labors of the original Twelve. Luke was writing not a general church history, but a recitation of how the gospel was made available to the Gentiles. The Acts of the apostles is not the title given to the work by Luke himself and is not

an accurate description of the contents. The earliest manuscripts do not bear this title; the book was originally called simply Acts.”⁵

As noted, the labors of Peter, John and others is limited to Acts 2-10. The majority of the book of Acts focus upon Paul including his conversion, preaching, journeys, and defenses.

Richard Lloyd Anderson states regarding Luke,

“The author was a companion of Paul as shown by his use of ‘we’ in certain missionary travels. Thus he came to Northern Greece with Paul on the Second Journey (Acts 16:10-17), returned with him to Jerusalem after the Third Journey (Acts 20:5-21), and went with Paul to Rome after his appeal to Caesar (Acts 27:1-28:16)...Luke’s Gospel preface strongly suggests that he did not walk with Jesus, but was a later convert who had talked to the first apostles: the ‘eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.’ (Luke 1:2) Because his detail on Paul starts after Paul comes to the metropolis of Antioch, there is reason to think that Luke lived there. His sophisticated Greek plus his sustained interest in Gentiles suggest that he was a convert from outside of Palestine.”⁶

With this introduction including an outline of the book of Acts, we now turn to Luke’s writing.

2. Jesus' Forty Day Ministry

The scriptural information we have regarding the forty days that Jesus spent ministering upon the earth from the time of His resurrection to His ascension is limited.

We may ask, “Why would Jesus remain on the earth for forty days rather than going immediately to heaven? The simple answer is that He would be able to appear to many, affirming beyond doubt that He had been raised from the dead. He would also be able to further teach His disciples and prepare them to “witnesses unto...the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8).

According to S. Kent Brown and C. Wilfred Griggs,

"Luke states that it was after the resurrection that the Savior, ‘opened...their [the disciples'] understanding, that they might understand the scriptures [Old Testament].’ (Luke 24:45). John adds that the resurrected Lord did many marvels that were not recorded in his writings (John 20:30)."⁷

It is highly probable that Jesus told them of His visit to the spirits in prison (see 1 Peter 3:19; 4:6) and taught them the principle of baptism for the dead (see 1 Corinthians 15:29), amongst other doctrine later restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Robert J. Matthew adds,

“...it is probable that during this forty-day period the church was organized into quorums and various offices.”⁸

The New Testament: Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Supplement states,

“It appears that during the first part of Jesus’ instructions, two major things took place. Jesus first tutored the Apostles in the very basic principles concerning the role of the Messiah. He then opened their minds so that they could ‘understand the scriptures’ (Luke 24:45) (They had to know how to properly fulfill their divinely

appointed role as special witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ. They also had to be able to explain, with proper authority, the true meaning of the scriptures.) Jesus also instructed his Apostles regarding the need for the attributes of love and genuine desire to serve.”⁹

His forty-day ministry concluded, Jesus walks with His Apostles one last time to the Mount of Olives.

Acts 1:4-5, 8

4 And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

“Without the Holy Ghost no man can know what the Lord wants him to do or say. By the power of the Holy Ghost the Lord's ministers preach the gospel, administer the affairs of the Church, perform the ordinances of salvation, work miracles, and do all things necessary for the salvation of their fellowmen. Without the power of the Holy Ghost, none of these things can be done, nor should they be attempted.”¹⁰

Jesus, having taught His Apostles and disciples important truths of His kingdom and its administration, with the promise of the Holy Ghost, now ascended into heaven.

3. Calling a New Apostle

Shortly after the ascension of Jesus, the Apostles returned to Jerusalem where they assembled with others in the upper room. The purpose for their gathering was to fill the vacancy of Twelve left by Judas.

Acts 1:14-15

14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples...

The individual to be selected had to have an important qualification.

Acts 1:21-24, 26

21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us;

22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen.

26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

“Peter and the others, guided by the Spirit...asked the Father, in the name of Christ, to tell which of the two he had chosen.[Upon Matthias being selected, then those gathered] gave forth their votes,’ presumably ‘sustaining votes’ to uphold him whom God had chosen to serve in the holy apostleship...As with all others who are called to service in the kingdom, first, God revealed his will, and then, the people voted to approve the heaven-named choice.”¹¹

The will of the Lord has been made known and Matthias was sustained as the twelfth member of the Apostles.

4. Day of Pentecost

Bruce R. McConkie states,

“In ancient Israel ‘the feast of weeks’ (Ex.34:22; Deut. 16:10), or ‘the feast of harvest’ (Ex.23:16), or ‘the day of the firstfruits’ (Num.28:26), was celebrated 50 days after the Passover. This occasion, from the Greek word Pentekoste (meaning 50th) was known as the day of Pentecost.”¹²

It was the day that the Apostles were to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 2:1-4

1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all gathered with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, [gift of tongues with the interpretation thereof], like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

In the latter days, at the time of the evening meeting on the day of the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, [Sunday, March 27, 1836], those in attendance experienced an event similar to the day of Pentecost.

Joseph Smith states,

“Brother George A. Smith arose and began to prophesy, when a noise was heard like the sound of rushing mighty wind, which filled the Temple, and all the congregation simultaneously arose, being moved upon by an invisible power; many began to speak in tongues and prophesy; others saw glorious visions; and I beheld the Temple was filled with angels, which fact I declared to the congregation. The people of the neighborhood came running together (hearing an unusual sound within, and seeing a bright light like a pillar of fire resting upon the Temple), and were astonished at what was taking place. This continued until the meeting closed at eleven p.m. The number of official members present on this occasion was four hundred and sixteen, being a great number than ever assembled on any former occasion.”¹³

On the day of Pentecost, despite those in attendance being “out of every nation under heaven...every man heard them speak in his own language.” (Acts 2:5-6).

Acts 2:14, 16-17

14 But Peter standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words.

16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel [Joel 2:28];

17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

Peter, without reservation or fear and in keeping with his Apostolic calling, bears his testimony to those gathered on this special day.

Acts 2:22-24, 32-33, 36

22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know;

23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Peter's words have been confirmed by the spirit of the Holy Ghost to those gathered and they knew of the truthfulness of his words. They had felt the spirit.

Acts 2:37

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked [affected in their conscience] in their hearts, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

Having their faith ignited, they now thirsted for more.

Acts 2:38

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

This is the same message taught by Jesus as well as by His prophets throughout the Dispensations of time. It is known as the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel. They are:

1. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ
2. Repentance

3. Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins
4. Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost

Peter's response to the inquiry of the people involves more than faith in Christ---it involves a willingness to be changed by Christ.

Ezekiel 36:26

36 A new heart...will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take the stony heart out of your flesh...

It means to be baptized; to make and keep sacred covenants; to do His works, and to endure to the end. Faith in Jesus Christ is the beginning of the journey of discipleship, not the end (see B/M, 2 Nephi 31:17, 20).

Acts 2:41

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

5. The Church in Jerusalem

The Church in Jerusalem continued to grow in numbers.

Acts 2:42, 44-47

42 And they that continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship [keep the commandments and attending their Sabbath meetings], and in breaking of bread [partook of the Sacrament], and in prayers [had their morning and evening prayers].

44 And all that believed were together and had all things common [lived the law of consecration];

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart [expressed gratitude in their prayers for their daily bread and the blessing they enjoyed from the Lord]

47 Praising God and having favour with all the people [sought to be at peace and on good terms with their neighbors and community]. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved [the congregation in Jerusalem was growing together as they worked out their salvation].

As the congregation of the Church in Jerusalem continued to grow in numbers, there were challenges that occurred that had to be addressed. Some of this included persecution of the Church leaders and dishonesty in living the law of consecration. Despite these and other challenges, the church continued to increase in number.

6. Peter and John Heal a Lame Man

Just as Jesus went to the Temple in Jerusalem to teach those who gathered there, the Apostles continued this practice. On this particular day, as Peter and John went up together to the temple, they were stopped by a man who was lame.

Acts 3:2-3

**2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;
3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms [offering].**

Peter, upon hearing the man's plea, spoke to him.

Acts 3:4-5

**4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.
5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.**

Surely this was not the first time the man had made such a request from one who was passing by. Due to his physical condition, begging was the only means he had, due to his physical condition, of augmenting his support. No one had previously asked him to look on them for those who did respond were too busy to converse.

Acts 3:6-7 [underlined added]

**6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.
7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.**

Not only did Peter and John stop, but Peter, by the power and authority of the priesthood he had received from Jesus Christ, uses his authority to heal. Peter, sensing the possible lack of faith on the part of the lame man, takes the man's hand and lifts him up. There are times in each of our lives when our faith falters. Doubts begin to arise and we question our faith. Paul, by this simple gesture, offers his faith to the man so he may believe and be healed.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"Peter did not ask the Lord to heal the cripple; he did not pray to God to pour out his grace and healing virtue upon the lame man. Instead--acting in the Lord's name and by virtue of a delegation of priestly authority already received--he himself commanded the miracle to occur. Peter was the Lord's servant, his representative and agent; he stood in the place and stead of Christ, doing what the Master would have done if personally present."¹⁴

For the first time in his life, the man stands. The man received no coins from the two Apostles, but instead got more than he could have imagined. He received the full restoration of his legs to perfect health!

Acts 3:8-10

**8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping, and praising God.
9 And all the people saw him walking, and praising God.
10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened to him.**

Peter and John proceed to the temple, not to partake of the ritualistic Jewish prayers, but as Jesus had done before them, to teach the people who were gathered there.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

“...the Holy Ghost, speaking by the mouth of Peter, reveals that not only Israel but all things are to be restored in a day to come. This prophetic pronouncement puts in perspective the teachings and hopes of all the prophets. It opens the door to an understanding of their statements about the restoration of the gospel in the latter-days, the gathering of scattered Israel, the Second Coming, Messiah’s millennial reign, and the return of the earth itself to its paradisiacal glory.”¹⁵

We can only assume that these were also some of the principles of the gospel Jesus taught the Apostles during His forty-day ministry with them.

They will also speak directly to those who, though ignorantly, had participated in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. To them there is no invitation extending by Peter to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. The most they could hope for, he offered to them.

Acts 3:13-15, 19-21

13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.

14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.

15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

20 And he shall send Jesus Christ [A second time] which was preached unto you:

21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

“Joseph Smith says that Peter is here addressing the murderers who crucified Christ and that this is the reason Peter ‘did not’ invite them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, but rather counseled them to repent and be converted in the hope their sins would be blotted out at the Second Coming. ‘They could not be baptized for the remission of sins,’ the Prophet said, ‘for they had shed innocent blood.’ (*Teaching of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 339). Speaking of this verse, Joseph Smith also said: ‘Remission of sins by baptism was not to be preached to murderers... There is no forgiveness for murderers; they will have to wait until the times of redemption shall come, and that in hell.’ (Franklin D. Richards and James A. Little. *A Compendium*. Second Edition, 288).”¹⁶

“The time of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21) to which Peter is referring cannot occur until there is an apostasy from the truths that have been taught by Jesus Christ. This includes the loss of the priesthood power and authority the apostles currently hold. The time of restitution or restoration of these truths by Heavenly messengers, commissioned of God, will not occur until the latter days. The Old Testament Prophet Amos also taught these truths.

Amos 8:11-12

**11 Behold, the days come, said the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD:
12 And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.**

Peter and John are yet in the process of teaching those gathered at the temple when they are approached by the Jewish religious leaders.

Acts 4:1-4

**1 And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple [guards?], and the Sadducees, came upon them.
2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached Jesus the resurrection from the dead.
3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.
4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.**

Peter and John are held overnight under guard awaiting their hearing in the morning.

7. Peter and John Before the Jewish Leaders

The next morning, Peter and John are brought before the Jewish leaders including, "Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas" (Acts 4:6). They are disturbed for the Apostles are teaching the people regarding Jesus Christ whom they had put to death and especially regarding his resurrection.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"If Jesus came forth from the grave, there is no salvation in Sadducean doctrine, for it falsely denies the resurrection..."

"Honest truth seekers respond by investigating to find out whether there is a resurrection...But the response of these Satan-led Sadducees was to seek to silence the apostles, lest their sect be overthrown by this bold testimony that Jesus had risen from the dead..."¹⁷

Peter, being full of the Holy Ghost, and spokesman, stands boldly before the same Jewish leaders who were instrumental in putting Jesus to death. He testifies to them.

Acts 4:10-12

**10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.
11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.
12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.**

Peter's bold testimony stands in stark contrast to his denial of Jesus in Caiaphas palace less than two months previous. Such is the power of the Holy Ghost as it burns within the man or woman who has been born anew through the process of repentance.

The reaction to Peter's bold testimony is one of awe. They had thought them only to be "unlearned and ignorant [ordinary, plain] men [while at the same time noting] that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Acts 4:15-18

15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves.

16 Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.

17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach the name of Jesus.

Their verdict is to silence the Apostles under threat of death or imprisonment. Their position, as with Jesus before them, is that if we do not agree with you then we will do all in our power to silence you. We respect your right to speak only if you say those things that do not disagree with us.

Neither Peter nor John will be silenced.

Acts 4:19-20

19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

Peter and John have been chosen to stand as witnesses of the truth and now stand ready to give their lives, if necessary, for their testimony.

Acts 4:21

21 So when they [the council] had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"What would be the proper response of God's servants in such cases? Peter and John here refused to be silenced. Daniel chose the lion's den rather than pray to Darius (Dan.6), and the three Hebrew children faced the fiery furnace rather than worship the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan.3). In other words, the Lord's true servants elect to put first in their lives the things of God's kingdom; they choose to do what is right and let the consequences follow..."¹⁸

The Apostles now return to the Jerusalem congregation and share their experience with the Jewish leaders. The response of the congregation is one of gratitude to God for His blessings.

Acts 4:24, 28-29

24 ...they lifted up their voice to God with one accord,...

28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

29 And now, Lord, behold their threatening: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.

Harold B. Lee states,

“Who knows but that again in our day some of the saints [members] or even apostles, as in former days, may be required to give their lives in defense of the truth? If that time should come, God grant they would not fail!”¹⁹

As their arrest had come in response to the reaction of the people to their healing of the lame man, they sought for this continued power.

Acts 4:30-31

30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child.

31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the world of God with boldness.

Their prayer for continued strength to preach and heal was confirmed by an outpouring of the Holy Ghost. This heavenly manifestation served to strengthen the faith and conviction of all who were present to continue the work they had been given to do.

8. All Things in Common and the Consequences of Lying

We learned previously [see: The Church in Jerusalem] “that all that believed...had all things common and [that they] had sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men, as every man had need” (Acts 2:44-45). This program has in our day been referred to as the United Order, the Law of Concentration or the Church Welfare program.

Henry B. Eyring states,

“His [God’s Plan] way of helping has at times been called living the law of consecration. In another period, His way was called the united order. In our time it is called the Church welfare program.”²⁰

While some people may limit their participation in this program, which is designed to temporally care for the poor and needy in the church, the spiritual benefits to those who participate carry the additional benefit of preparing them to live this law in the Celestial kingdom.

Ezra Taft Benson states,

“The law of consecration is a celestial law, not an economic experiment.”²¹

Gordon B. Hinckley adds,

“...the law of consecration [was] not done away with and [is] still in effect.”²²

Like the city of Enoch (PGP, Moses 7:18-19; 69) before them, and the Nephites (B/M, 4 Nephi 1:3) following the appearance of the resurrected Lord, each had attempted to live the law of concentration. This law was also practiced as part of the restoration of all things during the early history of the restored Church (see D&C 42:30-36). Unfortunately, due to a variety of reasons, the members were not able to live this law and it was rescinded by the Lord (see D&C 105:2-6). The Law of Tithing was then given (see D&C 119:1-7), in an effort to prepare the members so that one day they would be able to again live this law.

The components of the law as practiced by the Jerusalem Saints or members included:

Acts 4:32, 34-35	Principles
<p>32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they all things common.</p>	<p>1. Were of one heart and of one soul. There were no rich or poor among them.</p>
<p>34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the price of the things that were sold.</p>	<p>2. They share their means for the benefit of each member.</p> <p>3. Each member was cared for according to the needs which they had (see D&C 51:3).</p>
<p>35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.</p>	<p>4. The individual deeded their property to the Church who in turn deeded to them the amount that they needed, as individual or family, thereby continuing the principle of private ownership D&C 42:33-35). If an individual left the Church, they kept what property they held.</p>

There were times when all were not of “one heart and soul,” and the qualities of greed and envy, a part of the natural man, arose. When these emotions are not controlled, Satan begins to have a hold upon the individual and their allegiance to full participation in the program is divided. When we turn from full obedience to God’s commandments, we become easy prey for Satan to then exercise power over us. Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, exemplify this principle.

Acts 5:1-2

- 1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.**
- 2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy [aware] of it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.**

In disregard to the covenant they had made with the Lord to give all of their means to the church, Ananias and his wife decided to only give a portion of the income from a recent sale to the church and keep the rest for themselves. They made their decision in confidence so no one would learn of their deception. Separately, they met with Peter as a representative of the church. He was in charge of receiving the donations from the members at that time. When Ananias came to give an accounting of his donation, he was not prepared for Peter’s response. Through spiritual inspiration, Peter was aware of their fraudulent actions.

Acts 5:3-6

3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou has not lied unto men, but unto God.

5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on them that heard these things.

6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

It is important to understand that the penalty given to Ananias for lying was not pronounced by Peter, but by God Himself. We cannot serve Satan and God. We offend God when we choose to ignore the covenants, we have made with Him. The immediate result of our choice is the withdrawal of the Lord's spirit from us. In this incidence, the consequence of Ananias actions resulted in his immediate death.

During the same day, Ananias' wife, Sapphira came to declare the amount of the donation of the sale of the property to Peter as the representative of the church. She was unaware of her husband's meeting with Peter and his subsequent death.

Acts 5:8-11

8 And Peter answered [said?] unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost [died]; and the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

One of the lies that Satan perpetrates is to tell his victims that, "You can go ahead and break a covenant and no one will even know of your action." We cannot break any covenant we make without the Lord knowing what we have done. We may believe, and at times we are successful, in hiding our fraudulent actions from others, but never from the Lord. Nor can we hide our actions from His servants as He chooses to reveal His will to them through the Holy Ghost. Sooner or later, we will always pay the price of our deceitful actions.

One explanation for the fear that came upon all the church, is there may also have been other members who had also been less than truthful in their dealings and now felt the nudging of their conscience to repent and take responsibility for their actions. The actions of Ananias and Sapphira had provided an important object lesson for the young church.

Bruce R. McConkie asks and then answers,

"Why did the Lord slay Ananias and Sapphira? Their crime was lying; they conspired together to deceive their church leaders; and the Lord made them an example of how serious the offense, how severe the penalty—for lying."²³

In modern revelation, the offense of lying has been confirmed by the Lord.

Doctrine and Covenants 42:21

21 Thou shalt not lie; he that lieth and will not repent shall be cast out.

9. Apostles Continue the Miracles of Jesus

As a result of the faith of the people and their receptiveness to the word of the Lord as taught by the Apostles, many miracles were performed.

Acts 5:12-14

12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought, among the people: (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

13 And of the rest [JST-rulers] durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitude of men and women).

Adam Clarke states,

“...none of the different sects [that existed at the time] dared to join themselves to them; neither Pharisees, Sadducees, nor Herodians, as such were found in this simple, holy Church.”²⁴

It would appear the converts who joined the Jerusalem Church were not made up of those who were already members of other sects or the prevailing religious groups of the time. Instead they were the common people of the day who, because of no prior religious membership, did not fear retribution from the religious rulers.

The fruits of the faith and spiritual receptivity of the people resulted in Peter [and all the Apostles] being able to perform many wonders and miracles on behalf of the people.

Acts 5:15-16

15 Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

16 There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

Just as Jesus had healed the sick, cast out evil spirits, and performed miracles through His power in combination with the faith of the people, the Apostles did the same. In this manner the Apostles were following the example that Jesus had exemplified. First, He taught the people the simple principles of the Gospel and then when sufficient faith had been ignited within the people, He then invited them to bring forth those who were afflicted. As a result of their new faith, He could now heal them. It is essential for each of us to understand that the healing and miracles Jesus and the Apostles performed, **followed** their teaching the people the simple principles of the Gospel. It did not, nor could it, precede it. It is an eternal law that without the prerequisite faith on the part of the people, no miracles or healings can be performed (see B/M, Ether 12:12, 16, 18).

10. Neither Prison nor Persecution Deter the Apostles

Due to the determination of the Apostles who continued to teach the people regarding the resurrection of Jesus and then to perform miracles amongst them, they were again arrested. The Sadducees are especially upset with the teachings of the Apostles as they do not believe in a resurrection.

Acts 5:18

18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

It is while they are being confined that heaven intervenes on their behalf and an angel is sent with a message for them.

Acts 5:19-21

19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

21 And when they [apostles] heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning and taught...

The next morning, following the council [Sanhedrin] being called together, the prisoners were ordered to be brought before them for their judgment.

Acts 5:22-23

22 But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,

23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.

Upon learning that the prisoners are not in the prison, they wonder where they had gone. They are then told that they are “standing at the temple, and teaching the people” (Acts 5:25).

The temple guard is sent and the Apostles are brought (probably in bonds) before the Sanhedrin for questioning and judgment.

The High Priest now questions their actions as they had previously been directed not to preach to the people, especially regarding Jesus’ resurrection.

Acts 5:28

28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.

Peter, acting as spokesman, responds to the High Priest’s directive forbidding them to teach Jesus’ resurrection.

Acts 5:29-30, 32

29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree [cross].

32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God had given to them that obey him.

The response of the High Priest and others is the same regarding the teachings and witness of Jesus. Just two months earlier they had chosen to put Jesus to death because His teaching were contrary to the false teachings that they had chosen to follow that they might continue to get gain. The guilty in positions of power do not want to hear the truth, but instead chose to silence those that oppose them.

Acts 5:33 [underline added]

33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

It is at this moment a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, speaks to the council as the sole defender of the apostles.

Gamaliel cites two previous incidents where individuals have risen up, drawing a large number of people after them, but upon their death, their followers disbanded and nothing became of their cause. He then offers a solution for dealing with the Apostles.

Acts 5:38-39

38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; least haply ye be found even to fight against God.

The counsel determines to follow the words of Gamaliel and not to slay them.

Acts 5:40 [underline added]

40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

The reaction by the Apostles to the beating and judgment by the religious leaders was one of rejoicing.

Acts 5:41-42 [underline added]

41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

“Persecution is the tool of Satan to harass, hinder, and destroy, if possible, the cause of righteousness. The spiritually weak, the lukewarm disciples, those who have not given themselves wholly to the Cause of Christ are purged from the Church by persecution.”²⁵

These early Apostles are an example to each of us today. They did not cease to bear their testimonies or to teach the principles of the Gospel, even when they were persecuted by the civil authorities. Gamaliel was correct. If the teaching of Jesus had not been divinely approved, it would have come to naught. It is mainly

because it has God's approval, that even centuries later, it still flourishes today in the hearts and minds of truth-seeking individuals.

11. Conclusions

During this lesson we have been privileged to witness the transformation of the Apostles, especially as manifest by the witness and testimony of Peter. They had been taught and prepared for their work by the Savior. Would they rise to the occasion and fulfill the calling which they had been given to witnesses to all the world the works and resurrection of their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ or would they shrink from their calling as the threats and persecution increased against them? The answer is a resounding yes; they would rise to their calling and in glory exemplify the trust they have been given to be witnesses to all the world regardless of the threats to their lives, beginning in Jerusalem.

What was it that transformed the Apostles from humble followers of Christ to become bold witnesses of Jesus and his teachings? It is my belief that it was the gift of the Holy Ghost that burned deeply into their souls the seeds of testimony of Jesus and His teachings. Having undergone a spiritual rebirth, they spoke as moved upon by the Holy Ghost and their witness was without compromise. They had been endowed and reborn and they were sent to, "be witnesses unto me...unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). They were no longer unlearned Galileans. They had become special witnesses of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ unto all the world.

Their witness is also an example to each of us as we are called upon to share with others our testimony of Jesus, His divinity and His resurrection. As we do so, we chose to become numbered among His disciples, not only in word, but in deed. May each of us live our lives so that we may have the gift of the Holy Ghost to guide and sustain us that we will not shrink when given the opportunity to also share our witness.

Footnotes

Chapter 28

- ¹ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971, [9th Printing, 1976], 21.
- ² *The Life and Teaching of Jesus and his Apostles (Institute) Student Manual*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978, [Second Edition, Revised, 1979], 242-243.
- ³ *Guide to Acts and the Apostles' Letters. Student Supplement, Religion 212, New Testament*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, Farms Reprint, 1990, [Third Edition, Revised, 1999], 4.
- ⁴ "A Summary of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles in Diagram and Outline" in *CES Conference Handout 2000*, 24th Annual Church Educational System Religious Educators Conference. Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 8-10 August, 2000, 85.
- ⁵ "Unto All Nations," in *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 6. Edited by Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987, 25.
- ⁶ *Guide to Acts and the Apostles' Letters. Student Supplement, Religion 212, New Testament*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, Farms Reprint, 1990, [Third Edition, Revised, 1999], 3.
- ⁷ "The Postresurrection Ministry" in *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 6. Edited by Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987, 14.
- ⁸ *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 6. Edited by Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987, 26.
- ⁹ "The Forty-day Ministry" in *The New Testament: Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Supplement*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982, 106.
- ¹⁰ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970, [9th Printing, 1976], 27.
- ¹¹ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970, [9th Printing, 1976], 30-31.
- ¹² *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970, [9th Printing, 1976], 34.
- ¹³ *History of the Church*, Vol. 2. Edited by B. H. Roberts. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co. 1948, [Seventh Printing, 1973], 428.
- ¹⁴ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970, [9th Printing, 1976], 46.
- ¹⁵ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970, [9th Printing, 1976], 47-48.
- ¹⁶ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970, [9th Printing, 1976], 48.
- ¹⁷ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970, [9th Printing, 1976], 54.
- ¹⁸ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970, [9th Printing, 1976], 54-55.
- ¹⁹ "The Constitution for a Perfect Life" in *Decisions for Successful Living*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co, 1973, 62.
- ²⁰ "Opportunities to Do Good" in *Ensign*, May, 2011, 22.
- ²¹ *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988, 639.
- ²² *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1997, 639.
- ²³ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970, [9th Printing, 1976], 58.
- ²⁴ *Adam Clarke Commentary on the Bible*. Abridged by Ralph Earle. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1967, [Nineteenth Printing March, 1991], 968.
- ²⁵ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970, [9th Printing, 1976], 63.