

The Compass

Week 26

OT Readings: 2 Kings 8:1-19:37

NT Readings: Acts 16:16-21:17

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- Chapters 8-10 will focus on Israel; Jehu will become king, institute a purge of Baal worship and destroy the house of Ahab. Beginning with Chapter 11 there is increasing focus on the Southern Kingdom, Judah.
- 2 Kings 17 recounts the demise of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. Assyria enters the story as a world power, captures and destroys Samaria (Israel's capital) and deports the inhabitants. The Northern Kingdom is no more.¹
- 2 Kings 18-20 tells the story of Hezekiah, one of Judah's truly great and good kings. Hezekiah's trust in God is reflected in his prayer (18:14-18) which God answers. Unfortunately, following Hezekiah it will all be downhill. The remainder of Judah's kings, with the exception of Josiah, will be wicked and incompetent.

New Testament

- The inbreaking of the kingdom continues. It *comes* as the message is declared, accompanied by the Holy Spirit's power. Yet, this coming is met with both human and demonic resistance.²
- Paul's third missionary journey, launched from Syrian Antioch in AD 52 (Acts 18:23), will take Paul among other places to Ephesus where he will spend considerable time and see significant results.³
- Acts 19:1-7 recounts another "coming of the Spirit" on a group of people. What similarities and what differences do you see in the various Acts' accounts?
- Luke increasingly narrows his focus; the remainder of Acts gives insight into the early Jesus movement as seen through the events of Paul's life and ministry. What can you learn?

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Acts 19:1-7. This is the final example given in Acts of the Holy Spirit's "coming" on a group.⁴ The question Paul asks them (19:2) reflects his concern about their present experience with the Spirit. Both his question and his answer tell us something important about God. His question is simple, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"⁵ Having discovered what they know and what they presently believe, Paul takes them through a process culminating in their being filled with the Spirit, "the Holy Spirit came on them" (19:6).

Paul's action reflects God's heart and intent for everyone - that all would believe in Him and all would be filled with Him - nothing short of that, nothing less than that. This is the NT picture of our relationship with God. In love, we are fully possessed by God and we fully possess Him - such that we have all that we need, when we need it, for whatever our need, as we walk with Him and learn to know Him better. In other words, God loves us so much that He will settle for nothing less than giving us the fullness of His Spirit! No matter where we are in our relationship with Him, it is His desire to *continually* fill us up with Himself (Eph. 5:18). Such is His invitation given to you, will you accept - today? Now?

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

Acts 20:17-35. Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders is filled with insight into Paul's heart and into his perspective on life and mission. Particularly fascinating is 20:22, "bound by the Spirit." Is Paul in some sort of "Holy Spirit headlock" being dragged against his will to Jerusalem? Perhaps a better translation is "bound together with the Spirit" for Paul's heart and life are so intertwined with the heart and life of the Spirit that they are joined together, *bound together*.

It is a profound statement of *conviction*. The whole passage bears this out. His heart is captured by the *person* of Jesus (Phil. 3:7-14, 2 Cor. 5:14-15) and his life captivated by the *purposes* of Jesus; he is person gripped by God. What does it mean to have conviction, to be gripped by God, bound together with the Spirit? Many things might

be drawn from this passage, but essentially conviction is this: to be so gripped with the reality of truth that *you can do no other*, you can live no other way; you are *convinced* and it means everything else in your life must yield to that conviction. Is it this way with us? Are we so convinced of Jesus' reality, of His love for us, of the paramount importance of His purposes and kingdom that *all* else in our lives must take second place?

Difficult Question of the Week

2 Kings 9-10 (see especially 10:30). Q. "Did God give approval to the violent and blood-filled actions of Jehu?"

In reading these chapters, one might well be disturbed by the way in which Jehu expresses his "zeal for the Lord" (10:16). Where is God in all of this? Seemingly God both instigates the judgment on Ahab's house (9:1-10) and approves of Jehu's completed actions (10:30). But is this the full picture?

God does not give unqualified approval to Jehu (10:28-33) nor to his actions (Hosea 1:4-5). For God to approve in *general*, i.e., of the removal of evil Ahab does *not* mean that God was pleased with the way in which Jehu went about it. The *extent* of Jehu's purge was not necessary to bring about God's ends here. In a similar situation in 2 Kings 11-12, Jehoiada overthrows wicked Athaliah with a minimum amount of violence. Violence cannot produce the kind of world for which God longs.

Yet God must deal in reality and He works with what is available to Him in any given situation. Jehu's zeal to rid the land of Baal worship was commendable and God is willing to work him. However, this does not mean that God controls every action that Jehu takes.⁶

Jer. 42:10 provides an interesting perspective, "I grieve for the disaster I brought upon you." (NEB) While the Babylonians are the agents whom God uses to discipline His wayward people, God grieves over the extent of the harm done to His people through the Babylonian violence and will hold them responsible.⁷

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¹ Samaria falls in BC 721. 17:7-18 tells why all of this happened – Israel abandoned YHWH and gave herself to the gods of the peoples who surrounded them. Assyria is important for several reasons. Their policy of deportation and replacement with other peoples created in the region of the Northern Kingdom a mixed population who would appear in the NT as the Samaritans, 17:24-41.

² You can see this reality in nearly every account Luke gives: Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, etc. Always we are left with the sense that despite difficulty and opposition, "Nothin's gonna stop it!" (As best I know Bill Jackson coined this phrase.) Note as well that Luke's narrative of Paul's visit to each of these cities is background to the letters he will write: Philippians, 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Corinthians, Ephesians.

³ Ephesus was one of the most important cities in the Roman Empire. The worship of Artemis made it a religious center. The inroads of the gospel, delivered in power, shake the status quo. In the centuries following this region will become one of the great centers for Christianity.

⁴ Acts 2, 8, 10-11, 13:52, 19. Obviously there is much "Spirit" activity in the remainder of the book, but this is Luke's last illustration of an initial filling of a group. We will address the question, "What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?" when we come to the Epistles. Also, later in the NT we will address the particulars of prophesying, tongues, etc.

⁵ Actually, the question is anything but simple! Much theological conversation wraps around this passage. If they were "disciples," i.e., believers, why would he ask such a question? Of course they had the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). Yet, apparently *he is looking for something he does not see*. If they were not yet believers (as the passage seems to imply), the process Paul takes them through and the point of arrival he is after (filled with the Spirit) makes the text even more interesting.

⁶ Those who hold the view that God meticulously controls every detail of history must also explain how God is not responsible for evil. I find their arguments unconvincing. Jehu is a free agent, however we understand God's intention to work with and through him. To grapple with these issues, I would recommend Terence Fretheim's commentary, *First and Second Kings* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

⁷ Terence Fretheim captures something of this God-world interaction, "In pursuing the divine purposes, God does not act alone, but works with what is available, with human beings as they are, with all their foibles and flaws, as well as their wisdom. God does not perfect people before working in and through them; God can work even through evil toward the divine purposes (see Gen. 50:20)." Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 27.