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Jesus Opened Their Minds
So They Could Understand the Scriptures
Luke 24:44-49 and Acts 1:3-8

Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures DIG: What convincing proofs did Yeshua present to the apostles? What task does Messiah give the talmidim? With what promise? Why do you think they asked the Lord about when He was going to restore the Kingdom to Isra'el (Acts 1:6)? What do the apostles think would happen when they received the Ruach Ha'Kodesh? What are some major ways their idea of the Kingdom differed from Jesus' (Acts 13:7-8)?

REFLECT: What convincing proofs do you have of Yeshua's resurrection that would make sense to your non-believing friends? As a disciple, what is the impact on you of Jesus' words (Acts 1:8)? What do you need the Holy Spirit's power to accomplish this week? What does Messiah think about setting a specific date for His return? Where is your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth to witness (Acts 1:8)? How can you be a witness for Christ this week?

After His suffering, Jesus presented Himself to the apostles and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). The apostles needed the accurate message as well as the courage to proclaim that message even if it cost them **their** lives (which it eventually did). **They** needed to know that **the Chief Shepherd** was alive and would fulfill **His** promise of **the Kingdom**. To secure the necessary confidence, **Yeshua presented Himself after His suffering and presented many convincing proofs (John 20:30)**, such as entering a room where the doors were locked **(Yochanan 20:19)**, showing the wounds from **His** crucifixion **(Luke 24:41-43)**, and eating and drinking with them **(Luke 24:40).** Most convincing, however, was **His appearing to them over a period of forty days**, beginning with the day of **His** resurrection. The Greek text actually reads *through forty days.* That confirms that though **He** was not with them

continually, **He** did appear at different times.

The end result of these appearances was that **the talmidim** became absolutely convinced of the reality of **their Great Rabbi's** physical resurrection. That assurance gave **them** the boldness to preach the Good News to the very people who crucified the **Son of God**. The transformation of the apostles from fearful, cowering skeptics to bold, powerful witnesses is a potent proof of the resurrection. No one dies for something they know is false.[1702]

After the time spent with **the apostles** in Galilee, **Yeshua** returned with **them** to **Tziyon**. **This was the tenth appearance of Jesus after His resurrection. Luke** recorded the final commission that **Christ** gave to **them** after **His** resurrection. There is no doubt that **Messiah** met with **the Eleven** on many occasions between **His** resurrection and ascension. But this was not only a time of fellowship, but also instruction. **He said to them: This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Torah, the Prophets and the Psalms (Luke 24:44).** As **He** had explained and interpreted the TaNaKh for the two on the Emmaus Road, **Jesus** did the same for **the talmidim**.



Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them: This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:45-48). In His name was an expression **Luke** used frequently with describing the gospel **(Luke 9:48, 24:47; Acts 2:38, 3:6** and **16, 4:10, 12, 17-18** and **30, 5:28** and **40, 8:12 and 16, 9:27-28, 10:43, 48, 16:18, 19:5)**. **Christ's** final commission was to remain in **the City of David** until the coming of **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** on Shavu'ot **(Acts 2)**. In order to

understand **the Scriptures** you must have **the Holy Spirit** **open** your **mind** and heart. Only **He** can make your Bible study come alive for you.

Having received the message, and witnessed the appearance of **the** risen **Messiah**, **the apostles** probably thought **they** were ready to minister on **their** own strength. To prevent that misconception, **on one occasion while He was eating with them Yeshua commanded them not to leave Yerushalayim.** To **the shlichim (**Hebrew: **messengers** or **emissaries)**, who were no doubt fired up to begin **their** ministry, it must have seemed like a strange command. But that's the point isn't it. All the preparation and training that knowledge and experience can bring are useless without the **power** (Greek: *dunamis* from where we get the word dynamite) to accompany the Good News. Thus, all believers have in them the spiritual **dynamite** for using their spiritual gifts, for service, for fellowship and being a **witness**.

Jesus said: But wait for the gift My Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be clothed with power from on high when you are **baptized with/by/in the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:48-49; Acts 1:4-5).** The righteous of the TaNaKh, like all children of **God**, experienced **the Ruach's power** for salvation and life, as well as for special occasions of ministry. But it was not a permanent indwelling **(Psalm 51:11)**. However, after Shavu'ot in **Acts 2**, **the Spirit** would permanently inhabit and **empower** **them** in a way that was unique.[1703]

The Eleven shared the zealous hope of **their** nation that **the Meshiach** would come and establish **His** promised earthly **Kingdom**. In fact, **Yeshua** had often taught **them** prophetically about the future **(Matthew 13:40-50; 24:1-51, 25:1-46)**. **Then they gathered around Jesus and asked Him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Isra'el" (Acts 1:6)?** This was a perfectly understandable question for those steeped in the TaNaKh. **Peter** asked somewhat the same question on the mount of Transfiguration (**to see link click Gb – Jesus took Peter, James and John Up a High Mountain where He was Transfigured**) when **he** said: **Lord, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three booths – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.** Being good Jewish boys, **they** had been taught that when **the Messiah** came **the Kingdom** would begin. So **they** were correct as far as **they** knew, but the Dispensation of Grace (see my commentary on **Hebrews Bp – The Dispensation of Grace**) was **a mystery** to **them (Ephesians 5:32)**. A **mystery** the Bible is not something like, "Is there life on the far side of Neptune?" We don't know because

it's a "mystery." A **mystery** in the Bible is something that was once hidden, but is now being revealed. So it was reasonable that **they** expected the immediate arrival of **the Kingdom**. Surely it was for this **Kingdom they** had longed for since **they** first joined **Jesus**. **They** had experienced a roller coaster ride of hope and doubt that **they** now hoped might be over.[1704]

However, **the Lord** quickly brought **them** back to reality. **He said to them: It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority (Acts 1:7).** The Scriptures teach us many things about **Yeshua Messiah** in **His Kingdom**, but not the exact time of its establishment. The fact that **He** doesn't deny **their** expectation of a literal, earthly **Kingdom** involving **Isra'el** is extremely significant. It showed that **their** understanding was correct, except for the time of its coming. It also shows that Amillennialism (Greek: A = "no" + millennialism, which holds that the **thousand years** mentioned in **Revelation 20:2** is merely a symbolic number) is without biblical support. Unfortunately, many Amillennialists also believe in replacement theology (which holds that the Christian Church has replaced national **Isra'el** regarding the plan, purpose, and promises of **God**. Therefore, many of the promises that **God** made to **Isra'el** must be spiritualized) and think that we're in the Millennial **Kingdom** right now. I don't know about your neighborhood . . . but I haven't seen any **lions** lay down with any **lambs** lately (I guess they must think that's spiritualized too)! The point is, **the apostles** had it right except the timing.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in four distinct stages: **in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).** There is a sense in which **believers** don't even choose whether or not to be **witnesses**. We *are* **witnesses**, and the only question is how effective **our** witness is. **Those** who love the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are under attack around the world today. But **we** are still called to be **witnesses**.

So many **believers** sealed **their witness** to **Messiah** with **their blood** that the Greek word ***martures*** or **witness** came to mean **martyrs**. **Their blood**, as the second-century theologian Tertullian stated, became the seed of the Church. Many were drawn to faith in **Jesus** by observing how calmly and joyously Christians met their deaths.[1705]

Bulgaria fought on the side of Germany in World War I and II, but remained at peace with Russia until near the end of the second Great War. In 1944 the Soviets formally

declared war to justify the entry of Red troops into Bulgaria. Backed by the Red soldiers, local Communists seized power.

There, as elsewhere, the Communists pretended to be democratic. “Free” elections, as supervised by the Russians, were a bitter joke on the Bulgarians. This is well illustrated in their policies toward the churches. From 1944 to 1948 the churches were all but ignored by the new rulers. Marxist officials were busy consolidating their power, setting up a constitution modeled after the Soviet one, repairing war damages, and polishing the new Bulgarian image for world propaganda purposes.

In 1948 the repression began, reflecting a Stalinist trend all across subjugated Eastern Europe. The puppet Bulgarian government forced the leader of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to resign, then pressured the ruling Orthodox Synod to take a pro-communist line. In 1949 state officials prodded the Orthodox clergy to hold special services in honor of Stalin’s seventieth birthday. Pastors who objected or failed to follow instructions were arrested and sent to labor camps.

In this same year a new law put all church activities and appointments of clergy under the control of the state. The theological faculty at the University of Sofia was compelled to add Marxism to its curriculum. More Orthodox pastors were arrested and put on trial. Some were executed.

Persecution of smaller church bodies was even more severe. All churches with connections to denominations outside Bulgaria were ordered shut down. Only after these churches cut links with their foreign brothers were they allowed to resume worship services.

Also in 1949 fifteen prominent leaders of Baptist, Pentecostal, Methodist and Congregational churches were arrested and charged with high treason, espionage, unlawful foreign exchange transactions and attempts to undermine the government. The government press claimed that all made “confessions of guilt” and, after being sentenced to terms ranging from one year to life, thanked the judge for such “mild punishment.” Protests were lodged with western governments and in the General Assembly of the United Nations, but to no avail. The only response of the Marxist regime was to make more arrests. Among others taken into custody were the Roman Catholic Bishop of Nikopol, Monsignor Eugene Boslov; the head of the Catholic seminary at Plovdiv; and two other priests. It is assumed that all four were executed.

As in Russia, arrested Bulgarian church leaders were convicted of “political” crimes and jailed with the general prison population. “We (pastors) were described as instruments of imperialism,” explains ex-prisoner Harlan Popov in his book *Tortured for His Faith.* The communist bosses also took stringent measures to destroy journals kept by **believers** about their personal experiences and about deaths of fellow inmates. Consequently, specific Christian **martyrs** among the thousands who died in Bulgarian prisons and labor camps have been hard to identify.

Baptist pastor Popov, a converted atheist, was picked up at his home in 1948 and taken to the local secret police station for “a little questioning.” After interrogation, he was escorted to a cellblock where a prisoner had scrawled a quotation from Dante’s Inferno (Italian: *hell*) over the cell door, which read, “Abandon all hope, you who enter here.”

Two weeks later Pastor Popov was put on a death diet and subjected to around-the-clock nonstop interrogation. Three questionnaires worked eight-hour shifts. Each time he denied spying, he was hit on the side of the head. After ten days of beatings and starvation, he later recorded what he saw reflected in a window . . . “a horrible, emaciated figure, legs swollen, eyes like empty holes in the head, with a long beard covered with dried blood from cracked, bleeding and hideously swollen lips . . . In that moment of total, crushing hopelessness, I heard a voice as clear and distinct as any voice I have ever heard in my life, saying: **I will never leave you, I will never forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6)**. Then the presence of **God** filled the Punishment Cell and enveloped me in a divine warmth, infusing strength into the shell that was my body.”

Popov spent eleven years in Bulgarian prisons. On the walls of the cells were scratched the longings of former inmates. Above one door he noticed an old Latin proverb, *Dum spiro spero . . . as long as I breathe, I hope.*

The prisoners developed a crude communication code. One tap on the wall stood for “a,” two taps for “b,” and so on through the alphabet. Pastor Popov used the telegraph to win men to Christ. One prisoner who had accepted Christ through Popov’s witnessing fell near him while they were constructing an embankment. Popov tried to carry him back to the barracks but collapsed after a few steps. The new **believer** died where he lay.

When Popov was released, he was given a “Resident’s Permit” to live in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. He boldly started illegal prayer meetings and Bible classes in an

old woman's small apartment. Later he felt compelled to escape to the free world to tell people about the plight of the underground Bulgarian churches and to rejoin his family who had been allowed to move to Sweden. Through the prayers of many believers all over Bulgaria, Popov was granted a passport. Thirteen years and two months after his arrest, Popov was reunited with his wife and children.

In the years since, he has preached to thousands of free world **believers**, raising money to smuggle Bibles to **believers** across the borders of Iron Curtain countries and pleading for prayer and concern for those suffering for **Christ** under communism. Popov says:

I have spoken around the world on behalf of the Underground Church. I have often asked, "Who here has prayed for the suffering **believers** of the Underground Church?" Always the answer is almost no one. It is a shame on the conscience of all free **believers**. We from Communist lands are your brothers and sisters in **Christ**. We are one body in **Christ** . . .

My people accept the suffering. They understand this is their cross. But they don't understand why their brothers and sisters in the free world seem to have forgotten them – even in their prayers.[1706] So many **believers** sealed **their witness** to **Messiah** with **their blood** that the Greek word ***martures*** or **witness** came to mean **martyrs**.

I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained (Revelation 6:9).

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth . . . others were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the earth (Hebrews 11:13, 35-38).