

THE FORTY DAYS · POST THREE OF FOUR

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A City That Did Not Know*Days 1–8 · Jerusalem · Thomas*

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The Shore at Dawn*Days 9–20 · Galilee · Peter*

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The Kingdom in the Margins*Acts 1:3 · Commission · Curriculum*

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The Hill and the Hands*Day 40 · The Ascension*

The Kingdom in the Margins

What Jesus Taught in the Days We Cannot See

Acts 1:3 · The Great Commission · How Broken Men Became Apostles

Acts 1:3 (ESV)

“He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.”

THE QUESTION

What Was Happening in the Days We Cannot See?

We have reached the part where the record goes quiet. The locked rooms and the lakeside fire belong to the first three weeks. The Ascension belongs to Day 40. Between those fixed points is a stretch of time that the Gospels do not narrate in sequence and Acts summarises in a single sentence.

Luke, who was characteristically precise about everything else, tells us only this: Jesus was *speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*. One phrase. One compressed summary of what must have been dozens of hours of teaching across several weeks. An entire curriculum reduced to a subtitle.

We cannot reconstruct the exact words. But we can ask: what did these men need to understand that they did not yet understand? And what did they clearly understand by Pentecost that they had not understood before? The distance between those two points tells us what the teaching must have covered.

THE EVIDENCE

Before and After: The Distance Between Two States

The most revealing clue about what Jesus taught in the forty days is the contrast between the disciples at the beginning of the period and the same men six weeks later at Pentecost. It is a transformation so complete that

it requires something to explain it.

Before the Forty Days	After Pentecost
Hiding behind locked doors, afraid (John 20:19)	Standing in the Temple courts, publicly declaring the resurrection to thousands (Acts 2:14)
Confused: “We had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel” — past tense (Luke 24:21)	Proclaiming with certainty: “God has made him both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36)
Unable to understand how the cross was consistent with messianic claims (Luke 24:25)	Interpreting the cross as the centrepiece of God’s plan, foretold in Scripture (Acts 2:23)
Still expecting an immediate political restoration of Israel (Acts 1:6)	Understanding the mission as reaching “the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)
Reading the OT as a national story of Israel’s history and hope	Reading the OT as a unified narrative pointing to Jesus, citing Psalms, Isaiah, Joel fluently
Grieving and directionless: “I am going fishing” (John 21:3)	Devoted continually to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer (Acts 2:42)

This is not the change produced by a good night’s sleep. This is the change produced by a systematic curriculum delivered by the best teacher who ever lived, to the people he trusted most, in the weeks between his resurrection and his departure.

ACTS 1:1–8

The Three Things Luke Tells Us Jesus Did

Luke was a physician — trained to observe and record precisely. When he compresses weeks of teaching into a few verses, he is giving us headlines, not padding. Each element he selects is central.

<p>Acts 1:3 The Content</p> <p>Speaking about the Kingdom of God</p> <hr/> <p>Jesus spent forty days teaching how the cross and resurrection had changed everything the disciples understood about the Kingdom. It had come — not as political liberation, but as a cosmic reclamation of all creation. The King had died and risen. His reign had begun.</p>	<p>Acts 1:4 The Command</p> <p>Wait for the Promise of the Father</p> <hr/> <p>He ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the Holy Spirit. The John 20 breathing was a personal pledge; the Pentecost event would be a public, international launch of the mission. You cannot use a tool you have not been taught to use.</p>	<p>Acts 1:6–8 The Redirection</p> <p>Not ‘when’ but ‘what will you do’</p> <hr/> <p>Their last question revealed what forty days had not yet resolved: when would Israel be restored? Jesus redirected from timeline to mission. Not a political programme but a geographical commission: Jerusalem → Judea → Samaria → the ends of the earth.</p>
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THE CURRICULUM

Reconstructing What the Forty Days Must Have Covered

We can work backward from what the disciples preached at Pentecost — because what they preached reveals what they had been taught. The first sermons in Acts are theologically structured and scripturally grounded. Someone taught these men how to read the Scriptures. That someone was Jesus.

I *How to Read the Old Testament*

Luke 24:44–45: He “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” The Greek word *dianoigō* — the same used for the stone rolled away from the tomb. He did not give them a new Bible; he unlocked the one they already had. Every text they had memorised since childhood suddenly pointed somewhere they had never seen. The key to reading Scripture was not scholarship. It was the resurrection.

II *Why the Cross Was Necessary*

Luke 24:25–26: “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer?” The word ‘necessary’ — *edei* — is crucial. Not accidental, but divinely ordained. The disciples needed to understand that the cross was not a deviation from the plan. It was the plan. God had been writing toward it since Genesis 3:15.

III *What the Kingdom Actually Is*

The disciples’ confusion — political liberation vs. spiritual reign — required sustained theological education. Jesus had to show them that the Kingdom was not an alternative to the cross but its result. The King had died and risen. His reign was real and present. But it spread through witnesses and service rather than armies and conquest.

IV *The Mission and Its Scope*

Matthew 28:19: “All nations.” Acts 1:8: “To the ends of the earth.” These phrases represented a theological earthquake for men whose religious inheritance was structured around the Israel/Gentile distinction. Jesus spent weeks showing them in the Scriptures — from Genesis 12:3, from Isaiah 42:6 — that this had always been the plan.

V

Forgiveness and the New Covenant

Luke 24:47: Repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations. What the disciples had experienced personally — the unearned, complete, covenant-backed forgiveness of God — was the message they were being sent to announce. Not a moral improvement programme. A declaration: the debt is paid, the door is open, forgiveness is available to anyone who turns.

VI

Their Own Identity

John 20:21: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” The disciples were being reconstructed not just theologically but personally. They had failed. They had hidden, denied, fled. The forty days were a restoration process. Jesus was rebuilding broken men into the foundation stones of the Church — not because they were worthy, but because that is how the Kingdom works.

THE KEY VERSE

He Opened Their Minds — Luke 24:45

Of all the things Luke records Jesus doing in the post-resurrection period, the statement in Luke 24:45 may be the most important and the most overlooked.

διανοίξεν
Di-noixen “He Opened” Luke 24:45

Three Progressive Openings in Luke 24

v.31 — Their eyes were opened. Physical recognition — they saw who he was.

v.32 — He opened the Scriptures. Emotional resonance — their hearts burned.

v.45 — He opened their minds. Intellectual understanding — the categories rebuilt.

The word *dianoigēn* is the same used in Acts 16:14 when God ‘opened’ Lydia’s heart to respond to Paul’s preaching. The capacity to understand Scripture is a gift given by the risen Christ, continued by his Spirit. The disciples had the same Scriptures before and after Easter. The resurrection was not just a historical event. It was a hermeneutical key.

THE COMMISSION

The Great Commission: Read Carefully — Matthew 28:18–20

Matthew 28:17 records something honest: “When they saw him they worshipped him, but some doubted.” Even at the Great Commission, in the presence of the risen Christ, some were still not completely settled. Jesus did not address the doubters. He addressed all of them together.

π■σα ■ξουσι■α
Pasa exousia

“All authority has been given to me.”

Not raw power but the right to exercise it. Not religious influence but total jurisdiction over everything that exists. The commission flows from this claim: the Church’s mission is authorised by the sovereignty of the risen King.

μαθητε■σατε
Math■teusate

“Make disciples” — the only imperative in the Greek.

‘Go,’ ‘baptising,’ and ‘teaching’ are participles — the manner of the command, not commands themselves. The one thing being commanded is the making of disciples: learners, people shaped by ongoing relationship with the living Christ.

π■ντα τ■ ■θνη
Panta ta ethn■

“All nations” — every people, language, tribe.

For men whose world was organised around the Israel/Gentile distinction, this was a complete revolution. But Abraham had been told “in you all the nations shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). The commission was not inventing something new; it was finally fulfilling something ancient.

■γ■ μεθ■ ■μ■ν
Eg■ meth■ hym■n

“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The Greek eg■ is emphatic — “I myself, I personally.” *Pasas tas h■meras* — literally ‘all the days,’ every individual day without exception. The commission could not be more ambitious. The promise could not be more intimate.

TRANSFORMATION

How Broken Men Became the Foundation of the Church

The forty days were not just a theology seminar. They were a formation process — the slow, sustained work of rebuilding frightened, shamed, confused, grieving people into the men and women who would turn the world upside down.

Think about who these people were at the start of the forty days. Peter had denied Jesus three times. Thomas had refused to believe the testimony of ten friends. James had never believed at all. This is the raw material from which the Church was built — not the impressive, the bold, the theologically prepared, but the broken, the cowardly, the confused.

“The pattern is clear: Presence first. Healing second. Task third. Jesus did not send broken people on a mission without spending time healing the break. The Church was not launched from strength. It was launched from restored weakness.”

The Forty Days Were the First Systematic Christian Theology

Taught by Jesus himself.

Every theology ever written — Paul’s letters, John’s Gospel, the creeds, Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Barth — is downstream of what Jesus taught in those forty days. The categories the disciples used in the early sermons of Acts were received, from the risen Christ, in the weeks we cannot see. The whole of Christian theology is an extended commentary on a curriculum that was never written down.

WHAT WE USUALLY MISS

Five Depths in the Forgotten Weeks

1. The forty days were the first systematic Christian theology — taught by Jesus himself

Every theology ever written is downstream of what Jesus taught in those forty days. The categories the disciples used in Acts were received, from the risen Christ, in the weeks we cannot see. The whole of Christian theology is an extended commentary on a curriculum that was never written down.

2. The disciples’ persistent confusion on the last day is a comfort, not an embarrassment

They still asked “will you restore the kingdom to Israel?” on Day 40. This is not a story about their slowness. It is a story about how deeply formation goes and how long it takes. What finally changed it was not more information — it was the coming of the Spirit and the experience of living the mission. Formation is a lifelong project. The disciples are not an embarrassment; they are a mirror.

3. The Great Commission begins with authority, not a call to effort

“All authority has been given to me — therefore go.” Most preachers treat this as a preamble. But it is the commission’s entire foundation. The disciples were not sent because they were capable. They were invited to participate in something already happening, backed by the total authority of a risen King.

4. The resurrection is a hermeneutical key, not just a historical event

Luke 24:45: Jesus “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” For anyone who has genuinely encountered the risen Christ, the world reorganises. What seemed random becomes purposeful. What seemed conclusive becomes provisional. What seemed like an ending becomes a beginning.

5. “To the end of the age” is addressed to every generation

Matthew 28:20 was not addressed only to the eleven on the mountain. The promise extends to the end of the age — which means it extends to now. The same Jesus who walked with the disciples through the forty days says to every follower in every century: “I am with you. All the days. To the end.” He is still teaching. He is still opening minds. He is still with us.

Study & Reflection

Jesus was ‘speaking about the kingdom of God’ for forty days — and yet on the last day his disciples still asked the wrong question. Is there something about God, the Kingdom, or your calling that you have been taught and heard, and yet keep returning to the wrong category? What would it look like for Jesus to redirect you from ‘when’ to ‘what will you do while it is arriving’?

Acts 1:6–8 · Isaiah 55:8–9 · Romans 12:2

Luke 24:45: ‘He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.’ The same texts, newly unlocked. Is there a passage you have read many times that you feel you haven’t yet encountered properly? What would it mean to ask the risen Christ specifically to open your mind to it — not just to read it, but to have it opened?

Luke 24:45 · Psalm 119:18 · 1 Corinthians 2:10

The Great Commission begins: ‘All authority has been given to me — therefore go.’ Is there a calling in your life you have been hesitating in because you don’t feel adequate? How does the ‘therefore’ of Matthew 28:18–19 change the equation? The commission is authorised by his authority, not yours.

Matthew 28:18–19 · 2 Corinthians 12:9 · Philippians 4:13

Jesus taught that the cross was ‘necessary’ — edei, divinely ordained, part of the plan. Is there something in your own life you are still reading as a tragedy or a derailment? What would it mean to ask the risen Christ to show you how it fits into a larger plan you can’t yet fully see?

Luke 24:26 · Romans 8:28 · Genesis 50:20

The disciples who received the commission were the same people who had failed, fled, doubted, and denied. Jesus did not wait for better people. Are you waiting to feel more qualified, more healed, more together before you consider yourself available for what God is asking? What does the pattern of the forty days say to that?

Matthew 28:17 · 1 Corinthians 1:27–28 · 2 Corinthians 4:7

‘I am with you always, to the end of the age.’ What difference does it make to your actual daily experience — not as a theological proposition but as a lived reality — that the risen Christ has promised his personal presence with you, all the days, without exception?

Matthew 28:20 · Hebrews 13:5 · John 14:18

Key Scriptures

Acts 1:1–8 · Luke 24:44–49 · Matthew 28:16–20 · 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 · Acts 2:14–41 · John 20:21 · Genesis 12:3 · Isaiah 42:6 · Psalm 119:18

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18–20 · The Kingdom in the Margins · The Forty Days · Post 3 of 4

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