

The Book of Acts Introduction and Chapter 1

A series based on a college text from 1972 by Jet Witherspoon, *Acts, The amazing history of the early church*.

Jet Witherspoon was one of the converts of the early Pentecostal movement of the early 1900s. Howard Goss, one of the early leaders of the church, preached in Wichita Falls in March 1915 and Jet received the Holy Ghost in that revival. She spent many years teaching in Bible colleges in Mississippi and Oregon.

I. Introduction

A. The author Luke

1. Luke was the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. His character and personality may be discerned from his writings and from the few Scriptural references to him in Paul's writings.
2. *Luke 1:1-4*
1 Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,
2 Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;
3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,
4 That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.
3. Luke was:
 - a. **A rigorous researcher:** He had studied writings and interviewed eyewitnesses
 - b. **An authoritative writer:** He had gained a full understanding of the events of the life of Jesus and was determined to write an orderly account of those things.
 - c. **A passionate teacher:** He wanted to pass those certain truths along to Theophilus.
4. *Col 4:14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.*
 - a. Luke was a **well-liked physician** and was a travel companion of Paul in his missionary journeys.
5. *2 Tim 4:9-11*
9 Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me:
10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.
11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.
 - a. Luke was a **loyal friend**. When others had forsaken Paul for various reasons, he remained loyal.
6. *Philem 23-24*
23 There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;
24 Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.
 - a. Luke was a **companion in trouble**: While Paul was a prisoner, Luke remained with Paul.

- B. Date:
1. The Book of Acts concluded with the account of Paul's early ministry in Rome, about A.D. 65, and appears to have been written near that time.
 2. This was the time of the reign of Nero (54-68) as Emperor of Rome, one of the more treacherous of Rome's emperors.¹
 3. This is the individual whom tradition says conducted Paul's trial in Rome that ended with his execution.
- C. To Whom Written:
1. Luke addressed both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts to person named Theophilus, of whom little is known except that he seems to have been a close friend to Luke.
- D. Theme:
1. The theme of the Book of Acts is the history, development, and growth of the early church, from the ascension of Christ to Paul's imprisonment in Rome and the beginning of his ministry there.
- E. Key Word:
1. The word "witness," which is used more than thirty times, seems to be the key word.
- F. Divisions:
1. The Book of Acts is naturally divided into two parts.
 2. Part I (Chapters 1 through 12) is concerned mostly with the apostolic ministry in and near Jerusalem. Peter was the most prominent minister of this period
 3. Part II (Chapters 13 through 28) is concerned mostly with the apostolic ministry to the Gentile world. Paul was the most prominent minister of this period
- II. Chapter 1
- A. Luke's Opening Address to Theophilus (Verses 1, 2)
1. *Acts 1:1-2*
1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,
2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:
 2. Luke addressed both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts to Theophilus.
 3. In Luke 1:3 he addressed him as "most excellent Theophilus," by which likely referred to his friend's outstanding character.
 4. Luke began his story of the apostolic ministry where he left off in the last verses of the Gospel of Luke on the life of Christ.
 5. In fact, the last verses of Luke and the first verses of Acts overlap. In both passages he recorded Jesus' last instructions to His disciples as well as His ascension.
 6. Luke's reference to his former treatise, in which he had written of **all that Jesus began to do and to teach** (in Luke), **implies** that he now writes (in Acts) about that which Jesus continued to do and teach through His Holy Ghost-filled disciples.

¹ Robert L. Cate, *One Untimely Born*, Mercer University Press, 2006, p. 25.

7. Which did not cease just because Jesus ascended back to heaven. He had told the disciples:
*John 14:12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and **greater works than these** shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*
 8. Empowered by the Holy Ghost, the believers would accomplish Jesus' works on a much wider scope as they ministered in all parts of the world.
- B. Infallible Proofs of Jesus' Resurrection (Verse 3)
1. *Acts 1:3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:*
 2. Luke reminded Theophilus of the forty days Jesus was seen alive after His passion, meaning his torture and death.
 3. But death was followed by resurrection and many appearances, infallible proofs, that He was indeed alive from the dead.
 4. We could not be saved without the resurrection:
1 Cor 15:13-14
13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:
14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.
 5. Witnessing the resurrected Jesus was crucial to their witness to others later.
 6. This is important: Unlike other major religions, the foundation of the New Testament church depends on a historical fact, not believing in a manufactured myth.
 7. For example, Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom when he confessed the revelation that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, (Matt 16:15-18), yet shortly after, when tested, He denied even knowing Jesus.
 8. But then Peter had his faith confirmed after seeing and speaking to Jesus several times after His resurrection (Mark 16:6-14; John 20:19-23; 21:1-17).
 9. *John 21:15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my lambs.***
 10. His faith was further confirmed when he was filled with the Holy Ghost, which equipped him to use the keys of the kingdom to open the door of salvation to all people (Acts 2:1-38).
 11. The resurrection of Jesus is doubtless the best attested fact in the Gospel records.
 12. Very early on the first day of the week (Sunday) there was a great earthquake. The angel of the Lord rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb and sat on it.
 13. The glory of heaven which shone from his countenance and raiment struck the guards dumb and paralyzed them with terror (Matt 28: 1-8).
 14. Only the guards were present when Jesus arose from the dead, and some of them went immediately to the chief priests and related all that had happened.
 15. The priests then bribed them with a large sum of money to lie that the body of Jesus had been stolen from the tomb (Matt. 28:11-15).
 16. But their lies were rendered ineffective by the many infallible proofs of His many appearances to His disciples during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension

C. Jesus' Last Instruction Before His Ascension (Verses 4, 5)

1. *Acts 1:4-5*

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.

2. Jesus' last instruction to His disciples before He ascended into heaven was to command them to return to Jerusalem to wait for the promise of the Father.

3. He explained that this promise was the Holy Ghost which John the Baptist had promised they should receive:

Matt 3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

4. The Holy Ghost was called the promise of the Father because God had promised it many times in scripture.

5. **Jeremiah** said that God would write His laws on the minds and in the hearts of His people (Jer. 31:31-34), and Hebrews teaches us this was fulfilled with the new covenant in the Holy Ghost (Heb. 8:6-13).

6. A very similar promise is recorded in **Ezekiel**, that God would put His Spirit within His people to give them a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 36:26-27).

7. And **Joel** promised that God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28-29). Peter quoted that passage as being fulfilled when the Holy Ghost was poured out (Acts 2:16-21).

8. And Jesus had promised to fill the thirsty with the living water of the Holy Ghost (John 7:37-39).

9. He also called the Holy Ghost the Comforter which He had promised to send upon them when He went away (John 14: 16-20, 26), and now the fulfillment of the promise was near.

D. The Disciples' Misunderstanding (Verses 6-8)

1. *Acts 1:6-8*

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

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 Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

2. When Jesus told the disciples to return to Jerusalem to wait for the coming of the Holy Ghost, they asked a question that was on the minds of most Jews since the time of the Babylonian captivity—restoring Israel as a nation.

3. From the time that Zerubbabel led the first company back to begin rebuilding Jerusalem, the people of Israel had gradually filtered back into the land of Palestine till the time of Christ and the apostles.

4. But they were presently under Roman rule, which they hated.

5. The disciples of Jesus along with the multitude at Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem weeks before, had associated the coming of Messiah with the restoration of the kingdom and had hoped that Jesus would deliver them from Roman rule (Luke 24:21).
 6. Their hope was now revived in the thought that this Christ who had conquered death, would now conquer Rome.
 7. To feed that hope, verse 12 said they were on Mount Olivet, and according to Zechariah 14:3-9, God chose this spot as the place He would conquer all nations and become king over all the earth.
 8. Plus, Jesus had told them:
Luke 22:29-30
29 And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me;
30 That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
 9. From our perspective, we see these as being fulfilled at the end of the Great Tribulation leading to the Millennial Reign of Christ. But they didn't have the luxury of our perspective.
 10. Jesus explained that it was not yet the time to bring them into political power. Their conquest at this time was not for a natural kingdom but for a spiritual one.
 11. They were to receive power in the Holy Ghost to witness to the world of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as God's means to save men from sin (1 Cor. 15:1-4).
 12. Through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus by the power of the Holy Ghost, (1 Cor. 2:1-5) men of all nations and races should be converted from the kingdom of Satan to the Kingdom of God:
Col 1:13-14
13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:
14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:
 13. The greatest power available to men in this life is not political power, but the power in the Holy Ghost.
 14. Greater things are accomplished by faith in God than by all the political, military, or physical powers in the world.
- E. The Ascension of Jesus (Verses 9-11)
1. *Acts 1:9-11*
9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.
10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;
11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.
 2. Immediately after Jesus promised the disciples power in the Holy Ghost, the disciples watched as Jesus' feet lifted from the earth and He began to ascend into heaven.
 3. As they watched Him ascend, a cloud came down and enveloped Him, hiding Him from their view.

4. And He has promised to return to earth on that same glory cloud (Rev. 1:7; 14:14) into which He will catch away His waiting saints:

1 Thess 4:17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

5. As the disciples looked up in amazement, two angels in white apparel appeared and encouraged them with the promise that Jesus would return in the same manner in which they had seen Him disappear into the cloud

F. The Disciples Return to Jerusalem (Verses 12-14)

1. *Acts 1:12-14*

12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

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

2. After the disciples received the reassuring message of the angels, they obediently and joyfully returned to Jerusalem to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost (Luke 24:52).
3. The place from which Jesus ascended was on the mount of Olives a short distance west of the town of Bethany. It was a sabbath day's journey from Jerusalem, which is about a half mile.
4. When the disciples arrived in Jerusalem, they went into an upper room where they could wait in prayer. This room seems to have been within the temple grounds, since they were said to have been continually in the temple praising and blessing God (Luke 24:53).
5. There were approximately one hundred and twenty disciples who gathered in the upper room to wait for the coming of the Holy Ghost.
6. The eleven Apostles who were named, and the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, were among the one hundred and twenty disciples.
7. The whole company continued in prayer and supplication with one accord (with the one purpose), that they might receive the promise of the Father.

G. The Election to Fill the Apostolic Vacancy Left by Judas (Verses 15-26)

1. Peter took the initiative in pointing out to the group the necessity of electing one to fill the vacancy left by Judas.
2. They appointed Joseph, called Barsabas and surnamed Justus, and Matthias and the lot to fall on Matthias.
3. But it is possible that they acted somewhat prematurely since there is no further mention made of Matthias or of his ministry.
4. However, in the years following, there is strong evidence that Saul of Tarsus was chosen of God to fill this particular office of one of the Twelve Apostles (Acts 9:15; Rom. 1:1; 11:13; 1 Cor. 15:5-10).

III. Conclusion: 18 questions