

# 1. The Book of Acts 1:1-8

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## *An Introduction to Acts*

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

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The Book of Acts is the second in a two-volume set written by Luke—

### **Acts 1:1 (NKJV)**

**<sup>1</sup> The former account [Luke's gospel] I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach...**[indicating that Acts was a continuation of Luke's gospel narrative—vol.2]

Luke was not a Jew; he was a gentile, the only gentile whose writings were included in the New Testament. We also know from Colossians 4:14 that Luke was a doctor.

Many Bible scholars and historians believe that, since many wealthy men back then would have at least one slave who was a physician that Luke was probably a slave. It is also believed that the man he was writing these two volumes to, a man by the name of *Theophilus*—could have been Luke's master.

It is further believed that when Theophilus got saved (along with Luke) that he released Luke from his slavery to accompany Paul on his missionary journeys seeing as Paul had some medical problems and would have benefited from having a personal physician by his side.

Those who have studied history have concluded that Luke was one of the greatest historians who has ever lived who has given us an extremely accurate and reliable historical record of the early church—at least for the first 30 years of it.

But also, the Book of Acts is an invaluable '*bridge*' that spans and connects the gospels with the epistles. Imagine what it would be like if the Book of Acts was missing.

You would pick up your Bible and see the ministry of Jesus ending in John's Gospel—and the next thing you would read about is a guy named Paul writing to followers of Jesus in Rome! You'd be scratching your head and wondering—"*Who is Paul? How did the gospel get from Jerusalem to Rome?*"

### **Acts answers these questions!**

The historical and chronological division of the Book of Acts is found in 1:8:

### **Acts 1:8 (NKJV)**

**<sup>8</sup> But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."**

The book divides naturally according to this key verse.

- The first seven chapters record the work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles in *Jerusalem*.

- Chapters 8 through 12 records the work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles in *Judea* and *Samaria*.
- The remainder of the book is devoted to the work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles to the *end of the earth*.

Scholars have debated the timing (date) of the book of Acts—with the majority believing it was written some time before AD 62.

Why before AD 62? Because of the way the book abruptly ends with Paul awaiting his trial in Rome (which took place in 62 A.D.). If the book was written after that date—then why didn't Luke record the outcome of Paul's trial before Caesar?

Also, if the book was written later (sometime between 70 and 80 A.D.)—why didn't Luke mention the persecution under Nero in A.D. 64; Paul's death in A.D. 68; or the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70?

But maybe, the reason that Luke (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) didn't provide us with a proper ending to this book is because—the book of Acts is a continuing story, and that the record of the Church continues to be written through the work of the Holy Spirit in each of our lives.

**Acts 1:1–2 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen...

In the last chapter of his gospel, Luke records the resurrection of Jesus and how He commanded His disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father (the Holy Spirit—John 14) Who would endue them with power to fulfill the Great Commission—

**Luke 24:46–49 (NKJV)**

<sup>46</sup> Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> And you are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”

Now Luke is going to continue the narrative, so he goes back to Jesus' post resurrection ministry to His disciples as a starting point—

**Acts 1:3 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup> to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs...

We know that after Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples on many different occasions over the next 40 days before He ascended back to His Father in heaven. When Jesus first appeared to them, they had doubts about Him being physically raised from the dead—they thought maybe He was a ghost or a spirit—

**Luke 24:36–40 (NKJV)**

<sup>36</sup> Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, “Peace to you.” <sup>37</sup> But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. <sup>38</sup> And He said to them, “Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup> Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” <sup>40</sup> When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.

So, Luke was saying that Jesus' resurrection was beyond a reasonable doubt rooted in evidence that would hold up in a court of law! Our whole system of juris prudence is built on eyewitness testimony—even as God established in *His* law:

**Deuteronomy 19:15 (NIV)**

<sup>15</sup> One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ had hundreds of eyewitnesses who testified they had seen the risen Christ—even as Paul talked about:

**1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

Again, our whole system of juris prudence is built on eyewitness testimony which is accepted in any court of law as proof of guilt or innocence—which Luke alludes to in verse 3 when he said:

**Acts 1:3 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup> to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by **many infallible proofs...**

Luke is saying that the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus were a powerful testimony to the validity of His bodily resurrection (especially under the threat of torture and death—explain).

The Greek word translated “**proofs**” occurs only here in the New Testament and speaks of *empirical* evidence—in other words, the Resurrection was proven by touch, sight, and feel (Luke 24:39-40; 1 John 1:1).

It reminds me of the story of Dr. Simon Greenleaf—

Dr. Simon Greenleaf, the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century professor of law at Harvard University, was a very verbal skeptic of Christianity.

He had written a set of books called “*The Laws of Legal Evidence*” and was challenged by his students to apply those laws to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He accepted the challenge, and in the process he became a Christian. His conclusion was “*The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the best established events of history, according to the laws of legal evidence administered in the courts of justice.*”

He went on to say, “*All that Christianity asks of men...is that they would treat its evidences as they treat the evidence of other things...*” (as in a human court of law)

**Acts 1:3 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup> to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, **being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.**

After His resurrection Jesus spent forty days with His disciples talking to them about the Kingdom of God.

This Kingdom is not to be confused with the Church—this Kingdom is the one that God promised Israel Messiah would someday bring where He would rule from Jerusalem over the whole earth. The Lord Jesus had offered Himself to the nation of Israel as King—but was rejected (Matthew 23:37).

When Israel rejected her King, she forfeited His earthly Kingdom (at His first coming). His literal earthly Kingdom was therefore postponed until Israel repents—Peter mentioned this:

**Acts 3:19–21 (NKJV)**

<sup>19</sup> Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, <sup>20</sup> and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, <sup>21</sup> whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

We read in Zechariah that during the Tribulation Period when the Antichrist’s wrath is being poured out on the Jewish people—at one point the nation repents and calls upon Messiah Jesus to return and save them.

So, the Lord spent 40 days after His resurrection talking to His disciples about the Kingdom of God (a Kingdom of light) that would be coming. Right now, the world is under the kingdom of darkness because the ‘*god of this world*’, Satan the prince of darkness, is in control—

**1 John 5:19 (NLT)**

<sup>19</sup> We know that we are children of God and that the world around us is under the control of the evil one.

**Matthew 4:8–9 (NKJV)**

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup> And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.”

Of course, Jesus refused to worship the devil—but notice that the Lord didn’t dispute Satan’s claim that the kingdoms of this world belonged to him.

But someday that is going to change—

**Revelation 11:15 (NKJV)**

<sup>15</sup> Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”

**Isaiah 2:4 (NKJV)**

<sup>4</sup> He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

What a glorious day is coming when this present evil age comes to an end and is replaced with God’s Kingdom of righteousness! In that day, God’s will is going to be done here on earth as it is in heaven and righteousness will cover the earth as waters cover the sea!

There will be no more injustice, evil, corruption, or war—for when the Kingdom is established Jesus will rule with a ‘*rod of iron*’ and people will live together in love, righteousness and peace.

So, Jesus has been talking to His disciples about the coming Kingdom of God—but since that would happen in the distant future He *'shifts gears'* to talk about the immediate future and the work of building the Kingdom in the present—

**Acts 1:4–5 (NKJV)**

**<sup>4</sup> And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; <sup>5</sup> for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”**

In the upper room the night before His crucifixion Jesus told His disciples that He was going away, and where He was going they couldn't follow Him.

He went on to promise them that He was not going to leave them alone, like orphans, but when He returned to heaven, He would pray to the Father and the Father would send them another Helper, the Holy Spirit who would remain with them forever. (John 14:16)

This promise was not new; God had spoken through the OT prophets that in the last days He would pour out His Spirit on His people around the world—

**Joel 2:28–29 (NKJV)**

<sup>28</sup> “And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. <sup>29</sup> And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

This would mark the beginning of a new era for the people of God—we call it the 'Church Age.' The Church Age refers to the time from Pentecost to the Rapture where the Spirit of God would be working in the world through the Church in a unique and powerful way.

Jesus is telling them that even though they knew the gospel—they weren't ready to go into the world to share it until they were first baptized with the Holy Spirit:

**Luke 24:49 (NKJV)**

<sup>49</sup> “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” [*i.e.*, 'baptized with the Holy Spirit']

**Acts 1:5 (NKJV)**

**<sup>5</sup> for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”**

The word '**baptize**' comes as a transliteration of the Greek word, 'baptizo' which means to '*immerse*.'

The word is used 74 times in the New Testament and every time the idea is immersion—the question is into what? Well, we have to look at the context of each passage to determine that—because the word is used to speak of different kinds of baptisms.

- Water baptism (Acts 1:5)
- The baptism of suffering (Matthew 20:23)
- The baptism of distress (Luke 12:50)
- The baptism of judgment (Matthew 3:11-12)
- The baptism of salvation (1 Corinthians 12:13)

But here in Acts 1 verses 5 and 8 the context is the *“Baptism with the Holy Spirit.”* Before we look at that—let’s read verses 6 and 7:

**Acts 1:6–7 (NKJV)**

**<sup>6</sup> Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup> And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.**

You need to understand why these men were so fixated on the Kingdom. From the time they were little children their mothers and fathers had taught them to look forward to Messiah coming and establishing the Kingdom—it was the hope of every Jew.

Their question revealed that they still expected the Lord (their Messiah) to set up His literal earthly kingdom immediately. The Lord did *not* correct them for expecting His literal reign on earth—such a hope was justified. He simply told them they could not know when His Kingdom would come because that was a date that was exclusively up to the Father’s authority—and He had not chosen to reveal it.

So, He was saying to them, *“Men, when the Father has decided to bring the Kingdom is not for you to know—but right now the only thing you need to concern yourselves with is building the Kingdom and for that you’re going to need the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

This is where verse 8 comes in—one of the most important verses in the Bible on the subject—

**Acts 1:8 (NKJV)**

**<sup>8</sup> But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**

Before we look at this, let’s read verse 5 again—

**Acts 1:5 (NKJV)**

**<sup>5</sup> for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”**

Jesus rose on the Feast of Firstfruits which took place exactly 50 days before Pentecost.

He spent 40 days appearing to His disciples after His resurrection speaking to them about the Kingdom before He ascended into heaven.

That would have left 10 days before Pentecost, which they spent in the upper room praying and waiting for the Spirit to be poured out.

Now during the Old Testament period, the Holy Spirit was only poured out on certain individuals—but during this period of time the Spirit would be poured out upon the Church in a unique and powerful way as well—never to leave them.

In the new covenant, we can’t pray like David in the OT *“Don’t take Your Holy Spirit from me”*—because Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit once given would remain with them forever. (John 14:16)

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