

the book of acts
WEEK TWO
Acts 1:1-14

“The historical framework is exact. In terms of time and place the details are precise and correct... As documents these narratives belong to the same historical series as the record of provincial and imperial trials in epigraphical and literary sources of the first and early second centuries AD...For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming...Any attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.”

A.N. Sherwin-White, an expert in Graeco-Roman history from Oxford

Luke–Acts: A Unified Composition in Two Scrolls

Shared dedication to Theophilus

Luke 1:1–4 and Acts 1:1 share the same dedicatee — standard Hellenistic literary device marking a two-volume work (cf. Josephus, Ag. Ap.).

Lukan prologue (Luke 1:1–4) sets the agenda

ἀσφάλεια — certainty — is the stated purpose. Luke writes as a careful historian using eyewitness sources (ἀπόπται).

The summary-resumption technique

Acts 1:1–2 summarizes Luke's Gospel before resuming — a recapitulation device common in ancient historiography.

Genre debate: historiography or biography?

Scholars divide: Talbert (biography), Hengel (history), Keener (ancient history). The debate shapes how we read Luke's claims.

Combined length = one Scrolls' worth

Ancient books were generally written on papyrus scrolls. It was practical to have a scroll about thirty-five feet in length. When it got any longer it got too bulky to carry around. This physical limitation has determined the length of many books of the Bible. Luke used two scrolls to tell his story, and one we call "The Gospel of Luke" and the other we call "The Book of Acts."

"Former treatise" (πρῶτον λόγον)

Acts 1:1 is a sphragis — a literary seal — connecting the two works and establishing authorial continuity.

Acts 1:1-3

- **Theophilus:** This man might have been a Christian wanting instruction. He might have been a Roman official being briefed by Luke about the history of the Christian movement. Or, the name could be symbolic, because the name Theophilus means "God-lover."
- In the introduction to the first volume (Luke 1:3), Luke addresses Theophilus with title most excellent, which was a way to address people who held high office.
- Since Acts ends with Paul awaiting trial before Caesar, some have wondered if Luke-Acts are not "defense briefs" on Paul's behalf to give a Roman official background on Paul's case. Luke arrived in Jerusalem with Paul in Acts 21:17; he left with him again on the journey to Rome in Acts 27:1. In those two years, Luke had plenty of time to research and write his Gospel and the Book of Acts.
 - Luke wanted to show Theophilus and the Romans:
 - That Christianity is harmless (some Romans officials had embraced it themselves).
 - That Christianity is innocent (Roman judges could find no basis for prosecution).
 - That Christianity is lawful (as the true fulfillment of Judaism, which was an approved religion in the Roman Empire).

τεκμήριον: The Strongest Possible Word for Proof

τεκμήριον

tekmerion
"decisive / irrefutable proof"

In 1 Corinthians 15:6 Paul described one of these many infallible proofs: He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present. More than 500 people saw the resurrected Jesus, and most of them were still alive some 25 years later in the days of Paul's ministry.

Distinguished from σημεῖον and ἀπόδειξις

Aristotle's Rhetoric distinguishes tekmerion as the necessary inference — not merely a sign but a logical demonstration.

Used in Hellenistic rhetoric & medicine

Galen uses it for diagnostic certainty; orators use it for slam-dunk argument. Luke's audience would recognize the epistemological register.

Contrast with εἰσός (probability)

Luke deliberately avoids merely probable language. The resurrection appearances are presented as belonging to the domain of the certain.

The number 40

Intertextual: Moses on Sinai, Israel in the wilderness, Elijah's journey, Jesus' temptation. 40 = a complete period of divine preparation.

βαπτισθήσεσθε ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ — Baptized with Holy Spirit

The Command (v. 4)

μὴ χωρίζεσθαι — present imperative negative: "do not continue to leave"

Obedience precedes empowerment. The Spirit cannot be rushed.

The Promise (v. 5)

"Not many days from now" —
ἐπὶ πολλὰς ἡμέρας

Deliberately vague. The timing belongs to the Father (v. 7). This is the ἐπαγγελία (promise) of Luke 24:49.

The Contrast (v. 5)

John / water vs. Jesus / Spirit

Not a negation of water baptism but an eschatological escalation. Joel 2:28–29 is now coming to fulfillment.

"Are you at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

The Ideological Background

- Second Temple Judaism expected a Davidic king to overthrow Roman occupation
- The Zealot movement was active — some disciples had been Zealots (Simon, Luke 6:15)
- "Restore" (ἀποκαθιστάνειν) = technical term for national political restoration in LXX
- Even the 40 days of resurrection teaching had not eliminated this expectation
- The question is not stupid — it is theologically coherent within Second Temple categories

Jesus' Redirection (vv. 7–8)

Times & seasons: not yours to know

χρόνους ἢ καιρούς — the Father retains eschatological authority

Power replaces timing

Their concern: when? Jesus' answer: who will empower you?

Witnesses, not warriors

μάρτυρες — not liberators, not political agents — witnesses

Scope replaces territory

Not Israel's land restored, but the world reached — ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς

Acts 1:8 as the Table of Contents for the Entire Book

"ἀλλὰ λήμψεσθε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐφ' ὑμᾶς, καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες ἐν τε Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ [ἐν] πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρεία καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς."

δύναμιν

— Power —

Not ἐξουσία (authority) but δύναμις (capacity/force). The Spirit is the active agent — the church is the instrument. Pentecost is the enabling event.

μάρτυρες

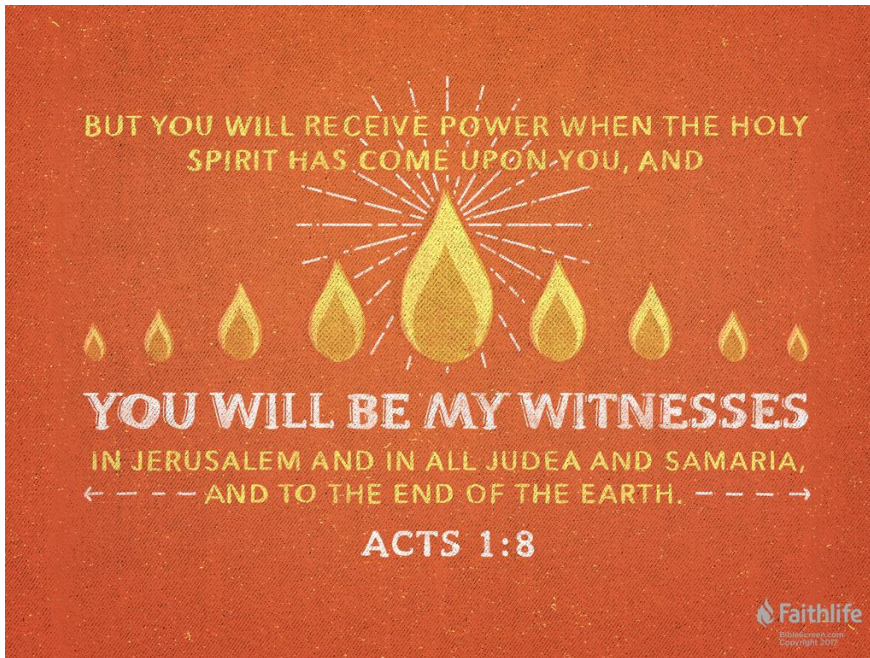
— Witnesses —

Legal term: eyewitness testimony. Not propagandists or crusaders. The content of witness = resurrection (cf. Acts 1:22, 2:32, 3:15, 5:32, 10:39–41).

ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς

— Ends of Earth —

Echoes Isa 49:6 (LXX) — the Servant's mission. Not sequential geography but theological scope. Rome is the literary fulfilment (Acts 28:31).



The Mission Of the Church

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20

The Work of the Church

- **The Plan to Witness:** Our main business is to tell others that Jesus has saved us from sin.
- **The Place to Witness:** Each Christian must witness in his or her Jerusalem, the place he or she lives. Yet our responsibility to witness does not end there. We are called to spread the gospel beyond our own neighborhoods.
- **The Power to Witness:** The power from the Holy Spirit is the only kind of power that will enable a Christian to be a faithful witness.
- **The Purpose of Witnessing:** Jesus will soon return. Our purpose in witnessing is to get people ready to meet Him.

The Ascension: Three Exegetical Observations

v. 9

The Cloud — νεφέλη as Shekinah, not meteorology

In LXX, the glory-cloud marks divine presence: Ex 40:34–38; 1 Kgs 8:10–11; Dan 7:13. The disciples would recognize this as a theophanic symbol, not a weather report. Jesus enters the divine sphere.

vv. 9–10

ὑπέλαβεν αὐτὸν — "received" / "took up under"

Not Jesus levitating under his own power — he is received/taken up. The passive voice places agency with the Father. This is exaltation language (cf. Ps 110:1; Phil 2:9: ὑπερῴψωσεν). The ascension = the beginning of the session.

v. 11

"In the same way" — ὁν τρόπον — the Parousia promise

The two ἄγγελοι (divine messengers, cf. Luke 24:4) correct the upward gaze and promise a return ὁν τρόπον — in like manner: bodily, visible, on clouds (Dan 7:13; Rev 1:7). The ascension is a guarantee, not a farewell.

THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS

**The ascension is not
Christ's absence.
It is a different type of presence.**

*At the Father's right hand (Heb 7:25; 8:1) — interceding, reigning, directing his mission.
The angels redirect the disciples' gaze from upward to outward. The ascension is a commission, not a conclusion.*

Four Exegetical Observations on the Upper Room Community

v. 12 A Sabbath Day's Journey — ὁδὸν σαββάτου

~2,000 cubits (~880m) — legally permitted Sabbath travel. Luke's geographical precision establishes historicity. Olivet to Jerusalem: this is a real place, a real walk.

v. 14a ὁμοθυμαδὸν — the theological keyword of Acts

"With one accord" / "united" — appears 11x in Acts (1:14; 2:1; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 15:25; 18:12; 19:29). Not emotional unanimity but a posture of shared purpose and prayer. The early church's engine.

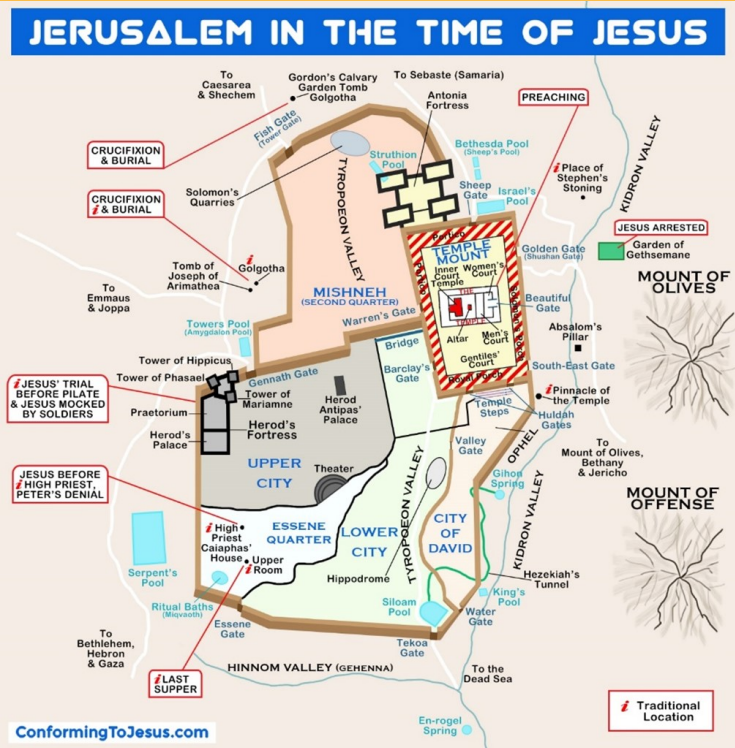
v. 13 The Names: the Eleven, the Women (v. 14), and the ὑπερῶν

The ὑπερῶν (upper room) is not the Last Supper location per se but a Jerusalem meeting place. The eleven names align with Luke 6:14-16 minus Judas — a historical control.

v. 14b σὺν γυναίξιν... Μαρία... καὶ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ

"His brothers" — οἱ ἀδελφοί — did not believe during Jesus' ministry (John 7:5). Their presence here is post-resurrection proof-of-concept: the resurrection reconciles estranged family. James becomes a pillar of Jerusalem (Gal 2:9).

On ὁμοθυμαδὸν: Haenchen, *Acts*, p. 152; Barrett, *Acts ICC* (1994), 1:89. On ἀδελφοί: Bauckham, *Jude & Relatives of Jesus* (1990), pp. 5-44.



Acts 1:1–14 — The Structural Architecture



*Luke's prologue to Acts is not mere introduction — it is a theological argument.
 Proof of resurrection → Promise of the Spirit → Commission for the world → Ascension as exaltation, not exit →
 Community formed in prayer.
 This is the DNA of every subsequent chapter.*

What the Exegesis Yields: Four Takeaways

1 The resurrection is a historical claim, not a theological metaphor

Tekmerion places Luke firmly in the domain of evidence-based argument. The truth of Acts depends on an empty tomb.

2 The Spirit's arrival is the hinge between Luke and Acts

Without Pentecost, Acts 1:8 is a commission without an agent. The church is Spirit-empowered or it is not the church of Acts.

3 The ascension reorients Christology from presence to mode-of-presence

Jesus is not absent, He is differently present: interceding (Heb 7:25), directing (Acts 9:4–5), returning (Acts 1:11).

4 ὁμοθυμαδόν is missiologically prior — not the fruit of mission but its soil

The 120 do not argue, organize, or mobilize. They pray together. The shape of the church precedes the advance of the gospel.

CLOSING PRAYER

*We have the evidence.
We have the commission.
We have the Spirit.
We have each other.*

Send us out as witnesses — from this room, ἕως ἑσχατοῦ τῆς γῆς.

Acts 1:8