

FOUNDATIONS OF THE FAITH

Acts 1:1–11

Introduction

Luke's Second Volume

- Acts is the second book of Luke's two-part work.
- It follows his Gospel account and picks up where that account leaves off (compare Luke 1:1–4 with Acts 1:1–2).

The Author

- Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14).
- He was a Greek, and he was likely a man of some wealth and status.

Date and Setting

- Luke most likely wrote after AD 70.
- This would have been after a season of intense, localized persecution, but during a time of relative peace for Christians.
- Even so, many conversations were taking place throughout the Roman world about whether Christians were legitimate.
- From this time forward, many Christian writers would expend great effort defending the faith and assuring the Roman government that Christians posed no threat to it.

Reading and Circulation

- Acts would have fit on a single scroll and would have taken roughly two hours to read in one sitting, which was common for public readings.

- The book probably circulated in cities where the apostle Paul was known and prominent, such as Corinth or Philippi.
- Believers may have gathered for the Lord's Supper or a common meal and then listened to it read aloud.

Notes on the Text

Acts 1:1

- Luke dedicates the book to a man named Theophilus.
- He was likely a person of high status, perhaps a Roman official, and possibly Luke's patron. In the Gospel, Luke addresses him as "most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3), a title usually given to men of rank.
- The dedication does not mean Theophilus was Luke's only audience. Luke is simply paying respects to him.

Acts 1:2

- Jesus gave the apostles commands through the Holy Spirit.
- The Great Commission was one such order, but Jesus surely gave more.
- Did He talk strategy? Did He tell them which cities to evangelize first? Did He give instructions on how to organize the church or what practices to follow in worship?

Acts 1:3

- Forty days. This was a time of testing, in which the apostles could examine the evidence of Jesus' resurrection.
- It was also a period of forty days in communion with God. Moses was on the mountain forty days receiving instructions for the ordering of the nation of Israel (Exodus 24:18).

- Now the apostles dwell with Christ for forty days, receiving instruction and understanding for the new covenant community in Christ.

Acts 1:4

- They were to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:5

- John immersed them in water. Jesus would immerse them in the Holy Spirit.
- In other words, they would soon be cleansed and made pure in a way far superior to washing with water. They would truly be ready to serve the Lord.
- This recalls the priesthood. Before the priests could serve in the Lord's house, they had to be washed (Exodus 29:4; Leviticus 8:6).
- Now the apostles must be perfectly cleansed and washed for perfect service.

Acts 1:6

- Naturally, their question concerned whether Israel would regain the sovereignty it had once enjoyed under David and Solomon.
- By this point Israel had been a vassal of more powerful empires for centuries.

Acts 1:7

- Jesus did not tell them this would never happen. He told them that the timing of such things was not theirs to know or to be concerned with.
- They were also asking the wrong question. The answer is not simple or easy to give, because true Israel is now in Christ and extends beyond the borders of historic Israel.
- Israel as they had known and conceived of it would never be the same.

Acts 1:8

- They asked about the nation gaining sovereignty and power. Jesus told them they would receive power.
- But it would not be military power to destroy their oppressors. It would be power to testify to the gospel, including power over spiritual forces.
- Is every Christian to understand himself as sent out with this command, as a witness and an apostle? Yes and no.
- We frequently see ordinary people, such as the Samaritan woman, who gladly told others of the redemption and wonder of Christ (John 4:28–30, 39). Every Christian should feel a compulsion to do likewise in his own neighborhood and community.
- Some, however, will be uniquely sent out from among us to the ends of the earth.
- Underlying all of this is the question of the coming of the kingdom of God. The people of God have already received unique power and authority from Christ and through the Holy Spirit.
- When nations and institutions will be added to us is a matter of the Father's timing.
- Until then, we must all work to the glory of Christ as His witnesses. This is how we spread and establish the kingdom of heaven.

Acts 1:9

- This is surely the fulfillment of Daniel 7:13–14. Jesus, the Son of Man, has ascended on the clouds to the Ancient of Days to receive the crown.
- He has received all power and authority, and from there He will pour out the Spirit upon His people so that they, too, receive power and authority, just as He promised.

Acts 1:10

- In Daniel, two angels are repeatedly present, revealing things to Daniel and helping God's people: Gabriel (Daniel 8:16; 9:21) and Michael (Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1).
- Perhaps these same two angels are the ones who appear throughout this narrative, at the resurrection (Luke 24:4, 23) and here at the ascension.
- Luke has already shown Gabriel at work at the beginning of the story, announcing the births of John and Jesus (Luke 1:19, 26).

Acts 1:11

- Elsewhere Jesus is said to come upon the clouds in judgment upon Jerusalem (Matthew 24:30; 26:64).
- This verse is also likely, or at least potentially, referring to Christ's final coming, when He will return visibly and bodily in the same way He ascended.
- It may seem odd for the angels to tell the apostles about a coming they would not live to see. But they will see it. The dead in Christ will be raised at His coming (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17), and every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7).
- The angels' words also serve a purpose in the moment. The apostles are standing and staring into the sky. Jesus has not abandoned them, and He will return, so they must go back to Jerusalem and take up the work He gave them in verse 8.
- The saints of old likewise received promises they would only see fulfilled beyond death (Hebrews 11:13, 39–40).