

The Acts of the Holy Spirit and the early church

Living Water Christian Church

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Acts 1:1-3, Accounts of the Holy Spirit and the risen Lord, Jesus Christ



Acts 1:1-8 (NASB)

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

The Book of Acts, which continues the narrative that Luke began in his gospel, is especially important because it was the first written history of the Christian church. Acts concerns the very vital period in Christian history between the resurrection of Jesus and the death of the apostle Paul, the time when Christian ideas and beliefs were being formulated and when the organization of the church into a worldwide movement was being developed.

Only with knowledge of this background can we understand the writing of the Gospels, as well as the other New Testament letters that followed on the heels of the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus. Although throughout modern history, this book has often been called (**The Acts of the Apostles**) which is really a poor description because Acts has very little to say concerning most of the original Apostles.

Peter's activities are described at some length, and John and Philip are mentioned, but more than half of the book is about Paul and his connection with the Christian movement. New names and faces are introduced to us, but in all honesty, the more appropriate title should be (**The Acts of the Holy Spirit**)

Volume one, otherwise known as (**the Gospel of Luke**), is the description of not just the messages that Jesus taught throughout His 3 year ministry, but the detailed aspects of His birth and all the circumstances and miracles surrounding it as well as His death and resurrection, written from the detailed hand of a man of medicine, every word inspired from the hand of God through the Holy Spirit.

The second volume in Luke's writing (**the Book of Acts**) is the account of all that Jesus continued to do and to teach, through His apostles. As the first volume ends with the Great Commission, the second volume begins with it in glorious detail. Among the many things we see in these early verses, we find that the Holy Spirit's ministry in Acts – a seriously dominant theme throughout the entirety of the book of Acts, is linked to His ministry through the person of our Lord Jesus.

So here we should notice that the same Holy Spirit, who empowered Jesus as He gave the Great Commission to His faithful followers, is the same one who empowered the apostles and will empower us as His church, (members of **Living Water** as well as all true believers) to carry out His commands. The ministry of the Holy Spirit does not commence in Acts, it continues in Acts, for its commencement is found in the prior writings of the Gospels.

We should take notice that Luke links the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of our Lord in the Gospels, to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church in Acts. And furthermore continuing down into our lives today, of which by believing in the risen Son of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit gives us the necessary tools to not only survive in this world, but to thrive in our relationship with Him. Luke begins by informing his readers that the Book of Acts is the second volume of his account of the life and ministry of Jesus.

The good doctor Luke



Although having written 20% of the New Testament, Luke is not mentioned a great deal in the Scriptures. The times he is mentioned, he is shown as being an associate of Paul. In the last letter ever written by Paul, the 2nd letter to Timothy, Just prior to the death of Paul, He states in sad fashion his situation.

2 Timothy 4:9-11a New American Standard Bible

Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me.

In addition to the letter to Timothy, Luke is also mentioned in the book of Colossians and in the letter to Philemon. Although we don't know much we can put a few things together about this man of God. To begin with we know for a fact that he was a man of medicine.

Colossians 4:14 (NASB)

Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.

Notice how that Demas was with Paul during some of his travels and incarcerations, however as the last letter of Timothy stated, Demas for whatever reason, left to follow his own path, but Luke having never been recorded as visually seeing Jesus in person, showed himself to be a faithful partner in the spread of the Gospel. The Biblical historian **Albert Barnes** wrote during the 1850's the following on Dr. Luke

It is easy to imagine that the presence of a physician might have been of important service to the apostle Paul in his travels; and that his acquaintance with the art of healing may have aided a tremendous amount in the furtherance of the gospel.

In the first part of Colossians, it is evident that Paul separates some of his faithful into the ones of circumcision and the ones not having had the procedure. Luke is mentioned in the latter, thereby having most historians believe that he was a gentile. Further historical records not Biblical relate that Luke was probably a proselyte. Furthermore, Luke is supposed to have been a native of Cyrene, and to have died in Achaia, soon after the martyrdom of Paul, at the advanced age of 84.

If you read through the Gospels and take each happening separately, it is fairly clear that Luke more than Matthew, Mark or John shows his familiarity with the science of medicine in his descriptions of the things

portrayed. Notice how that in the case of a woman who had an issue of blood, Mark says she had suffered many things at the hands of many physicians. Luke, however, carefully omits that phrase, which gives us a little insight into how Luke viewed his profession, not one to put others of his profession down.

Some historians believe that Luke first became connected with Paul in professionally attending on him in the sickness under which he labored in Phrygia and Galatia (in which latter place he was detained by sickness), in the early part of that journey wherein Luke first is found in his company. The great theologian of years past, **Matthew Henry**, writes the following on this man of God:

Luke was both a physician and an evangelist, for Christ himself both taught and healed, and was the great physician as well as prophet of the church. He was the beloved physician; one who recommended himself more than ordinary to the affections of his friends. Skill in being a physician is a useful accomplishment in a minister and may be improved to more extensive usefulness and greater esteem among Christians.

Most excellent Theophilus:

This mysterious individual, who was the main recipient of both of Luke's letters, has been a subject of much discussion throughout the early church as well as today. The only other mention of this individual in the Bible is in the introductory portion of Luke's first letter:

Luke 1:1-4 (NASB)

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

The salutation of **most excellent**, in and of itself seems to be denoting a specific rank or office of someone in a high up political or military position. There are those who believe that the title "**most excellent**" has been given to express the character of this man Theophilus, but given the usage in other parts of Scripture, the title appears to relate to men in an official position.

Acts 26:24-25 (NASB)

*While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad." But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, **most excellent** Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.*

Acts 23:26 (NASB)

*Claudius Lysias, to the **most excellent** governor Felix, greetings.*

The word Theophilus means "**a friend or lover of God**," It is probable that he was some distinguished Roman or Greek who had been converted, who was a friend of Luke, and who had most likely requested an account of these things pertaining to Jesus and the aftermath of His teachings.

It is very possible that this preface might have been sent to him as a private letter along with the gospel, and Theophilus chose to have them published together, for it is believed that in the early church that both Luke and

Acts were situation in a part 1 and part 2 basis. The earliest known person to suggest that most excellent Theophilus was none other than the High Priest was the theologian **Theodore Hase** who wrote in the year 1725 the following on this most mysterious of men in the Bible:

Theophilus would have been a Sadducee, that would make him the son of Annas and brother-in-law of Caiaphas, raised in the Jewish Temple. Adherents claim that Luke's Gospel was targeted at Sadducee readers. This might explain a few features of Luke. Luke also seems to stress Jesus' arguments with the Sadducees on points like legal grounds for divorce, the existence of angels, spirits, and an afterlife (Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead). If this was the case then Luke is trying to use Jesus' rebuttals and teachings to break down Theophilus' Sadducean philosophy, maybe with the hope that Theophilus would use his influence to get the Sadducees to cease their persecution of the Christians.

Continued teaching on the Kingdom of God:

Note that Jesus was not only seen by His disciples, but He continued the same topics of discourse as before his sufferings. Thereby showing that He was the same person that had suffered, and that His heart was still intent on the same great work. We see that His heart was occupied with the same purposes which ended his attention before He suffered, of which should teach us that we should aim at the same great work in all the circumstances of our being. In the military, they have a saying in lue of any new orders, you are to follow the last complete orders received. Let's take a quick look at the L.O.R. of the disciples from their leader and commander:

Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

We should note that similar instructions had already been given to the Disciples many times before, but once again Jesus reiterates one of the greatest teaching tools ever given to man from God. For us today in the glorious State of Colorado, we need to remember that neither afflictions, persecutions, or the passing of egregious laws that go against the Word of God, (Same Sex marriages, no Bible's in school) should not be allowed to divert our minds from the great work which God has given us to do.

Many historians believe that the simplest meaning of this further education is that Jesus gave his Disciples and followers instructions about the organization, spread (growth) and edification of His church. Bible teacher **David Guzik** writes the following on the further instructions of our Lord:

Many Gnostic and New Age teachers would like to think that after His resurrection, Jesus used the forty days to teach His followers strange and obscure doctrines that must be "rediscovered" with new revelations today. But Luke reminds us that Jesus simply taught them much the same material that He had taught them in His earthly ministry: The things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

Post-resurrection appearance of our Lord, Jesus.

Think of it! Jesus waited 40 days from the time of His resurrection till the day of His ascension into heaven. Almost six weeks of being seen and heard even sitting down and eating meals with his followers.



During those 40 days, the Bible said that Jesus provided His Disciples and others with “many convincing proofs” that He had indeed risen from the dead. The great man of faith, the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the church in Corinth wrote of the later appearances of Jesus:

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (NASB)

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me (Paul) also.

The apostles were witnesses of our Lord’s resurrection and in convincing fashion, our Lord saw to it that these witnesses had more than enough evidence of His resurrection, and added to this was the witness of the Spirit to the resurrection. The Holy Spirit would internally indict sinners regarding the righteousness of Christ because He cannot be seen any longer. The empty tomb and the absence of a body is further evidence of our Lord’s resurrection, and to this the Holy Spirit will bear witness.

A further matter of interest is that during this 40-day period, our Lord spoke with the apostles concerning the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. We are not, however, given any indication as to just what things Jesus taught them.

Somewhere along the line, the apostles were enlightened by our Lord concerning the mystery of the church. I would suspect that it may have been during that 40-day interval between our Lord’s resurrection and His ascension. What is of particular interest is that this revelation came about **“through the Spirit.”** Notice how amazingly the Holy Trinity works together in perfect harmony, even through the actions of our Lord Jesus:

Acts 1:1-2 Amplified Bible

*In the former account which I prepared, O Theophilus, I made a continuous report dealing with all the things which Jesus began to do and to teach until the day when He ascended, after He **through the Holy Spirit** had instructed and commanded the apostles whom He had chosen.*

Now Jesus knew it wasn't enough just to have the information that He had given over the last 3 years, for there had to be a personal manifestation to not only verify, but also to solidify all His teachings and prophetic statements. Quite literally, the post resurrection physical presence of Jesus gave that certain something that His Disciples and Apostles could hang their life on. For how many people would be willing to die for a lie! And so He appeared to them at special and repeated intervals so that they might know beyond any shadow of a doubt that He was in fact very much alive.

John 21:1-13 & 25 New American Standard Bible

After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No."

And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught."

Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.

From reading other accounts in Scripture, we see the real aspect of fear and dread that came upon the Disciples soon after the death of our Lord, Jesus. The disciples were so afraid, and they thought, "**Oh, the Messiah is gone.**" They were scattered...the sheep without a shepherd...and everything is crumbled.

And they were hiding in this place with the door locked because they were afraid of the Jews. They thought the Jews would send the temple police and capture them all. The same fate that happened to Jesus would happen to them, and they were cowering in this little room, thus begins the faith building process in the lives of these forlorn individuals.

John 20:19-20 & 24-31 New International Version

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

We don't have the record of any of those wonderful things that Jesus did apart from what the Bible tells us, for it clearly says that they're not written in this book. Obviously, some of them occurred before His death, some of them likely after His resurrection. One of the greatest Biblical minds of this century is **Dr. John MacArthur**, who notes the following on our commission as Christians, having never physically seen the resurrected Jesus.

We cannot finish the unfinished work of Christ unless it flows out of a vital reality of Christ in our lives, unless we're seeing and feeling and knowing and fellowshiping and sharing with Him. You can't be a secondhand witness. You can't give somebody else's testimony. You can't pass on Scripture that is irrelevant to you because you've never personally met Jesus Christ. Jesus makes himself visible by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Just think about what we do have as proof of our risen Savior, we have the record of His 500+ witnesses. We have the record of the empty tomb. We have the record that the Romans bribed the soldiers. And the Jews were in on the whole thing in order to say that He was dead and His body was stolen, rather than to admit that He arose from the dead. We have all the evidence that He is alive, and the evidence is consummated because we know Him to be alive in our lives. One of the greatest proofs of the reality of God is the transformed lives of so many over the years.