



## Jesus' Promise to His Apostles Acts 1

### Introduction

In his gospel, Luke had written about Jesus' life and ministry on earth through His death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. However, Jesus' ministry did not end with the ascension. It was carried on in His apostles through the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. The Acts of the Apostles is Luke's account of the continuation of Christ's ministry.

During the period between His resurrection and ascension, Jesus had appeared to His apostles and made them a promise concerning their future ministry. Luke begins his account with testimony concerning those appearances of the risen Christ and His promise to the apostles. He then describes the ascension through the eyes of the apostles and gives us a picture of them patiently awaiting the fulfillment of the promise.

### Outline of Acts 1

- I. A Previous Account - Acts 1:1-2
- II. Jesus' Appearances After the Resurrection - Acts 1:3-8
- III. Jesus' Ascension - Acts 1:9-11
- IV. After the Ascension - Acts 1:12-26

### I. A Previous Account - Acts 1:1-2

The Book of Acts is addressed to Theophilus, just as was the Gospel of Luke. In the first verse of Acts, Luke reminds him of the contents of the gospel.

- A. Of all that Jesus began to do and teach - Acts 1:1

The key word here is *began*. It lets us know that there will be a continuation of the same subject Luke dealt with in his gospel. The subject of the gospel was all that Jesus did and taught. Acts shows us what Jesus continued to do and what He continued to teach through the ministry of His followers. What makes this so exciting to those of us who are studying this book is that Jesus continues to *do* and *teach* through His followers today. He does it in the same way He did in the first century — through the power of the Holy Spirit. What is Jesus doing through you? Who is He teaching through you?

- B. Until His ascension - Acts 1:2

The gospel of Luke chronicles the events up to the

ascension of Christ. Prior to the ascension, Jesus had given certain commands to His chosen apostles. These are recorded later in this chapter and also in the Gospel of Luke. The first is that they were to wait in Jerusalem for that which was promised (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). The second was that they were to be witnesses to the world (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). These commands were to be obeyed in sequence.

### II. Jesus' Appearances After the Resurrection - Acts 1:3-8

Appearances of Christ between His resurrection and ascension are recorded in Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21, and 1 Corinthians 15:5-7. However, this passage in Acts supplies us with information which is found nowhere else in the Scriptures. Luke not only tells us to whom Jesus appeared but the length of time over which these appearances took place and the purposes of the appearances.

- A. He appeared to the apostles - Acts 1:2b-3

The apostles were the ones Jesus had chosen (1:2b) to minister with Him during His time on earth and to carry on His ministry after He had returned to the Father. He appeared to them over a period of *forty days*.

- B. He appeared to show proof of His resurrection - Acts 1:3

Luke tells us that Christ presented many infallible proofs that He was alive. The apostles had witnessed His suffering and death. Now it was vital that they know He was resurrected and alive. They saw Him with their own eyes, not just once or twice, but during a forty-day period. They touched Him (John 20:26-29). They heard Him speak about the kingdom of God. They knew it was He by what they saw and by what they heard Him say!

- C. He appeared to speak about the *kingdom of God* - Acts 1:3

This was the subject of Jesus' teaching during the forty days. It was important because it was the doctrine which the apostles were to preach. Philip's message in Samaria was about the *kingdom of God* (Acts 8:12). Paul preached in Ephesus about the *kingdom of God* (Acts 20:25). Paul's message to the Jews and Gentiles in Rome was about the *kingdom of God* (Acts 28:23, 31). As you study Acts, watch to see how many times the

*kingdom of God* is mentioned or alluded to.

D. He appeared to give instructions to the apostles  
- Acts 1:4-5

1. Wait in Jerusalem - 1:4

In Luke 24:49, Jesus had spoken of the *Promise of My Father* which would endow His apostles with *power from on high*. He had also promised them that when He went away, He would send them a *Helper* who would never leave them (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7). Jesus instructed them to *wait* in Jerusalem for the fulfillment of the promise.

2. For the promise of the Spirit - 1:5

The apostle John, who had baptized with water for the repentance of sins, had predicted the future baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8). The Holy Spirit was the Helper Jesus had promised. The apostles' ministry was to be a ministry of the Holy Spirit, and they would not have many days to wait until that prediction and promise were fulfilled. Believers today have access to this same Helper. In fact, the apostle Paul, in Ephesians 5:18, commands believers to be *filled with the Spirit*.

E. He appeared to answer questions - Acts 1:6-7

1. The apostles' question - 1:6

Jesus had been speaking to the apostles about the *kingdom of God*, so their natural question was, *Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*

The Jews at this time were looking for the Messiah to come, to set their nation free from Roman domination, and to establish an earthly political and religious rule over all the nations. This is what the apostles looked for as well. The Holy Spirit would have to come and teach them that Christ's mission at that time was not an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual one. Jesus had not come to restore the kingdom to Israel, but to set up His own spiritual kingdom.

2. Jesus' answer - 1:7

The Lord simply told His followers that they were not to concern themselves with dates, changing circumstances, and the kinds of events that would accompany the establishment of God's kingdom. They were to concentrate rather on being witnesses for Christ throughout the world. *Christ had promised His disciples that He would show them things to come and signs of the times. But they must not expect nor desire to know either all the particulars of future events or the exact times of*

*them. As to the times and seasons of the year, we know, in general, there will be summer and winter counterchanged, but we know not particularly which day will be fair or which foul, either in summer or in winter. What this or that particular day will bring forth we cannot tell, but must accommodate ourselves to it (The Matthew Henry Commentary).*

Note: Some have taken verse 7 to be a repudiation of the prophecies concerning the restoration and glory of national Israel and a replacement of national Israel with "spiritual Israel," the church. But this is not necessarily correct. Romans 11:26 tells us that *all Israel* will be saved.

F. He appeared to commission the apostles - Acts 1:8

This verse contains Christ's second command (from verse 2) to His apostles. They were to be witnesses to Him *in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*. In Matthew 10:5-6, Jesus had instructed the apostles not to go to the Gentiles nor the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of Israel. This verse removes those limitations and shows that the *kingdom of God* is universal in scope. With this vast responsibility before them, the apostles would have little time to worry about *times and seasons* (1:7). Like them, we should be content and honored that Christ calls us to serve Him in our day. Serving Him should be more than enough to fill our time and our thoughts as we wait for His return!

The remainder of Acts will show how the apostles fulfilled their commission. In fact, The Wycliff Bible Commentary calls Acts 1:8 a table of contents of the Book of Acts. (See outline in Lesson 1.)

## II. Jesus' Ascension - Acts 1:9-11

After Jesus had spoken with His apostles and taught them all they needed to know, He ascended into heaven. It was necessary that He ascend so the Holy Spirit could come as the Helper and source of power as the apostles preached the gospel (John 16:7).

A. The manner of His ascension - Acts 1:9-10

1. The cloud - 1:9

As the apostles watched, Jesus was taken up. He disappeared in a cloud of the heavens and the apostles seemed to be transfixed by the sight. What a glorious cloud it must have been! The cloud symbolized the Shekinah glory of God which represents His mighty, awesome presence (Exodus 33:7-11; 40:34; Mark 9:7). No wonder they could not take their eyes off it.

2. The *two men* - 1:10-11

Have you ever taken a loved one to the airport and then strained to see their airplane as it vanished into a cloud? If so, perhaps you can sense the intensity of the apostles as they looked up after their beloved Lord. A voice brought them back to earth and they turned to see *two men in white apparel*, probably two angels. The men told them that Jesus, whom they had just seen depart, would one day come back in the very same way.

## B. The manner of His return - Acts 1:9-12

If Jesus is going to return in the same manner in which He was taken, then we know four definite things about His coming.

## 1. He will come in a cloud - 1:9

## 2. He will come bodily - 1:9-10

Jesus ascended in bodily form — in His resurrection body. We can therefore expect His bodily return.

## 3. He will come in view of people - 1:9-10

The apostles were eyewitnesses of Jesus' ascension. We can therefore expect Him to return in plain view of people.

## 4. He will come again to the Mount of Olives - 1:12

Verse 12 makes it clear that this is where the ascension took place. It is located just east of Jerusalem. The very place where Jesus was in agony and where He was betrayed had become a scene of triumph. So will it be even more so when He comes again!

**IV. After the Ascension - Acts 1:12-26**

Luke describes two incidents which took place shortly after Jesus' ascension. The first was a prayer meeting and the second a meeting to choose a replacement apostle for Judas.

## A. Prayer meeting - Acts 1:12-14

Immediately after witnessing the Lord's ascension, the apostles returned to Jerusalem as He had instructed them to do. They had been about a quarter of a mile outside the city on the Mount of Olives. Luke describes the distance as *a Sabbath day's journey* (believed to be about 1100 paces). According to religious tradition, this was the distance a Jew was allowed to walk without breaking the command to keep the Sabbath Day holy.

1. The *upper room* - 1:13

The place they met was an *upper room*. In those days, houses had their large meeting rooms on the upper story. The walls of the smaller rooms on the main floor helped to hold up the second story structure.

## 2. The people who were present - 1:13-14

The eleven apostles were there (only Judas, the traitor, was missing) along with the women who had followed Jesus, including His mother, Mary. Jesus' brothers, who had not been among His disciples prior to His death and resurrection, were also there. They had clearly experienced a change of heart. (Jesus' brothers are named in Mark 6:3.)

3. Praying *with one accord* - 1:14

Jesus had established a pattern of prayer for His disciples and now they continued in it. The phrase *with one accord* means that they prayed with one mind. They were unified in their will, their purpose, and in their desire. They were one in Christ, each in agreement with the other because they were individually committed to Christ. Who wouldn't want to be a part of a prayer group such as this!

## B. Replacement for Judas - 1:15-26

From this passage, it is clear that the eleven apostles felt it necessary to fill the vacancy left by Judas. Jesus had told them that when He sat on His throne of glory, they would sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Perhaps this attributed to the urgency of replacing Judas.

Luke says the meeting took place *in those days* which would refer to the ten days between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost (Acts 2:1). About 120 disciples were present. This was the "seed" of the church. They were the tiny mustard seed that would grow into a tree (Matthew 13:31-32).

## 1. Peter's speech - 1:16-22

Peter's speech shows that the betrayal of Jesus was not an unplanned tragedy, but rather a part of God's providential purpose and plan.

## a. Fulfillment of Scripture - 1:16 and 18-20

Peter argued that the Psalms show the evidence and explanation of Judas' betrayal of Jesus. The Psalms which he quoted, Psalms 69 and 109, were written by David about his own enemies. Even as David wrote, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was working through him,

also making the Psalms a prophecy concerning the enemies of Christ. Peter applied these Psalms to Judas. His habitation was left desolate (Psalm 69:25) and another must take his office (Psalm 109:8). David foretold the sin and the punishment.

Notice that verses 18 and 19 are in parentheses. This is because Luke inserts his own explanation of the fate of Judas into Peter's speech. Judas actually bought the *Field of Blood* indirectly. He threw the money he had been paid to betray Jesus into the temple and the priests then used it to buy a burial plot for foreigners (Matthew 27:3-8). In this way, the field was purchased with the blood money which had been paid to Judas.

b. Finding the right man - 1:16b-17  
and 21-22

Judas had been one of the apostles. He had been a part of their ministry. However, it is obvious that he did not share the spirit and the nature of the apostles. He led the arresting soldiers to Jesus and identified Him to them. He did it for thirty pieces of silver.

Peter put forth the requirements for the man who would replace Judas. He had to have been a follower of Jesus from the time when He was baptized by John until His ascension. This man would become a witness of the resurrection along with the eleven. (The word *witness* does not refer to an observer, but to one who will bear testimony of what he has seen and heard and knows to be true.)

2. Prayer - Acts 1:23-25

Two men were offered for consideration: Joseph, also called Barsabas, surnamed Justus, and Matthias. Nothing more is known about either of these men. All those present joined in what has come down to us as the first recorded Christian prayer. It is very short and unpretentious. They simply placed their confidence in the Lord and asked Him to choose His replacement for Judas. Do you keep your prayers short and simple?

3. Lots - Acts 1:26

After praying, they cast lots and the lot fell on Matthias, *And he was numbered with the eleven apostles*. The lot was some manner of determining a decision by chance. It may seem most unchristian to us today to make any choice in such a way. However, we must remember that lots were used in Old Testament times as a means of ascertaining God's will, (Numbers 26:55; 1 Samuel 14:41-42; Nehemiah 10:34; etc.), and it may have seemed perfectly logical to these men who had not yet received the Holy Spirit. After the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, there are no more accounts of lots being used. There was no longer any need.

### Applications

1. How is what *Jesus began both to do and teach* being continued through you?
2. Are you faithful in prayer? How often do you pray with others for the needs of the church or the needs of your ministry?
3. Do you always pray before making decisions?
4. Is your church a praying church? What will you do to encourage prayer among the people of your church?