



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 1

Chapter 1

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- The book is a special book in the New Testament
 - It's the historical account of the Apostles and the spread of the church outward from Jerusalem following Jesus' resurrection
 - As many have noted, it's probably misnamed
 - It's called the Acts of the Apostles, but it only covers the work of two principle Apostles, and then only a portion of their work
 - And it's more a focus on how Jesus works to build His church by His word and by His Spirit
 - The book is unique in many ways, some obvious and others surprising
 - It's the only New Testament narrative apart from the Gospels, and together with the four Gospels it completes the New Testament Pentateuch
 - It's the bridge between the life of Messiah and the New Testament epistles written by the Apostles
 - It's our only record of how a Gentile Church was birthed from Judaism
 - The author was Luke, the author of the third Gospel, and they were probably written as a single work
 - He probably wrote both over a series of years
 - Together they comprise 25% of the New Testament, and are the only books of the Bible written by a Gentile
- Speaking of the author, Luke is a fascinating study himself
 - He was the traveling companion, close friend and personal physician of the Apostle Paul
 - According to an early prologue to Acts written in the 2nd Century, Paul converted Luke during one of his early missionary journeys
 - Curiously, Luke writes the story of Acts in the third person until Chapter 16:8 when Paul reaches Troas, Greece (*Note: audio incorrectly states Chapter 8*)
 - Then in Chapter 16, Luke changes to the first person (we)
 - This has led many to assume that Luke was living in Troas when Paul converted him, and that he left Troas with Paul
 - Luke then accompanied Paul in all his journeys until Paul's death as a martyr
 - Luke remained unmarried without children in devotion to Paul's work
 - And he died at the age of 84
 - Without Luke's record in Acts, some of the things Paul wrote of himself in the epistles would be difficult to understand
 - Dating the letter is fairly easy
 - We know it captures most of Paul's missionary journeys but it's also notably silent on Paul's death or the destruction of Jerusalem
 - Therefore, it was likely written before Paul died somewhere around 60-62 AD
 - This means the book covers about 30 years of history of the early Church

- Finally, let's briefly consider the structure of the book itself
 - As I teach verse-by-verse, I always try to emphasize finding the structure of books and allowing that structure to guide our understanding
 - The Holy Spirit is the author of this book, and God is a God of order, so it's incumbent upon us to look for that order and understand it
 - The book of Acts has several different structural elements that work together to help us understand it
 - First, the book is a record of the outward movement of the Church during Luke's lifetime
 - From its beginning in Jerusalem to its eventual arrival in Rome
 - The plot-line of the book moves in a one-way arc from God's city to the enemy's city
 - There is a theme evident in that pattern, of the Kingdom of God moving steadily outward to overcome the kingdoms of the earth
 - Secondly, the story presents the Gospel taking root first among Jews, then Samaritans and finally Gentiles
 - Fulfilling Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4; that salvation is of the Jews but will unite Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles
 - Third, Luke focuses on the ministry of Peter in the first half of the book and Paul in the second half
 - Peter was the leader of the Jewish church and Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles
 - So Luke's two-part structure alludes to the eventual transformation of the Church from predominantly Jewish to one almost exclusively Gentile
 - Finally, Luke punctuates his narrative with triumphant statements emphasizing the true power driving the Church forward
 - The statements consistently highlight the power of God's word and the Spirit (John 4 again...worshipping in Spirit and Truth)
- Tonight we study the section of the book commonly called the introduction
 - It's the bridge between Luke's Gospel and the rest of the book of Acts
 - The introduction is Chapter 1

Acts 1:1 The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach,

Acts 1:2 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.

Acts 1:3 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.

Acts 1:4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me;

Acts 1:5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

- Luke wrote Acts to document the events after Jesus’ ascension, so Chapter 1 forms a bridge between the Gospel and what comes next
- Luke begins this book in the same way he began his Gospel
 - Writing to Theophilus, another Greek
 - His name means “loved or lover of God”
 - In the Gospel account, Luke calls him “most excellent”
 - This is a title of rank, probably a Roman official
 - Luke may have been commissioned to write these accounts by this official who apparently was a Christian
 - He likely was Luke’s benefactor who supported Luke’s ministry, and perhaps Paul’s as well
 - Josephus’ famous history of the Jews was written to the “most excellent Epaphroditus,” who was Josephus’ benefactor
- Concerning Luke’s purpose, he intimates that the Gospel was just the beginning of his record
 - Likewise, Jesus’ work in the Gospel was just the beginning
 - And Luke also notes that his first account ended when Jesus was taken up (v.2)
 - In Luke 24, Jesus is seen to depart in this way:

Luke 24:50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.

Luke 24:51 While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

Luke 24:52 And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy,

Luke 24:53 and were continually in the temple praising God.

- But as Luke shows now, there was a bit more involved in Jesus’ departure than Luke chose to cover in his first account
 - In v.2 we hear that Jesus conveyed orders to the Apostles prior to His ascension
 - And these orders were delivered by means of the Holy Spirit
 - What’s the significance of Luke explaining that Jesus delivered His instructions by means of the Holy Spirit?
 - Jesus spoke the words, so why did He need the Holy Spirit to be involved?
 - There is a Biblical principle that spiritual truth cannot be understood by flesh, by natural man
 - It can only be understood by means of the Spirit of God

1Cor. 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

1Cor. 2:13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

1Cor. 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

- In other words, when we're exposed to spiritual truth, we must be taught what it means by the Spirit of God
 - Remember how often Jesus would teach the Apostles and yet His word were misunderstood?
 - It was a demonstration of this same principle
 - Jesus' words were a mystery until the Spirit was working to make them understandable
 - We see that moment after the resurrection in John 20

John 20:20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

John 20:21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

John 20:22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

- So Luke explains that the instructions the disciples received were delivered by the Holy Spirit
 - So we can know that the Apostles understood them And they were delivered during times when Jesus presented Himself alive as a proof of His power over death
 - These appearances lasted for 40 days and occurred in Jerusalem and Galilee and places in between
- Then in vs.4-8 Luke addresses the instructions that Jesus delivered to the Apostles
 - First, He told them not to leave Jerusalem until they received what the Father had promised to them
 - This was the promise from John's Gospel that the Father would send the Helper to the Church

John 15:26 "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me,

John 15:27 and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

- Jesus refers to this event as a baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Jesus emphasizes the greater nature of this coming baptism in comparison to the one done by John with water
 - This passage reminds us of the Biblical perspective of both baptisms
 - The water baptism is a picture of the real baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - We are saved by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but we use water to picture the event
 - In the case of the Apostles, the two events were reversed in sequence
 - The Apostles (and many of the first century believers) experienced water baptism first followed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit
 - This reversal was purposeful in the first century, and we'll explore why as we reach those moments in the book
- Jesus' comments lead the disciples to ask an interesting question

Acts 1:6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”

- Why do the apostles ask this question at this point?
 - Luke begins the verse with the Greek adverb “*oun*” which means therefore
 - So this question came as a result of the instructions the disciples received
 - Specifically, the disciples had the kingdom of Israel on their minds
 - Remember, Jesus Himself mentioned the coming kingdom in v.3
 - And then He says they will all share in a baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Jewish disciples knew from their Old Testament that the arrival of the Messiah would be associated with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Israel
 - We covered this topic in detail during our Isaiah study, but you can review for yourself in Zechariah 12:10-13:1
 - So, the disciples know Jesus to be the resurrected Lord, the Messiah
 - And they hear Him speak of things concerning the Kingdom and of a baptism by the Holy Spirit
 - So the only logical conclusion for them to make is this is the moment when the Kingdom is established for the sake of Israel
 - But the baptism Jesus spoke about was a different event, one that brings individuals into the family of God
 - The baptism that awaits for Israel is the one that will eventually bring the nation as a whole into faith and into the kingdom
- Jesus answers the question in vs.7-8

Acts 1:7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;

Acts 1:8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

- Jesus says no, now is not that time
- And furthermore you aren't to know when that time will come
 - It is a time fixed by the authority of the Father
 - This is consistent with Jesus' statement in Matthew 24 when He said the time of His return is unknowable

Matt. 24:36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

- But then Jesus turns to the substance of their concerns
 - The disciples were seeking reassurance that Jesus' authority would overcome and triumph in the world
 - They expected it would come in the form of the promised kingdom
 - And it will eventually, but Jesus says in the meantime you will receive power to establish a different kind of kingdom
 - The kingdom they will establish will start in Jerusalem, then extend to all Judea, then Samaria and finally to the entire Gentile world
 - This simple statement becomes the marching orders of the Church for the time until Jesus' return for His Bride
 - This statement is the theme statement of the book of Acts
 - The book chronicles how the Apostles received power in a specific sense
 - Power to bring the Gospel to the world and impress its truth upon many people
 - Power to perform miracles and teach with authority
 - It's also important to note that this statement is highly contextual
 - It was spoken to a specific group of men
 - And it came in conjunction with a very specific commission
 - It shouldn't be assumed to apply to every believer or every circumstance
- And then Luke records Jesus' ascension, something he didn't describe in His Gospel

Acts 1:9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Acts 1:10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.

Acts 1:11 They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

- The moment of the ascension must have been bitter sweet for the disciples
 - They watch their beloved Lord leaving in glory
 - Specifically, Jesus was lifted up (the Greek word means to be caught up)
 - And He entered the clouds and was out of sight
 - This explains why the disciples kept gazing after Jesus was gone
 - Perhaps they wondered if He would re-emerge from the clouds
 - But He's gone
 - And all that remains are 11 men standing in the middle of the road silently staring at the sky
 - And apparently God felt like they needed a little nudge or they might just stay there all day
 - The Greek word for gazing means a fixed stare into space
 - They must have been some sight
 - The angels ask, why keep looking for Jesus in the sky?
 - Don't worry...He'll return in the same way one day
 - Because He still has a Kingdom to rule over
- The next brief passage records the Apostles obeying Jesus' command to remain together in the city

Acts 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

Acts 1:13 When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.

Acts 1:14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

- They had been with Jesus on the Mount of Olives
 - And now they walked back into the city, about 3/4 of a mile which is the "sabbath's day walk"
 - And they return to the upper room, probably the same place as the last supper some six weeks earlier
 - The same place where Jesus appeared after His resurrection
 - It's become something of a home base for the Apostles
 - And then we see the 11 disciples listed
 - But with them are Mary and His brothers
 - The mention of His brothers is significant
 - In John 7:5 we learn that His brothers weren't believing in Jesus prior

to His death and resurrection

- But now they have joined the faithful
 - And their time was spent in unified prayer, most likely prayer dedicated to the instructions Jesus gave them
 - Calling for the Spirit to come
- Finally, the introduction ends with the selecting of a replacement Apostle

Acts 1:15 At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said,

Acts 1:16 “Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

Acts 1:17 “For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry.”

Acts 1:18 (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out.

Acts 1:19 And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

Acts 1:20 “For it is written in the book of Psalms,

‘LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE,
AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT’;

and,

‘LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.’

Acts 1:21 “Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us —

Acts 1:22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us — one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

Acts 1:23 So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias.

Acts 1:24 And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen

Acts 1:25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”

Acts 1:26 And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

- First, note that Peter takes the initiative and calls the group to address an obvious problem in the group
 - Once there were 12 apostles, but there were only 11 now
 - Peter says to this group that a 12th was necessary
 - As there will be 12 apostles ruling over the 12 tribes of Israel in the Kingdom

(Matt 19:28)

- Peter reminds this group that the 12th died
 - And Peter mentions graphically the manner of that death
 - Judas was thrown down (headlong) and his intestines burst out
 - Why be so graphic?
 - And how do we reconcile this with Matthew 27 where we're told Judas hanged himself?
 - The answer is that Judas did hang himself
 - But by hanging himself on Passover, his dead body was a risk to anyone who came into contact with him
 - He defiled the city
 - So likely the priests had Gentiles carry the body outside the city and cast it onto the burning trash heap outside the city
 - It was located in the Valley of Hinnon, or Gehenna which became a picture of hell
 - When Judas' body landed on the heap and began to decay, his body would have bloated and eventually burst open
 - Peter's point in speaking graphically was to remind everyone that his death was a just punishment
 - In effect, both his body and soul were in hell
- Somewhat ironically, Peter says in v.17 that Judas has already received his portion of Jesus' ministry
 - And that portion was to play a very ignominious part in fulfilling Scripture
 - The Psalm 69 records that a man's homestead would be left desolate, with no one willing or able to dwell on it
 - For he will be the one to forsake the Messiah
 - The priests used Judas' reward money to buy a field after his death
 - And under Jewish tradition, that field remained his since it was purchased with blood money
 - No one else could claim that field
 - And then Peter quotes another Psalm (109) speaking of that same betrayer, saying that another man will take his office
 - So acting out of his faith and devotion to God's word, Peter takes the initiative to find that replacement Apostle
 - Interestingly, Peter doesn't assume he has the authority to appoint such a person
 - He turns to a time-honored tradition to discern God's will in finding a replacement
- Peter then gives a qualification of who may be considered an Apostle
 - In v.21 Peter says he must be a man who has accompanied Jesus from the beginning of His earthly ministry with John the Baptist

- And they must be witnesses to the resurrection of the Lord
 - These are the qualifications to be one of the Twelve
 - Other apostles were selected (like James and Paul) but they weren't one of the twelve who have the promise of ruling over the 12 Tribes
- Apparently, only two men met that test and were placed in consideration
 - Then they placed the decision in the Lord's hand praying that He would reveal His will
 - And in an act of faith, they drew lots, believing that God would direct the outcome according to His will
 - Casting Lots is a valid Old Testament method of receiving the Spirit's revelation
 - Rocks were labeled with the men's names and placed in a container or pot and shaken until one fell out
 - God gave this practice in Proverbs 16:33 and it appears in numerous Old Testament books
 - After the indwelling of the Holy Spirit came upon the Church, this method was no longer valid in light of the inward leading of the Spirit
 - In fact, this is the last time in the Bible that we see this method used, as expected
- And so Matthias becomes the 12th Apostle