



## The Book of Acts - Chapter One

### Summary of Chapter One

Luke writes to Theophilus and provides a summary of proof for the resurrection of Jesus, through his discourses with his disciples over a period of 40 days. During that time, Jesus gave encouragement and final instructions to his followers before ascending, in their presence, into heaven. Two angels appear to confirm that Jesus would return to earth in the same way that he had departed.

We are introduced to the embryonic church of 120 people, who had taken to meeting regularly in Jerusalem, to offer thanks to God and to enjoy fellowship with one another. On one such occasion they decided it was proper to replace Judas Iscariot, and they did so by drawing lots. This was not a form of gambling, but a way of ensuring this key post was fulfilled by a divinely approved candidate.

### I. Acts 1:1-2:13 - Preparation for Witness

Acts opens with the account of the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Chapter One relates to the preparation of the disciples for that event, which is covered in Acts 2:1-13.

#### I.a. Acts 1:1-11 - Jesus taken up into heaven

This section takes the story back to where Luke concluded with Jesus sharing his final moments with his key disciples, giving final instructions before ascending to heaven.

##### I.a.i Acts 1:1-5 - Jesus prepares the disciples

After a brief introduction (vv.1-2), Luke reviews the 40-day period when Jesus prepared the disciples for their forthcoming ministry (vv.3-5).

<sup>1</sup> In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach

#### Acts 1:1

In his Gospel, Luke addresses Theophilus with the respectful title 'most excellent', which is not repeated here. This could either be because their relationship was now closer and the title had been dropped, or that Theophilus' faith made him aware that such titles were of the world and no longer appropriate for him.

Luke's former book is the Gospel of Luke, which gives an account of what Jesus began to do and to teach. This suggests that the book of Acts is going to be about what Jesus continued 'to

do and teach' in the world through those he had chosen to do so. Although he had physically ascended into heaven (v.9), yet spiritually he was still present on earth (see Matthew 28:20). When one realises that the term Lord, (Greek Kyrios), in Acts usually refers to Jesus, it becomes evident that the entire book tells how Jesus was building his church: selecting an apostle to replace Judas (v.24), pouring out the Holy Spirit in new power (Acts 2:33), adding people to the church day-by-day (Acts 2:47), appearing to Ananias (Acts 9:10), and to Paul (Acts 9:5 and 18:9), healing a paralysed man (Acts 9:34), raising a dead woman (Acts 9:40), receiving worship from the church (Acts 13:2), stopping a magician who was opposing the Gospel (Acts 13:11), and opening people's hearts to believe the Gospel (Acts 16:14). See v.2, John 14:26 and John 15:26 on the Holy Spirit's role. It is the execution of the divine programme that Jesus directs and mediates. Luke's Gospel was also dedicated to Theophilus, probably an actual person but possibly a symbolic name for any Christian seeker or convert.

<sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

### Acts 1:2

The day he was taken up refers to Jesus' ascension into heaven (see Luke 24:51). The beginning of Acts parallels the conclusion of Luke's Gospel (see Luke 24:36-53).

Through the Holy Spirit means that as Jesus gave instructions and commands to his disciples, the Holy Spirit accompanied his teaching, empowering the disciples so that they would rightly understand it and obey it.

Apostles. The word apostle comes from the Greek *apostolos* or messenger, i.e. one who is sent out. Jesus had initially chosen the 12 apostles: <<**When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles**>> (Luke 6:13), and he equipped them for ministry: <<**When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal those who were ill**>> (Luke 9:1-2). Their number was reduced to 11 when Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, who then committed suicide: <<**So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself**>> (Matthew 27:5). This chapter explains how Judas was replaced (see v.26).

Some other men were given apostolic authority due to their work in the church including Barnabas and James, the Lord's 'brother' and, of course: <<**Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God**>> (Romans 1:1).

After giving instructions through the Holy Spirit. Nicodemus, a Pharisee, had acknowledged quite early on in Jesus' ministry that his teaching was from God: <<**He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him'**>> (John 3:2). It also confirms the miracles or signs that often accompanied Jesus' teaching, many but not all, of which are recorded for us in the Gospels: <<**Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written**>> (John 21:25).

<sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

## Acts 1:3

Jesus appeared many times to his disciples and gave them convincing proofs to strengthen their faith. Solid evidence and knowledge of facts increase faith, an idea contrary to some modern views of faith. Only Acts provides the specific time reference, over a period of forty days, for the resurrection appearances, a number that evokes thoughts of many biblical events, such as the wilderness wanderings of Israel, Moses on Mount Sinai with God giving him the commandments, and the temptations of Jesus. It also indicates the great love and affection that Jesus held for them, and it would have been a great comfort to have him with them for this time after his resurrection.

Although common in the Gospels as the main theme of Jesus' teaching, the phrase Kingdom of God occurs only six times in Acts (1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:23 and 28:31). Significantly, two of the six are at the beginning and end of Acts, indicating that the proclamation of the Gospel in Acts represents the beginning of the fulfilment of God's kingdom promises. The Kingdom of God does not mean an earthly political or military kingdom, but the present spiritually-directed reign of God, gradually transforming individual lives and entire cultures, through the power of the Holy Spirit: <<***But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well***>> (Matthew 6:33).

<sup>4</sup>On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.'

## Acts 1:4

The gift my Father promised refers to the new and greater empowering of the Holy Spirit. In order to receive him, the disciples were told do not leave Jerusalem. The disciples had spent part of the 40 days in Galilee and had met with Jesus there on at least one occasion, as described in John Chapter 21.

But the disciples were to be in Jerusalem, despite the increased personal safety problems this posed, as the Holy Spirit must be given in Jerusalem, for:

1. It was where God had put his name (1 Kings 11:36).
2. It was where Christ was put to shame (Mark 15:24a).
3. It is upon the holy hill at Zion that God will once again stand (Revelation 14:1).
4. The word of God must go out from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3).
5. It is also symbolic of forgiveness for his enemies and persecutors, to show them that they will have further opportunities for salvation (Luke 23:34).

The Spirit was long promised: <<***The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, 'I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire'***>> (Luke 3:15-16), and: <<***I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high***>> (Luke 24:49).

<sup>5</sup>For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'

## Acts 1:5

Baptised with the Holy Spirit looks forward to Pentecost, which we will read of in Chapter Two. John had contrasted his baptism of repentance with Jesus' Holy Spirit baptism: <<*baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit*>> (Mark 1:8). Throughout Acts, baptism and the gift of the Spirit are closely related. Repentance, forgiveness, water baptism, and the receiving of the Spirit comprise the basic pattern of coming to faith.

### I.a.ii Acts 1:6-11 - The Ascension

At the end of the 40 days (v.3), Jesus took his disciples to the Mount of Olives and ascended visibly (vv.9-11). Before doing so he commissioned them to be his witnesses (v.8).

<sup>6</sup> Then they gathered round him and asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'



## Acts 1:6

The place of the disciples' assembly was the Mount of Olives (v.12), at the foot of

which lay Bethany (see Luke 24:50). The disciples asked Jesus when he would restore the kingdom to Israel because they concluded, from his resurrection and the promise of the Spirit that the messianic era had dawned, and the final salvation of Israel was imminent. However, they were probably still expecting the restoration of a military and political kingdom that would drive out the Roman armies and restore national sovereignty to Israel, as had happened numerous times in the OT. Jesus corrected them; not by rejecting the question, but by telling them that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit, not in order to triumph over Roman armies but to spread the good news of the Gospel throughout the world. In other words, the return is in God's timing; in the meantime, there are other key things believers are to do.

### The Mount Of Olives

The disciples still thought Jesus would restore the kingdom of Israel as it was in the days of David, Solomon, Asa and Jehoshaphat, but Jesus had established his own spiritual kingdom for God. Shiloh had come, but not in the way they had perceived or expected (Genesis 49:10 - ASV).

With regard to the coming of the Messiah, the Rabban quote: 'Perish the men who calculate the time'. This can also be said about the Second Coming.

In many ways the church has tried to set itself up as the kingdom, in the same way the apostles saw the kingdom of Israel. It was never intended to be like that, although we do expect to see glimpses of the Kingdom on earth. But it will always be a spiritual and not a temporal kingdom in this life.

<sup>7</sup> He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.'

## Acts 1:7

The Father has set by his own authority. Ultimate authority in determining the events of history is consistently ascribed to God the Father among the persons of the Trinity.

<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

## Acts 1:8

Jesus corrected the disciples' question (v.6) with a commission: 'this time' would be for them a time of witnessing for the Gospel, and the scope of their witness was not to be just Israel but the world. Verse 8 is the thematic statement for all of Acts. It begins with the Spirit's power that underpins, equips and drives the witness of Jesus as the Christ. Then it provides a rough outline of the book:

- Jerusalem (Chapters 1-7),
- Judæa and Samaria (Chapters 8-12),
- and to the ends of the earth (Chapters 13-28).

You will receive power. Interpreters differ over whether the Holy Spirit was at work in the lives of ordinary believers prior to Pentecost in a lesser way or not at all, except for empowering for special tasks. On either view, something new that needed to be waited for was here. This powerful new work of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost brought several beneficial results:

1. More effectiveness in witness and ministry - v.8;
2. Effective proclamation of the Gospel - see Matthew 28:19;
3. Power for victory over sin - see Acts 2:42-46, Romans 6:11-14 and Romans 8:13-14, Galatians 2:20 and Philippians 3:10;
4. Power for the ongoing victory over Satan and other demonic forces - see Acts 2:42-46, 16:16-18, 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, Ephesians 6:10-18 and 1 John 4:4;
5. A wide distribution of the gifts for ministry - see Acts 2:16-18, 1 Corinthians 12:7 and 1 Corinthians 12:11, 1 Peter 4:10. See also Numbers 11:17 and Numbers 11:24-29.

The disciples likely understood power in this context to include both the power to preach the Gospel effectively and also the power, through the Holy Spirit, to work miracles confirming the message. The same word, Greek *dynamis*, is used at least seven other times in Acts to refer to the power to work miracles in connection with Gospel proclamation, see Acts 2:22, 3:12, 4:7, 6:8, 8:10, 10:38 and 19:11).

**In John 20:22 we read: <<And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'>>. Many commentators state this was an out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. It is best understood as a foretaste of what would happen when the Spirit was given at Pentecost and was used to help them to open their hearts and minds so they could understand the scriptures, which they had consistently struggled to comprehend up to this point. It also does not mean that the Holy Spirit had no presence in the disciples' lives prior to this point.**

<sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

## Acts 1:9

Elsewhere in scripture, a cloud is often associated with a manifestation of God's presence, Hebrew Shechinah. See Luke 9:28-36, Jesus Transfiguration, for an example of this. This was not an ordinary rain cloud but the cloud of glory that surrounds the very presence of God.

It could be described as:

- A cloud of thick darkness, where God had said he will dwell (Psalm 18:11).
- Bright cloud of His Glory, similar to that on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5).
- His chariot (Psalm 104:3).
- As God appeared on the Mercy Seat (Leviticus 16:2).

He was taken up before their very eyes. <<*God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets*>> (Psalm 47:5). This visible ascension of Jesus into heaven indicates that Jesus retains a physical human body as a man, though he is exalted to the right hand of God, i.e. given direct executive rule in God's spiritual kingdom: <<*Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'*>> (Matthew 28:18). When coupled with v.11, it also indicates that he will someday return in the same physical body: <<*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The amazing miracle of the incarnation is not only that the eternal Son of God took human nature on himself and became a person, who is simultaneously and completely God and man, but also that he will remain both fully God and fully man forever.

Here, the apostles and disciples saw him ascend into heaven but Daniel saw him arrive there (Daniel 7:13) and Stephen would later see him standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56).

<sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

## Acts 1:10

The two men were angels in human form, as their white robes attest (see Matthew 28:3, Luke 24:4 and John 20:12 for similar descriptions).

<sup>11</sup> 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'

## Acts 1:11

Will come back in the same way you have seen him go. Jesus' return, like his ascension, will be bodily and visible as noted earlier. This is confirmed by: <<*so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him*>> (Hebrews 9:28).

### I.b. Luke 1:12-26 - Matthias chosen to replace Judas

Following Judas' suicide, see Matthew 27:5, the apostolic group was depleted and it was necessary to ask the Lord to anoint a replacement, which is what this section describes.

<sup>12</sup> Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.

### Acts 1:12

A Sabbath day's walk was the maximum distance one could travel on the Sabbath without it constituting work. This was not an explicit OT law but a later Jewish tradition. The rabbis set the limit at 2,000 cubits (about 0.6 miles or 1 km). Jews at Qumran had a lower travel limit.

<sup>13</sup> When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphæus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup> They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

### Acts 1:13-14

The women in the upper room likely included those who ministered to Jesus' followers (Luke 8:2-3), accompanied them from Galilee (Luke 23:55), and witnessed the crucifixion and empty tomb (Luke 23:49, 23:55-56 and Luke 24:2-11). Jesus had four half-brothers –James, Joses, Judas and Simon (Mark 6:3).

The main activity in the upper room was prayer. Jesus had told them <<*wait for the gift my Father promised*>> (v.4), but waiting for God and prayer are closely related in several places in the OT, and therefore it is likely that they were constantly in prayer, asking that the promised Spirit would descend on them.

There is a lot of conjecture about this room. It would not have been in the temple, as some commentators have suggested, as the priests would not condone this. Other speculations are: the upper room used for the last supper (Luke 22:12), or the house of John Mark's mother, which was identified as a church in Acts 12:12.

This is the last mention of Mary, Jesus' mother, in the Bible.

<sup>15</sup> In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)

### Acts 1:15

As during Jesus' ministry, Peter continues to be the spokesman for the apostles and disciples. This confirmed that he had been fully restored, following his denial of Jesus just a few weeks earlier. See Luke 22:54-61.

The one hundred and twenty were probably the 11 apostles, many, if not all, of the 72 sent out in Luke Chapter 10, and other disciples who had followed Jesus into Jerusalem, or who had been attracted to the group following the resurrection.

<sup>16</sup> and said, 'Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus.

## Acts 1:16

The Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David is one of the clearest affirmations in scripture that the Bible is the inspired word of God. The Holy Spirit 'spoke' through David's mouth in the sense that David's written words were inspired by the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, foretelling events that took place a thousand years later.

Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. <<*Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders*>> (Mark 14:43).

<sup>17</sup> He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.'

<sup>18</sup> (With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out.

## Acts 1:17-18

Judas bought a field. That is, the field was acquired indirectly by Judas, through the agency of the chief priests. As Matthew 27:3-7 records, Judas brought the 30 pieces of silver back to the chief priests and elders. The chief priests then purchased the Potter's Field with Judas's money, producing the same effect as if Judas had himself made the purchase.

His body burst open. The two accounts of Judas' death are complementary retellings of the same event, each focusing in different ways on the same details. Both accounts involve: Judas' remorse, the purchase of a field with his ill-gotten money, its reputation as 'the Field of Blood', and Judas' gory death.

The main difference is that Matthew 27:5 states Judas: <<*hanged himself*>>, while here, Peter states that he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. One possible explanation suggests that the field overlooked a cliff, and as Judas hanged himself, the rope or the branch may have broken, with his body falling headlong over the edge of the cliff and onto jagged rocks below. Others have suggested that Judas' body may have remained hanging for some time, decaying and decomposing; eventually falling to the ground and bursting open in its decomposed condition. In either case, there is no reason to see the two accounts as contradictory, since they focus on complementary details of the same event. In both accounts, the effect of Satan's control over Judas' life is clear, demonstrating the general principle that Satan brings total destruction and disgrace to the person who comes under his control, for: <<*He was a murderer from the beginning*>> (John 8:44) and at the Last Supper we know that: <<*As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him*>> (John 13:27a).

Judas' death was a well attested fact in Jerusalem around that time and the reason for his death was also apparent.

Most church traditions, from at least the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, place this field in the Hinnom Valley, south of Jerusalem, although it is difficult to confirm the precise location.

The Greek for hell in Matthew 18:9 is Gehenna, a name derived from the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, where rubbish was constantly burned so that it came to be seen as a metaphor for the fire of hell.

<sup>19</sup> Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

<sup>20</sup> ‘For,’ said Peter, ‘it is written in the Book of Psalms:

“‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,” and, “‘May another take his place of leadership.”

### Acts 1:19-20

Judas’ death was the fulfilment of Psalm 69:25, and May his place be deserted confirms his place among the disciples was now empty.

May another take his place of leadership. The selection of Matthias (v.26) as the twelfth apostle was a direct fulfilment of prophecy (see v.16 and Psalm 109:8), carried out under the direction of the Lord.

The addition of this new twelfth apostle would complete the new nucleus for the people of God, parallel to the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel in the OT. Although these 12 would remain the core group of the apostles, (see Luke 22:30, 1 Corinthians 15:5, Revelation 21:12 and 21:14), a few more men became apostles later, including at least Barnabas (Acts 14:4 and 14:14), and James, the Lord’s half-brother (Galatians 1:19). However, apostles were not replaced from this point onwards, e.g. in Acts Chapter 12, James the brother of John was not replaced after his execution. Paul was also called to be an apostle when Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road (Acts Chapters 9, 22 and 26, 1 Corinthians 9:1, 1 Corinthians 15:8-9 and Galatians 1:13-17), and the unusual timing of his call led Paul to conclude that no more apostles would be chosen after him (1 Corinthians 15:8).

<sup>21</sup> Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, <sup>22</sup> beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.’

<sup>23</sup> So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. <sup>24</sup> Then they prayed, ‘Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup> to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.’

### Acts 1:21-24

Two men, Joseph and Matthias, met the necessary requirements to be considered for apostleship. The group turned the matter over to the Lord, that is, the Lord Jesus, who had chosen all the other apostles, praying that he would make his choice known. Joseph is probably the Justus referred to as a companion of Paul in Colossians 4:11.

<sup>26</sup> Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

### Acts 1:26

The lots were probably marked stones that were placed in a pot and then shaken out: <<**He is to cast lots for the two goats - one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat**>> (Leviticus 16:8). This does not imply that people should cast lots to make their decisions today, for there is no such command in any NT letter or in any of Jesus’ earthly teachings. The appointment of a twelfth apostle was a unique situation, a choice that was made by Jesus himself.

In the rest of the NT, the elders and deacons and other church leaders are chosen according to decisions made by human beings, whether by an apostle or by others in the churches (see Acts 6:3-6, 14:23 and 15:22, 2 Corinthians 8:19, 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9).

Such decisions need to be taken after spending time in dedicated prayer on the issue, just as Jesus did when he appointed the original twelve: <<*One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles*>> (Luke 6:12-13).

Although they were unknowingly fulfilling scripture: <<*They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment*>> (Psalm 22:18), the Roman soldiers who cast lots for Jesus clothing (Mark 15:24), were simply gambling and not taking part in some divine revelation or enlightenment.