

# Acts 1:1-5

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/acts/acts-1/acts-11-5/>

*Luke begins his second account. His first was about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This account is about the acts of the disciples and the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come to them.*

The book of Acts was written by Luke, a Gentile believer in Jesus and a physician (Colossians 4:14). It is a continuation of his gospel, the Gospel of Luke, mentioned here as the *first account* he *composed*. This second *account*, the Book of Acts, is addressed to the same man as the gospel was—*Theophilus*. Luke began his Gospel (gospel means “good news”) by explaining that it was based on the personal accounts of eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life which he had investigated carefully. It was written “in an orderly sequence, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:3-4).

Who is *Theophilus*? He is not mentioned anywhere else in scripture outside the introductions to Luke and Acts. The name *Theophilus* comes from two Greek words, “Theos” (God) and “Philo” (friend). So it means “friend of God.” No one knows if this was a specific person, perhaps a nickname or an alias for a Roman official who was also a believer. Or it possibly could be a catch-all name for any friend of God who reads Luke’s accounts, any believer in Jesus. Similar to saying, “Dear Reader” or “To Whom It May Concern,” but with a more specific idea of the intended audience. It seems clear that Luke wrote Acts in large part to validate the teachings and apostolic authority of Paul. Acts will end with Paul under house arrest in Rome. At this time, Christianity was unlawful. So it could well be that Luke wrote this in such a way to maintain anonymity for some, to avoid bringing unnecessary persecution.

The book is typically called the Acts of the Apostles. Irenaeus, one of the early church fathers in the third century, gave it this name. It could just as easily be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit, because as Jesus returns to Heaven, the Holy Spirit becomes the primary way in which God works through the apostles and the budding church.

Just as the Gospel of Luke is a historical account of Jesus's ministry on earth, Acts is the historical account for the beginning of the age when the Holy Spirit will dwell within humans. One a gospel of Jesus, the other a gospel of the Holy Spirit, both combined make up more than 25% of the entire New Testament.

It is likely that the main reason Luke wrote Acts was to solidify Paul's apostleship, and his teaching of the gospel of grace. Acts grounds Paul’s church letters (epistles) with apostolic authority, and validates his insistence that being justified in the sight of God is apart from following religious regulations. Without the Book of Acts, we would not have a testimony to confirm who Paul was. If the book following the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) was Romans, written by Paul, without Acts between, there could be considerable doubt as to who this man was and why he had any authority to teach believers in Christ.

But the book of Acts establishes who Paul is, first as a persecutor of the church, and then later as one of its greatest ambassadors. This account confirms Paul's apostolic credentials to show what Christ has done in his life and why we ought to listen to what he has to say in his letters (which include Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, Philemon, Colossians, Philippians, 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy, Titus, and likely Hebrews).

Luke begins Acts with an overlap of where the *first account* he *composed* ended. The *first account*, being the Gospel of Luke, was *about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to Heaven*. Acts begins on the day Jesus ascended. The things Jesus did during his earthly ministry are recorded in Luke, as well as what He taught. In Acts, we will see Jesus hand the baton to His apostles, including Paul, to spread what He did and taught to the Gentiles. This movement has subsequently spread throughout the world.

Before going to *Heaven*, Jesus *had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen*. These apostles were the faithful eleven out of the twelve disciples who had followed and served Jesus during His ministry. Apostle means "a person who is sent." It is used in the book of Acts to describe the disciples who were sent by Jesus to tell the world about His death and resurrection. Traditionally, "apostle" is only applied to the twelve disciples (after Judas was replaced) and to Paul. These were the prominent leaders who witnessed Jesus firsthand, and then founded and nurtured the church as it was birthed and grew.

Luke does not here repeat the *orders* that He gave the *apostles* through the *Holy Spirit*. Luke records the following order Jesus gave the Apostles, which will be amplified in Acts:

"Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.'"

(Luke 24:45-49)

Matthew records what is generally referred to as "The Great Commission" which is also an order, and is quite similar to what Luke records:

"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"

(Matthew 28:18-20)

In this passage Jesus makes clear that "all authority" was granted to Him. "All authority" was granted to Jesus as a reward for His faithfulness during His earthly ministry (Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 12:1-2; Revelation 3:21). If someone has "all authority" they have immense power. In each passage from Luke and Matthew, Jesus commands the apostles to remain in Jerusalem until

they receive the power needed to do the job Jesus assigned them, to be sent forth to be His witnesses.

*To these* (the apostles), Jesus *presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs*. As recorded in the Gospel of Luke, the disciples lost faith in Jesus after He was crucified. He did not fulfill their expectations of what the Messiah would be and do. Now Jesus is reestablishing their faith *after His suffering* to bear the sins of the world upon the cross. Some of these *convincing proofs* were the empty tomb and the angels announcing Jesus's resurrection (Luke 24:2-12) as well as Jesus's physical body restored to life (Luke 24:39). Jesus also opened the scriptures to demonstrate that they spoke of Him (Luke 24:44-45), as He did to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:25-27). The apostles turned their back on Jesus because He did not fulfill what they understood He would be and do, based on how they had understood the Bible. Jesus reshaped their understanding of the Bible, and showed that all they had seen was necessary, and predicted to come to pass.

Jesus' hands and feet were still scarred from His crucifixion. He was not merely a spirit or ghost, but the same man, now resurrected from death into an eternal, spiritual body. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:44 that this is the hope of all who receive the free gift of salvation. Jesus lived among His disciples for *forty days* in a resurrected physical body, eating food, and *speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God*. This was nothing new. Jesus spoke concerning the good news (gospel) of the kingdom of God during His entire ministry (Matthew 4:23). However, the disciples did not really understand much of what Jesus taught; likely because they had the wrong mental model about the kingdom. This is why Luke records that Jesus spent much of the forty days teaching them a new way to see the scriptures (Luke 24:44-45).

It seems the disciples' mental model was limited to having a descendent of David retake the throne of Israel, expel the Romans from their borders, and restore Israel as a nation. This will occur, as the scripture foretells, but Jesus first had to suffer and die for the sins of the world, as Jesus showed from the scriptures. The disciples made clear on numerous occasions that they could not comprehend this, even when Jesus stated it to them plainly (Matthew 16:21-23).

The Apostle Paul records that the risen Jesus appeared to 500 people in one situation, many of whom were still alive at his writing (1 Corinthians 15:6). 500 witnesses is a significant number of people who would have firsthand knowledge to confirm that Jesus was raised from the dead.

After Jesus spent forty days with His followers, teaching them *concerning the kingdom of God*, He then prepared to go back to Heaven. Luke writes that *Gathering them together*, Jesus *commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised*. Jesus was referring to the promise of power, and a Helper (Luke 24:49; John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7). This promise would be fulfilled through the descent and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

*Jerusalem*, the capital of Israel, was where Christ was arrested, tried, and crucified. Many Jews were there to celebrate Passover when this happened. They had witnessed the dramatic trial and execution of the famous teacher, Jesus. They were complicit in the death of Jesus; when Pontius Pilate gave them the choice to release Jesus or a criminal named Barabbas, they called for Jesus's crucifixion (Mark 15:14). By this point in Acts 1, forty days after Jesus's resurrection,

many Jews had returned to their homes away from Jerusalem, but they would soon come back to the capital city to celebrate another feast, Pentecost, which takes place fifty days after Passover.

Pentecost was established by Moses, and was initially called the feast of firstfruits (Exodus 23:16-22; Leviticus 23:9-20). It was to celebrate the first fruits of the harvest. Jesus is the first fruit of the resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). The Holy Spirit will come to indwell believers on the first day of Pentecost.

*Jerusalem* was the location where the disciples were *to wait*. What they waited for was *what the Father had promised*. Jesus reminds them of this promise: “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Jesus is echoing John the Baptizer’s teaching, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16).

To be *baptized* simply means “to be immersed.” Jews routinely baptized to symbolize purification. John the Baptizer immersed people in literal water as a sign to show that they had repented of sin, and that they were choosing to identify with God in His kingdom and with the Messiah. This was symbolic and an important public way for people to show that they are choosing to follow Jesus as Messiah, that they repent of their sin, and are prepared for God’s kingdom.

But Jesus is now telling His disciples, “I’m going to immerse you in Myself. I’m going to immerse you in the Holy Spirit and I’m going to transform your life.” This now takes place when anyone believes in Jesus. This new age of the Holy Spirit will be inaugurated at Pentecost.

Jesus spoke many times about the Holy Spirit and His purpose. He calls the Holy Spirit “the Helper”: “But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you” (John 16:7). This makes clear that the indwelling Holy Spirit is a greater asset to believers than having Jesus physically present on earth.

The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of truth, “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:13).

The Spirit would provide help in knowing the truth, and also in giving courage to the disciples, who had incredibly difficult lives ahead of them, “When [enemies] bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (Luke 12:11-12).

Since Christ was physically leaving earth, a spiritual Helper would be sent to minister to and through believers. This Helper, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, is the third person of the

triune God. God the Father had sent God the Son to save the world, now God the Son was returning to God the Father, and they would send God the Spirit to teach and to speak through believers in Jesus.

### **Biblical Text**

<sup>1</sup> The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. 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; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”