

HOW DO WE GET THERE FROM HERE

ACTS 1:1-8 JUNE 5, 2019

Please find your way to the Book of Acts this evening. Tonight we set out on a study through this dramatic and beloved book, whose scenes and stories make us marvel and think, “Those were the days!” As we read the Bible, sometimes we come across sections or chapters that have a hard time holding our attention. Long lists of materials or genealogies. Most of us don’t get overly excited about hitting Numbers in our personal reading. But we don’t have that problem in Acts. It’s jam packed, wall to wall with all sorts of good stuff.

Before we embark on chapter 1, verse 1, imagine for a moment that tomorrow you receive a call. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Organization has dialed your number and invited you to *lead* a crusade tour from California to Texas. We’re just pretending here, so let’s say you agree. You don’t know why they think you’re the person for the job, but ok. Let’s do it. You *do* have a few questions though: When are we going to go and who’s going with me? “Don’t worry about it.” How are we going to travel and where will the stops be? “You’ll see.” Well, how are these events going to work? What’s the program? What should I plan for? What should I say? “It’s gonna be great. You’ll love it.”

Even if you’re not a Type A personality, this plan is not off to a great start!

Now consider for a moment how *little* information the Church had in advance when it came to being established and starting her mission. We’re pretty well-versed in the adventures in the book of Acts. But, what we’re going to find in chapter after chapter is a group of people living out their faith, often without any heads up of what was coming next. Just like we experience today as we follow Christ.

Acts records for us remarkable stories of the work of God through His people. But along they way they didn’t have a detailed itinerary or 5 year plan. Instead we see them sent out with a somewhat vague directive, an essential promise and a faithful God. It turns out, *that* equipment is more than sufficient to turn the world upside down. Those were the days that changed history. Where multiplied thousands were being saved for eternity.

But the book is not just remarkable *historically*, for a Christian it is also remarkable *personally*. This book explains how *we* got here. Without Acts, we wouldn’t know how you get from John to Romans. We wouldn’t know who this Paul guy is. We wouldn’t understand how you get from a group of 11 Jewish believers in Jerusalem to an all Gentile church in Hanford. Because of this commentators like Dr. Ivor Powell point out that Acts stands in “magnificent isolation” in the New Testament. Not only does it stir our hearts, expand upon doctrine, and give many examples. It also sort of serves as a Biblical 23andMe for us, or ancestry.com. Because it reveals to each of us what we are supposed to be about as members *of* this Church, established in the first century, continuing today. You and I are part of the same Church, Christ’s Body. You and I are part of that same human chain, given the *same* commission from our Lord as Peter and Paul and all the rest. And so we can’t overstate the significance of the book for Christian living.

In your Bible, it’s probably titled, “Acts of the Apostles.” That’s not what the author called it. It was written as a *letter*, not a textbook. The manuscripts often title it simply, “Praxis” which means actions or works. Some of them add “of the Apostles” but we’ll find that there’s a lot more going on than just what the apostles were doing. In fact, most of the apostles (at least the original 11) are only listed once and then we don’t seem them saying or doing *anything*. In the mean time, we see *many*

individual Christians being used by God, communities responding both positively and negatively, governments taking action. Page after page is full of *activity*.

In fact, in most of these chapters a recurring theme that we will see is that these were days when God stirred the hearts of individuals to action. Sometimes those actions were big, sometimes they were small. Sometimes they had a huge result, sometimes they were quickly forgotten. But each time God stirred in someone's heart and they obeyed we see the kind of work Christ *began* to do through His spiritual Body and the kind of power He supplied for them to do it.

Let's begin at verse 1.

Acts 1:1 - The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

From antiquity it has been accepted that Dr. Luke was the author of Acts. There is excellent internal and external evidence for this. The Gospel of Luke is the "former account" he's referencing, the first volume of the saga. Acts is the sequel, written probably sometime around 64 AD. We know that Luke was a physician, a personal friend and traveling companion of Paul, even to the very end and, in Luke 1, he identifies himself as an *expert* when it comes to recording and relaying this information concerning Jesus Christ and His church. Between his two books, Luke, the *only* Gentile author, wrote the largest slice of the New Testament. 27% of it, in fact.

Luke's Gospel covered what Jesus began to do and to teach, but as far as the good doctor was concerned, the Lord was just getting started. Acts was part two, revealing the next phase of all Jesus would do and teach through His spiritual Body: the Church.

A good question for each of us to ask at this point is: What is God doing in your life? What is He *teaching* you? He is a God who speaks and who does. He's a God who calls us and sends us and changes us. The Lord is not on a long vacation before His second coming. What He began in Luke He continued in Acts and what He began in Acts He continues today.

Acts 1:2 - ²until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen,

There were already more believers in Jesus beside the 11 apostles (the 12 minus Judas), but the responsibility of laying the foundation of the Church was given to these guys. Later in chapter 1 we'll get into this a bit more, but there was a special place for "the 12" in the plan of God. We'll discover that there were *other* apostles, beyond the original 11 and Matthias (who would replace Judas). Paul, of course, was an apostle. Barnabas is identified as an apostle. But the hand-chosen apostles, known as "the 12" had a special assignment from the Lord to be the foundation upon which the building of the Church was constructed.

We notice here the emphasis on the commandments that Christ gave these men. Though they would have powerful, dynamic, supernatural ministries, though they had enjoyed unrestricted access to Jesus, they were still men under authority, men under orders, sent to serve.

What did the Lord command them? The book will make it clear that these guys really had no plan. We see them being led day by day, responding to what was going on as it happened. They had no

details laid out. “Who should replace Judas?” We don’t know. “Are Gentiles allowed to become Christians?” We don’t know. “If they can, do they have to be circumcised?” We don’t know.

It seems what the Lord was commanding them to do was *wait*, abide, feed the sheep. He did *not* lay out a 10 year business plan for the Church. He didn’t tell them who was going where. That was going to be the work of the Spirit, Who would not only empower them, but also direct them.

Acts 1:3 - ³ to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis for Christianity. Without it, we have no hope and no reason to believe. We will see that the resurrection is the rallying point for each sermon in the book of Acts. And Acts contains a *bunch* of sermons. In fact, there are 24 speeches in the book. Either sermons or discourse or monologues or debates. They’re about 30% of the book.

It is the resurrection that makes Christianity what it is. Jesus Christ is not some wise teacher or some moral philosopher. He is the *Living* God. And that makes all the difference. That changes all the rules of life and eternity.

Here Luke says that Jesus *proved* the reality of His resurrection for over a month. He appeared, physically, to hundreds of people. Paul lets us know that He appeared to over 500 people at one time. These believers were able to speak with Him and eat with Him. They could *handle* Him and cling to Him. We’re fond of saying that the resurrection is the most provable event in human history. If that seems far fetched, we’d recommend one of many books that dive into this issue. Books like *The Case For Christ*. If *anything* in history is sure, it’s Jesus’ resurrection.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee said:

“The problem of the unbeliever today is not with the facts but with his own unbelief. The facts are available. I wonder whether anyone doubts that the Battle of Waterloo was a historical event...I believe that Napoleon lived and I believe that he fought the Battle of Waterloo. But I have very little evidence for it. Actually there is ten thousand times more evidence for the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ than there is for the Battle of Waterloo.”¹

Luke also lets us know in verse 3 that during those 40 days Jesus spent a great deal of time talking with His disciples about the kingdom of God. File that away till we get to verse 6.

Acts 1:4 - ⁴ And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the Promise of the Father “which” He said, “you have heard from Me;

The promise was the Holy Spirit, the One who would give them the power needed to do what they were being asked to do. He was the One who would give them the spiritual eyes to see what they needed to see. He was the One who would supply them with courage to stand and speak, even with people who wanted to murder them. He was the One who would lead and guide them.

¹ J. Vernon McGee Acts: Chapters 1-14

Reading verse 4, I imagine some in the group thinking, “Um, don’t we need the Holy Spirit *now*? What are we waiting for?” But they’d have to stick around and wait for another 10 days.

So, Jesus had given them their commission. He had explained to them how they were going to continue His work. He had laid the responsibility of global evangelism at their feet. But then He says, “Don’t do *anything* until you have received the baptism with the Holy Spirit, which will endue you with the power to do all this.” In other words, *don’t fake it till you make it*. Have you ever heard that expression? That’s not how God wanted His church to go out and do kingdom work.

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

In John 20 we learned that Jesus had breathed on them, saying: Receive the Holy Spirit. So, clearly, there is a *separate* idea that He is referencing here. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is, of course, controversial and often times emotional, depending on your Christian background. But what’s clear here is that, despite the fact that the Holy Spirit was *within* them, they were still waiting for an immersive *baptism* with the Holy Spirit, which would uniquely and *essentially* empower them to live the Christian life as witnesses for Jesus. That was the great promise from God and that was the prerequisite for *everything* that would follow in these chapters.

Acts 1:6 - ⁶ Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Commentaries ignite in controversy at this verse. Some of them are quick to chastise and belittle the apostles for asking this question. But should they be criticized? First of all, we’ll find that some of the greatest moments in Acts come from people asking questions. The Philippian jailer. Cornelius. The Bereans. When we have a question, especially about the Lord’s truth, He’s excited to have us ask it.

Second, remember what has been happening for the last 40 days: Jesus has been popping in, getting His disciples ready for this new dispensation. And, we’re told, has been *specifically* talking to them *about* the things pertaining to the kingdom (v3). We’re told in Luke 24 that during this period of time the Lord “opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” In response to *all* the Lord has been teaching them the apostles say, “Ok, so is the literal return of the kingdom *to Israel* going to happen now or later?” Their minds were drawn to prophecy. And, we’ll see that there is a very significant emphasis on prophecy *throughout* the book, *especially* in the sermons that are delivered. Prophecy matters. It mattered to the apostles, it should matter to us.

Some commentaries suggest that they were only thinking selfishly and were blind to the truth of God’s word. But that contradicts what we’ve already been told: That their understanding had been *opened*. And when Jesus answers, He does not rebuke them or sit them back down and say, “Well, obviously you didn’t pay attention to My last lecture.” Here is His response:

Acts 1:7 - ⁷ And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

His answer was *not* that they were blind or that there was not going to be a literal kingdom, only a spiritual one. Instead, He simply tells them that they don’t need to know the specific timing of these things. They had asked, “Lord, when are you going to *restore* the Kingdom of Israel, with You on the throne as King?” It would’ve been a perfect time for the Lord to *correct* them, because they were,

after all, the ones who were sent out to go and *preach the Kingdom!* And they clearly believed it would have a literal, Jewish fulfillment.

What Jesus told them was that He was not going to give them a specific calendar. There would be no detailed itinerary for them. Instead of an itinerary, what they needed was the soon-to-come filling of the Holy Spirit and a *mindset* - the mindset of a witness.

Acts 1:8 - ⁸ But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

This was all the detail they got. They weren't told when or how these things would happen. They didn't know about Paul or about Cornelius. They had never imagined Timothy or Luke. Instead, they were given this general plan. That, at some point, the general "you" would move outward, starting from the upper room, down into the city streets, then along the roads from the place to place until the ends of the earth had been reached with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As they went, they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to live and speak as *witnesses* wherever they were sent. This is the 'business' plan of the Church. And if I want to be a part of this amazing story, the question that arises here is: "What *end* of the earth have I been sent to as a witness?" Peter would find himself in Joppa, but not in Turkey. Paul would find himself in Rome, but not in Spain. Some to Samaria. Some to Antioch. Some to India. Some to California. All sent *somewhere*. Each specific calling may be different, but the *commission* is the same. And so, it follows that we need what they needed.

During this transition period, Jesus was under the impression that His followers needed 3 things: To understand the Scriptures. To be baptized with the Holy Spirit and to be specifically led day by day. It's clear He did *not* think they needed a detailed itinerary of life or a 5 year plan for the Church. A step-by-step layout of how everything was going to go. No, what God's people need is the understanding of His word and the *power* of His Spirit. We must have *both* of these things, not one without the other.

In Acts we see the days of men and women living as witnesses of the resurrection, preaching the Kingdom with a power that shook the world. We see people living in simple faithfulness and really experiencing the dynamite power of the Holy Spirit. We see them receiving more and more understanding of the truth of God's word. And we see individuals being stirred to serve, big and small, near and far. Those were the days. And nothing about that is different than what we should expect and pray for today. The book continues with you and with me. We've received the call. Perhaps we don't have a detailed itinerary, but we have what these believers had: God's word, His Spirit, His leading. And along with that supply we've been commanded with the same commission. To go and live as witnesses in a lost and dying world.

Some of you probably already know that the word used for "witnesses" is the word "martyr." The book of Acts will also tell the stories of those who paid the ultimate price for their faith. But, in reality, every believer featured on these pages is a martyr. Because they considered their lives as forfeit to the cause of Christ. To His will. Jesus invites us to die to ourselves. To live as martyrs, whether that's in the board room or the gallows. As we go, we live to *witness* by His power. By definition a witness must be a person who has seen and experienced himself, not that they heard something secondhand.

One commentator reminds us that "a witness does not say 'I think so,' he says, 'I *know*.'" As we read these pages we'll see those were the days where men and women knew the power of the Spirit

and were used by God to spread the Gospel and to further the *spiritual* aspect of His Kingdom. Let the same be true of us as we continue the story, day by day in the power of the Spirit and the truth of His word.