

BEGINNINGS

Acts 1:1-11

We live in an age of sequels. Everyone likes to hear the rest of the story. We aren't really satisfied with "they lived happily ever after." We want more. The Book of Acts is a sequel. It follows on the heels of the Gospel According to Luke. It is the rest of the story.

Luke let us know in his first account that he had carefully investigated the facts surrounding Jesus. These facts were not particularly flattering to the disciples. Luke has pointed out that they were often fearful and doubting and unbelieving. As we read of their struggles, we can see they had a hard time believing. The question arises, if they had a hard time believing, then how much harder is it for us who live in a scientific age to believe.

On the other hand, I want to point out that their doubts and their struggles and their lack of faith does not weaken the Christian position. It strengthens the Christian position. It means that they looked at the events with which they were confronted with a critical eye and they came to believe the gospel in spite of such a stance.

AN INTRODUCTORY REVIEW

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 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 1:1-2).

Luke addresses his Gospel Account to "most excellent Theophilus." This is an honorific title indicating that Theophilus held some high political rank. But it is not used here. Perhaps it was no longer needed. Perhaps Luke was writing to a believer in Christ.

1. It was the custom in the early church to drop titles of those who came into the church.

The implication seems to be that at some time between the writing of the Gospel according to Luke and the writing of Acts, Theophilus became a Christian.

2. The name “Theophilus” (Θεοφιλε) means, “lover of God.” Theophilus became a God-lover.

One of the evidences that the Bible is the Word of God is that the Bible produces Christians. It changes lives. It is designed to be read, not merely as an academic exercise, but to make you different.

3. Did you ever stop to think that Luke wrote two great books of the New Testament in order to be read by a single man? God is like that. He cares about individuals. You are more than just a number in a file. He cares about YOU.

These two verses summarize the book of Luke. That account dealt with all that Jesus BEGAN to do and to teach. This book will now deal with all that Jesus CONTINUES to do and teach through His disciples.

Luke	Acts
Jesus healed	His disciples will heal
Jesus preached	His disciples will preach
Jesus evangelized	His disciples will evangelize

Acts is Volume 2 of a two-volume work. It is still about Jesus. He is still active. Are there two volumes in your life? Is Jesus still at work? Or do you view your salvation only in the past tense? If your salvation is only in the past, then it isn't in the present - it doesn't exist at all.

RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

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 1:3).

Luke told in his Gospel Account how Jesus had been born and had taught and had died on a cross. But that is not all. Luke also taught of the resurrection. He set forth the fact that we can KNOW that a dead man got up

Verse 3 says that Jesus appeared over a span of 40 days. This number seems significant.

- ◆ It rained for 40 days in the flood.
- ◆ Moses was 40 days on Mount Sinai.
- ◆ The spies were in Canaan for 40 days.
- ◆ Goliath issued his challenge for 40 days.
- ◆ Jonah gave the city of Nineveh 40 days to repent.

In each case, there was a test involved.

and walked.

The reason that we can know this is because Jesus presented Himself alive. He appeared to people who were not expecting Him to appear. He appeared to people who were not looking for a resurrection. That is convincing. Jesus gave a number of such convincing proofs. He allowed Thomas to conduct a physical exam. He ate in the presence of the disciples, showing that He was no mere figment of their imagination (figments don't eat hamburgers).

Jesus presented himself as alive. He is alive today. He is living. We worship the living God. This is the central truth of Christianity. If our God is a corpse in a Jerusalem graveyard, then our religion is worthless. If you find the body of Jesus, then Christianity comes tumbling to the ground. On the other hand, if you have met the risen Christ, then your life has been transformed.

When Jesus was risen from the dead, He did not spend a lot of time teaching. He spent His time proving to people that He was really alive.

- (1) The Presence of Jesus (1:1-2).
- (2) The Proofs of Jesus (1:3).
- (3) The Promise of Jesus (1:4-5).

A PROMISED BAPTISM

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; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:4-5).

Luke's Gospel account closed with the command to remain in Jerusalem "*until you are clothed with power from on high*" (Luke 24:49). This command is repeated here, but with more information. The disciples are to wait for a baptism. This will not be the same kind of baptism which had been utilized by John the Baptist. This will be a baptism with the Holy Spirit. It will not be a mere ritual, but a living reality.

John's baptism was a ritual. It was only a shadow - an outward form which represented the reality to come. But these disciples would receive the reality behind the ritual.

Notice that there was nothing that they could do to bring about this baptism. It was not something they would bring upon themselves. It would be done TO them. Their part would be completely passive. All they could do is to wait.

Specifically, they are to wait at Jerusalem. The disciples are from Galilee and it will be their natural tendency to return home. But they are to remain here for a time.

A KINGDOM QUESTION

- 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?”
- 7 *He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the*
Father has fixed by His own authority; 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.” (Acts 1:6-8).

This is the last question that the disciples would ever have opportunity to ask of Jesus. It is a question regarding the kingdom. The theme of the kingdom runs through the Bible. It was promised by the Old Testament prophets. It had been promised by John the Baptist. Jesus had come on the scene proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. Now for the past 40 days He has been speaking to them of the kingdom (Verse 3).

The Jews were looking for the kingdom. They were looking for a day when the Romans would be thrown out and when God would again rule from Jerusalem. The disciples were apparently of the same mind. They had been following Jesus for three years, waiting for Him to bring the kingdom. And so, they ask: “Is it now, Lord?”

Jesus doesn’t answer their question. He isn’t going to give them a course in eschatology. He doesn’t hand them a time-line or a chart or a copy of “The Late Great Planet Earth.” He does give them:

- A Promise of Power.
- A Commission.

They do not realize it, but He has answered their question. They asked, “Are you going to restore the kingdom?” And in effect, He answers, “No, you are.” You see, they were still thinking of the kingdom as some physical manifestation that was going to come down from heaven in a very dramatic way. They were looking for thunder and lightning and

trumpets and the hand of God. What they did not understand was that the kingdom was already in their midst. They should have known better, for Jesus had already spoken to this issue.

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; ²¹ nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17:20-21).

When Jesus had first come on the scene, He had announced that the kingdom of God was at hand. He didn't mean that it was coming in a few years. He meant that He was bringing in the kingdom in His day.

He came planting the seeds of the kingdom and those seeds were only now beginning to bear fruit. By the end of this chapter, we shall see that it has produced 120 believers. By the end of the next chapter, that number will have grown to over 3000.

1. A Contrast of Gifts.

Verse 8 introduces a contrast. It does this with the word "but" (*ἀλλὰ* is a strong contrast). The contrast is between verse 7 and verse 8.

Verse 7	Verse 8
Negative emphasized	Positive emphasized
<i>It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority</i>	<i>You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you</i>
What will not be given to them	What will be given to them

There are a lot of people going around trying to figure out when Jesus is going to return. I remember a fellow who wrote a book entitled "88 Reasons Why Christ Will Come Back in 1988." The year 1988 came and went and the book was proven to be wrong. I can remember preachers stating dogmatically that Jesus had to come within a generation of the time that Israel became a nation. This took place in 1948 but a generation followed and nothing happened. Jesus said that we were not meant to know the times and the epochs. And if someone comes along who tells you that he has it all figured out, he doesn't.

2. A Promise of Power.

“...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

They are presently powerless. That powerlessness was manifested at the arrest of Jesus. He was arrested and all of the disciples fled into the night. They ran like frightened sheep. There was nothing of them to be seen but heels and elbows.

But there will be a change. They will receive power - δυναμις. This is the word from which derives our English words “dynamite”, “dynamic” and “dynamo.” It is more than mere authority. It the power of ability. They do not presently have this power. And there is nothing that they can do to empower themselves. But it will be given to them as a gift. The Bringer of this power will be the Holy Spirit.

They had received a certain measure of power in the days of Jesus’ earthly ministry (they had cast out demons and had healed the sick), but they would receive a power now that surpassed any previous power.

3. The Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will come upon them in a way in which He has not previously come. It will be a coming with power. And it will be a coming to seal them into a permanent covenant relationship with God. As a result of the Spirit’s coming, they will be witnesses.

4. Witnesses.

a. Definition of a witness.

It is from the Greek word μαρτυρες that we derive our English word “martyr” - one who is put to death because of his witness of Christ.

A witness is a very simple thing. A witness need not be eloquent or convincing. There are only two things that are required of a witness.

- (1) A witness must have witnessed something.
He must have seen that of which he is bearing witness.
- (2) A witness must tell others of that which he has seen.
He need not have complete understanding. He doesn’t need a seminary degree or a Bible College education. He need only say

what he knows.

A witness has both an inflow of information and an outflow of information. Without an inflow, he has nothing of which to witness. Unless there is a corresponding outflow, he becomes as stagnant and as lifeless as the Dead Sea.

b. The benefit of a witness.

And yet, a witness does not speak merely for himself. He speaks for the benefit of others. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were not given to us for OUR benefit. They were given so that we might use them in the service of OTHERS.

When you see a spiritual gift which is being used to benefit the one who has the gift, then you are seeing a misuse of that spiritual gift.

c. The topic of a witness.

We have said that a witness does not speak for the benefit of himself. It is also true that a witness does not speak OF himself. If our testimony ever turns into a “bragomony” then we have ceased bearing witness of Jesus.

5. The Place of their Witness: *Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth* (1:8).

There is an expanding locale described. Their witness begins in Jerusalem. And it expands to include all of Judea. And it moves north to the neighborhood province of Samaria. And it moves from there to encompass the entire world. This movement serves as an outline of the book of Acts.

Here is the principle. Missions begins at home. Do not expect to be a missionary in another land unless you have first been a missionary where you live and where you work.

a. The witness begins in Jerusalem (Acts 2-7)

b. The witness expands to Judea (Acts 8:1)

c. The witness extends to Samaria (Acts 8:4-25).

d. The witness extend to the world (rest of Acts).

The question the disciples had asked whether the kingdom would be extended to

Israel, but the answer Jesus gives is that it would extend to the entire world.

6. The Fulfillment of the Promise.

We will see the fulfillment of this prophecy in Acts 2. Luke wants us to see both the prophecy and the fulfillment. But I want you to notice something. I want you to notice that there is a disparity between the number to whom this prophecy is given versus those who experience the fulfillment.

The Prophecy	The Initial Fulfillment
Given on the Mount of Olives	Fulfilled in the city of Jerusalem
Given to 11 disciples	The Spirit falls upon 120 people

Do you see it? The prophecy is only given to 11 disciples. The fulfillment takes in a great many more believers. The fulfillment of the Great Commission goes far beyond those to whom it is initially given. This means that this prophecy has wider-ranging implications for the church at large - ultimately even to Christians today.

God's number one priority is to proclaim Jesus Christ as the risen, victorious Christ and Savior to the world. His way of doing that is through you. You are a part of God's number one priority.

A HEAVENLY ASCENSION

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 1:9).

What did the disciples see? They saw Jesus go up. And then they saw a cloud. And then they didn't see Jesus any longer. Some of these disciples had seen this cloud before (Luke 9:28-36).

Transfiguration	Ascension
A cloud	A cloud
Disciples saw two men: Moses & Elijah	Disciples see two men in white clothing: Angels

When it was over, only Jesus and the disciples remained	When it is over only the two men and the disciples remain
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What was this cloud? It was the Shekinah Cloud. It was the cloud which hid the presence of God. It was the same cloud of smoke that Isaiah saw in Isaiah 6:4. It was the same cloud that led the Israelites through the wilderness. It was the cloud that filled the tabernacle and it was the cloud that filled the Temple. It was the cloud that represented and which hid the presence of God.

A LINGERING PROMISE

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

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." (Acts 1:11).

Who are these two men? They are called "two males" (ἀνδρες δύο). If they are the same as in Luke 24:4, then they are angels.

Their words seem almost by way of a rebuke. "Why are you standing here looking? Why aren't you headed back to Jerusalem where He told you to go?" There is a lesson here. The fact of the ascended Christ is in itself a call to action. We come to Christ and we look, but then we return to the city to do the work of ministry.

The message of the two men is that the going of Christ will one day be reversed. He who went up and was hidden by a cloud will one day return in the clouds. As He left, so shall be His return.

- From the Mount of Olives.
- In the clouds.
- In a visible manner.

We live in the light of His return. When He comes, everyone will know it.