

## The Historical Stories of the Acts of the Apostles

### Lesson 1 Acts 1:1 – Acts 2:13

#### Reminder about the Gospel of Luke

**Acts 1:1** 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, 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. <sup>1</sup>

Between AD 61 and AD 63, the Holy Spirit guided Luke to write his first account to Theophilus which concerned the life and ministry of the Lord from the eyewitness testimony of a Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus. We will see in this second account to Theophilus that, after Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, Luke joined him on many of his missionary endeavors as his constant companion and personal physician. In this account, written after AD 63, Luke picks up where he ended his gospel with the intent of recording for all time the Acts of the Apostles, but Luke specifically uses this record to prove the apostleship of Saul whom the church would eventually come to know as Paul the Apostle.

We know very little about Theophilus, yet the Holy Spirit saw fit to deliver almost 28% of the New Testament to his personal mailbox in the form of two letters from Luke.<sup>2</sup> We do know that his name means "lover of God" and we can only assume his Roman citizenship. Likewise, we can only assume his Gentile heritage. Nevertheless, he allowed these letters to be circulated from church to church for evangelistic and educational purposes.

#### Ascension of the Lord

**Acts 1:4** And 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 shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

In the last chapter of his gospel, Luke listed several of the Lord's appearances during the forty days after His resurrection. In Luke 24:50-51, Luke speaks of the Lord's last words and His ascension, but with little detail. With this letter, Luke alludes to those appearances during the forty days and tells more about His final instructions to His followers before His ascension.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scriptures in this series of lessons entitled "The Historical Stories of the Acts of the Apostles" are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE, Copyright (C) 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1988, by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup> The entire New Testament contains 184,159 words. Luke's two letters to Theophilus (Luke and Acts) contains 51,087 words.

The Lord's first instruction commanded them to stay in Jerusalem until the promise arrived. The Lord promised them the Holy Spirit whom the Father would soon send to them. In the Gospel of John, the Lord called this promise the "Helper," or "Comforter."<sup>3</sup> During his ministry, John the Baptist predicted that Jesus would bring about the baptism of the Holy Spirit as seen in Matthew 3:11.<sup>4</sup> Just before ascending into heaven, Jesus promised the fulfillment of John's prophecy in the coming days.

### **The Question Concerning the Restoration of the Kingdom of Israel**

**Acts 1:6** And 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 shall 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."** **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.

For forty days after the resurrection, the Lord explained the Scripture to the apostles in detail. As He stood on the Mount of Olives and prepared to rise into the heavens, the apostles and disciples still failed to understand the Lord's plan. Once again they showed their ignorance by asking the question, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" Before the crucifixion they had argued over who would be the greatest in the kingdom. They had begged the Lord for a place at the right or left hand of His throne. And just as the Lord could not grant them their request in those days, He could not grant their request that day because only God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit knew the timing and understood from a godly perspective all that needed to transpire before the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. The finite and earthly minds of the apostles and disciples could not grasp the infinite and heavenly plan of God at that time. They still needed the insight of the Holy Spirit - their Teacher, their Comforter, their Helper - and He had not been given to them yet. Once the Holy Spirit began to live within them on the day of Pentecost, He would guide them in God's heavenly plans as they needed to know them.

### **Angelic Message**

**Acts 1:10** And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; **11** and 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."

Into the heavens the Lord ascended as His band of followers watched in amazement. We must notice that the Lord did not leave them waiting long before He sent a

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<sup>3</sup> John 14:16, 26; John 15:26; John 16:7; 1 John 2:1

<sup>4</sup> **Matthew 3:11** As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

message to them again. He told them to go wait in Jerusalem, but they stood in a stupor gazing into the heavens, so the Lord redirected their attention through the message of two angels. Two important points are clear in their words to the men of Galilee that day. First, they had stood gazing into the heavens too long and they needed to obey the Lord's command and return to Jerusalem to wait. Second, they needed to know another piece of the all-important prophecy concerning the Lord's second return. God's plan for the ages could not be changed. It was written on the pages of history from the beginning of time. The Lord's return to the earth at His second advent will imitate His departure at the conclusion of His first advent. Just as the clouds received Him into the heavens at this departure from the Mount of Olives, so too, will He break through the clouds and return to the Mount of Olives upon His return. No one today can mark the place from which the Lord's feet left the mount on that day, but the Lord surely knows and He will return His feet to that very spot when He comes to reestablish the preeminent kingdom of Israel on earth.

### **Gathering in the Upper Room**

**Acts 1:12** Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. **13** And when they had entered, 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*. **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.

The distance of a Sabbath day's journey is not clear in this passage, nor can it be clearly understood in the Old Testament. The Lord's original instruction told the Israelites to rest on the Sabbath and not travel.<sup>5</sup> Taking other passages out of context, the Israelite leadership allowed the people to travel a total of 2,000 cubits or 3,000 feet on a Sabbath day.<sup>6</sup> Over the 1,400 year history of Jewish life between the exodus and the birth of Jesus, the Israelite leadership established a loophole in the system allowing a person to travel 4,000 cubits or 6,000 feet on a Sabbath day. If a person placed food 2,000 cubits away from his home before the Sabbath, he could travel 2,000 cubits from his home, stop and eat his food, thus establishing that place as another home, and then he could travel 2,000 more cubits that day for a total of 6,000 feet. Later, the Israelite leadership determined that if a person traveled 6,000 feet away from home on a Sabbath, feasibly he would need to return to his home, allowing him to travel 12,000 feet on a Sabbath day. Therefore, depending on the religious slant of their belief, whether Pharisee or Sadducee, a person could travel different distances without breaking the religious law of the day. Nevertheless, the distance on a map from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem measures about 4,854 feet, showing that a Sabbath day's journey for Luke did not coincide with any of the religious customs.

Upon returning to Jerusalem, the eleven remaining apostles with all the women disciples, the mother of Jesus, and Jesus' brothers gathered in the upper room where they had eaten the Passover meal forty-one days before. For ten days they prayed as they waited for the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>5</sup> Exodus 16:9

<sup>6</sup> Numbers 35:5; Joshua 3:4

### Peter's First Message – Replacement of Judas

**Acts 1:15** And 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, **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. **17**"For he was counted among us, and received his portion in this ministry." **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 bowels gushed out. **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.)~~ **20**"For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO MAN DWELL IN IT'; and, 'HIS OFFICE LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE.' **21**"It is therefore necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us-- **22**beginning with the baptism of John, until the day that He was taken up from us-- one of these should become a witness with us of His resurrection."

**23**And they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (~~who was also called Justus~~), and Matthias. **24**And they prayed, and said, "Thou, Lord, who knows the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen **25**to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." **26**And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

In the upper room, Peter shows his impetuosity once more as he takes the lead to find a replacement for Judas Iscariot. Peter uses David's words from a psalm to prove that Judas had fulfilled the prophecy of old and another man should take his place.<sup>7</sup> Peter makes this plan on his own without the direction of the Lord or the leading of the Holy Spirit. The two men they had selected had all the qualifications needed for apostleship because both had witnessed the entire ministry of the Lord and His forerunner, John the Baptist. However, the Lord did not select either of them. If the Lord had wanted either of these men to be an apostle, He would have surely selected him previously, or, at least, given instruction concerning the replacement of Judas. The lot fell on Matthias, causing his name to be recorded in pages of the Scripture forever, but that is the extent of his usefulness as a man-made appointed apostle. Later in this letter, Luke recorded the Lord's selecting the replacement of His choice.<sup>8</sup>

### Day of Pentecost – Filling of the Holy Spirit – They Spoke in Other Tongues

**Acts 2:1** And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. **2**And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3**And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. **4**And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

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<sup>7</sup> Psalm 69:25

<sup>8</sup> Acts 9; Acts 22

The first reference to this festival finds its roots in the exodus and the feast of harvest.<sup>9</sup> From the second day of the Passover, seven complete weeks were counted, forty-nine days in all, with the celebration of Pentecost on the fiftieth day.<sup>10</sup> With the harvest completed, the celebration included two leavened loaves of corn bread and the sacrifice of two lambs. Besides the bread and sacrifice, the feast included a free will offering to the Temple.<sup>11</sup>

A violent noise similar to the sound of a hurricane filled the upper room. Flaming tongues that looked like fire, but were not fire, touched each of them separately. John the Baptist had predicted this occurrence.

**Matthew 3:11** As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John's prophecy included two ingredients, the Holy Spirit and fire. They expected the Holy Spirit because the Lord promised His arrival, but they did not expect the fire although in Jewish history, fire accompanied the presence of the Lord.<sup>12</sup> Nothing else could be more appropriate than the presence of fire with the presence of God at this point in God's plan for the ages. As a tongue touched a person in the room, the Holy Spirit came to dwell in him at that moment and remained forever. As a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence in each life, one by one they began to speak in other known languages that would be understood by Jews from other lands. Three miracles occurred in that room that day, the sound, the tongues which looked like fire, and the untaught languages. Jews from all over the known world had arrived in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost and the miracle of the apostles speaking in the languages of those nations would facilitate their hearing the gospel in their own language and provide proof of the power of God and His plan of salvation for all Jews. However, these three miracles are not proof of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a person's life today. The miracle of a person indwelt by the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues occurs only two more times in the New Testament. In both occurrences, the Holy Spirit causes the utterance for the purpose of proving to a Christian of Jewish descent that a Gentile has accepted the Lord and received the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

### **Day of Pentecost – Jews Hear the Gospel from Every Nation under the Heavens**

**Acts 2:5** Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation under heaven. **6** And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were bewildered, because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language. **7** And they were amazed and marveled, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **8**"And how is it that we each hear *them* in our own language to which we were born? **9**"Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia,

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<sup>9</sup> Exodus 26:15

<sup>10</sup> Numbers 28:26

<sup>11</sup> Leviticus 23:15-19; Numbers 28:27-29; Deut. 16:9-11

<sup>12</sup> The burning bush and Moses, Exodus 3:2, and the Lord on Mt. Sinai, Deut. 5:4

<sup>13</sup> At the house of Cornelius in Caesarea, Acts 10:44-47 and Acts 11:15-17; with the disciples of John in Ephesus, Acts 19:6

Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs-- we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." <sup>12</sup>And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" <sup>13</sup>But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."

After the initial baptism of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and other disciples in the upper room, the team took to the streets to spread the good news to all the other Jews visiting the city for the day of Pentecost. Luke stated that Jews attended the festival from every nation under heaven. We often miss the importance of this point when we read through Acts 2. We focus on the magnificent results of the response to Peter's message that day, but we fail to grasp the magnitude of where that message will travel in the next ninety days after the completion of the celebration. As the Jews return to their homes after the festival, they will literally take the gospel message and the idea of the church back to every nation under heaven. Many of the names mean nothing to today's reader, yet when examined, prove the potency of God's plan for the ages by delivering the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

When we look at Luke's order of the countries listed, we see he has placed them according to the four corners of the map with Judea at the center. Luke listed the general country areas of the world from the furthest countries he knew about starting in the east, then to the north, west, and south, all around Judea. Then as now to the Jews, Jerusalem represented the center of the world. To look forward meant they looked to the east; to look backward meant they looked to the west. To the left they were facing north and to the right they were facing south. Here is a list of the countries Luke listed in Acts 2:9-11 with their modern day names.

| Name as Found in Acts 2:9-10     | Modern Name Today                      |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Parthia                          | Southern Iran                          |
| Mede                             | Northern Iran                          |
| Elam                             | Jordan                                 |
| Mesopotamia                      | Iraq                                   |
| Judea                            | Israel                                 |
| Cappadocia                       | Central Turkey                         |
| Pontus                           | Northern Turkey                        |
| Asia                             | Northwest Turkey                       |
| Phrygia                          | Southwest Turkey                       |
| Pamphylia                        | Mid coast Turkey                       |
| Egypt                            | Egypt                                  |
| Districts of Libya around Cyrene | Coastal North Africa                   |
| Rome                             | Roman Empire                           |
| Crete                            | Greek Islands                          |
| Arabia                           | Saudi Arabia and surrounding countries |

Until the Day of Pentecost, very few Jews from Jerusalem associated with the followers of the Lord, most of whom came from the Galilean area, speaking a very crude Aramaic and a rough Koine Greek. The Jewish visitors from all the nations found themselves enamored with the Galileans as they heard them speaking each of their own languages with linguistic perfection. Others, who could not understand the foreign languages, made fun of their speech - until Peter stood to give his second message recorded in the next passage found in the historical stories of the Acts of the Apostles.