

The Acts of the Apostles

“A study of the application of theology to the work of the church as a group”

Chapter One

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Began September 17, 2005

Acts 1:1 “The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach,

Acts 1:2 until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

Acts 1:3 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 1:4 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;

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

Luke refers to the first account that he had composed, which was the Gospel of Luke. He ended that Gospel by telling how Jesus appeared after His resurrection to many people and then He told His disciples the following:

Luke 24:44 “Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

Luke 24:45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

Luke 24:46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day;

Luke 24:47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Luke 24:48 "You are witnesses of these things.

Luke 24:49 "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 24:50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.

Luke 24:51 And it came about that while He was blessing them, He parted from them.

Luke 24:52 And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy,

Luke 24:53 and were continually in the temple, praising God.”

Luke is repeating himself somewhat in the beginning of Acts as any good author would do when writing a text that is a continuation of another text. Jesus has now proven beyond any doubt that He had been resurrected from the dead and that He now was ready to begin the next phase of His ministry. This next phase would be the spreading of the spiritual Kingdom of God throughout the world in such a way that the world was turned upside down. There would first be many persecutions and the resultant martyring of all

the Apostles except for John, but within three hundred years Christianity even became the state religion of Rome! Jesus was getting ready to send forth His apostles with great power but they had to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit.

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?”

Acts 1:7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;

Acts 1:8 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. ””

Luke quickly tells us that the apostles still did not understand what was about to happen for they still thought that a political kingdom of Israel was about to be restored. Jesus had to reprimand them about their false understanding of their coming mission. He told them that they did not have to understand what the Father was going to do or the timetable for those missions. Jesus then went ahead and gave them some details of their charge and how the mission was to be accomplished. They were not going to be able to do this task under their own power. They were going to need the power of the Holy Spirit for the task of doing the work of Jesus Christ in setting up His church as an outreach of His Spiritual Kingdom. Then He told them the earthly range over which they would be working and that information should have been enough to make them tremble a bit and understand why they were going to need the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus had already told them that they would even be able to do more than He had done:

John 14:12 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father.”

I am sure that they did not understand what Jesus meant when He told them that they would do more works than He did. Jesus could have accomplished all of the work of setting up the church and spreading it Himself but God usually works to people through people and this He was about to do by empowering the Apostles to do this work. They certainly did not understand what He meant about His having to first go to the Father unless they thought that there was going to be another transfiguration experience before Jesus went to work here. While He had their attention He then went on to tell them more that they could not yet understand:

John 14:16 “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;

John 14:17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.

John 14:18 “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

John 14:19 “After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also.

John 14:20 "In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."

Judas may have expressed what many of them were thinking at this point when he said,

John 14:22 "Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us, and not to the world?""

The apostles still thought that Jesus was the Messiah but that He was going to restore all of Israel to the glory promised by God through military and political workings. But if Jesus was to be the military Messiah He was going to have to tell the whole world and not just a few of the disciples.

Now we see in Acts that Jesus indeed did begin to set out His plan by using only the Apostles working with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:9 "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.

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;

Acts 1:11 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.""

Now Jesus left them with their mouths open staring into the sky!!! Well, that is just my interpretation, but probably not far from the truth! Two angels approached these shocked Apostles as they stood there and told them to get about what Jesus told them to do. They promised them that Jesus would return in the same way that they watched Him go into heaven. It is certainly to their credit that they took the angels at their words and left the area.

Acts 1:12 "Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

Acts 1:13 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.

Acts 1:14 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."

Now we see all eleven of the remaining apostles as they gathered in the upper room with the women, with Jesus' mother, and with Jesus' brothers. I want to praise them for their courage and for their prayer as they all wanted to go about the task given them by their Lord. They did not really understand what they were going to do and they did not understand how they were going to do this great mission but they were all gathered together in prayer to do the will of their Lord.

A good question to ask at this point is “What was the subject of their prayers?” We can think about all that they had been through in the past 50 days or so. Peter had denied His Lord. All of them had scattered in fear as Jesus was arrested and crucified. But they had also spent the last 40 days in the presence of the risen Jesus as He proved His physical resurrection and ate and talked with them. We do not know what all Jesus talked about with them but they must have been greatly reassured. They should also have remembered what Jesus told them about the coming of the Holy Spirit and now they probably had a better understanding of what Jesus had told them. So they probably were confessing their sins of disobedience and fear and lack of trust in their Lord. They also were probably praying for a right spirit to receive the Holy Spirit. Surely they were praising God and thanking Him with prayers of adoration and supplication (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and supplication – ACTS). I would think that they were also praying for wisdom as they knew that God would send them that wisdom they needed for the coming event. I think that what Peter did next shows that he did receive some wisdom at this point.

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,
Acts 1:16 "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.
Acts 1:17 "For he was counted among us, and received his portion in this ministry."
Acts 1:18 (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.
Acts 1:19 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.)
Acts 1:20 "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.'
Acts 1:21 "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--
Acts 1:22 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.”

This upper room must have been very spacious to handle 120 of them! Peter understood from his understanding of the Old Testament the role of Judas in their early ministry with Jesus. Peter also laid out the rules for someone being an apostle of Jesus. He must have been with the group since the time of the baptism of John so that he was taught by Jesus and he must have witnessed the resurrection of Jesus.

Acts 1:23 And they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias.
Acts 1:24 And they prayed, and said, "Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen
Acts 1:25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place. "

Acts 1:26 And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”

I am going to mention something that I have not read anyone else comment upon but I can't help but wonder if Peter is being his typical self. Jesus did not tell them to choose another person to take the place of Judas at this time. Jesus just told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Also we know from what happens later that Jesus planned to bring forth Paul as another apostle. Was Paul supposed to be the chosen 12th apostle instead of the 13th apostle? I do not know, of course but I think that this is worth thinking about as we are thinking about how the church is to be the church of Jesus Christ. It would not be the first premature action by one of God's people. We immediately think of Abraham and Sarah as they prematurely brought forth a seed of Abraham. Possibly another clue in this choosing of another apostle is that we know nothing more of the work of Matthias.

Peter is known as a compulsive person who had a strong tendency to blast ahead with his ideas such as when he told Jesus that He should not die:

Matt 16:21 “From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

Matt 16:22 And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You."

Matt 16:23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."”

Peter also impulsively took his sword to one of the guards who had come to take Jesus:

John 18:10 “Simon Peter therefore having a sword, drew it, and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus.

John 18:11 Jesus therefore said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"”

And, of course, Peter denied knowing Jesus Christ:

John 18:25 “Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said therefore to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it, and said, "I am not."

John 18:26 One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?"

John 18:27 Peter therefore denied it again; and immediately a cock crowed.”

Certainly the history of Peter's actions before Pentecost can be used to offer considerable circumstantial evidence for a premature action by Peter in causing the eleven apostles to choose the Matthias as the twelfth apostle. As I said before, I have no way of knowing that this action of Peter's was premature but I do think that this conclusion fits the known information. Also if we assume that this action of Peter's was a premature action by a

person who would be a chief worker in the church then this points us to another possible action by a local church ruling body that we should watch closely. I think that the tendency in many decisions is not to wait on the Lord but to go ahead and make a hasty decision concerning choosing a new pastor, changing building plans prematurely, deciding to not trust the Lord for funding but to go ahead and reduce a budget ahead of time, etc. I have witnessed many such premature actions by groups of church planners in three different denominations so that I am very conscious of the possibility of people making plans according to man's plans rather than according to God's plans.

References

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