

ACTS Introduction: Luke 1:1-4 & Acts 1:1-5

Acts of the Apostles. My title: “The Acts of the Risen Christ by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles.”

Why study Acts?

First, Acts follows the Gospels to show how Christians built on the solid foundation laid by Jesus after he returned to heaven. It is intended to be a **paradigm/model** of how the kingdom of God would be spread worldwide through the centuries until Jesus returns. Acts is open-ended. It goes beyond the “Apostolic Age” of the first century. What is described in Acts is meant to continue until Christ’s Great Commission is completed. It shows us how to complete Christ’s Great Commission. Acts details principles and procedures of spreading the gospel of the kingdom.

Most of the NT is dedicated to missions. Contents of the NT:

- 56% of the NT is dedicated to explaining the origins and growth of Christianity - the Gospels and Acts.
- 38% deals with the nature of existing Christians (Epistles – letters to churches) - understanding salvation (soteriology), how believers grow, live with one another, and how they live in the world.
- Revelation is the remaining 6%.

This shows that the primary emphasis of the NT is directed toward understanding the origin and growth of the Christian movement. Communicating the gospel to the lost is the major theme. The Gospels and Acts show how it happened in the past and how it should happen today.

Second, we need to know the third person of the Trinity. Luke is all about the HS. There is a transition from the ministry of Jesus to the ministry of the HS. The HS becomes the lead actor in the Bible drama to glorify Jesus. The HS guides and empowers the church for its mission. Missions is no mere human achievement. The gifts of the Spirit are given for the purpose of mission and not for the private edification of the church or its individual members.

Our retreat speaker Dr. Wayne Marshall spoke about the HS in Acts 8. I planned to speak about what he spoke about even before I knew he was coming and what he would speak about. That’s confirmation from the HS! Dr. Marshall got us

started on this, so I will carry on what he started. I feel like he just passed a baton to me in a relay race. I used to run the last leg of the 440 relay. I will explain in more detail what he taught Saturday and Sunday as we go through Acts. I took notes so I could follow up on what he taught about the HS from Acts 8. You will have a spiritual growth breakthrough when you know how to live the Christian life empowered by the HS.

Therefore, third, Acts is designed to be God's training manual for modern Christians. It's not just a history book. It's more than a history of the first 30 years of the first century church. One key to understanding Acts and using it as a training manual for ministry today is recognizing that the power of the HS that operated in Jesus also operated in the apostles and can operate in us as well. We will study Acts as a discipleship manual.

Fourth, I not only want to study the book of Acts, I want to live it. How about you? I am not content with living a safe weekend Christianity. I want more. I have missionary friends whose evangelism - mission work - reads like the book of Acts.

Read Luke 1:1-4.

Acts 1:1-5: *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many infallible proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ And while staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

Jesus presented himself alive by many infallible proofs (demonstrative evidence) over 40 days. This is not circumstantial evidence. Admissible evidence in a court of law: testimonial, documentary, or tangible. Testimonial is eyewitness evidence. Documentary is Scripture (OT prophecies and Gospels). Tangible is lives transformed by Christ (Saul to Paul). Luke mentions several infallible proofs in his gospel.

- ❑ **Empty tomb & linens:** According to Luke 24:1-12: stone rolled away and empty tomb. Women found the empty tomb and angels who said he was risen. The

disciples treated their testimony like a fairy tale. Peter saw the empty tomb and “the linen cloths by themselves.” (See also John 19:40.) Jesus’ body was not washed according to Jewish custom because he died a violent death with the shedding of his life-blood and the Sabbath was imminent. Grave robbers wouldn’t take time to unwrap the linen clothes. What Peter witnessed was the collapsed cocoon of the linen wrappings stuffed with spices. (The linen burial shroud has been preserved and now known as the Shroud of Turin. It isn’t a medieval forgery. Jesus’ body was not washed due to Jewish custom.*)

- ❑ **Conspiracy theory proof:** 24:13-35: Jesus revealed himself to two followers who were not part of the 11, so the resurrection event was not a conspiracy by the 11. Later Jesus appeared to the 11 disciples.
- ❑ **Prophecy fulfilled:** 24:25-27, 44-48: Jesus interpreted the Scriptures for the two men and the disciples as decisive proof – his death and resurrection was prophesied hundreds of years before it happened (Acts 2:24-32).
- ❑ **Physical body:** 24:38-43: Jesus appeared to the 11 disciples. According to Luke 24:40-42, Jesus showed his scars and ate food - he was not a ghost or a figment of their wishful imagination or a vision or dream (Acts 10:41).
- ❑ **Multiple appearances:** 1 Corinthians 15:4-8: Christ’ post-resurrection appearances were “in accordance with the Scriptures” and many eyewitnesses. There were large (500 at one time) and small group appearances and intimate one-to-one appearances. 500 at once - mass or collective hallucinations are a myth. (Hallucinations are individual and subjective.) A mass hallucination would be like we all came to church this morning and had the exact same dream - every detail - last night. Even if a mass hallucination were possible it doesn’t explain the empty tomb.
- ❑ **ACTS:** The book of Acts is proof - the rapid growth of Christianity in a hostile environment. Would Christianity have flourished in such a hostile environment if it could be so easily falsified? Imagine yourself in such a situation. You know that if you become a Christian you’ll face harsh persecution, maybe death. Before you take that step you’d check to make sure the central claim of the movement is true. If Jesus body was still in the tomb the case for Christianity doesn’t even get

off the ground. Christianity continues to grow in hostile environments worldwide: Iran, Saudi Arabia, China, India, and other Asian countries.

- **In Jesus' name:** A decisive proof is that the Apostles and other believers (non-Apostles) continued to do what Jesus did in Jesus' name. Any miracle or deed done in the name of Jesus (by his authority) is proof that he is alive and seated at the right hand of God the Father and he has sent the Holy Spirit.

Jesus *began* to do and teach for three years. The GR verb *began* means Acts is a continuation of what Jesus did and taught in Luke's Gospel. Luke's Gospel describes Jesus' visible ministry on earth. Acts reveals Jesus' invisible ministry on earth from his position in heaven. Jesus continued to do and teach by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles. Jesus continues to do and teach by the HS through the true church. (*True* means a church that remains true to the word of God.) Jesus is not doing nothing at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. He's active in the world.

One night I binge-watched Christian testimonies on *YouTube*.

- ✓ A neo-Nazi skin head with tattoos all over his body and face. He was bullied and filled with hatred. He was an alcoholic. He met a Christian girl (she's now his wife). After he received Christ it took several years of laser treatment to remove all the tattoos.
- ✓ A drug-dealing black man from a broken family. He was converted and threw several thousand dollars' worth of drugs out the window of his car. He thought his drug 'boss' came to kill him, but he said, "I heard you're a Christian now. Pray for me." He's now a pastor.
- ✓ A woman raised in a Satanist family who was abused in sexual Satanic rituals by her father. She could see and hear demons. The demons came to take her daughter. When she went to commit suicide she found a Bible in her car. She didn't know where it came from. She gave her life to Christ. Her daughter is now a worship leader.
- ✓ A Muslim man from Saudi Arabia came to America to get a graduate degree in engineering. He stayed with Christian families and tried to convert them to Islam, but then he read the book *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, and received Christ. He was disowned by his family.

- ✓ A Muslim woman from Kuwait whose father was an influential imam. Her father beat her to memorize the Quran. Her family fled to America when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. She had no concept of God's love until she was invited to church. She received "Isa" as Savior. (Her identity was disguised during the interview for her protection.)
- ✓ An influential New Age guru with several hundred thousand online followers. After he received Christ he told them all he had led them astray and Christ is the truth. He lost a lot of money! He created a website *Reasons for Jesus*.
- ✓ A French atheist who mocked Christians, a former lesbian, a former gay man (Becket Cook, *A Change of Affection*), a Jewish professor... and Kanye West?!
- ✓ Extra special: I received an email from a ministry I support in the Middle East. 94 former Muslims were baptized in the Arabian Sea in a secret ceremony. After prayer, God calmed the sea with a glowing light.

This diversity of people is living proof Jesus Christ is alive and still doing what he did 2000 years ago.