

## Can He Get a Witness? (Acts 1:1-8)

### Introduction

Among Christians there are a myriad of ideas and more than a little mystery about the Holy Spirit. Most of the ideas are biblical. The Bible presents to us the fact that He is a Helper to us in the life; this truth comes straight out of the gospel of John from Jesus Himself (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7). And then there is the fact that He brings power into the life of people that receive Him (Judges 13:25; 14:19; 15:14-17). Again, Jesus said as much (Acts 1:8). But with these truths and the mixing in of our sinful desires to be self-important, always happy, and in control, the Holy Spirit has also become cast as a mysterious Agent enabling us to do whatever we want... in Jesus' name. According to more than a few popular preachers the third person of the Trinity is here to make us rich, healthy, and capable of performing miracles that eliminate misery.

The ancient historian and Jesus follower Luke has something different to say. According to the beloved physician the Holy Spirit was given with a single reason in mind – *a mission*. Everything that the Helper can or will do through the person He indwells is in support of that mission. Everything! The abundant life promised by Jesus (John 10:10) comes as a result of us both receiving the Holy Spirit and living so as to collaborate with the Holy Spirit to carry out the mission. Are you ready to experience the fulness of the ministry of the Spirit? For that to happen we must be willing to give ourselves fully to the mission; that is why He is here.

The writing of Luke to Theophilus about Jesus' earthly ministry, The Gospel According to Luke, is a powerful treatise on what happened when Christ lived in the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the mission given to Him by His Father (Luke 4:16-21). The second volume, also known as Acts or Acts of the Apostles, is what the Spirit will do through ordinary people like you and me when we are focused on the mission. What mission? Keep reading. I will try to make what follows both brief and clear.

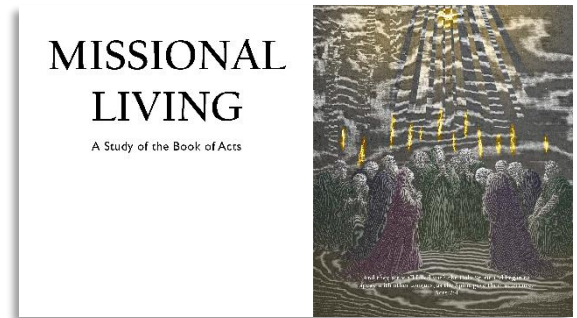
### Indispensable Preparation (Acts 1:1-2)

**The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen**

Before presenting more history to Theophilus (*dear to God*) the Luke speaks summarily about his previous work. He tells his recipient that the former account is to be regarded as a comprehensive (**all**, πάντων) record of Jesus' works (**to do**, ποιεῖν) and words (**and teach**, καὶ διδάσκειν) during his earthly ministry. Modern readers have come to know that prior work as *The Gospel According to Luke*. It was what Jesus **began** (ἤρξατο) regarding the works and words presented in the prior volume? Because the risen and ascended Jesus did not stop working and teaching.

The implication of Luke's words is that his second volume will be an account of what Jesus *continued* to do and teach after his ascension—no longer in visible presence on earth but by his Spirit in his followers.

Bruce, F. F. (1988). *The Book of the Acts* (p. 30). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.



A.T. Robertson is even more technical in bringing out the significance of the word **began**:

Jesus “began” “both to do and to teach” (ποιειν τε και διδασκειν [poiein te kai didaskein]). Note present infinitives, linear action, still going on, and the use of τε—και [te—kai] binds together the life and teachings of Jesus, as if to say that Jesus is still carrying on from heaven the work and teaching of the disciples which he started while on earth before his ascension. Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Ac 1:1). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

For Luke the Jesus of the former record is not merely a historical figure. He is the risen Lord. Out of that perspective the physician hereby indicates that the work once **began** still goes on. The book of Acts is his description of the *ongoing* words and works of Jesus.

To get His disciples ready for the ministry of the Spirit in their lives Jesus did a special work in them. That is, even before He gave them the Holy Spirit there was a work to give them a newfound ability to understand Scripture (Luke 24:44-48). He also, with the enhanced aptitude for apprehending spiritual truth, explained to them things about the kingdom (Acts 1:3). Only after this special work and time spent explaining the kingdom was he taken up from among them. What was that special work he performed in his disciples? Glad you asked! He opened their eyes.

A Work for Insight: His Teaching and His Touch (Luke 24:44-48) - It is imperative that these men, soon to become the leadership for His church, understand the ministry of the Spirit and the faith they will promote. How else will they be able to teach others all that He commanded (Matthew 28:18-20)? And so Jesus teaches on the history of His ministry and how he had been talking about most recent events all along (Luke 24:44; 9:22; 18:31). And so Jesus teaches on the inevitability of what He had just suffered based on the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms (Luke 24:27, 44; Isaiah 53:1-12; Daniel 9:26; Psalm 22:1-18). And so Jesus teaches on the necessity of His suffering and now His own resurrection from the dead (Luke 24:46). But more than His teaching is needed. If the truth of God is to be really received there must be a softening of hard hearts, an opening of blind eyes, and a sharpening of dull minds. And so, beyond expounding upon the Scriptures the men are changed (Luke 24:45; Acts 16:14; 1 John 5:20). What Jesus did to make His message accessible was a supernatural work in them. Is this the only time he does this? Nope! What he began in His earthly ministry He continues to do; Jesus will do the same work in Lydia when Paul brings her the gospel (Acts 16:14). Jesus, prior to their reception of the Spirit, gave them a new aptitude for apprehending the meaning of God's word (1 Corinthians 2:14-15).

**Opened he their mind** (διηνοιξεν αὐτων τον νουν [diēnoixen autōn ton noun]). The same verb as that in verses 31 and 32 about the eyes and the Scriptures. Jesus had all these years been trying to open their minds that they might understand the Scriptures about the Messiah and now at last he makes one more effort in the light of the Cross and the Resurrection. They can now see better the will and way of God, but they will still need the power of the Holy Spirit before they will fully know the mind of Christ.

Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Lk 24:45). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

A Word of Instruction: Tarry (Luke 24:49-53; Acts 1:2) - The Promise of His Father was none other than the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). Lest the disciples begin to believe they could start reaching the world based on strong resolve (Matthew 26:30-35; Luke 24:46-48) Jesus makes it clear that they do not yet have the power to do the job. Thus He commands them to wait in the city of Jerusalem until the power was received - *the Person of the Holy Spirit*. He would enlighten the disciples, enabled people to receive their message, and empower them for

the work of being witnesses. The command to preach in His name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem, could not begin until they had been equipped like John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) and Jesus Himself (Luke 3:21-22; 4:16-19).

**Witnesses are appointed by God and anointed for the work.  
Apart from both His election and enabling they cannot be  
effective.**

### Infallible Proofs and Kingdom Talk (Acts 1:3)

<sup>3</sup> 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 Proof:** The Lord's post resurrection appearances attested the reality of the Resurrection. Christ gave many convincing proofs of this. The word proofs (τεκμηρίοις) occurs only here in the New Testament and looks at demonstrable evidence in contrast with evidence provided by witnesses. In other words, the Resurrection was proven by touch, sight, and feel (cf. Luke 24:39-40; 1 John 1:1).<sup>1</sup>
  - The Resurrected Jesus is not a Spook (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23) – These two passages help us see that the post resurrection appearance of Jesus is not just His spirit. Two obvious things bring us to this conclusion: (1) Jesus eats food, and (2) Jesus can be felt by human hands and examined for scars.
  - The Resurrected Jesus is not a Spoof (John 20:26-29) – It is not hard to imagine why Thomas was not immediately convinced. First, he was not there at the first group appearing. Second, it certainly seemed suspicious in light of the fact that Thomas saw both Jesus crucifixion and the confirmation of a spear being thrust through the body. We can almost hear him saying, “I am not saying you guys are lying... just that you are being led astray. Someone is pulling a fast one. I won't believe it unless I see Him and touch the wounds I saw the Romans give Him.” However, when presented with the opportunity to touch the wounds Thomas can only say, “My Lord and My God!”
  - The Resurrected Jesus is not a Fluke (1 Corinthians 15:3-8) – This presents problems for anyone wanting to deny the resurrection. After all, if the disciples wanted to lie about the resurrection it will not do them favors if they claim over 500 witnesses that they cannot produce. Even if they were able to produce a list of 500 names how many of them would die for a lie.

### Acts 1:4-5

<sup>4</sup> 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; <sup>5</sup> for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

- **The Promise:** In contrast with the recommendations of the world Jesus gives direction that does not make earthly sense. He commands the disciples to stay in the same city where he was brutally murdered

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 2:353

only a few weeks earlier. Against the dictates of conventional wisdom God says wait. People who are accustomed to working with the Son of God will not be surprised or unsettled by the uncanny commandments of Christ. They have learned like his mother Mary that the blessings of God are opened by faith-based obedience.

His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you do *it*.” (John 4:5)

- John 14:15-18 <sup>15</sup> If you love Me, keep My commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

**Acts 1:6-7** <sup>6</sup> Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup> And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

- **The Problem:** The disciples are more interested in being winners than being witnesses. Like Hezekiah they are primarily concerned about their own prosperity. Like them we are often distracted by our own desires. We are always trying to find an angle to get what we want instead of wanting what we get. However, if we are truly being followers of Jesus we have to learn to lay aside our own interests to make Him known and promote the interests of others.
- When we only come to God for what we can get for ourselves we become spiritual gold-digger’s. Our needs are met as we step out in faith to be a blessing to others.

<sup>1</sup> Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, <sup>2</sup> fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

<sup>5</sup> Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup> but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:1-8, NKJV)

**Acts 1:8** <sup>8</sup> 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.”

The power to present Christ is not in us nor of us. However, God gives it to all that place their faith in Jesus (Ephesians 1:13). This power flows from the person of the Holy Spirit. He is the one that speaks:

<sup>26</sup> “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. <sup>27</sup> And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning. (John 14:26-27, NKJV)

Notice who will testify of Jesus – the Holy Spirit will (John 14:26). It is to this end that the Spirit is given to us. Is He our Counselor? Yes. Is He our Comforter? Yes! But do not miss that He has been given to us with a mission in mind – *making us effective witnesses*. That is what His counsel is about. That is what the comfort is for. And that is what the gifts given to us are for – witnessing! The mission is making Christ known and the people who will experience the fulness of the ministry of the Spirit are those who work with Him to accomplish the mission.

This is the way it has always been.

**The Spirit has always been given with a mission in mind.**

In the table below I share with you a brief summary of people that had the Spirit in the Old Testament and the mission for which He was given.

| <b>Person</b> | <b>Passages</b>               | <b>The Mission in Mind</b>  |
|---------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Joseph        | Genesis 41:36-38              | Providing advice that will save Egyptians and the house of Jacob during a famine.   |
| Bezalel       | Exodus 31:1-5                 | Equipping to do all manner of art and to understand how to make the temple.   |
| Moses         | Number 11:17, 24-25           | Empowered to lead the people. The 70 elders were then also empowered to help him with the burden of helping the people.   |
| Samson        | Judges 13:25; 14:19; 15:14-17 | Enhanced to provide deliverance from oppressors.  |
| Jesus         | Luke 4:16-21                  | Enabled to preach, to heal, to help those like sheep without a shepherd. In the Spirit he was able to carry out the work that would eventually become our redemption. |
| The Apostles  | Acts 1:1-8                    | Equipped, empowered, enhanced to be witnesses concerning Jesus.   |
| You           | Ephesians 1:13; 2:10          | God gives us the Spirit with the mission of magnifying the Son in mind.   |

What Jesus began to do he is continuing to do in and through us. He is continuing to teach and help us understand His word. He is continuing to draw people out of darkness into the light. How? Through us by the enabling of the Spirit! The Spirit of Christ is at work through us to bring about a great deliverance. Insofar as we are willing to be witnesses we are going to be filled and used to finish what He began. Can He get a witness?

**Questions for Further Study**

1. What is required in order for a person to understand the words of Jesus (Luke 24:44-48; Acts 16:14). What is my capacity to comprehend the things of God apart from this work (1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1-3)?
2. Why is the Spirit given in general? (Genesis 41:36-38; Exodus 31:1-5; Number 11:17, 24-25) For what reason is the Spirit given to us? (Acts 1:8)
3. How do you feel about being a witness? Are witnesses really needed? (Romans 1:16; 10:14-17)

**The Story of the First Apostolic Witness (Martyr) - James:** Of him Christ had predicted, that he should drink of the same cup, of which He (Christ) would drink, and that he should be baptized with the same baptism, with

which He was baptized; that is, that he should be subject to His (Christ's) suffering and death. (Matthew 20:22, 23) After Christ's ascension he also remained at Jerusalem; and when he, together with the other apostles, had there received the Holy Ghost, he preached the Gospel in Judea and Samaria. (Acts 1:13,14) This apostle lived only until the fourth year of the Emperor Claudius, at which time, Agabus had predicted, there should be a dearth throughout all the world. Oros. *lib. 7. carp. 6.* At that time Claudius charged Herod Agrippa to suppress the church of Christ. Then Herod laid his bloody hands on this apostle and, on the feast of the passover, put him in prison. Shortly afterwards he was sentenced to death, and executed with the sword, in Jerusalem. This occurred in the year forty-five after the birth of Christ. (Acts 12:2) Clemens relates that the executioner, seeing his innocence, was converted to the Christian faith, and died with him. According to the annotation of Eusebius Pamphilius, from Clemens Alexandrinus, the executioner was so moved on account of the death of James, that he professed himself to be a Christian; and so, as he states, both were led forth together to death. As they were led out, the executioner asked James to forgive him. James, after a little deliberation, said, "Peace be with thee," and kissed him. And thus both were beheaded. *Euseb. lib. 2. cap. 9. ex Clem. Alexand. Also W. Baudart. Apophthegmat. lib. 1. page 4. from Joach. Camer. in vita Christi, page 42. Niceph. lib. 2. cap. 3. Strac. in Festo Jacobi, page 209. Cie. Circa, cap. 45. Annum.* James was the first martyr of the apostles.