

Journey Into Changing the World



LESSON 1 . . . The Unique New Testament Book (Acts 1:1-11)

NOTES

Acts is unique because it is the only book of **history** in the New Testament. It records the exclusive story of how the early church changed the world. Imagine how confusing the New Testament would be if it began like this: *Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Romans*, etc. It would be baffling to read the last verse of *John* and then read on the next page: “This letter is from Paul.” You would ask yourself, “Who is Paul?” and “How did believers come to be in Rome?” The information contained in *Acts* cannot be found anywhere else in the New Testament and forms a bridge from the gospels to the epistles.

The first eleven verses of this unique book can be divided into **four** parts, **the preface, the pause, the promise, and the parting**. First is . . .

The Preface (1:1-3)

The book of Acts begins, *The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach* (1:1). This indirectly tells us who wrote the book of Acts because Luke 1:3-4 clearly reveals the third gospel was written to *Theophilus* [thee-off’-uh-less]. Therefore, the author of *Acts* is Luke. We know he wrote *Acts* in the early sixties (around 61 A.D.) since he did not write about Paul’s death (68 A.D) nor the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.). It is unknown where Luke was when he wrote *Acts*. Luke is mentioned only a few times in the New Testament, so we know relatively little about him. We know he was a physician (Col. 4:14) and Paul’s co-worker (Philemon 24). What else do we know about Luke (2 Timothy 4:11a)?

Luke never refers to himself by name in his gospel nor in *Acts*, and simply uses *we* or *us* when he is involved in Paul’s travels. Luke has the distinction of being the only Gentile writer in the New Testament.

Luke addresses both of his books to Theophilus, who was probably a high-ranking Roman official. We believe this because how does Luke address him in the last phrase of Luke 1:3?

In his gospel, Luke writes about *all that Jesus began both to do and teach* (Acts 1:1c). Then, in *Acts*, he records what Jesus continues to do *through the Holy Ghost* (1:2). What we read in the book of Acts would seem impossible unless Theophilus and we, as readers, are aware that all the events occurred through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Though the ministry of Jesus continues through the power of the Holy Spirit, *the apostles whom he had chosen* are the channels through whom His power flows (1:2b). After His crucifixion, how does Jesus prepare *the apostles* to spread the Gospel (1:3)?

During the *forty days* in which Christ appears to His disciples after His resurrection, He tries to restore their confidence in Him and the coming kingdom of God. After the **preface**, comes . . .

The Pause (1:4-5)

In His post-resurrection appearances, our Lord commands His disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15). However, *Acts* records Jesus also tells them not to leave Jerusalem yet, but to *wait for the promise of the Father* (1:4). This *promise* is they will be *endued with power from on high* (Lk 24:49).

After telling them to *wait*, Jesus reminds the disciples John baptized with water but they will *be baptized with the Holy Ghost* in a few days (1:5). The word translated *baptized* (BAPTIZŌ, bap-tid'-zo) normally means "to dip or immerse." Here it carries the idea of "uniting with" (1 Cor. 10:1-2). Being *baptized* with the Holy Spirit places believers into the spiritual body of Christ called "the Church" (1 Cor. 12:13a).

Jesus has remained on earth for forty days after His resurrection (which was during Passover). The event to which Jesus is now referring will take place ten days later on the Feast of Pentecost, which is celebrated fifty days after Passover. However, this doesn't mean when we are saved we have to wait ten days to receive the Holy Spirit. Because Jesus had not yet ascended to the Father, the Holy Spirit could not come to earth. However, since the Holy Spirit has now come, what does Romans 8:9b-c declare?



Before beginning the evangelization of the world, Jesus commands the disciples to **pause** at Jerusalem and wait to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

After the **preface** and **pause** comes . . .

The Promise (1:6-8)

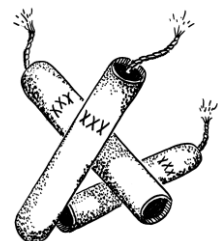
The disciples are filled with excitement when they hear Jesus, in His resurrected body, speak about the coming kingdom. However, they are still confused about the kingdom. Therefore, what do they ask Jesus (1:6)?

The disciples have the secular confused with the spiritual. However, the Lord does not rebuke them for asking this question because it is valid, considering what they know at the time. They are probably familiar with Old Testament prophecies that associated baptism by the Spirit with the beginning of the messianic kingdom and the restoration of Israel (Isa. 32:15-20; Ezek. 39:28-29; Joel 2:28-3:1, Zech. 12:8-10).

In response to their question, Jesus doesn't deny the position of the nation of Israel in God's future kingdom. What *mystery* does Romans 11:25d reveal about Israel and God's future redemptive program?

This makes it clear God is not finished with the nation of Israel, but as Jesus tells the disciples, *It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power* (1:7). Well-meaning believers frequently disregard this teaching of Jesus and direct their energies toward eschatology (study of the end times), rather than evangelism.

Knowing this is a letdown, Jesus quickly tells the disciples they *shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost comes upon them* (1:8a-b). The word translated *power* (DYNAMIS, doo'-nuh-mis) is the Greek word from which we get the word "dynamite." So, as believers, we all have "supernatural dynamite" with which to use our spiritual gifts in ministry and sharing the Gospel.



With our spiritual "dynamite," Jesus says we are to be His *witnesses* (1:8c). The word translated *witnesses* (MARTYS, mar'-toos) is the word from which we get our English word "martyrs." The blood of these first *witnesses* became the seed of the church. However, the original meaning of the word

refers to a witness who can share something based on firsthand experience, not hearsay.

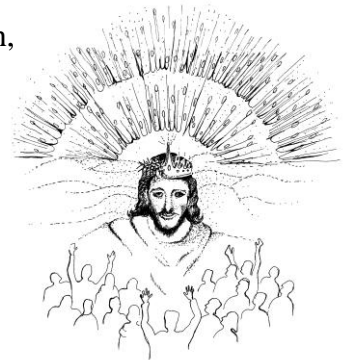
Rather than trying to figure out when Israel will be restored, Jesus tells His followers to spread the Gospel. He then gives them the inspired outline of the book of Acts. Where does Jesus tell them they are to be His witnesses (1:8d-g)?

They will be His *witnesses* to the Jews, the part-Jews, and to the Gentiles.

After the **preface**, **pause**, and **promise** comes . . .

The Parting (1:9-11)

When the Lord finishes speaking these words, and as the disciples watch, He is taken out of their sight up into *a cloud* (1:9). This is undoubtedly the Shekinah glory of God. Such a cloud hovered over the tabernacle in the wilderness as a visible sign of God's presence (Ex 40:34). As the disciples stand on the Mount of Olives, or Mount Olivet, (1:12) watching Him disappear, two men (angels) in white robes stand by them. They ask the disciples why they are looking up into heaven. The angels tell the disciples Jesus will return in the same way they have seen Him go into heaven (1:10-11).



This passage makes it clear why Jesus leaves us here after we are saved. There are only two things we can do on earth we can't do in heaven: sin and win lost people to Christ. Which of these two things does Jesus leave us here to do? The power of the Holy Spirit has not diminished. Therefore, why are believers not changing the world? How does Jesus answer this question in Matthew 9:37b?

Jesus leaves us here to change the world, but the problem is soul-winners are few. Therefore, Jesus tells us what to do if we really want to change the world for Him. He says: *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest* (Mt 9:38). However, it is hypocritical to pray for that to happen unless you are willing to be one of the laborers.

This unique book, which tells us how the early disciples changed their world, begins with **the preface**, **the pause**, **the promise**, and **the parting**.