

# The Promise of the Father (Acts 1)



## A. Introduction

1. Who is it by? Doctor Luke. (i) Luke had a medical and scientific mind to give an account for the beginning of the Church. Every detail is carefully preserved. Paul's shipwreck was checked out by a naval historian. (ii) Luke was a friend and companion of Paul. The book of Acts is part of Luke's diary. It is Luke's personal account as well. (iii) Luke is the only gentile writer in the New Testament. God chose a gentile to tell us the story of Jesus' life and ministry in the gospel of Luke, then tell the story of the Church's birth and the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem (religious capital) to the gentile world, Rome (secular capital) in Acts.
2. Who is it about? It is a Volume 2 of Luke, titled 'Acts of the Apostles.' Yet, nine of the twelve are not even mentioned in Acts. It is not the acts of *all* the apostles. Acts follows only two apostles – Peter and Paul.

Perhaps we can title the book 'Acts of Jesus, Volume 2'? Luke's gospel records 'What Jesus began to do and teach', and Acts records what Jesus continued to do after His ascension. There is a remarkable parallel between Luke and Acts - starting with 'Mary'; then the introduction of the Holy Spirit; then the preaching followed by a trial at the end.

Its best title is 'Acts of the Holy Spirit.' The OT is mostly about God the Father. The gospels are about the Son. Then beginning with Acts, we begin to explore the person and the work of the Holy Spirit through the Church. Our God is triune, and we must know each person of the Trinity. *God made us; Jesus redeemed us; Holy Spirit dwells in us.*

3. Who is this book for? It is addressed to one man, 'Theophilus.' In his gospel Luke calls him 'Your excellency' (Luke 1:3). This suggests Theophilus was probably a high Roman official who was interested in the Christian faith. Perhaps Luke as a medical doctor had an opportunity to introduce the gospel to this Roman official when Paul was arrested and on trial in Rome. Luke's gospel shows Roman authority was sympathetic to the Christian faith. Acts shows the gospel is not against the Roman state, and could defend Paul in his Roman trial that 'Christianity is not anti-Roman'.

'Theophilus' means 'man who loves God', 'man who is loved by God' – a 'friend of God' and a seeker of God. Luke is saying, '*I sent you Volume 1, here is Volume 2 on what Jesus continues to do.*' How can Jesus whom they have executed, continue to do His powerful work on the earth? '*By using the body of His people on earth.*' How can He do this? The same way He did in the gospels, by being filled with the Holy Spirit. The message of Acts is, when ordinary followers of Jesus are filled with His Spirit, they continue to do the works of Jesus! '*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works I do also; and the greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.*' (Jn 14:12)

4. Why should we read it?

(i) Enlightenment: Acts is the link between the gospels and the epistles. We won't understand the epistles or who we are without Acts. What is the Church? Whose idea is the Church? It was Jesus' idea.

(ii) Encouragement: The Church started with just eleven disciples Jesus chose, and spread to the whole world. The 120 disciples prayed together and were filled with the Holy Spirit, and the city of Jerusalem was turned upside down, and the Roman Empire was shaken. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century when we often feel small, weak, and irrelevant, we need to read this book.

(iii) Emulation: It is the plumbline and benchmark for the Church. The pattern of the early church is clearly shown here - what the Church 'ought to be.' *What is the 'true' church? Where do we go from here?* We need to go back to Acts. If we can rediscover the secret the early church had, we can recover the keys to the purity and power the early church walked in, and finish the mandate Jesus placed on the Church when she was birthed. Every major move of God was sparked by a small band of believers who earnestly desired to go back to our roots of the Church's identity, mandate, and power – the Reformation, the Great Awakening, the Pentecostal movement. The 20<sup>th</sup> century Pentecostal movement was birthed out of asking one simple question: '*What is the initial evidence of being filled with the Spirit? Is it available today?*'

## B. Prologue (1:1-4)

We have here a quick summary of Luke's gospel. The disciples needed a 'breathing space' after the exhausting events of the Lord's crucifixion and resurrection. They needed to be properly 'reorientated' towards the future. Before Jesus was 'taken up', He 'kept on appearing' (συναλίζομαι – intimate gathering, e.g., meal fellowship, v4) for 40 days. Why?

The Purpose of the 40 days ministry of Jesus (Resurrection-Ascension):

(i) To teach the disciples the Scriptures and kingdom of God. Jesus does no public miracles now. It is now the work of the Church. In the 6 weeks, Jesus taught them more Scriptures than the previous 3 ½ years put together. Everything in the Old Testament points to Jesus. Peter immediately used the Scripture for guidance (v20) and in his first preaching (2:17ff). Note that Jesus taught them Scriptures 'through the Holy Spirit' (v2) – it was Spirit-anointed teaching and exposition of the Scriptures!

(ii) To give the disciples many 'infallible proofs' of His resurrection for 40 days by appearing to them repeatedly! They had to be fully, permanently, irreversibly convinced of Jesus' resurrection to become the first generation 'witnesses' of Christ's resurrection to the ends of the earth. They were not ready yet.

(iii) To give the disciples direct commands - the Church's mandate on earth, and to give them the final equipping to achieve that mandate.

## C. Ministry of Jesus continues through His Disciples (1:5-14)

### 1. 'The Promise of the Father' (v5-8)

- a. 'Do not leave Jerusalem until you receive the promise of the Father.' (1:4) None of them wanted to stay in Jerusalem. They were Galileans. Jesus was alive! They were filled with joy and praise (Lk 24:52-53), but they weren't ready for Jerusalem. Jesus told them, 'Not many days from now you will be baptised with (into) the Holy Spirit.' (1:5) This promise went back to John the Baptist (Lk 3:16). John baptised the people with water, but they needed more than water baptism. Water baptism brings joy and peace, but it doesn't bring power. Power comes from being 'plunged into' the Holy Spirit. Now they had to stay in Jerusalem (the last place they wanted to be) and 'wait in prayer' until they got plunged into the Holy Spirit. (C.f. Is. 40:31)
- b. 'Not many days' - This really excited the disciples, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' (v6) Jesus has risen; we will receive the Holy Spirit just in a few days; Then what? Do we go back to the city, take over this world, and establish the kingdom of Israel on earth? Is this our mandate after we receive the promise of the Father? Have we come to the end of all things?
- c. Jesus answered, 'Don't ask about the times and seasons. Don't be distracted, but focus on 'receiving power' when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you shall be My witnesses from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' (v7-8) Just like the early church, we need the power of the Spirit to convict people that Jesus is alive!

Principle of Power: (i) 'plunged' into Holy Spirit (internal); (ii) Holy Spirit comes 'upon you' (external); (iii) You 'receive' power ['lambano' – 'take hold of' (active)].

2. What is the mandate of the Church? Not to take over the world, but to be the witness of Jesus' resurrection! Taking over the kingdoms of this world will happen when the King comes back. Until then, we bear witness to the King by preaching His kingdom to the ends of the earth by the power of the Holy Spirit! The world will become increasingly darker, but the Church will burn with God's glory. This is GI vision!

3. Ascension (v9-11) – At that very moment, Jesus began to rise to the sky!

- a. How dramatic! As Jesus spoke His last words - the Church's mandate - He ascended into the cloud out of their sight. For 33 years Jesus has been away from His home in heaven. Jesus was finally returning home in heaven to His Father, after commanding the disciples to go back to the Jerusalem city (where they didn't want to be), without telling them when and how He will be back!

- b. What would be your response? *'Wait, Jesus! Please don't go yet. Come back!'* ??? *'They looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up.'* (v10) Two angels gave a partial answer to their unspoken question, *'Why do you stand up gazing up into heaven?'* They didn't tell them when He will be back, but how He is coming back. *'The same way He went up into heaven.'* (v11)
  - c. With His ascension, Jesus lifted their vision vertically and horizontally. From the viewpoint of national and political restoration, their eyes were re-directed to 'heaven' (where Jesus is) and to the 'ends of the earth.' The last word Jesus uttered on earth is 'earth' (v8). We need His vision!
4. The catalyst of the early church (v12-14) – There were more than 500 at the scene of Jesus' ascension (1 Cor 15:6). Now 120 returned to Jerusalem to pray. How long? 7 days of prayer and waiting on God. No other religion in the world began with women as it did with the Church. From the very beginning was Mary. The Holy Spirit filled her 33 years ago when she supernaturally conceived Jesus. She is still here and praying with the rest of the disciples according to Jesus' command. This is the last picture of Mary. James (Jesus' brother) who once thought Jesus was mad, is also there. They were waiting and praying. They must have remembered Jesus' teaching, *'If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!'* (Luke 11:13)

#### D. Ministry of Judas taken by another (1:15-26).

1. Judas is replaced – Peter was the lead pastor of this church, but he addresses all 120 as 'brothers'. We are all 'brothers in Christ.' Peter knows Judas' ministry must continue, and he must be replaced. Peter's revelation is backed up by the Scriptures (Ps. 69:25; Ps 109:8). Jesus' intention and desire was to have the twelve rule over the twelve tribes of Israel in the millennial reign of Christ.
2. This is the first divine guidance recorded in the New Testament:
  - (i) It starts by asking for the Lord's will.
  - (ii) Then they consulted the church. Asking for the advice of the mature Christians would help young believers avoid much heartache, instead of claiming, *'God spoke to me or I feel led...'* and go ahead with big decisions. The qualification to replace Judas' apostolic ministry was that this candidate had to be with Jesus from baptism to resurrection. Only two of them were qualified among the 120. Joseph (Barsabas) and Matthias. How do they choose between the two?
    - (ii) They cast lots. *'The lot is cast into the lap. But its every decision is from the LORD.'* (Prov 16:33) God can control the outcome. And it takes the decision out of human hands.
    - (iv) Should the Church continue to do this? This was the first and the last time this method was used in the New Testament. We now have the Holy Spirit in us to guide our hearts and minds more directly. But we do need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and maintain clean motives.

Principle of office: If a man is to fill an office in the church, it must be God's choice and his choice. That was the last lots, and the office of apostleship is no longer filled this way.
3. Prophetic Parallel?
  - (i) The global Church is in the *Acts 1 moment* right now. The world is trying to force ungodly social and economic reset agenda. God desires a 'spiritual reset' of all Church (Covid-19). We need to clarify our mandate from heaven. Who are we? Why are we on earth? We must rediscover the key to fulfil our heavenly mandate, and that key is the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Holy Trinity. When the Church understands what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit, then Jesus can begin to move through the Church again.
  - (ii) Judas forfeited his apostolic ministry because of his betrayal. His ministry was filled by another man worthier than him. I believe we are in an hour the Lord is reshuffling the deck of the church leadership.
  - (iii) There were more than 500 present at Jesus' ascension. But only 120 obeyed and waited in Jerusalem to be empowered with the Holy Spirit. Where were 380? Are you part of 120 or 380?

Let's seek God with all our hearts this year and be filled with God's Spirit to do His will.