

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

An Exposition

by

Arno C. Gaebelein

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CHAPTER ONE

The opening chapter of this book gives the events which preceded the great day of Pentecost.

However, of the many things which must have transpired in Jerusalem during the fifty days between the resurrection day and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit not all are mentioned in this chapter. Here, as in the great historical books of the Old Testament and in the Gospels, only certain events are reported while others are passed over. Not man but GOD by His Spirit arranged the matter to give us more than a mere historical account of what took place. As the Book of Exodus in its history foreshadows spiritual and dispensational truths, so, as we shall find, does this New Testament Exodus book teach spiritual and dispensational lessons.

The events preceding Pentecost written in this first chapter are:

I. An account of events preceding the ascension of the Lord, the ascension itself and the message of His personal, visible and glorious return. Verses 1-11.

II. The waiting company in prayer. Matthias added to the Apostles in the place of Judas. Verses 12-26.

I. Verses 1-3. The first three verses of the chapter form the introduction.

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

As shown in the introduction the first verse proves that Luke, the beloved physician, the writer of the Gospel of Luke, was the chosen instrument to write the Book of Acts. Theophilus (*Friend of GOD*) is as prominent in the beginning of the Acts as he is in the Gospel of Luke, where he is addressed as "**most excellent.**"

From a reliable source dating back to the second century we learn that he was an influential and wealthy man residing in the city of Antioch. He dedicated his magnificent palace, called a Basilica, to the preaching of the Gospel. Luke came most likely also from Antioch. He may have belonged to the household of Theophilus. It is not unlikely that Luke had received great kindness from Theophilus; some claim that he used to be a slave and became through Theophilus a free man.

That both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are addressed to Theophilus does not mean that these *discourses* (the word meaning of **treatise**) were meant for Theophilus alone. Luke addressed Theophilus as a prominent man, a responsible person, whose name bespeaks close walk with GOD, and through him to that assembly to which Theophilus belonged, and in a larger sense to all the Gentile-Christian churches.

According to the address to Theophilus we have in the Gospel of Luke the beginning of what CHRIST did and taught and therefore in Acts a continuation of these. He began on earth and now the scene is changed. He is the Man in Glory and from there He continues His work.

It is beautiful to see how the Lord Jesus is brought to our view in these few sentences with which this book opens. How this manifests the One who guided the pen of the beloved physician, that is the Holy Spirit. Seven things are mentioned concerning our Lord.

1. His earthly life of doing and teaching.
2. He charged His Apostles by the Holy Spirit.
3. He was taken up.
4. He had suffered.
5. Presented Himself living with many proofs.
6. He was seen by them for forty days.
7. He spoke of the things which concern the Kingdom of GOD.

What an array of wonderful facts we find in these few sentences! The fact of His resurrection after His passion is the leading feature of the passage. It must be necessarily so for His resurrection is the great foundation upon which the Gospel and the Church rests. He presented Himself living with many proofs and was seen by them for forty days. It is only here in this passage that the period of time during which He manifested Himself is mentioned. And during that time the "**many proofs**" were given.

He appeared in their midst; He walked with them, ate with them, they touched His body, His hands and feet, and they found He was not an apparition, but had a body of flesh and bones. Blessed fact, He presented Himself living, He is the living One!

That He thus showed Himself with many proofs is beyond controversy. But these forty days are likewise shrouded in mystery. It is easy to make fanciful applications of these forty days and to teach unscriptural doctrines by such applications. For instance, a widespread evil system which denies some of the fundamentals of the faith, holds that the Lord is now present on the earth as He was present for forty days after His resurrection.

According to this teaching (Russellism or Millennial Dawn), He came in a secret manner in 1874 and is to remain here for forty years, when He will reveal Himself. Such teaching, if it can be called that, lacks all scriptural support. During these forty days, a number which stands for testing, He not only showed Himself, but also spoke of the things which concern the Kingdom of GOD. The words He gave them at these occasions, the instructions they received from His lips are not reported to us.

The verses which follow describe the farewell meeting, His last words to His disciples, the ascension of the Lord, and the promise of His return to earth.

"And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Verses 4-11).

This occurred ten days before the day of Pentecost. Their place was to be in Jerusalem and to wait in that city for the promise of the Father, which they had heard from His lips. He had given them this promise, when He talked to them before His death, as written in the Gospel of John.

The same command to remain in the city is found at the close of the Gospel of Luke as well as the fact that the promise of the Father was soon to be fulfilled. Then He refers to John and his baptism with water, that they were to be baptized with the Holy Spirit; the **"fire"** of which John spoke (Matthew 3:12) the Lord does not mention, because the baptizing with fire does not refer to the day of Pentecost, but to the time when: **"He shall gather His wheat into the garner and burn the chaff with fire unquenchable;"** that is, His second coming.

He announced once more the **"other Comforter"** who was to come to be with them and in them. All this we shall follow in detail when we come to the great second chapter in our study of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Here we only wish to add that the waiting of the disciples for the promise of the Father remaining in Jerusalem for ten days cannot be repeated now.

Often people, well meaning and spiritually-minded, have appointed meetings for days of waiting and prayer that **"the promise of the Father"** might be given to them. Such expectations are out of order. The Father has kept His promise, the Holy Spirit has come. To ask the Father now to keep His promise amounts to the same thing as to ask GOD to make peace by the death of CHRIST. Peace has been made; the Holy Spirit has been given.

And now we hear the assembled disciples addressing the Lord. What blessed intercourse they had with Him! He spoke to them in all His former tenderness and sympathy and they could ask Him their questions. And so He is still accessible for His Own who draw dear to Him.

"Lord, is it at this time that Thou restorest the kingdom to Israel?"

This was their question, and a very natural question it was for them to ask. They were still Jews and knew only the earthly kingdom as their hope. He had risen from the dead and to their minds this must be the time in which the kingdom is restored to Israel.

Frequently the inquiry of these men who had believed in JESUS and followed Him is declared to have been prompted by ignorance and selfishness. They were, so it is said, still expecting an earthly kingdom, to be established in the land with Jerusalem as the center; they were not yet delivered from their Jewish ideas.

Others tell us that at the time they asked this question, they were ignorant of the true meaning of the kingdom. According to these interpreters the kingdom is the New Testament Church; the Holy Spirit swept away these earthly kingdom expectations. Such and similar reasons have been given to explain the question of the disciples.

It has occurred to but a few that this question was perfectly in order for them as Jews, which they were still, and did not emanate from ignorance, but was asked by reason of their superior knowledge of GOD's purposes as revealed in the Old Testament, a knowledge which is so sadly lacking in the present-day professing church.

The Lord does not rebuke their supposed ignorance nor does He tell them that they were mistaken.

"And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath placed in His own power [authority]."

This answer approves the subject of their question. The Kingdom is to be restored, the times and the seasons were not then to be revealed, for the Father hath put these in His own power.

And this answer is most instructive. In connection with the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, the establishment of the theocratic kingdom on earth, as promised by GOD's holy prophets, times and seasons are expressly stated, and the declaration was made that at the time of the end, preceding the coming of the kingdom, the wise should understand (Daniel 12:10).

But the Lord does not here, as He did in His Olivet discourse, direct their attention to Daniel.
"For you it is not to know the times or the seasons."

A better hope, a heavenly hope was to be theirs, and in connection with that blessed hope of the Coming of the Lord for His Saints to bring them not to Palestine and given them an earthly kingdom, but into the Father's House in Glory, there are no **"times or seasons"** revealed.

For His Saints He may come at any time. These disciples were soon to be formed into the one body, the church, by the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Lord anticipating this gave them this answer. It pointed them away from the earthly Hope of the Kingdom. Others in the future, Jewish disciples once more, a faithful remnant of Israelites, called after the completed church has left this earthly scene, will surely know the times and the seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

Once more He announces their great mission, and that before they could be such witnesses they were to receive power by the Coming of the Holy Spirit upon them. Such was the case on the day of Pentecost as we shall find when we reach the events of that day.

One verse only gives us the account of the ascension of our Lord, His Return to the Father.

He was taken up, they beholding, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. What a spectacle this must have been! He in whom they had believed, in whose company they had been, to whose loving, tender words they had listened, whom they had forsaken when the hour of His suffering had come; He who had died on a cross, reckoned among the evil-doers, who had rested in a tomb and was raised from the dead by the power of GOD; He who had been with them in a glorified human body and manifested Himself in His resurrection glory and power during the forty days was now taken up, "**received into Glory.**"

Gradually He must have been lifted out of their midst. Lovingly His eyes must have rested upon them while their eyes beheld only Him. Now He is lifted higher and still they behold Him in human form. And then a cloud received Him out of their sight. The Greek verb used is "*to take in*;" so that it reads literally, "And then a cloud took Him in out of their sight." This cloud surrounded Him, and the last they saw of Him was that He disappeared from their view in this human glorified body in a cloud.

And that cloud was not a cloud of vapor.

- It was the same cloud which had appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, the Shekinah.
- It was the same cloud of glory which had filled Solomon's temple,
- It was the same cloud which so often in Israel's past history had appeared as the outward sign of the Lord's presence with his people.

The Glory-cloud came to take Him in, to bring Him back to the Father from whence He had come. What human tongue or pen can picture what took place after He had disappeared from human vision! The Shekinah cloud had come to meet Him and where that Glory began sight ceases and faith begins.

What must it have been when He came into the presence of the Throne of His Father when He took His seat, greeted with the word of welcome: "**Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec . . . sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.**"

What a glorious scene it must have been participated in by the angels in heaven!

And now He is back with the Father. In His Name we can approach GOD; He is our Advocate, our Priest in the presence of GOD, appearing for His own. The evidence that He is thus with the Father is soon given by the answered prayer of the first chapter, and the greater evidence, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Coming of the third person of the Trinity.

We must not overlook the teaching of one great truth assailed so much in our times by higher critics and infidels.

The Lord JESUS CHRIST passed through the heavens with a real human glorified body, a body of flesh and bones and went with that body to a literal place, the throne of GOD, where He sat down and where He is now "**the Man**" in the Glory. The denial of this fact, so universal in our day, strikes at the very foundation of the Gospel, our salvation and our heavenly Hope. This great truth that the Lord left bodily His own and bodily returned to the Father is indisputably seen in this account of His ascension. May His person, His ascension and bodily presence in Glory be as real to our hearts, dear readers, as it must have been to the hearts of the eye-witnesses of this great event.

The cloud had taken Him in and still they were gazing into heaven. It was because they had still a vision of that cloud; "*as He was going.*" The verb indicates this. They could not take their eyes away from that bright spot where He was, their Saviour, their Lord, their Hope, their All in All. This upward look should have been the attitude of the church.

Two heavenly visitors appear now upon the scene and they give utterance to that familiar promise of His Second Coming, which establishes that great event beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

Could human language make it any plainer? It seems almost impossible that any intelligent human being could not grasp the simple fact of His return, personal, visible and glorious, as revealed in this angelic message. The same glory cloud will bring Him back, yea even to the same place, for Zechariah tells us that "**His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives**" (chapter 14:4).

However, we must beware of confounding this event given here with that blessed Hope, which is the Hope of the church.

The Coming of the Lord is His visible Coming as described in the prophetic books of the Old Testament; it is His coming to establish His rule upon the earth. It is the event spoken of in Daniel 7:14 and Revelation 1:7. When He comes in like manner as He went up, His Saints come with Him (Colossians 3:4; II Thessalonians 1:10).

The Hope of the church is to meet Him in the air and not to see Him coming in the clouds of heaven.

The coming here "**in like manner**" is His Coming for Israel and the nations. The Coming of the Lord for His Church before His visible and glorious Manifestation, is revealed in I Thessalonians 4:16-18.

It is well to keep these important truths in mind. Confusion between these is disastrous. He left them to enter into the Holy of Holies, to exercise the priesthood which Aaron exercised on the day of atonement, though our Lord is a priest after the order of Melchisedec. And when this promise of the two men in white garments is fulfilled, He will come forth to be a priest upon His throne.

II. The waiting company in prayer. Matthias added to the Apostles in the place of Judas.

"Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Verses 12-14).

With what emotions they must have left the blessed spot from which the Lord had visibly gone to the Father!

And now we behold them in a waiting attitude. Obedient to the command of their Lord they tarry in Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father. Their waiting was unique as a company of disciples, believers in JESUS as the CHRIST.

Ten days after, the promise of the Father came, the Holy Spirit was poured out. Ever since He is here. There is no need of waiting now for the promise of the Father. No company of believers in this age could ever be again in the position in which the disciples were before Pentecost. It is, therefore, incorrect and unscriptural to hold prayer meetings, as stated before, waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Persons who expect a repetition of what took place on Pentecost, who pray for and expect another sending of the Holy Spirit are on unscriptural ground.

We see the disciples gathered in an upper chamber. This was not in the temple, but in a private house. Perhaps it was the same room, which is mentioned in the Gospel of John. Such rooms of good size were used by Hebrews for prayer and meditations. They do so still and have large assembly rooms for prayer (*Beth Midrash*) in private houses in different cities.

The expression "**upper room**" is used often in Talmudical writings. Peter's name is put in the first place, as he appears in the foreground throughout the first part of this book. After the names of the disciples are given and that they gave themselves with one accord to continual prayer the fact is mentioned that the women were present likewise. These, no doubt, are the same mentioned in Luke 8:2-3.

They are mentioned not by name.

Last of all appears Mary the mother of JESUS and His brethren.

That the Holy Spirit gives the name of Mary the mother of JESUS, is most significant. It reminds us of the whole story of the incarnation and the blessed life of Him, the Son of GOD, who came of a woman, Mary, the virgin of prophecy (Isaiah 7:14).

But the significance is in the fact that she, who was chosen by GOD's grace to be the blessed vessel, through whom the Creator, the Son of GOD, entered in human form the world He had created, is mentioned here in company with the other waiting disciples. She has no place of superiority among them, but with the rest, waited for the promise of the Father; when the Holy Spirit was poured forth she too was baptized by the one Spirit into the one body of which through the Grace of GOD, she is a member like any other believer in the Lord JESUS CHRIST. She was fallible and sinful like every other person, and all which a corrupt form of Christianity has made of her is wicked teaching.

Not once is she mentioned after this chapter in the Book of Acts. In vain do we look for her name in the Epistles, in which the Holy Spirit reveals Christian doctrine and privileges. Mary, the mother of JESUS, has absolutely no relation to the redemption work of the Son of GOD. Then the brethren of our Lord are mentioned, the same, who with Mary, their mother, attempted to interfere with the ministry of our Lord (Mark 3:21-31-35). Not one of these was an apostle.

It is positively stated that up to a certain point His brethren did not believe in Him. **"For neither did His brethren believe in Him"** (John 7:5). How they believed later we do not know. Their presence in the waiting company shows that they had believed.

"And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about a hundred and twenty,) Men and brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called, in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein; and, His bishopric let another take" (Verses 15-20).

On a certain day, which is not mentioned, the number of the disciples present were one hundred and twenty. This however, was not by any means the whole number of believers before Pentecost. We read elsewhere that the risen CHRIST had appeared to about five hundred brethren at once (I Corinthians 15:6). These no doubt belonged to Galilee.

On that day before Pentecost, Peter arose in the midst of the one hundred and twenty and addressing them as brethren, laid before them the sad case of Judas, who had been numbered among the twelve apostles. The awful fate of Judas is mentioned once more. There is no discrepancy between Matthew's account and the words here. He committed suicide by hanging, and the rope broke, and the terrible thing happened, which is reported here.

The Apostle Peter, in bringing the case before the disciples, quotes the Word of GOD in a most remarkable way, which shows its inspiration.

The question arises at once about the legitimacy of Peter's action. Was it right to act in this way? Was he authorized to address the assembled company and propose the addition of another apostle in the place of Judas? Or was his action another evidence of his impulsiveness, wholly wrong? We are aware that some good brethren, teachers of the Bible, declare that Peter made a mistake. They tell us that this action was not according to the mind of the Lord. They assert furthermore, that not Matthias, but Paul, should have been the Apostle in the place of Judas.

We do not agree at all with their teaching. Peter and the gathered company did not make a mistake. He acted by inspiration and what they did was not only according to the mind of the risen CHRIST, according to the Word of GOD, but it was a manifestation of CHRIST in their midst. It was the Lord who added Matthias to the twelve.

To say that Paul was meant to be the twelfth apostle is a great blunder. Paul's apostleship is entirely different from that of the men, who were called to this office by our Lord, in connection with His earthly ministry. Paul is the apostle of the Gentiles and received from the risen and glorified CHRIST the double ministry, that of the Gospel, which he called "**my Gospel**" and the ministry of the church.

Not till Israel's failure had been fully demonstrated in the stoning of Stephen, was Saul of Tarsus called to his apostleship. Furthermore twelve apostles were necessary. Twelve is the number denoting earthly government. Inasmuch as there was to be given another witness to Jerusalem after the ascension of our Lord, a national witness, a second offer of the Kingdom (Acts 3:19, 20) twelve apostles were necessary as a body of witnesses to the nation. If only eleven apostles had stood up on the day of Pentecost, it would not have been in harmony with the divine plan and order. How strange it would have sounded if the record said "but Peter standing up with the ten" instead of "with the eleven" (Chapter 2:14). Twelve had to stand up on Pentecost to bear witness to the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST, therefore another one had to be added before that day. Besides this, there is positive proof that the Holy Spirit endorsed the action of the disciples in the upper room. In I Corinthians 15:5 the Holy Spirit mentions the twelve, who saw the Lord, to whom He appeared. Paul then is mentioned apart from the twelve; he saw the Lord in glory as one born out of due season (Verse 8).

A closer examination of the record of their action shows that the Lord guided them in this matter. Peter begins by quoting scripture. He does it in a way which clearly proves that he was guided by the Lord. "**The Scriptures should be fulfilled**" is what Peter said. How different from the Peter in Matthew 16 when he took the Lord aside and said after he had announced His coming death, "**far be it from Thee.**" He had then no knowledge of the Scriptures.

Repeatedly it is said that they knew not the Scriptures and that their eyes were holden. Here, however, he begins with the Scriptures. Surely this was the right starting point, and thus ordered by the Lord. He quotes from the Psalms. Part of Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 are given by him as the foundation of the purposed action.

These Psalms are prophetic of the events, which had taken place.

The Lord Himself had opened his understanding as well as that of the other disciples. In Luke 24 we read that He spoke of what was written in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms. **"Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures"** (Luke 24:45). It was a gift of the risen Lord and here Peter guided by the Spirit of GOD uses the prophetic Word. All the company is one with Him in the undertaking. It must be done. The Lord moved them in this matter.

"Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection" (Verses 21-22).

Here he defines the qualification of an apostle. He must be a witness of the resurrection of CHRIST as well as of what He said and did in His earthly ministry.

"And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Verses 23-26).

How simple it all is! How can anyone say that they erred in this action! Two are selected. Then they prayed; no doubt Peter led in audible prayer. And the prayer is a model of directness and simplicity. They address the Lord and believe that He had made a choice already. What they pray for is that the one chosen by Him may now be made known by Himself. The lot was perfectly legitimate for them to use. The Scriptures speak of it. **"The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord"** (Proverbs 16:33).

As they were still on Old Testament ground, it was perfectly right for them to resort to the lot. It, however, would be wrong for us to do it now. We have His complete Word, and the Holy Spirit to reveal His will. The Lord selects Matthias. His name means *"the gift of the Lord."* Thus the Lord gave him his place. The Apostolate complete, all was in readiness for the great day of Pentecost.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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