

Acts 1:1-3 Teacher Proof of Jesus' Resurrection

Introduction: Today we begin a study of the book of Acts, so turn over to Acts 1.

Who wrote the book of Acts? It was written by Luke. Luke was not one of the original disciples, nor was he an apostle. Luke was a later convert, a physician (Col 4:11-14) and a traveling companion of Paul. He could be considered the equivalent of a modern day missionary. Tradition tells us he was a Gentile.

Look in your Bible; what is the full title of Acts? The full title given to us by the church of history is "The Acts of the Apostles". It is a record of the actions of the Apostles. Acts is kind of an odd title in my opinion. I think the title odd because in a theatrical production there is Act 1, then Act 2, then Act 3, etc. A person in a play is an actor. If a friend successfully pretended to feel something he didn't really feel, you might say, "That was quite an act you put on." Yet the New Testament book of Acts is not a play and it is not fiction. Luke recorded the actual actions of the early church. Acts is a church history book.

Remember, the titles of the various New Testament books are not inspired. The content is, but the titles are not. Perhaps a better title would have been the Actions of the Holy Spirit, because Luke doesn't systemically record the actions of any of the apostles in depth except for Paul. And yet Luke's interest really isn't even in Paul, it is in **1**) how God's work on earth shifted from Jesus to the Holy Spirit and **2**) how the Spirit **a**) overcame all obstacles in causing the Gospel to be spread from Jerusalem westward to Rome and **b**) changed the church from being predominantly Jewish to being predominately Gentile.

Outline: A good summary of Acts is arguably found in **Acts 1:8** (*read aloud*). Acts is a history of how the Holy Spirit empowered the church to be a witness for Jesus starting out in Jerusalem and spreading toward the end of the earth.

Location: Luke ended his chronicle with Paul imprisoned in Rome. Since Luke traveled a lot with Paul it is thought that Luke wrote Acts in Rome in the A.D. 60s.

******1. What material did Luke deal with in his first book (1:1-3)?** He dealt with the life and teachings of Jesus, right up to His ascension into heaven, 1:1-2.

— 1:1 —

What is the name of Luke's first book (1:1)? We call it the Gospel of Luke. Luke did not name it that; the church of history did. The content is inspired, the title is not.

Based on 1:1, to whom did Luke write Acts? It was written to a guy named Theophilus.

Who was Theophilus (1:1)? Very little is known about him. In Luke 1:3 he is addressed as “most excellent” Theophilus, which suggests he was a person of standing in Roman society. His name means loved by God or lover of God. Perhaps Theophilus was not his real name but rather a title of affection used by Luke. He probably was a believer.

2. Turn back to Luke 1:1-4. What was Luke’s stated purpose in writing to Theophilus? (Read aloud).

ESV Luke 1:1-4 . . . many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us . . . it seemed good to me also . . . to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Luke’s purpose in writing the Gospel of Luke was to give an orderly account of the things concerning Jesus so that Theophilus could have certainty concerning the things he had already been taught. His purpose in writing Acts was likely similar, except it concerned the spread of the Gospel after Jesus’ ascension.

Bridge: Acts provides us with a nice bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles. In fact, without Acts to give us the background information, we would have a very hard time figuring how the context in which Paul wrote his letters.

Review: What Luke did not write an “orderly account” of was **1)** theology or **2)** church practice or **3)** the biographies of the apostles or **4)** of the spread of the Gospel eastward to India or Southwest into North Africa. In Acts, Luke’s concern seems to have been to give an orderly account of how the Gospel overcame all opposition in spreading from Jerusalem to Rome and how it went from being a primarily Jewish religion to being a primarily Roman/Greek/Gentile religion.

— 1:2 —

3. In 1:2, Luke mentioned that Jesus was “taken up”. What is that a reference to? See 1:9 and Luke 24:50-51.

ESV Luke 24:50-51 [Jesus] led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

After Jesus’ resurrection, he was “taken up” into heaven, **1:9**. Jesus ascended bodily into the clouds and has never been seen again since. He is, however, coming back! **See 1:11.**

ESV Titus 2:11-13 . . . the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ . . .

Swoon Theory? Some unbelievers posit that Jesus only swooned on the cross but did not actually die. Everyone just thought He was dead, including the Romans. Later, in the coolness of the tomb He revived and staggered out to find the apostles. Being ignorant, superstitious men, they sincerely but mistakenly thought He had risen from the dead. Jesus even believed it himself.

Answers: **1)** One problem with the swoon theory is that there is no record of anyone ever surviving a Roman crucifixion. **2)** Even if Jesus had only swooned, how did He roll away the stone and overpower the guards? **3)** Also, if he merely swooned on the cross, then like all people He would have actually died like everyone else. Yet these same supposedly superstitious but sincerely deceived men testified that they saw Him ascend bodily in to heaven. *How did He pull that off?* If this is not factually true then the apostles were deliberate deceivers.

4. According to 1:2, Jesus gave commands to the apostles before He was taken up. What were these commands? See 1:4, 8.

- a) One command is found in Acts 1:4 (wait for the Holy Spirit).
- b) Another is the Great Commission wherein He commanded the apostles to make disciples of all nations, Acts 1:8..

Matthew put it his way:

ESV **Matthew 28:19** Go . . . make disciples of all nations . . .

Applications: The apostles did exactly what Jesus commanded them to do. They took the Gospel to all the nations of their world (the Roman Empire). Since that time the Holy Spirit has raised up missionaries to continue their work in principle who have taken the Gospel literally to the ends of the earth. That is why the church supports missions and missionaries. It is also important for local churches to continually teach people to observe all that Jesus commanded.

In what sense did Jesus give the apostles His commands “through the Holy Spirit” (1:2)?

The Greek here is unclear as to whether “through the Holy Spirit” refers to giving the commands or choosing the apostles. Perhaps Luke intended it to apply to both.¹ The Holy Spirit plays a big role in Acts. We see Jesus prominent in Luke’s Gospel and the Holy Spirit prominent in Acts.

—1:3—

5. In 1:3, Luke wrote of the “suffering” of Jesus. Why did Jesus suffer?² See 2 Corinthians 5:21. He chose to die in payment for our sins, in our place. Being infinite God, Jesus could suffer on the cross in a finite time what it would take us, who are finite, an eternity to suffer in Hell.

ESV **2 Corinthians 5:21** [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

¹ L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 24.

² Thoughts Jesus’ suffering adapted from sermon by Adrian Rogers, “The Day Death Died”, Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, TN.

A Willing Sacrifice: Jesus chose to suffer. He did not have to die. Jesus is the only person who ever willingly decided to die.

ESV **John 10:17-18** . . . I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.

What Jesus did was different than what a person does who commits suicide. In suicide a person picks the time of this death not the fact of it. That he would eventually die anyway is a foregone conclusion. Jesus' death was different because He was not liable to death. He was not a sinner. There was no seed of death in Jesus.

In the Bible, death is sometimes personified as a person, sort of like we envision the Grim Reaper. When Jesus died, Death thought he'd won a victory: "He's mine!" he said. Jesus' body lay in that dark tomb cold and stiff. But on the third day Jesus rose from the dead. He walked out of that tomb a risen, living victorious savior. Jesus defeated death. He knocked King Death off his throne, took off his crown and put it on His own head. He pulled the sting out of death. Jesus decimated death in that tomb. The tomb became death's dungeon. Resurrection Sunday was the day death died.

Application: Death could not hold Jesus and it can't hold you! Jesus took away death's holding power. Death is a defeated foe. We can laugh in the face of death if we know the Lord Jesus. Jesus' resurrection defeated death's keeping power. Jesus said a time is coming when all who are in their tombs will come out! The sea heave and give up the dead in its depths, the howling deserts sheets will yield up its dead and grave yards will look like plowed up fields.

ESV **1 Corinthians 15:52-55** . . . For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable . . . For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality . . . then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

6. It is been said there is more proof that Jesus rose from the dead than there is that Julius Caesar ever lived. Luke wrote that Jesus presented Himself alive by many proofs (1:3). Based just on 1:3, what were these proofs? The main proof lay in Jesus' many appearances to them in person and alive from the dead over a forty day period, 1:3.

ESV **1 Corinthians 15:20** . . . in fact Christ has been raised from the dead . . .

Hallucination: Skeptics say the apostles were distraught and only imagined they saw Jesus alive. It was wishful thinking on their part. They were sincerely mistaken. **Answer:** *Did all eleven apostles repeatedly imagine it over a forty day period?* There was not wishful thinking. Also, Scripture records Jesus appeared to more than **500** people. It is very unlikely that five hundred people would suffer from a mass hallucination!

ESV **1 Corinthians 15:6** . . . he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

ESV 2 Peter 1:16 . . . we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Luke 24

7. Since Luke wrote both Acts and the Gospel of Luke, let's look to Luke 24 for some other proofs that Jesus gave the apostles. What proof did Peter see in Luke 24:1-12? One proof that the apostle Peter saw was when he ran and saw the stone rolled away and an **empty tomb**. It was been observed that the stone was rolled away not to let Jesus out, but to let the apostles see that it was empty. The effect on Peter was that he went home "marveling" (24:12).

If the hostile Jewish authorities could have produced a corpse, the resurrection would have been proved a hoax and infant Christianity would have been strangled in its cradle. Movie worth seeing: Risen (a 2016 film), starring Joseph Fiennes.

Scripture records Jesus actually to time to fold the grave cloth and left it behind (Jn 20:7). **Joke:** *How did you leave your bedroom this morning?* This tells me that Jesus was in no hurry! He was in complete control.

Another proof was the **testimony of the women** which, though not believed, was described as amazing (24:22).

8. What proof did Jesus present in Luke 24:13-35? Jesus appeared incognito to two of the apostles on the road to Emmaus and showed them how **Moses and the Old Testament prophets predicted everything** that had happened to Jesus. When they finally realized it was Jesus with whom they were speaking — poof! — he disappeared.

Example: So powerful is the testimony of Scripture that Jesus told a parable of the rich Jewish man and Lazarus, where in both died. Lazarus went to paradise and the rich man to torment. The rich man begged Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers lest they too end up in torment. Look how Abraham responded:

ESV Luke 16:29-31 . . . Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Scriptural proof may not have been valid for a pagan Gentile, but it should have been ample proof for a Jewish person with a tradition of exposure to Jehovah God.

9. What proof of bodily resurrection did Jesus give in Luke 24:36-43? Later, when the apostles were gathered together, Jesus suddenly **materialized** right there in the room with them, scaring them badly. At first they thought He was a ghost, but He showed them the **wounds** in His hands and feet and let them touch him. He also **ate some fish** (ghosts don't usually eat things). This is another proof that Jesus literally, bodily, rose from the grave.

Liar, Liar Pants on Fire: The apostles claimed to be eye-witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. *Were the early disciples liars? Were they false witness?* The case would not simply be that they were mistaken. Instead, they would have knowingly lied. *Were they con artists? Deceivers?* They suffered, bled and died for their faith. Men are not going to the flogging post for a fairly tail. tell lies to get out of trouble; not to get into trouble. They had no motive to lie. Liars and con artists are not cut out of the same cloth as apostles.

10. What proof did Jesus present in Luke 24:44-47? Jesus showed them how everything that had happened was in **fulfillment of Moses and the Prophets**. Thus, part of the convincing proof lay not only in Jesus personally appearing to them but also in demonstrating how His death and resurrection fulfilled the Law of Moses and the Prophets.

11. What are some Old Testament prophecies about Jesus' suffering and resurrection (Lk 24:44-47)? *See Psalm 16 & 22, Isaiah 53.* Old Testament Prophecies about Jesus' suffering describe such things as the crucifixion, that his hands and feet would be pierced, that none of His bones would be broken and that lots would be cast for his clothing. Here is two famous text about Messiah's suffering and resurrection:

ESV **Isaiah 53:4-6** Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

ESV **Psalm 16:10** For you will not . . . let your holy one see corruption.

Back to Acts 1

According to Acts 1:3, what did Jesus speak about during the forty days? He spoke to them about the kingdom of God (whatever that is!).

12. What is the kingdom of God (1:3)? Luke did not explain what he meant since he had so thoroughly dealt with it in his Gospel. Here is my understanding of it:

a) The Kingdom of God is the same thing as the Kingdom of Heaven.

b) God's rule as King has always been universal:

ESV **Psalm 103:19** The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

c) God's kingdom rule is largely invisible in this present age since God allows for continued rebellion. It is most evident in the lives of those who obey Jesus as King (Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Re 19:16).

ESV **Luke 17:20-21** . . . asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.

d) God's kingdom is both now and yet. It has begun but is not fully consummated.³ There is a time coming in the future when the Kingdom of God will be revealed in all of its fullness at the Second Appearing of Jesus. Thus we pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." God's will is already being done in both heaven and earth, but in the same way with the same visible effects.

So What?

13. How can you benefit from the many proofs of the resurrection Jesus presented to the apostles?

ESV **1 Peter 1:8-9** Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

NAS **Romans 10:9** . . . if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved . . .

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

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³ Fee & Stuart, *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 153.