**The Acts of the Apostles**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A man was feeling *terrible,* so he and his wife went to see the doctor. After examining him, the doctor asked if he could speak to the man’s wife privately. When the man left the room, the doctor told her, “Your husband has a rare but *terminal* disease. His only hope is for you to begin to make sure he is completely happy all of the time.

“You must treat him like a king among men. Cook his favorite meals every day, and let him go fishing or golfing whenever he feels like it. Let him spend your life savings on whatever toys he wants. If you do all that, he will make a full recovery.” The woman thanked him, and went out to take her husband home. When he asked, “What did the doctor say?” she replied, “He said you’re going to die.”

I tell that story about how she didn’t want to treather husband like a king to help understand the meaning of a word found in the opening verse of our text:

**“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” (Acts 1:1,2).**

Now that word “treatise” is not a word we use much these days, so I looked it up. The dictionary says that a treatise is a formal, written composition on a particular subject. It comes from a Latin word that refers to how to *treat* or *handle* a subject. So when the author of the Book of Acts talks about a “former” treatise that he wrote, it suggests that Acts itself must be a formal, written composition on a particular subject.

Whatever that former treatise was, the writer informs us that it too was written to a man named Theophilus. That tells us that the writer is speaking about the Book of Luke. As Luke began his gospel, he wrote,

**“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us…it seemed good to me also…to write unto thee in order, *most excellent Theophilus”* (Luke 1:1-3).**

When Luke wrote the story of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ found in the gospel that bears his name, he wrote it as a *treatise.* And as you know if you’re familiar with the book, he treated the Lord *very* respectfully in that treatise; like a king among men—just as the wife in our opening story was told to do for her husband.

We’re not really sure who Theophilus was, since the Bible only mentions him in these two references. But all names have meanings, and in the Bible, the meaning of names often has some spiritual significance. Pastor Harland Shriver used to joke that Theophilus got his name when he was born, and his father took one look at him, and said, “That’s the awful-est-looking kid I’ve ever seen!”

The name Theophilus actually means “Friend of God.” That’s significant, because there is only one man in the Bible who is called the friend of God, as we read in James 2:23:

**“…*Abraham*…was called the friend of God” (cf. II Chronicles 20:7).**

So when Luke wrote The Gospel According to Luke to a man named Theophilus, that’s one of the many ways God tells us that Luke’s gospel is written to the Jews,the *seed* of Abraham, the friend of God.

Now don’t get me wrong. I have no doubt that there was an actual person named Theophilus. But as I mentioned, Bible names are often spiritually significant, and I believe the spiritual significance here is that the Book of Luke was written for the people of Abraham.

Now I know that that’s not what most Christians believe and teach. Most Christians think that Luke was written *for us,* members of the Body of Christ, living in the dispensation of grace. But Luke describes the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Apostle Paul tells us that “Jesus Christ was a minister *of the circumcision…”* (Rom. 15:8). So the Gospel of Luke is written *to* and *for* and *about* the Jews, the circumcision, the seed of Abraham, the friend of God. A careful study of Luke’s earlier treatise will bring this out clearly.

But if the Book of Acts is *also* written to Theophilus, that tells you that *it too* was written with the Jews in mind. That’s important to remember as we study this book, for must Christians believe that the first two chapters of Acts describe the beginning of something new. Most Christians hold that these chapters record the beginning of “the church, which is His Body” (Eph. 1:22,23). But if Luke says that his *first* treatise was about all that Jesus *began* to do and teach the Jews, then this *second* treatise must be about all that the Lord *continued* to do and teach the Jews—*through the twelve apostles.* I trust that our study of Acts will bring this out clearly as we go through it.

When Luke mentions the day in which the Lord ‘was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen,” that’s a reference to something we read about in Mark 16:15-19:

**“…He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature…*then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven…”***

After the Lord gave those commandments to the apostles He had chosen, He ascended into heaven. And you’d think that would have been the end of all that the Lord taught the Jews. I mean, He was here as “a minister of the circumcision,” He *taught* the people of the circumcision (Mt. 15:24), and He left. But Luke insists that such was not the case! He states that the Lord’s earthly ministry was just the *beginning* of what He wanted to teach the Jews. In the Book of Acts, He went on to *continue* to teach them *through the apostles.*

Now as you read our opening text here in Acts, you may have wondered why Luke said that the Lord gave His commandments to His apostles “through the Holy Ghost.” Well, that’s often how God communicated with men. He spoke to them through the Holy Spirit, who spoke to men through the prophets, as we see in this later incident in Acts involving Luke and the Apostle Paul:

**“…we…sailed into Syria…And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: *who said to Paul through the Spirit,* that he should not go up to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:3,4).**

As you can see, when God wanted to speak to men, He spoke to them through the Holy Spirit, who spoke through the prophets.

But why would God need to speak to men through the Spirit *when the Lord was talking?* Wasn’t He God? Well, yes He was. But do you remember what John the Baptist said about the words the Lord spoke when He was here? Speaking of Him, John said,

**“For He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: *for* God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him” (John 3:34).**

Did you notice that he didn’t say, “He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for He *was* God?” He rather said that the Lord spoke the words of God *for He was given an immeasurable gift of the Holy Spirit.* The Lord was God in the flesh, but He was also a man—and a prophet (Deut. 18:15-18). And John said that while He was here on earth, the words that He spoke weren’t His words, they were the words that God gave Him to speak through the Spirit. Remember, the Spirit descended upon Him at His baptism (Mt. 3:16). Ever after that, whenever He spoke, it was the Spirit speaking through Him, as He Himself admitted in John 14:10:

**“…the words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: *but the Father that dwelleth in Me*…”**

So why would Luke remind us of this in his introduction to the Book of Acts? Surely it is because God was about to *continue* to speak to men through the Spirit *through the 12 apostles,* instead of through the Lord now that He had ascended into heaven. Remember, at Pentecost,

**“…they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, *as the Spirit gave them utterance”* (Acts 2:4).**

You see, when the twelve apostles spoke in tongues, the Spirit didn’t just give them the ability to speak in a foreign language that they had never learned. The Spirit *also* told them *what to say* in those languages. You know. Like He told the Lord what to say when He was here, because Acts is a continuation of what the Lord taught *through the Spirit, through the twelve apostles.*

Now, speaking of those twelve men, we read:

**“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” (Acts 1:3).**

Now when Luke talks about the Lord’s “passion,” he’s talking about His suffering and death. That’s one of the definitions of the word*.* That’s why around Easter time many churches feature something they call “passion plays,” reenactments of the Lord’s crucifixion and death.

Luke says that *after* the Lord suffered and died, He showed Himself to be *alive* to the twelve apostles—and for a very good reason! You see, they thought He was dead, and that this meant He wasn’t their Messiah! Just look at what two of the Lord’s disciples said of Him:

**“…the chief priests and our rulers…crucified Him. *But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel…”* (Luke 24:19-21).**

When the Lord died, all of His followers gave up on the idea that He was their Christ—even Peter and the twelve! Do you remember what Peter told some of the apostles in John 21:3?

**“Simon Peter saith…*I go a fishing*. They say unto him, *We also go with thee…”* (John 21:3).**

Peter and three of the other apostles were fishermen, and when the Lord died, they went back to fishing! I point this out to you because there are many skeptics who refuse to believe the Lord rose from the dead, skeptics who say things like, “Peter only claimed He rose from the dead because Jesus made him famous, and if He were dead, Peter wouldn’t know what to do with himself.” No! Before the Lord called him to be an apostle, Peter had a successful business. Look how Luke describes his call to the ministry. Speaking of the Lord, he wrote,

**“…He…saw two ships standing by the lake…And He entered into one of the ships, *which was Simon's,* and…they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. *And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship…*James and John” (Luke 5:1-10).**

Peter and his brother Andrew had a fishing business (Mt. 4:18), a business that appeared to be thriving, with “partners” and at least two ships! They walked away from a *lot* to follow the Lord! And they went right back to fishing when they thought He was dead. The only thing that made them leave their trade *again* was when the Lord provedHe was still alive, by what Luke calls “many” proofs.

What kind of proofs? Well, first of all, Luke says that he “shewed Himself alive” to those twelve men (Acts 1:3), something he describes in Luke 24:36,37:

**“…*Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them*…but they were terrified and affrighted, *and supposed that they had seen a spirit.”***

The first time the twelve saw the Lord after He rose from the dead, they thought He was a ghost! So He quickly put their minds at ease, saying,

**“Behold My hands and My feet, *that it is I Myself:* handle Me, and see; *for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have*. And when He had thus spoken, *He shewed them His hands and His feet”* (Luke 24:39,40).**

Now you know why the Lord asked them to behold his hands and feet, right? It was because *that’s where they nailed Him to the cross.* So when He was able to show them those wounds, it proved that it was Him. It proved that the One they crucified was still alive!

But you can make it *look* like you are wounded when you are really not. When I was a teen, I bought a novelty keychain that looked like a human thumb. Hey, it was the ‘70s, and I was a dumb teenager who thought it was cool! At that time, I was working for my father in his tool and die shop. I remember taking that very realistic-looking thumb and laying it on the punch press, a machine known for lopping off fingers from careless workers. I adorned it with ketchup, and waited for my boss, my dad’s partner, to arrive and notice it. When he did, I came in with a ketchup-soaked rag around my thumb. I’d like to be able to say that he fell for it, but he didn’t. But if he had, all he would have had to do was *handle my thumb* to see that I wasn’t really dismembered.

So that’s what the Lord told the twelve to do, charging them to “handle” Him. He later told Thomas to place his fingers in the wounds in his hands, and thrust his hand into the spear wound in His side (John 20:27). The Lord’s challenge to handle His wounds gave *another* proof that He was alive, in addition to the mere sight of Him. Then He proceeded to offer *further* evidence that He was alive, for we read that

**“…while they yet believed not for joy…He said…*Have ye any meat?* And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And He took it, *and did eat before them”* (Luke 24:41-43).**

Did you ever hear a ghost story that featured a ghost that sat down and ate a meal with people? Of course not! Do you know *why* you’ve never heard of such a thing? It is because *ghosts can’t eat.* That was yet *another* proof that the Lord Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.

And He didn’t just show Himself to be alive to the twelve apostles, for we read that

**“Christ died for our sins…and…rose again…and…He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: *After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once;* of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep” (I Corinthians 15:3-6).**

This mass-sighting of our risen Savior reminds me of a story I heard recently regarding the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. There were over 500 people in Ford’s Theater the night in which the president was slain, and one of them later talked about what he saw that day *on television.* Samuel J. Seymour was 5 years old that night in 1865, and in 1956 he appeared on the television game show “What’s My Line?” That means he testified to what he witnessed that fateful night *for 91 years.* And that means that some of the 500 witnesses who saw the risen Christ told *their* story for the better part of the next *century.*

And do you know what made all those “many” proofs “infallible” (Luke 1:3)? Luke says that “He shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, *being seen of them forty days.”* There are people who swear that Elvis Presley is still alive, because they believe they caught a glimpse of him once at the local laundromat. But the Lord’s sightings proved He was alive by many infallible proofs because He showed Himself over and over again.

And not just to strangers, but also to the apostles who lived and worked with Him intimately for three straight years, men who knew Him well. I mean, if Elvis’s *wife* claimed she saw him for forty days, I would find that much more convincing than when I hear some yahoo that never met him say that he saw the deceased musician.

As we read on in our text, we see that *during* those forty days the Lord did more than just prove that He was alive. Luke says that He spoke to them about “the kingdom of God.” That’s the kingdom the prophet Daniel described when he wrote,

**“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall…break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, *and it shall stand for ever”* (Daniel 2:44).**

What would you call a kingdom set up by “the God of heaven?” The kingdom of God, maybe? The kingdom of heaven, perhaps? Well, the Bible calls it both! Compare these two versions of something the Lord said at the beginning of His ministry here on earth:

**“…Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 4:17).**

**“…Jesus came…saying, The time is fulfilled, *and the kingdom of God is at hand”* (Mark 1:14,15).**

This is the kingdom that the Lord then went on to talk about during the entire three years of His ministry to the people of Israel.

It is important to point out here that the Lord didn’t tell His followers to try to fixthe kingdoms of men. He told them that someday *God* would fix them by *destroying* them, and replacing them with *His* kingdom. It has never been his plan to do otherwise. This suggests that those who are trying to fix the kingdom of the United States by protesting abortion, speaking out against gay rights, etc., are misdirecting their efforts. God will right all of those wrongs and more when He establishes the kingdom of heaven on earth.

When the Lord announced that this kingdom was “at hand” (Mt. 4:17; Mark 1:15), that meant it was ready to appear at that point in time. But something had to happen *before* it could appear, something the Lord explained in one of His parables:

**“…He spake a parable…*because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear*…A certain nobleman went into a far country *to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return*…and…when he was returned, *having received the kingdom…”* (Luke 19:11-15).**

With the appearance of the kingdom’s King on earth, Israel’s kingdom was at hand when He was in their midst. But the kingdom couldn’t come until He died and rose again, and then ascended into heaven to go *get* the kingdom of heaven and bring it back to the earth, as the Lord portrayed in this parable. The nobleman here represents the Lord Himself, and the “far country” refers to the far country of heaven. The Lord ascended into heaven to receive the kingdom, and someday will return with it after the Tribulation.

But if the Lord spent three years speaking to the twelve apostles about this kingdom, you might be wondering what good it would do to spend an *additional* 40 days “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God?” If so, it helps to remember that many of the things the Lord taught the twelve seemed to go in one ear and out the other. But things were different during this 40 day Bible conference, for “*then opened He their understanding,* that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:45). When He did that, all of the pieces of the kingdom that puzzled them in the past fell suddenly fell into place. And that was an understanding that they would need as they were now the Lord’s official representatives here on earth.

Still speaking of the Lord, Luke went on to write of Him,

**“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” (Acts 1:4).**

Well, wait a minute! Didn’t He just tell them to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15)? Wasn’t that order included in the commandments He gave “unto the apostles whom He had chosen” (Acts 1:2), the instructions He gave them just before ascending into heaven? Well yes, but here we learn that there was something they had to wait for before carrying out that instruction, something the Lord called “the promise of the Father.” And we don’t have to guess as to what that was, for we know what He said when He promised it:

**“And, behold, *I send the promise of my Father upon you:* but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, *until ye be endued with power from on high”* (Luke 24:49).**

The promise of the Father was a promise of *power.* And we know how God planned to give them that power, for the Lord went on in our text passage to say.

**“But ye shall receive power, *after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you…”* (Acts 1:8).**

The power that the Lord was telling them to wait for was the power they received when they were filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4). At Pentecost, disciples like Stephen were filled with the Spirit and given the “power” to do “great wonders and miracles” (Acts 6:5,8). The reason they neededthe power to do mighty *works* was to confirm the *words* they were preaching. After receiving that power, we read,

**“And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, *and confirming the word with signs following”* (Mark 16:20).**

Now here we have a dispensational difference. God hasn’t promised *you* that kind of power. You can tarry in Jerusalem all you want, and you will not be endued with power from on high. I know that churches often hold what they call “tarrying meetings,” where they get together to wait for the Spirit to come upon them, but no one today receives that kind of power from the Spirit, simply because the Father didn’t promise it to members of the Body of Christ, living in the dispensation of grace.

If you want to confirm the power of God’s Word today, you have to do it by demonstrating God’s power in your life. When you display God’s *patience* in the midst of your difficult circumstances, you exhibit the power of God in a powerful way. When difficult *people* tax your patience, you can display the power of God mightily by exhibiting His *longsuffering.* You can also show the power of God’s *holiness* when you are tempted to sin and you resist the temptation steadfastly. If you want to talk about demonstrating the power of God, *that’s how it’s done in this dispensation.*

But the filling of the Holy Ghost didn’t just give the disciples the power to work miracles. It gave them another kind of power, the kind the Spirit gave the prophet Micah in ancient Israel:

**“*But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD*, and of judgment, and of might, *to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin”* (Micah 3:8).**

Do you have any idea how much power it takes to stand in front of a bunch of unsaved Jews, who think they’re the favored people of God just because they were born the seed of Abraham, and tell them how sinful they are? Micah knew! And so did men like Stephen and the twelve apostles.

You see, that was the message they were sent to preach. They were sent to *charge* the people of Israel with the death of Christ, and *threaten* them with His resurrection. They were sent to say, as it were, “You killed Him, but He rose from the dead, and now He’s angry with you, so you’d better repent!”

Now here we have yet *another* dispensational difference. It’s not up to us to show the nation of Israel her sins, or any other nation for that matter—including the nation in which we live! Though you wouldn’t know that from the way most of Christianity conducts itself, by going around pointing out how sinful our nation is when she legalizes things like abortion and gay marriage. All that does is make people *hate* Christianity, and turn a deaf ear to the gospel we proclaim. Our job is to show *individuals* their sins. All *that* does is help people to see their need of a Savior. That means if you want to fix what’s wrong with our nation, don’t become a political activist. Become an evangelist and change the nation by changing the hearts of men.

As we read on in our text, we see further evidence that the promise of the Father was the Holy Ghost.

**“For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:5).**

Did you notice that the Lord called the coming of the Holy Ghost as a *baptism?* Most people think there is only one kind of baptism, and it involves water in some way, shape or form. But there are baptisms in the Bible that have nothing to do with water, and this is one of them.

The reason the people of Israel to whom the Lord ministered needed *two* baptisms is found in God’s promise to them in Exodus 19:6, where He told them:

**“…ye shall be unto me *a kingdom of priests,* and an holy nation”**

For men to qualify for the priesthood in Israel, they needed two baptisms. The first one involved water:

**“…this is the thing that thou shalt do to hallow them, to minister to me in the priest’s office…*wash them with water”* (Exodus 29:,4).**

This is one of the reasons the Lord baptized the people of Israel. When He announced that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, He meant the kingdom *in which the Jews would be “kings and priests”* (Rev. 1:6; 5:10). He then washed them with water so they could *qualify* as priests.

But there was *another* baptism that priests in Israel were required to undergo to be initiated into the priesthood, one that God went on to talk about in that same passage:

**“Then shalt thou take *the anointing oil,* and pour it upon his head, *and anoint him”* (Exodus 29:7).**

We know that oil is a type of the Holy Spirit for, in speaking of David, we read that

**“Samuel took the horn of *oil*, and *anointed* him in the midst of his brethren*: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward”* (I Samuel 16:13).**

See the connection? Samuel anointed him with *oil,* after which *the Spirit* came upon him.

But when Old Testament Levites had to be baptized with water and oil to be priests to the rest of the tribes of Israel, that was a type of how all New Testament Jews had to be baptized with water and the Spirit to be God’s priests to the rest of the world.

But as you know, the people of Israel responded to Peter’s offer of the kingdom (Acts 3:19) with a resounding *no* when they stoned Stephen, a man filled with the Holy Ghost. And we see this reflected in the varied manners in which Luke addressed Theophilus.

Did you notice he addressed him as “most excellent” in the introduction to his gospel (Luke 1:3). That was how men of rank and position were addressed in those days. In speaking to such a man, a Roman captain wrote,

**“Claudius Lysias unto *the most excellent governor Felix* sendeth greeting” (Acts 23:26).**

This tells us that Theophilus was a man of some authority in the Roman empire. Luke addressed him as such in his gospel, for he sought to lead him to believe on the Lord. I mean, if Luke wrote him to help him “know the certainty” of the truth about the Lord, that indicates that Theophilus was *uncertain* that He was their Christ. But in writing him *another* treatise about what the Lord *continued* to do and teach through His apostles, it would seem that Theophilus had believed on the Lord. That would explain why he didn’t feel the need to address him as “most excellent,” now that they were brethren.

But I see in this a type of the people of Israel, the friends of God. During the time the Lord was in their midst, they were most excellent in the eyes of God, so that’s how Luke addressed Theophilus in his gospel. But after they crucified their messiah, they had lost some of that excellence, so Luke doesn’t address Theophilus that way in his introduction to the Book of Acts.

As we continue our study of Acts, we shall see that the people of Israel would be given one more chance to get their excellence back, through the ministry of the twelve apostles.