

## **1. The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction**

*The Acts of the Apostles* begins with Luke restating the purpose of his former book, *The Gospel According to Luke*. In Acts 1:1-2, Luke wrote: "1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen." The instructions that he gave were to his apostles—eleven in number, with the death of Judas. This focus on the apostles becomes more important, since in modern times, powers given only to them are widely ascribed to others. The empowerment of modern ecclesiastical hierarchies comes directly from efforts through the centuries to usurp these powers and authorities given only to the apostles of Christ.

### **Convincing Proofs of the Resurrection of Christ**

In Acts 1:3, Luke describes the empirical nature of Christ's appearance after his resurrection and his giving of many convincing proofs: "3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive." Luke spoke of these same empirical proofs in Luke 1:1-2: "1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word." Christ showed himself and eyewitnesses saw. In 1 Cor 15:3-8, Paul summarized the power and nature of this eyewitness testimony upon which the truth of the resurrection stands:

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

In addition to Paul, Peter and John claimed the power of eyewitness testimony as convincing proofs of the resurrection of the Son of God. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:16-18:

16 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

John agreed with Peter and Paul in establishing the convincing proofs of eyewitness testimony in 1 John 1:1-3:

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.

When discussing the proofs of the resurrection, Luke claims certainty in his “convincing proofs.” In Luke 1:3-4, he wrote:

3 Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the **certainty of the things** you have been taught [Emphasis added].

In all human affairs, proofs achieve three levels of credibility: It is *possible* that the Lord rose from the dead. It is *probable* that Jesus rose from the dead. It is *certain* that Jesus rose from the dead. In Luke 24, Luke adds his own accumulation of witnesses to testify that Christ rose from the dead.

### ***The Lord Appears and Opens the Scriptures to the Apostles***

To all these witnesses, the Lord himself called on the power of the prophets to prove of a certainty that he who was dead is now alive. Luke recorded his words in Luke 24:25-27:

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Two men on the road to Emmaus were eyewitness to his appearance and to the fact that he had opened the scriptures to them. In Luke 24:30-32, he eats with them:

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

In Luke 24:45-49, the Lord again opened the minds of the apostles so that they could understand the scriptures. In these few words, he defined the gospel—his death and resurrection—and told them the mission to come—repentance and the remission of sins to be preached by his authority to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Significantly, Jesus said, “You are witnesses of these things.”

### ***Luke Documents a Number of Eyewitnesses as Convincing Proof***

Luke 24 documents a number of eyewitnesses who stand as contemporary and convincing proof that Jesus rose from the dead. In Luke 24:5-8, the angels testify of his resurrection to the women who had brought spices to his tomb:

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 'The Son of Man

must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again." 8 Then they remembered his words.

These women—three named with others unnamed--were enough witnesses to establish the certainty of the event. They related the news to the apostles who remained skeptical about the certainty of the event. Luke recorded in Luke 24:9-11

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

They thought what the women said was nonsense, not accepting even the possibility of the truth of the resurrection. Peter was provoked to wonder what had happen when he saw the empty tomb and strips of linen in Luke 24:12: "12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened." Nonsense turns to *possibility*.

Luke 24:13-32 is a narrative of the appearance of Christ to two disciples where *possibility* of the resurrection turns to *probability*. In verses 13-16, Jesus appears to them, but they are kept from recognizing him. In verses 19 to 24, they discuss with the Lord the *possibility* of the resurrection of the Lord, concluding their account of the events with the women and Peter by saying,

"22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

In the verses following this episode, the two witnesses became to understand the certain truth of Jesus' resurrection. First, Jesus conveyed the teaching of the prophets in verses 25-27:

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Second, Jesus opened their eyes and they recognized him in verses 30-32:

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

It is with these events that the two disciples become *certain* of the resurrection of Jesus, for when they return to the apostles, they say in Luke 24:34, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."

Here, Jesus appears to the apostles and provides them with empirical evidence that he is alive. Luke records this evidence in Luke 24:37-43:

37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

Finally, they became actual witnesses of his ascension—an event that Luke will return to in Acts 1—recorded in Luke 24:50-53:

50 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. 52 Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

### ***Theme of Acts of the Apostles***

These are the convincing proofs of the former book, the gospel according to Luke. Acts of the Apostles begins with these events and unfolds the gospel story as it spreads through out the world. Just as the Gospel of Luke was about what Jesus began to do and teach, so Acts of the Apostles is about what the church of the first century did and taught. A study of Acts presents convincing proofs of what the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must believe and practice. Acts 1 begins where Luke 24 leaves off.