

Israel's Redemption

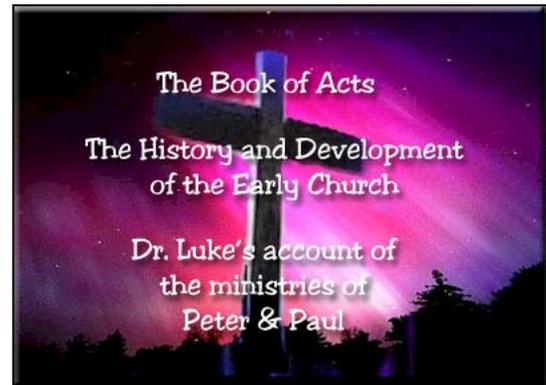
[Acts 1:1-6](#)



We begin a new study today in the book of Acts. Imagine what it would be like if the Book of Acts were missing. You would pick up your Bible and see the ministry of Jesus ending in the Gospels; next you would read about a guy named Paul writing to followers of Jesus in Rome. Who was Paul? How did the gospel get from Jerusalem to Rome? What happened to the kingdom of God that Jesus said was at hand? The Book of Acts answers these questions.

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, (Acts 1:1 NASB)

Who wrote this book? That is one of the first questions that we need to seek to answer. *“The first account I composed”*—this refers to what? The NIV says, *“In my former book.”* This refers to the Gospel of Luke. The Book of Acts is the **second volume** of a two part work, the first volume being the Gospel of Luke.



Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4 NASB)

The first thing I want us to see here is that Luke writes as a historian. Luke most likely personally interviewed Mary and as a result he writes a lengthy narrative of the birth of Jesus. My most basic presupposition is that the Bible is the Word of God. It was God who caused Luke to write the gospel of Luke and Acts. That said I want you to understand something here; from a secular perspective Luke has been esteemed as the most accurate historian of the ancient world. That is because his work has been checked out more closely than any other historian.

Early in the twentieth century a British scholar by the name of [William Ramsay](#) who was a skeptic of Christianity set out to trace the missionary journeys of Paul as recorded in Acts. He traveled widely in Asia Minor and rapidly became the recognized authority on all matters relating to the districts associated with Paul's missionary journeys and on Christianity in the early Roman Empire. He was known for his expertise in the historic geography and topography of Asia Minor and of its political, social, cultural and religious history. [Ramsay](#) started out a skeptic and ended up a believer because he was overwhelmed by the evidence they were able to uncover. *“Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense . . . In short this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.”*

Luke claims to *“having investigated everything carefully from the beginning”* ([Luke 1:3](#)) and to be concerned that his sources were both eyewitnesses and Christian teachers ([Luke 1:2](#)). This indicates a determination to arrive at the facts, and to do it on the basis of what actually happened specifically from a Christian viewpoint. He is not therefore to be looked on as someone who just writes about things without taking the trouble to check his sources. He brings historical truth.

In the mid 1960's, [A.N. Sherwin-White](#), an expert in Graeco-Roman history from Oxford, wrote about Acts: *“The historical framework is exact. In terms of time and place the details are precise and correct . . . As documents these narratives belong to the same historical series as the record of provincial and imperial trials in epigraphical and literary sources of the first and early second centuries AD . . . For Acts the confirmation of historicity is*

overwhelming . . . Any attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted."

Luke wants us to know that he has written on the basis of the strongest testimony possible. Luke did a lot of investigating, interviewing and actual traveling to give an accurate account of the Christian faith. Luke's account has been thoroughly checked out and found to be impeccable. And given his accuracy where we can prove it, we have good grounds for accepting that he will be accurate where we cannot prove it.

Who was Luke? What can you tell me about Luke? It appears, from his being distinguished by Paul, in [Colossians 4:11-14](#), from those "of the circumcision," that he was a **Gentile**. In [Colossians 4:14](#) Paul calls him "*the beloved physician.*" We meet him for the first time in Troas where he joins Paul and Silas and Timothy on the second missionary journey:

And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (Acts 16:10 NASB)

Notice the "we". He may have been converted there and joined the missionary team. He traveled with Paul for years and went with him finally to Rome where Paul died. During his final imprisonment in Rome Luke was by his side:

Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. (2 Timothy 4:11 NASB)

All these years in all these travels, including two years in Palestine, Luke is taking notes about the works and words of Jesus and the progress of the church. Finally God moves him to write a two-volume work.

If you were to ask people which New Testament writer wrote the largest portion of the New Testament, most people would say Paul. But the answer is not Paul, but Luke. If you take the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, Luke wrote more of the New Testament than any other one writer.

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, (Acts 1:1 NASB)

To whom was this book written? Luke is writing to **Theophilus**. The name Theophilus was a common one it means: "*friend or lover of God.*" Or it can mean: "*One who is loved by God.*" Because of this some have suggested that it was a pseudonym. I think it is better to see him as a real person. Theophilus might have been a Roman official being briefed by Luke about the history of the Christian movement. He may have been a high-ranking Roman official because Luke referred to him as "*most excellent Theophilus*" (Luke 1:3). The term excellent is also used in the Bible in reference to Felix and Festus, who were Roman governors ([Acts 23:26, 26:25](#)). In the ancient world often major publications were dedicated to members of the nobility, even when the intention was that the treatise should be read widely (Josephus makes a similar ascription in [Contra Apion](#)).

Theophilus had more of the sacred writings of the New Testament written for and sent to him than any other person or even collection of persons, including the people and churches to which Paul addressed his Epistles.

When did Luke write this book? The book ends with Paul in Rome. The Romans had arrested him. Luke does not say what happened to Paul next. So, many students think that Luke completed Acts very soon after this. Also, he said nothing about the Emperor Nero, who killed many Christians in A.D. 64. Luke had probably finished the book around **A.D. 62**.

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, (Acts 1:1 NASB)

The word "*began*" here is worthy of note. The implication is that Jesus ministry will now continue through the

teaching of the Apostles. The Gospel leads up to His resurrection and ascension. The Acts starts from those glorious facts and develops their consequences.

Up to this point all our questions were easily answered but now comes a difficult one:

Why did Luke write Acts? What is this book about? What is its major theme?

It is often stated that the book is misnamed because it really concentrates on Peter and Paul and is not about the “Acts of the Apostles”.

Alexander McLaren writes, *“The book, then, is misnamed Acts of the Apostles, both because the greater number of the Apostles do nothing in it, and because, in accordance with the hint of the first verse, Christ Himself is the doer of all.”*

The charismatic and Pentecostal Christians make Acts their textbook, declaring that it is about the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit. The claim if it happened in the book of Acts it should happen today. You may want to look at [Acts 5](#) and the death of Ananias and Sapphira for lying before you say this book is the norm for the church.

Some have said that Luke’s purpose is stated in:

but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8 NASB)

They say he wanted the world to know that Jesus’ words and God’s purposes were being fulfilled. I think this is true. Luke wants everyone to know that Jesus’ words and God’s purposes were being fulfilled. But I think his theme is even more specific than this.

The prolog of this book acts as a preface and the preface is setting before us the preview of the author. I think that Luke does this in:

And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6 NASB)

I think that this book is about the ***“Redemption of Israel.”*** I’m indebted to Don Preston for showing me this marvelous truth. We will develop this theme throughout our study but let me try to show you what I mean. God had promised His people Israel that He would redeem them:

Zion will be redeemed with justice, And her repentant ones with righteousness. (Isaiah 1:27 NASB)

As the gospels end Jesus has been rejected by Israel. Then the writings of the New Testament are written to the Church:

to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: (1 Corinthians 1:2 NASB)

So the question is, What happened to Israel? What about all the promises God made to Israel? The book of Acts answers those questions.

Look with me at what Paul said to the Galatians:

So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. ⁴

But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,⁵ in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:3-5 NASB)

Paul says in verse 5 that Christ came to redeem those under the Law. That is a reference to Israel. Christ came to redeem Israel and this is what we will see Him do in our study of the book of Acts.

Before we move on in the text let me say here that a key to understanding Acts is to see that it is a transitional book, showing how the worship of God moved from the physical Jewish temple, to the spiritual temple of God the church. Jesus told the Jewish leaders:

"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it. (Matthew 21:43 NASB)

Acts shows us the transition that lasted from the death of Jesus to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, which fulfilled Jesus' prophecy.

While God obviously can and does work miracles today (after all, He is God!), to claim as some do that miracles should happen today with the same frequency as in Acts is to miss the transitional nature of the book. God had a special purpose for miracles, to authenticate the apostles within this transition period.

Alright now that we know **who** wrote Acts–Luke, and to **whom** it was written–Theophilus, and we know **when** it was written–around A.D. 62, and we know **why** it was written–to show us the fulfillment of God's promises in the redemption of Israel, let's now examine the text.

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach,² until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. (Acts 1:1-2 NASB)

Jesus Christ sovereignly chose them, first to salvation, and then to apostleship. The word "apostle" means: "sent one". They were men under authority, laboring as bondservants. They were not entrepreneurs, building their own empires. They did not make up or preach their own message. Rather, they were witnesses, relaying to others what they had seen and heard.

We'll see as we go through Acts that Luke puts a distinct emphasis on the sovereignty of God in the progress of the gospel. This is especially seen in:

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48 NASB)

Those, and only those, that God had appointed to eternal life believed.

To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3 NASB)

"To these"—refers to the apostles. Here Luke stresses the great and central fact of Christian faith: **Jesus alive!** That incomparable fact is what separates Christianity from all religions. Jesus alive, He has risen from the dead!

Christ showed Himself to the apostles so they would know He had conquered death. One of the greatest proofs of the resurrection is the early church's boldness and commitment in preaching about Christ. The apostles were confident because they had seen Christ in His resurrection glory. Had that not happened, they would have gone back to the

routine of life and quit advocating Christianity.

There is a list of the people Christ appeared to in:

and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷ then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸ and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. (1 Corinthians 15:5-8 NASB)

There were more than five hundred people who had seen the resurrected Jesus, and most of them were alive some twenty-five years later in the days of Paul! Those appearances convinced Christ's followers that the Lord had indeed risen.

The word "appearing" in Acts 1:3 is the Greek word *optanomai* [o'p-ra/w], [op-tan'-om-ahee] from which we get our word, ophthalmia, i.e., *the word for the eye, or literally, the eyeball*. If we were to use the modern vernacular, what Luke says is, these disciples "eyeballed" him for forty days. They saw him again and again, not merely once, but many times during this period.

In Luke's gospel in chapter 24 we learn in more detail what Jesus taught them when He was *"appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God."* But we learn here a fact not mentioned there: that the time from the resurrection to the ascension was forty days. To a Hebrew thinker what does the number "forty" represent? Of all the types and shadows of the First Testament, none is as pervasive, and therefore important, as the shadows revealed in the relationship between "forty" and the fulfillment of promises.

It may well be that Luke intends us to see in the reference to forty days a reminder that when Moses went to meet God in Mount Sinai in order to receive the covenant he did it twice for *"forty days"*. Here then was the present equivalent, with the disciples meeting with Jesus over a period of forty days, resulting in their officially receiving the new covenant in His blood, through which would result the establishment of God's Kingdom.

There may also be a connection here to the 12 spies who searched out the promise land for 40 days, learning about its blessings, and then they enter a forty year testing period before entering the promised land of Canaan. Here Jesus teaches the 12 for forty days about the blessing of the Kingdom of God and then they enter a forty year testing period before entering the promised land of the fully consummated Kingdom of God.

Luke is giving us here "exodus topology." One of the first lessons a student of types and shadows will learn is the lofty place given to the Exodus out of Egypt. It is this event which presents the clearest correspondences to the redemptive work of Christ and the time-frame of its fulfillment.

To be more specific, the exodus out of Egypt and into the Promised Land by the children of Israel under Moses is a direct shadow of the exodus of the New Testament generation from the cross to the entrance into the eternal land of rest—the kingdom of God.

There are two forty year exodus periods. The first exodus period is one familiar to all of us. Israel, after the flesh, was removed from bondage to Egypt at Passover, and they were put in the wilderness on a physical journey to a physical promised land. Now, the more important, the anti-type, is the spiritual exodus. This exodus runs from the Cross to A.D. 70. In this exodus, Israel, after the Spirit, left its bondage to the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2) and begins a forty year spiritual journey to a spiritual inheritance; the Kingdom of God or the New Heavens and New Earth.

What were Jesus and the disciples doing during this forty day period?

To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to

them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3 NASB)

During this forty day period Jesus was teaching them about the kingdom of God. Let's go to Luke 24 and see something very important that happened during this forty day period. Do you understand that volume one and volume two overlap by 40 days? So Luke tells us about the last words and the Ascension of Jesus twice—at the end of the gospel and at the beginning of Acts.

Jesus had just met with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. When Jesus left them they went back to Jerusalem:

And they arose that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, (Luke 24:33 NASB)

So we have the two disciples from the road to Emmaus, the eleven and others who were with them gathered together and Jesus appears to them and says:

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (Luke 24:44 NASB)

Here Jesus uses the Hebrew three fold division of the First Testament. The Law of Moses is the [Torah](#). The Prophets is the [Nevi'im](#), and the Psalms is the [Ketuvim](#). Together they make up the [Tanakh](#) what we call the First Testament. Now notice carefully the next verse:

Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, (Luke 24:45 NASB)

What is the first thing that jumps out at you from this verse? This shows us the deity of Christ, that He had the power to open the minds of men to understand what before had been hidden or confusing to them.

The Greek word for “opened” is [dianoigo](#), [dee-an-oy'-go] which means: “to open thoroughly.” This is the same word used by Luke in:

And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened [[dianoigo](#)], her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. (Acts 16:14 NASB)

Lydia responded because the Lord opened her heart.

“He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures”—the word “understand” is the Greek word [suniemi](#), [soon-ee'-ay-mee] which means: “*to put together, i.e. (mentally) to comprehend.*” It is the same word used in:

THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; (Romans 3:11 NASB)

No one understands the things of God unless God opens their understanding.

The Bible reveals to us things that are spiritually discerned, which the natural man, the man without the Spirit, cannot understand:

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Corinthians 2:14 NASB)

Paul said this again in:

But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. (2 Corinthians 3:14 NASB)

Unless Christ removes the veil, opens the understanding, we will not understand His Word. Salvation is a sovereign act of God. The Gospel is; God saves sinners!

So during the forty days that Jesus spent with His disciples He opened their understanding so they could know the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures.

and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ "You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:46-49 NASB)

He opened their minds to understand his suffering, death, and resurrection, taught in the Hebrew scriptures. [Psalms 22, 34](#); and [Isaiah 53:1-9](#), for example, show that Christ must suffer for the sins of mankind. [Psalms 2, 16, 68, 110](#); [Jonah 1:17](#); and [Hosea 6:2](#) show that Christ must be raised from the dead.

Let's go back to Acts:

To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3 NASB)

So Luke tells us in [Luke 24:45](#), that Jesus ***opened their minds to understand the Scriptures*** and he tells us in Acts 1 that during this time he was teaching them about the kingdom of God. So would you think that they now have a correct understanding about the kingdom of God? I would think so!

The disciples had been so slow of heart to understand and believe during the ministry of Jesus on the earth. Now they needed a crash course in post-resurrection kingdom theology. So Jesus answered their questions. What were the promises of the First Testament really all about? In what sense had the kingdom really come in the ministry of Jesus? How would the kingdom show itself now in the life and ministry of the church?

And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:4-5 NASB)

What was the promise of the Father? Wait before we answer that let's back up a bit and ask another question, The promise of the Father to whom? There is only one answer, it is **Israel**. John the baptizer told his audiences that while he baptized with water, Jesus would baptize men with the Holy Spirit and with fire. This was the "promise of the Father" for which they were now commanded to wait. It would not be many days before this would come to pass.

The prophets had declared that in the final days the Spirit would be poured out like rain from above:

"But now listen, O Jacob, My servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: ² Thus says the LORD who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you, 'Do not fear, O Jacob My servant; and you Jeshurun whom I have chosen. ³ 'For I will pour out water on the thirsty land And streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring, And My blessing on your descendants; (Isaiah 44:1-3 NASB)

"And it will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. (Joel 2:28 NASB)

Remember these disciples have much of the Tanakh memorized, and they have just had their minds opened by Jesus to understand the kingdom of God. Jesus tells them to wait for the promise of the pouring out of the Spirit which they know happens in the last days and brings in the kingdom of God. So in their final question to Jesus before His ascension is:

And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6 NASB)

Now here almost without exception the commentators accuse the disciples of still looking for a physical, national kingdom for Israel.

One commentator writes, *"Their misconceptions consisted in the expectation that Christ would re-establish the earthly kingdom of Israel, and restore it to its ancient glory, under its own personal reign."*

Bob Deffinbaugh writes, *"I am not certain their motivation for wanting the kingdom to come was much different than it was during the earthly ministry of our Lord. Perhaps the disciples were still thinking of power and position and prestige. It isn't impossible. It would seem that the disciples were preoccupied with the kingdom, a "Jewish" kingdom."*

John Calvin writes, *"Marvelous is their rudeness, that when as they had been diligently instructed by the space of three whole years, they betray no less ignorance than if they had heard never a word. There are as many errors in this question as words."*

Remember what happened during the forty days of Christ teaching them about the kingdom of God?

Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, (Luke 24:45 NASB)

Their question was about time. When Lord? Everyone wants to add "national and ethnic" to the disciple's words. But that is not what the text says. They understood the kingdom, Jesus had taught them about it for forty days and he open their understanding, they just wanted to know when?

These disciples are not confused at all. When they hear the promise of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, they ask in verse 6, ***"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"*** In other words they knew that the First Testament promise of the outpouring of God's Spirit was a promise for the last days when God would establish his kingdom on the earth and restore His people. For example, in Ezekiel says:

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I shall be jealous for My holy name...."²⁹ "And I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 39:25, 29 NASB)

So when Jesus says that the long awaited outpouring of the Spirit—the baptism with the Holy Spirit—is just a few days away, they would naturally ask for a clarification: "Do you mean the end is that close? The final kingdom is about to be established in just a matter of weeks or months?" This was not a foolish question, remember what Jesus had taught them at the Last Supper?

and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you³⁰ that you may eat and drink at My

table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 22:29-30 NASB)

In other words Jesus had told them that the kingdom would be restored to Israel—they themselves would sit on thrones as rulers along with the Son of Man over a redeemed and believing Israel. And they knew from the First Testament ([Ezekiel 39:29](#); [Isaiah 32:15](#); [44:3–5](#); [Joel 2:28ff.](#); [Zechariah 12:10](#)) that this restoration was going to be the result of a great outpouring of God's Spirit. So it is not a foolish question to ask, "Do you mean the redemption of Israel is soon to follow?"

And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6 NASB)

This is what the book of Acts is all about—the redemption of Israel. As the gospel's end, Jesus has been rejected by the Jewish leadership and they have put Him to death. They killed their Messiah so now what happens to all the promises made to Israel? We'll see as we study our way through the book of Acts.

This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on March 9, 2008. Media #406.



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