

Acts of the Apostles

Week 2 – Acts 1:1-26

Jesus Taken Up Into Heaven (1:1-11)

- Luke addresses his second book to Theophilus, a wealthy Christian, who may have financed both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.
- Luke's thesis includes the idea that the apostles will continue the Jesus story through the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - o In most of Acts, the word Apostles is used for the Twelve, but it is also used of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14). An apostle is an agent sent on behalf of another.
 - o Jesus spends time with the apostles preparing them to be agents on his behalf.
 - The forty days that Jesus spent with the apostles mirrors the forty days he spent in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4:2).
 - During these forty days, Jesus taught them about the kingdom of God (v 3).
 - Their time with Jesus was meant to increase their knowledge about the kingdom and their faith in the resurrected Jesus. Jesus appeared to and ate with the disciples providing additional evidence that he had bodily risen from the grave (see also Luke 24:38-43). He was not a ghost or a spirit.
- Luke's emphasis upon the Holy Spirit's role in the life of the church cannot be overstated.
 - o Jesus commands the disciples to wait on the baptism of the Holy Spirit before heading out on the mission (vv 4-5).
 - o Jesus very clearly explains that the power of the ministry will come from the Spirit (v 8).
 - o Jesus clarifies that the role of the Spirit will be to enable their witness concerning Jesus to the ends of the earth (v 8).
- Luke's vision of the kingdom of God is also evident in the first few verses.
 - o Jesus's kingdom will not look like the kingdoms of this world.
 - o The disciples question indicates that they expected Jesus to restore Israel to greatness over the nations of the earth and install them as powerful government officials (see Luke 22:30).
 - o The kingdom will not appear through power, but through the disciples' witness, not through those who kill, but through those who are willing to be martyred for their faith (The word witness can also be translated martyr).
- Jesus's ascension of Jesus was necessary for the furthering of the mission.
 - o His ascension to glory confirms his vindication by the Father (Luke 22:69; 24:26; Acts 2:33).
 - o His ascension paves the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, Jesus can be near to each one of them, wherever they go.

- His ascension signals the start of the church's mission. This is why the angels ask the disciples to stop staring at the sky (v 11). The hour has come to turn their attention to the mission of the church.
- His ascension foreshadows his return. He will come back in the same way you saw him go (v 11).

Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas (1:12-26)

- As the early believers wait on the giving of the Spirit, they are in constant prayer (v 14).
- It is notable that Jesus's brothers have joined the group of believers.
 - They were hostile to Jesus at many points in his earthly ministry but have joined the faithful after the resurrection.
 - James, the brother of Jesus, will become a leading figure in the early church.
- Peter takes an early lead in the church (v 15) and provides counsel concerning Judas's betrayal of Jesus.
 - Peter views Judas's betrayal through the lens of scripture combining lines from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8.
 - Most scholars see verses 18-19 as an insertion by Luke and not a part of Peter's address.
 - His account is different than that in Matthew where Judas died by hanging (Matthew 27:3-10).
 - Luke or Matthew may be reporting on what was commonly said in Jerusalem and no attempt to harmonize the account is needed.
 - Those who wish to harmonize the accounts suggest that Judas hanged himself, but the rope broke and his body was ruptured by the fall.
 - Peter's words focus not on Judas's betrayal, but on what comes next – the choosing of another disciple to take Judas's place as one of the Twelve.
 - Jews of Jesus's day believed that God would one day restore the ten lost tribes of Israel.
 - By choosing twelve disciples, Jesus was symbolically reinstituting the nation of Israel.
 - The candidate must be someone who journeyed with Jesus throughout his whole ministry and who will bear witness of his resurrection (vv 21-22).
 - Two men qualify (Barsabbas and Matthias). Matthias is chosen through prayer and the casting of lots.
 - There is Old Testament precedent for the casting of lots (see Leviticus 16:8; Numbers 26:55).
 - Garland is probably right when he notes, "Casting lots belongs to the 'old era,' before Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit comes upon the community, which explains why this practice does not appear again in the New Testament" (22).

Sources

Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

David E. Garland, *Acts*, Teaching the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids MI: BakerBooks, 2017).

I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 1980).