

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Acts 1:1-5 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the passage. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

ACTS 1:1-5 ESV

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

STRUCTURE (through verse 11, which forms a single unit)

- I. Prologue: What Jesus began to do and teach before being "taken up" (1:1-3)
 - a. Address (Luke's second volume): to Theophilus and all God's friends (1:1)
 - b. Summary (Luke's first volume):
 - i. What Jesus *did* before being "taken up": choose apostles, give commands, suffer death, rise again, appear often (1:2-3a)
 - ii. What Jesus *taught* before being "taken up": the kingdom of God (1:3b)
- II. Introduction: What Jesus continues to do and teach since being "taken up" (1:4-11)
 - a. Jesus' ministry will continue by means of Spirit-empowered witnesses (1:4-8)
 - i. Commanded to wait for the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit (1:4-5)
 - ii. Confused about Israel's eschatological restoration (1:6)
 - iii. Received clarity about Israel's eschatological restoration (1:7-8)
 1. Timing: not for you to know
 2. Scope: not just Israel, but all nations
 3. Nature: not just political, but spiritual
 - b. Jesus' ministry will continue until the ascended Christ returns (1:9-11)
 - i. Jesus ascends – a cloud envelops Him, and the disciples witness it (1:9)
 - ii. Angels rebuke – until Christ returns, there's work to do (1:10-11)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

The introductory note to Theophilus sets the tone for what this book will be about: friendship with God (see comment on 1:1 below). Theophilus was a real person, and the book was truly addressed to him, but his name bears symbolic significance. It means "beloved of God," or "friend of God." The Book of Acts is about God extending His friendship to the ends of the earth. How does He do it? By means of Christ's redemption and the Spirit's empowerment. The two relate in this way: by means of Christ's ascension to David's throne, He then pours out His Spirit on the church, in order that we might extend His friendship to the ends of the earth (see Acts 2:29-33 for the relationship between Christ and the Spirit).

When the Holy Spirit arrives (note: the Spirit was always present in Old Testament times, but He was less operative in believers' lives; see Jhn. 7:39; 14:16-17, 26; 16:7), it is a greater event than the coming of John the Baptist who brought revival to all Israel, and who baptized in water for repentance. The "baptism of the Spirit"—which is the same as "when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (1:8)—is what empowers the church to fulfill her mission of extending friendship with God to the remotest parts of the world. The Holy Spirit is the One through whom our ascended King Jesus continues what He "began to do and teach" (1:1). Or more precisely, it is the Spirit's animation of Christ's body—the church—that causes us to effectively reach nations. Just as the body without the spirit is dead, the "church" without the Spirit is dead. O, that God might empower us by His Spirit to reach nations!

This promise of the Father would require them to wait and pray. God's sovereignty does not eliminate human responsibility. The Gospel would indeed, by the Father's decree, extend from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (cf. Isa. 2:2-3; Mic. 4:1-2). Nevertheless, the Father includes within His decree the cooperation of a praying

church. A praying church is an empowered church. And there was no use journeying outwardly before the Spirit had empowered them inwardly. The car must be filled with gas before it goes on a road trip.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,

—The first account is the Book of Luke; the second is the Book of Acts. Luke relates to what Jesus began to do and teach. Acts relates what Jesus continues to do and teach.

—In other words, this is not just a two-volume work about what Jesus did first, and what the apostles did afterward. Nor is it an appendix to the Jesus story. Rather, it is a two-volume work about what Jesus did before the ascension, and then what He continues to do afterward—through His Spirit-empowered church.

—There is no indicator from Luke that we should expect Jesus to “do less” now that He’s gone. Jesus Himself said He would do more because of the Holy Spirit. And He’s not dead; He’s alive. The Jesus who was “mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (Lk. 24:19) continues “to do and teach” through the church.

—“first book”: Luke’s first book was written about “the things that have been accomplished/fulfilled among us” (Lk. 1:1) on account of “eyewitnesses” (1:2), and of his own “orderly” investigation (1:3). Luke was a theologian (paying attention to OT fulfillment), a historian, and an educated doctor (cf. Col. 4:4). He was thus qualified to write this account.

— Theophilus:

- His name means dear to God or beloved of God or friend of God. Acts anticipates the future reading by all the “friends of God”, as a blueprint for deepening/expanding that friendship. Acts is the story of Christ’s original company of friends going forth to bear much fruit, fruit that remains (Jn. 15:16). It is a book of how the circle of divine friendship is enlarged by them. The book also shows how we—the friends of God—can continue enlarging that circle.
- We can discern from Luke’s first volume that Theophilus was a man of rank, for he calls him, “most excellent Theophilus” (Lk. 1:3). This same designation was given to royalty later in Acts (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25).

—Jesus doesn’t just teach; He does. And He doesn’t just do; He teaches. It’s important that the church both teaches and does. Oftentimes, we “teach” but we don’t “do”. Or if we “do”, we limit our actions to acts of service. Acts indicates that the church should be active both in acts of service and in acts of power. In fact, God intends that our acts of power *be* acts of service (cf. 1 Cor. 12-14).

—If someone was to ask, “What did Jesus DO when He walked the earth?” After reading the Gospels, one would conclude, “What Jesus did most was heal people and cast out demons.” This was in fact part of the disciples’ calling (Mk. 3:13-15). When He sent them out on mini-missions, He sent them to teach and demonstrate the kingdom. A church that does not emphasize and exercise healing power is not doing what Jesus did.

—If someone was to ask, “What did Jesus TEACH when He walked the earth?” He taught many things, but it could all be summed up as one thing: the kingdom of God (1:3). This was the revolutionary shift in redemptive history. Before Jesus came, prophets talked about the someday-kingdom; when Jesus came He continued to talk about the someday-kingdom, but He also talked about the right-now-kingdom. He preached, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). He exorcised spirits and said, “The Kingdom of heaven has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28).

—If a church is not healing people, casting out demons, and teaching the kingdom of God, it is not letting Jesus continue teaching and doing. It is instead teaching and doing its own agenda.

—WWJD usually means, “What ethical decision would Jesus make?” or “How would Jesus humbly serve people?” We have turned Jesus into a good teacher and humble servant—and He is those things for sure. But He was also a healer and miracle worker. We think, “Oh, that was for Him, because He was special.” He was beyond special. But the same Spirit that He lived by, the church can live by. And lest we doubt what He intended, the church in the Book of Acts did all the things Jesus did. Not just teaching and humbly serving, but healing, casting out demons, and raising the dead. The church in America has (often) stripped the Holy Spirit of what He was given for, removed every trace of supernatural empowerment, and turned Him into an energy force that rubber stamps what we would’ve done without Him.

—The sequence of “do and teach” is significant. We “do” first, and teaching flows out of that. We earn the right to be heard by living like Jesus lived.

—This book may well have been called, “The Acts of the Risen Christ”. It is a book about how Jesus continues to “act” *through* His church, and *from* the Father’s right hand.

2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

—These orders were given by Jesus, by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit, just as the Apostles would soon be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Again, there is continuity between the life of Jesus and the life of the church. That continuity is the Holy Spirit. If we want to “teach” and “do” like Jesus, we must have the Spirit.

—The “day” is mentioned again in 1:9-11 and frames the introduction. Luke aims to show that in between “the day when Jesus was taken up” (1:2) and the day when Jesus returns in precisely the same manner that “He was taken up” (1:11)—the church has a mission to fulfill. The Spirit-empowered great commission rests between the two mentions of Jesus’ ascension. Without the ascension, the Holy Spirit is not given (2:33). This agrees with what Jesus has said elsewhere:

- *John 14: 12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. 15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*
- *John 14:25 "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*
- *John 15: 26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.*
- *John 16:7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.*

—The “orders” Jesus gave are captured in 1:4 and 8. To wait for the promise of the Spirit in Jerusalem. The church was not planned by the disciples as a practical post-ascension program; it was a result of their obedience to God’s commands. Our responsibility as the people of God is not to devise the best strategies, but to listen and obey God. The outpouring of Pentecost cannot be manufactured.

—“apostles”:

- The first mention of the disciples in Acts is as “apostles” (sent ones). This title is mentioned 6 times in Luke, but 30 in Acts. The Christian church is based on both divine commandment and divine commission.
- The apostles are a major focus of the introduction. Luke wants us to know that they saw “convincing proofs” (1:3), that they prayed with one mind in obedience to Jesus (1:12-14), that they have learned from Jesus how to interpret Scripture (1:20), that all of them spent loads of time with Jesus (1:21-23), and that God sovereignly chose them (1:24-26).
- Since the theme of the book is the apostolic witness of the church, it makes sense that Luke is at pains to depict their credibility.

—These orders would have been hard to follow. Jerusalem is where Jesus was just crucified. The soldiers’ story that they’d stolen the body would’ve circulated widely. It was not a safe place to be! Still today, the power of Pentecost requires us to drop our safety net. Following Jesus is just that way (cf. Matt. 4; Mark 1).

—Stott: After describing the ascension of Jesus as a “watershed” moment, he proceeds: “Not only did it conclude Luke’s first book and introduce his second (1:9), but it ended Jesus’ earthly ministry and launched his heavenly ministry.”

—Stott: “Luke’s first two verses are, therefore, extremely significant. It is no exaggeration to say that they set Christianity apart from all other religions. These regard their founder as having completed his ministry during his lifetime; Luke says Jesus only began His.”

3 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.

—Luke is concerned with two things here: (1) establishing the fact of the resurrection, and (2) revealing the priority of Jesus. These go together: considering Jesus is alive, we should weigh very seriously the things He said.

—Jesus’ concern was to speak of “the kingdom of God”. This means the reign of God on the earth. God always reigned over all things, but through Jesus, He fulfilled His desire to rule through man (cf. Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8). When Jesus rose, He said, “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). This very day, He is “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5). Jesus presently reigns in the midst of enemies (Ps. 110:1), but one day He will reign, uncontested (Rev. 11:15-19).

—There is clearly a connection between the Spirit and the Kingdom. We see that connection here, in that Jesus spent His 40 days talking about the Kingdom, and when He's actually quoted, He talks about the Spirit.

—We also see it in Matthew 12:28: *"If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."* The Spirit empowers us to extend God's reign. This explains why—when the Apostles want to talk about God's political reign on the earth—Jesus talks about the Spirit empowering them to be witnesses. Jesus' point is, "If you want to see God's reign on the earth, then here's how it happens: by the Spirit empowering you to be witnesses."

—Both the kingdom of God and the Spirit of God capture the essence of the New Age of Redemptive History in which we live. In times past, they spoke of the Kingdom as a distant reality, but when Jesus came, He declared it was "at hand"—within reach; here and fast approaching. In times past, they longed for a greater manifestation of the Spirit (Num. 11; Joel 2), but in our age, that manifestation is here and now!

—There are 8 references to the kingdom of God in Acts, and two are in the first six verses (1:3, 6). Since this is an introduction, it means that it is an incredibly important theme for the rest of the book. Reinforcing this conclusion is the repetition of the kingdom in the final verse of Acts: *"proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance"* (28:31). Since the "kingdom of God" frames the narrative, appearing prominently in both the introduction and the conclusion, it suggests that the entirety of the Book of Acts is devoted to this subject. This is not just a sequel to Luke. It is an explanation for how the kingdom of God will continue to expand now that Jesus has ascended to heaven. Luke's answer is that Jesus ascended, not just to rest, but to reign. Jesus reigns on the throne of His father David, in fulfillment of the promises, and from that place, He immerses His church in the Holy Spirit, in order that we might expand His reign to the ends of the earth.

—Since Jesus' ascension relates to His reign (Acts 2:33-36), there is a direct correlation between Jesus' instruction about the kingdom of God (1:3) and his own kingship.

—Schnabel: "Luke regularly summarizes the content of the apostolic preaching in terms of 'the kingdom of God' (8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23). The teaching 'about the Lord Jesus Christ' (28:31b) and the 'kingdom of God' (28:31a) are so closely associated (cf. 8:12) that they seem to be interchangeable."

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

—"And": this word connects what Jesus soon says about the Spirit with what He just said about the kingdom. Again, God extends His kingdom on the earth through Spirit-empowered witnesses.

—"John baptized with water..."

- Swindoll: "In Judaism, a new convert was ceremonially immersed in pure water after attending classes to learn the Hebrew language, study Hebrew history and culture, and most importantly, learn the Law of Moses. After passing an examination, the males were circumcised, and all converts were baptized. The symbol of baptism became a figurative once-for-all cleansing from sin before entering the Hebrew covenant community. To be 'baptized into' Judaism was to become a 'son of the covenant' along with natural-born Jews. John the Baptizer then gave the rite of Gentile baptism a new application. He called Jews to a baptism of repentance, saying, in effect, 'because of your sin, you are outside of Abraham's covenant with God—unclean! You must repent like a Gentile and come to God as if for the first time.'"

— Jesus had already told them many times, "It is better for you that I go away". John makes it clear in his Gospel that the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified (Jn. 7:39). The gift of the Spirit is the Promise of the Father, made possible because of the sacrifice of the Son. Jesus purchased the gift in His blood. Because He was the propitiation for our sins, we became pure temples, able to replace those temples constructed by human hands. Now the Spirit is able to inhabit each of us individually, and all of us corporately. Now the church—people—we are the Temple where the Spirit of God dwells. Jesus accomplished it. But He had to ascend to heaven, to leave the disciples, to make that gift available. As long as Jesus was with them physically, He was the gift. Once He departed, His Spirit was the gift. And He would no longer be limited by geography, as He was when He walked the earth.

—"promise of the Father": see Joel 2:28-32; Isa. 32:15-20; 44:3-5; Lk. 24:49.

—John had prophesied that the Messiah would baptize Israel in the Holy Spirit. The word "baptize" means "immerse," and it would have been understood as a cleansing that went deeper than Israel's external rituals—down to the heart. In short, John prophesied the restoration of Israel through the baptism of the Spirit. That Jesus recalls this promise means that He envisions the events of Pentecost as initiating that restoration.

—Acts 1:8 will clarify that once Israel is restored, she is free to fulfill her original design—to be a light to the nations. Not just Israel, but the ends of the earth, will be restored through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Come, Lord!

—Why did they need to all be together in one place, in Jerusalem, waiting?

- First, they needed to be in one place and of one mind because this is a huge theme in Acts: the Spirit blesses a unified church. See Acts 2:42-27; 4:23-31; 5:12-16; etc. Luke probably emphasizes this because the church is God's new temple, where believers come together as living stones, for God's Spirit to dwell (Eph. 2; 1 Pet. 2). Pentecostals are right to emphasize our need for praying and tarrying for God to move in power. I believe they are wrong, however, to insist that the baptism of the Spirit is subsequent to conversion. Paul teaches that it is simultaneous (1 Cor. 12:13).
- With regard to Jerusalem, there was first of all a practical reason: Pentecost. Jewish pilgrims would travel there from around the world, so that when the Spirit fell, the scattered Jewish remnant would be restored—the very thing the disciples had been concerned about (1:6). (Although, it must be noted, they were apparently more interested in political than spiritual restoration.)
- Second—on the note of restoration—Jerusalem needed restoration more than any other Jewish locale, for it is the city that kills its prophets and that killed its Messiah. Observe the Jerusalem theme in Luke's first volume:
 - *[Luk 9:31, 51 ESV] 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ... 51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*
 - *[Luk 13:33-35 ESV] 33 Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.' 34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35 Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"*
 - *[Luk 18:31 ESV] 31 And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.*
 - *[Luk 24:47 ESV] 47 and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*
- Note that when Peter preaches on Pentecost, he concludes his sermon by referring to "this Jesus whom you crucified" (2:36). Jerusalem had been so wicked as to torture her own Messiah to death. Nevertheless, God was bound to His people by the promises made to the patriarchs. Not only does He give them a second chance; He gives them first dibs. The most wicked city that ever existed got the first chance to receive Jesus, and with Him, restoration.
- Third, God's original promise to bless nations was made to the Jews, so God wanted to give them the first opportunity to accept or reject the message. As the Apostle Paul says elsewhere, the gospel is "first for the Jews, then for the Gentiles" (Rom. 1). This does not mean that God loves Jews more. It simply means that since they stewarded the blessing first, they would be granted the chance to respond to the message first. Through Jerusalem to the nations—that's the flow of God's promise.
- Fourth, not only would this result in Israel's restoration, but it would also serve as the firstfruits of a global harvest. God saw symbolic meaning in Pentecost. Just as Christ, our Passover Lamb, was crucified on Passover, the Holy Spirit was poured out during a harvest festival, where three thousand people got saved. This was God's way of saying, "This is just the beginning."
- Fifth, that Jerusalem would serve as a launching pad for a global mission would fulfill the promises of the prophets:
 - *Isaiah 2:2: It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, 3 and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*
 - *Micah 4:1 It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, 2 and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us*

his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

- Schnabel adds this: "The emphasis on Jerusalem highlights not only the significance of Joel's promise of the Holy Spirit and of salvation 'on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem' (Joel 2:32) and the salvation-historical continuity between Israel and the community of the followers of Jesus. More significantly, it underscores that God's sovereign rule and salvation always aimed at the restoration of Zion and Jerusalem, from where it will spread to the nations (v. 8). Jerusalem was and remains the city of salvation for God's people."
- Stott, at times quoting Johannes Blauw: "the Old Testament perspective was one of concern for the nations (God made them, and they will come and bow down to him), but not of mission to the nations (going out to win them). Even the Old Testament vision of the latter days is of a 'pilgrimage of the nations' to Mount Zion: 'all nations will stream to it.' Only in the New Testament, Blauw adds, is a 'centripetal missionary consciousness' replaced by a 'centrifugal missionary activity', and 'the great turning-point is the Resurrection, after which Jesus receives universal authority and gives his people a universal commission to go and disciple the nations.'"

—There was a fundamental shift from John to Jesus. John represented the best of the old order. He preached repentance, which was fundamental and prepared for the coming of Jesus. But John Himself preached that Jesus brought a baptism that he was incapable of bringing: the baptism of the Spirit.

—From John to Jesus, the age of redemptive history shifted. John was the last of the old order, but "he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Lk. 7:28). This does not mean that casual Christians are more special to God than every Old Testament saint. Rather, it means that the age of fulfillment has arrived in Jesus. Prophets and even angels longed to know the grace we have (Mt. 13:17; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). Even the least of the saints in the age of fulfillment is "greater"—more privileged—than John the Baptist.

—Missionally, we'll see in 1:8, that this shift in redemptive history also shifted the focus of God's mission. The mission moves out. In the past, Israel was to be a stationary light that would shine like a beacon for all to come and find God. Now they are overtly called to go out as missionaries.