

ACTS

A PERSONAL  
VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY

BY  
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As an introduction to this study, I would like to use a quote from David Guzik's commentary quoting A. N. Sherwin-White, an expert in Graeco-Roman history from Oxford, regarding the historical accuracy of this book.

"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."

Ray Stedman adds: "If the book of Acts were taken out of our New Testament, we would never understand the rest of it...When you close the record of the gospels, you see nothing but a handful of Jews in the city of Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life, talking together about the kingdom for Israel. When you open the book of Romans...you discover that a man whose name is never mentioned in the gospels is writing to a group of Christians in Rome of all places, the center of Gentile culture...obviously, something has happened in between." Acts provides a bridge between the gospels and the epistles.

This book was written by Luke as a continuation of the record begun in the gospel of Luke. The two books comprise about 30% of the New Testament. Paul identifies Luke as "the beloved physician" and one of his most faithful companions.

*Colossians 4:14 "Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you."*

*2 Timothy 4:10–11 "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me."*

In the introduction to both books Luke addresses them to a man named Theophilus for the express purpose of affirming the truth about Jesus and His teachings.

*Luke 1:1–4 "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed."*

That Luke addresses the recipient as "most excellent Theophilus" seems to indicate that he was a man of high position. Eerdman's Dictionary states that he is "possibly a man of considerable financial means who helped fund the publication of Luke's writings."

**Acts 1:1 ¶ The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus**

**began both to do and teach,**

**Acts 1:2 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 1:3 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:**

“The former treatise” is a reference to the gospel of Luke, as shown from the excerpt quoted above. That gospel was written to affirm the works and teachings of Jesus until the time that He visibly ascended to heaven to return to the Father. Point is made that before His ascension He gave ample proof of His resurrection by appearing visibly to His followers several times over a period of forty days. Each gospel records specifics associated with some of these visits. The Apostle Paul also testifies to the truth of Luke’s account in his letter to the Corinthians.

*1 Corinthians 15:3–8 “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that 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. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”*

Jesus also commanded His specifically chosen apostles as to their ongoing ministry in sharing the gospel message and opened their understanding through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

*Luke 24:44–47 “And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”*

Luke makes a point that Jesus spoke about things pertaining to “the kingdom of God.” I believe this is a reference to the realm where Jesus/God rules as King. Though we know that God is sovereign in power and authority, He chose to delegate authority over the world to man. Man, however, ceded that authority to Satan when he chose to reject God’s authority and sin. Since the resurrection, God’s kingdom exists in the church, the body of true believers. Man’s authority over planet earth will be restored when Jesus establishes His kingdom at His second coming. I believe that the kingdom will finally come in fullness when evil is judged and the new heaven and earth usher in eternity. At that time, all of creation will be in submission to and eager to serve their Creator.

**Acts 1:4 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 1:5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.**

Luke again affirms the closing words of his gospel.

*Luke 24:48–49 “And ye are witnesses of these things. 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.”*

Jesus instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for “the promise of the Father.” The coming “promise of the Father” is a reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower the disciples to effectively declare the good news of salvation. The gospel record of John affirms that Jesus had taught His disciples that after He returned to the Father, He would send them the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to teach them and guide them into “all truth” by reminding them of all He had taught them.

*John 14:16–17 “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”*

*John 14:26 “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”*

*John 16:13–15 “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”*

Luke compares the coming experience to baptism. Baptism is a public testimony to one’s acceptance of Jesus as Savior. The baptism of the Holy Ghost was given as a public testimony to the power of God at work in the lives of those that had accepted His gift of salvation in Jesus. The Greek for the word “baptized” makes reference to being “immersed...to make whelmed (i.e., fully wet).” I think that just as one is made completely wet with water in baptism, Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit will completely fill the believer with the power of God. In fact, without the indwelling Spirit we cannot be part of the family of God.

*Romans 8:9 “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”*

**Acts 1:6 ¶ When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?**

**Acts 1:7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.**

These are some interesting verses in light of my studies on end time prophecies. I could not find a parallel statement in the gospels. I am reminded that we always need to consider the whole of scripture and not just isolated texts.

Luke is saying that the disciples had asked Jesus if He was now going to re-establish the kingdom—as was expected of the Messiah according to the prophets.

*Jeremiah 23:5–6 “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”*

*Ezekiel 11:17–20 “Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. And they shall come thither, and they shall take away all the detestable things thereof and all the abominations thereof from thence. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”*

*Micah 4:6–7 “In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever.”*

Luke then records that Jesus told them that it was not for them to “know the times or the seasons” that God has purposed for the fulfillment of His plan. The Greek for both “times” and “seasons” makes reference to fixed or set times. Taken in context with other scriptures regarding the disciples’ interest in this subject, I believe this is a reference to knowing an exact date for the establishment of the kingdom.

In other scriptures Jesus taught His disciples concerning signs that would identify the fact that His return is near, e.g., Matthew 24. Scripture also records that He chastised the religious leaders of His day for not recognizing Him as the Messiah in light of the signs that fulfilled the prophecies of scripture concerning Him.

*Matthew 24:33 “So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.”*

*Matthew 24:42–44 “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”*

*Matthew 16:1–3 “The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?”*

I think these verses in Acts are just another affirmation that though we cannot know the exact date of His return to establish the kingdom, we can recognize that the time is near based on the signs of the times as prophesied in scripture.

**Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.**

Jesus told His disciples that the coming of the Holy Ghost would empower them to witness of Him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the rest of the Gentile world.

I think there is a principle being established here. Our first responsibility is to witness first to those where we live and then continue broadening our witness as possible to others further and further away from us. We are all witnesses, but the question is—What kind of witness am I?

John MacArthur: “...you don’t decide to be a witness. You just decide what kind you are going to be. You are one, either good, bad or indifferent.”

It is also important to note that our witness is empowered to be effective through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through us (cf John 14:16-17 above). In and of ourselves we can accomplish nothing.

*John 15:5 “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”*

It has certainly been a motivation to me to know that I have an opportunity like no generation before me to declare the truth of God’s word throughout the world via the worldwide web. Only in my lifetime has it been possible for individual believers to have such a far-reaching influence.

**Acts 1:9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.**

**Acts 1:10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;**

**Acts 1:11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.**

**Acts 1:12 ¶ Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey.**

Again, Luke reiterates the closing message of his gospel as he transitions into a history of the growing body of believers, the birth of the church.

*Luke 24:50–51 “And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.”*

Bethany was the home of Lazarus and was located about two miles east of Jerusalem on the Mt. of Olives according to Easton’s Dictionary.

Point is made that Jesus ascended to heaven visibly disappearing into a cloud. I can just imagine being there and not quite able to take my eyes away from the place he disappeared from sight.

Two men in white apparel (obviously angels in my opinion) spoke to the crowd that witnessed the ascension and broke their concentration. They reminded the disciples that “this same Jesus” (God in flesh) would one day return just as visibly as they saw Him go up to heaven.

**Acts 1:13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas *the brother* of James.**

**Acts 1:14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.**

**Acts 1:15 ¶ And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)**

Luke now records that the disciples were obedient to the Lord’s command to tarry in Jerusalem. There was evidently a large room in the place where they were staying—a place that would accommodate 120 people. Point is made to record the names of the remaining eleven apostles. Luke also notes that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a part of the group; she was just another disciple—not the leader. She was praying along with the rest; they weren’t asking her to intercede on their behalf. It is also significant to note that other women were a part of the gathered group of disciples; scripture often notes that there were faithful women as well as faithful men serving the Lord Jesus during His ministry. Also interesting to note is that Jesus’ brothers were part of the group; they had finally become believers.

*John 7:1–5 “After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. Now the Jews’ feast of tabernacles was at hand. His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him.”*

While they waited they prayed. I especially liked this comment from David Guzik: “Already, we see three important steps in making godly decisions: The disciples were in obedience, they were in fellowship, and they were in prayer.”

**Acts 1:16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.**

**Acts 1:17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.**

**Acts 1:18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.**

**Acts 1:19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.**

**Acts 1:20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.**

During this period of waiting, Peter decided to speak out regarding a replacement for Judas, the disciple that betrayed Jesus. He noted how Judas had been chosen as one of twelve for specific ministry with Jesus. He also added some information regarding what happened when Judas hung himself. It seems that the rope broke causing his body to fall and burst apart (gross!). Evidently, the event became so well known throughout Jerusalem that they named the place of his suicide Aceldama, The field of blood.

It is also significant to note that Peter recognized the writings of David to be inspired by the Holy Ghost and that he understood these verses to have specific application to replacing Judas.

*Psalms 109:7–8 “When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; and let another take his office.”*

**Acts 1:21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,**

**Acts 1:22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.**

**Acts 1:23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.**

Based on the scripture, Peter proposed that a man be chosen to replace Judas from among the men who had been identified among the disciples of Jesus from the beginning of His ministry (identified as the baptism of John) until His ascension. He must be one who could personally testify as an eyewitness to the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Two men were nominated:

- Joseph called Barsabas and surnamed Justus
- Matthias

**Acts 1:24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,**

**Acts 1:25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.**

**Acts 1:26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.**

Important to note is that the disciples made their decision a matter of prayer. They acknowledged that only the LORD knows the hearts of men, and they wanted Him to reveal His choice as the replacement apostle. The choice was determined by the casting of lots, and Matthias was shown to be the choice. From that time on he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Scripture records that the casting of lots was an accepted way of determining God's will in biblical times. The casting of lots was used to determine the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement. Joshua cast lots to determine the division of the land among the tribes of Israel. Jonah was identified as the cause of trouble for the ship by the casting of lots.

*Proverbs 16:33 "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD."*

I have sometimes heard it preached that Peter was overstepping his bounds in leadership at this point and acting outside of God's will. The fact that the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record this event based on scriptural principles tells me that he was acting in accordance with God's will. Even Paul recognized Matthias as one of the twelve.

*1 Corinthians 15:3-5 "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve...."*