

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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ACTS 1 v 1 – 14

This is the second of two books written by Dr Luke, the first being the Gospel bearing his name. Together they form a complete record of the birth and life of Jesus, the birth of Christianity, and the early spread of that faith, known as the Church. The complete works of Dr Luke reveal him to be a very gifted man intellectually, with a finely trained mind and a very determined ability to get at the truth. In addition, his writings, especially Acts, demonstrate his ability as:

- a) A historian. Luke had a very clear understanding of the first century world of the Roman Empire including many of the important personnel. With Acts, Luke provides us with one of the best historical records of that period.
- b) An apologist. As he writes, he shows an apologist's grasp of the arguments in defence of the truths he is describing, especially as the apostles, including Paul, proclaim the truth of Jesus against the Jewish zealots who see Him as a dangerous heretic.
- c) A theologian. Luke fully understood the purposes of God in bringing about a new era in His dealings with this world, and that this era is essentially characterised by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. So much so, this book could be called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit".

v 1 – 2. Both Luke's Gospel and the Acts are addressed to a man called Theophilus, who appears to be quite a high-ranking man in the central Roman administration. Possibly he could be the man who would conduct Paul's case when his appeal was heard before Caesar, which would explain why Acts finishes after Paul had spent two years in Rome, with his appeal maybe about to begin. If this is so, then Luke's writings would constitute Theophilus' briefing papers – "the case for the defence".

v 3. Here's a doctor happily describing the existence of "convincing proofs" that Jesus was alive. From what we know about Luke he would have been much more circumspect if he himself was not convinced. He also mentions that before His ascension, Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God. Here there is no suggestion Luke meant the Messianic kingdom (see on v 6 – 7 below), and in Luke 17 v 20 - 21 he refers to Jesus dealing with the same point by explaining that the kingdom of God is within us. In other words, Luke is referring to a spiritual kingdom, present on earth throughout the Church age and embracing all who own Jesus as Lord by accepting Him as Saviour.

v 4. The word translated "wait" is "perimeno", which means literally "stay in the circle where I have placed you". The assembled (120) followers of Jesus were to remain together in Jerusalem until God had fulfilled His promise. This is the only place in scripture where this word is found, and suggests that when we are waiting for God to reveal His next step for us, we are to stay in the "circle" where He has put us until He tells us to move on.

v 5 and 8. The central feature of the Church era of history, the indwelling Holy Spirit in the lives of those who have accepted Jesus, is described as a baptism. The question arises whether this is a separate event from conversion. The spread of the gospel is also described as ripples on a pond, moving outwards from

Jerusalem. In Acts, Luke describes each of those ripples as great times of conversion, first in Jerusalem (the 120 themselves and then immediately 3000 others, probably most being Jews), then amongst many other Jews and those living in Samaria, then the gentile world beyond, starting with Cornelius. In each instance, the conversions were accompanied by evidence of the coming of the Holy Spirit, showing that this remarkable evidence of authentic conversion also applied to that particular segment of humanity as well. Nowhere in scripture is it suggested that Christians are divided into two groups, those that have the Holy Spirit and those that haven't – the "haves" and the "have nots". To believe we should divide the people of God in this way is to directly contradict the Lord's request in John 17 v 11 & 21. No one can call Jesus Lord without the Holy Spirit, and in any case, He is the indispensable guarantor of every true believer's salvation. We cannot divide the persons within the Trinity in this way – if we have Jesus (as Saviour) we have the Holy Spirit and we have the Father (John 14 v 23). We need to go on being filled with the Holy Spirit, and that's the process of sanctification. After conversion we don't have a subsequent once-for-all "baptism" in the Holy Spirit sometime later, and then believe we have "arrived". The ultimate conclusion of this "second blessing" teaching is the error of sinless perfection.

v 6 – 7. The disciples had been expecting Jesus to bring about the long-promised messianic kingdom on earth. It was only since He had explained to the two on the Emmaus road that he had to come the first time to suffer and die, and then would come back later as the reigning king, that they realised there were two separate facets of the Messiah's work. As Jesus explained, this was exactly what the prophets had foretold. Having at last realised the nature of the Lord's role as the suffering servant, they tentatively asked if now was to be the time for the revelation of the Messianic kingdom, with Jesus reigning on the throne of David. Some Christians have suggested that the church has taken over the role of Israel (replacement theology) and that therefore we are not to expect any kingdom other than the spiritual kingdom in our hearts here and now. But here Jesus didn't tell His followers that they had got it wrong, just that they weren't to know the timing.

v 9. This verse holds no embarrassment for us, for we believe in the existence of a spiritual realm in and from which God is both immanent and transcendent. Indeed, God is a spirit and all physical reality – space, time, matter and energy - came from the eternal spiritual realms. So, Jesus simply returned to those spiritual realms, shielded by a cloud, or mist, and there is now a physical man in the heavenlies, for Jesus is both divine and human. He had already demonstrated that in the spiritual dimension the laws of physics are different, for He physically entered a locked room to be with the disciples, at least twice.

v 10 – 11. He is going to return in the same way, and this promise seems to relate to His return for the Church (the Rapture) which Paul describes so clearly in 1 Thessalonians 4 v 13 – 18. We too, as resurrected and physical beings, will rise and enter the spiritual realms.

v 12 – 14. This was the period of waiting, following the Lord's instruction, and we see that the whole central body of His followers were present, 120 altogether (v 15), including Mary and the Lord's natural brothers. As far as Mary was concerned, this is the last mention of her in the Bible. She had done her job and was now just one of the people who made up that core of the church at Pentecost. Mary has no further part to play in the theology of the New Testament. However, we certainly honour her for doing the job entrusted to her, namely providing a wonderfully secure spiritual and loving environment for the Lord to grow up in as a baby, child, youth, and into adulthood. An amazing example of motherhood for any child.

Regarding the Lord's natural brothers, their presence in that upper room and into the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, is a real miracle of grace. As Jesus left home to commence His earthly messianic ministry, they were sarcastic and hostile (John 7 v 5). Apparently, they were nowhere to be seen when Jesus was arrested, tried and crucified. What had transformed them? After all, James became leader of the church in Jerusalem and both he and Jude wrote epistles that became part of the canon of the New Testament. The answer seems to be indicated in 1 Corinthians 15 v 7, where we read that following His resurrection Jesus appeared to James. (The other brothers and maybe even His sisters could well have been with James.) In other words, the resurrection answered all doubts and settled the matter. Ever since, the resurrection of Jesus has been the central proof of the Lord's identity and ministry. The life of the risen Christ within our lives is the defining evidence that He is real and we are His.