

I. The Introduction. Acts 1:1-2.

1. The Author.

Luke was the writer of the Acts of the Apostles. In his statement, "the former treatise" he referred to the Gospel which bears his name. Luke was a Gentile, the only Gentile writer of Holy Scripture. He was a medical doctor, and a man of considerable culture.

2. The Date--63 A. D.

3. The Place of Writing--Rome.

4. The Period Covered--30 to 63 A. D.

Who is Theophilus, to whom Luke inscribes this book as well as his former production, the Gospel? In all probability he was a friend of Luke, a man of some social distinction, and a Christian of eminence. The etymology of his name indicates that he was a friend of God. He was a Gentile, and probably a Roman official. This lover of God and admirer of divine things was immortalized through his intimacy with Luke. It is quite probably that he was a man of rank, as the epithet "most noble" is prefixed to his name in Luke's Gospel. This epithet generally does not refer to character, but to station. It would seem that he was a person of authority from office or position, a powerful and distinguished friend of the Christians. It is quite likely that he held some post of influence in the Civil Government which enabled him to befriend the Christians in their trials.

Luke's Gospel contained a history of the deeds and sayings of Christ while He was on the earth. Luke emphasized the Lord's doings as well as His teachings. The Book of Acts begins at the date of the departure of Christ in visible form from the earth, and consists of a record of some of the deeds and sayings of some of the apostles of our Lord.

As Luke's former treatise was concerned with what Jesus began to do and to teach, this new treatise is concerned with the things which He continued to do and to teach.

Luke's Gospel contains the record of His deeds as well as His doctrines; the truths taught by His miraculous deeds as well as those uttered by His lips, for in all that He did and said He proved Himself the Teacher of mankind both by word and by example. The Gospel told not only the story of what He did, but what He suffered. His sufferings were deeds by which He procured our redemption.

These words "to do and teach" remind us that for thirty years our Lord lived the life before He sought to teach others the kind of life to live. They also remind us that it is the duty of the Christian to do all things in accordance with His teaching, since he teaches as powerfully by his deeds as by his words. He is first to do, and then to teach. He is first to practice the things taught in the Scriptures, and then to declare them by deed and word.

The ascension of Christ is the boundary between Luke's Gospel and the Acts. The Gospel ends and the Book of Acts commences with an account of it. In the Gospel the ascension is the termination of the earthly life of Jesus, and in the Acts it is the commencement of His heavenly life.

Christ's ascension did not take place until after He had given commandments through the Apostles whom He had chosen. The expression "whom He had chosen" reminds us of the truth that He seeks us out before we come to Him. His very choice of us causes us to love Him.

Christ was taken up in order that He might open to us a way to heaven, that He might prepare a place for us in heaven, that He might intercede for us while we remain here on earth, and that He might raise our interests and affections to that place whither He has gone.

II. The Forty Days. Acts 1:3-8.

What is the significance of the forty days of waiting after the resurrection? It was better for the disciples for Christ to remain with them for this period. It settled their doubts. It gave them courage. It stabilized their opinions. It was long enough to disprove all false theories. It put the burden of proof on the ones who denied His resurrection. It gave them time to investigate the claims of the disciples that He was alive. It gave Him time to recommission His disciples. He gave them a final, last-hour inspiration about their life, their duty, and their message to a hopeless world. It was a testing time, as well as a time of readjustment. It was long enough, but not too long.

Christ raised Himself from the dead, and thereby declared Himself to be the Son of God with power, which cannot be said of others. There were others that were alive after death, but not by their own power. To His disciples He showed Himself alive, having really died and truly risen from the dead; alive, no more to die. He did this by many infallible proofs, such as sight, hearing and feeling. He appeared to the Apostles not once, but many times. He made His appeal to their natural senses. They saw Him, and heard Him, and touched Him, and ate with Him, and satisfied every doubt in their minds about His reality. There are no less than ten appearances of the Lord after His resurrection.

1. To Mary Magdalene.
2. To the other women on their way from the sepulchre.
3. To Cleopas and his companions on the way to Emmaus.
4. To Simon Peter.
5. To the Apostles, when Thomas was absent.
6. To all the Apostles.
7. To the seven by the Sea of Galilee.
8. To over five hundred on a mountain in Galilee.
9. To James in Jerusalem.
10. To the Apostles for the last time in Jerusalem and on Olivet where He ascended.

It was not one person but many who saw Him. They saw Him not only separately but together, not at a distance but near, not once but many times. They not only saw Him, but walked with Him, talked with Him, ate with Him, and touched Him. He showed unto them His hands and His feet and His side in order that they might see the scars which the nails and the spear had made, and which were positive proof that He was risen in the same body in which He suffered. At these appearances He gave His disciples ample opportunity of testing the reality of His resurrection, by speaking to them, walking with them, eating with them, and allowing Thomas to touch the print of the nails, and to thrust his hand into His side.

He instructed them about the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. He had lived for that; He had died for that; and He had conquered the grave by that power. To carry this message to the ends of the earth was to be their chief aim. All other things were to be secondary. All other interests were to be absorbed in that. Their very best was to be put into it.