

# JESUS' MINISTRY ON EARTH

## ACTS 01:01–05

### *Introduction*

Note the words “my former book” or treatise. Luke was referring back to his gospel. He was now writing to the same man to whom he had written his gospel, Theophilus. He was reminding Theophilus that in his gospel he had covered the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth. Note the word “began.” Jesus’ life and work on earth was only the beginning. Although He is in heaven, He *continues* to work and minister through the presence of the Spirit in the hearts and lives of believers. The book of Acts could well be called...

- the acts (works and teachings) of believers; or
- the acts (works and teachings) of Christ; or
- the acts (works and teachings) of the Holy Spirit.

Very briefly, Luke was saying that the life of Jesus Christ continues on. The book of Acts is the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ. Verses 1-5 are a summary of the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, a summary of the ministry of Christ covered in Acts.

- I. Luke wrote to Theophilus — reminded him of the gospel, that is, of Jesus’ ministry (v. 1).
- II. Jesus’ work and teaching (vv. 1-2).
- III. Jesus’ death and resurrection (v. 3).
- IV. Jesus’ promise of the kingdom (v. 3).
- V. Jesus’ promise of the Spirit (vv. 4-5).

### **I. Acts 01:01 Theophilus**

Luke wrote to Theophilus, reminding him of the former gospel which he had written, the gospel which covered the life and ministry of Jesus.

Who is Theophilus? We are not told, but note several facts.

1. Theophilus is called “most excellent Theophilus” in the *Gospel of Luke* (Lk. 1:3). The words, “most excellent Theophilus,” are a title of rank and honour. It is the same title used of Felix and Festus, two high ranking Roman officials (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:27). Theophilus must have been a Roman official of high rank.
2. Theophilus was a personal friend of Luke, close enough to correspond with Luke about the Lord Jesus. He was either a man interested in knowing the truth about Christ or else a new convert who needed to be grounded in Christ. Perhaps Luke himself had led Theophilus to Christ.

Note: Luke did not address Theophilus as “most excellent” in Acts. The title is dropped. Why? There are three possibilities.

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- a. Luke and Theophilus were close friends, close enough to be on a first name basis.
- b. Theophilus had either retired or been removed from office between the writing of Luke and Acts.
- c. Theophilus, having grown in Christ, had grown so loving and humble he did not want his title used among his Christian friends, not in times of personal communication and fellowship.

**Thought 1:** There is a great lesson in this thought, a lesson on love and humility so needed by the world and among God's people (see Mt. 23:7-12).

3. Theophilus lived outside Palestine, somewhere away from Luke.
4. Theophilus was a man of education and culture. His title and the fact that the Gospel of Luke and Acts are addressed to him point toward his being educated and cultured.
5. The name Theophilus means "loved by God" or "the friend of God."

**Thought 1.** Theophilus was a man who sought to grow and mature in the Lord. Imagine! Luke and Acts were written to him! Two of the greatest books ever written! And why? Because he had such a deep hunger to know the Lord, to learn all he could about the Lord. What a legacy and testimony — to be known as a man who so hungered to know the Lord that God had two of the greatest books ever written addressed to him! May we all develop a hunger to learn all we can about the Lord and Saviour of the universe.

## II. *Acts 01:01–02 Ministry of Jesus Christ*

Jesus' ministry on earth began with His work and teaching. Note the subject of this first chapter, "The Great Days of Expectation." The works and teachings of Christ launched these days. Jesus Christ brought the greatest expectation to earth imaginable to man; in fact, He brought the only hope man has of surviving...

- of conquering the sin and shame of the earth: its hatred, killing, maiming, selfishness, bitterness, division.
- of conquering the death and hell of man's destiny: his dread, fear, insecurity, ignorance and baseless hope of what lies beyond the grave.

As stated, Jesus Christ brought the only hope man has of surviving. He taught men how to live together in peace and how they should live before God. Note three significant things.

1. Christ worked and taught until He was "taken up," that is, until He ascended back into heaven. He was faithful, using all He had for God until His life upon earth was completed.

**Thought 1.** The believer is to use his gifts for God until he enters heaven. There is no retirement from seeking to reach a world sunk so desperately in need.

**John 4:35** “Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”

**John 9:4** “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.”

**1 Cor 4:2** Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

**1 Cor 6:20** You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.

**1 Pet 4:10** Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

**2 Tim 1:6** For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

**2 Tim 1:4** Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy.

**Eccl 9:10** Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

2. Christ worked and taught “through the Holy Spirit.” While He was on earth in the flesh, Christ was totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit. He had to surrender Himself and to make Himself available to the Spirit.

**Thought 1.** Just think! If Christ was so dependent upon the Spirit of God, how much more are we! How much more do we need to make ourselves available to Him, available for His gifts and power!

**Acts 1:8** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

**Rom 8:5** Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

**Rom 8:13** For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

**Eph 5:18** Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

**1 John 2:27** As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit — just as it has taught you, remain in him.

3. Christ gave and taught His commandments to those whom He had *chosen*, His apostles. He taught throngs of people, but He zeroed in on the apostles. His whole mission depended upon them. They were to be the first who would carry His message to the world after His departure. If they failed, his mission would fail; if they

succeeded, His mission would succeed. He had to concentrate upon them; to drill His commandments into them so that they in turn could teach His commandments.

**Thought 1.** Note a critical fact: every believer is the chosen servant of God to carry on the mission of Christ. Every believer is to be proclaiming the glorious message of hope to a world lost and doomed to death.

**2 Tim 2:2** *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*

**Mat 28:19-20** *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

**John 20:21** *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*

**Acts 1:8** *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

### **III. Acts 01:03 Resurrection of Jesus Christ**

Jesus' ministry on earth was climaxed in His passion and resurrection (see Acts 17:3; 26:23). The word *suffering* (pathein) means passion; it refers to the sufferings or death of Christ. His death and resurrection assured the salvation of man.

=> By death He paid the penalty for man's sin.

**1 Pet 2:24** *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

**1 Pet 3:18** *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.*

=> By arising from the dead He conquered death for man and now makes available a new life of power for the believer.

**Rom 6:4** *We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

**1 Cor 15:20-23** *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.*

**2 Cor 5:17** *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

**Eph 1:19-20** *And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.*

**Eph 2:4-10** *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Note the two proofs of salvation.

1. Jesus *showed* (paristemi), presented Himself alive to these men. There are ten resurrection appearances of Jesus recorded in the New Testament (see *Resurrection, Jesus Christ*, Acts 1:3). However, there were apparently many more that are not recorded (see Jn. 20:30-31; 21:25).
2. Jesus gave many infallible proofs of His resurrection. (See Acts 10:40-41)
  - a. The word *proofs* (tekmeriois) means positive proof; infallible proof; convincing proof; sure signs and ways.
  - b. The infallible, positive proofs and appearances went on for *forty days*.

### ACTS 01:03 RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

*After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. Acts 01:03*

Jesus appeared at least ten times after His resurrection before He ascended into heaven. There were apparently many more appearances not recorded (see Jn. 20:30-31; 21:25).

1. He appeared to Mary Magdalene (Mk. 16:9-11; Jn.20:11-18).
2. He appeared to the women running to tell the disciples about the empty tomb (Mt.28:8-10)
3. He appeared to Peter, probably to assure him of his restoration (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).

4. He appeared to the two Emmaus disciples sometime in the early evening (Mk. 16:12; Lk. 24:13-42).
5. He appeared to the disciples with Thomas absent (Mk. 16:14; Lk.24:36-43; Jn. 20:19-25).
6. One week later, He appeared to the disciples who had gone fishing (Jn. 20).
7. He appeared to 500 believers (1 Cor. 15:6).
8. He appeared to the apostles (Mt. 28:16-20; Mk. 16:15-18).
9. He appeared to James, the Lord's half-brother (1 Cor. 15:7).
10. He appeared to the believers at His ascension (Mk. 16:19-20; Lk. 24:44-53; Acts 1:3-12).

It should be remembered that since Jesus' ascension He has appeared at least two other times.

1. He appeared to Stephen at his martyrdom (Acts 7:55-56).
2. He appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3f). □

#### **IV. Acts 01:03 Kingdom of God**

Jesus' ministry on earth was to proclaim the great hope of man, the promise of the Kingdom of God. (See *Kingdom of God*, Mt. 19:23-24.) Note: the Kingdom of God is the focus of His message even after His resurrection. Man's only hope for survival is the Kingdom of God.

#### **V. Acts 01:04–05 The Promise of the Holy Spirit**

Jesus' ministry on earth was to proclaim the great promise to believers, the promise of the Holy Spirit. God knew and Christ proclaimed that no man could live and witness for God, not in *the arm of the flesh*. No man or group of men were powerful enough to live for God or to convince others of *the foolishness of the gospel*...

- that love is more powerful than might.
- that God's Son actually came to earth as a man.
- That God's Son died but was raised from the dead, conquering death.
- that the cross is the way men are saved from sin, death and hell.
- that man can be *born again*, literally born again and made into a new creature by *believing* in Jesus.
- that man can live forever by being born again through belief in Jesus.

Christ knew that man needed a supernatural power, the power of God Himself. He knew that the very presence of God's Spirit had to *enter into* the very heart of man and...

- impart the divine nature of God (2 Pet. 1:4).
- recreate his being completely (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:23-24; Col. 3:9-10).
- live within his body, giving the believer the power to control his life for God and to courageously proclaim the gospel to a world that would consider it foolishness and often react in violence.

In these two verses, Christ is sharing how the apostles (and all succeeding believers) are to receive the Holy Spirit in all His fullness and power.

1. They are to “wait for the gift my Father promised, “ *wait in prayer* for the coming of the Holy Spirit.
  - a. Note the phrase “the gift my Father promised.” The idea is that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the *supreme gift* of God to the believer. The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God Himself, and God promises to give His Spirit to the believer.

**Mat 3:11** *“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”*

**John 14:16-17** *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”*

**Acts 1:8** *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

**Acts 2:38** *Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

**Luke 24:49** *“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”*

**Isa 32:15** *Till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest.*

**Isa 44:3** *For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.*

**Joel 2:28** *‘And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.’*

**Zec 2:10** *“Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,” declares the Lord. (See Holy Spirit, Pentecost, Acts 2:1-4)*

- b. The believer must *wait* in prayer to receive the Holy Spirit. *Waiting, centring and focusing* one’s attention upon God is another way of saying, believing, trusting and focusing one’s life upon God. If a person will *wait* upon God — if he will learn to *wait* more and more — he will...

- gain more and more awareness and consciousness of the Spirit's presence and power.
- gain more and more knowledge of the Spirit Himself, how He lives and works within the believer's heart and life.
- learn how to surrender more and more of his life to the Spirit's control and witness.
- experience more and more of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Note: the fruit of the Spirit is borne only as the believer is *filled* with the Spirit. Being filled is a command. Believers are not automatically filled. Too many believers walk around in the flesh and sinful nature, totally unconscious of the Spirit's presence and will.

**Luke 11:13** *“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*

**Eph 5:18** *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.*

2. Believers have to hear about the promise of the Spirit before they can receive Him. A believer cannot sit with a wandering or preoccupied mind and be filled with the Spirit of God; he cannot expect to be filled with the presence of God and never centre his mind upon the things of God. The believer has to hear and focus his attention upon, hunger and thirst for the things of God. He has to centre his life upon God's Spirit in order to receive the promise of the Spirit.

**Rom 8:5-6** *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.*

**1 Cor 2:12** *We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.*

3. Then, believers will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Note: this baptism is not water baptism, not the kind of water baptism John used. It is the baptism brought by Christ Himself when the believer is converted or saved, the immersion of the believer into the Spirit of God and of the Spirit into the believer. (See Mt. 3:11. See *Pentecost*, Acts 2:1-4.)

(See notes, Jn. 14:15-26; 16:7-15; see Rom. 8:1-17 for the person and Work of the Holy Spirit. Christ clearly outlined both His Person and Work.) ■