

Sunday, March 23, 2025 | Filled

Week 1 | Acts 1:1-5 | “The Acts of the Holy Spirit”

Today, we embark on a journey through the Book of Acts. Just as we did with Luke, we'll break down this extensive volume into several series, the first of which we've titled 'Filled.' In 'Filled,' we'll explore the pivotal role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. Instead of being known as the 'Acts of the Apostles,' as John Chrysostom suggested in the fifth century, it might be more fitting to call it the 'Acts of the Holy Spirit.' While the apostles may take center stage, it's the Spirit of God who directly influences and inspires everything they do and say.

The Spirit's administration should be a source of great encouragement. It means that the effectiveness of the gospel doesn't rely on human capabilities, but on the power of the Holy Spirit. Whether it was 2,000+ years ago or today, all we need to do is trust, obey, and lean on the Lord for the Church to flourish.

READ: Acts 1:1-5 (ESV)

¹In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ²until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

⁴And 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; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Before we unpack the introduction, it is important to lay some groundwork for the entire book:

Size: According to one scholar, assuming Luke wrote on a papyrus roll, his gospel account would've stretched 35 feet, and Acts would've been 32 feet tip to tail.¹ By word count, Acts is the second-largest book in the NT behind Luke, which means that a third of the NT was written by Luke. Of the rare words that appear in the NT (5,436), 37% (2,038) are used by Luke in Acts.²

¹ Garland, David E., *Luke*, The Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 28.

² Bock, Darrell L., *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 6.

Author: Luke.

Date: 60-63AD. This is evident by the fact that (1) there's no mention of Nero's persecution of Christians (64AD), (2) Paul's imprisonment/execution in Rome (65-70AD), or (3) the destruction of Jerusalem (66-70AD). But this is all an argument from silence, so it is impossible to be dogmatic. What is clear is that the "we" passages in the latter half of the book (cf. 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-8; 27-28) indicate the writer was a companion of Paul.

Historical context: Jews had been under Roman occupation for over a century. The population of the Roman empire in the first century was around 65 million people, with the Jews comprising 5 million (7%).³ Considering that 3,000 people were saved on the Day of Pentecost, this means that, on day one, Christians only made up little more than 0.005% of the populace.

Genre: Like his gospel, Luke's account of the apostles is a historical narrative. But it also relays many speeches. In fact, a third of the book is just people addressing audiences.⁴

Audience: Though it has application for unbelievers, unlike John (cf. Jn. 20:30-31), Acts was written for believers. The things he talks about aren't going to interest a non-believer. But for a Christian, Acts is an engaging account of their movement's beginnings.

Theology In Acts: God's Sovereignty, Christ's Lordship (Christology), the Holy Spirit's indwelling (pneumatology), mankind's redemption (soteriology), the Church's mission (ecclesiology), the world's end (eschatology), and many more.

Two-fold purpose:

First, Luke wanted believers to have confidence in the gospel tradition. Considering Acts is Luke's second volume, his purpose statement in his first volume is still operative:

READ: Luke 1:1-4 (ESV)

¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

³ Bock (2007), p. 43.

⁴ Bock (2007), p. 20.

Second, he wanted to defend Christianity. Bruce (1990), p. 22, states that Luke was the first apologist. Specifically, he wanted to distinguish Christianity from paganism, demonstrate that it wasn't a threat to Roman society, and, most importantly, establish its roots in Judaism.

Luke wanted to legitimize Christianity, demonstrating how it was rooted in the OT. It is a movement started by the Jewish Messiah. As we'll see, the Jews are synonymous with early Christians. It was only when Jewish unbelievers began persecuting their believing countrymen that Christendom became distinct from Judaism. And it is because of Israel's wholesale rejection of the gospel that Gentiles are, at least know, the stewards of a faith first propagated by Jews and rooted in the Jewish Scriptures. Consequently, Luke demonstrates how such a peculiar event took place and that it was foreseen by God. The gospel would also start with Jews and then move to non-Jews. This is best illustrated by how the book *begins* in Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish world, but *ends* in Rome, the center of the Gentile world.

Though verses 1-5 are broken up into three sentences in English, in Greek, it's one sentence.⁵

Vs. 1-2 – Obviously, the "first book" references the Gospel of Luke. The name "Theophilus" means "friend of God" or "loved by God" (θεός+φίλος). Historically, we know this was a relatively common Greek name. Thus, contrary to those who claim that it was the general designation for anyone who follows the Lord, it is far more likely that Theophilus was real. This is further supported by the fact that Luke adds the phrase "most excellent" (Lu. 1:3) in his original address to Theophilus. Such an exaggerated greeting indicates that Theophilus was a man of some authority and/or means.

In his first volume, Luke says he "dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach." That he said "began to do" and not "accomplished" implies that Jesus was still doing and teaching at this time. In fact, Jesus continued doing and teaching "until the day when he was taken up after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen." Herein, Luke establishes the chain of custody: Christ to the apostles to others. The work Christ started continues through the word of the Apostles. Though the term "apostles" can be used to refer to those who were not among the twelve (cf. 14:4, 4), it almost always refers to Jesus' original disciples in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 1:26; 2:37, 42-43; 9:27; 15:6; 16:4; etc.). Jesus gave his apostles "commands through the Holy Spirit." This is the first of many references to the Holy

⁵ Peterson, David G., *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 99.

Spirit. We'll talk more about the significance of the Spirit in a moment, but Jesus Christ was indwelt by and spoke through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Vs. 3 – Luke reminds Theophilus that Jesus “presented himself alive to [the apostles] after his suffering.” This is a reference to the resurrection. These encounters were verified “by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days.” While the number “40” is attached to Israel’s wanderings (cf. Num. 14:34) and Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness (cf. Lu. 4:2), there is no symbolic significance to such a number; it is merely a time designation and nothing more. The point isn't that Jesus lingered for forty days; it is that the apostles and others saw, talked, touched, and even ate with the risen Lord for over *five and a half weeks*. And though we don’t know all the appearances, the NT records quite a few. And though it depends on how you count them, there are at least 11 appearances.⁶ The total count is 12 if you count Paul’s conversion.

- The women at the tomb (cf. Matt. 28:8-10)
- Mary Magdalene (cf. Jn. 20:11-18)
- The Emmaus disciples (cf. Lu. 24:13-34)
- Peter in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 15:5)
- The ten disciples (cf. Jn. 20:19-23)
- The eleven disciples (cf. Jn. 20:26-29)
- The seven disciples fishing in Galilee (cf. Jn. 21:1-2)
- The eleven disciples in Galilee (cf. Matt. 28:16)
- The five hundred (cf. 1 Cor. 15:6)
- James the Lord’s brother (cf. 1 Cor. 15:7a)
- The “all the apostles” appearance (cf. 1 Cor. 15:7b)
- Paul’s conversion (cf. Ac. 9).

What is significant is that, during those resurrection appearances, Jesus spoke “about the kingdom of God.” The phrase “kingdom of God” is one of Luke’s favorites; it shows up throughout his gospel account (cf. Lu. 4:43; 9:2; 18:16-17; etc.) and at key points in Acts (cf. 1:3; 8:12; 14:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:32, 31).⁷ “Kingdom of God” is an expression that indicates God’s rule on earth. Thus, contrary to what some might think, God’s reign has already begun; it’s as much a current reality as a future one.

⁶ Bock (2007), p. 56, using Kistemaker (1990:48), lists 10 appearances but fails to account for the appearance before “all the apostles” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:7b).

⁷ Peterson (2009), p. 105.

Vs. 4-5 – The word “**staying**” is **συναλίζω** (synalizō), and it refers to table fellowship.⁸ Once again (cf. Lu. 24:41-43; Jn. 21:9-14), we find the Jesus community eating a meal together. This speaks of intimacy and comradery. Fellowshiping at a dinner is part of the Church’s DNA.

Jesus orders the apostles “**to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father,**” something that they had “**heard**” about before. This is a reference to Luke 24:49, where we learned that the phrase “**the promise of my Father**” refers to the Holy Spirit. But back then, the Holy Spirit didn’t indwell believers until the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2). After this, a person’s conversion would correspond with the filling of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 10:44-48).

But, when Jesus first talked about the “**promise of the Father,**” Pentecost was still nearly two months away. Now, forty days have passed. In the words of Jesus, it’s “**not many days from now**” when the Holy Spirit will descend. Little did they know, they’d need only wait ten more days! At this point, Jesus says that just as “**John baptized with water,**” he will “**baptize [them] with the Holy Spirit.**” This is a reference to John the Baptist:

READ: Luke 3:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Unlike the kind we practice today, John’s water-baptism symbolized being cleansed of one’s sinfulness; it prepared the hearts of men to receive the coming king. Jesus’s Spirit-baptism isn’t the sin-cleansing type but the Spirit-indwelling type; it seals the hearts of men (cf. 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13-14). As John immersed people in the waters, Jesus immerses believers in the Holy Spirit, which empowers and secures them. And just as people were soaked to the bone after John baptized them, believers are “**clothed with power from on high**” (Lu. 24:49) after Jesus baptizes them. Those who put their faith in Jesus Christ are no longer dressed in sinfulness and fragility but are outfitted with God’s righteousness and vitality.

The same one who gave commandments to the apostles through the Holy Spirit (cf. vs. 2) will also give them the Holy Spirit.

⁸ Bock (2007), p. 59; Peterson (2009), p. 106.

So, what's the takeaway? Because Christians are immersed in the Holy Spirit, they're outfitted for gospel ministry.

READ: Philippians 2:12-13 (ESV)

¹²Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Video Description:**Filled | Week 1 | “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:1-5)**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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