

ACTS

Bible Study

Final Words

Acts 1:1—3

The book of Acts picks up where Luke leaves off. Luke records Jesus' death, burial and resurrection and then His ascension. Acts fills us in quickly about the 40 days Jesus was with the Disciples after His resurrection and then records His ascension. In other words, there is no change in how God is dealing with mankind between Luke and the beginning of Acts. God was still working through Israel as a nation at the end of Luke and this was picked up at the beginning of Acts, a completely smooth continuation of action. Of course, people who misinterpret what is going on in the book of Luke will also misinterpret what is going on at the beginning of Acts.

Jesus' earthly ministry (verse 1)

The book of Acts begins with a summary of the book of Luke. Luke contains information about Jesus' life, from birth through His ascension. It is specifically focused on Jesus' earthly life and ministry. This means that it is a record of how God was dealing with the Jewish nation, in accordance with the prophetic Scripture. The Old Testament told the Jewish nation that they were going to be given a Savior, One whom is called the Messiah (Daniel 9:25—26; Isaiah 43:11). These prophetic utterances were fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ (Luke 2:11; Acts 5:31).

Most people are confused about Jesus' earthly ministry. They try to connect everything He did directly to us in this Dispensation of Grace, thinking He began working with the Jews and then expanded His teachings to the Gentiles throughout the book of Acts. They see no distinction between His earthly and heavenly ministries. Instead of separating them, most people connect them.

I believe a careful reading of Scripture will lead one to see there is a separation of ministries. One was focused on the Jews operating under the prophetic program, while the other is focused on the Gentiles under the Mystery program. The first was concerning Jesus' earthly ministry and the 12 Disciples while the later concerns Jesus' heavenly ministry, which was delegated to the Apostle Paul.

Jesus' earthly ministry was all about the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture. Paul states, in Romans 15:8, that Jesus came as a minister of the circumcision (the Jews) for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). Jesus did not come to proclaim a new religion or teaching, He came to advance the promises made in the Old Testament to the nation of Israel. Jesus was born under the Law to redeem those under the Law (the Jews).

It's stated in Matthew 10:5; 15:24 that Jesus came only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. His message to Israel was the gospel of the (Millennial) Kingdom (Matthew 4:23; 10:7—8). This was the Kingdom that was in view in prophecy. Healing (along with miracles, signs and wonders) was always a part of the gospel of the Kingdom. Those who accepted the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom did so through faith in Jesus as the Messiah along with repentance and baptism (Matthew 3:2; Luke 3:3). While Jesus was ministering to the Jews, the Gentiles were far off, without hope (Ephesians 2:12—13). It was under these circumstances that Luke wrote the book of Luke, laying out details of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. This is also where the Book of Acts begins, continuing to chronicle Jesus' earthly ministry. So far there is no indication that Gentiles were being reached with the Gospel.

Final teachings (verse 2)

Jesus spent His last 40 days on earth proving that He was resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:5—8; Luke 24:33—36; Mark 16:14; John 20:19). His last physical appearance, to date, was to the Apostle Paul as He personally taught him the Mystery in this Dispensation of Grace (Acts 26:16; Galatians 1:1, 11).

This 40-day period on earth gave Jesus Christ time to prepare the Disciples to take over the ministry. They had all struggled with His death, not understanding that He needed to be put to death, but then would

come back to life to act as their perfect High Priest (Matthew 16:21—23; Luke 9:44—45; 18:34; Hebrews 6:20).

Notice that the Disciples had some important gaps in their knowledge base in spite of walking with Jesus for approximately three years. They had first-hand experience in seeing exactly who Jesus really was. It was only after His resurrection that they come to understand some advanced teachings.

We see Jesus opening the eyes of understanding for the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus. Jesus Christ began to put all the pieces together for them as He explained to them from Moses and through the prophets how He was the One who was the subject of Israel's redeemer (Luke 24:27, 32). These two disciples then went to the 11 Disciples to tell them about their meeting with Jesus Christ (Luke 24:33—34). Jesus Christ then appeared in their midst, in the middle of a locked room. He proved to them that He indeed had been raised from the dead, and then connected these events with Old Testament prophecy (Luke 24:24:36—49). He not only taught them and connected these events with Scripture, but he also gave them a special ability to understand Scripture (verse 45). Those who didn't believe were given Bible truths in parables, while those who believed what Jesus was telling them were given the ability to understand deeper teachings (Matthew 13:10—17).

This supernatural ability to understand Scripture was given to them so that they could stand up as leaders of the Little Flock of believing Israel and stand against the unbelieving leaders of Israel. When Peter stood up to preach, we see him speaking with incredible power (Acts 1:15—22; 2:14—40; 3:12—26). This power came from Peter being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:8). This was all in fulfillment of Matthew 10:19 when Jesus told the Disciples to take no thought of how or what to speak, because the right words would be given to them at the right time (Luke 12:11—12; 21:15). The ability to comprehend and speak intelligently came from the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, Who was promised upon Jesus leaving them (Acts 1:2; John 14:26). This godly wisdom was evident to the leaders in the temple, who were trying to silence the Disciples from speaking about Jesus Christ while being amazed at how well-spoken these unlearned and ignorant men were (Acts 4:13).

Speaking of the Kingdom (verse 3)

During the 40 days that Jesus Christ was with the Disciples after His resurrection, He filled them in on things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God being taken away from the leaders of Israel and given to a different group who will produce proper fruit (Matthew 21:43). This was this Kingdom that was declared to be "at hand" in Mark 1:15. This was also the Kingdom that Jesus preached during His earthly ministry (Luke 4:43) and that the Disciples were commissioned to preach (Luke 9:2). According to Luke 16:16, the Kingdom of God was first preached beginning with the public ministry of John the Baptist.

The Apostle Paul is also said to have preached the Kingdom of God for three months while in Ephesus (Acts 19:8), and also while imprisoned in Rome (Acts 28:23). He declares in 1 Corinthians 15:50 that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, and speaks of those who are working for the Kingdom of God (Colossians 4:11).

Since the Disciples and Paul spoke of the Kingdom of God, most of Christendom assumes that the same Kingdom is in view. This incorrect view has lead many to believe there is no difference between the messages of the Disciples and Paul. The term "Kingdom of God" is a general description of the area of God's rule. When Paul speaks of the Kingdom, he generally is referring to the Kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13), the Kingdom composed of the Body of Christ. When the Disciples speak of the Kingdom, they are generally referring to the Millennial Kingdom, the hope of Israel, which is what they were looking for in Acts 1:6.

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