



'Acts' - Extra Teaching Points #1

Acts 1:1-14 (NASB)

Pages 1-15 in 'Acts For Everyone' (Part1) by N. T. Wright

Acts 1:1-5 (NASB)

*The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had **by the Holy Spirit** given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. ³ **To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. ⁴ Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."***

Q: Luke's first letter was about "all that Jesus began to do and teach." If this second letter is about how Jesus is continuing to act and teach in our world through His followers, how should that impact the way you read this letter?

- This isn't just a history book, this is just the beginning scene of a story we are now a part of!
- We need to know how the story worked at the beginning so we can play our part the right way today.

Q: Why is Luke's (and the other gospel writers') description of Jesus' resurrection body so important?

- Jesus' resurrection body was something more than ordinary.
- His transformed body is now the beginning of God's new creation!
 - In God's new creation, heaven and earth will come together in a new way ([Rev 21:1-4](#), [Ephesians 1:7-10](#)).
 - "Jesus' risen body is the beginning of a heavenly reality that is at home on, and in, this physical world ('Earth'), and

the beginning of a transformed physical world which is fully at home in God's sphere ('Heaven')." P. 3-4

Q: Why does Luke draw so much attention to the Holy Spirit right at the start of this letter?

- John had called people to a baptism of repentance and renewal, but promised that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire ([Matt 3:11](#)).
 - The Holy Spirit represented new birth, and fire represented judgment.
- Luke puts it out there that this promised baptism of the Holy Spirit happened right there at the beginning.
 - Luke wants us to know that the long awaited renewal of creation, and the restoration of humanity, have begun... it's happening now! ([Romans 8:19-25](#))

Acts 1:6-8 (NASB)

*So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; ⁸ but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and **you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."***

Q: Why would the apostles be asking Jesus about the times and dates (epochs) of the restoration of Israel?

- "They had seen Jesus rather like King David in the Old Testament, who, for several years, was a kind of king-in-waiting, standing in the wings with a ragtag group of followers, wondering when their turn would come." P. 7
- Many Jews of the day believed that when God restored Israel, the whole world would be turned around, and Israel would be the top nation, ruling over the rest of the world.

Q: Most people assume that Jesus' answer points to the idea that His plans are for a heavenly kingdom, not an earthly one, which will influence the way they read the rest of Luke's letter. Does that sound like what Jesus is saying?

Q: Why does Jesus tell them they are going to be His witnesses all over the earth?

- "In the world of the first century, when someone was enthroned as king, that new authority would take effect through heralds going off throughout the territory-in-question with the news, 'We have a king!' That was always proclaimed as good news, because everyone in the ancient world (unlike many in the modern world) knew that anarchy is always worse than authorized government... So heralds would go off to the far reaches of the kingdom... to demand glad allegiance from supposedly grateful subjects." P. 9
- This is what Jesus is telling them to do!
 - They were asking about when the Kingdom would come, and Jesus was saying that, in one sense, it was already here!
 - "The apostles were to go out as heralds, not of someone who may become king at some point in the future, but of the one who has already been appointed and enthroned." P. 9

Acts 1:9-14 (NASB)

*And after He had said these things, **He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.***

¹⁰ *And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.*

¹¹ *They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? **This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.**"* ¹² *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.*

¹³ *When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.*

¹⁴ ***These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.***

Q: Jesus was taken "up... into heaven"; but where is heaven?

- "Heaven and earth are two halves of God's created world." P. 11
- "The reality is this: 'heaven', in the Bible, is God's space, and 'earth' is our space. 'Heaven' isn't just 'the happy place where God's people go when they die'; and it certainly isn't our 'home', if by that you mean (as some Christians, sadly, have meant) that our eventual destiny is to leave 'earth' altogether and go to 'heaven' instead. God's plan, as we see again and again in the Bible, is for 'new heavens and new earth', and for them to be joined together in that renewal once and for all. Heaven may be our temporary home, after this present life; but the whole new world, united and transformed, is our eventual destination." P. 12
- "Part of the point about Jesus' resurrection, is that it was the beginning of precisely that astonishing and world-shattering renewal. It wasn't just that He happened to be alive again, as though by some quirk of previously unsuspected 'nature', or by some extraordinary 'miracle' in which God did the impossible, just to show how powerful He was; death suddenly worked backwards in this particular case. It was, rather, that because on the cross He had indeed dealt with the main force of evil, decay, and death itself, the creative power of God, no longer thwarted as it had been by human rebellion, could at last burst forth and produce the beginning, the pilot project, of that joined-up-heaven-and-earth reality which is God's plan for the whole world." P. 12

- “They believed that ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ are the two interlocking spheres of God’s reality, and that the risen body of Jesus is the first (and so far the only) object which is fully at home in both, and hence in either, anticipating the time when everything will be renewed and joined together.” P. 13
- “Jesus is ‘lifted up’, indicating to the disciples, not that He was heading out somewhere beyond the moon, beyond Mars, or wherever, but that He was going into ‘God’s space’, ‘God’s dimension’. The cloud, as so often in the Bible, is the sign of God’s presence (think of the pillar of cloud and fire as the children of Israel wandered through the desert, or the cloud and smoke that filled the Temple when God became suddenly present in a new way). Jesus has gone into God’s dimension of reality; but He’ll be back on the day when that dimension and our present one are brought back together once and for all.” P. 13

Q: Why were they so devoted to prayer?

- “It is precisely in worship and prayer that we, while still on ‘earth’ in the sense I’ve explored already, find ourselves sharing in the life of ‘heaven’, which is where Jesus is.” P. 15
- “The constant references to prayer in Acts are a sign that this is how these very ordinary, frequently muddled, deeply *human* beings, the apostles and the others with them, found that their story was being bound up with the story of ‘what Jesus was continuing to do and to teach’. From the ascension onward, the story of Jesus’ followers takes place in both dimensions.” P. 15
- “As we, in our own day, not only read Acts, but try to follow Jesus and witness to His lordship over the world, it is through prayer and worship that we, too, can know, enjoy, and be energized by the life of heaven, right here on earth; and work out what that will mean in terms of other claims, other lords, other ways of life.” P. 15

Follow Up Assignment

Q: If Luke were still alive and adding chapters to Acts, how would he describe you and your part in this story?

Q: Does knowing the long awaited renewal of creation, and the restoration of humanity happening now, change the way you see your purpose in life?

Q: Are you devoted to prayer and worship?

- Is prayer and worship more of a ‘solo sport’ for you, or a ‘team event’?
- Which was it more like for those original followers we see in Acts?