Acts 1:1–12 — The Former Treatise

Jesus Began to Do and to Teach, the Promise of the Father, the Kingdom Question, and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

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Scripture Reading: Acts 1:1–12

> *“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen.*
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> *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”*
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> *“And when they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”*

The Order: To Do and to Teach

Verse 1 states that the former treatise was of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach — not to teach and to do. The order is divine. He did first; he taught what he lived. We hear sometimes, do as I say, not as I do — a reproach directed at those who say the right things while doing otherwise. That was never the Lord’s pathway. He was what he taught and he taught what he was. This is a lesson for all who follow him: the doing precedes the teaching, and the life gives authority to the word.

Luke writes that what Jesus began to do and teach continued until the day he was taken up. The word began is significant: the entire Gospel of Luke, indeed the Lord’s whole earthly ministry, was only the beginning. He continues to teach

through his designated servants, through the operations of the Spirit, through the gifts he has given to the body. Acts is not the story of what the apostles did; it is the continuation of what the Lord Jesus began.

The way the Lord's departure is described varies with the character of each Gospel. In Luke — the Gospel of his perfect humanity — he is taken up, lifted up by another; the dependent man is dependent to the end, carried up into glory. In John — the Gospel of his Godhead — he says, I ascend, by his own divine power, returning where he was before. Both are true simultaneously; each Gospel presents the aspect suited to its own theme.

The Forty Days and the Ten Days

Two brief periods are marked at the opening of Acts. During the forty days between resurrection and ascension, the Lord showed himself alive by many infallible proofs, spoke of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and gave commandments to the apostles he had chosen. He directed them during those days, appearing among them, and giving them their charge. Then there were ten more days — from the ascension to Pentecost, the fiftieth day — during which they waited as commanded. During those ten days they were engaged in prayer and supplication, and in the choosing of Matthias to fill the place left by Judas.

Theophilus: Most Excellent No Longer

Luke addressed his Gospel to most excellent Theophilus, giving him the title that was due him. Here in Acts the title is dropped. This is not familiarity or carelessness on Luke's part — Scripture says render honour to whom honour is due, and Luke had done so. The dropping of the title is thought to indicate that Theophilus had come to know the Lord and had himself moved out of the kind of position that carried such titles. Whether or not that can be proven, something had changed, and Luke would not have dropped the title without reason.

The Promise of the Father: How Both Persons Send the Spirit

The Lord commanded them to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father. He had spoken of it at the end of Luke 24, and throughout John 14 and 16. John the Baptist had prophesied of one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The promise was coming; they were to wait for it.

Both the Father and the Son send the Spirit, and Acts 2:32–33 gives the explanation of how. “This Jesus hath God raised up… Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this.” The Father gives the exalted Son the Spirit, and the Son pours the Spirit out. The Father sends the Spirit through the Son; the Son is the instrument of the promise. He had received the Spirit once before at his baptism, in accordance with the perfection of his person. This was different: he now receives the Spirit as the glorified Head in heaven in order to pour him out to form one body in union with himself. That is a new and distinct operation.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit: Once, Corporate, Unrepeatable

Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. This baptism took place once, on the day of Pentecost, and it was corporate: by one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13). The body was formed at that moment. It cannot be formed again; you cannot form the body more than once. The idea that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a repeated individual experience is foreign to Scripture and based on a misunderstanding of what that baptism was and did.

Ephesians 1:13–14 gives the connection: “In whom ye also trusted… in whom also after that ye believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.” The Ephesians were not present at Pentecost. They were sealed with the Holy Spirit designated as the Spirit of promise — the same one who came at Pentecost. The phrase links them to what happened then. When a believer is sealed with the

Spirit today, he is joined to the body that was formed once for all at Pentecost. The Spirit never left; he came to indwell the church and the saints, and he will not leave until those he indwells are removed at the rapture. The objection that the removal of the Spirit as restrainer (2 Thessalonians 2) would make salvation impossible after the rapture misunderstands this: he ceases to operate in the special capacity for which he came at Pentecost, but he is omnipresent and was at work in the Old Testament and will be in operation in a different capacity through the tribulation and millennium.

Lord, Wilt Thou at This Time Restore the Kingdom to Israel?

When they came together before the ascension, the disciples asked: Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? This was much on their minds — it had been throughout the Lord's ministry. They had disputed about who would be greatest, sought seats at his right and left, and the whole godly remnant of Israel — Zechariah's prophecy in Luke 1, Anna, Simeon — was expecting the kingdom the prophets had described. Their expectation was right. The Lord never once told them there was going to be no such kingdom as they anticipated.

His answer was not, you are wrong about the kingdom. His answer was: it is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in his own authority. The timing was wrong; the expectation was right. The offer of the kingdom had been real, couched in the person of the Messiah himself, and the testing of the first man was brought to its issue by the rejection of that offer. But the kingdom is not cancelled. The kingdom awaits its time. Anti-dispensationalists who argue the Lord corrected the disciples' kingdom expectation read into his silence what is not there — and in so doing contradict the plain language of every prophet of Israel, John the Baptist, the Lord himself in his preaching, and the inspired prophecy of Zechariah.

The phrase it is not for you to know the times and seasons also connects with 1 Thessalonians 5:1–2: “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.” The two passages together affirm the same thing: the timing of these events belongs to the Father’s own authority, and the posture of the people of God is not calculation but watchfulness and readiness.

Jesus began both to do and teach. And he has not stopped.