

# Acts of the Apostles

William S. Kurz, SJ



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## Editors' Preface

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord. . . . All the preaching of the Church should be nourished and governed by Sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the power and goodness in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons and daughters, the food of the soul, a pure and perennial fountain of spiritual life.

Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* 21

Were not our hearts burning while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?

Luke 24:32

The Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture aims to serve the ministry of the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church. Since Vatican Council II, there has been an increasing hunger among Catholics to study Scripture in depth and in a way that reveals its relationship to liturgy, evangelization, catechesis, theology, and personal and communal life. This series responds to that desire by providing accessible yet substantive commentary on each book of the New Testament, drawn from the best of contemporary biblical scholarship as well as the rich treasury of the Church's tradition. These volumes seek to offer scholarship illumined by faith, in the conviction that the ultimate aim of biblical interpretation is to discover what God has revealed and is still speaking through the sacred text. Central to our approach are the principles taught by Vatican II: first, the use of historical and literary methods to discern what the

biblical authors intended to express; second, prayerful theological reflection to understand the sacred text “in accord with the same Spirit by whom it was written”—that is, in light of the content and unity of the whole Scripture, the living tradition of the Church, and the analogy of faith (*Dei Verbum* 12).

The Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture is written for those engaged in or training for pastoral ministry and others interested in studying Scripture to understand their faith more deeply, to nourish their spiritual life, or to share the good news with others. With this in mind, the authors focus on the meaning of the text for faith and life rather than on the technical questions that occupy scholars, and they explain the Bible in ordinary language that does not require translation for preaching and catechesis. Although this series is written from the perspective of Catholic faith, its authors draw on the interpretation of Protestant and Orthodox scholars and hope these volumes will serve Christians of other traditions as well.

A variety of features are designed to make the commentary as useful as possible. Each volume includes the biblical text of the New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE), the translation approved for liturgical use in the United States. In order to serve readers who use other translations, the most important differences between the NABRE and other widely used translations (RSV, NRSV, JB, NJB, and NIV) are noted and explained. Each unit of the biblical text is followed by a list of references to relevant Scripture passages, Catechism sections, and uses in the Roman Lectionary. The exegesis that follows aims to explain in a clear and engaging way the meaning of the text in its original historical context as well as its perennial meaning for Christians. Reflection and Application sections help readers apply Scripture to Christian life today by responding to questions that the text raises, offering spiritual interpretations drawn from Christian tradition, or providing suggestions for the use of the biblical text in catechesis, preaching, or other forms of pastoral ministry.

Interspersed throughout the commentary are Biblical Background sidebars that present historical, literary, or theological information, and Living Tradition sidebars that offer pertinent material from the postbiblical Christian tradition, including quotations from Church documents and from the writings of saints and Church Fathers. The Biblical Background sidebars are indicated by a photo of urns that were excavated in Jerusalem, signifying the importance of historical study in understanding the sacred text. The Living Tradition sidebars are indicated by an image of Eadwine, a twelfth-century monk and scribe, signifying the growth in the Church's understanding that comes by the grace of the Holy Spirit as believers study and ponder the Word of God in their hearts (see *Dei Verbum* 8).

A map and a Glossary are located in the back of each volume for easy reference. The glossary explains key terms from the biblical text as well as theological or exegetical terms, which are marked in the commentary with a cross (†). A list of Suggested Resources, an Index of Pastoral Topics, and an Index of Sidebars are included to enhance the usefulness of these volumes. Further resources, including questions for reflection or discussion, can be found at the series website, [www.CatholicScriptureCommentary.com](http://www.CatholicScriptureCommentary.com).

It is our desire and prayer that these volumes be of service so that more and more “the word of the Lord may speed forward and be glorified” (2 Thess 3:1) in the Church and throughout the world.

Peter S. Williamson

Mary Healy

Kevin Perrotta



# Abbreviations

†	indicates that the definition of a term appears in the glossary	
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament, vol. 5, <i>Acts</i> , ed. Francis Martin and Evan Smith (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006)	
<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>	
Catechism	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> (2nd ed.)	
JB	Jerusalem Bible	
Lectionary	<i>The Lectionary for Mass</i> (1988/2000 USA Edition)	
LXX	†Septuagint	
NABRE	New American Bible Revised Edition (2011)	
NIV	New International Version	
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible	
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version	
NT	New Testament	
OT	Old Testament	
PL	Patrologia latina, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1844–64)	
REB	Revised English Bible	
RSV	Revised Standard Version	
RSVCE	Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition	

## Books of the Old Testament

Gen	Genesis	1 Kings	1 Kings	2 Macc	2 Maccabees
Exod	Exodus	2 Kings	2 Kings	Job	Job
Lev	Leviticus	1 Chron	1 Chronicles	Ps	Psalms
Num	Numbers	2 Chron	2 Chronicles	Prov	Proverbs
Deut	Deuteronomy	Ezra	Ezra	Eccles	Ecclesiastes
Josh	Joshua	Neh	Nehemiah	Song	Song of Songs
Judg	Judges	Tob	Tobit	Wis	Wisdom
Ruth	Ruth	Jdt	Judith	Sir	Sirach
1 Sam	1 Samuel	Esther	Esther	Isa	Isaiah
2 Sam	2 Samuel	1 Macc	1 Maccabees	Jer	Jeremiah

## Abbreviations

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Lam	Lamentations	Amos	Amos	Zeph	Zephaniah
Bar	Baruch	Obad	Obadiah	Hag	Haggai
Ezek	Ezekiel	Jon	Jonah	Zech	Zechariah
Dan	Daniel	Mic	Micah	Mal	Malachi
Hosea	Hosea	Nah	Nahum		
Joel	Joel	Hab	Habakkuk		

## Books of the New Testament

Matt	Matthew	1 Tim	1 Timothy
Mark	Mark	2 Tim	2 Timothy
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philem	Philemon
Acts	Acts of the Apostles	Heb	Hebrews
Rom	Romans	James	James
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	1 Pet	1 Peter
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	2 Pet	2 Peter
Gal	Galatians	1 John	1 John
Eph	Ephesians	2 John	2 John
Phil	Philippians	3 John	3 John
Col	Colossians	Jude	Jude
1 Thess	1 Thessalonians	Rev	Revelation
2 Thess	2 Thessalonians		

## Introduction

The Acts of the Apostles fulfills a unique role in the New Testament. Written as a sequel to the Gospel of Luke by the same author (Acts 1:1), Acts continues the Gospel by recounting how Jesus' mission was carried on by his disciples after he ascended into heaven. It provides the only narrative link we possess of the transition between Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection to the spread of the Church beyond its Jewish origins to reach other nations. In addition, the canonical placement of Acts between the four Gospels and Paul's Letters enables Acts to introduce and situate those letters. Without Acts we would have no way to reconstruct the historical context of Paul's Letters or to establish some key dates within which his ministry took place.

Luke's second volume builds on what Jesus "began to do and teach" during his earthly ministry (Acts 1:1, literal translation). The Gospel covered all that Jesus *began* to do and teach. By implication, this sequel treats what Jesus *continues* to do and teach through his followers, after he was taken up to heaven and poured out his Holy Spirit on them. It describes how Jesus' mission is carried on by his followers, who spoke and acted in his name after they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. But Jesus' saving mission to all nations is not yet fully accomplished even with the apostles' ministry narrated in Acts. The narrative abruptly stops with Paul in house arrest in Rome, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason why the ending of Acts is deliberately left open-ended is to engage its readers. Inspired by the words and deeds of Paul and other followers of Jesus, Christians today are to carry on Jesus' mission even in the twenty-first century and until Jesus returns.

We disciples, who like the first Christians have been empowered by the Holy Spirit, are called to give ongoing witness to Jesus and his saving message to the ends of the earth. By recounting the climactic events of that story which took place in the first century, Luke's Gospel and Acts update the biblical story of salvation that began in the Old Testament. That story of salvation is *to be continued* by Jesus through us until he returns at the end of world history.

## Who Wrote Luke and Acts?

Although the author is not named within Acts itself, the earliest surviving manuscripts of Luke's Gospel contain the superscription "according to Luke." Church traditions as early as the second century attribute both the Gospel and Acts to Luke, a traveling companion of Paul in his later journeys. Many scholars have debated, doubted, or denied this tradition, often because the theology in Acts does not always clearly correspond to Paul's own theological emphases. The tone of Acts differs especially from the sharpness of Paul's early controversies, as in Galatians, against the necessity of Jewish circumcision and the Mosaic law for salvation.

More recently, there is a growing acceptance that Luke probably was the author. The following conclusions seem reasonable. In the prologue of the Gospel (Luke 1:1–4), the author writes in the first person as "I." He concedes that he is not the first to write a Gospel: "Many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us" (Luke 1:1). Nor does he claim that he himself is an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry. Rather, he says that "those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us" (v. 2). He then clarifies his own role. "I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus" (v. 3). His purpose for writing to Theophilus is "so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received" (v. 4). His Gospel is to confirm Christian oral traditions about Jesus by providing a carefully structured account of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection.

In the prologue to the Acts of the Apostles, the same author addresses the same Theophilus and refers back to his Gospel: "In the first book, Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1, literal translation). So far, all the author has told us is that he is a Christian and not one of the original witnesses to Jesus. He makes no claim to have been present at Pentecost or in the earliest days of Paul's mission. Later in Acts, however, he uses the

first-person “we” in several passages, implying that he was present at some of the events he is narrating. The first hint that the author was a companion of Paul is in Troas after Paul’s vision of a Macedonian asking for help, when he writes that after Paul had seen the vision, “we sought passage to Macedonia at once, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them” (Acts 16:10, italics added). Several times thereafter, he employs first-person-plural pronouns, implying that he was a companion and eyewitness on some of Paul’s journeys.

These claims of being present on some of Paul’s later missions, beginning especially in Macedonia and Philippi, correspond to the references to Luke in Paul’s Letters (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Philem 24) and to the early Christian tradition that Luke was a Gentile companion of Paul. The “we” passages appear only after Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 13–14) and the †Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), so Luke claims to have been a companion only on Paul’s later travels, well after all Paul’s heated controversies about faith and circumcision (see Gal 2:1–5:12). This could explain why those early Pauline emphases are less prominent in Acts. It is the later Paul whom Luke knew personally.

Luke implies that although he was with Paul on his later journeys, including his journey to Rome in chains (28:14–15, after which “we” is no longer mentioned), he was not present at Paul’s trials or final Roman imprisonment. Luke thus calls attention to similarities between Paul and his Lord Jesus, who was accompanied by his disciples on the journey to Jerusalem, but who faced his actual trials, final imprisonment, and crucifixion alone, without their presence or support.

With most of the Fathers and Church tradition, it makes sense to accept the traditional and simplest interpretation—that the author, Luke, was present at some events in the latter half of Acts. Although some scholars still treat the matter as historically insoluble, Joseph Fitzmyer has dealt with all the positions pro and con and has concluded that the most plausible historical explanation of the “we” passages, beginning with Acts 16:10, is that they are credible indications by the author of Acts that he actually was present on some of Paul’s travels.<sup>1</sup> Although Acts has some theological differences from Paul’s Letters, or has details about the †Judaizing controversies that are hard to reconcile with

1. See especially the introduction of Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 98–103 and 580. Compare Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 480–86; and C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994–98), 2:xxv–xxx and 773. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 296–97, discusses the main possibilities without giving a strong opinion.

Paul's own accounts in Galatians, these can be partially explained if Acts was written at a later time, when the controversies were no longer burning questions.

### For Whom Was Acts Written?

Both the Gospel of Luke and Acts are addressed to Theophilus. This common name in Greek means "lover of God," which could be a symbolic reference to all Christians. However, it seems likely that Luke was following the Greek and Roman practice of dedicating his writing to a patron of some sort and that Theophilus was an actual person to whom Luke dedicated his two-volume narrative. If so, Theophilus may have been a wealthy Christian, host of a house church, or a Christian leader who helped Luke get his two volumes copied and distributed (today we would say "published"). It can be presumed that the Gospel and Acts were meant for the Church and for Christians at large, and that Theophilus was someone who helped Luke to accomplish this goal.

### When Was Acts Written?

The narrative ends with Paul's two-year house imprisonment in Rome, without reporting what happened to Paul at the end of those two years. However, Luke would not have known that Paul's imprisonment lasted "two full years" (Acts 28:30) without also knowing what happened to Paul at the end of that time, whether he was condemned and martyred or whether he was set free and continued his travels. (We know from Rom 15:24 that Paul had intended to go to Spain after visiting Rome: "I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain.")

Luke's silence about Paul's fate at the end of Acts, therefore, is probably not because it had not yet befallen him but because the focus of Acts is not on the life of Paul. It is on the spread of the saving message of Jesus "to the ends of the earth." Luke deliberately ends on a high note, showing that the spread of God's word is not held back even by Paul's confinement. The book ends with an affirmation that even under house arrest, Paul continues to proclaim the kingdom and teach about Jesus Christ "with complete assurance and without hindrance" (Acts 28:31).

In Luke's account of Jesus' end-times discourse on the Mount of Olives, Jesus refers to events that would precede the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. He prophesies that there will be false prophets, wars, and natural disasters, "but it will not immediately be the end" (Luke 21:9). He adds, "Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over

to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name” (Luke 21:12). This period of persecution prophesied in Luke 21:12–19 is fulfilled in Acts when it befalls Stephen, James, Peter, Paul, and others.

Luke 21:20–24 then refers to the destruction of Jerusalem (which occurred in AD 70) as her “time of punishment” (v. 22), when her inhabitants will be slaughtered or taken captive to all the <sup>†</sup>Gentiles. This period of Jewish captivity after Jerusalem’s destruction will last “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (v. 24). The implication is that after the fall of Jerusalem, when the Jews are scattered throughout the Roman world in exile, the Church’s evangelization of Gentiles will increase dramatically. After that period will come the final cosmic signs and return of the Son of Man in judgment at the very end of the world (Luke 21:25–27). Most scholars date the death of Paul between AD 64 and 67, shortly before Jerusalem’s destruction in 70. If, as many think, Luke wrote the Gospel and Acts after the destruction of Jerusalem, Luke may thus have regarded himself as living in the post-Jerusalem “times of the Gentiles,” though Acts does not make explicit reference to that period.

## Theological Themes

The framework for Luke’s narrative is the biblical story of God’s saving actions for his people, which began in the Old Testament and came to climactic fulfillment in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. The Acts of the Apostles is a decisively new chapter in this story. In Acts the messianic age has dawned, and God is present in the world in a new way through the activity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Through summaries, quotations, allusions, and echoes from the Old Testament, Luke places us distinctly within Scripture’s perspective on God’s plan of salvation. We read what happens to Jesus and the apostles within the overall narrative of a God who created all things “good” (Gen 1:31). However, human sin and rebellion infected the good creation with evil, alienating humans from their loving Creator. God initiated his plan to rescue estranged humanity through the people he formed from the seed of Abraham and accomplished this plan through the Messiah and Son of God sprung from their stock. Acts frequently refers back to Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets to ground its narrative in the fulfillment of God’s ancient promises.

One special theme in both Luke and Acts is that first Jesus (Luke 2:32) and then, in imitation of him, his followers such as Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:47)

exercise the role of the Servant of the Lord. The theme of the servant is rooted in the biblical depiction of Moses as God's servant in the exodus (Num 12:7). The prophet Isaiah develops this theme, describing a humble Servant of the Lord to whom God says: "It is too little . . . for you to be my servant, / to raise up the tribes of Jacob, / and restore the survivors of Israel; I will make you a light to the nations, / that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49:6). Luke understands this prophecy as fulfilled in both Jesus and his followers, who are to be "a light to the nations, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47, author's translation). Although Jesus ministered primarily to his fellow Jews, the disciples in Acts specifically reached out to Gentiles ("the nations") as well as to Jews. As in the book of Isaiah, so also in Acts, this ministry to Gentiles includes a strong proclamation that there is only one God. This theme of †monotheism is depicted in Paul's occasionally humorous conflicts with idolatry and superstition.

Perhaps the principal theme in Acts is that Jesus' followers are his witnesses, who like him are filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered to speak and act in his name. The risen Jesus prophesies their witness in Acts 1:8, which is a skeleton outline of the plot of Acts: "You will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."<sup>2</sup>

## Reading Acts Today

Today we find Acts to be a fascinating historical account of the beginning and initial spread of the Church through the witness of founding heroes like Peter, Stephen, Philip, Paul, and their coworkers. But Acts is not meant merely to inform us about the ancient church. It provides a paradigm for the life and mission of the Church today. As Pope Paul VI wrote in his apostolic letter on evangelization, Acts "bears witness to a privileged and in a sense exemplary moment of [the Church's] missionary effort which will . . . leave its mark on the whole history of the Church."<sup>3</sup> In the heroes of the earliest Church, we see models of how the risen Lord acts in and through his people today and of how we can respond to the Spirit's promptings.

Acts depicts the Church as filled with missionary dynamism. Apostles, deacons, prophets, and ordinary believers are all used powerfully by the Spirit to

2. Readers may discern other themes in Acts by considering the entries in the Index of Pastoral Topics beginning on p. 390.

3. *On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*, 51.



draw others to Christ, and even to do signs and wonders in his name. Luke also portrays the character traits essential for sharing in Christ's mission: love of God and others, willingness to suffer for the sake of the gospel, obedience to the Holy Spirit, courage, faithfulness, endurance, boldness, and fervent intercessory prayer. Acts can thus renew our understanding of the evangelistic vocation of the Church and of our call to evangelize as individual believers in Christ. As Pope Paul VI stated, "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize."<sup>4</sup> Saint John Paul II wrote even more strongly in a letter to all the Christian faithful: "We must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardor of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost. We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul, who cried out: 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel' (1 Cor 9:16)."<sup>5</sup>

Another reason that Acts is timely today is that the cultural context in which the Church finds herself is in some ways more like that of the first-century Church than it has been at any time since. Vast numbers of people in contemporary society are ignorant of Christ and of the biblical worldview. Many are living a pagan, hedonistic lifestyle—not unlike the Gentiles whom Paul encountered in his missionary journeys throughout the Roman Empire. Social patterns often run counter to basic values such as the dignity of the person, the sanctity of life, or the Christian vision of marriage, sexuality, and family. Christians often find themselves subject to state pressure to conform to a secular agenda, and publicly witnessing to Christ sometimes provokes mockery, hostility, or even persecution.

As Christians we believe that Acts, like the entire Bible, is the word of God in human language. To understand what Luke, the inspired human author, intended, we employ historical-critical methods to uncover the meaning of the book in its first-century setting. Understanding the original sense helps us avoid †eisegesis, naively reading our contemporary biases into the Bible. On the other hand, because we recognize God as the ultimate author of the Bible, we understand Acts as God's word to us and to all Christians. We accept it as authoritative for our own lives and for our witness to the world.

Catholics interpret Acts within the context of the whole of Sacred Scripture as it has been elucidated in the Church's creeds, dogma, worship, sacraments, and tradition; we take into account the perspective of saints, scholars, and Church teaching, both ancient and modern. Unlike some early practitioners of

4. *Ibid.*, 14.

5. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (*At the Beginning of the New Millennium*), 40.

historical criticism, we do not regard dogma as obstructing our understanding of the Bible, but rather as shedding light on it. Studying this inspired account of the earliest years of the Church increases our faith in the power of God, raises our expectations of what God can do in and through us, and helps us understand how the Spirit and his gifts can operate in the lives of all who commit themselves to the Church's mission of evangelization.

# Outline of Acts

**Plan of Acts:** Witness to Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the Ends of the Earth (1:8)

- I. Preface (1:1–2)
- II. Commission and Empowerment of the Disciples (1:3–2:13)
  - A. Jesus' Farewell and Commission to Witness (1:3–8)
  - B. Jesus' Ascension (1:9–11)
  - C. Prayer in the Upper Room (1:12–14)
  - D. Replacement of Judas (1:15–26)
  - E. Pentecostal Empowerment by the Spirit (2:1–13)
- III. The Word of God in Jerusalem (2:14–8:4)
  - A. Peter's Inaugural Address to Jews in Jerusalem (2:14–41)
  - B. First Summary: Life in the Jerusalem Church (2:42–47)
  - C. Peter's Healing of a Lame Man and Temple Speech (3:1–26)
  - D. Peter and John before the Sanhedrin and Prayer of the Community (4:1–31)
  - E. Second Summary: Sharing in Community Life (4:32–35)
  - F. Positive and Negative Examples of This Sharing (4:36–5:11)
  - G. Third Summary: Apostles' Signs and Wonders (5:12–16)
  - H. Apostles before the Sanhedrin (5:17–42)
    - I. Expansion of Community Leadership: The Seven (6:1–7)
    - J. Stephen's Ministry, Discourse, and Martyrdom (6:8–8:1a)
  - K. Persecution and Scattering of Disciples from Jerusalem (8:1b–4)
- IV. The Word of God in Judea and Samaria (8:5–12:25)
  - A. Philip Evangelizes in Samaria and Judea (8:5–40)

- B. Saul the Persecutor Becomes Witness to the Risen Christ (9:1–31)
- C. Peter Heals in Judea and Begins Gentile Mission (9:32–11:18)
- D. Disciples Convert Gentiles in Antioch of Syria (11:19–30)
- E. Persecution of James and Peter by Herod (12:1–25)
- V. The Word of God to the Ends of the Earth (13:1–28:31)
  - A. Paul and Barnabas’s First Missionary Journey (13:1–14:28)
    - 1. The Church of Antioch Commissions Barnabas and Paul (13:1–3)
    - 2. Evangelization of Cyprus (13:4–12)
    - 3. Paul’s Inaugural Address at Antioch of Pisidia (13:13–52)
    - 4. Further Evangelization in Asia Minor (14:1–20)
    - 5. Return to Antioch and Report to the Church (14:21–28)
  - B. The Council of Jerusalem (15:1–35)
  - C. Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (15:36–18:22)
    - 1. Paul and Barnabas Separate (15:36–41)
    - 2. Paul in Derbe and Lystra, Joined by Timothy (15:41–16:5)
    - 3. Paul Called to Macedonia, Joined by Luke (16:6–10)
    - 4. Paul in Philippi (16:11–40)
    - 5. Paul in Thessalonica and Beroea (17:1–15)
    - 6. Paul Witnesses to Philosophers at Athens (17:16–34)
    - 7. Paul Witnesses at Corinth, Called before Gallio (18:1–17)
    - 8. Paul Returns to Home Church of Antioch (18:18–22)
  - D. Paul’s Third Missionary Journey (18:23–21:26)
    - 1. Apollos in Ephesus and Greece (18:23–28)
    - 2. Paul in Ephesus: Disciples of the Baptist, Riot of Silversmiths (19:1–41)
    - 3. Paul in Macedonia, Greece, and Troas (20:1–12)
    - 4. Paul’s Journey to Miletus, Farewell to Ephesian Presbyters (20:13–38)
    - 5. Paul’s Journey to Jerusalem, Meeting with James and Presbyters (21:1–26)
  - E. Paul’s Arrest in Jerusalem and Imprisonment in Caesarea (21:27–26:32)
    - 1. Paul Seized by a Mob, Saved and Arrested by Romans (21:27–40)
    - 2. Paul Recounts His Call to Jerusalem Crowd (22:1–21)
    - 3. Paul Spared Questioning under the Lash (22:22–29)

4. Paul before the Sanhedrin, Transfer to Caesarea  
(22:30–23:35)
  5. Trial before Felix and Imprisonment at Caesarea (24:1–27)
  6. Paul Appeals to Caesar, Relates His Call to Festus and Agrippa (25:1–26:32)
- F. Journey to Rome, Shipwreck, Final Testimony in Rome  
(27:1–28:31)
1. Sea Journey to Rome, Storm, Shipwreck (27:1–44)
  2. Arrival in Rome, House Arrest and Testimony (28:1–31)

**Open Ending of Acts (28:30–31):** “He remained for two full years in his lodgings. He received all who came to him, and with complete assurance and without hindrance he proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.”



# Luke's Introduction to Acts

## Acts 1:1–11

Luke's Gospel left off in the middle of the action. The risen Jesus ascended into heaven after commissioning his followers to preach in his name to all nations. He had instructed them to wait in Jerusalem and promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to empower them. But before reporting this event, Luke's Gospel ends with the disciples' worshipping God in the temple. Readers might wonder how Jesus' promise would come true and how his commission would be carried out. Here at the beginning of Acts, Luke resumes his account, retelling the last scene of the previous installment to bring the readers back into the flow of the story.

### A Sequel to the Gospel Story (1:1–2)

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<sup>1</sup>In the first book, Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught  
<sup>2</sup>until the day he was taken up, after giving instructions through the holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

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NT: Luke 1:1–4; 24:45–51

Catechism: "all that Jesus did and taught," 512

Lectionary: Acts 1:1–11: Ascension of the Lord (Years A–C)

Luke's reference to his Gospel as **the first book** highlights that Acts is a second book or sequel that continues the story begun in the Gospel. He first addresses **Theophilus** directly (see Luke 1:3). Though we know nothing about

1:1–2

Theophilus, most scholars believe he was the patron, the person of means and influence who helped Luke get his Gospel published and distributed. His name has a further possible significance. In Greek, *Theo-philos* means “lover of God.” Thus Theophilus can stand symbolically for all readers of Acts, lovers and beloved of God.

Luke summarizes the content of his Gospel as **all that Jesus did and taught** before his ascension. A literal translation of the Greek would be “all that Jesus *began* to do and teach” (RSV, NIV). This remarkable phrase clarifies why Luke sees a sequel as necessary. If the Gospel narrates all that Jesus *began* to do and teach, this volume recounts what Jesus will *continue* to do and teach through the ministry of his disciples when they are filled with his Spirit.

The Gospel of Luke reported Jesus’ activities **until the day he was taken up** to heaven in his ascension. Before this final departure he gave **instructions through the holy Spirit<sup>1</sup> to the apostles whom he had chosen,<sup>2</sup>** to equip them further for their leadership role. We know the risen Jesus’ instructions included an explanation of why it had been necessary for Israel’s Messiah to suffer and die and then be raised (Luke 24:26–27, 46–47). We may suppose his instructions included guidance on leading the Church after his ascension.

### Jesus Prepares His Apostles for His Departure (1:3–5)

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<sup>3</sup>He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the holy Spirit.”

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OT: Isa 44:2–3; Ezek 39:29; Joel 3:1–2

NT: Luke 3:16; 24:49; John 16:12–13; Acts 13:30–31; 1 Cor 15:3–8

**Catechism:** appearances of the risen Jesus, 641–44; Jesus’ ascension, 659–64; promise of the Holy Spirit, 729

**Liturgy:** Acts 1:3–8: confirmation; Acts 1:1–11: ascension of the Lord (Years A–C)

1. The NAB does not capitalize “holy,” presumably to indicate that the Holy Spirit was not yet a fixed title for the Third Person of the Trinity.

2. The Greek syntax is ambiguous and scholars disagree as to whether the phrase “through the Holy Spirit” goes with “giving instructions” (as in the NAB, NRSV, NIV) or with “chose the apostles” (as in the NJB), that is, whether Luke describes the Spirit as influencing Jesus’ final instructions or his choice of the apostles. The context seems to support the majority of translations, which prefer the former interpretation.



After addressing Theophilus directly, Luke resumes his story. First he recounts what Jesus did between his resurrection and ascension. Luke's Gospel reported Jesus' ascension into heaven (Luke 24:51) but left the timing vague. Now Luke clarifies that time frame: after Jesus' resurrection and before his ascension, he spent forty days in preparing his disciples for his departure and their future mission.

Luke emphasizes that Jesus **presented himself alive to them by many proofs**. According to Luke's Gospel, the risen Jesus not only appeared to the apostles but also let them touch him and ate some fish before them so they could be assured he was truly risen and not a ghost or spiritual apparition (Luke 24:36–43). Those who encountered the risen Lord did not need arguments to be fully convinced that he is alive (see sidebar).<sup>3</sup> Acts explicitly notes that the risen Jesus showed himself only to his followers, who then had to witness to others about his resurrection (Acts 13:30–31). He will show himself to all people only at his return for judgment at the end of the world (Luke 21:26–27). Thus, although Jesus' appearances were incontestable proofs for the apostles who saw him, later Christians depend by faith on the testimony of those apostolic witnesses that the Jesus who "suffered, died, and was buried" (Nicene Creed) is now truly risen and alive.<sup>4</sup>

The **forty days** are the period between Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Jesus' many post-resurrection appearances (1 Cor 15:3–8) and further instruction of his disciples took place during this time (except for the later appearance to Paul, who stresses the uniqueness of his own case in 1 Cor 15:8). Later †Gnostic heretics would claim that this period of post-Easter appearances extended to eighteen months, apparently to make more plausible their claim that the risen Jesus revealed a whole new secret religion to them.<sup>5</sup> Such later heresies illustrate how providential is Acts's mentioning a definite endpoint—Jesus' visible ascension after forty days—after which no more appearances were to be expected.

The number forty calls to mind biblical events in which God's people received divine revelation: the forty days when Moses received the law on Mount Sinai and the forty years when God led Israel in the desert (Exod 24:18; Deut 8:2). Just as the number forty appeared at the birth of the nation of Israel and its instruction, so too it marks the birth and instruction of the Church. Moreover,

3. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 96–98 on "Miracles as 'Signs.'"

4. Compare Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

5. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.3.2 [ANF 1:319]; Pelikan, *Acts*, 39.

## Miracles: Proofs or Signs?

Are the miracles in Acts proofs that compel belief or signs that require some further explanation to be understood? Luke is aware of both kinds of evidence, which are described by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (fourth century BC). In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle distinguishes between two legal terms: a “sign” (*sēmeion*), evidence needing further explanation to be fully persuasive in court; and a “proof” (*tekmerion*), self-evident judicial proof not needing any explanation. Aristotle’s example of a sign is a bloody knife that is insufficient to convict the accused without further evidence that the knife was found with him. His example of a proof is a birth more than nine months after a husband’s absence in the army: the timing proves that the child is not the husband’s.

The word Luke uses for “proofs” of Jesus’ resurrection in Acts 1:3 is *tekmerion*. Thus Luke regards the multiple appearances of the risen Jesus as self-evident proofs to the apostles that Jesus is alive after his death. Luke treats most other miracles not as self-evident *proofs* but as *signs* that require explanation or evidence to be persuasive. For example, Peter’s healing of a lame man is a “sign” (4:22) because it requires Peter’s explanation to be understood. The healing was caused not by Peter’s power but by the “God of Abraham,” who glorified Jesus by raising him from the dead and healed this lame man through faith in Jesus’ name (3:12–16). The signs done by the disciples in Jesus’ name attest that Jesus is alive and are an invitation to faith in him, but faith always remains a free decision.

### BIBLICAL BACKGROUND



just as Jesus underwent forty days of preparation for his earthly ministry (Luke 4:1–2), his disciples are now prepared for their mission during the same length of time. By emphasizing the number forty, Luke underlines that the life of Jesus is relived in the Church.

During this interval, the risen Jesus continued to teach his followers about the **kingdom of God**, which had also been his principal message during his earthly ministry. The kingdom of God is the fulfillment of Israel’s hope that God would one day fully manifest his sovereignty over the whole world, beginning with Israel (see Isa 24:23; 52:7). Even with this additional teaching, the apostles’ response in verse 6 will show that their understanding of God’s kingdom remained limited.<sup>6</sup>

6. Luke presumes that his readers know what “kingdom of God” means, for he does not define it either in his Gospel or in Acts (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible 31 [New York: Doubleday, 1998], 199).

Before taking any action, the apostles are to wait until they are empowered by the Spirit from on high, since only then will they have the divine grace and power they need to carry out their daunting commission. As Jesus' farewell address in the Gospel of John indicates, he had more to teach his disciples than they could understand without the aid of the Spirit (John 16:12–13). Here the risen Jesus enjoins them **not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father . . . for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the holy Spirit.”** Jesus thus reinforces his command in Luke 24:49: “I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

The promise that believers would be “baptized with the holy Spirit” is one of the most frequently repeated prophecies in the New Testament.<sup>7</sup> John had contrasted his own baptism in water with the baptism of the mightier One to come: “I am baptizing you with water. . . . He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16). The word “baptize” in Greek means to dip, drench, or immerse in water. It recalls the biblical promises that in the final times God would pour out his Spirit like water on thirsty ground.<sup>8</sup> The phrase “baptized with the holy Spirit” conveys a vivid image of what would soon occur. The disciples would receive a far greater baptism than that of John; they would be immersed in God's own divine life! This promise will be realized at Pentecost, and then in Christian baptism, which involves both water and the Spirit's indwelling and empowerment. In Acts 2 Luke will describe how this baptism with the Spirit fills the disciples with God's love, life, power, and insight into his work in the world.

## Reflection and Application (1:3–5)

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance for Christian belief and practice of the insistence that Jesus is alive (Acts 1:3). He is not merely a “historical Jesus” who lived and died in the first century. Jesus presented himself as alive to the apostles, no more to die, and he is still alive today and forever.

Christian faith is grounded in the eyewitness testimony of the apostles who encountered Jesus alive after his death. This faith has been confirmed from the first century till now by the Church's experience of Jesus as alive and present to us in our worship, prayer, and communal life. From the very beginning of Christianity, Christians have baptized new believers “in the name of the Father,

7. It is announced by John the Baptist in all four Gospels (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33) and by Jesus himself here in Acts 1:5 and is recalled by Peter in Acts 11:16. See also Jesus' promises of the Holy Spirit (the Paraclete or Advocate) in John 14:15–17, 25–26; 15:26; 16:7–15.

8. See Isa 32:15; 44:2–3; Ezek 39:29; Joel 3:1; Zech 12:10.

## Rediscovering the Baptism with the Holy Spirit



Commenting on Jesus' promise that the disciples would be "baptized with the holy Spirit," Pope Benedict XVI noted that Acts presents Pentecost as the fulfillment of that promise and therefore "the crowning moment of Jesus' whole mission." The pope explained that the grace of Pentecost is not confined to the past but is a gift to be desired, prayed for, and rediscovered today:

In effect, Jesus' whole mission was aimed at giving the Spirit of God to men and baptizing them in the "bath" of regeneration. This was realized through his glorification (cf. John 7:39), that is, through his death and resurrection: Then the Spirit of God was poured out in a superabundant way, like a waterfall able to purify every heart, to extinguish the flames of evil and ignite the fire of divine love in the world. . . .

Today I would like to extend this invitation to everyone: Let us rediscover, dear brothers and sisters, the beauty of being baptized in the Holy Spirit; let us be aware again of our baptism and our confirmation, sources of grace that are always present. Let us ask the Virgin Mary to obtain a renewed Pentecost for the Church again today, a Pentecost that will spread in everyone the joy of living and witnessing to the Gospel.<sup>a</sup>

a. Benedict XVI, *Regina Coeli* message, May 11, 2008.

and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). From the beginning Christians have experienced the presence of the living Jesus in their midst, especially in their celebration of the Eucharist, as he promised: "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matt 28:20).<sup>9</sup>

### Mission to the Whole Earth (1:6–8)

**"When they had gathered together they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"<sup>7</sup>He answered them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."**

9. See Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

OT: 2 Sam 7:16; Isa 43:10–12; 49:6; Dan 7:27

NT: Matt 28:19–20; Luke 2:30–32; 24:49; Acts 13:47

**Catechism:** the Church founded on the apostles, 857–60; coming of the kingdom, 672–73; outpouring of the Spirit, 1287

**Lectionary:** Acts 1:1–11: Ascension of the Lord (Years A–C); Acts 1:3–8: Confirmation

The disciples' question raises concerns that will reappear in various ways in Acts: what, when, and for whom is God's **kingdom**? The disciples probably have in mind God's promises to restore the royal kingdom of David (Jer 23:5–6; Amos 9:11–12), which had been defunct since the sixth century BC. Many of their Jewish contemporaries expected that the <sup>†</sup>Messiah would reestablish the political kingdom of Israel and overthrow the oppressive Roman government. It may be that the disciples had such an understanding of the restoration of Israel. But Jesus uses the question as an opportunity to further expand their understanding of God's kingdom. Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God throughout his public ministry was rooted in the Hebrew understanding of God the Creator as having dominion over not only his own Jewish people but also all people (Tob 13:11; Ps 99:1–2; Isa 49:6). Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come," that is, "Your will be done, on earth as in heaven" (Matt 6:10). God's kingdom is wherever Jesus himself is present and God's will is loved and obeyed. Here Jesus indicates that the kingdom will be restored not by military or political conquest but by establishing his kingship in human lives through the witness of his disciples (v. 8). Jesus already reigns as king (Acts 2:34–36), although his kingdom will be fully and visibly realized only at the end of history.

1:6

Jesus puts off the disciples' question about a specific time for the restoration of Israel's kingdom with a simple answer: "**It is not for you to know the times or seasons.**" Questions about God's timetable were often raised by Jews in the first century (and continue to be asked by Christians today), but Jesus refuses to answer this question. His disciples will receive God's power, not to exercise political authority, but to be his witnesses. And their testimony will not be related to Israel as a nation, but to God's saving authority over all nations.

1:7

"**But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you,**" Jesus further explains. This power from the Spirit will give them the courage and guidance to be able to witness to Jesus. Jesus' promise of the Spirit's empowerment calls the disciples back from their concerns about "times or seasons" to his previous command to wait for "the promise of the Father," the promise that they "will be baptized with the holy Spirit" (vv. 4–5). Just as Jesus' own baptism in the Jordan, when the Spirit descended on him, inaugurated his public ministry

1:8



Fig. 1. The initial spread of the gospel: from Jerusalem throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 1:8).

(Luke 3:21–22), so the apostles’ baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost will launch their ministry. Up to this point the apostles have been afraid and hidden behind locked doors (John 20:19). The coming of the Spirit will break the crippling power of all such fear.

Jesus’ promise, “**You will be my witnesses,**” introduces a major theme in Acts. Christian faith is grounded in the testimony of the apostles, both to Jews (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:29–32) and to Gentiles (10:39–42; 13:30–31). The apostles had walked with Jesus, seen his mighty acts, recognized him as God’s Messiah, and encountered him alive from the dead. Once they are empowered by the Spirit at Pentecost, they

will boldly proclaim what they have seen and heard, becoming witnesses to God’s saving acts in history.

Verse 8 functions as a skeleton table of contents, identifying the major events in Acts. The apostles’ witness to Jesus will begin **in Jerusalem** after they have received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2–7). It later will spread out through **Judea and Samaria** (Acts 8–12), extending to the Mediterranean coast through Peter. Peter will be the first to preach to Gentiles (Acts 10–11). Finally, Paul will bring the witness all the way to Rome (Acts 13–28), the center of the empire, from where it can radiate out to **the ends of the earth**. The “ends of the earth” does not refer to a geographical locality but means that the mission is unlimited in scope.<sup>10</sup>

10. See Kenneth Duncan Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture in Luke-Acts: Telling the History of God’s People Intertextually*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series 282 (London, New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 152–53.

## The Mission of the Servant of the Lord

Jesus' commission to the apostles to be his witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) is an echo of God's commission to his servant in Isa 49:6: "I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." The prophet Isaiah often wrote about this Servant of the Lord whose mission was to be God's witness to the <sup>†</sup>Gentiles. The servant embodies the vocation of Israel that began with Abraham (Gen 12:3): to be a blessing to all nations by bringing them knowledge of the one true God (see Isa 43:10–13; 44:8).

The mission of the Servant of the Lord is fulfilled in Jesus. At Jesus' presentation in the temple, Simeon prophesied that Jesus was "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel" (Luke 2:30–32, echoing Isa 49:6). After his resurrection Jesus applies the servant's mission to his apostles, who are to witness to all nations about God's gift of salvation in him (Acts 1:8). Paul and Barnabas later ascribe the same mission of the Servant of the Lord to themselves: "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth'" (Acts 13:47). The missionary vocation of Israel, to testify to all nations that the Lord is the one God and savior of all, finds fulfillment in the Church, <sup>†</sup>eschatological Israel.

### BIBLICAL BACKGROUND



### Reflection and Application (1:6–8)

Jesus' command that the apostles *wait* until they receive the Holy Spirit's power (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5, 8) is significant not only for the apostolic Church but also for the Church today. Aware of the great needs of the world and a multitude of ministry opportunities, we can be tempted to rush out and try to accomplish things on our own rather than waiting for the Holy Spirit's empowerment and guidance. But merely human resources cannot accomplish the supernatural mission that God has given the Church.

Recent popes have summoned all Catholics to a "new evangelization," to bring the good news of Christ anew not only to distant non-Christian lands but also to the secularized post-Christian societies of the West. Saint John Paul II wrote of the urgency of this task: "I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization. . . . No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church, can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples."<sup>11</sup> In order to carry out this great task, Catholics today are

11. *Redemptoris Missio*, 3.

as much in need of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as were the first Christians. Indeed, Pope Paul VI insisted that “the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization,” since “it is He who impels each individual to proclaim the Gospel, and it is He who in the depths of consciences causes the word of salvation to be accepted and understood.”<sup>12</sup> It follows that in order to carry out the new evangelization, the Church needs a new Pentecost. In his visit to the United States in 2008, Pope Benedict XVI prayed: “Let us implore from God the grace of a new Pentecost for the Church in America. May tongues of fire, combining burning love of God and neighbor with zeal for the spread of Christ’s Kingdom, descend on all present!”<sup>13</sup>

Many of the Church’s prayers to the Spirit begin “Come, Holy Spirit!” Christians have already received the Holy Spirit in baptism and confirmation, yet are continually in need of a fresh outpouring of the Spirit to carry out the mission that God has entrusted to each one of us. With the spiritual power we too receive “when the holy Spirit comes upon” us, we in our own generation are able to continue the apostles’ testimony that Jesus is risen and present among us.

### Jesus’ Ascension to Heaven and the Apostles’ Mission on Earth (1:9–11)

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**9**When he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. **10**While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. **11**They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.”

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**OT:** Exod 24:15–18; 2 Kings 2:9–10; Dan 7:13–14

**NT:** Luke 21:27–28; John 16:7

**Catechism:** Jesus’ ascension, 659–64; cloud as symbol of the Holy Spirit, 697

**Lectionary:** Acts 1:1–11: Ascension of the Lord (Years A–C)

Luke’s description of Jesus’ ascension looks backward to its Old Testament foreshadowings and forward to Jesus’ prophesied return at the end of time. As the prophet Elijah was about to depart this earth, according to 2 Kings 2:9–10,

12. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75.

13. Homily at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, New York City, April 19, 2008.



Elisha asked him for a double share of his spirit. Elijah responded that this request would be granted only if Elisha saw him being taken into heaven. Elisha did see Elijah taken up in a flaming chariot, and consequently he received Elijah's spirit and power to work miracles. The apostles see Jesus being taken into heaven, recalling the confirming sign that Elisha had received. Readers can thus be assured that the apostles will receive Jesus' Spirit and work miracles as Jesus did in the Gospel. Likewise Moses imparted his spirit to his assistant Joshua before his departure, ensuring that Joshua would carry on his mission to lead Israel (Deut 34:9).<sup>14</sup> Such biblical allusions demonstrate the continuity between the Spirit-filled ministry of Jesus and that of his apostles and their successors. The scriptural theme of the passing on of Spirit-filled prophetic vocations—from Moses to Joshua, from Elijah to Elisha, and now from Jesus to his apostles—shows that succession of authority has always been part of God's saving plan.

As Moses ascended Mount Sinai in a cloud (Exod 19:16–20; 24:15–18) to receive the gift of the law and then give it to the people, so Jesus is now **lifted up** to heaven on a **cloud** to receive the gift of the Spirit and give it to his Church (see Acts 2:33). Often in Scripture a cloud represents God's presence (see Exod 13:21; 16:10). The angelic figures' appearing as **two men dressed in white garments** recall Moses and Elijah, who appeared with Jesus in the cloud at the transfiguration (Luke 9:29–35).

1:9

As the disciples are **looking intently at the sky as he was going**, the two men chide them, "**Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?**" They remind the disciples that Jesus had prophesied his <sup>†</sup>parousia, his return in glory on a cloud at the end of the world (Luke 21:27–28): "**This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven,**" that is, on a cloud. Jesus' ascending in a cloud alludes to Daniel's vision of "One like a son of man" coming on the clouds of heaven to receive everlasting dominion from God (Dan 7:13–14). Jesus had indicated that he himself is the Son of Man foreseen by Daniel who will come with power and glory (Luke 21:27).

1:10–11

Jesus' ascension does not imply his absence from the Church. Rather, as Acts will show, he will be present and active in a new way through the Holy Spirit (see John 14:18). As his disciples speak and act "in his name," Jesus himself will be at work through them (see Acts 3:5–16).

14. According to Jewish tradition, Moses too had been taken up into heaven; see the Jewish apocryphal work *Ascension of Moses*.

## Reflection and Application (1:9–11)

God provided that the apostles would receive the Spirit and power of Jesus so that his saving work could be continued through them. We can rely on the presence of that same Spirit and power in the Church today so that through us God can extend his saving work to our generation also. Because we, like the apostles, have assurance that Jesus will return at the end of the world, we should not regret his physical absence after the ascension (John 16:7), but focus instead on his presence through the Spirit and on the mission he has entrusted to us. Although we look forward to Jesus' coming in glory, we are not to focus on the "times or seasons" when he will return. Nor are we to get distracted from serving our neighbors and witnessing to Jesus by elaborate speculation about how the end times will play out.<sup>15</sup>

15. See William S. Kurz, *What Does the Bible Say about the End Times? A Catholic View* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2004), a Catholic reading of biblical end-times prophecy in response to the Left Behind novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.