

The Ascension

The second book written by Luke and contained in our New Testament has been called, "The Acts of the Apostles," in the oldest manuscripts available and until today where it is just called "Acts." The narrative begins as a letter addressed to an individual but documents the work of Christ carried out by men. The work of two apostles dominate the narrative, Peter and Paul. Peter delivered the first sermons to the Jews and Gentiles, and Christ sent Paul to the gentiles.

Comparing the introductions to both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, a change in the way Theophilus is addressed, from "*most excellent Theophilus*" (Luke 1:3) to just "*Theophilus*" (Acts 1:1), indicates that he was convinced by the proofs in the first account and became a follower of Christ. Dropping the title of respect usually suggested that the reader and writer were equal, or brothers in fellowship. The first **account** described the teaching and miracles of Jesus. The second describes Jesus ascending to heaven, the establishment of the church, and the spread of the gospel to the world. Together they present a history of the work begun by Jesus and expected to be continued by Christians today.

The first point made in the book is the raising of the resurrected Son of God to the heavenly home from which He descended. "*While they looked on, he was raised up: and a cloud received him out of their sight*" (Acts 1:9). The next visions of Him are when He appeared to Stephen (Acts 7:55-56) and later to Paul (Acts 9:3-7). A vision shown to the apostle John, recorded in Revelation 5, gives us an idea of the joyous reunion in heaven. It also describes the presentation of the scroll to the Lamb of God. Revelation chapter 6 begins the opening of the seven seals, which pours forth in apocalyptic and prophetic language the things which will take place as the kingdom begins and grows.

The second point made is, be devoted to what is important to the work Christ wants done. The disciples stood in wonder as the rising savior held their attention. "*And while they were beholding him going up to heaven, behold two men stood by them in white garments. Who also said: Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to heaven? This Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come as you have seen him going into heaven*" (Acts 1:10-11). The master has gone for a while. The servants need to get busy working for the master until He returns as taught by Jesus in Matthew 25.

The first task to accomplish is to bring their number back up to the necessary twelve. Judas committed suicide rather than seek forgiveness. A twelfth apostle was needed before they would receive the promised Spirit and power. Acts 1:21-22 tells of the qualifications necessary for the position. The man must "*have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.*" "*And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place."* And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:24-26).

Of all the things these men had seen, heard, and done with Jesus, the thing they were expressly commissioned to do was "*become a witness with us of His resurrection*" (Acts 1:22). They were to tell the world that Jesus was alive, that He came out of the tomb, walking, talking, and eating as a living man. As we continue through the book of Acts, every sermon contains that fact. To the Jews on

Pentecost, *"But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power"* (Acts 2:24). To the leaders in the Temple, *"For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways"* (Acts 3:26). Before the council of the Jews, *"let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health"* (Acts 4:10). In every case where Jesus was preached to the Jews, and the learner was baptized, the message of death, burial, and resurrection was present. And as Paul preached to the religious judges at the Areopagus in Athens, his dominate point was that God *"has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead"* (Acts 17:30-31).

We also preach Jesus and Him resurrected and ascended to His throne.