

LOGOS

Logos Online Bible Study

First Wednesdays, 7.00–8.30 pm, on Zoom

Christian Beginnings

According to the Acts of the Apostles

Session 2 – Acts 1.1 – 26

Acts of the Apostles

‘Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I, too, decided, as one having a grasp of everything from the start, to write a well-ordered account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may have a firm grasp of the words in which you have been instructed.’ (Luke 1.1–4)

Strong resonances with Ancient Greek Historiography (‘Historical Monograph’)

Cf Thucydides (5th cent BCE), *History of the Peloponnesian War* & Polybius (2nd cent BCE), *The Histories*

‘... our author is a well-travelled retainer of the social elite, well educated, deeply concerned about religious matters, knowledgeable about Judaism, but no prisoner of any subculture in the Empire. Rather, he is a cosmopolitan person with a more universalistic vision of the potential scope of impact of his faith, both up and down the social ladder, and also across geographical, ethnic, and other social boundaries.’

(Ben Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, p 56)

Acts – Chapter One Overview

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A Community in Waiting (vv 1–5)

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Farewells, Departure & Prayerful Expectation (vv 6–14)

Jesus' Ascension & Mary's Inclusion

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The Twelve Restored (vv 15–26)

Fate of Judas & Election of Matthias

Acts – Chapter One

A Community in Waiting (vv 1–5)

‘In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach ² until the day when he was taken up to heaven (*anelêmphthê*), after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit (*enteilamenos tois apostolois dia pneumatos hagiou*) to the apostles whom he had chosen.’ ³ After his suffering he presented himself alive (*parestêsen heauton zônta*) to them by many convincing proofs (*pollois tekmeriois*), appearing (*optanomenos*) to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father (*tên epangelian tou patros*). ‘This,’ he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (*en pneumati baptisthêsethe*) not many days from now.’

Acts 1. 1 – 5

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Holy Spirit (pre-Pentecost) as Mediator of Christ’s Presence

‘I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate (*ho paraklêtos*), the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you ... I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.’ (John 14.25–26; 16.12–13)

The Twelve

‘And when day came, [Jesus] called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles (*ous kai apostolous ônomasen*): Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor (*prodotês*; cf *ho paradous*, Matt 10.4; *hos paredôken*, Mark 3.19).’ (Luke 6.13–16)

Acts 1.1 – 5

‘After his suffering he presented himself alive (*parestêsen heauton zônta*) to them by many convincing proofs (*pollois tekmêriois* [hapax]; ‘necessary/compelling proof’, Aristotle, *Rhetoric*), appearing (*optanomenos* > *horaô*) to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God (*tês basileias tou theou*).’ (v 3)

Appearance Traditions in Luke

Emmaus Way, Cleopas + Companion (24.13–35) & the Disciples (24.36–49)

Appearance Traditions According to the Apostle Paul

‘For I handed (*paredôka*) on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received (*parelabon*): that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures and that he appeared (*ôphthê* > *horaô*) to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared (*ôphthê*) to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared (*ôphthê*) to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared (*ôphthê*) also to me.’ (1 Cor 15.3–8)

Acts 1. 1 – 5

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The kingdom of God (*hê basileia tou theou*)

Luke x 32; Acts x 6; cf Matthew x 55 [inc ‘of Heaven’]; Mark x 14; John x 2

How (divine and/or human agency)?

When (past, present, future, eternal)?

Where (earthly, heavenly)?

Realm (geographical)? Rule (jurisdictional)? Reign (confessional)?

‘It expressed God's spiritual dominion over the minds and lives of his people and of human beings in general, and in time came to formulate also an eschatological hope when God's salvation ... would be fully realised ... it expresses the new way the kingship of God has entered into human experience through Jesus ...’ (Joseph Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 203)

Acts 1. 1 – 5

‘While staying with them (*synalizomenos* > *synalizô*, to eat together, to assemble; cf Acts 10.41), he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father (*tên epangelian tou patros*). ‘This,’ he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (*en pneumati baptisthêsethe*) not many days from now.’ (vv 4–5)

The Promised Gift of the Holy Spirit

‘And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’ (Luke 24.49)

‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.’ (John 14.15–17)

‘And it shall be after these things, I will pour out of my spirit on all flesh ...’
(Joel 2.28–29 // Acts 2.17–21; also Isa 44.3; Ezek 36.26–27)

Acts 1. 1 – 5

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Origin & Meanings of Baptism

‘[John the Baptist] went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (*baptisma metanoias eis aphesin hamartiôn*) ... John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Luke 3.3, 16)

‘For Herod had put [John the Baptist] to death, though he was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practise justice towards their fellows and piety towards God, and so doing to join in baptism (*baptismô*). In his view this was a necessary preliminary if baptism (*baptisin*) was to be acceptable to God. They must not employ it to gain pardon for whatever sins they committed, but as a consecration of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behaviour.’

(Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.116-118)

Acts 1. 1 – 5

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‘For the Baptist, fire and Spirit were not two things but one – fiery breath (hendiadys). He proclaimed that, at the boundary of the new age, all would pass through the fiery *ruach* of God, a stream which would purify the righteous and destroy the unrighteous.’ (Dale Allison, *Matthew*, vol 1, p 317)

Fire & Water – Judgement

‘A stream of fire issued and flowed out from [the Ancient One’s – God’s] presence ... The court sat in judgement, and the books were opened.’ (Daniel 7.10)

Water & Spirit – Purification & Renewal

‘I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.’ (Ezekiel 36.25–27)

Acts 1. 1 – 5

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Spirit Baptism

Baptizô

Literal: dip, immerse, wash, sink, cause to perish

Metaphorical: overwhelm, undergo, plunge

‘But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with (*to baptisma hon egô baptizomai baptisthênai*)?” (Mark 10.38; also Luke 12.50)

‘Baptism in the Holy Spirit’ is a metaphor for being immersed in or overwhelmed by God’s empowering and transformative presence, initially embodied in Jesus and subsequently characterising (defining) early Christian experience. According to the Acts of the Apostles, how this relates to conversion (ie embracing Christian belief) and initiation through water baptism into Christian community is complex.

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Next Time

Wednesday 5th August 2026

Session 3 – Acts 1.15–26

Please read beforehand