

Acts 1:1–26

As we open the Book of Acts, we step into the unfolding story of the early *ekklesia*¹—a community of ordinary people empowered by an extraordinary Savior, who continues His work through them by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke, the author of this book and the Gospel that bears his name, addresses both writings to a man called Theophilus. His name means “lover of God,” which may indicate an actual individual or may serve as an address to anyone whose heart is open to God. Early Christian tradition suggests that Theophilus might have been Luke’s former master, having released him to travel with Paul on his missionary journeys. Whether or not that is true, Luke writes with the precision of a historian and the compassion of a pastor.

Many believe Luke first met Paul through the Macedonian vision Paul received in Troas. What we can say with certainty is that once Luke joins Paul’s ministry, the narrative shifts from “they” and “them” to “we” and “us.” Luke becomes a participant, eyewitness, and faithful recorder of the Spirit’s work.

Jesus’ Ministry Continues Through His People

Luke opens Acts by connecting it to his Gospel:

“The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.”

That word began is important. Luke’s Gospel tells what Jesus *started*. Acts tells what Jesus *continues* to do—now through His Spirit and His people. Though He has ascended into heaven, His ministry has not ended. He still saves, heals, strengthens, and transforms lives. He now works through those who have surrendered themselves to Him and received the power of the Holy Spirit.

This means Acts is an unfinished story. The risen Jesus is still at work in His people today. God can use angels if He chooses, but for now He has entrusted His work to redeemed but imperfect men and women—people like us. Many of us feel unworthy or incapable, just as Moses and Jeremiah once did. Yet God delights to work through those who humbly place themselves in His hands. He reveals Himself to the world through the lives of His children.

¹ We often say we are “going to church,” but the word Jesus used—*ekklesia*—had absolutely nothing to do with a building, a location, or a one-hour religious service. *Ekklesia* simply means the assembly of people who call Jesus Christ their Lord. In contemporary English, “church” has become a casual shorthand for physical architecture or a scheduled religious service. This represents a significant departure from the original Greek term *ekklesia*. In its biblical context, *ekklesia* refers strictly to the assembly of believers who have confessed Jesus Christ as Lord.

The New Testament applies this term in a distinct hierarchy of meaning:

- The Universal Church: First and foremost, it denotes all believers in Jesus: the global, historical, and timeless body of all who belong to the fellowship of Christ’s salvation.
- The Local Church: Secondly, it refers to specific, localized gatherings of believers.

Because the *ekklesia* is defined by people rather than property, it is entirely independent of geography. An *ekklesia* can manifest in a traditional building, a public park, a shoreline, or a desert. The location holds no spiritual weight; the true essence of the *ekklesia* is realized whenever two or more believers gather in the name of Jesus, invoking His promised presence among them.

The Risen Christ Appears to Many

Luke reminds us that Jesus showed Himself alive *“by many infallible proofs”* after His suffering:

“Being seen by them for forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

The resurrection is not a myth or a symbolic story—it is a historical reality attested by eyewitnesses. In a courtroom, the consistent testimony of even two or three witnesses establishes truth. Jesus appeared to individuals, to small groups, and to over five hundred people at once. These witnesses not only testified but held their testimony even under persecution and death. They gained nothing in this world by confessing Christ’s resurrection—quite the opposite. Yet they held firm because they knew what they saw. And their testimony still stands.

Jesus’ resurrection declares Him to be God, Savior, and Lord. Through His shed blood He saved us from sin, and through His victory over death He revealed the way to eternal life. This is the message the apostles would carry into the world.

The Promise of the Spirit

Jesus instructed His followers not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the Father’s promise:

“For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

This promise echoes God’s words through the prophet Joel—that He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. Jesus had already explained the Spirit’s ministry: He would be *with* them, *in* them, and now *upon* them for power. This third aspect—the Spirit coming “upon” them—is the empowering presence of God enabling believers to serve, witness, and live out the gospel with courage and love.

A Question About the Kingdom

The disciples asked:

“Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Longing for God’s kingdom is natural. Jesus often spoke of it, filling their hearts with hope for a world made new—free from injustice, suffering, and sin. And Scripture assures us that God will indeed establish His righteous reign.

But Jesus redirected them from speculation about God’s timing:

“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.”

The kingdom is certain, but its schedule belongs to God. Our calling is not to predict dates but to live faithfully in the present.

Power to Be Witnesses

Jesus then gave His final commission:

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

The word “witness” speaks not only of words but of a life that confirms what is spoken. Many early believers sealed their witness with their blood, not because martyrdom made them faithful, but because their faith was already genuine and unshakable.

The gospel would begin in Jerusalem—the hardest place, their own hometown—and then move outward until it reached the entire world. That mission continues today. Every believer is invited to take their place in this ongoing story.

Jesus Ascends and the Angels Promise His Return

As the disciples watched, Jesus was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight. Two messengers stood beside them and said:

“This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

His return will be visible, unmistakable, and glorious. He will come again as King and Judge, and every eye will see Him. Until that day, His people live in readiness and hope.

The Upper Room

The disciples returned to Jerusalem and gathered in an upper room with continual prayer and unity. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is mentioned here for the last time in Scripture—present as a humble worshiper among believers. Jesus’ brothers were there too, now convinced of His identity as the risen Lord.

Peter Speaks About Judas

During this time, Peter stood among the believers—about one hundred twenty—and explained from the Psalms that Judas’ fall and replacement had been foretold. Though Peter spoke with zeal, he may have acted too quickly in urging the group to choose a replacement before the Spirit was given. Yet he showed a deep understanding of Scripture and a sincere desire to see God’s word fulfilled.

They identified two qualified men—those who had followed Jesus from the beginning and had seen Him after His resurrection. They prayed, asking God to reveal His choice. Then they cast lots, a method used before the Spirit’s coming to discern God’s direction. The lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven. Scripture never mentions him again, but God knows the quiet faithfulness of His servants.

After Pentecost, the casting of lots disappears, replaced by the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. God’s people would now be led from within, not by chance.

Practical Application

Acts 1 reminds us that Jesus continues His work through His people. His mission did not end at the cross, at the empty tomb, or at the ascension. It continues through every believer who yields to Him and walks in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We learn three essential truths:

1. God uses ordinary people who trust Him more than they trust their excuses.
2. The Holy Spirit empowers believers to live out the gospel with courage, love, and integrity.
3. Jesus is coming again, and our lives today should reflect the hope of His return.

Ask yourself: *Am I available for Jesus to continue His work through me?*

Am I relying on the Spirit's power or my own strength?

Do my words and actions bear witness to my risen Lord?

A Challenge for Believers

God has entrusted you with a role in His ongoing story. Your home, workplace, friendships, and daily routines are your "Jerusalem." Begin there. Pray for the Spirit to fill you, to strengthen you, and to overflow through you. Let your life point others to the One who died for them and lives forever.

An Invitation for Non-Believers

If you have never given your life to Jesus, hear the heart of the Book of Acts: the Savior who died for your sins is alive, and He invites you into a relationship with Him. He shed His blood to cleanse you. His resurrection declares His victory over death. He is God, Savior, and Lord—and He loves you.

If you are ready to turn from sin and trust Him, you can call on Him now in simple faith:

“Lord Jesus, I believe You died for me and rose again. Forgive my sins. Make me new. I give my life to You. Be my Savior and my Lord.”

Everyone who calls on His name in faith will be saved. And when you do, the same Spirit who empowered the early church will begin His work in you.