



## **Introduction to the Book of Acts** **(Acts 1:1-3)**

*Notes: Week One*

### **Acts 1:1-3 (NIV)**

#### **Jesus Taken Up Into Heaven**

**1** In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup>until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.<sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

### **Acts 1:1-3 (HCSB)**

#### **Prologue**

**1** I wrote the first narrative, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach <sup>2</sup>until the day He was taken up, after He had given orders through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After He had suffered, He also presented Himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

## Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*<sup>1</sup>

*Acts 1:1-3*

[1:1](#) The preface links the book of Acts explicitly with the **first narrative**, the Gospel of Luke ([Lk 1:1-4](#)). Though the books are separate in the NT canonical order, both were probably written by Luke, the traveling companion of Paul. The books are both large enough to fill a complete scroll, and so it is unlikely that they were ever joined as a single book.

The book of Acts was written after the Gospel of Luke, as is indicated by the preface ([1:1](#); cp. [Lk 1:1-4](#)). Luke builds these companion narratives on a broad chronology that begins with the birth of Jesus, then extends through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. He next shows the expansion of the church from Jerusalem to Rome. Acts closes with Paul awaiting trial in Rome. Like the first volume, the second is addressed to a person named **Theophilus**. Some speculate that Theophilus (Gk "lover of God") was a literary figure representing Christians generally, but more likely he was an actual historical person.

Some think on the basis of [Lk 1:1-4](#) that Theophilus was a seeker after God and that Luke aimed to explain Christianity to him. Others think Theophilus was a recent convert who required instruction in his newfound faith. Still others suggest he was an early church leader for whom Luke provided a summary of events surrounding the rise of Christianity. In any of the above scenarios, it is possible that Theophilus was Luke's patron, financing the publication of Luke and Acts. Though only a maximum of 20 percent of urban men were literate, there was a distinct book culture in the ancient world. Publication involved hand copying an original document to make it available for others. The cost of materials for the initial document plus all subsequent drafts could be expensive, with each copy costing up to four days' wages. As a result, the patronage system was an important fact in making book publication possible in the ancient world.

[1:2-3](#) Luke opened Acts by mentioning the Gospel of Luke, the narrative of Jesus' life and ministry up until His ascension. Before His ascension, Jesus **suffered** the agony of death and then **presented** Himself alive to His disciples ([Lk 24](#)). Jesus presented Himself by **many convincing proofs**, including appearing to the disciples during the **40 days** between His resurrection and ascension. During this time Jesus instructed them about **the kingdom of God**.

---

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 1".

## English Standard Version - Study Bible<sup>2</sup>

### Acts 1:1-3

**1:1-2:13 Preparation for Witness.** Acts opens with the account of the Spirit's descent at Pentecost. [Chapter 1](#) relates the preparation of the disciples for that event, which is covered in [2:1-13](#).

**1:1-5 Jesus Prepares the Disciples.** After a brief introduction ([vv. 1-2](#)), Luke reviews the 40-day period when Jesus prepared the disciples for their witness ([vv. 3-5](#)).

**1:1** Luke's **first book** is the Gospel of Luke, which gives an account of what Jesus **began to do and teach**. This suggests that the book of Acts is going to be about what Jesus *continued* "to do and teach" in the world. Though physically he had ascended into heaven ([v. 9](#)), yet spiritually he was still present on earth (cf. [Matt. 28:20](#)). When one realizes that the term "Lord" (Gk. *Kyrios*) in Acts usually refers to Jesus, it becomes evident that the entire book tells how Jesus was building his church: selecting an apostle to replace Judas ([Acts 1:24](#)), pouring out the Holy Spirit in new power ([2:33](#)), adding people to the church day by day ([2:47](#)), appearing to Ananias ([9:10](#)) and to Paul ([9:5](#); [18:9](#)), healing a paralyzed man ([9:34](#)), receiving worship from the church ([13:2](#)), stopping a magician who was opposing the gospel ([13:11](#)), and opening people's hearts to believe the gospel ([16:14](#)). (See also [1:2](#) on the Holy Spirit's role.) It is the execution of the divine program that Jesus directs and mediates. Luke's Gospel was also dedicated to **Theophilus**, either an actual person or a symbolic name for any Christian seeker or convert.

**1:2 The day when he was taken up** refers to Jesus' ascension into heaven ([Luke 24:51](#)). The beginning of Acts parallels the conclusion of Luke's Gospel ([Luke 24:36-53](#)). **Through the Holy Spirit** means that as Jesus gave instructions and commands to his disciples, the Holy Spirit accompanied his teaching, empowering the disciples so that they would rightly understand it and obey it. **apostles**. See notes on [Acts 1:20](#); [Rom. 1:1](#).

**1:3** Jesus appeared multiple times to his disciples and gave them **many proofs** to strengthen their faith. Solid evidence and knowledge of facts increase faith (an idea contrary to some modern views of "faith"). Only Acts provides the specific time reference of a 40-day period for the resurrection appearances, a number that evokes thoughts of many biblical events, such as the wilderness wanderings of Israel and the temptations of Jesus. Though common in the Gospels as the main theme of Jesus' preaching, the phrase **kingdom of God** occurs only six times in Acts ([1:3](#); [8:12](#); [14:22](#); [19:8](#); [28:23](#), [31](#)). Significantly, two of the six are at the beginning and end of Acts, indicating that the proclamation of the gospel in Acts represents the beginning of the fulfillment of God's kingdom promises. The "kingdom of God" means not an earthly political or military kingdom but the present spiritually directed reign of God, gradually transforming individual lives and entire cultures through the power of the Holy Spirit. Cf. [Matt. 6:33](#).

---

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 1".

## NLT Life Application Study Bible<sup>3</sup>

*Acts 1:1-3*

**1:1** In the book of Acts, Luke continues the story he began in his Gospel, covering the 30 years after Jesus was taken up into heaven. During that short time the church was established, and the Good News of salvation was spread throughout the world, even to the capital of the Roman Empire. Those preaching the Good News, though ordinary people with human frailties and limitations, were empowered by the Holy Spirit to take it all over the world. In the book of Acts we learn about the nature of the church and how we, like these early believers, can turn our world upside down (**17:6**).

**1:1ff Verses 1-11** are the bridge between the events recorded in the Gospels and the events marking the beginning of the church. Jesus spent 40 days teaching his disciples, and they were drastically changed. Before the Resurrection, they had argued with each other and had deserted their Lord. One of them (Peter) even lied about knowing Jesus. Here, in a series of meetings with the living, resurrected Christ, the disciples had many questions answered. They became convinced of the Resurrection, learned about the Kingdom of God, and discovered their power source—the Holy Spirit. By reading the Bible, we can sit with the resurrected Christ in his school of discipleship. By believing in him, we can receive his power through the Holy Spirit to be new people. By joining with other Christians, we can take part in doing his work on earth.

**1:1-3** Luke says that the disciples were eyewitnesses to all that had happened to Jesus Christ—his life before his crucifixion, and the 40 days after his resurrection as he taught them more about the Kingdom of God. Today people still doubt Jesus' resurrection. But Jesus appeared to the disciples on many occasions after his resurrection, proving that he was alive. Consider the change the Resurrection made in the disciples' lives. At Jesus' death, they had scattered, disillusioned, and fearing for their lives. After seeing the resurrected Christ, they became fearless and risked everything to spread the Good News about him around the world. They faced imprisonment, beatings, rejection, and martyrdom, yet they never compromised their mission. These men would not have risked—and in some cases, given—their lives for something they knew was a fraud. They knew Jesus was alive, and the early church was fired with their enthusiasm to tell others. We need to know this so we can have confidence in their testimony. Twenty centuries later we can still be confident that our faith is based on fact.

**1:3** Jesus explained that his coming inaugurated the Kingdom of God. When he returned to heaven, God's Kingdom would remain in the hearts of all believers through the presence of the Holy Spirit. But the Kingdom of God will not be fully realized until Jesus Christ returns to judge all people and remove all evil from the world. Until that time believers are to work to spread God's Kingdom across the world. The book of Acts records how this work was begun. What the early church started, we must continue.

---

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1814.

## Life Essentials Study Bible<sup>4</sup>

### A Principle to Live By Acts #1: Waiting and Working

*from Acts 1:1-11*

**Though we should always be prepared for Christ's return,  
we are to focus on being His witnesses in this world.**

Though several Old Testament prophets foresaw a time when Jesus would indeed rule and reign on earth, the apostles were obviously still confused about God's immediate plan for both Jews and Gentiles and their part in implementing this plan. Jesus responded to this question by making it clear they were not to focus on "times or periods" ([v. 7](#)) but on all who needed to hear and understand the story of redemption. Luke then continued to unfold historically what happened as the apostles responded to the leadership of the Holy Spirit and launched the church.

Nearly two thousand years later, many Christians still need to learn the same lesson as the apostles. We are definitely to anticipate Christ's return since He could come at any moment. However, at the same time, we are to be about our Father's business being "salt" and "light" in this world ([Mt 5:13-16](#); cp. [Tit 2:11-14](#)). After describing the "mystery" regarding Christ's "blink of an eye" return to remove believers from the world ([1Co 15:51-52](#)), Paul exhorted the Corinthians with words that are just as applicable today:

*Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. ([1Co 15:58](#))*

### Reflection and Response

*In what specific ways can we maintain a proper balance between  
being ready for Christ's return and carrying out His work in the world?*

---

4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1480.