

“Jesus, Continued...”—Acts 1:1-5

Brandon Holiski

Southern Oaks Baptist Church

May 11, 2025

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Grab a Bible and meet me in Acts 1...

Today we will begin a new series. This series, Lord willing, will take us through the first twelve chapters of Acts. There is a natural division in chapter 12, right before the missionary journeys of Paul kick off. I would love to study the whole book with you all. And if God allows, I intend to. But as I often do when it comes to the larger books, I like to break them up into chunks. And the cool thing about Acts is that it intersects with a number of other portions of the New Testament, with the New Testament epistles in particular. So I've always thought it would be cool to study the epistle as we study the book of Acts. Perhaps we will have the opportunity. I certainly hope so.

If you are unfamiliar, Acts is “the sourcebook for the spread of early Christianity.”¹ It was written by Luke, who has another book named after him in the New Testament (and, yes, he authored that one too). It is in the book Acts that we see the Church birthed. It is here we see the first missionaries sent out and the first local churches planted. It's an exciting book. Seriously, really exciting! And it can teach us a lot about God's intention for the local church. And in this season when our church is involved in planting a new church, it seems like a fitting time for us to dive deeply into this section of God's Word. Today, however, we are simply going to dip our toe in and introduce the book.

The first fourteen verses serve as the Luke's own introduction to the book. In this sermon, however, we will work through the opening five verses, which in Greek is actually just one long sentence.² This sentence functions as a prologue, recapitulating what took place in the Gospel of Luke, and especially in Luke 24, the final chapter.³ Of course, the Gospel of Luke is what the author refers to as “*the first book*” in the opening verse of Acts. Let's look there together. I invite you to follow along as I read, beginning in verse 1. This is God's Word...

“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’” (Acts 1:1-5)

Now, as I mentioned, “*the first book*” is referring to that masterpiece we know as the Gospel of Luke. Clearly, Luke expected the reader to be familiar with his prior work. In fact, it's probably best to regard Luke and Acts as a single volume in two parts, which is why scholars will sometimes refer to them together as “Luke-Acts” (the two words joined by a hyphen). It's quite possible that the only reason they exist separately is because of practical considerations and technological limitations.

You see, back then, books were written out by hand on either parchment or papyrus, which was then rolled up into a scroll. It wasn't unusual for such ancient scrolls to stretch out longer than 30 feet when unrolled,⁴ but if they got too long, they became cumbersome and difficult to use. As a result it is very likely that Luke utilized

two scrolls for his work, and, furthermore, it would have been difficult (if not impossible) for him to acquire a single scroll that could contain all of Luke and Acts to begin with. There just wasn't much a market for that sort of thing.

Whatever the case, the author assumes that the reader will bear in mind what he has already written in that prior work. Therefore, we will make frequent reference to the Gospel of Luke as we study Acts. In fact, let's do so now, since the introduction to the Gospel of Luke may very well serve as an introduction to Acts as well.⁵ Here it is:

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:1-4)

Clearly, Luke has a deep concern for recording accurate history. He's done his homework. He's interviewed the eyewitnesses. Indeed, as we venture into the book of Acts, we will discover through the occasional "we" references that he himself was an eyewitness to some of the missionary activity that he documents in the pages that follow. He set out with Paul on his so-called second missionary journey, along with Timothy and Silas (Acts 16:10). Paul would later describe him as *"the beloved physician"* (Col 4:14), which would suggest not only that he was well regarded by Paul, but also that he was probably well to do financially and well educated (given his profession).

His education is on display in what he writes as Luke and Acts evince the most sophisticated Greek prose we have in the New Testament, along with Hebrews (which some have even suggest may also have been written by Luke). His loyalty is noted by Paul in his last letter written, during his final Roman imprisonment, in which he writes simply, *"Luke alone is with me"* (2 Tim 4:11). "All these years in all these travels, including two years in Palestine, Luke is taking notes about the works and words of Jesus and the progress of the church." Then one day the Holy Spirit moved him write Luke-Acts, which take up nearly a quarter of the New Testament.⁶ And according to the opening of his Gospel, he sought to write this *"orderly account"* so that his reader *"may have certainty concerning the things that have been taught"* (Luke 1:3-4). And I'm sure his original reader, a man by the name of *"Theophilus,"* appreciates all his due diligence.

But who is Theophilus mentioned at the beginning of Luke and Acts? Theophilus was a common name at that time.⁷ The name itself means "one who loves God" or "one who is loved by God," which has led some to speculate that the name is just a placeholder for any believing reader. While Luke no doubt intended his writing to benefit believers generally, I happen to think that Theophilus was a real man, and I think that because of the title used to describe him Luke 1:4. He is called *"most excellent"* (*kratistos*), the same honorary title used of the governors Felix and Festus (Acts 23:26; 26:25), which has led many to conclude that Theophilus was "someone of high rank and authority in Roman society."⁸ He may have even been Luke's patron, funding this literary exploit since writing and copying were quite expensive in antiquity.

The truth is, however, that we don't know much about the man, except that he was previously *"taught"*—or perhaps we could say *"catechized"* (*katecheo*)—in the truth about Jesus. Perhaps he was a seeker or a new believer. In any case, Luke has taken an interest in the man. And it's noteworthy that the opening of Acts drops the title for the man—he's no longer the *"most excellent Theophilus,"* but just *"Theophilus."* This does not mean that he has forfeit his standing in society, but could suggest his maturity in the faith since Luke evidently felt at ease to dispense with formality and address him as an equal, perhaps a brother.

The opening verses of Acts summarize the content of the Gospel of Luke. There we read,

“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.” (Acts 1:1-2)

The Gospel of Luke is about the “doings” and “teachings” of Jesus until He was “*taken up*” at the ascension, which concludes the first account (Luke 28:50-53) and will soon be narrated in greater detail in the second (Acts 1:6-11). It should come as no surprise that the “works” and “words” of Jesus would be a fitting summary since throughout the Gospel “we see Jesus performing various merciful and miraculous deeds” and “teaching with astonishing authority.”⁹ The two were always meant to go together. Jesus’ miracles, John Calvin observed, were “seals whereby the truth [of the doctrine of Christ] is established and confirmed, and the effect is declared.”¹⁰ Christ’s doings and doctrines belong together. His works authenticate and illustrate His words. You need the one to understand the other. And that wasn’t just true in the Gospel of Luke, it’s going to be true in the early church, according to Acts.

And this brings me to a very important observation. Notice the word “*began*” in verse 1. Luke summarizes his previous account as what “*Jesus began to do and teach*”. Why word it that way? Because Luke is making a point that he will not be moving on to other things in this volume—as though the Gospel account was about Jesus, while Acts is about the early church. No, no, it’s all about Jesus! The Gospel of Luke is about what Jesus *began* to do and teach, and Acts is going to be about what Jesus *continued* to do and teach through the ministry of the Apostles, in the life of the early Church, and (most importantly) in the power of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ When Jesus said, “*I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*” (Matt 16:18), He was referring to the very thing that Acts describes. Christ is building His Church. That’s what Acts describes.¹² The Church plant, with Christ as the Church Planter. Christ is doing it.

For example, one main figure that we will read about in Acts is the Apostle Paul. Half of the book follows the ministry of this man. But listen to what He writes to the Romans:

“For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God...” (Romans 15:18-19)

What an interesting way to describe his ministry. Commenting on the connection between this and the opening of Acts, John Piper remarks,

“Whatever Paul accomplished for the kingdom, it was Jesus’s doing and teaching. Note the same pair of words: Christ worked through me ‘by word and deed.’ Jesus is speaking and acting. He is alive, and he is building his church. That is what the book of Acts is about. And that is why it is so relevant for us today. Jesus is still alive. He will always be alive! He is still speaking and working. He is building his church, wherever people come under the authority of his name and receive his forgiveness for sins and trust his power.”¹³

Do you see? The ministry of Jesus is still active!¹⁴ That’s Luke’s point, though it’s often missed. Even the title—“Acts”—can be misleading. Whose acts are we talking about? The Apostles’? Well, yes...but that would seem to obscure where the power of the Apostles really derived. Thus, many have preferred to think of the book as “the Acts of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵ Well, yes...but that would seem to obscure Luke’s point at the opening of Acts. Jesus lives. The ascension positioned Him as King of kings and Lord of lords, but it didn’t bring His ministry to a halt. “Christ is still active; He is not docile in heaven.”¹⁶ He still is ministering, but in a new way, by His Spirit empowering and enabling the Church. In a very real sense then, this book is about the continuing “Acts” of Jesus Christ.¹⁷ And while it would never stick because it’s too long, the proposal of John Stott does not miss the mark when he suggested the title (perhaps a little tongue in cheek): “The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus by His Spirit through the Apostles.”¹⁸ That’s a mouthful, so “Acts” will have to do.

Turning our attention to verse 3, we learn that the risen Jesus appeared before His chosen apostles—those whom He was about to send out to reach the world—for a period of “*forty days*.” The number “*forty*” is often associated with periods of preparation in the Bible: “Moses spent forty days on Sinai receiving the law (Ex. 34:28); Elijah visited Horeb on a forty-day journey, being refreshed before returning to work (1 Kings 19:8); and Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness undergoing temptation before beginning his ministry (Luke 4:2).”¹⁹ Now it is these disciples are being prepared for new ministry. Apparently, there were multiple encounters with Jesus over this period (cf. 1 Cor 15:5-8; Acts 13:31). If Jesus’ encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24 is typical, then these encounters likely fostered “enraptured excitement, unfolding mystery, suspense, and anticipation.”²⁰ Here in Acts 1, three subjects in particular made up the curriculum for these sessions with the risen Christ: proof that He had been raised from the dead, additional teaching related to the kingdom of God, and the reminder of the promised Holy Spirit.²¹ This suggests that there were three realities these men needed to grasp before they could be effectively used in the Lord’s service—three realities that we better take seriously as well—and they are: Christ is risen; Christ is reigning; and Christ’s Spirit is required. Let’s consider each for a moment, beginning with the fact that...

Christ Is Risen (Convincing Proofs)

Verse 3 tell us that Jesus “*presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs...*” Christianity is a historical faith. Something like Buddhism could exist without a historical Buddha. Not so with Christianity. Christianity needs a historical Christ.²² Without Him there is no faith. Without His death there is not hope. Without His resurrection there is no salvation. Everything hangs on a real Christ, crucified and raised, which is why the apostle Paul said that the resurrection was of “*first importance*” (1 Cor 15:3-4). “Everything in the book [of Acts] hinges on the resurrection, not simply an odd dramatic miracle that God did for Jesus, but as the launching of God’s new creation in the person of His Son.”²³

Is it any wonder then that Christ would spend so much time offering His disciples “*many proofs*” that He was “*alive*” again? They saw Him with their eyes, broke bread with Him at the table, even placed their hands upon him to feel His wounds and know that their senses were not deceiving them. He was no ghost. He was gloriously raised. “This is no spiritual, disembodied idea of a resurrection.”²⁴ This is a living Jesus in the flesh. And the disciples needed to be convinced of this.

This suggests that they were not “gullible simpletons” as moderns sometimes wrongly assume.²⁵ They knew that people don’t walk out the grave three days after dying. “The resurrection was no less controversial, and no easier to believe, in the first century than it is today.”²⁶ And yet they became convinced. Bruce Milne comments,

“That such conviction resulted is patent from the subsequent months and years of their witness-bearing. There is never the merest hint at any point, or on the part of any individual, of any diminution in their commonly held, absolute persuasion of Jesus’ conquest of death. This is a fact which no historian can deny. The entire Christian movement, an indubitable reality at the heart of modern history, is predicated on the astonishing claim that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead ‘on the third day’, and on the disciples’ undeviating commitment to it, even in the face of violent state-sponsored persecution, and the consequent, agonizing suffering to death in the case of virtually every one of the men so persuaded. The ‘Easter faith’ is a fact. It is explicable only as being the fruit of a repeated exposure to the Risen Christ.”²⁷

We must recognize though that they were not simply told that Christ was raised. They witnessed it themselves and then bore witness to that truth at great personal expense, bodily harm, and even to the point of death itself. If it was all made up, then they would have known. Friends, people die for sincerely held beliefs, but not for known falsehoods. In fact, it was this fact that was so instrumental in the conversion of Chuck Colson. Before he became a well-known Christian leader, he was known as President Richard Nixon’s “hatchet man.” He was

eventually embroiled in the “Watergate” scandal, for which he eventually served time in federal prison, where he came to faith in Christ. His role in the “cover-up” of Watergate was instrumental in convincing him that the earliest disciples of Jesus could not have orchestrated a resurrection hoax. Concerning this, he wrote the following:

“Watergate involved a conspiracy to cover up, perpetuated by the closest aides to the President of the United States—the most powerful men in America, who were intensely loyal to their president. But one of them, John Dean, turned state’s evidence, that is, testified against Nixon, as he put it, ‘to save his own skin’—and he did so only two weeks after informing the president about what was really going on—two weeks! The real cover-up, the lie, could only be held together for two weeks, and then everybody else jumped ship in order to save themselves. Now, the fact is that all that those around the President were facing was embarrassment, maybe prison. Nobody’s life was at stake. But what about the disciples? Twelve powerless men, peasants really, were facing not just embarrassment or political disgrace, but beatings, stonings, execution. Every single one of the disciples insisted, to their dying breaths, that they had physically seen Jesus bodily raised from the dead.”²⁸

It's difficult to live a lie. Harder still to suffer and die for one. And yet these men were willing to die for something they were uniquely positioned to know for certain wasn't a lie, all the while proclaiming, “Christ is risen!” And “given the centrality of the resurrection” to both salvation and Christian preaching, “it should come as no surprise to us that Jesus prioritized the establishment of credible witnesses to His resurrection in the days leading up to his ascension.”²⁹ In forty days, He turned these cowering doubters into sold-out witnesses.

But they were not just convinced in these forty days that Christ is risen. They were also convinced that...

Christ Is Reigning (Kingdom Teaching)

Verse 3 also tells us that, during these forty days of preparation, Jesus was “*speaking about the kingdom of God*.” If I were to poll people today about the primary thrust of Jesus teaching ministry, I imagine a variety of answers would be supplied. But if we were to ask the authors of the biblical Gospels to summarize the teaching of Jesus, they would “express it in terms of the kingdom” of God.³⁰ In fact, they did. Many times (e.g., Luke 4:43; Matt 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; cf. Matt 3:2). Indeed, in Luke’s Gospel, the kingdom is mentioned almost forty times. As one scholar put it, “It is fair to say that not only Jesus’ teaching but also the whole of Jesus’ ministry in the Gospels finds coherence and meaning in the kingdom.”³¹

Even in Acts, where the word occurs much less, we find mention of the kingdom at critical junctures, including here at the beginning and in the book’s final verse. Framing the book with these mentions of “*the kingdom of God*” is Luke’s way of inviting us “to understand the whole of Acts in terms of the kingdom of God.”³² If that’s true, then we have to understand what is meant by the kingdom of God.

So what then is the kingdom of God? Simply put, it’s the “redemptive rule and reign of God.”³³ Think of it this way: In the Old Testament the good news for Israel was that God reigned. The gods of the nations that surrounded them were not in charge. Their God was. And yet it often didn’t look that way. Often, they found themselves under the boot of an oppressor. They sinned against God, ignored His prophets, failed to repent, and God would send the judgment He warned them about. Eventually, they lost their freedom, their homeland, their national sovereignty. So when I say that they were yearning for the kingdom of God, what I mean is that they were longing for the day when God would put an end to this oppression and all would know that their God, Yahweh, reigned supreme. They envisioned a day when Yahweh would visit them, crush their enemies, and establish His unquestioned reign.

So when Jesus came along preaching “*the good news of the kingdom of God*” (Luke 4:43), people were getting excited. “However,” as Andrew Wilson explains,

“it quickly became clear that Jesus' idea of what these things looked like didn't match what any Jew expected. God's reign would not be accepted by everyone; in fact, lots of people (including the religious leaders) would reject it. The enemies crushed included sickness, Satan, demonic powers and sin, but not Roman soldiers. Worst of all, the return of Yahweh would mean judgment for Israel and her temple, not exaltation. The prophet from Nazareth was turning the popular notion of the kingdom of God on its head through the things he did and the stories he told.”³⁴

And what made things worse, from the perspective of many of Jesus' detractors, was the kinds of people that Jesus was welcoming into the kingdom.

“The 'worst' sinners, such as crooked tax collectors and sexually immoral women, were being welcomed and invited to dinner. People with no place in Israel at all, such as Samaritans and Romans, found themselves included, and (worse) held up as examples for good Jews to imitate. Jesus knew what he was doing. In each unexpected action, he signified that the kingdom of God was much wider than anyone had realized and that it was going to incorporate more than just Israel...God's banquet will be full of people you would never expect: outsiders, the poor, the sick, unthinkable from the highways and hedges. The rich will be poor, the poor will be rich, the first will be last and the last will be first. And so it goes on, as Jesus hammers a new understand of the kingdom into his listeners. The kingdom is at hand, but it's not what you thought.”³⁵

But you can see it—the kingdom of God—as you see communities of people recognizing reign of Christ and submitting to His rule. You see it in the Church.³⁶ You see it as the Gospel is proclaimed and people believe and are then added to our number. You should see it in this place as well as we submit to Jesus as King. But the way we see it now is in inaugurated way. With the incarnation of the Son of God the kingdom drew near because the King had come. He inaugurated the kingdom. Planted it like a mustard seed in the field, which has been growing and expanding ever since. The fullness of the kingdom will not be experienced until King returns at the end of the age. Thus, our experience of the kingdom has “already” and “not yet (fully)” dimensions to it, as we considered last week. And that's not always easy to grasp. It wasn't for the apostles either. In fact, you get a sense of their confusion—particularly related to the timing of kingdom's blessings—if you peek ahead at their question in verse 6. So don't worry, we will return to this topic and address some of the lingering confusion in the weeks ahead.

For now, I simply want you to remember that Jesus' teaching on the kingdom relates to Christ as King. And Christ as King relates to the rule and reign of God. His ascension, which we will come to next week, is all about His enthronement at the Father's right hand. The ascended Christ is the reigning Christ. And Christians are those who recognize His reign. It's why we confess Him as Lord. We have submitted ourselves under the rule and reign of King Jesus.

Jesus was preparing these disciples with such knowledge. They needed to know that Christ is risen, and they needed to see Christ as reigning. And, finally, they needed to be reminded that...

Christ's Spirit Is Required (Promise and Command)

Look at verses 4 and 5...

“And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’” (Acts 1:4-5)

If you know where the story is heading, then you know that the Spirit of God is about to be poured out on God's people in dramatic fashion in Acts 2. John immersed them in water. Christ will immerse them in the Holy Spirit. We're going to have a lot to say about the significance of this promise in the days ahead, so I mention it now simply as a placeholder.

But a couple details are worth noting today. First, the gift of the Spirit is called "*the promise of the Father*" here. Why? Because He is alluding to the fact that God had promise to pour out His Spirit in the last day in certain key passages from the Old Testament (e.g., Isa 32:15; 44:3; 59:21; Ezek 11:19; 36:26-27; 37:14; 39:29; Jer 31:33-34; Joel 2:28-32; Zech 12:10). This "*promise of the Father*" is also what Jesus was promising when He told His disciples that they would receive "*power from on high*" (Luke 24:48).

And since Jesus knows what is coming, He commands them to remain in Jerusalem. This is another way of saying, "Wait for the Spirit." Jesus understood that His disciples do not have the resources in themselves to carry out His mission in the world. They don't have what it takes. They lack the power. But, as He will say in verse 8, they will "*receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon*" them. And the Holy Spirit is given to empower them "*to be [Christ's] witnesses*" in the world. We will have much more to say about this in the days ahead.

For now, ask yourself, "To what are Christians meant to bear witness by the power of the Spirit?" Christ. But what specifically about Christ? That He is Savior and Lord. Amen? Now think about how that relates to the preparations that Jesus put the disciples through during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. When we say that Jesus is our Savior, we are saying that Christ suffered for sinners and was raised from the dead. Another way of summarizing that is by saying, "Christ is risen!" When we say "Christ is risen," we are confessing that Christ is Savior! But Christ is also Lord. To confess that Christ is Lord is to acknowledge that He is boss. Another way of saying that Christ is King. He rules. He reigns. The kingdom has come. Confessing Jesus as our Lord and Savior, then, involves us recognizing that Christ is risen and reigning.

That's exactly what these post-resurrection encounters with Jesus were meant to convince the apostles of. He gave them convincing proofs and kingdom teaching so that they would believe that He was the risen Savior and reigning Lord. And that will be the content of their Spirit-empowered witness moving forward. And how should people respond to this witness? How should you respond? The same way Jesus instructed when he went about "*proclaiming the gospel of God*" (Mark 1:14). He said, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel*" (1:15). Repent and believe. Turn from you sin, and turn instead to the Jesus. That's repentance. When you see that you are guilty before God and there is nothing *you* can do to erase your guilt, you are invited to turn to Jesus to remove your guilt through His saving work on your behalf. He died on the cross for your sin. He was raised on the third day conquering death. This saving work—Christ's death and resurrection—are what has the power to save because they involve a sacrifice to atone for your sin. Believe that. Trust in Christ to save you by His work. You can do that now. Confess your sin and need, and call upon Jesus to save you from your sin and shame. He will do it. That's why He came to this world. That's why He bore a cross to pay for our sins. He loves us. He loves you.

What a glorious Savior—crucified and raised. What a glorious Lord—reigning above and within as King of kings and Lord of lords. That is what we mean when we say that Jesus is Savior and Lord. And that is the good news that turned the world upside-down, as the book of Acts is going to show us. I can't wait. To be continued...

Let's pray...

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire* (PW; Wheaton: Crossway, 1996), 13.

² The punctuation, since it does not exist in the original manuscripts, is debated. Some suggest that the opening sentence concludes at the end of verse 2 (e.g., NA²⁸), while others have determined that the period belongs at the end of verse 5 (as suggested above). Those advocating for the latter include: GNT (UBS); David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 99; Dean Punter, *Acts* (SGBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 36.

³ Guy Prentiss Waters, *Acts* (EPSC; Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP, 2015), 25; I. Howard Marshall, *Acts* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 55.

⁴ R. C. Sproul, *Acts* (SAEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 17-18. "Very early on, it became the practice of the church to collect the four biographical sketches of Jesus that we call the four Gospels and keep them together in the church to be read and studied. As a result, the Gospels of Luke was separated from his volume two, the book of Acts." Ibid., 18.

⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (BST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 22.

⁶ "Luke was a prolific writer. He recorded for us the stories of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan. And his works show a remarkable depth of precise historical research. Luke traveled and carefully interviewed those with key roles in Christ's life. (In his quest to collect details, he was more like Indiana Jones than a history professor!). He investigated and reported on a vast amount of information. In fact, Luke-Acts is comprised of more material than all of Paul's letters combined, and since Luke was a companion of Paul, it's clear he was involved with writing the majority of the New Testament. Yet Luke record virtually nothing about his own life. This is a sign of humility. He does not boast about his relationship with Paul, nor does he go into detail about his own story. Instead, in Luke-Acts we read about the man's passion for the life-changing gospel, his sensitivity to the disadvantaged, his heart for prayer, and his concern for the Gentiles. Each of these characteristics reflects the church in Antioch (11:19-30), Luke's hometown according to an ancient second-century documents (*Anti-Marcion Prologue to Luke*)." Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (CCE; Nashville: Holman Reference, 2017), 6.

⁷ The name is well-attested, which examples dating back to at least the third century B.C. See Eckard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 70.

⁸ Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts* (REC; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 6-7. Sproul points out that, "in the ancient world, often major publications were dedicated to members of the nobility, and members of the nobility were often addressed with gracious titles such as 'most excellent.'" Sproul, 19.

⁹ Merida, 8.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles* (repr.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1:32.

¹¹ As John Stott put it, "Thus Jesus' ministry on earth, exercised personally and publicly, was followed by his ministry from heaven, exercised through his Holy Spirit by his apostles." Stott, 32. Similarly, Bruce Milne comments, "Both parts are about the ministry of Jesus; His ministry on earth, personally and publicly exercised (the Gospel), and his subsequent ministry from heaven, exercised on earth through the Holy Spirit (Acts)." Bruce Milne, *The Acts of the Apostles: Witnesses to Him...to the Ends of the Earth* (FBC; Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2010), 20.

¹² "Readers should therefore expect Christ-shaped and Spirit-filled 'word-deed and suffering-rising' patterns in Acts." Patrick Schreiner, *Acts* (CSC; Holman Reference, 2021), 80.

¹³ John Piper, "What Jesus Did After the Beginning," accessed online at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/what-jesus-did-after-the-beginning>.

¹⁴ Though I appreciate the qualification that John Piper gives: "Now I don't want to minimize the finality — the once-for-allness — of the saving work of Jesus on the cross and in his resurrection. Hebrews 10:12 says, "When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God." When Jesus cried, "It is finished," the debt was paid, the sins were covered, the wrath was removed and Satan was mortally wounded. I don't want to minimize the glorious once-for-allness of that in any way. But I do want to stress what Luke says here — that what Jesus did on the earth in his tough, compassionate, loving, healing deeds and what he said on the earth in his truthful, authoritative, convicting, comforting teaching was only the beginning of his doing and his teaching. This is absolutely crucial for understanding the purpose of the book of Acts and who we are as a church and what this age is all about. Because the clear implication is that now — now that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father — he is not finished. He is not done with his work and with his teaching. He is not dead and he is not absent. He is alive and he is present. He is doing and he is teaching." Piper, "What Jesus Did After the Beginning."

¹⁵ Indeed, since the Holy Spirit inspired the book, one might think of Acts, as Sproul did, as "The Autobiography of the Holy Spirit." Sproul, 18.

¹⁶ Schreiner, 80.

¹⁷ Bruce Milne points out: "Luke's perspective has two other profound implications which can be noted. Firstly, this continuity between the Gospels and Acts means that our understanding of Jesus cannot be confined to the thirty-plus years of His earthly life and ministry; it needs also to encompass this continuing ministry of the Risen Lord across the ages of history, and not least in our own day, when as never before in human history He is seen, known and passionately followed in every corner of the earth. It also needs to embrace by implication, the entire mission of the church until the parousia. Putting the same point more technically, Christology needs to include ecclesiology. Secondly, this means that the church cannot be understood in purely sociological terms. The church is the community of the disciples of Jesus, the people of God who seek to represent Him in the world. But it is also the body of Christ, and no matter how far it may wander from its biblical roots, in both faith and life, it remains by His grace the place where His is to be encountered. Accordingly we must never in despair give up on church, nor pursue a Christian vocation in entire isolation from it. 'Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sister, you did it to me.'" Milne, 23.

¹⁸ Stott, 34. Furthermore, because Jesus' ministry remains active, this sets "Christianity apart from all other religions" in that they "regard their founder as having completed his ministry during his lifetime," yet "Luke says Jesus only began his." Ibid.

¹⁹ Brian J. Vickers, "Acts" in *John-Acts* (ESVEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 334.

²⁰ Hughes, 14.

²¹ John D. Harvey and David Gentino suggest that "[b]y painstakingly proving His resurrection, He presumes that His disciples are prone to doubt. By carefully teaching them about the kingdom of God, He presumes His disciples are prone to misunderstand." To this it may be added that the reminder of God's promise to send the Holy Spirit, He presumes that His disciples are prone to impatient and self-reliance. Harvey and Gentino, 81.

²² Merida, 7.

²³ N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Acts: Rediscovering What the Church Was and Is* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 3.

²⁴ Vickers, 334.

²⁵ Schnabel, 72. Dean Pinter remarks, similarly, "There is sometimes a condescending attitude possessed by modern people who think that first-century Christian peasants and fishermen were gullible, superstitious, and primitive people who would believe anything. But what do Luke and Matthew say was the response of the first disciples when the women returning from the tomb tell them that it is empty? Some thought it was nonsense (Luke 24:11); some doubted (Matt 28:17). The truth is that first-century Jews like them were far less likely to believe in the resurrection of Jesus than most moderns. Most of the Jews of that time were strict monotheists who believed in a transcendent God who would never become human, let alone be cursed and hung on a cross. Even the Jews who did believe in the resurrection were anticipating a general resurrection of all people at the end of time; no one looked for one person who would be resurrected in the middle of time. In this regard, Jesus may have had a far harder audience to persuade than we do now, yet he does convince them. And those early disciples, once convinced of his incarnation and resurrection, were transformed men and women. They carried the wonder and message of resurrection into a pluralistic, multicultural world and, to a person, never changed their story that they had witnessed the living and resurrected Jesus. As for proof, they did what any ancient person would do: they pointed to eyewitnesses who could attest to their claims (see 1 Cor 15:5–8). From what we know regarding the early-church record, none of these eyewitnesses ever changed their story about the resurrection. Many of them even went to their deaths without ever denying what they saw and affirmed." Dean Pinter, *Acts* (SGBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 44.

²⁶ Vickers, 334.

²⁷ Milne, 27–28.

²⁸ Chuck Colson, "An Unholy Hoax?: The Authenticity of Christ," <http://www.breakpoint.org/2002/03/an-unholy-hoax>.

²⁹ Waters, 30.

³⁰ Pinter, 46.

³¹ Waters, 31.

³² Ibid., 32.

³³ Ibid., 31.

³⁴ Andrew Wilson, *Gospel Stories: How the Greatest Story Is Richer, Deeper, and More Wonderful Than We Think*, 143.

³⁵ Ibid., 144.

³⁶ Patrick Schreiner defines the kingdom as "the King's power over the King's people in the King's place" in *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018). Similarly, Jeremy Treat defines it as "God's reign through God's people over God's place." *Seek First: How the Kingdom of God Changes Everything* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 15.