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ACTS

The Amazing History of
the Early Church

JET WITHERSPOON TOOLE

Acts

By Jet Witherspoon

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THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Chapter 1

Luke's Opening Address to Theophilus

(Verses 1-2)

Luke addressed both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts to Theophilus. In Luke 1:3 he addressed him as “most excellent Theophilus,” by which he evidently referred to his character. And we may assume that Theophilus was deeply interested in the life of Christ, of whom Luke had written to him in his former treatise (the Gospel of Luke), and also in the apostolic ministry, of which Luke was now writing a second treatise. Luke began his story of the apostolic ministry where he left off in the last verses of the Gospel of Luke on the life of Christ. In fact, the last verses of Luke and the first verses of Acts overlap. In both passages he recorded Jesus’ last instruction to His disciples and His ascension.

Luke’s reference to his former treatise, in which he had written of all that Jesus began to do and to teach, strongly implied that he now wrote (in Acts) of that which He continued to do and teach through the ministry of His Spirit-filled disciples. The works which Jesus did while He

was on earth did not cease when He ascended back to heaven. He had told the disciples, “He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12). The disciples went forth from the day of Pentecost, filled with the Spirit of Christ, to perform, by the power of His Spirit, the same works He had wrought when He was here in the flesh, but in much greater scope, as His representatives spread out into all parts of the world.

Infallible Proofs of Jesus’ Resurrection

(Verse 3)

Luke reminded Theophilus of the forty days following Jesus’ resurrection, during which time His many appearances to His disciples were infallible proofs that He was indeed alive from the dead. The fact of the resurrection of Jesus is essentially basic to the gospel message of salvation. If He had only died but had not come forth in the resurrection, men still would not have been saved (I Corinthians 15:13-23).

Jesus commissioned His disciples to testify of His gospel to the world (Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48), but they would only be able to witness to that which they had seen and experienced. One of the basic requirements of apostles was that they must have seen the Lord alive after His resurrection (I Corinthians 15:1-10). An eyewitness account of the resurrection of Jesus was necessary by which to lay the foundation of the New Testament church.

The church was to be built on the foundation of the confession of faith in the deity of Jesus by divine revelation (Matthew 16:15-18). Peter, whose confession was

made before the crucifixion of Jesus, had his faith confirmed after His resurrection (Mark 16:6-14; John 20:19-23; 21:1-17). And his faith was again confirmed by the infilling of the Holy Ghost before he was equipped to use the keys of the kingdom to open the door of salvation to men by witnessing to them of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:1-38).

The resurrection of Jesus is doubtless the best attested fact in the Gospel records. Since the Jews knew that Jesus had said He would rise from the dead, they took every precaution to preclude any possibility of His body being stolen and a rumor spread that He had arisen from the dead. They requested of Pilate that the tomb be sealed and put under heavy guard to prevent any such occurrence. And he gave them permission to make it as sure as they could (Matthew 27:62-66). Their efforts would certainly have prevented any attempt to steal the body but could not prevent the resurrection of Jesus.

Very early on the first day of the week (Sunday) there was a great earthquake. The angel of the Lord rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb and sat on it. The glory of heaven which shone from his countenance and raiment struck the guards dumb and paralyzed them with terror (Matthew 28:1-8).

When the women came to anoint the body of Jesus, the angel, who still sat on the stone, announced to them the resurrection of Jesus and sent them to tell His disciples. They, too, feared this miraculous demonstration, but their fear was mingled with joy for the news that Jesus was alive.

Only the guards were present when Jesus arose from the dead, and some of them went immediately to the chief