

## The Acts and Torah of the Apostles Study Guide

### Chapter 1

#### 1:1

The author never directly identifies himself by name. But in v. 1, he links himself to a previous work addressed to someone named Theophilus, which is only found elsewhere at the beginning of the gospel of Luke. The second verse of that gospel shows that he was not an eyewitness to the gospel accounts, meaning he never actually followed Yeshua literally. But he was taught by actual eyewitnesses, and verse 3 shows that he investigated their testimony to his satisfaction.

In Colossian 4:14, Luke is identified as a physician. There are more medical references in the gospel of Luke than the other three gospels, which suggests a personal expertise in highlighting those issues. The Greek of Luke-Acts is written in a classical and rhetorical style that suggests an educated, literary person like a physician was the author.

Later, as we get into the narrative of Acts, Luke is identified as a traveling companion of Paul. And, in several passages in Acts, the author writes about his personal participation in the events (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16). So the evidence is strong that Luke is the author.

But, what about his ethnicity? According to tradition, he was a gentile, which would make him the only non-Jewish author in the Bible. Two reasons are cited for this conclusion:

1. He writes with too much sophistication in the first century to be Jewish, which is a huge assumption and suggests anti-Jewish bias.
2. It is claimed that the text of Colossians 4 indicates that he wasn't Jewish. According to that argument, in vv. 10-11, Paul refers to Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus Justus as being the only men "from the circumcision" who were fellow-workers for the kingdom of God. And then, he goes on to cite other people, including Luke, which leads many to conclude that Luke wasn't "from the circumcision" and therefore he was not Jewish. In fact, some translations like the NIV employ the term "Jews," even though that word is not in the Greek. So the translators of the NIV concluded that the phrase "from the circumcision" must refer to Jewish people in a general sense.

But, the problem is that the same Greek wording for the phrase "from the circumcision" is commonly rendered in Galatians 2:12 as "the party of the circumcision" or "the circumcision group." That is not an ethnic designation whatsoever, but it is a reference to Jewish believers who insisted on circumcision as a requirement for full inclusion into the people of God. We will see that also when we come to Acts 15.

So, in Colossians 4:11, if Paul wanted to refer to Jews ethnically, he would have done so literally by using the Greek word *Ioudaioi*, as he did consistently in other passages. Instead, Paul's usage of "those of the circumcision" was a reference to specific ethnic Jews who held to a more conservative theological perspective than Hellenistic Jews. And Paul's exclusion of Luke from the list of names who came from party of the circumcision simply meant that he could be a Hellenized Jew.

The recipient of the book is identified in v. 1 as Theophilus. A number of theories exist regarding his full identity. One of particular note holds that Luke was writing to Theophilus ben Ananus, the High Priest of the Temple from 37-41 A.D. He was a Sadducee, the sect that did not believe in the

resurrection or life after death, and since Luke emphasized both issues in his gospel and in Acts, it is possible that he wrote both of these books as a testimony to him.

It would also be consistent for Luke, as a Jew, to be writing to another Jew like Theophilus. And it would be consistent with elements in the book, like emphasizing in Acts 6:7 that “a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” A Gentile writing to convince Gentiles would not emphasize Jewish details like Luke does in both books. Clearly, the New Testament is Jewish throughout; capturing in-house debates within Judaism, while also revealing how Gentiles would be blessed through the Jewish people and the Jewish Messiah (Genesis 12:3).

### 1:2-4

Verses 2-3 describe the time Yeshua spent with His disciples after His death and resurrection. It is a summary of the last chapters of each of the four Gospels. In v. 4 Yeshua warns the disciples not to leave Jerusalem. He says it was in order that they would be present when His promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit could be fulfilled. But it is also an affirmation that they were not to abandon their biblical cultural heritage. They still needed to be in Jerusalem for Shavuot (Heb.)/Pentecost (Gr.)/Feast of Weeks that was part of the Torah. So if the time had come to abolish the Torah, this would have been a good time to make that clear. But He didn't do that.

### 1:5

Yeshua affirms the coming promise of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. In order to understand this phrase, you have to deal with it in the original Greek language.

First, *baptizo* was transliterated into English and a new word, baptize, was created. But it has the sense of immersion, as in dipping into a body of water. The concept itself does not require water, but conveys the meaning of immersion or being surrounded by something. And that can include the Holy Spirit

Second, in each of the seven passages in the New Testament where the phrase “baptized with the Holy Spirit” appears, it is used either with the preposition “in” or using what is called the dative case, which generally marks the indirect object of the verb. Either way, that means it never refers to the subject of the baptism. Or to put it another way, it never means baptism *by* the Holy Spirit or *of* the Holy Spirit. Instead the only subject that is identified as doing the baptism/immersion is Yeshua (Mat 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33). Each of those passages says that Yeshua baptizes believers *with* the Spirit. That rendering is true in the vast majority of English translations of the Bible. But when you consider the way that it is used in popular Christian culture, you see something very different. Generally you hear it phrased, “baptism *of* the Holy Spirit” As a simple illustration, if you Google these phrases, websites that use the inaccurate phrase, “baptism of the Holy Spirit” are 10 times as common as those that use the accurate phrase “baptism with the Holy Spirit.” This error is, to a great extent, the result of a lack of understanding of the important role of prepositions in biblical Greek.

Third, the Greek verb used here in Acts 1:5 is a very precise one. “Shall be baptized” is in the punctiliar passive future tense. That means it will take place at a point in time but not continuing. There are other verb tenses that could be used that convey continuous action or starting at a point and then continuing, but that is not the case. So the point in time is identified here with the phrase, “not many days from now.” It is a reference to what is described in chapter 2. But later on, when you get to Acts 11:16, baptism with the Spirit is used in the sense of a fulfilled promise. And the last time it is used in 1 Corinthians 12:13, it is phrased in the passive aorist tense, which means that it was at a moment in time in the past. So it is used there in the same

way that the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Yeshua are described as a moment in time in the past. There is no place in the teaching of Yeshua or the writings of Paul, Peter, James and John that the baptism with the Spirit is a recurring event for the future.

In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul also says it is a baptism/immersion into one body. And that is really what this phrase is communicating. It is all about a moment in history when the Spirit came and joined all believers into one body. So the context and the grammar show that the phrase, “baptism with the Holy Spirit” is not a description of something believers experience, but it is a historical accomplishment by Yeshua in which believers are immersed into one body with the Spirit.

This fact does not negate the empowering work of the Spirit and the giving of Spiritual gifts. That is a separate issue altogether, and should be addressed using biblical concepts besides the “baptism with the Holy Spirit.” But based on the use of Greek grammar and the greater context of Scripture, here in Acts 1:5 Yeshua is merely foretelling the next event in God’s plan of redemption—the coming of the Holy Spirit and the uniting of believers into one body.

### 1:6-8

The disciples ask “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” By asking that question, it expresses their belief in a literal restored kingdom. If there will be no physical Messianic kingdom, that would mean the understanding of the disciples was wrong. In that case this was the ultimate moment for Yeshua to correct their view. Moreover, He was just about to ascend into heaven, so this was His last opportunity to set things straight if they had it wrong about the kingdom. But He didn’t do that. Yeshua simply said they were not going to be told when it would happen. And if they couldn’t know when, He would give them a responsibility during that time of uncertainty. They were to be witnesses about salvation through Yeshua, so that the kingdom of God could be filled with citizens whenever the time came—a time that only the Father knew about (Mat 24:36).

The disciples had strong reasons to believe in a literal kingdom because it is a central theme of the Scriptures they knew well. Here are the key points that demonstrate:

### **The Case for the Millennial Kingdom**

#### **1. The prophets foretold its attributes.**

- The Messiah will reign over the entire earth (Daniel 7:13; Jeremiah 33:15-17).
- God’s saints will serve under Messiah in ruling over the nations (Daniel 7:27).
- The world will be restored much like its state before the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden (Isaiah 11:6-7; 65:17; Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:8).
- Worship of Adonai will take place at the new temple in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40-47; Haggai 2:7-9; Micah 4:1-2; Zechariah 14:9,16-18).
- Peace will be maintained among the nations because Yeshua will be the final authority (Micah 4:3).
- Israel will have full possession of its covenant land (Jeremiah 30:3; Ezekiel 37:25; Isaiah 60:21).

#### **2. The disciples of Yeshua affirmed the millennial kingdom.**

- The transfiguration of Yeshua (Matthew 16:28-17:12).

Yeshua took Peter, James and John to an unnamed mountain, which has been said to be Mt Tabor since the third century. And when they got to the top, Yeshua was transfigured, meaning that His form changed to a radiant, glorified appearance, confirming His divine identity.

Suddenly Moses and Elijah made an appearance. The disciples were familiar with Malachi (4:5) who said that Elijah would be sent again in the last days. They knew that Yeshua fulfilled all of the prophecies regarding the Son of David ruling over Israel. And they knew that He had been preaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (see especially Matthew 16:28).

So they had evidence connecting this moment to the inauguration of the physical kingdom. What would they conclude to be the proper response? All that remained was to observe *Sukkot*—the memorial indicator of the kingdom, according to Zechariah 14. That is exactly what Peter proposed in Matthew 17:4. He was merely responding in such a way that was consistent with the common understanding about both the Kingdom of God and the Feast of Tabernacles. So he offered to build some *sukkot*.

But Peter didn't have everything just right. He failed to acknowledge that the other final manifestations of the kingdom, in which the world is greatly changed, would not occur until the Jewish people had been restored to the land of their fathers a second time, and Yeshua was rightly enthroned as king. Peter's misunderstanding of the precise timing, however, does not negate his overall belief that a day would come in which the kingdom would be restored in a literal manner.

- The ascension of Yeshua (Acts 1:6). As we saw earlier, the disciples asked Him about the unfinished work of the kingdom with a full sense of sincerity.

Taken together, these episodes make it clear that the disciples were expecting a literal kingdom on earth in their lifetime, based on the prophecies cited above. Their belief was representative of the broader understanding of the Jewish people of the second temple period.

### **3. Yeshua confirmed the reality of the millennial kingdom (Acts 1:7-8).**

### **4. The earliest believers continued believing in the millennial kingdom.**

We know from history that the first century church leaders who were directly taught by the New Testament Apostles believed in a literal future restoration of the Kingdom of God. These individuals include Apollinarius of Laodicea, Irenaeus of Lyon, Polycarp of Smyrna who was a direct disciple of the Apostle John, and Papias who was discipled by both John and Philip.

In other words, the first Christians immediately after the writing of the New Testament believed in a future literal Messianic kingdom because they learned it from the original disciples of Yeshua. Here is what Papias taught on this subject:

“There will be a period of some thousand years after the resurrection of the dead, and that the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this very earth” (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.12).

He, and the others listed above believed in the plain meaning of Scripture. So their knowledge of the complete Word of God, supplemented in some cases by sitting under the direct teaching of inspired authors of Scripture, like John, led them to this unambiguous conclusion on the coming literal kingdom. That is an exceptionally important detail that Amillennialists never mention.

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In terms of our modern context, verse 8 is typically used metaphorically, where Jerusalem represents your immediate neighborhood and then you go outward from there. But the primary intent of the verse is a description of the need to act literally by taking the Gospel to the heart of the Jewish people in Jerusalem and to the rest of the Jewish people in the countryside, and to the half-Jewish people in Samaria, and also to the Gentiles in the remotest part of the earth. This kind of approach emphasizes not overlooking anyone. So rather than using this passage as a general motivation for missions that is relative to your metaphorical Jerusalem, it can serve as a motivation to be a witness to everyone, including people you are not comfortable reaching, like Muslims, for they would be the equivalent of Samaritans in biblical days.

### 1:9-11

Yeshua then ascended to the Father and two angels showed up. Their question in the first part of verse 11 is a reinforcement of Yeshua's commandment He had just made in v. 8 to be His witnesses. The answer of the angels to their own question in the second part of verse 11 indicates that Yeshua's return will be a mirror image of His departure—His feet will return to the exact same spot in fulfillment of Zech 14:4—“And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east. . .”

### 1:12-14

The disciples' actions once they returned to Jerusalem were not formal and religious in nature. It was about being united in purpose and attitude (“one mind”), to prayer and breaking down barriers of separation (notice that the men and women functioned together). This is consistent with Paul's teaching in Eph 2:14 that when people are reconciled with God, it breaks down the barriers between one another.

### 1:15-26

The Apostles then address the loss of Judas from their ranks. They determined that a replacement had to come from among those people who accompanied the Twelve continually from the time of the baptism of John to the ascension of Yeshua, and who was a witness of His resurrection. That informs us that no one is qualified for the office of Apostle today.

At that time, two men were determined to be qualified. The Apostles prayed and drew lots, with the lot falling to Matthias. So that meant there were now two Matthews among the Twelve. Would this method be suitable for today? The objective was ascertaining the will of God. And there is no prohibition in Scripture against this method. However, we have to bear in mind that this act took place before the coming of the Holy Spirit. Today the enduring presence of the Spirit is able to give wisdom to the body of believers, and thus we are able to make the determination collectively. So drawing lots would not be necessary.