



**Sunday School Lesson**  
**Acts 1:1-11**  
 by Lorin L. Cranford  
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**Beginnings**



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In this first lesson of the new series, entitled "The church on mission" in the Formations Sunday School lessons, we turn to Acts 1:1-11, which describes the beginning of Christian history by Luke. Acts is the second volume of a two volume set of documents in the New Testament that were written by Luke the physician -- the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Our passage, especially verses one through five, link Acts back to the gospel of Luke. Chapter twenty-four of the gospel helps because it also describes Jesus' ascension back into Heaven.

**I. Context**

The contexts of the passage, as always, play a helpful role in correctly and more deeply understanding the passage. Thus we will give some attention to them, before digging into the study of the verses themselves.

**a. Historical**

The **external history** of The Acts of the Apostles is closely linked to the Gospel of Luke because of the Prologue of Acts, along with that of the Lucan gospel. The list below illustrates how this is:

**Acts 1:1-5 (1-11)**

1 In the first book, **Theophilus**, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning 2 until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 4 While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

**Luke 1:1-4**

1 Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3 I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent **Theophilus**, 4 so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.



**Luke 24:44-53**

44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; 53 and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Acts intersects Luke here at two important points. First, both books are dedicated to Theophilus (more on that below). This links the two documents together, and as coming from one source. Second, the instruction to stay in Jerusalem, along with the ascension of Jesus into heaven, is a second link to Luke 24 -- the only gospel writer to describe these two items. Both similarities and differences in this second point exist, and will be explored in the study of Acts 1:1-11.

Who then was this writer? When and where were these materials produced? Who was targeted initially by these writings? What was the writer trying to accomplish with these writing? To whom were these documents written? Were there different purposes for each of these writings? Or a common purpose for both? Also, what is the literary form (=genre) of Acts in terms of the ancient world? And how is Acts different from [the other books of Acts](#) that showed up in early Christian history? Early Christianity had to sort through at least a dozen such books in order to decide which one to include in the New Testament. These are the questions about the external history of the book of Acts.

Now let's explore the answers to these questions as far as the available information provides answers. The "who" question has traditionally been Luke the physician. No where in either the Gospel or Acts is Luke specifically identified as being responsible for these two documents. This identification comes from early church tradition, not from something specific inside either document. This early church tradition begins in the late second century with the [Muratorian Canon](#), as Julius Scott in his article on "Luke-Acts" in the [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#) notes:

A second-century document, the Muratorian Canon, states that the third Gospel and the Book of Acts were written by "Luke."

In assessing this tradition -- mainly for the Lucan gospel -- John Nolland in the *Word Biblical Commentary* volume one on Luke's Gospel notes the following about Luke:

How do we evaluate this traditional ascription? The role attributed to Luke in the NT is quite modest. In Philem 24 he occurs in a list of Paul's fellow workers. In Col 4:14 Luke the beloved physician sends greetings (and is normally thought to be of non-Jewish origin on the basis of v 11, though this can be read in other ways). In 2 Tim 4:11 he is said to be Paul's sole companion. That is all, unless we identify this Luke with the Lucius (Λούκιος) who is said to be kinsman of Paul in Rom 16:21. The tradition has certainly exploited these texts to maximize the link with Paul; but this is clearly in the context of the sub-apostolic standing of Luke, which itself constituted a problem for the recognition of this text as Scripture and canon.

Thus modern scholars, working with procedures to determine factual history that are derived mostly from the modern western culture's scientific methodology, tend to not be as confident of this identification as early church leaders were. To be sure, Luke does not show up often in the pages of the New Testament; only [three times](#) by name. He was a physician according to Col. 4:14. Now one needs to keep in mind the huge difference between physicians in the ancient Roman world and the modern world. In that Roman world [most physicians](#), as well as lawyers, were slaves with education in medicine gained in the temple to the god [Asklepios](#) or through an apprenticeship with another doctor. Differing attitudes toward medicine and doctors existed in the ancient world. The Egyptians probably had the highest esteem for doctors, while the Romans had one of the lowest. The Jewish attitude fell somewhere between the two extremes. One must remember that physical illness and medical treatment were generally linked to religious belief and practice. R.K Harrison in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* has a good summary of the early Christian view, as expressed in the New Testament, in his article on "Medicine":



The NT has very little indeed to say about medical treatment, and such references as occur appear in an incidental manner. The Good Samaritan rendered effective first aid (Luke 10:34) by applying antiseptic and soothing dressings to the unfortunate victim of an assault. The anointing of Luke 7:37-38 was more of a cosmetic technique than a specifically therapeutic one. This practice was one of several connected with the preparation of a corpse for burial (Luke 23:56). The anointing with spittle (John 9:6) was of a symbolic nature, and as employed by Jesus was not strictly a therapeutic procedure.

The administration of sour wine mixed with gall and myrrh to those being crucified (Mark 15:23) was an act of charity intended to lessen the sufferings of the victims. But unless the potion contained some such narcotic as opium, its effect on the crucified persons would be negligible, since myrrh is only slightly sedative.

The kindly counsel of Paul to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23) is typical of folk medicine in all ages. Probably Timothy was suffering from flatulent dyspepsia, the discomfort of which would be relieved temporarily by alcohol. However, there



seem to be good reasons for believing that the gastric condition was only a part of a larger pathological pattern ("frequent ailments"), which was probably psychosomatic in nature. The anointing with oil in the name of God was symbolic rather than therapeutic, and intimately associated with the "prayer of faith."

If early church tradition is correct about Luke being responsible for these two documents, then the remaining questions (When? Where? Why? To whom?) become helpful to answer. Normally the assumption is that the gospel was written first, especially in light of Acts 1:1 reference to "the former word that I did..." (τὸν μὲν πρῶτον λόγον ἐποίησάμην...). With Acts 28 ending with the apostle Paul under house arrest in Rome, this would place Acts no earlier than about AD 61. The dating of the Gospel depends upon the literary connection of Mark, Matthew and Luke to one another (the so-called Synoptic Gospels). Most scholars including me work off the conviction that Mark is the first one to be written, and was brought together in the mid to late 60s. This would place the Lucan gospel later into the early-to-mid 70s, with Acts following it. Acts ends with Paul in Rome primarily because one of the major principles of history writing in the ancient world was to trace the movement of significant events from one major starting point to a climatic ending point geographically. For Luke, this meant tracing the beginning of the Christian movement from its beginnings in Jerusalem (the Jewish/Christian religious center of the world) to the imperial capital of the world of that day (Rome) over a thirty year period (AD 33 to AD 61).

The To Whom and Why questions are tied up in the [Prologues](#) of both documents. Theophilus is the mystery figure who is identified in both documents as the one to whom Luke dedicates both documents. Although many different views of his identity exist, the one that most appeals to me -- especially after supervising a PhD dissertation on Luke 1:1-4 -- is that Theophilus was a new convert to Christianity, who as a rich person and most likely a person of substantial position in the Roman government, decided to follow a well established pattern in the ancient world: to serve as a patron to underwrite the expense of a trusted authority to write out an account of the Christian movement and to have numerous copies of it produced and distributed widely in order to help promote the spread of this movement. This was commonly done by wealthy patrons who became disciples of individual philosophers in that day. Thus, Luke-Acts would both help him better understand his new Christian faith, as well as help promote it to others. Where Luke was when he penned these two documents could range all the way from Rome to northern Palestine, and is probably the least important of these "reporter" questions to answer.

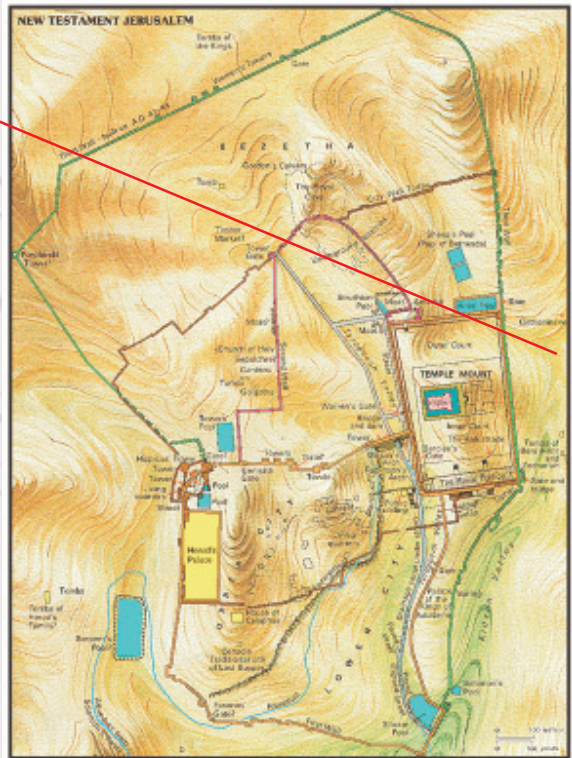
In light of these perspectives, therefore, Luke-Acts stands as an early effort to put into written expression the beginnings of the Christian movement first with its founder, Jesus Christ, and then with the first three decades of its expansion out of Jerusalem to the imperial capital of Rome. The apostles Peter (chaps 1-12) and Paul (chaps 13-28) stand as the representatives of both the Jewish and the non-Jewish focus of this spreading movement. The doctrinal ("philosophical viewpoint") aspects of this presentation are significant. Luke saw Jesus (phase 2) as the climatic fulfillment of what God had begun through Moses and the prophets (phase 1) and this salvational work was continued by God in the early work of the apostles (phase 3). Since the 1950s this has been labeled in German as Heilsgeschichte (salvation history). Since in the ancient world, history along with theology were subdivisions of philosophy, one could easily use history to espouse a philosophy with strong religious overtones. This is what -- in my estimation -- Luke has done. This was intended in large part to meet the needs of Theophilus and those who would subsequently read these two documents. Hopefully the readers would be attracted to this new religious movement and become converts to Christ, and the new converts could use these two documents to gain a strong grounding in their faith commitment to Christ.

Thus theology and history stand along side each other as important emphases for the Lucan writer. One cannot understand Acts as pure history, nor as pure theology. The two aspects are inseparably intertwined with one another in the writing of Acts. The interpretative process must take this into account, if a correct understanding of the text is to be achieved.

The **internal history** of 1:1-11 focuses upon the location of the event described in the text. The traditional site of ascension is the starting point. Acts 1:12 identifies the location as the Mount of Olives: "[Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away.](#)" (NRSV).



This is located just east of Jerusalem outside the walls of the temple as the map indicates. In this same area was the place of Jesus' arrest earlier. Theologically important, this is the place that Jews understood that God's Messiah would first make his appearance with the armies of liberation to begin the recapturing of the promised land for God's chosen people. Andrew H. Trotter has a helpful article on the theo-



logical aspects of Jesus' ascension in his article "Ascension of Jesus Christ," in the online [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#). In addition to our passage, which contains the most detailed depiction of this event in the New Testament, other passages allude to it. These include [Luke 24:51](#) ("While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven."); [Eph. 4:10](#) ("He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things."); [1 Tim. 3:16](#) ("Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory."), along with several others that allude generally to his return to the Heavenly Father after his resurrection. The primary Greek word for this idea is the [verb](#) ἀναβαίνω (anabaino; to go up), along with the [noun](#) ἀνάληψις (analepsis; ascension). One of the modern issues sometimes discussed is whether this was a bodily raising of Jesus or not. The biblical evidence favors a positive answer to this question. Jesus' ascension stands somewhat in the OT tradition of the ascension of Elijah as Trotter observes:

The Old Testament contains several stories of, and references to, "ascension" that may prefigure the ascension of Jesus. While the Old Testament contains stories of ascension that take place in dreams or visions (Gen 28:12), straightforward narratives like that of the angel of the Lord ascending in the flame of the altar while Manoah and his wife look on (Jud 13:20), and particularly of Elijah ascending to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Ki 2:11-12), although not related directly in the New Testament to the ascension of Jesus, are rightly seen as fundamental to the New Testament understanding that Jesus physically came down from heaven and returned there. Most of the Old Testament references to ascension into heaven emphasize that it is a divine act done only by God's power and not to be thought of as possible by mere humanity (Deut 30:11-12; Prov 30:4; Isa 14:12-15).

The timing of this event is some 40 days after Jesus' resurrection from the tomb, and it serves as the [climatic resurrection appearance](#) of the Lord to the disciples.

### b. Literary

The literary form (genre) of Acts 1:1-11 is basically that of an ancient prologue. In modern terms, the prologue of written works is defined by the online [Merriam-Webster dictionary](#) as "the preface or introduction to a literary work." In the ancient world, however, a prologue to a written work could serve a variety of functions. Inside the New Testament this variety surfaces with the several prologues that can be detected. [John 1:1-18](#) seeks to lay a [conceptual foundation](#) for the theological concepts that become the "filter" through which the story of Jesus is told by the fourth evangelist. [1 John 1:1-5](#) attempts something of the



same, although through a different approach. [Hebrews 1:1-4](#) both links Jesus to the past and establishes a basis for the writer's interpretation of Jesus in light of the Old Testament. The prologue closest to the dominant ancient Greek literary pattern is [Luke 1:1-4](#). Just a casual reading of the single Greek sentence in vv. 1-4 reveals the dramatic difference of the literary style of this to the remainder of the Lucan gospel. This prologue comes closer to the modern idea of a book Preface.

The question to be raised in our study is the role of the prologue of Acts 1:1-11. The answer goes at least two directions. First, and perhaps most importantly, is that the Acts prologue seeks to link the book of Acts closely to the Lucan gospel, as has already been discussed. Secondly, the more detailed repeating of the ascension story of Jesus ([Luke 24:50-53](#) // [Acts 1:6-11](#)) not only further links Acts to the Lucan gospel, but also becomes the conceptual basis for telling the story of the first three decades of the spread of the Christian movement from Jerusalem to Rome. This will highlight the importance of Acts 1:8 in the telling of that story. In Acts Luke will carefully highlight the divine presence of the Holy Spirit in the ministries of Peter and of Paul to that of Jesus as set forth in his gospel story. This divine presence constitutes God's approval of the work of the apostles in spreading the salvation message of Jesus first to the Jews and then to non-Jews all the way to the imperial capital of the world at that time.

## II. Message

The internal literary structure of these eleven verses clearly falls into two sections. The climatic declaration of the first section, vv. 1-5, to wait in Jerusalem for the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" leads naturally to Jesus' departure into Heaven, vv. 6-11. The inferential conjunction "then" (οὐν) in verse 6 serves as an important hinge holding these two sections together.

### a. Promise of the Spirit, vv. 1-5

GNT	NASB	NRSV	NLT
<p>&lt;1:1&gt; Τὸν μὲν πρῶτον λόγον ἐποίησάμην περὶ πάντων, ὃ Θεόφιλε, ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν &lt;1:2&gt; ἄχρι ἧς ἡμέρας ἐντειλάμενος τοῖς ἀποστόλοις διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου οὗς ἐξελέξατο ἀνελήμφθη· &lt;1:3&gt; οἷς καὶ παρέστησεν ἑαυτὸν ζῶντα μετὰ τὸ παθεῖν αὐτὸν ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις, δι' ἡμερῶν τεσσαράκοντα ὀπτανόμενος αὐτοῖς καὶ λέγων τὰ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ· &lt;1:4&gt; καὶ συναλιζόμενος παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων μὴ χωρίζεσθαι, ἀλλὰ περιμένειν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πατρὸς ἣν ἠκούσατέ μου, &lt;1:5&gt; ὅτι Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐν πνεύματι βαπτισθήσεσθε ἁγίῳ οὐ μετὰ πολλὰς ταῦτας ἡμέρας.</p>	<p>1 The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. 3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. 4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."</p>	<p>1 In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning 2 until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 4 While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."</p>	<p>1 Dear Theophilus: In my first book I told you about everything Jesus began to do and teach 2 until the day he ascended to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions from the Holy Spirit. 3 During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time and proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. On these occasions he talked to them about the Kingdom of God. 4 In one of these meetings as he was eating a meal with them, he told them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you what he promised. Remember, I have told you about this before. 5 John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."</p>

## Notes:

In the first two verses Luke provides a brief summary of his gospel story of Jesus: “[1 In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning 2 until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.](#)” The Gospel of Luke, comprised of twenty four chapters, is a very lengthy account of the life of Jesus from his birth to his ascension back to Heaven. Thus Luke covers more of the life of Jesus than any of the gospel writers. He takes 169 [pericopes](#) (units of material) to tell this story. This is exceeded only by Matthew with 179 [pericopes](#), but doesn't cover quite as much of the story as does Luke. Luke's begins with the infancy narratives and concludes with the ascension.

The focus of that story is on what Jesus did and said. Modern scholars have accurately divided up this material basically into the narratives and sayings of the Jesus story, although the dividing line sometimes is blurred with a mixture of both elements into a single pericope. Most of these [two basic categories](#) of material additionally fall into distinctive subsections that can be clearly identified. In the **narrative** category one finds distinctive forms of the Infancy Stories, the Pronouncement Stories, the Miracles Stories, and the Hero Stories. These tend to follow established ancient patterns that existed in the surrounding Jewish and Greco-Roman written literary world. Thus studying the gospel materials against the backdrop of the similar patterns in the surrounding world provides significant insight for understanding the canonical gospel materials. The categories only cover detectable literary forms, and thus, not everything that Jesus did as recorded in the four gospels falls into one of these categories. Interestingly, these literary patterns are most noticeable in the first three gospels. The Gospel of John goes its own direction so intensely that most of these patterns do not show up in it.

Regarding the things that Jesus said, the **sayings** materials, the range of distinctive forms is confined basically to two patterns: the parables and the logia, which leave a lot of the material without sufficient distinctive form to be classified into either category. A large chunk of what Jesus said falls into the [parables](#) section. Most of Jesus teaching comes through this form. His parables uniformly focus upon the Kingdom of God as the central topic of his teaching. The logia category provides a grouping for a wide variety of materials such as proverbs, maxims, etc. The largest collection of a good variety of these are found in the Sermon on the Mount, in both [Matthew's version](#) in chaps. 5-7 and [Luke's much shorter version](#) in 6:20-49. Included in these are beatitudes, entrance sayings etc. Also interesting is that the four gospels contain only a small portion of what Jesus did and said during his earthly ministry. Two signals of this emerge in the New Testament. First, John's statement to this effect in [21:25](#): “[But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.](#)” Secondly, Paul quotes one of those unrecorded sayings in [Acts 20:35](#): “[In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'](#)” This axiom is not found in any of the four gospels.

Two additional types of materials will be found, primarily in the synoptic gospels (Matt., Mk. and Lk.) that incorporate both sayings and actions but have a distinctive form: the Infancy Narratives and the Passion Narratives. Only Matthew and Luke provide accounts of Jesus' birth. These accounts have loose parallels in Greco-Roman literature and need to be studied with these two gospel accounts. The one place where all four gospels come the closest to telling the story of Jesus is with the [Passion Narrative](#) (sometimes called in the Latin, *Passio Christi*). This material contains both narratives and sayings and all four gospels follow pretty much the same sequence and have a lot of overlapping material that tell about the final week of Jesus' earthly life, climaxed with his crucifixion on Friday of that week. The evident reason for this is that the most important part of Jesus' earthly ministry was his redemptive death on Calvary. This part of the Jesus story was the first to come together in written form and to become rather fixed in form.

For a more detailed discussion of all of this material see my [Lecture Notes on Gospel Genre](#) at Cranfordville.com.

Acts 1:3 alludes to the various resurrection appearances of Jesus during the 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension: “[After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.](#)” Again in very summary fashion Luke alludes to [these appearances](#) of the resurrected Jesus to the apostles. Of the 9 recorded resurrection appearances of Jesus in the four gospels only one overlaps: the initial appearance to the women early

Sunday morning. And even these four accounts have considerable variation of details, as we noted in a [study](#) of Luke 24:1-12 several months ago. Luke contains three of the [remaining eight](#) accounts to the apostles: (1) to the two on the Emmaus road (24:13-35); (2) to the apostles in Jerusalem (24:36-49) and (3) the ascension (24:50-53), which is really an extension of (2). The reason for this diversity lies in the distinctive purpose of each gospel writer. Matthew with [his single appearance](#) to the apostles in 28:16-20 ends the story of Jesus with the Lord commissioning the spread of his salvational message to all the world from Galilee. Mark, in its original form, ends at 16:8 with the dramatic appearance of Jesus to the women, and thus leaving the reader with the lingering question of “has he appeared to me like he did to these women”. John ends [his account](#) with Jesus probing Peter and the others about genuine, unconditional service to him as Lord and Master. Luke, very distinctively, ends his story of Jesus with the appearance and ascension of Jesus in Jerusalem where Jesus promises them the needed spiritual resources to carry out his continuing mission through the Holy Spirit.

Also Luke notes that the central focus of Jesus’ teaching during those 40 days had been the Kingdom of God. We will explore that theme in greater detail below, since it stands as a major theme of verses 6-11.

Verses 4 and 5 highlight that emphasis on waiting for the promised Spirit: “4 While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This,’ he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’” The interpretation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit has occasioned a lot of debate in modern Christian circles, as Craig Blomberg’s article “Baptism of the Holy Spirit” in the [Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#) illustrates. He summarizes the issue as follows:

Seven New Testament passages speak of baptism of/in/with/by the Holy Spirit. The varying prepositions reflect the fact that the Spirit is both the agent and sphere of this baptism. Six of these passages refer to John the Baptist’s teaching, contrasting his baptism in water with Jesus’ future baptism in the Holy Spirit. The seventh is 1 Corinthians 12:13, which refers to the initiation of all the Corinthian Christians into the church.

In Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16, John predicts that the Messiah who will come after him will baptize with the Spirit and fire. This expression is best taken as referring to the one purifying action of the Spirit that blesses believers and condemns unbelievers, and which embraces the entire work of the Spirit from Pentecost on, culminating in final judgment. Mark 1:8 and John 1:33 reflect this identical utterance of John, but mention only the baptism of the Spirit. It is unlikely that anybody in John’s original audience knew exactly what he meant by these predictions.

In Acts 1:5, however, as Jesus prepares to ascend into heaven, he refers back to John’s words and predicts their fulfillment within “a few days.” In just a little over a week, the disciples celebrate Pentecost and receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 (Acts 2:1-41, esp. vv. 17-21). A number of years later, when Peter is ministering to Cornelius, the Spirit again manifests itself in dramatically similar ways (leading to the common labeling of this event as the “Gentile Pentecost”). These similarities lead Peter to reflect on Jesus’ parting words again and to quote them to the Jewish-Christian leaders in Jerusalem in defense of his “scandalous” association with Gentiles (Acts 11:16).

Quite clearly in Acts 1:5, the point of Jesus is an allusion to the day of Pentecost, which Luke describes in chapter two. If the disciples were to complete successfully the work that Jesus would give to them, they would have to have supernatural resources. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost would fulfill that promise and provide what was needed.

What can we learn from vv. 1-5? A lot can be gleaned about the gospel stories of Jesus. Both his actions and his words stand as foundational to our Christian faith. Without these gospel accounts we have no Christian faith. And with four distinctive accounts we have deeper insights than a single account could have ever provides. Additionally, Luke reminds us that the apostles, in spite of having walked with the earthly Jesus, needed God’s provision of his Spirit in order to complete their assignment from the Lord. Certainly, if that was true of the Twelve, it is much more our need today. Any successful work of the Lord much be led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. That has been true from the beginning. Luke’s gospel emphasized that about Jesus’ earthly ministry, and then reemphasized that in the Book of Acts. This is one of his main theological points in these two volumes. Also, important to all of this in vv. 1-5 is that only through obedience to Jesus’ instructions were the apostles able to experience the empowering of the Holy Spirit. They were told to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came. They were prohibited from rushing out in their own excitement to do the work. They were to wait! This may be our most difficult task. To just sit



back and wait for God to move -- that's not easy in an activist culture like ours. But it is absolutely essential, if our work is to be successful.

## b. Ascension, vv. 6-11

### GNT

<1:6> Οἱ μὲν οὖν συνελθόντες ἠρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες, Κύριε, εἰ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ; <1:7> εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς, Οὐχ ὑμῶν ἐστὶν γινῶναι χρόνους ἢ καιροὺς οὓς ὁ πατήρ ἔθετο ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ, <1:8> ἀλλὰ λήμψεσθε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες ἔν τε Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ [ἐν] πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρείᾳ καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς. <1:9> καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν βλεπόντων αὐτῶν ἐπήρθη, καὶ νεφέλῃ ὑπέλαβεν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν. <1:10> καὶ ὡς ἀτενίζοντες ἦσαν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν πορευομένου αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνδρες δύο παρειστήκεισαν αὐτοῖς ἐν ἔσθήσεσι λευκαῖς, <1:11> οἱ καὶ εἶπαν, ἄνδρες Γαλιλαῖοι, τί ἐστήκατε [ἐμ]βλέποντες εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν; οὗτος ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ ἀναλημφθεὶς ἀφ' ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν οὕτως ἐλεύσεται ὃν τρόπον ἐθεάσασθε αὐτὸν πορευόμενον εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.

### NASB

6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." 9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

### NRSV

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going and they were gazing upward toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

### NLT

6 When the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, are you going to free Israel now and restore our kingdom?" 7 "The Father sets those dates," he replied, "and they are not for you to know. 8 But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 It was not long after he said this that he was taken up into the sky while they were watching, and he disappeared into a cloud. 10 As they were straining their eyes to see him, two white-robed men suddenly stood there among them. 11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!"

### Notes:

This second section of our passage is typically labeled "The Ascension of Jesus." Yet most of the passage is devoted to a question and answer session in Jesus' final appearance to the disciples before his return to the Heavenly Father. Sequentially it should parallel the gospel of Luke with Jesus' final appearance before his ascension in [Luke 24:36-53](#). But about the only overlap between the two accounts is the rising of Jesus into the clouds (Lk 24:51 & Acts 1:9). The discussion aspects focus on very different topics. In Luke 24:36-43 Jesus reassured them with the display of his hands and feet as well as eating some fish with them. In 24:44-49 Jesus instructed them about the Messianic nature of the Old Testament that predicted Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. Also, that the message of repentance and forgiveness of



sin in Jesus' name was to be proclaimed worldwide beginning in Jerusalem. Then they were instructed to remain in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Once the instruction was completed Jesus led them out to Bethany where he ascended to Heaven. Then they returned to Jerusalem rejoicing and praising God in the temple.

In Acts 1:6-11 a very different emphasis is set forth. The following chart helps put this in focus:

#### Luke 24:36-53 (NRSV)

36 While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 37 They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate in their presence.

44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you?that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; 53 and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

that God has his own time table which has not been revealed to anyone. Thus the modern preachers who think they can predict when Christ is coming again to set up God's rule on earth are claiming knowledge in direct contradiction to what Jesus says here. The apostles were not privy to such understanding. I doubt that TV preachers today know more than the apostles did. **Second**, the far more important responsibility is to be Jesus' witnesses under the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. For the apostles the day of Pentecost (chap. 2) became the launch pad for this spreading testimony about Jesus that would eventually lead Paul to Rome itself. Note two things: witness and empowerment. The entire world is the location; the leadership and power of the Holy Spirit is the vehicle. This commission ultimately passes on to us who follow in the footsteps of the apostle's obedience to Christ.

The Acts narrative emphasizes also the angelic message (vv. 10-11), that brings a **third** issue into the picture: "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." The ascension of Jesus stands as evidence that Jesus will one day return in similar fashion. This theological point of Luke is powerful. For the apostles their experience watching Jesus leave gave confirmation to his promise to return for them, and ultimately for all those who call upon his name.

The remainder of Acts becomes Paul Harvey's "the rest of the story" in detailing how this commissioning played itself out for the first three decades of Christian history. But that story is still being written and must play itself out within the same parameters of obedient, empowered witness to salvation in Christ Jesus.

#### Acts 1:6-11 (NRSV)

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

The Acts discussion centers on the establishment of the Kingdom of God. This was the disciples' question (v. 6). But it is framed in terms of traditional Jewish apocalyptic terms: the messiah restores a political kingdom to Israel along the lines of that of David and Solomon. In spite of prior teaching about the kingdom during the 40 days of resurrection appearances (cf. 1:3), the disciples still didn't understand the broader concept of the Kingdom in Jesus' teaching. If nothing else is evident here, it is that deeply entrenched mistaken religious tradition is hard to turn loose of even when Jesus is your teacher.

Jesus' reply contains powerful, critical insight (vv. 7-8). **First**, he stressed that the establishment of the Kingdom of God is the Father's responsibility and

## GNT

<1:1> Τὸν μὲν πρῶτον λόγον ἐποίησάμην περὶ πάντων, ᾧ Θεόφιλε, ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν <1:2> ἄχρι ἧς ἡμέρας ἐντειλάμενος τοῖς ἀποστόλοις διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου οὗς ἐξελέξατο ἀνελήμφθη· <1:3> οἷς καὶ παρέστησεν ἑαυτὸν ζῶντα μετὰ τὸ παθεῖν αὐτὸν ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις, δι' ἡμερῶν τεσσεράκοντα ὀπτανόμενος αὐτοῖς καὶ λέγων τὰ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ· <1:4> καὶ συναλιζόμενος παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων μὴ χωρίζεσθαι, ἀλλὰ περιμένειν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πατρὸς ἣν ἠκούσατέ μου, <1:5> ὅτι Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐν πνεύματι βαπτισθήσεσθε ἀγίῳ οὐ μετὰ πολλὰς ταύτας ἡμέρας.

<1:6> Οἱ μὲν οὖν συνελθόντες ἠρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες, Κύριε, εἰ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ; <1:7> εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς, Οὐχ ὑμῶν ἐστὶν γινῶναι χρόνους ἢ καιροὺς οὗς ὁ πατὴρ ἔθετο ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ, <1:8> ἀλλὰ λήψεσθε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες ἐν τε Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ [ἐν] πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρείᾳ καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς. <1:9> καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν βλέπόντων αὐτῶν ἐπήρθη, καὶ νεφέλη ὑπέλαβεν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν. <1:10> καὶ ὡς ἀτενίζοντες ἦσαν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν πορευομένου αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνδρες δύο παρειστήκεισαν αὐτοῖς ἐν ἐσθήσεσι λευκαῖς, <1:11> οἱ καὶ εἶπαν, Ἄνδρες Γαλιλαῖοι, τί ἐστήκατε [ἐμ]βλέποντες εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν; οὗτος ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ ἀναλημφθεὶς ἀφ' ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν οὕτως ἐλεύσεται ὃν τρόπον ἐθεάσασθε αὐτὸν πορευόμενον εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.

## NASB

1 The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. 3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. 4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." 9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

## NRSV

1 In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning 2 until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 4 While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."



## NLT

1 Dear Theophilus: In my first book I told you about everything Jesus began to do and teach 2 until the day he ascended to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions from the Holy Spirit. 3 During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time and proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. On these occasions he talked to them about the Kingdom of God. 4 In one of these meetings as he was eating a meal with them, he told them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you what he promised. Remember, I have told you about this before. 5 John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

6 When the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, are you going to free Israel now and restore our kingdom?" 7 "The Father sets those dates," he replied, "and they are not for you to know. 8 But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 It was not long after he said this that he was taken up into the sky while they were watching, and he disappeared into a cloud. 10 As they were straining their eyes to see him, two white-robed men suddenly stood there among them. 11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!"



## GNT Diagram

1 1:1 **Τὸν μὲν πρῶτον λόγον ἐποίησάμην**

περὶ πάντων,

ὦ θεόφιλε,

ὃν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν  
τε καὶ  
διδάσκειν

1:2

ἄχρι ἧς ἡμέρας... ἀνελήμφθη·

ἐντειλάμενος τοῖς ἀποστόλοις  
διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου

1:3

οὓς ἐξελέξατο

οἷς καὶ παρέστησεν ἑαυτὸν ζῶντα  
μετὰ τὸ παθεῖν αὐτὸν  
ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις,  
δι' ἡμερῶν τεσσαράκοντα  
ὄπτανόμενος αὐτοῖς

καὶ  
λέγων τὰ

περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ·

1:4

καὶ  
συναλιζόμενος

ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων

2 **παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς.. μὴ χωρίζεσθαι,**

ἀλλὰ

**περιμένειν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πατρὸς**

ἣν ἠκούσατέ μου,

ὅτι Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν  
ὔδατι,

δὲ

ἐν πνεύματι  
ὑμεῖς... βαπτισθήσεσθε ἅγιω  
οὐ  
μετὰ πολλὰς ταύτας ἡμέρας.

1:5

1:6

οὖν  
Οἱ μὲν συνελθόντες

3

**ἠρώτων αὐτὸν**  
λέγοντες,

Κύριε,

ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ

α

**εἰ... ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ;**



1:7 δὲ  
4 εἶπεν  
πρὸς αὐτούς,  
β ὑμῶν  
Οὐχ... ἐστὶν γνῶναι χρόνους  
ἢ  
καιροὺς  
οὓς ὁ πατὴρ ἔθετο  
ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ,  
1:8 ἀλλὰ  
γ λήμψεσθε δύναμιν  
ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος  
ἐφ' ὑμᾶς  
καὶ  
δ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες  
ἐν τε Ἱερουσαλὴμ  
καὶ  
[ἐν] πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ  
καὶ  
Σαμαρείᾳ  
καὶ  
ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς.  
1:9 καὶ  
ταῦτα εἰπὼν  
βλεπόντων αὐτῶν  
5 ἐπήρθη,  
καὶ  
6 νεφέλη ὑπέλαβεν αὐτὸν  
ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν.  
1:10 καὶ  
ὡς ἀτενίζοντες ἦσαν  
εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν  
πορευομένου αὐτοῦ,  
καὶ  
ιδού  
7 ἄνδρες δύο παρειστήκεισαν αὐτοῖς  
ἐν ἐσθήσεσι λευκαῖς,  
1:11 οἱ καὶ εἶπαν,  
ε Ἄνδρες Γαλιλαῖοι,  
τί ἐστήκατε  
ἐμβλέποντες  
εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν;  
ζ οὕτως  
οὗτος ὁ Ἰησοῦς... ἐλεύσεται  
ὁ ἀναλημφθεὶς  
ἀφ' ὑμῶν  
εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν  
ὃν τρόπον ἐθεάσασθε αὐτὸν  
πορευόμενον  
εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν

### Semantic Diagram

ὁ θεόφιλε

I.	A.	-----	1	Aor	Act	Ind	1	S	ἐγὼ (Luke)
	B.	-----	2	Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	(αὐτός) (Jesus)
	1.	-----	3	Impf	Act	Ind	3	P	Οἱ συνδλθόντες
	A.	-----							
	2.	-----	4	Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	(αὐτός) (Jesus)
II.									
	a.	-----	5	Aor	Pass	Ind	3	S	(αὐτός) (Jesus)
	1.	-----							
	B.	-----	6	Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	νεφέλη
	b.	-----							
	2.	-----	7	Aor	Act	Ind	3	P	ἄνδρες δύο

### Exegetical Outline

- I. (1-2) Luke's summarization focused on the instruction to his disciples
  - A. (1) Luke summarized his previous description of Jesus' instruction
  - B. (2) Jesus had encouraged his disciples to wait in Jerusalem.
  
- II. (3-7) Jesus gave instructions before ascending into the clouds.
  - A. (3-4) The response to the question about the Kingdom was a commissioning to go preach
    - 1. (3) The assembled ones asked about the Kingdom's beginning
    - 2. (4) Jesus responded with a commissioning to go preach
  - B. (5-7) Jesus' ascension was followed by the appearance of angels
    - 1. (5-6) Jesus ascended up into the clouds
      - a. (5) Jesus was lifted up
      - b. (6) A cloud took out out of sight
    - 2. (7) The appearance of two heavenly messengers brought a rebuke