CHRIST'S ASCENSION AND JUDAS' REPLACEMENT

V 1 The former account I have made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

"The former account." **A reference to the Book of Luke.**

"O Theophilus." **The Book of Acts was addressed to this man, whose name, significantly, means "lover of God" in Latin. The Gospel of Luke was addressed to the same man, so most likely Luke was also the author of the Book of Acts.**

Luke 1:3 states, *"most excellent Theophilus"*, suggesting that he was some important Roman official. Communicating with someone of such high standing perhaps gave Luke extra incentive to write his account accurately and well, with the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. He was indeed a careful researcher and accurate historian, as the passage in Luke 1:1-4 would suggest: *"It seemed good to me… to write to you an orderly account."*

Certain portions of the Book of Acts were written in the first person. (16:10-17, 20:5-21:18, 27:1-28:16) As Paul's traveling companion and physician, Luke was directly involved in many of the exploits about which he was writing; *"Luke the beloved physician"*, Paul calls him in Colossians 4:14.

Where Luke did not have firsthand knowledge of events, he did, of course, have plenty of access to Paul to fill in the gaps; and even for the experiences of Peter and the early Apostles, Luke had opportunity to interview them and get firsthand information about what transpired in the early days after Christ's resurrection.

In Luke 1:3 Luke mentions that he *"had perfect understanding of all things from the very first"*, that is, right from the birth of Christ. That statement suggests he had considerable interaction with the early disciples, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, so that he was able to interview them and find out the information he needed for his Gospel.

As for the Book of Acts, Luke was not just writing after the fact, as in

the Book of Luke, but was also an active participant in many of its episodes.

<u>V 2</u> until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen,

"Until the day in which he was taken up." **Jesus' ascension into Heaven was the event that marked the end of *"the former account"* (the Book of Luke) and marks the beginning of this one, the Book of Acts.**

"Commandments." **Such as the commission to witness, and to love one another. (Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:19-20, John 15:12)**

<u>V 3</u> to whom He also presented himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen of them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

***"Infallible proofs… during forty days"*:**

1) John 20:30 – *"many other signs… not written in this book"* – some of which would have been done while Jesus was in His resurrection body,
2) 1Corinthinans 15:5-8 – seen by 500 disciples,
3) John 20:19 – entered a locked room,
4) Luke 24:39 – showed wounds to Thomas,
5) Luke 24:41-43 – ate and drank, proof of <u>bodily</u> resurrection.

We can barely imagine what it was like for the disciples to experience Jesus' resurrection. Here was the Man whom they knew so well and loved and whose horrible crucifixion they had just witnessed. How they must have marveled, and how supremely overjoyed they must have been, to see this "comeback" after seeming defeat, the greatest comeback ever to happen in all of history. What an impact it must have had, seeing Him there again, alive and well. Whatever their experience was like, we can be sure it gave them great motivation to preach the Good News (the Gospel) a few days later during the Feast of Pentecost… and for the rest of their earthly lives.

<u>V 4-5</u> And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not

to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, "which", He said, "you have heard from Me;
for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

"Wait for the promise." **The Holy Spirit: Luke 24:49, John 7:39 (also John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:17)**

"Baptized." **John immersed his followers in water, which symbolized cleansing from the "dirt" of past wrongdoing along with a commitment to change and follow in God's way. This was known as the "baptism of repentance". The baptism that Jesus promises here to His disciples would also be like an immersion – a bathing in the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit baptism would work much more effectively to cleanse, renew, and empower believers to follow in God's way.**

"Not many days from now." **7 days later. There were 3 days between Passover and the Resurrection + 40 days of Jesus' Resurrection appearances (according to verse 3) + 7 days waiting, and you end up with 50 days after Passover, the day on which the Pentecost feasts were held. . . which was also the day they were to be *"baptized with the Holy Spirit"*.**

V 6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

"Restore the kingdom to Israel." **This was not the first time the disciples had expressed this patriotic expectation for the land of Israel (as in Luke 19:11, 24:21). The disciples were probably hoping to see Israel restored to the kind of greatness and influence it enjoyed during the days of David and Solomon. Jesus had just said they would soon *"be baptized with the Holy Spirit".* Since in the Old Testament there were prophecies about the outpouring of the Spirit which seemed to coincide with the coming of the Kingdom, they had some reason to suppose the earthly Kingdom was at hand. (Ezekiel 36:24-30, Joel 2:28-32)**

What the disciples did not understand was that the Holy Spirit would usher in the Gospel age, which was to be a time of preparation for that great day when Jesus would return to usher in the earthly Kingdom known as the Millennium. Only then, when the spiritual children of Israel have

been gathered, will the Kingdom of God, which the disciples were hoping would come right away, be realized in all its fullness.

This worldwide Government will be ruled by spiritual Israel – those who were true followers of the Light of God in this life (which, no doubt, will include many flesh-and-blood Jewish people). Although there is reason to believe from Scripture that the territory of Israel will have the honor of hosting the future world Government, the old political nation (along with all other nations) will bow to the authority of the coming worldwide Government of God. (See discussion on the God-Man.)

V 7-8 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.
But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

***"Not for you to know."* They were in way over their heads on this subject, and it wasn't to be their concern. They only had to obey what God had for them to do at that time. *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever."* (Deuteronomy 29:29)**

***"But you shall receive power."* This *"power"* was of a different sort, meant not for the purpose of establishing an earthly kingdom, but to spread the Good News throughout the world.**

> **◊ And He had a promise to go with that commandment, like He does with nearly all commandments; every promise has a condition! If they kept the commandment, what would happen? What is truly the key verse of the whole Book of Acts? Acts 1:8!**
> ***"But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me!"* PTL! They were to start right there at home and go to the uttermost parts of the Earth.**
> **Why do you suppose He told them to wait in Jerusalem? Why didn't they wait out in the country some place? Why didn't they wait up in Samaria? For one thing, that's where they were at the**

time. They were right outside the walls of Jerusalem when He gave them this commandment – on the Mount of Olives. Evidently the disciples must have been living in an upper room – sort of communal living. (1:13)

[from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1967]

<u>V 9</u> Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Same scene of Jesus' departure into Heaven was depicted in Luke 24:51.



<u>V 10-11</u> And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,

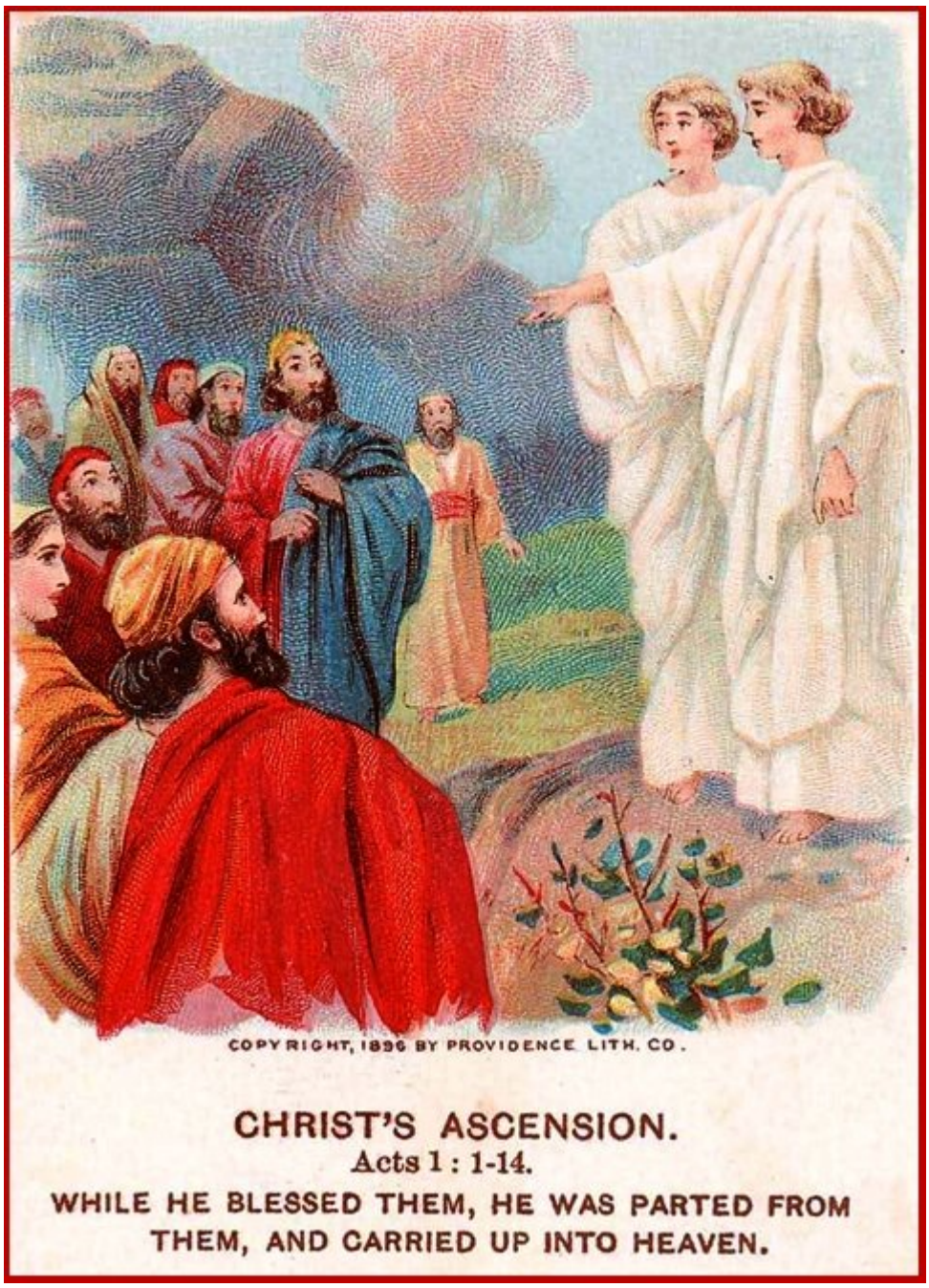
who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into

heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

"Looked steadfastly." **It is hard to imagine what the scene was like, of Jesus being taken up into Heaven, but evidently, it was an awe-inspiring one for the disciples.**

"Two men. . . in white apparel." **Two angels.**

"Come in like manner." "They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven"**, but this next time it will be *"with power and great glory".* (Matthew 24:30. Also Daniel 7:13, Zechariah 14:4, Matthew 26:64, Revelation 1:7)**



<u>V 12</u> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.

Luke 24:52 says, they *"returned to Jerusalem with great <u>joy</u>."*

***"From the mount called Olivet."* Apparently, Jesus' Ascension took**

place at the Mount of Olives. In the *Book of Zechariah*, we read that He will descend, return to the same place,

> ***"And in that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south… Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You."* (14:4-5)**

***"Sabbath day's journey"* = ½ mile. There is mention of this in Exodus 16:29. During their wilderness wanderings, the outermost tents of the children of Israel's congregation were ½ mile from the tabernacle. They were allowed to go to the tabernacle on the Sabbath to offer sacrifice, but that was the most "work" they were permitted to do.**

The fact that this same rule was still being followed after 1,500 years shows how steeped in tradition the Jews were. That stubborn tenacity had enabled God to use the Jewish people to preserve His Word through the centuries, but when it came time to adopt the *"grace and truth"* of Jesus Christ, it seemed to hinder their ability to break away from the old laws and ways of the past. (John 1:17)

V 13 And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room, where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James.

***"Upper room."* This may have been the same room where the Last Supper was held and where Jesus first appeared to the Apostles after the Resurrection.**

***"Peter."* In the list of disciples he is always mentioned first as acknowledged leader. *"Bartholomew"* was also known as Nathaniel; *"James the son of Alphaeus"* was not the brother of John but was a different James; *"Judas the son of James"* was also known as Thaddeus.**

(◊ To learn more about what happened to the twelve disciples, see below. ◊)

<u>V 14</u> These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

"Women." **Would likely have included three longtime disciples who had witnessed Christ's crucifixion: Mary Magdalene, Mary wife of Cleophas, and Salome. There also may have been there the sisters Mary and Martha and the Apostles' wives.**

"His brothers." **In Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 they are listed as James, Joses, Judas, Simon. James later became leader of the Jerusalem church (12:17, 15:13-22) and wrote the Book of James. Judas, or Jude, was likely the author of the Book of Jude.**

After witnessing their Brother's Resurrection, they had become believers, but 8 months before this they were complete skeptics. (See John 7:5.) "Familiarity breeds contempt", and it seems it took the Resurrection miracle to get it through their heads that their "brother" was actually the Messiah.

<u>V 15 -17</u> And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said,
"Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus;
for he was numbered with us and had obtained a part in this ministry.

Peter introduces the matter of finding a replacement for Judas, which issue fills up the rest of Chapter One.

<u>V 18-20</u> "(Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out.
And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)
For it is written in the book of Psalms:

'Let his dwelling place be desolate,
And let no one live in it';

And,

'Let another take his office.'

"This man purchased a field." **Because the field was bought with the money the Jewish leaders had paid to betray Jesus, and which a remorseful Judas later *"threw down in the temple"*, the author of Acts refers to Judas as if he were the buyer. (See also Zechariah 11:12-13.) The chief priests would not put the money back into the temple treasury; it was unlawful to do so since it was the *"price of blood".***

So perhaps their idea was to spend it on something useful, but not something they would normally budget for. In this case it turned out to be a field that could be used as a cemetery: *"the potter's field, to bury strangers in".* (Matthew 27:5-7)

"Burst open in the middle." **The tree on which Judas hung himself overlooked a cliff. Apparently, his body fell a distance and ruptured on the rocks below.**

"Known to all… Field of Blood." **It seems Judas' betrayal and death became so well known that the field purchased by his 30 pieces of silver got labeled as the *"Field of Blood".* It was also known as the *"potter's field"* because the soil of that particular field was suitable for making pottery. (Matthew 27:7,10, Zechariah 11:13)**

"It is written in the Book of Psalms." **The passages quoted are from Psalms 69:25, 109:8.**

<u>V 21-23</u> "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,
beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."
And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

"From the baptism of John, to that day when He was taken up from us." **There may not have been very many who had accompanied Jesus right**

from start to finish. Two men were selected as candidates: Barsabas and Matthias.

V 24-25 And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen
to take part of this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place."

"You, O Lord, who know the hearts." **They acknowledged that they didn't know everything and needed God's help to make the decision.**

"To his own place." **Referring to Judas' fate in the Afterlife – probably in the Heavenly Realm's version of a rehabilitation center; there he would have to endure a time of *"shame and everlasting disgrace"*. (Daniel 12:2, NLT) (See "Fate of Judas" post.)**

V 26 And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

"The lot fell on Matthias." **Asking God for a sign is one way of finding God's will. Casting lots was a more common practice in the Old Testament. But when the Holy Spirit was given who, as Jesus promised, *"will guide you into all truth"* (John 16:13), this once-popular method of finding God's will became less essential.**

A weakness of using signs is that it doesn't allow much room for the Lord to speak or give alternatives. It is better to use this method as a confirmation after having used the other ways to find God's will, such as counseling, direct revelation, and so on.

It is thought that Matthias later traveled to Colchis (now the area of Georgia on the Black Sea) and preached among the barbarians there who were cannibals at that time in history.

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◊ **What Became of the 12 Apostles?** ◊

Peter: Peter was a native of Bethsaida and had a fishing business in partnership with his brother Andrew, and with James and John, and

Zebedee their father. Originally known as Simon, Jesus re-named him Peter (Greek) or Cephas (Aramaic), both of which mean "rock". He came to be acknowledged as the leader of the 12, and indeed he was a fearless advocate for the Gospel in those early days of the Church. Peter is thought to have travelled to the cities of Asia Minor where the apostle Paul had pioneered and finally landed in Rome where he was executed for his faith.

James: The older brother of John, he also was part of the fishing business at the time Jesus called him to be a disciple. James was part of the inner circle with John and Peter. Executed by Herod in 44 A.D., he was the first of the 12 (excluding Judas Iscariot) to die.

John: A partner in the same fishing business, John became a follower of John the Baptist who first proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah. At that point John became Jesus' follower and eventually was recognized as His closest disciple and one of the inner circle with Peter and James. After Jesus' Resurrection he stayed in Jerusalem for some years, and in later life went to Ephesus where he wrote His Gospel. The Romans had begun persecution, and tradition has it that they attempted to boil him in oil, but since he wouldn't boil, they exiled him to the island of Patmos off the coast of Turkey where, they hoped, he couldn't have any more influence. (96-98 A.D.) But that was where John received the Book of Revelation, which has inspired generations of Christians for 2,000 years since that time. After his release John apparently lived to a ripe old age, becoming the only apostle to die a natural death.

Andrew: Also part of the fishing business, he along with John were Jesus' first disciples. Andrew brought his brother Peter to Christ. Tradition has it that he preached in Asia Minor (Turkey), Greece, and Scythia (Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan).

Philip: Also from Bethsaida, Philip was a fellow-townsman of Peter and Andrew. He brought Nathanael to Christ. Tradition has it that he preached in Phrygia (central Turkey) and in Hierapolis, a city further to the west in Turkey.

Thomas: Well known as "doubting Thomas", he travelled far afield for the sake of the Gospel, laboring in Syria, Parthia (part of modern-day Iran), Persia, and finally in India where he was martyred.

Bartholomew: Thought to be the surname of Nathanael, who came from Cana, a town in Galilee (the one where Jesus attended the wedding feast and turned the water into wine). Tradition has it that he preached in Parthia (Iran).

Matthew: A tax collector for the Romans, Matthew would have been adept at keeping careful records and thus was well suited for the task of writing his Gospel version of Jesus' life and ministry. Tradition has it that he preached in Palestine for some years and then travelled to foreign countries.

James: The son of Alphaeus, he was called James the Lesser, perhaps because of his stature. Tradition has it that he preached in Palestine and Egypt.

Simon: Nicknamed *"the Zealot"* (Greek) or *"the Cananite"* (from the Aramaic "canna" which means "zealous"). The Zealots were a radical sect of nationalists fighting for Jewish independence. Interestingly, he was from the completely opposite background to Matthew the Romans' tax collector. But the love of Christ enabled the two to work together in unity. Little is known of Simon although it is thought that he labored in Egypt and teamed up with Jude to work in Mesopotamia and Armenia.

Thaddeus: Called *"Judas the son of James"* in Acts 1:13, he was also called Lebbaeus. Tradition has it that he went to Abgarus, king of Edessa (in southeastern Turkey), and to Syria, Arabia, and Mesopotamia.

Judas Iscariot: He came from Kerioth, a town of Judah, which made him the only non-Galilean disciple. It seems he expected to make great worldly gains through his association with Jesus. When he saw that was not going to happen, he betrayed Him and afterwards, unable to face himself or others, committed suicide.

(Continue to ACTS, chapter 2)