

Acts 1:1-3 | The Changing Dispensations and Many Infallible Proofs

Scripture | Acts 1:1: The former treatise. The Gospel of Luke 1:1-4.

Acts | God's Introduction of the Law

When we speak about the Law, in Christian circles, most understand it is not our local, state, or federal government law that we are talking about, but the Law of Moses. The Gospel of John states, "*For the law was given by Moses*" (John 1:17). When the law is mentioned in Scripture, many will think of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), but there are over 600 in total.

Even before the Law was given to Moses, there were practices and customs followed by men and women who were made in the image of God. Some of these customs before the Law were: *offerings/sacrifices* (Genesis 4:3,4); *sacred feasts to the Lord* (Exodus 5:1), *priests* (Exodus 19:22); *sacred oaths to God* (Genesis 14:22); *marriage customs* (Genesis 29:16-30); *circumcision* (Genesis 17:10); *birthrights* (Genesis 25:31-34); *homicide consequences* (Genesis 9:6), and others.

Was There Judgment for Sin Before the Law?

In the earlier periods of human history, before the Mosaic Law was established, divine punishment for wrongdoing was not dealt with on an individual level but affected the entire global community. Individual violators of the societal norms do not appear to have been subject to divine accountability for their actions (Genesis 4:11-15). Yet God's wrath was revealed against *all humanity*. As sin increased, mankind *knew God, but glorified him not as God, neither were thankful* (Romans 1:21). God's universal wrath was observable first with the Flood (Genesis 6), followed by the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11).

After the Flood, there was a dispensational change in which some kind of divine law was pronounced and placed upon mankind. We can think of Noah who lived before the Law of Moses. Could we say that God gave Noah various verbal pre-law requirements that were to be passed down and obeyed, such as seen in Genesis 9:1-7?

Those who violated those pre-law customs and practices faced consequences from man (Genesis 9:6). Although death was inevitable for all men (Romans 5:14), it was not due directly on account of individual sin, since sin was not imputed to individuals. Romans 5:13 states, "*For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.*" The word *imputed* means not assigned.

Later, Moses put in writing the complete Law that was given to him by the LORD (Exodus 17:14; 24:4; Deuteronomy 31:9). With this codified Law in place, individuals, as well as the nation of Israel, faced divine accountability based on their obedience or disobedience to the commandments and laws. Even nations outside of Israel faced divine accountability for their actions for or against God's chosen nation. They would be blessed if they blessed Israel and cursed if they did not.

The Law can be referred to in various ways: The Law of Moses, The Torah (usually in scroll form), the Chumash (Hebrew for five books), and the Pentateuch (Greek for five books, *Penta = five, Teuchos = books*). The

Pentateuch refers to the first five books in the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It is rare, but occasionally “the Law” refers to the entire Old Testament.

Why Was the Law Given?

The popular view of the Law is that it shows us how bad we are, and that we need a Savior. Indeed, mankind needs a Savior, but that is not the reason given in Scripture for the Law. A key in interpreting the Bible is to understand that the Law of Moses was for Israel alone. The Apostle Paul explained why the Law was given to Israel. In Galatians 3:19, Paul wrote, “*It was added because of transgressions.*” Specifically, the Law of Moses was given to keep the Seed line of Christ intact. Satan’s mission has always been to destroy the Seed of the Woman (Genesis 3:15). Without the Law, the Jews would have gone the way of other nations, like the Canaanites or Hittites.

Nations cease to exist because they transgress; they have no natural moral compass. The Law was given to keep a People group (The Jews) together for 2,000 years *until the Seed should come*. The Law has now served its purpose. It held a nation together, and the Messiah has come.

When Was The Law Given?

Four hundred and thirty years before the Law was given, God made a multi-faceted promise with Abram (Genesis 12:1-3):

1. To give him land.
2. To make him into a great nation.
3. To make his name great.
4. To bless His “Seed” and all families of the earth. Through Abram’s family line, ultimately it was Christ who would bless all the nations of the earth.

Some of these promises have been partially fulfilled, but they will be completely fulfilled in Christ’s Millennial (1,000-year) rule on earth.

Later Israel had a religious program added to their promises in the form of The Law. The Law was imposed on them until *the time of reformation*, Greek, *diorthosis* = the time of straightening (*Hebrews 9:10*). The only time when things will be thoroughly straight is the Millennium (labeled as “Kingdom” on the Prophecy Panorama¹).

The ordinances of the Law, which would come later, included food regulations, drink regulations, various baptisms, and other rites and ceremonies. Currently, the Law is in abeyance until the seven years, or *The Time of Jacob’s Trouble*, (Jeremiah 30:7), what is often called the Tribulation.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, God blotted out the handwriting of ordinances. He took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross (Colossians 2:13,14). That brings us to the Book of Acts. As we move through the book,

¹ See the Prophecy Panorama in charts and graphs at rogerfeenstra.com

there will be some problems that we will encounter and have to deal with concerning the Law. Whether we can completely figure them out remains to be seen, but we should at the very least be alerted to them.

The Book of Acts is a Transition book; from the Dispensation of the Law to Grace.

Remember that ***dispensations are distinct periods in which God variously operates***. This means that while God never changes, the way he relates to humanity has changed over time. Therefore, to be dispensational is a belief that God has related and relates to people throughout human history and today in unique ways. Each of these unique historical relationships between God and people is called a dispensation.

The book of Acts seems to show a transition from the dispensation of The Law to the dispensation of grace, following Christ's death and ascension. In other words, it wasn't as if one morning the Jews woke up and did not follow the Law. We will see this early on in Acts. The Early Christians, those who believed in Jesus as Messiah still followed the Law, but the Law would diminish. I expect that we will see the Law diminishing as we move through the book of Acts.

The Law in Acts will fade away and, by A.D. 70, will be completely set aside since the Temple was destroyed. Yet, as noted above, the Law will resume during the Tribulation: *Time of Jacob's Trouble*, the 70th week of Daniel.

Currently, so long as the dispensation of grace remains in force, all mankind, Jew, or Gentile, male or female; that is, every man, woman, boy, or girl is under grace and can believe in Jesus Christ. *"By grace are ye saved through faith and not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast"* (Ephesians 2:8,9).

All of the above are building blocks to help us understand the Book of Acts. But there is more we should grasp. We need to understand Law and Grace, but we also need to understand the role of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ at His first coming.

Jesus Was Born Under the Law and Was Sent only for the Nation of Israel.

We should keep in mind several important truths about Jesus Christ and His first coming²:

- He was made under The Law (Galatians 4:4).
- He was born as *David's Seed* to be Israel's Savior (Acts 13:23).
- He was sent *only* to Israel (Matthew 15:24; Matthew 10:5-8; 10:23).
- He was a minister of *the circumcision* (The Jews, Romans 15:8).
- He performed miracles amid Israel (Acts 2:22; 10:39).
- He came not to destroy The Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17).

² O'Hair J.C. *How to Understand and Enjoy the Bible. Bible Doctrines to Live By.* Comstock, WI. 2020

- He recognized those who sat in Moses' seat, i.e., those who taught The Law (Matthew 23:1-3).
- He took His place as a *worshipping Jew* (John 4:22). Jesus is perhaps speaking of the worship in Jerusalem, or of His Kingdom in Jerusalem.
- He regularly attended the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16).
- He instructed the Jews to obey the Law of Moses (Matthew 8:4).
- He observed the feasts of the Jews (John 7:10; Luke 22:15).

Jesus was fully Jewish, born a Jew, and did not direct His earthly ministry at His first coming to the Gentiles. However, while born a Jew, *"He came unto his own, his own received him not."* (John 1:11). He was rejected by his own (Matthew 21:42). His own put him to death (Acts 5:29-31).

What About the Gentiles?

At one time, Gentiles had *"No hope and without God in the world"* (Ephesians 2:12). However, with the rejection of Jesus by his people:

- Romans 11:30.
 - The Gentiles have obtained mercy through Israel's unbelief.
- Romans 11:15.
 - The result of Israel being *cast away* is that the entire world has been reconciled. Israel's **casting away** is temporary. Prophetically, one day, Israel will be received by God when they call out to Him and believe, then they will receive everlasting life.

Reconciliation for all was needed because of the Messiah being rejected and killed. Early on in the book of Acts, we will see that the risen Jesus sent out His disciples to teach and preach His commandments one last time to the Jews who had rejected Him.

Then He raised Paul to reach the Gentiles.

The Ministry of Reconciliation Was Given to the Apostle Paul.

Jesus Christ gave the apostle Paul the ministry of reconciliation to the Gentiles:

- Romans 15:16.
- Ephesians 3:8.

A reason for God selecting the Gentiles for salvation is to provoke jealousy among the Jews (Romans 11:11). The jealousy may not be clear now. Still, during the Tribulation, the Jews will realize that they were the ones who rejected their Messiah. They will long to have been a part of the Body of Christ, where there is neither

Jew nor Gentile. The Church (or the body of Christ) exists because of Israel's rejection. But Israel will one day believe.

It is clear then that the message of the Bible strongly focuses on Israel and the Jews. But what about us? This is the amazing grace-filled part of the story. We, non-Jews, who were without hope and without God (Ephesians 2:12), through God's grace, get to have a part in His Plan. We are going to see that plan unfold as we study the book of Acts. We are going to see the dispensational change from law to grace!

Acts 1:1-3 | Many Infallible Proofs

Introduction and Instructions to the Disciples

The Acts of the Apostles might also be titled The Acts of the Holy Spirit. We see the third person of the Trinity moving and at work throughout the book. The *Holy Ghost* (Or Holy Spirit) is mentioned 84 times in Acts. It is unclear why the translators used the word "Ghost," except, in 1611, the term was commonly used in the sense of a person's spirit and did not carry the same meaning as we use today when we think of a ghost. The Greek, *pneuma hagios* (*spirit holy*), may have been translated as Holy Ghost to refer to the Third Person of the Trinity.³



The book of Acts is the "indispensable link between the Gospels and the Epistles (letters)."⁴ It is the only entirely historical book of the New Testament and the only record we have of the progress of the gospel proclamation that followed the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Acts is our only record of the expansion of the Gospel across the entire Mediterranean region. The Acts is our only record of the conversion and career of the apostle Paul and his church-planting mission.⁵ A keyword to notice is "Church." The Greek word for every use of the word church (with one exception in 19:37) throughout Acts is *ekklesia*, which means *assembly*. We will let the context determine its proper meaning each time the word *ekklesia* appears.

The word Gospel means "Good News." We will find two variations of the Gospel preached in the book of Acts.⁶ Both pronouncements of the Good News pertain to Jesus Christ; both require belief in His death, burial, and

³ Ghost, n." OED Online. Oxford University Press, September 2020. Web. 7 October 2020.

⁴ Hanna, Kenneth G., *From Gospels to Glory, Exploring the New Testament*. WestBow Press. Bloomington, IN. 2015.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ We should challenge this, as we should with all assumptions, as we study the book of Acts. To be clear, there is only one saving Gospel today in our dispensation of Grace. There is only one response to the Gospel today, that is to "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; by Grace through faith and not of ourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works..." Acts 16:31; Ephesians 2:8,9.

resurrection. Yet the recipients of each variation resulted in a different response. We will develop this thought further in subsequent classes.

The book moves from the primary focus on Israel, the Kingdom, and the Law, to the Gentiles as fellow heirs with Jews, and of the same Body in Christ by grace. It is a transition, from early Jewish believers alone to the complete Body of Christ (Colossians 2:10) where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but all are one in Christ.

The Date of Writing and the Author

There is much debate on when Luke wrote The Acts. According to the Scofield Reference Bible, and the most probable dating, the book covers about 30 years, from A.D. 33 to A.D. 63. Which would mean *Luke could have written the book sometime after A.D. 63. The book begins with the apostle Peter's ministry, who eventually fades from the scene to the introduction of the apostle Paul who takes the dominant role in the narrative. The book ends abruptly at 28:31. What happened to Paul after the **two years** Luke recorded in 28:31? No one knows.

The standard Christian position regarding the book of Acts is that "*Acts is the Church's standard textbook on the first three decades of its history and its ageless global task of evangelization.*"⁷ We should question this assumption, and we will.

*Nowhere in the Gospel of Luke or The Acts does the author mention his name. Early Christian tradition names Dr. Luke as the author. There is no reason to dispute that dogmatically. Paul mentions *Luke* in Colossians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:11 (Luke traveled with Paul), and Philemon 24. Was Luke a Jew or a Gentile? That, too, is debated, although his writing shows that he understood the Hebrew Scriptures, which, may lean toward him being a Jew, the position that I hold. If a Gentile, he was undoubtedly a God-fearer, as we will see with Cornelius when we get to chapter 10.

Acts 1:1-3 | Many Infallible Proofs and the Things Pertaining to the Kingdom of God

Verse 1 —

The former treatise (a written work) is what we know as the *Gospel according to Luke*. **Theophilus** (See Luke 1:3), a Roman name meaning, *loved of God*. Some believe **Theophilus** is a representative name for all who believe in God, yet, the epithet *most excellent* (Luke 1:3) is often used in literature to distinguish a person from others with the same name. **Theophilus** could have been a Gentile Christian with status (e.g., **most excellent**), and was perhaps a patron who financed Luke's travels and published his writings. Or maybe Luke is just dedicating the two-volume work to **Theophilus**?

⁷ Jensen, Irving L. *Acts: An Inductive Study*. Moody Press. Chicago, IL. 1968.

All that Jesus began to do and teach. Not all Jesus taught, but what he **began** to teach. Other Gospels, inspired by the Holy Spirit, help fill in details of Jesus's teachings (cf. John 20:30).

Verse 2—

Until the day in which he was taken up, the phrase **taken up** could mean *taken up on the cross*. It might refer to his death and resurrection, but the more natural reading⁸ refers to his ascension since Luke uses the same phrase in Acts 1:11, 22.⁹ **After...had given commandments unto the apostles,** these commandments are popularly known as *The Great Commission*, although Scripture does not supply that name. We would be more accurate to call them commandments given to the apostles. These commandments are in all four Gospels: Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15-19; Luke 24:45-49; John 21:15-17. The commandments were given by Jesus, to the apostles, **through the Holy Ghost**. These were Spirit-breathed commandments specifically for the apostles.

Many Christians, if not most, apply these commandments as being written for us. But we should not be lazy in our Bible study and instead work hard at making a correct interpretation. Acts 1:2 states these were commandments given **unto the apostles whom he had chosen**, specifically the eleven, Judas had already betrayed Jesus and was dead¹⁰ (For the choosing of the apostles, Luke is pointing back to Luke 6:12-16).

Verse 3—

To whom also he showed himself alive...by many infallible proofs. This he did for **forty days**. Scripture records forty days of multiple appearances, providing evidence of his resurrection from the dead: Acts 13:31; Matthew 28:9, 16-17; Mark 16:10-14; Luke 24; John 20-21:1; 1 Corinthians 15:5-7; I John 1:1. The Greek word for **infallible proofs** is *tekmerion*, which is "something known." In other words, the fact that Jesus was alive was not mysterious; the living Jesus was seen with great **infallible proofs**.

It is important to note that Scripture records the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The tomb is often overlooked but is one of the critical parts of his **passion**. Passion means suffering. The burial proved he was dead; he was not merely resuscitated. The claim that those who saw him were hallucinating is weak since he was seen by many over **forty days**--Some of these were public appearances.

Speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Suffice it to say (and we will develop the kingdom message as we move through Acts) that the hope of Israel receiving a kingdom and serving and ruling in it

⁸ If the plain sense makes common sense seek no other sense.

⁹ Mark uses the same Greek word for the ascension in Mark 16:19, as does Paul in 1 Timothy 3:16.

¹⁰ Judas' replacement was selected in Acts 1:26, bringing the total back to twelve.

pertains to a future, physical dominion. The Jews are to be kings and priests within the kingdom (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). During Jesus's life, the Jews who believed in Him expected Him to set up His kingdom there and then (even in Acts 1:6). But they had not fully understood His teaching that He must first go away and then return (Luke 19:12). In the meantime, He would equip the apostles to carry out the mission of getting the nation ready for His return (Acts 1:8). The kingdom concept is difficult to grasp and highly misinterpreted.

An assumption we will make through our study of Acts is that while the Church may be in the kingdom one day in the future; serving and ruling in the physical kingdom is promised for Israel. The Church (Body of Christ) is not kingdom-related insofar as being kings and priests; instead, the Church exists, among other purposes, to 1) Glorify God (Ephesians 3:21). 2) Edify and build up (Ephesians 4:13-16). 3) Follow Paul's revelation from Christ; regarding our freedom in Christ from Law and in pleasing all men so they may be saved (1 Corinthians 10:33).

Many Infallible Proofs

The fact of Christ's resurrection has been accepted throughout history as irrefutable due to all the evidence and "infallible proofs." Paul listed numerous facts about the resurrection. Let's look briefly at some proofs:

- **The first proof is Jesus Christ himself.** Throughout his ministry, he anticipated his death and his resurrection. For example, in John 2:18-21, the Jews asked Jesus for a sign. He told them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days, I will raise it up." Verse 21 includes a note that he was speaking of his body. See also: Matthew 12:38-40; 16:21; 17:9, 23; 20:19; 27:63; Mark 8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:34; 14:58; Luke 9:22; 18:33.
- **The Empty Grave.** Several theories exist about how Jesus could have been revived in the tomb and was not dead, but that is highly unlikely. At Christ's burial, a large stone was rolled before the tomb. It was sealed, and a guard was placed before it. It could only have been a superhuman feat to remove his body; no man could have done it. How could his friends have done it in the presence of a Roman guard? Had they removed the body, why strip him naked first? Why would they have taken the time to unwrap the body? Why would his enemies do that? That would cause the report of his resurrection to spread—his enemies wanted him in the tomb. Can we say that the most adequate evidence, is the empty tomb? It is the one thing skeptics do not know how to deal with.
- **The Transformation of the Disciples.** They had seen their master die. It was a horrific day. One day they were discouraged and dejected, suddenly their doubts fled! Then they saw him. It couldn't have been a hallucination involving over 500 people at once.
- **Thousands of Jews Believed in Him.** Because of Peter's eyewitness account in Acts 2:14-41.

- **The Apostle Paul's Witness.** "Last of all he was seen of me also." (1 Corinthians 15:8). Everything the apostle Paul did and everything he preached began with that sudden change—when he saw the risen Lord. Everything Paul did, he attributed to the sight of the risen Christ. If we reject even this one proof, we would have to reject nearly half of the New Testament.
- **The Gospel Accounts.** Four different accounts describe the chain of circumstances from the empty tomb to his ascension (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51).