

Well, good evening, y'all. Welcome to Center Point. Good to see y'all. Hope you've been able to enjoy that little hint of fall in the air. I think that's what it is. I'm not sure if it's going to stick around or not, but that's that's my hope and prayer. We're gonna start a new study tonight on the book of Acts for the next few minutes before we go into our prayer time. And hopefully some of the things that we talk about in the study will be a springboard to that prayer. So if you'd like a overview of Acts, we'll study guide to help us through this study. Feel free to grab one if you haven't already. But I'll be covering the first four or five verses in Acts chapter one. which are a little bit like the book jacket on a modern book in that Luke, the writer, gives us a brief synopsis, sort of a overview of the main theme that he wants to cover so that we know what we're gonna see outlined and explicated within the book itself. Luke and Acts, are kind of like volumes one and two of the same book, the same work. And I have here in my hands volume one and two of Steve Lawson's book, which is entitled, Foundations of Grace, A Long Line of Godly Men. So this one covers the foundation 1400 B.C. to A.D. 100, this volume two covers A.D. 100 to 1564. So parts two and one of the very same book, and they're separated for, I think, ease of use and other considerations. Well, in the early years of the church, Acts and Luke were considered parts one and two of the same work. One talked about what Jesus began to do and to teach, and the next, the book of Acts, talked about the things that Jesus continues to do and to teach from heaven through the Holy Spirit. And so, in the early years of the church, it was customary to consider those together as one work. Might call them Luke-Acts. Later on, a little bit later on, it became customary to group together the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. So in many people's minds, that became separated from Acts. But really, thematically, Luke and Acts do belong together in the sense that they're both written by the same person and essentially for the same reason. So it's helpful knowing that to do a little bit of comparison and contrasting of the prefaces of Luke and Acts. They're very, very similar, but there's also some helpful distinctives that show us the purposes that Luke had in mind when he wrote both of these. First of all, let's look at who Luke was. It becomes obvious as we're reading through the Book of Acts that Luke was a physician and a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. We'll notice that at times throughout his narrative in Acts, he changes pronouns from they to we, indicating that he is right there on the scene, himself an eyewitness of what's going on. and corroborating the truth of what's being narrated there. So a traveling companion of Paul, he was a Gentile, so he brings that perspective of a non-Jew to the canon of scripture, to the New Testament, which is fascinating. He was an historian. He wasn't attempting to write a theological treatise per se. He was attempting to write an accurate history, and that's exactly what he did. Among the historians of the ancient world, Herodotus, Tacitus, Pliny, Josephus, and others, Luke stands apart as the most accurate of the ancient historians. period, which is fascinating. He, for obvious reasons, has been subjected to more scrutiny than any of the others because of the things that he claims in his history, and he has proven correct time and time again by archeological expeditions and the turning of the shovel, so to speak, has been proven right again and again. So that is good to know. He wants us to know, as we read his history of the early church and the Holy Spirit's ministry through that church, that what we're reading is reliable history, that he's carefully investigated all these things from the beginning. He is not making this stuff up. He has talked to eyewitnesses. He himself is an eyewitness in many instances. And so he's given us a very, very reliable history. So we should not hesitate for an

instant to subject Luke or Acts to scientific inquiry and investigation because it will prove true time and time again. It is the word of God and it is also very, very accurate history. It's also obvious that Luke is a cultured man. He's an educated man. He's very well educated as you would expect a physician to be in the ancient world as well as the modern world. He uses in his writing some of the most elevated Greek in the New Testament. This is not Walmart parking lot Greek. This is very much elevated and sophisticated. He shows himself to be a very well-read man. And again, probably, most likely, a physician. Based on many things, one of which is he uses a lot of medical terminology that the other New Testament writers, gospel writers, do not use. Showing knowledge that a physician would be expected to have in the ancient world. He also has a particular affinity for women, and I say that in the most appropriate sense possible. He points out the importance and the prominence of women in a way that some of the other gospel writers do not. Not that they were in any way disrespectful to women, but women figure very, very prominently in Luke's gospel and in the book of Acts. So since Luke wanted his two books to be read as parts one and two of the same work, rather than separately, we may accurately, I believe, collectively call them Luke Acts, and parts one and two of the same work. Both are dedicated to someone named Theophilus. Theo meaning God, philo meaning love. So a person who loves God is a good translation. Also an acceptable translation is someone whom God loves. Both of those would be accurate in this case. Some have made the argument that Theophilus may be a group intended to widely include everyone who loves God or is loved by God. It's probably not the case, and the reason I say that is because in Luke's preface, Verse 3, he refers to Theophilus as most excellent Theophilus. It seems as if he's referring to an individual rather than a collective group of people. And using that phrase most excellent, he's probably referring to a man of some means, a man of some standing, perhaps a Roman official or someone of that nature. But he addresses this to Theophilus. Both works, Luke and Acts, are addressed to Theophilus, a man apparently of some standing. Also, he seems to be a devout man, a man who lived up to, in every sense of his name, lover of God, or one who was loved by God. Theophilus seemed to fulfill that. So, if we look at Luke's preface here, the first three verses of his gospel, Luke writes, inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things that you have been taught. What do we learn from this preface? Again, we can think of this as sort of the book jacket of the Gospel of Luke. This is encapsulated what the Gospel is setting out to do. Well, one thing we can learn here is that Luke, I said here Luke is not an eyewitness from the beginning. It's a bit of an overstatement. He obviously was an eyewitness of some of the things that transpire, but not all. So how does he know that they are true? Well, as he claims in the preface, he has carefully investigated, which probably entailed interviewing several of the apostles and others who figure prominently in his gospel, perhaps even Mary, the mother of Jesus. Luke tells us things about the nativity and about the annunciation that are unique to him. We don't see these in the other gospel writings. You can picture Luke sitting down with perhaps an aged Mary and listening very attentively to her recounting tales of the nativity, of raising her son, of the event that happened when Jesus was a youngster in the temple. And you can imagine Luke

listening as Mary beamed with pride over what her son had done and perhaps had tears in her eyes when she thought about what he did to lay down his life for the sins of the world. But imagining that conversation is quite poignant. We also learn from this preface that Luke's sources were the apostles also, not just Mary and the other eyewitnesses, but he carefully investigated and interviewed those who were there, who spent time with Jesus, who spent the entirety of his three-year ministry with him, and who know what they're talking about. Luke, again, does claim to write accurate history, and we can put him to the most careful scrutiny and not fear that anything will be overturned. He has been proven right again and again. Luke is telling us about the fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures. As he says in verse three, seemed good to me also having followed all things closely for some time past. Luke is not unfamiliar with the Old Testament scriptures. He's deeply steeped in them and perhaps has committed much of it to memory and speaks authoritatively of it, especially on Jesus' fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. And Luke is quite obviously trying to persuade Theophilus to be certain about the truths of Christianity that he has heard. Theophilus, whomever he was, seems to have been somewhat familiar, as most people were in the ancient world, about what had happened with Jesus of Nazareth, but he had some doubts. And Luke's stated purpose is to make him certain of the things that he's heard, make him convinced in his heart of heart, not just of the historical reliability of facts, He wants him to know Jesus personally as his Savior and his Lord, and that's quite obvious. So he wants to persuade him, not just of the truth of the history, but he wants to persuade Theophilus to become a Christian. Okay, so we can compare and contrast that with the Book of Acts. Before I do that, I'll back up a little bit and tell you about William Ramsey, who was a British archeologist, I believe, in the early part of the 20th century. who was very familiar with Luke and Acts, but did not believe the Gospels, did not believe them to be true, was a very skeptical person. And so he set out to prove that very thing, that they were false. And so he followed the path of the Apostle Paul throughout the book of Acts. So when it says Paul went to Ephesus, Ramsey went to Ephesus and did his archeological excavation there, followed along the places that Paul said he went, And surprise, surprise was every turn of the shovel turned up to point to the veracity of what Luke had written, pointed to the accuracy of even the details that Luke recounts to us in Luke and Acts. And so Ramsey became persuaded, he was absolutely overwhelmed with the historical evidence simply presented by Luke in Acts, so that he not only said, yes, this is accurate history, he actually became a Christian as a result. Exactly what Luke is setting out to do when it comes to Theophilus and others who will read his two-volume work. So in Acts, the first three verses go like this, and again, you'll detect much similarity with Luke's preface. In the first book, O Theophilus, notice he doesn't claim to be Luke. but it's very evident that the same person wrote both of these. O Theophilus, in my first book, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. Notice that he simply addresses Theophilus as oh, Theophilus, rather than most excellent Theophilus. Perhaps he's established a closer, more intimate relationship with Theophilus by this time. We know that Acts was written sometime after the book of the Gospel of Luke. So perhaps he knows him well, is keeping up a correspondence with him. What do we learn here in this

preface? Well, Luke's Gospel deals with all that Jesus began to do and to teach while he was physically present on earth. And it's strongly implied, if not quite said outright, that Acts deals with all that Jesus continues to do and to teach from heaven. So in both, we read about Jesus's acts through the Holy Spirit, through the apostles in the church. The ascension is really the hinge point. It's the event, perhaps sometimes neglected in the church's observation of the important events, Jesus' life and death and resurrection and ascension. Maybe it doesn't get quite as much attention, but Oh, how important the ascension really is. It's the thing that brings Jesus's earthly ministry to a close as he ascends into heaven, having given them the great commission. And it's the very thing that inaugurates the second phase. Jesus's continued ministry from heaven through the Holy Spirit whom he promised to send to the apostles to continue the very same things that he began while he was on earth doing his earthly ministry. So the ascension you can think of as a hinge point. Closed one and opens the other. Now the Holy Spirit will be the agent of Jesus's ministry. Guess what? Just as Jesus promised, right? In the upper room, in his final discourse, Jesus said he will take from what is mine and he will make it known to you. You will do even greater works than I have been doing. What an astounding thing for Jesus to say. But it's because he's going to send in his place another counselor, another helper. to do for you what he would do if he was present. So that Jesus can actually say it is better for you that I go away. Because the disciples were all upset. Jesus seemed to be leaving them at the worst possible time. What a reassurance when Jesus told them no, it's actually better if I go away into heaven because from there I will send the Holy Spirit to indwell you and to enable you to continue to do and teach the things that I have done and taught. So, the Holy Spirit is now the agent. So, if the Holy Spirit is the agent, what is the role of his apostles whom he has commissioned? Well, they are the instruments to carry out what the agent enables them to do. It turns out that Jesus was guided by the Holy Spirit throughout his earthly ministry, even in choosing his apostles. We see this in verse, let's see, verse two. after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. Jesus' life and ministry are enabled, empowered, accompanied by Holy Spirit power, even to the extent of giving the Great Commission, and even to the extent of commissioning his apostles to do his work after he leaves. All of that is guided by the Holy Spirit. And Luke, the careful historian, does not hesitate to speak of proofs of the resurrection. Acts as an apologetic work. a defense of the truth claims of Christianity. We see this in verse three, in that after his resurrection, he presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. We know that he appeared to hundreds of people after his resurrection, offering those proofs, that apologetic proof, the substantiation of who he said he was. Now we know, being presuppositional in our thinking, I think, is that the unregenerate heart will not be persuaded by any amount of evidence that Jesus is who he says he was. But once the Holy Spirit gives us the rebirth, gives us regeneration, there is a certain sense in which proofs can have an apologetic and helpful effect in clearing out the doubts so that the grass of faith can grow, so to speak. Only Jesus, only the Holy Spirit can give that new birth and persuade us of the truth of the gospel. But there is, according to Luke, and according to many other Christian apologists, a role for Christian apologetics to substantiate the faith that the Holy Spirit gives us as a gift. So Luke does not hesitate to speak of these proofs of the resurrection, the evidence that what Jesus said and did is true and substantial. We

see in Luke and Acts also a defense of apostolic authority. The apostles are who they said they were. And a defense of the apostleship of Paul. You'll remember that Paul had an apostleship that was different from the other apostles. He was one abnormally born, as he says. And so there were some who doubted his true apostleship and questioned him on it. He accounts for his faith story, his conversion story, no less than three times in the book of Acts, and each one has a different emphasis, a different flavor and perspective, but each of them together paint a very powerful picture of God. of Paul Saul of Tarsus' very unusual but very legitimate conversion and commissioning to be the apostle to the Gentiles. So he paints a very persuasive picture with each of those conversion accounts. So if we had to come up with a theme for the Book of Acts as we move through it that'll help us to understand the constituent parts better, I think we can do no better than R.C. Sproul, who said the theme was that the church's obedience to Christ's commission and commandment to be his witnesses as the ascended king, the king of kings, and the lord of lords. I'll say that again, the church's obedience to Christ's commission and commandment to be his witnesses as the ascended king, the king of kings, and the lord of lords. The apostles, we'll see as we go through the book of Acts, are the instruments that Jesus chose to continue his ministry through the Holy Spirit. So if you compare the prefaces of Luke and Acts, it's very obvious that the contrast he's making between his gospel and his history of the church is not between what Jesus did in his gospel and then what his apostles did in Acts, but rather what Jesus began to do in his gospel And then what Jesus continues to do through the sending of the Holy Spirit into the apostles in the book of Acts. So that may help us as we navigate through. So what can we call this book? Well, obviously it's been called, historically speaking, the Acts of the Apostles, which is quite accurate. This is about what the apostles did and said, but perhaps a little bit too man-centered. It doesn't really give the Holy Spirit his due, does it? So it emphasizes the divine aspect to the exclusion of the, I'm sorry, it emphasizes the human aspect to the exclusion of the divine. So by the same token, you could also accurately call this book the Acts of the Holy Spirit. Some have gone so far as to call it the autobiography of the Holy Spirit, which is fascinating to consider. It is all about what the Holy Spirit did in the early church. Not that he is introduced to us in the Book of Acts, he obviously is all over the Old Testament as well, but after Pentecost, the Holy Spirit's activity and ministry goes to an unprecedented level. So we may call it the Acts of the Holy Spirit, but that may overemphasize the divine aspect to the exclusion of the human component. So, bringing all this together, I love John Stott's accurate but cumbersome subtitle to the Book of Acts. This doesn't fit on an e-board, so I shortened it to Acts of the Spirit, which is, I think, accurate enough, but this is a good comprehensive title, I believe, for the Book of Acts. The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus Christ from Heaven by His Holy Spirit through His Apostles. So continuing on the things that Jesus began to do and to teach only now he's doing it from his throne as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in heaven. He's doing it through his Holy Spirit that he promised to send the spirit of Christ as he is often called taking from what is Christ and making it known to us through the work of the apostles. So, I love Stott's subtitle there. It is lengthy, somewhat cumbersome, but it covers all the bases, I believe. It is the work of Jesus, the agent is the Holy Spirit, the instrument is the apostles. And while we do not any longer have apostolic Succession, there's no such thing as apostles anymore in the true biblical sense of the word as those who were eyewitnesses of the resurrected

Jesus and directly commissioned by him. But we do have apostolic authority, don't we? We have it vested in the New Testament, in the Gospels, and in the epistles that the apostles wrote, inspired by the Holy Spirit. So, The Lord has left us with continuing apostolic authority, not vested in men, but vested in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Just looking at the last two verses of our preface here, our introduction. And while staying with them, Jesus ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, you heard from me. For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. And in fact, we know that it was just 10 days later, the ascension that Pentecost happened, that the Holy Spirit did in fact come to fulfill Jesus' prophecy and prediction, bringing the church to an amazing realization of what it was and what it was supposed to do, and now empowered to do what Jesus had commanded it to do in the world. So, just to sum it up one more time, The theme of Acts is that the church's obedience to Christ's commission and commandment to be his witnesses as the ascended king, the king of kings, and the Lord of lords, continuing to do the things that he began to do in Luke and Acts, now through his apostles. So with that in mind, let's go into a time of prayer. And if anyone needs a sheet, please let me know.