

# Touchstones of God's Economy

## Acts

In Acts a great transfer is taking place from God's Old Testament dispensation to His New Testament economy. When viewed from this perspective, this book is very dispensational. The term *dispensation* denotes not mainly an age or God's dealing with people during a certain period of time but the divine arrangement in God's eternal economy (Lee, *Acts* 269). *Dispensation* and *economy* are synonymous terms, both of which refer to the same Greek word *oikonomia* (Eph. 1:10; 3:9). God's economy (1 Tim. 1:4) is God's household administration to carry out His eternal plan according to His good pleasure (Eph. 1:9-10). In God's eternal economy there are different ages—the age before law, the age of law, the age of grace, and the age of the kingdom (Rom. 5:14; John 1:17; Acts 3:20-21; Rev. 11:15; 20:4, 6). In each age God has a particular arrangement to accomplish His economy in that age, and this arrangement is the dispensation of the age. All those whom God called and used in the book of Acts were raised up under God's Old Testament dispensation of law. The goal of the Lord's ministry in the Gospels was to transfer them into God's New Testament dispensation of grace. This transfer was accomplished in a transition that began with the Lord's incarnation and concluded with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The first group of believers, including the apostles Peter and John, were saturated and even constituted with the elements of the Old Testament dispensation. Consequently, it was difficult for them to give up the things of the Old Testament dispensation in an absolute way. This caused a grave difficulty among the churches in Acts. Although the transfer between the Old Testament and the New Testament dispensations was completed in Acts 2:1-4, the transitional experience of the early disciples continued throughout the remainder of the book. In reading through Acts, it becomes increasingly apparent that the full realization of this transfer is associated with the life of one man, the apostle Paul. Eventually, Acts shows a person who is living and working fully in the New Testament dispensation, a person who is fully

burdened for and saturated with God's New Testament economy.<sup>1</sup>

### The Days Following the Lord's Resurrection

After His resurrection the Lord Jesus' relationship with His disciples changed significantly. The Lord not only was resurrected physically with a body of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39), but in resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). He is now the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17), the pneumatic Christ. In His humanity He was designated the firstborn Son of God according to the Spirit of

holiness, the divine essence of the incarnated Jesus (Rom. 1:4; 8:29). The disciples were regenerated through the Lord Jesus' resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3), and the Lord breathed the Holy Spirit into them on the evening of the day of His resurrection (John 20:22). In that day they came to know that the Lord was in the Father, that they were in the Lord, and

that *the Lord was now in them* (14:20). They were born again, born of the Spirit, entering the kingdom of God (3:3, 5) and being joined to the Lord through an organic union with Him in their regenerated human spirit (v. 6; 1 Cor. 6:17; John 7:39).

During the days between His resurrection and ascension, the Lord Jesus spoke with His disciples concerning the kingdom of God and appeared and disappeared from them. Yet He never left them; He was continually with them. However, because He still had not ascended to be inaugurated as Lord and Christ for His heavenly ministry in resurrection, the disciples' experience of the Spirit was not complete. They needed the Lord not only as the Spirit of life within for their living (Rom. 8:2, 4) but also as the Spirit of power upon them for their ministry (Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:8). For this they needed to wait until the Lord was exalted to the highest place at the right hand of God and had received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father. This promised Spirit, the consummation of the processed Triune God, would be poured out upon them for the formation of the Body of Christ.

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In Acts 1:6 the disciples asked the Lord if this was the time when He would restore the kingdom to Israel. They were Jews, and their thoughts were still occupied by the kingdom of Israel in God's Old Testament dispensation. In His answer the Lord brought them back to the main item in His New Testament economy, the Spirit, and reminded them that the sphere of God's dispensation now encompassed the entire world (v. 8; cf. John 3:16). It is the consummated Spirit of the processed Triune God, not the physical land of Israel, that fulfills God's promise to Abraham, and He is for all men, not just the Jews (Gal. 3:14). Thus, the disciples were to be His witnesses not only in Judea but also in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

**T**he vision of the Lord Jesus' ascension into heaven must have been a great strengthening outwardly to the disciples. Moreover, they were energized inwardly by the supply of the indwelling Spirit of life. Now they, who a little earlier had been contentious with one another and cowardly, remained in Jerusalem for ten days at the risk of their lives, praying in one accord. During this time, Peter expounded the Scriptures with revelation and authority, just as the Lord Jesus spoke during His ministry in the Gospels. When there was a need to find a replacement for Judas Iscariot in the corporate ministry to which they had been called, the Lord led them to select Matthias, one who had accompanied them from the beginning. However, being unaccustomed to the New Testament way of guidance, they fell back upon an Old Testament practice of casting lots (Lev. 16:8). Whereas God's people in the Old Testament age received guidance through physical means (Num. 9:15-23), the indwelling Spirit is the normal agent for making known God's will in the New Testament age (Acts 16:6-8; Rom. 8:14).

### **The Outpouring of the Spirit and the Beginning of the Church Life**

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost initiated a great propagation. On that day alone three thousand souls who listened to Peter were added to the disciples. These newly baptized ones immediately began to practice the church life. The Lord's salvation was so dynamic that it delivered them from the bondage of mammon and released them to abandon fully their private interests and share a corporate life in oneness. The apostles bore strong testimony to the resurrected Christ as the Author of life and the stone whom the builders in God's Old Testament dispensation rejected (Acts 3:15; 4:11). This One, who is now the head of the corner, is the unique element in God's New Testament building.

However, it was difficult for the early disciples to fully forsake their customs as Jews. Undoubtedly, they talked among themselves about how the Lord left the temple and

foretold of its coming destruction (Matt. 23:37-39; 24:2) and also concerning the end of the law (11:13), for such words were cited by the opposing Jews. Yet the disciples continued to go to the temple. There was some rationale for this related to the preaching of the gospel. The temple afforded them the best opportunity to contact God's seekers among the sons of Israel, and it was for this purpose that Paul later went to the synagogues (Acts 13:5). Nevertheless, the temple was forsaken by the Lord and left desolate. All the activities performed there were now only empty rituals and substitutes for Christ. Moreover, the temple was full of those who were zealous for the law and had rebelled against Christ. They were evil men (Matt. 21:41), who had crucified Christ and now proceeded to stone Stephen, the Lord's witness. They were an evil companionship that would corrupt the morals of the young church (1 Cor. 15:33). The temple presented a great temptation to compromise God's New Testament economy. Eventually, the church in Jerusalem fully succumbed to this temptation.

If the temple was the place for the worship of God in the Old Testament dispensation of the law, Israel was the sphere of that dispensation. The early disciples found it difficult to go beyond the sphere of Israel and fulfill the Lord's commission to preach the gospel to all the nations, a commission recorded four times in the Gospels and Acts (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). A great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, following the martyrdom of Stephen, was needed in order to scatter the disciples and the seeds of the gospel. Through Philip, the gospel went to the Samaritans, those of mixed race, and was confirmed through the laying on of hands by the apostles Peter and John (8:4-17).

**A**t this juncture, the Lord Jesus Himself took a step to fulfill the requirement in His New Testament economy to preach the gospel to all the nations. He appeared directly to Saul of Tarsus, a leading persecutor of the church. It is significant that the Leader and Savior of all men waited to appear until Saul left Jerusalem and Judea and was on the wilderness road toward Damascus. Outside the atmosphere of the Jewish religion and separated momentarily from his kinsmen, Saul saw a great light from heaven and heard the Lord's voice speaking to him (9:3-4). The Lord's charge was for Saul to bear His name before the Gentiles (v. 15). In Saul of Tarsus, who later became Paul, the Lord prepared a chosen vessel who was burdened to spread the kingdom of God to the uttermost part of the earth, including Rome and even Spain (Rom. 15:24).

### **The Spread of the Kingdom of God to the Gentile World**

Nevertheless, the Lord still honored Peter as the apostle through whom the kingdom of the heavens would be

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opened, both to the Jews and the Gentiles (Matt. 16:19). Gradually, Peter's ministry brought him closer to the Gentile region, specifically to Joppa, where he raised the disciple Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36). Joppa was within reach of Caesarea, and there Cornelius, a Gentile centurion, was divinely instructed through an angel to send for Peter (10:3-6). Cornelius gathered his relatives and intimate friends together in his house and waited patiently for Peter. Meanwhile, Peter was in a controversy with the Lord. In prayer, Peter received a vision concerning the Gentiles. The Gentiles under God's Old Testament dispensation were unclean and excluded from the commonwealth of God's holy people (Eph. 2:12). Since Peter was saturated with the old dispensation, the Lord was forced to give him this vision three times, and each time Peter rejected the Lord's word.

**F**or a Jew to contact a Gentile was to forsake the Jewish tradition and habit of the Old Testament dispensation. Thus, by going to meet with Cornelius, Peter took a momentous step for God's New Testament economy. This step required the intervention of an angel, a vision to be given three times, and the Lord's sudden outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his household before Peter had finished his message (Acts 10:9-48). Although the Lord prepared His disciples in plain words for the spread of the gospel to all the earth, it was still difficult for them to receive the Gentiles as fellow partakers of the promise (Eph. 3:6). When Peter and his companions brought the good news of the events in Caesarea to the church in Jerusalem, they received a muted response (Acts 11:1-2).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles should have been a much needed impetus to the disciples in fulfilling the Lord's commission. Yet in the period immediately following, they continued to preach the gospel only to Jewish communities. However, when those who were scattered by the tribulation reached Antioch, a great Gentile center, some of the disciples, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, spoke also to the Greeks (v. 20). A great number of them believed and the church in Antioch was established (13:1). This was an important preparation for the spread of the gospel to Asia and Europe through the apostle Paul and his company.

As the gospel spread, the jealousy of the Jews intensified and so did their persecution. On their instigation, Herod killed James, the brother of John, and imprisoned Peter, intending to kill him too (12:1-5). But four quaternions of

soldiers, chains, two guards, and the iron gate were of no account in holding the Lord's earthly representative. The Lord fully vindicated His witness both by miraculously delivering him from prison and by striking his persecutor Herod with a mortal illness. Here, the record in Acts concerning Peter's ministry as the leader of the first group of apostles ends. These apostles were cautious and reluctant to extend the Lord's move to the Gentiles. Thus, it was difficult for the Lord to use this group of apostles for the greatest part of His New Testament economy, the part that concerned the Gentiles. The apostle Peter reached the limit of his usefulness, and the task of advancing God's New Testament economy passed to Paul.

### The Preparation of Paul as a Vessel

Paul's conversion illuminates the entire book of Acts. Of those to whom the resurrected Lord appeared directly, He appeared to Paul last (1 Cor. 15:5-8). Nevertheless, Paul had the advantage of knowing Christ only according to spirit, not according to the flesh, as those earlier apostles had known Him. Thus, Paul never knew Christ when He was under the law (Gal. 4:4). The revelation that Paul received from the Lord was far greater than the one Peter received. Paul received a revelation of the all-inclusive Christ, the centrality and universality in God's economy, and of the church as the Body of Christ, the fullness of Christ.

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**T**he full scope of what Paul received from the Lord is implied in the account of his conversion, which is given three times in Acts. When a great light flashed around him, Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 22:7; 26:14). This word caused Saul to realize two momentous things: First, he understood that Jesus of Nazareth, whom he had despised and considered dead, was Jehovah God, his Lord. He was the Triune God, who, as the Son of God, was incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended as the Lord and Christ. This Jesus was both God and man, the all-inclusive One (Col. 2:9). Second, Saul saw that all the followers of Christ, whom he had been persecuting, were the Body of Christ, the corporate Jesus (1 Cor. 12:12). The Head of this Body was now speaking to him from the heavens. When Saul was persecuting these believers, He was persecuting Jesus, for Jesus was living and moving in every member of His Body.

Although the Lord Himself appeared directly to Saul, his conversion experience was not complete until three days later. The Lord took away Saul's sight, and he waited

three days for a little-known disciple, Ananias, to come and lay hands on him. Then he received his sight and was baptized. The Lord told Ananias that Saul was a chosen vessel who would bear His name before the Gentiles, kings, and the sons of Israel (Acts 9:10-15). This word concerning being a vessel deeply impressed Saul and became a central part of the revelation he received (Rom. 9:21-24; 2 Tim. 2:20-21). Through this word he saw that Christ had entered into him to be a treasure in his earthen vessel (Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27; 2 Cor. 4:7). He surely realized that Jesus Christ was no longer in the flesh, having become the life-giving Spirit in order to enter into and live in His believers and be one spirit with them (1 Cor. 15:45; 6:17). Henceforth, Saul would bear the Lord's name both in word through his preaching and in life through his living and magnification of Christ by the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19-21; 4:13). Saul also needed another member of the Body, Barnabas, to bring him into the full fellowship of the Body of Christ when he visited Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-27).

From Paul's Epistles, we realize that he received a vision of the preeminent Christ as the reality of all the types, shadows, figures, and prophecies of the Old Testament (Col. 1:15-18; 2:17; Heb. 10:7-12). Furthermore, he saw that there was no place for distinctions of race and social rank in the Body of Christ and that there cannot be Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, slave nor free man in the new man (Gal. 3:27-28; Col. 3:10-11). All the ordinances under the law have no place in God's New Testament economy. They were the middle wall of partition that was abolished by Christ on the cross (Eph. 2:14-15).

### **The Fellowship in Jerusalem over the Question of Circumcision**

When certain men came down from Judea and began to trouble the believers in Antioch, teaching that they needed to be circumcised according to the custom of Moses for their salvation, Paul and Barnabas had "no little dissension and discussion" with them (Acts 15:1-2). The church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to seek a solution to this controversy. The gathering of the church there with the apostles and elders and Paul and Barnabas was not a general council held at a central headquarters but a fellowship among the churches to solve a problem that affected the entire Body of Christ, and to solve it at its source, Jerusalem. After much discussion, the problem was resolved through Peter's testimony, Paul and Barnabas's account of God's work among the Gentiles, and the judgment of James (vv. 7-21). However, James's proposal could not have been entirely satisfactory to Paul. It still required the observance of certain ordinances by the Gentiles and thus directed them to walk according to the flesh instead of according to the spirit (Rom. 8:4). It

also left the door open for the Jewish believers to continue in the observance of the law in God's Old Testament dispensation. Indeed, in his concluding word James made particular mention of those who observed the law, noting that Moses "has in every city those who proclaim him in the synagogues, he being read every Sabbath" (Acts 15:21). By this statement, he maintained a distinction between those who observed the law, the Jews, and those who did not, the Gentiles. In his Epistle James indicates that he even considered the meetings of the Jewish believers as one of the synagogues within the Jewish religious community (2:2).

### **Paul's Concern for the Church in Jerusalem**

The mixture of the things from the Old Testament dispensation with God's New Testament economy must have troubled Paul deeply during his second ministry journey with Silas, which brought him to Macedonia and Achaia. On the one hand, the decision in Jerusalem released the Lord's move in the Gentile world from the frustration of those who demanded circumcision. On the other hand, as Romans and Galatians reveal, those who observed the law continued to trouble the believers. What they spoke was a different gospel (Gal. 1:6). The stream flowing from Jerusalem was not a pure stream of divine grace in the fellowship of the Body of Christ, but a mixed flow. From his visit to Jerusalem, Paul received a heavy burden for the believers. Judea, however, had not been measured to him by the God of measure for his apostleship (2 Cor. 10:13). Nevertheless, he was a member of the Body and full of concern as he observed the situation among the fellow members of the Body.

Therefore, as he neared the end of his second journey, before returning to Antioch, Paul went up to Jerusalem to greet the church there. During his third journey, while he was so busy with the work of the Lord in Europe and Asia, his thoughts frequently turned toward Judea. At this time he prepared an offering from the churches among the Gentiles for the poor believers in Judea. While he was in Ephesus, he purposed in his spirit to go to Jerusalem and after that to Rome. No doubt, this strong determination arose in his spirit, which was deeply troubled by the situation of the church in Jerusalem.

### **The Mixture in Jerusalem**

Paul could not be moved from his resolve to go to Jerusalem. He was undeterred by the warnings he received from the Holy Spirit of the sufferings that awaited him there (Acts 20:23), and he was unmoved by the grave concern that the brothers in various places along his journey expressed (21:11-14). However, even this bold apostle could not stand against the pervasive influence of Jewish tradition which he confronted when he reached



the ancient city. As he related to James and the elders all that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry, he must have sensed their growing unease. Then James, the leading pillar in the church (Gal. 2:9), invited Paul to consider the many thousands of Jews who had believed and who were all zealous for the law (Acts 21:20). No doubt, like James, Paul had a deep concern for the salvation of his own race and was willing to go to extraordinary lengths for this (Rom. 9:3). Earlier he had circumcised Timothy “because of the Jews who were in those places” where he was ministering (Acts 16:3). Now James warned Paul of the distress his teaching had caused the law-keeping believers in Jerusalem. Paul did indeed teach that the law of Moses had been superseded in Christ (13:39), that circumcision nullified the profit in Christ (Gal. 5:2), and that the believers should not walk according to the customs of the dead letter (Rom. 4:11-16). His teaching was fully according to God’s New Testament economy. But a great number of the believers in Jerusalem could not tolerate such teaching and were troubled when they learned of Paul’s presence among them.

“What then is to be done?”

James asked Paul (Acts 21:22). In fact, James already had prepared a solution, one that demonstrated how much he was willing to compromise God’s New Testament economy in order to appease those who kept the law. Paul was asked to accompany four men—whether they were unbelieving Jews or believers

it is unclear—in the performance of a vow. At this point Paul had a certain sympathy for this action. He had even taken a vow by shearing his head when he was about to sail from Achaia to Asia during his second journey. However, that vow was a private vow, performed in a far-off country without any offerings. The vow that he was now asked to join and pay the expenses for was a very public one. It was a Nazarite vow that was completed in the temple with the shaving of the head and the offering of animal sacrifices. In essence, this vow involved a return to the ritual ordinances of the law in God’s Old Testament dispensation.

Out of respect for Peter and John, Luke does not mention their names on this occasion. However, they were elders in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9; 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 John 1), and “all the elders were present” (Acts 21:18). James’s proposed action to Paul went unchallenged, indicating that the elders went along with James. This is evidence that the early apostles and elders were not fully transferred from God’s Old Testament dispensation to His New Testament economy. They tolerated a mixture of

Jewish traditions and faith in Christ, and they allowed the middle wall of partition between the Jews and the Gentiles to remain. They expected Paul to “walk orderly, keeping the law” (v. 24), the law of commandments in ordinances that Christ had abolished in His flesh on the cross (Eph. 2:14-15). This mixture was intolerable to the Lord. Paul went to Jerusalem with the burden to help the believers be delivered from this mixture, but ultimately, the situation in Jerusalem was incurable, like a house with malignant leprosy (Lev. 14:44). That house of rebellion needed to be broken down, with “its stones and its timber and all the plaster of the house” (v. 45). The Lord as the heavenly High Priest did this in A.D. 70 when the Roman army under Titus completely devastated Jerusalem. “This rescued and absolutely separated the church from the devastation of Judaism” (Recovery Version, Acts 21:26, note 1).

### The Lord’s Deliverance

During the seven days Paul spent in the temple waiting for the vow to be completed, he faced a grave predicament.

He must have been deeply troubled by what he was doing there, but he must have felt that he had no way out of this predicament. Moreover, he must have been greatly disappointed that he had been unable to fellowship with the elders in Jerusalem concerning the situation in the church. Undoubtedly, the Lord sympathized with Paul in his

loving concern for the church, because after his arrest He stood by him and encouraged him. However, the Lord was unwilling to allow the testimony of the church to be damaged, and Paul’s willingness to offer a sacrifice severely threatened the Lord’s testimony. So the Lord intervened both to rescue Paul and to preserve the revelation of God’s New Testament economy. When the seven days were almost concluded, as sacrifices were about to be offered, the Jews from Asia discovered Paul in the temple. They stirred the whole city into a commotion, forcing the intervention of the Roman guard. Paul was forcibly removed from the temple and saved from certain death. And, just as significantly, he was delivered from performing actions according to the Old Testament dispensation.

The events of the succeeding days must have seemed wholly illogical to Paul. He was a Roman who had committed no crime and therefore should have been released. Yet he slid further and further into indefinite detention by the Romans. First he was removed from Jerusalem to Caesarea, and then he was left imprisoned there. Eventually, he was forced to appeal to Caesar in order to

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save his life. But under God's sovereignty, his subsequent imprisonment in Rome accomplished a great service for God's economy. It separated Paul from the intolerable mixture of the church in Jerusalem. His prison became a sanctuary where he could spend time in the Lord's presence (Eph. 3:1; 4:1). Like the years that he had spent alone in Arabia after his conversion, these two years allowed him to ponder in the light of the Scriptures what had taken place in Jerusalem and reconsider the heavenly vision that he had received from the Lord. During this period of reflection he became burdened after his release to write more letters to the churches, including Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Hebrews. These Epistles became the very heart of the apostle Paul's written ministry for the unveiling of the hidden mystery in God's eternal economy, the completion of the word of God (Col. 1:24-27). How much stronger he was in these Epistles, compared to Romans and Galatians, concerning the termination of the law and the abolition of the ordinances, and how uncompromising in his denigration of the old Judaic practices!

### A Life Fully in God's New Testament Economy

After Paul had testified before King Agrippa, the months of uncertainty in Caesarea finally came to an end. Within a short time Paul was committed to the centurion Julius, and his journey to Rome began. Two Gentile believers—Luke, the author of Acts, and Aristarchus of Macedonia—accompanied Paul on this momentous voyage. The ship's owner and navigator had a schedule according to their own purpose, but the ascended Lord in heaven decided the true timetable for the accomplishment of His will. In the course of this journey, the prisoner on board became, in effect, the master of the ship. He himself was the guarantor of the lives of all 276 persons on board: he accurately predicted what would happen to them, he alone raised their morale when all hope had been lost, he gave the instructions which saved their lives, he ensured that they had food and accommodation after they had been shipwrecked, and finally because of him they all (but not their cargo) reached their

destination unharmed (Acts 27:9-11, 21-25, 31, 33-37, 44).

Aboard this ship on his way to Rome, Paul was finally delivered from the threat to his life from the Jews who had hunted him relentlessly, and thus his bonds now provided him a secure environment to write his crucial Epistles. Paul was also removed from the land of Israel and from the influence of Judaism that was holding God's people back from entering fully into the up-to-date revelation of God's New Testament economy. Now Paul was fully in the New Testament dispensation, not an Israelite living according to the law by the exercise of his flesh but a member of the Body of Christ, the new man, living Christ by walking according to the spirit. During his imprisonment-voyage there was no lingering flavor of the Old Testament dispensation in Paul. Instead, he lived an ordinary life as a pattern to every New Testament believer. He was able, in spite of his bonds, to have fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ wherever he went. He was unable to accomplish any great work outwardly, but through the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, he magnified Christ to all whom he met—to the soldiers and sailors, to the natives in Malta, to the local chief men, to the prison guards, and eventually even to members of Caesar's household (Phil. 1:19-20; 4:22). His was the pattern of a life lived fully in God's New Testament economy.

by Jim Batten

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>For a full treatment of this dispensational transfer, see *Life-study of Acts*, pages 162-168, 240-241, 268-274, 349-350, 360-367, 379-380, 420-440, 445-447, 495-521.

### Works Cited

Lee, Witness. Footnotes. Recovery Version of the Bible. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 2003.  
———. *Life-study of Acts*. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1986.

### Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

“Who also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into **heaven**, will come in the same way as you beheld Him going into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

**heaven:** Luke's Gospel ends with the Lord's ascending into heaven (Luke 24:51), and his Acts begins with it. His Gospel is a narrative of the ministry of the incarnated Jesus on earth; his Acts is a record of the continuing ministry of the resurrected and ascended Christ in heaven, carried out through His believers on earth. In the Gospels His ministry on earth, carried out by Himself, only sowed Himself as the seed of the kingdom of God into His believers, with no church being built up yet. In the Acts His ministry in heaven, carried out through His believers in His resurrection and ascension, spread Him as the development of the kingdom of God for the building up of the church (Matt. 16:18) throughout the entire world to constitute His Body, which is His fullness (Eph. 1:23) for His expression, and which is even the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19) for God's expression.