

# THE REAL MEANING OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

BY WITNESS LEE

Many Christians today do not know the real significance of the book of Acts. Although many books have been written about Acts and many teachings put forth about it, even up to today our understanding of this book may not be very deep. This is because this book records matters that are wonderful and beyond our human concept. We may consider Acts to be an easy book, relating the story of how the disciples of Christ after His ascension into heaven exercised extraordinary power to do things in a miraculous way, convincing people, bringing people to Christ, and setting up churches. However, if we have only this much understanding of this book, we lack the full revelation and insight.

## Being Enlivened by the Resurrection of Christ

We need the real insight concerning the record of this book. Two important things transpired after the Lord's death—resurrection and ascension. Resurrection is the strongest proof that the Son of God is the divine life, a life that nothing can damage, hold, or overcome (Acts 2:24). This life overcomes all things—Satan, death, Hades, and the grave. Nothing and no one can hold Him, damage Him, or overcome Him. This was fully proved and testified by the resurrection of Christ. This is one significance of the resurrection.

However, the resurrection of Christ is not only a proof or testimony; it is also an imparting of Himself into His members. In His resurrection Christ imparted Himself into all those who identify themselves with Him in faith (1 Pet. 1:3). Therefore, objectively speaking, His resurrection is a proof, a testimony, that He is the indestructible life, and subjectively speaking, it is the imparting of Himself into us to make us the members of His Body.

## Being Positioned in the Enthronement of Christ

In His ascension Christ was enthroned and made the very Head over all things in the universe (Eph. 1:22). Therefore, He is the Head, the Lord, the King, and the anointed One on the throne. On the one hand, His ascension was His enthronement. On the other hand, because we were identified with Him in His ascension, we also were brought into the heavens with Him (2:6). When He was crucified, we died in Him on the cross; when He was resurrected, we were raised up with Him; and when He ascended, we also ascended to the heavens with Him. Therefore, His enthronement is our position. Because He is on the throne in the heavens, we also are in the heavens and on the throne. Enthronement indicates authorization. This is why the Lord Jesus told His disciples that all authority in heaven and on earth has been committed to Him (Matt. 28:18). Psalm 2, as a prophecy of Christ's ascension, is the declaration of God

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to the entire universe that He has enthroned His Son, the anointed One, and made Him the Head over all things.

God committed all authority in the universe to His resurrected and ascended Christ, and now we are in Christ. Therefore, the enthronement of Christ is our position. We are in the heavens and on the throne with Christ. The Lord told His disciples to go and disciple all the nations because all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. They were sent not to preach the gospel in a common way but to preach the gospel of the kingdom and make people Christ's disciples. This was carried out not only with His word and His divine life but also with His authority.

By the resurrection of Christ we have been regenerated as His members, and by His ascension we also have been enthroned and brought into the heavens. Resurrection is a matter of life, and ascension is a matter of position. In His resurrection we receive the Triune God within us as our life to be regenerated. In His ascension we have been brought into the heavens to be positioned and enthroned there. These two matters—resurrection and ascension—must be very clear to us. What is the resurrection of Christ? To Christ the resurrection is a proof and testimony that He is the indestructible life, and to us it is the impartation of the Triune God as our life so that we might be enlivened and regenerated to become the members of His Body. What is the ascension of Christ? To Christ it is His enthronement, and to us it is our position in the heavenlies on the throne.

### Experiencing the Resurrection and Ascension by the Spirit

How can the wonderful, objective facts accomplished by the resurrection and ascension of Christ be our experience? It is possible only by the experience of the Holy Spirit. It is in the Spirit that all these wonderful facts are applied to us and experienced by us. Without the Spirit, these facts are merely facts and are objective and unrelated to us. Therefore, we need the Spirit.

Regarding the Holy Spirit there are two aspects. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit comes into us as life; on the other hand, the Spirit comes upon us as power, as authority. Both of these comings have been accomplished. After His resurrection, on "that day" (John 20:19), Christ came to His disciples to breathe Himself into them as the Holy Spirit. When He breathed into the disciples, He said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (v. 22). The Holy Spirit is the very breath of Christ. Our breath, which comes out of us, is a part of our very being. On the day of resurrection Christ came back to His disciples to breathe Himself into them as the Spirit of life.

The Spirit of life is Christ Himself as the breath of life breathed into the disciples. We should not believe that the Holy Spirit and Christ are separate and have nothing to do with each other. In actuality, these two are one. We have illustrated before that although water becomes vapor, the water and the vapor are different only in form; in substance they are one. In the same way, Christ is the very Spirit of life whom He breathed into the disciples on the day of resurrection.

Following this, Christ ascended to the heavens, and on the day of Pentecost He came down, not to enter into the disciples but to blow upon them as a rushing violent wind (Acts 2:1-4). On the day of resurrection there was the breathing, but on the day of Pentecost there was the rushing of a violent wind. Breathing is for life, whereas the rushing is for power.

If Christ did not come back to the disciples on the day of resurrection and breathe into them, what He accomplished by His resurrection would have had nothing to do with the disciples. It was by His breathing that what He accomplished in His resurrection

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was applied to them. In the same principle, by the blowing of the wind on the day of Pentecost what He accomplished in His ascension was applied to the disciples. By His ascension He was enthroned, and we as His members were also put into the same position, but it was only by the blowing on the day of Pentecost that the enthronement was applied to the disciples.

The day of Pentecost was a day of “inauguration.” On election day a man is voted into the office and position of president, but it is not until the inauguration day that he assumes the real authority as president. We have been put into a heavenly position by the ascension of Christ. However, what was accomplished by His ascension was applied to us on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit came down from the heavens as a rushing violent wind upon the disciples. At that time all the disciples were inaugurated, appointed, with the heavenly power and authority.

### Applying the Resurrection and Ascension by Faith

On the day of resurrection Christ imparted Himself into His disciples as life, and on the day of Pentecost Christ put all of His disciples into Himself. Just as we take water in, Christ dispensed Himself as the living water of life into His disciples on the day of resurrection. Then, just as we baptize people into water, Christ baptized His disciples into Himself on the day of Pentecost. On the day of resurrection Christ put the “water” into the disciples, and on the day of Pentecost He put the disciples into the “water.” This water is Christ, the very Triune God. The Triune God was put into us as our life on the day of resurrection, and we were put into the Triune God on the day of Pentecost. The Triune God is power to us; because we have been put into Him, we have been put into His power and authority. Therefore, within us we have the Triune God as our life, and upon us we have the Triune God as our power and authority. We have Christ, the Triune God, as our living drink within and as our clothing and covering without.

**A**ll this has been accomplished and applied to us in Christ’s resurrection and ascension. Now all we need to do is to receive it by faith. We should simply take it and say Amen. If we would say Amen to the Lord, we have it. Christ has resurrected, and on the day of resurrection He applied His resurrection to us. In the same way, the heavenly position and enthronement that Christ obtained in His ascension was applied to us on the day of Pentecost. Even the application of it has been accomplished. Now we need only to say Amen to the Lord, and when we say Amen, we experience the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is the application of the enthronement and the heavenly position of Christ.

We must be clear that we were already appointed, inaugurated, and authorized on the day of Pentecost by the ascension of Christ. Because many believers do not have this vision, they are weak, low, and poor. However, if today we have this vision, we will say, “Amen, Hallelujah! Everything is mine.” We will enjoy and experience all these things by faith.

### Living according to the Book of Acts by Denying Ourselves and Living by the Triune God

The book of Acts is a record of a group of people who are resurrected and ascended with Christ, having Christ within them as their life and Christ upon them as their power and authority. They live not by themselves but by Christ as life. They forget about their own life and deny themselves. Moreover, they walk, act, and work not by their own strength, their own way, or their own method but by Christ as their power, their way, and their method. This Christ who is now their method, way, and power is the very Holy Spirit who came down upon them. In other words, they live by the Triune God within them

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as their life, and they act by the Triune God upon them as their strength, their way, and their method. This is the contents of the book of Acts.

If we believe that the resurrection and ascension have been accomplished and applied to us, if we say Amen to this and take it by faith, then we must also deny our self all day long. We must not live by our self but by the Triune God, and we must also forsake all our methods, ways, knowledge, understanding, doctrine, and teachings. We have to abandon all these things just as the Galilean disciples eventually did. The disciples picked up a great deal of knowledge from Judaism. Peter is a prime example of this. Because Peter was very much influenced by the teachings of Judaism, God was forced to give him a vision from the heavens (Acts 10:9-16). There should have been no need for Peter to have that vision; it was only because he was deeply influenced by the teaching of Judaism.

This is a strong proof that if we want to live according to the book of Acts, we have to drop all the old doctrines. Many of us are still under the wrong influence of the traditional teachings of Christianity. In the record of Acts the disciples did not act or work according to the teaching of Judaism or according to the Old Testament. All that they did and worked was according to the living guidance of the Triune God, who came down after His enthronement to dwell upon them. This group of people lived not by themselves but by Christ within them as their life, and they also walked, worked, and acted not by the old ways, knowledge, or teachings but by the living guidance of the Triune God.

Whenever we live by ourselves, we are not according to the book of Acts. Similarly, whenever we work, act, and walk not according to the living guidance of the Triune God but according to regulations, rules, knowledge, and doctrines, we are not a part of the history of Acts. Instead, we are a part of the history of Christianity. In principle, Acts is a record only of that group of people who are resurrected and ascended with Christ, having Christ within them as their life and Christ upon them as their power. Moreover, they live not by themselves but by this Christ within, and they act not according to knowledge, doctrine, teaching, rules, regulations, forms, and traditions but according to the living Christ upon them. This is the meaning of the book of Acts. If we take this point of view and go back to read this book again, we will gain the proper insight into it.

### Preaching the Gospel with the Heavenly Authority

In the Holy Spirit within us we have the reality of resurrection, and with the Holy Spirit upon us we have the reality of ascension. Therefore, within us we have life, and upon us we have authority and power. However, the situation in Christianity today is poor and even pitiful, especially in the preaching of the gospel. Many today use worldly means for the gospel, such as advertising and fund-raising. They do not preach the gospel by the heavenly authority. On the day of Pentecost the disciples preached the gospel not by begging but by the heavenly authorization. In Matthew 28:18-19 Jesus had said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and disciple all the nations." We must go with Christ's authority to preach the gospel. When we go in the name of Jesus to preach the gospel, we have the authority. We should not go as beggars to the worldly people. We must be as ambassadors from heaven to deal with this world. This is the proper way to preach the gospel.

We have Christ's authority as our backing. As His enthronement is ours, we are those coming from the heavens to announce something of our King to His subjects. We speak with authority. This is the right way to preach the gospel. Not only in preaching the gospel but in any kind of ministering, we must stand in the position of Christ's authority. If we look into Acts thoroughly, we will see a clear picture that all those sent ones

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went out with the heavenly power and authority. They had Christ within as their life and Christ without as their authority. Christ became their uniform. Christ is not only our drink but our clothing, our uniform. He is our life, and He is our power.

### Acting and Moving as One Body

The entire record of the book of Acts also shows a group of people who always acted as the Body. From the very first chapter neither Peter, John, nor those one hundred twenty acted individually. Rather, all the actions of this group of people were the actions of the one Body. The one hundred twenty prayed together with one accord, and they received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, preached the gospel, bore the testimony of Jesus, and always moved and acted as one Body (1:14; 2:1, 4, 14, 46-47). From chapter 1 to chapter 28 the actions of this group of people were the actions of one Body.

It is difficult to find anyone among them who acted individualistically. Although it appears that Philip preached the gospel by himself in chapter 8 when he was in Samaria, it was Peter and John who came to confirm his preaching (vv. 5, 14-17). The Holy Spirit, the power upon the Body, did not come upon those believers through Philip's preaching. It was when Peter and John came and laid hands on the Samaritan believers that the Holy Spirit on the Body was transmitted to them. This proves that even Philip's preaching was not an individual action. His preaching was related to the move of the Body. Therefore, chapter after chapter in Acts records the move and activity of the Body, not of individual believers.

**T**he activities recorded in Acts were not only of the Body but also for the Body, that is, for the building up of the church. No one acted in a way that had nothing to do with the Body. Rather, everyone acted in a way that was for the building up of the Body. The issue and result of what they did was the building up of the church. The activities in this book are absolutely different from the movements of today's Christianity. Many in today's Christianity act in a way that is not of the Body or for the Body. As we have seen, Acts is a record of a group of people who act and work all the time for the Body and through the Body. Therefore, in this book the churches are built up out of the activities of those people. Acts contains a beautiful picture of the one accord in the activities, work, and move of the believers. They always moved in the Body and for the Body.

### Moving, Acting, and Working in One Divine Flow

Lastly, this book shows us a divine stream, a divine current. This stream flows from the throne in the heavens (Rev. 22:1). What happened in the book of Acts is the same as the picture in Revelation 22. From the throne of God and of Christ, the enthroned Lamb, the flow began, and in the book of Acts it flowed to the earth, beginning from the first station, Jerusalem. All the members of the Body of Christ were in this flow. As this flow proceeded, they simply moved in the current of this flow. This flow eventually went to Antioch (Acts 11:19-21). Antioch became a turning point for the flow to move from the east to the west. From Antioch the flow turned westward across the Aegean Sea, between Asia Minor and Macedonia in the eastern part of Europe, and from that sea the flow reached Europe (16:10-12). From there, the Lord's move went onward to western Europe and Rome (28:14, 30-31). We can draw a line to trace the flow all the way from Jerusalem to Antioch, westward across the sea to eastern Europe, and from there to the middle part of Europe, including Rome.

The divine stream moved westward rather than toward the east. To understand this, we must know the history, geography, and civilization of the time. At that time it was difficult for people to go eastward. There was no way to turn but toward the west. History tells us that the Roman Empire built many highways. Moreover, there was

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much traffic on the Mediterranean Sea, and it was very easy for people to sail from Palestine to the west. Not only so, there was much intermingling of the people, and their language and even citizenship were brought together. There was no need to obtain a permit to travel. As long as someone was a Roman citizen, he could travel throughout the entire Mediterranean area. In this way all the different countries became one under the Roman Empire.

Beginning from Jerusalem in Acts 2 there was only one flow on this earth, and all the early disciples moved, acted, and worked in the flow. There were not two currents in the flow, but always one. All those who were raised up by the Lord sooner or later were brought into the flow. While the flow proceeded westward, believers such as Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos, and others were raised up by the Lord and brought into this one stream (18:2, 24-28).

There is no record of more than one stream. Barnabas was in this one flow up to a certain point; after that he was separated from the flow (15:35-39). Following this, there is no further record of Barnabas in the book of Acts, because he was no longer in the flow. There was only one stream, one current, of the flow. The flow was not like today's turnpikes, which branch in every direction and confuse people. In the New Jerusalem there is only one flow, one way.

Today there are many works that are not in the one flow, as exemplified by the work of Barnabas. The work of Barnabas was not in the flow, whereas the work of the apostle Paul and his co-workers was in the flow. We may do a work for the Lord, yet our work may not be in the one divine flow. Throughout the entire history of the church there has always been a situation that some Christian work was in this unique flow, but many works were not in the flow, even though these works were for the Lord. The work of Roman Catholicism, for example, is a work for the Lord, but it is not in the one flow. The work in the flow is the work of the Lord's present testimony.

Thus far we have seen the principles of the book of Acts. If we apply these principles when we read chapter after chapter, we will be clear about what is in Acts. We will know its real meaning, and we will have insight into it. The central meaning of the flow in Acts is that there is a group of people who know the meaning of resurrection and ascension. They live not by themselves but by Christ as their life, and they act not according to certain ways or methods but by the living Christ as their strength, power, method, and way. Moreover, they realize that they are the Body, and they always act in the Body and for the Body in the one divine stream. May we all be clear to such an extent that we not only know the resurrection and ascension, but we live in resurrection and act in ascension, not by ourselves but in the Body, for the Body, and in one flow. This is the real meaning of the book of Acts. **AFC**

#### Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"These all **continued** steadfastly with one accord in prayer..." (Acts 1:14)

**continued:** Before the Lord's death the disciples had no interest in praying for spiritual things (Luke 22:40, 45-46); rather, they contended among themselves as to which of them was considered to be greatest (Luke 22:24). But after the Lord's resurrection and ascension, their spiritual condition changed radically. They did not contend among themselves but were burdened to continue steadfastly with one accord in prayer, even before the day of Pentecost, when they would receive the outpoured Spirit of power economically (ch. 2) This is a strong sign and proof that they had received the indwelling Spirit of life essentially on the day of the Lord's resurrection (John 20:22).