

What Comes Next? Know With Certainty

Acts 1:1-12 NIV

What comes next? A preacher was asked how he determined what he was going to preach. He said, “I preach what comes next.”

Paul, writing to the Corinthians, reminding them about the gospel he preached while he was with them. He writes:

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

So, after the resurrection, the appearances of Jesus, and him taking his proper seat next to his Father, what comes next? Luke’s record in Acts:

Of the four gospel writers, two, Luke and John, write more of what we call books of the Bible. Actually, they are letters, some

circulated in general to churches; others to individuals, like Luke’s two letters.

Both his gospel account and what is called the book of Acts are addresses to ‘most excellent Theophilus:’ a friend, former employer; most excellent Theophilus may indicate that he was some kind of government official, but we don’t really know who this person is. But we do know why Luke wrote to him. From Luke’s first letter to Theophilus, we read:

¹ Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, [*here is the reason*] ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4)

So, from the angel telling Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a son, to Paul’s house arrest in Rome, Luke recorded from eyewitness accounts and first hand experience while traveling with Paul the following for Theophilus:

¹ In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

¹² Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. (Acts 1:1-12)

Keep in mind that the gospel records, including Luke’s, contain some of the things that Jesus did, and that Acts records some of the acts of some of the apostles. Some prefer to call Acts the ‘Acts of the Holy Spirit.’ After all, He is the Author, Luke is just the recorder. But, it is still only some of the acts, not all.

This record, called Acts, like Genesis, is a book of beginnings. It covers approximately thirty-two years of the beginning:

- of the Holy Spirit’s work of evangelism;
- of gospel preaching;
- of the church of the Lord;
- of salvation through the blood of Christ;
- and, of world-wide evangelism.

(Partial list from Acts Made Actual: Don De Welt.)

Even though this was not all the acts of the apostles or all the acts of the Holy Spirit, what Theophilus held in his hands when the package arrived; few people were so privileged. Did he have any idea what he had?

One night a wife found her husband standing over their infant’s crib. As she watched him looking down at their very first baby, she saw on his face a mixture of emotions: ...disbelief, doubt, delight, amazement, enchantment, skepticism. Touched by this unusual display and the deep emotions it aroused, with eyes glistening she slipped her arm around her husband. "A penny for your thoughts," she said. "It’s amazing!" he replied. "I just can’t see how anybody can make a crib like that for only \$46.50."

When the package from Luke finally arrived, what did Theophilus receive? He may have waited as long as ten years for the completed work. Did he receive installments from Luke? We don’t know.

Did Theophilus think that one day he would sell this original copy for millions? What would this original be worth today? Or was the content of this package priceless to him?

Did he realize that he had received the ‘Good News’ plus?

Many times people look upon God’s handiwork and only see the outside and never the miracle within. It works that way

with many things, whether it is the miracle of the birth of a new baby; or the miracle of the birth of a new Christian; or the fact that most of us can leave here and within an hour, hold a brand new Bible in our hand: all 66 books, not just two.

Do people realize that owning a Bible is a miracle from God and that it is a miracle that you can know the certainty of the things that you have been taught? What people take for granted; what sets on a bookshelf untouched – by some of the most blessed and privileged ever – neglecting the miracle given to them.

Through the diligent work of Luke, Theophilus now has a written record of what he has been taught.

Why was this important?

From the beginning of the church, there was a problem with false teachers, whether they were purposely trying to mislead people or just honestly mistaken about the events that had taken place. But Theophilus can now check from Luke’s carefully researched record with his own eyes to verify what his ears have heard or are currently hearing. What a comfort this must have been in a world turned upside down with the conflict between Rome, the Jew, and the Christian.

When his faith would be challenged, as faith always is, he could remember and re-read how these hand picked men deserted Jesus, but a short time later, walked the streets of Jerusalem, boldly preaching the

resurrection of the one that had been crucified.

When tempted to surrender and call it quits, he can recall and verify with his own eyes how Paul was treated by his own countrymen; threatened, stoned, beaten; and yet finished well; or how Jesus was rejected in his own home town, but went on to teach:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²² Blessed are you when men hate you,
when they exclude you and insult you
and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man.

²³ “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy,
because great is your reward in heaven. For
that is how their fathers treated the prophets.
(Luke 6:20-23)

If his assurance of salvation was called into question, Theophilus could open Luke’s work and read, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.” (Acts 11:18)

And that is just with two books; only a small part of the Bible we have.

Did you know that according to statistics from Wycliffe International, the Society of Gideons, and the International Bible Society, the number of new Bibles that are sold, given away, or otherwise

distributed in the United States is about 168,000 per day?

You would think that most American’s would be Bible literate, wouldn’t you? However, in a land of plenty, which includes plenty of Bibles, Americans don’t do too well. When asked:

- Only half of adults interviewed nationwide could name any of the four Gospels of the New Testament.
- Only 37% of those interviewed could name all four Gospels.
- 70% were able to name the town where Jesus was born, but just 42% could identify him as the person who delivered the Sermon on the Mount.
- 38% of Americans believe the entire Bible was written several decades after Jesus’ death and resurrection (This is only true of the New Testament).
- 12% of adults believe that Noah’s wife was Joan of Arc.
- 49% believe that the Bible teaches that money is the root of all evil. (The love of money is said to be the root of all types of evil).
- 75% believe that the Bible teaches that God helps those who help themselves. (Where does this philosophy come from?)

Even given a little wiggle room and a margin of error on these percentages, for the

number of Bibles that pass hands, Bible knowledge in America is on the decline. Don’t you be included in that number.

What you hold in your hand, what you have on your bookshelf or coffee table, what awaits on your nightstand or lays open in your study ready to verify the certainty of what you have been taught is a miracle from God.

The information contained in the Christian Bible you own can help you become as effective as any of Jesus’ evangelists, teachers, or ministers that you read about between its covers.

A preacher once persuaded a skeptic to attend a church where he would be preaching the basics of Christianity for the next four weeks. The skeptic came and listened and after the fourth sermon, made it know to the preacher that he wanted Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Out of curiosity, the preacher asked him if any particular sermon had helped him make the decision. The man said, “Your sermons were helpful, but they were not what persuaded me.” After church on one of the Sundays, he had helped an elderly woman on a slippery walk. She looked at him and said, “I wonder if you know my Savior, Jesus. He is everything to me. I would like for you to know him too.”

The skeptic had listened to four messages from a preacher, but the real evangelist, the elderly woman, only used three sentences to pierce a skeptical heart.

What Luke wrote to Theophilus, plus even more, has been graciously passed on to all who follow.

What a blessing and privilege to have God's Word opened before us for our own eyes to read, our ears to hear, and our mind and spirit to confirm what we have been taught.

In a world turned wrong side out by ... **the rulers, the authorities... the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12)**; when our faith is challenged, when we are tempted to surrender and call it quits, when the assurance of our salvation is called into question by spiritual forces of evil, what a comfort and anchor in the time of storm God's Word is...

⁴ so that you (and I) may know the certainty of the things you (we) have been taught.