

ACTS

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

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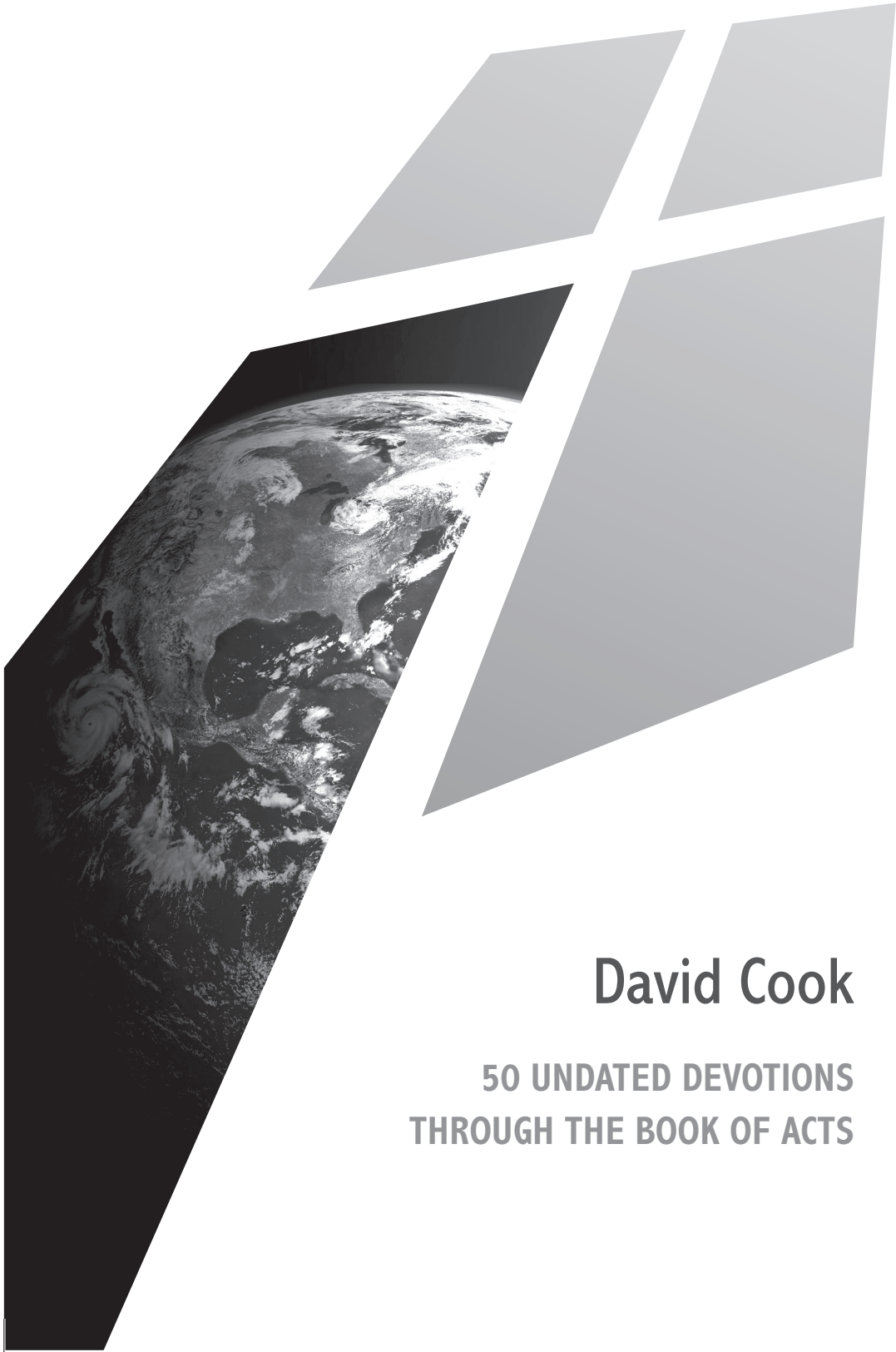
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**50 UNDATED DEVOTIONS
THROUGH THE BOOK OF ACTS**

Luke is the author of Luke's Gospel and the book of Acts. Today's verses provide the bridge between the two volumes.

In Luke 24:46–47, Jesus summarizes the purpose of God. Notice that verse 46 is a good summary of the Gospel of Luke – the suffering, the death and resurrection of the Christ. Verse 47 is a good summary of Acts – that same gospel being preached to the ends of the earth. Notice that verse 47 is as much the purpose of God as verse 46; the broadcast of the gospel, mission and evangelism is at the very heart of God's ongoing purpose until His Son returns.

Acts 1:8 is a similar verse to Luke 24:47. It sets the pattern for the unfolding narrative of Acts. The Holy Spirit will come on the church to empower it for witness in ever-widening circles until the gospel reaches the ends of the earth.

This tells us that Luke's purpose, under God, in writing Acts is to show the triumphant progress of the gospel, through Judea, into Samaria, throughout Asia, into Europe and finally to Rome. However, this is not triumphalism, for the gospel messenger will be opposed, tortured, imprisoned and martyred. There will be opposition from the

outside religious and commercial interests and even dissension within the church, yet the gospel will progress and people will come to Christ. God buries His messengers but not His message.

Luke, in the original Greek, concludes his account in Acts 28:31 with the word 'unhinderedly'. The march of the gospel is ongoing; it has not yet ceased.

The book of Acts provides the church of the twenty-first century with its mandate – and your mandate for today. You have the Holy Spirit. He will empower you today for witness to Christ in a lost world.

'All hope in ministry lies in the Spirit of God operating on the spirit of men.'
C.H. Spurgeon.¹

REFLECTION

Think of the people you contact and of your witness to them. How can it be more effective? Do you think we make Luke 24:47 of lesser importance than Luke 24:46? What effect does this have on the church?

The opening two verses are very similar to Luke's introduction to his Gospel (Luke 1:1–4). Both verses are addressed to Theophilus, and Acts takes up where the Gospel left off – that is, with the resurrection of Jesus.

In verses 4 to 8, Luke records Jesus' final words to His disciples before He ascends to His Father. The disciples' question in verse 6 is a natural one. As resurrected Messiah, will Jesus now bring down the curtain of history, restore Israel to her rightful place and reign over all creation? Jesus makes it clear that before this happens there is more to be done, but it is not merely human work, it is Spirit-empowered witness.

So they are to wait (v. 4) and they will receive power (v. 8). This is the gift of God to His people of which John was speaking (v. 5) – the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The effect of this baptism is that the Holy Spirit will enable the church in its witness. Your witness today is one part of a two-part witness. You witness. But as you do, the Holy Spirit also witnesses with you (see John 15:26,27).

Jesus then ascends to the right hand of the Father (v. 9). The proof of this, says Peter, is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32,33). The disciples are reminded that just as Jesus has gone up, so He will come down. These heavenly messengers, similar to those

who announced the resurrection (Luke 24:4), also now remind the church that there is a limited time to work, until Jesus returns (vv. 10,11).

Jesus spoke of His ascension in Luke 22:69. His resurrection was the means to His ascension, and His ascension means His total exaltation to the right hand of God, where He intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34). He now occupies the highest place (Phil. 2:9), He bestows gifts to His people (Eph. 4:11), and from the place of exaltation He will return in triumph to bring in the new heaven and the new earth.

It is little wonder that Paul encourages us to set our hearts and minds on the things above where Christ is seated at God's right hand (Col. 3:1–3).

REFLECTION

Think of the ways that Christ's ascension can be a source of blessing for you. What is He doing at the Father's right hand? What do you think the ascension meant to the Lord Jesus? What are you to be doing with the gifts He has given you until He returns?