

The Acts of the Apostles

LESSON 1

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Introduction to the Book

Why should we study the Book of Acts?

The Book of Acts is a bridge connecting the Gospels and the Epistles.

It is the outcome of the Gospels.

In the Gospels, Jesus is seen as a grain of wheat who falls to the ground and dies (John 12:24).

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.

The book of Acts gives us the result of Jesus' willingness to lay down His life. It is the "much fruit" that is brought forth.

It is a sequel to the Gospels.

In the Gospels, Christ purchases the Church with His blood. In the Book of Acts, that Church rises to actual existence.

In the Gospels, Jesus gives His famous prophecy stating, "I will build my church" (Mt. 16:18). In the Book of Acts, we see the fulfillment of that prophecy.

In the Gospels, Christ issued the commands to His followers to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. In the Book of Acts, we get a glimpse of just how the apostles responded to those commands under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit.

It is an introduction to the Epistles

It gives the background and occasion for much of what will follow, and it helps us to understand the Epistles in their historical context.

The Book of Acts is the only book in the New Testament that focuses on practical theology. It establishes for us the foundational truths and principles of the Church "in word and deed." It demonstrates for us in living form all of the teaching of Christ in the Gospels. It illustrates the life application of all the doctrine outlined in the Epistles. It provides a textbook on such things as:

- Evangelism
- Ministry in the spirit
- Missions
- Church planting
- Church government

- Team ministry
- Prayer life of the church
- Character of a biblical Christian
- The training and releasing of leaders

The Book of Acts is a book of inspiration in these days of the restoration of the Church. It provides a record of the early rain outpouring of the Spirit. It gives us a description of much that God is restoring. It provides us a glimpse of and stirs our faith in regard to what God wants to do in the Church today.

The Book of Acts is the only unfinished book in the Bible. It is one book that has no “amen” to it. It closes with the continued preaching of the Kingdom of God (Acts 28:30-31).

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

Our lives are to help complete this book throughout the ages.

What is the significance of the title of this book?

This book is titled “The Acts of the Apostles,” or more literally “Acts of Apostles.” Although many would suggest other titles, this one has merit because:

It is the story of how God uses weak human vessels to implement His eternal purposes. It shows us what can be accomplished as we stand “in Christ?” I can do all things...

One of the key words in the Book of Acts is “apostle” or “apostles.”

- Apostolos (apostle) is used 30 times
- Apostello (sent) is used 25 times.
- Apostolee (apostleship) is used once.

Some have suggested other titles as some have suggested in jest, “Some of the Acts of Some of the Apostles.” Others have also stated:

- It neither contains all of the acts of some of the apostles
- Nor some of the acts of all of the apostles
- It focuses on two apostles. In the first twelve chapters, Peter is the central figure. In the rest of the Book of Acts, the central figure is Paul.

Others feel it could more appropriately be called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit in the Church.” Nearly every chapter contains reference to the Holy Spirit. There are 50 (Pentecost) references to the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts.

It could be called the “Life of Paul.” Even though Peter is a central figure in the early chapters, as soon as Paul is introduced the focus of the book changes. It could be argued that even the material surrounding the

ministry of Peter only provides an introduction to Paul and his ministry to the Gentiles. The events that are recorded prior to Paul's apostolic work all have a bearing on such a ministry.

Other suggestions include:

- Acts
- The Acts of the Holy Spirit
- The Gospel of the Holy Spirit
- The Gospel of the Resurrection
- The Acts of the Ascended and Glorified Lord
- Luke-Acts
- The Book of the Continual Doing and Teaching of the Living Christ by the Holy Spirit through His Body Which Is the Church (G. Campbell Morgan)

Who wrote the book of Acts?

The real author is the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21; II Tim. 3:14-17). The human author was a man by the name of "Luke." Luke was referred to by Paul as the "beloved physician" and is the only Gentile author in the New Testament (Col. 4:14). Luke also wrote the gospel that bears his name, which is an account of Christ's earthly ministry – "Christ according to the flesh." Luke wrote Acts as a continuation recording Christ's heavenly ministry – "Christ according to the spirit."

Because of the way the Book of Acts ends, many have suggested that he was planning on writing another book to finish the story. There is much evidence to establish Luke as the author.

- Both Acts and Luke are addressed to the same person—Theophilus (Acts 1:1; Luke 1:3).
- The writer refers to a former treatise—the Gospel of Luke (Acts 1:1).
- The style of both the Gospel and the Book of Acts are the same (medical language).
- Fifty words are used in common to the two books that are not found anywhere else in the New Testament.
- Luke was a companion of Paul and, therefore, qualified to write the book (Acts 16:10, 20:4-6, 28:16; Col. 4:14; II Tim. 4:11; Phil. 4). Notice the use of the pronoun "we" (Acts 16:19, 20:4-5).
- Luke's authorship of both books is unanimously attested to by Early Church tradition.

When was the Book of Acts written

The Book of Acts was most likely written between 63 and 65 A.D. Paul was still in prison in Rome and had not come to trial. The reign of Nero included these years. It was obviously written before the death of Paul. It was very likely written shortly after the close of the time covered in the book, after Paul had been two years in Rome.

The Book of Acts covers approximately 33 years from the ascension of Jesus to the time when Paul had been in prison in Rome for two years (See Chart on the Chronology of the Book of Acts).

What is a general overview of the contents of the Book of Acts?

This is the first history of the church and the only unfinished book in the Bible. It is simply a sketch history (John 21:25). The history of the Church continues to be recorded in the book of heaven. We can expect the end to be greater than the beginning (Eccl 7:8).

The book, like Genesis, is the book of beginnings and it is just as important. It contains the following beginnings:

- The Holy Spirit's work of evangelism
- The gospel of preaching (I Cor 15:1-4)
- A new dispensation (the Holy Spirit)
- The Church of our Lord
- World-wide evangelism
- Salvation through the blood of Christ

The book centers on the work of two great apostles.

- Peter to the Jews (Chapters 1-12)
- Paul to the Gentiles (Chapters 13-28)

The book revolves around four geographical centers.

- Jerusalem - home missions
- Antioch - foreign missions
- Ephesus
- Rome
- Thus, the gospel begins in Jerusalem, the religious hub of the world, and ends in Rome, the political hub of the world.

The book gives to us a glimpse into the divine execution of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:46-47).

What is the key verse and how is it fulfilled in the Book of Acts?

The key verse in the Book of Acts is Acts 1:8. It is the key verse because it gives the order of witness in the Book of Acts.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

- Jerusalem (Acts 1:4, 8; Luke 24:47)
- Judea (Acts 2:9, 14, 8:1, 9:31, 10:37, 11:1, 19, 15:1)

Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Acts 8:1

- Samaria (Acts 8-10)

Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. Acts 8:4-5

- Uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 11:19, 23:11, 28:14-31).

Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Acts 11:19-21

- But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.” Acts 23:11

What was the purpose for which this book was written?

There are many possible reasons that have been suggested for which Luke may have written this book.

He may have written it...

- To preserve an historical record of the origins of the Early Church. Luke, being a man of education, would be concerned that these happenings were recorded for future generations.
- To demonstrate the continuing work of Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1).
- To defend the church from the Roman Empire’s antagonism toward the Jews by showing that while they share common scriptures, they are a separate religious group that the Romans need not fear.

To demonstrate the pattern by which Christ builds His church.

To provide a defense of Christianity in a time when world-wide persecution was foreseen. From this book

could be demonstrated the past Roman policy of ignoring but never persecuting the early Christian leaders.

To assist in the evangelization of the Jews by showing that Christianity is indeed the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

To provide a biographical sketch of the life of one of the greatest apostles in the early church.

To provide a defense brief to be presented at Paul's trial to explain his arrest and the charges that were against him.

What are the key words used in the Book of Acts?

Key words often give insight into the main message of a book. Some of the key words in the Book of Acts include the following:

- Paul – 154
- Peter – 64
- (Holy) Spirit – 50
- Word (of God) – 48
- Name (of Jesus, the Lord) – 34
- Apostle(s) – 30
- Witness (or some form of the word) – 30
- Prayer – 28

What is the key message of the Book of Acts?

Make a sentence with all the key words in it.

Sample: *The story of how God equips people with supernatural equipment (Holy Spirit, Name of Jesus, Word of God, Prayer) and sends (apostles) them out to be His witnesses and accomplish His purpose.*

KEY EVENTS	ACTS Chapter/s	DATE/s	HIGH PRIESTS	RUMLERS IN JUDEA	PAULINE EPISTLES WRITTEN
Ascension of Christ	1:9-11	30	Caiaphus	Pontius Pilates	
Pentecost	2:1-41	30			
Martyrdom of Stephen	6-7	32-33			
Saul's First Visit to Jerusalem	9:26-30	36	Jonathan, Theophilus	Marcellus	
Saul in Tarsus	9:30	36-44	Simon, Matthias	Marullus, Herod Agrippa I	
(Holy) Spirit to Aioch	11:25-26	44	Elioenai	Cuspius Fadus	
Saul's Second Visit to Jerusalem	11:29-12:25	46	Joseph	Tiberas Julius Alexander	
First Missionary Journey	13-14	47-49	Ananias		
Jerusalem Council	15	49		Cumanus	Galatians
Second Missionary Journey	15:40-18:22	49			
Paul in Corinth		51-52			I & II Thessalonians
Paul's Fourth Trip to Jerusalem	18:22	52		Antonius Felix	
Third Missionary Journey	18:23-21:4	52-58			
Troas, Illyricum, Achala		56-58			I Corinthians (54) II Corinthians (56)
Paul's Fifth Visit to Jerusalem	21:5-23:22	58	Ishmael		Romans (57)
Paul's Ceasarean Imprisonment	23:23-25:32	58-60		Porcius Festus	
Paul Sails for Rome	27:1	60	Joseph		
Paul's Roman Imprisonment	27-28	61-63	Ananus, Jesus	Albinus	Prison Epistles
Paul's Release from Prison		63	Jesus, Son of Gamaliel		I Timothy, Titus
Paul's Final Imprisonment		65			II Timothy
Paul's Death		65	Matthias	Gessius Florus	

* It should be noted that because of limited historical records, dates are approximate

