

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

INTRODUCTION

It is very possible that this Biblical account of the “history” section of the NT, originally had no title. The early church father’s when referring to this letter had many names and titles. For example:

- Acts
- The Acts
- Acts of the Apostles
- Acts of the Holy Apostles

I will use the single word of “Acts” when referring to this letter.

It is generally understood that this letter is the “part two” or the “second volume” of Luke’s historical account of Christianity, written to the same person, Theophilus¹ (Lk 1:3; Ac 1:1). It is in the book of Acts, that we see the movement of the church from Palestine, spreading throughout the known world. We are given a glimpse into the life of the early church struggles and successes. We find the Apostles carrying out the command of Christ:

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

And

Acts 1:6-8 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

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

Stanley Porter, in his commentary of the Acts of the Apostles writes:

The book of Acts provides a glimpse into the first three decades of the early church (ca AD 30–63) as it spread and multiplied after the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is not a detailed or comprehensive history. Rather, it focuses on the role played by

¹ Theophilus was the original reader of Luke and Acts. It is generally believed that Theophilus was a well-known and important person. His name is of Gentile origin and perhaps he had been introduced to Christ and needed verifiable and authentic news surrounding the Christian movement. However, there are those that believe that Theophilus was not a real person, but symbolic of any reader since Theophilus literally means “lover of God.”

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apostles such as Peter, who ministered primarily to Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.²

AUTHOR

Previously I have failed to give full credit of the inspiration by the Holy Spirit to each of the human authors in each of the Gospels. The book of Acts of the Apostles was/is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The writer for Acts is anonymous. The author does not fully identify himself in the text of the book. However, the traditional view is that writer is the same as the person who wrote the “Gospel according to Luke.” In its pages, we discover that the author, was a companion of Paul and an eyewitness to many of the events about which he writes.

The book of Acts has portions that include the word “we.” This is referred to as the “we” sections of the letter. The first-person plural pronoun is used in several sections (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16).

The book of Acts is formally anonymous. The traditional view is that the author was the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke—Luke the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tm 4:11; Phm 24). As early as the second century AD, church leaders such as Irenaeus wrote that Luke was the author of Acts. Irenaeus based his view on the “we” passages in Acts, five sections where the author changes from the third person (“he/she” and “they”) to first-person plural (“we”) as he narrates the action (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–29; 28:1–16). Irenaeus and many scholars since his time have interpreted these passages to mean that the author of Acts was one of the eyewitness companions of Paul. Luke fits this description better than any other candidate, especially given the similar themes between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.³

The Book of Acts bridges the Gospels to the epistles by giving a limited view of the transition from spreading the Gospel in and around Jerusalem, to a movement of missionary journeys where churches were planted, and elders were called. It is filled with the central character of Acts, the Holy Spirit.

We are introduced to the work of the Apostles, specifically the work of Peter and Paul.

Historically, from the second to the fourth century A.D., the early church testified that Luke, the traveling companion of Paul, was the author of both Acts and the Gospel of Luke.

For our study, we will assume the ponderance of evidence from the early church that Luke was the author.

DATE

For our study, we will presume that Acts was written sometime before the end of Paul’s first Roman imprisonment (ca. A.D. 60–62), awaiting trial before Caesar. Acts ends with Paul still in

² Stanley E. Porter, “Acts,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1713.

³ IBID

prison, waiting on his day in court with Caesar. It just makes sense to me for the author, Luke, who gave so much space for Paul's ministry, would have given some ink to the events leading up to his trial and after-effects of Paul's death.

Luke wrote about James martyrdom (Ac 12:2). That leads me to believe that Acts was written before AD 70.

PURPOSE AND CONTENT

First of all, Acts is the continuation of the narrative begun in Luke's Gospel. In Acts Luke draws a connection between the two when he refers to his Gospel account in the Acts as "former treatise."

Acts 1:1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, (KJV)

Secondly Luke begins in a manger in Bethlehem in his Gospel and in Acts, he extends the vista to the heart of the Roman empire, Rome. From shepherds in a field to Caesar's household. His work is truly a panorama of the life of Christ and the birth of the Church.

Thirdly, Luke gives the history of the Church during the first fifty to sixty-five years. The book of the Acts of the Apostles is exactly that: the story of the Apostles moving out from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth (Ac 1:8) and declaring the Gospel, baptizing and planting churches. However, just like the Gospels were all about Jesus, you could infer that Acts is all about the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of the early church who offered their lives for the cause of Christ. Example after example of the moving of the Holy Spirit working through the Apostles, their converts and in general, congregations of believers attempting to be obedient to the call of the Holy Spirit.

Where the message of Christ's "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" became the Apostle's message of the birth, life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ...the Gospel. This radial movement of the Gospel out of Jerusalem was primarily the work of persecution from the Jewish religious leaders, the Holy Spirit used the persecution to move the Apostles into action, obeying the Great Commission of Jesus. And, as they went, the Gospel found a place in the hearts of Jews and Gentiles, even to the capital of Rome itself. Everywhere the Gospel was preached

It can also be said that Acts has three main characters: The Apostles in general, the Apostle Peter, and the newcomer, the Apostle Paul. Luke gives precedent to the activities of Peter in chapters 1–12. The narrative changes then to the activities of Paul of chapters 13–28.

While Paul was not numbered with the twelve, Jesus own words tell of the importance of the Apostle Paul.

Acts 9:15-16 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: 16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. (KJV)

The book of Acts covers the movement of Christ's message throughout the known world of the first century.

AUDIENCE

Acts was written to Theophilus. Theophilus, whose name means “lover of God,” was a believer that Luke was instructing or that Theophilus was an unbeliever that Luke was trying to convert is not clear.

Theophilus is seen as a Roman official or a wealthy patron of Luke’s. Luke gives special honor to him, “most excellent”. The Roman society were divided into two major classes: aristocratic and wealthy and the poorer commoners which were called plebians. A patron was a caretaker, supporter of a plebian. A patron was in contrast to a plebian in every way: status, financial, and educational. In the case of Luke and Theophilus, Theophilus was perhaps the benefactor of Luke. He possibly funded Luke so that Luke could take on writing full time. He would have covered all his expenses. Therefore, Luke’s addressing in each of his writings would have been proper and fitting for Luke to do so.

Luke and Acts, at their very foundation, can be seen as a defense or apologetic of the Jesus movement, specifically addressing the issues and objections of the Jewish mind. Luke gives plenty of ink to sermons and speeches given to Jewish audiences.

A broader audience would be the struggling church in the first century. There were theological and practice issues within the early church. Heresies were prevalent as errors were introduced into the fledgling church and Luke addresses many of them in Acts. Luke includes the struggles with the church and the world government and systems.

As a reader in the 21st century, Acts addresses a broad set of issues that affected the early church and the church of today.

WRITTEN FROM

While Luke does not say specifically, historically it is believed that Luke wrote from one of two places. He could have written from Antioch with heavy Greek influence or from Asia Minor in Ephesus or Smyrna.

OUTLINE

- I. The Witness in Jerusalem (Act 1:1-8:3)
- II. Preparation for the Church (Act 1:1-26)
- III. Establishment of the Church (Act 2:1-47)
- IV. The Church in Jerusalem (Act 3:1-8:3)
- V. The Witness in Judea and Samaria (Act 8:4-12:25)
- VI. The Preaching by Philip (Act 8:4-40)
- VII. The Conversion of Saul (Act 9:1-31)
- VIII. The Miracles of Peter (Act 9:32-43)
- IX. The Conversion of Cornelius (Act 10:1-11:18)
- X. The Ministries of Barnabas, Peter, and Saul (Act 11:19-12:25)
- XI. The Apostle’s Witness to the Ends of the Earth (Act 13:1-28:30-31)
- XII. The First Missionary Journey of Paul (Act 13:1-14:28)
- XIII. The Issue of Circumcision and the Law on the Gentiles (Act 15:1-35)
- XIV. The Second Missionary Journey of Paul (Act 15:36-18:22)

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XV. The Third Missionary Journey of Paul (Act 18:23-21:17)

XVI. The Arrest of Paul and His Journey to Rome (Act 21:18-28:31)

Another simple outline, considering the Gospel, might look like this:

- I. The Gospel in Jerusalem
- II. The Gospel in Judea and Samaria
- III. The Gospel to the Uttermost

KEY THOUGHT/CENTRAL MESSAGE

The central message of Acts places emphasis that Jesus was a Jew. In every place that the Apostle Paul went, he first went to the synagogue and preached Jesus to the Jews.

The Central Theme then is:

- The Holy Spirit
- The Apostles
- The Church

LOCATIONS FOUND IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

- Achaia 18:12
- Amphipolis 17:1
- Antioch (Syrian) 11:26-29; 12:25; 13:1-3; 14:26-28; 15:36-40; 18:22,23
- Antioch (Pisidian) 13:14-50; 14:21
- Antipatris 23:31
- Apollonia 17:1
- Appii forum 28:15
- Arabia (Gal. 1:17*)
- Assos 20:13,14
- Athens 17:15-34
- Attalia 14:25
- Berea 17:10-14
- Bithynia** 16:7
- Caesarea 9:30; 18:22; 21:8-14; 23:33-26:32
- Cenchrea 18:18
- Chios** 20:15
- Cilicia 22:3 (Gal. 1:21*); 15:41
- Clauda** 27:16
- Cnidus** 27:7
- Colosse (Philemon 22*)
- Coos 21:1
- Corinth 18:1-18; (2 Cor. 13:2*); 20:2-3; (2 Tim. 4:20*)
- Crete 27:7-13; (Tit. 1:5*)
- Cyprus 13:4-13; 21:3**; 27:4**
- Damascus 9:8-22; (Gal. 1:17*)

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- Derbe 14:20-21; 16:1
- Ephesus 18:19-21; 19:1-41; (2 Tim.1:3*); (2 Tim. 1:18*)
(Gal. 4:13-15?*); 16:6; 18:23
- Galatia 20:2,3
- Greece 20:2,3
- Hierapolis (Col. 4:13*)
- Iconium 13:51-14:5; 14:21-23
- Illyricum (Rom. 15:19*)
- Jerusalem 26:4; 7:58; 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 9:26-29; 11:30; 12:25; 15:4-29; 18:22; 21:15-23:31
- Laodicea (Col. 2:1*)
- Lasea 27:8**
- Lycaonia 14:6
- Lycia 27:5
- Lystra 14:6-20; 14:21-23; 16:1-3
- Macedonia 16:12; 20:1,2; 20:3-6; (1 Tim. 1:3*)
- Melita 28:1-10
- Miletus 20:15-38; (2 Tim. 4:20*)
- Mitylene 20:14
- Myra 27:5,6
- Mysia 16:11
- Neapolis 16:11
- Nicopolis (Tit. 3:12*)
- Pamphylia 13:13; 14:24
- Paphos 13:6-12
- Patara 21:1,2
- Perga 13:13; 14:25
- Phenice 15:3; 21:2; 27:12
- Philippi 16:12-40; 20:6; (Phil. 1:26?*)
- Phrygia 16:6; 18:23
- Pisidia 14:24
- Ptolemais 21:7
- Puteoli 28:13,14
- Rhegium 28:13
- Rhodes 21:1
- Rome 28:16-31; (2 Tim. 1:17*)
- Salamis 13:5
- Salmone** 27:7,8
- Samaria 15:3
- Samos 20:15
- Samothracia 16:11
- Seleucia 13:4
- Sidon 27:3,4
- Spain? 15:24,28
- Syracuse 28:12

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- Syria (Gal. 1:21*); 15:41; 18:18-23; 21:3
- Tarsus 22:3; 9:30; 11:25-26
- The fair havens 27:8-12
- Thessalonica 17:1-9
- The three taverns 28:15
- Troas 16:8-11; (2 Cor. 2:12-13*); 20:6-12; (2 Tim. 4:13*)
- Trogyllium 20:15
- Tyre 21:3-6

MAIN EVENTS

1. Christ appears to the apostles after His resurrection (Acts 1:4-8).
2. Christ ascends to heaven (Acts 1:9-11).
3. Matthias is appointed to replace Judas as the 12th Apostle (Acts 1:15-26).
4. The Holy Spirit comes to the apostles in the form of tongues of fire (Acts 2:1-4).
5. The apostles speak in tongues (Acts 2:5-13).
6. Peter heals a lame man (Acts 3:1-10).
7. Stephen is stoned to death and becomes the first Christian martyr (Acts 6:8-15, 7:54-60).
8. Saul persecutes the Christians (Acts 8:1-3).
9. Saul has a dramatic encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19).
10. Saul escapes from Damascus in a basket (Acts 9:23-25).
11. Peter raises Dorcas (Tabitha) from the dead (Acts 9:36-43).
12. King Herod Agrippa I orders the execution of the Apostle James (Acts 12:1-2).
13. An angel rescues Peter from prison (Acts 12:3-10).
14. Saul's first missionary journey - Cyprus, Antioch, Iconium and Lystra. Saul becomes known as the Apostle Paul. (12:2 - 14:28)
15. Paul and Peter meet at the Council of Jerusalem to decide if Gentile Christians must observe the Jewish Law and customs (Acts 15:1-20).
16. Paul writes his First Letter to the Thessalonians - the earliest New Testament book.
17. Paul writes his Letter to the Galatians.
18. Paul's second missionary journey - Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea, Athens and Corinth (15:36 - 18:22)
19. Paul's third missionary journey - Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Macedonia, Troas, Miletus, Tyre and Caesarea (18:23 - 21:14)
20. Eutychus falls asleep while Paul is preaching and falls out a window (Acts 20:9-12).
21. Paul is arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27-36).
22. Paul is taken to Rome for trial and shipwrecked on the way (27:1 - 28:16).

THEOLOGICAL THEMES

Without a doubt, the work of the Holy Spirit in Acts is the emphasis both theological and doctrinal. The study of the Holy Spirit in seminary is called, "Pneumatology." (Ac 1-11; 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, and 28).

Many times we overlook the importance of the Holy Spirit in God's plan of salvation. Before Jesus left this earth, He promised the arrival of a "Comforter." The Comforter is the Holy Spirit,

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“ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” The Holy Spirit’s coming is highlighted and fulfilled in Acts. The Holy Spirit working through the Apostles is found many times where the Holy Spirit “fills” them to exhibit the Power of the One, True and Living God. (cf. 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:5; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9).