

ACTS

“The Beginning of Christianity”

Writing of the Book

- The opening words of Acts declare “in my former book” which clearly refers to an earlier work, the book of Luke.
- Ancient tradition and the clear similarity in literary features establish the common authorship of these two books - If Luke wrote Luke, he also wrote Acts.
- Acts was probably written no later than the early 60s, when Paul was under house arrest in Rome awaiting trial.

Writing of the Book

- Presumably, Acts was written after he finished the Gospel, although exactly when is hard to know.
- Key parts of Acts make it clear that the writer was part of the narrative (16:10-17; 20:5-21:28; 27:1-28:16).
- The full title of the book is “Acts of the Apostles.”

Outline of Acts

- I. The Witness to Christ in and around Jerusalem (1-7)
 - a. Introduction and Instructions (1:1-8)
 - b. Ascensions (1:9-11)
 - c. Selection of Judas' Replacement (1:12-26)
 - d. Pentecost (2)
 - e. Encounter with Religious Leaders (3:1-4:35)

- f. Ananias and Sapphira (4:36-5:16)
 - g. Second Encounter with Religious Leaders (5:17-42)
 - h. Seven Servants (6:1-7)
 - i. Stephen (6:8-7:60)
2. The Witness to Christ in Judea and Samaria (8:1-12:25)
- a. Saul and Philip (8:1-40)
 - b. Saul's Conversion (9:1-31)

- c. Peter's Ministry in Judea (9:32-11:18)
 - d. Barnabas's Ministry (11:19-30)
 - e. Peter's Deliverance (12:1-25)
3. The Witness to Christ to the Ends of the Earth (13:1-28:31)
- a. Paul's First Missionary Journey (13-14)
 - b. Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)
 - c. Paul's Second Missionary Journey (15:36-18:22)

- d. Paul's Third Missionary Journey (18:23-21:15)
- e. Paul's Arrest and Incarceration (21:15-26:32)
- f. Paul's Voyage to Rome (27:1-28:10)
- g. Paul's Ministry at Rome (28:11-31)

Purpose and Message

- Acts is important for its historical value and theological insight.
- Acts mentions over thirty countries, more than fifty towns or cities, numerous islands, and almost 100 people (sixty of whom aren't mentioned elsewhere in the NT).
- Luke demonstrates impressive knowledge of geography, politics, customs, seafaring, and the first-century world in general.

Purpose and Message

- Theologically, Acts demonstrates the development, discussion, and occasionally dissension of the early church and the early spread of preaching about Jesus Christ.
- Luke and Acts together are over $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NT. Acts explains how the preached gospel made its way into the world and acquired universal significance, making it the key witness to what the early church preached, taught, and believed (church practice and doctrine).

Purpose and Message

- One of the key interpretive questions about Acts is how much in the book is descriptive (what took place at this time and setting) and how much is prescriptive (what should take place at other times and settings).
- This requires careful study, and comparison of Scripture with Scripture.

Major Themes Witness

- The focus of Acts is Jesus, which is why Acts begins with him after the resurrection.
- He left standing orders, telling his disciples not to waste energy speculating on the timetable of the messianic reign, **but prepare themselves for the outpouring of the Spirit.**
- The Spirit would enable them (and us) to fulfill Jesus' mandate, **to testify to all of who Jesus was and what he did.**

Major Themes Holy Spirit

- Pentecost is the Jewish holiday started in Moses' time, taking place seven weeks after Passover.
- The Spirit came on this day to symbolize the completion of God's redemptive work through Jesus on Good Friday/Easter (Passover), linking it with the onset of a harvest of souls in response to the proclamation about Messiah's cross.

Major Themes

Holy Spirit *(continued)*

- The Holy Spirit drives our witness, as seen in Peter's Pentecost sermon.
- Peter preached from Joel, asserting that the times of this proclamation of the last days were now at hand, and that it was time to call on the Lord, the God of the OT, with a renewed fervor and intensity yes, but primarily in a spirit of repentance and faith, for their leaders had conspired with the Romans to put Jesus to death, the Jesus who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven (as confirmed by many witnesses), which demonstrated that this Jesus was God and the way to God.

Major Themes Church

- Acts 2:42-47 map out the longer-term outcome of what happened at Pentecost: **the church.**
- The apostles and no others had been appointed by Jesus as his spokesmen, **their message of death and resurrection was his message.**
- Fellowship was also central, including both breaking of bread and prayer - **Fellowship is the relational intimacy that binds followers of Jesus Christ together in Christ through the Spirit.**

Major Themes

Church *(continued)*

- They met regularly in the temple courts as well, which would have been a normal practice for them before their conversions.
- ...their presence was a significant witness that the God who instituted the temple and temple worship had ultimately spoken in Jesus Christ.
- All of this led to praise of God and favor of outsiders.
- Their lifestyle was distinctive then as ours is supposed to be today.

Major Themes Church *(continued)*

- And the last outcome mentioned is growth, as God added daily to their number those who were being saved.
- Acts again makes it clear that the growth of the church was not human religious activity or social organization.
- It was the amazing work of the Spirit through the gospel of Jesus Christ, transforming sinners and their relationships with one another.

Major Themes

Mission

- Persecution leads to mission, as we see with Philip and the spread of the gospel into Samaria.
- Cornelius, a Roman military commander, received a vision from God that led him to call Peter, and we see God's approval of Gentiles coming into the church.
- The church at Jerusalem sends Barnabas north to Antioch to check out reports of gospel activity and encourage the new work there, where he enlists Saul as a teacher in the church.

Major Themes

Mission *(continued)*

- The second half of the book describes three separate missionary journeys, each of which carries the gospel to new regions.
- Acts 15 summarizes the theological debate surrounding what to do with Gentiles coming into the church.
- The book of Acts ends with the story of Paul reaching Rome, taking the gospel to the ends of the earth