



INTRODUCTION to ACTS

The Book of Acts gives today's Christians basic information and insights into the early church. Luke portrays the tensions, persecutions, frustrations, theological problems, and hopes confronting the neophyte bride of Christ. Acts marks the transition from the work of God provincially among the Jews to His establishment of the universal church. In a real sense the reader goes from Jerusalem to the uttermost part of the world in these 28 chapters.

Besides all these, Acts presents a stimulating challenge to every Christian today. The zeal, the faith, the joy, the commitment, and the obedience of those early saints is an example to all believers. It is crucial for followers of Jesus Christ to be as intimately acquainted with this book as possible.

The earliest extant evidence for the name "Acts" is found in an anti-Marcionite Prologue to the Gospel of Luke, a work dated between A.D. 150 and 180. How or why it received this title is open to speculation.

It must be conceded that "Acts" is not an accurate title because the book by no means contains all the acts of all the apostles. Only Peter and Paul are emphasized. The great Apostle John is mentioned, but none of his words are recorded. The death of John's brother James is given in one brief sentence (Acts 12:2).

three accounts of Paul's conversion (chaps. 9; 22; 26).

Acts shows the universality of Christianity. Is this its primary purpose? The gospel goes to Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, Gentiles at Antioch, poor and wealthy, educated and uneducated, women and men, the high and lofty as well as those in humble positions. This approach also helps explain the emphasis on the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15. However, this again does not explain certain elements in the book such as the choice of Matthias in Acts 1 or the selection of the Seven in Acts 6.

The persecution in Acts is always religious except in two locations—Philippi (chap. 16) and Ephesus (chap. 19). In both of these the opposition was due to vested interests. In every other case the persecutions arose from Jewish sources.

By far the most popular view of the purpose of Acts is the one which states that it is a historical one. According to this approach Luke's goal was to record the spread of the gospel message from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth (1:8). This explains the transition from a Jewish ministry to a Gentile one, and from Peter to Paul. In addition, this view suits the historical outlook of Acts 1:1 with Luke 1:1–4. The prologue of Luke 1:1–4 is that of a historian like Herodotus, Thucydides, or Polybius. It is quite clear that Luke was writing history in both books.

The purpose of the Book of Acts may be stated as follows: *To explain with the Gospel of Luke the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome.* In Luke's Gospel the question is answered, "If Christianity has its roots in the Old Testament and in Judaism, how did it become a worldwide religion?" The Book of Acts continues in the vein of the Gospel of Luke to answer the same problem.

Alongside this worldwide progression there is an emphasis on eschatology in both Luke and Acts. The prophetic expression *kingdom of God* occurs in Luke 32 times and in Acts 6 times besides the allusions to God's kingdom in 1:6 and 20:25 (cf. 1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:23, 31). In addition there are many references to eschatology in other terminology and by inference (1:11; 2:19–21, 34–35; 3:19–25; 6:14; 10:42; 13:23–26, 32–33; 15:15–18; 17:3, 7, 31; 20:24–25, 32; 21:28; 23:6; 24:15–17, 21, 25;

26:6–8, 18; 28:20). Obviously, the church in the present Age is heavily accented, but the church also is seen as an heir of the kingdom. It may be concluded, then, that Luke shows how the kingdom message moved from mostly Jews to mostly Gentiles and from Jerusalem to Rome.

If this purpose statement is accepted, it does not rule out the previous suggestions. It includes both Peter and Paul as prime characters, Peter the minister to the circumcised, and Paul to the uncircumcised. The universality of the gospel is part of Luke's emphasis in both his Gospel and here in Acts. Certainly the progression of the book, declared in 1:8, fits into this statement. All of these contribute to the overall purpose of Luke in penning this work.

Miracles by Peter and Paul

Peter

Acts 3:1–11	Healed a man lame from birth
5:15–16	Peter's shadow healed people
5:17	Success caused Jewish jealousy
8:9–24	Dealt with Simon, a sorcerer
9:33–34	Healed Aeneas, a paralytic
9:36–41	Raised Dorcas to Life

Paul

14:8–18	Healed a man lame from birth
19:11–12	Handkerchiefs and aprons from Paul healed people
13:45	Success caused Jewish jealousy
13:6–11	Dealt with Bar-Jesus, a sorcerer
20:9–12	Raised Eutychus to life

The writing of Acts must have taken place before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Certainly an event of such magnitude would not have been ignored. This is especially true in light of one of the basic themes of the book: God's turning to the Gentiles from the Jews because of the Jews' rejection of Jesus Christ.

Luke scarcely would have omitted an account of Paul's death, traditionally dated from A.D. 66–68, if it had occurred before he wrote Acts. Nor did Luke mention the Neronian persecutions which began after the great fire of Rome in A.D. 64.

Furthermore, a defense of Christianity before Nero by using the Book of Acts to appeal to what lower officials had ruled regarding Paul would have had little point at the time of the Neronian antagonism. At that time Nero was so intent on destroying the church, the defense set forth in Acts would have had little effect in dissuading him.

The date usually accepted by conservative scholars for the writing of Acts is around A.D. 60–62. Accordingly, the place of writing would be Rome or possibly both Caesarea and Rome. At the time of writing Paul's release was either imminent or had just taken place.¹

Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

This verse is a table of contents and divine outline for the entire book of Acts.

1. Witnessing in Jerusalem (Acts 1–7).
2. Witnessing in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8–12).
3. Witnessing unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 13–28).²

¹ Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 349–357.

² Harold Willmington, *Willmington's Guide to the Bible* (Tyndale House Publishers, 1981), 366–369.

ACTS 1:1–3

¹The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, ²until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, ³to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

1	The	•	former	account	I made	,	O	^a Theophilus	,	of	all	that
	ὁ	μέν	πρῶτος	λόγος	ποιέω		ὃ	Θεόφιλος		περί	πᾶς	ὅς
	DASM	TE	B J	NASM	VAMI1S		I	NVSM		P	JGPN	RR-GPN
	Jesus		began	both	to do	and	teach	,	^{2 b} until	the	day	in
	ὁ Ἰησοῦς		ἄρχω	τέ	ποιέω	καί	διδάσκω		ἄχρι	ἡμέρα		
	DNSM NNSM		VAMI3S	CLK	VPAN	CLK CLN	VPAN		P			NGSF
	Which	¹	He was	Taken	up ,	after	He	through	the	Holy	Spirit	^c had
	ὅς			ἀναλαμβάνω			διά	ἅγιος	πνεῦμα			
	RR-GSF			VAPI3S			P	JGSN				NGSN
	Given		Commandments	to the	apostles	whom	He had	chosen	,	^{3 d}		
	ἐντέλλω			ὁ	ἀπόστολος	ὅς		ἐκλέγομαι				
	VAUP-SNM			DDPM	NDPM	RR-APM		VAMI3S				
	to whom	He also	presented	Himself	alive	after	His	suffering	by			
	ὅς	καί	παρίστημι	ἑαυτοῦ	ζάω	μετά	αὐτός	ὁ πάσχω	ἐν			
	RR-DPM	BE TE	VAAI3S	RF3ASM	VPAP-SAM	P	RP3ASM	DASN VAAN				P
	Many	² infallible	Proofs	, being	seen	by	them	during	forty			
	Πολύς	τεκμήριον			ὀπτάνομαι		αὐτός	διά	τεσσεράκοντα			
	JDPN	NDPN			VPUP-SNM		RP3DPM	P	XN J			
	days	and	speaking	of the	things	pertaining	to the	kingdom	of			
	ἡμέρα	καί	λέγω	ὁ		περί	ὁ	βασιλεία				
	NGPF	CLN	VPAP-SNM	DAPN		P	DGSF	NGSF				
	God											
	ὁ θεός											
	DGSM											NGSM

COMMENTARY

I. The Witness in Jerusalem (1:1–6:7).

A. *The expectation of the chosen (chaps. 1–2).*

1. THE INTRODUCTION (1:1–5).

Acts 1:1–2. In the first two verses of this book Luke looked back to his Gospel. **Theophilus** may have been Luke’s patron who financed the writing of Luke and Acts. At any rate he was a believer in Christ. These two books would confirm and instruct Theophilus, as well as the church of Christ, in the faith.

LUKE 1:1-4 Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all

^a Luke 1:3

^b Mark 16:19; Acts 1:9, 11, 22

¹ He ascended into heaven.

^c Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; John 20:21; Acts 10:42

^d Matt. 28:17; Mark 16:12, 14; Luke 24:34, 36; John 20:19, 26; 21:1, 14; 1 Cor. 15:5–7

² *unmistakable*

things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

The verb **began** (Acts 1:1) indicates that Acts continues the account of the ministry and teaching Christ began on earth. He is still working and teaching through His people today.

The reference to the Lord's Ascension in Acts 1:2 looks back to:

Luke 24:50–53

“And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.”

Two commandments were given by the Lord before He returned to heaven: (1) the apostolic band was to remain in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4; cf. Luke 24:49); (2) they were to go into the world as witnesses (Acts 1:8). Luke 10:4; 24:47). These **instructions** may have seemed contradictory but they were to be obeyed sequentially.

1 Corinthians 15:1–8

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that 1)He was seen by Cephas, then 2)by the twelve. After that 3)He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was 4)seen by James, then 5)by all the apostles. Then last of all 6)He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

Acts 1:3. The Lord's post-resurrection appearances attested the reality of the Resurrection. Christ **gave many convincing proofs** of this. The word “proofs” (*tekmēriōis*) occurs only here in the New Testament and looks at demonstrable evidence in contrast with evidence provided by witnesses. In other words, the Resurrection was proven by touch, sight, and feel (cf. Luke 24:39–40; 1 John 1:1).

For **40 days** after His resurrection the Lord **appeared** to the apostles and discussed **the kingdom of God** with **them**. What is meant by this term? God has always ruled over the world and especially in Israel (Dan. 2:47; 4:3, 25–26, 32, 34–37; 5:21; 6:25–27; Pss. 5:2; 84:3; 89:6–18; 103; etc.). However, a time is coming, commonly called the Millennium, when God will burst into human history in a spectacular way to establish His rule on earth. This is what is meant by the term “kingdom of God” (cf. comments on Matt. 3:2; 13:10–16). Though this topic was the subject of much of the Lord's teaching and preaching before the Cross, He saw fit to discuss it further during His 40 days of post-resurrection ministry.³

³ Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 349–357.