

Survey of Acts

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Author and Title

Although the author is unnamed in Acts, the evidence leads to the conclusion that the author was Luke. Acts is the second volume of a two-part treatise written by Luke to Theophilus about “all that Jesus began to do and teach.” In support of Luke as the author, Ryrie writes:

That the author of Acts was a companion of Paul is clear from the passages in the book in which “we” and “us” are used (16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16). These sections themselves eliminate known companions of Paul other than Luke, and Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24 point affirmatively to Luke, who was a physician. The frequent use of medical terms also substantiates this conclusion (1:3; 3:7ff.; 9:18, 33; 13:11; 28:1-10). Luke answered the Macedonian call with Paul, was in charge of the work at Philippi for about six years, and later was with Paul in Rome during the time of Paul’s house arrest. It was probably during this last period that the book was written. If it were written later it

would be very difficult to explain the absence of mentioning such momentous events as the burning of Rome, the martyrdom of Paul, or the destruction of Jerusalem.

Regarding the title, all available Greek manuscripts designate it by the title *Praxeis*, “Acts,” or by the title, “The Acts of the Apostles.” Just how or why it received this title is uncertain. Actually, “The Acts of the Apostles” is perhaps not the most accurate title since it does not contain the acts of all the apostles. Only Peter and Paul are really emphasized, though the promise of the coming of the Spirit was made to all the apostles in Acts 1:2-8 who were then to go into all the world preaching the gospel in the power of the Spirit (however, see 4:32). Many have felt that the book would be more accurately titled, “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” since it describes the spread of Christianity from the time of the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2 as promised in Acts 1:8.

Date: A.D. 61

The issues regarding the dating of the book are summarized by Stanley Toussaint as follows:

The writing of Acts must have taken place before the destruction of Jerusalem in ad 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 ad 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 AD 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 AD 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.

Theme and Purpose

The book of Acts stands out as unique among the New Testament books for it alone provides a bridge for the other books of the New Testament. As Luke's second treatise, Acts continues what Jesus "began to do and to teach" (1:1) as recorded in the Gospels. It begins with Christ's Ascension and continues to the period of the New Testament Epistles. In it we have the continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit at work in the apostles who went forth preaching and establishing the church, the body of Christ. Acts is the historical link between the Gospels and the Epistles.

Not only does it make this bridge for us, but it provides an account of the life of Paul and gives us the historical occasion for his letters. In the process, Acts recounts the first 30 years of the life of the church. After summarizing various views on the purpose of Acts, Toussaint writes:

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.

Acts 1:8 expresses the theme of Acts—the indwelling Holy Spirit empowering God's people to be the Savior's witnesses both in Jerusalem (home base), and in all Judea and Samaria (the immediate and surrounding areas), and even to the remotest part of the earth (the world).

Key Word

The key concept for Acts would be *the growth of the Church in all the world*.

Two key words are "witness" or "witnesses," and "the Holy Spirit."

Key Verses

1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth."

2:42-47 They were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayers. **2:43** Reverential awe came on everyone, and many wonders and miraculous signs came about by the apostles. **2:44** All who believed were together and held everything in common, **2:45** and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need. **2:46** Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts, **2:47** praising God and having the good will of all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved.

Key Chapters

Since the accomplishment of the church's global mission of worldwide outreach is dependent on the coming of the Holy Spirit, **chapter 2** is naturally

the key chapter. This chapter records the fulfillment of 1:8 on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came and began His ministry of baptizing believers into Christ's body, the church (cf. 1:5; 11:15-16 with 1 Cor. 12:13), began indwelling all believers and empowering them to be witnesses of the Savior.

Key People

Key people include: Peter, Stephen, Philip, James, Barnabas and Paul.

Outline

Acts can be naturally outlined around Acts 1:8, the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth.

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

A. The Expectation of the Chosen (1:1-2:47) *Progress report no. 1*: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (2:47).

B. The Expansion of the Church in Jerusalem (3:1-6:7) *Progress report no. 2*: "So the Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly" (6:7).

II. The Witness in all Judea and Samaria (6:8-9:31)

A. The Martyrdom of Stephen (6:8-8:1a)

B. The Arrest of Stephen (6:8-7:1)

C. The Address of Stephen (7:2-53)

D. The Attack on Stephen (7:54-8:1a)

E. The Ministry of Philip (8:1b-40)

F. The Message of Saul (9:1-31)

G. The Conflicts of Saul (9:19b-31) *Progress report no. 3*: "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria . . . was strengthened; and [it was] encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord" (9:31).

III. The Witness to the Extremity of the Earth (9:32-28:31)

A. The extension of the church to Antioch (9:32-12:24) *Progress report no. 4*: "But the Word of God continued to increase and spread" (12:24).

B. The extension of the church in Asia Minor (12:25-16:5) *Progress report no. 5*: "So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers" (16:5).

C. The extension of the church in the Aegean area (16:6-19:20) *Progress report no. 6*: "In this way the Word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" (19:20).

D. The extension of the church to Rome (19:21-28:31) *Progress report no. 7*: "Paul . . . welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (28:30-31).