

Introduction to the Book of Acts

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I. Value of the book of Acts

A. *Filling the gap in the New Testament canon between what the second century Christians called “Gospel” (i.e., the gospels, which anticipate the church) and “Apostle” (i.e., the epistles, which presuppose the church)*

1. How did the teaching of Jesus develop into the doctrine found in the epistles?
2. Introducing Paul: who was this writer of so many epistles (and why care about him)?
3. How did the gospel, which was confined to Israel at the end of the gospel accounts, reach places like Galatia, Asia Minor, Greece and Rome, as we find to be the case in the epistles?

B. *Proof of the Gospel—Acts as apologetic*

1. Evidence of Christ’s resurrection: Eye-witness testimony of apostles, continuation of the miracles of Christ through His body, the church
2. Evidence of Christ’s superiority to the demonic religions: Confrontations with sorcerers, demon possessed individuals, and pagan priests
3. Evidence of Christ’s sovereignty over governments: The futility of official resistance, miraculous releases from prison, judgment upon persecutors (e.g., Herod), favorable court rulings, etc.
4. The supernatural success of the gospel in its unstoppable expansion to many lands, and among all classes (2:47/ 5:14/ 6:7/ 9:31/ 12:24/ 13:12/ 16:5/ 19:20)

C. *Taking our own temperature*

1. Prototype of genuine, Holy Spirit revival
2. The measure of true discipleship and ministry
3. The dynamic of the Holy Spirit: Real or surreal to us?

II. Circumstances and contents of the book of Acts

A. *The name and canonicity of the book*

B. *Written by whom—and when?*

1. Believed to be Luke from the middle of the second century onward
2. The author sometimes accompanied Paul, and was with him in Rome (“we” sections: Acts 16:10-17/ 20:5-15/ 21:1-18/ 27:1-28:16/ comp. Col.4:14 & Philem.24)
3. Timothy and others mentioned by name in the book must be ruled-out
4. Author shows familiarity with the vocabulary of Gr. Medical writers (Col.4:14)
5. Relation to the third gospel (Acts 1:1ff): same addressee; same Greek style and structure; same emphasis on Gentile sympathies and the significant roles of women; picks-up the story where the gospel left-off
6. Written between the second year of Paul’s house arrest in Rome (AD 62) and the beginning of Nero’s persecution (July, AD 64). (This places the writing of Luke’s gospel even earlier!)
7. The author himself may have died before or shortly after Paul’s death, else he would probably have at least attempted the writing of a sequel, a third volume

C. *Written to whom—and why?*

1. Purpose?
 - a. Like the gospel (Luke 1:1-4), to establish an orderly history from previous fragments?
 - b. To trace the progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome?
 - c. As an apologetic for Christianity in a time of tension with pagan authorities?
 - d. As a defense of Paul in anticipation of his impending trial?
2. Who is Theophilus?

D. *Controversies associated with Acts:*

1. The question of Luke’s sources
2. Accuracy of the facts
3. Is that the real Paul?

E. *The theme of the book: the continuing ministry of Christ through the Spirit-filled Church*

F. *Parallels between Peter and Paul in Acts:*

1. Each has one lengthy sermon recorded (chs. 2 & 13) and several shorter ones
2. Both heal lame men (chs. 3 & 9)
3. Both incur judgment by a word (chs. 5 & 13)
4. Peter's shadow, and Paul's clothing are instrumental in healing (chs. 5 & 19)
5. Both confront sorcerers (chs. 8 & 13)
6. Both raise the dead (chs. 9 & 20)
7. Both are miraculously released from prison (chs. 12 & 16)

G. *Outline of contents:*

1. The birth and growing pains of the infant church in Jerusalem (chapters 1 through 7)

- a. Tarrying in Jerusalem and replacing the defector (ch.1)
- b. The dynamic beginning of the church (ch.2)
- c. The church grows as a result of a dramatic healing (ch.3)
- d. Growing conflicts with the Jewish authorities (ch.4-5)
- e. The apostles delegate some duties to seven stewards (ch.6)
- f. The sermon and martyrdom of Stephen (ch.7)

2. God expands His harvest efforts to non-Jewish people (chapters 8 through 12)

- a. Samaria receives the gospel through Philip (ch.8)
- b. Saul's conversion and early Christian activities; Peter's ministry abroad (ch.9)
- c. The first uncircumcized Gentiles are admitted into the church (ch.10-11)
- d. James is martyred; Peter arrested, and escapes (ch.12)

3. Focus on Paul's mission among the Gentiles (chapters 13 through 20)

- a. First missionary journey: Cyprus & Southern Galatia (ch.13-14)
- b. Jerusalem Council (ch.15)
- c. Second missionary journey: Macedonia & Achaia (ch.15:36-18:22)
- d. Third missionary journey: Asia Minor & Greece (ch.18:23- ch.20)

4. Paul's arrest and adventures as an ambassador in chains (chapters 21-28)

- a. Paul's last trip to Jerusalem; his arrest and incarceration there (ch.21-22)
- b. Paul is transferred to Caesarea and imprisoned two years there (ch.23-26)
- c. Paul's trip to Rome and two years' ministry as a prisoner (ch.27-28)

III. Benefiting from the study of Acts

A. *The case for "primitivism"*

B. *Distinguishing between the descriptive and the prescriptive elements*

C. *Relevant topics in Acts:*

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| 1. The Holy Spirit in Acts | 11. Church community in Acts |
| 2. Prayer in Acts | 12. Selection and training of ministers in Acts |
| 3. The presentation of the Gospel in Acts: its situations | 13. Prophetic ministry in Acts |
| 4. The presentation of the Gospel in Acts: its content | 14. Speaking in Tongues in Acts |
| 5. The nurture of converts in Acts | 15. Miracles in Acts |
| 6. Church growth in Acts | 16. Team ministry in Acts |
| 7. Church unity in Acts | 17. Missionary strategies in Acts |
| 8. Church government in Acts | 18. Spiritual warfare in Acts |
| 9. Patterns of church gatherings in Acts | 19. Church/state relations in Acts |
| 10. Church economics and ministry finances in Acts | 20. Persecution in Acts |