

Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles

Introduction

The book of Acts is found in the New Testament. It is sandwiched between the **gospels** (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and the **Epistles** (letters written to other Christians by the **apostles**). This book is the authentic record on the first 30 years of the Christian church. It is an amazing blessing that God has given us this book to study so that we can know how the Christian church began nearly 2,000 years ago. You do not remember when you were born because you were too young. Perhaps, you have heard about the day you were born. You may know stories about funny things you did when you were very young. It is comforting to know about your beginning. It is also a comfort to know about your Christian beginnings. Without the book of Acts, we would not know how God spread the gospel after Jesus rose from the dead. We would not know how the life, death and resurrection of Jesus came to be known in farther parts of the world. We would not know about the miracle of the church's birth on the day of Pentecost. We would not know about the amazing **conversion** of Saul who becomes the apostle Paul. We would not know about the very first time followers of Jesus were called Christians!

I. Author

Even though the author of Acts is not named in the book, most Bible scholars agree that Luke wrote this book, as well as the gospel that is named after him. In fact, the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were kept together as one book at first. There are many reasons why scholars believe that Luke wrote this book:

1. Both the book of Luke and Acts are dedicated to the same man, Theophilus (Luke 1:3, Acts 1:1).
2. The author of Acts refers to his "former

account," likely the book of Luke.

3. The order and style of both books are a lot alike.
4. The books were both written in very proper Greek language, which reflects a high level of education, which Luke had because he was trained as a doctor.
5. In the book of Acts, you will often times hear the pronoun 'we' used. That means the author was one of Paul's travel companions, as was Luke.
6. The book of Luke and Acts both show great compassion for people in general and, especially, women.

It is believed that Luke was a Gentile from the passage in Colossians 4:11-14. He was a close friend to Paul and travelled with him on parts of Paul's second and third missionary journeys. Luke also travelled to Rome with Paul. He seems to have been Paul's most loyal friend. Near the end of Paul's life when he was a captive in a cold, dark dungeon and expecting his execution, Paul wrote to his co-worker and friend Timothy, "*only Luke is with me.*"

II. Background of the Book

The book of Acts is also known as The Acts of the Apostles in many **Bible translations**. Perhaps the best title for the book would be: The Acts of Jesus Christ Performed by His Apostles Through the Power of the Holy Spirit. In this study, we will refer to the book simply as Acts. Scholars differ in opinion, but Luke probably wrote the book during the two years he spent with Paul in Rome (the first time Paul was imprisoned there). Since we know that Luke was with Paul to the end, it would be unusual for him to not have included more details such as Paul's trial before Nero.

III. Content of the Book

Spiritual History

As said before, Acts is the history book of the early church. Luke was careful to give a clear picture of how the church was born and how it grew. Luke also shows us how our powerful God is at work in all things. He is always accomplishing His perfect will in His church. We see this in Acts 5:1-14 when the church becomes more unified and grows because of Ananias and Sapphira. Again in Acts 8:1-4, Stephen is martyred and his death caused the word to be preached everywhere. In Acts 9, Saul completely changes his ways. He no longer tries to destroy the church, but instead, defends the church.

These are only a few examples of God's **sovereignty** that you will see in Acts. In this book you will see many strong opponents try to squash the fire of the Gospel. But, time and time again, an even greater number of people will respond with joy and believe. As you study, look for God's hand working behind the scenes for the good and growth of His church. Do you know what it means to say God is working "behind the scenes?" Think for a moment about a play, recital or sporting event. When an actor comes on stage, someone has to turn the light on or lift the curtain, so the actor can be seen. Likewise, when you go to a recital, someone has set up microphones so the audience can hear. And, when a team of basketball players runs out on the court, someone has already made sure there is a ball to play with and that the nets are set to the right height. That someone is the person working "behind the scenes." In your life, God is always working "behind the scenes." Sometimes you may know what He is up to and other times you may be too busy to notice. But that doesn't stop God from working because He is accomplishing His will... always. You will see Him doing that in Acts.

Biography

Acts is also a biography book. It continues to tell the story of the apostles after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. It is about the ministry of the apostles in the power of the Holy Spirit. Chapters 1-12 deal mainly with Peter and how he proclaims the kingdom of God in Jerusalem. In chapters 13-28, Paul's ministry is described as Gentiles are called to Christ. You will learn about Stephen, Philip, Jewish and Gentile conversions, and much more. Never forget as you read that the men and women you are reading about are ordinary people just like you. They made a commitment to God and were filled with the Holy Spirit. Take time to think about your life and how you can avoid the temptations of this world. Aim to live for an eternal purpose...sharing the gospel and giving God glory.

Testimony

So, Acts is a history book, a biography book, and it is also a personal **testimony** of Luke. He believed that all he wrote was the truth. Luke lived in a **phenomenal** era! He was a firsthand witness. He knew the apostles well and had obvious respect for them.

Acts is also a testimony of the ministry of Paul. Three times in Acts we will read about Saul's conversion on his way to Damascus. Luke shows us in this book that even though Paul was a "latecomer" to the apostles, his ministry was genuine, and Jesus Christ chose him.

Purpose

Luke quotes Jesus' words to the apostles in Acts 1:8: *You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.* The entire book of Acts will show just that. The gospel will spread throughout Jerusalem, then to nearby Judea and Samaria, and eventually to Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. In just one **generation** the gospel spread from Jerusalem to be proclaimed throughout the civilized world.

Outline of the Acts of the Apostles**I. The Birth of the Church in Jerusalem****Acts 1-7****II. The Spread of the Church to Judea and Samaria Acts 8-12****III. The Expansion of the Church to the Uttermost Parts of the Earth - Acts 13-28****IV. Invitation to Study**

We have named Luke as the author of Acts, but there was a force far greater behind Luke that gave him the ability to write it down. All Scripture is inspired and brought forth by the Holy Spirit in accordance with God's divine purpose (see 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20). The Holy Spirit is the true author. He is the One that will teach you and will work within you to apply the book to your own life.

Acts was a comfort to its original readers. It **made** the truth certain for them. It encouraged them to live for Christ and tell others about Jesus. But it was not meant only for them. God uses this book of Acts to encourage and inspire us today. Will you join us in studying this amazing book? Are you willing to let Him live through you and spread the gospel through you as He did with the men and women of the early church? †

Prayer

Ask the Holy Spirit to open your mind and your heart to receive God's message for you.

Memory Verse

Acts 1:8: *You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

Vocabulary

apostle - one sent forth; in Acts the apostles are those that were an eye-witness to Jesus' resurrection and were called by Him.

authentic - not false or copied; real

Bible translations - Bibles come in different translations because the Bible was written in a different language than we speak (English), individuals translate the text to English. The different interpretations are called 'translations.'

conversion - spiritual change from sinfulness to righteousness

epistle - a letter (to a church or person) written by an apostle in the New Testament.

generation - people born and living at about the same time

gospels - the story of Jesus' life and teachings in the New Testament books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; literally means good news

phenomenal - very extraordinary

sovereignty - supreme power

testimony - a declaration made to establish fact

QUESTIONS FOR ACTS LESSON 1

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read all notes and references.

1. Locate the following locations on the map.

Jerusalem

Judea

Samaria

Greece

Rome

1. What is the Book of Acts about? _____

2. a. Who was the writer of Acts? _____

- b. What did you learn about him from the notes? _____

DAY TWO: Read Acts 1:1-3 and Luke 1:1-4.

3. a. What was "the former account" made by the writer of Acts?

- b. To whom were both accounts written? Why did Luke write to him?

4. a. How many days had it been since Jesus had risen from the dead?

- b. What had He been speaking to his apostles about during that time?

- c. What do you learn about the kingdom of God from the following Scripture passages?

Luke 12:29-32 _____

John 3:3 _____

Acts 14:22 _____

Romans 14:17 _____

- d. Using the above verses to help you, how would you describe the kingdom of God to someone who asked you about it? _____

DAY THREE: Read Acts 1:4-11.

5. Why did Jesus command his apostles to stay in Jerusalem? Underline the correct answers.

They were to wait for the Promise of the Father.

He would return to meet them there. It was the safest place to be.

They would receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

6. a. What did Jesus' apostles want to know? _____
b. What was Jesus' answer in verse 7? _____
c. From verse 8, what was more important for them to know? _____

7. ? (Thought Question) Which of Jesus' promises to His apostles are also for us today?

8. From verses 9 through 11, give three descriptive statements about Jesus' ascension into heaven and one promise that was made. _____

9. What more do you learn about Jesus' return from these Scriptures?

Mark 13:24-27 _____

Luke 21:25-27 _____

Revelation 1:7 _____

DAY FOUR: Read Acts 1:12-14.

10. Where were Jesus and His apostles when He ascended into heaven?

11. a. Where did the apostles go after Jesus ascended? Be specific. _____

b. What did they do there? _____

c. Who else was with them?

12. a. How is the prayer and supplication of those in the upper room described?

b. What does this mean to you? _____

DAY FIVE: Read Acts 1:15-26.

13. From verses 15-20, circle the following statements about Judas which are true? Write the verse where you found it.

a. T or F vs. _____ Judas was a righteous man.

b. T or F vs. _____ Judas was a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

c. T or F vs. _____ Judas was one of the twelve apostles.

d. T or F vs. _____ Judas bought a field with the money he received for betraying Jesus.

e. T or F vs. _____ David wrote a prophesy about Judas in the book Psalms.

f. T or F vs. _____ Judas was assassinated by the apostles.

14. a. What decision needed to be made to fulfill Scripture?

b. What requirements did Peter set forth for the one who would take Judas' place?

15. a. How did the apostles make the choice? _____

b. From what we know of the Bible, what do you consider to be the best method for making decisions?
