



## Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles

### Introduction

The Book of Acts is found in the New Testament between the four Gospels, which record the life of Jesus, and the Epistles, which are letters of instruction to Christians, written during the apostolic period. Acts is very important because it gives continuity to the New Testament (Student Survey of the Bible, G. Campbell Morgan). It is a sequel to the Gospels and an introduction to the Epistles, making it the “hinge” upon which the New Testament turns. Without the Book of Acts, there would be a definite void in the Scriptures. Acts is the only authentic record of the first thirty years of the Christian church. Without it, we would not know about the dedicated lives and work of Jesus’ Spirit through His apostles after His resurrection. We would not know the dramatic story of the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost and the miracles of changed and committed lives as the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Samaria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. We would not know the exciting details of Paul’s conversion. We would not have the explicit example of the early church to inspire and challenge us to live worthy lives and continue the mission which was begun nearly 2000 years ago to spread the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. As you study Acts, may the Holy Spirit grip your heart and open your eyes to what the abundant life in Jesus Christ really is. May you be inspired to live in the light of the revelation of all Christ desires you to be!

### I. Author

Although the author of Acts is not named in the text of the book, it is generally agreed to be Luke, who also wrote the gospel bearing his name. In fact, the Gospel of Luke and The Acts were originally circulated as a single work. Several other facts also support Luke as the author:

1. Both the Gospel of Luke and The Acts are dedicated to Theophilus (Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1).
2. The writer of Acts refers to his former account, evidently the Gospel of Luke.
3. The orderly and methodical style of the two books is very similar.
4. The Greek of both books is said to be, along with Hebrews, the highest and finest of all the New Testament writings. This would point to a very well-educated author. Luke was definitely that, having been trained as a physician.
5. Both books show a great compassion for people in general and for women in particular.

6. The pronoun “we” is used many times from Chapter 16 on, indicating that the writer was one of Paul’s traveling companions. It is known that Luke accompanied Paul on many of his travels, possibly as his personal physician. See Colossians 4:14.

The “we” passages (where the narrator includes himself in the story) in Acts show that Luke accompanied Paul on portions of his second and third missionary journeys and on his voyage to Rome as a prisoner (Acts 16:10-40 and Acts 20:5-28:31). Of all Paul’s associates, Luke seems to have been the most loyal. Near the end of Paul’s life when he was confined in a cold, dark dungeon in Rome anticipating his execution, he wrote these plaintive words to his friend and co-worker Timothy, *Only Luke is with me* (2 Timothy 4:11).

Luke’s primary source of information for his writing was probably the apostle Paul, although he definitely used a number of other sources such as the apostle James (Acts 21:18-19). When Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 24), Luke was with him and would have had ample time to interview those who had been eyewitnesses to the events described in the early parts of the book.

From Colossians 4:11-14, it can be concluded that Luke was a Gentile. Luke addressed his writing to another Gentile, a man named Theophilus, who was obviously a believer. Many conjecture that Theophilus was Luke’s benefactor, and that he supported Luke financially while he wrote both the Gospel of Luke and Acts.

### II. Background of the Book

#### A. Title

The Acts of the Apostles was originally the second volume of a two-part work which included the Gospel of Luke. It was not until the four gospels were collected and circulated together that the Book of Acts became a separate historical work. No one is sure how the book got its name. However, many scholars have suggested that a more fitting name would be The Acts of Jesus Continued in the Apostles, since all the actions, preaching, and miracles of the apostles in Acts were done in His name and attributed to Him (see 1:24; 2:38; 3:6; 4:18-19, and so on through the book). Others believe that a better name would be The Acts of the Holy Spirit Accomplished Through the Apostles because after the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), the

apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit for power and ministry. It is true that Acts is really a continuation of Jesus' ministry in His apostles through the power of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the truest title would be The Acts of Jesus Christ as Performed by His Apostles Through the Power of The Holy Spirit. In this study, we will refer to the book simply as "Acts."

### B. Date and Place of Writing

It is difficult to date the writing of Acts, and there is a wide diversity of opinion among scholars. Most likely Luke wrote Acts in the two year period he spent in Rome during Paul's first imprisonment there. It could not have been completed earlier because Acts ends with this account. Also, it was probably not written later, or Luke would have included Paul's later travels and his trial before Nero. As stated previously, we know that Luke stayed with Paul to the end.

## III. Content of the Book

### A. Spiritual History

It has already been stated that Acts is a history of the early church. Luke's historical data was carefully selected and presented to give a clear picture of the birth and growth of the church in the time in which he lived. In addition, Luke gives an insightful picture of the power of God at work in all things, accomplishing His perfect will in His church. Clear examples of this are seen in Acts 5:1-14 where even the sin of Ananias and Sapphira resulted in unification and growth of the church; in Acts 8:1-4 where the martyrdom of Stephen resulted in the word being preached everywhere; in Acts 9 where Saul's zeal for God was redirected, away from the destruction of the church to the defense of the church and the preaching of the gospel far and wide.

These are only a few of the examples of God's sovereignty as seen in Acts. Throughout the book, it is evident that, in spite of strong opposition from many sources, the gospel spread and people responded with joy and commitment. As you study, look for God's hand behind the scenes working all things together for the good and growth of His church.

### B. Biography

Acts continues the story of the lives of Jesus' apostles after His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. It is primarily the account of the ministry of the apostles as they laid aside their own lives and set their hearts upon following Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Chapters 1-12 deal mainly with the life of Peter as he proclaimed the kingdom of God in Jerusalem and called the Jews to repentance. Chapters 13-28 chronicle the ministry of Paul as he preached

the gospel to the Gentiles and called them to belief in Christ. Interspersed are short accounts of incidents involving Stephen, Philip, and the church leaders in Jerusalem. Luke also includes descriptions of the conversions and ministries of women, such as Rhoda, Dorcas, Lydia, and Priscilla. The commitment and compassion of all these men and women will stir your mind and heart as you study Acts. Do not lose sight of the fact that these were ordinary, everyday people. They were simply men and women who were committed to the will of God and were filled with the Holy Spirit. May their lives inspire you to emulate them in laying aside your earthly passions, pleasures, and cares to live for the only worthwhile and enduring purpose — the gospel of Christ and the glory of God.

### C. Testimony

In a sense, Acts is also Luke's personal testimony. He was thoroughly convinced of the truth of all that he wrote. He was acquainted with the apostles and obviously had the utmost respect for Peter, James, Philip, Stephen, Barnabas, and all the rest. Luke's writing bears witness to the power and truth of the phenomenal era in which he lived.

Acts is also a testimony to the ministry of Paul. Acts 9 (also 22 and 26) records Paul's miraculous conversion and the events which followed. The last sixteen chapters of Acts is dedicated to the ministry of Paul. Luke's written account shows that this man was chosen by the Lord Jesus Christ and that his ministry was genuine. Peter, whose ministry is prominent in Chapters 1-12, was the rock (John 1:42). He had walked with, talked with, and learned from Jesus during His three year ministry here on earth. Paul, however, was a latecomer to the group of apostles. He did not even fulfill the requirements for an apostle as stated in Acts 1:21-22, not having been a follower of Jesus during His earthly ministry. In fact, he had spent his early career persecuting believers in Christ. Even after his conversion, all the leaders of the church were still afraid of him. Luke's account of Paul, as described in Acts, is a testimony to the authenticity of the man and his ministry.

The amazing parallels Luke draws between the careers of Peter and Paul must be more than coincidental. Compare the following sequence of events in the ministries of these two men as recorded by Luke in Acts (taken from Explore The Book by J. Sidlow Baxter.)

- Peter: First sermon - Acts 2
- Lame man healed - Acts 3
- Simon, the sorcerer - Acts 8
- Laying on of hands - Acts 8
- Peter worshipped - Acts 10
- Tabitha raised - Acts 9
- Peter imprisoned - Acts 12

Paul: First sermon - Acts 13  
Lame man healed - Acts 14  
Elymas, the sorcerer - Acts 13  
Laying on of hands - Acts 19  
Paul worshipped - Acts 14  
Eutychus raised - Acts 20  
Paul imprisoned - Acts 28

#### D. Purpose

Luke quotes Jesus' words to His 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 lays out that progression. Luke shows how, after the Day of Pentecost, the witness of the gospel spread through the power of the Holy Spirit in Christ's apostles from Jerusalem into the surrounding areas of Judea and Samaria and on to Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. At the same time the Holy Spirit stirred in the hearts of the hearers and many came to Christ. The church was born and began to grow in dynamic proportions. In one generation, the gospel spread outward 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

Luke has been named as the author of Acts, but there was a force beyond the human which inspired and enabled him to write. 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.) Acts is the work of the Holy Spirit. As the true author of the book, He is the one who will teach you and work within you as you study and apply what you are learning to your life.

Acts was surely a comfort, a confirmation of the truth, and an inspiration to the men and women who were the original readers of the book. As the Holy Spirit applied the truth of this book to their lives, they were encouraged to live for Christ and proclaim His name to others. But Acts was not meant for those readers only. The Book of Acts has been preserved by the sovereignty of God for the purpose of your edification and inspiration as well.

Acts is filled with exciting true stories of men and women whose lives were changed forever by the power of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Peter, who had habitually spoken "with his foot in his mouth," began speaking out boldly and eloquently for Christ. The first Christian martyr, Stephen, willingly and fearlessly laid down his life for the Truth. Saul, a self-confident young Pharisee, fell to his knees in the presence of Jesus Christ and his life was changed completely. Successful business women, jailers, Jews, Gentiles, Roman centurions, eunuchs, and more joyfully responded to the gospel and became a part of the body of Christ. Many were healed and raised from the dead.

Will you commit to study this priceless book of the Bible? As you do, will you ask the Holy Spirit to open your mind and your heart to receive God's message for you? Are you willing to have your life changed? Are you willing to be filled with a passion for Christ and a desire and commitment to let Him live through you and spread the gospel through you, just as He did through the men and women of the early church? The study of Acts is going to be an exciting adventure. Please join in!



# QUESTIONS FOR ACTS LESSON 1

Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

## **DAY ONE: Read all notes and references.**

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.

They would receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.      It was the safest place to be.

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 had the apostles been with Jesus 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, which of the following statements about Judas are true? Write T next to the true statements, along with the verse where you found it.

Judas was a righteous man.

Judas was a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

Judas was one of the twelve apostles.

Judas purchased a field with the money he received for betraying Jesus.

David wrote a prophesy about Judas in the book Psalms.

Judas was assassinated by the apostles.

14. a. What decision needed to be made in fulfillment of 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 know of the Bible, what do you consider to be the best method for making decisions?