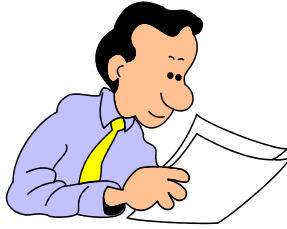


AN INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES



BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK ACTS

- A. The book of Acts picks up the story of Jesus and His followers where the Gospels leave off. As the curtain opens, Jesus gives His final instructions to His disciples and ascends into heaven. Jesus challenges His followers to tell the whole world about what He has done, and then leaves! How can eleven men—especially these eleven men—ever reach the whole world?
1. In the very next chapter the power came that Jesus promised in Mark 9:1: “*And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power" (NIV)*. Also in Luke 24:49 Jesus promised again that power would come, “*And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.*” (KJV)
 2. This power is the Holy Spirit promised by the prophet Joel in 2:28 and Peter quotes Joel and says, “*this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel*” Acts 2:16.
 3. Therefore, God the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and gave them the courage to burst out upon their world with the life-changing message of Jesus’ love. By the power of the Holy Spirit they turned the world upside down.
- B. As the author Luke has the distinction of being the only Gospel writer to produce a sequel to his Gospel on the life and ministry of Jesus.
1. The Gospel of Luke tells about the things “*Jesus began both to do and to teach*” Acts 1:1.
 2. Acts tells what Jesus brought about through the Holy Spirit’s continuation of His work. Acts 1:8, cf. John 16:13.
 3. It is interesting to note that Luke’s combined literary output constitutes well over one-fourth of the entire New Testament.
- C. The book of Acts is a crucial part of the New Testament:
1. We read of the establishment of the Lord’s church on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two. Remember the Lord promised to build His church in Matthew 16:18 and this is the fulfillment of that promise.
 2. Then follows the conversion of three thousand people on that day. Acts 2:36-41

3. The author then gives the history of the growth and expansion of the early church amid frequent perils and documents the gospel's phenomenal spread throughout the Roman Empire.
4. Jesus had commanded His apostles to preach the gospel to every nation or every creature, Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49. The gospel was to be preached first in Jerusalem, Isaiah 2:2-3, and then spread to other places. "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" (NIV) Acts 1:8
5. Many cases of conversions are recorded. Thousands heard, believed, and were baptized for the remission of their sins.
6. The book does not tell all the acts of the apostles. In fact, it doesn't even relate some of the acts of all of the apostles.
7. If you are desirous of being a part of the continuous unfolding of God's work among men you will want to read and read over and over again this wonderful book.

SOME FACTS ABOUT ACTS

A. Evidence points to Luke as the author of the book.

1. Ante-Nicene fathers such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria ascribe the authorship to Luke. The overwhelming weight of evidence points to Luke the physician.
2. Luke was not an eyewitness to the life of Christ (Luke 1:1-4), but he was a participant in many of the events of Acts. Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16
3. Luke was with Paul at Rome during the imprisonment with which Acts closes. Acts 28:30-31; cf. Col. 4:14; Phile. 24
4. Luke wrote in the polished style of an educated professional. He used over seven hundred Greek words not found anywhere else in the New Testament. Luke included eighty geographical references and mentioned over one hundred people by name in the book of Acts. He was very precise in describing places and the titles of government officials. Archaeological evidence has confirmed Luke's accuracy over and over and he is now known to display a minute accuracy of detail which is unsurpassed in ancient literature.

B. The book of Acts was written c. 62 A.D.

1. Acts closes abruptly with Paul under house arrest at Rome, waiting the outcome of his appeal to Caesar.
2. The most reasonable explanation for the book's leaving us in the dark as to the outcome of the appeal is that the case had not yet been decided when Luke wrote.
3. Paul and his company arrived at Rome in the spring of A.D. 60 and stayed there "two whole years" before going to trial. Acts 28:30
4. Therefore, Acts must have been written sometime around A.D. 62, just before Paul's release.

C. The purpose of the book was to continue the treatise to Theophilus from events following the resurrection of our Lord to the preaching of the gospel in Rome. Acts 1:1

1. We don't know who Theophilus was but his name gives us the clue we need to link the book of Acts with the book of Luke. Luke 1:3-4.
2. The two books were written to give Theophilus an accurate overview of Jesus' life and ministry (Luke) and then of the expansion of the Church throughout the Roman Empire (Acts).

D. Criticisms of the book:

1. Nineteenth-century biblical scholarship, dominated by the destructively critical views of German writers, generally held that Acts was a second-century document from a third-rate historian who had little concern for historical accuracy of detail.
2. However, research in geography, archaeology, and history have so thoroughly vindicated Acts' trustworthiness as a document from the first century that such criticisms now appear absurd.
3. Sir William Ramsay was trained in and accepted the German critical theories; when he actually began archaeological work in Asia Minor, he was forced to abandon the attitude he had learned toward Acts and eventually became one of the most ardent defenders of Luke's reliability. (Ramsay's *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, 1915).
4. Acts reflects details that only a first-century author who was personally familiar with them could have related. He is now known to display a minute accuracy of detail that is unsurpassed in ancient literature.

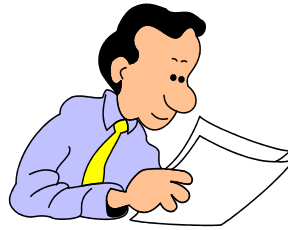
E. A Book of Transition:

1. A most important fact to keep in mind as you read Acts is that it is a transition book. It is the bridge between the Old Testament worship of God in Israel and the New Testament worship of God by Christians. Although the Old Testament had been nailed to the cross, Colossians 2:14-17, men and women still worshipped in the temple in Jerusalem. When Acts closes, Christians no longer gather in the temple or synagogues, but in assemblies called churches. That transition is covered in Acts.
2. When Acts opens, every follower of Jesus is a Jew, but when Acts closes, there are churches filled with Jews and Gentiles (non-Jewish people) all over the Roman Empire. God had promised Abraham that through him all families of the earth would be blessed, Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:16, and Acts explains how that was fulfilled.
3. Another transition in the book centers on geography. Everything in the Gospels took place in a very small territory on the far eastern frontier on the Roman Empire. When Acts opens, we are still in Jerusalem because that is where the law was to go forth, Isaiah 2:2-3. But by the end of the book the followers of Jesus are in Rome, the center of the empire and the springboard to everywhere else.
4. A fourth transition in the book centers on how people became the children of God. Under the Law of Moses people were physically born into covenant relationship with God but under the Gospel people are spiritually born into the family of God. John 3:3-5; Acts 2:38-41; Acts 16:29-34; Acts 22:16; Galatians 3:26-27

- F. The geographical movement of the book involves three key cities. Jesus Himself gave the best outline of the book in Acts 1:8: "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit*

comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (NIV) Jesus’ empowered followers would bear witness to Him first in Jerusalem, then in the larger regions of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

1. Jerusalem is the base for the church’s evangelistic activity among the Jews for the first 12 chapters.
2. Antioch is the center of activity among the Gentiles in chapters 13-21.
3. Rome is the city of Paul’s evangelistic enterprise as the book comes to a close.



THE SPREADING OF THE GOSPEL

After Jesus ascended back into heaven and the selection of Matthias to take the place of Judas (Acts chapter 1) the apostles are in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit comes to empower them (Acts 2:1-4). As the Jews learned of this they assembled around the apostles and the gospel was preached for the first time in all of its fullness and glory. The people hearing the message of the gospel were the very people who seven weeks earlier had demanded for the crucifixion of Jesus. Being convinced that Jesus was in reality their Lord and Savior they were pricked in their hearts and cried out “What shall we do?” Acts 2:36-37. Peter replied:

“Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38 (NIV)

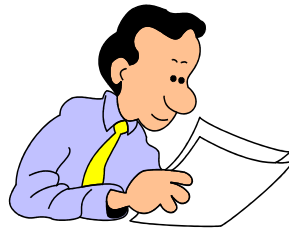
Three thousand Jews believed in Jesus and were baptized for the remission of their sins that day, and the church was born. The church grew by leaps and bounds but persecution arose and after Stephen’s martyrdom drove the people to evangelize in the larger area of Judea and Samaria, Acts 8:1ff. As the Christians were scattered into the region around Jerusalem they talked about Christ and new churches sprang up.

An Ethiopian convert to Judaism heard the gospel by Philip and obeyed the gospel being baptized for the remission of his sins and going on his way rejoicing, Acts 8:26-39. God sent Peter to the house of Cornelius and we have the first recorded instance of Gentile conversions, Acts 10. This met with objections, Acts 11:1-3, however, the right of Gentiles to hear and obey the gospel was affirmed, Acts 11:4-18. Christians finally began to get the message that Jesus offered forgiveness and peace with God to anyone who would believe in Him and obey His gospel.

Even one of the Christians’ fiercest persecutors was converted. Saul, a Jewish leader, was determined to stop the spread of Christianity. He imprisoned many Christians and even looked on with approval as Stephen, one of the Christian leaders, was stoned to death, Acts 8:1;

9:1-2. On his way to the city of Damascus to persecute more Christians, Saul was confronted by Jesus in a vision, 9:1-19, and was told to go into the city to wait for instructions. Ananias went to Saul and told him to “*Arise and be baptized to wash away your sins*” Acts 22:16. Saul was baptized and became a Christian and one of the most powerful preachers of the gospel.

It was Saul, Paul was his Roman name, who was responsible for the next big spread of the gospel. Three great missionary tours were sponsored from Antioch as Paul and his co-laborers went everywhere preaching the gospel. The first tour covered the years ca. 46-47 (Acts 12:25-14:28) and was followed by a conference at Jerusalem which debated the matter of Gentile acceptance into the church, Acts 15:1-35. Paul’s second journey (chapters 15:36-18:22) began ca. 48 and extended into late 51 or early 52. The gospel was carried to Europe (Macedonia) and Greece. The third tour began in 52 and ended with Paul’s arrest at Jerusalem in 57 (Acts 18:23-21:16). Paul’s extended work at Ephesus for about three years was done in connection with this tour. The remainder of Paul’s career in Acts is spent as a prisoner at Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome. Paul went to Rome because he appealed to Caesar, the Roman emperor, and because he was a Roman citizen he had the right to appeal his case to the highest authority. At government expense, he got a trip to Rome, the capital of the empire. The book of Acts ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome waiting for his appearance before the emperor. Even as a prisoner Paul was able to preach the gospel to his guards to whom he was chained therefore the gospel was making its way into the heart of the Roman Empire, even into the household of Caesar himself.



KEY CHARACTERS

The Holy Spirit: God the Spirit who came upon the apostles to establish the church.

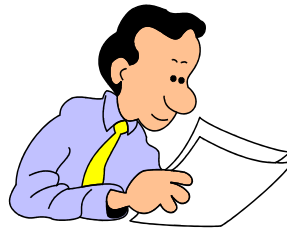
Peter: One of Jesus’ closest followers and took the lead on the day of Pentecost in preaching the gospel for the first time in its fullness.

Stephen: A Christian who made a courageous defense of Jesus and was stoned to death for it (Acts 7).

Paul (or Saul): Saul let the opposition to the Christians until Jesus appeared to Him in a vision and then he came the messenger to the Gentiles (non Jews) for Jesus.

Barnabas: One of the companions of Paul.

Silas: Another companion of Paul.



THE NAME “CHRISTIAN”

The followers of Jesus were first called “Christians” in the city of Antioch. The name “Christian” appears only three times in the Bible (Acts 11:26; 26:28; I Peter 4:16). The term “Christian” is derived from the term “Christ.” The term “Christ” is translated from the Greek word *kristos*, which means “anointed.” It may be possible then that all who wear this name Scripturally may be regarded as *the anointed people of God*.

The name “Christian” then is a name of distinction, intending to distinguish those who wear it from all other people. It is intended to point out that those who wear it are the property of Christ. It implies that they are not their own, but that they belong to Christ, being bought with His precious blood (I Peter 1:18-20; I Corinthians 6:19-20).

The prophet Isaiah speaking by inspiration, looked forward to the gospel day, and said:

“And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen; and the Lord Jehovah will slay thee; and he will call his servants by another name:” Isa 65:15

“And the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory, and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of Jehovah shall name.” Isa 62:2

I suggest that the name “Christian” is the *new name*. If this is not true, then the prophecy above has never been fulfilled, for this is the only *new name* by which the people of God were called in the New Testament. God’s people were called **saints** because of the purity of their hearts and lives, but this is an Old Testament name (Psalms 116:15). They were called **brethren**, but this is no new name. David said: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psalms 133:1). They were called **disciples**, but this name was known to the Old Testament saints, and was applied to students of the different schools of philosophy (Isaiah 8:16). There was no other new name by which the followers of the Lord were called, save the name “**Christian**.” It was a new name unknown to Jew or Gentile until Paul and Barnabas has assembled with the church at Antioch a whole year, and had taught much people. Then it was, while these divinely authorized teachers were fully instructing the people in the will of God, that the disciples were called Christians first. Then was fulfilled the word of the Lord, which saith: “You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name.”

“Christian” carries the name “Christ” in its own bosom, and as long as there are people who are called “Christians” the author and finisher of the Christian system of faith can never be forgotten.

GENERAL OUTLINE OF ACTS

I. The Beginning and Growth of the Church in Jerusalem, Chapters 1-7

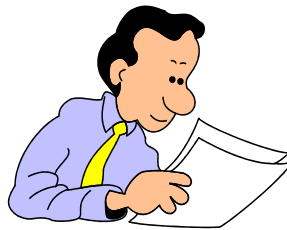
- A. The Setting for Beginning the Church, Chapter 1
- B. The Beginning of the Church in Jerusalem, Chapter 2
- C. A Miracle and Its Results in Jerusalem, Chapter 3
- D. The First Persecution Against the Church in Jerusalem, Chapter 4
- E. The First Deaths Mentioned of Members of the Church, Chapter 5:1-11
- F. The First Suffering by Members of the Church, Chapter 5:12-42
- G. The First Appointment of Servants in the Church, Chapter 6:1-7
- H. Stephen, the First Martyr of the Church, Chapters 6:8 to 7:60

II. The Spread of the Church to Judea and Samaria, Chapters 8-12

- A. The Church is Scattered Abroad from Jerusalem by Persecution, Chapters 8:1-4
- B. The Church in Samaria, Chapter 8:5-25
- C. The Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch, Chapter 8:26-39
- D. The Conversion of Saul, (1:1-30; 22; 26)
- E. The Church Throughout Judea, Chapter 9:32-43
- F. The Church to the Gentiles, Chapters 10:1 to 11:18
- G. The Church in Antioch of Syria, Chapter 11:19-30
- H. James is Killed and Peter is Imprisoned, Chapter 12

III. The Extension of the Church to the Whole World, Chapters 13-28

- A. The First Missionary Journey of Paul and Barnabas, Chapters 13, 14
- B. The Debate on Circumcising Gentile Christians, Chapter 15
- C. The Second Missionary Journey of Paul and Silas, Chapters 16-18
- D. The Third Missionary Journey of Paul and Company, Chapters 19, 20
- E. Paul goes from Jerusalem to Rome, Chapters 21-28



THE MESSAGE

Jesus meets with His disciples and commissions them to go into the entire world to preach the gospel (1:1-8). Jesus then ascended back to the throne room of God (1:9-11).

The disciples are waiting in the city of Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Kingdom and Matthias was selected to take the place of Judas (1:12-26).

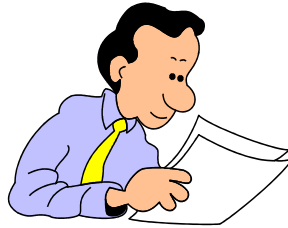
The Holy Spirit descends upon the apostles (2:1-4) and the gospel is preached in power and many conversions occurred and the church/kingdom is established (2:5-47).

Christian fellowship is demonstrated as the Christians became one heart and soul (4:32). The church soon experienced both triumphs and tragedies (3:2; 5:1).

Special servants are selected to provide for the Grecian widows (6:1-6). Tragedy strikes as the church has its first martyr – Stephen (7:60).

The most notable convert occurs with the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (9:1-19). The church proves the power of prayer as a prison is opened (12:5).

The church conducts a debate on the matter of circumcising of Gentile converts (15:19).



APPLICATION OF ACTS

I. Acts shows us what a New Testament church should provide: Acts 2:42; 20:7

- A. Teaching
- B. Fellowship
- C. Breaking of bread
- D. Prayer

II. Acts shows us what Christian fellowship should be like: Acts 4:32

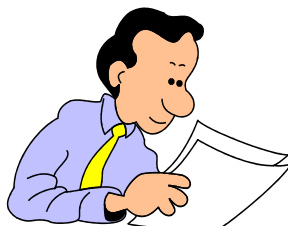
Sharing and caring

III. Acts shows us how to carry the gospel into all the world: Acts 13:4 – 15:35; 15:36 – 18:22; 18:23 – 19:41

Paul's three missionary journeys

IV. Acts shows us how to take care of problems: Acts 6:1-6; Acts 15

- A. The selection of men to serve in benevolence
- B. The discussion of a problem



Walking the Walk

- A. Where is your area of activity and influence in the world? What effort have you made to tell the message of Jesus to people in your own community?
- B. Are you interested in helping to spread the gospel in other parts of the world through money, prayers and letters?
- C. How would you explain to a friend what it means to become a Christian? Is there one person in your circle of friends who needs to hear that message? Ask God to give you the courage and opportunity to tell that friend about Jesus.