

A Survey of the Book of Acts

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Author:

The Acts of the Apostles, and the gospel of Luke, are written anonymously in a third person style, but traditionally ascribed to the "beloved physician" Luke (**Colossians 4:10**). Outside of the "we sections" in Acts (**Acts 16, 20-21, 27-28**), Luke is mentioned three times in the New Testament (**Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24, II Timothy 4:11**). Luke, no doubt, accompanied Paul as a traveling physician to aid him because of poor health. There were others, according to the prison epistles that joined them: Timothy, Aristarchus, Jesus (Justus), Epaphras, John Mark, Demas, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, etc.

Luke is the most polished writer of the New Testament as he uses a wide vocabulary (nearly 800 words found nowhere else in the New Testament). His works comprise 25% of the New Testament, more than all of Paul's letters combined. In the book of Acts he allows his medical knowledge, and seafaring terminology, to bleed through allowing the reader to see his education and interests.

Date:

This book was probably written from Rome in the late 50's or early 60's AD. Some scholars speculate a date of about 62 AD, and that it was written shortly after Luke's gospel. It would have been written after Paul's two year Roman imprisonment (**Acts 28:30-31**), but before Paul's trial, otherwise that information would have been included in the book.

Theme:

The theme of the book of Acts is the work of the church. The book is the main source of history concerning the first generation of Christians. It is the only "orderly account" we have of the establishment of the church, corporate organization, the rise of Christianity, and the evangelism of the world from a Christian point of view.

The title of the book suggests that it was meant to be a historical record of the events of the apostles, and a textbook for future generations. It is interesting that while the twelve apostles are listed in **Acts 1:13-26**, it only mentions Peter, James (who dies in chapter 12), John, and Paul (who would not be added to the church until chapter nine) from that point forward.

In fitting with the theme and agenda of the book it will cover more than three decades of church history (30's to 60's AD). The book also chronicles the work of the Holy Spirit within the church with over seventy references. Most of those references occur in the first eleven chapters. The purpose of God sending the Holy Spirit was to continue the work of Jesus.

Luke hopes to reveal that Christianity was politically harmless. Despite the early persecution by the Jews, Christians were peaceful people and no threat to the Roman government. Luke reveals the impartiality of the Roman officials like Gallio (**Acts 18:12-17**), Sergius Paulus (**Acts 13:7-12**), and the secretary at Ephesus (**Acts 19:30-41**). Instead, the Jews are viewed as the instigators, but the Roman authorities never seem to take sides.

Audience:

The book of Acts, like Luke's gospel, undoubtedly targets a Gentile audience. The name Theophilus (meaning "lover of God") is given as the designated recipient. When the term "most excellent" is used elsewhere in the book it is a reference to someone in a government position (**Acts 23:26, 24:3, 26:25**), therefore he must have been a real person that held an important office, maybe even in Rome. This might also help us to understand why Luke spends some much time discussing the peaceful and harmless nature of the church.

As we have studied many times before, the work of the church moved from Jerusalem to spread throughout the world. One "hub" of activity was the city of Antioch. This is evident in the book of Acts. Many of the strong congregations discussed in the book are cities with large Roman populations and synagogues that were influenced by Hellenistic culture. The narrative moves from Jerusalem to Antioch to Rome. This emphasizes Christianity from a Gentile perspective and allows Paul to have the limelight.

Luke seems to emphasize that Paul is as much of an apostle as Peter and the others. His writings give Paul's apostleship and letters more credence. Roughly 2/5 of the book deals with the acts of Peter (**Acts 1-12**), and 3/5 records the acts of Paul (**Acts 8-9, 13-28**). He shows the similarities between the two: both heal cripples (**Acts 3:28, 14:8-12**), both have encounters with sorcerers (**Acts 8:18, 13:6**), both raise the dead (**Acts 9:36, 20:9**), both are miraculously released from prison (**12:7, 16:26**), both become the objects of worship (**10:25, 14:11**), both are beaten for the name of Jesus (**5:40, 16:22**), etc.

The beginning of the book emphasizes the fulfillment of the vision of Jesus and the reinforcement of the Great Commission. By the books end the gospel has reached the Jews in Jerusalem, those of the Diaspora, the Samaritans, the Gentiles, the Romans, and many "God-fearers" in between. The abrupt ending may be meant to give the impression that the work was ongoing. The ministry of the church will never end!

Key Verses:

Acts 1:8-9, 1:29, 2:4, 2:38, 4:12, 4:19-20, 5:41-42, 6:4-6, 7:59-60, 8:4, 8:35, 9:3-6, 9:20, 9:27, 11:20, 12:5, 12:12, 13:3, 14:7, 16:25, 16:31-32, 17:11, 18:28, 20:7, 20:20-36, 28:31

Outline:

- I. *The Preface (1:1-3)*
- II. *Preparation For Ministry (1:4-2:13)*
- III. *Witnessing in Jerusalem (2:14-5:42)*
- IV. *Witnessing Beyond Jerusalem (6:1-12:25)*
- V. *Witnessing in Cyprus and Southern Galatia (13:1-14:28)*
- VI. *The Council in Jerusalem (15:1-35)*
- VII. *Witnessing in Greece (15:36-18:22)*
- VIII. *Witnessing in Ephesus (18:23-21:16)*
- IX. *The Arrest in Jerusalem (21:17-23:35)*
- X. *Witnessing in Caesarea (24:1-26:32)*
- XI. *Witnessing in Rome (27:1-28:31)*