

Acts

A Model for the Church

I. Introduction to Acts

Acts is the 5 book of the New Testament and stands alone as the historical narrative connecting the Gospels to the Epistles.

Acts tells the story of the work of Christ after His ascension.

A. TITLE

- Around 200AD, Irenaeus referred to it as “Luke’s witness to the apostles” and Tertullian called it “Luke’s commentary.” Around 300AD the book seems to have received the lasting title, “The Acts of the Apostles.”
 - The book most commonly referred to as; Acts or Acts of the Apostles
- Many today refer to it as the Acts of the Holy Spirit for
 - Not all the apostles are followed
 - Not all the work is accomplished through apostles,
 - Every bit of its ministry is done through the power of the Holy Spirit.

B. AUTHOR -

The book is anonymous, but Luke is strongly implied.

1. 4 reasons should convince us that Luke wrote the book.
The “we” sections. Portions of the book are written in the 1st person plural. The writer is including himself as a witness of the drama that unfolds. These sections are –
 - a. 16:10–17 (second missionary journey at Philippi)
 - b. 20:5–15; 21:1–18 (end of third missionary journey)
 - c. 27:1–28:16 (Paul sent as prisoner to Rome)
2. The connection between the third Gospel and Acts is obvious when we compare Luke 1:1–4 with Acts 1:1–2.

* Luke was written to Theophilus to give an accurate account of the life and ministry of Christ

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* Acts was also written to Theophilus to describe the work Jesus accomplished after His ascension

3. Common style and vocabulary unite Acts with Luke's Gospel.
4. The unanimous witness of the early church

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 156–215), Tertullian (A.D. 160–200) and Origen (A.D. 185–254) ALL REFER to Luke as author of both 3rd Gospel and Acts.

The early church historian Eusebius, wrote
“Luke, by race, a native of Antioch, and by profession, a physician, having associated mainly with Paul and having companioned with the rest of the apostles less closely, has left us examples of that healing of souls which he acquired from them in two inspired books, The Gospel and The Acts of the Apostles.”

Luke, though not an eyewitness to all the events, carefully researched them and wrote an accurate account.

- From the book of Acts we discover that in addition to being an author, Luke was a companion of Paul and an eyewitness to many of the events about which he writes.
- From outside the book of Acts we learn that Luke was a doctor, a laborer for the kingdom and a companion of Paul up until his execution.

* Luke is mentioned by name 3 in Scripture.

- Colossians 4:14
- 2 Timothy 4:11
- Philemon

C. DATE -

There is much discussion regarding the time of the writing of Acts, but the events themselves cover from about A.D. 30–63

Because the book ends with Paul in prison and we know Paul was released from prison in Rome in the middle 60's, rearrested later and executed under Nero around 64 AD, we can confidently conclude that the book was written prior to that.

The best estimate is around 65 AD

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D. PURPOSE -

One purpose of the book of Acts was to document the birth and rapid growth of the Church.

- It began from Jewish roots to spread to a worldwide ministry; from the locked upper room Jerusalem to the palace of Caesar himself.
- Luke's writings give us the history of the first sixty plus years of Christianity. About thirty years are covered in each of his two books.

Acts is to the NT what Joshua through II Kings is to the OT. It gives us an inspired historical narrative of the spread of the Gospel.

The focus is not on chronology or an exhaustive recording of events. Certain events are selected to explain who God is, how we are made right with Him, and how He wants us to live.

One of the primary purposes of Acts is to give an inspired example of what Real Christianity should look like. Acts alone is the model for the church.

It is important to keep in mind that Acts is not deigned simply to look back at what the Lord did, but to give an illustration of what the Lord wants to do.

- Acts is a model for the church and Christian living today.

Luke's chief doctrinal emphasis here is upon the person and work of the Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit is mentioned more than 60 times in Acts

II. OUTLINE

There are many ways to divide the content of Acts.

A. Based upon the key locations

Acts refers to 32 countries, 54 cities, and nine Mediterranean Islands. The three major cities are Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome

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Acts 1-12 - Jerusalem and the surrounding provinces

Acts 13- 22 - Antioch and their missions ministry

Acts 23 -28 - En route to Rome and Paul's incarceration

B. Based upon the key Characters

There are more than 95 people mentioned in Acts, but the main characters are Peter and Paul.

1. Acts 1-12 - ministry of Peter

Some of the Co-stars include - John, Stephen, Philip, James, Barnabbas and Saul

2. Acts 13-28 - ministry of Paul

Some of the Co-stars include - Barnabbas, Silas, Timothy and Luke

Working alongside Peter and Paul were a number of other notable individuals: Stephen (chap. 6, 7); Philip the evangelist (chap. 8); Barnabas (chap. 4, 9, 11, 13–15); John Mark (chap. 12, 13, 15); Silas (chap. 15–17); Timothy (chap. 16, 17); Aquila and Priscilla (chap. 18); Apollos (chap. 18, 19).

3. Based upon the key verse

Acts 1:8

"But 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."

This is perhaps the best outline for it emphasizes the real purpose of Acts which is to show the way in which the Church began and the kingdom of God was furthered

In Acts we see that the kingdom is here in power now, changing the lives of all who believe.

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Intro - 1:1-11

Jerusalem - 1:12-8:3

Peter and Stephen

Judea & Samaria - 8:4-12:

Peter, Philip & Saul

Uttermost Parts - 13:1-28:29

Barnabas, Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke

Conclusion - 28:30-31

This is the pattern that we will follow as we un-wrap the book.

III. WHY STUDY ACTS?

A. Acts is a pattern for the church.

1. Everything must be done in the power of the spirit Acts 1:8

B. Acts is a model for missions

1. Local church should have eyes on the horizon

2. Some of the practices as it relates to missions include:

- Prayer meeting
- Sending out missionaries
- Sending short term teams
- Sending relief
- Giving updates to the local church
- Providing support

C. Acts illustrates the proper use of the gifts of the Spirit

A list of the gifts are given in Romans and Corinthians and Joel

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Romans 12:6-8

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness

1 Corinthians 12:8-10

for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

1 Corinthians 12:28-30

And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

Acts 2:17 (Joel 2:28)

*'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.*

1. Included in these lists we have

Prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, mercy, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation, helps, administrations, visions and dreams

2. All these gifts can be seen in action in the book of Acts and many in the life and ministry of Jesus.
3. We can understand fully how the gifts are supposed to function within the church today.

Many of the practiced of the modern church could be avoided by a more careful look at the book of Acts

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It is also important to note that in addition to the gifts of the Spirit the NT also gives a list of offices that will be held within the church by those with the appropriate gifts and spiritual maturity.

Those offices include:

- Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor teachers, elders who do not teach and deacons
- It is worth noting that there is no office of a healer or miracle worker.

It is also worth noting the absence of worship leaders. This is not to suggest they are not valuable, the Bible is filled with exhortations to public worship, but that the true emphasis of the church is the Word of God being held and proclaimed

4. The gifts within Acts

PROPHECY

The Bible defines the gift:

1 Corinthians 14:3-4

But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

Revelation 19:10

10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

In addition to telling the future, prophecy is to encourage others in Christ and to present the Gospel to them

Acts 21:10-14 - records the use of prophecy in the life of Paul.

- Paul was warned of the dangers he faced in Jerusalem. The prophets were correct in what was coming but it was left to Paul to determine what that meant for His life and walk with Christ.
- Whenever we are encountered with someone giving us a prophetic word, we must take it to prayer to determine:

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- i. Is it from God? This is found by comparing their words with Scripture
- ii. What does God want you to do?

MINISTRY - diakonia, deacon

Those who serve as the hands and feet of the ministry

- In Acts 6 we read of 7 men who were raised up to ease the role of the ministry of the apostles/ pastors
- The character qualities and gifts required are clearly laid out for us.

TEACHING - didasko - to instruct

Acts 18:24-26 Aquila and Priscilla instruct Apollos more fully on the ways of God. Aquila and Priscilla had no formal training; they became familiar with the teachings of Scripture and shared them with others.

EXHORTATION – Parakeleo - to come alongside or to call alongside

Those who will run to the aid of the hurting

- Barnabbas was called son of encouragement because of how strongly his life exhibited this gift

If we think we have this gift we must be careful with its operation. When we are drawn to the hurting we should seek to listen, pray and at the appropriate time to share the Word with them. It is dangerous to give your opinions because our opinions are often wrong and misleading.

GIVING - to impart or give away

Acts 4:32-37 - Barnabbas and others gave generously to assist the ministry

LEADING - literally to stand before

Those who do any type of ministry that places them in front of others.

- In Acts 15 James found himself catapulted to the front in a leadership role. We find that the gifts necessary were provided at the time he needed them.

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MERCY, FAITH, HEALING, MIRACLES –

All evidenced in acts 3 healing the lame man

WORD OF WISDOM –

Supernatural wisdom not received through experience or instruction but given by God.

- In Acts 15 James was given the solution for the conflict between churches.
- This was a critical point for Christianity. Two sides had been formed over the issue of salvation. James was given heavenly wisdom that provided solution to the matter

WORD OF KNOWLEDGE - Knowledge that could only be derived by the work of the Spirit

- Acts 5 Ananias and Saphira lying to the apostles
- Peter knew their story was untrue because the Spirit revealed it to him

DISCERNING SPIRITS - Seeing the spiritual behind the natural.

- Must not be confused with intuition.
- Must be accompanied with prayer
- Sometime we are given a check in our spirit about a person or situation only so we would engage in the battle of prayer

Acts 13 bar Jesus

Acts 16 the demon possessed girl

HELPS - to aid or support

Much of the ministry of Silas and Barnabbas

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ADMINISTRATION –

The verb is translated as “Helmsman” or the one who guides the ship

- Acts 16 - Paul on 2nd journey - Asia, Bithynia Macedonia
- The Spirit must lead those who lead, this gift is essential in every area of ministry.
- God has an order within His church. He is the head, and gives the helm to the Pastor; the pastor in turn gives little helms to those who serve in various capacities. We must all serve under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the authority of those who are over us.

TONGUES –

Even in the early church this was one of the most misunderstood and abused gifts. As a result it is given more ink in the New Testament than any other gift.

Tongues is given when someone is baptized in the Spirit

- Acts 2, 10 and 18 - upon baptism with spirit people spoke in tongues

Tongues has been called a prayer language because its purpose is to speak to God

1 Corinthians 14:2

For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

IN Acts 2 the people were speaking in tongues and declaring the wonderful work of God

Acts 2:11

Cretans and Arabs —we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.

It is not a gift of language to preach the Gospel

Tongues is a spiritual gift available to the believer designed more for private use than public.

In a church setting the gift is to be used with limitations –

1. Must have interpretation,

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2. Limited to 2 or 3 expressions in any given meeting

1 Corinthians 14:27

If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.

INTERPRETATION - ability to discern meaning of tongues

VISIONS – Like a dream while but you are awake

Acts 16 – while in Troas Paul received a call to Macedonia

DREAMS

In acts 10 Peter dreamed of a picnic

6. Many of the gifts can also be seen in the life of Jesus

A careful study of Luke's Gospel reveals that Jesus was:

- Born of the Spirit
- Baptized with the Spirit
- Led by the Spirit
- Empowered by the Spirit
- Gifted by the Spirit

His ministry included:

Prophecy, healing, miracles, words of wisdom and knowledge, helps, administration, leadership, discernment, mercy

IV. JESUS IN ACTS

Jesus is seen as the head of the church and the one who cares for its needs and survival.

Book records the further work of Jesus on earth through His Spirit empowered church, but the Book is also filled with information about who Jesus is

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- A. Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to His disciples (Acts 2:24, 31–32; 3:15, 26; 10:40–41; 17:31; 26:23; Rom. 8:34; 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:4–7, 12ff; 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Peter 1:2; 3:18, 21).
- B. Jesus was exalted by God and given the name “Lord” (Acts 2:25–29, 33–36; 3:13; 10:36; Rom. 8:34; 10:9; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:3; 1 Peter 3:22).
- C. Jesus gave the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:14–18, 38–39; 10:44–47; 1 Peter 1:12).
- D. Jesus will come again for judgment and the restoration (Acts 3:20–21; 10:42; 17:31; 1 Cor. 15:20–28; 1 Thess. 1:10).