

ACTS: ABOUT THIS BOOK

The writer

Most people agree that Luke wrote Acts. Luke also wrote the third *Gospel. In Acts, he told how the good news about Jesus *Christ spread. It spread to the world beyond *Jerusalem.

Luke was a *Gentile and he was a doctor (Colossians 4:14). He worked with Paul and he travelled with Paul (Philemon 1:24).

Luke was very careful about what he wrote. He knew that some things were true. And he wrote only those things. At the beginning of his *Gospel, he wrote this. 'You have heard many things. I am writing this account so that you will know the truth about them' (Luke 1:4). In Acts, he continued with this account.

Luke was travelling with Paul. Luke wrote about what happened during that time (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16). In these verses, he used 'we' instead of 'they' or 'he'. So, we know that Luke was there at those times.

After Luke had arrived in *Jerusalem (Acts 21:17), he stayed in *Judea. He stayed there for two years. Then he left to travel to *Rome (Acts 27:1). He went to *Rome with Paul. While Luke was in *Judea, he probably spoke to other witnesses. They told him about the other events that he describes.

The purpose of the book

Luke had several reasons why he wrote Acts. People were telling false stories about *Christians. They were afraid that *Christians wanted to make trouble. Luke wanted the *Roman rulers to know that this was not true. *Christians helped other people to behave well. He wanted to show that to the rulers. It was good for the *Roman government.

Luke wrote about many *miracles. God gave to *Christians the power to cure people, for example. Also, God rescued Peter from prison by a *miracle. So, anyone who opposed the Christians was opposing God. He also wanted to show to the *Jews that the *Christian *faith was not a separate religion. Instead, it made *Judaism complete, because Jesus is the *Messiah.

However, Luke had one main reason why he wrote this book. The good news about Jesus had travelled from *Jerusalem to *Rome. Luke wanted to record how that happened. *Rome was the most important city in the world. Luke showed that the *gospel was for all people in every nation. It was for *Jews and it was also for *Gentiles.

Contents

Acts can be divided into 6 parts. Each part ends with a report that more people were joining the *church.

1. Acts 1:1-6:7

In the first part, Luke describes how the *church grew in *Jerusalem. This part ends like this: 'So, God's message spread. The *disciples in Jerusalem continued to increase quickly in number. And very many priests obeyed the *faith.'

2. Acts 6:8-9:31

From this part, we learn how the good news reached *Samaria because of Stephen's death. This part ends like this: 'Meanwhile, the *church all over *Judea, *Galilee and *Samaria enjoyed a peaceful period. The *Holy Spirit made the *church strong and he encouraged the *Christians. They respected the *Lord and more people joined the *church.'

3. Acts 9:32-12:24

In this part, the writer tells us how Paul met Jesus. This happened on the road to Damascus. Damascus is a city in Syria. We learn how the *gospel reached Antioch, the capital city in Syria. Also, we learn how Peter accepted Cornelius into the *church. Cornelius was a *Gentile. This part ends like this: 'God's message continued to grow and it continued to spread.'

4. Acts 12:25-16:5

In this part, Luke describes how the *gospel spread through more countries. It ends like this: 'So, the Christians became stronger in the *faith and more people joined the *churches daily.'

5. Acts 16:6-19:20

We learn from this part how the good news about Jesus reached Europe. Paul started a new *church in Corinth, a city in Greece. He also started a new *church in Ephesus. Ephesus was a very important city. It was in the same country that is called Turkey today. It is near Greece. This part ends like this: 'In this manner, the *Lord's message continued to increase in power and it spread widely.'

6. Acts 19:21-28:31

In the final part, Luke tells us that Paul reached *Rome. When it ends, Paul is in prison. There, 'he *preached boldly about God's *kingdom. He taught the facts about the *Lord Jesus *Christ and nobody tried to stop him.'

When Luke wrote Acts

When the book ends, Paul is in *Rome. The *Romans had arrested him. Luke does not say what happened to Paul next. So, many students think that Luke completed Acts very soon after this. Also, he said nothing about Nero. Nero was an *Emperor. He killed many *Christians in *AD 64. Probably Luke had finished the book in *AD 62. But we do not know the exact date.

ACTS 1.1-11

¹Theophilus, I first wrote to you ^a about all that Jesus did and taught from the very first ²until he was taken up to heaven. But before he was taken up, he gave orders to the apostles he had chosen with the help of the Holy Spirit. ³For forty days after Jesus had suffered and died, he proved in many ways that he had been raised from death. He appeared to his apostles and spoke to them about God's kingdom. ⁴While he was still with them, he said:

Don't leave Jerusalem yet. Wait here for the Father to give you the Holy Spirit, just as I told you he has promised to do.
⁵John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Is Taken to Heaven

⁶While the apostles were still with Jesus, they asked him, "Lord, are you now going to give Israel its own king again?" ^b
⁷Jesus said to them, "You don't need to know the time of those events that only the Father controls. ⁸But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world." ⁹After Jesus had said this and while they were watching, he was taken up into a cloud. They could not see him, ¹⁰but as he went up, they kept looking up into the sky.

Suddenly two men dressed in white clothes were standing there beside them. ¹¹They said, "Why are you men from Galilee standing here and looking up into the sky? Jesus has been taken to heaven. But he will come back in the same way that you have seen him go."

Notes

1. The former account is the Gospel of Luke. At one time the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were joined together as one book with two "volumes."
2. Imagine what it would be like if the Book of Acts were missing. You would pick up your Bible and see the ministry of Jesus ending in the Gospel of John; next you would read about a guy named Paul writing to followers of Jesus in Rome. Who was Paul? How did the gospel get from Jerusalem to Rome? The Book of Acts answers these questions. "A great New Testament scholar has said that the title of *Acts* might be, 'How they brought the Good News from Jerusalem to Rome.'" (Barclay)

3. Theophilus might have been a Christian wanting instruction. He might have been a Roman official being briefed by Luke about the history of the Christian movement; or the name could be symbolic, because the name Theophilus means "God-lover."
4. Since Acts ends with Paul awaiting trial before Caesar, some have wondered if Luke-Acts are not "defense briefs" on Paul's behalf to give a Roman official background on Paul's case. Luke arrived in Jerusalem with Paul in Acts 21:17; he left with him again on the journey to Rome in Acts 27:1. In those two years, Luke had plenty of time to research and write his gospel and the Book of Acts.
5. **Luke wanted to show Rome that Christianity was *harmless* (some Romans officials had embraced it themselves), *innocent* (Roman judges could find no basis for prosecution) and *lawful* (as the true fulfillment of Judaism, an approved religion in the Roman Empire).**
6. Notice that the former account concerned all that Jesus *began* both to do and teach. **Luke's Gospel describes only the beginning of Jesus' work; Acts describes its continuation; and the work of Jesus continues to our present day.**
7. We must remember that Acts does not give us a full history of the church during this period. For example, the churches in Galilee and Samaria are barely mentioned (Acts 9:31), and the establishing of a strong church in Egypt during this time isn't mentioned at all. Acts takes us up to about 60 or 61 A.D., with Paul in Rome waiting to appear before Caesar Nero. This same Nero began his infamous persecutions of Christians in 64 A.D.
8. **JESUS, THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT, INSTRUCTED THE APOSTLES REGARDING WHAT TO DO IN HIS ABSENCE.** Jesus also established the fact of His resurrection with many infallible proofs during the forty days after his resurrection but before His ascension.
9. In 1 Corinthians 15:6, Paul describes one of these many infallible proofs: *He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present.* There were more than five hundred people who had seen the resurrected Jesus, and most of them were alive some twenty-five years later in the days of Paul!
10. The teaching Jesus gave during that period is not recorded, but we are told that He used that time to speak of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

THE ASCENSION OF JESUS.(4-5): JESUS' FINAL INSTRUCTIONS TO THE DISCIPLES.

11. He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem: Jesus has nothing else for the disciples to do other than to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. **HE KNOWS THAT THEY REALLY CAN DO NOTHING EFFECTIVE FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD UNTIL THE SPIRIT COMES.**
12. These verses provide another of the many "Trinity in Miniature" examples. Jesus tells of the Promise of the Father, which is the coming of the Holy Spirit.
13. **You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit:** The idea of being baptized is to be immersed or covered over in something; even as John baptized people in water, so these disciples would be "immersed" in the Holy Spirit.
14. **Perhaps it is more useful to describe the baptism of the Holy Spirit more like a *condition* than an *experience*. WE SHOULD PERHAPS ASK, "ARE YOU BAPTIZED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT?" INSTEAD OF ASKING, "HAVE YOU BEEN BAPTIZED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT?"**

THE DISCIPLES ASK JESUS A FINAL QUESTION BEFORE HIS ASCENSION.

15. Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? This was a question asked many times before. They must have believed that Jesus would certainly establish an earthly political kingdom before ascending to the Father. Of course, when Jesus ascended into heaven, He would leave them in charge of the kingdom!
16. "The verb *restore* shows that they were expecting a political and territorial kingdom; the noun *Israel* that they were expecting a national kingdom; and the adverbial clause *at this time* that they were expecting its immediate establishment." (Stott)
17. The disciples certainly knew the many Old Testament prophecies describing the spiritual *and* political rebirth of Israel. The disciples probably thought that the spiritual rebirth seemed certain, so the political would come, also.

(7-8) Jesus' final teaching and final promise before His ascension.

18. It is not for you to know: Jesus warned the disciples against inquiring into aspects of the timing of God's kingdom, because those things belong to God the Father alone (which the Father has put in His own authority).
19. It was wise for Jesus not to outline His plan over the next 2,000 years. How do you think the disciples would have felt if they had known that the kingdom they wanted to see right then would not be coming for almost 2,000 years?
20. At the same time, Jesus did not say that there was to be *no* restoration of the kingdom to Israel; He simply said that speculation into the times and dates of it was not proper for the disciples.
21. **But you shall receive power: If the political kingdom they wanted would be delayed, power would not. They would shortly receive power with the coming of the Holy Spirit.**
22. **The disciples were still seeing power, too much in terms of Caesar, and not enough in terms of Christ. Jesus offers them real power, spiritual power. They were thinking of political power!**
23. The natural result of receiving that power would be that they would become witnesses of Jesus, all over the earth. Notice that this really isn't a command; it is a simple statement of fact: *When* the Holy Spirit has come upon you . . . you *shall* be witnesses of Me. The words shall be are in the indicative, not the imperative. Jesus wasn't recommending that they become witnesses, He was saying they would be witnesses.
24. If we want to be witnesses, we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit! Far more important than the best course in evangelism is the filling of the Holy Spirit!
25. Isaiah 43:10 has the Lord proclaiming to His people *You are My witnesses*. A cultic group today claims that this is their mandate for being "Jehovah's Witnesses." Unfortunately, they fail to see Isaiah 43:10 in the context of Acts 1:8; we are truly *Yahweh's Witnesses* when we are *Jesus' Witnesses*.
26. The progress of the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and then to the end of the earth becomes the outline of Acts. Acts chapters 1 through 7 describe the gospel in Jerusalem, chapters 8 through 12 speak of the gospel in Judea and Samaria, and chapters 13 through 28 tell of the gospel going to the end of the earth.
27. We might imagine the objections to the places of ministry Jesus described. Jerusalem was where Jesus was executed at the word of an angry mob; Judea rejected His ministry; Samaria was regarded as a wasteland of impure half-breeds; and in the uttermost parts of the earth, the Gentiles were seen as nothing better than fuel for the fires of Hell. Yet God wanted a witness sent to all of these places.

(9-11) JESUS ASCENDS INTO HEAVEN.

28. Jesus was taken up from them, as He was blessing them (Luke 24:50). As He slowly disappeared into the sky, surrounded by a cloud (of Shekinah glory?), they continued to gaze upward.
29. Why did Jesus ascend this way? He certainly could have simply "vanished" to the Father's presence in a secret sort of way. But with the ascension, Jesus wanted His followers to know that He was gone for good, as opposed to the way He appeared and reappeared during the forty days after the resurrection.
30. Remember Jesus' words to His disciples in John 16:7: *It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you*. Now the disciples could know that that promise would be fulfilled.
31. Why do you stand gazing up into heaven? The two men (apparently angels) told the disciples to put their attention in the right place (obedience to Jesus' command to return to Jerusalem), not in wondering where and how Jesus went. Jesus told them to go to the ends of the *earth*, and they stood gazing up into heaven.
32. Morgan speculates that the "men" were possibly Moses and Elijah. It seems best to say they were angels.
33. Will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven: Jesus will return just as He left: *physically, visibly*, and to the *Mount of Olives*.

Application:

What specifically was God saying to me tonight?

What adjustments will I make in my life as a result of God's Word to me?