

Acts

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ACTS

By Chad Sychtysz

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Spiritual “equipment” for the contest of life



Dedication

This work is fondly dedicated to Larissa (my “favorite daughter”) and Logan (my “favorite son”), cherished souls with whom my life has been greatly blessed and for whom my prayers are unceasingly offered.

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Introduction

The Book of Acts is easily one of the most significant works of Scripture. Besides serving as a natural bridge between the gospels and epistles, Acts provides a conclusion to Christ's earthly ministry as well as the implementation of His teachings for the newly-formed church that bears His name. The advent of the so-called Church Age also ushered in the close of the Jewish Age, bringing to an end 1,500 years of law, festal rites, priesthood, and sacrifice.

Acts is also a significant work of secular history. Luke is most certainly its author/narrator, and he was a historical writer of the highest caliber. "Ramsay dares to call Luke, all things considered, the greatest of all historians, even above Thucydides."¹ Luke pays great attention to political, historical, and geographical details. He lists over one hundred personal names, many of which are described as belonging to a particular city, province, or region. He also lists over one hundred place names. "And last, with many nautical, climatic, and geographical terms Luke has given a reliable account of Paul's voyage to Rome (27—28)."² Sir William Ramsay says:

... The historical work of the highest order [is one] in which a writer commands excellent means of knowledge either through personal acquaintance or through access to original authorities, and brings to the treatment of his subject genius, literary skill, and sympathetic historical insight into human character and the movement of events. Such an author seizes the critical events, concentrates the reader's attention on them by giving them fuller treatment, touches more lightly and briefly on the less important events, omits entirely a mass of unimportant details, and makes his work an artistic and idealised picture of the progressive tendency of the period.³

1 A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, no date), xii.

2 Simon J. Kistemaker, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 7.

3 William Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), 2-3.

Acts serves as the literary and historical hub for most of the New Testament (NT). Most of the NT epistles were written during the period covered by Acts; some of the writers themselves, such as Paul and James, are here first introduced. Many of the recipients of the NT letters are also introduced: Timothy; Titus; Christians from Galatia, Corinth, and Rome; the Thessalonians; and the churches of Asia (particularly Ephesus, where Paul spent nearly three years). Without such critical information, we would be wondering what link these people and places had to the proclamation of the gospel, and (thus) why it would be relevant to study them.

To appreciate what we have in the Book of Acts, try to imagine our knowledge and comprehension of the NT *without* it. For example, we would not know:

- What happened to Jesus' disciples after receiving the "great commission."
- How the remaining apostles dealt with Judas' suicide.
- What the promise of the power of the Holy Spirit was.
- How the gospel was originally preached (or received).
- The conversion process (or method) by which a person is made a Christian.
- Who Paul was, or why he was authorized to write epistles to the churches.
- Why Paul was arrested and imprisoned (as mentioned in his epistles).
- Any firsthand information about the condition of the early church.
- How the church handled internal problems.
- How the church handled external persecution.
- God's response to Judaism, in light of the gospel of Christ.
- How the Old Testament scriptures were used in preaching the gospel.
- How and why Gentiles were permitted in the church.
- How the early church supported itself financially.
- How the gospel spread beyond Judea and into Asia Minor, then into Europe.
- What effect Christianity had on the heathen world.
- The (early) Roman disposition toward Christianity.

- ❑ The Jewish position against Christianity.
- ❑ The faith, determination, and devotion of the many men and women who serve as examples and martyrs for all successive generations of believers.

Theological and Historical Perspectives

God’s schedule always works according to two major criteria: the *sequence* of certain events and the fulfillment of certain *conditions*. “Sequence” refers to the serial or chronological order of things (as in, “But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation”—Luke 17:25). “Conditions” refers to God letting a situation run its course or reach a known objective (as when Christ was manifested to the world “at the proper time”—Titus 1:3). In Acts, both of these criteria are addressed, though the scope of God’s work exceeds what was actually recorded.

Christ had promised to build His church upon the fact that He was both the Christ (i.e., Messiah) *and* the Son of God (Matthew 16:16-18, John 20:31). These truths were irrefutably proved through Christ’s own resurrection from the dead, which served as the crowning achievement of Christ’s earthly ministry *and* the foundation for the entire gospel (Acts 17:30-31, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Since His resurrection did occur exactly as He promised, then all else that He declared is also true. By the same power and authority with which He raised Himself from the dead, so He flawlessly fulfilled the entire Law and Prophets, as He promised (Matthew 5:17, Luke 24:44). Everything carried out by Christ was “given at the proper time” (1 Timothy 2:5-6; see also Romans 5:6), and in “the fullness of the time” (Galatians 4:4). Thus, the sequence of events that led to the establishment of the church *and* the conditions that had to be met for that establishment were fulfilled in Christ and by Christ’s authority (as delegated to His apostles).

The spiritual church of God rests upon Christ’s position and authority as the King over all of creation (1 Corinthians 15:27-28, Ephesians 1:22-23). It could not be established unless or until Christ ascended to the throne of God for this very purpose. His death, burial, and resurrection were necessary for His ascension to the right hand of God

as both King of kings *and* eternal High Priest of those redeemed by His blood (Acts 2:33, Hebrews 8:1-2). The “kingdom of God”—Christ’s rule over God’s kingdom for the purpose of salvation to men—was established as soon as He received that kingdom from His Father. (This is predicted in Daniel 7:9-10, 13, and shown to be fulfilled in Revelation 5:1-9.) R. C. H. Lenski provides an excellent overview of God’s kingdom:

It is the kingdom of the heavens because heavenly powers make it and also give it heavenly character; the kingdom of God (Christ) because he is over and in it everywhere, at once its source and its control. This rule or kingdom goes back to the beginning and extends to eternity. When we look at the power and the omnipotence, it rules the whole universe; when we look at grace, it embraces the whole church; when we contemplate the glory, we see heaven and all its inhabitants. The kingdom and rule of grace fills the whole Testament from Adam onward; it is the rule of grace through the Messianic promise. A new era began when the promise was fulfilled in Christ, the era of the New Testament which extends to the end of time.⁴

While His kingship was secured even before His literal ascension (Matthew 28:18), nonetheless Christ had to ascend into heaven *first* and take His rightful place upon His Father’s throne before His church could be established. With His authority legitimately and permanently secured, Christ could then do what He had promised: add souls to His church and simultaneously send the Holy Spirit to those who had been so added.⁵ Acts provides the realization and historical record of these promises. The invitation is offered to the Jews first, then the Gentiles (cf. Romans 1:16). Jim McGuiggan rightly observes: “Since the book of Acts proclaims the existence of the kingdom the Gospels looked forward to, we should expect Acts to show the kingdom to be

4 R. C. H. Lenski, *Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 25.

5 Jesus *personally* promised the Holy Spirit to His disciples (John 14:16-19, 15:26-27, and 16:12-15), but *practically* to all who become Christians (Acts 5:32). He (the Spirit) is the church’s “Comforter” or “Helper,” and carries out the work of Christ on earth in ways both known and unknown to us.

peculiarly related to the Jews. And that's what we find. The proof is plentiful."⁶

The *timing* of Christ's presentation of His gospel to the world is remarkable and ingenious, as we should expect from an intelligent and all-powerful God. The world into which the gospel was first taught and distributed was much more advanced and commercialized than we might first imagine. Although relatively primitive and crude by today's standards, the civilization of the first century (AD) was modernized and mobilized like the ancient world had never seen before—and like the world would never see again for over a thousand years. Nonetheless, this world was still predicated upon the ancient foundations of the Greek Empire, which the Romans adopted and then improved upon as they saw fit. While the Greeks were very self-centered and ethnocentric in their thinking and politics, the Romans were much more practical and adaptable. They took remnants from numerous vanquished people and assimilated them into their own, so as to create a great melting pot of ideas and cultures—and religions—that assumedly would serve the best interest of the Empire as a whole. (Ironically, this assimilation actually led to its downfall, as predicted in the prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar's dream; see Daniel 2:40-43.)

Consider the Roman infrastructure that provided the successful transmission of the gospel to a diverse and expansive Empire without any modern communications:

- ❑ The *Pax Romana* ("Roman Peace"), made possible through Octavian (Augustus) Caesar's capable administration (31 BC—AD 14), provided for the greatest economic and political stability in the history of the Empire. "Under this ruler one of the world's most efficient organizations was perfected with a resulting era of peace, security and progress that has seldom been equaled. Unconsciously Rome was preparing the way for the gospel of Christ. It would be difficult to overestimate this contribution."⁷

6 Jim McGuiggan, *The Reign of God* (Fort Worth, TX: Star Bible Publications, 1992), 69.

7 H. I. Hester, *The Heart of the New Testament* (Liberty, MO: The Quality Press, Inc., 1963), 44.

- ❑ *Koine* (“common”) Greek was nearly universal throughout the Empire, allowing people to communicate through this language even though they often maintained their native tongue. *Koine* Greek is very precise and descriptive; appropriately, it is the language of the original text of the entire NT. We can only imagine how difficult it would have been (as modern missionaries can attest) to spread the gospel awkwardly and inefficiently through an interpreter rather than to speak directly to the people in a universal language.
- ❑ The Roman road system was the best, most extensive, and widely-used travel system the world had ever seen. (Some of these roads were so well-laid that they are still in use today.) This provided for expanded trade, mobility, and access; the Roman military kept the more popular thoroughfares (*vias*) free from robbers and bandits that often interfered with travel (see 2 Corinthians 11:26); inns and horse exchanges were available along some routes. Arches (which the Romans perfected with the keystone) were used for bridges, spanning rivers and ravines in ways that the ancients had never before enjoyed. (Some of these spans have also survived to this day.)
- ❑ The Roman army is what literally subjugated the Mediterranean world. Garrisons were everywhere; Roman soldiers kept the peace in every province and demanded the respect of the Roman government. It is remarkable how many references are made to soldiers, centurions, the Roman army, and the Roman government (that controlled this army) throughout the New Testament and especially Acts. It is the Roman army that literally saved Paul on several occasions from the hands of both Jewish and Gentile opponents. Also, seafaring was safer than ever from piracy, since the Roman navy regularly patrolled the Mediterranean Sea to keep trade routes open.
- ❑ Rome enjoyed a single economy and a universal coinage system, which meant that people could do business with other countries within the Empire without monetary loss through currency exchange or unbalanced trade practices. (Jews in Jerusalem, however, demanded that all Temple donations be converted to *their* coinage—for a transaction fee—which is one reason why moneychangers were present at the Temple during feast days; see John 2:12-16.)

- ❑ Jews had been dispersed throughout the Empire through previous centuries of deportation, exile, commercial ventures, and other reasons. This seeding of God's people among Gentile nations provided an excellent opportunity for the pagan world to hear the gospel from those many Jews who heard it, understood it (in light of the Law and the prophets of old), and obeyed it. These would become the "first fruits" (cf. James 1:18) of the church harvest, so to speak, from which an untold number of Gentile believers would follow.

Thus, the gospel was introduced into a world that had unknowingly been prepared (by God) for centuries to receive it. Not only was the *world* (logistically and politically) ready to receive it, but *individual people* were ready as well. We see this in the great responses that Peter and Paul received when they preached the gospel to both Jewish and Gentile audiences. Such reception was proportionately greater than perhaps at any other time in all of human history. We cannot be deterred by the great *rejection* they also received; this is typical of man's response to God's kindness.

The gospel of Christ was not limited to any one group or status of people. Men and women of all strata of society heard and obeyed it, from Jewish priests to Gentile soldiers to Hellenist widows. In fact, the early church was comprised of a large percentage of slaves, just as slaves also comprised a healthy percentage of the Empire's entire social structure. "Slaves" covers a broad sweep of social positions, from those assigned to hard labor to those who served as professionals (household managers, copyists, secretaries, paralegals, doctors, etc.). Estimates of the number of slaves in the Roman Empire range from about 20 to 50 percent of the entire population.

Slavery was an entrenched institution which few questioned and apparently none was willing to challenge. The extent of it was amazing. To occupy a place of respectability a family must have a minimum of ten slaves. Prominent families considered two hundred slaves an adequate supply, though some lords owned thousands of them. Slave markets were common sights on the streets of Rome.

The lot of slaves in the empire was extremely hard. In legal language they were called, not *personae* (human beings), but *res* (things). They were bought and sold for profit. They were mated like cattle and their offspring were sold as “the increase of the herd.” Treatment of them usually was extremely cruel. Runaway slaves were branded with the letter F (fugitive) on the forehead.⁸

Not all slaves were treated badly or inhumanely. In any case, such people were literally owned by a master, regardless of how much “freedom” they may have enjoyed in whatever occupation they held. For this reason, the spiritual freedom that was offered through the gospel of Christ had a particular attraction for slaves. Slavery was often a hopeless and dead-end life; the gospel provided a purpose *to* life, and the realistic hope of a happy afterlife. We cannot underestimate the effect that this new message of light, purpose, and hope would have provided for those who were trapped in a social system from which they might never escape.

Theme and Purpose

Every NT book or epistle was written for one or more specific purposes. Acts does not necessarily have one singular purpose (to the exclusion of all others) but has a manifold purpose that directly supports Christ and His gospel. The scholar F. F. Bruce writes:

When we examine the way in which Luke develops his narrative, we can hardly fail to be struck by his apologetic emphasis, especially in the second volume [chapters 13—28]. He is concerned to defend Christianity against the charges which were popularly brought against it in the second half of the first century. We must recognize that in the eyes of those who set some store by law and order in the Roman Empire Christianity started off with a serious handicap. Its Founder had admittedly been condemned to death by a Roman governor on a charge of sedition. And the movement which He inaugurated seemed to be attended by tumult and disorder wherever it

8 Hester, *The Heart of the New Testament*, 47-48.

spread, both in the Roman provinces and in Rome itself. Luke sets himself to reduce this handicap, or rather to remove it altogether.⁹

This is an excellent synopsis of the situation, yet does not provide specific details of its apologetic tone. (Formally, an “apology” is an argued defense of something; in this context, it has nothing to do with saying “I’m sorry” for anything.) However, it is conspicuous that, on every turn, Luke provides historical proof that the authorities who called for Christ’s crucifixion were themselves corrupt and disobedient to the very Law they claimed to cherish. Likewise, Roman authorities appear at first to be uninterested in Christianity (see 18:14-17), completely ignorant of it, or unconvinced by it—largely because of their own political agendas. In other words, point by point Luke unfolds the truth about “what happened” surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. Not only does he show Jesus to be innocent of any crime, but the apostles themselves are undeserving of legal prosecution. Furthermore, he demonstrates (through the preaching, miracles, and virtuous conduct of its genuine representatives) that the church truly “is of God,” as Gamaliel had ominously proposed was possible (Acts 5:38-39).

Besides providing a defense for the gospel of Christ as a legitimate (versus illegal) religion in the Roman world, another major theme of Acts is the salvation offered through that gospel. This salvation is wholly dependent upon Jesus’ divine nature, the historical reality of His ministry (from His baptism by John the Baptist to His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven), and the credibility of eyewitnesses to these things (1:8). Thus, the authenticity of the gospel message depends upon the biblical facts (of prophecy) and the historical events necessary to substantiate it. “Luke was ‘both a reliable historian and a good theologian. ... We believe that the validity of his theology stands or falls with the reliability of the history on which it is based.’”¹⁰ For this reason, Luke pays considerable attention to those speeches

9 F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 20; bracketed words are mine.

10 Howard Marshall, quoted in John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 30.

(sermons) and accounts which underscore the reality and universality of salvation through Christ. Samples of this include:

- ❑ “And it shall be that everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD will be saved” (2:21). “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (4:12).
- ❑ “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him [Christ] everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses” (13:38-39).
- ❑ “...I [Christ] am sending you [Paul] to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me” (26:17b-18).

Critical to this gospel and its proclamation of salvation is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The power that Christ possesses to save souls is dependent upon the historical reality of His bodily resurrection, which itself is dependent (as a proclaimed message) upon the evidence and eyewitnesses supporting this event. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then His authority to establish His church is nothing but a grandiose idea. As Paul said, “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised” (1 Corinthians 15:13-15). It is no surprise, then, that Luke makes certain—by inspiration of the Holy Spirit¹¹—to include

11 It goes beyond this commentary to address properly the subject of divine “inspiration.” Traditionally, and as influenced by English translations of 2 Timothy 3:16, “inspiration” [from *theopneustos*, lit., “God-breathed”] is thought to mean that God gave His endorsement or approval to men’s writings, thus making it “Scripture.” Biblically, however (as evidenced in John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh”), Scripture is not merely endorsed by God but comes *from* Him. Scripture *is* Scripture because God Himself is the Source of its content and message. If God needed someone to write down the history of the early church as *He* desired for it to be recorded, then He (in essence) *breathed* into the heart of a man like Luke to do this. Thus, men wrote down what God put into their heart to say, and yet He allowed them to maintain their own style, personality, and (as it suited God’s purpose) word choices in their writings.

the testimony of Jesus' resurrection throughout Acts, such as in the following passages:

- ❑ “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power” (2:24).
- ❑ “... [David] looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay” (2:31).
- ❑ “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses” (2:32).
- ❑ “For you [Jews] first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways” (3:26).
- ❑ “And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all” (4:33).
- ❑ “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross” (5:30).
- ❑ “God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible...” (10:40).
- ❑ “But God raised Him from the dead ...” (13:30).
- ❑ “... He [God] has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (17:31).
- ❑ “... [T]hat the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles” (26:23).

The resurrection of Christ is the greatest miracle of His ministry. It manifests a mastery of power and authority over the physical realm as well as the spiritual realm. It is the core of Paul's preaching—among the things of “first importance” in the preaching of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Besides providing a testimony of Christ's resurrection, there are a number of other reasons for which Acts was written:

- ❑ As Luke’s well-researched compilation of Jesus’ ministry for “most excellent” Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1).
- ❑ To provide a brief historical overview of the church to all generations to follow. Since the logical faith of Christianity is based upon knowledge and evidence, there must be an authentic and credible source of this. Luke—by inspiration and the providence of the Holy Spirit—sought to provide this source.¹² This does not mean that Luke set out to write a book of history, *per se*; it means that Acts is undoubtedly historical in nature, and that Luke was fully aware of this.
- ❑ To provide a brief account of Peter’s inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles into Christ’s church—to fulfill his role regarding the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (cf. Matthew 16:13-19) *and* support the legitimacy of universal salvation.
- ❑ To provide a bold apologetic for the church, and thus to establish legal and biblical justification for its existence (to counter Jews’ claims of heresy or apostasy). “Christianity and not Judaism is the true fulfillment of the revelation given through Moses and the prophets”¹³; see Acts 24:14-15.
- ❑ To provide a legal defense for Paul; to show that he did not violate the Law of Moses or the laws of Rome; and to prove that Christianity cannot be considered an illegal or illegitimate religion (to be discussed in more detail later).
- ❑ To show the illegitimate response of Jews who opposed the gospel—i.e., to expose their methods and reasoning as similar to that which Christ Himself confronted and condemned. In Acts, the Jews are condemned (by Peter) for their part in the murder of Messiah;

12 There is *no good reason* to question the historical reality of Luke’s writing. While some scholars think that Luke sought to preserve a theological perspective *regardless* of historical facts, this remains the opinions (or “tends”) of such scholars and serves an agenda that either questions or rejects altogether the factual basis of Acts (Dennis Gaertner, *The College Press NIV Commentary: Acts* [Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Co., 1993], 23-24). If Luke’s history is beside the point, as some assume, then what does this say about the *real* and *factual* circumstances that the apostles and early church faced? And what does this say about the present-day church: are we to operate in a purely theological mindset, regardless of and without being affected by our own historical reality? This study rejects such views, simply because they: do not make sense; stand in opposition to the actual record; are without critical basis; do not contribute to one’s understanding of Acts, but instead rob it of its contextual and practical value.

13 Ibid., 24.

later they are condemned (by Paul) for being stumbling blocks to themselves and the Gentiles (compare, for example, Matthew 23:13 and Acts 13:44-52). It was the Jewish authorities, and not the Christians themselves, that created the confusion, disturbances, and riots in cities in which the gospel was preached.

- ❑ To demonstrate, both directly and indirectly, the gospel's superiority over paganism, superstition, sorcery, and demonism (through the ministry of Paul and others).
- ❑ To record the success of the church despite all odds against it. (Acts records the church's success against Jewish persecution; Revelation [prophetically] records the church's success against secular persecution.)
- ❑ To answer definitively, "What must I do to be saved?" (cf. Acts 16:30-33).
- ❑ To prove that the so-called "great commission" was indeed fulfilled (compare Matthew 28:19 and Colossians 1:23).
- ❑ To prove that this commission was impossible without divine intervention. Likewise, all present-day evangelism does not rest upon mere human effort but necessarily requires divine intervention—not in the form of visible miracles, but through providence and the unseen ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Despite Acts' classification of as a book *of* history, its main focus is not *on* history. It is not merely "the acts of the apostles," since all twelve apostles are only mentioned once (1:13), and only the highlights of a few of them are recorded. In fact, several people included in the account are not even of the twelve apostles (Barnabas, Stephen, Philip, Silas, Apollos, etc.).¹⁴ If anything, it would be better referred to as "the acts

14 "Apostle" has two uses in the New Testament. The first is a generic one which refers to one (who is) sent' to fulfill a certain work or mission. The word (*apostolos*) implies both conveyance (of something) and representation (of someone). Thus, an apostle is generally one who conveys a message provided by the one whom he also represents. We can see this generic usage in such passages as Luke 11:49, John 13:16 ("one...sent"), Acts 14:14, 2 Corinthians 8:23 ("messengers"), and Philippians 2:25 ("messenger"). The other sense in the New Testament is that of an office, for which one is 'called' and 'set apart' (Romans 1:1). This does not describe only what certain men did (in conveying and representing), but also the authority which such men possessed. These men collectively are known as 'the' apostles, designating a specific group of hand-picked ambassadors (Matthew 10:2-4). When Judas abandoned this calling, he was replaced by another whom the Lord Himself also selected (Acts 1:23-26). ...The original twelve apostles were personally selected by Christ out of all the many disciples

of Peter and Paul.” Acts is not merely a chronicle of the beginning of the church either, since much is omitted and there are years of faithful brethren’s work about which the narrative is silent. Those details and events that *are* recorded, however, necessarily drive the main purpose for the book. In some respect, “Acts is a book of conversions,” since “practically the whole of it revolves around a series of conversions and attempted conversions.”¹⁵ Even so, there is a great deal of material in Acts that has nothing directly to do with specific conversions. Some Bible students believe that Acts was written as a kind of legal deposition to exonerate Paul from any actual criminal guilt with the Roman Empire. While this theme does have considerable merit, one would be hard-pressed to prove that Luke wrote the entire narrative with this in mind. “The problem with this suggestion is that Luke includes so much material [in Luke *and* Acts] that has nothing to do with Paul’s defense. Why would he include the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of the Lord? Why would he focus on the Apostle Peter in the early chapters of Acts? Acts would be very tedious reading if the main purpose were a defense of Paul.”¹⁶

Acts can be divided into four sections, each roughly equal in length:

- ❑ 1:1—7:60, the church in Jerusalem.
- ❑ 8:1—14:28, the response to the gospel in Samaria, among “God-fearing” men, and Gentiles; the church in Antioch becomes a base for missionary journeys.

who followed Him (Luke 6:13-16). After this, only Matthias and Paul were added to this unique and distinguished group. Matthias was added to complete the ‘twelve’ just prior to their unveiling of the gospel of Christ to the Jews. Paul was added as an ideal ambassador to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15-16, Romans 15:15-16). These men all had the same *authority*, even though one could well argue that both Peter and Paul had certain *responsibilities* that differed from the others. Nonetheless, ‘the signs of a true apostle’ must be confirmed ‘by signs and wonders and miracles’ (2 Corinthians 12:12)” (Chad Sychtysz, *The Holy Spirit of God* [Summitville, IN: Spiritbuilding Publishing, 2010], 132-133).

15 James Coffman, *Commentary on Acts* (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1976), 3.

16 Gaertner, 21; bracketed words are mine. For what it is worth, I agree with this observation: there is simply too much in Acts (especially) that is irrelevant to substantiate *merely* a legal defense for Paul. It is worth noting, too, that there is other material that may be *missing* as well if one were to pursue that conclusion, especially more background information about Paul, his connections with the party of the Pharisees (and possibly the Hellenistic Freedmen?), and other details that would bolster this position.

- ❑ 15:1—21:17, the Jerusalem council places Jews and Gentiles on equal footing within the church; Paul’s journeys into the Gentile world bring this egalitarian message to both groups.
- ❑ 21:18—28:31, Paul’s arrest and imprisonment, and the legal battles and delays involved in these.

Practically-speaking, Acts really revolves around two characters—not so much Peter and Paul, but far more so Christ and the Holy Spirit. Christ is the central theme and purpose for the book; without Him, there would be no apostles, no church, and nothing to write about. The Holy Spirit provides the authority, navigation, and inspiration for the apostles and early Christians to fulfill their moral responsibilities to Christ as His servants. Without the Spirit’s work, the church would be a lifeless, directionless, and uninspired group of people trying desperately to find their *own* “Way.” Without Christ *and* the Spirit, there would be no atoning sacrifice, no sanctification of the human soul, no “gifts” of God, no miracles, no salvation, and no hope. It seems most appropriate, then, to recognize the preeminence of Christ and the critical role of the Holy Spirit in everything related to the establishment, development, and success of Christ’s church.

Christ is the Founder of His church, as He Himself declared (Matthew 16:18). Having been given “all authority” in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18), Christ was made the head and preeminent figure of this holy sanctuary of all believers (Ephesians 1:19-23, Colossians 1:15-20). It is Christ who chose His own apostles, provided them with His gospel, empowered them to produce miracles sufficient to confirm this gospel, sent them on their missions, and delivered them from their predicaments (as suited His purpose).

Once He took His rightful place in the heavens, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into His church, to give life to it. Just as our own body is dead without our spirit to give it life (James 2:26), so Christ’s “body” (church) must be filled with the Spirit of God. Otherwise, the church would have existed, but only as a lifeless construction. God “breathed into [Adam’s] nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7); likewise, Christ breathed the Holy Spirit into His church, and it became

a living, God-breathing organism. When we are baptized into Christ's body (church), we are not brought into a lifeless, empty chamber, like a church building or a mere holding pen. Rather, we are made a part of an *animate body* that pulses with the blood of Christ and breathes with the Spirit of God. Each soul that is brought into this body is made a functional member of it (Romans 12:4-5); together with Christ and the Spirit, this living body serves as a living temple of God (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5).¹⁷

Even so, Acts chronicles the efforts of specific *people* as they strive to implement Christ's commission and follow the Holy Spirit's bidding. Unquestionably, then, Peter and Paul dominate the immediate attention of the reader of Acts, even though they are both merely servants of a purpose far greater than the span of their individual ministries. Furthermore, the student of Acts cannot help but notice the parallels between the ministries of Peter (chapters 1—12) and Paul (chapters 13—28):

Peter's Ministry	Paul's Ministry
Healing of a lame man (in Jerusalem; 3:1-8)	Healing of a lame man (in Lystra; 14:8-10)
People healed through Peter's shadow (5:15)	People healed by Paul's clothing articles (19:11-12)
Peter confronts a (former) sorcerer (8:18-21)	Paul confronts a sorcerer (13:8-10)
Tabitha is raised from the dead (9:36-40)	Eutychus is raised from the dead (20:9-12)
Cornelius tried to worship Peter (10:25)	Pagans tried to worship Paul (14:11-13)
In Peter's vision of the sheet being lowered, the instruction to "arise, kill, and eat" is given three times (10:9-16)	Paul's vision of his meeting with Christ is recorded three times (9:3-6, 22:6-10, and 26:12-15)

17 Sychtysz, *The Holy Spirit of God*, 106.

Peter's Ministry	Paul's Ministry
Peter faced the Sanhedrin, but was spared by a Pharisee (Gamaliel) (5:34)	Paul faced the Sanhedrin, but was spared by the Pharisees (23:6-7)
Peter was beaten (5:40)	Paul was beaten (16:22-23, et al)
Peter was arrested and imprisoned (12:3-4)	Paul was imprisoned (16:24, 24:27)
Peter was miraculously released from prison (5:19)	Paul was miraculously released from prison (16:26)

“The early church noted this parallel, and carried it on. They said that both died in Rome on the same day. [But] just because a certain parallel outline seems to be followed as the lives of Peter and Paul are presented is not reason to doubt the truthfulness of Luke. ... It cannot be said that such a practice of comparison falsified the story for either character being compared. Neither can it be said that the Acts record is falsified.”¹⁸

While the principal characters in Acts are indeed Christ and the Holy Spirit, we see both Personages working through the apostles, and then through other dedicated men and women as well. All of this is intended to bring about the Father's will, that all men would hear the message of His salvation (Isaiah 49:6). Stott sums it up well: “Nevertheless, if the title ‘the Acts of the Apostles’ over-emphasizes the human element, ‘the Acts of the Holy Spirit’ over-emphasizes the divine, since it overlooks the apostles as the chief characters through whom the Spirit worked. ... The most accurate (though cumbersome) title, then, which does justice to Luke's own statement in verses 1 and 2 [of chapter one] would be

something like ‘The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus by his Spirit through his Apostles.’”¹⁹

18 Gareth L. Reese, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1976), xxxii.

19 Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 33-34; bracketed words are mine.

Author and Dates

The authorship of Acts is almost unanimously attributed to Luke, the “beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14).²⁰ Luke no doubt had unparalleled access to numerous primary sources and witnesses, including the apostles themselves, and to certain legal records. His historical and geographical accuracy have been vindicated time and again through comparisons to the political and social conventions of his day and through modern archaeology. His travels with Paul (the conspicuous “we” sections of Acts 16, 20, 21, 27, and 28) gave him first-person perspectives of exactly what it meant to be a missionary preacher in the first century. Later Christian apologists (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Eusebius, all of whom were of the first few centuries AD) confirm that Luke is most certainly the author of Acts.²¹ It is clear, too, that whoever wrote the Gospel of Luke also wrote Acts, since the prologue in both works (Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-2) and the overlapping of events (Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-11) indicates that these are two volumes of one great compilation.

Luke was a Gentile, and thus he saw the world (and the gospel) in a perspective different than that of the original Jewish believers. His handling of difficult subjects—namely, the Jewish reaction to the gospel, and then the Jewish Christians’ reaction to the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church—is balanced and objective, proving him to be a competent and well-trained rhetorician.²² He not only recorded the

20 “He was Paul’s medical adviser, and doubtless prolonged his life and rescued him from many a serious illness” (A. T. Robertson, “Luke, the Evangelist,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [electronic edition], database © 2004, WORDsearch Corp.). While this may be true in a general sense, it does not contradict whatever divine protection and healing God provided to Paul, as what is implied in Acts 14:19-20. William Ramsey has suggested that Luke and Titus are actually blood brothers, and that the “we” section (beginning in Acts 20:5) actually includes both men. Other commentators have found this to be a reasonable explanation as well (see footnote on 20:4).

21 H. Leo Boles, *A Commentary on Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1976), 11-12; Kistemaker, 20-21; and especially Reese, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, xxiv – xxv.

22 Rhetoric is the art of speech designed to influence people to a particular manner of thinking, change in beliefs, or change in policy. A well-spoken rhetorician “is a person of power, and the ancient world gave recognition to both the great general and the great rhetor. ... Rhetoric was, to the ancients, *power*, whether for good or ill. In the

substance of what was said (in speeches, sermons, and conversations) but he also maintained the linguistic nuances of those who did the speaking. Luke's own writing style, use of the Greek language, and particular attention to detail are nothing short of exceptional, as also demonstrated in his gospel account.²³ His accounts are not only remarkable but are also invaluable social, political, and historical portals into the life and times of the first century AD. "It is ... well worth our while to notice, as a mere matter of Christian evidence, how accurately St. Luke writes concerning the political characteristics of the cities and provinces which he mentions. He takes notice in the most artless and incidental manner of minute details which a fraudulent composer would judiciously avoid, and which in the mythical result of mere oral tradition would surely be loose and inexact."²⁴

It is widely believed that Acts was written in Rome in the early AD 60s, during Paul's Roman imprisonment but before the Jewish Revolts (66-70). The best date seems to be circa 62, which precedes the burning of

Graeco-Roman world, *speaking* was central to success. ... A failure to appreciate the ancient 'power' or 'art' of rhetoric and the centrality of oratory in the culture in which early Christianity grew up would be disastrous for the student of the New Testament" (Conrad Gempf, "Public Speaking and Published Accounts," *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993], 260, 262).

23 "Acts was known to the early church in two Greek texts, the 'Alexandrian,' especially in the great fourth- and fifth-century codices (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus and Alexandrinus) and the 'Western,' especially in the fifth- or sixth-century Codex Bezae (which is kept in the Cambridge University Library), although its existence has been traced back at least to the second century. The latter differs from the former as being in size longer (about 1,500 more words), in style smoother, and in content more colorful" (Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 36, fn. 49). *ISBE* clarifies: "[The Codex Bezae] is the early known manuscript which Theodore Beza obtained in 1562 from the monastery of Irenaeus at Lyons and which he gave in 1581 to the University of Cambridge, where it now is. It is a Greek-Latin text, the Greek holding the chief place on the left-hand page, measuring 8 x 10 in., and dates probably from the end of the 5th century. Both Greek and Latin are written in large uncials and divided into short clauses, corresponding line for line. The hands of no less than nine correctors have been traced, and the critical questions arising from the character of the readings are among the most interesting in the whole range of Biblical criticism and are still unsettled. It contains only the Gospels and Acts with a fragment of 3 John" (Charles F. Sitterly, "Texts and Manuscripts of the New Testament," *ISBE* [electronic edition]; bracketed words are mine). Given the questionable authenticity of the Codex Bezae (Western text), this study will use specific information from that text only as a commentary to the more credible Alexandrian text, and not as a primary source.

24 W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 259.

Rome (64) for which Paul and other Christian leaders were blamed, arrested, and (for Paul, tradition tells us) executed. The conspicuous absence of the burning of Rome and siege of Jerusalem, both of which would have directly impacted Paul's ministry, necessarily imply a date of writing prior to these major events. Nonetheless, some assume otherwise: "Many scholars fix the date [of writing] between AD 70—80. The reasons often given for this date have to do with the subject matter of Luke's Gospel, especially Luke 21:5-38. In these verses Jesus speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem. His description is so vivid that many scholars believe Luke must have recorded it after the event had occurred in AD 70."²⁵ This is not sound scholarship, however, as it assumes more than it proves. It also calls into question the authenticity of Luke's gospel, since he attributes these words to Jesus—they are not his own summary of "what happened." And *this* calls into question Jesus' ability to prophecy future events with great accuracy (as in Matthew 16:21), as we would expect of a Divine Being. With such logic, too, we might as well regard *all* detailed prophecies (especially those in the Old Testament) as after-the-fact accounts rather than what they *are*—prophecies of the future. (It is this same liberal revisionist attitude that refuses to accept Daniel as the author of the book by his name, for example, because his historical prophecies are "too accurate.") If we apply this to Isaiah's account of Jesus' death (in Isaiah 53), for example, we may as well conclude that Isaiah (or God Himself) could *not* have given such accurate details of events 700 years in the future, so then the book of Isaiah must have been *after* Jesus' death and not *before* it! This study summarily rejects all such theories that refuse to accept the genuineness of divine prophecy and divine inspiration of the NT writers.

Also conspicuous is the absence of the outcome and details of Paul's release from Roman prison. Acts ends with: "And he [Paul] stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered" (28:30-31). Church history is fairly consistent concerning the end of Paul's life: he was released from this imprisonment, continued in further missionary journeys, was re-arrested and brought to trial before Emperor Nero

25 Gaertner, *Acts*, 15; bracketed words are mine.

(allegedly for being responsible for the fires that burned part of the city of Rome, even though Nero himself was suspected of this), and executed in (or soon after) AD 64. Another proposal by some scholars is that Luke merely *avoided* Paul’s martyrdom “in order to preserve his focus on the victorious progress of the church.”²⁶ This would allow for a date of writing between AD 70 – 80. Given such logic, we wonder what is to be done with Revelation, for example, in which *many* Christians face martyrdom, and the church appears at one point to be defeated (Revelation 11:3-13)? This seems far more damaging to the physical church than does the martyrdom of one apostle. (And what do we do with James, another apostle whose martyrdom is actually *recorded* in Acts [12:1-2]?)

Such theories are purely speculative in nature, and (again) create more questions than they answer. Practically-speaking, it is far more natural to maintain that Luke did not record Paul’s release from prison, later re-imprisonment, or execution because these things had not yet happened. (It is for this same reason that the Hebrews writer does not mention the destruction of Jerusalem, but speaks of things that are “still standing” [9:8]: he definitely writes prior to the *fall* of such “things” [the temple], thus prior to AD 70.) Given this, the following is offered as a reasonable timeline for the period of Acts (AD 30-62):

Date	Events
AD 30	Christ is crucified (in the spring); the church begins 50 days later on Pentecost.
34-35	Saul (Paul) is converted. He spends some time in Damascus, escapes to Jerusalem, spends three years in Arabia, returns to Damascus, then is sent to Tarsus (in Cilicia) and remains there for several years (Acts 9:20-30, Galatians 1:17—2:1, 2 Corinthians 11:32-33).
40-42	Barnabas finds Saul in Tarsus and brings him to Antioch (Acts 11:22-26); while in this city, Saul is called into the ministry of an apostle (13:1-3).
45-48	First missionary journey, led by Saul (Paul) and Barnabas (Acts 13—14).

Date	Events
51	Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15).
51-54	Second missionary journey, led by Paul and Silas (Acts 15—18).
54-58	Third missionary journey, led by Paul himself (Acts 18—20).
58	Paul is arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21).
58-60	Paul spends two years in the custody of Roman governors, Felix and Festus (Acts 22—26).
60-62	Having appealed to Caesar, Paul is sent to Rome, where he spends two years in fairly comfortable custody (Acts 27—28) awaiting his trial before Caesar Nero.

It is believed that Paul was released from Roman imprisonment in 62 or 63, having been exonerated of any crime. He then continued in his apostolic ministry, possibly visiting Spain as he had hoped (Romans 15:22-29). After (and as a scapegoat for) the burning of Rome in 64, Paul was re-arrested by Roman authorities, tried, and executed. (See notes at the end of this study for more detail.)

The Jewish Situation

Something needs to be said about the Jewish world in which the gospel was first preached. The Jews despised Roman rule, but could not do much of anything to remove it, once it was established. (Ironically, it was the Jews' invitation for the Roman general Pompey into their country [in 63 BC] to settle a rivalry between two high-priestly families that led to Roman occupation in the first place.) Nonetheless, they resisted, as best as they could, assimilation into the Greco-Roman culture. The Jews actually enjoyed unprecedented and unparalleled favored status from the Romans; to Rome, Judea was a "special case," an emotionally-charged powder keg that had to be treated carefully and diplomatically. Thus, Judea was given self-governing status (autonomy); Jewish men were not conscripted into the Roman army; Jews were exempt from certain Roman taxes; etc. In return, Jewish aristocrats—and especially the Sadducees (see below)—supported Rome politically, even though many of them still despised the "uncircumcised heathen" presence in their country. Unfortunately, Rome did not always provide

Judea with competent leadership that understood the volatile Jewish situation. This indiscretion heavily contributed to the Jewish Revolts in AD 66-70, and ultimately fueled the siege against and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The Jewish political-religious establishment was divided into four main parties, all of which represented a very small percentage of the people but (collectively) exercised substantial religious, political, social, and economic influence over Judea.

- ❑ **Sadducees:** These were often the wealthiest of the Jews, and the most politically-active. They controlled the Jewish court (a.k.a. the Council or Sanhedrin) through the office of the high priest. They did not believe in the afterlife, angels, spirits, or resurrection (see Matthew 22:23-33, Acts 23:6-8); notably, they denounced any teaching on Jesus' resurrection (Acts 4:1-2), and may have believed that the soul dies with the body.²⁷ Jesus' popularity threatened their own local authority; more specifically, He threatened Judea's relationship with Rome (so they presumed; see John 11:47-50). These men had little tolerance for the apostles.
- ❑ **Pharisees:** These men were the closest to "the multitudes," the general God-fearing populace; however, they always kept a conspicuous distance between themselves and "the people."²⁸ Often

²⁷ See Josephus (*Josephus: Complete Works*, trans. Wm. Whiston [Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978]), "Antiquities," 18.1.4; "Wars of the Jews," 2.8.14. But Alfred Edersheim disagrees: "[Josephus's conclusions] may be dismissed as among those inference which theological controversialists are too fond of imputing to their opponents. ... We may therefore credit Josephus with merely reporting the common inference of his party. But it is otherwise in regard to their denial of the resurrection of the dead" (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993], 219; bracketed words are mine). In other words, we know for certain that they did not believe in a bodily resurrection from the dead; what they thought of the final disposition of the soul is difficult to determine conclusively.

²⁸ The Pharisees prided themselves on their learning and rabbinic education, as taught in the Jewish academies. "The result of attendance at one of these schools for a prolonged period of time was absorption of an incredible amount of memorized data, critical acumen, and a faculty for biblical argumentation. With these proficiencies, however, there often came an attitude of condescension and patronizing hate for the common man. 'This people who knoweth not the law are cursed' (John 7:49) is indicative." Furthermore, these men believed that those not schooled in their academies "had no right to do Biblical exegesis and so could not possibly be good or pious. Their inquiry, 'By what power, or in what name, have ye done this?' is tantamount to asking, 'What academy did you attend and who was the headmaster?'" (Daniel H. King, *At the*

wealthy and heavily involved with the temple, Pharisees adhered strictly to the entire Law *and* Prophets, whereas Sadducees only observed the Law (i.e., the Pentateuch or Torah). They regarded their long-held rabbinical “traditions” which had been handed down for generations as sacred; these traditions were often viewed on par with the Law of Moses as binding requirements (Matthew 15:1-9). Pharisees typically viewed Jesus as a defiant blasphemer of the Law. F. F. Bruce adds:

In the first century A.D. they were about five or six thousand strong, organized in “brotherhoods” (*haburoth*). They had great religious influence with the people, the more so as most of the scribes, the public expositors of the law, belonged to their party. Their two chief schools in NT times were those of Hillel and Shammai, two leading rabbis who flourished in the later part of Herod [the Great]’s reign. After the fall of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70 it was the Pharisaic party, and more particularly the school of Hillel, that proved best able to survive the collapse of the old temple-constitution and preserve the continuity of national life.²⁹

- ❑ **Zealots:** This radical group of nationalists loathed Roman domination of Judea with a vehement passion, and conducted terrorist attacks against Roman sympathizers. Eventually they incited the great Jewish Revolt (AD 66-70) that spelled irrevocable doom for Jerusalem and whatever remained of the nation of Israel. Their absolutist position—either full independence of Judea or full-scale military revolt, even to the point of self-martyrdom—made the relationship between Rome and Judea (and Jews in general) difficult, tense, and irreconcilable.³⁰

Feet of the Master: Studies in the Background, Content and Methods of Jesus’ Teaching [Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1997], 55).

29 Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 123, fn 42; bracketed words are mine.

30 In the listing of the apostles is “Simon the Zealot” (Matthew 10:4, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15, and Acts 1:13). (“Canaanean,” as found in some versions, is the Aramaic word for “Zealot.” The KJV word “Canaanite” is incorrect, and “Zelotes” is a poor translation at best.) It is possible that Simon originally associated with these radicals—though not as an assassin—and maintained his staunch anti-Roman position during his apostolic ministry. Or, it is possible that Simon abandoned his party affiliation when he became an apostle, but was called “the Zealot” simply to differentiate him from the

- ❑ **Essenes:** Though not directly mentioned in Scripture, these people nonetheless had a powerful religious impact upon Jewish society. Monastic, ascetic, separatist, and radical in their beliefs, the Essenes accused the religious sects of Jerusalem of being corrupt and religiously impure. They accused the high priests, often who were appointed by Roman proconsuls, of not being of pure lineage; thus, the Essenes had little to do with the temple. They voluntarily chose stringent diets and difficult lifestyles; their views were extremist, communal, and often misogynistic (i.e., contemptuous of women). Paul alluded to some of their ascetic practices in Colossians 2:20-23, but certainly did not support them.

The Herodian dynasty of Judean kings corresponds with the life of Christ and the early church. The Herods were not actually of Jewish descent, but for political reasons befriended the Jews (or at least pretended to) and supported their religion, and even claimed to have converted to it.³¹ They built many buildings (most notably, the great temple in Jerusalem) and contributed a great deal of money to Jewish causes. Yet, regardless of such outward gestures, most Jews hated the Herods—and the feeling was mutual. For reference purposes, these kings are as follows:

- ❑ **Herod the Great** (reigned 37 – 4 BC). Mentioned in Matthew 2:1-19 and Luke 1:5, this Herod was responsible for the slaughter of the children near the time of Christ's birth. Paranoid, power-hungry, and ruthless, he had his own family members murdered for fear that they would usurp his throne. Upon his death, his kingdom was divided among his three sons: Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip.³²

other apostle named Simon (Peter). Regardless, whatever conjecture we come up with cannot contradict Simon's *foremost* allegiance which was to Christ, not to the national liberation of Judea.

31 Herod was actually descended from the Idumeans, the lingering vestige of the ancient Edomites. Thus, the age-old antagonism between Edom and Israel was revived through Herod's kingship over the Jews.

32 “[T]he son of a king did not automatically become king of his father’s domain on his death; he was more likely to be assigned to another area by the Romans, according to their need. If unsatisfactory, he was apt to find himself summarily removed, ‘pensioned off,’ like Herod Archelaus and Antipater, to retirement in some pleasant spot on the other side of the Roman world.... If satisfactory, he might be ‘promoted’ to

- ❑ **Herod Archelaus** (ruled 4 BC – AD 6) became ethnarch of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea (Matthew 2:22) according to the terms of his father’s will. However, he was such an inept ruler that the Jews petitioned Rome to remove him. As a result of this action, Archelaus was deposed, and his “kingdom” was turned over to Roman prefects and procurators. This is the reason why Pontius Pilate (and other Roman governors before and after him) ruled over Judea during the time of Christ instead of a Herodian king.
- ❑ **Herod Antipas** (ruled 4 BC – AD 39). This king ruled over the districts of Galilee and Perea; he built the city of Tiberius and ruled from there when it was completed (in AD 23). He is the one who had John the Baptist executed (Matthew 14:3-12, Mark 6:17-29, and Luke 3:19-20). John had spoken out boldly against Herod since he had married the (divorced) wife of his brother Philip. Herod also tried to scare Jesus away (Luke 13:31-33), but Jesus referred to him as a “fox”—a relatively weak creature that uses cunning to achieve its objectives.³³ Later, Jesus stood trial before Herod Antipas at the time of His death (Luke 23:6-12).
- ❑ **Herod Agrippa I** (ruled AD 41 – 44). This Herod acquired the territory of Antipas by befriending the new Caesar Claudius (after Caligula’s death) in his ascension to Emperor. To win the favor of the Jews, he had (the apostle) James executed, and imprisoned Peter, intending to have him executed as well. This plan, of course, failed miserably (Acts 12:1-19). Agrippa died unexpectedly in Caesarea Palestina, being “eaten by worms” (Acts 12:20-23). Because his son, Agrippa II, was only 17 years old at the time of his death, his territories were given over to appointed procurators until AD 50.
- ❑ **Herod Agrippa II** (ruled AD 50 – 100) lived—incestuously, it is

somewhere more important or more sensitive, and might indeed well end up as a king of somewhere, though if it turned out to be his father’s kingdom this was more a matter of luck than anything else. This is not kingship by anybody’s definition; this is civil service” (Robyn Tracey, “Syria,” *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, vol. 2, 248-249).

33 Actually, either Herod tried to scare Jesus away or the Pharisees tried to scare Jesus *with* alleged threats from Herod. The first scenario seems more natural, however. Herod was “haunted” with guilt over his unjustified execution of John the Baptist (see Mark 6:14-29), and thought that Jesus was a resurrection of John (see Matthew 14:1-2). Even so, his solution to this problem may have been to get rid of Jesus as well.

generally believed—with his sister Bernice (whose husband, king of Chalice, died in 48). Agrippa oversaw the Jerusalem temple operations, including the appointment of its high priests, and was the religious liaison between Judea and Rome. He is the Agrippa before whom Paul testified in Acts 26. His death in AD 100 marked the end of the Herodian dynasty.

Outline and Chapter Titles

The outline for Acts closely follows its chapter breaks. This makes for a rather easy-to-remember outline format (below). In chapters 1-12, Peter is a principal character; ministry to the Jews is the main focus; and Jerusalem is the central location of the events described. In chapters 13-28, Paul is the principal character; ministry to the Gentiles is the main focus; and numerous cities are involved (though Antioch of Syria serves as a kind of base camp for Paul's missionary journeys).

Chapter 1:	Christ's Ascension; Choosing an Apostle
Chapter 2:	Peter's First Sermon; Conversions to Christ
Chapter 3:	Healing of the Lame Man; Peter's Second Sermon
Chapter 4:	Peter and John's Arrest
Chapter 5:	Ananias & Sapphira; The Apostles' Arrest
Chapter 6:	Appointment of Seven Servants; Stephen's Arrest
Chapter 7:	Stephen's Defense and Martyrdom
Chapter 8:	Dispersion of the Church; Philip's Ministry
Chapter 9:	Saul's Conversion; Peter's Ministry
Chapter 10:	Cornelius' Conversion
Chapter 11:	Peter's Defense of Cornelius; the Church at Antioch
Chapter 12:	Peter's Arrest and Deliverance
Chapters 13-14	First Missionary Journey
Chapter 15	Council in Jerusalem
Chapters 16-18	Second Missionary Journey
Chapters 19-20	Third Missionary Journey
Chapters 21-23	Paul's Arrest and Defense before the Jews
Chapter 24	Paul's Defense before Felix
Chapter 25	Paul's Defense before Festus
Chapter 26	Paul's Defense before Agrippa
Chapter 27-28	Paul's Journey to Rome