

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Presented by: Dr. Jon Korkidakis



## SESSION 1 - INTRODUCTION

The Book of Acts serves as a multi-functional witness of the history, power, and theology of the early church.

History can be a powerful witness, and as such, much of the contemporary church, with its ignorance of the past has lost the value of embracing the past in order to give us greater confidence for embracing not only the present, but the future as well.

As for power, many have seen in the pages of Acts the power of God working through his people. How many have longed for the spiritual power evidenced in Acts as the church moved boldly and courageously into a culture fraught with sin and evil.

Nowhere is the evidence of Acts more telling than the conviction of the early church to the resurrection power of Jesus and the Gospel that he proclaimed. No movement this profound or powerful would be possible unless it was part of God's plan. The early church, under the power of the Holy Spirit, changed the face of the first century and the world has not been the same since.

From the outset, a study of the Book of Acts causes the reader to ask whether the events in the book are:

1. Descriptive.
2. Prescriptive.

## AUTHORSHIP

The authorship of Acts is closely linked to the Gospel of Luke. It is supported...

1. Universally by the early church fathers (Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria).
2. The "we" sections in the book implying a travelling companion of Paul's.
3. Link to Gospel of Luke and their common address to "Theophilus" (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1).

## DATE AND PLACE OF COMPOSITION

- The abrupt ending in Acts suggests a composition date of ca. A.D. 60-62 (near the end of Paul's two-year imprisonment in Rome).
- Since the book has a strong historical orientation, it would have surely mentioned the Fall of Jerusalem if it had already taken place (A.D. 70).
- The place of composition is unknown, but Rome is a likely place, especially if a pre-70's date of Acts is correct.
- Rome may also be the place where the book took its final form, while Paul was in confinement.

## PURPOSE

Various views have been presented with respect to the book's purpose and Luke's intent for writing. They are:

1. A history of the early church – as outlined in Acts 1:8.
2. A defense of Christianity before Roman rulers.
3. An apologetic against false charges by the Jews.
4. A theology to show how Christ is building his church (Matt 16:18).

Most scholars acknowledge that Luke's intent likely included all of the above and limiting the purpose to only a narrow field of interpretation leads to a narrow understanding of the book as a whole.

Therefore, taking all these elements into account, we can posit the following concerning the purpose of Luke in writing Acts:

1. He allowed for a Roman audience a defense for the theological validity of Christianity.
2. He integrated both Gentile inclusion with Jewish rejection.
3. He placed into perspective the expansion of the church beyond Israel into its salvation-historical context.
4. He illustrated the sovereign nature of the church – making it a legitimate act of God, not man due to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

5. He demonstrated the Christological emphasis on Jesus as “Lord” with the major evangelistic message being centered on the Resurrection of Christ.

Therefore, the Book of Acts serves as a strong polemic against any arguments that would attempt to see the church as an historical anomaly or an illegitimate part of God’s plan.

### LITERARY STRUCTURE AND UNIQUE FEATURES

Acts is a broad preview of Jesus’ parting words in Acts 1:8.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere-- in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Act 1:8 NLT)

This passage is considered a form of the “Great Commission” which is primarily understood from Matthew 28:16-20, but is found in some form or another in all the Gospels (see Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:47-49; John 20:21-23 – see also Acts 2:38)

Therefore, the book divides itself into an extension of Acts 1:8.

Chart

Geographical Location	Verses
From Jerusalem	1:1-6:7
To Judea and Samaria	6:8-9:31
To the ends of the Earth (i.e. Rome)	9:32-28:31

Luke also includes summaries on the growth of the church as narrative markers (See 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31).

These markers are meant by Luke to indicate,

- Progress and advancement of the initial mission statement (1:8).
- A summary of a section and a transition to new material.

Typically, the latter part of Acts is outlined based on Paul's missionary journeys.

Section	Verses
Christianity's spread to the Gentiles	9:32-12:25
The 1 <sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey	13:1-15:41
The 2 <sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey	16:1-18:23
The 3 <sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journey	18:24-20:6
Journey to Jerusalem	20:7-21:17
Paul in Jerusalem	21:18-23:35
Paul before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa	24:1-26:32
Journey to Rome	27:1-28:31

Another way of understanding the final section of Acts is through the repeated statements that Paul must go to Jerusalem and then to Rome.

Destination	Statement	Verse
Jerusalem/Rome	Afterward Paul felt compelled by the Spirit to go over to Macedonia and Achaia before going to Jerusalem. "And after that," he said, "I must go on to Rome!"	19:21
Jerusalem	He was hurrying to get to Jerusalem, if possible, in time for the Festival of Pentecost.	20:16
	And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem.	20:22
	These believers prophesied through the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem.	21:4
	We and the local believers all begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.	21:12
	After this we packed our things and left for Jerusalem.	21:15
Rome	That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have been a witness to me here in Jerusalem, you must preach the Good News in Rome as well."	23:11
	You have appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar you will go!	25:12
	I have decided to send him to Rome.	25:25
	"He could have been set free if he hadn't appealed to Caesar."	26:32
	When the time came, we set sail for Italy.	27:1
	Don't be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar!	27:24
	And so we came to Rome.	28:14
	When we arrived in Rome	28:16

Scholars have debated the outline of Acts, especially the Pauline section, but regardless of the outline adopted, there are two significant points to note.

1. For Luke, the ultimate destination for Paul is Rome (Based on 19:21). This is presented halfway through the 3<sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journey and begins to overshadow the entire narrative in the same way that Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem does in Luke's Gospel.
2. As with Christ's journey to the cross, the repeated statements by Luke in Acts on Paul's ultimate destination of Rome implies the events are divinely orchestrated.

#### THE THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF ACTS

1. God and His Plan.
2. Jesus as Messiah and Lord.
3. The Holy Spirit.
4. Salvation and the Atoning Work of Christ – Resurrection.
5. The Gospel.
6. Witness and Mission – centered on the Resurrection.
7. Miracles.
8. Magic and the Demonic – Spiritual Warfare.
9. The Church.
10. Spiritual Gifts.
11. Suffering and Discipleship.
12. The Kingdom of God.

#### CLOSING THOUGHT

Luke presents two overarching principles that are intrinsically connected and serve as a logical continuum to God's plan.

1. In his Gospel, he records what Jesus did and taught in his body – his earthly ministry.
2. In Acts, he records what Jesus continues to do and teach in his body – the church.