

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

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Part XLIV: Acts

Luke's "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1), and the subsequent reminder of his Gospel account (Acts 1:2-12; compare Luke 24:51), set the stage for Luke's account of the history of the early church. The names "Acts" or "Acts of the Apostles" or "Acts of the Holy Apostles", as the book is variously called, simply mean that this book concerns the acts or deeds of the apostles following the ascension of Jesus. In fact, the English word "practice" ultimately comes from the Greek *prasso* (πράσσω), a verb showing repeated action; accordingly, one could say that this book shows the practice of the apostles especially. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia shows that while the book may have not been originally titled, manuscript copies of the book often had titles incorporating the noun form of this word, *praxis* (πρᾶξις).

As has been suggested, Luke is the author of this book which was written for Theophilus. While those two points are not questioned if one regard Luke as writer of the eponymous Gospel account, the questions of when and from where the book was penned is yet important. Luke could have been penned anywhere from the early 40s A.D. to the early 60s; this much is known: Acts was penned after. The dating is made even easier given some other benchmarks in the book itself: Gallio's Achaian proconsulship (A.D. 51) [Acts 18:12] and Festus' Judean procuratorship (A.D. 56) [Acts 24:27] require the book have been penned after A.D. 56, while having no mention given concerning Nero's burning of Rome (A.D. 64), Paul's martyrdom (traditionally between A.D. 66 and 68), or Jerusalem's destruction (A.D. 70) suggest the book was written before A.D. 64. A safe date, then, for Acts is some time between A.D. 56 and 64. Acts' ending with Paul imprisoned in Rome and Luke's being with Paul at least some during his imprisonment (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11), suggest that the book was written from Rome. The purpose in writing would have mirrored the purpose of Luke's Gospel account (Luke 1:1-4): Theophilus needed the next chapter so he could "know the certainty" not only of Jesus' history, but also of the Apostles' and the early church's history; incidentally, it is interesting that while there are four Gospel accounts, there is only one account of the early church--certainly the epistles which follow help to supplement this history.

The key words of Acts are "church" (used eighteen times, four more in the plural), "baptized" (used twenty-one times), and "witness" (used twenty times in its varied forms); in these words are found the body, the means of entry, and the mission. The key phrases are the five "what shall/must we/I do" questions preceding command and obedience. The key verse of Acts shows the church's consistent growth (Acts 2:47). The key chapters record the establishment of the church (Acts 2), the death of the first Christian martyr (Acts 7), and the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

More of the Bible's magnificent lessons are found in this wonderful record: first, God is not concerned with one's national or ethnical background, only his soul (Acts 2; 8; 10; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11); second, baptism is essential for salvation (Acts 2:38,41;

8:12,13,16,36,38; 9:18; 10:47,48; 16:15,33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16); third, Christians must care for each other (Acts 2:44-46; 6:1,2; 20:34,35; cf. Gal. 6:2); fourth, even the “chief” of sinners can change (Acts 8:3; 9; 22; 26; cf. 1 Tim. 1:15); fifth, some judge themselves unworthy of salvation (Acts 13:46); sixth, when ones cannot work together, they can still be relied upon to work effectively (Acts 15:36-41); and, seventh, it is hard to say goodbye to a faithful co-laborer, especially when there may never be another meeting (Acts 20:36-38)—at least on this side of eternity. Two other lessons are seen throughout: first, the righteous will face persecution; second, the church must be mission minded.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

I. BASICS.

A. Name.

1. Acts.
 - a. Note that Luke did not name this history.
2. Of the Apostles.
 - a. The book is not just about the apostles; it is generally about the early church
 - b. Focuses upon only two apostles (Peter and Paul) and several non-apostles are given prominent roles (Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, John Mark, etc.).

B. Author.

1. Credited to Luke.
 - a. Attested by "the Anti-Marcionite Prologue . . .; the Muratorian Fragment; Against Heresies; by Irenaeus, and writings of Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Tertullian, and others during the early centuries" (C.A. Cates).
 - b. "Some have suggested that Titus, Timothy, or Silas wrote the book; however, they are introduced in Acts too early, are not present during the 'we' passages, and were with Paul when the author uses 'they' and 'them'" (C.A. Cates).
2. Who was Luke?
 - a. Much uncertainty since the Bible is largely silent regarding him.
 - b. Mentioned three times by name in Scripture ([Col 4:14](#); [2Ti 4:11](#); [Phm 1:24](#)).
 - c. Eusebius, Jerome, and others say he was from Antioch (Fausset); while others say he was from Cyrene ([Act 13:1](#) [if [Rom 16:21](#) refers to Luke the Physician]) (Barnes).
 - (1). Antioch is supposed due to the emphasis placed on it by Luke in his book of Acts (e.g. only Nicholas' home is identified: Antioch [[Act 6:5](#)]) (Vincent).
 - d. Some say he was a Gentile ([Col 4:11-14](#)), while others say he was a Jew (Lardner in Clarke).

- e. Probably a Jewish proselyte (Barnes).
- f. A physician ([Col 4:14](#)).
 - (1). The "great medical temple of Aesculapius was at Aegae, not far away" from Antioch (Robertson).
- g. Some say he had been converted by Paul, others that he had, with Galen (his mentor and perhaps his uncle), gone to see the miracles of Jesus and was there made one of the seventy (Gill).
 - (1). This is not the case, for Luke had to appeal to eyewitnesses ([Luk 1:2](#)).
- h. Began working with Paul on second missionary journey ([Act 16:10](#)).
- i. Never married (Henry).
- j. According to Jerome, he died in Achaia at age 84 (Henry, Barnes).
- k. Almost all agree he died a natural death (JFB).

C. Date.

1. Benchmarks:
 - a. After A.D. 56, for [Act 18:12](#) is tied to that date by mention of Gallio.
 - b. After Gospel account of Luke ([Act 1:1](#)).
 - c. Before A.D. 64, for no mention of burning of Rome by Nero.
 - d. Before A.D. 70, for no mention of destruction of Jerusalem.
2. A.D. 62 (Mosher).
3. A.D. 63 (C.A. Cates).
4. A.D. 63-64 (Dunn).
5. Some, as they do with Luke, allege that Luke copied from Josephus, therefore pushing the book into the A.D. 90's.
6. Some, alleging Acts was written to harmonize the contrast between the practices of "Petrine" (Judaizing) and "Pauline" (Hellenizing) Christians, require that the book have been written sometime in the second century (and, therefore, by someone other than Luke) (C.A. Cates).

D. Audience.

1. Theophilus.
2. Christians (see purpose).
3. All men.

E. Written from.

1. Rome, since Luke was by the side of Paul during his imprisonment (C.A. Cates).

II. MOTIVATION.

A. Need.

1. An authentic account of the establishment and activities of the church which Jesus had promised was needed.

B. Purpose.

1. What was not the purpose (C.A. Cates).
 - a. Not *just* to provide a history of the first century church.
 - b. Not to harmonize Peter's and Paul's factions.
 - c. Not to defend Paul on trial in Rome.
 - d. Not to give history of Christianity's spread into foreign lands by other apostles than Peter and Paul.
2. What was the purpose?
 - a. Likely, the same as Luke: To give Theophilus an informed and accurate account.
 - b. To show the perfection of God's plan to redeem man.
 - c. To show how the church is to cooperate and worship and serve.

C. Relation to other books.

1. Written by the same author as Luke ([Act 1:1](#); [Luk 1:3](#)).
2. It picks up immediately after the Gospel accounts and shows how many of the congregations to whom other books are addressed were founded.

III. CONTENTS.

A. Keys (Dunn).

1. Key words.

- a. Beginning ([Act 1:22](#); [Act 11:15](#); [Act 15:18](#); [Act 26:5](#)).
- b. Baptized.
- c. Christian ([Act 11:26](#)).

2. Key phrases.

- a. "What shall we do? . . . Repent, and be baptized" ([Act 2:37-38](#)).
- b. "What must I do to be saved? . . . Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" ([Act 16:30-31](#)).
- c. "What shall I do, Lord? . . . Arise, and be

baptized, and wash away thy sins"
([Act 22:10](#), [Act 22:16](#)).

d. "Ye shall be witnesses" ([Act 1:8](#)) (Joe Nichols).

3. Key passages.

a. [Act 1:8](#).

b. [Act 2:36-38](#), [Act 2:41](#), [Act 2:47](#).

B. Lessons.

1. Several subordinate themes (C.A. Cates).

- a. Shows work of the Holy Spirit.
- b. Shows the persecution and how Christians handled it.
- c. Shows the faithfulness of God in establishing His kingdom.
- d. Shows the falling of the temple and Judaism before its literal destruction in A.D. 70.
- e. Shows how the early church worshipped ([Act 2:42](#)).
- f. Shows the progression of Christianity from Jews (Acts 2) to Samaritans (Acts 8) and then to Gentiles (Acts 10).
- g. Shows how the early church provided for her needy through free-will offerings.
- h. Shows the importance of man's spiritual being: His heart.

2. Lessons for today from Connally.

- a. Describes the work of the Holy Spirit today.
- b. Depicts the divinity of the church today.
- c. Destroys denominationalism today.
- d. Demands world-wide evangelism today.
- e. Decries racial discrimination today.

C. Outline.

1. From Connally.

a. Jerusalem the Center.

- (1). Christ and His Disciples ([Act 1:1-11](#)).
- (2). Waiting for the Holy Spirit ([Act 1:12-26](#)).
- (3). Day of Pentecost ([Act 2:1-47](#)).
- (4). The First Miracle ([Act 3:1~Act 4:31](#)).
- (5). Community of Goods ([Act 4:32~Act 5:11](#)).
- (6). Power and Protection ([Act 5:12-42](#)).
- (7). Persecution and Dispersion ([Act 6:1](#)).

~[Act 7:60](#)).

b. From the Dispersion to the Commission of Saul.

- (1). The labors of Philip, the Evangelist ([Act 8:1-40](#)).
- (2). The Miraculous Conversion of Saul of Tarsus ([Act 9:1-31](#)).
- (3). Extension of the church ([Act 9:32~Act 12:23](#)).

c. Antioch the Center.

(1). First Missionary Journey.

- (a). The Commission of Paul and Barnabas ([Act 13:1-3](#)).
- (b). From Seleucia to Antioch in Pisidia ([Act 13:4-52](#)).
- (c). From Antioch to Antioch in Syria ([Act 14:1-28](#)).
- (d). The Council at Jerusalem ([Act 15:1-35](#)).

(2). Second Missionary Journey.

- (a). The disagreement between Paul and Barnabas ([Act 15:36-40](#)).
- (b). From Antioch to Philippi ([Act 16:1-40](#)).
- (c). From Philippi to Antioch ([Act 17:1~Act 18:22](#)).

(3). Third Missionary Journey.

- (a). At Ephesus ([Act 18:23~Act 19:41](#)).
- (b). From Ephesus to Troas ([Act 20:1-12](#)).
- (c). From Troas to Jerusalem ([Act 20:13~Act 21:16](#)).

(4). Journey to Rome.

- (a). Arrest at Jerusalem ([Act 21:17~Act 23:24](#)).
- (b). Sent to Caesarea ([Act 23:25~Act 26:32](#)).
- (c). From Caesarea to Rome ([Act 27:1~Act 28:31](#)).

2. By focus.

a. On prominent preacher.

- (1). Peter ([Act 1:1~Act 12:25](#)).

- (2). Paul (Act 13:1~Act 28:31).
- b. On prominent place.
 - (1). Jerusalem (Act 1:1~Act 7:60).
 - (2). Judea and Samaria (Act 8:1~Act 12:25).
 - (3). Antioch (Act 13:1~Act 21:16).
 - (4). Rome (Act 21:17~Act 28:31).

IV. AUTHENTICITY/CANONICITY.

A. Authenticity.

1. From McGarvey.
 - a. "The book comes to us from a writer possessed of the first degree of credibility according to the canons of historical criticism; that is, he was a contemporary of the events which he records . . ."
 - b. "The events which he records correspond in many important particulars with the statements of other competent writers of the age in which he lived, and whose creeds and nationalities were hostile to his own."
 - c. "The book contains many points of incidental agreement with the acknowledged apostles of the apostle Paul, which cannot be accounted for except on the supposition that he and Paul both give a truthful account of these events."

B. Canonicity (Geisler and Nix).

1. Cited by Polycarp (A.D. c110-150), Hermas (A.D. c115-140), Justin Martyr (A.D. c150-155), Clement of Alexandria (A.D. c150-215), Tertullian (A.D. c150-220), and Origen (A.D. c185-254).
2. Authenticated by Irenaeus (A.D. c130-202), Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. c315-386), Eusebius (A.D. c325-340), Jerome (A.D. c340-420), and Augustine (A.D. c400).
3. In Muratorian (A.D. c170), Apostolic (A.D. c300), Cheltenham (A.D. c360), and Athanasius (A.D. 367) canons.
4. In Old Latin (A.D. c200) and Old Syriac (A.D. c400) translations.
5. Authenticated by councils of Nicea (A.D. c325-340), Hippo (A.D. 393), Carthage (A.D. 397), and

Carthage (A.D. 419).

V. MISCELLANY.

- A. Acts is sometimes called "the book of conversions."
- B. Problems with Peter versus Paul.
 - 1. There was some disharmony ([Gal 2:11-14](#); [1Co 1:12](#)), the latter not being due to Peter, but those who held him up as being something greater than he was; the former being due to Peter's prejudice.
 - 2. However, this does not affect the authorship or date of Acts! (C. Cates).
 - a. In [Act 15:7-11](#) Peter and Paul agreed that circumcision was not bindable.
 - b. The New Testament canon has been proven closed after the first century.
 - c. Everything in the book fits the first century better than the second.
- C. "The language of Acts is even better Greek than that of the Third Gospel" (Thiessen).
 - a. Continues medical terminology.
 - b. Uses nautical terms widely and accurately.
- D. "Furnishes the background for ten of Paul's Epistles: For 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, and Philippians" (Thiessen).

Matt.
28:19,20

EXAMPLES OF CONVERSION IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Mark
16:15,16

Event/Verse	To believe	To repent	To confess	To be baptized	Were saved
3000 saved Acts 2		Repented 37,38		Baptized 38-41	Remission 38,47
Eunuch Acts 8	Believed 36,37		Confessed 37	Baptized 38	Rejoiced 39
Saul Acts 9 Acts 22				Baptized 9:18	Sins washed away 22:16
Cornelius Acts 10	Believed 31,34			Baptized 48	Remission 43
Lydia Acts 16				Baptized 15	Rejoiced 15
Jailer Acts 16	Believed 31,34			Baptized 33	Faithful 34
One must hear Rom. 10:14	One must have faith Heb. 11:6	One must repent of sins Luke 13:3	One must confess Christ Rom. 10:9,10	One must be baptized Gal. 3:27	In order to be saved II Tim. 2:10