

# New Testament Survey

## The Acts of the Apostles

### I. Attestation and Authorship

#### A. External Evidence<sup>1</sup>

1. Polycarp seems to allude to Acts in his *Epistle to the Philippians* (chapter 1) and possibly to Acts 5:41 (chapter 8).
2. Justyn Martyr clearly alludes to Acts 1:9 in *On The Resurrection* (chapter 9) and possibly to Acts 7:22 in *Hortatory Address to the Greeks* (chapter 10).
3. Tatian possibly alludes to Paul's speech in Athens in his *Address to the Greeks* (chapter 4).
4. The Muratorian Canon states, "But the Acts of all the Apostles were written in one volume. Luke compiled for 'most excellent Theophilus' what things were done in detail in his presence, as he plainly shows by omitting both the death of Peter and also the departure of Paul from the city, when he departed for Spain."
5. Irenaeus frequently quotes or alludes to Acts, e.g. 22:8, 26:15 in *Against Heresies* (III.xv.1), 2:30-37 in *Against Heresies* (III.xii.2), and 3:6 in *Against Heresies* (III.xii.3).
6. Tertullian frequently quotes from Acts as well. For example, Acts 2:9-10 in *An Answer to the Jews* (chapter 7), 8:9 in *A Treatise on the Soul* (chapter 57), and 15:1-31 in *On Idolatry* (chapter 24).

#### B. Lucan Authorship<sup>2</sup>

1. The Muratorian Canon ascribes the authorship of Acts to Luke.
2. Clement of Alexandria writes in *Stomata* (V.xii), "As Luke in the Acts of the Apostles relates that Paul said, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.'"
3. Tertullian said in *On Fasting* (chapter 10), "In the self-same commentary of Luke the third hour is demonstrated as an hour of prayer, about which hour it was that they who received the initiatory gift of the Holy Spirit were held for durnkards."
4. Irenaeus writes in *Against Heresies* (I.xxiii), "Simon the Samaritan was that magician of whom Luke, the disciple and follower of the apostles, says,". He also writes in the same work (IV.xv.1), "Luke also recorded that Stephen who was the first elected into the diaconate by the apostles, and who was the first slain for the testimony of Christ, spoke regarding Moses as follows,".

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<sup>1</sup> Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), pp. 177-180.

<sup>2</sup> Thiessen, pp. 178-179.

5. By examining Acts, we can identify its writer as Luke. Hence, Luke wrote Luke as well.
  - a. The “we” sections of Acts (16:10-17, 20:5-21:18, and 27:1-28:16) indicate that the author of Acts was with Paul on his journey.
  - b. Timothy, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus, and Trophimus are excluded by Acts 20:4.
  - c. Silas cannot be easily fit into the “we” sections.
  - d. Only Timothy and Luke remain. There is not internal or external evidence for Timothy, hence we are left with Luke.
  - e. The writer of the rest of Acts is also the writer of the “we” sections, hence Acts has a single author.
  - f. Luke and Acts employ the same grammar and style of writing, hence both were written by the same author.
  - g. The medical language in both Luke and Acts indicates the writer was a physician. Since Luke was called a physician (Colossians 4:14), we conclude that the writer of Luke-Acts is Luke.

## II. Occasion and Date<sup>3</sup>

- A. There was a need for an authoritative account of the leading apostles Peter, James, and Paul.
- B. There was a need to show Christianity as being a single movement.
- C. There was a need to set Paul's ministry and arrest in the proper light.
- E. There was a need to show God bore witness with the apostles themselves.
- F. Probably written A.D. 60-62 by Luke while Paul was in prison in Caesarea.
  1. Luke would have had ample time for his research while Paul was imprisoned.
  2. Luke would have been able to interview eyewitnesses to the events in the Life of Christ during this time, as well as the events covered by the book of Acts.
  3. Acts ends with Paul's arrival in Rome. It would be unlikely for Luke to have omitted material after Paul's arrival had he written the book much later.

## III. Purpose and Plan

- A. Peter is the major figure in the first 12 chapters, Paul in the remaining 16.
- B. The outline of Acts 1:8 is seen in chapters 1-7 (Jerusalem), 8-12 (Judea and Samaria), and 13-28 (the uttermost parts of the earth).

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<sup>3</sup> Thiessen, pp. 184-185.

- C. Acts shows the growth of the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit during the first three decades of its existence.

#### IV. A Brief Outline<sup>4</sup>

- A. The Commission of the Apostles from Christ - Acts 1:1-11.  
B. The Equipment of the Disciples for their Task - Acts 1:12-2:47.  
C. The Development of the Work in Jerusalem - Acts 3:1-8:1a.  
D. The Extension of the Gospel to Judaea, Samaria, and the Surrounding Country - Acts 8:1b-40.  
E. The Conversion and Early Ministry of Paul - Acts 9:1-31.  
F. The Progress of the Gospel to the Gentiles - Acts 9:31-11:30.  
G. The Persecutions by the Civil Government - Acts 12.  
H. The First Missionary Tour of Paul - Acts 13-14.  
I. The Victory for Gentile Freedom at the Jerusalem Council - Acts 15:1-35.  
J. The Second Missionary Tour of Paul - Acts 15:36-18:22.  
K. The Third Missionary Tour of Paul - Acts 18:23-21:16.  
L. The Arrest and Trial of Paul in Jerusalem - Acts 21:17-23:30.  
M. The Imprisonment of Paul in Caesarea - Acts 23:31-26:32.  
N. The Voyage of Paul to Rome - Acts 27:1-28:15.  
O. The Imprisonment of Paul in Rome - Acts 28:16-31.

#### V. Chapters To Remember

Acts 1	The Commissioning of the Disciples
Acts 2	Pentecost
Acts 5	Ananias and Sapphira
Acts 7	The Martyrdom of Stephen
Acts 8	The Ethiopian Eunuch
Acts 9	The Conversion of Paul
Acts 10	Peter and Cornelius
Acts 12	Peter's Rescue by an Angel
Acts 13-14	Paul's First Missionary Journey

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<sup>4</sup> Thiessen, p. 187.

Acts 16	The Philippians Jailor
Acts 20	Paul and the Ephesians
Acts 27	Paul's Journey to Rome

## VI. Points and Peculiarities

1. Acts is a missionary book.
2. Acts is an inspired account of the advent, mission, and operation of the Holy Spirit.
3. There are 24 separate addresses in Acts.
4. Records five visits of Paul to Jerusalem.
5. Furnishes the background for ten of Paul's epistles:
  - a. Second missionary journey - 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
  - b. Third missionary journey - 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Galatians.
  - c. Prison in Rome - Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians.
  - d. After Acts - 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus.
6. Acts mentions many other personalities of lesser importance although it focuses on Peter and Paul.
7. Acts is a book about "what" happened in the early Church.<sup>5</sup> It is not to be taken as a model for what "should happen." For example:

Charismatics often go to the book of Acts to find support for tongues. They want to use it as a pattern for what should happen today. However, in Acts there are four accounts of tongues, each one of them is different. Which one of the patterns for tongues is to be the norm for today?

Acts 2 - Tongues given at Pentecost to those who were already believers for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel to the many foreigners in Jerusalem at Passover.

Acts 8 - Tongues given to the Samaritans in response to Peter and John's prayer.

Acts 10 - Tongues given to Cornelius upon his conversion - no waiting period.

Acts 19 - Tongues given to disciples of John after hearing the message of Christ, believing, and having Paul lay hands on them.

8. Acts is a book of transition from the Old Covenant to the New.

## VII. A Closer Look

- A. Acts 1

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<sup>5</sup> For an extended discussion of the Doctrine of Subsequence, see John F. MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1992), pp. 171-193.

1. The Commissioning of the Disciples - Acts 1:1-11.
  2. The Replacement of Judas - Acts 1:12-26.
- B. Acts 2
1. The Day of Pentecost - Acts 2:1-47
- C. Acts 4
1. Peter and John imprisoned - Acts 4:1-4.
  2. Peter and John before the Rulers and High Priests - Acts 4:5-22.
- D. Acts 5
1. Ananias and Sapphira - Acts 5:1-11.
  2. "We Ought To Obey God" - Acts 5:17-32.
- E. Acts 6
1. The Choosing of the Deacons - Acts 6:1-7
  2. The Arrest of Stephen - Acts 6:8-15
- F. Acts 7
1. The Trial and Stoning of Stephen - Acts 7:1-60.
- G. Acts 8
1. Saul Persecutes the Church - Acts 8:1-4.
  2. Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch - Acts 8:26-40.
- H. Acts 9
1. The Conversion of Paul - Acts 9:1-31.
  2. Dorcas Raised from the Dead - Acts 9:32-43.
- I. Acts 10
1. Peter and Cornelius - Acts 10:1-48.
- J. Acts 12
1. The Martyrdom of James - Acts 12:1-2.
  2. Peter's Deliverance by an Angel - Acts 12:3-19.
  3. The Death of Herod Agrippa I - Acts 12:20-23
- K. Acts 13-14
1. Paul's First Missionary Journey - Acts 13:1-14:28

- L. Acts 15
  - 1. The Jerusalem Council - Acts 15:1-35.
  - 2. Paul and Barnabas Split over Mark - Acts 15:36-41.
- M. Acts 16
  - 1. Paul's Second Missionary Journey Begins - Acts 16:1-8
  - 2. The Macedonian Call - Acts 16:9-10
  - 3. The Philippian Ministry - Acts 16:11-40.
- N. Acts 17-20
  - 1. Ministry in Thessalonica - Acts 17:1-9
  - 2. Ministry in Berea - Acts 17:10-15
  - 3. Ministry at Athens - Acts 17:16-34.
  - 4. Ministry at Corinth - Acts 18:1-18.
  - 5. Return to Antioch - Acts 18:19-22.
  - 6. Ministry in Ephesus - Acts 18:24-19:41
  - 7. Ministry in Macedonia and Greece - Acts 20:1-5.
  - 8. Ministry in Troas - Eutychus Raised - Acts 20:6-12
  - 9. Ministry in Miletus - The Ephesian Elders Visit - Acts 20:13-38.
- O. Acts 21-26
  - 1. Paul's Trip to Jerusalem - Acts 21:1-25.
  - 2. Paul's Arrest in the Temple - Acts 21:26-40.
  - 3. Paul's Address to the Mob - Acts 22:1-23.
  - 4. Paul Before the Council - Acts 23:1-11.
  - 5. Paul Moved to Caesarea for Protection - Acts 23:12-35.
  - 6. Paul Before Felix - Acts 24:1-27.
  - 7. Paul Before Festus - Acts 25:1-9.
  - 8. Paul Appeals to Caesar - Acts 25:10-12.
  - 9. Paul Before Festus and Agrippa II - Acts 25:13-26:32.
- P. Acts 27-28
  - 1. Paul's Journey to Rome - Acts 27:1-28:15.

2. Paul In Rome - Acts 28:16-31.