

44. Jesus in Acts

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Follow-up is extremely important in the business world. You can make the best deal in the world, but if you don't do proper follow-ups, most likely you will lose that deal. Jesus made it clear to His disciples that they should understand He had His own follow-up plan after His earthly ministry with the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit through them.

The Book that follows the 4 Gospels are known as the Book of Acts of the Apostles, or simply Acts. If you are interested in studying the history of the Christian church, the Book of Acts is where you must start. Without it, you have no basis of your study.

No other Book in the Bible underscores the richness of the history of the church better than Acts. And no other Book affirms more clearly its God-given power to persevere. Although the church may be comparatively small in number, no remnant was ever more sure of its destiny.

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

The author of this Book is Dr. Luke who was a Gentile physician, missionary, and traveling companion and friend of the apostle Paul.

Acts 1:1 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

As you can tell, the author addressed his words to a person name 'Theophilus'. There is little doubt that we have the same writer naming 'Theophilus' for the first volume of his writings as well as his second volume.

Luke 1:3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus,

Dr. Luke's writing was originally one monumental volume that was divided into two parts in the second Century. The first part of Luke's work was called "the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Luke," while the second part was titled "the Acts of the Apostle." I like the way the late pastor Chuck Smith retitled this Book, "The Acts of the Holy Spirit Through the Apostles."

The Book of Acts was written sometime after A.D. 60 as we know Paul was imprisoned in Rome around that time and the Book ends with Paul in Rome. There is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in A.D. 70, so it was written sometime between A.D. 60 and 69.

According to the church tradition that passed around, Theophilus was a wealthy Roman official who had purchased Luke's freedom for him. Nowadays, doctors are wealthy and famous, but during that time, most of the physicians were slaves. Luke was investigating the accounts of Jesus and the establishment of His church and reporting the facts back to Theophilus. Some people have suggested that the name "Theophilus" might be a pseudonym, to protect the identity of the man Luke was writing to. The name "Theophilus" means "lover of God." What a great name! If that were the case, then we could say that it is addressed to all lovers of God, which would include us.

B. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

Obviously the theme of the Book is the growth of the early church. This is the fulfillment of what Jesus said in Matthew:

Matthew 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

C. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

This Book tells us the story of what happened after Jesus' resurrection. The Book of Acts begins with the resurrection of Jesus and it is placed prominently throughout the Book. The apostles were driven to declare the reality of the resurrection.

Don't ever think that Jesus' story ended with His four Gospels, nor did His ministry end with His ascension. Each Gospel presents Jesus' earthly ministry. Acts presents the continuation of Jesus' ministry through His followers.

Jesus continued to heal; Jesus continued to work. Jesus continued to pour forth His grace, mercy, and love. Only, in Acts, He did it by the power of the Holy Spirit through His apostles. In that sense, the Book of Acts is an open-ended Book because the Lord continues to work in the present day through people filled with the Holy Spirit. In other words, the final chapter of the Book has not been written yet.

D. PEOPLE, EVENTS, AND THE GREAT TRUTHS

The Book of Acts presents people, events, and great truths at a neck-breaking speed. There is nothing slow and relaxed in this Book. We see some old friends whom we know from the four Gospels and new people as well.

We see two main characters – two spiritual giants in Christianity, the apostle Peter and the apostle Paul.

Peter takes the center stage in the first 12 chapters of the Acts. This foot-in-mouth-diseased and denied-Jesus-three-times apostle was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and preached a powerful sermon on the day of Pentecost. That was the beginning of the church in chapter 2. Peter became one of the main leaders among the first converts.

God worked in Peter's Jewish legalistic mind beautifully and revealed the earth-shattering new message that the Gospel was for Gentiles as well as for Jews.

But from chapter 13, Peter faded into the background abruptly and Paul took the center stage. Throughout the rest of the Book of Acts, Dr. Luke records Paul's great missionary journeys to the end of the earth.

After the resurrection, first, Jesus presented Himself to Mary Magdalene; then to the other women; then Peter, then to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus; and on that first Sunday night, to ten of the apostles, Thomas not being present. The following Sunday night, Jesus appeared to the apostles again with Thomas present. We have the account in the last chapter of the Gospel of John of His appearance to seven disciples in Galilee. Paul also wrote that Jesus appeared to more than five hundred people at once in 1 Corinthians 15.

I know, I know what the unbelievers would say about this eyewitnessing. They would argue, "They were all Christians. They came up with the same fake story as the

fact.” The problem with these unbelievers’ credibility is that they are the same people who believe the big bang theory that has no scientific factual basis and no logic, and is pretty much a make-believe wishful theory against the Christian truth.

Christianity is not a feel-good belief system that demands you to accept some misguided fairy tale. It is based on reliable and documented evidence of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, thereby justifying His claims and promises. Granted, there is an element of faith that is required to believe, but it is based on the clear facts.

If this Jesus’ resurrection was a hoax the apostles conjured up, certainly one of them would have broken ranks and admitted it when his life was threatened. But they all died the death of a martyr except John, who survived an execution attempt and was banished to the island of Patmos. Not one of them broke ranks, because they could not deny what they knew was true.

Jesus was alive. They had seen Him with their own eyes. It transformed their lives, and they had to share the Gospel message with others. They have been real people just like you and me. Yet God used them to turn the world right side up.

E. MARKING THE TRANSITION TO THE NEW COVENANT

For the first time, our God poured His Spirit on all believers, not just prophets, judges, and kings. He no longer requires temple sacrifices or circumcision, nor does He distinguish between “clean” and “unclean” or demand observance of the feasts.

You remember the apostle Peter’s vision of the sheet in Acts 10. It is another sign of the transition from the Old Covenant – in this case the dietary laws particular to the Jews – to the New Covenant’s unity of Jew and Gentile in one universal Church. The “clean” animals symbolizing the Jews and the “unclean” animals symbolizing the Gentiles were both declared “cleansed” by God through the sacrificial death of Christ. No longer under the Old Covenant of law, both are now united in the New Covenant of grace through faith in the shed blood of Christ on the cross.

For the first time, we see the believers of God transitioned from worshipping only in synagogues on the Sabbath (Saturday) to the Jews and Gentiles together worshipping the Lord from their house churches on Sunday.

For the first time, the Holy Spirit transitioned from guiding His Jewish people through the old method of casting lots to speaking to ordinary believers through His Word.

For the first time, the believers started to see God’s grace override the Law that was misinterpreted by the century-long rules and regulations when the Jerusalem council accepted the Gentiles as their believers.

For the first time, there was a change in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, whose primary function in the OT was the external “anointing” of God’s people, among them Moses, Samson, Gideon, Saul, and David. After the resurrection of Jesus, the Spirit came to live in the very hearts of believers, guiding and empowering them from within. The indwelling Spirit is the gift of God to those who come to Him in faith.

The apostle Paul’s conversion was a dramatic example of the transition from the Old Covenant to the New. Paul admitted that, prior to meeting the Risen Savior, he was

the most zealous of Israelites and was blameless concerning the righteousness of the law, going so far as to persecute those who taught salvation by grace through faith in Christ. But after his conversion, he realized that all his legalistic efforts were worthless, saying he considered them "rubbish":

Philippians 3:8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith
Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

F. STAGES OF GROWTH

The Book of Acts divides nicely into three stages that reflect the growth of the church. These three stages coincide with our own growth as we walk with Jesus today:

1) God establishes us as His people and the church. – Acts 1-7

The Lord brings us into His family. He holds us close and shields us. He watches over us and protects us. He nurtures us like a mother with her newborn baby.

2) God enlarges us as His people and church. – Acts 8-12

Just as an infant baby starts to grow and be aware of oneself and others around him, we begin to discover the gifts our Lord has given us. From immature action to mature mindset, from expecting others to serve to wanting to serve others. It is the process all the Christians should go through. However, many, many Christians choose to remain in the perpetual infant stage for their own selfish reasons. But those who are obedient to the Lord and His Word, they grow and become firmly grounded in their faith in Christ.

3) God expands us as His people and the church. – Acts 13-28

Until the second stage, the Lord often shields His believers from the onslaught attacks of satan and his demons, from the unbelievers, even from fellow believers who are immature. Whether we like it or not, the only way for believers to become spiritually mature is going through the trials and tests that are custom-tailored for individual believers by our Master. As the Lord sees our maturing process, He prepares us to send us out into different ministries and locations.