

Acts

1. Introduction

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One of the things that the Lord impressed upon me from the beginning of our church was that I should teach one of the Gospels of Jesus frequently. If you've been with us for sometime, you've noticed that I teach 2 or 3 Books from the O T and NT, then we go back to one of the Gospels.

Last two Books we studied were the Books of Job and Ephesians. Now we are going to study the Book of Acts. Some might say, "Hey preacher, this ain't one of the Gospels of Jesus Christ." True, it may not be one of the Gospels, but it sure talks a lot about the resurrection of Jesus Christ throughout the entire Book.

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.

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 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.

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 think that Jesus' story ended with His four Gospels. His ministry did not 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 to the present day through people filled with the Holy Spirit. The final chapter of the Book has not been written yet.

D. THE STRUCTURE

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

This is what Jesus said to His disciples before He ascended to heaven. This provides a threefold outline of the Book – chapters 1-7 record the spread of the Gospel in Jerusalem and the church was established; chapters 8-12 show that the church was enlarged to Judea and Samaria; with chapters 13-28, the church was expanded to the rest of the known world.

E. 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 will find some old friends whom we know from the four Gospels and will meet many new people as well.

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

Peter takes the center stage in 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 spot. Throughout the rest of the Book of Acts, Dr. Luke records Paul's great missionary journeys to the end of the earth.

We will see events happening one after another so quickly that we wish that we can slow down and learn more, but the author Dr. Luke moves on to next.

And the same is true with the great truths and weighty doctrines fill the pages of the Acts.

F. PREFACE

Acts 1:1-3 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by

many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

What do we know about this man 'Theophilus'? As I mentioned before, we heard his name twice – once in the Book of Luke, and here. But we don't know anything about him.

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 him. 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.

Facts are determined in our judicial system by the testimony of eyewitnesses. When two or three eyewitnesses testify that they eyewitness a certain thing on the same date and time under oath in the court, it becomes very hard to argue against it and it can be determined to be an actual fact.

First, Jesus presented Himself to Mary Magdalene after His resurrection; 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. He appeared another time to James. 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' creditability 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 were real people just like you and me. Yet God used them to turn the world the right side up.

G. THE ASSIGNMENT FOR THE BELIEVERS

Acts 1:4-8 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; 5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The disciples didn't understand the main reason for Jesus' physical presence on earth while He was with them before His death; they still didn't understand it after His resurrection. That's why they asked Him when He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel. Their mindsets were in the physical realm while Jesus' was in the spiritual.

When you are on Harbor Boulevard in Anaheim and see the Disneyland sign, it means, "You are gonna spend a lot of money." The famous Las Vegas sign means, "You are gonna lose a lot of money." Signs have meaning.

While we can't pinpoint when Jesus is going to come and get us out of this world that is known as the rapture, we can see signs of the times that say it is getting very close. What are these signs? We read them in the headlines every day or hear them on the news or see them on TV. I am not a prophet, nor a son of a prophet. I just read the Bible. And the signs of the times are plainly recorded in Scripture.

Biblical prophecy provides some of the greatest encouragement and hope available to us today. Just as the Old Testament is saturated with prophecies concerning Christ's birth, so both testaments are filled with references to the second coming of Christ.

One scholar has estimated that there are 1,845 references to Christ's second coming in the Old Testament, where 17 Books give it prominence. In the 7956 verses of the New Testament, there are 318 references to the Second Coming of Christ, an amazing 1 out of every 25 verses. Twenty-three of the 27 New Testament Books refer to this great event. For every prophecy in the Bible concerning Christ's first arrival as a Babe in the manger, there are 8 which look forward to His Second Coming as the King of kings and the Judge!

In the meanwhile, we all have a job to do – taking the Gospel of Jesus to your family members, your neighbors, friends, coworkers, even strangers you come across in your walk of life. You may say, "I don't know how. I don't know much about the Bible." Don't worry. That is where the Holy Spirit comes. You really don't want to evangelize without the Holy Spirit. Because it will be a nasty crash and burn.

But as He opens the door and leads you and fills your heart with His power, what you will say about Jesus to them will be impossible to stop, impossible to ignore, impossible not to be heard, and impossible to resist.

The same power that energized the first-century believers is available to us today. Have you been empowered by the Holy Spirit? If not, you can be. Ask God to fill you with this power to change your world. It is not about emotion. It is about fact. God wants to fill you with His power.

Rather than focusing on when Jesus is coming back, we should focus on what we are to be doing as we await His return.

H. QUESTIONS

1) How is your testimony of Jesus Christ?

Does your life reflect who you are in Christ as well as what you say about Him to others?

2) When was the last time you witnessed to others about Jesus Christ?

God doesn't need or want secret agents. He wants bold people who proclaim and you can be one of them with the power of the Holy Spirit, if you only let Him.