

Acts

Introduction, Background, and Argument

1. Title

1.1 *Πραξεις*. This word commonly used in Greek literature to summarize accomplishments of great men (e.g. *The Acts of Alexander* or *The Acts of Hannibal*)

1.1.1 *Acts* or *The Acts*

1.1.2 *Acts of the Apostles* or *Acts of the Holy Apostles*

1.1.3 *Acts of Peter and Paul*

1.1.4 *Acts of the Holy Spirit*

1.1.5 *Acts of the Risen Christ*

1.1.6 *Discourses and Acts of the Apostles*

1.1.6 *Acts of the Risen Lord through the Holy Spirit*

1.1.7 *The Acts of the Spirit of Christ Working in and Through the Apostles*

1.1.8 *The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles and Others during the First Generation of the Christian Church*

2. Authorship

2.1 Anonymous

2.2 Tradition identifies Luke (cf Anti-Marcionite Prologue, Muratorian Canon, Against Heresies, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius,

2.3 “First account” was also written to Theophilus (cf Lk 1:3) which identifies the author of Luke and Acts as the same person.

2.4 “We” passages show the author was with Paul at times (cf. Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16). Process of elimination removes those named as being the one with Paul (i.e. Salus, Timothy, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus, Trophimus)

2.5 732 words exclusive to the Gospel of Luke and Acts.

2.6 Luke was a doctor and Acts includes medical terminology (cf. Acts 1:3; 3:7-9; 9:18; 13:11; 28:1-10).

3. Date and Setting

3.1 AD62-63 (some hold to AD68 to place it after the early church’s claim that Mark was the first Gospel written and Luke depended on Mark for his Gospel, which precedes Acts. I do not hold to Markan priority or Lucan dependence).

3.1.1 Luke suddenly closes his history with Paul’s 1st imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:30-31)

3.1.2 No mention of the results of Paul’s trial, Nero’s Persecution (AD64), Paul’s death (AD68) or the destruction of Jerusalem (AD70), all silent indicators of an earlier date.

3.1.3 Eusebius, Jerome

4. Purpose of Writing and Theme

4.1 Historical Purpose. Luke's purpose is not stated, but it has a close connection to the purpose of his Gospel, so it may serve to provide an orderly account of the origins and growth of the Church.

4.1.1 Luke wrote to record historical details in the origin and growth of the Church so Theophilus "may know for certain" these details (cf Lk 1:4).

4.1.2 Luke picks up the story where his Gospel leaves off and traces the geographic movement of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.

4.2 Theological Purpose. Luke wrote Acts to record the inclusion of Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles in the Church.

4.3 Missionary Purpose. Luke wrote Acts to show the rapid growth of the church as the gospel went out from Jerusalem.

4.4 Apologetic Purpose. Luke wrote Acts to present the Church in a positive light against the charges of the Jews.

4.5 Transitional Purpose. Luke wrote Acts to show six major transitions in the plan of God.

4.5.1 Communal: Christianity Inside Judaism to Christianity Outside Judaism

4.5.2 Focal: Kingdom to Church

4.5.3 Geographical: Jerusalem to Rome

4.5.4 Theological: Christ Present to Spirit Present

4.5.5 Dispensational: Israel to Church

4.5.6 Majority: Jew to Gentile

4.6 Legal Purpose. Luke may have written Acts as a court brief for Theophilus to present before Caesar in the defense of Christianity as a peaceful religion.

4.7 Theme: "you will be My witnesses" (Acts 1:8)

5. Summary

5.1 Luke's second volume traces the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and eventually to Rome. The Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost just as Jesus predicted. In Jesus' absence the Spirit was present to begin the Church. The Church grew in Jerusalem until it came into conflict with the Sanhedrin, at which time its zealous member Saul began to ravage the Church, forcing its adherents into the surrounding regions of Judea and Samaria, both of which responded positively and entered the Church alongside Jews. Peter also extended the witness to Gentiles who entered the Church alongside Jews and Samaritans. By this time Saul had his Damascus Road experience where he converted to Christianity. He was God's chosen vessel to take the gospel to the Gentiles. His first missionary journey extended into southern Galatia. Many Gentiles responded prompting the discussion of Gentile salvation at the Jerusalem Council. His second missionary journey extended into Cilicia, southern Galatia, Asia,

Macedonia, and Achaia. Paul was becoming a controversial figure and had many run-ins with the Jews. On his third missionary journey he returned to Cilicia and southern Galatia and went to Ephesus where he spent more than two years, eventually going into Macedonia and Achaia, after which he returned to Jerusalem with a famine relief fund for Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Paul continued to have run-ins with the Jews, but was rescued by the Roman authorities. In his third trial Paul appealed to Caesar and was imprisoned at Caesarea for two years awaiting transport, during which he stood before Agrippa. At last he made his journey to Rome by way of ship that came into a storm resulting in shipwreck. After surviving the journey was completed and he was taken into house arrest in Rome with freedom to receive visitors. Luke abruptly ends his second volume.

6. Outline

Option 1 Based on Acts 1:8

- 6.1 The Witness in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7)
- 6.2 The Witness in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12)
- 6.3 The Witness to the Remotest Parts of the Earth (Acts 13-28)

Option 2 Based on the Six Growth Reports (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31)

- 6.1 The Growth in Jerusalem (Acts 1:1-6:7)
- 6.2 The Growth in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (Acts 6:8-9:31)
- 6.3 The Growth in the Remotest Part of the Earth (Acts 9:32-28:31)
 - 6.4 The Growth along Coastline, in Antioch, and Jerusalem (Acts 9:32-12:24)
 - 6.5 The Growth in Cyprus, Pamphylia, Syria, and Cilicia (Acts 12:25-16:5)
 - 6.6 The Growth in Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia (Acts 16:6-19:20)
 - 6.7 The Growth in Macedonia, Greece, and Rome (Acts 19:21-28:31)

7. Uniquenesses

- 7.1 Acts is the only record of the first 30 years of church history.
- 7.2 Acts records hundreds of archaeologically verified historical details (see the Tübingen school convert William M. Ramsay, *St. Paul The Traveler and Roman Citizen, The Bearing of Recent Discovery*).
- 7.3 Acts emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit (mentioned 58x's).
- 7.4 Acts is the only record of the selection of the 12th apostle.
- 7.5 Acts records 24 sermons and defenses of Christianity (e.g. Acts 2, 3, 7, 10, 14, 17, 23, 24, 25, 26).
- 7.6 Acts records the first church council (Acts 15).
- 7.7 Acts records the rapid growth of the early church.

8. Theological Importance

8.1 Missionary. Basic principles for missionary work are described that may be applicable to the Church in all ages.

8.2 Spirit. The Spirit is at the forefront of the missionary work. His direction and empowerment are highlighted in the Book of Acts. He is mentioned 58 times in the book.

8.2 Historical. Includes a wide variety of references to historical facts that have been confirmed meticulously through archaeological investigation. About 80 geographical references including provinces, areas, cities, and localities are mentioned. Official Roman titles are used including procurator, consul, praetor, politarch, Asiarch, and others. Cultural and religious affairs are introduced with remarkable accuracy, including mention of well-known figures on the world stage.

8.3 Preaching. Apostolic preaching is revealed so we have a clear idea of their content and purpose, which provide invaluable details for our own preaching.

8.3 Doctrinal. Harmony between the preached messages is clear. They all present in varying ways Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, who died and rose for our sins.

9. Controversial Passages or Ideas

9.1 What are tongues? (Acts 2:1-13; 10:46; 19:6)

9.2 How do the NT authors quote the OT? (Acts 2:16; 15:15-18)

9.3 What is required for salvation? (Acts 2:38, 44; 3:19; 4:4, 32; 5:14, 31; 8:12, 13, 37; 9:42; 10:43; 11:17, 18, 21; 13:12, 39, 48; 14:1, 23; 15:5, 7, 11; 16:1, 31, 34; 17:12, 30, 34; 18:8, 27; 19:2, 4, 18; 20:21; 21:20, 25; 22:19; 26:20)

9.4 Is communism taught by the Bible? (Acts 2:44-45)

9.5 When did the church begin? (Acts 2, 9, 13, 28)

9.6 Were Paul's decisions to have Timothy circumcised and take vows in Jerusalem correct? (Acts 16, 21)

9.7 Is the gospel to the Jew first for all time as a theological truth or a historical description of Paul's practice?

9.8 Is civil disobedience proper in light of Romans 13? (Acts 5:29)

9.9 Should we build doctrine from Acts? Is it descriptive of what happened or prescriptive of what must happen?

10. Keys to Acts

10.1 Key Word: Growth (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; **9:31**, 35, 42; 11:21, 24; **12:24**; 14:1; **16:5**; 17:12; **19:20**; **28:31**)

10.2 Key Verse(s): Acts 1:8; 4:12; 5:38-39; 9:4

10.3 Key Sermons: Acts 2 (Peter to Jews); Acts 10 (Peter to Gentiles); Acts 13 (Paul to Jews); Acts 17 (Paul to Gentiles)

10.3 Key Idea: Jesus Christ is building His church by means of the Spirit. It grows by prayer, persecution from religious zealots, political monsters, regional banishment, internal problems, et. al. It can't be stopped!