

ACTS

NEW TESTAMENT

**INTRODUCTION
TO THE BOOK
OF ACTS**

**THE BOOK'S
STRUCTURE
& OUTLINE**

**THE PURPOSE
& RELEVANCE
FOR TODAY**

GET INTO ACT

THERE is a great danger in our urban Christian lives that we will fall into the comfort zone trap.

What does it take to live a radical life and what does an empowered Christian life look like?

Discover the answers from the Acts sermon series.

This 3-part series will take you through how the believers of the early church worked to spread the Gospel of Christ even in impossible situations.

As it was then so it is now; the Holy Spirit makes the impossible - possible!

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***LIVING A
RADICAL
LIFE FOR
GOD***

If you are feeling excited or intrigued, great!

Pray and anticipate the supernatural to happen.

And get ready to get into action!

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ACTS

GREEK ORIGIN OF THE WORD ACTS

The title 'Acts' comes from the Greek word 'praxis', from which we get the word 'practice'. Acts literally means therefore "the practice of Christianity."

'NOT REALLY THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES'

Although usually called the 'Acts of the Apostles', most of them do not appear in it except for James who was beheaded in the early chapters and John, who is mentioned alongside Peter. Only Peter receives a more thorough mention but more than half of the book focuses on Paul who is not even in the original Twelve.

SEQUEL TO THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke which describes what Jesus began to do and to teach (Acts 1:1). It is also about the prominent role of the Holy Spirit from the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

GOD, JESUS, THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts is an expression of the Trinitarian theology (God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit) vital in the Christian faith.

David Pawson in 'Unlocking the Bible' expressed excellently the practical title of Acts in this way: 'The Acts of God through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit in the Apostles'.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - DR. LUKE

Luke is unique among the Bible authors as he is the only Gentile. He wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

His translated English name of "Luke" comes from the original word "Loukas" and he was a native of Antioch in Syria. He was a doctor (Colossians 4:14), historian, traveller, writer and evangelist.

DATE OF WRITING

Acts was probably written around A.D. 60-62 at the time when Paul's release from prison was either imminent or had just taken place.

The first Gentile Church was established in Antioch (Acts 11:26) and the followers of Jesus Christ were first called "Christians". This term then was actually quite disparaging, a nickname given by the locals to the people who sought to follow Christ.

The commonly preferred words were either 'believer' or 'disciple', and we can appreciate this in our day and age of cultural Christianity.

Salvation is a key word in the book of Acts. Luke is especially concerned about highlighting the fact that the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh - on Jews, on Samaritans and unto the ends of the earth (Gentiles).

Acts was written more as a defence brief rather than a history of Paul's life or of the early Church.

Otherwise Luke would have included the outcome of Paul's trial and his death, and far more details about the growth and life of the early Church.

STRUCTURE AND OUTLINE

There are **TWO** commonly held approaches to Luke's intended structure for Acts, one around the two prominent apostles and the other looking at the geographical locations.

1. TWO SECTIONS

The simplest is that it is structured around the two main apostles.

- a. Peter is the apostle to the Jews (Chapters 1-12). This section describes the beginnings of the Church in Palestine.
- b. Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles (Chapters 13-28). This section describes the expansion of the Church from Antioch to Rome.

There is a remarkable parallel between what Luke says about both Peter and Paul, implying the same anointing and favour of God over both, whether it is on their miracles, visions, healings, faith, preaching, sufferings or courage.

Luke seems to want to emphasise that they should both be equally honoured and valued as apostles in the church and there should not be a threat of two churches evolving out of their allegiance to either Peter of the Jewish church or Paul of the Gentile church.

A SIMPLE OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS:

- The preparation of the church for ministry - Acts 1:1-2:13.
- The witness begins in Jerusalem - Acts 2:14-5:42.
- The witness spreads beyond Jerusalem - Acts 6:1-12:25.

(The focus shifts here from Peter's ministry to Paul's.)

- The witness reaches Cyprus and Southern Galatia - Acts 13:1-14:28.
- The council in Jerusalem - Acts 15:1-35.
- The witness reaches Greece - Acts 15:36-18:22.
- The witness reaches Ephesus - Acts 18:23-21:16.
- Arrest in Jerusalem - Acts 21:17-23:35.
- The witness reaches Caesarea - Acts 24:1-26:32.
- The witness reaches Rome - Acts 27:1-28:31.

2. THREE SECTIONS

Acts 1:8 provides this division: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

It is a geographical division of the progression of the witness for Christ.

- a. Starts in Jerusalem (Chapters 1-7)
- b. Into Judea and Samaria (Chapters 8-10)
- c. Finally it spreads to Europe and the heart of the Roman Empire (Chapters 11-28)

However, Rome is hardly considered to be the "ends of the earth" although it was the world's political and cultural centre then. We know Luke did not intend his writings to narrate the entire history of the early church.

Acts 1:8 is very much a mandate today as it was then because there are still unreached people groups in different pockets of the world.

Luke describes the irresistible expansion of the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire, like ripples with each summary statement above, in one direction of north-west from Jerusalem.

The only hint of a south-bound ripple is the conversion of the Ethiopian on his way home to Africa (Acts 8:27-39).

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK & **RELEVANCE** FOR TODAY

AS A DEFENCE BRIEF FOR PAUL

As mentioned earlier, Acts was written more as a defence brief for Paul to Theophilus. But on a divine level, Acts is a vital link between the Gospels and the Epistles. Events, people and ideas mentioned in the Epistles would be without context and difficult to understand had not Luke put in the context for us.

His narrative supplies a bridge connecting the life and ministry of Jesus to the life of the church and the witness of the earliest believers.

Without Acts, we would have no idea who Paul was, as he was not one of the twelve apostles and he was not mentioned in the Gospel. His letters to churches and individuals would have lost their importance without his conversion background.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF BAPTISM

Acts gave us the context of baptism in water for new believers as Paul merely presumed the knowledge of his readers in his epistles.

The phrase "baptised you with the Holy Spirit" is used in all four Gospels but none tells us how it is practically worked out. The Epistles are silent about its meaning and only the book of Acts described it through various events.

FREE FROM THE LAW OF MOSES

Acts clears our doubts about the need to follow the 613 different requirements of the Law of Moses as the great argument on the need for circumcision climaxed in Acts 15. Christians are completely free from the Law of Moses though bound by the law of Christ.

TIMELESS PRINCIPLES OF THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Luke records for us the good, the bad and the ugly about the life of the early church. Arguments, rivalries, divisions, hypocrisies, immoralities, heresies and mistakes are written out in detail. So are blessings and stories of extraordinary growth. We need to discern which events are recorded as one-off lessons and historical events, and which others are timeless principles for Christian life and church growth.

Timeless principles of the life of the Church are found in the warm fellowship together of God's people, the centrality of prayer and evangelism in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the face of great persecution and sufferings, there was fearless declaration of the Gospel in the presence of the joy of knowing God and a reverent fear of God. They were people of hope and courage.

AN EXCELLENT MISSIONARY MANUAL

Acts is an excellent missionary manual describing the sending of apostles to plant churches in highly populated cities so that the growing urban churches could have a ripple effect throughout the surrounding area.

Making disciples was a key strategy to establish an ongoing community of believers and the apostles spent substantial time in the new churches to do that.

Elders were appointed before they left each community so that the churches would become self-propagating, self-governing and self-supporting.

WHAT A CHURCH SHOULD BE LIKE

Acts is the only book that described what a church should be like. Only the Gospel of Matthew mentions the word at all, but is not descriptive and the Epistles merely give hints.

Acts describes how churches are planted, elders appointed and the relationships between the apostles and the churches they founded.

Acts also describes the proper way people were born again through repentance, faith, baptism in water and baptism in the Holy Spirit.