

Acts of the Apostles

All that Jesus Continues to Do and Teach.

Acts of the Apostles forms the essential link between the four Gospels and the epistles. "In many ways the Epistles are not fully intelligible until they are read against the background of the book of *Acts*. The book shows effectively the main trends in the development of Christianity and presents in effect samples of the continuing work of Jesus," writes Donald Guthrie.

NAME: Although the fifth book in the New Testament is often called *The Acts of the Apostles* only four apostles are mentioned in it. The book begins with Peter as the leader of the little apostolic band, and then he passes from the scene to be succeeded by Paul. Probably the book had no title originally. The early church fathers alluded to it without naming the book or author. It appeared with various titles including, "Acts," "The Acts," and "The Acts of the Apostles" which was given to it in the middle of the second century A. D. It was the second volume of a *History of Christian Origins* which was dedicated to a man named Theophilus. The theme that unites volume one and volume two is Acts 1:8. When they were first written the two volumes were circulated together as one complete and independent work. The Acts of the Holy Spirit would be an excellent title because the Spirit is referred to more than fifty times.

AUTHOR: The author does not give his name. However, the view held by the early church is that Acts was written by Luke, the physician-friend and fellow-traveler of the Apostle Paul (Col. 4:14; Philemon 24; II Tim. 4:11). Compare the following "we" passages in Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16). From his medical vocabulary and style we know that he was a medical doctor. He could, indeed, have been "the Macedonian" (16:9) who was seen in the vision of Paul. If not, he was an Antiochene of Macedonian origin who worked in Philippi for a number of years. Paul writes to the Colossians, "Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings" (Col. 4:14). The second century tradition of Lucan authorship is supported by the weight of internal evidence.

DATE: The best date is A. D. 63 during Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Nothing in Acts would indicate the destruction of the Temple (A. D. 70) has taken place before the writing of the book. There is no hint that Nero's anti-Christian policy had yet manifested itself as it did in the year 64. The death of Paul is not mentioned in Acts. Luke was with Paul during his last imprisonment, perhaps in A. D. 66 or 67 (II Tim. 4:11). There is strong presumption that he did not long survive his friend. A historian of Luke's ability would surely have finished the life of Paul. There is not even a hint of a tradition of a third volume. The preferred date is prior to Nero's persecution in A. D. 64, and that he wrote his history in Rome while waiting for Paul's trial to begin. This date would lend itself for Luke to have written his Gospel about A. D. 60, possibly in Caesarea during Paul's two year imprisonment (Acts 24:27).

TIME COVERED: Acts covers a period of about thirty-three years from 30 to 63 A.D.

PURPOSE: Luke states his purpose in writing in Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-3. His primary purpose as a historian is to help his readers to recognize the divine authority behind the events of the church. This volume is the continuation of the work Jesus "began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). Volume one recorded what Jesus

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is the continuation of the work Jesus "*began* to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). Volume one recorded what Jesus *began* to do and teach and volume two tells us what Jesus *continues* to do and teach through His disciples who are empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is the mission book in the New Testament. What is Jesus continuing to do through His body today? Acts gives us volume two of the continuing story of that which will continue until Christ returns at His Second Coming.

KEY VERSE: 1:8

KEY WORD: bold witness

THEME: The theme is set forth in the key verse 1:8. It also provides an excellent outline of the book.

STYLE: Luke writes in clear, lucid, competent Greek with a command of language and expression which marks the writer as an educated man who communicates effectively with literate men. His ability with the language matches his ability as a historian. His sincerity, conviction, and first hand reporting shows through. Luke has the ability to state the facts with brevity. The speeches in Acts are vivid and effectively interwoven into the theme of the book. Blaiklock observed, "Such decisiveness requires a clarity of mind and a literary ability of no mean order." The author frequently uses medical terms (1:3; 3:7ff; 9:18, 33; 13:11; 28:1-10).

RECIPIENT: Theophilus is mentioned in Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1, and may have been a convert of Luke to Christ. He is probably a man of high rank in the service of the Roman government. His name means lover of God. It has been conjectured that Luke was Theophilus' doctor. In Rome a group of people would be invited to listen to a new work being read aloud by its author or his representative.

CHURCH GROWTH: In a little over ten years Paul established the Church in four Roman provinces. Before A. D. 47 there were no Churches in these provinces; in A. D. 57 Paul could speak as if his work there was done, and could make plans for extensive tours into the far West. From Acts we know that Paul concentrated on the population centers through out the Roman empire. The length of the work depended on the progress of the work, and the degree of opposition by the citizens. He reached out to neighboring provinces from key centers at Tarsus, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome.

LUKE S' SOURCES: Paul would be Luke s' chief source of information, and Luke s' travels would have given him opportunity to make personal contact with many of the church leaders throughout Judea and the Roman empire. He could have obtained all the data he needed for his history from personal contacts and personal journals from his own missionary work. Personal journals would have been complemented by personal contacts with informed individuals in each areas of ministry where he traveled. One scholar writes, "No historian ever had better sources or used his sources more accurately" than Dr. Luke. Archaeological discoveries confirm the historical accuracy of the author.

Title: Introduction to Acts of the Apostles

Series: A Look at the Book

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