

Maranatha Bible Church 2019

Equipping Hour: NT Gospels and Acts Introduction

Week 6: The Book of Acts

Introduction

The Book of Acts

The book of Acts is unique to the New Testament as it serves primarily as a historical record for the early church. Though not known for being theologically rich, Acts has an important role in the New Testament as it shows the development of the early church but also how the first Christians put into practice all Jesus had taught.

This book would've been written sometime between 60-62 AD, and all of Paul's writings fit into the timeline Acts represents except 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. You can read about the churches he planted and letters he wrote as you read through the book.

The book actually divides up easily. **Chapters 1-12 are all about Peter** and his exploits to bring the gospel to the world. Then **chapters 13-28 are all about Paul** and his missionary journeys as he spread the gospel to the world. These two men, Peter and Paul, are foundational figures in the early church, and we today stand on what they accomplished. Though these two men were instrumental in the early church, both men were only successful in their efforts b/c of the empowering of the Holy Spirit, **who is the main character of this book**.

The Book of Acts serves as a transition from the Old Covenant of law-keeping to the New Covenant of grace and faith. This transition is seen in the change in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, whose primary function in the Old Testament was the external "anointing" of God's people. 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 by faith.

- This book is Luke's account of the work after Jesus but through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church. It is there for us today to have a foundation but also for us to continue the work which was started.
- It is important to remember that between Jesus' resurrection and ascension, there were 50 days which took place.
 - There were 40 days before He ascended and then 10 days the disciples were on their own.
 - It was during the 40 days between Jesus death and ascension to heaven that He, through the Holy Spirit, gave commands to the chosen apostles.
 - Jesus appeared to many (over 500 1 Cor. 15:6) and to the disciples.
 - By focusing in on Jesus' commands, Luke is defending all the apostles would do in the name of Jesus.
 - Perhaps most importantly, we read of Jesus restoring Peter in John 21:15-17.
 - This is so important to understand because Peter ran away from Jesus when He was going to be crucified and was actually lying along the way (John 18).
 - Now, as the book of Acts starts out, in 1:12-26, Peter is taking the lead and getting someone to replace Judas.
 - Peter goes from close companion of Christ, denying Christ and then leading Christ's people and establishing Christ's church

Author: Luke

Reader(s): Theophilus

The Purpose¹: There are several major themes in Acts, and here let us consider three of them. One is apologetical. Apologetics is the branch of theology that is concerned with defending Christianity against accusations and error. In the early days of the church, many were accusing the Christians of being seditious against the Roman imperial government. Luke recorded several courtroom scenes and made it clear that whenever Christians came before the Romans, the Romans recognized that the Christians were good, peaceful citizens. The real trouble, Luke showed, came from those Jews who rejected Jesus as Messiah, and who thus were angry at the Christians who claimed to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises.

A second theme is the validity of Paul's apostleship. Luke showed in Acts 1 that the qualifications for an apostle were that he had spent three years with Jesus and that he had been a witness of the Resurrection (Acts 1:21–22). On the surface, Paul of Tarsus did not fit these qualifications, and so his ministry was constantly questioned by Judaizers and others. Luke's narrative in Acts demonstrated that Paul did see Jesus in His resurrection, spent years in personal study "with Christ" before taking up the mantle of apostleship, and was accepted on an equal footing by the other apostles.

A third theme common to both Luke's gospel and to Acts is the inclusion of the Gentiles in the new kingdom. There had been Gentile believers throughout the Old Testament, but they had not been members of the priestly nation of Israel and consequently had to worship "at a distance." Luke shows that in the new covenant, there is no longer any difference between Jewish and Gentile believers.

Date: 62-63 AD

Sources for Information: First of all, remembering back to Luke 1:1-4, Luke says that he *investigated everything carefully from the beginning*. Furthermore, he talked to eyewitnesses and those who were passing along the information. This is the same care he took with Acts as he sought to further his study on Jesus.

- There are the "we passages" in Acts. When Luke changes from "I" to "we" showing he was actually there in the journey.
- Acts 16:10 "When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."
 - Interestingly in verse 19 after the demon-possessed women was no longer demon-possessed, Luke writes that "they", meaning Paul and Silas, were taken to prison.
 - Luke's use of "we" did not pick back up again until chapter 20.
 - This is fascinating because it was on Paul's return trip through Macedonia that he ends up connecting again with Luke.
 - Though it certainly is not spelled out indefinitely, in my opinion, I believe Luke stuck around Philippi and pastored the church there.
 - When Paul came back around, he hooked up with him and they all went to Jerusalem (Acts 21:17).
 - Acts 27-28 also have Luke's first-hand knowledge as he sailed to Rome and was shipwrecked with Paul and saw him under house arrest there.
- Also, in Acts 5:33-40, the Jewish Council is trying to figure out what to do with Peter and the apostles as they were preaching Christ at the Temple.
 - We read in verse 34 that Gamaliel stood up at the council and ordered that the apostles were to be put outside when the spoke privately.

¹ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/purposes-of-the-book-of-acts/>

- In vv. 35-39, we have the content of that meeting? How did Luke know what was happening at the meeting? He was a Gentile and maybe not even converted at this time.
- We know that Paul was trained under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and that he was a Pharisee (Phil.3:5).
- There is a very good chance that the apostle Paul (who would have been Pharisee Saul at this point) was at that meeting behind closed doors.
 - After being born again, he most likely had so many stories to tell of how the Council schemed to kill not only them, but most likely Jesus too.
- Till the end, Luke was by Paul's side. Paul says in **2 Timothy 4:11a** **"Only Luke is with me."**
 - It is most likely that Luke watched as Paul was beheaded by Nero.
 - One can only imagine what was going through his mind as saw his close friend and brother in the Lord finish his race.
 - This is probably why Paul calls him a "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14) and a "fellow laborer" (Philemon 24).

The Characteristics and Theology of Acts

- The Sovereign Plan (Purpose) of God –
 - The dei (it is necessary) Motif
 - The Fulfillment of Scripture (Acts 3:18; 13:27; 26:22-23)
- The Holy Spirit (1:2, 5, 8, 16; 2:4, 17, 18, 33, 38; 4:8, 25, 31; 5:3, 9, 32; 6:3, 5, 10; 7:51, 55; 8:15, 17, 18, 19, 29, 39; 9:17, 31; 10:19, 38, 44, 45, 47; 11:12, 15, 16, 24, 28; 13:2, 4, 9, 52; 15:8, 28; 16:6, 7; 19:2, 6; 20:23, 28; 21:4, 11; 28:25)
- Prayer and a Praying Church
 - "to pray" (1:24; 6:6; 8:15; 9:11, 40; 10:9, 30; 11:5; 12:12; 13:3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8) "prayer" (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 6:4; 10:4, 31; 12:5; 16:13, 16)
 - "to entreat" (4:31; 8:22, 24, 34; 10:2; 21:39; 26:3)
- The Power of God (dunamai –21x; dunamis – 10x; dunatos –6x; Acts 1:8; 4:7, 33; 6:8)
- Savior (soter – 5:31; 13:23); Salvation (soteria – 4:12; 7:25; 13:26, 47; 16:17; 27:34; soterion – Acts 28:28); To save, free from disease, free from harm (sozo –2:21, 40, 47; 4:9, 12; 11:14; 14:9; 15:1, 11; 16:30, 31; 27:20, 31)
- The Rejection of Jesus as Christ by Israel (7:54-8:1a; 13:46; 22:22; 28:24-27)
- Acceptance by The Gentiles (2:5; 4:25, 27; 7:7, 45; 8:9; 9:15; 10:22, 35, 45; 11:1, 18; 13:19, 46, 47, 48; 14:2, 5, 16, 27; 15:3, 7, 12, 14, 17, 19, 23; 17:26; 18:6; 21:11, 19, 21, 25; 22:21; 24:2, 10, 17; 26:4, 17, 20, 23; 28:19, 28)
- Witness (1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15, 20; 26:16; cf. Luke 24:48)
 - Preaching the resurrection throughout the book
- The Response to the Message
 - "to repent" (2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20); "repentance" (5:31; 11:18; 13:24; 19:4; 20:21; 26:20)
 - "to turn" (3:19; 9:35, [9:40]; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19 [15:36; 16:18] 26:18, 20; 28:27); "conversion" (Acts 15:3)
 - "to believe" (2:44; 4:4, 32; 5:14; 8:12, 13; 9:26, 42; 10:43; 11:17, 21; 13:12, 39, 41, 48; 14:1, 23; 15:5, 7, 11; 16:31, 34; 17:12, 34; 18:8, 27; 19:2, 4, 18; 21:20, 25; 22:19; 24:14; 26:27; 27:25) "faith" (3:16; 6:5, 7; 11:24; 13:8; 14:9, 22, 27; 15:9; 16:5; 17:31; 20:21; 24:24; 26:18)

Selected Interpretive Problems

- The Historicity of Acts
 - Some think that Paul in Acts was not the same Paul from the epistles.
 - Paul in Acts seems like a go getter while epistle Paul seems weak and depressed.
 - The differences between Jesus' teaching and Paul's are easily reconcilable, they were different people, teaching to different people at a different time.
 - Nobody has to be wrong, they can be talking about different people.
 - Not 'how does it align with Paul'...but 'how does it align with Josephus'...in Acts 5, two men are named, the same in Josephus, but in different times.
- Choosing of Matthias / Casting of Lots
 - Not God's Will
 - God's Will
 - This was simply describing what happened, not what we need to do to find the will of God.
 - Casting lots was an OT precedence, but God was doing the choosing
 - Scriptures in the NT give details on how to choose leadership...not casting lots
- The coming of the Holy Spirit (2:1-4)
 - permanent
 - temporary power given
 - Luke says 'baptize' and also 'to fill' or 'to stuff'
 - Eph. 5:18...not the permanent and complete indwelling (as in Pentecost) but something that we need to continue to walk in
- The nature of the tongues
 - Ecstatic speech AND/OR Human language (same in Corinth and Acts, both human language)
 - The tongues at Pentecost are human languages and at Corinth are ecstatic speech
 - Dealing with a word 'glossia' means a language (1 Cor. 13:1)
 - Acts 2:5-6 does not support an ecstatic speech
 - 1 Cor. 13:1, Paul is using hyperbole
- The Speeches in Acts [GNTI, 378-82]
 - Actual Reproductions (summaries, but the very words of the speakers)
 - Accurate Summaries [Marshall; Kostenberger; Stott]
 - Inventions of the Writer [Barrett]
- Peter's Use of Joel 2:28-32 (2:16-21) [MSB, 1635-6; 1268]
 - Complete Fulfillment [Bruce (?); Stott (?)]
 - Partial Fulfillment [Barrett; Marshall; EBC (?)]
 - Potential Fulfillment [BKC]
 - Preview of Future Fulfillment [MacArthur]
 - Last Days is reference for the time between the 1st and 2nd coming of Christ
- The Imperative "Be baptized" (2:38) [MSB, 1637; DLNT, 112-25] –
 - Baptism Necessary for Forgiveness [Barrett]
 - Baptism on the Basis of Forgiveness [MacArthur]
 - Baptism Parenthetical; Only Repentance Necessary (cf. 3:19) [Bruce (?); EBC (?); BKC]
- James' Use of Amos 9:11-12 (15:13-18) [MSB, 1661]
 - Complete Fulfillment of Amos in the Present [Bruce (?); Marshall; EBC (?); Stott]
 - The Present Gentile Salvation "Like" Future Gentile Salvation – It was never God's plan for Gentiles to become like Jews first, in order to be saved. [MacArthur; BKC]

- Four Chronological Movements; i.e. The Church – The Return of Christ – The Restoration of Israel – The Millennial Salvation of Gentiles
 - LXX actually says what the Masoratic text was prophecies (it is a more free rendering that incorporates the theological interpretation more fitting for Jews of their day)
- Reasons for Prohibitions in Acts 15:19-20
 - Noahic Covenant
 - Moral Law
 - Ceremonial Law
- Acts 2:44-46
 - The church members sold their stuff and gave it to the church
 - This was simply describing what was happening, not telling us what to do
 - They were taking care of the people who were there for Pentecost and wanted to stay
 - Sacrificial gift that was there to disciple the people

The Theme: Acts 1:8 “...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

- The rest of Luke’s account shows the fulfilling of what Jesus said here.
- The church started in Jerusalem and then went all over the known world.
 - In Acts 6:7 “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”
 - There was a problem...the church in Jerusalem was not reaching outside of Jerusalem.
 - What was the solution? In God’s own irony, Saul (later the Apostle Paul who gives his life for the church) persecutes the church to force them outside of Jerusalem. Acts 8:1 “Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”
 - So, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, perhaps for leadership, but the other believers ran for their lives; fulfilling what Jesus said back in 1:8.
 - What did they do as they ran? Acts 8:4 “Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.”
 - Now the church would continue to grow and flourish as the Holy Spirit empowered believers to do the work of the ministry.

The Central Role of the Holy Spirit

Signs and wonders

- Act 2:43 “Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place *through the apostles.*”
- Act 5:12 “At the *hands of the apostles* many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.”
- Act 6:8 “And **Stephen**, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.”
- Act 8:6 “The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by **Philip**, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.”

- Act 14:3 “Therefore **they [Paul and Barnabas]** spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.”
- Act 15:12 “All the people kept silent, and they were listening to **Barnabas and Paul** as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.”
- With regards to signs and wonders throughout the book of Acts, it is either the apostles or specifically Stephen or Philip.
 - Both Stephen and Philip were companions of the apostles and God used them in a unique way at a unique time.
 - Act 6:5 “The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip...”
- Why were signs and wonders done then and not now?
 - These were done with the preaching and teaching of the apostles to confirm that they were actually *God’s Words* they were preaching.
 - After the end of the Apostolic Age and the completion of the canon of Scripture, we no longer need to have these signs and wonders.
 - We now have the Bible to compare people’s teachings to. If they do not align with what Scripture says, they are not from God.

Speaking in Tongues

- The first instance we read about is at the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came.
- Acts 2:4 “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.”
 - Notice a few things...
 - They all were speaking in tongues, the whole gathered group.
 - Verse 8 says they all heard them speaking in their own language.
 - This was not some ecstatic, crazy blabbering that we hear today as ‘tongues.’
 - What were they saying? Verse 11 says they were speaking the mighty deeds of God and it caused the crowds to stand in amazement and great perplexity.
 - Peter did not preach to the whole crowd, but to the Jews who were there.
 - He recounts the story of Jesus for the Jews specifically and then in verse 37 the crowd calls Peter and the group *brethren*.
- Acts 8:14-18 “Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money...”
 - Philip goes to Samaria because of Saul’s persecution of the church in Jerusalem.
 - He began preaching the word and proclaiming Christ. People were getting healed, demons were getting exorcised and many were coming to faith in Christ.
 - But, there was a problem, the Holy Spirit had not fallen on them.
 - When the Jerusalem apostles heard about a revival in Samaria, they sent their leaders to go and check it out...enter Peter and John.
 - They confirmed the rumors to be true, laid their hands on the people and the Holy Spirit came upon them.

- Now, to be sure, it never says they spoke in tongues when this happened, but it does say that *Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands.*
 - Something happened that he visibly was more intrigued than when Philip was doing his own preaching.
 - Most likely, they were speaking in tongues.
- Acts 10:44-46 “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God...”
 - Literally thousands of people had been saved and filled with the Holy Spirit between chapter 2 and chapter 10, but this is the next record of speaking in tongues.
 - What was happening here in this story?
 - Peter had a vision and the Holy Spirit told him to go to Cornelius' house (10:19-20). He went to Cornelius' house with some *brethren* (other Jewish converts).
 - As Peter was preaching in the house, the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles in the house.
 - To prove to the (stubborn?) Jewish brethren that God indeed accept the Gentiles into His family, they spoke in tongues. Just like the Jews did on the day of Pentecost.
 - The Jews were *amazed*, they heard them *speaking in tongues and exalting God.*
- Act 19:6 “And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.”
 - This final group of people who spoke in tongues upon receiving the Holy Spirit were a group that was outside the church, but thought they were in the church.
 - They were men who were disciples, but had not heard of the Holy Spirit.
 - I like the way MacArthur puts it “That was further indication that they were now a part of the one true church. And since they had not even heard that the Spirit had come, they needed tangible proof that He had indeed come into their lives. The church, which had embraced Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans, now gathered in the last group: Old Testament saints.”
- This is it for speaking in tongues and its link to salvation and/or baptism in the Holy Spirit.
- It is important to notice a few things:
 - It was always an Apostle (Peter or Paul) who did the praying when this happened.
 - Jesus came for the Jews first, therefore they received the Spirit first.
 - The Jews hated the Samaritans and the Gentiles and most likely never would have welcomed them into the church without this sign from God.
 - We are one body, no more OT saints and NT church, we are united under the death and resurrection of Christ.
 - This was by no means the normative practice for the church. It is simply bad hermeneutics to assume that because it happened, it happened all the time.
 - These accounts were *descriptive* not *prescriptive*. It means that Luke was simply telling the story, not giving us commands and clues for future use.
 - In Acts 2 and 10, we are told the tongues were *exalting God*. Speaking in tongues is not an evangelistic tool nor is it some sort of prayer language. It was used to point people to God.
 - This was to the demise of the Pentecostal movement in the 20th century who thought they would simply travel the world, speak in local languages and then see millions get saved.

- Luke was very careful with the words that he chose and the Greek language that Paul used in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. This would make sense as they were close companions.

Regenerating People and Building His Church

- Acts 13:48 “When the Gentiles heard this, they [began] rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”
- Acts 16:14 “A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.”
 - Luke would have seen this firsthand.

What can the church today learn from Acts?

- The gospel spreads *independently* of what the government does.
 - During this time in church history, it is helpful to look at the Jews and the Romans as ruling over this area. To be sure, the Romans were certainly in charge, but they gave the Jews a special kind of latitude so they would be peaceful.
 - The Christians not only were heavily persecuted by the Jews, but they were constantly antagonized by the Roman government and her citizens.
 - Even though both ruling entities were consistently hostile towards them, the gospel spread, churches were planted at a rapid rate and many came to saving faith.
 - If we look to *any means* above the Word of God for spiritual things, we are putting our trust in man and saying that God is somehow lacking.
- Proper, church supported missions has a goal of church planting in the forefront.
 - Paul was directly or indirectly involved in 15-20 churches being planted during his life.
 - This is an astonishing number considering his jail time, his travel time, his sick time, etc.
 - He had many opportunities to fight slavery, stop human sacrifice, feed the hungry, dig wells, teach farming and a myriad of other “good” things. But Paul knew that all those things pale in comparison to preaching the gospel, discipling and church planting.
 - “Unless those efforts are aimed at getting the gospel to people who have never heard it and then pulling those people into local churches, they are not part of the church’s mission².”
- God uses normal life/means to spread the gospel.
 - The spreading of the gospel was done by normal people simply living their lives.
- God blesses a simple reliance on His Word and His ways
 - They were simply preaching and teaching the Word of God and allowing Him to take care of the results.
 - Nothing was done to specifically promote church growth, but the church grew leaps and bounds.

² <https://www.imb.org/2017/10/26/mission-church-planting/>