

Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles

Overview:

- The book is a **bridge between the story of Jesus in the Gospels and the life of the church in the letters (epistles)** that follow.
- It **covers events of the AD 30 – 60s**.
- **The recipient of the book was Theopolis**, a Roman aristocrat and patron who published Luke's works. He was **the same publisher of Luke's Gospel**.
- It **begins with Jesus' ascension** into heaven after forty days of post-resurrection activity.
- Ten days later, **God sends the Holy Spirit** on the festival day of Pentecost – **and the church is born**.
- Through the Spirit, the **disciples are empowered to preach boldly about Jesus in a new movement called "the Way"** (see Acts 9:2 and John 14:6).
- **The movement spreads** throughout much of the known world **and persecutions of believers occur** in fear of them.
- **One such persecutor, Saul, becomes a believer** himself when he encounters the heavenly Jesus.
- Saul, renamed **Paul, joins Peter and other Christian leaders in preaching, performing miracles, and strengthening the church**.
- **Acts does not tell us all that Jesus' followers did to spread the Gospel** throughout the nations. **It's focus is on expansion from Jerusalem to Rome**.

Who wrote it?

- The **author's name is not mentioned**, but inferences point to Luke.
- The Early Church ascribed to him **authorship of both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles**.
- Born a **Gentile** in perhaps Antioch (Syria). **Well educated in the Greek and Egyptian cultures**.
- He was a **physician** (Colossians 4:14) **and a missionary companion of Paul** (2 Timothy 4:11).
- Met and travelled with many of Jesus' disciples but **was not an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry**.
- The Anglican Church and other **major denominations venerate him as Saint Luke the Evangelist** and as a **patron saint of artists, physicians, bachelors, surgeons, students and butchers**.
- Luke was **eighty-four years old when he was hanged on an olive tree** in the city of Thebes in Boeotia.
- He was **buried in Thebes**. His holy miraculous relics were located there until the second half of the fourth century, when they were **transferred to Constantinople**, in the time of Emperor Constantias, son of Constantine.
- His **feast day is 18 October**.

When was it written?

- **Possible dates** for the writings are:
 - **AD 63:** soon after the last event mentioned. This is supported by the silence of significant events that follow (i.e., the outcome of Paul's trial, the burning of Rome; martyrdoms of Peter, James, and Paul; nor the destruction of Jerusalem).
 - Over some time and **finished around AD 70:** the purpose of the writing being to document how the church spread -- not to record history.

Literary Features:

- Luke uses a **large vocabulary compared with other NT writers**. He uses **words that fit the cultural settings of the events** he records.
- At time he **employs good classical Greek as well as Aramaic** of first-century Palestine.
- The **skillful use of speeches contributes to the drama** of the narrative and is **equally balanced between Peter and Paul**.
- He is **objective in his account** – showing both **failures/successes and the good/bad** in the early church.
- The writing is **vivid and fast-moving**.

Organization:

- The **main theme** is best summarized in 1:8
- Divided into **two major parts**:
 - events that record **Peter and the beginnings of the church** in Palestine (chaps 1-12)
 - events that record **Paul and the expansion of the church** from Antioch to Rome (chaps 13-28)

Theological Significance:

- Christians are **guided by the power of the Holy Spirit** which they receive when they accept Christ as their Savior at baptism.
- The **church's mission is to restore ALL people in unity with God and each other**.

Quotable Verses: (NIV)

- *“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11)*
- *Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)*
- *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)*
- *He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4)*

Modern Relevance: This book may be studied to gain an understanding of the principles that ought to guide the church during any age. The church in Acts was very different from the structure that is in place today. “Church” was a simple thing where people would come to be taught, worship, and share with each other. Many churches today are amazing, but some focus so much on tradition and structure that they forget that, like the early believers in Acts, we should focus more on coming together, giving what we can of ourselves to those who are in need, and be filled with a desire to learn more about God’s love.