

## **#7. THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**

1. **THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES** is the name given to the second New Testament book written by Luke for Theophilus (Luke 1:3). Though some contend the original document had no title (and was simply a *part two* to Luke's Gospel), many manuscripts simply have the title as *Acts* (Greek - *praxeis*) and was a word used to describe the achievements of outstanding men. It is believed this referred to the *actions* of notable men such as Peter, Stephen, Phillip, and Paul.
  - **Author** - Luke, the *Beloved Physician* is the author of the Acts account. Though he is not specifically identified as the author of Luke or Acts, significant evidence confirms his authorship. In the later portions of Acts, Luke uses the personal pronouns *we* and *us* (16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16). He was a frequent ministry companion of Paul (Colossians 4:14) as well as his personal physician. Church tradition describes Luke as a careful researcher, reportedly having interviewed Mary, Phillip, and other characters in his gospel as well as the Acts account.
    - Many Church fathers, including Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Jerome, and Tertullian testify to Lucan authorship of both books.
    - He is mentioned by name only three times in Scripture (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24), but plays a vital role in the New Testament Canon.
    - A casual study indicates Luke may have been the only Gentile writer of Scripture, but in the chapter on his gospel we discover reasons to believe Luke was actually a Jew.
2. **Luke's emphasis** is as a record of the earliest days of the Christian community. He records the drift and eventual split from Judaism, as well as providing valuable insight into the lifestyle of these early followers of Jesus.
3. **The Date of writing** is probably 60-62AD, before the end of Paul's first imprisonment. There is no mention of Nero's persecution of the Christians in Rome (64AD), the Martyrdom of James (62AD), or the Siege and Fall of Jerusalem (66-70AD). The omission of these events argue for a date in early 62AD at the latest.
4. **Key Chapters**
  - Chapters 1:1-12:25 centers on the ministry of Simon Peter and the Jerusalem Church.

- Chapters 13:1-28:31 features the conversion and ministry of Paul and his three missionary journeys to the Gentiles.

## 5. Key Verses

- **Acts 1:8 NIV** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
- **Acts 2:1-4 NIV** “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues the Spirit enabled them.”

## 6. Key People

- **Jesus the Messiah** - The Resurrection of Jesus occurs in the first chapter. The focal point of Christianity and all events in the Book of Acts is centered upon Jesus.
- **Peter, James, and John** are the most mentioned of the original Twelve.
- **A new generation of leaders arise.** Among them are James (the brother of Jesus), Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Timothy Aquila, Priscilla, Lydia, Phillip, Stephen, and Mark.
- **Political leaders** such as Herod, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa are introduced in the narrative.

## 7. Key Places

- **Jerusalem** - the early chapters of Acts take place in the Jerusalem area. It is here we visit the Temple, the Upper Room, and the Hall of the Sanhedrin. The events involving the early Christians in Acts 1- 7, as well as the Council of chapter 15, and the subsequent arrest and early trial of Paul take place in Jerusalem.
- **Caesarea** - is the scene of a significant portion of Paul's trials.
- **Samaria** - as persecution of the Jerusalem Church became more intense, the scene shifted to Samaria (chapter 8). Here we learn of a city-wide conversion under the

ministry of Phillip. John and Peter also minister there, and we read of the conversion of Simon the Sorcerer.

- **Antioch** - as the church in Jerusalem is persecuted and scattered, we see the church in Antioch become the headquarters of Christianity during the life of Paul.
- **Syria** - The scene of Paul's dramatic conversion near Damascus. We also see the establishing of the greatest Gentile church of that era in the city of Antioch of Syria (9:1-12:25).
- **Cyrus and Galatia** - the scene of much activity during Paul's first missionary journey with Barnabas (13:1-14:28)
- **Macedonia** - in chapters 15:36-17:14, Paul, accompanied by Silas, conducts his second missionary journey into the regions of Macedonia.
- **Notable churches were established** in cities such as Corinth, Ephesus, and eventually in Rome (chapters 18-28).

## 8. Key Themes

- **The centrality of the Gospel remains on Jesus** - evangelism is a dominant activity; every message centers upon Jesus as the Messiah.
- **The Holy Spirit creates and sustains the supernatural character of Christianity** - all activity was suspended until the *promise of The Father* had been received on the Day of Pentecost.
- **The Kingdom of God is worldwide - transcending Judaism and every other culture as well** - Jesus set the stage to take the message from Jerusalem throughout the entire world.
- **The ministry of the Body** - is centered on genuine loving fellowship. Care for the body and outreach to unbelievers is seen as highest priority.

## 9. The Contents of the Book of Acts

- **The Introduction - 1:1-8**

- **Witnesses in Jerusalem (1:9-8:3)**
  - Preparation for The Spirit's Outpouring (1:9-26)
  - The Establishing of the Church (2:1-47)
  - The Early Days of Growth (3:1-8:3)
  
- **Witnesses in Judea and Samaria (8:4-11:30)**
  - The Gospel goes to the Samaritans (8:4-25)
  - The Conversion of a Full Gentile - the Ethiopian (8:26-40)
  - The Gospel goes to Judea (9:32-43)
  - The Gospel to the Gentiles - the House of Cornelius (10:1-11:30)
  
- **Excursus - The Persecution in Jerusalem by Herod (12:1-25)**
  
- **Witnesses in the Whole World (13:1-28:31)**
  - Paul's First Missionary Journey (13:1-14:28)
  - The Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)
  - Paul's Second Missionary Journey (15:36-18:22)
  - Paul's Third Missionary Journey (18:23-21:16)
  - Paul's Trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea (21:17-26:32)
  - Paul's Journey to Rome (27:1-28:31)

## Worth noting

- Acts is an account of the first three decades of the early church. Therefore, it gives insight into the nature of early Believers, their Pentecostalism, and their transition from Judaism into Christianity.
  
- There are several significant sermons (addresses, testimonies, and sermons) summarized in the Acts narrative:
  - Peter preached to the Feast crowd during Pentecost - Acts 2:14-40
  
  - Peter preached to a crowd at the Temple - Acts 3:12-26
  
  - Peter preached to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem - Acts 4:5-12
  
  - Stephen preached to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem - Acts 7:2-53
  
  - Peter preached to the Gentiles in Caesarea - Acts 10:28-47
  
  - Peter preached to the church at Jerusalem - Acts 11:4-18
  
  - Paul preached at the Synagogue in Antioch - Acts 13:16-4
  
  - Peter preached to the Jerusalem Council - Acts 15:7-11
  
  - James preached to the Jerusalem Council - Acts 15:13-21
  
  - Paul preached at Miletus to the Ephesian Pastors - Acts 20:17-35
  
  - Paul preached to a crowd in Jerusalem - Acts 22:1-21
  
  - Paul preached to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem - Acts 23:1-6
  
  - Paul preached to King Agrippa in Caesarea - Acts 26:2-23

- Paul preached to the Jewish leaders in Rome - Acts 28:17-20
- Prayer, dreams and visions, miracles, and angelic visitations are vital occurrences in the Book of Acts. It should be noted that such manifestations should be considered part of the normal Christian life.

### **When reading the Book of Acts:**

- Take note the activity of the Holy Spirit is mentioned over fifty times.
- Remember that only Paul's first imprisonment is mentioned in Acts. We learn of his second imprisonment in 2 Timothy.
  - In Acts 28, Paul was accused of sedition and heresy by the Jews. It was during this time he wrote the Prison Epistles. We see only occasional, mostly local persecutions at this point. He lived decently in a rented house, and had many visitors. He was generally optimistic, and anticipated release (Philippians 1:24-26).
  - In 2 Timothy, Paul had been arrested by Rome, and was considered an enemy of the state (probably as a result of the persecution under Nero in 64-68AD). His living conditions were poor and apparently was allowed only to have Luke present with him. He had very few opportunities for ministry and was anticipating his execution (2 Timothy 4:6).
- Luke makes many references to the Old Testament in Acts:
  - Acts 2:17-21 is from Joel 2:28-32.
  - Acts 2:25-28 is from Psalm 16:8-11.
  - Acts 2:35 is from Psalm 110:1.
  - Acts 4:11 is from Psalm 118:22
  - Acts 4:25, 26 is from Psalm 2:1, 2.
  - Acts 7:49, 50 is from Isaiah 66:1, 2.
  - Acts 8:32, 33 is from Isaiah 53:7, 8.
  - Acts 28:26, 27 is from Isaiah 6:9, 10.