

Acts

Summary

The book of Acts unfolds in three epic movements of God. Each one tells part of the story of the early Christian Church. In the first movement, we see the birth of the Church. In these first seven chapters, the Holy Spirit comes in power at the Day of Pentecost; the Church, from this early infant form, begins to grow. Like a newborn baby, things are both messy and exciting. Then, for the next five chapters of the book, we see the Church growing, spreading, and entering an adolescent phase. Growth is rapid, a vision is forming, and we can look on and get a sense of what the Church will look like when it is really grown up. Finally, in chapters thirteen through twenty-eight, under the apostolic leadership of Paul, we see the Church spreading all over the world. This time, an adult season of growing maturity for the community of believers as more and more churches are planted, leaders are trained, and the message of Jesus is being spread far and wide.

Author

The book of Acts was written by Luke, a physician. He is also the author of the Gospel of Luke, which tells of Christ's life while He was here on earth. Although Luke was not one of the twelve original disciples, it appears that he was a close associate of Paul, staying near him while Paul was imprisoned and sharing his travels. He spoke Greek and many scholars believe that Luke may have been a Gentile rather than Jewish, making him the only Gentile to contribute to the New Testament.

Date

This book was probably written between A.D. 63-70 and describes the events of the early Christian Church from its birth through the early formative years following Christ's resurrection and ascension.

Primary Characters

God, the Holy Spirit; God, the Son (both are highlighted throughout the book of Acts)

Stephen, who was stoned (Acts 7)

Peter (Acts 1-12)

Paul (Acts 9-28)

People coming to receive and follow Jesus (throughout the book of Acts)

Historical Moments

Jesus Christ's Ascension into Heaven (Acts 1)

Pentecost and the Giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2)

The Martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7)

The Conversion of Saul/Paul (Acts 9)

The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)

Paul Preaches in Athens (Acts 17)

Paul Focuses His Ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 18)

Paul Arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21)

Paul Sails for Rome (Acts 27)

Paul Arrives in Rome (Acts 28)

Major Theological Themes

The Church Is the Instrument of God's Sovereign Hand to Bring the Gospel to the World -

The book of Acts paints a powerful picture of God moving the gospel of Jesus deeper into the world. He accomplishes this through the establishment and growth of local congregations of believers. From the first century after Christ's resurrection until today, God is building a Church to change the world.

The Holy Spirit Is Present and Alive in the Local Church and the Lives of Christians -

Throughout the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit is present, powerful, and active. Often as we read we can see the hand of the Spirit at work. In the book of Acts we discover that where there is life, growth, and the spread of the gospel, the Holy Spirit is always near.

God Is Always Doing Something New - The God who said, *Let there be light* (Genesis 1:3) continued to do new things all through the Bible. This theme shines brightly in the book of Acts. The Holy Spirit begins to work in new and fresh ways, the gifts of the Spirit are given, and the Church, the body of believers, is born. The first Christian martyr, Stephen, gives his life to stay faithful to Jesus in the book of Acts. The first church is planted and the gospel is preached to Gentiles. Governing leaders hear the message of Jesus.

Suffering Is Part of Following Jesus - Stephen stayed faithful and was stoned to death. Peter preached Jesus and was locked in jail. Paul spread the gospel and was beaten, stoned, and imprisoned. When we follow the will of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit, there is no guarantee that our path will be safe and secure. As a matter of fact, following Jesus can be dangerous and costly.

Lessons Learned from Acts

God Calls and Anoints Leaders for a Season of Ministry - Who can God use to accomplish His purposes in this world? The answer is simple, whomever He wants to use. For the first twelve chapters of Acts, we see an amazing work of God through Peter. From the thirteenth chapter on, the role and mantle of leadership is placed on Paul. God uses a variety of people to accomplish His will.

The Will of God Is Going to Be Accomplished, and We Can Choose to Be Part of It - God is sovereign over the universe, this earth, and our lives. We can fight and resist, but God's will is going to prevail. Saul fought and resisted, but God won him over and he eventually followed and became the apostle Paul. It is always best to surrender to God's will and ways instead of resist and fight. His will is perfect and we can take delight in this following.

God Loves to Give Second Chances - Peter denied Jesus three times and crumbled when the pressure was on. But, God chose to use him to preach at Pentecost and God called Peter to be the first and primary leader at the birth of the Church. Paul rejected Jesus, persecuted Christians, and destroyed local congregations. But, God called him to be a key leader in the spread of the gospel and the establishment of many local congregations. If God could restore Peter and redeem Paul, He can use people like us! God loves giving second chances and the book of Acts teaches this over and over again.