

THE
MOVEMENT
A journey through the Book of Acts

An introduction to the
Book of Acts


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The Movement: A Journey through the Book of Acts
An Introduction to the Book of Acts

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PURPOSE OF THE SERIES

We often put a lot of faith in government, organizations, initiatives, and movements. These can have great leadership, be supported by many, and even produce great results. However, we also know many organizations and movements that end because they lack leadership, have no support, and produce little results. Throughout time, God has always been about creating a people for his own possession and purpose. What began with the people of Israel in the Old Testament continued with the birth of the church in the New Testament. God purchased a people for himself through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God, however, did not create the church to be a social club who has closed membership and only gathers to hang with those in the club. Rather, God created the church to bring him glory by making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). We know that, unlike other organizations and movements, the church cannot fail. Jesus said this about the church: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). The church will not be built by you or I. Rather, Jesus will build his church and nothing (including Satan) will stop it from advancing. This, however, does not exempt us from work. While Jesus will build his church, he has chosen us to be the means by which he accomplishes this task.

The church is not a social club or organization. It is also not a dead institution. The church is living and active because Jesus is building his church. The church is the movement that began over 2000 years ago in the book of Acts that continues today. Vintage Church is a part of the movement. If you have been loved and saved by Jesus, you are a part of the movement. As we

journey and study through the book of Acts, you have to ask yourself: Will I join the movement?

AUTHOR

The Bible makes clear that “all Scripture is breathed out by God” (2 Timothy 3:16). However, the Bible is also clear that the books of the Bible were written by human beings. 2 Peter 1:21 says “for no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, while the Bible is certainly written by God, it is done so through the Holy Spirit’s inspiration of human beings as they write. Who was the human author of the book of Acts? Unfortunately nowhere in the letter does it say, “I, so and so, wrote this book.” This, however, does not mean we are unable to discern who wrote the book.

First, it is important to see the connection between Acts and the Gospel of Luke. Both are written to a man named Theophilus. This simple point shows that whoever wrote the Gospel of Luke probably wrote the book of Acts. The two books also share a similar vocabulary and writing style. Additionally, throughout Acts 1-16:9, Paul and his traveling companions are always referred to in the third person plural (“They”). However, a subtle shift occurs in Acts 16:10. Here it says, “and when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia” (Acts 16:10). The subject shifts from the third person plural to the first person plural (“we”). Whoever wrote the book of Acts was a personal eyewitness and travel companion of Paul’s from Acts 16:10 on. We know from some of Paul’s letters (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11) that Luke, the beloved physician, accompanied Paul on his journeys, includ-

ing his journey to Rome, where Paul possibly wrote his letters to Colossae, Philemon, and Timothy. Therefore, it makes sense that Luke would have been the author of Acts. Furthermore, early church tradition (AD 170-180) credits Luke for writing his Gospel and the book of Acts.¹ Because of this, we can proceed confidently knowing that Luke, a Greek-speaking, second generation Christian, and travel companion of Paul, wrote his Gospel and the book of Acts.

TITLE & GENRE

While Acts probably never had a title originally, the genre of the book helped to give the book a generally accepted title. The historically accepted title of the book of Acts is “The Acts of the Apostles.” This title became associated with Luke’s work sometime during the second century AD.² This title makes sense in light of what Luke was trying to share with his original readers and us today. The New Testament scholar, Ben Witherington III, is right when he writes “if you go to Acts to answer all of the later questions about infant baptism, or church apostles after the first generation, you will be frustrated because of a lack of complete, and sometimes any, answers. Luke’s agenda was not ours.”³

Based on the title attributed to Luke’s work it is clear his goal was not to answer all of our questions about the early church. Rather, he wanted to share the acts of the apostles, particularly Peter and Paul. This is where the title teaches us much about the genre of Acts. Throughout the past few decades there has been a debate as to what type of book Luke was writing. Often people ask “was Luke actually writing history?” When we ask this question, we are often thinking of writing history in

light of how history is written today. This, however, is the wrong way to think about it. If we want to know whether or not Luke actually wrote history we have to compare it to how history was written in the first century AD. While there were various viewpoints on history, it seems as though Luke was writing history according to the Greek understanding. The Greek historian, Polybius, considered "personal observation and participation in events, travel, inquiry, the consultation of eyewitnesses" to be hallmarks for true Greek history.⁴ Another important Greek element to how Luke wrote Acts is his arrangement of his material. Greek historians typically arranged their material both chronologically and geographically. Interestingly enough, Luke tells his story chronologically but he also tells his story geographically, beginning in Jerusalem and ending in Rome (i.e. to the ends of earth).⁵ Also important to Greek history was the mixing of narrative and speeches. Throughout Acts, we see Luke writing as a Greek historian, mixing narratives and speeches. The speeches he utilizes "convey theological perspectives on reported events and carry the narrative forward."⁶ From this and other evidence it seems clear that Luke was writing a Greek theological history of early Christianity.

You might be asking yourself why this is this important. If Luke intentionally followed the pattern of Greek history, then we can say with confidence that what he wrote was not fiction but actually the history of the early church. While Luke wrote the book of Acts from his own subjective perspective, he still wrote Acts with the goal of explaining objective history. Therefore, in knowing that Luke wrote according to the standards of Greek history, we can trust that Luke accurately described the early church in Acts. This allows us as Christians in the

twenty-first century to have an example of what the church looked like in the first century. While this does not provide us with a prescription of how the church should be, it does provide an incredible description of the early church.

DATE

The dating of the book of Acts is ultimately tied to the dating of the Gospel of Luke. It is presumed that Luke was written prior to Acts. We can at least say that Acts would have to be written after AD 62 when Paul was imprisoned in Rome for two years. Others have argued that Acts was written as late as mid-second century. If Luke is the author of the text this date seems far too late. Also important to the dating of Acts is Luke's description of the destruction of Jerusalem in Luke 21:20-24. Here, Jesus prophesies that Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies and that those inside the city will flee to the wilderness. While we believe that this actually was a prophecy of Jesus, the details seem more precise than in Mark 13:14-23. Therefore Luke was not just recording Jesus' prophecy but also writing it in light of Jerusalem's actual physical destruction. These facts leave many to conclude that Acts was written some time between AD 70-90. Based on Luke's historical accuracies, it is easily possible that he wrote Acts in the early 70s. Still, regardless of when Luke wrote Acts, he is only ten to thirty years removed from the last recorded events of Acts if he wrote it between AD 70-90. This again points to the historical accuracy of Acts and the trustworthiness of the text.

SETTING

The setting of Acts is unique, because it encompasses a large amount of time as well as a vast area of geography. Luke writes a narrative that includes over thirty years of history with stories from Jerusalem to Rome. Therefore, it is almost impossible to narrow down succinctly the cultural context and setting of the book of Acts. This, however, should not stop us from understanding the basic setting surrounding Acts. The significance of Acts is that it bridges two worldviews⁷ or cultural perspectives. Luke begins telling a distinctly Jewish story. He begins his story about a Jewish messiah who has come to restore Israel. This Jewish story, however, quickly turns into a global story. The story begins in the Jewish capital, Jerusalem, yet it ends in the capital of the known world, Rome. Therefore, Luke is writing a history which combines both Jewish elements and Greco-Roman elements. Certainly during this time the prevailing



Map taken from the ESV Study Bible

culture in the known world was not Jewish but rather Greco-Roman culture. This meant that Judaism did not influence Greco-Roman culture but that Greco-Roman culture influenced Judaism.

Hundreds of years prior to the rule of Rome, Israel was exiled from the land of Israel by Assyria and Babylon. While many Jews later came back to the land of Israel, many stayed where they were living. One writer notes that "as many as two-thirds of the Jews in the first century were living outside Palestine."⁸ During the time of Acts we find Jews living in Syria, Egypt, Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), Greece, Rome, and other places. While Judaism enjoyed a place of privilege within the Roman empire because of their longstanding relationship with Rome, most prominent Greeks and Romans held negative attitudes toward them.⁹ Despite these negative attributes, the Greco-Roman culture provided an environment in which Christianity could flourish.

When Alexander the Great conquered the known world in the third century BC, he hellenized each culture he came in contact with, bringing Greek culture to everyone. Alexander founded cities with Greek features like theaters, gymnasiums, schools, and other elements. He brought Greek deities to other cultures. He also brought philosophy to other lands. Another significant element to Alexander's conquest was improved travel. As Alexander moved East he developed highways to increase travel between the East and the West. Quite possibly the greatest element of Alexander's Hellenization was the emergence of Greek as a global language. Koine Greek became the language of trade and commerce. Therefore, almost everyone spoke this language and it became the universal language for the world.¹⁰ Hopefully you can see the implications of Alexander's Helleni-

zation. He gave Luke and the early church a common language. He gave Paul and other missionaries like him better highways on which to travel to bring the Gospel to the nations. As we read Acts, we must read it, seeing both the the Jewish and global context in which it was written. When we do this we can better understand exactly what was happening and what Luke was trying to articulate.

PURPOSE

Why was the book of Acts written? At first glance, this is a basic question with an obvious answer. If we look at the Gospel of Luke, Luke's first volume, we see that he is writing to provide "an orderly account" or "narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us" (Luke 1:1-4). Also of significance is that he wrote Luke and Acts to a man named Theophilus. While we do not know much about Theophilus, it seems as though he was "a socially significant recent convert who has been informed or more likely instructed about the Christian faith but still had some confusion and questions."¹¹ Because he was potentially a socially significant individual, Theophilus was probably also wealthy and therefore able to support financially Luke's writing of his Gospel and Acts.

While this does not speak necessarily to the purpose of Acts, this information still influences the overall purpose. Luke certainly wanted to provide information about Christianity to Theophilus. However, he also wrote for a broader context. Whether written to the Christian or pagan, Acts was written as an apologetic/defense of Christianity.¹² While Luke does not neglect the Jew, a major focus of this defense was the inclusion of gentiles in the

church. Throughout Acts he emphasizes "to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles." Perhaps then what Luke is trying to illustrate is that "Jew and Gentile united in Christ is the true Israel, not the new Israel."¹³ Therefore, Acts is a defense of how Jesus came to save both the Jew and Gentile and make this mixed group God's people.

THEMES

GOD THE FATHER

It is important to understand how significant God is in the book of Acts. Throughout Acts, God's presence and purpose is made abundantly clear (Acts 2:23; 4:28; 5:38-39; 13:36; 20:27). In the book God "acts in the new community, just as he has acted throughout the centuries in Israel's history. In Jesus' ministry, the raising of Jesus, and the direction of those who follow him in the new community this role is particularly evident."¹⁴ Every story in the book of Acts shows us that God is active and in control, saving people and growing his church.

JESUS

Jesus also is very important in the books of Acts. Unlike the Gospels, Jesus is only on Earth for a very short time in the book of Acts. In Acts, Jesus has already been resurrected and he ascends into heaven. Two things are obvious about Jesus in Acts. First, he is clearly the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. Throughout the book of Acts people profess Jesus as the Lord and Christ (or Messiah) (Acts 1:21; 4:33; 7:59; 8:16; 9:17; 11:17, 20; 15:11, 26; 16:31; 19:5, 13, 17; 20:21, 24, 35; 21:13; 28:31). He is seen and believed as the one who was to come and deliver Israel.

Second, Jesus is also seen as Lord. "Acts depicts the exalted Jesus as 'present within the church in the same way that the OT describes transcendent Yahweh as immanently involved with Israel.'"¹⁵ Thus in Acts Jesus is both the deliverer and the ruler.

HOLY SPIRIT

To say that the Holy Spirit is important in the book of Acts is an understatement. Luke mentions the Holy Spirit fifty-seven times in Acts alone.¹⁶ From the very beginning to the end of the book, the Holy Spirit is a major and active character throughout the story. He is first mentioned in Acts 1:4, when Jesus promises the disciples that they will be baptized by the Holy Spirit. Then in Acts 1:8 Jesus tells his disciples to stay in Jerusalem to receive power from the Holy Spirit. The emphasis on the Holy Spirit in Acts is important for two reasons. First, with Christ ascending into heaven and the Holy Spirit descending onto the people, God's presence does not leave. With the coming of the Spirit, God now dwells in human hearts. Therefore, God is closer than he has ever been. The Holy Spirit also brings empowerment to the church. The Spirit brings "empowerment for mission," equipping every believer with the message of the Gospel, the power of the Gospel, and the ability to proclaim and live out the Gospel.¹⁷

SALVATION

From Acts 2 until the end of the book, salvation is a major topic. In Acts 2:38 Peter declares: "Repent and baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Since the time of the Old

Testament, the people of Israel were waiting for God to save them. For the Jews, salvation was both an individual and corporate issue. Individuals within Israel knew and realized they had sinned against God. The people as a whole, however, also waited for and expected both spiritual and physical salvation. "The salvation that Luke describes is not something that humans can attain for themselves, but is the gift of God."¹⁸ Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone.

THE CHURCH

One of the most important themes in the book of Acts is the church. In the book of Acts we see the beginning of the church. One of the elements Luke illustrates most clearly for us is the importance of community in the early church. In Acts, the church is never referred to as a building. Rather, the church is always referred to as a gathering of people. Of all the passages in Acts which paints a vivid picture of this early Christian community, one of the most important is Acts 2:42-46. Here, we see the church focused on God's word, worship, eating together, and taking care of one another. Also important to the church in Acts is the inclusion of gentiles (non-Jews) into God's people. Prior to Jesus, the people of God was primarily comprised of Jews. However, after Jesus' ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel spread to Gentiles. Philip preached to the Ethiopian Eunuch. Peter shared the Gospel with Cornelius, a Roman soldier. Paul went all over Asia and Europe proclaiming the Gospel to Gentiles. God's vision of his people coming from all tribes, nations, and tongues was coming to fruition. "This shows that Acts should not be read as the story of God abandoning the Jewish people, but rather as

God redefining the nature of his people."¹⁹ Directly related to the inclusion of the Gentiles was the mission of the church. Jesus did not call the church, nor did the Holy Spirit equip the church to sit and remain unmoved with the Gospel. Rather, as people received and believed the Gospel from Jesus' disciples, the Spirit continued "to equip and motivate disciples to share the message with still more people, urging them to respond with repentance and faith."²⁰ It is no wonder that the Gospel could not be confined to Jerusalem. Rather, it traveled all the way to the capital of the known world, Rome (see Acts 28).

OUTLINE OF ACTS

- I. The Empowerment of the Early Church (Acts 1:1–2:13)
- II. The Church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:13–8:1a)
- III. The Church in Samaria & Judea (Acts 8:1b–12:25)
- IV. The Church To the Ends of the Earth (Acts 13:1–28:31)
 - A. Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1–15:35)
 - B. Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36–18:22)
 - C. Paul's Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23–21:26)
 - D. Paul's Arrest (Acts 21:27–28:31)
 1. In Jerusalem (Acts 21:27–23:35)
 2. In Caesarea (Acts 24:1–26:32)
 3. To and In Rome (Acts 27:1–28:31)

RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

We have included below some study helps, aids, and resources for our series through the book of Acts. We encourage you to study the book yourself outside of our worship gatherings and your community group.

TECHNICAL COMMENTARIES:

Darrell Bock, *Acts, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007. ISBN: 978-0801026683

F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts, Revised, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988. ISBN: 978-0802825056

David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles, The Pillar New Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. ISBN: 978-0802837318

Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. ISBN: 978-0802845016

NON-TECHNICAL COMMENTARIES:

Ajith Fernando, *Acts, The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998. ISBN: 978-0310494102

I. Howard Marshall, *Acts, The Tyndale New Testament Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008. ISBN: 978-0830842353

John Stott, *The Message of Acts, The Bible Speaks Today*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1994. ISBN: 978-0830812363

Warren Wiersbe, *Be Dynamic (Acts 1-12), The Be Series Commentary*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009. ISBN: 978-1434767462

Warren Wiersbe, *Be Daring (Acts 13-28), The Be Series Commentary*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009. ISBN: 978-1434767424

INTERNET RESOURCES:

The Gospel Coalition Resources on Acts
<http://thegospelcoalition.org/resources/scripture-index/acts>

Desiring God Resources on Acts
<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/scripture-index/acts>

Mars Hill Resources on Acts
<http://marshill.com/media/acts-empowered-for-jesus-mission>

REFERENCES

¹David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles. The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 1.

²F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*. Rev. ed. *New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 3.

³Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1.

⁴*Ibid.*, 27.

⁵*Ibid.*, 34.

⁶Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 27.

⁷A worldview is defined as the interpretive grid through which humans, both individually and corporately, perceive all of reality.

⁸Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 427.

⁹*Ibid.*, 428.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 13-14.

¹¹Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 51.

¹²Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 38.

¹³Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 73.

¹⁴Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 119.

¹⁵Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 57.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁹Steve Walton, "Acts" in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 76.

²⁰Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 83.

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**JOIN THE
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