

## Acts of the Apostles

### Introduction

From the beginning of time God's intention has been to create a people for himself. Adam and Eve thwarted God's purpose. So did Noah's descendants after the flood. So did the children of Israel in spite of all the special advantages God gave to them.

Jesus succeeded where all others failed. He was "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3). Now in Christ God is creating a new people to claim as his own, a people who are reflectors of his image to the world. They are a "chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9). They are the new Israel.

In the book of Acts, the story of how God is at work in Christ recreating and refashioning a holy people for himself is told. It tells us the story of the unfolding of God's Master Plan in and through his Church.

The book of Acts serves as a bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles. It provides us with the background information we need for an informed and profitable study of the Epistles. It also provides the church today with an opportunity to learn what guiding principles ought to govern the church as it carries on the mission Jesus has given it in all ages.

### The Author

- ✓ Luke (Acts 1:1)
- ✓ For more information refer back to the author information from the Gospel of Luke.

### Date and Place of Writing

- ✓ Around 65-68 AD, likely from Rome

### Purpose of Writing

- ✓ The former book, the Gospel of Luke, records what Jesus *began* to do and to teach. This book records what Jesus *continued* to do and to teach in and through the preaching and teaching of the messengers of his word.
- ✓ Acts is not a chronicle or a history of the early church in the usual sense. It is a continuation of what Luke began in book one, i.e., the story of what Jesus is doing. The risen Christ is now the ascended Lord. As Lord, Jesus has an impact on the lives of people. He confronts people now as then in the word of his witnesses. He wants to stake out his claim on our lives. Some acquiesce to his claim. Others do not. Those who do are people who belong to God.
- ✓ Luke depicts specific incidents to record for the following purpose:
  1. To show the impact of the Gospel on the hearts of people.
  2. To show the triumph of the Gospel in spite of opposition.
  3. To show the march of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome (from the capital of the Jewish world to the capital of the Gentile world).

### Structure of the Book

- ✓ In Acts 1:8 the words of Jesus provide the strategy for the apostles to employ in carrying out the Great Commission. The church is to move forward in ever-expanding circles.
  1. In Jerusalem (Chapters 1-7)
  2. In Judea (Chapters 8-9)
  3. To the ends of the earth (Chapters 10-28)

**Summary**

Acts relates the story of the beginning and the growth of the apostolic church. The content of the book incorporates four elements:

1. Key Figures (Peter and Paul)
2. Key Events (Ascension, Pentecost, Call of the Seven Deacons, Conversion of Saul and Cornelius, Council at Jerusalem, Mission Expansion from Jerusalem to Rome).
3. Obstacles to the Gospel (Jewish exclusivism, persecutions by the Jews, confrontations with civil authorities, imprisonments, and litigation).
4. The working of the Word.

**Features to look for**

- ✓ Frequent references to the Holy Spirit and his work (50+)
- ✓ Significant firsts:
  - Martyr
  - Council of the church
  - Deacons
  - Use of the name Christian
  - Etc.
- ✓ The Gospel comes to Europe which becomes the cradle for Christianity
- ✓ The phenomenon of speaking in tongues (languages)
- ✓ The frequent references to prayer in the early church
- ✓ Luke's concern for historical detail in recounting events and in dealing with different areas and cultures from Jerusalem to Rome
- ✓ Luke's literary style: "All the discourses and addresses of various persons, delivered at different times, are reported by Luke in perfect accordance with the peculiarities of each speaker and the circumstances under which they were spoken. When Luke records Peter's sermon, the style reflects Peter's Aramaisms. When he records Paul's preaching among Hellenistic Gentiles, Hellenisms are in evidence.
- ✓ Luke's vivid style of writing (cf. Acts 27 and Paul's shipwreck)
- ✓ Luke's objectivity in reporting the bad about the church and its personalities as well as the good.