

Lesson 31

ACTS

THE AUTHOR

Even though the book of Acts doesn't identify its author, the Prologue (Acts 1:1-3) clearly implies that _____ [a] wrote it because: (1) both Luke and Acts mention _____ [b] as the recipient; (2) Acts refers to "the former book," implying that the Gospel of Luke is that book; (3) Acts also begins the story of Jesus at the point Luke ends it—the ascension of Christ; and (4) the style of Greek used in both books is polished and formal. In addition to those four facts, the unanimous testimony of the early church was that Luke wrote Acts.

THE PURPOSE

Jesus said in Matthew's Gospel that He would build His _____ [c], and the gates of Hades would not prevail against it. Acts is Luke's account of the _____ [d] and early _____ [e] of Jesus' church. The book of Acts, then, is the first volume of church _____ [f]. It records the story of the church's first _____ [g] decades—from its formal, explosive beginning on the Day of Pentecost to Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

Another way of describing the historical emphasis of Acts is to say that Acts intends to show how the apostles began the work that Jesus initiated on the earth. Acts 1:1 describes Luke's Gospel as an account of "all that Jesus began to do and to teach." Acts intends to describe how the _____ [h] continued this work of _____ [i]. The Gospel began in Jerusalem and fanned out over the whole Roman world to the city of Rome itself. Paul wrote that the salvation of the Lord is "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16). The book of Acts records how God used human means to send out the divine message of _____ [j] to the Jews first and then to the whole world.

Acts also provides a _____ [k] link between the Gospels and the letters of the New Testament (the *epistles*). If all we had were the New Testament epistles, it would be difficult to understand the flow of the early _____ [l] of the church. But with the book of Acts, we have a core _____ [m] around which we can assemble the information contained in the epistles. This enriches our comprehension of the epistles.

THE CONTENT

The content of Acts falls easily into _____[n] parts. Acts 1:8 says, “you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Luke then goes on to record the growth of the church, which begins in _____[o], then spreads to _____[p], and finally extends to the _____[q].

The Witness in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7)

The good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection was to be given first to the _____[r]. After Jesus’ ascension, then, Luke begins with the first great event in the spreading of the gospel—the Day of _____[s] in Jerusalem. On that day, the apostles were probably in the portico of the temple when the Holy Spirit came upon them. The Spirit’s arrival upon them was accompanied by the sound of a mighty wind sweeping through the building, tongues of fire appearing over their heads, and their ability to speak in the native languages of the crowds. Several thousand quickly gathered, people from all over the Roman Empire who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost. Peter then preached a powerful sermon, and about _____[t] people responded to Peter’s command to “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus for the remission of your sins” (Acts 2:38). Later, after a dramatic healing of a man lame from birth, Peter delivered a second sermon, and thousands more were added to Jesus’ saved community, the church (Acts 3:1-4:4).

Given what had happened to Jesus in Jerusalem, it’s not surprising that _____[u] quickly set in. Within days Peter and John were jailed, beaten, and released (Acts 4:1-22). On another occasion all of the apostles were thrown in jail, but God miraculously released them (Acts 5:17-42). _____[v], a prominent leader in the young church, and one who was among “the Seven” (Acts 6:1-6)—a group of men chosen to serve as aides to the apostles—was arrested and killed as an example to other Christians (Acts 7). Obviously, it was hoped that his death would stop this new religious movement centered on Jesus Christ.

The Witness in Samaria (Acts 8-12)

When Stephen was killed, _____[w] was one of the primary participants in his death. He soon gained a feared reputation among the church as the chief _____[x] of Christians (Acts 8:1-3). This diffused some the explosive growth of the church in Jerusalem and caused many Christians to flee; but this set the stage for God’s plan to send the gospel beyond the _____[y] and _____[z] boundaries of the Jews.

First, _____[aa] were admitted to the church. _____[bb], another of “the Seven,” was the first to go to Samaria to preach the gospel, and many of the Samaritans responded to his preaching (Acts 8:4-

24). There was such hostility between Jews and Samaritans that it would have been unimaginable for many Jewish Christians to think God would also want Samaritans in His church. So, Peter and John came to the region of Samaria to confirm that God approved of Samaritans and that they were now brothers and sisters in Christ. After preaching in Samaria, Philip was then transported to preach to an _____[cc] eunuch who was on his way home from Jerusalem (Acts 8:25-40). Because of the eunuch's physical impairment, he could never be accepted as a full member of the Jewish community (Deut 23:1). So, the half-Jewish Samaritans and the outcast eunuch were accepted into Jesus' church.

Acts 9 (and also Acts 22 and 26) narrates the conversion of the chief persecutor of the church at that time—Saul of Tarsus. Once Saul became a Christian, he began to use the name _____[dd] and Jesus made him an _____[ee]. Paul became known as the apostle to the _____[ff], the name the Jews used for all non-Jews. Raised in a Greek city and highly educated, Paul was an ideal choice to take the message of Jesus to a culture that didn't know Moses and the Prophets.

From this point on, the direction of the church took a decisive turn. For the first time, the gospel goes to the _____[gg]. In Acts 10 and 11 Luke tells us how Peter was miraculously led by God to a Gentile named _____[hh]. While Peter was preaching to Cornelius and other members of his household, the _____[ii] fell upon these Gentile listeners and they spoke in tongues just as the apostles had done on Pentecost. This “Gentile _____[jj]” showed that God wanted Gentiles in His church too. It showed that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34); all stand before Him on equal footing. At this point the church is now beginning to become a Gentile church, and the stage is set for the work of Paul among the Gentiles.

The Witness to the Ends of the Earth (Acts 13-28)

Roughly speaking, Acts 1-12 focuses on the work of _____[kk]. Almost every chapter in that section contains some report on his work. With Acts 13 Luke switches the spotlight to _____[ll]. Paul first teamed up with a man named _____[mm]. Paul was ministering in Antioch when he and Barnabas were called by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2) to become missionaries to Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Together they traveled through the heart of Asia Minor, planting new communities of “believers,” a common name in the Bible for those who are following Jesus. The Bible calls each community of believers a _____[nn]. This was Paul's “_____ [oo] missionary journey,” and it was incredibly successful. After it was over, the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) places its stamp of approval on Paul's offering of the gospel to Gentiles. After that, Paul is off again on another missionary trip.

On Paul's "_____ [pp] missionary journey" he and his new missionary partner, _____ [qq], intend to continue preaching in Asia Minor but the Holy Spirit leads them to _____ [rr] where they have a vision in the night calling them to do missionary work in _____ [ss] and Greece (Acts 15:36-22). After his second missionary journey, Paul soon undertook his "_____ [tt] missionary journey" to plant new churches, strengthen existing one, and train up leaders. During his third missionary journey, Paul is compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22). The Holy Spirit repeatedly warns him that _____ [uu] and hardship are waiting for him there, but Paul is determined to be obedient (Acts 20:23). While in Jerusalem he is imprisoned and ultimately taken to _____ [vv], the largest city of the ancient world, and the Gentile capital of the Roman Empire. There Paul preaches and shares the gospel with all who will listen while he awaits his trial before Caesar. Luke leaves the story there with Paul proclaiming that the gospel is for the Gentiles as well as the Jews (Acts 28:28).

THE HISTORICAL ACCURACY OF ACTS

The historical accuracy of Acts began to be challenged in the mid-to-late nineteenth century (mid-to-late 1800s). Those challenges have proven to be powerless. Luke was an incredibly accurate historian. He shows familiarity with Roman law and privileges of Roman citizens, he gives the correct titles of various provincial rulers, and he accurately describes various geographical boundaries and locations. One prominent doubter of Luke's accuracy in the late-1800s was scholar and archeologist Sir William Ramsey. But after he focused thirty years of meticulous research on Asia Minor, Ramsey concluded that he had been wrong about Luke, and that Luke was precisely accurate when it came to reporting history and making geographical references. Recent scholars have confirmed Ramsey's view of the historical reliability of Acts.

ACTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

One final important note about the book of Acts is how the role of the Holy Spirit is highlighted. The Spirit is mentioned more than ____ [ww] times in Acts. As many have suggested, instead of calling the book "The Acts of the Apostles," it could well be called "The Acts of the Holy _____ [xx] Through the Apostles." In Acts the Holy Spirit is seen choosing missionaries (Acts 13:2) and directing missionary operations (Acts 8:29; 16:6-7). He presided at the first church council (Acts 15:28), and came upon the first Gentile listeners as Peter preached (Acts 10:44). Peter promised that all who are baptized in the name of Jesus would receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Paul rebaptized believers in Ephesus who had not received the Spirit (Acts 19:1-7), and Peter and John laid their hands on the new Samaritan converts and they received the Holy

Spirit (Acts 8:17). Paul told the Ephesian elders that the Spirit had made them overseers (Acts 20:28). In short, the Holy Spirit is significantly involved in the direction and control of all operations of Jesus' church.

LESSONS FROM ACTS

- There is a general _____[yy] for the local church to follow.
- The one baptism is _____[zz] baptism.
- There is a normal pattern for being _____[aaa] again.
- Some early events of the church were _____-offs [bbb].
- All ministries of the church are _____[ccc].
- Through many _____[ddd] we must enter the kingdom.
- Our central task is to faithfully spread the _____[eee].

KEY PASSAGES FROM ACTS

- Acts 1:8
- Acts 2:38
- Acts 5:29, 42
- Acts 8:4, 35-38
- Acts 10:44-48
- Acts 14:21-23
- Acts 16:30-33
- Acts 20:28-32
- Acts 28:28-31

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK ANSWER KEY

[a] Luke	[ss] Macedonia
[b] Theophilus	[tt] third
[c] church	[uu] prison
[d] birth	[vv] Rome
[e] growth	[ww] 50
[f] history	[xx] Spirit
[g] three	[yy] pattern
[h] apostles	[zz] water
[i] Jesus	[aaa] born
[j] salvation	[bbb] one
[k] historical	[ccc] important
[l] history	[ddd] tribulations
[m] history	[eee] gospel
[n] three	
[o] Jerusalem	
[p] Samaria	
[q] world	
[r] Jews	
[s] Pentecost	
[t] 3,000	
[u] persecution	
[v] Stephen	
[w] Saul	
[x] persecutor	
[y] racial	
[z] ethnic	
[aa] Samaritans	
[bb] Philip	
[cc] Ethiopian	
[dd] Paul	
[ee] apostle	
[ff] Gentiles	
[gg] Gentiles	
[hh] Cornelius	
[ii] Holy Spirit	
[jj] Pentecost	
[kk] Peter	
[ll] Paul	
[mm] Barnabas	
[nn] church	
[oo] first	
[pp] second	
[qq] Silas	
[rr] Troas	