

Discuss: Why is the book of Acts called *Acts*?

Group Assignments: Take the first three minutes to look up...

Group #1: Answer the question: "How do we know Luke was the human author of Acts?"

Group #2: Develop a timeline (use a transparency). Include these key events: the birth of Jesus, the ascension of Jesus to heaven, the sending of the Holy Spirit, how long the early church was Jewish, when it spread to Samaria, when it spread to Gentiles, when Paul became a Christian, when Paul wrote his epistles, and when Paul died.

Group #3: Scan the book. Luke records a series of "misfortunes" (setbacks, trials) that hit the early church. Find as many as you can.

- **Who wrote the book?**

--Luke

[Have group #1 share their findings]

- Luke is not mentioned as the author.
- The author of Acts is the same person who wrote the gospel of Luke (1:1)

Discuss: What's the relationship between the gospel of Luke and Acts, acc. to 1:1-2?

- There are clues within the book that indicate that Luke was the author.

--The "we" passages

Notice the pronouns...

16:7-9 "they...they...they..."

16:10 "*we* got ready..." [here is where the "we" passages begin; the author was with Paul]

16:11 "*we* put out to sea..."

20:5 "These men went on and waited for *us* at Troas."

27:1 "When it was decided that *we* would sail for Italy, Paul..."

The author includes himself as a companion in Paul's travels in the events where he uses the "we" pronouns. One of these events was Paul's two year prison stay at Rome (ch. 28). During that time, Paul wrote several letters, including Philemon and Colossians. Notice in his greetings that he includes Luke.

See: Phile 23-24; Col. 4:14

--The vocabulary indicates a well-educated person

The book includes medical terminology which would indicate it was written by a man with such training...

28:6 "The people expected him to *swell up*." [it's the usual medical term for inflammation; the word is used only by Luke in the NT]

Note: Remember, in Col. 4:14 Paul calls Luke "the doctor."

- **When was the book written?**

--A.D. 63 (soon after the last event recorded in the book)

What's the evidence that indicates the book was not written later?

1. There is no mention of the outcome of Paul's trial.
2. There is no mention of the burning of Rome (A.D. 64), nor of Paul's second imprisonment (A.D. 64-67).
3. There is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in A.D. 70.

- **Why was the book written?**

Q: Acc. to 1:1, who received the book? Theophilus

Q: What is the subject matter of the book? What's it about?

--Acts provides the historical account of what happened to the Church in its first 30 years of existence.

Key Verse: Acts 1:8

Q: What instruction/guarantee did Jesus give His disciples? You will be my witnesses.

Q: Where? Starting in Jerusalem, then in Judea, then Samaria, then to the world

Acts shows that what Jesus said would happen *did* happen. The gospel spread just like Jesus predicted. His disciples did bear witness for Him.

So Acts gives us a historical record of how the early church grew. But why? What's the purpose of such an account? To satisfy curiosity? Are they stories to entertain us? Certainly, it's more than that. Is the purpose of Acts to give us a model to follow? Are we supposed to repeat the experiences of the Christians in Acts? Some say so... e.g. -- Since the Holy Spirit came in tongues of fire on the believers in Acts 2, we should have a similar experience; a second work of grace. You receive Jesus at salvation; you must receive the Holy Spirit at sanctification. If the believers in Acts spoke in tongues, healed lame legs, received special messages from God, and had encounters with angels, so should we. Is that right?

Remember, Acts is historical narrative. It tells us what happened. It doesn't give us a prescription for what *should* happen in the church. What part of the Bible does that for the church? The epistles.

The Purpose of Acts:

1. *It gives us history.*

[Have group #2 share its findings]

It recounts the first 30 years of the church.

2. *It gives us encouragement.*

The book shows that even in the face of severe persecution, God's purpose for His Church cannot be hindered (see Acts 28:31).

[Have group 3 share its findings -- Scan the book. Luke records a series of "misfortunes" (setbacks, trials) that hit the early church. Find as many as you can.] Here are a few: the arrest of Peter and the apostles; the killing of Stephen; the attacks of Saul; the murder of James; the undermining of the Judaizers; the stoning of Paul at Iconium; the defection of John Mark; the conflict between Barnabas and Paul; the beating at Philippi; the arrest of Paul in Jerusalem; the injustice of Paul's trial and waiting in prison.

Yet in the face of all these "setbacks" the gospel went forward *unhindered!!!*

3. *It gives us a reliable defense for Christianity.*

The NIV Study Bible says (1644), "Luke probably wrote this work as Paul awaited trial in Rome. If his case came to court, what better court brief could Paul have had than a life of Jesus, a history of the beginnings of the church (including the activity of Paul), and an early collection of Paul's letters?"

- **What is the outline of the book?**

The fulfillment of Acts 1:8:

I. The Gospel goes to Jerusalem (Acts 1-7)

II. The Gospel goes to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12)

III. The Gospel goes to the Uttermost Part (Acts 13-28) -- Syria, Phoenicia, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy

A. Paul's First Missionary Journey (13-14)

B. The Council in Jerusalem (15)

C. Paul's Second Missionary Journey (16-18)

D. Paul's Third Missionary Journey (19-21)

E. Paul's Imprisonment (21-28)

The Main Characters:

I. Peter and the Jewish Beginnings of the Church (chs. 1-12)

II. Paul and the Spread of the Church to the Gentile world (chs. 13-28)

- **What is the message of the book in one sentence?**

--Acts tells the story of the first thirty years of the early church.

- **What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?**

1. *The book reveals the importance of the Holy Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit is mentioned over 50 times in this book. As Gromacki points out (155), "It is no wonder that some have dubbed it 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit.'"

To do: From the following verses, what do we learn about the Holy Spirit?

1:5 The believers were "baptized" with Him. When did that happen? Acts 2.

1:8 He gives power for witnessing.

5:3, 9 He can be lied against and tested.

7:51 He can be resisted.

9:31 He encourages and strengthens the church.

13:2 He commissions for service.

16:6-7 He directs His servants in the spread of the gospel.

20:28 He appoints pastors.

2. *Luke shows that we have a job to do.*

Read: 28:30-31 Paul is still in prison.

Discuss: Why does the book end so abruptly? Why are we left hanging? *We* are part of the ending of the book! The baton has passed to us.

3. *Luke emphasizes the importance of prayer.*

Nearly every chapter makes mention of prayer. The church moves ahead as it prays. Have people read: 1:14; 2:42; 4:24; 6:24; 9:11; 12:5; 13:3

Discuss: What must happen if we are to be a people of prayer?