

Introduction to the Book of Acts

“Jesus Is Alive As Head Of His Bride”

What is the “Book of Acts” (or “The Acts of the Apostles”)?

It is an inspired (2 Timothy 3:16-17) literary work which traces certain key aspects of the first century Christian Church—keying on specific “acts” of the Apostle Peter (Chapters 1-12) and the Apostle Paul (Chapters 13-28).

As one of the 27 NT books, what it affirms is inerrant and indispensable...however as narrative literature it can at times be descriptive (about certain events that took place) without being prescriptive (affirming that those things are good/right or normative). The truths it teaches are important and the framework it gives is extremely helpful in understanding the setting/purpose of other NT books.

Who Wrote the Book of Acts?

The book is anonymous, but early external and internal evidence argues strongly that Luke, the “beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14) was the author of both the Gospel traditionally associated with him and its twin work: the Book of Acts

Luke 1:1-4 (NRSV)

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us,² just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word,³ I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,⁴ so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed. Luke 1:1-4 (NRSV)

Acts 1:1-3 (NASB)

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up *to heaven*, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the Kingdom of God.

Why Was The Book Written in the First Place?

IOWs: What Was Luke's Original Purpose for the Book?

As Dr. Daniel Wallace explains in detail at bible.org, the immediate/pragmatic purpose was to inform the Roman Government official, Theophilus about key facts supporting the legitimacy of Christianity generally and the ministry of Paul specifically. To equip him to support Paul in his appeal to Nero in Rome.

Beyond yet consistent with this, the Holy Spirit of God moved Luke to write for critically important edificatory, apologetic and evangelistic purposes.

Edification

The book was written to instruct and build up believers in their faith by demonstrating how the purposes and plan of God was at work in the first generation Church despite the difficulties it had faced/continued to face.

More specifically, the Book of Acts validates the fact that the Risen/Ascended Christ was fulfilling His promise to irresistibly build His Church through faithful though flawed human raw material including Peter, Paul and Mary (and Dorcas!)

Apologetics ("To Defend" NOT to Apologize)

The book was written to answer false charges vs Christ/Christianity by both secular and religious opponents. The book of Acts "...is not merely concerned to draw a link between the time of Jesus and the time of early church, as is commonly noted, but also between the time of Israel and the time of Jesus and His Church. Acts insists that the God who was at work in the history of His ancient people Israel...is the same God who was at work in the Church." Brian Roser

Evangelism

The book was written to declare the love of God in Christ through the power of the Gospel over human limitations and prejudice > culture, color or country. According to the Bible, there is only one "race" the human race, and as Carl Perkins said "if some of you don't start movin' you're going to finish in last place!"

When Was the Book Originally Written?

Internal and historical evidence allows the book IMHO to be dated very precisely, in late spring/early summer 62AD, just before Paul's hearing before Nero after a two year waiting period.

"He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance." Acts 28:30-31 (ESV)

Just so you'll know: many scholars today date the book in the 80s AD. In response to that, Dan Wallace says the fact "that Acts ends where it does is a great embarrassment to those who" date it in the 80s. Well known British (and non-evangelical) scholar, J.A.T. Robinson, in his major work on the dating of the New Testament argues strongly for the book being written in 62. German scholar, Adolph von Harnack held to a late date for the book, before doing research for his volume **The Date of Acts**. He then changed his opinion noting (among many other facts) evidence: for the last "eight chapters of Acts, Luke keeps his readers intensely interested in the progress of the trials of St. Paul, simply that he may in the end completely disappoint them [in the sense that]-they learn nothing about the final result [of Paul's trials in the Book of Acts itself]!" His point is such a state of affairs seems impossible IF the author was writing decades (80AD) later when the conclusion of Paul's legal issues had been resolved years before.

Final Question

How can we get a good sense of the overall content of 28 whole chapters?

One Answer

Start by remembering just eight words: "Jesus Is Alive As Head Of His Bride"

Take This To Heart

We've seen what the Book of Acts is, who wrote it, why it was written and when it was written. My prayer is that this "behind the scenes" truth will increase our appreciation for what God has provided for us in/through this book. It is an essential portion of the Word of God written! It is inspired by the Holy Spirit. It has been preserved by the Holy Spirit. And as we come to it with teachable hearts, that same Divine Person will illuminate it to/for hearts, that we might be transformed to the glory of God "by the renewing of our minds."

Jesus ascends
Establishment of the Church
Salvation of a Lame Beggar
Unleashing of Persecution
Sin in the Church

Impact of Deacons
Stephen's Stoning

A broad with Philip (Samaria and Gaza)
Life comes to Saul/Paul
Invitation/Salvation to Cornelius
Verification of Gentile Salvation
Execution of James/Escape of Peter

Antioch Bible Fellowship Flourishes
Synagogues Strike

Heresy Corrected
Europe Evangelized
Apathy in Athens
Disciples at Corinth

Offense of the Gospel
Farewell to Ephesian Elders

Hebrews Riot
Instruction in the Temple
Sanhedrin Sizzles

Bondage under Felix
Roman Appeal before Festus
Inflencing King Agrippa
Disaster at Sea
Entry into Rome