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THE BOOK OF ACTS

THE HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

SURVEY AND ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

THE TITLE

The Book of Acts is called "The Acts of the Apostles," but more truly it could be called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit in the Church."

The secret to the whole Book is the Person, Work and Ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through the Church which is the physical Body of Christ on earth. There are about 50 references to the Holy Spirit in this brief and sketchy history of the first century Church.

All that is said and done, by means of preaching and teaching the Word of God, declaring the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ in power, signs and wonders and the phenomenal growth and development of the Church numerically, plus the Doctrine, Grace and Gifts and Word, is found in the operation of the Holy Spirit. He is the key to the Book of Acts.

It is here in the Book of Acts, by the Holy Spirit, that we hear the voice of the risen Lord in the Church and then through the Church to the World.

The Book has variously been called:

- The Acts of the Apostles
- The Acts of the Ascended and Glorified
- The Gospel of the Resurrection
- The Acts of the Holy Spirit
- The Gospel of the Holy Spirit
- The Lord Jesus Christ at Work By the Holy Spirit Through the Apostles

AUTHOR AND DATE

The Book of Acts is the sequel to the Gospel of Luke, and continues the early history of Christianity. The book begins by referring to "the former treatise" and is addressed to the same person to whom the other work is addressed, Theophilus.

Although the Book of Acts as it stands is anonymous, like the Gospel of Luke, the name of Luke was associated with both at an early date, and this uninterrupted tradition of authorship is universally accepted today. The internal evidence points in the direction of Luke as its author. Certain passages (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; chapters 27 and 28) are written in the firstperson plural, and are called the "we-sections," as indicating that the author was present and an eyewitness of the events which he records. The "we sections" also correspond to Luke's presence as Paul's companion and associate at the city of Troas, and on Paul's other journeys.

The most natural date to assign to the composition of the Book of Acts is about the close of the Apostle Paul's Roman imprisonment. Paul and Luke, and the remainder of the party, arrived at Rome early in 61 A.D. Luke closes his narrative with the statement of the "two whole years" of that first imprisonment (28:30-31). This would place the date of the book at about 63 A.D. and not later, as Luke does not mention some of the momentous events of 64 A.D. to 70 A.D. such as, Great Fire of Rome in 64 A.D., followed by the persecution of Christians; the Jewish Rebellion against Rome which began in 66 A.D., culminating in the destruction of the Temple and all Jerusalem by the Romans, under their commander Titus, in 70 A.D.

Also, from tradition as well as from Paul's later letters, it is generally supposed that Paul was tried before the Emperor Nero, and acquitted, about 63 AD., not long after the writing of the Book of Acts.

THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

Luke's purpose in writing the book of Acts is the same as his purpose in writing the former book, the Gospel of Luke. His introduction to the Gospel may very well be his introduction, also, to the Book of Acts. In the first book, Luke's purpose as stated in the introduction was to write a complete and orderly account of the Gospel story as revealed in the life and ministry of our Lord.

Connecting the two works, Luke begins his second book with this significant remark:

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up..." (Acts 1:1,2).

The phrase, "**all that Jesus began both to do and teach,**" implies that the Lord Jesus is continuing His work, after the Ascension, and Luke's second book is to continue that story through the "ACTS" of the Apostles.

Luke's purpose is further evident when he quotes the Lord's Great Command before His departure, in these words:

"....and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8)."

These words, also, may be taken as the key to the Book of Acts. For it is precisely the story of these witnesses, in the three respective areas mentioned, with which the Book of Acts deals.

Luke's further purpose is revealed in his interpretation of the early history of the Christian movement. Just as Mark was the companion and interpreter of the Apostle Peter, and a disciple of Peter's preaching and approach to the Gospel story; so was Luke a disciple of the Apostle Paul and presents the universality of the Gospel, and the all sufficiency of Christ as Savior. Other Jewish Christians might hold to circumcision and the observance of the Jewish ceremonial law, but not them.

So Luke's main mission and purpose, both as a follower and a historian, was to tell the story of the growth and expansion of the early Christian Church, from "a Jewish sect into a world-wide religion." The Book of Acts, therefore, is of the greatest value to the present day reader, because it is the only authentic record which we have of the first thirty years of the history of the Christian Church.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

In the composition of the Book of Acts, Luke shows himself the true historian. On every hand there is evidence of painstaking effort to secure the true facts, and to organize and to report them.

As Luke said in the introduction to the Gospel of Luke, that he undertook to trace the course of all things accurately from the very first.

One of the characteristics of the work of Luke is that it has stood the test of time for historical accuracy. Luke sets his history in the framework of contemporary imperial events. Luke's pages are full of the names of Roman officials, governors, including their correct official titles. He mentions a Roman Emperor 5 name [No other New Testament writer does so.] Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect to its trustworthiness.

Luke's plan for the composition of Acts, as we can readily see, is to group his narrative around a central figure, such as the Apostle Peter in chapters 1 to 12, and the Apostle Paul in chapters 13 to 28. Likewise, in the smaller units, Luke has followed the same method. For instance, he singles out some one person, such as Stephen, Philip and the Ethiopian, Cornelius, the young Timothy, his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois and develops the story around them.

Another feature is the number of speeches which He reproduces. The first is Peter's great sermon on the Day of Pentecost, 2:14-41; Stephen's defense of himself, 7:25-53; Paul's speech before the Areopagus Forum, in Athens, 17:22-31. Paul delivered at least five speeches while under arrest or in prison, at Jerusalem and Caesarea, 21:37 to 26:29. Luke records others, some of which are summarized briefly, while others are given at more length.

OUTLINES AND ANALYSES

There are a number of ways to approach and analyze the Book of Acts. In this survey of Acts we will give three of the most common analyses'. Number one is the most natural of the three.

Analysis No.1

In this the first outline and analysis of the Book of Acts we will group the contents into the three divisions suggested in Acts 1:8 which is the key verse of the Book.

"But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

1. The Church in Jerusalem, Chapters 1 - 7.

[The Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles in Jerusalem.]

- a. The Forty Days
- b. Out-pouring of the Holy Spirit
- c. Peter Performs Miracles
- d. Annanias and Sapphira
- e. Seven Deacons
- f. Martyrdom of Stephen
- g. Persecution of Church

2. The Church in Judea and Samaria, Chapters 8 - 11:18. [The Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles in Judea and Samaria. I]

- a. The Preaching of Philip
- b. The Conversion of Saul
- c. Peter Preaches, also, to the Gentiles

3. The Church beyond Palestine, Chapters 11:19 - 28. [The Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles to the **UTTERMOST** part of the earth.]

- a. The Church at Antioch
- b. The Gospel Preached to Gentiles
- c. Saul comes to Antioch
- d. Deeds of Mercy for the Poor
- e. Herod Agrippa I and His persecution of the Church
- f. **Pauls First Missionary Trip**
 - (1) Westward: Saul becomes Paul
 - (2) John Mark
 - (3) Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe
- g. The Council Meeting at Jerusalem, 50 A.D.
(The question of Circumcision)
- h. **Paul's Second Missionary Journey, 50-53 A.D.**
 - (1) Westward again
 - (2) Paul and Silas
 - (3) The Young Man Timothy
 - (4) Paul Carries the Gospel into Europe
 - (5) Luke Enters the Story
 - (6) Paul at Philippi
 - (7) Paul at Thessalonica
 - (8) Paul at Athens
 - (9) Paul at Corinth
 - (10) 1st and 2nd Thessalonians
 - (11) Paul Returns to Jerusalem and Antioch
- i. **Paul's Third Missionary Journey, 54 - 58 A.D.**
 - (1) The 3rd and Last of the Great Journeys
 - (2) Paul at Ephesus
 - (3) Luke's Summary of the Ephesus Mission
 - (4) Paul Re-visits Europe, Including New Territory
 - (5) 1st and 2nd Corinthians, and Romans
- j. Paul's Momentous Trip to Jerusalem
- k. Paul at Jerusalem and Caesarea, 58 - 60 A.D.
 - l. The Long Voyage to Rome
- m. Two Years with Paul in Rome

Analasis No. 2

1. Jerusalem- "Home Missions" - Acts 1:4 - 12:23

a. Acts 1:4 - 2:13

- The City and Centre of activity
- Mission of the Holy Spirit
- Equipment of the Disciples

b. Acts 2:14 - Chapter 11

- Peter (with others) the Apostle to the Jews, the circumcision, witnesses to the Jews and Samaritans.

- Peter to the gentiles

c. Acts 12:1-23

- Peter's imprisonment
- Subsequent abode (Caesarea)
- close of ministry

d. Ministries Highlighted

- Peter
- John
- Stephen
- Philip

e. Witnesses to:

- Jerusalem
- Judea
- Samaria

2. Antioch- "Foreign Missions" Acts 12:24 - 28:31

a. Acts 12:24 - 13:3

- The city and centre of activity
- Mission of the Holy Spirit
- Equipment of the Apostles

b. Acts 13:4 - 19:20

- Paul (with others) Apostle to the Gentiles, the uncircumcision
- ministry apart from Jerusalem and the Twelve to other nations
- Paul's ministry in association of the twelve

c. Acts 19:21 - 28:29

- Jerusalem
- Ephesus
- Paul's arrest and imprisonment
- Subsequent abode (Rome)
- close of ministry

d. Ministries Highlighted

- Paul
- Barnabas
- Silas
- Apollos

e. Witnesses unto the "Uttermost Parts of the Earth"

Conclusions -Acts 28:30-31

Analasis No. 3

Peter and Paul

Though it was called the Acts of the Apostles, it particularly centers around two Apostles:

1. Peter - the Apostle to the Jews, The Apostle of the circumcision. (Galatians 1:7) -
Ministry- Acts 1-12 chapters

2. Paul - The Apostle to the gentiles, Apostle of the uncircumcision (Galatians 2:7-9) -
Ministry- Acts 13:28 Chapters.

The following outline gives a brief summary of the book relative to these two ministries of the Lord Jesus through Peter and Paul, in the church.

General Outline

Jerusalem- The City and Center

Acts 1:1-11 The Lord Jesus Christ

The crucified-resurrected one

Acts 1:12-26 The 120 in the upper room before Pentacost

Acts 2:1-13 The first Pentacost

Acts 2:14-47 The first sermon converts

Acts 3-4 The first miracle and opposition

Acts 5 The first divine judgement

Acts 6 The first deacons chosen

Acts 7 The first martyr, Stephen

Acts 8 1-4 The first great persecution

Acts 8:5-40 The first evangelist, Philip

Acts 9 The visitation of local churches by Peter

Acts 10-11 The first outpouring on the gentiles

Acts 12 The final mention of Peter

Acts 12 Is the last mention of Peter in Acts, particularly, and brings the scene to a close on the activities of the church in Jerusalem which had reached out from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria. Now the rest of Acts deals especially with Paul and the ministry of the church from Antioch, and unto the uttermost parts of the then-known world- unto the gentiles.

Acts 9:1-31 The conversion of the Apostle Paul

Acts 12:24-26 Barnabas and Paul together

Acts 13 Barnabas and Paul separated for the ministry unto the gentiles

Acts 14 Various churches established

Acts 16-20 Missionary journeys of Paul

Acts 21-22 Paul at Jerusalem

Acts 23-26 Pauls witness before Kings and rulers

Acts 27 Pauls voyage to Rome
Acts 28 Paul in Rome-gospel established

Note: the following comparison between Peter and Paul, the Holy Spirit, sealed both Apostolic ministries almost identically in their respective fields of witness.

The church needs both Peter and Paul (1 Corinthians 3:4-6; 21-23)

PETER	PAUL
Acts 1-12 Chapters	Acts 13-28 Chapters
An Apostle to the Jews the Circumcision	An Apostle to the Gentiles the Uncircumcision
Foundation Ministry	Foundation Ministry
Apostolic revelation to the church	Apostolic Revelation to the church
To the Jews first	To the synagoues first
Then to the Gentiles	Then to the gentiles
Lay hands upon the Samaritans	Lay hands on the Ephesians
Outpoured the Holy Spirit	Outpoured Holy Spirit
Healed a lame man	Healed a lame man
Raised a person from the dead	Raised a person from the dead
Signs and wonders	Signs and wonders
Deals with a sorcerer	Deals with a sorcerer
Witnessed before the Sanhedrin	Witnessed before the Sanhedrin
Seven Addresses recorded in Acts	Seven addresses recorded in Acts
Established local churches	Established local churches
Imprisoned for witnessing	Imprisoned for witnessing
Angel of the Lord delivers from prison	Angel of the Lord sends earthquake
Arrested in the temple	Arrested in the temple
Chains fell off	Chains loosed
A man of heavenly visions	A man of heavenly visions
Religious and political opposition	Religious and political opposition
Beaten for the name of Jesus	Beaten and stoned for the Lord
Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria	The Uttermost part of the earth
Writer of two epistles	Writer of 14 Epistles

Note: 1Corinthians 15:1-10; 2Corintians 11:5; 12:11-12 and especially the Book of Acts are for these comparisons.

COMMENTS

- The Gospel begins in Jerusalem, the Religious hub of the world. It ends in Rome, the Political hub of the world.

- Rome, the World Kingdom which crucified Jesus, the despised Carpenter and Jew.
- Rome, who declared and boasted her justice, yet condemned the Christ of God, the Innocent One, to the Religious Leaders of Jerusalem to be crucified.
- Rome, who stamped her seal on the Tomb of Jesus to prevent the resurrection. Rome working with Jerusalem against the Lord and His Anointed.
- Now from Jerusalem - "Beginning at Jerusalem" - the Gospel of the Crucified-Resurrected-Ascended-Glorified-Exalted Son of God, The Lord Jesus Christ, goes into all the world, and it ends in Rome in the court of Caesar, by Paul, A Jew!
- Religious and Political powers conquered by the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Rome and Jerusalem linked together. As it was then, so shall it be in the end of the Age.