

Acts Introduction

Mike Rogers, M.D.

All right, this session we're looking at the introduction to the Acts of the Apostles, the title is given as "Acts of the Apostles" in just about every Bible. Yet, this is not a record of all of the acts of all of the apostles. Perhaps a more accurate description would be "some of the acts of some of the apostles." And possibly, we might even narrow that down and say, "Some of the acts of Peter and some of the acts of Paul," might even be a better description of this book. But, undoubtedly, Acts is a continuation of Luke's Gospel. Combine this with Acts and Luke, this work provides the history of Jesus from the beginning, as we read in Luke chapter one, to the spread of the Gospel throughout the known world. And so there's kind of where we're going with this introduction to Acts.

Who is the author? Well, the author was Luke, because it is no doubt, it is a continuation. It's generally accepted that the same author wrote Acts, who wrote Luke. And in our introduction, we concluded that Luke is the author of the Gospel according to his name, and therefore he would continue to be the author according in Acts. Acts clearly picks up where Luke leaves off. If you look in Luke chapter 24. And you begin reading with verse 44. Luke says, "Now he said to them, these are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about me in the law of Moses and the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. And he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I'm sending forth the promise of my father upon you, but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high. And then Jesus ascended.'"

Well if you turn to Acts chapter one, and you begin reading, you see that everything that Luke said at the end of his Gospel that had to take place, what took place right here in Acts chapters one and two. The Holy Spirit coming down upon them being filled with power from on high. They were speaking to all the different nations, looking in Acts chapter one and two, when they were all speaking to the different nations that were there and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins had to be preached in the name of Jesus. Up until this time, repentance for the forgiveness of sins was preached in the name of John, but now it would be preached in the name of Jesus. Where's the first time that that happens? Well it happens in Acts 2, on the Day of Pentecost, when Peter said, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins." So, everything that Jesus says to His apostles, had to take place at the end of Luke, takes place at the beginning of Acts. So, it clearly just flows naturally from one to the other.

There's no doubt that this is, that Luke is the author of the Acts just like he is of the Gospel according to his name. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Irenaeus all attest to Luke's authorship of Acts.

The "we" and "us" sections, as Luke and company, has Luke accompanying Paul on the many missions support Lukan authorship. And just a few: you can look and and see this and Acts 16:10-17 and Acts 20:5-21, and so on. You can follow it and you can see Luke is with Paul and uses "we" and

“us” as he writes this letter. So, he has the information. He's an eye-witness to it all, and he writes it down. And so, Luke is the author.

What about the audience? To whom is Luke writing? Well, Luke writes to the same person in Acts that he wrote to in the his Gospel. In the beginning, in Luke's chapter one, he calls him “most excellent Theophilus. But in Acts chapter one, there is no reason to address him as “most excellent,” because he already has done that in Luke. So he is simply calls him the “Theophilus” in Acts. And this also supports the fact that it is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke and the same author wrote it. But the audience, the audience, the primary audience obviously, is Theophilus. I want to talk more about that in a moment.

But there is a broader audience, I think, in Acts Gospel, as well, as in Luke's Gospel, in Acts of the Apostles, there's a broader audience. Acts talks about strife between Jewish and Gentile believers. Acts shows divisions based on leadership of different apostles and teachers. Acts corrects doctrinal errors introduced by false teachers. Acts addresses strife between the church and and civil governments. Acts touches on the issues faced by women and the poor. Acts reveals persecutions, sufferings and imprisonment of Christians.

Luke wrote the book of Acts to address a very broad set of issues. Thus, it is certain he intended for his work to be read by the church in general, for everyone, dealing with those women and men in the church, and whether they were Jew or Gentile. He wanted this work, primarily written to Theophilus. But it was a work that was valuable for every member of the body of Christ then, and as much so now.

And then, what is the place for the writing of the book of Acts? Assuming that Luke's Gospel was written from Rome, and Acts being a continuation of Luke's Gospel, we conclude that Acts was written from Rome as well. And there's some argument that Acts, may have been written from Antioch. And I can understand that especially as you begin in the latter part of chapter 12. And, and in 13, especially when there's so much attention given to Antioch as the beginning of the mission point, where the Paul and Barnabas and then Paul and Silas and Barnabas and John Mark are sent out from Antioch to go out in to the world. And there's some that might, might say that this, that Antioch might be the place of this writing. However, Antioch is not given the support by early Christian fathers and others who have written on the authorship of Acts. This, most people will go along with the idea that being a continuation of Luke's Gospel, Acts would have been written, and written at about the same time, and we'll talk about that in just a moment, as a following from Luke's Gospel. Acts would have been written from Rome.

And then so let's look at the date for Acts of the Apostles. It is consistently agreed that Acts of the apostles was written shortly after Luke's Gospel. As was said in the introduction of Luke's Gospel, there is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem in Acts. Therefore, one should be able to confidently assume Acts was written before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Acts chapter 12 and verse 2 records the death of James the apostle, and Josephus informs us that James died about AD 62. Furthermore, Acts ends with Paul in his first prison term in Rome in his own private home, under guard, which would have been, most people date it somewhere between 62 and 64. Therefore, we put, we must put the date for the writing of Acts somewhere between 64 and 68, in my opinion. It had to come before Paul's death. If Luke wrote Acts as a continuation of Luke's Gospel, and if the purpose for the letter is in defense of Paul (and we'll talk about that more in just a moment), then it seems logical that Acts was written just prior to Paul's death, which is given by most

people, 67 to 68. With these facts and assumptions, I date the book of Acts, along with Luke's Gospel, to have been written near the end of 67, or the beginning of 68. Now that's following along with Luke and Acts.

So what is the purpose of Acts? Well, I see the primary purpose for Acts of the Apostles as a historical account of the spread of Christianity. If you look in Acts chapter 1, and verse number 8. In Acts chapter 1, and verse 8, he says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." You're going to be my witness. And so we have, as you go through the book of Acts, you see it, this very thing taking place. You see the very spread of the Gospel. And so it gives you a historical record of the spread of the Gospel throughout the known world.

A secondary purpose is to complete the Gospel story. Jesus promised in Matthew 16 and verse 18, to build his church. The church was not established. The church, there's no mention of the church being established until Acts chapter 2. So it is the completion of the building of the church that Jesus promised in Acts chapter 16, in verse 18.

Another thing that's important, I think, is that Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. And we see that in John 15:26, and 16, and verse 13. We see it in Luke's final Gospel, and even in Acts chapter one, "of the power from on high." Well, we see this taking place in Acts, this prophecy, the fulfilling of the Gospel, is what we're talking about. And each one of the Gospel accounts ends without this being accomplished. And so Acts picks up and this is accomplished. The apostles were commanded to preach to the whole world, Matthew 18:18-20, even at the end of Luke, and even at the end of Mark. This is fulfilled in Acts as the Gospel is spread throughout the world.

But a third purpose for the book of Acts, is to explain the establishment of many congregations. As you go through the book, and if you read it, and we'll kind of do this in just a moment, but if you go through the book, and you look at it from Acts chapter 1 and verse 8, you see where the Gospel began in Jerusalem, and the first congregation of the Lord's people were established right there in Jerusalem. And then you follow it through and you see it going on out into Judea, and then you see it going into Samaria. And then you see it going into the rest of the world as, as Paul takes the Gospel into the rest of the world. And this is, this is exactly what's taking place and this is what we see throughout this. And so it gives us a historical record of the establishment of the different congregations of the one church.

Finally, Acts introduces us to the Apostle Paul. Now in Galatians chapter 1 and verse 1, "Paul an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead. Paul is not introduced in any of the Gospel accounts. But we come to Acts and we come to Acts chapter 9, we learn who Paul was, Saul at that time, we learned that he was a persecutor of Christians. And we learn about his conversion in Acts chapter 9, and we see who he was, and we see how he is called. And then we see his work as an apostle, as it goes throughout the, throughout the book. And so from this perspective, Acts of the Apostles, may be written along with Luke's Gospel, as a defense for Paul, as he is in prison, awaiting his trial. And he writes this particularly to most excellent Theophilus to tell why, who Paul is, why Paul is preaching the Gospel that he's preaching. But he didn't start with the conversion of Saul, or Paul. He went all the way back and explained who Jesus is, and brought it all the way through to where Paul and why Paul is in prison preaching in the name of Jesus.

And this, in my opinion, is one of the most profound purposes for this book, written particularly to Theophilus, not to mean that it wasn't intended to be read by the church. And it wasn't intended to be read by everyone else, even today. But it was written specifically to Theophilus for the purpose of defending, giving Paul a defense and explaining to Theophilus, who Paul was and why he is in prison. And that gives us all of this information.

And then let's look at the division. If you look at the basic division of this letter, I divided it basically in two parts, and that is: Peter's mission and Paul's mission. Peter: chapter one, verses one through chapter 12, and verse 19. And then Paul's mission: chapter 12:20, through chapter 28 and verse 31.

Perhaps a better division, though, is to follow chapter 1 and verse 8, and the Gospel in Jerusalem, chapter 1, verses 6, through chapter 7 in verse 60. And then the Gospel goes into Judea and Samaria, chapter 8, verse 1, through chapter 12, and verse 25. And then the Gospel goes to the Gentiles, Chapter 13, verse one through chapter 26, and verse 32. And then the Gospel goes to Rome, in chapter 27, verses 1 through chapter 28, and verse 31. And there's two ways that you can read it, you can divide it into two parts, and you can read it about this. These are the acts of Peter. And you go to chapter 12, verse 28, and these are the acts of Paul. Or you can look at Acts chapter 1 and verse 8. And you can see the Gospel as it spreads. And you can divide it into those terms and see the Gospel being spread and churches being established throughout the known world, from that perspective. The Gospel, or the Acts of the Apostles, is one of the most entertaining works that you can read, you can't really understand the epistles without understanding the Acts of the Apostles, because it gives you the foundation, the beginning of those churches, to whom the epistles are written to. And you have the foundation, the beginning of those churches recorded in the books of Acts.

Thank you for your time.