

Acts

AD 33	AD 36	AD 49	AD 57–58	AD 70
Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost	Conversion of Paul	Jerusalem Council	Paul journeys to Rome	Romans destroy Jerusalem

OVERVIEW

Author

Luke

Date

Written c AD 60–62

Places

Jerusalem; Samaria; Syrian Antioch; cities in Asia Minor and Greece; Rome; see map, p 1886

People

Jesus; Peter, John, and the other apostles; James the brother of Jesus; Saul/Paul; Barnabas

Purpose

To link the Gospel of Jesus and the service of the 12 apostles with the missionary work of the apostle Paul

Law Themes

Kingdom of God; way of God; call to bear witness; repentance; devotion to the Law; turn to God; call to preach; condemnation of lying, magic, simony, and superstition; resisting the Spirit; persecution; generosity urged

Gospel Themes

Kingdom of God; way of God; God's promises fulfilled; resurrection; filled with the Spirit; salvation; Jesus' name; forgiveness; fear of God; grace; Gospel proclamation

Challenges for Readers

Relationship to the Gospel according to Luke. As the opening words show (Ac 1:1–3), Acts cannot be considered separate from Luke. See pp 1700–1701. Acts differs from Luke in that Luke was himself an eyewitness to the events he records in Acts (cf Lk 1:1–4). For example, scholars have noted several “we” passages (Ac 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16) where Luke writes as a companion of Paul, beginning with Paul's second missionary journey (c AD 49–51).

Speeches in Acts. Critics have noted the unity of style present in the various speeches Luke recorded in Acts. They point to this unity as proof that Luke made up the speeches and that they do not reflect real or faithful history. Certainly Luke was not an eyewitness to every speech, and it is also natural that his style as a narrator would come through, especially since some speeches were originally delivered in Hebrew and Aramaic (e.g., 22:2). But Luke never

claims to record speeches word for word. He presents summaries of speeches, and he even lets the reader know when he is not quoting a source (see note, 23:25). Paraphrases and summaries were perfectly acceptable ways of presenting historical events both in the first century and today. We cannot condemn Luke's approach as unhistorical based on modern standards of documentary history.

Work of the Holy Spirit. Some interpreters treat Acts like mere history. However, the Book of Acts may rightly be called "The Acts of Jesus and the Holy Spirit." See pp 1841, 1876.

Christianity and Empire. Luke seems very concerned to demonstrate that Christianity is no threat to the Roman Empire and that Christians are loyal citizens. He is not shy in recording the fact that the Gospel brought controversy, whether among Jews in Jerusalem or Gentiles in Ephesus. Yet Luke wants the reader to understand that, when carefully examined by Roman officials, Christians are innocent of any charges of rebellion. Christians spread their doctrine throughout the known world and even to the capital without resorting to violence, even though they were often persecuted. See p 1892.

Peter, Paul, and Church Unity. Perhaps the most important feature of Luke's account is that he demonstrates the unity of apostolic mission and ministry through two important leaders of the Early Church: Peter and Paul. Although James the brother of Jesus features importantly as leader of the Church at Jerusalem (ch 15), Luke focuses on the two apostles responsible for the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles and the fact that this was the express will of Jesus (1:8; 9:15), the heavenly Father (2:38–39; 15:16–17), and the Holy Spirit (8:14–17; 10:44–48). See note, 16:6–10. The Jerusalem Council (ch 15) demonstrates the consensus of all.

The Resurrection. Luke places special emphasis on reporting the miracle of the resurrection both as a demonstration of Jesus' calling and divinity (2:22–33) and that God's work in the world has changed following the resurrection (cf 17:29–31). By raising Christ to life again, God shows that He gives life in Christ to those who believe (2:28; 3:15; 11:18).

Paul's Visits to Jerusalem. A challenge arises for readers comparing Acts with Paul's Letters. In his Letters, Paul mentions three visits to Jerusalem (Gal 1:18; 2:1; Rm 15:25–26). Acts describes five visits (9:26; 11:27–30; ch 15; 18:22; 21:17). The first and last visits recorded in Acts correspond to the first and last visits mentioned in Paul's Letters. However, scholars debate when the Gal 2:1 visit occurred and how it fits with the examples from Acts. For more on this, see chronology, p cviii.

Blessings for Readers

By writing his Gospel and Acts, Luke wrote about 25 percent of the NT, more text than any other NT writer. In these two books, Luke provides an account of God's work from the announcement of Jesus' birth to the announcement in Rome of salvation in Jesus (AD 58). Luke shows that, through poor and helpless people on the margin of society, God spread His Word.

As you study the Book of Acts, consider how the Lord calls every believer—including you—to bear witness to Jesus' death and resurrection and to the salvation in His name. Acts records how God works through His Word, whether spoken or written, to bring people to faith in Christ. Through the Gospel, the Lord is turning the world upside down and advancing His kingdom from person to person and from nation to nation.

OUTLINE

The Book of Acts may be divided most easily between the work of Peter (chs 1–12) and the work of Paul (chs 13–28). Also, 1:8 provides a helpful outline for the progress of the 25

years of history presented in Acts (c AD 33–58): **From Jerusalem (1:1–6:7), To Judea and Samaria (6:8–9:31), To the ends of the earth (9:32–28:31)**

The following detailed outline takes into account the main characters as well as the progress from Jerusalem out to the broader Roman Empire and its capital.

- I. Prologue (1:1–2) (Links Acts to Luke and Shows that Christ’s Work Continues as the Spirit Works in and through the Church)
- II. Peter and the Church’s Foundation: The Gospel Spreads from Judea to Galilee and Samaria (1:3–14:28)
 - A. The Church Is Born (1:3–2:47)
 1. Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God, promises the Holy Spirit, and ascends into heaven (1:3–11)
 2. Matthias chosen to replace Judas: the foundation of the 12 apostles is restored (1:12–26)
 3. Pentecost: the descending Spirit gives birth to the Church (ch 2)
 - B. Peter and John Carry On the Work of Christ in Jerusalem (chs 3–5)
 1. Peter and John’s first trial and its effects (3:1–5:11)
 2. Peter and John’s second trial and its effects (5:12–42)
 - C. The Martyrdom of Stephen and Initial Spread of the Gospel (chs 6–8)
 1. Stephen and his martyrdom (6:1–8:1a)
 2. The persecution of the Church leads to the Gospel’s spread (8:1b–40)
 - D. The Conversion of Paul and the Vision of Peter Pave the Way for Outreach to the Gentiles (chs 9–14)
 1. Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus (9:1–31)
 2. Peter’s vision and the extension of the Gospel (9:32–11:18)
 3. The Church in Antioch (11:19–30)
 4. Peter’s escape; Herod’s death (ch 12)
 5. Paul’s first missionary journey (chs 13–14)
- III. The Jerusalem Council: Paul’s Work Endorsed by Peter and James (15:1–35)
 - A. Paul’s Missionary Work Sparks Controversy (15:1–5)
 - B. Paul’s Missionary Work Evaluated (15:6–21)
 - C. The Council Sends a Letter to the Churches (15:22–35)
- IV. Paul Carries the Gospel to the Ends of the Earth (15:36–28:31)
 - A. Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (15:36–18:22)
 - B. Paul’s Third Missionary Journey (18:23–21:16)
 - C. Paul Goes to Rome (21:17–28:31)
 1. Paul’s imprisonment in Jerusalem (21:17–23:35)
 - a. Paul’s arrest (21:17–22:29)
 - b. Trial before the Council (22:30–23:11)
 - c. Transfer to Caesarea (23:12–35)
 2. Paul’s imprisonment in Caesarea (chs 24–26)
 - a. Trial before Felix (ch 24)
 - b. Trial before Festus (25:1–12)
 - c. Hearing before Festus and Agrippa (25:13–26:32)
 3. Voyage to Rome (27:1–28:15)
 4. House arrest in Rome: the Gospel is preached (28:16–31)¹

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