

**ACTS AT A GLANCE**  
***A Thirteen-Lesson Overview of the Book of Acts***

<b>Lesson Three – Introduction to Acts</b>
--

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1. This quarter we will be studying the book of Acts.
- 1.2. Acts is the only book of history in the New Testament. It alone describes the establishment of the kingdom-church and the growth of that body throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> century world.
- 1.3. Since it contains little doctrinal material (at least compared to that in the epistles) some might question its value. But imagine the confusion if we did not have it. We would have the four gospels declaring, *“The kingdom is a hand.”* Then we would have a number of letters to existing kingdom citizens (Christians) throughout the world. What a gap that would leave between the two sections!
- 1.4. Also, while the epistles are largely composed of exhortation and encouragement for those who are already in the kingdom, the book of Acts addresses critical information about how one gets into the kingdom.
- 1.5. A mature understanding of the epistles is probably impossible without a corresponding knowledge of Acts because Acts informs us about the geographical, political, and cultural context in which the epistles were written. It introduces us to the characters, churches, and conflicts that are important elements of those epistles.
- 1.6. So this Holy Spirit inspired book is more than worthy of our careful study. Let us try to look beyond just noting a list of destination cities in each missionary journey. Let us strive to understand all that the Lord is revealing to us in this great book.

**2. The Title of the Book**

- 2.1. The book of Acts is usually labeled “The Acts of the Apostles.” This title is quite old – at least back to 180 AD – but was not necessarily given when the book was written.

**3. The Author of Acts**

- 3.1. No claim of authorship is made in the book of Acts but almost all modern Bible scholars believe that Luke was its author.
  - a. The same person wrote both “The Gospel of Luke” and the book of Acts.
    - Luke starts this way: *“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou may know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed”* (Luke 1:1-4).

- And Acts starts with these words: *“The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen”* (Acts 1:1-2).
- b. Second-person pronouns (e.g., “we”) are used in portions of Acts. This indicates that its author was sometimes a traveling companion of Paul’s – as was Luke.
  - The writer joined Paul near Troas before he entered Europe on his second missionary journey and appears to have stayed at Phillip after Paul left. *“Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them”* (Acts 16:10, also see vs. 11-16). Then contrast Acts 17:1 – *“when they passed through Amphipolis ...”*
  - According to Acts 20:5-6, the writer returned with Paul from Philippi to Jerusalem following His third missionary journey. *“These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas. But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days”* (Acts 20:5-6). Then note, *“And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.”* (Acts 21:17).
  - When Paul left for Rome as a Roman prisoner, the writer was there: *“And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment”* (Acts 21:17). The writer stayed with Paul until he reached Rome and probably throughout his first captivity there. *“Now when we came to Rome ... Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him”* (Acts 24:14).
  - While in Rome Paul wrote to the Colossians, *“Only Luke and Demas are with me”* (Col 4:14). And in his letter to Philemon he described them as *“fellow laborers”* (Philemon 24). Later near the end of Paul’s life, Demas forsook him *“having loved this present world”* but Luke was still with him. (2 Tim 4:10).
  - When Bible scholars consider these passages and then exclude Paul’s traveling companions who could not have written the book, they are left with Luke. All this information taken together supports the commonly held conclusion that Luke was the writer of Acts.
- c. There is internal evidence that the writer of Acts was interested in and knowledgeable about medicine – as was Luke.
  - For example, see Acts 28:6: *“However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.”* The Greek work translated *“swell up”* in the NKJV is a medical term for inflammation used only here in the NT. Similar language is

used in verse 8 where Publius' father is described as *"sick of a fever and dysentery."*

- And Luke was a doctor. Paul said of him, *"Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you"* (Col 4:1).
- For an exhaustive consideration of this matter see Luke the Physician by Adolf Harnack.

#### 4. The Book of Acts Records the Fulfillment of Prophecy

- 4.1. Some 500 years before the time of Acts, the prophet Daniel wrote, *"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever"* (Dan 2:44). The Book of Acts records the coming on this eternal kingdom in chapter 2 and then its first decades of life as it began to spread throughout the world.
- 4.2. Joel prophesied (Joel 2:28-32) that the start of the kingdom would coincide with the start of a period of great miraculous works. That prophecy also was fulfilled starting in chapter two (Acts 2:16-21).
- 4.3. Other prophets (e.g., Isaiah – Isa 2:1-3, 62:1-2) revealed that this kingdom populated spread forth from Jerusalem and that is what we see in the first seven chapters of Acts.
- 4.4. The prophets foretold that this would be a universal kingdom with citizens from all nations throughout the world (e.g., Isa 2:1-2, 9:1-2; Hos 1:10-11). And Acts records the fulfillment of such prophecies beginning in chapter eight and especially with Cornelius in chapter ten.
- 4.5. This eternal kingdom was to be headed by the Lord's anointed king – the Messiah (e.g., Psa 132:10-18; Isa 9:1-2). The apostles and preachers in Acts strongly asserted that such prophecies were fulfilled in the resurrected Jesus Christ – beginning with Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:36).
- 4.6. The Messiah Himself underscored that this kingdom was to be a spiritual kingdom (John 18:36). It was to be composed of willing subjects (Psa 110:3). Its objectives involved the salvation of its people and not competition about territory, riches, and power
  - a. In the words of the prophets:
    - *"For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you"* (Ez 36:24-26).

- *“And I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; ... Then I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ And they shall say, ‘You are my God!’” (Hos 2:23)*
  - *“That whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, As the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls” (Joel 2:32).*
  - *“But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness” (Ob 1:17).*
  - *“For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, That they all may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him with one accord ... In that day you shall not be ashamed for any of your deeds In which you transgress against Me” (Zeph 3:9-13).*
  - *“Behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH ... and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day ... In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech 3:8-9, 13:1).*
- b.** And, in the Book of Acts the focus of the apostles and gospel preachers of the new kingdom is focused like a laser on the spiritual salvation of mankind. At his sermon on Pentecost Peter was asked, *“What shall we do?”* He responded, *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37-38).*

## **5. The Theme and purpose of the Book**

5.1. The purpose of Luke in this book is to:

- a.** Accurately document the establishment and growth of the long prophesied spiritual kingdom of the Messiah. He does this by following the work of several great men as they proclaim the gospel. He starts with the work of Peter (Acts 1-7, 10-11) and ends with the work of Paul (Acts 13-28). In between he focused on men like Phillip, Stephen, and Barnabas (Acts 6-8). The primary focus is on the work of the two apostles Peter and Paul.
- b.** Provide information on how people were granted entry into that kingdom. To that end, a number of conversions are recorded. When considered together they reveals that (1) the gospel was preached to men and women, (2) some believed that message, (3) believers with a good heart were motivated to repent of their sins, (4) the repentant believers were then baptized into the kingdom.

5.2. Perhaps the best internal statement of the theme of the book is given in Acts 1:8 when the Lord said to His apostles, *“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria,*

*and to the end of the earth.*” Indeed Acts is filled with the eye-witness testimony of the apostles Peter and Paul as to the fact of the deity of Jesus as evidenced by His miracles and resurrection (e.g., Acts 4:20, 5:32, 10:39, 26:16). In fact, the book of Acts could be outlined around the progression mentioned in this verse.

- a. Chapters 1- 7 address witnessing in and around Jerusalem
- b. Chapters 8-12 address witnessing in Judea and Samaria
- c. Chapters 13-28 address witnessing *“to the ends of the earth”*

5.3. One final note on this matter: A *“witness”* is one who has actually knowledge of the truth of a matter because of personal experiences with one of their five senses. The Apostles were witnesses because they had seen the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:1-3) and had actually seen and/or touched the scars in His hands and side (John 20:19-28). This term is often misused today as a synonym for teaching as in, “He witnessed to his friend about his faith.” And certainly no so-called “Jehovah’s Witness” is a true witness in the sense that the Lord’s apostles were.

## 6. The Doctrine of Acts

- 6.1. The epistles are filled with doctrinal material about the nature and means of our salvation, about eternal spiritual truths, and instructions to Christians on godly living.
- a. The book of Acts is quite different – first in that it contains far less doctrinal material. But, of course, that is not surprising since Acts is primarily a book of history. But it does contain some such material in the various gospel sermons that it records.
  - b. It is also different in the nature and emphasis of its teaching.
- 6.2. The teaching of Jesus prepared men to seek the kingdom.
- a. Jesus spent the three years of His ministry on earth preaching God’s righteous requirements for mankind (e.g., *“love your enemies”* – Luke 6:27). The problem was, no one kept such commandments perfectly. Jesus said, *“No one is good but One, that is, God”* (Mark 10:18). Everyone was a sinner and some with tender hearts were convicted of those sins and wanted to regain God’s favor.
  - b. But Jesus not only came to identify righteous behavior and, by contrast, sin. He also came with the solution to that sin. He said, *“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”* (Luke 19:10). That solution consisted of His sacrificial death, His resurrection, and His ascension to the right hand of God where He assumed kingship of His new kingdom. Only those who truly accepted Jesus as Lord and King were placed in that in that long-prophesied kingdom and only they were saved. These kingdom citizens, the saved ones, were also known collectively as the church Acts 2:47; Eph 1:22-23).

### 6.3. The preaching of Acts

- a. The gospel preaching in the book of Acts is amazing in its simplicity and power. Paul described it to the Corinthian Christians this way: *“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified”* (1 Cor 2:1-2).
- b. And this is precisely the focus of Peter, Phillip, and Paul as they preached the gospel in Acts.
  - For example, consider the first post-kingdom gospel sermon by Peter on Pentecost. The entire lesson consisted of proof from the Old Testament prophecies and New Testament miracles that Jesus was the resurrected Messiah – the Son of God. Peter concluded with this statement: *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (Acts 2:36).
  - Similarly, Peter’s second sermon recorded in Acts focuses like a laser beam on Jesus. He ended this lesson by saying, *“To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities”* (Acts 3:26).
  - Phillip preached to those at Antioch *about “the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.”* (Acts 8:12). Then later he *“preached Jesus”* (Acts 8:34) to the Ethiopian Treasurer.
  - When Paul and Barnabas went to Antioch in Pisidia on their first missionary journey, the focus of the preaching is the same. He said, *“From this man’s [David’s] seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior— Jesus”* (Acts 13:23) and *“And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. We declare to you glad tidings--that promise which was made to the fathers, God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus”* (Acts 13:28-33). And *“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses”* (Acts 13:38-39).
- c. In response to such plain and powerful preaching, the hearts of some were touched. The preachers of Acts did not leave them in despair about their newfound conviction about their sin and their lost-ness. Instead, they instructed on how to obtain forgiveness of their sins and to be a part of God’s glorious

kingdom and church. As a matter of fact, There is more clear teaching about specifically what one must do to be saved in Acts than any other book.

- For example, on the Day of Pentecost, some *“were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do? Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37-38).*
- When Philip *“preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ”* to those at Antioch, *“they believed”* and *“both men and women were baptized”* (Acts 8:12).
- When Paul preached at Corinth, *“Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized”* (Acts 18:8).

## **7. Acts as a Book of History**

7.1. Scope of the Book – The Book of Acts covers the first 33 years or so of the early church from its establishment at Pentecost (circa AD 30) until the second year of Paul’s first Roman imprisonment (circa AD 63).

- a. Some matters during these years are touched on lightly if at all. For example, almost nothing is said about the first 8-10 years after the conversion of Saul.
- b. Others are addressed in great detail – for example Paul’s danger-filled ocean voyage to Rome (Acts 27).
- c. Of course no book could contain the whole of all that happened during this time. It is the role of a good historian to include and exclude events as needed to achieve clarity and accuracy in achieving his literary goal. Remember that Luke stated in Luke 1:1-4 his intention to write *“an orderly account”* based on his *“perfect understanding”* of his subject. Also Luke and all other inspired writers *“spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Pet 1:21) so he was not dependant on his own literary skills in crafting the Book of Acts.

7.2. Historical Trustworthiness of Luke and this Book

- a. It was fashionable during the 1800s to address religious studies in a pessimistic, hypercritical, and extremely liberal fashion. Such influential centers as the Tubingen University in Germany taught that the Book of Acts was a malevolent second century forgery. Its historicity was dismissed as laughable.
- b. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century dawned, more enlightened approaches were adopted. Also, biblical criticism was aided by a multitude of new archeological discoveries.
- c. One of the more important new scholars was W. M Ramsey. He came to be the recognized expert when it came to Asia Minor, to Paul’s travels there, and to the growth of the church in this area. One of his important publications was St. Paul the Traveler and Roman Citizen. When he started writing this book, he was

convinced that the Tübingen theories were correct. Following his extensive research he concluded that Luke was a “first rate historian” who wrote the Book of Acts in the middle of the first century. He supported his conclusion with references to numerous geographic, political, and other details in Acts that archeology had confirmed that Luke got it precisely right.

- d. But the one with confidence in the Lord and His word does not need the affirmation of men about the value of any book of the Bible. He fully believes that, *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Tim 3:16-17).
- e. So let’s study Acts!

## ACTS AT A GLANCE

### *A Thirteen-Lesson Overview of the Book of Acts*

Questions on Lesson Three
---------------------------

#### 1. Introduction

1.1. Name all the books of history in the New Testament \_\_\_\_\_

1.2. How can a knowledge of the Book of Acts help us better understand the epistles?

\_\_\_\_\_

1.3. List some types of information that we find in Acts but far less in any other NT book.

\_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. The author of Acts

2.1. How does the wording of the first two verses of Acts give a hint as to who its author was? \_\_\_\_\_

2.2. How does the form of personal pronouns (as in Acts 16:10) have any relevance in the search for the identity of the author? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2.3. What was the occupation of Luke and how does this impact the search for the author of Acts? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### 3. Fulfillment of Prophecy in the Book of Acts

3.1. How were these prophecies fulfilled in the Book of Acts?

a. Daniel 2:44 \_\_\_\_\_

b. Joel 2:28-31 \_\_\_\_\_

c. Isaiah 2:1-3 \_\_\_\_\_

d. Hosea 1:10-11 \_\_\_\_\_

3.2. What do passages like Ezek 36:24-26 and Ob 1:7 indicate about the purpose of this new kingdom that was rolled out on the Day of Pentecost (Also see John 18:36)?

\_\_\_\_\_

**4. The Theme and Purpose of Acts**

- 4.1. In your own words, state the purpose(s) of the Book of Acts \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 4.2. What is to be the role of the apostles as given in Acts 1:8? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 4.3. What is a “witness” (Acts 1:21-22, 2:32)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Who can qualify as a witness today? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4.4. How can the words of Acts 1:8 be used to construct a general outline of Acts?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**5. The Teaching and Preaching of Acts**

- 5.1. Where in the Book of Acts does one find information about (a) salvation by grace through faith? The qualification of elders? The responsibility of family members to one another? Instructions on conduct of public assemblies? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5.2. What, in the words of 1 Cor 2:1-2, was the focus of preaching in the Book of Acts? (Also see Acts 2:36) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5.3. What was the purpose of such preaching (e.g., Acts 2:38)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5.4. Who is the audience for such preaching? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5.5. What role did miracles play in the evangelism reported in Acts? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5.6. What purpose did Old Testament prophecies play in such evangelism? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5.7. What combination of factors (in addition to the OT scriptures) prepared the hearts of “devout Jews” to accept the fact that they were sinners in need of salvation and that Jesus was the Christ who brought such salvation (see Matt 3:7-12, 5:1-2)  
\_\_\_\_\_

**6. Acts as a Book of History**

6.1. What events marked the beginning and the end of Acts and what were the approximate dates of those events? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6.2. Obviously not all that happened in these three decades could be included. How were the specific contents decided? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6.3. What notable scholar, after extensive study of Acts, concluded that Luke was a “first rate historian?” \_\_\_\_\_