

NAME

Adapted from Murphy:

The name “The Acts of the Apostles” was not originally attached to the manuscript. It became accepted about 150 A.D. The name is not of Divine origin.

From an objective study of the nature of the book, the name “the Acts of the Apostles” would appear to be a misnomer. The idea was that of historical continuity (i.e. to tie the book in with the life and ministry of Christ’s twelve apostles). However, the book is not a record of the actions of the twelve apostles. The Twelve are mentioned only once (1:13,16). Acts gives no data on the activities of nine of the Twelve. Of the Twelve, only Peter and John are prominent and that only in the early chapters of Acts. James, the brother of John, is only mentioned again when he is martyred (Acts 12). In Acts 13-28 the most prominent apostles were not of the Twelve (i.e. Paul and Barnabas).

Scholars have suggested other names for Acts which better reflect the nature of the book: “Some Acts of Some Apostles,” “The Acts of the Holy Spirit,” “The Acts of the Holy Spirit Through the Apostles,” “The Acts of the Lord Jesus Christ Through the Apostles” (J. Vernon McGee). Some ancient manuscripts call it “Acts of Apostles” and “Acts.” Spanish: Hechos de los Apóstoles. Armenian: Արարեալներոյն Գործերը:

A full name would thus be: “The Acts of the Lord Jesus Christ Through the Holy Spirit, Select Apostles, and Other Believers.”

The one point all these views stress in common is that Acts is, by nature, and action book. It is a record of deed more than words divorced from deeds. The deeds, furthermore, are missionary, not “churchly.” i.e. they focus more on the outwards mission of the church than the perpetuating of existing church structures. In this sense the church is formed (has a structure) which is designed for its function of outward mobility.

AUTHOR

Acts is the second volume of a two-volume set of historical writings. Acts is book two of Luke’s Gospel (Acts 1:1; Luke 1:1-4). The two books circulated together as historical and apologetical writings tracing the origin of Christianity and its spread throughout the Roman Empire.

For information on Luke see the introduction to Luke.

DATE

NASB - Introduction to ACTS:

Two dates are possible for the writing of this book: 1) c. 63 A.D. (62?), soon after the last event recorded in the book; and 2) c. 70 A.D. or later.

The earlier date is supported by:

1. Silence about later events: While arguments from silence are not conclusive, it is perhaps significant that the book contains no allusion to events that happened after the close of Paul’s two-year imprisonment in Rome: e.g., the burning of Rome and the persecution of Christians there (64 A.D.), the martyrdom of Peter and Paul (possibly 67 A.D.) and the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.)

2. No outcome of Paul's trial. If Luke knew the outcome of the trial Paul was waiting for (28:30), why did he not record it at the close of Acts? Perhaps it was because he had brought the history up to date.

Those who prefer the later date hold that 1:8 reveals one of the purposes Luke had in writing his history, and that this purpose influenced the way the book ended. Luke wanted to show how the church penetrated the world of his day in ever-widening circles (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth) until it reached Rome, the world's political and cultural center. On this understanding, mention of the martyrdom of Paul (c. 67 A.D.) and of the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) was not pertinent. This would allow for the writing of Acts c. 70 A.D. or later.

THEME

Halley (page 44): *"Formation of the Church"*

Roland: *"God's Family Grows"*

Murphy:

The Great Commission (1:4-8): Jesus presents the three necessary elements of their mission; spiritual dynamic, stated goals, and adequate strategy. In doing so, He gives the outline of the book in 1:8.

Halley (page 655):

The theme of the book of Acts is best summarized in 1:8, when the resurrected Jesus said to the apostles, *"You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* And preach they did! Within the first apostolic generation of the church, the Gospel of Christ expanded in all directions until it reached every nation of the then known world (Colossians 1:23). The book of Acts specifically tells the story of this expansion of the Gospel throughout Palestine, northward to Antioch, and from there westward, through Asia Minor and Greece, to Rome - the region that constituted the backbone of the Roman Empire.

NASB - Introduction to Acts:

The main purposes of the book appear to be:

1. To present a history. The significance of Acts as a historical account of Christian origins cannot be overestimated. It tells of the founding of the church, the spread of the gospel, the beginnings of congregations, and evangelistic efforts in the apostolic pattern. One of the unique aspects of Christianity is its firm historical foundation. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ are established in the four Gospel narratives, and the book of Acts provides a coordinated account of the beginnings of the church.
1. To give a defense. One finds embedded in Acts a record of Christian defenses made to both Jews (e.g., 4:8-12) and Gentile (e.g., 25:8-11), with the underlying purpose of conversion. It shows how the early church coped with pagan and Jewish thought, the Roman government and Hellenistic society. Luke probably wrote this work as Paul awaited trial in Rome. If his case came to court, what better court brief could Paul have had than a life of Jesus, a history of the beginnings of the church (including the activity of Paul) and an early collection of Paul's letters?

1. To provide a guide. Luke had no way of knowing how long the church would continue on this earth, but as long as it pursues its course, the book of Acts will be one of its major guides. In Acts we see basic principles being applied to specific situations in the context of problems and persecutions. These same principles continue to be applicable until Christ returns.
1. To depict the triumph of Christianity in the face of bitter persecution. The success of the church in carrying the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome and in planting local churches across the Roman Empire demonstrated that Christianity was not a mere work of man. God was in it (5:35-39).

Key Word (Nelson's): Empowered For Witness - Because of Luke's strong emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, this book could be regarded as "The Acts of the Spirit of Christ working in and through the Apostles."

Key Verses (Nelson's):

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-47)

Key Chapter (Nelson's): 2 - Chapter 2 records the earth-changing events of the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit comes, fulfilling Christ's command to wait until the Holy Spirit arrives to empower and direct the witness. The Spirit transforms a small group of fearful men into a thriving, worldwide church that is ever moving forward and fulfilling the Great Commission.

Outline (adapted from the Expositor's Bible Commentary):

- I. Introduction: The Constitutive Events of the Christian Mission 1:1-2:41
 - A. A Resumptive Preface 1:1-5
 - B. The Mandate to Witness 1:6-8
 - C. The Ascension 1:9-11
 - D. The Full Complement of Apostles 1:12-26
 - E. The Coming of the Holy Spirit 2:1-41
- II. The Christian Mission to the Jewish World 2:42-12:24
 - A. The Earliest Days of the Church at Jerusalem 2:42-6:7
 1. A Thesis Paragraph on the State of the Early Church 2:42-47
 2. A Cripple Beggar Healed 3:1-26
 3. Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin 4:1-31
 4. Christian Concern Expressed in Sharing 4:32-5:11
 5. The Apostles Again Before the Sanhedrin 5:12-42
 6. The Hellenists' Presence and Problem in the Church 6:1-6
 7. A Summary Statement 6:7

B. Critical Events in the Lives of Three Pivotal Figures 6:8-9:31

1. The Martyrdom of Stephen 6:8-8:3
2. The Early Ministries of Philip 8:4-40
3. The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus 9:1-30
4. A Summary Statement 9:31

C. Advances of the Gospel in Palestine-Syria 9:32-12:24

1. The Ministry of Peter in the Maritime Plain of Palestine 9:32-43
2. The Conversion of Cornelius at Caesarea 10:1-11:18
3. The Church at Antioch of Syria 11:19-30
4. Divine Intervention on Behalf of the Jerusalem Church 12:1-23
5. A Summary Statement 12:24

III. The Christian Mission to the Gentile World 12:25-28:31

A. The First Missionary Journey and the Jerusalem Council 12:25-16:5

1. The Missioners Sent Out 12:25-13:3
2. The Mission on Cyprus and John Mark's Departure 13:4-13
3. At Antioch of Pisidia 13:14-52
4. At Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe and the Return to Antioch 14:1-28
5. The Jerusalem Council 15:1-29
6. The Reception of the Council's Decision and of the Letter 15:30-16:4
7. A Summary Statement 16:5

B. World Wide Outreach Through Two Missionary Journeys 16:6-19:20

1. Providential Direction for the Mission 16:6-10
2. At Philippi 16:11-40
3. At Thessalonica 17:1-9
4. At Berea 17:10-15
5. At Athens 17:16-34
6. At Corinth 18:1-17
7. An Interlude 18:18-28
8. At Ephesus 19:1-19
9. A Summary Statement 19:20

C. To Jerusalem and Thence to Rome 19:21-28:31

1. A Programmatic Statement 19:21,22
2. The Journey to Jerusalem 19:23-21:16
3. Various Events and Paul's Defenses at Jerusalem 21:17-23:22
4. Imprisonment and Defenses at Caesarea 23:23-26:32
5. The Journey to Rome 27:1-28:15
6. Rome at Last 28:17-30
7. A Summary Statement 28:31

RECIPIENTS

The obvious recipient is Theophilus (for consideration of other recipients see Notes Luke: Recipient). It is possible that Theophilus was already a believer (Luke 1:1-4). If not, he was already instructed to some degree about the facts of the faith (Luke 1:4).

Some believe the name was a literary invention. Thus Luke did not have a specific person in mind. He could represent the general public. He could represent the Christian community. The name Theophilus means “lover of God.”

Others believe he was an important Roman official. The New English Bible translates Luke 1:3, “Your Excellency.” The fact two books the size of Luke and Acts were probably written to one man supports this view. His conversion or more sympathetic view of Christianity would perhaps help check the rising tides of persecution beginning in the Empire (i.e. Nero in 64 A.D.). Thus Luke’s apologetic style graphically revealed in Luke 1:1-4, reveals Luke to be an apologetical missionary historian. Further support is seen in that the writer goes out of his way to show Christians are not a political threat to Rome (witness Paul’s apologetic on trial and his attitude towards Rome and Roman citizenship). Furthermore, the Romans are always presented in the best light: 1) The Jews were responsible for Christ’s death, not the Romans; 2) The Jews are primarily responsible for persecuting the church, not the Romans; 3) All Roman officials, i.e., governors, clerks, soldiers, etc., are shown in the best light.

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

Adapted from Murphy:

1. Acts is the bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles.
 - About 100 A.D. the church had two major collections of New Testament Scriptures, the Gospels and the Epistles. Acts ties the two collections together making it all one account of God’s redemptive grace centering in Christ and His church.
 - The Gospels present the Christ of history and the Epistles present the Christ of theology (i.e. theological reflection under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit). Acts provides the “missing link” to tie the two together.
2. Acts gives the historical background to over half of the New Testament.
 - The Gospels promise the Holy Spirit. The Epistles describe His person and ministry as already present. Acts tells of His coming and describes, historically, the effects of His work in the churches.
 - The Gospels declare Christ will build His Church. The Epistles were written to congregations already in existence. Acts describes the birth and missionary history of those churches.
 - In the Gospels the twelve apostles are prominent. Most of the Epistles were written by a person unknown to the Gospels, Paul, who also claimed Apostleship. Acts tells us who Paul is and how he was called to Apostleship. Acts also records the shift from the Twelve Apostles to the Jewish nation, to Paul, the chief apostle to the nations.
3. Historically Acts recounts the first 30 years of the church.
 - It is also a bridge that ties the church in its beginning with each succeeding age (us). This book may be studied to gain a practical understanding of the principles that ought to govern the church of any age.

RESOURCES

Gromacki, Robert C. *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978

Robert H. Gundry, Ph.D., *A Survey Of The New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1970

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor, Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell & Dr. Ed Murphy), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoizian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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