

Overview of Acts

Luke begins his gospel account by pointing out that he had investigated everything carefully, including dealing with eyewitnesses. His account was meant to convey the “exact truth” about what happened as Jesus

walked the earth. He begins the second part of his account, the book of Acts, with a similar type of statement that connected what Jesus did to what His apostles would soon be doing in preaching the gospel.

Jesus had promised that He would be raised again, and it happened just as He said. He “presented Himself alive ... by many convincing proofs” (vs. 3). However, His purpose was not to remain upon the earth for an indefinite time. In fact, He told His disciples that He would return to heaven in order to send “another comforter” — the Holy Spirit (John 14: 25-29; 16:5-15). This promise is restated in Acts 1. Jesus told His disciples to stay in Jerusalem to wait for the fulfillment of the promise regarding the Holy Spirit, which would be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

When Pentecost came, they were all together, waiting for the promise: “And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind...” This was it. The Holy Spirit came upon them: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other



tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance” (vs. 4).

The prophets had said that this would happen. Peter shows how Joel had prophesied of this, which indicated that the “last days” of the

prophets had finally come. The purpose of the ages could be completely preached: Jesus died for sins, was buried, and rose again. The apostles were witnesses. Now the gospel message is being proclaimed according to the plan of God.

“And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.” (Acts 3:24-26)

Purpose

The purpose of the book of Acts is manifold. We see an inspired account of the apostles carrying out the great commission Jesus had given them. They were doing what they were told to do, and, through the preaching, were demonstrating how people may turn to

Jesus Christ for the salvation of the souls. “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

Acts shows the fulfillment of God’s promises concerning His kingdom. In the gospels, the kingdom is at hand (Mark 1:15); in Acts, the kingdom has come because Christ, through His resurrection, was now seated upon the promised throne of David (Acts 2:29-36; 13:28-39). Further, the reign of Christ extends not only to the Jews, but also to the gentiles (Acts 10). The relationship between Christianity and Judaism is seen in the connection the Law of Moses, but the gentiles did not need to become Jews (i.e., be circumcised) in order to become Christians. That question was settled, and the Spirit testified to it (Acts 15).

The role of the Holy Spirit is prominent throughout Acts. Jesus promised that the apostles would receive His power (Acts 1), which happened on Pentecost (Acts 2), and continued throughout. “And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32). The Spirit testified to the truth of the gospel, and so demonstrated God’s authority in the spread of the gospel. Even Gamaliel recognized that if this movement really was from God, then no one could stop it (Acts 5:38-39). Indeed that is one of the great themes running throughout the book. God cannot be stopped.

Acts is often thought of as an early apologetic (defense). It demonstrates that Christianity, while it had connections to the Jews, is not just another Jewish sect like the Pharisees or Sadducees. Neither is it another pagan religion among many in the Roman Empire. Christianity is unique among all religions and deserves to be heard on its own strength.

The book of Acts is the key to understanding the rest of the New Testament. It continues naturally from the four gospel accounts (especially Luke), and it sets the stage for the rest of the books. Since most of what comes after Acts are epistles, we can see how the journeys of Paul, for example, dovetail into those writings. Acts shows Paul going into the various cities, establishing churches, and working among the brethren, many of whom he would later write (e.g., Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, etc.).

The importance of Acts for understanding the earliest history of the church cannot be overstated. To the apostles, Jesus said, “and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Acts shows how that happened.

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