

A Study Outline of Acts

by
Greg Herrick, Th.M.
gregh@bible.org

IV. An Overview of the Book of Acts

The life of the early church is recorded and preserved for us in the book of Acts *and the epistles*. The following outline is intended to be used while studying the book. It will help to keep the whole of the book before you as you work your way through each section.

A. The Importance of the Book of Acts

The importance of this second of Luke's two-volume work can hardly be over-estimated, for without it we would have no record of the beginnings and development of the early church. Therefore, as Acts furnishes for us a *selective* record of events that took place during the formative years of the church, it provides us with the historical antecedents of our faith and how that faith came to be embraced from Jerusalem to Rome. It also provides helpful information of the facts surrounding many of the letters of the apostles, which in turn helps us to better understand *when* they said what they said and *why* they said it. It was probably written in the early 60's, perhaps from Antioch, Rome or Ephesus.

B. The Purpose of Acts

As was stated, Acts is the second part of what was originally a two-part, single volume (i.e. Luke-Acts; cf. Acts 1:1). Therefore, it is reasonable to include Luke's purpose for Acts as falling under his purpose for the book of Luke. In Luke 1:4 the author says that he is writing to "most excellent Theophilus" . . . "in order that he might know the certainty of the things he had been taught." Apparently, as Longenecker¹ observes, Theophilus "seems to have been a man, who though receptive to the gospel and perhaps even convinced by its claims, had many questions about Christianity as he knew it." Luke wrote to strengthen him in his belief. Given the contents of the book of Acts, Theophilus appears to have had questions about the coming and activity of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of the apostles, Paul and his dealings with the Jerusalem apostles and the advance of Christianity to the Imperial capital.

In a sentence, given the emphasis on the unity of the church (2, 4, 15, 20) and its expansion from Jerusalem to Rome we may say that the Luke's purpose was to demonstrate to Theophilus the sovereign, unified and unmitigated advance of the gospel into all the world, i.e. from Jerusalem to Rome. There are seven "progress reports" on the unity and advance of the church that further confirm this (cf. 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30, 31). With this knowledge, Theophilus, who was probably a Roman official,² could understand how Christianity reached his city.

Outline of Acts

I. Introduction to the Beginning of the Church (1)

A. The Lord Prepares the Disciples (1:1-11)

1. *The Reaffirmation of the Promise (1:1-5)*
2. *The Re-orientation to the Program (1:6-8)*
3. *The Ascension and Predicted Return (1:9-11)*

¹Richard Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles" in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, v. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981): 217.

²The designation "most excellent" is used by Luke to refer to Roman officials of high rank. Cf. Acts 23:26 and 24:3 where it refers to Felix (a Roman governor from AD 53-60) and Paul refers to Festus (AD 60-62) as "most excellent" (Acts 26:25).

B. The Lord Re-Establishes 12 Apostles (1:12-26)

1. *The Apostles and Others Gathered in Jerusalem (1:12-14)*
2. *The Motion of Peter to Choose Another Apostle (1:15-26)*
 - a. *Judas' apostatizing fulfilled Scripture (1:15-20)*
 - b. *The criteria for an apostolic replacement (1:21,22)*
 - c. *The Method of choosing (1:23-26)*

II. The Church in Jerusalem (2-8:3)

A. The Church is Born (2:1-11)

1. *Pentecost*
 - a. *The Coming of the Holy Spirit (2:1-4a)*
 - b. *The Sign: Tongues (2:4b-11)*
 - c. *The Reaction: Mixed (2:12-13)*
2. *Peter's Explanation in a Sermon (2:14-36)*
 - a. *Pentecost: The fulfillment of Joel 2 (2:14-21)*
 - b. *Pentecost: Based upon Christ's Work (2:22-36)*
3. *The Reaction to Peter's Sermon (2:37-41)*
 - a. *People cut to the heart (2:37-40)*
 - b. *3000 saved (2:41)*

B. Summary of the Young Church (2:42-47)

1. *Unity among the people (2:42-46)*
2. *Praise to God from the people (2:47)*

C. The Church Ministering in Jerusalem (3-8:3)

1. *A Sign to Israel: A Lame Man Healed (3:1-11)*
2. *A Warning to Israel: Peter's Sermon (3:12-26)*
3. *The Reaction: Persecution (4:1-37)*
 - a. *The animosity of the religious leaders (4:1-22)*
 - b. *The prayer for boldness (4:23-31)*
 - c. *The continuing unity of the church (4:32-37)*

D. Struggle from Within and Without

1. *The deceit of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11)*
2. *The Sanhedrin and the apostles (5:12-42)*
 - a. *The apostle's respected by people (2:12-16)*
 - b. *The jealousy of the leaders (5:17-42)*
3. *The first racial tension in the Church (6:1-7)*
 - a. *The Problem (6:1)*
 - b. *The solution (6:2-6)*
 - c. *The result (6:7)*

E. The Climax of the Persecution in Jerusalem: Stephen Killed (6:8-8:3).

PIVOTAL PERSON #1

1. *Stephen brought before a council (6:8-15)*

- 2. *Stephen's sermon (7:1-53)*
- 3. *Stephen's death (7:54-60)*
- F. The Church is Scattered (8:1-3)
- III. The Church Scattered into Palestine and Syria (8:4-12:25)
 - A. The Ministry of Philip (8:4-40). *PIVOTAL PERSON # 2*
 - 1. *Philip in Samaria (8:4-25)*
 - 2. *Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (8:26-39)*
 - 3. *Philip en route to Caesarea (40)*
 - B. The Conversion of Saul (9:1-30). *PIVOTAL PERSON # 3*
 - 1. *Paul Sees the Lord (9:1-9)*
 - 2. *Ananias Ministers to Paul (9:10-19a)*
 - 3. *Paul Proclaims Jesus as the Christ (9:19b-30)*
 - C. A Summary Report of the Church (9:31)
 - D. The Ministry of Peter (9:32-11:18)
 - 1. *Peter in Lydda: A man healed (9:32-35)*
 - 2. *Peter in Joppa: A woman healed (9:36-43)*
 - 3. *Cornelius' Vision (10:1-8)*
 - 4. *Peter's Vision (10:9-16)*
 - 5. *Peter Goes with the Men from Cornelius (10:17-22)*
 - 6. *The Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit (10:23-48)*
 - 7. *Peter Defends Himself Before the Jerusalem Church (11:1-18)*
 - E. The Church at Antioch: A New Center of Operations (11:19-30)
 - 1. *The Church established (11:19-21)*
 - 2. *The Church Sanctioned by Jerusalem (11:22-24)*
 - 3. *Barnabas Brings Paul Back to Antioch (11:25, 26)*
 - 4. *The Unity in the Church: Antioch to Help Jerusalem (11:27-30)*
 - F. God Continues To Protect Jerusalem Church (12)
 - 1. *James Put to Death (12:1, 2)*
 - 2. *Peter Delivered (12:3-17)*
 - 3. *Herod Put to Death (12:18-21)*
 - G. A Summary Report of the Church (12:24, 25)
- IV. The Church Advancing to the End of the Earth (12-28)
 - A. The First Missionary Journey (13, 14)
 - 1. *The Holy Spirit Set Paul and Barnabas Apart (13:1-3)*
 - 2. *Cyprus and the Proconsul (13:4-12)*
 - 3. *Pisidian Antioch: Paul's Sermon & the Reaction (13:13-52)*
 - 4. *From Iconium to Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe (14:1-7)*
 - 5. *Lystra: A Lame Man Healed & the Reaction (14:8-20a)*

6. *The Return to and Stay at Antioch (14:20b-28)*
- B. *The Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)*
 1. *The Problem: Those from Syrian Antioch (15:1-5)*
 2. *The Discussion: The Argument from James (15:6-18)*
 3. *The Conclusion and Application (15:19-35)*
 - a. *The Consensus Among the Leadership (15:19-22)*
 - b. *The Letter Written (15:23-29)*
 - c. *The Letter Delivered to Antioch (15:30-34)*
 4. *Paul and Barnabas Stayed In Antioch to Teach (15:35)*
- C. *The Second Missionary Journey (15:36-18:22)*
 1. *Paul and Barnabas Disagree on John Mark (15:36-40)*
 2. *Syria and Cilicia Revisited (15:41)*
 3. *Paul/Timothy in S. Galatia To Deliver Council's Decrees (16:1-5)*
 4. *From Galatia-Mysia- To Troas (16:6-10)*
 5. *The Work in Philippi (16:11-40)*
 6. *The Work at Thessalonica (17:1-9)*
 7. *The Work in Berea (17:10-14)*
 8. *The Work in Athens (17:15-34)*
 9. *The Work in Corinth (18:1-17)*
 - a. *Paul's Work in the Synagogue (1-6)*
 - b. *Paul's Work at the House Titus Justus (7-11)*
 - c. *Paul Charged by the Jews (12-17)*
 10. *Paul in Ephesus en route to Antioch of Syria (18:18-22)*
- D. *The Third Missionary Journey (18:23-19:19)*
 1. *Paul in Galatia and Phrygia (18:23)*
 2. *Apollos Goes from Ephesus to Corinth (18:24-28)*
 3. *Paul in Ephesus (19:1-41)*
 - a. *The Twelve Men (1-7)*
 - b. *In the Synagogue & School of Tyrannus (8-10)*
 - c. *God Confirming Paul's Message by Miracles (11, 12)*
 - d. *Seven Sons of Sceva (13-17)*
 - e. *Mass Repentance (18, 19)*
 - f. *A Summary Report of the Church in Asia (20)*
 - g. *Paul's Statement of His Plans: Jerusalem & Rome (21, 22)*
 - h. *Demetrius and the Riot in Ephesus (23-41)*
 4. *Three Months in Greece (20:1-5)*
 5. *Paul's Sermon & Healing at Troas (20:6-12)*
 6. *Paul's Words at Miletus with the Ephesian Elders (20:13-38)*
 7. *Paul at Caesarea with Philip the Evangelist (21:1-14)*

E. Paul in Jerusalem (21:15-23:22)

1. *Welcomed by Brethren (21:15-26)*
2. *Arrested by the Jews (21:27-40)*
3. *Paul's Defense (22:1-21)*
4. *The Response of the People (22:22-29)*
5. *Paul Before the Sanhedrin (23:1-10)*
6. *The Plot Against Paul (23:11-22)*

F. Paul in Caesarea (23:23-26:32)

1. *Paul Escorted to Caesarea (23:23-35)*
2. *Paul Before Felix (24:1-21)*
3. *Paul Imprisoned (24:22-27)*
4. *Paul Before Festus (25)*
5. *Paul Before Agrippa (26)*

G. Paul in Rome (27, 28)

1. *The Shipwreck (27)*
2. *Paul in Malta (28:1-15)*
3. *Paul in Rome (28:16-31)*