

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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## INTRODUCTION

The exact title of this book, commonly called, "*The Acts of the Apostles*," is difficult if not impossible to determine. When it was first sent by its author to Theophilus it probably had no title. It appears in different forms in ancient manuscripts - but all agree that it was "*The Acts*."

## THE AUTHOR

There can be no reasonable doubt that Luke is the author of the Acts. It is the second book dedicated to Theophilus and follows the history as recorded in the Third Gospel. It continues the history of early Christianity from the ascension of Christ through a part of the imprisonment of Paul at Rome. The early church regarded Luke alone as the author of the book. Irenaeus, Clemens, Alexandrinus, Tertullian and others speak of Luke as the author, and so confident do they appear that they do not even pause to discuss the fact.

Dr. J.H. Kerr, in his Introduction to New Testament Study - commended by Prof. B.B. Warfield - (p. 78) gives the following reasons to show that Luke was the author:

- (1) It was the unhesitating and unanimous belief of the early church.
- (2) The similarity of the inscription, character and style of this book to the Third Gospel.
- (3) The similarity of the language between the two books, over fifty words being common to them that are not used elsewhere in the New Testament.
- (4) The manifest connection between the two books, this being the continuation of the history given in the Third Gospel.

Even literary critics, like Renan, admit the absurdity of asserting that a compiler of the second century would have been so careless as to have left the "we passages" unaltered. These passages begin with the sixteenth chapter and the tenth verse when Luke became a member of the missionary party at Troas. Luke used the pronoun of personal participation, always remain a strong testimony in favor of a companion of the Apostle as the author of the whole book, of which that narrative is a part; to separate the subject of that narrative from the author of the whole, is a procedure of skeptical caprice.

Prof. J. Gresham Machen, in his elaborate argument on, *“The Origin of Paul’s Religion,”* declares that, “Literary criticism establishes Luke-Acts as the work of a companion of Paul” (p. 36). This companion was undoubtedly Luke.

To regard Timothy as the author is, upon the very surface of the Book, incorrect. He is clearly distinguished from the author in Chap. 20:4-5: **“And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These going before tarried for us at Troas.”** If Timothy had been the writer, the “we-passages” would have begun at Chapter 16:4: **“And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.”** The writer of the Acts is far too intelligent to have written or compiled a book so carelessly. For similar reasons Silas could not have been the author. Luke clearly indicates by the use of the first person when he was with Paul: **“And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them”** (16:10), but the use of the third person when they were separated: **“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews”** (17:1), and by the use of the first when they were together again in their work (20:5 above).

Sir William Ramsay says that those who attempt to show that the author was a second century writer have “displayed a misapprehension of the real character of ancient life and Roman history which is often astonishing, and which has been decisively disproved in the progress of Roman historical investigation. All such theories belong to the pre-Mommsenian epoch of Roman history: they are now impossible for a rational and educated critic; and they hardly survive except in popular magazines and novels of the semi-religious order.” (*St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*, p. 10).

Concerning the effort made by Dr. Clemen to show that three Redactors, or editors, making use of three older documents, have compiled the Book of Acts, each inserting some of his own views, Ramsay declares: “A dissection of this elaborate kind cannot be carried out. Style is seen in the whole rather than in single sentences, still less in parts of sentences; and a partition between six authors, clause by clause, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, of a work that seemed even to bold and revolutionary critics like Zeller and Baur in Germany and Renan in France to be a model of unity and individuality in style, is simply impossible” (Ibid. pp. 12-13).

## CANONICITY

In view of the fact that The Acts is an historical book, it was not likely to be quoted as often as the Epistles, yet there are a number of ancient writers who quote it and others who make reference to it. Polycarp quotes it about the year 116 A.D. The Muratori Canon names it, 170 A.D. The Syriac (160 A.D.) and Old Latin Versions (170 A.D.) quote it. Irenaeus (175 A.D.), Tertullian (190 A.D.) and Clement of Alexandria (195 A.D.) quote it by name.

Those who rejected it as the Manicheans, Marcionites and Ebionites, did so because they held certain preconceived heretical views, and could not continue to hold these heresies with the semblance of consistency if they accepted the teaching of the Acts.

The internal evidence is conclusive in favor of its authenticity, as is shown by Paley in his "*Horae Pauline.*" He has compared the historical references with the Epistles and has shown that the undesigned coincidences form an unanswerable argument concerning the genuineness of The Acts.

In his Introduction (Vol. II, p. 51), Dr. Samuel Davidson writes, "We hesitate not to assert that the idea of the book being fabricated by a later unknown writer, with whatever motive he set about the task, involves the improbably, not to say the impossible at every step. - We are confident that the credibility of the Acts will be universally acknowledged long after the negative criticism has vanished away like every temporary extravagance of unbridled reason, or rather of unbridled skepticism."

After first-hand investigation, Sir William Ramsay came to regard the author of the Acts as an "historian of the first rank." He had at one time been convinced that the Tubingen theory was correct, namely, that the Acts was a second century work. "It did not lie then in my line of life to investigate the subject minutely; but more recently I found myself often brought in contact with the Book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities, and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne in upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth." After a "dispassionate historical criticism," he decided that he could speak "confidently and uncompromisingly," and "Place this great writer on the high pedestal that belongs to him" (Ibid. pp. 4, 8-10).

### **SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

Luke, in all probability, when writing the Acts, followed a similar plan to that which he informs us he used in writing the Gospel which bears his name. In writing the Gospel he received much information from eye witnesses. In writing the Acts he was an eye witness of much which he records. Most of the remainder of the Book he could learn from fellow disciples who were eye witnesses of the events. A part of it he no doubt learned from documents to which he had access. He was *undoubtedly guided and taught of the Holy Spirit* so that he wrote accurately all the facts recorded.

The Book of Acts contains 1007 verses. Luke evidently witnessed the facts recorded in the "we-passages", which include 318 verses. He could have learned from Paul and Philip that which is recorded in 402 verses. Therefore, from his own observation and conversation with intimate friends, Paul and Philip, he would be able to write 720 verses.

This comprises more than seven-tenths of the entire book, and the information could be secured without reference to any documents. There are 287 verses left to be accounted for, a few of which are introductory, while the remainder mainly relate to messages and actions of Peter. These were probably preserved in written form. Many of the facts would be vividly remembered by a number of the disciples still living at that time. Luke then could secure his information from personal experience and written records.

## TIME AND PLACE

The date of the composition of the Book of Acts has been generally thought to have been during the year 63 A.D. The place was apparently at Rome. The year when Paul was brought to Rome has been given as 61 A.D. At the time of the completion of this Book he had been a prisoner for two years. From the wording of the last chapter it is evident that Luke was with Paul at Rome, therefore, it seems reasonably certain that the Acts was written at Rome in the year 63 A.D.

## OBJECT OF BOOK

The first Book, or Gospel of Luke, was written originally to instruct Theophilus, a lover of God, and to confirm his faith. The second book, The Acts, was written for further instruction of the same person and for all lovers of God. Luke desired to tell the world authoritatively, under the guidance of the Spirit, what the Lord Jesus continued to do after his ascension, by the power of the Spirit, through the instrumentality of his disciples.

“The historian who is to give a brief history of a great period,” writes Ramsay, “need not reproduce on a reduced uniform scale all the facts which he would mention in a long history, like a picture reduced by a photographic process. If a brief history is to be a work of art, it must omit great deal, and concentrate the reader’s attention on a certain number of critical points in the development of events, elaborating these sufficiently to present them in life-like and clearly intelligible form.

True historical genius lies in selecting the great crises, the great agents, and the great movements, in making these clear to the reader in their real nature, in passing over with the lightest and slightest touch numerous events and many persons, but always keeping clear before the reader the plan of composition. The historian may dismiss years with a word, and devote considerable space to a single incident. In such a work, the omission of an event does not constitute a gap, but is merely a proof that the event had not sufficient importance to enter in the plan” (Ibid. p. 7). Luke, manifestly, did not set out to tell all the history of the main characters, Peter and Paul. He selected great crises, great agents and great movements, passing over or touching lightly upon many others.

Dr. Philip Schaff writes concerning the Acts: It “represents the origin and progress of Christianity from the capital of Judaism to the capital of heathenism. It is the history of the planting of the Church among the Jews by Peter, and among the Gentiles by Paul. Its theme is expressed in the promise of the risen Christ to His disciples in Acts 1:8: **“ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you”** (chap. 2); **“and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem”** (chaps. 3-7); **“and in all Judaea, and in Samaria”** (chaps. 8-12); **“and unto the uttermost part of the earth”** (chaps. 13-18)” (History, Vol. I, p. 726).

“In the Gospels we see Christ purchasing the church with His own blood:” writes Dr. David Brown, “here we see the church so purchased rising into actual existence; first among the Jews in Palestine, next among the Gentiles, until it gains a foothold in the great capital of the ancient world - sweeping majestically from Jerusalem to Rome.”

The early triumphs of Christianity are recorded for the benefit of men of every age. It is a remarkable testimony to the power of the Gospel, that, within thirty years it made a deep impression upon all parts of the civilized world. It had not failed to transform men and communities in the most powerful and corrupt cities. Churches were established in Jerusalem, Antioch, Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia, Italy and Africa. Its success cannot be accounted for by any view, other than that it was God's message, and His Almighty power made it effective.

## WAS IT COMPLETED?

Many writers upon the Acts think that it was not completed. They believe that it ends abruptly and attempt to account for this by supposed that Luke was called away from the city to some other part of the church, or that political changes compelled his withdrawal from Rome. Others, with Ramsay, suppose that the author suffered martyrdom under Domitian, and that for this reason the Book was left uncompleted.

My own view, as stated more fully in the last chapter, is that the Book was completed in an admirable manner. It closes leaving the apostle Paul in the place where he had longed to go, and while preaching Christ, whom he loved to preach. For years it had been his ambition to go to Rome. He earnestly desired to preach the Gospel unhindered by Jewish mob or heathen priests. As the Book closes he was at the great world-center of that day, **“preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him”** (Acts 28:31).

That was his chief desire. I can imagine no more appropriate ending. It is the picture of the great apostle which I like to keep in mind. His chains were incidental. To preach the Gospel unhindered, where it would reach the largest number, and go out to the ends of the earth, was the fulfillment of his highest ambition. It is the hope of this writer that such an ambition may be aroused in the hearts of many of God's servants who read this expression.

## THREE OUTLINES OF THE CONTENTS

### I. GENERAL OUTLINE

1. The promise of the Holy Spirit (chap. 1).
2. The out-pouring of the Holy Spirit and revival (chap. 2).
3. The development of the church in Jerusalem in the midst of opposition (chaps. 3-7).
4. The growth of the church through Judea and Samaria (chaps. 8-12).
5. The growth of the church among the Gentiles (chaps. 13-28).

### II. OUTLINE BY CHAPTERS

Outline by chapters, with key verses, to enable the student to keep the main points and choice verses of the Book in mind.

General facts:

Writer - Luke

Written at Rome, 63 A.D.

Theme - The continuation of the work of the Christ, by His Spirit, through His disciples.

Chapter 1 - The ascension - promise of the Holy Spirit - reorganization.

Key verse: **“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (1:8).**

Chapter 2 - The first revival - Pentecost.

Key verse: **“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (2:38-39)**

Chapter 3 - The first miracle of healing - the lame man healed.

Key verse: **“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (3:19)**

Chapter 10 - The first mission to the Gentiles - Peter sent to Cornelius.

Key verse: **“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (10:34-35).**

Chapter 11 - The first dispute about missions - The Jews convinced.

Key verse: **“When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (11:18).**

Chapter 12 - The first persecution by the state - James killed - Peter arrested - his miraculous escape.

Key verse: **“Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him” (12:5).**

## **JOURNEYS OF PAUL**

Chapter 13 - Paul and Barnabas go to Cyprus and Asia Minor - Paul's sermon at Antioch.

Key verse: **“For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth”** (13:47).

Chapter 14 - At Iconium, Lystra and Derbe - the disciples praised - Paul stoned - return and report to home church.

Key verse: **“Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”** (14:22).

Chapter 15 - Dispute about circumcision - send letter to Gentiles - Paul and Barnabas separate.

Key verse: **“But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they”** (15:11).

## **SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY**

Chapter 16 - Paul and Silas go through Syria and Cilicia - At Lystra Timothy joins the company - to Neapolis and Philippi.

Key verse: **“And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”** (16:31).

Chapter 17 - To Thessalonica, Berea, Athens - The Unknown God

Key verse: **“For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you”** (17:23).

Chapter 18 - To Corinth, Ephesus, Caesarea, Jerusalem, Antioch

Key verse: **“For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ”** (18:28).

## **THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY**

Chapter 18:23 - 19:41. To Galatia, Phrygia - at Ephesus 3 years

Key verse: **“Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus”** (19:4).

Chapter 20 - To Macedonia, Achaia, Philippi, Troas, Miletus

Key verse: **“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (20:24).**

Chapter 21:1-17. Returned to Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Key verse: **“Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (21:13).**

## IMPRISONMENT OF PAUL

Chapter 21:17 - 22:30. Paul mobbed - rescued - addressed the people.

Key verse: **“For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard” (22:15).**

Chapter 23 - Tried before the Sanhedrin - a conspiracy - sent to Caesarea.

Key verse: **“And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou has testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (23:11).**

## AT CAESAREA

Chapter 24 - Defense before Felix - Governor moved - left two years.

Key verse: **“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (24:25).**

Chapter 25-26. Paul’s hearing before Festus - appeal to Caesar - address before Agrippa.

Key verse: **“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds” (26:28-29).**

## ON THE SEA

Chapter 27 - Paul’s voyage and shipwreck

Key verse: **“For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee” (27:23-24).**

## AT ROME

Chapter 28 - Paul at Melita, Puteoli and Rome - preached at his lodging and hired house, unhindered.

Key verse: “**Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it**” (28:28).

### III. OUTLINE TO ENCOURAGE CHRISTIAN WORKERS

It is encouraging to note that *notwithstanding persecution*, hypocrisy, dissention, or mob violence, *the church continued to grow*.

1. The disciples were terrified by the crucifixion of Jesus - the Holy Spirit came in power - Peter preached - 3000 added - 2:41.
2. Jewish leaders arrested the apostles - apostles proclaimed Jesus - *Number came to be 5000* - 4:4.
3. The disciples were threatened - they prayed - were filled with the Spirit - spoke with boldness - *a multitude believed* - 4:32.
4. Hypocrites came in - Divine discipline was exercised - wonders wrought - *multitudes* of men and women *were added* - 5:14.
5. Persecution arose - disciples imprisoned - miraculously released - *the disciples were multiplied* - 6:1.
6. Dissention arose - deacons chosen - number of *disciples multiplied* exceedingly - *company of priests obedient* to faith - 6:7.
7. The disciples driven from Jerusalem - Philip preached in Samaria - *the multitudes gave heed* with one accord - 8:6.
8. Personal work with an *Ethiopian* - *he believed* - 8:37.
9. Paul converted - churches had rest - *were multiplied* - 9:31.
10. Peter cured *Aeneas* - *all who saw him turned* to the LORD - 9:35.
11. Peter raised Dorcas from the dead - *many believed* on the LORD - 9:31.
12. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles - *many believe* - 10:44-45.

13. Persecuted disciples driven to Antioch - preach to Greeks - *a great number believed* - 11:21.

14. Barnabas sent to help with the work at Antioch - *much people was added* unto the LORD - 11:24.

15. Herod persecuted the church - killed James - arrested Peter - Herod smitten by an angel - the *word grew and multiplied* - 12:24.

16. Paul preached in Cyprus - was opposed by a false prophet - the *Pro-consul believed* - 13:12.

17. Paul preached in Antioch in Pisidia - the Jews opposed him - *many Gentiles believed* - the Word was spread throughout all the region - 13:49.

18. Paul driven to Iconium by a persecuting mob - preached - *a great multitude* of Jews and Greeks believed - 14:1.

19. Paul stoned - driven to Derbe - preached - *made many disciples* - 14:21.

This outline takes us half way through the Book, through the first missionary journey of Paul. The story is ever the same. *Nothing can stop the growth of a Spirit-filled church.* Such a church will pray earnestly, study the Bible diligently, give liberally of her wealth, and continue in constant personal work for Christ.

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