

# The Acts of the Apostles

---

We are beginning our journey through the book of Acts today.

## Some reasons why I've chose this book now

- It is the sequel to the Gospel of Luke and so doing it now on the heels of finishing Luke together will help because you are already immersed on the context and the arch of the storyline.
- Systematic Theology provides a grid through which to study scripture, relate to God and understand the world. However, it doesn't do well to provide a Biblical instinct for the overall narrative of scripture.
- The Bible is God's story, and it is one story from start to finish. It is cohesive, just as history is cohesively His story. Developing this sense of the storyline of the gospel will help you understand the Bible and understand the world.
- Similarly, it would be easy to walk away from Luke feeling like that's the end of the story. Christmas & Easter. What Acts does for us is it draws a straight line from the cross, through Pentacost and right to Kernersville Community Church. It places you and I into church history and shows us that we are as vitally connected to God's story as Peter, Paul, and Stephen were.
- My prophetic sense of what God is doing in the world right now is that He is shuffling the nations, and his people, like a deck of cards. The Church around the world is in transition. Part of that shuffling involves rediscovering our roots. Finding our mission again. Our roots go back to Acts. This is the birthplace of the church. The Delta of the river. The spring that breathed life into the Church and gave it its mission is documented in these pages.

1

## An Introduction to Acts

Scholars believe that Acts was written in either AD70 or AD62. I lean towards AD62 because it fits the writing a little better, but we don't know for sure. This puts its writing 30 – 40 years after Jesus' death.

Acts covers the span of 33 years time at the start of the church.

Acts is a continuation of Luke's selective history of the church, written to Theopholis.

The gospel of Luke was written to convince Theopholis that Jesus was the Messiah and that He had risen. Now he writes Acts to give Theopholis confidence that the gospel is alive, and it is an unstoppable force in the earth. Nothing, no one, can stop its spread.

Though Acts has often been referred to as a historical book, it is important to understand that Luke did not write it as such. Luke is primarily being evangelistic here. He is doing more than simply reporting what he has seen. He is telling a story.

## Unique Features

- Luke provides many speeches and sermons in the voice of the speaker. In fact, direct speech comprises over 1/3 of the book.

- Luke delivers these speeches to us in different voices and dialects in the Greek. This not only adds to the drama of the speeches, but it also gives us a feel for the personality of the speaker.

In these speeches, Luke is not just trying to relate WHAT they said, but also HOW they said it. This is an uncommon literary device in scripture. (This is why I will do my best not to simply summarize these speeches, but read them together so you get a feel for what these men were like)

- Luke uniquely ties the ministry of Jesus to the work of the Holy Spirit. He demonstrates the continuity of the two, showing the Holy Spirit continuing Christ's work through His Church. Again.... Drawing a direct line between Jesus, His ministry, death and resurrection right down through history to you and I here in 2011.
- In Acts, there are several summaries that are unique to the book. Luke takes time to stop the narrative and step back to tell us what is going on across the landscape. He stops to tell us what's happening in the Church, how it works, who is doing what. Without this, we would have little understanding what it was like to be a Christian in these early years.

## Setting the stage for Pentacost

**Acts 1:1-3 – PAGE 778 IN THE BLACK 7 WHITE BIBLES NEARBY**

This is the equivalent of saying, "Last time on Acts of the Apostles..."

### Acts 1:4-11

The disciples are hoping that Jesus' return to them after the resurrection means that He is going to return Israel to its rightful place.

- They're thinking, "Ok, we've got it NOW. Jesus rose from the dead. Everyone will believe us now."
- Jesus gives them the great commission.
- Then He leaves before their eyes.
- A couple angels come along and snap them out of it...

## We don't know WHEN He's coming back, but we know that He WILL

- Having an expectancy that He is coming should generate a sense of urgency and freedom from worry.
- However, it should NOT generate in us passivity and fatalism.
- The mission helps us do this.

**We have just seen this illustrated with this May 21 Rapture scare. There are two big problems with what we saw happening.**

1. It is pointless, and harmful, to predict the day of the Lord's Coming. Jesus was clear that we will not know the day or the season.
2. Even if we did know the day, the response of bringing life to a halt and waiting, staring up at the sky, is wrong. It neglects Jesus' commission and is the same mistake that these disciples were making as Jesus ascended.

## What is a “Witness”?

The term “witness” got a little watered down in the 80’s and 90’s and became associated with a pretty narrow form of evangelism. It became kind of stereotypically associated with aggressive door to door evangelism and/or Christian t-shirts.

Witness here has two primary meanings:

1. Witness TO: to see, record, acknowledge, or confirm that something exists or has happened. Like a witness to a crime, or a witness at a wedding or contract signing.
2. Witness FOR: to defend or corroborate that something is true. To bear witness.

**We are all called to witness to and for the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Interestingly, this is the primary theme (IMHO) of the book of Acts. If you read through the book and make note of every time the apostles are witness to or for the gospel you will see that it is a much more prominent theme than the Holy Spirit.

**Perhaps the point is that the Holy Spirit longs to empower us to witness, and that this witnessing to and for the gospel should be the consistent temperature of our lives.**

He doesn’t say “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will have good meetings.” We will grieve the Holy Spirit if we expect Him to spice up our meetings, but we do not allow Him to do what He wants to do in regards to being an empowered witness.

*If we do this, then what we do is akin to trotting the H.S. out at parties and beauty pageants like those little girls in those disgusting kiddie beauty pageants across the south.*

## Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends the earth...

We are the ends of the earth. Were it not for that command, we wouldn’t be worshipping Jesus.

Christianity was born in Jerusalem, not the USA. You and I were grafted in, adopted into the family.

### “The ends of the earth”

- The disciples would have thought that this meant Rome. To them, Rome was as far as the world went.
- Had they known how much geography “the ends of the earth” included then I imagine they would have been overwhelmed by the task.
- They expected Jesus to return any day. They would have thought that Jesus was on his way back, and as soon as the gospel spread throughout the Roman empire, they were going home.
- In fact, scholars believe that the apostles likely thought that Jesus would return before the end of their lives.

If you and I could see the enormity of what we are called to do, and the difficulty in accomplishing it we would probably never try.

So the God leads us step by step into our destiny. He gives us faith for today.

Don’t make the mistake of looking at your life and saying, “my life isn’t going anywhere”. **IF YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN, THEN YOUR LIFE IS GUARANTEED TO BE GOING SOMEWHERE.** It’s just not going somewhere that you are familiar with. Nor is going where you tell it to go. Your life is going where Jesus wants it to go.

## Not According to Plan

You think your life isn't going according to plan? Look at these guys.

They joined Jesus' crew thinking that He was going to lead a rescue mission for Israel. IT DIDN'T HAPPEN.

They thought that Jesus would be around for a long time, continuing to grow in popularity. IT DIDN'T HAPPEN.

Instead, one of their own betrayed them, sold Jesus to their enemies resulting in His unjust murder as a criminal among thieves.

Then Jesus rises from the dead. This is great news! Now everyone will believe that He is the Messiah! IT DIDN'T HAPPEN.

Jesus sticks around and teaches them, hangs out with them, for about 40 days. Then He floats off to heaven after telling them to go be witnesses.

But there is hope. He told them to wait for another to come and that He would return when it was time.

The Holy Spirit comes, but they are expected Jesus to return any day. This whole thing is like a short term missions trip. He'll be back soon.

IT DIDN'T HAPPEN. At least not the way they expected.

**Who are we to expect a different outcome in our lives now? Your life will not turn out as you expect, but just like we can see now how Jesus was leading his people then; Jesus is leading you and this church now into what He has had planned all along.**

*He promises to provide the people, the leaders (like Matthias), the resources, and the most importantly the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to do it.*

## Closing

*What you are going to see as we go through the book of Acts is ordinary, some less than ordinary, people doing extraordinary things. You are going to see people that used to be one way, but have been transformed so completely that they are virtually unrecognizable to their former selves. **Peter and Paul look NOTHING like who they were before meeting Jesus.***

This is what happens when the Holy Spirit comes on the scene.