

# **Overview of Acts**

# Introduction and Title

- A record of how the Gospel spread from Jerusalem to the world
  - Matthew 28:18-20 – Great Commission
  - Acts 1:8 – Witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth
    - Witnesses in Jerusalem – Acts 1:1 – 8:4
    - Witnesses in Judea and Samaria – Acts 8:5 – 12:25
    - Witnesses to the ends of the earth – Acts 13 – 28
- Greek Manuscripts of this book contain title “Praxeis” meaning Acts. Some read “Acts of the Apostles”. It really records the Acts of the Holy Spirit working in and through the apostles.

# Author

- Same author composed two accounts to the “Most Excellent Theophilus”
  - Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-3
- Evidence Pointing to Luke as the Author
  - Early Christian leaders taught it was Luke
  - Writer was a traveling companion of Paul and described some of their travels with the plural pronoun “we” (e.g. Acts 16:11-17)
  - All of Paul’s associates except for Titus and Luke are referred to in the third person.
  - Paul’s references to Luke show that Luke was a loyal and beloved companion of Paul (Col 4:14, 2 Tim 4:12)

# Date of Writing

- AD 62 – Just before Paul's trial in Rome

## Theme and Purpose

- Records the historical narrative of how the church was established
- Serves as an historical link between the gospels and the epistles
- Records the establishment of various churches that would later receive letters (epistles) from Paul.

# Important Observations

## Proclamation of the gospel is foundational for church growth

1. Sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2) – 3000 saved and more daily after the initial 3000.
2. Preaching on Solomon's Porch (Acts 3:11-4:3) – 5000 men believed, presumably the total including women and children was substantially more.
3. Preaching in the temple continued and the number of disciples was multiplying (Acts 5:17 – 6:1)
4. Stephen preached powerfully against unbelieving religious establishment and was publicly executed. This resulted in increased persecution and believers scattered and preached the word wherever they went (Acts 7 – 8:4)

# Important Observations

## The Holy Spirit Provides the Power for Church Growth

1. Acts 1:8 – You shall receive power to be my witnesses when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.
2. Holy Spirit came in power on Pentecost. Disciples spoke in languages they had not learned in order to get the attention of the foreigners in Jerusalem for the feast (Acts 2:5). Peter's sermon was presumably not spoken in tongues.
3. The Holy Spirit gave boldness to speak truth to power (Acts 2, Acts 5:26-32). Nearly all died for their faith. The deaths of Stephen and James are recorded in Acts.
4. The Holy Spirit gives wisdom to men and women of God (The apostles were suddenly able to see and preach the connection between Old Testament prophecy concerning the Christ and the person of Jesus)

# Important Observations

## The Holy Spirit Provides the Power for Church Growth (Continued)

5. The Holy Spirit is seen filling believers and anointing them for service and giving boldness (Acts 2:4, 4:31, 6:3, 7:55, 9:17)
6. The Holy Spirit is seen indwelling believers (2:38, 8:15-19, 15-18, 15:6-11, 19:5-7)
7. The Holy Spirit empowered the apostles and Barnabus to perform signs and wonders among the people (Acts 5:12-16, 6:8, 19:11-14). God used this to confirm the truth of the gospel being proclaimed by the apostles.
8. The Holy Spirit raises up overseers (elders) to shepherd and guard the people of God (Acts 20:28)

# Important Observations

## Tribulation Awaits Believers in this Life

1. Peter and John were questioned twice and forbidden to preach in Jesus' name (Acts 4:3, 18)
2. All the apostles were threatened and imprisoned by the Sanhedrin for preaching Jesus (Acts 5:17-42)
3. Stephen was martyred (Acts 7)
4. Paul instigated a great persecution against the church (Acts 8:1-3)
5. Herod beheaded James (Acts 12)
6. Paul experienced all kinds of persecution and adverse circumstances on his missionary journeys (Acts 13-27)
7. The early church experienced the truth that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12).

# Important Observations

## Principles of Church *Government*

1. Church devoted to Apostles Teaching, Fellowship, Breaking of Bread, Prayer (Acts 2:42).
2. Corporate Prayer was a Common Occurrence (Acts 4:23-31, 12:5-15)
3. Local churches were established in cities where the gospel was received, elders (plural) were appointed in every church (Jerusalem church, Asian cities Acts 14:23)
4. Breaking of bread was a primary reason the believers came together (Acts 20:7)
5. The Holy Spirit is the one who raises up elders (Acts 20:28)

# Important Observations

## The Gospel is for All

1. Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2:38, 5:31)
2. A woman named Dorcas (Acts 9:36)
3. Cornelius and his household – Gentiles (Acts 10)
4. Paul's preaching to Jews in the synagogues
5. Paul's preaching in the open air (Acts 17)
6. Paul preached to kings and authorities including Festus and King Agrippa (Acts 25)
7. Paul preached to seasoned seamen while traveling to Rome (Acts 27-28)
8. Paul preached to both Jews and Gentiles in Rome (Acts 28)

## Interpretive Challenge

**Since Acts is an historical narrative, how do we determine whether what we read is simply historical in nature, or an ongoing timeless truth applicable in the church today.**

1. Teachings and or observations backed up by clear teaching directed toward the church in the epistles is timeless truth (the way of salvation, God's inclusion of Gentiles in the church, etc).
2. Practices of the early church such as being devoted to teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer are all activities encourage and even commanded in various epistles.
3. Some of the activities of the Holy Spirit such as indwelling, filling, empowering for service are reiterated in the epistles.

## Interpretive Challenge

**Since Acts is an historical narrative, how do we determine whether what we read is simply historical in nature, or an ongoing timeless truth applicable in the church today.**

- The work of the Holy Spirit in the form of signs and wonders is His work, not ours. He chooses the time and place in which signs and wonders are performed.
- Signs and wonders were originally practice to confirm and attest to the validity of the message and the authenticity of the speaker. The Spirit of God works these as He sees fit.
  - Historically speaking the church has not seen these types of activities widely practiced since the first century.
  - Based partially on Heb 2:3-4, I see those things as largely having served their purpose in this age and are not widely seen today.