

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Introduction to Acts

Acts 1:1-2

Keywords: gospel, Luke, New Covenant, Holy Spirit, Acts

PowerPoint Presentation included: none

SermonAudio Blurb: This is the first message introducing the entire book of Acts to the church. As a result there is a lot of background material introduced as well as some key theological points drawn out. Acts is used by so many in churches to push various agendas. Sometimes this is done with great skill and is helpful to the people of God and other times it is done in such a way as to hinder the Church. Acts is a unique book as it straddles two great covenants of God in the bible. The Old Covenant (Mosaic) and the New Covenant. It also shows the unfolding of the Abrahamic covenant as well. As a result this book is one to be studied and understood if one wants to understand what God is doing in and through the Church.

I. Introduction.

- A. We begin a new journey together in an extremely important book for any Christian to understand. But open your bibles first to Luke 1.
- B. Acts is the second volume of a 2 book work by Luke.
 - 1. Because Matt Miller is preaching through Luke I realized it was a good time for me to take us through Acts.
 - 2. I do not need to go into some of the details related to the background of Luke and his writing because you can listen to Matt's first sermons on Luke if you need a reminder.
- C. Basic background:
 - 1. Luke 1:1-4 gives us a sense of how he went about gathering the information that resulted in both Luke and Acts.
 - a. He compiled all of this through many sources (1).
 - b. He sought out (2) actual eye-witnesses for Luke and Acts.
 - c. The goal was to give a clear and true explanation of what happened.
 - (1) First with the person and work of Jesus Christ.
 - (2) And second with the spread of the gospel and the divinely empowered birth and expansion of the Church.

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2. In Acts 1:1 we have him again introducing the man, Theophilus, to his methodology.
 - a. Acts was likely written around the early to middle 60s.
 - b. It is worth noting that Luke was a work that was designed to tell us all about Jesus Christ. And as that is how you should read that book. Always ask why is this story here? What do I learn about Jesus in this story or that story? How must I change my thinking regarding Jesus due to what I just read or heard?
3. A word about memorization.
 - a. This is a lost art in our modern world and I would like to encourage you all to give this some serious thought.
 - b. In the time prior too and during the life of Jesus memorization was how the world learned and taught and spread information. Books did not exist like they do today.
 - c. Even in the early church there would be only one bible scroll if they were fortunate. A letter by an apostle would be written and then it would be carried from church to church and read. Perhaps it would be copied but usually it would just be memorized.
 - d. In the Greek/Roman world memorization was the foundational skill taught to young people. Once key facts and information was memorized, only then would their education continue and expand.
 - (1) When you became a disciple of some teacher it was your responsibility to memorize what they taught you. That was not optional and you would not be allowed to continue in your training with him if you didn't.
 - (2) Even if you didn't agree with something it was still your job to properly represent his views. It was a matter of honor.
 - (a) Think about that carefully please.
 - (b) Teaching was a time to convey knowledge, not merely to motivate or inspire.

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- (c) And it is something that we try to do here at Missio. The only question is how diligent are you to actively listen for the purpose of retention.
 - (d) One New Testament scholar, Craig Keener, noted that a student was expected to be able to recite back what was taught them the prior day by their instructor.
- (3) It is important for you to know this because there are many who will try to say that because of the lack of written material there is no way that we can know what Jesus actually did or said.
- (a) The people of that time would laugh at this idea.
 - (b) The verbal transference of words and deeds were as natural to them as you and I looking something up on the internet.
 - (c) And it is also what is behind my exhortation to you all to not use electronic bibles. One day you likely will have to unhook yourself from those tools and you will find your bible dusty and unmarked and not useful for remembering what was taught.
4. The historical flow of Acts.
- a. Luke was no fool. He knew that he had to be accurate in his writing as the listeners and readers would know too much to be fooled.
 - b. The various towns and cities were well known. They had their own unique ethnic make-up. So in Acts 14:11 it is written regarding the multitude there, “. . . they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have become like men. . . .’” Well Lystra was a place that actually kept its own local language or dialect and this is why it is recorded that way. And everyone knew that.
 - c. Widespread famine under Claudius (Acts 11:28, A.D. 44-48)
 - d. Death of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:20-23, A.D. 44 [spring])

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- e. Proconsulship of Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7, appointed in A.D. 53)
[like a governor, served for one year appointed by the Roman Government] This is not a man unknown to the readers and there would be no tolerance for him to make the guy up.
- f. Expulsion of Jews from Rome by Claudius (Acts 18:2, A.D. 49 [?])
- g. Proconsulship of Gallio, Acts 18:12 (a.d. 51 or 52 [?])
- h. Proconsulship of Felix (Acts 23:26; 24:27, a.d. 52-56 [?])
- i. Replacement of Felix by Festus (Acts 24:27, a.d. 57-60 [?])
- j. Judea's Roman officials:
 - (1) Procurators (these represented the Roman government on matters of law and would preside over these regions. So when you read that word think “Rome.”)
 - (a) Pontius Pilate, a.d. 26-36
 - (b) Marcellus, a.d. 36-37
 - (c) Marullus, a.d. 37-41
 - (2) In a.d. 41 the procuratorial method of Roman administration was changed to an empirical model (think “mini-king”). The Roman Emperor, Claudius, appointed Herod Agrippa I in a.d. 41.
 - (3) After the death of Herod Agrippa I, a.d. 44, the procurator method was reestablished until a.d. 66
 - (a) Antonius Felix
 - (b) Porcius Festus

5. So what?

- a. One of the frequent statements made by people about the bible is whether you can really understand it or trust it. Over and over you will hear some say that it is historically suspect and unstable.
- b. At times I like to post articles from various sites to my FB page where they discover another detail from the Old and New Testaments that was once assumed to be false.

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- c. This was also the driving force behind my series through Genesis 1-11. Do we believe the bible?
 - d. Acts does not allow you to simply reject it. The level of detail is extreme and therefore easy to research.
 - e. Throughout the book of Acts you have these details that make it so unique and useful. For the readers of that time it helped convey the clear message that Luke had been careful and precise. It also means we need to treat it in that manner.
 - f. And remember that other details that are written in Acts would have been easily searched out by those who were contemporary to Luke. Examples would be the stoning of Stephen or the death of Annanias and Saphira.
 - g. I am consistently grieved by how many Christians seem to almost be embarrassed by the bible and reluctant to assert the full integrity of the entire bible.
 - (1) Beloved, never apologize for it.
 - (2) You do not need to defend it. You simple have to unleash it and obey it as what it is, the Word of God.
- D. How to read and think through Acts.
- 1. First, it is the work of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church.
 - a. Remember it is a continuation of the gospel of Luke.
 - b. Luke is showing the person and work of Jesus Christ in light of the Old Testament promises of One who would come and make all things right.
 - (1) It ends with these words, ““You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.’ And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem

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- with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.” (Luke. 24:49-52)
- (2) The mention of the promise of the Father and the power from on high is left vague in that passage.
- c. Acts is simply going forward with those very words where now they are expanded and explained and then seen.
- (1) Don’t miss this point beloved. Acts is still talking about Jesus, only now it is through His Body, the Church.
- (2) The Apostles’ words are His words. The Apostles’ and Church’s works are His.
- (3) In Luke we learned from Matt Miller that all that Jesus said and did was through the empowerment of the Spirit. And all of it was in accordance to the Father’s will.
- (4) In Acts the same is seen. Nothing the Church does is on its own power. All is done via the power of the Spirit. And all of it is done in accordance to the Father’s will.
- (5) Luke was Jesus in the flesh and Acts is Jesus embodied in the Church. Or as Matt Miller told me, Luke is Jesus purchasing His Church and Acts is Jesus sending His Church.
2. Second, what you read is a work of God. So try to read it in a Trinitarian manner.
- a. How are you seeing the three persons of the godhead displayed?
- b. The harder you work at this skill the better and richer your study of the bible will be.
3. Third, there are some unique stories in the book.
- a. When you read a story ask yourself why is it there?
- b. To write this was very expensive and difficult. You didn’t waste your words like we do today. So every detail has a purpose so your job is to ask why?
- c. And if you keep my first two points in mind you will usually figure it out quite well.

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- d. Remember that passive reading seldom bears lasting fruit.
- 4. Fourth, the book requires you to make some decisions about interpretation.
 - a. There will be many stories that describe certain events. There will be teachings that will contain information.
 - b. The question is what do we do with all of it?
 - c. Does a practice described in Acts mean that we are to expect that to be normative? Does a practice described mean that we are to practice it as well?
 - d. A helpful rule is to keep indicatives separate from imperatives.
 - (1) Example, just because the early church met in the synagogues and then in homes does not mean that we ought to as well.
 - (2) Example, just because the Spirit came to the first gathering of people in a powerful and unique way does not mean that we should expect it today.
 - (3) Example, just because Paul was bit by a poisonous snake and it did not harm him does not mean we should not use caution around snakes.
 - e. Also understand that a massive transition is taking place, especially in the early chapters. A transition to what the bible calls the “New Covenant.”
 - (1) This was prophesied in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It speaks of a time when the Spirit would be poured out upon God’s people.
 - (2) In the gospels this covenant did not even exist. Jesus was teaching and acting under the old covenant made with Moses and Israel.
 - (3) But in His death the New Covenant was born and is still in the process of being unfolded.

II. The Precursor to The Book (1:1-2).

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- A. As already stated, this is the second volume of Luke's work. Written first to this man Theophilus, it is a faithful, careful description of the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth.
 - 1. The book of Luke is designed, according to vs 1, to teach all that Jesus began to do and teach.
 - 2. I have already argued that Acts is simply the continuation of that work.
 - a. You will hear people argue things like, Jesus never said a word about homosexuality therefore neither shall I. Or perhaps you will hear some one say that what Paul is teaching about women or slaves or the government is not consistent with the words of Jesus.
 - b. But the reality is that the rest of the New Testament is nothing more than the teachings of Jesus, only now through the Apostles.
 - (1) John 16:12-14 is a key passage (take them through it).
 - (2) Therefore, understand that though you may have a red letter edition of the bible, in reality, the entire New Testament is red letter.
 - (3) If you learn this it will change how you read the bible.
- B. Luke then sets the stage for the events of chapters 1-2.
 - 1. All that Jesus spoke was through the Holy Spirit.
 - a. This reminds us what Matt Miller already has taught us, that Jesus did nothing on His own. Everything done and said is by and through the Holy Spirit.
 - b. And this is exactly what takes place now through the Apostles. They are indwelt and empowered by the Spirit to speak and instruct and act in the name of Jesus.
 - c. Therefore their words and commands are to be taken as divine commands. They are not open for arguments nor are they to be changed or rejected.
 - 2. The vehicle through which Christ would continue to work is through the Apostles.

III. Conclusion.

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- A. Beloved, read and hear these messages on Acts with a heart of anticipation. For we are a part of Acts. What is written there continues to this day as the power of the gospel through the work of the Holy Spirit goes forth into all the world.
- B. In Acts everything changes.
 - 1. And from the moment that the Spirit came and empowered them nothing was the same again.
 - 2. The Church came into existence.
 - 3. The good news that full forgiveness of sin is found in Jesus Christ is now proclaimed and the work of the followers of Jesus began.
 - 4. It started in Jerusalem.
 - 5. By chapter 6 is in spreading into Judea and Samaria.
 - 6. And by chapter 11 it is spreading throughout the earth.
- C. Beloved, every person here is a recipient of that beginning.
 - 1. Whether you believe what is said or not, it has come to you.
 - 2. And do with it what you will, but it can not be undone.
 - 3. You know that you can find forgiveness with the One who made you.
 - 4. You know that in Jesus salvation from the judgment of God is found.
 - 5. You know that He calls you to turn from whatever path you are traveling and now follow Him as your Master and Savior.
- D. For the Christian in this room the challenge is to ask yourself in what manner are you obeying the command to proclaim this truth?
 - 1. In what way does your life reflect a life of following Jesus?
 - 2. How do your choices and decisions show that you have a different love and hope?
 - 3. How do your words unfold and reveal to a dying world that life, true life, is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?
- E. As Matt and I take you through Luke and Acts these are going to be brought before you every week. May each of you have ears to hear and eyes to see.

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Small Group Questions

- What are things you are hoping to learn in Acts? Also why? Have the group write them down and send them to Pastor Matt so that he can keep them in mind.
- Do you think that most Christians understand that the whole of the New Testament is really the words of Christ? What are ways you have heard people perhaps diminish the rest of the New Testament as opposed to the gospels and the “red letters?”
- How familiar are you with issues related to the New Covenant and also End Times? Both of these are developed in Acts but your pastor is unsure of how deep he should go into each of these. Give your thoughts and communicate them to the pastor.