

Acts of the Apostles

The Acts of the Apostles is situated in the New Testament just after the fourth Gospel. This was a logical choice made by the early compilers of the Bible. The Four Gospels tell the story of the life of Jesus; while "Acts" continues the story of Christianity after the Resurrection of Jesus.

The thrust of the story is the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to the rest of the Roman world. "Acts" records the remarkable spread of what began as an obscure religion and moved like wild-fire to become a dominant force in the Roman world.

We read the story in Acts as history. In fact, it is one of the few places where events in the early church were recorded. Had "Acts" not been written, we would only have glimpses of the early Christians through the letters of Paul, Peter and James.

Yet, Acts was not written to preserve information for posterity. The book is addressed to "The Most Excellent Theophilus. No one knows for certain who Theophilus was, but the honorific of "your Excellency" was generally used for Roman officials of fairly high stature.

Much of "Acts" talks about relations between the early apostles and the Roman state always stressing the cordial relations between the two. The apostles respected the government and the government dealt civilly with the apostles. The story dwells much on Paul. For this reason, many scholars accept that "Acts" was not history, but part of a legal brief sent to a man representing Paul (Theophilus). The brief is meant to show Paul and Christianity in a good light to the Roman government in general and possibly to the Emperor Nero specifically.

Paul had been arrested, and, as he was a Roman citizen, it was his right to take his case to the highest authority. He chose to do this. What gives even more credence to this conjecture is that Acts ends just when Paul's trial would be beginning. Much to the dismay of Christian scholars the outcome of the trial was never recorded. Yet it is quite certain that Paul ended his career soon after the book of "Acts" concludes.

It has been accepted since early times that the author of "Acts" is Luke. Luke was a physician and a trusted companion of Paul. He was also author of a Gospel (that might also have been part of the legal brief).

Acts - Chapter 1

Questions:

1. How long did Jesus stay with the Apostles after the Crucifixion? Why?
2. Why did the Apostles ask Jesus, "Lord will you at this time give the Kingdom back to Israel?" What answer did Jesus give?
3. What about this method of choosing a successor to Judas?

Acts - Chapter 2

Questions:

1. How did the Holy Spirit descend upon the Apostles on Pentecost?
2. How are prophecies fulfilled in Chapter 2?
3. What is life like among the new Christians?

Acts - Chapter 3

Questions:

1. In Chapter 3 Peter performs a miracle. What is its significance?
2. What is the nature of miracles? Do miracles happen today?
3. Peter makes a speech in the Temple. What does he tell the people there? How can we apply it to our own life?

Acts - Chapter 4

Questions:

1. What does Chapter 4 have to say about the growth of the church?
2. What is significant about the following passage? "The members of the Council were amazed to see how bold Peter and John were and to learn that they were ordinary men of no education."
3. Peter and John were arrested, warned not to mention Jesus again. What did they do in response?

Acts - Chapter 5

Questions:

1. In Chapter 5 what is the significance of the story of Ananias and Sapphira?
2. Why do the High Priest and the Sadducees have the Apostles arrested?
3. The Apostles were punished, but were happy, why?

Acts - Chapter 6

Questions:

1. How and why do the Apostles change the organization of the church.
2. Why was Stephen arrested?
3. What is significant about the demeanor of Stephen?

Acts - Chapter 7

Questions:

1. In Chapter 7 of Acts, why does Stephen relate a history of the Jewish Nation?
2. Why should this anger the Council?
3. What about Stephen's response to his stoning?

Acts - Chapter 8

Questions:

1. What role did persecution play in the early church?
2. What is the significance of Simon and his overtures to Peter?
3. Why is Phillip's conversation with the Ethiopian Eunuch important?

Acts - Chapter 9

Questions:

1. Why is what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus one of the most famous stories in the New Testament?
2. What is it in the personality of Paul that would make of him the greatest evangelist of all time?
3. How does the story of Tabitha compare to the story of Lazarus?

Acts - Chapter 10

Questions:

1. What can we make of Peter's vision at the beginning of Chapter 10?
2. What do we know about Cornelius and his conversion?
3. How do we understand Peter's speech to Cornelius?

Acts - Chapter 11

Questions:

1. How does Peter convince the apostles that his conversion of Cornelius was correct?
2. What is the significance of the trip by Barnabas to Antioch? Who does he recruit to do work there?
3. Why did the disciples send help to the believers in Judea?

Acts - Chapter 12

Questions:

1. Why does Herod pop up so often in the New Testament?
2. Why was Peter arrested? How did he escape?
3. What is the importance of Herod's death?

Acts - Chapter 13

Questions:

1. How were Paul and Barnabas chosen to go on a missionary journey?
2. What is the significance of Paul's handling of Elymas on Cyprus?
3. In Antioch (in Pisidia) Barnabas and Paul tell the story of Jesus, His sacrifice and promise. Why do they preach first at the synagogue. What is the reaction of the people to their preaching?

Acts - Chapter 14

Questions:

1. Why was there so much animosity between the early Christians and Jews?
2. Why do the people of Lystra call Barnabas "Zeus" and Paul "Hermes"?
3. What does verse 23 tell us about the organization of the early church?

Acts - Chapter 15

Questions:

1. The question of circumcision rises up again in Chapter 15. How does Peter finally resolve the issue.
2. James also intercedes in the argument. What does he have to tell us?
3. Why do Barnabas and Paul separate? Who is this John Mark they fight about?

Acts - Chapter 16

Questions:

1. Why, when Paul had just won the battle for Gentiles not to be circumcised, did he circumcise Timothy?
2. How does the story suddenly changes perspective with the introduction of the word, "We"?
3. Why were Paul and Silas arrested? Why were they freed?

Acts - Chapter 17

Questions:

1. What happened to Jason in Thessalonica?
2. What about all of these idols in Athens?
3. How does Paul deal with the philosophers, Stoics and Epicureans?

Acts - Chapter 18

Questions:

1. What do you make of Paul's trade of tent-maker?
2. Paul is seized and brought before the Governor of the region, Gallio. What is he charged with and how does the governor deal with the situation?
3. Why was Apollos important?

Acts - Chapter 19

Questions:

1. What is the difference between having received the baptism of John and the baptism in the name of Jesus?
2. How do you explain the episode of the sons of Sceva?
3. What was the riot in Ephesus all about?

Acts - Chapter 20

Questions:

1. What happened to Eutychus?
2. What does Paul's farewell speech say to the people?
3. What does Paul's speech tell us about Paul himself?

Acts - Chapter 21

Questions:

1. In Paul's trek to Jerusalem he is met by group after group of Christians who tried to dissuade him from continuing. Why does he continue?
2. Why is Jerusalem so dangerous for Paul?
3. What happens to Paul in Jerusalem?

Acts - Chapter 22

Questions:

1. What do we learn about Paul from his speech?
2. What attributes made Paul the perfect missionary to be sent to the Gentiles?
3. What do you make of this exchange between Paul and the commander?

Acts - Chapter 23

Questions:

1. How does Paul deal with the Council when he is brought before it?
2. Why do the conspirators wish to kill Paul? How does the commander thwart them?
3. In the letter from Claudius Lysias we find a fairly impartial view of events. What does Lysias think is going on between Paul and the Council?

Acts - Chapter 24

Questions:

1. What was Paul accused of by the lawyer Tertullus?
2. When Paul defended himself before Felix he said "I also believe in everything written in the Law of Moses and the books of the prophets." What is the significance of this passage!
3. Paul had some discussions with Felix and Drusilla. What do you think they talked about?

Acts - Chapter 25

Questions:

1. What can we understand of the character of Festus? of Roman attitudes to Christianity and Judaism in General?
2. Why did Paul make an appeal to the Emperor?
3. Why did Festus ask for the help of Agrippa?

Acts - Chapter 26

Questions:

1. How does Paul's defense before Agrippa show how much Paul was changed by Christianity?
2. This is the third time in Acts that Paul's conversion is described. How is this retelling different?
3. What does Agrippa think of Paul's defense?

Acts - Chapter 27

Questions:

1. Paul underwent quite an adventure at sea. How did he handle the adversities?
2. An angel appeared to Paul during the voyage. Angels appeared in many places in acts. What was the role of the angel?
3. The soldiers wished to kill the prisoners. The Centurion Julius stopped them. Why?

Acts - Chapter 28

Questions:

1. What can we learn from the incident with Paul and the viper.
2. What is the significance of the meeting of Paul and the "brethren" at the Three Taverns.
3. What do you think came of Paul in Rome?