

Acts

Luke begins the Book of Acts where he left off in his gospel. Acts records the initial fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) as it traces the beginnings and growth of the New Testament church. The book reveals the rapid expansion of the gospel, beginning in Jerusalem and spreading throughout the Roman Empire. Jesus' last words before His ascension (Acts 1:8) are perfectly realized in the Book of Acts and provide a concise outline for its contents: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem (chapters 1-7) and in all Judea and Samaria (chapters 8-12), and to the end of the earth (chapters 13-28)."

INTRODUCTION

Jesus' last recorded words have come to be known as the Great Commission: "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (1:8). The book of Acts is the story of the men and women who took that Commission seriously and began to spread the news of a risen savior to the most remote corners of the known world. The book is divided into three sections (chapters 1-7, chapters 8-12, chapters 13-28). Each section focuses on a particular audience, a key personality, and a significant phase in the expansion of the gospel message.

AUTHOR

The book of Acts was written by Luke. Sometimes referred to as the fifth gospel, it is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Chapter 1, verse 1 refers Theophilus to "the former treatise," that is, the Gospel of Luke and continues the story from where the Luke's gospel concludes.

As a second volume in a two-part work by Luke, this book probably had no separate title. However, all available Greek manuscripts designate it by the title *Praxeis*, "Acts," or by an expanded title like "The Acts of the Apostles." *Praxeis* was commonly used in Greek literature to summarize the accomplishments of outstanding men. While the apostles are mentioned collectively at several places in the story, this book really records the acts of Peter (chapters 1-12) and of Paul (chapters 13-28).

DATE & SETTING

About A.D. 63. Acts covers a period of approximately 30 years and is the inspired record of the beginnings of the church. "While Genesis records the origin of the physical universe, Acts records the origin of the spiritual body" (Dr. J. Vernon McGee). Suggested dates for the writing of Acts range from A.D. 62 to the middle of the 2nd century. Modern archaeological discoveries have confirmed the trustworthiness and precision of Luke as an historian and show that his work should be dated in the 1st century.

Luke's abrupt ending with Paul awaiting trial in Rome has led many to believe that Acts was completed prior to Paul's trial (A.D. 62). If it was written after this crucial event, why didn't Luke mention the outcome? Luke may have had a reason, but the simplest explanation of his silence is that Paul had not yet stood before Caesar. Acts gives no hint of the persecution under Nero (A.D. 64), Paul's death (A.D. 68), or the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70).