

**1. AUTHOR**

Q. What do you know about Acts?

A. Acts was written by the physician, Luke, perhaps before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. It commences: *'In my former book [i.e. Luke], Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach'* <sup>1</sup>

Its historical account ends with the apostle Paul under house arrest in Rome in circa 60 AD. When Dr Luke joins the story in 16:10, it then becomes an eye-witness account of the gospel entering Europe.

PROBABLE DATES OF WRITING (AD)				
MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN	ACTS
63 – 70	40 – 65	62 – 64	80 – 85	63 – 70

**2. ONE KEY THEME – 'BE MY WITNESSES TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH'**

It is clear from Acts 1:1 that Acts is a continuation of Luke's gospel. For many years the two books travelled as a pair known as 'Luke-Acts', but they are distinct books. It records the acts of Jesus (1:1), through his Spirit and his apostles.

Like Matthew 28:18-20 and John 20:21-23, Acts contains a 'church commission' in Acts 1:4-8.

**3. SHAPE & TEXTUAL STRUCTURE OF ACTS?**

Acts has a geographical 'shape' which tracks the spread of the gospel to Europe and Rome.



Q. What was required in order to force the gospel to be taken out of Judea? A. Acts 7; 8:1-5.

<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p.25: Sir William Ramsay ... was able to give reasons 'for placing the author of Acts among the historians of the first rank'. A.N. Sherwin-White (ancient history, Oxford University) ... described himself as 'a professional Graeco-Roman historian', and strongly affirmed the accuracy of Luke's background knowledge. He wrote of Acts: 'any attempt to reject its basic historicity ... must now appear absurd'.

TEXTUAL STRUCTURE OF ACTS			
CHAPTER: VERSE	PEOPLE	ETHNICITY	DETAIL
1:1-11	Jesus	Mainly Jewish <sup>2</sup> Christians & proselytes	'Church commission'
			Jesus' ascension
1:12-26	The 12 apostles		The apostle Matthias chosen by Jesus
2:1-41	The Holy Spirit		1 <sup>st</sup> Christian Pentecost (from Jesus 2:33)
2:42-5:42	Peter & the church		Peter & John (& Jesus 3:6)
			Ananias & Sapphira (& the Holy Spirit!)
6:1-8:40			Stephen & Philip (full of the Spirit)
9:1-31			Saul converted, 13 <sup>th</sup> apostle, to the Gentiles
9:32-11:18			Peter & Cornelius' family ( <b>11:9-18</b> )
11:19-12:25			The church in Antioch
13:1-14:28	Paul & his team	Gentile Christians added	Paul's 1 <sup>st</sup> missionary journey 46 – 48 AD
15:1-35			Synod at Jerusalem
15:36-18:22			Paul's 2 <sup>nd</sup> missionary journey 49 – 52 AD
18:23-21:17			Paul's 3 <sup>rd</sup> missionary journey
21:18-28-31			Paul takes the gospel to Rome

Shortly before the 'action' moves from Peter to Paul, there is a key verse:

*Acts 11:18 When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." ESV*

#### 4. KEY VERSE(S)

*Acts 1:7-8 [Jesus] said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. ESV*

#### 5. KEY GROUPS OF PEOPLE

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|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jesus Christ (1:1)</li> <li>2. His Spirit (2ff)</li> <li>3. His apostles, especially Peter and Paul</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Stephen and Philip</li> <li>5. Jews &amp; Gentiles</li> <li>6. Paul the Roman citizen (22:26; 25:11)</li> </ol> |
|--|---|

<sup>2</sup> Including some (circumcised) Samaritans and an Ethiopian (Acts 8).

## 6. GREAT EVENTS

1. Jesus' ascension (1)
2. The 'church commission' (1)
3. The first Christian Pentecost (2)
4. Many signs of the apostles (as per 2 Corinthians 12:12)
5. Ananias & Sapphira (5)
6. Persecution: Stephen's martyrdom (7)

7. Saul/Paul's conversion (9:18,27;22;26)
8. The so-called 'Gentile Pentecost' at Cornelius' house (10)
9. God kills Herod Antipas (12:23) in 44 AD
10. Paul's missionary journeys<sup>3</sup>(46–57 AD)
11. Paul's journey to, and preaching in, Rome (57-62 AD?)

## 7. THEMES

1. Jesus' acts (1:1)
2. The Holy Spirit's acts (2ff)
3. The apostles' acts<sup>4</sup> (3ff)
4. Boldness (**4:31, 28:31**)
5. Ecclesiology<sup>5</sup> (commission, apostles, elders, 'proto-deacons', synods,

- baptisms, church membership)
6. Persecution (4ff)
7. False teaching (15, 20)
8. A defence of Paul prior to trial in Rome
9. World evangelism

## 8. ACTS IN PRACTICE

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Acts 9:26-35 And when [Saul/Paul] had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to **join** the disciples. And they were all **afraid** of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.

<sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen **the Lord, who spoke to him**, and how at Damascus he had preached **boldly in the name of Jesus**. <sup>28</sup> So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, **preaching boldly in the name of the Lord**. <sup>29</sup> And he spoke and **disputed against the Hellenists** [culturally Greek Jews]. But they were seeking to **kill him**. <sup>30</sup> And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

<sup>31</sup> So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the **Holy Spirit**, it multiplied.

<sup>32</sup> Now as **Peter** went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. <sup>33</sup> There he found a man named Aeneas, **bedridden for eight years, who was paralysed**. <sup>34</sup> And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, **Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed**." And immediately he rose. <sup>35</sup> And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. *ESV*

**Q1.** What **themes** from section '7. Themes' feature in the passage above?

<sup>3</sup> Paul undoubtedly took a 4<sup>th</sup> missionary journey encompassing certainly Crete (Titus 1:5) and perhaps Spain (Romans 15:28).

<sup>4</sup> Irenæus (c.180 AD) may have been the first to refer to Acts as 'The Acts of the Apostles' (*Against Heresies*, Book 3, Chapter 13.3)

<sup>5</sup> i.e. Churchology, from the Greek ekklesia + logos.

The apostle Paul to the Ephesian elders (At Miletus):

Acts 20:18-35 ... "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, <sup>19</sup> serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; <sup>20</sup> how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, <sup>21</sup> testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. <sup>24</sup> ... <sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, of [among] which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood [or, blood of his own]. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. <sup>32</sup> And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. <sup>33</sup> I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel [clothes]. <sup>34</sup> You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. <sup>35</sup> In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" ESV

**Q2.** What themes from section '7. Themes' feature in the passage above?

**Q3.** Which is the most important chapter in Acts? Why?

1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 15, 29?

## 9. HOMEWORK

Read Acts; be inspired and motivated.

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