

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ACTS

¹ **PURPOSE:** To give an accurate account of the birth and growth of the Christian church.

² **AUTHOR:** No specific claim to authorship is contained in the text of the book itself. Tradition is supported by the internal evidence of style and subject matter—that the writer was likely the apostle Luke, a Gentile physician, and the friend and fellow traveler of Paul.

DATE WRITTEN: Between Ad. 63 and 70.

SETTING: ACTS is the connecting link between Christ's life and the life of the church – between the Gospels and the epistles [letters].

KEY VERSE: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be My witnesses, telling people about Me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”* (1:8). (Jesus)

SPECIAL FEATURES: ACTS is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke.

¹ Adapted from the Life Application Bible, New Living Translation, Large Print Edition, Tyndale, p. 2,362

² The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Zondervan Publishing House, ©1975, 1976, p. 39

¹ The book of ACTS begins with the outpouring of the promised Holy Spirit and the commencement of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This Spirit-inspired evangelism began in Jerusalem and eventually spread to Rome, covering most of the Roman Empire. The gospel first went to the Jews, but they, as a nation, rejected it. A remnant of Jews gladly received the Good News. But the continual rejection of the gospel by the vast majority of the Jews led to the ever-increasing proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles. This was according to Jesus' plan. The gospel was to go from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (1:8). This, in fact, is the pattern that the ACTS narrative follows. The glorious proclamation began in Jerusalem (chapters 1-7), went to Judea and Samaria (chapters 8 and following), and to the countries beyond Judea (11:19; 13:4 and on to the end of ACTS). The second half of ACTS is focused primarily on Paul's missionary journeys to many countries north of the Mediterranean Sea. He, with his companions, took the gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Some of the Jews believed, and many of the Gentiles received the Good News with joy. New churches were started and new believers began to grow in the Christian life.

As you read ACTS, put yourself in the place of the disciples; identify with them as they are filled with the Holy Spirit, and experience the thrill of seeing thousands respond to the gospel message. Sense their commitment as they give every ounce of talent and treasure to Christ. As you read, watch the Spirit-led boldness of these first-century believers, who through suffering and in the face of death take every opportunity to tell of their crucified and risen Lord. Then decide to be a twenty-first century version of those men and women of God.

² THE BLUEPRINT

A. PETER'S MINISTRY (ACTS 1:1—12:25)

1. Establishment of the church 2. Expansion of the church

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Peter preached boldly, and performed many miracles. Peter's actions demonstrate vividly the source and effects of the power the Holy Spirit wants to give us. Because of the Holy Spirit, God's people were empowered so they could accomplish God's purposes. The Holy Spirit is still available to empower believers today. We should turn to the Holy Spirit to give us the strength, courage and insight to accomplish the work God has called us to.

B. PAUL'S MINISTRY (ACTS 13:1-28:31)

1. First Missionary Journey 2. The Council at Jerusalem
3. Second Missionary Journey 4. Third Missionary Journey 5. Paul on Trial

Paul's missionary adventures show us the progress of Christianity. The gospel could not be confined to one corner of the world. This was a faith that offered hope to all humanity. We, too, should venture forth and share in this heroic task to share Christ with the world.

¹ Adapted from the Life Application Bible, New Living Translation, Large Print Edition, Tyndale, pp.2,362-2,263

² Adapted from the Life Application Bible, New Living Translation, Large Print Edition, Tyndale, p.2,363

MEGATHEMES in the BOOK of ACTS

CHURCH BEGINNINGS

Explanation – ACTS is the history of how Christianity was founded and organized and solved its problems. The community of believers began by faith in the risen Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, who enabled them to witness, to love and to serve.

Importance – New churches are continually being founded. By faith in Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the church can be a vibrant agent for change. As we face new problems, ACTS gives important remedies for solving them.

HOLY SPIRIT

Explanation – The church did not start or grow by its own power or enthusiasm. The disciples were empowered by God's Holy Spirit. He was the promised Advocate and Guide sent when Jesus went to heaven.

Importance – The Holy Spirit's work demonstrated that Christianity was supernatural. Thus, the church became more Holy Spirit conscious than problem conscious. By faith, any believer can claim the Holy Spirit's power to do Christ's work.

CHURCH GROWTH

Explanation – ACTS presents the history of a dynamic, growing community of believers from Jerusalem to Syria, Africa, Asia, and Europe. In the first century, Christianity spread from believing Jews to non-Jews in 39 cities and 30 countries, islands, or provinces.

Importance – When the Holy Spirit works, there is movement, excitement, and growth. He gives us the motivation, energy, and ability to get the gospel to the whole world. How are you fitting into God's plan for spreading the Gospel? What is your place in this movement?

WITNESSING

Explanation – Peter, John, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, and thousands more witnessed to their new faith in Christ. By personal testimony, preaching, or defense before authorities, they told the story with boldness and courage to groups of all sizes.

Importance – We are God's people, chosen to be part of His plan to reach the world. In love and by faith, we can have the Holy Spirit's help as we tell others of Jesus. Witnessing is also beneficial to us because it strengthens our faith as we respond to those who challenge us.

OPPOSITION

Explanation – Through imprisonment, beatings, plots, and riots, Christians were persecuted by both Jews and Gentiles. But the opposition became a catalyst for the spread of Christianity. Growth during times of oppression showed that Christianity was not the work of humans, but of God.

Importance – God can work regardless of opposition. If you are sharing the Gospel in a spirit of “gentleness and reverence” (see 1 Peter 3:15), when rejection from hostile unbelievers comes, trust God to work in the lives of those with whom you are interacting. Remember, people are not the enemy, Satan is!

¹ Adapted from the Life Application Bible, New Living Translation, Large Print Edition, Tyndale, pp.2,363-2,364