

Book Study: “The Acts of the Apostles” [Acts 1.1-11]

- **Second** book. Duology. Companion [sequel] to Luke. Luke, birth of Christ [30 years on earth]. Acts, birth of church [first 30 years of its history, AD 33-62].
- **Subtitle.** Earliest manuscripts have “Acts” [*deeds* or *actions*]. *Acts of the Apostles* was added later [AD 160-180]. A bit misleading as the focus is on *two* apostles only, Peter [1-12] and Paul [13-28].
- *Acts of the Holy Spirit* or *Acts of the Risen Christ* is better. Christ has gone above but is still working [1.1].

The Purpose of the Book

- To trace the *transition* from Judaism to Christianity. Judaism – an *earthly* and *exclusive* religion. *Ornate buildings. Priestly garments. Sacrifices. Decommissioned at cross.* Christ introduced something **better**.
- The church. Huge change [growing pains]. Movement from the old covenant to the new. From law to grace. From Jew to Jew & Gentile [inclusive]. Completely **new**. One “new man” [Eph. 2]. Christ the Head.
- Based on a better sacrifice, with better promises. Associated with heaven – all is *spiritual* and *eternal*.
- Huge *numerical* [spiritual] growth [120]. **Seven** progress reports [2.47. 5.14. 6.7. 9.31. 12.24. 16.5. 19.20].

The Pillars of the Book

- Key hangs at the door [1.8]. Witness to a risen Christ will spread globally. Two unequal sections.
Acts 1-2: The Pillars [Foundation] of Witness. Acts 3-28: The Progression [Furtherance] of Witness.
- Begins with **two** significant days that will *never* be repeated [1.2; 2.1]. The movement of divine Persons.

1. Day of Ascension [40th day]. A risen Christ at God’s right hand, who is coming again [1.9-11].

- Taken up! Passed *through* the heavens. Within the veil [Heb. 6]. Sat down *on right hand* of God [Heb. 10].
- God now sees us “in Him” – where He is now. His *standing* is ours. His *acceptability* is ours. His *life* is ours.

2. Day of Pentecost [50th day]. Spirit descended from heaven. Fulfills the promise of Christ [John 16.7].

- In OT times, the Spirit *came upon*. Now he resides permanently, *in* the church and individuals.
- 1. Christians [as a body] were *vitaly* linked to *Christ* the exalted Head in heaven. 2. Christians became *vitaly* linked to *one another* [members of a body]. I am not a *solo* individual; I function *with others*.
- All the witness [testimony] of the Acts depends on these **two** things. A Man directing operations at God’s right hand. And the Spirit *empowering* and *enabling* operations on earth.

The Progression of the Book

- Witness expands in *three* circles. Unique triad in each section [trinity at work]:

1. Acts 3-7: Primary witness in Jerusalem. Sanhedrin. Jewish high court. Settled political and religious disputes.

- Acts 4. Peter and John. Lame man made to walk. By what *power*? [4.7, 10]. Name – we *represent* Him.
- Acts 5. Peter and Apostles. Angel opened the prison. Who gave you *permission*? [5.28]. *We obey God*.
- Acts 7. Stephen. What do you think of this *place*? God is not confined to a place. Meeting place between God and men is a Person. “*The hour is coming, and now is, when true worshippers...*”

2. Acts 8-12: Persecution witness in Judea and Samaria [cf. 8.1, 4]. Witness is widening. Why? Persecution.

- Three great conversions. In Rom. 1-3, three groups are condemned. 1. Son of Ham – uncivilised *pagan* [Ethiopian]. 2. Son of Japheth – educated *Greek* [Cornelius]. 3. Son of Shem – religious *Jew* [Saul of Tarsus].

3. Acts 13-28: Pauline witness to “the ends of the earth”. Three *spheres* of witness.

- Acts 13-15. Sent out from **Antioch**. Gospel clearly *declared* [13.37-39]. And *defined* at Jerusalem council [Acts 15]. Circumcision was not necessary for salvation.
- Acts 16-20. Journeyed around the **Aegean**. Gospel is *powerful* [*dunamis*]. Whether *intellectual* Athens [17], *immoral* Corinth [18], or *idolatrous* Ephesus [19]. The gospel is the “power of God unto salvation.”
- Acts 21-28. **Apologetic** ministry. Gospel is *defended* [against every charge, anti-empire, anti-Jew]. He defends the gospel in Jerusalem, before Roman consuls [Felix, Festus], and even Caesar.
- The gospel is charged today. Irrelevant, soul’s eternal destiny. **Intolerant**, exclusive – but Christ is the Way; judgmental not inclusive – moral standards are set by God. **Irrational**, to believe a God who cannot lie?
- The **only hope** this world has is **Jesus Christ**. Hence, witnesses to Christ to the ends of the earth.