

Acts Of The Apostles

The fifth book in the New Testament Canon is The Acts of the Apostles. It is the single book in the historical division and is a sequel to Luke, one of the four accounts of the life of Christ. These books are both addressed to one "Theophilus" and the design of each is early stated. The following are the introductory remarks from Luke 1:1-4 "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus; that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou was instructed." In Acts 1:1-5, Luke writes: "The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which he was received up, after that he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles whom he had chosen...and, being assembled together with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which saith he, ye heard from me...."

Who Was Theophilus?

Nothing is known of Theophilus beyond that which is found in Luke and Acts. The word literally means "lover of God" and some suggest that "Theophilus" was not an actual person but stood for all believers. Such is a possibility. On the other hand, others are just as certain that Theophilus was a real person just as Timothy, Titus and Philemon. But whichever of the two positions is correct, one thing is certain: the two books make a significant contribution to the knowledge and faith of all believers.

Who Wrote Luke and Acts?

It is certain that the same individual wrote both Luke and Acts but who was that individual? Neither of the two volumes identify its author. Arriving at the authorship of the books is approached from two directions. There is almost universal agreement among early "church fathers" that Luke wrote the books and by a process of elimination Luke remains the most logical person to have been the author. In Acts certain portions clearly show the accounts were written by an "eyewitness". These passages are called by some "we" passages and whoever the author, he

indicates his presence when such incidents occurred. These sections begin in Acts 16:10 and continue through Acts 16:17. They pick up again in Acts 20:5 and continue through 21:18. They resume again in Acts 27:1 and continue to the book's conclusion. There were several who could not have been the author. Neither Barnabas, Silas nor Timothy could have written the books. The author had to be some one who traveled extensively with Paul and who traveled with him from Caesarea to Rome. We know from Paul's letters that one of his constant companions in Rome was Luke (Col. 4:14; Philemon 24; 2 Tim. 4:11).

When Was The Book Written?

Acts was written after Paul, as a prisoner, arrived in Rome, which was about AD 61. He spent two years there (duly noted in Acts 28:30-31), so the book had to be written some time after AD 63.

The Acts

Some call this book "The Acts of The Apostles". Actually, it is a book that gives acts of several besides the apostles. Neither Stephen, Philip nor Barnabas were apostles, but works of each of these men are included. On the other hand, not all the acts of the apostles are found herein. While all the apostles are named (Acts 1), the book tells only of some of Peter's works and to a lesser degree, some of the activities of James and John, but it includes no account of the labors of any of the rest of the Twelve. The book shows how the apostles and disciples fulfilled the Great Commission of Jesus to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15). Thus we see Jews from a dozen or more nations present at Pentecost, then the word spread to Judaea, to Samaria and Ethiopia. Dispersed disciples carried the Word to Damascus, Troas and Antioch. Paul's journeys carried him to many regions of Asia, then to distant reaches of Europe and finally to Rome itself. Paul even purposed to go further to Spain, but Acts gives no accounts of that journey if ever he was able to make it. By the time Paul wrote the Colossians he could say that the gospel had been "preached to every creature under heaven" (Col. 1:23). Primarily, however, the book records the preaching and labors of two apostles: Peter as he preached to the Jews and Paul as he preached to the Gentiles. Still, the accounts of each of these two are very abbreviated. When one reads of the trials of Paul which he recounts to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:23-27), it is evident that only a few of those trials he experienced were recorded in the book of Acts.

The book is also called the "Book of Conversions". It lists the conversions of many people. Some of these are the people of Pentecost (Acts 2); the Samaritans and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8); Paul (Acts 9), Cornelius (Acts 10); Lydia and the Jailor (Acts 16), the Corinthians (Acts 18) and the Ephesians (Acts 19).

The book of Acts is one of the most important books of the New Testament. Continue with us as we study summarized accounts from its pages.

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