

Introducing Acts

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." - Acts 1:8

Acts—Luke's Sequel:

Luke, the physician wrote two books of the New Testament. The Gospel of Luke is about the life of Jesus Christ. The book of Acts is about the spread of the church. In fact in the first century, Luke and Acts were together in one volume. It probably wasn't until the second century that Luke was put with the other three gospels and Acts received its current title.

Luke—What do we know?

Luke is mentioned three times in the New Testament:

- Colossians 4:10-14—Paul calls him a physician
- Philemon 23-24—Paul calls Luke a “fellow worker”
- 2 Timothy 4:11—Luke is the only one left with Paul to help him while in prison

Luke is the only Gentile author in the New Testament, writing a total of 28% of the New Testament (Luke—14% & Acts 14%). Ironically, Luke is said to have emphasized Jesus' Jewish roots more than any of the other gospels.

Purpose—Why was Acts written?

It was written to Theophilus (“lover of God”) to inform him about “all that Jesus began to do and to teach...” (Acts 1:1). It was probably written mostly to Jewish Christians for three reasons:

- 1—To show that the gospel was not an attack on the Jews or the Law.
- 2—To keep Christian Jews from falling away from Christianity as non-Christian Jews persecute the church.
- 3—To show that the gospel spread across the civilized world within one generation.

Given a Mission (Acts 1:4-9)

What did Jesus tell his disciples to do?

- Stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit

Where are they to be witnesses at?

- Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Luke has given the gospel story a twist. In the Gospel of Luke, Luke follows just over 30 years of Jesus' life beginning with Jesus' birth in light of the **Roman** leaders who were in power at the time (Herod—Luke 1:5, Augustus—Luke 2:1, and Tiberius—Luke 3:1). From there he wrote about Jesus' ministry in **Galilee**, then in **Judea**, then in **Samaria**, and eventually in **Jerusalem** where Jesus was crucified. In Acts Luke writes about the next 30 years. Only this time the order is flipped as the disciples start where Jesus left off—in **Jerusalem**. From there they will move to **Judea**, then to **Samaria**, and finally into the whole **Roman** world.

The apostles are told to start where they are and progressively work their way further and further out. It is like saying, “you will be my witnesses in your neighborhood, and in all of St. Petersburg and Pinellas County, to all of Florida and eventually to the whole world.

What does that tell us about where evangelism begins?

- It begins with the people we know and grows from there.
- We don't have to go to some far off country. We first go to those we are closest to.

Guaranteed Success—3 ways

Read Acts 1:1-3—*What is the first thing that guarantees their success in reaching the whole world?*

- Jesus has triumphed over death itself and now he offers life to the world.

How do you think actually having experienced the risen Jesus would make evangelism easier to do?

- It is easier to talk about things you actually saw—Jesus death, burial and resurrection.

Read John 20:24-29—Jesus is talking about us! *Even though we haven't seen Jesus or touched his nail scars, does Jesus also expect us to be witnesses today? Why?*

- We have the testimony of the apostles.
- We have seen God make a difference in our lives and the lives of others.

The second thing that guarantees their success is that God is the driving force by His Spirit. *How does power from the Holy Spirit guarantee success?*

- It is not up to their own strength or our own strength. It is up to God's.
- The kingdom is not initiated by man but by God.

How does taking the focus off of our own power, ability, or intelligence and relying on God's power make our mission easier?

- We don't have to do it all alone
- We don't have to have all the right answers.

Often we think that effective evangelism is based on our ability and so we avoid it fearing failure. In Acts, it is clear that it is God's ability and power that assures us of success. We are just His instruments.

We often avoid the term "witness" because some religious groups have twisted it or overused it but that is no reason to throw out a perfectly biblical word. *What is the role of a witness and how does that relate to evangelism?*

- A witness tells what they know.
- We tell people about Jesus as we know through the Bible
- We tell people about the difference Jesus has made in our lives.

Read Acts 1:9-11—*What is the third thing that guarantees this mission will be successful?*

- Jesus is going to return and make good on God's promises.

These two men, presumably angels, remind the apostles that Jesus is not gone forever. He is coming back. Luke 24:52 tells us, "Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." *What kind of joy do we have knowing that Jesus is coming back for us and how should that encourage us to reach the lost?*

There is no better place to start our story than with all the power of God as Father (1:7), Son (1:1-9), and Holy Spirit (1:8) all coming together to change the whole world. God has invested a lot into saving the world and He calls each of us to be witnesses to the world announcing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. In just 30 years these men changed the world because it was by God's power and not their own. *How can God use you to do the seemingly impossible?*

Close the session with prayer that God could use us more effectively to be his witnesses to a dying world. Pray that God will give us courage and boldness to reach the lost.