



Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together

Sixth Series: "The Top Edge" New Testament: Gospels
Lesson 22: Acts

I. Introduction

- A. Luke's gospel and the book of Acts are two parts of a single "whole." And, they can be seen as two parts of a continuous work. (Some commentators think Luke may have actually intended to write a three volume work).
- B. It is a book of transition...from the day of Pentecost (the day the Church age began) until a time when the church is family established in churches in Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia.
- C. It covers the time between the gospels and the epistles.
- D. It revolves around the lives of three men: Peter, Stephen and Paul. With Stephen as the link, it is Peter and Paul who are in sharp contrast.

"But Acts not only reveals the greatness of Paul's character; it also establishes the validity of his apostleship. This tendency of Acts is the more important when we consider how Paul's apostleship was compared disadvantageously with that of the Twelve in several quarters, as the Galatian and Corinthian correspondence testifies. Incidents therefore seem to be selected by Luke in order to show how Paul's apostleship was confirmed by the same signs as was Peter's. Does Peter heal a lame man (iii. 2 ff)? So does Paul (xiv. 8 ff). Has Peter's shadow healing power (v. 15)? So have Paul's kerchiefs (xix. 12). Does Peter exorcize (v.16)? So does Paul (xvi. 18). Has Peter a victorious encounter with a sorcerer (viii. 18 ff.)? So has Paul (xiii. 6 ff). Does Peter raise the dead (ix. 36 ff.)? So does Paul (xx. 9 ff)." (Acts of the Apostles, p. 33)

1. Peter:
 - a. Personal disciple of Jesus
 - b. A Palestinian Jew
 - c. Unlearned fisherman
2. Paul:
 - a. Was an apostle "born out of time" (I Cor. 15:8)
 - b. A Hellenistic Jew
 - c. A Scholar, a rabbi, an educated Pharisee

- E. Luke seems to be “balancing” Paul with Peter. Of the 18 addresses in Acts, seven are by Peter and seven by Paul. Stephen, James, Gamaliel and Tertullus have one each.
- F. This book is truly the “Acts of the Holy Spirit.”

“Rather than giving us a theological dissertation on the Holy Spirit, Luke tells the exciting story of who He is and what He does. In this way we are irresistibly drawn into an unfolding drama about real people in whom the Holy Spirit took up residence. The birth and growth of the church, the new Israel and the new creation, is the story line of the dramatist’s word portrait of the Lord’s strategy for human history.” (The Commentator’s Commentary: Acts, Lloyd, John Ogilvie, p 16)

II. Author

- A. Luke is the author (see notes on the Gospel of Luke). He is a careful historian who was an eyewitness to many of the events (see the “we” sections – Acts 16:10, 20:6-28), he also utilized Paul’s, Peter’s and Barnabas’ accounts.
- B. Again, Luke’s style is very good Hellenistic Greek. Acts has been called “the most literary part of the New Testament.”

III. Date

Because of its abrupt ending, Luke probably wrote Acts during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome perhaps around 63 AD. (Note: we believe Peter died in Rome c. 64 AD and Paul c. 66 AD).

IV. Place of writing

There seems to be three possibilities:

- A. Antioch (where Luke came into contact with Theophilus)
- B. Philippi – where Paul left Luke for a period of time
- C. Rome – the most logical choice because of the way the book ends.

V. Purpose or Theme

- A. “As a companion of Paul’s, Luke, like the other assistants of the Apostle, was a preacher. The supreme interest of his life was not medicine, nor the writing of history nor his friendship for Paul, but the promulgation of the gospel.” (Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles, Lenski, p. 8)

*Notice the “book ends” of Acts 1:8 vs. Acts 28:30.

- B. Luke seems focused on Rome. “The gospel spread out from Palestine in every direction, but the direction in which Luke is interested is the road that leads to Rome.” (Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles, p. 31)

VI. The divisions of the Book (according to C.H. Turner)

“Luke includes six summary statements or “progress reports” (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; and 28:31), each of which seems to conclude its own “panel” of material.

Taking all these literary and structural features into account, we may conclude that Luke developed his material in Acts along the following lines:

Introduction: The Constitutive Events of the Christian Mission (1:1 – 2:41)

Part I: The Christian Mission to the Jewish World (2:42 – 12:24)

Panel 1 – The Earliest Days of the Church at Jerusalem (2:42 – 6:7)

Summary Statement: “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” (6:7)

Panel 2 – Critical Events in the Lives of Three Pivotal Figures (6:8 – 9:31)

Summary Statement: “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers living in the fear of the Lord” (9:31).

Panel 3 – Advances of the Gospel in Palestine-Syria (9:32 – 12:24)

Summary Statement: “But the word of God continued to increase and spread” (12:24).

Part 2 – The Christian Mission to the Gentile World (12:25 – 28:31)

Panel 4 – The First Missionary Journey and the Jerusalem Council (12:25 – 16:5)

Summary Statement: “So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers” (16:5).

Panel 5 – Wide Outreach Through Two Missionary Journeys (16:6 – 19:20)

Summary Statement: “In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (19:20).

Panel 6 – To Jerusalem and Thence to Rome (19:21 – 28:31)

Summary Statement: “Boldly and without hindrance be preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ” (28:31).”

(The Acts of the Apostles, p. 234)

VII. Some Key Stories

- A. Jesus taken up into Heaven (1:1-11)
- B. Pentecost (2:1-13)
- C. Saul’s conversion (9:1-30)
- D. Council at Jerusalem (15:6-29)

- E. Disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (15:36-41)
- F. Paul's vision of the man from Macedonia (16:6-10)
- G. Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin (23:1-10)

VIII. Paul's Four Missionary Journeys (see attached maps)

- A. First Journey: Acts 13:2 to Acts 14:28 Through Asia Minor
Traveled with Barnabas and John Mark (Deserted 13:13)
- B. Second Journey: Acts 15:40 to Acts 18:22 Through Asia Minor and Greece
Traveled with Silas. Timothy joins them at Lystra (16:1-3)
- C. Third Journey: Acts 18-23 to Acts 21:15 Through Asia Minor and Greece
Traveled with Luke and others (19:22 and 20:4)
- D. Fourth Journey: Acts 23:31 – Acts 28:16 To Rome
Traveled with Luke and Aristarchus (See 27:2)

IX. So what?

Consider the encouragement and promise of Acts 1:10-11 for your own life.

Discussion Questions:

1. Compare the end of Luke's gospel to the first part of Acts. What do you observe?
2. Compare the description of the early church in Acts 2:42-47 to the activities and behaviors of your church. How do they compare?
3. Why do you think the book of Acts ends as it does?







