

Acts

Authorship

Luke, the sometime traveling companion of Paul and author of the Third Gospel, is the author of Acts. Evidence for this identification includes the opening paragraph, which refers to the author's earlier writing to Theophilus, the "we sections" in the book itself (16:10-40; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16), and reference to the book in early church writings.

Date

Evidence within the book itself argues for a date of A.D. 62. This would be near the end of Paul's first Roman imprisonment, thus accounting for its abrupt ending. From the tenor of the rest of Acts, it seems highly unlikely that Luke would have failed to mention either the persecution of Nero (A.D. 64) or the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) had they already occurred. Hemer notes the "immediacy" of the last two chapters along with the ending itself as support for an A.D. 62 dating.¹

Historical Setting

The events recorded take place between the years A.D. 33 (the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ) and A.D. 62. They concern the presentation and reception of the Christian faith in the areas of Judea, Syria and Cilicia, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia and Rome. The events of Acts take place in a world under the *pax Romana*, a world that was united in many ways, including language, trade and culture. However, it was also a world in tension especially with respect to Judaism in the various Roman provinces, particularly in and around Judea. These factors all play a part in events that God set in motion "in the fullness of time" (cf. Gal. 4:4).

Original Readers

Acts could easily have apologetic, evangelistic, and confirmatory value. Jews who were open to considering how the phenomenon of the church's growth and vitality related to the messianic ministry and claims of Jesus would benefit from reading Acts. Inquiring unbelievers could better appraise the power and universality of the Christian gospel by

¹ See Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)), 375-408 and John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 92-3.

reading Acts. Christians, especially those from a Jewish background, would benefit from Acts in countering various threats to their faith.

Occasion

There is no specific occasion mentioned that would have prompted the writing of Acts. Rather, it may be concluded that Luke, directed by the Holy Spirit, saw fit to chronicle the birth and progress of the church as an authoritative, permanent record of God's new work for a new time. Therefore, the "occasion" would be the newness of what Acts presents against the background of its roots in Judaism.

Special Issues

Acts as transition. The book of Acts has presented problems for the church down through the ages with respect to how certain doctrines and practices are to be applied. Since it is obviously a New Testament book, its authority and applicability to the church must be affirmed. However, Acts is also a book of transition. In it Luke shows how God's program shifted from one that was comprised of Jews alone, to one that was mostly Gentile. Along with this, the church moves from looking to Jerusalem as its center, to Gentile regional centers like Antioch and Rome. Acts also displays different patterns with respect to such things as the reception of the Holy Spirit. It is important to understand these transitions when it comes to establishing doctrine and practice for the church in the present age. Acts is crucial for understanding how the church became planted and established as an empire wide entity. However, when it comes to doctrine and church practice, the epistles are to control.

Message

From its beginning in Judaism under the leadership of the Apostle Peter, the church, as an extension of its Head, Jesus Christ, becomes, under the leadership of the Apostle Paul, a worldwide, largely Gentile entity despite Jewish opposition.

Outline

Book I: The Church Founded in Jerusalem	1:1–6:7
I. The Apostles are commissioned as witnesses of the Resurrected Lord.	1:1-26
A. Prologue: Luke sets the context of the Apostolic Witness.	1:1-3
B. The Apostles are commissioned as witnesses by the Lord Jesus.	1:4-11
C. The Apostles congregate in Jerusalem in obedience to the Lord Jesus.	1:12-14
D. The Apostles complete their number according to Scripture.	1:15-26
II. The Apostles begin to carry out their mission.	2:1–3:26
A. The Spirit manifests his presence to produce testimony to Christ.	2:1-47

1.	The Apostles experience the Spirit's enablement for supernatural testimony to Israel via unlearned languages.	2:1-13
2.	Peter explains the Spirit's gifting from prophetic Scripture.	2:14-40
3.	The church reflects the Spirit's presence in its behavior and testimony.	2:41-47
B.	The Son manifests his willingness and power to save and restore.	3:1-26
1.	Peter heals a lame man in Jesus' name.	3:1-10
2.	Peter proclaims forgiveness and times of refreshing through faith in Jesus' name.	3:11-26
III.	The Apostles encounter and defeat spiritual opposition.	4:1-6:6
A.	They prevail in the face of Sadducean threats against preaching in the name of Jesus.	4:1-31
1.	They are arrested and prohibited from preaching Jesus.	4:1-22
2.	They maintain their witness through prayer for boldness.	4:23-31
B.	They overcome a threat to the church's unity.	4:32-5:11
1.	Their witness is bolstered by Christian communion.	4:32-37
2.	Christian communion is preserved through exposure of deceitful covetousness.	5:1-11
C.	They prevail in the face of renewed Sadducean threats.	5:12-42
1.	They are imprisoned for their witness but miraculously released.	5:12-21
2.	They are tried but refuse to cease their witness.	5:22-32
3.	They are spared through the counsel of Gamaliel.	5:33-42
D.	They overcome another threat to Christian unity.	6:1-7
1.	There is a complaint over partisan ministry.	6:1
2.	There is a commitment to principled ministry.	6:2-6
IV.	Book One Summary: Disciples multiply in Jerusalem.	6:7
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I.	The climax and rejection of the witness in Jerusalem.	6:8-7:60
A.	Stephen comes into conflict with the council despite the Spirit's powerful manifestation in his life and ministry.	6:8-15
B.	Stephen incurs the wrath of the council over his reproach of the nation's history of unbelief.	7:1-60
1.	Stephen expounds on the Jewish nation's resistance to the Spirit.	7:1-43
a.	Abraham delayed in his response to God's call.	7:2-8
b.	The Patriarchs betrayed God's deliverer, Joseph.	7:9-16
c.	The Nation rejected Moses as God's deliverer.	7:17-36
d.	The Nation rejected Moses as God's prophet.	7:37-43
2.	Stephen explains the transitory nature of the Temple.	7:44-50
3.	Stephen excoriates the Nation for their murderous rebellion.	7:51-53
4.	Stephen experiences martyrdom for testifying of Jesus.	7:54-60
II.	The commencement of divine witness to Judea and Samaria.	8:1-40
A.	The church's presence is expanded as a result of persecution.	8:1-4
B.	The church's power is protected from selfish human ambition.	8:5-25
1.	The power of the Gospel is manifested.	8:5-13

2.	The purity of the Gospel is preserved.	8:14-25
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B.	Saul is encouraged by Ananias and receives strength.	9:10-19
C.	Saul is empowered by the Spirit and testifies of Jesus.	9:20-30
1.	Saul preaches Christ to the Jews at Damascus.	9:20-25
2.	Saul preaches Christ to the Jews at Jerusalem.	9:26-30
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A.	Peter demonstrates the source of his ministry authority and power.	9:32-43
1.	In the restoration of a paralytic.	9:32-35
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1.	Peter is divinely selected in response to Gentile need.	10:1-8
2.	Peter is divinely prepared with respect to his Jewish sensibilities.	10:9-20
3.	Peter is obedient to his divine summons to Gentile ministry.	10:21-33
4.	Peter is effective in his divinely appointed opportunity.	10:34-48
C.	Peter defends his ministry among the Gentiles.	11:1-18
1.	He had been divinely instructed and directed in his ministry.	11:1-14
2.	God had sovereignly blessed with the gift of the Spirit.	11:15-18
II.	The establishment of a new center for Gentile evangelism at Antioch.	11:19-30
A.	The church had been established through the preaching of those scattered through persecution.	11:19-21
B.	The church is strengthened through the ministry of Barnabas and Saul.	11:22-26
C.	The church becomes energetic in ministering to needs in Judea.	11:27-30
III.	The eruption of hostility against the church in Jerusalem.	12:1-23
A.	Herod manifests the spirit of Judaism in his hostility against the church.	12:1-4
1.	Herod kills James.	12:1-2
2.	Herod imprisons Peter.	12:3-4
B.	Herod is thwarted by the Lord's sovereign protection of Peter.	12:5-19
C.	Herod is judged for his blasphemous pride.	12:20-23
IV.	Book Three Summary: The word of God grows and multiplies.	12:24
Book Four: The Establishment of the Pauline Apostleship		12:25-16:5
I.	Paul is established in the pattern of his divine mission.	12:25-13:52
A.	Paul and Barnabas are selected by the Spirit for his pre-ordained mission.	12:25-13:3
B.	Paul is enabled by the Spirit for his ministry of redemption.	13:4-12
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1.	Paul proclaims Jesus as Messiah to the Jews and is rejected.	13:13-47

	2. Paul's proclamation to the Gentiles is welcomed.	13:48-52
II.	Paul is exemplary in his response to the human condition.	14:1-28
	A. Paul and Barnabas experience positive response and hostile opposition to the word of truth.	14:1-7
	B. Paul and Barnabas express humble restraint to excessive adulation.	14:8-18
	C. Paul experiences physical suffering for his persistent continuation.	14:19-20
	D. Paul and Barnabas exhibit steadfast concern in caring for the church.	14:21-28
	1. They take responsibility for encouraging recent converts.	14:21-23
	2. They are responsive to the encouragement of their sending assembly.	14:24-28
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	A. The church is confronted with a challenge to the gospel of grace.	15:1-5
	B. A council is convened to deliberate the challenge to the gospel.	15:6-21
	1. Peter confesses the inclusion of the Gentiles apart from Law.	15:6-11
	2. Paul & Barnabas report God's work among the Gentiles.	15:12
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	C. A communication is conveyed to answer the challenge to the gospel.	15:22-16:4
	1. The communication is drafted by the whole church.	15:22-29
	2. The communication is delivered by the selected messengers.	15:30-16:4
	a. Paul and Barnabas encourage the church at Antioch.	15:30-35
	b. Paul and Silas encourage the churches in Syria & Cilicia.	15:36-41
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I.	The Holy Spirit sovereignly directs in the seeking of individuals.	16:6-40
	A. The Spirit provides guidance through circumstance and vision.	16:6-10
	B. The Spirit provides access to willing hearers.	16:11-15
	C. The Spirit provides opportunity for witness through the suffering of submitted servants.	16:16-34
	1. Suffering results from committed witness.	16:16-24
	2. Suffering displays a calm resolve.	16:25-29
	3. Suffering delights in spiritual opportunity.	16:30-34
	D. The Spirit provides protection for the fledgling church.	16:35-40
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	A. Jewish hostility preempts Paul's ministry at Thessalonica and Berea.	17:1-15
	B. Pagan apathy resists Paul's ministry at Athens.	17:16-34
	C. Gentile response sees Paul's continuance at Corinth.	18:1-17
III.	The Holy Spirit sovereignly directs the instruments of ministry.	18:18-19:19
	A. Paul introduces himself to ministry at Ephesus.	18:18-23
	1. Priscilla and Aquila remain for Paul at Ephesus.	18:18-19
	2. Paul returns to Jerusalem and retraces his ministry.	18:20-23
	B. Apollos ministers in Ephesus and Corinth.	18:24-28
	C. Paul exalts the Lord Jesus in Ephesus.	19:1-19
	1. Paul completes the preparatory work of Apollos.	19:1-7

2.	Paul ministers in the synagogue, then the school of Tyrannus.	19:8-10
3.	Paul magnifies his service to Jesus in Ephesus.	19:11-19
IV.	Book Five Summary: The word of the Lord grows mightily and prevails.	19:20
Book Six: Paul Carries the testimony of Christ to Rome.		19:21–28:31
I.	Paul’s Final Witness to Jerusalem is Repudiated.	19:21–23:10
A.	Paul’s resolve to visit Rome via Jerusalem is attended by a mixed response to his Gentile ministry.	19:21–20:12
1.	Paul’s witness is repulsed by Gentile idolatry at Ephesus.	19:21-41
2.	Paul’s witness is an encouragement to Gentile Christianity.	20:1-12
B.	Paul’s resolve to visit Jerusalem reveals the intensity of his service for the cause of Christ.	20:13–21:14
1.	Paul’s life as a shepherd is a model for the Ephesian elders.	20:13-38
2.	Paul’s constancy at the prospect of peril bears witness to his commitment to Christ.	21:1-14
C.	Paul’s resolve to visit Jerusalem ends in failure at any prospect for the nation’s repentance.	21:15–23:10
1.	Paul’s effort to conciliate the Jews in the Temple fails.	21:15-36
a.	Paul is counseled by the church to seek conciliation.	21:15-25
b.	Paul is condemned as a breaker of the law and defiler of the Temple.	21:26-36
2.	Paul’s effort to confront the Jews with the truth fails.	21:37–23:10
a.	Paul fails to convince the mob with his testimony.	21:37–22:22
b.	Paul fails to convince the rulers with his defense.	22:23–23:10
II.	Paul’s Future Witness to Rome is Readied.	23:11–26:32
A.	The Lord’s will for Paul prevails over Jewish treachery.	23:11-35
1.	The Lord’s intentions supercede human scheming.	23:11-22
2.	The Lord’s instruments serve human needs.	23:23-35
B.	The Lord’s way with Paul produces Christian testimony.	24:1–26:32
1.	Paul’s accusers give opportunity for witness to Felix.	24:1-27
a.	Paul is accused of creating dissension among the Jews and of defiling the Temple.	24:1-9
b.	Paul preaches the resurrection of Christ to Felix.	24:10-21
c.	Paul is detained by Felix out of greed.	24:22-27
2.	Paul’s patient endurance gives occasion for witness to Festus and Agrippa.	25:1–26:32
a.	Paul appeals to Caesar in the face of Jewish maneuvering.	25:1-12
b.	Paul appears before Agrippa.	25:13–26:32
1)	Paul’s case is set before Agrippa.	25:13-27
2)	Paul’s confession is given to Agrippa.	26:1-23
3)	Paul’s appeal is dismissed by Agrippa.	26:24-32
III.	Paul’s Fruitful Witness to Rome is Realized.	27:1–28:31
A.	Paul triumphs in his travel to Rome.	27:1–28:15
1.	Paul overcomes the Storm.	27:1-44
2.	Paul overcomes the Snake.	28:1-15

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| B. | Paul triumphs in his testimony to Rome. | 28:16-31 |
| 1. | Paul consummates his testimony to the Jews. | 28:16-29 |
| 2. | Paul continues his witness to all who came. | 28:30-31 |

Message

From its beginning in Judaism under the leadership of the Apostle Peter, the church, as an extension of its Head, Jesus Christ, becomes, under the leadership of the Apostle Paul, a worldwide, largely Gentile entity despite Jewish opposition.

Argument

Acts traces the formation of the church, the body of Christ, from its beginning with a small band of Jewish disciples who become the spearhead for a worldwide body that is predominantly Gentile. Acts displays the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the formation, equipping, building and spread of the church throughout the Roman empire. In the same way that Luke's Gospel presents a universal gospel with Jewish roots, so Acts presents the church as the new instrument of worldwide proclamation of salvation, a movement that grew out of and became distinct from Judaism.

Book I: The Church Founded in Jerusalem (1:1–6:7).

While Acts 1:8 gives a summary statement of God's creation and deployment of a special group of witnesses, it is probably inadequate for determining the overall structure of the book. In the first place, Acts does not specifically describe the outward radiation of the Gospel (e.g., the church had long been established in Rome before Paul arrives in A.D. 60). Secondly, Paul, who becomes the center of Luke's treatment, is not even present at the Acts 1:8 commission. The content of Acts requires an organizational scheme which incorporates the change in God's program as well as its advance. While Acts 1:8 provides a geographical plot, the summary statements of the church's progress, given at 6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 16:5, and 19:20 serve as structural markers of the transition in God's kingdom manifestation program from Israel to the church.

I. The Apostles are commissioned as witnesses of the Resurrected Lord (1:1-26).

Luke's prologue (1:1-4) introduces three main ideas that are foundational to the rest of the book: (1) chosen representatives (apostles) who had received commandments . . . (2) who were eyewitnesses of the resurrection . . . and (3) who had received information about the kingdom of God. These apostles will begin and carry out their specialized ministry

by means of the Holy Spirit in Whom they would participate in a new way (1:4-8). In fulfillment of John the Baptist's promise (John 1:33) Jesus would place them into union with Himself by the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13) and would gift them by the Spirit for their service of witness. In a very real sense then, Acts becomes the Book of the Work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus declines to answer directly the disciples' question about restoring Israel's kingdom. The Old Testament seems to connect the coming of the Spirit with the coming of the Kingdom.² However, until Israel positively responds to Messiah the actual timing of advent of the Kingdom is left in suspension. What the apostles are to give attention to is their commissioned testimony to the resurrected Lord Jesus (1:8). The ascension serves as closure for the first advent and as the promise of the Christ's return (cf. 1:11). The disciples' congregating in Jerusalem in anticipation of the promised Spirit coupled with their action in completing the number of witnesses according to Old Testament prophecy demonstrate that the new program is in complete accord with God's ancient promises concerning the Messiah and His mission.

II. The Apostles begin to carry out their mission (2:1–3:26).

The fulfillment of Jesus' promise of the Spirit results in ministry to Israel in accordance with their prophesied destiny.

A. The Spirit manifests his presence to produce testimony to Christ (2:1-47).

1. The Apostles experience the Spirit's enablement for supernatural testimony to Israel via unlearned languages (2:1-13). Pentecost, one of the three major Feasts of Israel's religious calendar, is connected with harvest and firstfruits (cf. Lev. 23:17; Num. 28:26). Acts 2 commences God's harvest program for the new age. Here the Holy Spirit begins his work of baptizing members into the body of Christ, thus creating the church.³ He also fills this particular group for supernatural witness to Messiah. The filling of the Spirit in Acts seems always to be connected with inspired proclamation of sovereignly selected witnesses. In this case the witness results from the supernatural ability to speak in the unlearned languages of certain Diaspora Jews who were present in Jerusalem for the feast. The result was an undeniable manifestation of God's presence and a harvest of 3000 souls.

² Cf. Isa. 32:15-20; 44:3-5; Ezek 39:28-29; Joel 2:28-31; Zech 12:8-10.

³ Compare the anticipation of Matt. 16:18 and Acts 1:5 with the reflection of Acts 11:15-16 and the description in 1 Cor 12:13.

2. Peter explains the Spirit's gifting from prophetic Scripture (2:14-40). Peter's explanation of this remarkable witness revolved around God's promise to pour out His Spirit in the last days as a necessary prelude to the removal of Israel's reproach and the full restoration of her intended blessing (cf. Joel 2). The fact that this is somehow a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy seems to be the intent of Peter's "this is that" introduction (2:16). However, this is far from saying that the kingdom as presented in the prophetic Scriptures had been inaugurated. What is certain, is that the ministry of the Spirit that is essential to such a kingdom had begun, with the intimation that the fulfillment of the kingdom promises might be at hand. The fact that Israel refused to respond as a whole brought the prolonged postponement of the kingdom. The crux of this issue lies in a proper evaluation of the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, whom Peter clearly presents as Messiah, son, and yet also Lord, of David, resurrected for eternal rule on David's throne. Israel's special culpability in his death meant that they would not only have to believe in Jesus as Messiah, but publicly identify with Him in baptism in order to experience the totality of the Spirit's benefits (2:36-39). In order to avoid the judgment coming upon Israel, they would have to take a public stand with the one Whom they had crucified (3:40). Many responded to this message, but the majority did not. Titus's destruction of Jerusalem twenty-seven years later punctuated Peter's solemn warning.

3. The church reflects the Spirit's presence in its behavior and testimony (2:41-47). In further demonstration of this truth, the Spirit is manifested mightily in the fledgling Jewish church. The new believer's public confession of Christ in baptism (2:41) gives rise to fervency in worship, community and witness (2:42-47).

B. The Son manifests his willingness and power to save and restore (3:1-26).

As a prelude to a re-offer of the kingdom to Israel, Peter heals a lame man outside the Temple (3:1-10).⁴ In response to the attention this receives, Peter delivers a sermon that centers on the nation's need for repentance so that its sins might be forgiven and so that "times of refreshing may come. . . and that [the Lord] may send Jesus Christ. . . whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things. . ." (4:19-21). Whether or not

⁴ This miracle is called a "sign" (shmei'on) by the Jewish leaders in Acts 4:16. It signifies Jesus' ability to heal and restore to fullness, which pertains not only to the individual in his relationship with God but also to the nation.

Peter is making an offer of the kingdom at this point,⁵ it is clear that the fortune of the nation of Israel is tied to its acceptance of or continued rejection of Jesus as Messiah (3:22-26). The fact that the nation as a whole continues in its unbelief, climaxing in the persecution of Herod in chapter 12, results in the church becoming a Gentile program not centered in Jerusalem.

III. The Apostles encounter and defeat spiritual opposition (4:1–6:6).

Jewish opposition and Satanic hostility both intensify as a result of apostolic proclamation. Yet they are powerless to halt the spread of the gospel and the growth of the church. Sadducean threats only result in prayer for boldness and the filling of the Spirit for witness (4:1-31). A threat to the church's unity over a violation of the sanctity of Christian fellowship is countered by apostolic action and divine judgment (4:32–5:11). More threats and mistreatment by the Sadducees only result in further teaching and the proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah; all this occurs in the temple at that (5:12-42)! Finally, an incident of murmuring among the Hebrew Christians is cut short by means of apostolic action (6:1-6).

IV. Book One Summary: Disciples multiply in Jerusalem (6:7).

Nothing is able to resist the apostolic witness and resulting response to the truth (cf. Matt 16:18). The church has become firmly established in Jerusalem largely through the ministry of Peter. However, Israel will not repent as a nation no matter how great a demonstration of the power and purpose of the resurrected Lord it may be granted.

Book Two: The Church expands from Jerusalem (6:8–9:31).

Once it becomes clear that the nation is continuing in its stubborn unbelief, the Holy Spirit begins to expand beyond Jerusalem. Book Two commences with the martyrdom of a Spirit-filled preacher (though not an “apostolic witness” per se) and concludes with the conversion of a “non-apostolic apostle” tapped for witness to the Gentile nations.

I. The climax and rejection of the witness in Jerusalem (6:8–7:60).

As a product of apostolic testimony, Stephen embodies all that a disciple is called to be. He is full of faith and the Holy Spirit (6:5), open and energetic in his confession, and steadfast in his commitment. However in his case, as later with James, it will be through death for the name of Christ that the church will be most benefited. Stephen's sermon is one of rebuke and judgment rather than an appeal for repentance (cf. 7:51-53). Increasing

⁵ In support of the affirmative see Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck eds. (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 361-62. That it is not an offer of the kingdom is argued by Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton: Scripture Press Publications, Victor Books, 1990), 275-76.

resistance to the Spirit, detected even in Abraham's delayed obedience, has come to its peak in Israel's rejection of Jesus (7:1-43). Its reliance on the temple is a false hope since it is but the Lord's footstool (7:44-50).

II. The commencement of divine witness to Judea and Samaria (8:1-40).

A. The church's presence is expanded as a result of persecution (8:1-4).

Stephen's death sets off a great persecution which results in a scattering of believers throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1). The persecution is extended through the efforts of Saul (8:3), though this only results in the word being spreading ever further (8:4).

B. The church's power is protected from selfish human ambition (8:5-25).

Once again the spread of the gospel and the building of the church are seen to be irrepressible in that another non-apostolic miracle worker, Philip, takes over where Stephen leaves off (8:5-8). Samaritans, considered defiled and unacceptable by the Jews, are made fit for the kingdom. The power of the Gospel is dramatically demonstrated and the gift of the Holy Spirit is communicated through Peter and John, apostles from Jerusalem, a move designed to avoid any schism in the fledgling church (8:14-16). However, another internal threat to the church is immediately presented. Simon, a recent convert, still powerfully controlled by old fleshly habits, must be rebuked for his covetous designs with respect to the Spirit's power. Such lusts would do great damage in the church in the future but not in this most delicate stage of its infancy.

C. The church's prospect is indicated through the response of a Gentile (8:26-40).

Not only would the church expand to its near-kin, the Samaritans, it would also eventually extend its influence into the Gentile world. An Ethiopian eunuch, having just visited Jerusalem for the purpose of worship, finds, on his way away from that great city, what he had been truly seeking. Philip's proclamation and the Ethiopian's immediate identification through baptism become the prototype for the future Gentile mission. The Holy Spirit is sovereignly directing and empowering willing human instruments in the unfolding of the new program of the age.

III. The conversion of a divine witness for the ends of the earth (9:1-30).

This section has been called the Book of the Three Witnesses.⁶ Stephen has testified in Jerusalem with negative results. Philip has carried the gospel to Samaria and sent

⁶ Zane C. Hodges, "Acts," unpublished class notes, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1973.

it to Ethiopia with good results. Now the witness who will be responsible for the definitive form of God's kingdom program for the age will be introduced.

A. Saul is encountered by Jesus near Damascus and believes (9:1-9).

The manner of Paul's conversion is crucial. He has a direct encounter with the Lord Jesus on the basis of which he believes and is saved. This will qualify him to pick up and fulfill the original apostolic commission to bear inspired witness to the "end of the earth" (Acts 1:8) as an apostle himself.

B. Saul is encouraged by Ananias and receives strength (9:10-19).

Paul's immediate experience in Damascus serves to give him a correct foundation in establishment and growth in the faith, things which are fully developed in his later epistles.⁷ He is presumably first informed of his commission through Ananias who had become God's agent of confirmation and encouragement (cp. 9:15-16 with 9:6).

C. Saul is empowered by the Spirit and testifies of Jesus (9:20-30).

Paul immediately proclaims Jesus as the Son of God in the synagogues of Damascus, persuasively demonstrating the Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. As far as the record of Acts is concerned, Paul flees Damascus "after many days," due to a murderous Jewish plot, and then visits Jerusalem (9:23-26). There he visits the apostles, aided by Barnabas, and testifies in and around Jerusalem (9:27-28). However, once again he has to flee for his life (v. 29). A straight forward reading of Acts seems to indicate that this visit to Jerusalem was soon after his conversion.⁸ The effect of Luke's account (and of the events themselves) is to confirm the unique and genuine conversion of the formerly fierce opponent of Christianity as the prelude to his ministry as apostle to the Gentiles.

IV. Book Two Summary: The churches of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria experiences peace and are multiplied (9:31).

This is the most extensive of the section summaries confirming that the church has become firmly established on Jewish soil. The next great movement is about to begin, the spread of the church to the end of the earth.

⁷ See, e.g., Rom. 6; Gal. 3-5; 2 Cor. 3-4.

⁸ The issues of chronological reconciliation with the visits as reported in Galatians will be dealt with there.

Book Three: The climax of Peter's Apostolic witness (9:32–12:24).

Book three is not so much a conclusion to the work of testimony in Palestine as it is a bridge to the great Gentile mission to be undertaken by Paul. It also provides the circumstantial instrument used by God to propel the church program out of Palestine and to the end of the earth, namely the persecution by Herod.

I. The establishment of a new missionary pattern for Gentiles at Caesarea (9:32–11:18).

The two miracles of restoration (to health and life) serve to signify the spiritual benefit that the Lord will soon bestow on the household of Cornelius through Peter (9:31-43). Peter overcomes his aversion to that which he had previously considered unclean so that he might take the gospel to the Gentiles (10:1-48). Peter's defense of his ministry to Cornelius confirms to the Jerusalem church God's intent to bless the Gentiles in Christ just as he had the Jews, including the full gifting of the Holy Spirit (11:1-18). This becomes the pattern for Gentile evangelism and reception of the Spirit for the rest of the church age.

II. The establishment of a new center for Gentile evangelism at Antioch (11:19-30).

The new objects and new ministry will require a new base of operation, especially since Jerusalem will become increasingly hostile to the Way, and will eventually be destroyed by the Romans. The church at Antioch, established by those who went out from Jerusalem (11:19-30), is built up and encouraged by Barnabas and Paul, the new apostle (11:22-26). However, there is to be no schism with the mother church, which Antioch's ministry of relief underscores (11:27-30).

III. The eruption of hostility against the church in Jerusalem (12:1-23).

Though this incident may be out of order chronologically (Herod probably died in A.D. 44), it serves to confirm Jerusalem's serious, yet ultimately ineffectual, hostility to the church. The Lord is sovereign in the deployment of his instruments and in the establishment of the church. One apostle furthers the church's expansion through his blood, and another through God's miraculous protection. The judgment of Herod serves as a warning of the awful punishment to come upon Israel for its continued rejection of Messiah (12:20-23).

IV. Book Three Summary: The word of God grows and multiplies (12:24).

In spite of even the most severe opposition, the word of God continues to grow and multiply (12:24). Yet its day of expansion on Jewish soil is coming to an end. Peter has been removed to Caesarea (12:19). The great Gentile expansion is about to begin.

Book Four: The Establishment of the Pauline Apostleship (12:25–16:5).

In light of Israel's continued rejection of the truth, the gospel will now be carried to the end of the earth. The chosen instrument for the foundation of that program has been in preparation for some time (about 14 years). The Holy Spirit will now propel his prepared tool into the Gentile mission field.

I. Paul is established in the pattern of his divine mission (12:25–13:52).

Having been divinely selected and officially commended for service, Paul and Barnabas travel to Cyprus where the pattern of Paul's ministry finds expression (12:25–13:12), namely initial preaching in the synagogues (13:5), contact with responsive Gentiles (cf. 13:6-7), demonstration of God's confirmatory power (13:11), and Gentile belief (13:12). This pattern is repeated in Pisidian Antioch, at which Luke includes what must have been Paul's characteristic message to those influenced by the truth as known by Israel (cf. 13:13-52). Response to his message becomes characteristic of the rest of Paul's ministry: positive response by some Jews (13:43), hostile opposition by the majority of Jews (13:45), and Paul's turning to the Gentiles (13:46-52).

II. Paul is exemplary in his response to the human condition (14:1-28).

Paul's success as a missionary strategist is matched by his sincere and sacrificial response to the spiritual plight of those to whom he ministered. Despite repeated opposition and mistreatment, and resisting the temptation of self-promotion (cf. 14:8-18), Paul and Barnabas maintain a steadfast commitment to the spiritual establishment and strengthening of the believers (14:21-23). They also take care to encourage their commending assembly (14:27-28).

III. Paul is exonerated in his ministry of the gospel of grace (15:1–16:4).

The conclusion of Book Four serves to establish the accuracy and purity of the gospel that Paul had been preaching to the Gentiles. The doctrinal challenge mounted by those who would add the keeping of Law as requirement for salvation (15:1-5) is settled by a council of the mother church at Jerusalem (15:6-21). This had been anticipated by the prophetic Scriptures (vv. 16-17) and is seen as fulfilled in the experience of Peter (vv. 7-11). Paul is vindicated in his gospel and the church is united in its core affirmation. The only compromise concerns the need for unity through deference to some Jewish observances (cf. 15:20, 29). The way is now clear for expansion of the Gentile ministry with Paul as its primary representative. This final shift is marked by Luke's inclusion of the incident with

Mark whereby Barnabas, who had been the senior partner in the recent missionary journey, fades from view (for the purposes of the message of Acts) (15:36-41). This section ends with a new missionary team poised for a new missionary effort (16:1-5).

IV. Book Four Summary: The churches are strengthened in the faith and increase in number (16:5).

This fourth positive statement about the church's strength and growth confirms the fact that this new missionary team is in complete compliance with the Spirit's intent and method.

Book Five: The Lord Jesus Christ is Exalted Among the Gentiles (16:6–19:20).

The new mission activity once again reveals the sovereign direction of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately success is not dependent upon the human instrument but upon divine initiative and enablement.

I. The Holy Spirit sovereignly directs in the seeking of individuals (16:6-40).

Forbidden by the Spirit to preach in Asia or Bithynia, Paul is directed by a man of Macedonia to a woman named Lydia and a jailer of Philippi. By divine direction and divine appointment God brings to Himself those whom He has prepared.

II. The Holy Spirit sovereignly directs in the locales of emphasis (17:1–18:17).

The missionary strategist seeks those fields that may yield the most fruit. The Holy Spirit is ever involved in such discovery. Having completed his appointed ministry at Philippi, Paul is driven from Thessalonica (17:1-9) and Berea, even though the latter indicated great promise (cf. 17:11). Even an opportunity with the wisest of the wise at Athens failed to result in a sustainable ministry beachhead (17:16-34). Rather, it is ignoble Corinth (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-31) that is divinely prepared (cf. 18:2-3) for extended ministry. Here Jewish opposition is actually turned back upon itself (18:12-17).

III. The Holy Spirit sovereignly directs the instruments of ministry (18:18–19:19).

Not only is the Holy Spirit sovereign in the seeking of individuals and the selection of locales, he is also sovereign in his choosing and deployment of the vessels of service. This is seen in the interaction of Paul with Priscilla and Aquilla, and in their interaction with Apollos in Paul's absence. These interactions are all interwoven with the movement between Corinth and Ephesus, the next great center of Pauline effort (18:18–19:1). Though it is Paul who is the spearhead of the Gentile mission, he does not work in

isolation nor independently. The Spirit's methods are always thus. The result of such multiple ministry is the exaltation of Christ in Ephesus (19:11-19).

IV. Book Five Summary: The word of the Lord grows mightily and prevails (19:20).

Vindication of the Spirit's sovereign direction comes in the form of the word's growth and power. And yet opposition will signal yet another horizon of the divine will.

Book Six: Paul Carries the testimony of Christ to Rome (19:21–28:31).

This last section of Acts contains the most diverse ministry situations and covers the greatest span in terms of time and travel. In this manner Luke captures a sense of the onrushing purpose of the Spirit to see the Gentile program spread to the extremities of the world.

I. Paul's Final Witness to Jerusalem is Repudiated (19:21–23:10).

Luke records Paul's intent to visit Jerusalem and then Rome (19:21) after which he chronicles the method of the Spirit to accomplish that intention.

A. Paul's resolve to visit Rome via Jerusalem is attended by a mixed response to his Gentile ministry (19:21–20:12).

Perhaps the riot at Ephesus serves to signal the fact that no field is immune from Satanic counterassault, no matter how powerfully the gospel has been manifested. Paul must find his way to the center of the empire and thus fulfill his establishment of the Gentile program for the age. However, the gospel's presence is firmly entrenched (20:1-12).

B. Paul's resolve to visit Jerusalem reveals the intensity of his service for the cause of Christ (20:13–21:14).

The rapidity of motion and avoidance of potential causes of delay underscore the seriousness of Paul's intent. His life has been a model of Christ-like shepherding (20:13-38), and now his heart longs to bear witness once more to Jerusalem, no matter what the risk (21:1-14).

C. Paul's resolve to visit Jerusalem ends in failure at any prospect for the nation's repentance (21:15–23:10).

Despite Paul's blameless life and the Jerusalem church's desire to convert unbelieving Israel (21:15-25), Paul is condemned as a lawbreaker and a defiler of the temple (21:16-36). Under Roman protection he is afforded the opportunity to make one last appeal to the Jews on behalf of Jesus (21:37–22:21). Israel's rejection forces Paul to invoke his Roman citizenship in order to fulfill his mission to Rome (22:22-29). The most that can be

accomplished in Jerusalem is to highlight the disunity and confusion existent within Judaism (22:30–23:10).

II. Paul's Future Witness to Rome is Readied (23:11–26:32).

The Spirit's final preparations for Paul's witness to Rome will not be hurried nor will they be haphazard. Once again Caesarea becomes the staging place for Gentile mission.

A. The Lord's will for Paul prevails over Jewish treachery (23:11-35).

The Spirit's protective sovereignty comes to the fore once again. Paul is assured of the Lord's ultimate purposes for him (23:11), is rescued from a Jewish plot (23:12-22), and is sent to the Roman governor at Caesarea (23:23-35).

B. The Lord's way with Paul produces Christian testimony (24:1–26:32).

In response to the Jewish charge of dissension and defiling the temple, Paul has one last opportunity to affirm that his faith is in complete accord with the prophetic Scriptures (24:1-21; cf. esp. vv. 14-15). Paul's confinement thwarts the Jews and works the purpose of God (24:22-27). After two years Festus examines Paul at Jewish insistence. Once again Israel spurns God's patient extension of grace, forcing Paul to appeal to Caesar (25:1-12). However, before he can be transported, opportunity presents itself for Paul to give testimony to another king (cf. 9:15). Agrippa hears and dismisses Paul's testimony, thus setting the stage for the apostle's journey to Rome (25:13–26:32).

III. Paul's Fruitful Witness to Rome is Realized (27:1–28:31).

Paul's fateful journey to Rome testifies once again to the sovereign oversight of the Holy Spirit in delivering His servant to his appointed task. Neither storm nor snake is able to end Paul's life before he has completed his ordained task (27:1–28:15). Indeed, it only gives greater opportunity to testify of God's grace (28:6-10). Upon his arrival in Rome, Paul follows his usual practice of testifying to Jews first and then, upon their rejection, turning to the Gentiles. In this way the purpose of Luke comes to its conclusion. All over the empire it has become evident that Israel has committed itself to rejection of Jesus as Messiah. As a result, God has turned to the Gentiles as those who will carry forth witness of Himself for the duration of the age. Even the prophet Isaiah foresaw this blindness (28:26-27).

The gospel had reached Rome long before Paul. However, it needed to be established that the Gentile church program was God's authorized instrument of witness and salvation as established and instructed by Paul. Luke has accomplished this task through a careful selection of events that display the sovereign superintendence of the Holy Spirit.

Luke gives no definite conclusion to the ministry of Paul, suggesting that the program of the church as God's kingdom representative will likewise proceed for an indefinite period under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who had so skillfully directed its beginning.

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