

THE BIG READ (5)

Jesus in Acts

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:45-47)

2. Following the four Gospels that tell the story of Jesus’ earthly life, painting a beautiful portrait of who Jesus is, comes the book of Acts.

Acts records the continuation of Jesus’ ministry by His Holy Spirit through His apostles and the early church.

Acts is a whirlwind tour of three decades of church history.

Acts is an exciting book – as we read it we encounter preaching, miracles, jailbreaks and shipwrecks; we visit Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Syria, Cyprus, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece and finally Rome.

Acts serves as a bridge from the Gospels to the New Testament letters like Matthew serves as a bridge from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

3. Acts is part 2 of Luke’s Gospel.

Like Luke’s Gospel it was written to someone called Theophilus, a person of rank who appears to have contributed money to sponsor Luke’s research and the cost of publishing Luke and Acts around AD62.

Acts, like Luke, provides an orderly account to give us certainty about the gospel, the good news for the whole world of salvation through Jesus’ death on the cross.

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye witnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1:1-4)

Acts also has the purpose of encouraging Christians by recording the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.

“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)

B. Luke the Man

1. A Historian.

“Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy... this author should be placed along with the very greatest historians.” (Sir William Ramsay)

“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.” (Acts 6:7)

Chapters 6:8-9:31 – The spread of the good news in Judea and Samaria.

“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.” (Acts 9:31)

Chapters 9:32-12:24 – The good news goes to the Gentiles.

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

Chapters 12:25-16:5 – The spread of the good news to the Gentiles in Asia.

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

Chapters 16:6-19:20 – The spread of the good news to the Gentiles in Europe.

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

Chapters 19:21-28:31 – The spread of the good news to Rome (the ends of the earth).

“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 28:30-31)

D. Jesus in Acts

1. Acts shows us that nothing can stop the Risen Lord Jesus from building His church.

It will include people of all nations because Jesus is the Saviour of the World.

2. Jesus will build His church.

Luke shows the church grows as the Risen Lord Jesus is preached in the power of the Spirit.

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:36)

“You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.” (Acts 3:15-16)

“It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.” Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:10-12)

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” (Acts 4:31)

“For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31)

Luke shows Jesus to be active in saving people.

“Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:38-39)

"When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life." (Acts 11:18)

"When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed." (Acts 13:48)

"On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles." (Acts 14:27)

"One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message." (Acts 16:14)

"One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." (Acts 18:9-10)

Luke uses statistics to emphasise the growth of the church.

"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." (Acts 2:41)

"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:47)

"But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand." (Acts 4:4)

"They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples." (Acts 14:21)

"So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers." (Acts 16:5)

Luke traces the movement of the Gospel from one nation to the nations, the Jews to Gentiles, from Jerusalem to the Ends of the Earth.

"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)

"Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven." (Acts 2:5)

"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria." (Acts 8:1)

"When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him... For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 28:16, 30-31)

Luke's focus on Peter and Paul emphasises both that Jesus will build His church and that His church will be made up from people of all nations.

"Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:17-19)

"But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." (Acts 9:15-16)

3. Nothing can stop Jesus from building His church.

We see that opposition, hypocrisy and friction within the church, persecution and martyrdom, storms and shipwrecks, courts and imprisonment cannot stop the progress of the gospel.

E. Conclusion

1. Luke wants us to be certain that Jesus is the only Saviour of the World.

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Have you called upon His name?

2. Luke wants us to be encouraged that Jesus is building His church.

We should be excited as we see the Gospel spread from Jerusalem to Rome – the centre of known world.

But there is still more work to be done, and Luke through Acts wants to energise our call to be witnesses for Jesus.