

THE BIG READ – ACTS

Peter was present to witness people in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and from the Gentiles being filled with the Spirit. Paul was chosen to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

He is building His church, and nothing can stop Him doing this

Luke shows how opposition, hypocrisy and friction within the church, persecution and martyrdom, storms and shipwrecks, courts and imprisonment cannot stop the progress of the gospel.

How then shall we live?

As we recognise that Jesus is building His church from all the nations of the world and nothing can stop Him doing this, how should we respond?

Keep speaking the gospel when opposition comes

“Peter and John answered them, “Whether it’s right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19-20)

“And now, Lord, consider their threats, and grant that your servants may speak your word with all boldness.” (Acts 4:29)

“The Lord said to Paul in a night vision, “Don’t be afraid, but keep on speaking and don’t be silent. For I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you, because I have many people in this city.” (Acts 18:9-10)

Keep speaking the gospel because it is the only message of salvation

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

Jesus is the only Saviour of the world.

Introduction

Following the four Gospels which tell the story of Jesus’ earthly life and paint 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.

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

It is an exciting book as we encounter preaching, miracles, jailbreaks and shipwrecks; and travel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Syria, Cyprus, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece, and finally Rome.

Acts also serves as a bridge from the Gospels to the New Testament letters.

It 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 (see Acts 1:1-2).

The author of Acts

He was a historian. Luke was a careful researcher who talked with eyewitnesses, read other accounts, compared stories, compiled and investigated data, before writing his own orderly account of what took place (see Luke 1:1-4).

He was an eyewitness. Whilst Luke was not an eyewitness to the events of his Gospel, he was an eyewitness to much of what is recorded in Acts

13-28 as he was one of Paul's travelling companions. Luke writes that "we" did this and "we" did that (see Acts 16:10; 20:13-15; 21:17; 28:1)

The story of Acts

Acts is about how the Risen Lord Jesus is building His church.

It can be read with a focus on who Jesus used to build His church.

Chapter 1-12: Jesus builds His church through the apostle Peter's ministry

Chapter 13-28: Jesus builds His church through the apostle Paul's ministry

But it can also be read with a focus on where Jesus builds His church.

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

"Acts 1:8 is a prediction and promise of the way this divine plan will be fulfilled, rather than a command. The rest of [Acts] shows how it happened." (David Peterson)

Each section ends with a key summary sentence (see Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31).

Chapters 1:1-6:7: The spread of the good news about Jesus in Jerusalem

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

Chapters 9:32-12:24: The spread of the good news about Jesus to the Gentiles

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

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

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

The purpose of Acts

Luke wants to give us certainty that Jesus is building His church by saving people from all nations – that the gospel crosses geographical boundaries.

He also wants to give us certainty that Jesus is building His church by uniting people from all nations – that the gospel produces one unified church.

Everyone who truly believes in Jesus should be accepted as being in the church.

Jesus in Acts

He is building His church from all the nations of the world

Luke uses statistics to show that Jesus is building His church (2:41; 2:47; 4:4; 14:21; 16:5).

He shows that the church grows as Christ is preached in the power of the Spirit (2:36; 3:15-16; 4:10-12; 4:31; 17:31).

He records Jesus as being active in saving people (2:38-39; 11:18; 13:48; 14:27; 16:14; 18:9-10).

He traces the movement of the gospel from one nation to the nations, the Jews to the Gentiles, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (1:8; 2:5; 8:1; 28:16, 30-31).

He reports the salvation of people from different nations (13:48).

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