



Acts of the Apostles

A DEEP DIVE INTO THE BOOK OF ACTS.

WEEK I

CLASS BY PASTOR GLYN NORMAN

1. Acts = praxeis

What's in a name?

2. Criticism of Acts – quick overview

- tendency criticism
- redaction criticism, value of historical writings
- proclamation or history, but not both?

3. Historical Writing in Antiquity

“With reference to the speeches in this history, some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; it was hard to record the exact words spoken, both in cases where I was myself present, and where I used the reports of others. But I have used language in accordance with what I thought the speakers in each case would have been most likely to say, adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what was actually spoken. (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1:22)

- interested in historical accuracy but also with additional purposes

4. Kerygma (proclamation) and history

- can proclamation be accurate history?
- can history be an accurate account of the original proclamation?

“The question is not whether the historian has an interpretation of the data he is putting forward but whether, given the fact of a bias, he has exercised his craft with due exactness so as not to falsify his data or distort their significance in the interests of his thesis.” (Richard Longenecker, “Acts” in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol 9, p.215)

5. Luke's Purpose in Writing Acts

- basically the same as in writing his gospel (Lk 1:4), but also:

a) Kerygmatic purpose (proclamation)

- a continuation of the ministry of The Word
 - The Word (Jesus) in his ministry: Lk 5:1; 8:11,21; 11:28
 - The Word of the Gospel through the ministry of the church: Acts 4:29, 31; 6:2, 4, 7; 8:4, 14, 25; 10:36; 11:1, 19; 12:24; 13:7, 44, 46, 48-49; 14:25; 15:35-36; 16:6, 32; 17:11, 13; 18:5, 11; 19:10...
- the Word of God as a clamp, joining the two eras (ministry of Jesus, ministry of the church) together
- fixed in the context of secular world history
- the spread of the gospel

b) Apologetic purpose

- Christianity not a political threat to the Roman empire
- a *religio licita* (legitimate, allowed religion) like Judaism
- problems of legality for Christianity

c) Conciliatory Purpose

- to reconcile the apparently different (contradictory?) messages of Peter and Paul

d) Catechetical Purpose

- for instructional purposes explaining the spread of Christianity, for new churches recently formed

The Text Examined: Acts chapter 1

- two books, almost exactly the same size, two equal scrolls of papyrus
- structural similarity
 - Lk 1:5-2:52 is a preparation for Lk 3:1-4:13 and these serve as an introduction to Jesus ministry that begins with Lk 4:14-30.
 - Acts 1:6-26 prepares for Acts 2:1-41, and serve as an introduction to the ministry of the church.

1:1-5 A Resumptive Preface

- prologue is really Lk 1:1-4, this is a resumptive preface
- “all” that Jesus began to do and teach (really, “many things” rather than a literal “all”)
- most excellent – used as honorific title for highly placed Roman official (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25) but also as a form of polite address. Latter is more likely.
- instructions to witness, see Lk 24:48,49 (quoted approximately in v4 & 5)
- v2 introduces main themes in Acts:
 - the witness mandate
 - the apostles
 - the Holy Spirit
 - the ascended Lord
- v3 The time before the ascension; emphasis on the living Christ and the convincing proofs
- the kingdom of God – God’s sovereign rule and relationships. God’s rule initiated in Israel, progressed through the church and through the lives of Christians, into all eternity
- v4 emphasis on the coming and baptism of the Holy Spirit as essential to the advance of the gospel

1:6-8 The Mandate to Witness

- the remains of a narrow, nationalistic understanding?
- their own ambitions: (see Mark 9:33,34; 10:35-41; Lk 22:24)
- a future role for Israel? See Romans 11:15,16, 25-29
- a new understanding of the divine program – leave Israel to God, this is what you have to do! Don't be involved in pointless speculation.
- a last word, a direct commission. A gift with a promise.
- a person, a power and a program.
- the person of Jesus, the power of the Holy Spirit, the program that begins at Jerusalem and spreads out to “all Judea and Samaria” and extends “to the ends of the earth”
- the Christian church is a missionary church, obedient to Christ's commission.
- the geographical movement of the gospel follows this pattern:
 - Jerusalem (Acts 2:42-8:3)
 - Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:4-12:24)
 - wider even to Rome (Acts 12:25-28:31)

1:9-11 The Ascension

- third mention: Lk 24:50-51; Acts 1:2, this one
- Jesus' ascension into heaven is stressed
- the missionary activity of the church rested not only on Jesus' mandate but also upon his presence in heaven and the promise of his return
- the role of the “*parousia*” (coming):
 - paralyzes missionary activity? Distracts from social action?
 - Marxist critique (the opiate of the people) – settle for injustice and oppression now, looking forward to a day “the sweet by and by” when it will be over
 - did the early church only turn to missionary activity when Jesus failed to return? When they realized he wasn't coming back immediately?
- the ascension – cloud, symbolic of the Shekinah glory, the visible manifestation of God's power and glory. See also Ex 40:34 and The Transfiguration Mark 9:7)
- the message of the angels: Jesus now has a heavenly existence. He will return in the same way (cloud of power and glory?) See also Mt 24:30; Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27)

1:12-26 The Full Complement of Apostles

- the centrality of the apostles and their mission
- back to full numbers after the defection and betrayal of Judas Iscariot
- apostles listed again (as in Lk 6:14-16) but without the name of Judas I.
- Matthias chosen
- v14 note the inclusion of the women (see Lk 8:2-3; 23:49; 23:55-24:10), who contributed to and financially supported Jesus ministry.
- v16 and v21 – the divine *dei* (necessity) appears again
- difficulty with the details of Judas' death (Acts 1:18 compared to Mt 27:3-10)
- Old Testament references used: Ps 69:25, Ps 109:8 – false companions and men who have become enemies of God's servant.

- necessary qualifications:
 - with them from Jesus' baptism until his ascension
 - a witness to Christ's resurrection
- the method of guidance: drawing lots. See Proverbs 16:33
- should we cast lots? Use strange Midrashic exegesis? Normative or descriptive?
Guidance for us: "search the Scriptures", "know the will of the Lord" – see Romans 12:1-2.
- Paul did not qualify (would otherwise have seemed a good choice)