

THE BOOK OF ACTS

The Acts of the Apostles gives a historical account of the Church during the first 30 years following Christ's ascension to Heaven. It provides evidence of the difficulties faced by 1st century believers during the transition that took place as God's program changed from dealing with the nation of Israel to calling out a people from the nations based on His New Covenant. This transition is carried out in two waves of activity. The first half of the book primarily focuses on the ministry of the Apostles to the Jews in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. The second half focuses on Paul's conversion and his ministry to the Gentiles in the Mediterranean world. All the while, God progressively reveals more and more revelation necessary for believers in the Church age. Although the doctrine for the Church was being communicated by God through the apostles and the New Testament prophets during this time, Acts should not be viewed as a doctrinal book because God's revelation was not completed until after this time period.

If a student of the Bible views the account of the Acts of the Apostles as normative and doctrinal then they will miss out big time! But, if they view Acts as being a historical account of God's temporary transition away from his program for Israel to a new kind of program for an entirely new entity known as the Church the pieces fit, makes sense, and many of these questions that arise from Acts will have a satisfactory answer.

Acts: A Transitional Book

- I. Peter to Paul (Jewish-centric to Gentile oriented)
- II. Jerusalem to the Gentile world (Geographical transition)
- III. The Gospel: Jews, Samaritans, and the Gentiles
- IV. Signs, Wonders, and Gifts
 - A. Purpose: Miracles, signs, and wonders served as God's sign of approval of the message being taught
 1. God performed miracles by Moses so that the nation would believe his report - Ex. 4:1-5
 2. God descended upon Mount Sinai and spoke to Moses so that the nation would believe - institution of the Mosaic Covenant - Ex. 19:8
 3. God sent fire from heaven upon the altar at Mount Carmel to demonstrate that He is the One True God - 1 Ki. 18:24
 4. Nicodemus recognized the Christ was from God because of the miracles he performed - Jo. 3:2
 5. Jesus stated that the crowd ought to believe his words because of His miraculous works - Jo. 10:37-38
 6. Peter stated that God demonstrated His approval of Christ and his teachings because of the miracles, signs and wonders He performed - Acts 2:22
 - B. The miracles, signs, and wonders performed by the apostles in Acts validated the preaching of the brand new message that faith in the Resurrected Christ provided forgiveness and acceptance with God
 1. Occurrences of miracles and wonders diminish as the Book of Acts progresses (read naturally)
 2. There are two separate waves of miracles and wonders recounted in Acts - *see* handout out on Signs and Wonders
 - a) Peter and the apostles in Jerusalem - first half
 - b) Paul in the Mediterranean - second half
 - C. As the Gospel message and New Testament revelation grew and became more established, the necessity of miracles and wonders became less and less necessary

D. Miracles and wonders are not prescriptive for the Church today because God's written revelation is complete - 1 Cor. 13:10

V. A Difficult Transition - Examples in Acts

A. Apostles questioned if Christ's Ascension was the time for the Coming of His Kingdom - Acts 1:6

1. The apostles display a lack of understanding regarding God's change of program from the nation of Israel to the Church
2. This ignorance intimates that there will be a lengthy transition period as the believers come to understand their new relationship within the body of Christ

B. Peter's hesitation about the heavenly vision regarding clean and unclean (approx. 10 years after Pentecost) - Acts 10

1. 10 years after the Great Commission had been given the apostles and other Jewish believers had yet to evangelize the Gentiles
2. Peter's reluctance to go with Cornelius' messengers was because he was still holding to Jewish law tradition concerning Gentiles - Acts 10:28

C. The Council of Jerusalem (approx. 20 years after Pentecost) was called to address disagreements regarding Gentile believers' relationship to the Law - Acts 15

D. James bragged to Paul about how thousands of Jewish believers were zealous for the Law (approx. 30 years after Pentecost) - Acts 21:20-21

1. These Jewish believers were concerned about Paul's teaching about Law on his missionary journeys
2. These same Jewish believers would be the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews a few years later, urging them to leave behind the Law and worship in the Temple

Acts: Doctrine, Yes! Doctrinal, No!

I. Events Unique to Acts

A. Choosing an apostle by the casting of lots

1. OT practice utilized prior to Pentecost - Prov. 16:33
2. NT epistles prescribe different methodology for choosing Church leadership - Titus 1; 1 Ti. 3

B. Visible manifestations of the Holy Spirit

1. Examples in Acts (4x)
 - a) Pentecost - unbelieving Jews - Acts 2:1-4
 - (1) Two different Greek words demonstrate that the "filling" of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is different than the instructions to "be filled by the Spirit" in the epistles
 - (2) There are no more occurrences of this type of "filling" after Acts 13:9 (approx. 18 years after Pentecost)
 - b) Samaritans - unbelieving mixed Jew/Gentiles - Acts 8:14-17
 - c) Cornelius and his house - unbelieving Gentiles - Acts 10:44-46
 - d) Disciples of John the Baptist - OT saints - Acts 19:1-6
2. These instances were intended to visibly demonstrate the fulfillment of Christ's promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit to various groups (all these groups were recipients of the same content of salvation)
3. No evidence of a visible manifestation of the Spirit's coming upon individual's at salvation in the NT epistles

C. Thousands of individuals saved at the same time - not necessarily normative

D. Believers selling all their goods and living communally

1. This type of giving appears to be a very organic outflow of the unified hearts and souls and not something mandated by the apostles
2. Not necessarily prescriptive for the Church today - 2 Cor. 9:7

- E. The death of Ananias and Saphira - Acts 5
 - 1. God intended for their death to demonstrate the seriousness of sin within the early church
 - 2. Ananias' and his wife's death filled many with fear
 - 3. Not necessarily normative - 1 Cor. 11:30; 2 Pe. 3:15-18
- F. Paul's Macedonian vision - Acts 16:6-10
 - 1. Paul was promised revelations - Acts 26:16
 - 2. No evidence in New Testament epistles that believers should seek revelations as a means for determining God's will - Ro. 12:1-2; Ja. 1:5
 - 3. Peter stated that believers have a "more sure word of prophecy" than what he experienced last the transfiguration - 2 Peter 1:16-21
- G. Paul's evangelism in Athens - Acts 17:22
 - 1. Paul's actions demonstrate that this approach was faulty - Acts 18
 - 2. Paul's words admit that this approach was faulty - 1 Cor. 1-2
- II. New Revelation Still Being Revealed in Acts
 - A. Jesus Promised Further Revelation - Jo. 16:12-14
 - 1. While in the Upper Room Jesus stated that there was more information His disciples needed to know
 - 2. The Holy Spirit would guide them into truth when He came - Pentecost and beyond
 - B. Paul - Steward of the Dispensation of Grace (saved approx. 5-7 years after Pentecost)
 - 1. The Resurrected Christ promised Paul at his conversion that He would provide him with revelation in the future - Acts 26:16
 - 2. Paul received the Good News he taught believers from Christ Himself - Gal. 1:12
 - 3. Paul received an abundance of revelations - 2 Cor. 12:7
 - 4. Paul made a steward of the mystery concerning the Church - Eph. 3:1-3
 - 5. Paul given stewardship to fill up what is lacking in the Word of God, concerning the believer's hope of glory, which is Christ in you - Col. 1:25
 - C. NT apostles and prophets
 - 1. Prophets were a gift to the church for growth and edification - Eph. 4:11
 - 2. The Church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets - Eph. 2:20
 - 3. Prophets were making use of their spiritual gift - 1 Cor. 12:28-29
 - 4. Mystery revealed to apostles and NT prophets - Eph. 3:5
 - 5. Examples in Acts:
 - a) Philip's daughters - Acts 21:9
 - b) Agabus - Acts 21:10
 - D. Most Epistles written in the 2nd half of Acts and after
 - 1. Church teaching had not been formalized
 - a) First letter regarding Church doctrine likely written 20 years after Pentecost (approx. Acts 15)
 - b) BLB - 18 NT books written *after* the end of Acts
 - (1) Paul's Prison epistles (heavy emphasis on Positional Truth) were not written until *after* the end of Acts
 - (2) *See* appendix for listing of chronological order of New Testament writings
 - 2. Examples in Acts (both events approx. 25 years after Pentecost)
 - a) Aquila and Priscilla instruct Apollos - Acts 18:24-26
 - b) Paul instructs disciples of John the Baptist - Acts 19:1-6