

ACTS

A Logion Press Commentary

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INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

The Book of Acts is special. No other book in the Bible is like it. Although there are historical books in the Old Testament, they emphasize the failures, the sins, and the idolatry that kept God's people from the fullness of His blessing.

In the Book of Acts, that failure is in the past. Israel has learned its lesson, and idolatry is no longer a problem among them. More importantly, Jesus has come. His death on Calvary has put the new covenant into effect (Heb. 9:15). By His resurrection He has brought blessing and great joy to His followers (Luke 24:51-52). A sense of both fulfillment and anticipation pervades the book.

1. Title and Content

Originally the book had no title. Since the middle of the second century A.D., however, it has been known as *The Acts of the Apostles*.¹ This title probably arose because the apostles are named in the first chapter (1:13) and in the first part of the book they preached in the temple. Yet, as we go through the Book of Acts we see that most of the apostles are not named again and some

¹Because Marcion, about A.D. 144, declared that Paul was the only faithful apostle, the Muratorian list of New Testament books calls it *The Acts of All the Apostles*. See Kirsopp Lake and S. Lake, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Harper, 1937), 280; and F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 1 (hereinafter cited as *Acts: Greek Text*).

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are only barely mentioned.² Peter alone is prominent in the first part of the book; Paul alone is prominent in the latter part.

Actually, the Holy Spirit is more prominent than the apostles, though they have a place of honor. The book records how Jesus himself focused attention on the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5). The outpouring of the Spirit (2:4) then sets the action of the book in motion. Acts mentions or refers to the Spirit fifty-one times. Consequently, many have suggested that *The Acts of the Holy Spirit* would be a better title.

However, the content of Acts is much broader.³ Acts 1:1 suggests we might enlarge the title; notice the word “began.” The “former book” (Luke’s Gospel) recorded what Jesus “began to do and to teach.” The Book of Acts, therefore, records what Jesus continued to do and teach through the Holy Spirit in the growing, spreading Church. Though Jesus is now in glory at the right hand of the Father’s throne, He is still doing His work in the present world. Accordingly, an enlarged title for the Book of Acts might well be *The Acts of the Risen Lord by the Holy Spirit In and Through the Church*. I shall, however, refer to it simply as *Acts*, for it does not tell us details about all the apostles. Neither does it tell the full story of the growth of the Church.⁴ In many cases it gives only brief summaries of what happened.⁵ The churches in Galilee and Samaria are given very little attention (9:31). Important events such as the growth of a strong church in Egypt or even Rome during the first century are not even mentioned. On the other hand, some events are given in great detail (see chaps. 8; 10; 11; and 28).

The speeches and sermons that stand out so prominently in the book probably are also summaries. Paul, for example, sometimes preached until midnight (20:7). Other occasions obviously required a whole synagogue service, yet what is recorded can be read in a very few minutes. It is clear, however, that these

²James (Acts 12:2); John (Acts 4:13,19,23; 8:14,17).

³Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 3.

⁴Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), 228.

⁵See examples in 2:47; 5:42; 6:7; 8:4,40; 9:31; 12:24; 13:49; 16:5; 18:23; 19:20; 28:30–31.

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speeches reflect the style and emphases of the apostles, as well as their actual words.⁶ That they can be identified as different genres (deliberative, apologetic, and hortative)⁷ also indicates that Luke did not compose these speeches out of his own imagination. Condensed accounts were necessary due to the limited space available in an ancient papyrus book or scroll. Someone has said that if we were to record the entire story of the growth and development of the Early Church, with all the signs and wonders given in detail, it would fill up several sets of books the size of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (cf. John 20:30–31; 21:25).

More than the limitations of space is involved, however. No one could write a history today by throwing together everything printed in the daily newspapers. The historian must choose events that are significant, events that show trends, turning points, and relationships. Luke does this by following a theme suggested by the words of Jesus: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The first seven chapters center on events in Jerusalem, describing the initial growth and testing of the Church. Chapters 8 through 12 reveal how the Spirit broke down barriers in Judea and Samaria. Finally, chapters 13 through 28 show how the gospel began to move toward the ends of the earth. The latter chapters emphasize new centers for the spread

⁶For example, early tradition says Mark got his Gospel from Peter’s preaching. We do see the same emphases in Mark’s Gospel as we do in Peter’s preaching in Acts. Compare also Acts 2:23 with 1 Pet. 1:2 and Acts 10:42 with 1 Pet. 4:5. In comparing Paul’s sermons in Acts with his epistles, however, keep in mind that in Acts he was speaking to people who had never heard the gospel. In his epistles he was dealing with Christians and the problems that arose among people who already knew and believed the gospel. See Richard Heard, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), 139–40. Compare, however, Acts 20:24 with 2 Tim. 4:7 and with Col. 4:17. Some modern writers say “these speeches are not a record of what was actually said, but at best a recollection of what might have been said” or were composed by Luke. Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 35–36. Williams, however, gives reasons for considering them “a reliable guide to what was actually said.” David John Williams, *Acts* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 10–11. F. F. Bruce points out that the speeches of Paul “suit Paul’s changing circumstances and are well adapted to the varying audiences addressed.” *Acts: Greek Text*, 38–39.

⁷Bruce, *Acts: Greek Text*, 38, 39.

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of the gospel at Antioch, Ephesus, and, finally, Rome, the center of the Roman Empire. Then, because Acts has no formal conclusion, we are left with the assurance that the gospel will continue to spread toward “the ends of the earth.”

Luke’s clarity and logical progression lead most Bible-believing scholars to agree that Luke is a first-class historian, not only because of what he included in Acts, but also because of what he left out.⁸ (Bible-believing scholars agree, of course, that the Holy Spirit directed and inspired the writing of the Scriptures.)

The events Luke does include are both significant and typical. At the time he wrote, churches in various areas were in communication with each other and were familiar with many of the events he describes. Thus the first readers of Acts would not have had any difficulty seeing the relationship of their own local church to the course of events described in Acts.⁹ We too can see in Acts a new way for us to live in relationship to the Lord, the Church, and the Holy Spirit. It will affect our values and help us be disciples who claim God’s promises and bring Christ glory. Acts is more than “a chronicle of the past. Rather, the past becomes the platform from which to preach to the present.”¹⁰ We need to do more than study the Book of Acts, we need to live it!¹¹

2. Genre, Authorship, and Date

GENRE

Many consider the genre of the Book of Acts to be historical monograph.¹² Luke-Acts has “much in common with the sacred

⁸See Charles W. Carter and Ralph Earle, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), 6. This is also the view of the British historian Sir William Ramsay.

⁹Heard, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 136.

¹⁰William H. Willimon, *Acts* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 5.

¹¹C. Peter Wagner, *Spreading the Fire: Book 1: Acts 1–8* (Ventura, Calif.: Gospel Light, Regal Books, 1994), 11.

¹²Darryl W. Palmer, “Acts and the Ancient Historical Monograph,” in *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke, vol. 1 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 3, 28. See Also Charles B. Puskas, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 113–18.

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historiography of ancient Israel, and even with the secular historiography of the Greco-Roman world.”¹³ The formal prefaces of Luke and Acts indicate that “Luke deliberately places his work into the context of sophisticated Greek literature.”¹⁴ However, two features “distinguish Acts from the genre of Hellenistic historical writings. One is the absence of chronology in Acts and the second is the presence of the perspective of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the chosen witnesses.”¹⁵ Its author, Luke, the only Gentile New Testament writer, focuses consistently on the progress and development of the Church as a missionary body, fulfilling the command of Jesus to spread the gospel.¹⁶ “By recognizing the invincible rise of Christianity, Luke was a better historian than anyone else among his contemporaries.”¹⁷ The first section follows Peter who is a prophet as well as an apostle. The remainder of the book follows Paul. His call is prominent (chap. 9, and retold in chaps. 22 and 26). It inspired his mission and the repetition keeps his mission and its importance before the reader. Another important emphasis is his prison experiences that reflect his own declaration that he was a prisoner, not of Rome, but of his Lord, Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:8; Philem. 1,9,23).

As I. Howard Marshall points out, it seems best to view the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts as “two parts of the one unified work.”¹⁸ He points out that the prologues of the two books uphold this. So does the material in the Gospel and its ending. He notes especially that the prophetic elements in the Gospel point forward to Acts.¹⁹ Therefore, “Acts should be read

¹³Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke's Charismatic Theology* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 13.

¹⁴S. John Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor: Character Types in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 89.

¹⁵Gerhard Krodel, *Acts* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1981), 2.

¹⁶Talbert takes Acts to be a “*bios* (‘biography’)” of a people group, the Church, analogous to *bioi* of peoples written by Greek writers. Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997), 14.

¹⁷Krodel, *Acts*, 41.

¹⁸I. Howard Marshall, “Acts and the ‘Former Treatise,’” in *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. Winter and Clarke, 172. As a student, I heard this from Henry J. Cadbury at Harvard Divinity School in 1945.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 174–76.

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in the light of the Gospel.”²⁰ In Luke, “conceived, empowered, and guided by the Holy Spirit, Jesus both embodies the Way and makes provision for others to follow in it, thereby fulfilling the divine plan.”²¹ In Acts, believers “empowered by the Holy Spirit . . . bear an unstoppable, universal witness to Jesus by word and deed, thereby fulfilling the divine plan.”²² Thus, Luke and Acts have the same genre “because Luke’s term *diēgēs*/narrative (Lk. 1.1) applies to his entire two-volume history.”²³ This is confirmed further by parallel structure, both Luke and Acts having similar thematic elements. Also, Luke shows careful design in Acts when he “reports each of Paul’s three evangelistic tours according to the same structure: (1) introductory episode(s); (2) a major report about one city; and (3) a series of summary reports.”²⁴

Some writers see apologetic motifs in Acts as well, noting how Acts brings out the political innocence of Jesus and the apostles.²⁵ Earl Richard points out, however, that “the theme of innocence is subordinate to that of righteousness and so motivated more by religious than by political concerns.”²⁶ Another concern is “relations between Jesus and his followers on the one hand and . . . non-believing Jews on the other.”²⁷ Some have used negative images of unbelieving Jews in Acts to justify Christian anti-Judaism. However, that is based on a misreading of the texts. Even though there are negative images of Judaism and Jewish

²⁰Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 13.

²¹Talbert, *Reading Acts*, 4.

²²Ibid. It should be noted that Luke’s Gospel and the Book of Acts were never connected in any canonical list. The speeches and matters of tone and attitude, and the fact that Acts is more Hellenic, cause some to challenge the generic unity of Luke and Acts. Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 8, 38–40, 53.

²³Stronstad, *Prophethood of All Believers*, 19 n. 2; see also 23–24.

²⁴Ibid., 14, 15.

²⁵Dr. Henry J. Cadbury stressed this in a 1945 class I took studying the Greek text of Acts in Harvard Divinity School.

²⁶Earl Richard, “Luke: Author and Thinker,” in *New Views on Luke and Acts*, ed. Earl Richard (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990), 17.

²⁷Joseph B. Tyson, *Images of Judaism in Luke-Acts* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 3.

leaders, "Aspects of Jewish religious life are often portrayed in positive ways."²⁸ Paul and the early Jewish believers were faithful to their Jewish heritage and to the God of their fathers.

Another concern of Luke's is to give a clear picture of the plan of God for the spread of the gospel. "God's providential guidance" is an important focus of the missionary speeches recorded in Acts 2 through 17.²⁹ As a "world Christian . . . he shows how the walls of separation between Jews and Gentiles were broken down and, thus, writes more about true missiology than any other biblical author."³⁰

AUTHORSHIP

Though the Book of Acts does not name its author, it is evident that Acts 1:1 refers to the same Theophilus mentioned in Luke 1:1–4. What we find in Acts is the outworking of the Gospel of Luke, though the Gospel does not name its author either. Good evidence, however, connects both the Gospel and Acts with the person Paul calls "our dear friend Luke, the doctor" (Col. 4:14).³¹ The Muratorian Canon attributes them to Luke the physician,³² as did Irenaeus and many of the early church fathers.

One important evidence of Luke's authorship is the "we" passages in Acts 16:10–17; 20:5 to 21:18; 27:1 to 28:16.³³ These passages "are written in a style indistinguishable from the rest of the book" and indicate that Luke "was using his own material."³⁴ In these passages the author indicates he was with Paul on parts of the second and third missionary journeys as well as the jour-

²⁸Ibid., 187.

²⁹John T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 63.

³⁰Wagner, *Spreading the Fire*, 19.

³¹E. Scott Spencer, "Acts and Modern Literary Approaches," in *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. Winter and Clarke, 407.

³²See Bruce, *Acts: Greek Text*, 1, 2.

³³Acts mentions Silas and Timothy in these passages, but in the third person. Titus is not mentioned in the greetings of Paul's epistles. Paul speaks of Luke as his fellow worker (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24). "Luke is the most likely person to have composed the books attributed to him." Kistemaker, *Acts*, 21.

³⁴Williams, *Acts*, 4. Note that the "we" passages are all sea journeys, but the writer does not use "we" in every sea voyage. That is, he doesn't use it for someone else's sea voyages, only for those where Luke was with Paul.

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ney to Rome.³⁵ To parts of the Book of Acts, then, Luke was an eyewitness. He was also able to talk to eyewitnesses, such as Philip the evangelist in Caesarea (21:8) and John Mark.³⁶

The fact that Luke was with Paul on his last visit to Jerusalem and also accompanied him on the journey to Rome indicates Luke was in Palestine during the two years Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea (24:27). Archaeological evidence shows Luke checked his facts carefully. Though the titles and statuses of Roman officials changed frequently in the first century, Luke never made a mistake. Nor did he make mistakes in what he says about geography and history. His “exact information about the cities of the coastal Plain, the Road from Jerusalem to Caesarea, and the relation between the Temple and the Antonia fortress in Jerusalem is striking.”³⁷ It would not be wrong to assume, therefore, that Luke spent those two years checking facts and talking to eyewitnesses of the events of his Gospel and the first part of Acts.³⁸

For example, in Luke’s Gospel he tells the story of the birth of Jesus from Mary’s viewpoint, while Matthew gives it from Joseph’s. Joseph most probably was dead before Luke came to Jerusalem, but Mary was still alive. Luke tells how Mary treasured the events surrounding Jesus’ birth in her heart (Luke 2:51). That is, she remembered them carefully. Luke also tells us that Mary was present in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost. Paul confirmed that many who saw the risen Christ were still alive when he wrote 1 Corinthians (15:6). Consequently, Luke was able to confirm the events that, under the guidance and inspiration of

³⁵The church historian Eusebius (about A.D. 330) and Jerome who translated the Latin Vulgate version (about A.D. 400) believed Luke was from Antioch. One ancient manuscript (Codex Bezae, or D) adds to Acts 11:28, “When we came together.” If this is correct it would indicate Luke was present in Antioch about A.D. 42.

³⁶In Luke 1:3, “investigated” is a perfect participle, *parēkolouthēkoti*, that is never used of research of documents or legal search. It always means being in possession of firsthand information. That is, Luke talked to people who witnessed these events.

³⁷Martin Hengel, “The Geography of Palestine in Acts,” in *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham, vol. 4 of *Acts in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Winter (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 27.

³⁸George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 313.

the Holy Spirit, he included in Acts.³⁹

He is accurate also "in his reproduction of the local color of widely differing places. . . . He gets the atmosphere right every time. Jerusalem, with its excitable and intolerant crowds, stands in contrast with the intellectually and religiously hospitable metropolis of Antioch on the Orontes."⁴⁰ What we read of Philippi, Athens, Ephesus, the shipwreck, and Malta, all reflect the fact that Luke was personally present or acquainted with each situation.

The fact Paul calls Luke "our dear friend . . . the doctor" (Col. 4:14) also fits what we find in Luke and Acts. Luke gives special attention to healing and often gives additional details or a more specific diagnosis. When Jesus said it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, the other Gospels use the common word for a sewing needle (Gk. *raphidos*, Matt. 19:24; Mark 10:25). Luke uses instead the more classical Greek word that the Greeks used for a surgeon's needle (Gk. *belonēs*, Luke 18:25). (Some have tried to press this further by looking for medical terms in Luke and Acts. However, doctors in New Testament times used everyday language. There was no such thing as a "medical language" at that time.)⁴¹

DATE

Since Acts concludes with Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, A.D. 60–62 is the earliest date it could have been written.⁴²

³⁹These include the miracles. Even some who have not been brought up to believe in miracles admit that the miracles are not tacked on to the Book of Acts. They are part of its very framework and structure. Take them out and the whole book falls apart. Since Luke was so meticulous in verifying everything else, we can be sure he did not fail to verify these miracles also.

⁴⁰Bruce, *Acts: Greek Text*, 33.

⁴¹Dr. William K. Hobart in *The Medical Language of St. Luke* (Dublin, Ireland: Hodges, Figgis, 1882) went too far in this direction. About ninety percent of his "medical terms" have been found in the works of nonmedical writers such as Josephus and even in the Septuagint (LXX).

⁴²As Johannes Munck says, "Since certain points in Luke's work clearly indicate an early date of composition—at the beginning of the sixties—there is good reason to favor that date." *The Acts of the Apostles*, rev. William F. Albright and C. S. Mann, vol. 31 of *Anchor Bible Series* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1979), LIV.

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Moreover, "Acts devotes so much space to events of A.D. 58–60 (chapters 20–28) that it is like the events had just occurred. We best explain the accuracy of geographical, political and sociocultural details, humanly speaking, if the work was produced close to the events it describes."⁴³ In A.D. 64 Rome burned and Nero began persecuting Christians. This brought a complete change in the relation between the Christians and the empire. Therefore, the latest date for the writing of Acts would be about A.D. 62⁴⁴ or 63.⁴⁵ Note also that Acts gives no hint of the Jewish revolt of A.D. 66, or of the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. We have in the book a record of the first generation of believers, the first thirty years of the growth of the Church that began at Pentecost.

3. Luke As A Theologian

Acts is clearly a Church book, giving us important theological teaching concerning the nature, growth, life, and purpose of the Church. Some, claiming Acts is only history, deny it can provide us with doctrine; consequently, we must go to the Epistles for doctrine. This categorization of Scripture sounds like "a canon within a canon."⁴⁶ They overlook the fact that the Bible does not give us history to satisfy our historical curiosity but rather to teach truth. Even the Epistles refer to both Old and New Testament history in order to teach doctrine or theology. When Paul wanted to explain justification by faith in Romans 4, he went back to the history of Abraham in Genesis. When he wanted to show what God's grace can do, he went back to the history of David. Acts does more than give a mere transition, or "shifting of gears," between the Gospels and the Epistles. It pro-

⁴³William J. Larkin, Jr., *Acts* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 18.

⁴⁴E. M. Blaiklock, *Acts: The Birth of the Church* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1980), 10.

⁴⁵Harrison, *Introduction*, 226. Some German scholars (esp. Conzelmann and Käsemann) suppose delay in Christ's second coming influenced Luke and this means Luke wrote near the end of the first century. However, this "has no compelling reason in its favor." Everett F. Harrison, *Interpreting Acts: The Expanding Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, Academic Books, 1986), 24.

⁴⁶William W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 38.

vides a background to the Epistles and is necessary for a better understanding of the truths they teach.

I am not alone in emphasizing the theological importance of Acts.⁴⁷ Recent scholars have recognized that Luke is not just a historian but a theologian. His use of the Old Testament⁴⁸ shows he is a biblical theologian who knew the Scriptures well and who believed in their inspiration and authority. They influenced his use of language, giving the book "a certain Semitic colouring."⁴⁹ Luke also sees the gospel and its spread as fulfilling Old Testament promises and prophecies. As I. Howard Marshall points out, "Throughout Acts Luke seizes the opportunity to show . . . that the Christian faith and witness are not contrary to the laws and true interests of Judaism."⁵⁰ Rather, the Christian faith and witness continue the work of God, building on the covenants and promises given to Israel in the past. Luke also uses this relation to the Old Testament as a political polemic to indicate to the Romans that Christians were still part of a legitimate religion (that is, Judaism). Even the inclusion of the Gentiles is presented as fulfillment of promises given to Israel.⁵¹ This is in contrast to the Qumran community, "which centered its attention on the Mosaic Law" and whose influence on the Early Church "was largely peripheral."⁵²

It is important to recognize therefore that Luke uses the past to present divine truth. He sees God directing the events of history (2:23; 3:21; 10:42; 17:31; 19:21; 23:11; 27:24,26) and he often speaks of the will of God (2:23,31; 4:28; 13:22,36; 20:27; 21:14; 22:14). God and Jesus act in history and the Holy Spirit

⁴⁷For a good summary of the theology of Acts see Larkin, *Acts*, 23–33.

⁴⁸Cited thirty-five times. See G. L. Archer and G. C. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), xx. Seventeen of these quotations reflect the Heb. rather than the LXX. See Brian S. Rosner, "Acts and Biblical History," in *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. Winter and Clarke, 69.

⁴⁹Rosner, "Acts and Biblical History," 69. This would seem to contradict Roth's statement that "Luke-Acts presupposes an audience that is not familiar with Hebrew terminology, but is familiar with the LXX." Roth, *Blind*, 213.

⁵⁰I. Howard Marshall, *An Introduction to Acts* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 46.

⁵¹Willimon, *Acts*, 15.

⁵²Harrison, *Interpreting Acts*, 34.

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gives direction (2:32–33; 8:29,39; 11:17; 15:8–9; 16:6–7). As Marshall says, “Throughout Acts the church remains subject to the guidance of the Spirit and its work is done through the power of the name of Jesus. It does not ‘possess’ these gifts. It is a church under the Word and subject to its Lord.”⁵³ Angels also carry out God’s will (5:19; 8:26; 10:30; 12:7–10; 12:23; 27:23).

Though the kingdom (rule, reign) of God is mentioned only six times in Acts (1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:23,31), it is an important feature of the Book. What is involved in the rule, or reign, of God “is spelled out in detail throughout the book.”⁵⁴ In the Church “as the community of the Spirit” we see “the purpose to both reflect and witness to the values of the Reign of God, by the power of the Spirit to the world.”⁵⁵ This, we can be sure, must always be connected with teaching “about the Lord Jesus Christ” (28:31; cf. 8:12; 19:8,10; 20:25,28).⁵⁶

Luke draws attention also to the way the Holy Spirit promoted the unity of the Body. Notice how often he mentions being “in one accord.”⁵⁷ More than once the Church were in danger of being split but the Spirit brought them together. The world tends to disrupt, divide, and build barriers. The Holy Spirit broke down barriers as the Church prayed together, worked together, evangelized together, suffered together. Nature tends to disperse, scatter, and break down. It takes a higher energy to unite, and more wisdom and power to build up, than to tear down. Consequently, an important theme of *The Acts of the Risen Lord Through the Holy Spirit* is church building; the acts of the Risen Lord are carried forward by the believers as “a community of charismatic prophets” and by “the ministry of six charismatic prophets . . . Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, Agabus, Peter and Paul.”⁵⁸

⁵³I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, enl. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, Academie Books, 1989), 214.

⁵⁴Howard Clark Kee, *To Every Nation Under Heaven: The Acts of the Apostles* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 20.

⁵⁵Eldin Villafañe, *The Liberating Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 187.

⁵⁶Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 333.

⁵⁷Gk. *homothumadon*, “with one mind or purpose”; see Acts 1:14; 2:1 (Textus Receptus); 2:46; 4:24; 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 18:12; 19:29. The NIV often translates it “together.”

⁵⁸Stronstad, *Prophethood of All Believers*, 54.

Notice further that just as in the Gospels and Epistles, Jesus is central in Acts. The books complement each other and exalt Him. Acts shows that the total life of the Church continued to revolve around the living Christ (not just the suffering Messiah, though that is an emphasis)—the One risen, ascended, and seated at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. In 1 Corinthians chapters 12 through 14, Paul has something to say about the Holy Spirit, but in chapter 15 he returns the focus of attention to the Christ who died for our sins and rose again. So, though Acts gives teaching and shows us much of the work of the Holy Spirit, it focuses attention primarily on Jesus. He is the Prince of Life, the One who has come, who is present through the Spirit, and who will come again. His resurrection life and power flow through the book. Luke also shows “as clearly as Paul or John that salvation is through faith in Christ alone (Acts 15:11).”⁵⁹ The Gospels, Acts, the Epistles, and the Book of Revelation are all one revelation of Christ, who is himself the Word of God. What a tragedy if any part is neglected.⁶⁰

One more thing should be kept in mind. Unlike many other books of the New Testament, the Book of Acts has no formal conclusion. It simply breaks off. Some suppose that this came about because Luke was martyred shortly after the apostle Paul. However, several ancient traditions claim he lived longer. It seems, rather, that the abrupt ending is intentional. The book had to come to an end, just as that first generation had to come to an end. But the acts of the Risen Lord through the Holy Spirit did not end then. They continued on into the second and third centuries with the same spiritual gifts⁶¹ and manifestations. Further, they continue today wherever God’s people gather in one accord with an earnest desire to search His Word, seek His gifts, and do His work.

⁵⁹Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 190.

⁶⁰“Both Chrysostom and Jerome note a general neglect of Acts.” Parsons and Pervo, *Rethinking*, 1. Sadly, that neglect continued over much of church history.

⁶¹It should be noted that the Gk. *charismata*, “gifts,” refers to ministries, not abilities. See Kenneth Berding, “Confusing Word and Concept in ‘Spiritual Gifts’; Have We Forgotten James Barr’s Exhortations?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 1 (March 2000): 51.

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4. Text

The NIV text we are using is based on what most Bible scholars accept as the oldest and best Greek manuscripts (recognized as a neutral text), collated by the American Bible Society. In a few cases it accepts readings from what is called the Western Text, represented by the Codex Bezae (D)⁶² and the Old Latin and Syriac versions.⁶³ The Book of Acts in Codex Bezae is ten percent longer than the neutral text. Some of this may be genuine Lukan material (e.g. 12:10; 19:9; 20:4,15; 27:5).⁶⁴ Most of the additions are either specific statements, possibly coming from early tradition, such as found in Acts 12:10 where it states that Peter and the angel “went down six steps.” Others are later, non-Lukan revisions or explanations (commentary) intended to clarify and smooth the text;⁶⁵ for example, in Acts 14:2 Codex Bezae adds “but the Lord gave peace quickly.”⁶⁶ Because some readings of the Western Text were copied into the late manuscripts used by the King James Version, you will find that the NIV text leaves them out. However, none of these omissions affects the truth of God’s Word, since whatever is true that was in these Western texts is found elsewhere in the New Testament. Thus, we can have confidence in the text we are using in this commentary.⁶⁷

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What would be a better title for the Book of Acts, and why?
2. What evidence indicates that Luke was a first-class historian?

⁶²Codex Bezae is a sixth-century manuscript now in Cambridge, England.

⁶³For a discussion of significant variant readings see Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 3d ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971).

⁶⁴W. A. Strange, *The Problem of the Text of Acts* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2. Many church fathers, beginning with Irenaeus, agree often with the Western Text.

⁶⁵Ibid., 50; see also Peter Head, “Acts and the Problem of Its Texts,” in *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. Winter and Clarke, 417.

⁶⁶Munck, *Acts of the Apostles*, lxxxv.

⁶⁷For “a critical comparison of the various types of text current in the early Christian centuries,” see Bruce, *Acts: Greek Text*, 69–80.

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3. Why should we consider the genre of Acts to be historical monograph?
4. What can be said about the relationship between the Gospel of Luke and Acts?
5. What evidence is there for Luke's authorship of Acts?
6. What does Luke as a theologian emphasize?
7. What is the significance of the abrupt ending of Acts?
8. How is the Western Text of Acts different from the neutral text?

