

A SURVEY OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

1. INTRODUCTION

Acts 1:1-5

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen.”

A Bible Study prepared by:
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Acts 1:1- 5

Introduction:

On church visitation one afternoon I met a man who said that he was a believer but as I spoke to him, I realized that he was misguided in some of his doctrine. He confidently declared, "I believe that all the Bible is the Word of God!" The man made this statement with much conviction after hearing me say, "But you shouldn't use the Book of Acts to prove that doctrinal point." I wanted him to understand that the purpose of the Book of Acts is to chronicle the expansion of the church in the first century. It tells the story of how the church came into being in Jerusalem and then expanded out "unto the uttermost part of the earth." (1:8) The truth of the doctrine we were discussing is found in the epistles but not in the Acts. Acts is a transitional book. It moves us from the Dispensation of the Law to the day of Grace. The Acts demonstrates doctrine but does not teach doctrine. However, to see doctrine worked out in a practical way we come to the narrative in the Acts.

I. The introduction to the birth of the Church (1:1-26)

The Book of Acts begins with a reference to “The former treatise”, which is a book written earlier by Luke. A treatise is a formal exposition of a specific topic. The language of verses 1 through 5 is strikingly similar to what we find in the Gospel of Luke chapter 1:1-4. There is no mention of the author of Acts included in the text. However by comparing the Gospel of Luke with the Book of Acts we discover the author to be the Apostle Luke, In fact, “the Gospel of Luke and Acts are two volumes of a single work. . . . Whatever title was originally prefixed to the Gospel served for both books. When the second volume began to circulate independently, this title [for Acts] was used to designate its contents.” (Wycliffe. P. 1123) “Clues to the authorship is provided by the three “we” sections, where the narrative is in the first-person plural. (Acts 16:10-19; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16) These suggest that the author was Paul’s companion on these occasions, and is using his travel diary as his source.” (IBID.)

The first five verses of chapter one of the Acts states that Luke was trying to explain “all that Jesus began both to do and to teach.” Luke chapter one tells us that he was among those who “from the beginning were witnesses, and ministers of the Word.” Luke says that he “had perfect understanding

of all things from the very first.” (vs. 3) Luke addresses both of these books to the “most excellent Theophilus”. (vs. 3b) There is some discussion as to whether this person is an actual person or a generic name to address all the people who would read Luke’s books. The name “Theophilus” means, “a friend of God.” The formula “most excellent is a common expression used to show honor to a person of rank. We see it used here as well as in Acts 26:25 where Paul speaks to “most excellent Festus”. It is also used in reference to “most excellent Felix” in Acts 24:2. Theophilus could be a Roman official to whom Luke was corresponding. In any case both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts were recognized as authoritative and passed among the churches as the Word of God.

In Acts 1:2 we are told that Jesus taught His disciples, *“Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen.”* We see the counter point to this passage in Luke 24:50. There Jesus is leading His disciples outside of the city and after instructing them, *“but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”* (vs. 49) In Acts 1:4 we read *“And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.”*

Some have said that Luke could have named his second volume “the Acts of the Holy Ghost” since we see so much of His power and working in the book.

The Book of Acts can be divided into 4 parts.

- I. The introduction to the beginning of the Church. (1:1-28)
- II. The Church in Jerusalem (2:1-8:3)
- III. The Church moving out of Jerusalem (8:4-12:25)
- IV. The Church advancing to the uttermost part of the earth. (12:26-28:30)

For the purposes of this study we will try to follow this outline.

Information in this study was obtained at

www.bible.org/article/study-outline-acts

www.Wikipedia.com (for information for Theophilus)

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary. Moody Press. 1962.

Ideas to consider:

1) What doctrines do we see in The Acts that later changed and are taught in the epistles?

2) In your opinion is Theophilus a real person or a generic name for the those who love God?

3) Why can we name the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, “the Acts of the Holy Ghost”?

Notes:
