

Lecture 14: New Testament Survey

The Acts of the Apostles

Why this book is called “The Acts of the Apostles”?

According to D.A. Carson, when Saint Luke penned this book, he gave it no title. It was only in the second century that the second volume of early Christian history came to be known as *The Acts of the Apostles*.

This title arose in response to a man named *Marcion*, who began teaching that the Lord Jesus Christ had introduced a *new religion*, and that only the Apostle Paul had fully obeyed it. Marcion was deeply influenced by the ministry of the Apostle Paul. To correct this imbalance, the Church affirmed the title *The Acts of the Apostles*—to declare that these are not merely the acts of Paul alone.

Some scholars suggest that this book ought to be called *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*, for it is the Holy Spirit who empowers and works through the apostles in all things.

Why is the Book of Acts Important?

1. The Book of Acts is a Bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles

- It is the fruit of the Gospels. In the Gospels, the Lord Jesus Christ is likened to a grain of wheat which falls into the ground and dies, and brings forth much fruit (John 12:24).
- It is the continuation of the Gospel story. In the Gospels, Christ shed His blood and purchased the Church; in Acts, the Church is brought into being.
- In the Gospels, the Lord Jesus prophesied, “*I will build My Church*” (Matthew 16:18); in Acts, that prophecy is fulfilled.
- In the Gospels, Christ commanded His disciples to preach the Gospel and carry it to the ends of the earth; in Acts, this mission is visibly carried out.

The Book of Acts also serves as an *introduction to the Epistles*. It provides the historical background of many of the letters and helps us understand their context more clearly.

2. The Book of Acts is a Book of Practical Theology

Acts lays down, through both word and deed, the foundational truths and principles of the Church.

It reveals the teachings of Christ in the Gospels brought to life through action.

The Book of Acts as a Foundational Curriculum

The Book of Acts also serves as a curriculum for various foundational themes of the Christian life and Church. Among these are:

- Evangelism
- Pneumatology (The study of the Holy Spirit)
- Mission
- Church Planting
- Church Governance
- Team Work
- The Prayer Life of the Church
- The Character of a Biblical Christian

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- Discipleship
- Christian Apologetics

The Book of Beginnings — Like Genesis

In many ways, Acts serves as a book of beginnings, much like the Book of Genesis:

- i. The beginning of Gospel proclamation
- ii. The beginning of a new era through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit
- iii. The foundation of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ

4. Acts Is the Only Unfinished Book in the New Testament

It is the only book in the New Testament that does not conclude with “Amen” (cf. Acts 28:30–31).

Instead, it ends with the ongoing proclamation of the Kingdom of God—signifying that the work of God’s Kingdom is not yet complete.

Date of Composition

At the close of the book, the temple in Jerusalem is still standing, and the Apostle Paul is alive and well, though imprisoned in Rome. This indicates that the book was written before 70 AD, the year in which Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. Moreover, it was written before 68 AD, when Paul was martyred.

On the other hand, the book must have been written after 54 AD, by which time the Gentiles had begun to be drawn in great numbers to the faith (cf. Acts 18:2).

According to Norman L. Geisler, the book was likely written around AD 61 or 62. Constantine Campbell also affirms that the book was written in AD 61.

The Book of Acts encompasses approximately 33 years of early Church history.

