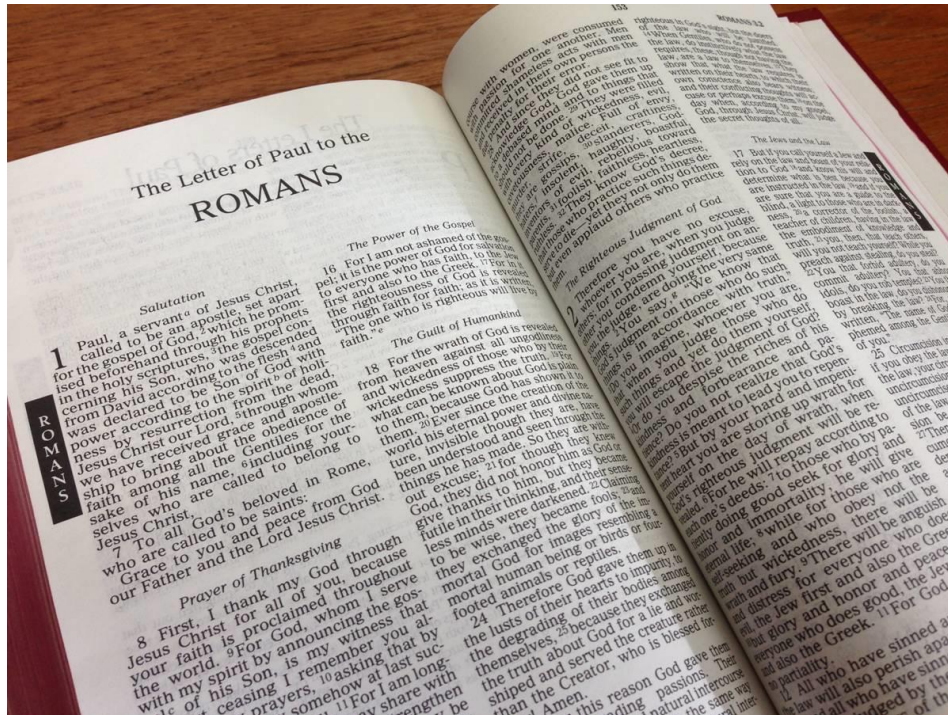


Ichthus Bible School

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How the Church acts in Acts

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1 Surveying the Scenery in Acts – An Example

Let's start by diving into Acts (almost) at Random... but it's a great story...

What do you notice here? Apart from the main point of the story - an amazing resurrection! (and the rather British understated conclusion) – *italics* provided to help...

ACTS 20.5-12 NRSV

⁵They went ahead and were waiting for *us* in Troas;
⁶but *we* sailed from Philippi after *the days of Unleavened Bread*, and in five days *we* joined *them* in Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

⁷On the *first day of the week*, when we *met to break bread*, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight. ⁸There were many *lamps* in *the room upstairs* where we were meeting. ⁹A young man named Eutychus, who was *sitting in the window*, began to sink off into a deep sleep while Paul talked *still longer*. Overcome by sleep, he fell to the ground *three floors below* and was picked up dead. ¹⁰But Paul went down, and bending over him took him in his arms, and said, 'Do not be alarmed, *for his life is in him*.' ¹¹Then Paul went upstairs, and *after he had broken bread and eaten*, he *continued to converse with them until dawn*; then he left. ¹²Meanwhile they had taken the boy away alive and were *not a little comforted*.

2 Who Does What in Acts?

Where, within eighty pages, will be found such a varied series of exciting events – trials, riots, persecutions, escapes, martyrdoms, voyages, shipwrecks, rescues – set in that amazing panorama of the ancient world – Jerusalem, Antioch, Philippi, Corinth, Athens, Ephesus, Rome and with such scenery and settings – temples, courts, prisons, deserts, ships, barracks, theatres? Has opera such variety? A bewildering range of scenes and actions (and of speeches) passes before the eye of the historian. And in all of them he sees the providential hand that has made and guided this great movement for the salvation of mankind.

Goodspeed EJ *Introduction to the New Testament* (Chicago, Chicago UP: 1937): 187-88

The dogs that don't bark in Acts.

2.1 The Divine Actor(s)

The Prominence of God/Jesus the Holy Spirit
Is Acts the 'Acts of the Holy Spirit'?

2.2 The Human Actors – the Apostles and the Churches

2.2.1 The Gospel and Acts – Parallel Stories

The primary gain of the recent criticism of Luke-Acts has been the recognition that the Gospel according to Luke and the Book of Acts are really two volumes of the same work that must be considered together.

Gasque WW *History of Interpretation of Acts*: 309

...both [Luke and Acts] proceeded from preliminary Spirit-anointing of the key actors, to the inaugural proclamation and confirmatory miracles followed by initial ministry success and increasing opposition, to an extensive travel narrative, succeeded by an arrest and three fold trial, and final consummation. The pattern of mission experienced by Jesus is also experienced by the early church...

Penny JM *The Missionary Emphasis of Lukan Pneumatology*: 16

2.2.2 The Apostles as Key Figures

The Parallelism of Peter and Paul
The Two by Two Strategy

3 The Gospel as the Word and Work of God

3.1 The Unique Universal and Cosmic Message of the Gospel

3.2 Preaching the Gospel as a Place of Divine Revelation

The gospel message is just 'the word (of God/the Lord)' (eg. 4.4, 29; 8.4; 15.36; 16.32; 17.13; 18.11; 19.20 etc.), the proclamation of the kingdom of God (eg 8.12; 19.8; 20.25; 28.23, 31).

This includes: (a) assertion of God's purposes with Israel revealed in Scripture;

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- (b) the identification of God's saving acts in Jesus as proof that he is the Messiah;
- (c) the conviction of the universal, cosmic and eschatological nature of this revelation.

Some Key Texts:

Example 1: The Day of Pentecost – Peter to Jews: 2.22-24, 31-40

Example 2: In Solomon's Portico – Peter to Jews: 3.13-26

Example 3: Peter before the Council – Peter to Jews 4.10-12, 20; 5.30-32

Example 4: In Cornelius' House in Caesarea – Peter to Gentiles 10.34-43

Example 5: In Pisidian Antioch – Paul to Jews 13.23-41

Example 6: Paul at the Areopagus – Paul to Greeks 17.22-31

Is there any difference in the proclamation to Jews and Gentiles or from apostle to apostle?

What common themes are in evidence here?

What distinctive ideas does each text have?

To what extent can this be described as 'the proclamation of the cross?' (cf 8.26ff; 20.28)

3.3 Responding to the Gospel

Responding to the gospel leads people to:

- (a) avoid the judgement which would otherwise come upon them;
- (b) experience salvation;
- (c) receive forgiveness;
- (d) join the company of those that believe.

Acts 2.38 is seen by many commentators (eg Dunn, Larkin) as **programmatic**:

Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins might be forgiven: and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...

To what extent does this represent a Lukan *ordo salutis*?

The various elements here are common in Acts, though rarely are they all constellated in the same way:

Disciples are designated *believers* (2.44; 4.32; 15.5, 7; 17.12, 34 'became believers' 18.8, 27; 21.20, 25; 22.19)

Repentance and/or believing (in Jesus) is a usual response to hearing the gospel message:

4.4: 'many of those who heard the word believed';

5.31: '...repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins';

11.17: 'the same gift he gave us when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ'; this is 'repentance that leads to life' (11.18);

15.7-11: 'God chose...that I [Peter] should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the gospel and believe...God testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit...and in cleansing their hearts by faith...we believe that we will be saved through the grace of Jesus Christ, just as they will';

17.30: '[God] commands all people everywhere to repent';

'to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they might receive forgiveness of sins and a place amongst those who are sanctified by faith...' (26.17-18))

Baptism is also a normal response to the gospel (8.12; 9.18; 10.47; 16.15, 33; 19.5; 22.16)

The coming of the Spirit is often clear and dramatic: (8.17; 9.18; 10.45-46; 19.6)

20.18-25 summarises Paul's ministry as: 'proclaiming the message, teaching...testified...about repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus...I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom...declaring to you the whole purpose of God.'

For Luke the resurrection of Jesus is not a necessary consequence of his life - as if the movement of history could of itself produce life over death – but an act of God... Yet we would be mistaken to think that the mere fact of the resurrection engenders universal mission... According to Acts, it is rather that the resurrection confirms the identity of Jesus as the Lord of all and makes this identity effective now, in the present, for the whole world... Though Luke has been long been accused of toning down the eschatological fervour of the early ... church, the narrative of Acts is actually replete with eschatological markers that underlie dramatically the radical shift in cosmic conditions that occurred with the resurrection of Jesus.

Because of the formative effects Christianity has had upon the entirety of Western society, it may be very difficult for us to unthink the necessity of mission as an essential element of vibrant religious life and to overcome the inevitable sense of strangeness that can accompany the encounter with profoundly non-missionary religions ... As stated categorically in the words of Robin Lane Fox: “exactly “none” of the Pagan religions “had a strong missionary drive .”

There is simply no good analogue to early Christian mission in the ancient Pagan world. As Martin Goodman remarked with pointed clarity, “no pagan seriously dreamed of bringing all humankind to give worship in one body to one deity.” And that of course is just what Christian mission is according to Acts.

It would have made little sense to initiate evangelism to gentiles with the term Christos. Unless they were already steeped in the messianic hopes of Judaism, to hear that Jesus was the Jewish messiah would in all probability have had little effect. Even Cornelius, a pious and religiously knowledgeable gentile, heard of Jesus less in messianic terms than in cosmic ones (judge of the living and the dead, Lord of all etc.). To proclaim ton kurion Iesoun, however, would be to speak a language intelligible even to... religiously ignorant gentiles. As we have already remarked, there were in the ancient world many gods and many Lords.

Rowe CK *World Upside Down: 123-128.*

4.4 The Narrative Arc of Acts Contains Claims about the Gospel

- That the spread of the gospel is successful – changing lives and reaching even Rome.
- Oversight of the mission is inherent to the work of the apostles, who itinerate. Though 8.4 suggests that those who were scattered from Jerusalem proclaimed ‘the word’ though this explicitly excludes the apostles (8.1).
- The work of mission is witness/testimony (apostles 1.8, 22; 2.32; 3.15; 4.33; 5.32; 10.39, 41 Paul 13.31; 18.5; 20.21; 22.15, 18; 23.11 etc.). This involves the ideas of both: (i) legal defence; and (ii) sworn eye-witness (cf 4.19-20). Note that God also *testifies* to the to the (inclusion of) the Gentiles by the Spirit (15.8).
- Mission is closely related to the work of the Spirit who gives boldness in speaking 4.30.
- Dramatic events both provoke interest and confirm the work of God (3.9-11; 4.30; 5.12-16; 6.8; 8.6-8; 9.34-35, 42; 14.8-11).
- Mission also involves the establishing of communities of believers.
- The gospel reaches out across religious and cultural boundaries: these churches contain both Jews and gentiles – the work of the Spirit shows the acceptance of the gentiles.

(Why) Does Paul go to the synagogue first? (13.14; 14.1; 17.1-2: ‘as was his custom’; 18.4, 19; 19.8 cf. Gal 2.9) Is this a model for mission (parallel to the idea of starting in ‘our’ Jerusalem (1.8))?

Are the apostles’ use of Scripture with Jews (cf 18.24-28) and Paul’s Areopagus Speech (17.22-33) models of Christian contextualised early apologetics?

Is Paul’s preparedness to circumcise Timothy a model for missionary empathy and adaptive practice? (16.1-5)

Does Paul focus on strategic centres as Bosch suggests? (Corinth 18.11, Ephesus 19.10, Philippi 16.6-11?)

What role does the local community (rather than traveling ‘evangelists’) play in mission?