



Lecture # 12 Part 4

INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

- B.** Acts is obviously related to the misunderstanding that surrounded the death of Jesus (for treason). Apparently, Luke is writing to Gentiles (Theophilus, possibly a Roman official). He uses (1) the speeches of Peter, Stephen, and Paul to show the scheming of the Jews and (2) the positiveness of Roman governmental officials toward Christianity. Romans had nothing to fear from the followers of Jesus.
1. speeches of Christian leaders
 - a. Peter, [Acts 2:14–40](#); [Acts 3:12–26](#); [Acts 4:8–12](#); [Acts 10:34–43](#)
 - b. Stephen, [Acts 7:1–53](#)
 - c. Paul, [Acts 13:10–42](#); [Acts 17:22–31](#); [Acts 20:17–25](#); [Acts 21:40–22:21](#); [Acts 23:1–6](#); [Acts 24:10–21](#); [Acts 26:1–29](#)
 2. contacts with governmental officials
 - a. Pontius Pilate, [Luke 23:13–25](#)
 - b. Sergius Paulus, [Acts 13:7, 12](#)
 - c. chief magistrates of Philippi, [Acts 16:35–40](#)
 - d. Gallio, [Acts 18:12–17](#)
 - e. Asiarchs of Ephesus, [Acts 19:33–41](#) (esp. [v. 31](#))
 - f. Claudius Lysias, [Acts 23:39](#)
 - g. Felix, [Acts 24](#)
 - h. Porcius Festus, [Acts 25](#)
 - i. Agrippa II, [Acts 26](#) (esp. [v. 32](#))
 - j. Publius, [Acts 28:7–10](#)
 3. When one compares Peter’s sermons with Paul’s, it is obvious that Paul is not an innovator, but a faithful proclaimer of Apostolic, gospel truths. The *Kerygma* is unified!
- C.** Luke not only defended Christianity before the Roman government (cf. **John W. Mauk**, *Paul on Trial: The Book of Acts as a Defense of Christianity*), but he also defended Paul before the Gentile church. Paul was repeatedly attacked by Jewish groups (i.e. Judaizers of Galatians; the “super apostles” of [2 Corinthians 10–13](#)) and Hellenistic groups (i.e. gnosticism of Colossians and Ephesians). Luke shows Paul’s normalcy by clearly revealing his heart and theology in his travels and sermons.
- D.** Although Acts was not intended to be a doctrinal book, it does record for us the elements of the early Apostles’ preaching which **C. H. Dodd** has called “the *Kerygma*” (i.e. **essential truths about Jesus**). This helps us see what they felt were the essentials of the gospel, especially as they relate to Jesus’ death and resurrection.



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SPECIAL TOPIC: THE *KERYGMA* OF THE EARLY CHURCH

- A. The promises by God made in the Old Testament have now been fulfilled with the coming of Jesus the Messiah ([Acts 2:30](#); [Acts 3:19, 24](#); [Acts 10:43](#); [Acts 26:6–7, 22](#); [Romans 1:2–4](#); [1 Timothy 3:16](#); [Hebrews 1:1–2](#); [1 Peter 1:10–12](#); [2 Peter 1:18–19](#)).
- B. Jesus was anointed as Messiah by God at His baptism ([Acts 10:38](#)).
- C. Jesus began His ministry in Galilee after His baptism ([Acts 10:37](#)).
- D. His ministry was characterized by doing good and performing mighty works by means of the power of God ([Mark 10:45](#); [Acts 2:22](#); [Acts 10:38](#)).
- E. The Messiah was crucified according to the purpose of God ([Mark 10:45](#); [John 3:16](#); [Acts 2:23](#); [Acts 3:13–15, 18](#); [Acts 4:11](#); [Acts 10:39](#); [Acts 26:23](#); [Romans 8:34](#); [1 Corinthians 1:17–18](#); [1 Corinthians 15:3](#); [Galatians 1:4](#); [Hebrews 1:3](#); [1 Peter 1:2, 19](#); [1 Peter 3:18](#); [1 John 4:10](#)).
- F. He was raised from the dead and appeared to His disciples ([Acts 2:24, 31–32](#); [Acts 3:15, 26](#); [Acts 10:40–41](#); [Acts 17:31](#); [Acts 26:23](#); [Romans 8:34](#); [Romans 10:9](#); [1 Corinthians 15:4–7, 12](#); [1 Thessalonians 1:10](#); [1 Timothy 3:16](#); [1 Peter 1:2](#); [1 Peter 3:18, 21](#)).
- G. Jesus was exalted by God and given the name “Lord” ([Acts 2:25–29, 33–36](#); [Acts 3:13](#); [Acts 10:36](#); [Romans 8:34](#); [Romans 10:9](#); [1 Timothy 3:16](#); [Hebrews 1:3](#); [1 Peter 3:22](#)).
- H. He gave the Holy Spirit to form the new community of God ([Acts 1:8](#); [Acts 2:14–18, 38–39](#); [Acts 10:44–47](#); [1 Peter 1:12](#)).
- I. He will come again for judgment and the restoration of all things ([Acts 3:20–21](#); [Acts 10:42](#); [Acts 17:31](#); [1 Corinthians 15:20–28](#); [1 Thessalonians 1:10](#)).
- J. All who hear the message should repent and be baptized ([Acts 2:21, 38](#); [Acts 3:19](#); [Acts 10:43, 47–48](#); [Acts 17:30](#); [Acts 26:20](#); [Romans 1:17](#); [Romans 10:9](#); [1 Peter 3:21](#)).

This schema served as the essential proclamation of the early church, though different authors of the New Testament may leave out a portion or emphasize other particulars in their preaching. The entire Gospel of Mark closely follows the *Petrine* aspect of the *kerygma*. Mark is traditionally seen as structuring Peter’s sermons, preached in Rome, into a written Gospel. Both Matthew and Luke follow Mark’s basic structure.

- E. **Frank Stagg** in his commentary, *The Book of Acts, the Early Struggle for an Unhindered Gospel*, asserts the purpose is primarily the movement of the message about Jesus (i.e. the gospel) from a strictly nationalistic Judaism to a universal message for all humans. Stagg’s commentary focuses on Luke’s purpose(s) in writing Acts. A good summary and analysis of the different theories is found on **pp. 1–18**. Stagg chooses focusing on the term “**unhindered**” in [Acts 28:31](#), which is an unusual



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way to end a book, as the key to understanding Luke's emphasis on the spread of Christianity overcoming all barriers.

- F. Although the Holy Spirit is mentioned more than fifty times in Acts, it is not **"the Acts of the Holy Spirit."** There are eleven chapters where the Spirit is never mentioned. He is mentioned most often in the first half of Acts, where Luke is quoting other sources (possibly originally written in Aramaic). Acts is not to the Spirit what the Gospels are to Jesus! **This is not meant to depreciate the Spirit's place, but to guard us from building a theology of the Spirit primarily or exclusively from Acts.**
- G. Acts is not designed to teach doctrine (cf. **Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, pp. 94–112**). An example of this would be the attempt to base a theology of conversion from Acts which is doomed to failure. The order and elements of conversion differ in Acts; therefore, which pattern is normative? We must look to the Epistles for doctrinal help. However, it is interesting that some scholars (i.e. Hans Conzelmann) have seen Luke purposefully reorienting the immanent eschatologies of the first century with a patient service approach to the delayed *parousia*. The kingdom is here in power now, changing lives. The church functioning now becomes the focus, not an eschatological hope.
- H. Another possibly purpose of Acts is similar to **Romans 9–11**, why did the Jews reject the Jewish Messiah and the church become mostly Gentile? In several places in Acts the world-wide nature of the gospel is clearly trumpeted. Jesus sends them into all the world (**Acts 1:8**). The Jews rejected Him, but Gentiles responded to Him. His message reaches Rome. It is possible that Luke's purpose is to show that **Jewish Christianity (i.e. Peter)** and **Gentile Christianity (i.e. Paul)** can live together and grow together! They are not in competition, but joined in world evangelism.
- I. As far as purpose is concerned I agree with **F. F. Bruce (i.e. *New International Commentary*, p. 18)** that since Luke and Acts were originally one volume that the prologue for Luke (i.e. **Luke 1:1–4**) functions also for Acts. Luke, though not an eyewitness to all the events, carefully researched them and recorded them accurately, using his own historical, literary, theological framework. Luke then in both his Gospel and narrative, wants to show the historical reality and theological trustworthiness (cf. **Luke 1:4**) of Jesus and the church. It may be that the focus of Acts is the theme of fulfillment (i.e. **unhindered**). This theme is carried forward by several different words and phrases (cf. **Walter L. Liefeld, *Interpreting the Book of Acts*, pp. 23–24**). The Gospel is not an after-thought, a plan B, or a new thing. It is



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God's predetermined plan (cf. [Acts 2:23](#); [Acts 3:18](#); [Acts 4:28](#); [Acts 13:29](#)).

V. GENRE

- A. **Acts is to the NT what Joshua through II Kings is to the OT, historical narrative. Biblical historical narrative is factual**, but the focus is not on chronology or exhaustive recording of events. It selects certain events which explain who God is, who we are, how we are made right with God, and how God wants us to live.
- B. The problem in interpreting biblical narrative is that the authors never put in the text (1) what their purpose is (2) or what the main truth is or (3) how we should emulate the things recorded. The reader needs to think through the following questions.
 - 1. Why was the event recorded?
 - 2. How does it relate to previous biblical material?
 - 3. What is the central theological truth?
 - 4. Is there significance to the literary context? (What event precedes or follows? Has this subject been dealt with elsewhere?)
 - 5. How large is the literary context? (sometimes large amounts of narrative form one theological theme or purpose).
- C. **Historical narrative should not be the only source of doctrine.** Often things are recorded that are incidental to the purpose of the author. Historical narrative often illustrates truths recorded elsewhere in the Bible. Just because something is recorded does not mean it is God's will for all believers in all ages (ex. suicide, polygamy, holy war, handling snakes).
- D. The best brief discussion of how to interpret historical narrative is in **Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart's *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, pp. 78–93 and 94–112.**

VI. COMMENTARIES AND HELPS

- A. *An Atlas of the Acts* by John Sterling
- B. *A Study Guide Commentary, Acts* by Curtis Vaughan (brief but excellent)
- C. *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale commentary Series, by E. M. Blaiklock (good historical summary of Greco-Roman world, as well as Judaism both within and without Palestine)
- D. *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary series by F. F. Bruce (he is one of my favorite commentators)
- E. *The Book of Acts, The early Struggle for an Unhindered Gospel* by Frank Stagg



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- F. *A Translator's Handbook of the Acts of the Apostles* by Newman and Nida, UBS**
- G. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Fee and Stuart**
- H. *An Introduction to the New Testament*, by Carson, Moo, and Morris**

VII. BASIC OUTLINES FROM THE ABOVE COMMENTARIES

- A. Curtis Vaughan's** commentary and the New International Study Bible's outline are based on [Acts 1:8](#).
- B. E. M. Blaiklock's** commentary in the Tyndale series is a good detailed outline.
- C. F. F. Bruce's** commentary in the New International Commentary series is based on the summary statements in Acts (cf. my notes at IV, A, 2, c).