

Place: Lurgan Baptist 1:12:2015

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

45. THE BOOK OF ACTS

Reading: Acts 1:1-14

Thomas J. Altizer, William Hamilton and Paul Van Buren started a theological thunder storm several years ago when they declared “*God is dead.*” In the midst of the debates which headlined American news magazines and polarized theological institutions one church put this message on their outdoor sign, “*God is alive and well, visiting hours every Sunday.*” If any document ever affirmed that God is alive and well, it is the Book of Acts. You see, Acts is not only the pivotal book of the New Testament it’s the primary document that describes the exciting development of the New Testament church. This fifth book in the New Testament has been called the Book of Acts. But the acts of whom ? Its usually called “*The Acts of the Apostles,*” but after chapter 12, little mention is made of any of the apostles. Others have declared this book to be the “*Acts of the Holy Spirit,*” who is mentioned 70 times in all. So to whose acts (praxis) does the title refer ? I think Luke gives us the answer in the opening verse of the book.

Do you see what he says ? (1:1-2) In the Gospels we see what *the Lord Jesus* began to do until the day He was taken up to be at the right hand of the Father. In Acts we see what *He continued* to do in His church through the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles and

other believers. *This book then, is a book about the acts of the resurrected Lord.* It forms the perfect counterpart and contrast to the Gospels. In the Gospels the Son of Man offered His life, in Acts the Son of God offered His power. The Gospels tell us of Christ crucified and risen, Acts speaks of Christ ascended and exalted. The Gospels model the Christian life as lived by the perfect Man, Acts models it as lived out by imperfect men. Now before we get into our study this I want to give some background information about the book of Acts. I want you to note,

(1) The AUTHOR of the Book:

Look at (1:1) In an indirect way that verse tells who wrote the book of Acts. Look at (Lk 1:3-4) Now Luke wrote his gospel for Theophilus. Then when he wrote a sequel, the book of Acts for Theophilus and he referred to his gospel as “*the former treatise.*” (1:1) Now we have discovered that Luke is not mentioned often in the New Testament so we know less of him than any other New Testament writer. He is referred to by name only three times in the New Testament. (Col 4:14: 2 Tim 4:11: Phil 24) and from those references we discover that Luke was a travel companion, a medical doctor, a beloved brother and a faithful servant. The Book of Colossians reference suggests Luke was a Gentile, making him perhaps the only Gentile writer of the New Testament. (1)

(2) The AIM of the Book:

Look at (1:1) again. Because Luke referred to his gospel as “*the former treatise,*” we can consider Acts to be the

second volume of Luke's writings. The gospel of Luke deals with what Jesus "*began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up,*" Acts deals with what Christ continued to do, after He was taken up, through the Holy Spirit in the lives of the *apostles*. (1:24 2:33,47) Now what Luke is saying is this. In the Gospel I showed you all that Christ *started* to do, in the book of Acts I am showing you all that Christ *continues* to do. The Gospel of Luke tells us of Christ's ministry while on earth in a *Physical Body*, the book of Acts tells us of Christ's ministry from heaven, through His *Spiritual Body*, the church. My Christ is still alive and active. He just has a different body for ministry. You say, "***where is the body of Christ ?***" Sitting in this building. Christ lives in us. (Col 1:27)

Have you discovered that God does not want you to do anything for Him ? What He wants is that He would do something through you ? Now notice what Dr. Luke is saying, "*I wrote the Gospel, that's what Jesus began to do, I am writing this book, that's what Jesus is continuing to do.*" So the **Aim** of this book is to show us Christ's ministry from heaven, through His Spiritual Body the church. **Chronologically** arranged, the contents of the book cover a 30 year period, from about 30 A.D. when Christ ascends to heaven, to 60 A.D. when Paul takes the gospel to Rome. Where do the events in Acts take place ? Well, like a travelogue Acts tours the ancient world,, taking us to Jerusalem to what is now Syria and Turkey, then hop scotching across the Mediterranean to Greece and finally Italy. **Geography is a key** to understanding the book, in fact, it is one of several ways to unlock its outline

for look at,

(3) The ANALYSIS of the Book:

Presented to us in (1:8) From that statement we learn that,

The Subject of Christian Witness is Christ:

The Source of Christian Witness is the Church:

The Sphere of Christian Witness is the World:

The Secret of Christian Witness is the Holy Spirit:

Now the best way to outline the book is geographically, using (1:8) as a guide. Now this verse summarises the entire book. (Ch's 1-7) tells of the witness in Jerusalem, the City, (Ch's 8 - 12) tells of the witness in Judea and Samaria the Provinces. And (Ch's 13 - 28) tells of the witness to "*the uttermost part of the earth.*" Put another way in Ch's 1-7 we see the church **Established** in Jerusalem, in (Ch's 8-12) we see the church **Scattered** to Judea and Samaria and in (Ch's 13-28) we see the church **Extended** to the remotest part of the earth. **Established, Scattered, Extended !** Do those three words not tell us something about,

(4) The APPLICATION of the Book:

You see Luke's story of the church remarkably resembles our own Christian development. For we, also, go through stages of **Establishing**: As new Christians, we enter a period of putting down roots. It's a nurturing time when Christ holds us close to Himself, often protecting us from

many of life's pains and giving us a sturdy foundation. Then according to His timetable, the next phase begins, **Scattering:** Persecution and pain, discomfort and disappointment are the watermarks of this stage, as Christ allows trials to wash over our lives. My through such times, the Lord strengthens us so that, eventually, we enter another phase of life. **Extending:** For having profited from life's buffeting, we become seasoned, mature servants of Christ, warts and all. Now He uses us as proven and worthy vessels that overflow with the message of Christ's power unhindered. Now,

5. The Advantages of the Book:

Are numerous.

Biographically: Luke portrays the characters of no less than 85 men and women. The outstanding characters of course Peter and Paul and these are in the fellowship of a host of other Christians many of whom are unnamed.

Experimentally: My the Book of Acts is the Authorized Missionary Manual of the Church and it's the greatest missionary story ever told. It records at least 60 names of places connected with the gospel. It covers a period of some 33 years from 30 A.D. to 63 A.D. Graham Scroggie says “ *Had the later generations of the church followed the example of the first the world would have been evangelized fifty times by now.* ”

Transitionally: Think of the Book of Acts as a revolving door. A revolving door is designed to allow people to go

in and go out at the same time. They go in on one side and out the other. The Book of Acts is like that. You see Old Testament Judaism is going out and the New Testament Church is coming in. Both are in the revolving door at the same time for a while, just as two people can be in a revolving door going in opposite directions. *But you can't do housekeeping in a revolving door for you'll get knocked right off your feet.* You see a revolving door is not for habitation it is for transition. In just the same way we should not rely on the Book of Acts exclusively for doctrine. *It's not designed for that. It's a book of history of fast moving events and of transition.* In this book we see the final rejection of the kingdom by Israel with the death of Stephen. Acts abounds with transitions from the ministry of Christ to that of the apostles, from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, from the nation as God's witness nation to the church as God's witness people.

Now if we do not keep the transitional nature of the Book in mind we will end up in confusion especially in relation to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. My the Book of Acts is designed to stir us up, to encourage and bless us, and to show us what God intends to do through His church. It's not primarily a book of doctrine. Now I want us to divide the book geographically as Luke does in (1:8) Therefore I want you to see,

(1) THE CHURCH IS ESTABLISHED Ch's 1:1-8:3

The first chapter is a preparation for all that follows in Chapter 2. Here we see the believers walking with the Saviour and waiting for the Spirit. I want you to notice

here,

(a) Something which is Fundamental: 1:1-2:13

It is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Look at (1:5) So you can see whatever this baptism was it was limited to a point of time, “ *not many days hence.*” (1:5) Do you know what Pentecost means ? The Greek word for Pentecost, means “ *fiftieth day.*” The Jews had a feast called the Feast of Pentecost because it took place fifty days after the feast of First Fruits which followed the Passover.

(Ex 23:16 Lev 23:13-16) *This feast was also known as the Feast of Harvest or the Feast of Weeks.* Fifty days after the Feast of First-fruits came the Feast of Harvest so called because it ushered in the harvesting period. The idea of the feast was to celebrate the completion of the harvest in advance. Now this feast predicts what happened on the day of Pentecost in (Acts 2) *It speaks of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.* The Son, the Lord Jesus honoured the Passover by dying. The Father honoured the Feast of First-Fruits by raising Christ from the dead. The Holy Spirit honoured the Feast of Weeks by coming on the disciples of Christ as they waited in that Jerusalem room.

The Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost to fulfil prophecy. My the Holy Spirit could not have come on any other day than the day that was appointed. ***Pentecost was a predetermined epoch in the mind of God.*** Now this does away with the notion held in some circles today that you have to wait to experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that you must go through stages to Pentecost. That

you have to tarry, wait, and ask for the Baptism of the Spirit. Now it's true that the disciples did tarry in obedience to Christ's command, (Lk 24:49 1:4-5) but they were told the precise spot, “ *Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem,*” So if anyone tells us that they are tarrying for the baptism of the Spirit we have every right to ask

“ *is it at Jerusalem ?*” More importantly, we have every right to ask, “ *is it necessary ?*” That all depends, depends on what ? Depends on whether or not the tarrying of the disciples caused the Descent or Baptism of the Spirit. ***The answer is no.*** The Holy Spirit did not come on the Day of Pentecost, because the disciples tarried, prayed, or met certain spiritual requirements. The Holy Spirit came on this day because that's when God planned for Him to come. He came on this day to fulfil prophecy. The appointed day had arrived and the Holy Spirit came. Now what did the Holy Spirit come to do ? He came to form a new body, the church. How did he do it ? By the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Of the seven references to the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament only one is doctrinal. (Matt 3:11 Mk 1:8 Lk 3:16 Jn 1:33 Acts 1:5 11:16) Look at (1 Cor 12:13) That word “ *by,*” can be translated “ *in or with,*” but whatever we take it Paul is stressing that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a baptism into the body of Christ. What happened on the day of Pentecost was this. About 120 individual believers in the Lord Jesus ascended the steps to the upper room, one body, the church came down. *These believers were constituted a spiritual body by the baptism of the Spirit, and thereafter by this baptism everyone upon believing is incorporated into the body of*

Christ. If you can answer the question, “ When was I placed into the body of Christ ? Then you can answer the question, “ when was I baptised with the Holy Spirit ?” The moment you believed. *So the baptism of the Spirit is when God’s Spirit takes a person and places him in the Body of Christ.* Look at how it happened in (Acts 2:2-3) These were the signs of the Spirit’s arrival. Wind and Fire symbols of the Holy Spirit. (Jn 3:8 Is 4:4) *There was the Awesome Sound:* “ *And suddenly,*” (2:2) The church was born suddenly. At the Rapture the church will leave just as quickly. *There was the Awesome Sight:* (2:3) The cloven tongues that sat on their heads weren’t actually fire, they appeared to be like fire. This was a testimony that each without exception had received the Holy Spirit. This was the Baptism of the Spirit and they all partook of it. The Holy Spirit, identifying these believers with their glorified Head the Lord Jesus, and forming the body which is the church. So there was the baptism of the Spirit, but there was,

The Filling of the Spirit: (2:4) Now don’t confuse the two. The baptism is the historical event, the filling is the human experience. The baptism is initial and final, the filling is often repeated or solemn truth may never be known at all. The word “ *filled,*” (pleroo) in the New Testament was used to convey the idea of “ *total control.*” Are you controlled by the Holy Spirit ? Does He exercise complete sway in your life ? (a)

(b) Something which is Evangelical: 2:14-4:22

Do you know what one of the key words in the Book of

Acts is ? Witness. “ *And ye shall be witnesses unto me,*” (1:8) The word occurs no less than 39 times in this book. (2:32, 3:15 10:39 22:15) Watch Peter as he preaches with power on the day of Pentecost (2:14) as he uses that opportunity to proclaim Christ at the gate of the Temple, (3:12) as he speaks with boldness to the Jewish Sanhedrin. (4:5-6) “ *Witnesses unto me,*” his theme was always Jesus Christ. The Greek word means “ *one who dies for his faith,*” because that was commonly the price of witnessing. My if Christ has done anything for you then you are to witness to it, tell others about it, share your experience of Christ. Are you telling others about Christ as you should ? Perhaps you have had the experience of having some neatly dressed young men come to your door and say something like this. “ *Wouldn’t it be nice if we had prophets today ?*” Then they present to you an incredible religious maze. An amazingly complex religious system, under the guise of being a witness for Christ’s later day church.

Their gospel is in reality a complete reversal of the good news of Christ’s grace. For the true witness to Christ referred is not like that. You see, to be a witness for Christ is to bring a message which is a marvel of simplicity. *Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh, He died to pay for our sins, He was resurrected, now He is exalted in heaven. He calls us to believe on Him and so receive forgiveness of sins.* My this is the good news of the gospel. And have you noticed about passionate the apostles were in their witness for Christ ? They fervently promoted their faith. They were a band of zealous believers who turned their world upside down.

Is this not what New Testament evangelism is all about ? They were witnesses. They were all at it and they were always at it. They had no radio, no television, no buses, no literature, no church buildings, no amplification, no computers, no internet, no broadband, no cameras and yet they turned the world upside down and inside out for Christ. “ *We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.* ” (4:20) Do you feel like that ? Or has Satan persuaded you to become a silent saint ? A.T. Pierson says, “ *Witnessing is the whole work for the whole church for the whole age.* ”

(c) Something which is Spiritual: 4:23-37

Do you know the thing that impresses you when you read the Book of Acts ? The people that God used were a praying people. The Book of Acts contains at least 30 references to prayer in many different settings. You see, the local church rises or falls with its praying. If you ask the average church member they will say, “ *No the churches rises or falls with its preaching.* ” Now preaching is important but praying was behind the apostles preaching in the Book of Acts. Paul was a man of prayer, Peter was a man of prayer. The early church believed in prayer and when they prayed something happened. Look at (4:31-33) Now I say to you that here is something which is spiritual. It does not appeal to the flesh that is why the Cinderella of the Church today is the prayer meeting. That’s why spiritual adolescents say, “ *I’ll not go tonight it’s only the prayer meeting.* ” Yet if you were to examine the early chapters of the Book of Acts do you know what you would discover ? You would discover that

church leaders attended the prayer meeting (1:13) Loyal women were found at the place of prayer. (1:14) That young converts were present (1:14) and those godly brethren did not miss. (6:4) What a lovely picture in the early church, the apostles who had been walking with Christ for about three years, godly women who had accompanied Christ from Galilee (Lk 8:2-3) and these new converts who had been saved just a short time, yet all at the place of prayer. Can I encourage all of you to attend the church prayer meetings ? C.H. Spurgeon said that “ *prayer is the autograph of the Holy Spirit on the renewed heart.* ” Prayer indicates our dependence on God, prayer acknowledges the Lordship of Christ, and prayer shows that we know our weakness and needs.

(d) Something which is Diabolical: 5:1-7:60

That is Devilish. Do you know how Satan attacks the church ? He attacks the church through Hypocrisy: (5:1-16) George McDonald wrote, “ *Half of the misery in the world comes from trying to look instead of trying to be what one is not.* ” Was this not the sin of Ananias and Sapphira ? My they sinned when they pretended to give it all. The name that the Lord Jesus gave to this practice is called hypocrisy. Its playing the part, its putting on the mask. Are we guilty of it ? Do we try to make others think we are more spiritual than we are ? Do you know how Satan attacks the church ? Through Intimidation: (5:17-42 7:1-7:60) What furious persecution we see here in (Ch’s 5, 6, & 7) Stephen probably one of the seven deacons appointed by the early church to “ *wait on tables,* ” (6:2) became the first

martyr. The Holy Spirit describes this outbreak as a “*great persecution.*” (8:1) You see, the devil never takes it lying down. Do you see what it says ? “*At that time,*” At what time. At the time when the church had great power, great grace, great fear. “*At that time,*” Are you enjoying the Lord’s blessing at the moment ? Then watch out for the devil will be at your heels. Do you see how Satan attacks the church ? Through Division: (6:1-7) What happened was this, When the other widows received two loaves of bread, the Hellenistic widows, that is Greek widows only got one. So you can see that the problem here was not doctrinal but functional. *It was not primary but over a petty thing.* Not, that it was not important but it was not one of the fundamentals of the faith. My do you realize that the devil wants to get us divided over incidental rather than fundamental things ? The apostles dealt with the problem promptly and a seven man body (possibly deacons) was appointed to administer the material and financial affairs of the church. Thus, the church was established.

(2) THE CHURCH IS ENRICHED 8:4-12:25

Do you recall the Doctor’s inspired outline ? “*Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and in Samaria,*” (1:8) So Philip the evangelist, one of the seven steps forward to carry the gospel down to Samaria. God uses different people at different times in different for different reason to enrich his church. So the church is blessed,

(a) BY PHILIP: 8:4-8:40

For when Philip goes down to Samaria revival breaks out, so much so that the Jerusalem church decide to send its two leading apostles Peter and John to see what was going on. Philip then left to carry the gospel to the Chancellor of the Exchequer from Ethiopia and tradition holds that many Ethiopians were led to Christ through this man. So the reach of the gospel extended to the continent of Africa. Now wasn’t Philip so flexible to the will of the Lord ? He was ready to serve anytime, anywhere and at any cost. Are you ? Is this not what Spirit-led witnessing is all about ? *The right person, in the right place, at the right time saying the right thing.* (a)

(b) BY PAUL: 9:1-31

When converted he was on his way north to Damascus, armed with warrants for the arrest of any Christian he could find, when he came face to face with the living Son of God. He was saved on the spot and thereafter flung himself enthusiastically and tirelessly into the evangelization of the lost. “*Lord what wilt Thou have me to do ?*” (9:6) You see, Saul settled the matter of life-service at the same time as he settled the question of the salvation of his soul. (1 Sam 3:9) Now up until his conversion Saul had been following his own will, the Devils will, (Eph 2:2) the will of the priests who commissioned him (9:1) but now he cries, “*Lord what Thou have me. to do ?*” Saul’s first question had the word “*Lord,*” at the end, this is what Christ had been to him previously. His second question put “*Lord,*” first and this is where Paul kept the Lord from this time onward. As an eighteen year old Jonathan Edwards wrote the following

in his journal. “ *Resolved that all men should live to the glory of God. Resolved secondly, that whether or not anyone else does I will.*” Paul realised that the Lord expects each of us to make that kind of commitment.

(c) BY PETER: 9:32-11:30

You see, Peter was God’s key man. Do you recall what the Lord Jesus said to Peter “ *And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.*” (Matt 16:19) We use keys to open doors and Peter was God’s key man. Peter was given the privilege of opening the door of faith to the Jews (Ch 2) then in (Ch 8) he opened the door of faith to the Samaritans and now in (Ch 10) he opens the door of faith to the Gentiles. What happened in Cornelius’s house was the same thing that happened in Jerusalem when Peter preached to the Jews at Pentecost and the Holy Spirit was poured out. ((15:7-9) The Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles as He was given to the Jews. This meant that God was including Cornelius and his household in the church. ***There would not be two churches a Jewish church and a Gentile church. There would be one comprised of believers from both groups.***

Peter was reluctant to go “ *Not so Lord,*” (10: 14) but eventually he was obedient. I wonder with us is it “ *Not so,*” or “ *Lord, ?*” (a) (b) (c) and the church was enriched,

(d) BY PERSECUTION: 12:1-25

You see, “ *the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.*” Herod would do anything to ingratiate himself with his Jewish subjects so he martyred James and

imprisoned Peter. Do you see (12:5) ? Do you see the word “ *but.*” There is a hostile world attacking, there is a beleaguered church praying and there is a prayer answering God intervening. And the same angel that saved Peter smote Herod “ *But the word of God grew and multiplied.*” (12:24) (1) (2) Notice finally,

(3) THE CHURCH IS EXTENDED 13:1-28:31

Do you recall Gods plan ? “ *Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*” (1:8) You see, (Acts Ch 13) begins the third main division in the book. The church was ***Established*** in Jerusalem, (Ch’s 1-7) ***Scattered*** to Judea and Samaria (Ch’s 8-12), and now, through the rest of the book of Acts, it will ***Extend*** to the remotest parts of the earth Here the emphasis in Acts moves, ***from Jerusalem to Antioch in Syria.*** (11:19) ***From Peter to Paul. From ministry to the Jews to ministry to the Gentiles. From Palestine to the Mediterranean world. From home missions to foreign missions.*** Paul was saved about A.D. 37. In A.D. 44 the church at Antioch sent Barnabas and him to the mission field. By the time Paul was arrested in Jerusalem in A.D. 58 just fourteen years later, churches in city after city of the Roman Empire were gathering for the worship of Christ. Isn’t that amazing ? You see,

(a) PAUL’S FAITHFUL ACTIVITY: 13:1-21:16

Is brought before us in these chapters. Now (Ch 13) to (Ch 21) focus on Paul’s three missionary journeys.

1. The First Missionary Journey is found in (13:4-14:28)

2. The Second Missionary Journey is found in (15:36-18:22)

3. The Third Missionary Journey is found in (18:23-21:17)

On the first missionary journey the *Holy Spirit is Calling*: on the second missionary journey the *Holy Spirit is Controlling*: and on the third missionary journey the *Holy Spirit is Consolidating*. What a tireless ambassador Paul was. Here he was a sick man, in constant need of medical attention. He says “ *I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*” (Gal 6:18) John Phillips has worked out that he travelled 5580 miles by foot, and 6770 miles by boat therefore as recorded in this Book of Acts he covered 12,350 hair raising miles to tell people about Jesus. I don't know about you but that makes me feel ashamed. I mean, can we go to the next door neighbour ? Can we stand on the street ? Can we witness in the open air ? Are we faithful in reaching the lost for Christ ? You know, even when they arrested Paul he was still witnessing for there was,

(b) PAUL'S FRUITFUL CAPTIVITY: 21:17-28:31

Do you see him at *Jerusalem* ? (21:17-23:22) Witnessing to a mob that were going to lynch him. Do you see at *Caesarea* ? Standing before Felix, courageous, (Ch 24) before Festus confident, (25:1-12) before Agrippa courteous. (25:13-26:32) Do you see him at *Rome* ? Ch's 27-28) You see, to a Jew Rome would be “ *the*

uttermost part of the earth.” (1:8) Now in Rome Paul was under house arrest. (28:30) Sure he was in chains but Satan could not stop Paul from **Witnessing**: he started with the Jews as this was always Paul's pattern. (28:17-29) Then of course there were the soldiers that were chained to him. (28:16) I mean can you picture it ? Paul had a captive audience and he led many of them to the Saviour. (Phil 1:12-14 4:22) Satan could not stop from **Writing**: For during these two years in Rome Paul wrote the prison letters, the Christ exalting letters of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon. And through these letters he has touched millions around the world. My what have you done with your prison circumstances ? What have you done with your limitation's ? Like Paul have you taken and used them to spread His name abroad ? “ *And Paul dwelt two years*” (28:30-31) Paul was released (A.D. 63-66/67) and then some time later arrested again. (A.D. 67)

He knew that the end was coming and so he writes to Timothy, “ *For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*”

(2 Tim, 4:6-7) Tradition tells us that he was beheaded at Rome in A.D. 67. Didn't he finish well ? The Book of Acts is evidently an unfinished document, for Luke never wrote and could not write the end of the story. It is still being written today. For the Lord continues His ministry today through you and me. But one day “ *this same Jesus,*” (1:11) and the story will be completed. ***The question is, what part will you play in this great story of reaching the lost for Christ ?***

