

## Episode #1105 Acts Introduction: Second Luke

I. Acts is unique in the New Testament. Rather than the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, it focuses on what came after, when the Lord had ascended back into heaven. The Lord left His disciples with many commands to carry out, and Acts tells us how they did them.

II. The author of this book was Luke, the physician, friend, and co-worker of Paul. Acts 1:1 points us back to Luke 1:3. Luke was not a disciple during the time of Christ, and only joined Paul partway through his ministry. He was not an eyewitness to many of the things in Acts. Yet Luke's words in his gospel assure us that he had "perfect understanding of all things from the very first." Luke was written by Divine inspiration. So, too, was Acts.

III. Many teach Luke was the only Gentile author of a book of the Bible. But consider Nebuchadnezzar (see Daniel 4:1.) Still if Luke was a Gentile, this would be the only book of Scripture to be written completely by a non-Jewish author. This idea is based on two pieces of evidence.

- A. The name "Luke" is probably a Latin name. But having a Gentile name was no proof of Gentile ancestry. My name, "Nathan," is of Hebrew origin, yet I am not a Jew.
- B. We know Luke was not circumcised. Colossians 4:11-14. But I do not believe that every Jew was circumcised. Particularly outside the land, many ancestral Israelites gave up on the practice of the religion of their fathers, and so would have neglected the circumcision of their male infants. Luke could have just as easily been one of these.
- C. It seems to me many say Luke was a Gentile based on wishful thinking rather than on any actual facts. Every other book of Scripture was written by or through an Israelite. Many want to see Gentiles taking over in the Acts period. If the author of every one of the books of the New Testament was a Jew that believed, this is called into question. But if every other author of the remaining twenty-five books of the New Testament was an Israelite, what would we assume about the one author we cannot confirm was a Jew? Luke was more likely an uncircumcised Jew who returned to the faith of his fathers by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. Luke's purpose in writing is to continue the record he began in his gospel. Yet what was the Holy Spirit's purpose in writing? Our answer will strongly affect how we read the book, and what truth we believe we can learn from it. I believe that there are more mistaken beliefs taken from Acts than from probably any other book in Scripture. This all comes back to one basic misunderstanding about the purpose of the book of Acts: that it records the beginning and initial growth of the Christian "church" of today. The meaning of the word "ekklesia," translated "church," will be crucial to our study of this book.

V. A second idea is that we today are a continuation of what was happening in the book of Acts. The book ends abruptly. Some suggest this is to teach us that we are the continuation of Acts. This idea does not come from an actual study of this book, or a realistic look at the world of Christendom today. Yet it is an idea that is prevalent, and the cry that we all should "get back to the book of Acts" is common among many believers today. Of those who attempt to "get back to Acts," no clear consensus on how this is to be done has been reached. Some attempt to do so by resurrecting the miracles and gifts, others by declaring their leaders as apostles or prophets, others by choosing to meet in homes. But whatever their strategy or beliefs, one fact is true of all of these. They are so busy trying to figure out how they **could** get back to the way things were in

Acts, that they never stop to ask themselves whether or not they **should** try to get back to the way things were then. Is this really what God wants us to do?

VI. Men justify a host of ideas by the words, actions, and teachings of the book of Acts. Among these are the practice of many religious rituals like water baptism, belief in the “charismatic” gifts today, and the idea of the authoritative position of the “church” and its leaders. A whole host of expectations of God are based upon things written in the book of Acts. Men expect miraculous signs, Divine helps, supernatural interventions, and Spiritual judgments to pass upon men from what they read in the book of Acts. Yet those who wait upon Heaven to provide these things find themselves ultimately disappointed.

VII. I believe all these errors are based upon a misunderstanding regarding the purpose for which the book of Acts was written. The common idea is that the purpose of the book of Acts was to record for us the early history of the church. This is done to justify from the Word of God the religion and practices of “Christianity.” Nothing is further from the truth. However, the largely apostate religion we call “Christianity” today came into being, it was not through the actions and activities of God’s apostles recorded for us in Acts.

VIII. So what was, in fact, the purpose of the book of Acts?

- A. This book was written to reveal to us the continuation **and completion** of the work the Lord Jesus began to do in His earthly ministry. Acts 1:1.
- B. The record of Acts answers a great question put to the Lord Jesus in Acts 1:6. According to the theology of most, the Lord should have answered, “Of course not! The kingdom was never a physical kingdom, but was always meant to be a spiritual kingdom.” But see verses 7-8. The disciples were hoping for the appearance of the government of God upon earth. Christ left the possibility open that that sovereignty could have been restored at that time. Nearly two thousand years later, we can conclude with certainty that Israel’s government was not restored then. Yet why not? Acts answers this.
- C. The book of Acts sets forth the acts, that is, the actions of the apostles. Romans 10:15. The Greek “sent” here is the verb form of the word “apostle.” This book records the proclaiming and the activities of those whom God sent. Not only their words, but also their actions were commissioned by God. Christ Himself would have done little differently had He Himself been on the scene and acting in their place in the time of Acts.

IX. Imagine what the Bible would look like if Acts did not exist. The jump from John to Romans would be jarring! The book of Acts finishes the picture, shows the completion of Christ’s work in the past, and gives hope for a yet-greater completion in the kingdom.

X. I believe we have before us the true purposes for which God gave us this interesting book. I have only touched on these briefly in this introduction, but we will have ample opportunity to examine them in detail as we move through the text of the book of Acts.

XI. Conclusion: The second book Luke wrote was for the purpose of recording how the Lord’s work and ministry begun in the gospel period continued through the apostles He chose. It does not record the start of a new work, the forming of a church, but the conclusion of an old one, the Lord’s ministry to Israel. Its message and focus is all toward God’s people of Israel. We will see more of this and what Acts is about in our next study.