

## Introduction to The Book of Acts

**Author:** Not much is known about the writer, as there is no mention of the writer's own background or life story. However, because of the "we" passages (e.g., 16:10-17) it seems likely that the author is Luke, the physician who joined Paul on some of his missionary journeys.

**Date:** The final stories and events told and recorded in the Book of Acts took place in early A.D. 60. This book was believed by most biblical scholars to have been written in the first century around 80-85.

**Theme:** The spread of the Gospel to all the known world is summed up with the eighth verse of the first chapter: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

**Historical Background:** In 30 short years, the church grew from what was considered an insignificant Jewish sect to a major faith movement and force in the Roman Empire. Luke wrote Acts as a companion piece to his Gospel to show how Christianity was the work of God's Spirit in building up a spiritual "kingdom," one comprised of all who live by faith in Jesus. Luke demonstrates this by focusing on two leading figures in the church: Peter, the apostle to the Jews (ch.1-12), and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (ch.13-28).

The full title of this book is *The Acts of the Apostles*. The word apostle comes from a Greek word meaning "one who is sent out," or a person sent to deliver a message. In Acts, apostles refer to disciples Jesus chooses to carry on his teaching and ministry that are empowered by the Holy Spirit, which is why the Book of Acts has also been titled *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*.

**What's the Story?** The books of Luke and Acts were written by the same person. Acts continues the story started in Luke. The Gospel of Luke ends with an account of Jesus ascending into heaven (see Luke 24:50-53). Acts begins with the same event (Acts 1:1-11). Acts tells the story of the early days of the Christian church. It traces its growth from a small group of Jewish believers in Jerusalem to a worldwide movement that included both Jews and Gentiles.

The outline of the Book of Acts follows Jesus' words in Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

**What's the Message?** To tell the story of God's redeeming and saving love in Jesus Christ. Luke is doing more than telling the story of the early church, he is also offering a defense of faith in Jesus Christ, including arguments that the faith is meant for Jews and Gentiles. Luke also strives to show how and why the Christian church became a movement that included both Jews and Gentiles. The stories and speeches by key leaders demonstrate how quickly Christianity spread beyond Jerusalem and demonstrates the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the early believers as they faced persecution and opposition to their witness.