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Why we should read Acts



For good reason the book of Acts has been called a fertile seedbed of schism. Much dissension arises from differences in opinion over Luke's purpose in writing Acts. Did Luke write in order to justify some experience of the Holy Spirit in salvation? Did he write to provide a model of church government through the ages? Or was it to provide a biblical foundation for some views of water baptism? In other words, does Luke write to provide us with a church manual?

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Luke was a historian. In Luke 1:1-4 he makes it clear that his purpose is to provide an orderly account, based on careful investigation. He records facts like the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. But this is no dry history! He engages our emotions. There is humour in the angelic kick to the body of the snoozing Peter (12:7) and in Rhoda's excited neglect of Peter's knocking at the door of Mary's house (12:14). We are moved by the tears of the Ephesian elders as they bid farewell to Paul for the last time (20:36-38). We are angered by the underhand ways of the envious opponents, the Jews, who would rather leave pagans in paganism than see them come to Christ (14:19). We are appalled at the miserable Felix waiting for his bribe, leaving Paul to suffer in prison (24:26). And our hearts are warmed at every mention of the encourager, Barnabas (4:36; 9:27; 11:25; 15:36-39). But while Luke involves his readers emotionally, his *key interest* is in





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showing us *why* things happened the way they did.

(1) SEE THE FULFILMENT OF GOD'S PLANS
God is the sovereign Lord of history. He is the faithful God. Things happen in fulfilment of God's plan. Central here is Luke 24:46-47 and Acts 1:8. These are the bridging verses connecting volumes 1 and 2.

Verse 46 is a good summary of Luke's Gospel, while verse 47 is a good summary of Acts. It is helpful to quote the verses in full here, since this is such an important point:

LUKE: 'He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day..."'
(Luke 24:46)

ACTS: "...and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).





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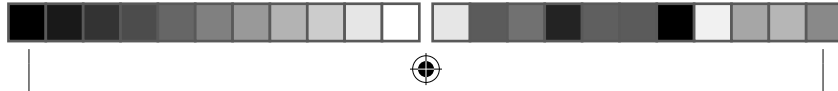
Verse 47 is as much the purpose of God as verse 46. To take one without the other makes no sense. The plan of God is the salvation of the nations. Jesus is the one to carry out this plan through His birth, death and resurrection, and then by His Holy Spirit empowering the church to reach the nations from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:7-8, 'He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."'



(2) RECOGNIZE THAT GOD IS AT WORK

God is clearly at work right from the outset in Acts. He accredited Jesus (2:22-23). He made this Jesus both Lord and Christ (2:36). He calls His people to salvation (2:39). **Jesus** is active, speaking to Paul on the Damascus road (9:4-5), disallowing





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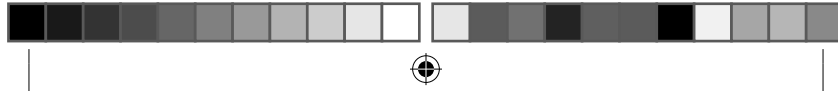
Paul from entering Bithynia (16:7) and encouraging Paul in Corinth (18:9-10). **The Holy Spirit** is active, baptizing the believers in chapter 2, filling them again in 4:31, coming on the Gentiles in 10:44-45 and setting apart the missionaries in 13:2.

God is actively bringing about the fulfilment of His plan. And because it is God's plan, it will be fulfilled! It is an unstoppable gospel, despite:



- external religious opposition (4:1ff; 5:17ff; 6:8ff);
- economic opposition (16:16ff; 19:23ff);
- internal hypocrisy (5:1ff);
- church friction (6:1-7; 15:36-41);
- persecution (5:17ff; 8:1ff; 12:1ff; 13:49-52; 14:19-20; 17:1ff; 21:27ff);
- martyrdom (7:54-8:4; 12:1-4);
- storms and shipwrecks (27:13ff);





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- courts (4:5ff; 18:12-17; 24:1ff; 25:1ff);
- imprisonment (12:5ff; 16:16ff);
- orthodox religious tradition (15:1ff).

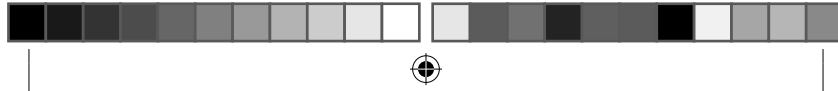
God will see His plan through! Christ will bring His people to salvation! Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations! The gospel will reach the ends of the earth! It is written!

(3) FOCUS ON JESUS

The gospel is all about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1:1; 2:36, 38; 4:8-12; 5:42; 8:12, 35; 10:36; 11:20-21; 13:38-39; 15:11; 16:31; 18:5, 28; 19:4; 20:24; 24:24; 28:31).

Luke also makes it clear what it's not about:

- It's not about Judaism (15:10).
- It's not about spiritism (16:18).
- It's not about politics (17:7).
- It's not about philosophy (17:18).



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It is the broadcast of this gospel about Jesus Christ which God uses to bring about the fulfilment of His purpose. And therefore, the focus of preaching in Acts is Jesus:

- At Pentecost Peter preaches about Jesus (2:14-39).
- At the healing of the lame man, Peter preaches about Jesus (3:6).
- To the God-fearing, Peter preaches Jesus (10:34-48).
- To conservative Jews, the apostles preach Jesus (14:3).
- To sophisticated Greeks, Paul preaches Jesus (17:31).
- To disciples of John the Baptist, Paul preaches Jesus (19:4).
- Jesus is preached as the Christ (2:31, 36, 38; 3:6, 18, 20; 4:10; 5:42; 8:5; 9:22; 10:36;



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16:18; 17:3; 18:5, 28; 26:23; 28:31), Son of David (2:25-36; 4:25-26; 13:33-34), Son of Man (7:56), Lord (1:6; 2:21, 36; 7:59-60; 9:5; 10:36), author of life (3:15), leader and Saviour (5:31; 13:23), prophet like Moses (3:22; 7:37), Holy and Righteous One (2:27; 3:14; 7:52; 22:14).

(4) REJOICE IN THE STORY OF THE CHURCH

Luke is also concerned to show the continuity between Jesus in Luke and His church in Acts. For example, there are clear parallels between the prophetic voices of Simeon and Anna at the time of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:25-38) and Peter's reference to the prophetic fulfilment of Joel (Acts 2:17-21) at the birth of the church. The flow of the gospel in Luke is Christ towards Jerusalem. In Acts, it is from Jerusalem out to the world. Each volume begins with a similar introduction to Theophilus, a period of waiting and prayer (1:1-14; cf. Luke 1:1-56) and





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then the coming of the Spirit (on Jesus at His baptism, and upon His church at Pentecost).

(5) UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANT PLACE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

There are also clear parallels between the Lord Jesus and Paul:

- Both come to Jerusalem and after a good initial reception are rejected by the people (Luke 19:37-40; Acts 21:17-20).
- Both visit the temple (Luke 19:45-47; Acts 21:26).
- Both are opposed by the Sadducees (Luke 20:27ff; Acts 23:6-8).
- Both are seized by the mob (Luke 22:47-54; Acts 21:30-36).
- Both are struck by the high priest's officials (John 18:22; Acts 23:2).
- Both experience four trials (Luke 22:66; 23:1, 7, 13; Acts 22:30; 24:1; 25:1ff, 23).

