

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

'From Jerusalem to the ends of the earth...'

Acts 1 – Power & Authority

Introduction

The book of Acts was written by Luke – a gentile doctor who also wrote the Gospel of Luke and who was a companion of the Apostle Paul. This is the sequel to his international bestseller on Jesus' life.

It charts how early Christianity went from a few Jewish followers of Jesus, through phenomenal growth and intense persecution to embracing non-Jewish followers and spreading throughout the known world. It does this by primarily focusing on the lives of the Apostle Peter and then the Apostle Paul. Luke doesn't attempt to be a complete history, covering everything that happened in the early church, but does cover the pivotal moments between around 30AD-60AD, throwing in some personal detail on the way.

The Story So Far...

Jesus, the Son of God, was miraculously born to a young, dirt-poor Jewish girl called Mary, grew up living an astounding, sin-free life (despite the disadvantages of his birth). At the age of 30 he packed in the day job and started a preaching and teaching ministry calling people to repent of their sins and telling them what God was really like. He frustrated and offended the religious leaders of the day by claiming authority to forgive sins, calling God his father and confronting hypocrisy – but his miraculous signs demonstrated that God was with him. He claimed to be the messiah – God's anointed king – who would usher in God's kingdom. In a shocking twist, he claimed that his mission would culminate in his death – but that he would then return to life three days later.

The book of Acts begins immediately after this: his followers have just seen death conquered and Jesus returned to life.

Firm Foundations

Acts 1:1-5

A credible faith in an incredible God

1. What did Jesus do in the 40 days between his crucifixion and ascension?
 2. What two things did he instruct the disciples to do?
 3. What is the difference between John's baptism and the baptism that Jesus promises in v5? (See also Luke 3:1-17)
- To ponder: If someone asked you what evidence there is that Jesus really was the Son of God, what would you offer them?
 - How would you deal with a friend who'd read the Da Vinci Code and isn't sure whether they can trust the accuracy of the bible?
 - How would you deal with a friend who is an atheist and doesn't believe there is any evidence that Jesus was God?
 - How would you answer a colleague who's a Muslim and doesn't believe Jesus died or rose?

To the ends of the earth

Acts 1:6-11

Good news for all nations

1. Who do the disciples think are at the centre of Jesus' mission? (v6)
 2. Who does Jesus say his mission is for? (v8)
 3. Where was Jesus taken?
 4. What are Jesus followers to be until he returns?
- To ponder: How many people do you know who know you but don't know Jesus?
 - How many of those know you're a Christian?
 - How many of those actually know what the good news of Jesus is?
 - To explore: How many nations are there in the world where the good news about Jesus can't be openly preached? How many places are Christians persecuted for trying to honour what Jesus says here? How can you help spread of the good news until the whole world hears?
 - What missionaries do you regularly pray for?
 - Is God calling you to be a missionary and help bring the gospel to the ends of the earth?

People of prayer

Acts 1:12-14

People of power

1. How many apostles were there?
 2. What did they do while they waited for God's promise?
- To ponder: How significant is prayer in your life? How regularly do you meet with other Christians to pray? Why do we pray?
 - Study Luke 11:1-13 – what did Jesus teach us about prayer?

The right people in the right places

Acts 1:15-26

Ready to follow where God leads

1. What does Peter suggest that they need to do?
 2. What had happened to Judas? (See Luke 22:3-6,21-22,47-48)
 3. What part did the Christians take in appointing a replacement for Judas? What did they expect God to do?
- To ponder: What is your attitude towards leaders in the church? Do you recognise that God is ultimately responsible for the choice and appointments of leaders? Do you have a healthy respect for those he's chosen – recognising that God has chosen them, but not forgetting that they are still only human?
 - To explore: Is there an empty place where you could be serving in the church?

For further study

- *The Truth About Jesus*, Paul Barnett
- *The Reason For God*, Tim Keller
- *Everything you want to know about the Bible*, Peter Downey & Ben Shaw
- *Everything you want to know about Jesus*, Peter Downey & Ben Shaw
- *The Case For Faith*, Lee Strobel