

Acts Overview

- a. **Author**
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- c. **Date**
- d. **Purpose**
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Concentric Model

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The Portrait of Jesus in Acts

1. Luke's Portrait of Jesus So Far

- a. Son of the Most _____
- b. Lord
- c. Son of _____
- d. Master

2. Images of Jesus in Acts (Borchert, pp 62-82)

a. _____ **Jesus**

b. **The** _____

c. **Barrier** _____

3. Questions for Reflection (Borchert, p 82)

- a. What stories in the book of Acts are the most gripping for you? Why? What about them gives you a sense of empowerment?
- b. Do you ever feel helpless in this era of increasing biblical illiteracy? When? Why? How can the dynamic of the Living Jesus be rekindled in our day? Is such a dynamic possible today? If so, what is the source? Would we recognize it? Would we try to turn it into some kind of church program?
- c. How does reading the book of Acts challenge you as a communicator of the gospel?
- d. How can you help others in your faith community discover the power of the Living Jesus today?

Homework

1. Read Galatians at least once and in one-sitting, if possible.
2. Read Borchert chapter 5, pp 89-95.
3. Think about your response to the *Questions for Reflection* on pp 94-95.
 - a. How well do Christians understand the portrait of Jesus Paul was painting? What was Paul saying to the Galatians? In what ways are we communicating this powerful message to others? How might we be charged with promoting rules and laws rather than freedom?
 - b. How does “walking” with Jesus Christ and the Spirit make a difference in your life? How are you communicating that difference?
 - c. How have we been promoting or eliminating distinctions among people? If you have been following the pattern Paul has advocated, how have others responded? If you have focused too much on distinctions, what can you do to change your pattern of living and communicating?

Portraits of Jesus

A Portrait of Jesus in Acts

A. Acts Overview

1. Author

- a. Scholars agree the author of Acts also authored Luke. “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach . . .” (Ac 1:1; cf., Lk 1:3).
- b. Luke, the physician and traveling companion of the Apostle Paul, is the generally accepted author of both Luke and Acts.

2. Audience

- a. Theophilus, whose name means “friend of God,” is mentioned as the recipient of both the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:3) and the Book of Acts (Ac 1:1).
- b. This name may be a pseudonym or a real but unknown Roman official, perhaps even the one who would hear Paul’s case. However, Theophilus may have been a Gentile Christian, or this term may address Gentile Christians in general.

3. Date

- a. The earliest possible date would be immediately after the events of Acts 28—the arrest and two-year stay of Paul in Rome. This would have been in the early CE 60s.
- b. It appears that Luke utilized the Gospel of Mark as a source which would suggest a date of CE 70-90 for Luke’s gospel.
- c. Acts was written some time after the Gospel of Luke (cf., Ac 1:1 – “my former book”).

4. Purpose

- a. Luke-Acts must be treated as a unit to obtain the complete picture/purpose.
 - 1) Luke focused on persuading Gentiles/Greeks to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord and assured his readers of the truthfulness of what they had been taught about Jesus’ life and teachings (cf., Lk 1:3-4).
 - 2) In Acts, Luke demonstrated the continuing work of the resurrected Jesus Christ through his followers as they obeyed his command to preach the gospel “to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47).
 - 3) Acts demonstrates the fulfillment of Jesus’ command/prophecy that his disciples “will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Ac 1:8).
- b. Acts records the acts of the apostles. It demonstrates how Christianity moved from being primarily a faith for Jews to a faith for Gentiles/all people.
- c. Luke-Acts may also be viewed as a defense/apology of Christianity and perhaps of Paul in particular as he stood trial in Rome.

5. Outline

- a. **Concentric Model** - Based on Acts 1:8: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and into the uttermost part of the earth.”
 - 1) Chapters 1-7 = Jerusalem
 - 2) Chapters 8-10 = Judea and Samaria
 - 3) Chapters 11-28 = ends of the earth
- b. **Key Events Model** - Certain events show phase changes
 - 1) 1:1—6:7 - Primitive church in its original setting, with a Jewish flavor
 - 2) 6:8—9:31 - First geographical expansion by Hellenistic Jewish Christians
 - 3) 9:32—12:24 - First expansion to the Gentiles/Cornelius
 - 4) 12:25—16:5 - First expansion into wider Gentile world with Paul’s first missionary journey and the beginning of his second journey up to the Macedonian call

- 5) 16:6—19:20 - Further westward expansion from the Macedonian call into Europe until Paul began his return home during the third journey
- 6) 19:21—28:30 - Paul in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and to Rome

B. The Portrait of Jesus in Acts

1. Luke's Portrait of Jesus So Far

- a. **Son of the Most High** (Gk., *huios huphistou*) - Luke uses this name on five occasions (Lk 1:32,35,76; 6:35; Acts 7:48) to support his high Christology of Jesus.
- b. **Lord** (Gk., *kyrios* = "lord, master, absolute owner") This was the title that Caesar applied with exclusivity to himself as a demi-god (i.e., *Caesar kyrios*). Luke used this title thirty-nine times to indicate that Jesus stood on a different level from others. He, like God, deserves the title Lord.
- c. **Son of Joseph** - "He was the son, *so it was thought*, of Joseph . . ." (3:23, emphasis mine). Luke focused on Jesus' human lineage through the males in Mary's line. Joseph was thought to be his father, but God Most High was actually Jesus' father.
- d. **Master** (Gk., *epistates* – lit. "one standing over or above") This term was used only by Luke in the New Testament (cf., Lk 5:5; 8:24,45; 9:33,49; 17:13), and it was used only by Jesus' close followers.
- e. What stories in the book of Acts are the most gripping for you? Why? What about them gives you a sense of empowerment?
- f. "Miraculous change or transformation is the foundation for the stories in the book of Acts, and such can be the secret of our stories today in this era of growing biblical illiteracy" (Borchert, 63).

2. Images of Jesus in Acts (Borchert, pp 62-82)

a. **Living Jesus**

1. ". . . I strongly believe that the key to understanding the book of Acts is realizing that it is the Living Jesus who is acting through his followers" (Borchert, 63).
2. "After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive" (Acts 1:3).
3. Jesus is the one who empowers and lives in his disciples: "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" (Acts 1:8).
 - a. The Living Jesus enabled his followers to preach in languages they did not know - **Read Acts 2:7-12.**
 - b. Peter preached with power and three thousand were saved (Acts 2:14-41).
 - c. As Jesus was ". . . accredited by God to you by miracles (Gk., *dunamesi* – fact), wonders (Gk. *terasai* - effect), and signs (Gk., *symeiois* – eternal truth)" (Acts 2:22) so also "Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders (Gk., *terata*) and signs (Gk., *symeia*) performed by the apostles" (2:43).
 - d. The disciples performed miracles but always with the purpose of proclaiming the Living Jesus - **Read Acts 3:6-16.**
 - e. "Then they [the Sanhedrin] saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note *that these men had been with Jesus*" (Acts 4:13, emphasis mine).
 - f. "On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all the chief priests and the elders had said to them. . . . After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly*" (Acts 4:23,31, emphasis mine).
4. Do you ever feel helpless in this era of increasing biblical illiteracy? When? Why? How can the dynamic of the Living Jesus be rekindled in our day? Is such a dynamic possible today? If so, what is the source? Would we recognize it? Would we try to turn it into some kind of church program?

b. The Name

1. “When Peter issues the call to repent and be baptized in the ‘name’ of Jesus, the response is an amazing three thousand (2:37-41)” (Borchert, 65).
2. In Jesus’ last message to his disciples in Luke, he said, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached *in his name* to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem” (Lk 24:46-47, emphasis mine).
3. In Acts, there is an emphasis on “the name” of Jesus and the power of his name. This term/title is used to identify Jesus 31x in Acts. Here are some key uses.
 - a. Peter quoting the Prophet Joel in his Pentecost sermon: “. . . everyone who calls on *the name* of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21).
 - b. “Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in *the name* of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).
 - c. Peter to the Sanhedrin: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other *name* under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).
 - d. “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for *the Name*” (Acts 5:41).
 - e. The Lord speaking to Ananias about Paul: “But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim *my name* to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for *my name* (Acts 9:15-16).
 - f. “But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in *the name* of Jesus” (Acts 9:27).
 - g. Peter concerning Cornelius and those in his household who believe: “So he ordered that they be baptized in *the name* of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:48).
 - h. James in his Jerusalem Council letter to Gentile believers: “So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—men who have risked their lives for *the name* of our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 15:25-26).
 - i. “Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In *the name* of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her” (Acts 16:18).
 - j. During Paul’s ministry in Ephesus to those baptized by John the Baptist: “On hearing this, they were baptized in *the name* of the Lord Jesus. . . . and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor (Acts 19:5,17).
 - k. Paul as he prepared to go up to Jerusalem where he would be arrested: “Then Paul answered, ‘Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for *the name* of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13).
 - l. Paul recounting to a crowd in Jerusalem the words Ananias spoke to him at his conversion: “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on *his name*” (Acts 22:16).
 - m. Paul speaking to Agrippa about his life before meeting Christ on the road to Damascus - “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose *the name* of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9).
4. How can you help others in your faith community discover the power of the Living Jesus today?

c. **Barrier Breaker**

1. “. . . crossing barriers is another major theme in the book of Acts” (Borchert, 68).
2. What barriers are crossed in the Book of Acts?
 - a. At Pentecost the barrier of the human heart was crossed as the Holy Spirit entered in to dwell permanently in the hearts of believers (Acts 2:1-12).
 - b. Seven wise Jewish men with Greek names were appointed to address the complaints of Greek-speaking widows and correct any sense of prejudice (Acts 6:1-6).
 - c. Philip preached the gospel to the Samaritans, who were considered to be half-breeds by the Jews (Acts 8:4-25).
 - d. The gospel is preached to the Ethiopian eunuch, and he is baptized (Acts 8:26-38). According to Isa 56:4-6 a eunuch “would not be able to enter the assembly of the Lord.”
 - e. “Luke undoubtedly views the story of Philip and the eunuch as providing a powerful signal that the promised new eschatological era has begun” (Borchert, 69).
 - f. The Jerusalem Council recognizes that “Gentiles do not need to become Jews in order to be accepted as Christians (Acts 15:19-20,27-29) (Borchert, 69).
 - g. Paul makes deep forays into Gentile territory with his missionary journeys (Acts 13-14).
 - h. On his second missionary journey Paul crosses the barrier from Asia to Europe with the gospel (Acts 16:6-10).
 - i. Paul crosses religious/philosophical barriers to proclaim to the Areopagus that Jesus is their “unknown god” (Acts 17:22-23).
 - j. At the end of Acts Paul crosses the Mediterranean to Rome with the hope of proclaiming the gospel in Caesar’s court.
3. How does reading the book of Acts challenge you as a communicator of the gospel?
4. Acts ends with the story of the church in motion but unfinished. Borchert writes, “. . . an unfinished book needs to be finished. But who will finish it? The answer is you and I. We must live and write our sequel to Acts. . . . Jesus Christ, who is alive and is not dead . . . can continue to do the miraculous through us today. The question is, are we ready to be his transforming agents of renewal?” (Borchert, 82)

C. **Homework**

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