



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

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The Book of Acts—Too Crucial To Overlook

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Time has a way of bringing change. Issues which concerned our fathers seem less important now. And we face things they did not. And there is certainly a place for action which results from seeing areas where extremes have existed and making an attempt to restore a more balanced view. The challenge, of course, is that in doing so we do not replace the old extremes with some from the opposite end of the spectrum.

We mention these things because of some recent study time we have spent in Acts. Some have lamented a time when the church was “acts-ed to death.” According to them, we spent so much time talking about Acts and the church that we neglected the Christ. We understand the sentiment, but fear that in the process of trying to correct one extreme some have gone to the other. The fact is, the church which will do the most good in the new millennium to challenge a pluralistic world which threatens to swallow Christianity must be more aware of the principles in Acts than ever.

Before looking at the purpose of Acts, let’s establish some things for keeping our study balanced.

Acts is part of the New Testament canon, given by revelation for the well-being of the church. We believe that in the New Testament God gave us “everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3 NASB), and that he gave it “once for all” (Jude 3). Furthermore, the book of Acts is designed to continue the story of Jesus begun in Luke (cf. Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-4). Those who focus on the gospels while demeaning Acts miss the nature of Acts and its connection with the gospels.

This connection is seen more clearly when we correct the impression many have about Acts and see that is a book concerned with Jesus. Although other terms used for God’s people appear in Acts besides *ekklesia* (usually translated “church”), a comparison of its use with names and titles for Jesus is revealing. *Ekklesia* appears 23 times, 19 of which refer to God’s people. It is never used in the evangelistic sermons in the book. In contrast, the name “Jesus” appears 68 times (14 in the evangelistic sermons), “Christ” is used 28 times (7 in the sermons), and “Lord” is used over 100 times (20 in the sermons). This data should not be taken to mean that the church was unimportant to the author, but to see that the primary focus of the book is on Jesus.

In other words, the question is not whether we will choose Jesus or Acts, but whether we will see what Acts has to tell us about what it means to be the people of Jesus.

The book's very name, *praxeis* in Greek, suggests its importance. Citing data from the New Testament's background, Jack Lewis has noted that "these data suggest that *praxeis*, rather than being history, biography, chronicle, or apologetic, is a category in which the actions of heroes are recounted. It has in common with ancient biography the goal of teaching values" ("An Introduction to Acts," in *Acts: The Spreading Flame*, 29).¹

The values Acts seeks to teach are readily seen. Acts 1:8 sets the book's agenda in Jesus' charge to his disciples to be "witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The author takes pains to present "progress reports" on how this mission fared (2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1-7; 9:31; 11:21, 26; 12:24; 14:1; 19:20; 28:30-31). And the variety of people included in the book also helps us understand the book's purpose: Luke mentions 95 people in 32 countries, 54 cities and 9 Mediterranean islands; in every case, they are people who are either preaching about Jesus or hearing others preach about him.

Is there any doubt that Acts is designed to teach us that we are to be diligent in testifying to our Savior to as many people as possible?

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¹ *Acts: The Spreading Flame—An Exposition of The Acts of the Apostles* (Harding University Lectures, 1989).