

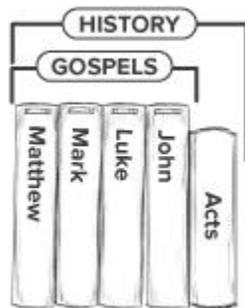
Introduction to the Bible

Week 4: The New Testament Gospels & Acts

Introduction

The gospels

BOOKS INCLUDED:



TYPE OF LITERATURE: Historical narratives of Jesus' life

TIME PERIOD: Approximately 60 – 90 AD

- Jesus lived from _____ to _____.
- The gospels were written between _____ and _____.

HUMAN AUTHORSHIP: All four gospels were written either by one of Jesus' apostles or by someone closely connected to an apostle. The apostles were personally authorized by Jesus to be His official spokespersons.

Matthew 10:40 **“He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”**

- Matthew and John
- Mark
- Luke

HISTORICAL ACCURACY: 150 years ago, many biblical critics held that the gospels were written in the second century AD, and that they were filled with historical inaccuracies.

- Today, even biblical critics acknowledge that the gospels were written in the first century AD.

- Historical and archeological research has repeatedly confirmed the historical reliability of the gospels.

“Archaeology confirms a whole raft of details susceptible to artifactual or epigraphic corroboration – for example, the existence of the pools of Siloam and Bethesda in Jerusalem (the latter with five porticoes just as John 5:2 describes), Pontius Pilate as prefect of Judea, Roman crucifixion by driving nails through the ankle bones, fishing boats large enough to hold 13 people (like Jesus and his 12 disciples), the tomb of Caiaphas, the probable ossuary (bone-box) of James, brother of Jesus, and so on. And all of these details in the Gospels were once doubted before the archaeological confirmation came forth.”¹

WHY THE GOSPELS ARE IMPORTANT:

- They are the earliest surviving written accounts of Jesus’ life, and they are eye-witness accounts.
- Each author wrote to a different original audience (see chart). While all of them agree on the main outline of Jesus’ life, each author includes different aspects of Jesus’ actions and teachings to persuade and/or encourage his respective audience.
 - “What about the contradictions between the four gospels?”
 - Also, their accounts are complementary – often interlocking to explain things that are otherwise puzzling. EXAMPLE:
- They present Jesus as the One who fulfills many of the specific Old Testament Messianic prophecies. EXAMPLES:
 - Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:1-6)
 - Public ministry begins in Galilee (Isa. 9:1,2; Matt. 4:12-16)
 - Healing ministry (Isa. 53:4; 35:5,6; Matt. 8:16,17; 11:5)

¹ Craig L. Blomberg, “The Historical Reliability of the Gospels,” <http://www.4truth.net/fourtruthpbible.aspx?pageid=8589952775>. For more examples, see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (IVP Academic, 1987), and F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Stellar Books, 2013).

- Non-ostentatious and uncontentious public ministry (Isa. 42:1-3; Matt. 12:15-21)
 - Jews' response of unbelief (Isa. 53:1; Jn. 12:37,38)
 - Enemies casting lots for Jesus' clothing at His execution (Ps. 22:18; Jn. 19:23-25)
 - Piercing of Jesus' side by His enemies (Zech. 12:10; Jn. 19:32-37)
 - His resurrection (Isa. 53:10; Ps. 16:10; Lk. 24:44-46)
- They present Jesus as the One who fulfills the key Old Testament covenants:
 - He is the "seed" of Abraham, the promised King from David's line, who brings the "blessing" of redemption to all of the nations.

Matthew 1:1 **The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham . . .**
 - He fulfills the righteous requirements of the Mosaic Covenant, and His death fulfills its animal sacrifices as the ultimate Sacrifice which pays the penalty of humans' sins.

Matthew 5:17 **"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."**

Mark 10:45 **"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."**
 - His death provides the basis for inaugurating the New Covenant.

Luke 22:19 **And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁰ And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."**

TIPS FOR READING:

- Like Old Testament narrative, read sections at a time and look for main themes.

EXAMPLES:

 - Matthew 8,9
 - John 14-16
- Note the many ways Jesus claims to be God.

EXAMPLES:

 - "I am" statements (e.g., Jn. 10:11; see Ps. 23:1)

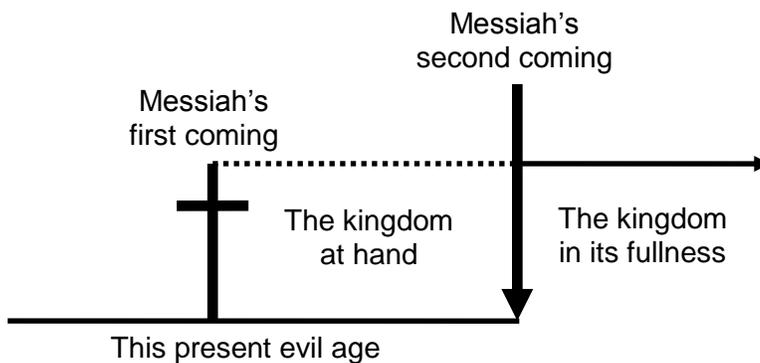
- Claims authority to forgive sin (Mk. 2:1-12)
 - Explicitly claims to be God (Jn. 8:58; 10:30)
 - Accepts followers' worship (Jn. 20:26-28)
- Note that many of Jesus' miracles are "signs" – symbolic acts that illustrate and validate Jesus' Messianic claims.

John 20:30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.



EXAMPLES:

- Note how Jesus insists both that God's kingdom *has* come in His Person (Matt. 4:17), and that God's kingdom *will* come in its fullness when He returns at the end of the age (e.g., Matt. 24:29-31). Many of Jesus' parables explain the first kingdom phase as the "mystery" phase because it was not clearly foreseen by the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Matt. 13).



EXAMPLES:

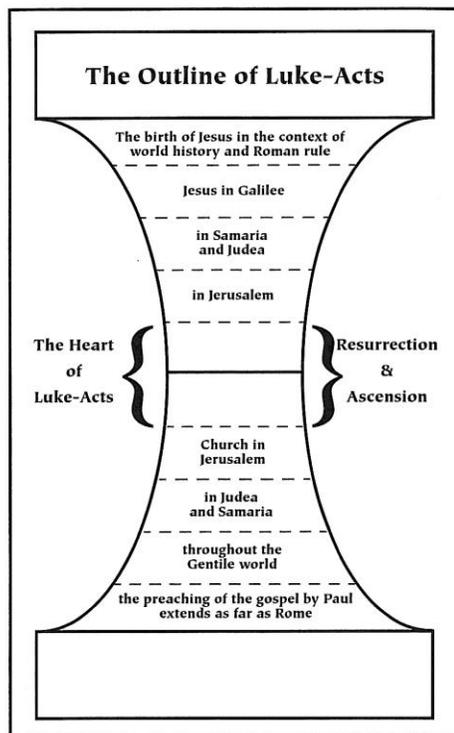
- Note how Jesus uses the Old Testament Law. At first glance, it often appears that He is saying that people can earn entry into God's kingdom by their good works.

But actually He is trying to convict self-righteous people of their need for God's forgiveness (e.g., Matt. 5:20-48; Mk. 10:17-22).

- Jesus is the perfect expression of God's love and wisdom. Notice how He loves people in different ways according to their need. Some of these love-expressions we expect, while others may surprise us. EXAMPLES:
 - As you read interactions between Jesus and individuals, compare how you might respond with how He responds. This will yield greater insight into what it means to love wisely.

Acts

BOOKS INCLUDED: Although our Bible separates Acts from the gospel of Luke, they form a two-part work written to "Theophilus" (see Lk. 1:3; Acts 1:1).



TYPE OF LITERATURE: Historical narrative account of the spread of the early Christian movement _____.

TIME PERIOD: Acts begins around _____, and ends around _____.

HUMAN AUTHORSHIP: Although the author does not name himself, he is almost certainly Luke, a close associate of Paul (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11).

HISTORICAL ACCURACY: 150 years ago, many biblical critics held that Acts was written in the second century AD, and that it was filled with historical inaccuracies. Today, even biblical critics acknowledge that Acts was written in the first century AD. Historical and archeological research has repeatedly confirmed the historical reliability of Acts.

- **EXAMPLE:** Sir William Ramsay, one of greatest archaeologists who ever lived, researched much of Asia Minor in an effort to disprove Luke's history by demonstrating inaccuracies. He entered his research with the assumption that "Acts" had written almost 100 years later than he claimed, inferring that it wasn't written by an eyewitness at all. He found that Luke names key historical figures in the correct time sequence, and assigns correct titles to government officials in various areas (e.g., Thessalonica, politarchs; Ephesus, temple wardens; Cyprus, proconsul). After 30 years of archaeological research, Ramsay concluded: "Luke's historicity is unsurpassed in respect to its trustworthiness . . . Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy . . . this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."²

WHY ACTS IS IMPORTANT:

- Imagine if your New Testament went directly from John to Romans. You would have many unanswered questions, such as:
 - "Who is Paul and why is he an apostle?"
 - "How did Christianity get all the way to Rome?"
 - "How did Christianity come to include so many Gentiles?"

- Acts 1:1,8 implies that Acts should not be called "the Acts of the Apostles," but rather "the continuing acts of Jesus by the Holy Spirit through His followers."

Acts 1:1 **The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus *began to do and teach . . .*⁸ "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."**

TIPS FOR READING:

- 1:8 provides a basic outline for Acts.
 - Acts 1:8** **" . . . you shall be My witnesses both in *Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*"**

² W. Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1953), p. 222.

- Chapters 1-7
- Chapter 8
- Chapters 9-28
- Acts is kind of a “highlights” film of the first three decades of the church. While it is tempting to read Acts as answering the question: “What is the normal activity of the Holy Spirit?,” we should look rather to the clear teaching of the New Testament letters for the answer to this question. EXAMPLES:
 - Whole groups of believers speak in tongues (e.g., Acts 2:4; 10:46). Does this mean that all Christians should do so?

1 Corinthians 12:10 (God gives to some) the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues . . . ³⁰ All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?
 - Sometimes there is a delay between belief in Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit (e.g., Acts 1:5; 2:4; 8:15-17). Does this mean that this is normal?

Ephesians 1:13 In (Christ), you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were (at that time) sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance . . .
- By asking the following four questions of each chapter through Acts 1-21, you can learn a lot about Luke’s emphases:
 - “What does this chapter teach about *the Holy Spirit*?”
 - “What does this chapter teach about *prayer*?”
 - “What does this chapter teach about *evangelism*?”
 - “What does this chapter teach about *the church*?”