

## The Deeds of the Sent Ones<sup>1</sup>

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Radio commentator Paul Harvey made a name for himself with news segments entitled “The Rest of the Story.” Harvey would report on a well-known event or person and then would declare “now, for the rest of the story,” after which he would provide information about the subject many may not have known. Luke’s second-volume is usually entitled the “Acts of the Apostles,”<sup>2</sup> but it could just as easily be called “the rest of the story.” In the first volume the gospel writer informed *Theophilus*<sup>3</sup> “about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven” (Acts 1.1b-2a). Now the story will continue with “all that [the Apostles] did and taught from the beginning until the day when [Paul arrived in Rome].”

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<sup>1</sup> *Deeds* translates the Greek *πραξεις* usually translated “Acts,” the most common title of “Luke’s” second-volume. *Sent ones* translates the Greek *αποστολοις* usually translated “apostles,” which refers to a delegate, messenger, or one sent forth with a commission. *Apostle* is better understood as a description of one’s role rather than a title; and since the commission in Acts 1.8 extends to all Christ followers, every Christian could rightly be called an apostle. Moreover, both men (cf. Rom 1.1) and women (cf. Rom 16.7) are referred to as apostles, which ought to give pause to those who believe that women are not allowed to preach or teach in churches. If we are all given the task of proclaiming the gospel (Acts 1.8; Mt 28.16-20), if in Christ there is no longer male nor female (Gal 3.28), if Priscilla and Aquilla teach Apollos (Acts 18.24-28), if various women were leaders of house churches (cf. Acts 16.11-15; Rom 16.3-5a; 1 Cor 16.19; Phil 4.2-3; Phlm 1-2), if Phoebe can serve as a deaconess (Rom 16.1a) and Junia as an apostle (Rom 16.7a), if 1 Timothy 3.8-13 provides deacon qualifications to both men and women, then it seems that there ought to be no boundaries for women with regards to the role in which they serve as a “sent one,” as one who is to proclaim the gospel in word and deed. For those who may respond that 1 Timothy 2.11-12 says that women are not to teach, I would respond that this is a culturally and circumstantially conditioned command that is not intended as a universal standard since Gal 3.28 is the more prevalent declaration Paul makes throughout his letters. If one chooses to disregard such a response in favor of a so-called “literal interpretation,” consider what verse 12 actually says: “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man.” Since Jewish boys are considered adults at the age of 13 [see <http://www.gregboyd.org/essays/essays-church/women-in-ministry/>], a literal application would require that women be forbidden to teach any male over the age of 13 (which would exclude them from teaching males in Sunday school and youth group at the church). And since Paul makes no qualifications about where these standards apply, Christians would have to place their male children in an education program with only male teachers once they reached the age of 13. Since most churches and Christians clearly do not apply such a standard, one has to wonder why those opposed to women in ministry (particularly in pastoral roles) feel threatened by a woman teaching adults (who have the ability to think for themselves to a much higher degree than children), but do not seem as concerned about them teaching children (who are much more impressionable than adults). One has to wonder why those stringent about the application of this text with regards to women in pastoral roles are lax about it when it comes to children being educated by women in other contexts. Finally, it is worth mentioning that right before this passage we find the command that women should not braid their hair or wear gold, pearls, or expensive clothing (v 9). Given that I have rarely heard even the most conservative Christians seek to apply these standards, it seems the application is rather selective, since some statements can be set aside as contextual and cultural teachings but not others.

<sup>2</sup> “The book of Acts presents a dynamic story of the gospel’s journey from Jerusalem to Rome, propelled by the earliest followers of the risen and ascended Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit....Guiding and energizing all missionary endeavors...is the figure of the Holy Spirit, arguably the chief protagonist in the narrative. Not a few readers have suggested ‘The Acts of the Holy Spirit’ as a more apt title for this work,” F. Scott Spencer, *Journeying Through Acts*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 13.

<sup>3</sup> As Raymond Brown notes, we cannot be sure if *Theophilus*, the “friend of God,” refers to an actual person or is symbolic. He suggests that this was “a real and influential person (of whom we know nothing else) who believed in Jesus or was attracted to what was preached about him,” but “Luke may have chosen Theophilus as the addressee because his name could apply to other desired readers,” *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 227, NOTE 5.

Acts quite literally picks up where the gospel leaves off, namely, with the ascension of Jesus at Bethany (cf. Lk 24.50-53; Acts 1.1-10).<sup>4</sup> Following the prologue (1.1-5) and prior to the ascension account (1.9-11), the writer reveals Jesus' commission to the disciples (1.6-8), which provides the structure for the rest of the Acts saga: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1.8).<sup>5</sup> This verse provides the lens through which we must view the story that follows, which details the movement of the gospel outward from Jerusalem (2.1-8.1a), into the environs of Judea and Samaria (8.1b-12.25), and ultimately to Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire and (symbolically) the very ends of the earth (13.1-28.31).<sup>6</sup> Now that we have the big picture we can turn to a more detailed summary.

Luke's prologue recaps the essential message of volume one (1.1-5) before turning to Jesus' commission to the disciples (1.6-11). As mentioned, it is here that we find the key to understanding Acts. The disciples are commanded to remain in Jerusalem, waiting for "the promise of the Father," namely the Holy Spirit (1.4-5, 8a).<sup>7</sup> The coming of the Spirit will enable them to fulfill their mission of taking the

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<sup>4</sup> "[Luke] is the longest of the four gospels. Yet it is only half of the great Lucan writing, for it was originally joined with Acts as part of a two-volume work that in length constitutes over one-quarter of the NT—a magnificent narrative that blends together the story of Jesus and that of the early church....At the very beginning of Luke's work he speaks of an orderly narrative, and all that he received or created has been woven into an epic that begins in the Jerusalem Temple and ends at the imperial court in Rome....In his storyline the author is using the single resurrection-ascension complex as a hinge...For the Gospel the ascension visibly terminates the activity of Jesus on earth; for Acts it will prepare the apostles to be witnesses to him to the ends of the earth," Brown, *Introduction*, 225, 267, 281. As the second volume of Luke's narrative, issues regarding dating and authorship for Acts cannot be determined apart from the gospel account that precedes. The majority of scholars today believe that Mark was the first gospel to be written (c. 60-75 AD), and date Luke and Matthew in the mid-80s AD with a 5-10 year window on either side. Given the dating of Luke, one must ask how long after this was the Acts narrative composed? Raymond Brown suggests that "a date no later than 100 is indicated. The Gospel's symbolic interest in Jerusalem as a Christian center does not match the outlook of 2d-century Christian literature," *Introduction*, 127, 172, 226, 273.

<sup>5</sup> "The outline of this second volume is supplied in Acts 1.8 through a directive of Jesus to the apostles," Brown, *Introduction*, 281.

<sup>6</sup> See Brown, *Introduction*, 280 for an excellent outline of Acts. Beginning with a broad overview enables the reader to understand the overall purpose of the Acts account, which is not to provide a biography of the disciples or to give an all-inclusive account of Paul's missionary travels. Rather, the primary goal is to demonstrate the continuation of Jesus' ministry by his followers, who, empowered by the Spirit, take the good news to the very ends of the earth. In doing so, Luke paints broadly, not attempting to give a comprehensive historical account of this process, but rather offering the highlights of the movement. As F.F. Bruce noted, "Luke is no mere chronicler: he envisages a pattern in the events he records. His interest is concentrated on the advance of the gospel: it has been launched into the world by the resurrection of Jesus and the coming of Spirit, and nothing can stop it," Metzger, Bruce M. and Michael D. Coogan, eds. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 9. Thus, in Luke-Acts, "like the historiography of the OT, there is the tracing of the activity of God in various historical events as viewed from a particular perspective," Richard Longenecker, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 9 – John, Acts*, "Acts," (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 214.

<sup>7</sup> I. Howard Marshall notes that "Luke stresses the place of the Spirit in guiding and empowering the church for its mission...see[ing] the church as raised up and directed by God so that it will achieve his intended purpose [*theologia gloriae*]...[yet] the triumph of the gospel is achieved only through suffering and martyrdom [*theologia cruces*]," *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Acts*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002 reprint), 50. In Luke 9.51 the gospel narrative shifts as Jesus begins the journey to Jerusalem with his disciples. On their way a Samaritan village refuses to let them pass through and in response, James and John ask if they can cast down fire and destroy the village. Jesus turns and rebukes them, declaring that they "do not know what manner of spirit they are of, for the Son of Man did not come to destroy but save the lives of human beings" (Lk 9.51-56). This is significant because the rest of Luke-Acts reveals the continued working of God's Spirit among the followers of Jesus, demonstrating the transforming power of God's grace and revealing how Jesus' disciples learn, slowly but surely, "what manner of Spirit they are now of." They must learn that as Kingdom citizens

good news of Jesus to the entire world (**1.8b**). The disciples return from Bethany, gather together for prayer, and choose Matthias as the replacement for Judas Iscariot (**1.12-26**).<sup>8</sup> In chapter two God's Spirit arrives (**2.1-47**), empowering the gathered disciples to begin reaching the world with the good news of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> With the Spirit's manifestation, Peter and John now take main stage—healing the diseased and declaring Jesus as the fulfillment of YHWH's promises to Israel (**3.1-5.42**). Their message, like that of Jesus, is met with a mixed response, leading to persecution at the hands of the religious authorities (4.5-22, 5.17-40). In 4.23-5.11 we find the ideal for Christian communities—gathering together for prayer, being “of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common...[so that] there was not a needy person among them” (32b, 34a; cf. 2.42-47).<sup>10</sup> **6.1-7** provides an interlude, transitioning from Peter and John to the Stephen narrative (**6.8-8.1a**). Stephen is arrested by the Jewish leadership for speaking “blasphemous words against Moses and God” (6.11), though the reader has been told are actually words of “wisdom and the Spirit” (6.10). 7.1-53 is a lengthy defense speech that recounts the history of Israel (1-50) and ends in a rebuke of the religious authorities (51-53), which leads to Stephen's death by stoning (7.54-8.1a).

**8.1b-2** is a turning point in Acts as the persecution following Stephen's death moves the gospel into Judea and Samaria. We then encounter an interlude (**8.3-11.30**), in which we are introduced to Philip (8.4-40) whose story helps transition from the persecution led by Saul (8.3-4) to his conversion (9.1-19a) and initial ministry (9.19b-30). The Pauline narrative is interrupted briefly by several sections detailing Peter's ministry (**9.32-11.18; 12.1-19; 15.1-21**), where we find a significant event that again pushes the gospel toward *the ends of the earth*. Through a series of visions and an encounter with a Roman centurion named Cornelius (10.1-33), Peter begins to recognize and accept the cosmic scope of the good news Jesus brings: “I truly understand that God knows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (10.34).<sup>11</sup> Peter then reports to the Jerusalem believers, helping them move beyond tribal boundaries and leading them to recognize that “God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life” (11.18). This final clause is significant, as the rest of Acts will detail the gospel moving into the center of the Roman Empire through the ministry of Saul, the former persecutor of the Way. **11.19-30** picks up where the story left off in **8.1b**, bringing Saul (Paul)<sup>12</sup>

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our battle is not against flesh and blood (Eph 6.12), and so the Kingdom of God advances not by the power of the sword but by that of the cross, by the power of self-sacrificial love.

<sup>8</sup> This reconstitutes “the ‘new Israel’ who proclaims the good news to people from every tribe assembled in Jerusalem for Pentecost,” Barbara E. Reid, *The New Interpreter's Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1957, 1.15-26.

<sup>9</sup> In verses 42-47 we find the first of many summary statements, which the author uses to move the narrative forward in stages or scenes. cf. 2.42-47; 4.32-35; 5.11-16; 6.7; 9.31; 12.24; 16.5; 19.20; 28.30-31. “This effort for transitions enhances the readability of Acts as a smooth-flowing narrative,” Brown, *Introduction*, 319.

<sup>10</sup> This echoes 2.42ff, which suggests that the author sees this as the ideal for Christian communities. Moreover, “the power of the apostles' witness and the favorable response are associated with the communal life,” Reid, *NIB*, 1964, 4.32-35 (SEE FOOTNOTE 26).

<sup>11</sup> In the visions Peter sees a sheet full of every kind of animal and refuses the call to get up and eat, noting that he has never eaten anything unclean (see Leviticus for examples Jewish dietary regulations). The voice responds by telling Peter to no longer call profane what God has made clean. This was quite radical, because as Brown has noted, “the thesis that in God's eyes all foods are ritually clean constitutes a major break from Jewish practice,” *An Introduction*, 300.

<sup>12</sup> Sometimes it has been suggested that Saul became Paul after his conversion. Instead, “he was known in Greek-speaking circles by his Greco-Roman name, Paul, while among his Jewish family and community he would be known by the Hebrew equivalent, Saul,” Reid, *NIB*, 1980-1, 13.9.

and Barnabus to the readers' attention once more and preparing for the account of Saul's ministry that will dominate the rest of the narrative (12.24-28.31).<sup>13</sup>

Paul's ministry can be divided into three "missionary journeys" (13.1-14.28; 15.36-18.22; 18.23-20.38),<sup>14</sup> with the Jerusalem Council (15.1-35) between the first and second journeys, and his arrest, trials and trip to Rome concluding the book of Acts (21.1-28.31). Throughout Paul's story we find the continual struggle of the early church to move beyond tribal boundaries (cf. 15.1-35; 21.1-26), slowly realizing that the gospel truly is good news for all peoples. The Council in Acts 15 is a turning point, as the account of Paul's proclamation of good news to both Jew and Gentile dominates the story hereafter.<sup>15</sup> Luke's sprawling, two volume narrative comes to a close with Paul's arrival in Rome (28.16-22), where he is under house arrest yet able to continue "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (28.23-31).<sup>16</sup> While much more could be said about Paul's ministry, what is most vital is that through Paul the gospel continues the progression of the Acts 1.8 commission. We began the story in Jerusalem (2.1-8.1a), moved into the environs of Judea and Samaria (8.1b-12.25), and will now see the gospel taken to the very ends of the earth (13.1-28.31). Luke ends with a ringing note of triumph, having revealed how the good news of Jesus has made its way

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<sup>13</sup> The careful reader will notice that the narrative moves quickly between characters at this point. 8.1b-3 notes the persecution following Stephen's murder, which introduces the Philip narrative (8.4-40) before jumping back to the Pauline story, noting Paul's continued persecution and subsequent conversion (9.1-30). The author then transitions again in 9.31 ("Meanwhile") to a Petrine narrative (9.31-11.18), which is interrupted by a Pauline interlude (11.19-30), and then resumes briefly (12.1-19) before an account of Herod's death (12.20-23) and a transition that reintroduces Paul and Barnabus yet again (12.24-25).

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that in Acts the missionary journeys of Paul are more structured than they appear from reading Paul's letters. Paul never reveals such a structured approach to his missionary efforts. As Luke Timothy Johnson notes, "from [Paul's] letters, it is difficult to detect journeys of the sort suggested by Acts. Paul rather seemed to use various urban centers for greater or lesser periods as the base of his missionary operations...[yet,] by the measure of ancient historical writings, the disparity between the sources is not remarkable and confirms more than it calls into doubt," 233. Raymond Brown also maintains that while "it is customary to detect in Acts three Pauline missionary journeys, with one journey (AD 48-49) before the Jerusalem conference [cf. Acts 15] and two after it (AD 50-52, 54-58)...It is highly unlikely...that Paul understood his missionary life to be so neatly divided, and indeed it is uncertain that the author of Acts made such a division, for it is easy to look on everything from 15.40 to 21.17 as one long journey. What is certain is that, after the Jerusalem decision, Acts describes Paul's missionary activity as ranging much further than his first missionary effort," *Introduction*, 308, note 74. I.H. Marshall has offered a rather insightful comment on the matter by suggesting that "the differences between Luke's portrait of Paul and the picture we get from Paul's own writings are basically due to the different interests of the two writers. Luke is principally concerned with the evangelistic mission of Paul and with his relation to Jewish Christians, while Paul's letters reflect his concern for problems with in the new churches and for the freedom of the Gentiles from Judaistic and syncretistic perversions of the gospel," *TNTC*, 43, note 4. Obviously no explanations can remove all the difficulties, nor should this be a pressing concern. Rather, we must appreciate the fact that Acts is not intended as a biography of Paul but as a kerygmatic narrative [Greek *kērygma*, from *kēryssein* to proclaim, from *kēryx* herald: the apostolic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ," <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/kerygmatic>] detailing the movement of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome; and Paul's letters are not intended to provide a historical overview but are written to specific communities with pressing concerns. SEE NOTE 18.

<sup>15</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 229. SEE ALSO NOTES 20, 21, AND 22. Paul journeys to major metropolitan areas such as Thessalonica, Athens, Ephesus, Corinth, and Antioch proclaiming Jesus as the resurrected Messiah. "The pattern in Acts (1.8; 2.5; 3.25; 13.14; 14.1; 17.1, 17; 18.4, 19; 19.8) is that the word is first proclaimed to Jews; when it is not well received in the synagogue, ten Paul turns to the Gentiles," Reid, *NIB*, 1980, 13.5.

<sup>16</sup> "Bold assurance (*parrhesia*, 'frankness,' 'outspokenness,' 'courage') is a hallmark of Jesus' Spirit-filled followers (2.29; 4.13, 29, 31; 9.27-28; 13.46; 14.3; 18.20, 26; 19.8; 26.26)," Reid, *NIB*, 1963, 4.13.

(through the power of the Spirit) into the very heart of the Roman Empire and is continually being proclaimed “unhindered.”<sup>17</sup>

The Acts narrative expounds upon many themes already discussed in the summary of Luke’s gospel, and so we will detail several distinct emphases, though there will invariably be some overlap. In Acts we find the story of the good news of Jesus moving outward from Jerusalem ultimately to Rome, revealing the continuity-discontinuity with Judaism, the roles of prayer and proclamation, the communal ideal, and the workings of the Spirit, all of which touches upon the principal theme—the universal scope of the gospel.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout, the reader encounters the early believers’ struggle to understand the life and teachings of Christ in light of Judaism.<sup>19</sup> There is clearly continuity, as the narrative reveals Jesus as the culmination of Old Testament hopes (Luke) and his followers as the extension of Jesus ministry (Acts).<sup>20</sup> Yet there is also much discontinuity, as the scope of the gospel continues to broaden with the story’s progression. As long as the message remains among Jews or converts to Judaism, the only issue is the choice to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the long awaited Messiah. However, as the good news is proclaimed to and accepted by Gentiles (non-Jews), the question of Jewish laws (such as circumcision and dietary restrictions) comes to the forefront. Acts reveals the difficulty of comprehending the innovative in light of the tradition, as the Spirit pushes beyond the boundaries of ethnic Judaism,

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<sup>17</sup> “At the beginning of Acts, the apostles ask Jesus—‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?’—to which Jesus responded by commissioning his followers to bear witness to him in the power of the Spirit from Jerusalem out to the ends of the earth (1.6-8). In sum, Israel would be restored not through a restrictive, nationalistic revolution, but through an expansive global mission of salvation in the name of the Messiah. Now at the ends of Acts, Paul’s preaching suggests a significant culmination of these restoration hopes.” “The long and winding journey of Acts ends on a strikingly open note...signaling hopeful opportunity, amid conflict and diversity, for ‘all’ kinds of people from diverse backgrounds...to continue to experience ‘the salvation of God’ and find their place in ‘the kingdom of God’ under the gracious domain of ‘the Lord Jesus Christ,’” Spencer, *Journeying*, 248, 30.

<sup>18</sup> While noting multiple reasons for composition, Richard Longenecker suggests that “primary among the reasons for its composition was undoubtedly a *kerygmatic purpose*. It proclaims the continued confrontation of men and women by the Word of God through the church and shows (1) how that gospel is related to the course of redemptive history, (2) its rootage in and interaction with secular history, (3) its universal character, (4) how it has been freed from the Jewish law, and (5) how that behind the proclamation of the Word of God stands the power and activity of the Holy Spirit” (217).

<sup>19</sup> In fact, Longenecker suggests that a primary purpose of Lk-Acts is to quell Theophilus’s anxieties “about how the Christian faith related to Jesus’ ministry, to Jesus and the world of Judaism, to the lifestyle of certain scrupulous Jewish Christians, to the more universalistic outlook of Gentiles, and to the sanctions of Roman law,” *EBC*, 217. To do so, I.H. Marshall notes that “Luke stresses the Jewish origins of the church and its roots in OT prophecy, but shows that it is a people of God, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, in which Jews may find the fulfillment of Judaism and Gentiles are not required to become Jews,” *TNTC*, 30. cf. 7.17; 13.32; 26.6. Thus, “Luke frequently quotes and alludes to Scripture in order to emphasize that God’s new manifestation in Jesus is in continuity with the divine saving acts toward Israel...Luke’s theme of promise and fulfillment stresses that it is the same faithful God who is at work in both ages of salvation,” Reid, *NIB*, 1960, EXCURSUS.

<sup>20</sup> “Luke presents the apostolic ministry as the necessary extension of the redemption affected by Christ. Luke views both the accomplishment of salvation and the spread of the Good News as inseparable units in the climactic activity of God’s redemption of mankind—a truth probably picked up from Paul (cf. Rom 8.17; Phil 3.10-11; Col 1.24),” Longenecker, *EBC*, 233. Indeed, “the beginning of Acts is not presented as an isolated new movement but rather as the next ‘act’ in a sweeping drama of salvation history, encompassing up to this point ‘all’ of Jesus’ words and deeds until the day of his departure (1.1),” Spencer, *Journeying*, 34.

culminating in the Jerusalem Council, where the inclusion of the Gentiles is finally acknowledged by Jewish Christians.<sup>21</sup>

From the beginning of the narrative we find the next four themes intertwined—prayer, proclamation, community, and the working of the Spirit. Jesus ascends, instructing his followers to wait in Jerusalem until the arrival of the Spirit (1.6-8). They return from the Mount of Olivet, “constantly devoting themselves to prayer” (1.14a) until the day of Pentecost when they “were all together in one place, and suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting...[and] all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (2.1-4). Having been filled with the Spirit, the witness to the ends of the earth (1.8) begins through the proclamation of Peter (2.14ff). These events become paradigmatic for the rest of Acts: *gathering together* for teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the *prayers* (2.42; cf. 4.23-35; 9.31; 10.1-2, 9; 11.5, 19-26; 13.1-3; 14.21-23; 16.25; 20.36-21.6)<sup>22</sup> leads to the advancement of the gospel by the *power of the Spirit* (2.43-47; cf. 4.1-22; 6.1-7; 7.54-56; 8.14-17, 26-40; 10.1-11.18; 13.4ff; 16.26-33)<sup>23</sup> through the *proclamation* that Jesus is Lord (see 1.15-26; 2.14-36; 3.11-26; 4.5-12; 7.2-53; 10.34-43; et al).<sup>24</sup> Indeed, it would not be an overstatement to suggest that Acts 2.42 is the ideal toward which every gathering of Christ-followers is to

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<sup>21</sup> “The Council addresses “the issue of the legitimacy of gentile inclusion within the messianic community....It also forms a watershed in the Acts narrative. Before it, all the apostles were at least ostensibly in view. After it, Paul’s work totally dominates....The narrative of the council itself forms the climax of a complicated plot development that has quietly been providing the background of Paul’s emergence,” Johnson, *The Writings*, 230.

<sup>22</sup> See Brown 287-288 for details on the elements of this communal ideal. The emphasis on community in Acts and the rest of the NT literature needs to be understood anew today in a world that often stresses the individual over the collective. The Church would do well to emphasize the need for community once again. This does not mean that we exhort individual family units to show up at the same location for a few hours once or twice a week. Thought some may consider this “church,” if there is no deeper connection than a shared locale, what is the difference between this and seeing a movie in a theater? Rather, we need to call Christ followers to a renewed understanding of the need to gather together in *koinonia* (partnership, fellowship, communion, community, social interaction) where our individual lives become intertwined by the good news of Jesus and the boundary-breaking ministry of the Spirit. As Brown notes, “we have little evidence in early Christian missionary endeavor of people being free to say, ‘I now believe in Jesus and then walking off on their own. Rather they are made part of a community. They are justified and can be saved, but not simply as individuals. Today, as all know, there are doctrinal divisions among Christian churches. Yet there may be a more fundamental division, namely, between those who think ‘church’ is important and those for whom Christianity is really a matter of ‘Jesus and me,’ without any concept of being saved as part of a people or church,” 329.

<sup>23</sup> “With the end of Jesus’ earthly appearances, believers henceforth experience his presence in the gathered community that acts in the power of the Spirit,” Reid, *NIB*, 1956, SPECIAL NOTE.

<sup>24</sup> The speeches in Acts serve a pedagogic [teaching] function, instructing the readers about the good news of Jesus. “Through the speeches of his characters, Luke interprets the story for his readers,” Johnson, *The Writings*, 235. “Roughly one third of Acts consists of speeches, made principally by Peter, Stephen, Paul, and James. Instead of describing in the third person the significance of something that is happening, Acts prefers to offer a speech where one of the main characters explains that significance,” Brown, *Introduction*, 318. Therefore, we need not read the speeches as if they are transcribed manuscripts actual speeches. In all likelihood, Luke is following the pattern of contemporary historians who “were primarily interested in...illuminating vignettes that gave insight into the ethos of the period or of a person’s character.” The approach of the author of Luke-Acts mirrors that of the Greek historian Thucydides: “‘With reference to the speeches in this history, some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; it was hard to record the exact words spoken....But I have used language in accordance with what I thought the speakers in each case would have been most likely to say, adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what was actually spoken (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.22),” Longenecker, *EBC*, 213, 214.

strive, for there the Spirit is able to work without hindrance, translating the good news into action and drawing more and more to the faith (2.43-47).<sup>25</sup>

All of this touches upon and leads us to the principle theme of Luke-Acts—the creation-wide, limitless reach of the good news first heralded by Jesus and continued by all who choose to be his followers. In Acts we find a grand dramatization of Paul’s declaration of the boundary-breaking good news of Jesus in Galatians 3.28. Moving beyond Jerusalem and ultimately reaching the ruling capital of the day, this Spirit-led mission fulfills the God-given promise and commission to Abraham in Genesis 12 that he would be a blessing and a light to all nations. This was Israel’s purpose from the outset, and though they, like we, often restricted the hope and blessing to themselves, God’s Spirit cannot be contained.<sup>26</sup> It crosses religious, political, social, and economic boundaries, liberating all who will allow their eyes to be opened to universal scope of God’s redemptive mission. All are loved, all are welcome, and all may enter in. This is the message revealed through the Lk-Acts narrative, and our mission is to pick up where the story ends. Continually devoting ourselves to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayers (2.42), and joining in “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (28.31).

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<sup>25</sup> “While this idyllic portrait of life in the first Christian communities was not always achieved; it still offers an ideal to which believers aspire,” *NIB*, 1961, 2.24-47.

<sup>26</sup> See Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*, (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 2006).

## Outline of and Commentaries on Acts

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### **Oxford Companion to the Bible**<sup>27</sup>

#### ***Prelude (1.1-26)***

Introduction; Ascension; Election of Matthias

#### ***Act I: The Church in Jerusalem (2.1-7.60)***

Scene 1: The Day of Pentecost (2.1-47)

Scene 2: Healing at the Temple Gate (3.1-4.22)

Interlude: The Spirit-Filled Life (4.23-5.16)

Scene 3: Apostles on Trial (5.17-42)

Scene 4: The First Christian Martyr (6.1-7.60)

#### ***Act II: The Scattered Church: Samaria to Antioch (8.1-12.25)***

Scene 1: Samaria and Gaza (8.1-40)

Scene 2: Damascus (9.1-31)

Scene 3: Caesarea (9.32-11.18)

Scene 4: Antioch and Jerusalem (11.19-12.25)

#### ***Act III: Paul the Missionary (13.1-21.16)***

Scene 1: Paul's First Missionary Journey (13.1-14.28)

Scene 2: The Apostolic Council (15.1-35)

Scene 3: Paul's Second Missionary Journey (15.36-18.23)

Scene 4: Paul's Third Missionary Journey (18.24-21.16)

#### ***Act IV: Paul the Prisoner (21.17-28.31)***

Scene 1: Paul on Trial: Jerusalem (21.17-23.30)

Scene 2: Paul on Trial: Caesarea (23.31-26.42)

Interlude: Storm and Shipwreck (27.1-28.10)

Scene 3: Paul in Rome (28.11-31)

### **Richard Longenecker**<sup>28</sup>

Intro: The Constitutive Events of the Christian Mission 1.1-2.41)

Part I: The Christian Mission to the Jewish World (2.42-12.24)

Part II: The Christian Mission to the Gentile World (12.25-28.31)

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<sup>27</sup> Loveday Alexander, "The Acts of the Apostles," *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, CD-ROM. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), "Introduction, H. Outline."

<sup>28</sup> Longenecker, *EBC*, 234.

### **For Further Study**

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