

How Christ Turned the World Upside Down

*These that have turned the world upside down
have come hither also* -- Acts 17:6

A : WHY WE SHOULD MASTER ACTS

1. In Acts we have the clearest examples of the apostolic proclamation of the gospel

(1) Acts is a book about mission. It is not unfair to take 1:8 as a summary of its contents: 'You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.' The purpose of the Christian church was to bear witness to Jesus ... The message which was proclaimed is expounded in a series of public addresses scattered throughout the book. Broadly speaking, it was concerned with the fact that Jesus, who had been raised from the dead by God after being put to death by the Jews, had been declared to be the Jewish Messiah and the Lord, and hence the source of salvation. It was through him that forgiveness of sins was offered to men, and it was from him that the gift of the Spirit had come down to the church. -- **I. Howard Marshall**, *The Acts of the Apostles* p.25

2. Acts is the only inspired record of how Christ guides His church in history

(2) We find, then, that the doctrinal writings of the Apostles are prefaced by the book of Acts, some account of that which was done being given as an introduction to the record of that which was taught. The function of this book in the scheme of Scripture is of very high importance, in other respects, to which we must advert hereafter, and especially in that which concerns us now. *It is a record of the personal action of the Lord Jesus Christ in the first evolution of his gospel and formation of his Church.* -- **Thomas Dehany Bernard**, *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament* p.104

3. Without Acts the body of the New Testament has no bones!

(3) In the study of history the first step is to learn the facts. No amount of topical study, no amount of reflection on the principles of the history, will result in anything better than a mental jumble, unless the memory has first retained the framework of fact ... The Acts provides the historical framework without which much of the New Testament could not be understood. With The Acts the epistles of

Paul, for example, would be hanging in the air. The work of Luke enables us to assign them their place in a connected account of Paul's life. -- **J. Gresham Machen**, *The New Testament: An Introduction to its Literature and History* pp.9,55

(4) Again, let us mark this important feature of the case, that the book before us is *quite unique*. If we were to lose it from the Bible, there is no book else that could stand in its place. There is none other at all like it, or that covers any part of the same ground. If one of the four Gospels were lost, we should have still three Gospels remaining, and a CHRIST, familiar and dear to us, whom we could reverence and adore. If even two or three Apostolic Epistles were to vanish, still more than a dozen such documents would remain in our hands, to tell us what Christianity is, and to insist upon its claims. But if the Book of Acts were gone, there would be nothing to replace it: and we may go further to say that the Christian Scriptures would then lie before us in two disjointed fragments. -- **J.J. Howson**, *The Evidential Value of the Acts of the Apostles* pp.19-20

4. Acts is the "how-to-book" of Christian missions (cult missions too!)

(5) God has given us in the book of Acts a pattern of Christian testimony, missionary effort, world evangelism and building of Christian churches -- a pattern which we would do well to follow. Certainly we can be assured of this: the closer we come to ordering all things according to this holy pattern, the greater blessing will attend our efforts. -- **Harry Ironside**, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* p.10

(6) ... it is not too much to say that this is the greatest missionary story that has ever been told, and it must ever remain the **authorised Missionary Manual** of the Church ... The message and the manner, as well as the method of these missionaries, are full of instruction for the present day enterprise. Wherever they went they preached the Gospel, and did so **tactfully**. -- **W. Graham Scroggie**, *ibid* pp.180-181 (emphasis added)

5. Acts is much misused and abused by church leaders who HAVE NOT studied it closely

(7) ... what are the implications for the modern interpreter of the canonical role of Acts within the New Testament? ... the canon has retained the Pauline letters, but within the framework of Acts which provides hermeneutical guidelines for their interpretation. -- **Brevard S. Childs**, *The New Testament as Canon* p.240

(8) ... it is Luke that we have to thank for the coherent record of Paul's apostolic activity. Without it, we should be incalculably poorer. Even with it, there is much in Paul's letters that we have difficulty in understanding; how much more there would be if we had no book of Acts! -- **F.F. Bruce**, *Acts* p.27

B: INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

1. WHAT really should be the name of the book of Acts?

(9) The title of this book as given in our English Bibles is of course not inspired. These titles have been added to the books by editors ... Actually this book does not contain the acts of the apostles as a whole. The fact of the matter is, very few of the apostles are even mentioned in it ... Actually the book might be called, as others have

suggested, *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*, or, if you will, *The Acts of the Risen Christ Through the Holy Spirit Working in the Church Here on Earth*. -- **Harry Ironside**, *ibid* (emphasis added)

(10) Perhaps the most comprehensive title we could give to it would be *The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles and others, during the first generation of the Christian Church*. -- **W. Graham Scroggie**, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption* Vol.2 p.170

2. WHEN was Acts written?

(11) The attitude to the Roman power throughout the book makes it difficult to believe that the Neronian persecution of A.D. 64 had begun ... There is no hint throughout the book of the Jewish War of A.D. 66-70, or of the Fall of Jerusalem in which it culminated. -- **F.F. Bruce**, *The Acts of the Apostles* p.12

3. WHO wrote Acts?

4. WHERE did he get his information?

5. WHY was Acts written?

(12) The Acts is probably the most important dispensational book in the Bible ... In its pages one sees that one dispensation is going, and that another is coming; that Judaism is less and less, and Christianity more and more; it is a story both **terminal and germinal**; it is the hinge on which the two ages swing, one out and the other in. -- **W. Graham Scroggie**, *ibid* p.178 (emphasis added)

(13) Luke is, in fact, one of the first Christian apologists. In that particular type of apologetic which is addressed to the secular authorities to establish the law-abiding character of Christianity he is absolutely the pioneer. But other forms of apologetic appear in the course of his work, especially in some of the speeches of Acts. Thus, Stephen's speech in Ch.7 is the prototype of Christian apologetic against the Jews, designed to demonstrate that Christianity and not Judaism is the true fulfilment of the revelation given through Moses and the prophets. Similarly, Paul's speech at Athens in Ch.17 is one of the earliest examples of Christian apologetic against the pagans, designed to show that the true knowledge of God is given in the gospel and not in the idolatrous vanities of paganism. And Paul's speech before Agrippa in Ch.26 is, of course, the crowning *apologia* for his own missionary career. - **F.F. Bruce**, *ibid* p.24

COULD YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS? : A PREVIEW

1. How do I know the Bible can be trusted?

(14) ... the main theme... the presentation of the historical basis for Christian faith. -- **I.H. Marshall** *The Acts of the Apostles* (p.22)

2. If Christianity is the true religion, shouldn't there be only

ONE church or organization?

3. Doesn't Acts indicate miracles, tongues etc. are **NORMAL** in the church?

4. What are the 5 favourite subjects of the apostles?

5. What made Paul the most effective missionary the church has ever had, and the perfect apostle for the Gentiles? (1 Cor.11:1)

NEXT WEEK:

Why Should We Trust the New Testament?

THE ASCENSION and

THE AUTHORITY OF THE APOSTLES