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## Acts: The Birth of the Bride

Harold Willmington

*Liberty University*, [hwillmington@liberty.edu](mailto:hwillmington@liberty.edu)

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# Acts

## The Birth of the Bride!

by Harold L. Willmington

**T**he Book of Acts is the true story of the first 30 years of the early church. In many ways it is the high mark of Christian witness. The action centers around two great "crusades," the Greater Jerusalem crusade (Acts 1-12), headed up by Peter, and the Global crusade (Acts 13-28), led by Paul. The associates involved in their campaigns were John the apostle, Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. The record tells us of the first deacons (6:1-5), martyrs (Stephen, 7:59-60 and James, 12:2), and missionaries (13:1-3). Believers were first called Christians during this time (11:26). The Book of Acts is in reality a fulfillment of John 15:26-27: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning."

The account relates the final two biblical resurrections of individuals, Dorcas (9:40-41) and Eutychus (20:9-12). During this period the preaching of the gospel is viciously attacked by the Devil, who attempts to bar it (4:18; 5:28), to buy it off (8:18), and finally, to blur it (16:16-18). Both angels and demons are seen in action. An angel protects an apostle (Peter, 12:7-8) and plagues a king (Herod, 12:23). Demons possess sorcerers (8:9; 13:6-10), damsels (16:16-18), and vagabonds (19:13-16). Both revivals (19:18-20) and riots (19:28-34) break out.

The Book of Acts lists three significant conversions: The Eunuch (8:36-38), a descendant of Ham (Gen. 10:6-20); Saul (9:1-6), a descendant of Shem (Gen. 10:21-31); and Cornelius (10:44-48), a descendant of Japheth (Gen. 10:2-5). The convert number jumps from 120 (1:15) to 3,120 (2:41), to 8,120 (4:4) to untold multitudes (5:14). Paul preached before prison keepers (16:25-34), philosophers (17:16-31), Pharisees (23:6), and potentates (24:24-25; 26:24-28).

Finally, the story that opens with an upper-room prayer session in Jerusalem (1:14) closes with a prison-room preaching session in Rome (28:30-31). The Books of Luke and Acts are similar. Both were written by Luke to Theophilus. The Book of Luke is the longest New Testament book and Acts is the second longest. Luke records the birth of the Son of God, and Acts records the birth of the church of God. Luke tells us what the Father began to do through the body of His Son (the Saviour), and Acts tells us what the Father continued to do through the body of His Spirit (the Saints).

Acts provides the final two of five of the most famous New Testament sermons: The Sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2) and the Sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17).

In fact, an outstanding feature of the Book of Acts is the amount of speeches and sermons. No less than 24 messages are found in its 28 chapters. The book opens with Peter preaching in Jerusalem, the Jewish religious capital, and ends with Paul preaching in Rome, the Gentile political capital (2:14; 28:31).

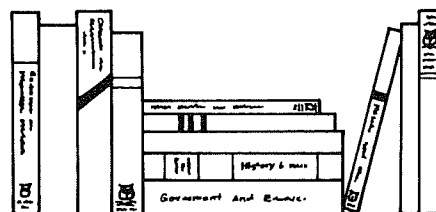
Acts is a bridge book, leading across the gap between the Gospel accounts and the Epistles. There are several "firsts" and "finals" in Acts such as the first example of tongue speaking (2:14), the first official religious and political persecution of believers (4:3,18; 5:17-18, 40), and the first practice of common-ism (2:44-47). Note: this is a far cry from Communism. The first says, "What is mine is thine," while the second says, "What is thine is mine!"

*Finals* (in the Bible) include the final appearance of God's glory cloud (1:9), the final mention of Mary (1:14), and the final listing of the 12 apostles (1:13).

Acts records three of the greatest evangelistic meetings: at Pentecost (2:41), in Samaria (8:5-8), and in Ephesus (19:18-20).

Acts 10 is the greatest example of how God brings together a seeking sinner and a soulwinner! Acts 12 gives us the most dramatic New Testament account of an angel ministering to a believer. Acts 16 records the most important New Testament vision (vv.9-10). Acts 20 records for us the most touching farewell address in the New Testament. Acts 24:25 records one of the saddest responses to the gospel message in the Bible. Acts 27 describes the most severe ocean storm since the Great Flood.

■ Adapted from *Willmington's Guide to the Bible* © 1981, Tyndale House.



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