

10.4

Distinctive Characteristics of the Book of Acts

A. The book of Acts is a sequel to Luke’s Gospel, which is referred to as “the first book” (1:1).

B. The book of Acts relates stories that parallel events reported in Luke’s Gospel.

	Luke	Acts
Preface and dedication to Theophilus	1:1–4	1:1–5
Coming of the Spirit during prayer	3:21–22	2:1–13
Inaugural sermon on fulfillment of prophecy	4:16–27	2:14–40
Healing of lame man	5:17–26	3:1–10
Conflicts with religious leaders	5:29–6:11	4:1–8:3
Invitation to visit house of centurion	7:1–10	10:1–23
Story involving a widow and a resurrection	7:11–17	9:36–43
Missionary journeys to gentiles	10:1–12	13:1–19:20
Journey to Jerusalem, where hero is arrested	9:51–19:28	19:21–21:17
Series of four trials	22:26–23:13	23:1–26:32

C. Acts offers heroic portrayals of people in the life of the early church.

- Peter (chaps. 1–5; 10–12)
- Stephen (chaps. 6–7)
- Philip (chap. 8)

- James (chap. 15)
- Paul (chaps. 9; 13–28)

The words and deeds of these individuals are reported in ways that parallel those of Jesus in Luke's Gospel (in fulfillment of Luke 6:40).

- Stephen's dying words (7:59–60; cf. Luke 23:34, 46)
- Paul's apron (19:11–12; cf. Luke 8:43–48)

D. The author of Acts claims to have sometimes been a companion of Paul.

See the "we passages" (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–8; 27:1–28:16).

E. Almost one-third of Acts consists of speeches.

- missionary speeches (2:14–36; 3:12–26; 10:34–43; 13:16–41; 17:22–31)
- speeches to Christians (1:16–22; 11:5–17; 15:7–11, 13–21; 20:18–35)
- defense speeches (4:8–12; 7:2–53; 22:1–21; 24:10–21; 26:2–23)

F. Acts records the advance and progress of the church's mission.

- geographical expansion (1:8)
- numerical growth (1:15; 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 11:21, 24; 12:24; 14:1; 16:5; 19:17–20; 28:30–31)

- ethnic diversity: Jews and gentiles (e.g., chap. 15)

G. In Acts, the success of ministry to Israel is ambiguous.

- Jews accept the gospel (2:41; 4:4; 6:7; 21:20)
- Jews reject the gospel (13:46; 18:6; 28:25–28)

H. In Acts, Jerusalem appears to have special prominence.

- starting point for mission (1:8; cf. Luke 24:49)
- location for church council (chap. 15)
- headquarters to which Paul reports (9:26; 11:27–30; 12:25; 18:22; 21:15)

I. Acts presents an idealized portrait of the church.

- a unified, peaceful community (2:44–45; 4:32–37)
- Peter, James, and Paul are of one mind (chap. 15; cf. Gal. 2:11–14)

J. Acts takes a positive attitude toward the Roman Empire.

- sympathy for Christians from Rome (18:12–16; 19:35–41; 23:10–35)
- Roman converts to Christianity (10:1–48; 13:7–12; 16:25–34)
- Paul is proud of his citizenship (16:37–40; 22:25–29)

K. Acts presents Jesus as located in heaven (7:56) but still active on earth.

- through the Holy Spirit (16:7)

- through use of his name (2:21; 3:6; 4:12, 30; 10:43; 16:18)
- through preaching of the word (13:26)
- through lives of his followers (9:5)

Thus Acts continues the account in Luke's Gospel, which narrated only what Jesus began to say and do (Acts 1:1).

L. Acts emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit.

- empowering people to be witnesses (1:8)
- directing the life and mission of the church (8:29; 10:19; 11:28; 13:2; 15:28; 20:23; 21:4, 11)
- coming upon and filling people (2:4; 4:31; 8:14–17; 10:44–48; 19:1–7)

M. “Promise/fulfillment” is a prominent theme in Acts.

- fulfillment of Scripture (2:16–21; 3:18; 15:15–17; 28:25–28)
- fulfillment of what is “necessary” (1:22; 9:6, 16; 13:46; 14:22; 17:3; 19:21; 23:11; 25:10; 27:24)

N. “Salvation” is a prominent theme in Acts.

- salvation bestowed by Jesus (2:33–40; 5:31; 13:23–39; 15:1–11; 16:30–31) or received through his name (2:21; 3:16; 4:12)
- salvation may consist of

eternal life (13:46)

forgiveness (2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38–39)

the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38; 11:15)

temporal blessings (3:8; 7:25; 14:9; 27:22, 34, 44)