

Overview of the Book of Acts

by Michael Haykin

The Book of Acts is a record of the early Christian church's spread of the Gospel and the advance of the Word of God, highlighting the importance of the church's witness and the role of the Holy Spirit in empowering the church's witness.

Duration: 44:56

Scripture: Acts 6:7, Acts 9:31, Acts 12:24, Acts 16:5, Acts 19:20, Acts 28:30-31

Topics: "Church Growth", "Evangelism"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the power and growth of the Word of God in the book of Acts. He highlights several summary sections in the book where Luke pauses to review what God is doing. Despite opposition, persecution, and even hypocrisy within the church, the Word of God continues to increase and build the church. The speaker encourages believers to be faithful in sharing and proclaiming the Word, as it is what drives the church forward and saves sinners.

Transcript

Well, it's good to be with you, and we're going to be thinking about the Book of Acts today. This hour, I want to do an overview of Acts, basically do the whole book in half an hour, 40 minutes. Seriously, yeah, we'll give you a good perspective on what the reason why Acts is in the canon of the New Testament and some of the key themes in the Book of Acts.

And then in the morning worship service, hopefully look at Stephen and why that narrative in Acts 6 and 7 is there and what God is seeking to teach us through the life and witness of Stephen and the whole area of the importance of the Word of God and the Spirit using that Word. And then this evening, Lord willing, we'll be looking at Acts 18 and the whole issue of revival and prayer, the prayer that undergirds it and precedes it and the way in which God honors the prayers of His people and brings revival. Turn, if you will, then, to the Book of Acts.

We're going to read Acts 1-1 down to verse 8. I will mention, I'll try to leave a few minutes at the end of the class so that if you have questions, that we can take them at that point in time. Acts 1, verses 1-8. In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when He was taken up, after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen.

To them He presented Himself alive after His suffering by many proofs appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them, He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which He said, You heard from Me. For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

So when they had come together, they asked Him, Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. Now, the theme of the book of Acts that we're going to pursue, and the theme that the book is designed to teach, is the advance of the Word of God and the way in which the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to expand, as it were, the borders of the church. During the time of the Reformation, the German Reformation, in the early years of the Reformation, after what we would regard as a remarkable outpouring of the Spirit of God upon especially eastern Germany, in which hundreds and thousands came to a living faith in Christ, after Martin Luther began to proclaim the Gospel in that part of the world, Luther was asked on one occasion, how could he explain what had taken place? What was the reason for it? Well, Luther said, I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word.

Otherwise, I did nothing. And while I slept, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing.

The Word did everything. And that little phrase, the Word did everything, I think is an appropriate phrase. It's obviously not found in the book of Acts, but it's an appropriate phrase for the book of Acts.

If there's a great theme of this book, it is the Word did everything. Now, when you read that opening section there in Acts 1, you realize immediately that this is the second part of a two-book or a two-volume set, because the writer there, Luke, says, in the first book of Theophilus. And the way in which the Scriptures have come down to us, we have the four Gospels placed together, then the book of Acts.

But obviously, when the book of Acts was first written, it was written as a sequel or a follow-up volume of the Gospel of Luke. And if you turn back to Luke 1, you actually find a mention there of Theophilus in Luke 1.1-4. And I want to just pick up one point here, because it applies also to the book of Acts. Luke 1 and verse 1. Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

The purpose of the Gospel of Luke lays out there very, very clearly. It is that this man, Theophilus, and because this is not simply a word to that one man in the early days of the Church, but a word for all of the Church, but that this man and the Church might have certainty, might have assurance about the things that are proclaimed in the Gospel. The reason why the Gospel of Luke is in the Scriptures is it gives us assurance about what we proclaim about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The book of Acts that follows has the same idea. It is to give us certainty, to buttress our faith, to establish our faith, and to help us understand something of the early years of the spread of the Gospel. So, that is the first thing to note.

The book of Acts is the second part of a two-volume set, as it were. And many of the themes of the book of Acts are already enunciated or alluded to in the Gospel of Luke. And we will see one of these, actually, in the morning when we look at Stephen.

And there is something that is said about Stephen that our Lord has already indicated in the book of Luke. And so, you need to always think in mind, as you are reading through the book of Acts, its closeness to the Gospel of Luke. Now, as you look at the book of Acts, we obviously don't have time to read the whole thing.

By the way, it probably would take, if you were to sit down, you could do it this afternoon, sit down and read the whole thing in under two hours, depending on how fast you are as a reader. I inherited a Bible from the first school I ever taught at in Canada. It was Central Baptist Seminary, a school that was located in Toronto, where Toronto Baptist Seminary is.

And at Central Baptist Seminary, for many years, the dean was a man named W. Gordon Brown. And I inherited one of his Bibles. And Gordon Brown had some interesting characteristics.

And one of them was, whatever Bible he would have, he would read through large sections of the Scriptures and would note how long it took him to read a book. And the Bible I've got is very interesting. He's done that all the way through the New Testament.

And there is no book in the New Testament that would take you longer than two hours. Now, maybe Gordon Brown was a fast reader, so maybe give us some allowance for that. But it's the amount of time that you might spend watching a movie or a ball game.

You could sit down and read a whole book or a portion of God's Word. There's value in that, great value in that. Because God has given these books as units, as it were, for us to read through, as it were, and sometimes at one sitting.

So, if we were to sit down and read through the whole book of Acts, and we were trying to understand the flow of the book, and how does it break up, break down, and so on, there are different ways of thinking about the structure of the book of Acts. Some scholars have said, some Bible students have said, well, the book of Acts really divides into two equal parts. Well, maybe not so equal.

Chapters 1 to 12 are the story of Peter. And then chapter 13 to 28 is the story of Paul. And there's some truth in that.

Certainly Peter is a prominent figure in chapters 1 through to 12. And Paul is a prominent figure in chapters 13 to 28. But Peter does appear in that latter section.

He appears in chapter 15, plays a role there. Paul especially appears in the earlier section, chapter 9, is devoted to Paul. And he's also there in chapter 11 as well.

And so, as I look at the book of Acts, I'm not really strongly convinced that that's what Luke is trying to tell us. Here's two stories of two apostles, Peter and Paul. Another way of looking at the book of Acts is to see a verse here in the passage I've just read as the theme verse of the book, and it's Acts 1, verse 8, where Jesus says, You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and the end of the earth.

And I think there's a lot to be said for seeing that as the key verse of the whole book. That what you see in the book of Acts is God taking the church from Jerusalem and leading His people, and we'll see, sometimes not always willingly. And it takes the death, the martyrdom of Stephen to push the church out of Jerusalem.

It would seem the church is quite content for a period of time. Well, we're here in Jerusalem. The kingdom is going to be reestablished in Jerusalem.

We'll just witness from here. But the Lord's intent is to drive the church out and to send the church out into, and we see this in the early chapters of Acts, into Judea and Samaria. And you can actually go through the book of Acts, and Acts 1 to 6 is the church in Jerusalem.

And Acts 7 through to really about 12 is the church in Judea and Samaria. And then Acts 13 to 28 is the church going to the ends of the earth. And it doesn't go all the way, obviously.

And it's beginning the story of which we are a part. And I think there's a lot to be said for that way of looking at the book of Acts. The Spirit of God using the church to witness.

Notice what's critical about that is you start to see a number of things in the book of Acts. One of the great purposes of the church is to bear witness to what God has done in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not so much what may have happened to us personally.

That's important. But our great proclamation is God has raised the Messiah, Jesus, from the dead. And He is now exalted to His right hand.

And He offers forgiveness to all who call upon His name in sincerity. That's the great apostolic proclamation. It's not so much what they experienced.

Obviously, that's part of it. But their proclamation that the prophet's prediction that the Lord would raise the Messiah from the dead has happened. The Messiah has come.

He's died for His people. He's been raised from the dead. And now forgiveness is offered to all who will call upon Him in sincerity and in truth.

And so one of the great themes of the book of Acts is witness, the witness of the church. The second great theme is the Spirit's empowerment of our witness. Notice the two go together.

We need to speak. The Spirit's not going to do it without us. On the other hand, we need the Spirit's help.

We can't do it on our own strength. And that will be a great theme as we will especially look at Stephen in the second hour. One interesting little thing about the word witness.

The word witness is the word that we get martyr from. In the singular, in the original Greek, it's martis, M-A-R-T-Y-S. In the plural, it's martires, M-A-R-T-Y-R-E-S.

And we get our word martyr from that. And we will see that in the course of the book of Acts, there will be some who bear witness to the point of death. The word originally, in the original Greek, didn't have the idea of death associated with it.

The word originally had the idea of somebody who you bring forward to a court of law. For instance, if a problem happened that had to go to trial, and you had a witness who had first-hand knowledge of that issue, well, you would bring them forward. And that person was a martir or a martires.

And so, originally, it's somebody who has first-hand evidence, first-hand knowledge. And the apostles, and the early church through the apostles, are people who have had first-hand knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. And they bear witness.

But then in the course of the book of Acts, you start to find that some of these people are slain or killed for their witness. And the word begins to take on the idea of sharing the gospel to the point of death. And thus, our word, martyr.

Incidentally, this time of year, obviously, and this day, our thoughts are taken back to 2001, when those who are Muslims claim that those who did those horrific acts died as martyrs. And one of the things that infuriates me, personally, is the misuse of that term. Those men were not martyrs.

The term martyr is a Christian term. It's a term that is created, really, by the church. It's those who so love the Lord Jesus Christ, that they're willing to give their lives for His witness, or witnessing to Him and His love.

And they die not in hatred or violence against their enemies. They die so frequently, as we see in the history of the church, praying for their enemies. We'll see this with Stephen.

He dies as a martyr. He loves those. They can't see that, but he has a love that only Christ can give to a Christian.

He has a love for these enemies of the gospel. And he dies, Lord, do not lay this to their charge. And those men who did those horrific acts in 2001 and other acts since.

I was born and raised in England. And the bombings in London. I know the area of King's Cross very well.

I had a friend, actually, who was on the train that morning. It was maybe a half hour outside of King's Cross when the bombing took place, and they turned the trains back. And I'm sure maybe you have links to the horrific events in New York City.

And those people who did those things are not martyrs. They're murderers and terrorists. And the word martyr is not an appropriate word to use for them.

And so a great theme, then, if you look at this one verse, Acts 1.8, the great theme that comes through the book of Acts is this whole issue of witness. Witness to the ends of the earth. And one of the things that is happening in the book of Acts is a fulfillment of what the Lord promised in a number of places in the Old Testament.

But let me point you to one verse, Isaiah 49 and verse 6. Isaiah 49 and verse 6. This is one of those passages in Isaiah that is talking about the servant of the Lord, who we know is the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah 49.6. He says, that is the Lord says, It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel. I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

It is not the case that God's intentions for the nations changes from the Old Covenant or the Old Testament into the New Covenant. God has always intended that the nations receive the light of the knowledge of the true and living God. God has always intended that the nations enter into salvation.

The difference is, in the Old Testament, the nations are to come to Israel. And He is drawing the nations to Jerusalem. Now, what do the disciples initially say in Jerusalem? Their thinking is, the nations are going to come here.

This is where the Lord is going to establish His kingdom. But in the New Covenant, the gospel message is now going out. It is a different movement.

The plan is the same. The plan is that the nations might know the true and living God. That God might deliver them from idolatry.

And whatever people might say about Islam in public, it is an idolatrous religion. It promotes a worship of a false god who brings men and women into bondage. And the gospel, if we can talk about it in the Old Testament, is that the nations might come to Israel.

Israel failed to be a light. But she was to be a light to draw the nations to her. And we have instances of that.

We have like Ruth the Moabitess. Or Naaman. Or others who join themselves to Israel.

But the same goal is in view that the salvation of God might go to the ends of the earth. In the gospel age, that is happening. And you see that being fulfilled in Acts.

The gospel going out from Jerusalem to Samaria and Judea, and not far from Jerusalem, then to the ends of the earth. What a privilege to be part of that great, great movement. So that is another way then of looking at the book of Acts.

We see Acts 1 and verse 8 as the great theme verse of the book of Acts. But there is another way that you can look at Acts. And I want to take you.

This is where I am going to take you through the whole book. And show you that there are seven places where Luke stops, as it were. He has narrated a bunch of stuff.

Things have been going on. And he stops, as it were. And he says, let's take a breather and look at what the Lord is doing.

There are what we call summary sections in the book of Acts. And when you look at these summary sections, you will see that the great theme is that what drives the church forward. And what saves sinners is the Word of God.

The first one is in Acts chapter 6 and verse 7. And if you want to prove this, do it this afternoon or sometime this week. Read the whole book of Acts and you will see that the verses I am going to give you stand out. They are all very similar.

And it is quite clear that Luke has divided his book into roughly seven sections. They are not equal. But these verses indicate the end of one section and the start of another.

If we had read all of Acts 1-1 to 6-6, we would find that everything is centered on Jerusalem. And the Gospel was proclaimed on the day of Pentecost. And many were won to Christ.

Even priests in the temple were won to Christ. There was opposition to the Gospel. The Sanhedrin, the apostles, were beaten and arrested a number of times.

But the Gospel is going forward in Jerusalem. And then Luke says, as it were, well, let's stop here and let's take stock of what has been happening. He says in Acts 6-7, these words, or he writes these words, And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

It is almost as if he says, let's stop here at this point and review what has been happening. And you remember often when you might be in a school setting. And for some of us, getting increasingly a long time ago, well, I'm still in a school setting.

And I've been in school since I've been four. Forty-six, forty-seven years on. For me, the year begins not in January, but in September.

It's an interesting experience. But if you remember when you would go to school, especially in the higher grades, and then university and college, there'd be points in the lecture or lectures where the professor or teacher would say, well, let's summarize what's been going on. Let's review.

And that's what Luke does here. He says, I've been narrating a number of things. Pentecost and the healing of the lame man by Peter and John through the power of God, and the arrest of Peter and John, Ananias and Sapphira.

Let's stop and review. What's been happening? Well, despite the attack on the church, despite the hypocrisy of a couple within the church, Ananias and Sapphira, despite the threat of division within the church, which is Acts 6, 1 to 6, which we'll talk about briefly in the morning hour, what's been going on? The word of God continues to increase. Interesting the way he puts it.

He doesn't say the church continues to increase. It was the word of God continues to increase. The word of God continued to influence more and more people, so much so that the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and even a great number of the priests became obedient to the faith.

These were the Pharisees. These were the Sadducees, many of them. They were the firmest opponents to our Lord's ministry.

What's God doing? He's saving these people. Then when you go from Acts 6, 8 on, you get the story of Stephen, and then you get Philip in Samaria, and Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch, and you get the conversion of Saul. And then Luke stops again.

And in Acts 9.31, it's the second summary verse, as it were, Acts 9.31, Luke says, okay, we've now done the second section I want to talk about, and the gospel in that section is mostly in, it's partly in Jerusalem, but it's in Judea and Samaria. And Luke says, let's take a breather again and review what's been happening. And notice he says, so the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.

Same sort of idea. The growth of the church and walking in the fear of the Lord in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. By the way, I find it interesting the two things go together there, the fear of God and the comfort and encouragement of the Spirit.

Many years ago, well, probably about 10 or 12 years ago, I remember reading a book written by a fairly prominent missiologist, a person who studies missions, and at some point in the book, about a third of the way in the book, he said something to the effect that the fear of God is an Old Testament thing, it's not a New Testament thing. It doesn't characterize New Testament believers. And I must say, at that point, I put the book down and I've never picked it up since.

I thought, if this man doesn't know such a basic thing, that the fear of God is a New Testament thing. That's very basic. I felt he's got nothing to teach me.

Maybe arrogant on my part. But the fear of God is not just an Old Testament thing. A number of times in the New Testament, we have this phrase, set of believers.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians, at the end of 6 and chapter 7-1, talks about preaching the gospel in the fear of God. It's not a slavish fear, but it's a fear of reverence, that we are dealing with a holy God who holds all things in His hands. And at the same time, this is a God who comforts us.

It's amazing. The two things held in tension here. And ideally, as you grow up in a family, that's the way one should feel towards one's parents.

The great reverence for one's father and mother. At the same time, it's not a slavish fear of them. It's the great comfort and security that comes from having, if one has, a godly father and mother.

Anyway, Acts 9-31, that is the end of the second section. And then Luke narrates the conversion, especially, of Cornelius, a Gentile. That's a very important event for Luke.

Because one of the great issues in the early church was, can a Gentile become a worshipper of the true God, without going through the room of Judaism? Don't they have to become Jews first? The Jews have no problems with Gentiles coming into Israel, but you've got to go through all of the aspects of becoming a Jew. But now the gospel comes, and the gospel is for all nations. It's not just one for one ethnic group.

And you don't have to become a Jew to be a worshipper of the true living God. And Cornelius is an example of that. He's a Gentile, and the door is now open to the Gentiles.

Chapter 12 is the great story of Peter being arrested. It's one of those passages of Scripture which I think does have elements of humor in it. Peter is released from prison.

The angel releases him. He's in a dream. He kind of wakes up when he gets out of the prison, realizes he's free.

He goes to one of the houses where there is a prayer meeting, the house of John Mark's mother. A slave girl, Rhoda, comes to the door. She's so astonished, she doesn't even open the door when she sees him.

Goes back into the prayer meeting, tells them that Peter is free. Presumably they've been praying for Peter, but they don't buy it. No way! What does that say about their faith? What are they praying for? Maybe they're praying, Lord, give Peter the resolve and help him to stand fast when he's martyred.

The idea that he might be freed, well, maybe it didn't go through their minds. So it's a story of elements of humor. And then at the end of Acts 12, we have these words.

Acts 12, 24. Your third summary verse. This one's a lot shorter.

The word of God increased and multiplied. And again, Luke says, think about what God's been doing. He's saving Gentiles.

Think about what God's been doing. Despite the fact that King Herod arrests Peter and James, James the brother of John, kills James, the gospel can't be stopped. The gospel's going to go forward.

Despite the opposition of the powers of this world, the gospel is going to go forward. One of the great encouragements of looking at the history of the church is to see nations that were determined not to receive the gospel. One thinks of Voltaire in France claiming that within 50 years of his lifetime, the Bibles would all be trashed, and people would turn away from the superstitions of Christianity.

Within 50 years of his death, his house that he lived in, in France, was being used as a Bible printing depot. And quite the opposite. One thinks of the Soviet Union claiming to be an atheist country.

And how God humbled that nation. In our lifetime, we've seen it. And the gospel is, I mean, there's some challenges, I know, but the gospel's going forward freely there in many places.

So despite earthly powers, and when Luke wants to drive that home, the word of God increases. It's interesting, he doesn't say the church. It's obviously the church he's thinking of.

But what's growing the church? It's the word. The fourth summary verse is found in Acts 16 and verse 5. And Luke has narrated in chapters 13, 14, and 15 the first missionary journey of the Apostle Paul. And the going out of the gospel, definitely now into Gentile territory.

Paul preaching in some synagogues, in other cases, preaching out in the public, in the open air, to people who've never heard, know nothing about the living God at all. And again, Luke says, let's take a summary. Let's take a breather and see what's going on.

And so the churches were strengthened in the faith. And they increased in numbers daily. And again, you see what he's doing.

He'll narrate some material, and then he says, what's happening? The church is growing. In some ways, one can see the book of Acts as being the fulfillment of what Jesus said, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. What you see in the book of Acts is the apostles and those who God calls to bear witness, as it were, storming the very gates of hell.

Outside of Israel, basically, before the gospel light went forward in the age that we call the gospel age, all the nations were in darkness. They were under the bondage of Satan. But God is going forward, driving His word forward.

Nothing can stop that word. Great encouragement. The book of Acts is fabulous encouragement for us.

No matter what might ultimately, as we look around us, be very discouraging, the long-term picture is God will build His church, and nothing, nothing, not earthly powers that oppose it, not persecution, not sometimes even the church itself, will stop the growth of God's kingdom. And what's driving it forward is

His word. Great encouragement to be faithful to the word and sharing that word.

Again, the fifth summary verse is in Acts 19-20. I'm going to read a few verses before it, because there's another theme that comes in here as well. Acts 19, and let me pick up, actually, at verse 18.

Many of those who are now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver.

That's the end of the section that comes before Acts 19-20. Then Luke summarizes, Show the word of the Lord, continue to increase and prevail mightily. And in Acts 16, we have the crossing of the gospel from what we call Asia into Europe, going to Philippi, the conversion of the Philippian jailer, Lydia.

In Acts 17, the planting of the church in Thessalonica, the proclamation of the gospel in Athens. Then in 18, in Corinth, of all places. Corinth was one of the most despicable cities in the Roman world.

It was the Las Vegas. No offense if you're in love with Las Vegas. When I think of Las Vegas, I just think of a place of deep-seated corruption.

I've never been there. Personally, I have no desire to go there. But Corinth is the Las Vegas of the Roman world.

But God planted a church right in that place. And it flourished. And then in Acts 19, the riot in Ephesus, the planting of the gospel in Ephesus.

So much so was the gospel powerful that even those involved in magic, the occult, were overcome. Those in league with demonic powers. This is a great word, I think, for us today.

We have, and would that things were differently, but we are in the day in which we live. We have lived for many years on the heritage of a society that by and large accepted a Judeo-Christian ethic. And until that was taken away and is being taken away, we probably didn't know how good we had it.

And that is rapidly eroding. It's probably more rapidly eroding where I live in Canada than it is here. But certainly in the large parts of the United States, it's rapidly eroding.

That doesn't mean people are not interested in spiritual things. There's a hunger there. But they're not turning to the true things of the Spirit.

They're turning to other things. And if you want to see this, go into a Barnes and Noble or a Borders bookstore. And you look at the self-help section and the religion section.

And you see what people are interested in. Witchcraft. And channeling and getting in touch with spirits to find out their future.

Astrology and Buddhism. Buddhism is becoming very big. And all of the other religions, they're all ultimately demonic.

It's a very strong statement. But you read the Scriptures. The Scriptures view it this way.

And we are increasingly living in a society where people are bringing themselves in a bondage to demonic powers. Are we to fear? No. Because the Gospel is stronger than anything that Satan can bring against

us.

And this passage again, the Word of God increased. And then the final section is all the way at the end of the book. And you've got this long section, about ten chapters.

19, 20. The story of Paul going up to Jerusalem. His arrest.

Nearly being killed. He's being held for four years. Actually, sorry, two years in Caesarea Philippi.

Then he's going to Rome, Acts 27. I think it's a fabulous chapter. You could make a movie.

A very thrilling movie out of the life of Paul. And that Acts 27 chapter. Just where Luke takes the time to narrate the trip by sea to Rome.

And God's preserving His Apostle. For the sake of His Apostle, preserving all on board that ship. And then he's coming to Rome.

And he's being held under house arrest for two years. You think of this. Four years in prison for the sake of the Gospel.

And Luke, I suspect, may well have known the ultimate outcome of that. But if he did, he doesn't tell us. Maybe in case he doesn't.

But notice the way he ends the Book of Acts. He ends this way in Acts 28, 30 to 31. This is his final summary section.

He lived there two whole years at his own expense. Welcomed all who came to him. Proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

It's the same thing. Not the exact same words, but the same thing. Can anything stop the Gospel? He actually ends the Book of Acts with those great words, without hindrance.

The man's in prison. He has house arrest. He has some degree of freedom.

But he's in prison. He's a prisoner of the Roman state. But Luke doesn't see it that way.

What Luke sees is God driving forward the Gospel. And it cannot be stopped. And it's great encouragement, I think, for us in our day.

There is so much to discourage us. Especially the dismantling of much that we hold dear. If our great-grandparents were to come back into this world now, they'd be horrified at things that we take for granted.

In Ontario in the 1880s, 1890s, 70% of Ontarians went to an evangelical church. Not that they were all Christians. I don't think one could say that, but 70%.

Today, it's about 5% to 8% in Ontario. Depends on how you do the polls, and maybe a bit higher. There's been a tremendous loss.

And that could be very discouraging. But the great encouragement from the Book of Acts is, no, God will build His kingdom. And whatever we may be seeing in our local area, the kingdom of God is going

forward.

And what we need to be doing is faithful to the Word. It's the Word. The great theme of Acts is the Word is what saves sinners.

It's the Word that builds up the church. It's the Word that establishes the church. And there are many churches across North America who have lost confidence in the Word.

And they're doing all kinds of other things to bring people in. And one of the great challenges for preaching today is, are people who say, well, preaching's passé. It's had its day.

And we need to do other things. Not so. Well, I say not so, not simply out of tradition, but I say not so because of God's Word.

It's the preached Word, the shared Word, that saves sinners and builds up His people. Well, we did go through the whole Book of Acts, but at fairly rapid speed. But I would encourage you to read the book and see the way in which Lucas structured it for these summary statements and so on.

Actually, I think I erred when I said seven. There are six summary statements. Yeah, there's Acts 6-7, 9-31, 12-24, 16-5, 19-20, and 28-30-31.

But it gives us one, two, three, four, five. It gives us six sections. So, I erred when I said seven.

That's in chapter 16 in the first five verses where Luke suddenly starts to say we. Yeah. In Acts 16... Actually, I think it's Acts 16-6 where he says... Yeah, Acts 16... It's 11.

Well, actually, I think it's before... Yeah, at least in 10. Yeah, it's in 10. When Paul had seen the vision immediately, we sought to go on into Macedonia.

Yeah. Yeah, Luke... At that point, Luke is probably from then one of the churches in Asia Minor. Often, people... What is now modern Turkey.

Some scholars say, well, he's from Philippi. But Luke hasn't... Paul hasn't got to Philippi yet. So... Yeah, at that point, Luke joins the apostolic bands.

One of the things that's vital to understand about Paul's ministry is there were about anywhere between five to eight or nine men who committed themselves to seeing Paul's ministry carried forward. It's not just him by himself. It's Timothy, Titus, Luke, Epaphras, Tychicus, Tertius, and there's a few others.

And these men basically gave up whatever ambitions they had in their own lives to walk with Paul and to see the gospel churches planted. But that's the point at which Luke starts to talk weak. The two dominant figures, as far as persons go, are Paul, as you said, Peter and Paul.

We can presume that Luke probably outlived both of them, knew about their death, but didn't record their death. That would probably be to... that he consciously didn't want to make it a book about Peter and Paul. Yeah, both traditionally, and I think there's good reason to support the tradition, both Peter and Paul died as martyrs.

But the book of Acts is not primarily about... We'll see this this morning, Lord willing, in Stephen. The narration about Stephen is not so much about his death but about his witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the church does get off track to some degree in our history when she starts to focus on the martyrs as martyrs.

It's what they point to that is to be our focus. Yeah. Yeah.

I hadn't thought of that, but that certainly would be. Yeah. Very good.

Maybe time for one other question if somebody wants to, or a comment. Well, let's close then in prayer. Our Father, we are thankful for your holy word, that you have not left us without revelation and wisdom.

We are thankful for your holy word because it points us individually to the Lord Jesus Christ and the necessity that we each call upon him in faith and believe. We are thankful for the wisdom that it gives us in our own personal lives, but we are especially thankful that this word is stronger than all the powers of this world and that upon this word you will build your church and the Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified and his name honored and salvation will go to the ends of the earth and every knee shall bow to him. And we are thankful that you have opened our eyes and given us faith and that as we look towards the end of time we do so not with fear and terror, but with anticipation that the one whom we have loved in this world we will see face to face and adore him forever.

To be with us in the hour to come, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

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