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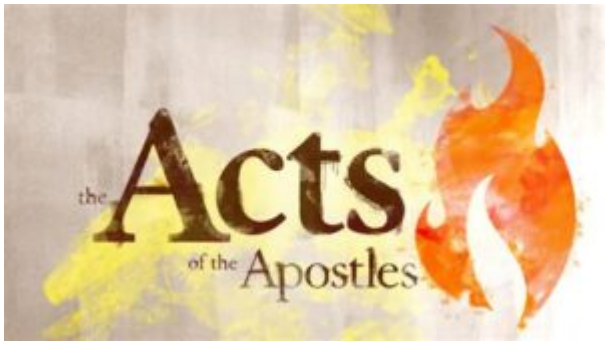
Introduction to the Book of Acts from a Messianic Jewish Perspective

To Linda, faithful editor, friend, encourager, and prayer warrior.
Her insightful additions and deletions make our commentaries easier to read and understand.

The book of **Acts** is the first volume of the congregations of **God**. It records the story of the Messianic Community from its explosive beginning on the festival of Shavu'ot to the imprisonment of its greatest missionary in Rome. During those three decades, the Messianic Community exploded from a small group in Jerusalem to hundreds of thousands of believers in dozens of congregations throughout the Roman Empire. **Acts** describes how **the Spirit of God** controlled and empowered the expansion of the Messianic Congregation/Church. Indeed, the book could well be called "The **Acts** of **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** Through the Apostles."

Acts is a significant book for several reasons. Without **Acts** it would be very difficult to understand the flow of the early history of the Messianic Community/Church. With it, however, we have a core history around which to assemble the data in the epistles, enriching our understanding of them. The book follows first the ministry of **Peter**, then **Rabbi Sha'ul/Paul**. From it, we learn principles for discipling believers, building the Body of **Messiah**, and evangelizing the world.

Although a work of history, not theology, **Acts** nevertheless emphasizes the doctrinal truths concerning salvation, **Yeshua ha'Natzrati** is boldly proclaimed as **Isra'el's** long-awaited **Messiah**; and that truth, is ably defended from the TaNaKh **(2:22ff, 3:12ff, 4:10ff, 7:1ff, 8:26ff, 9:22, 18:5** and **24-28, 28:23)**.



The book of **Acts** also teaches much about **the Spirit of God**, who is mentioned more than fifty times. **He** regenerates, immerses, fills, and sanctifies believers. **The Ruach Ha'Kodesh** is seen choosing missionaries **(13:2)** and directing their operations **(8:29). He** presided over the first council of the Messianic Community/Church and basically directed and controlled all of her operations.

The doctrinal importance of **Acts** is not limited, however, to its teaching on **Jesus Christ** and **the Holy Spirit**. While it does not flow around doctrinal issues, but historical events, it does, however, touch on many theological truths. The importance of the book of **Acts** is in its preservation of the main doctrinal themes presented in the preaching of the apostles, though there is no evidence of an attempt to develop a systemized theology.[1]

The Use of the Tree of Life Version

Because I am writing this commentary on the book of **Acts** from a Jewish perspective, I will be using *the Tree of Life Version* unless otherwise indicated. There will be times when I substitute Hebrew for English names using the Complete Jewish Bible (CJB) by David Stern. But generally, I will be using the TLV translation for the Jewish perspective.

Author

The author of the gospel of **Luke** and the book of **Acts** writes anonymously. In fact, none of the writers of the four gospels identify themselves by name. But church tradition, as far back as the early part of the second century, has always agreed that **Luke** was the writer of both the gospel of **Luke** and **Acts**. Taken together, **Luke**, a Hellenistic Jew, wrote more of the New Covenant than any other writer, including Paul. **Luke** is mentioned by name only three times in the New Covenant **(Colossians 4:14; Second Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24)**. From these passages

and **Luke's** books we discover several things. **Luke** was a well-educated Greek living in Asia Minor. **Luke's** use of the Greek language was superior. **His** lively, entertaining style resembles the writing style of Greek novelists at the time. **He** was also a careful historian, often tying **his** story to specific dates and historical incidents and figures. **Luke** was also a physician **(Colossians 4:14)**. **His** medical training shows in **his** use of technical medical terms. After **he** met Paul, **Luke** was the apostle's constant companion, even in jail. In the "**we**" passages, beginning in **Acts 16:10**, **Luke** switches to the first-person plural, showing that **he** was there and part of the action.

Date

The date of the gospel is closely tied to its companion volume **Acts**. Since Paul was in prison
in Rome at the end of **Acts** (about AD 62), **Luke** may have finished **Acts** before Paul's release
and later martyrdom. This would place **Acts** around AD 62, and the Gospel of **Luke** was probably written in the early 60s.

Where and How Luke Got His Information

Luke was not an eyewitness to anything **he** describes in **his** gospel, nor to most of what he wrote about in the first fifteen chapters of **Acts**. **He** never saw **Jesus**. The opening paragraph of **his** gospel, **Luke** tells where and how **he** got **his** information **(Luke 1:1-5)**. **He** heard about **Jesus** from the apostles and others who told **him** what they had seen and heard. **Luke's** two books were written probably about thirty years after **Jesus** rose from the dead.[2]

Style

Luke likes to write things in sequence. Right from the beginning, in the preface to **his** gospel **(Luke 1:1-3)**, **he** states that **he** is writing a narrative, **and** that **he** is going to tell things **in sequence**, **in consecutive order** (Greek: *kathexes*). In fact, **Luke** is the only gospel author who claims to write in such a way. **He** builds **his** case in meticulous fashion, the order of events and stories playing a major role in the structure and style. The same reason also lies behind **Luke's** custom of first introducing **his** important characters in passing fashion, returning to them later as though they were already a known part of **his** story (see Barnabas, Paul, Apollos and Agrippa).

Luke also adopts typical Greek rhetoric style in the narration of Paul's defense speeches **(22:3-21, 24:10-21, 26:4-23)**. **His** use of these speeches reflects the purpose of the book, enabling **him** to present Paul as a loyal Jew who has devoted himself to fulfilling the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. **He** likewise represents **his** writing as "history" according to the biblical genre. This allows **him** to substantiate the events which **he** records as the fulfillment of **Yeshua's** command to **his** disciples to witness **to the ends of the earth**. In this way **he** demonstrates how the Gentiles have come to be included in **God's** Kingdom, in total agreement with Isra'el's most basic beliefs, written in the Torah and spoken by the prophets.

Furthermore, **Luke** frequently introduces summaries and brief statements through which the reader can focus on **his** goal **(2:42-47, 4:32-35, 5:12-16, 6:7, 9:31** and **42, 11:21** and **24, 12:24, 14:1, 16:5, 19:20, 28:31).** This gives a feeling of progress and historical momentum unique to Luke-Acts in the B'rit Chadashah. The same is true of the reports of **signs and wonders** that follow the apostles in their evangelistic work.[3]

The use of ADONAI

Long before **Yeshua's** day, the word **ADONAI** had, out of respect, been substituted in speaking and in reading aloud for **God's** personal name, the four Hebrew letters *yud-heh-vav-heh*, variously written in English as **YHVH**. **The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) made it a requirement not to pronounce the Tetragrammaton**, meaning the four-letter name of **God**, and this remains the rule in most modern Jewish settings. In deference to this tradition, which is unnecessary but harmless, I will be using **ADONAI** where **YHVH** is meant.1 In ancient times when the scribes were translating the Hebrew Scriptures, they revered the name of **YHVH** so much that they would use a quill to make one stroke of the name and then throw it away. Then they would make another stroke and throw that quill away until the name was completed. **His** name became so sacred to them that they started to substitute the phrase *the Name*, instead of writing or pronouncing **His** Name. Over centuries of doing this, the actual letters and pronunciation of **His** Name were lost. The closest we can come is **YHVH**, with no syllables. The pronunciation has been totally lost. Therefore, the name Yahweh is only a guess of what the original name sounded like. Both **ADONAI** and **Ha'Shem** are substitute names for **YHVH**. **ADONAI** is more of an affectionate name like *daddy*, while **Ha'Shem** is a more formal name like *sir*.

The use of TaNaKh

The Hebrew word **TaNaKh** is an acronym, based on the letters **T** (for "**T**orah"), **N** (for "**N**evi'im," the Prophets), and **K** (for "**K**etuvim," the Sacred Writings). It is the collection of the teachings of **God** to human beings in document form. The term "Old Covenant" implies that it is no longer valid, or at the very least outdated. Something old, to be either ignored or discarded. But **Jesus Himself** said: **Don't think I have come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets, I have not come to abolish but to complete (Matthew 5:17 CJB).** I will be using the Hebrew acronym **TaNaKh** instead of the phrase the Old Testament, throughout this devotional commentary.

The Use of the phrase, "the righteous of the TaNaKh," rather than using Old Testament saints

Messianic synagogues, and the Jewish messianic community in general, never use the phrase Old Testament saints. From a Jewish perspective, they prefer to use the phrase, "righteous of **the TaNaKh**." Therefore, I will be using "the righteous of **the TaNaKh**," rather than Old Testament saints throughout this devotional commentary.

The Use of Disciple and Apostle

Luke indicates that **Jesus** chose **twelve** from among **His** disciples, and that these **He** named **apostles**. Consequently, I will be using the word disciples as a general term for those who were committed to following their **Master** to learn from **Him**. And I will be using the word **apostles** for **the Twelve** whom **Messiah** invested **His** time and sent out with **His** delegated authority. Obviously, **Yeshua** chose **twelve** special disciples to be **His apostles**. Also, at times, I will also be using the Hebrew word **talmid** (singular) or **talmidim** (plural), which means *student or learner,* to refer to **His Twelve apostles**. Empowered by **the Holy Spirit**, they carried on **His** ministry after **He** had ascended back to **the Father** in heaven.

The Purpose of Acts

Each of the letters in the B'rit Chadashah was written to deal with a set of problems facing a specific congregation, or reflects the relationship of the writer to a particular community. One of the main purposes of the book of **Acts** is to explain

the relationship between the Jewish and Gentile segments of the early community, and to reconcile Paul's ministry with Peter's. Luke opens up with the story of the proclamation of the gospel in Jerusalem, which then spreads to the ends of the earth in fulfillment of the words of the prophets **(Isaiah 2:3; Acts 1:8)**. The book of **Acts** can in many ways be seen as an apologetic for peace between Jews and Gentiles in the body of **Messiah**. **Luke** is Paul's disciple and has taken pains to research and put in order the written and oral material that he gathered in Isra'el and in the diaspora.

Luke succeeds in reconciling the two great leaders in the Church so well that the reader has difficulty finding much difference between them.

Peter – Apostle to the Jews: **Peter's** first healing was a cripple (see **Ap – Peter Heals a Lame Beggar**), **he** healed through a shadow **(5:15)**, **his** success caused Jewish jealousy **(5:15-17)**, **he** dealt with **Simon** the **sorcerer (8:9-24)**, **he** raised **Dorcas** to life **(9:36-41)**, **he** was miraculously released from **prison (12:7)**. **And the word of God kept on spreading (6:7)**.

Paul – Apostle to the Gentiles: **Paul's** first healing was also a cripple **(14:8-18)**; **he** healed through handkerchiefs and aprons **(19:11-12)**, **his** success also caused Jewish jealousy **(13:45)**, **he** also dealt with a **sorcerer** named **Bar-Jesus (13:6-11)**, **he** also raised someone to life, **Eutychus (20:9-12), he** was also miraculously released from **prison (23:26)**. **So, the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing (19:20).**

The similarities between the two men indicate a comparison between the ministry to the Jews and to the Gentiles in the book of **Acts**. It is important to note that **Chapter 15** – which deals with the problems between the Jewish and Gentile parts of the body of **Messiah** – divides **Acts** in half. These indications suggest that **Acts** was written in order to accomplish the following goals:

1. To demonstrate the validity and equality of **Peter's** and **Paul's** ministries.

2. To place the ministry to the Gentiles in its proper perspective with respect to the Messianic Community.

3. To show that the ministry to the Gentiles was a part of **God's** design from the beginning of the apostolic ministry, commanded by **Yeshua Himself**.

4. To communicate to the readers that although **God** has ordained the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, this in no way threatens the Jewishness of the apostolic mission, nor Torah-observance and Jewish **customs**. The book of **Acts** begins in Jerusalem with vision of the restoration of the Kingdom of **God** to Isra'el and ends with Paul assuring the Jewish leadership in Rome that **I had done nothing against our people, or the customs of our fathers (28:17).**4