

ACTS

Structure: Luke wrote Acts as a sequel to his gospel in order to show how Jesus empowered His Church by His Spirit to bear witness about Him in Jerusalem (1-7), Judea and Samaria (8-12), and to the ends of the earth (13-28) (see Acts 1:8). The emphasis in the first 12 chapters is on Peter, who was the lead apostle to the Jews, but as the gospel spread into the gentile world the emphasis switches to Paul (the lead apostle to the gentiles) and Peter is phased out of the narrative. In order to legitimize the apostolic ministry of Paul (which many people doubted) Luke shows the parallels between his ministry and Peter's. Notice how both Peter and Paul preach that Jesus is Messiah, both cast out unclean spirits, both heal the lame, both raise the dead, both unknowingly heal someone (shadow/cloth) , and both are miraculously freed from prison!

Overall Message: Acts is all about the spread of the gospel, and it sets the tone for how the Church has fulfilled the Great Commission ever since. Key features of the gospel spread include: the gospel is for all nations, social classes, and genders; its spread is empowered by the Spirit; and spreading it might bring persecution or even death. The message to spread is that Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection prove that He is the Messiah, that He is King, and that His Kingdom has come. The necessary response is to repent and believe. The result of repentant faith is entrance into Christ's Kingdom, adoption into His family, and the privilege to continue His work.

Historical Context: For the past 2,000 years (Abraham to Jesus) the Jews had enjoyed being the lone people in covenant relationship with God. Their religious, cultural, and racial differences from gentiles fueled disdain and animosity between them. The reality of the New Covenant (which unifies Jews and gentiles as one under Christ) did not remove the animosity overnight. Luke is honest about this struggle, and it is a key factor in many of the New Testament epistles.

ROMANS

Purpose: Paul wrote his letter to the Roman church in order to unify the divisions between the Jews and gentiles. He aimed to do this so that they could be a healthy flagship church that could support his missionary ambitions to Spain. The result: the best gospel presentation ever given.

Structure: The gospel reveals the righteousness of God, the righteousness of man (both Jews and gentiles), and the power of God to save (1-4). The gospel brings redemption for all mankind and all creation through the man Christ Jesus (5-8). The gospel fulfills all of God's promises to Israel (despite how it might seem in the moment) (9-11). And the gospel is what unifies the Church.

Key Themes: All people are sinners in need of salvation. God is able to judge sin and save sinners. Justification has always been by faith. The law is good, but has never had the power to save. The death of Christ is central to salvation. God is completely sovereign over salvation. The Spirit empowers believers to live a holy life. And the gospel is for the glory of God!

1 CORINTHIANS

Purpose: Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians in order to address some of the many problems that had arisen since he left. The purpose of the book is straightforward: He names each problem and then helps them think about each one from a gospel perspective.

Problems and Gospel Solutions: Paul first responds to the divisions over who is the best Christian leader by reminding them that Christianity is all about Jesus. Leaders in the church are merely servants of Christ (1-4). He then addresses the many sexual perversions in the church and proclaims that purity matters because a believer's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (5-7). He then deals with whether or not Christians should eat meat that was sacrificed to idols (8-10) and what is and is not appropriate during a church gathering (11-14). The answer to both of these problems is to love your neighbor as yourself. He concludes by destroying the notion that the bodily resurrection of Christ is irrelevant to being a Christian (15).

2 CORINTHIANS

Purpose: In this letter we learn that the Corinthians did not respond very well to Paul's first letter. Their response prompted Paul to return in person to rebuke them in what he calls "a painful visit" (2 Cor. 2:1). The painful visit led some of the Corinthians to humble themselves and repent. This letter was written to assure them that Paul had forgiven them and that they were fully reconciled, and to challenge those who still rejected him and to warn them of coming judgement.

Structure: In 1-7 Paul assures them of his forgiveness and responds to some of the reasons why they had rejected him as an apostle. He argues that his suffering does not disqualify him, in fact it does the opposite because of the paradox of the cross. He also has a long discussion about the old and new covenants, arguing that the Spirit being written on their hearts is further proof of his legitimacy. In 8-9 he talks about generosity being a gospel issue, not a money issue. And in 10-13 he concludes the letter with his challenge to those who still reject him.

GALATIANS

Purpose: A group of Judaizers had infiltrated the Galatian churches and convinced them that gentiles needed to be circumcised, abide by the kosher food laws, and observe the Sabbath in order to be part of God's covenant family. Paul writes to passionately refute them.

Structure: There is only one gospel: justification by faith alone (1-2). Salvation has always been by faith alone, even in the Old Covenant (3-4). Genuine faith leads to gospel transformation (5-6).

EPHESIANS

Key Theme: Unity in Christ: Paul writes to help the Ephesians marvel at God's eternal plan for salvation which has resulted in the redemption of all creation (including gentiles!) through Jesus Christ. In addition to being unified to Christ, Jews and gentiles can be unified with each other as one Church body, with Christ as the head.

Structure: Theology proclaimed (1-3) and theology applied (4-6).