

## **Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Some notes on The Acts of the Apostles**

**Tom Wright:** The presence of Jesus haunts the whole story of Acts, not as an increasingly distant memory, but as a living and powerful reality. Jesus is announced as the King and Lord to be obeyed and followed. And yet he remains a person who can be known and loved, who continues to operate within the real world. We call the book “The Acts of the Apostles”, but we should think of it as “The Acts of Jesus: Part Two”. Reading Acts helps us to see how Jesus’ acts through the apostles inform and empower our acts today.

*A word of caution: Tom Wright is, of course, right; but the story of Jesus’ first disciples is a selective story. A picture of 24 hour Christians who never for one moment pause from thinking Jesus and doing Jesus can be a bit off-putting. You might see yourself as setting aside some Jesus time on Sundays, and getting on with ordinary life as best you can for the rest of the week. Even if you earn your living as a minister of the Gospel, you have other things to do; and even the full-time Gospel minister isn’t going to have many friends if every word and every act is explained as “Jesus told me to do this”.... and nobody will believe you! We can be 24 hour Christians by doing ordinary things to the best of our ability; and maybe never formally preaching.*

**William Barclay:** In one sense, Acts is the most important book in the New Testament. It opens a series of windows and gives us vivid glimpses of great moments and personalities. The correct translation of the book’s Greek title is Acts of apostolic people. Most of the twelve Apostles are not even mentioned. It is fairly certain that it was written by a Gentile doctor Luke: about whom we know surprisingly little – as a sequel to Luke’s Gospel. Luke seems to be writing to explain Christianity to a Roman of some status: “how they brought the good news from Jerusalem to Rome”. *Not a Jewish sect: a universal reality: for all people for all time.* Luke clearly went to considerable trouble to get his facts right.

**When was Luke writing?** One version is Gospel AD 58-62 and Acts AD 80-90. Say within 50-60 years of the Crucifixion.

**Abel Clerk’s “Bibel”:** Acts mingle with words. Words filter thoughts.

**Derek Williams: An Idiot’s Guide to the Bible:** The events recorded here took place between AD 30 and AD 61. So, your leader is dead and your hopes dashed. Not the best basis for establishing a lasting and influential multi-national movement is it? But it happened, and this book describes how. The resurrection of Jesus forms the focal point of the preaching.

**Simon Jenkins: The Bible from Scratch:** The transition from Jesus to church.

**Eugene Peterson: The Message Bible:** The story of Jesus doesn’t end with Jesus. It continues in the lives of those who believe in him. The supernatural does not stop with Jesus. Luke makes it clear that these Christians he wrote about were no more spectators of

Jesus than Jesus was a spectator of God – they are *in* on the action of God, God acting in them God living in them. Which also, of course, means us.

**A.C. Winn: Acts of the Apostles:** Luke wrote about one fourth of the New Testament. May have been two 32 feet long scrolls, written one after the other. It is not easy to reconcile the Paul of the Letters with the Paul of the Acts. But the most exciting book ever written *does tell it as it is.*

**Loveday Alexander: Acts:** This book will make a traveller of you.

**John Stott: The Message of Acts:** The Word of God is always relevant, but that does not mean we may simply “read off” the text as if it was originally addressed to us in our context... We have no liberty to copy everything the apostles did.

*Since the Day of Pentecost miracle of everybody understanding without translation, missionaries have had to labour mightily to translate the Gospel into the thousands of local languages. In the Early Church, Paul noted that “the gift of tongues” was a description of inspired speaking that almost nobody else could understand!*

**Phil Moore: Straight to the Heart of Acts:** In 30 AD, Jesus of Nazareth looked to have been an utter failure. If you don’t understand that, then you will miss the message of the Book of Acts. It is a record of survival through adversity, triumph against all odds, and victory snatched from the jaws of defeat. It is the story of a group of ordinary people who turned the tide of history through the power of their extraordinary God.....

*With respect, I think Phil Moore is rather over-stating his case. Modern Christians are perhaps a little too much inclined to kid themselves that while on Good Friday Jesus had a very modest number of declared supporters, on Easter Day the crowds were back cheering him on. It is important to remember that although there were not multitudes reciting the Nicene Creed, there were quite a lot of people for whom the words of Jesus and/or his healing touch were imprinted on their minds and lives for ever. Phil estimates that the starting point for the young Church was 120 followers. His argument is unconvincing!*