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# THE HOLY BIBLE NKJV REFERENCE GUIDE

NEW TESTAMENT

BOOK 44

ACTS



The stoning of St. Stephen by Annibale Carracci

## SUMMARY

The Book of Acts, which continues the narrative that Luke began in his gospel, is especially important because it was the first written history of the Christian church.

Acts concerns the very vital period in Christian history between the resurrection of Jesus and the death of the apostle Paul, the time when Christian ideas and beliefs were being formulated and when the organization of the church into a worldwide movement was being developed.

Only with knowledge of this background can we understand the writing of the Gospels, as well as the other New Testament literature that followed.

The book has been called "The Acts of the Apostles," really a misnomer because Acts has very little to say concerning most of the original Twelve Apostles. Peter's activities are described at some length, and John and Philip are mentioned, but more than half of the book is about Paul and his connection with the Christian movement.

Scholars are somewhat divided in their opinions concerning the book's authorship. There can be no question about Luke being the author of parts of the book, but the inclusion of what has been called the "we sections" raises some question about the persons to whom the pronoun "we" refers.

Was someone other than Luke also involved in the reports that are made? While no definite answer can be given to this question, it seems highly probable that Luke was the author of the original book, but the work of editors and redactors was added before the text reached the final form in which we have it today.

The Book of Acts contains twenty-eight chapters. Of these, the first twelve report events between the time of Jesus' last meeting with his disciples and the beginning of Paul's work as a Christian missionary.

The remaining sixteen chapters describe Paul's activities, beginning with his mission to the church at Antioch and ending with an account of his residence in Rome as a prisoner of the Roman government.

The events recorded in the first section of the book include such topics as the ascension of Jesus into heaven, the choosing of a disciple to replace Judas, who had betrayed Jesus, the Feast of Pentecost and the so-called gift of tongues,

Peter's sermon delivered on that occasion, the arrest of Peter and John in the Temple at Jerusalem, the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, the stoning of Stephen, Philip's meeting with the eunuch and the baptism that followed, the story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, and Peter's visit with Cornelius, the centurion.

In addition to giving us some insight concerning the early activities of the Christian community, these accounts are especially valuable in that they tell us about the beliefs that Christians held concerning Jesus prior to the writing of the Gospels.

Paul's letter to the church at Corinth is the earliest written summary of the Christian faith. Paul mentions that he received no direct revelation concerning the facts pertaining to the life of Jesus and their significance for the Christian faith, but he is passing on to the members of that church what has been related to him by others.

## SUMMARY Continued

From this statement, we can infer that the essential beliefs of the Christian community about Jesus were already formulated and were included in the preaching that took place prior to that time.

The first section of the Book of Acts reports several different sermons that give us definite information about these beliefs. These sermons constitute the kerygma, or the primitive gospel that was proclaimed by early Christians before any written records were made.

For example, we are told of Peter's sermon to a group of about one hundred and twenty people, another sermon that he delivered on the day of Pentecost, and a third one that he preached in Jerusalem, standing on Solomon's porch in front of the Temple.

Stephen's sermon at the time of his stoning is reported at considerable length, and we are told of Philip's instruction to the eunuch whom he baptized and again of Peter's discourse with Cornelius and his report to the Christian leaders at Jerusalem.

In the last section of Acts, a number of Paul's sermons are recorded in considerable detail. From these records, it is possible to reconstruct with a fair degree of accuracy the main contents of the kerygma, or earliest preaching of the Christian church.

The story of the stoning of Stephen throws some light on those factors in Paul's experience that led to his conversion on the road to Damascus. From Chapter 13 to the end of the book, we have a somewhat detailed account of Paul's missionary journeys and his experiences with different churches.

In Chapter 15, we have a report concerning the Jerusalem council in which the issue concerning circumcision was discussed. The account that Luke gives with reference to the results of this meeting does not agree in all details with the account of the same meeting given in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians.

Since Paul was a participant in the council and Luke was giving what might be called a secondhand account, the preference must be given to the one in the Galatian letter.

Luke was a strong believer in Christian unity, and in this instance, as well as in others that might be mentioned, he was anxious to minimize the differences between conflicting views. To him, the question had to be settled in a manner that was satisfactory to everyone.

The remainder of the Book of Acts describes Paul's visit to Macedonia. While in the city of Philippi, Paul and his companion, Silas, were thrown into prison. After an earthquake shook the prison, they were released and at Paul's insistence were given a police guard until they were safely out of the city.

Paul's experiences at Athens and at Corinth are related, as is his work at Ephesus, where he stayed for a considerable period of time, probably from two to three years.

The occasion for Paul's last visit to the city of Jerusalem was the collection of gifts from the various churches that he wished to give for the relief of poor Christians in that city.

## SUMMARY Continued

Trouble broke out while he was there, and he was accused of starting a riot in the Temple. Paul spoke at some length in his own defense. Forty men entered into a plot to kill Paul, but a friend warned Paul of the plot, and Paul appealed to a Roman officer for protection.

The officer heeded his request, and Paul was given asylum at Caesarea, a seat of the Roman government. In Caesarea, hearings were held before Felix and Agrippa, to each of whom Paul was given an opportunity to speak in his own defense. At his request, he was permitted to go to Rome in order that his case might be tried in Caesar's court.

On the voyage to Rome, he was shipwrecked but eventually did get to Rome, where he was accorded a considerable amount of liberty even though he was still a prisoner. After a time, he was tried, convicted, and executed.

In writing the Book of Acts, Luke traces the expansion of the Christian movement from its earliest beginnings to the time when it reached worldwide proportions. Luke was keenly aware of the way in which Christianity was being attacked by enemies of the movement, and he wanted to present the story of its development in a most favorable light.

Although it was quite impossible to write a complete history of the movement, he selected those events that he regarded as the more important ones, sufficient to characterize the movement as a whole.

Having been a companion of Paul, he was more familiar with Paul's work than he was with the activities of other Christian leaders. Then, too, he was an admirer of Paul and realized the significance of Paul's work in bringing the gospel to various cities.

He deeply appreciated the points of view held by Jewish Christians, who conceived of Christianity as a further development of Judaism instead of as an entirely separate movement.

He wanted to emphasize the agreements rather than the differences among those groups whose ideas frequently clashed with one another. In this respect, he was a kind of troubleshooter of the early Christian movement.

We do not know what source materials Luke used for writing Acts. Some things he observed himself, and quite possibly he may have kept a diary from which he extracted materials that were useful for his narrative. Presumably he had access to other manuscripts, and some of what he reported was obtained by direct conversation with others.

Many things were omitted, and Luke was not completely unbiased in all that he wrote, but given these limitations, Luke produced a remarkable piece of work whose inclusion in the New Testament contributes a great deal toward a better understanding of the entire work.

The early Christian sermons that Luke summarized and recorded form to a very great extent the basis for a reconstruction of the kerygma, and from this point of view, the gospel records were made.

## SUMMARY Continued

Luke's account of how Christianity made its way among Gentiles without discarding the more vital points of Judaism did much toward establishing unity. The account of Paul's arrest in the city of Jerusalem and the trials that followed clearly vindicate Paul in the eyes of any impartial reader.

The end of the book is somewhat disappointing because one would expect to read about Paul's trial in Caesar's court, but the account ends rather abruptly. Some people think that Luke intended to write a third volume of his history but was unable to do so. Of this we cannot be certain. However, we are indebted to Luke in no small measure for the two accounts of Christianity that he did write.

## NKJV SELECTED SCRIPTURE

- 1:7** And He said to them, *It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.*
- 1:8** *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*
- 2:1** When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.
- 2:2** And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.
- 2:3** Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.
- 2:4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
- 2:38** Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- 2:39** For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.
- 3:1** Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.
- 3:2** And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple;
- 3:3** who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms.
- 3:4** And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, Look at us.
- 3:5** So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.
- 3:6** Then Peter said, Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.
- 3:7** And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.
- 3:8** So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them--walking, leaping, and praising God.
- 4:22** For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.
- 5:29** But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: We ought to obey God rather than men.

## NKJV SCRIPTURE Continued

- 5:30** The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.
- 5:31** Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.
- 5:32** And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.
- 7:51** You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.
- 7:52** Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,
- 7:53** who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.
- 9:15** *But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.*
- 9:16** *For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.*
- 9:17** And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- 9:18** Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.
- 9:33** There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed.
- 9:34** And Peter said to him, Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed. Then he arose immediately.
- 9:35** So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord
- 9:40** But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.
- 9:41** Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.
- 10:44** While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.
- 10:45** And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.
- 10:46** For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered,
- 13:9** Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him
- 13:10** and said, O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?
- 13:11** And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time. And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.
- 28:8** And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him.

## NKJV SCRIPTURE Continued

- 28:9** So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed.
- 28:10** They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.
- 28:28** Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!
- 28:29** And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.
- 28:30** Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,
- 28:31** preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

## CHARACTER Definitions

**PHILIP** - Philip the evangelist or Philip the deacon. Philip was one of the original seven deacons selected to serve in the Jerusalem church. Philip had a heart for evangelism, and, when the great persecution arose in Acts 8:1, Philip left Jerusalem to become an evangelist in Samaria.

After the church in Samaria was started, Philip was used by the Holy Spirit to bring the gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch, a member of the court of Candace, the Ethiopian queen.

Philip found the eunuch sitting in his chariot, reading Isaiah and trying to make sense of the prophet's words. Philip offered to explain, and the eunuch invited him to come up and sit with him.

In the end, the eunuch was saved and baptized. Immediately following the baptism, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away to Azotus, where he continued to preach the gospel in the towns from there to Caesarea. Twenty years later, Philip is mentioned again, still in Caesarea.

Paul and Luke and others were traveling to Jerusalem, and they stopped at Philip's home in Caesarea. They stayed with Philip for several days. Philip had four virgin daughters at that time, all of whom had the gift of prophecy. That is the last time the Bible mentions the evangelist Philip.

**PAUL** - Paul the Apostle (c. 5 – c. 67), commonly known as Saint Paul and also known by his Jewish name Saul of Tarsus was an apostle (though not one of the Twelve Apostles) who taught the gospel of the Christ to the first century world.

Paul is generally considered one of the most important figures of the Apostolic Age and in the mid-30s to the mid-50s AD he founded several churches in Asia Minor and Europe. He took advantage of his status as both a Jew and a Roman citizen to minister to both Jewish and Roman audiences.

According to writings in the New Testament and prior to his conversion, Paul was dedicated to persecuting the early disciples of Jesus in the area of Jerusalem. In the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles (often referred to simply as Acts),

## CHARACTERS Continued

Paul was traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus on a mission to arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem when the resurrected Jesus appeared to him in a great light.

He was struck blind, but after three days his sight was restored by Ananias of Damascus and Paul began to preach that Jesus of Nazareth is the Jewish Messiah and the Son of God. Approximately half of the book of Acts deals with Paul's life and works.

According to the account in Acts, it took place on the road to Damascus, where he reported having experienced a vision of the resurrected Jesus. The account says that he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Saul replied, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: [it is] hard for thee to kick against the pricks (goads).

According to the account in Acts 9:1-22, he was blinded for three days and had to be led into Damascus by the hand. During these three days, Saul took no food or water and spent his time in prayer to God.

When Ananias of Damascus arrived, he laid his hands on him and said: Brother Saul, the Lord, Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. His sight was restored, he got up and was baptized. This story occurs only in Acts, not in the Pauline epistles.

And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, He is the Son of God. And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name?

And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests? But Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

Paul described himself as a servant of Jesus Christ; having experienced an unforeseen, sudden, startling change, due to all-powerful grace – not the fruit of his reasoning or thoughts.

Having seen Christ as did the other apostles when Christ appeared to him as he appeared to Peter, to James, to the Twelve, after his Resurrection; called to be an apostle; set apart for the gospel of God.

Paul described Jesus as having been promised by God beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures; being the true messiah and the Son of God; having biological lineage from David; having been declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

Being Jesus Christ our Lord; the One through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

## CHARACTERS Continued

Jesus, lives in heaven; is God's Son; would soon return.

The Cross, he now believed Jesus' death was a voluntary sacrifice that reconciled sinners with God.

The Law, he now believed the law only reveals the extent of people's enslavement to the power of sin – a power that must be broken by Christ.

Gentiles, he had believed Gentiles were outside the covenant that God made with Israel; he now believed Gentiles and Jews were united as the people of God in Christ Jesus.

Circumcision, had believed circumcision was the rite through which males became part of Israel, an exclusive community of God's chosen people; he now believed that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything.

The new creation is what counts in the sight of God, and that this new creation is a work of Christ in the life of believers, making them part of the church, an inclusive community of Jews and Gentiles reconciled with God through faith.

Persecution, had believed his violent persecution of the church to be an indication of his zeal for his religion; he now believed Jewish hostility toward the church was sinful opposition that would incur God's wrath.

He believed he was halted by Christ when his fury was at its height; It was through zeal that he persecuted the Church, and he obtained mercy because he had acted ignorantly in unbelief.

The Last Days, had believed God's messiah would put an end to the old age of evil and initiate a new age of righteousness; he now believed this would happen in stages that had begun with the resurrection of Jesus, but the old age would continue until Jesus returns.

Paul is critical both theologically and empirically of claims of moral or lineal superiority of Jews while conversely strongly sustaining the notion of a special place for the Children of Israel.

There are debates as to whether Paul understood himself as commissioned to take the gospel to the Gentiles at the moment of his conversion.

Paul's writings emphasized the crucifixion, Christ's resurrection and the Parousia or second coming of Christ. The three major emphases in Paul's writings: His strongest emphasis was on the death, resurrection, and lordship of Jesus Christ.

He preached that one's faith in Jesus assures that person a share in Jesus' life (salvation). He saw Jesus' death as being for the believers' benefit, not a defeat. Jesus died so that believers' sins would be forgiven.

The resurrection of Jesus was of primary importance to Paul, as may be seen in his first letter to the Thessalonians, which is the earliest surviving account of conversion to Christianity.

## CHARACTERS Continued

The resurrection brought the promise of salvation to believers. Paul taught that, when Christ returned, those who had died believing in Christ as the savior of mankind would be brought back to life, while those still alive would be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air.

Sanders concludes that Paul's writings reveal what he calls the essence of the Christian message: God sent his Son. The Son was crucified for the sins of humanity. After being dead three days, the Son was raised from the dead, defeating death.

The Son would soon return. Those in Christ will live with him forever. Followers are urged to live by a set apart (sanctified) standard – And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## BIBLE TIMELINE

|       |                                      |              |
|-------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| 30 AD | The Ascension                        | Acts 1       |
| 30 AD | The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost   | Acts 2       |
| 30 AD | Peter Heals and Preaches             | Acts 3       |
| 30 AD | Peter and John Arrested and Released | Acts 4       |
| 30 AD | Apostles Preach and Heal             | Acts 5:11    |
| 31 AD | Stephen's Speech, Stoning and Death  | Acts 6, 7    |
| 31 AD | Philip in Samaria                    | Acts 8:3     |
| 31 AD | Simon the Sorcerer                   | Acts 8:9     |
| 34 AD | Saul's Conversion                    | Acts 9       |
| 37 AD | Peter Preaches to the Gentiles       | Acts 10, 11  |
| 42 AD | Barnabas Sent to Antioch             | Acts 11:22   |
| 42 AD | Peter Led from Prison by the Angel   | Acts 12      |
| 44 AD | Herod Agrippa Dies                   | Acts 12:20   |
| 48 AD | Paul's First Missionary Journey      | Acts 13      |
| 48 AD | Paul and Barnabas in Iconium         | Acts 14      |
| 49 AD | Paul's Second Missionary Journey     | Acts 15:36   |
| 49 AD | Paul in Thessalonica, Berea, Athens  | Acts 17      |
| 51 AD | Paul in Corinth                      | Acts 18      |
| 57 AD | Paul in Macedonia and Greece         | Acts 20      |
| 59 AD | Paul Returns to Jerusalem            | Acts 21 - 23 |
| 60 AD | Paul imprisoned in Caesarea          | Acts 24      |
| 62 AD | Paul Before Festus                   | Acts 25      |
| 62 AD | Paul Before Agrippa                  | Acts 26      |
| 62 AD | Paul Preaches at Rome                | Acts 28:11   |

MAP REFERENCES

