

Answers to tough questions in Acts

1. How can Luke's authorship of Acts of the Apostles be defended when his own name is not mentioned in the Book?

The gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles share numerous marks of common human authorship. They are addressed to the same person — Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). They are parallel in style. The second book claims to be an extension of the first. Lack of the author's name within a text is no an unusual challenge in establishing the authorship of a Bible book. Many books of the Bible come to us without obvious human authorship. In most cases, however, internal and external clues lead us to reasonable confidence in identifying the authors. One benefit created by initial anonymity involves recognizing that the Bible books originated by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It may take some effort to discover whom God used in writing one of those books, but the original Author is not in question.

2. What can we learn from the Book of Acts about the Holy Spirit's special role in our lives?

On caution we must exercise in studying the Book of Acts has to do with the difference between description and prescription. The difference plays an important role in interpreting the historical bíblica books. The Bible's description of an event does not imply that the event or action can, should, or will be repeated.

The arrival of the Holy Spirit as the promised Helper (John 14:17), which Acts describes as a startling event (2:1-13), had some partial and selected repetitions (8:14-19; 10:44-48; 19:1-7). These were special cases in which believers are reported to have received or been filled with the Holy Spirit. In each of these cases, the sound and the tongues as of fire that were present in the original event (2:1-13) were absent, but the people spoke in tongues they did not know (but others recognized). These events should not be taken as the basis for teaching that believers today should expect the same evidence — tongues— to accompany the filling of the Holy Spirit. Even in Acts itself, genuine conversions did not necessarily lead to extraordinary filling by the Holy Spirit. For example, a crowd of three thousand people believed and were baptized on that same Day of Pentecost (2:41) that started so dramatically with the gift of tongues, yet no mention of tongues is made with regard to the new converts. So, why in some cases did tongues accompany the confirmation of faith? This likely demonstrated that believers were being drawn from very different groups into the church. Each new group received a special welcome from the Holy Spirit. Thus, Samaritans (8:14-19), Gentiles (10:44-48), and believers from the Old Covenant (19:1-7) were added to the church, and the unity of the church was established. To demonstrate that unity, it was necessary to have some replication in each instance of what had occurred at Pentecost with the believing Jews, such as the presence of the apostles and the coming of the Spirit manifested through speaking in the languages of Pentecost

3. How does the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Cro 12:13) relate to the Holy Spirit's activities in the Book of Acts?

Acts describes a number of occasions in which the Holy Spirit “fell on” or “filled” or “came upon” people (2:4; 10:44; 19:6). Peter identifies these actions by God as a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28-32). Viewed from the perspective of the entire NT, these experiences were neither the same nor replacements for what John the Baptist (Mark 1:8) and Paul described as the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). The baptism with the Spirit is the one-time act by which God places believers into His body. The filling, on the other hand, is a repeated reality of Spirit-controlled behavior that God commands believers to maintain (Eph 5:18). Peter and others who experienced that special filling on Pentecost day (2:4) were filled with the Spirit again (4:8, 31; 6:5; 7:55) and so boldly spoke the Word of God. That was just the beginning. The fullness of the Spirit affects all areas of life, not just speaking boldly (Eph 5:18-33).