

THE ACTS  
AND  
APOCALYPTIC  
LITERATURE

EDWARD P. BLAIR

*A* Guide for Bible Readers

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APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

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**SET UP, PRINTED, AND BOUND BY THE  
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TENNESSEE, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**TO  
MY MOTHER**

whose love for the Bible  
aroused in me the desire to know it  
intimately and to walk in its light



**A GUIDE FOR BIBLE READERS**

*Edited by Harris Franklin Rall*

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**THE ACTS AND  
APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE**

# A GUIDE FOR BIBLE READERS

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## THE OLD TESTAMENT

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|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| I. THE BOOKS OF THE LAW  | <i>Walter G. Williams</i> |
| II. THE BOOKS OF HISTORY | <i>John H. Hicks</i>      |
| III. THE PROPHETS        | <i>William G. Chanter</i> |
| IV. POETRY AND WISDOM    | <i>Elmer A. Leslie</i>    |

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| I. THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS                      | <i>Montgomery J. Shroyer</i> |
| II. THE LETTERS OF PAUL                      | <i>Albert E. Barnett</i>     |
| III. THE ACTS AND APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE     | <i>Edward P. Blair</i>       |
| IV. THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND THE LATER EPISTLES | <i>John Knox</i>             |

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

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*THIS* volume is intended to help the reader who wishes to know the Bible at first hand. The way to know a country is to visit it and travel through it, not just to read about it. But a good guide can help. He can lead to places of greatest interest and can give information needed for understanding what is seen. The Bible is a great and wonderful country. It is not one book but many books—books in which many voices join, and whose story stretches through many centuries. Its writings differ widely in character, as do the mountains and valleys, the rivers and sea-coasts, the cities and plains, of a wide country like ours. At the same time, they have a real unity. They have one source, the Spirit of God moving upon the hearts of men. They have a living center, Jesus of Nazareth. We call the Bible the Word of God, and with good reason, for it comes out of the word which God spoke to these writers “by divers portions and in divers manners,” and through it God speaks to us today.

All of us know some parts of the Bible quite well—a chapter here, a verse there, certain psalms learned perhaps in childhood, and some parts of the New Testament. But we all need wider acquaintance with the Bible, and truer understanding and larger appreciation of its wealth of moral and spiritual meaning.

This book is one of eight Guides planned for the purpose of leading to this broader knowledge. The authors have been chosen because of their training in Bible study and their experience in teaching. Four of the books are given to the Old Testament, four to the New. Many of the less



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important parts of the Bible have of necessity been omitted. The Guides go with the reader on his journey through these writings. They stimulate interest and understanding. They introduce the writer and indicate the time, place, purpose, and special character of the writing. Chapter by chapter, they help the student to discover the meanings and values in the Bible, especially for the personal religious life. Since these Guides will be used largely by ministers, attention is given to material for sermons; but the lay reader will find them equally helpful. Each book is intended to serve for a six months' period. Four or five *Readings* should be completed each week.

Here are some *rules for Bible reading* whose observance will pay rich dividends:

1. Read with a definite purpose and expectation: to understand what is written; to gain quickening of thought and enlargement of mind and vision; to get personal help for good living; and, above all, to meet God and to hear his voice. These are great ends; whether they are reached will rest with each student.

2. Bring all that you have to your reading. What you get will depend on what you bring. Especially, bring a sympathetic imagination. You will not be reading dead words. They came out of life. Try to enter into that life of the past: into the faith of a psalmist and his trials and hopes, the appeal of a prophet speaking to a nation, the witness of Paul, the full heart of the Evangelists. Occasional reading aloud will help make the words live. Bring also an attentive and inquiring mind. Read slowly, pause, reflect, always seeking the real meaning.

3. Read in the spirit of prayer. Offer a prayer as you begin. Ask for the light which God's Spirit can give. Lift up your heart to God and ask God to come to you.

4. Read in the spirit of obedience. Ask what the passage means for your own life and pray for grace to follow what is thus revealed. "Apply thyself wholly to the Bible; apply the Bible wholly to thyself." (Bengel.)

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

In this course are frequent references to *ABC*, which means *The Abingdon Bible Commentary*, a commentary on the Old and New Testaments which contains many interesting articles on the Bible as a whole as well as an article on each book of the Bible. The purchase of this book is recommended to the lay reader, who will find it most interesting and helpful. For the minister who is studying these Guides it is indispensable.

The student will find that keeping a notebook from day to day as he reads will prove of great value.

HARRIS FRANKLIN RALL



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## INTRODUCTION

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*THIS* Guide deals with Acts, Daniel, and Revelation, each of which has a message of significance for our day.

In Acts we have the story of the beginning and spread of the Christian Church. We are introduced to its great early leaders and to their source of power: the Holy Spirit. Revelation gives us a picture of the church at the end of the first century. By that time its early enthusiasm had begun to wane. Decay had set in, and it was in danger of being swept away by pagan forces. From these two books we learn what makes the church great and what destroys its power. Both seem to have been written near or during the last decade of the first century. They thus reflect the condition and needs of the church in the same period.

Daniel is an O.T. book. It is included here because it belongs to the same kind of writing as Revelation. Both are apocalypses. The introduction to the *Readings from Daniel* discusses this type of literature at some length. It will suffice here to say that apocalypses were written to encourage the people of God to hold steady in times of persecution. The writers undertook to disclose to the sufferers how God would deliver and reward them in the near future. The author of Revelation knew and used the book of Daniel in writing his apocalypse.

All three books stress to a unique degree the hand of God in the affairs of men. The authors share the same great faith: that God is active in the world he has created, and that he is preparing men for participation in a great Kingdom which he plans to inaugurate. As one reads these books he becomes strongly aware of the fact that God and

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man are going somewhere together, and that this high destiny demands man's highest co-operation.

This unit contains 83 *Readings*, a smaller number than in other Guides of this series. It is to be completed in a period of six months. This means that the reader will need to cover between three and four *Readings* a week. Thoroughness is to be preferred to speed. One should not attempt to cover the material in less than the prescribed period unless he has abundant time. The material of these books is rich and deserving of careful pondering.

Each *Reading* consists of two parts: numbered questions and directions, followed by expository comments. The reader should proceed as follows:

1. Read the designated Bible passage through carefully, jotting down in a notebook any striking features, the general content of the passage, and any personal message this first contact may bring you.

2. Take each direction and question separately and consider it fully. These suggestions are intended to open up the material to you and to stimulate thought. The profit derived from this series of *Readings* will depend largely on the careful attention you give to these suggestions. Record your results in your notebook.

3. After you have completed the directions and questions, read the comments on the passage. *Do not read the comments until you have followed out the directions and questions.* These comments are meant to give you a yardstick by which to measure the results of your own study, and to round out your knowledge of the passage.

*The success of the course depends on a careful adherence to the above plan.*

Keep a section of your notebook for sermon and teaching ideas. The assignments marked "Written Work" are to be written out and sent to the examiner or instructor.

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# I

## THE BOOK OF ACTS

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*ACTS* is unquestionably one of the most important historical works ever planned. Without it we should know little about the rise and spread of a very powerful force of history—the Christian Church. “If the curtain had been drawn upon the crucifixion of Jesus and lifted again only after the death of Paul, we never could have understood how the Christian faith had burst its Jewish bonds and taken its flight over all the Mediterranean lands and established itself as the inevitable conqueror of all the modern world.” (D. A. Hayes, *The Synoptic Gospels and the Book of Acts*, p. 311.)

The religious value of Acts needs little comment. It is Christianity’s “Hall of Fame,” in which every disciple should saunter often, beholding this hero and that, until he is transformed into the same spiritual image.

Acts is the second volume of the two-volume work Luke-Acts. This fact is revealed by the opening reference in Acts to “the former treatise” addressed to Theophilus (1:1; cf. Lk. 1:3). Theophilus seems to have been a Roman official whom Luke was trying to set right on certain matters pertaining to Christianity (Lk. 1:4). Inasmuch as the exact purpose of the work can be understood much better after the book of Acts has been read, further comment will be withheld here. The date and place of writing cannot be ascertained with certainty. It probably was written during the last quarter of the first century A.D., possibly between 80 and 90, perhaps in Antioch or Rome.



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To understand Acts adequately one needs to familiarize himself with the Gospel of Luke. Fortunately, however, it is not hard to break into the narrative at the beginning of the second volume. The author has seen to this by summarizing the contents of the first in his preface to the second, and by repeating the connecting link between Jesus present and Jesus absent—the ascension.

And so we begin our study with all that Jesus *continued* to do and teach after his resurrection, what he *began* to do and teach (Acts 1:1) having been covered in the Guide to the Synoptic Gospels.

### AN INTRODUCTORY SURVEY OF ACTS

1. Learning to know a book of the Bible is like becoming acquainted with the landscape of unfamiliar territory. One must somehow get above the woods and the towering hills to a point where the whole countryside can be seen at a glance. There one has a sense of direction and relationship. In reading the Bible it is woefully uncomfortable to be lost in details; but if one knows where he is going and how the details fit into the total plan, exploration is pleasurable.

The peak from which to see the book of Acts is 1:8. Read this verse carefully. What are the disciples to be and do, and where are they to go? Now scan the book as a whole to see whether its contents follow the outline indicated in this verse. Record results in your notebook.

2. Acts is alive with vibrant personalities, some of them more important than others. Who are the two leading characters, and at what point in the story does the lead change? Roughly, how much of the book is devoted to each?

3. Would you say from these first contacts with Acts that it is well or poorly planned? Did the author have a clear idea of what he wanted to do? See Lk. 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-5.

The book of Acts clearly carries out the outline suggested in 1:8. A key word of the book is “witness” (1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39; 13:31; 22:15; 26:16), and the suc-