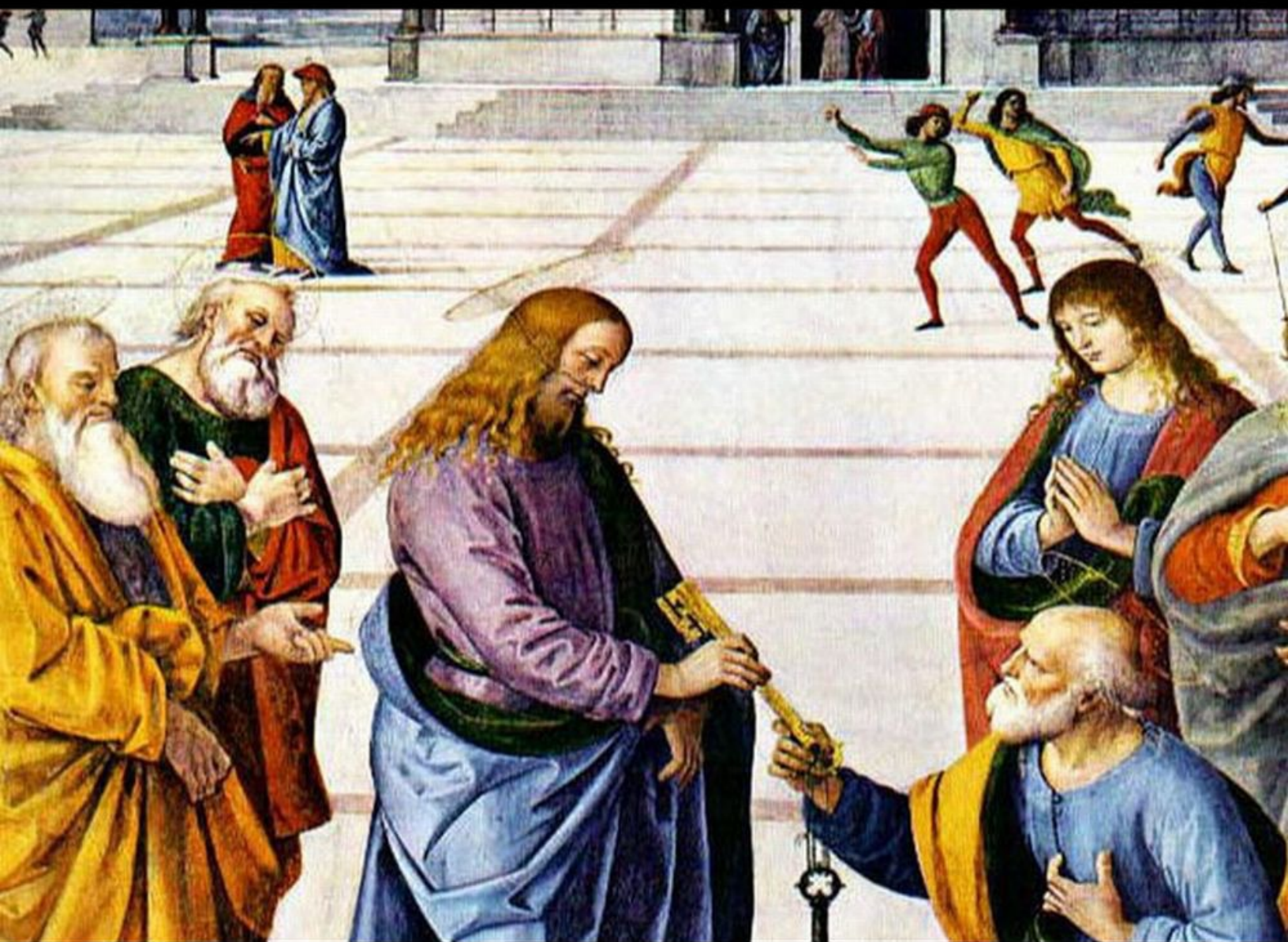


CHILDREN'S GREAT BIBLE TEXTS

VOLUME XVIII



THE BOOK OF  
ACTS

# ***CHILDREN'S GREAT BIBLE TEXTS***

## **THE BOOK OF ACTS**

**JAMES HASTINGS**

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*The Book Of Acts, J. Hastings*  
*Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck*  
*86450 Altenmünster, Germany*

*ISBN: 9783849622091*

*[www.jazzybee-verlag.de](http://www.jazzybee-verlag.de)*  
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## **LUKE.**

The former treatise I made, O Theophilus.— Acts i. 1.

There is a favourite composition exercise (a favourite of your teacher, I mean) which you all know. You are asked to write a letter to a friend, perhaps telling what you have done during the summer holidays, perhaps describing some event that has taken place recently in your neighbourhood. You know that that letter is going to be criticized and blue-pencilled, so you take special pains with such details as the beginning and the ending. You see that the address is neatly written in the top right-hand corner and that the date is correctly given underneath. Then you leave a space of a line or two and begin, "Dear," or "My Dear So-and-so," well to the left of the sheet. Below that but a little bit in from the margin you begin the real contents of your letter — the polite remarks about the supposed last letter you have received from your correspondent. After that you come to the information about your doings.

Now though it may not look very like it, to-day's text is the beginning of a letter. It is the beginning of a very long letter of twenty-eight chapters. And you will notice that it is written to a man called Theophilus. Who Theophilus was we do not know for certain, but he is supposed to have been a man of rank who was a follower of Christ. You will notice that the writer of the letter mentions a former letter — treatise he calls it — which he had already written to Theophilus. We have all read that letter, or bits of it. For it is the book of the Bible which we call the Gospel according to St. Luke. It was Luke who wrote both it and the Book of Acts ; and to him we owe not only a most beautiful biography of Christ, but also a history of what befell the Christians who lived in the half century immediately following Christ's death.

Who was Luke ? He is so anxious to tell us about Christ and the early Christians that he keeps himself in the background. He never mentions his own name, but all the same he lets slip a few facts about himself. In the later chapters of the Book of Acts you will notice that when he is describing some of Paul's journeys, especially his last voyage to Rome, he says, "We" did such and such. That shows that he was Paul's companion at the time. Indeed so minute are some of the descriptions that scholars think he must have copied them from a diary he kept at the time.

But though Luke was so silent about himself, Paul was not silent about him. Twice he mentions him, and each time he says something kind about him. In a letter written to the Colossians, Paul sends greetings to them from "Luke, the beloved physician." That shows us that Luke was a medical man and that he was with Paul in Rome. In the second letter to Timothy, which Paul wrote shortly before his death, he says " Only Luke is with me." That shows us that



at the end of Paul's life, when some of his followers had deserted him, Luke was still faithful.

Out of these little scraps of information, a few more scraps gathered from writings of the early centuries, and a very close study of all Luke wrote, clever men have been able to piece together Luke's history and to tell us many interesting facts about him.

Luke was a Gentile, not a Jew. He first met Paul at Troas. Some think that he was the "man from Macedonia" who appeared in a dream to Paul and asked the apostle to go over into Macedonia and help them. Whether that be the case or not, he and Paul made their first missionary journey together into Macedonia. Paul was far from strong and Luke as physician was a great comfort to him. He not only took care of Paul. He helped him to heal the sick who were constantly brought to the apostle to be cured. So we may call Luke " the first medical missionary." If you read Luke's Gospel you can't help noticing how many miracles of healing he records, and how he gives details that a doctor would naturally notice.

On one occasion Luke accompanied Paul to Jerusalem. There we may be sure he met and talked with many who had known Christ on earth. You can imagine how eagerly he questioned them about the great Healer and how carefully he noted and remembered all they told him.

When Paul was at last sent as a prisoner to Rome, Luke went with him — not as a fellow-prisoner, but as a friend. He stayed long in Rome and while there he met many of those Christians whose names are mentioned in Paul's letters. He must have seen quite a lot, for instance, of John Mark, the man who wrote Mark's Gospel.

It was not till forty or fifty years after Christ's death that Luke wrote his own Gospel, but we know that what he wrote is true to all that happened, for he tells us himself that he got his information and collected his stories from those who had really seen and heard Jesus. And besides that, he had Mark's Gospel to refer to, for it was already written.

I'm afraid we don't realize how many lovely Bible stories we owe to Luke. If it had not been for him we should never have heard how the angels sang, " Glory to God in the highest," and how the shepherds heard the song and hastened to worship the Babe who lay in the manger at Bethlehem. Without Luke we should have missed the story of how Christ as a boy of twelve visited the Temple at Jerusalem and loved it so much that He stayed behind. We should never have heard the story of plucky little Zacchaeus either, and how he climbed the tree to see his Lord. As for the parables ! Why, without Luke we should have lacked the story of the Good Samaritan, the story of the Prodigal Son, the story of the Pharisee and the Publican, and oh ! ever so many more.

We need not count them all over here ; but you can try it yourselves at home. When you have done so I'm sure you will agree that had it not been for the loving pen and the tender heart of "the beloved physician," the Bible to-day would have been a poorer Book for you and me.

### **TRYING TO SEE INTO HEAVEN.**

Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?— Acts i. ii (AV).

Have you ever watched a steamer that held a very dear friend leave the pier and steam out into the ocean? If you