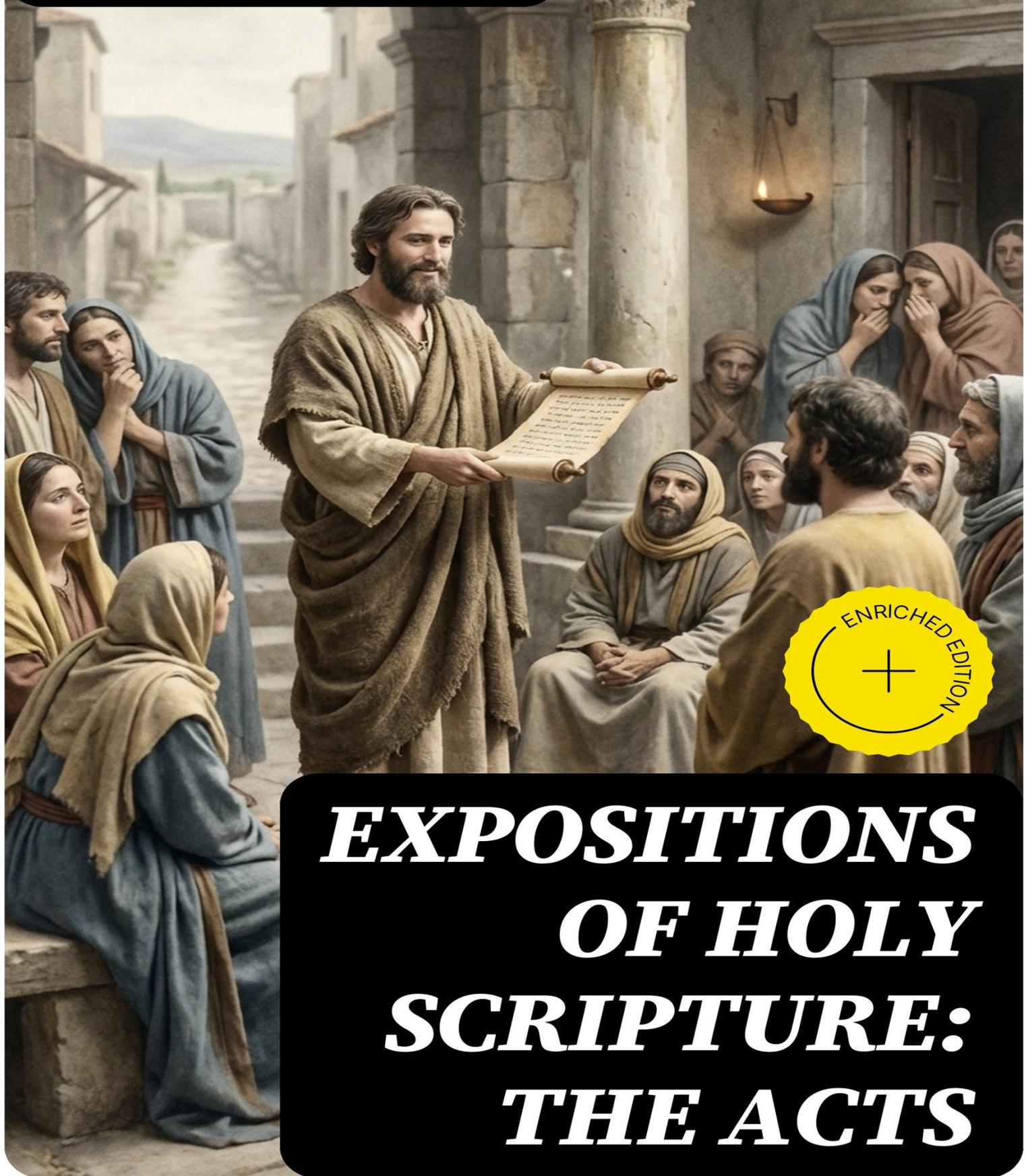
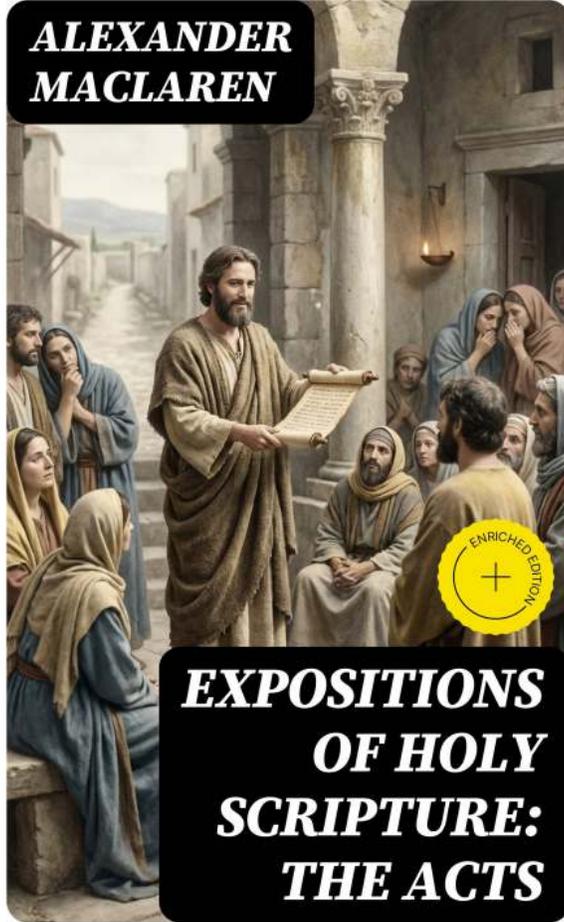


**ALEXANDER
MACLAREN**



**EXPOSITIONS
OF HOLY
SCRIPTURE:
THE ACTS**

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**EXPOSITIONS
OF HOLY
SCRIPTURE:
THE ACTS**

Alexander Maclaren

Expositions of Holy Scripture: the Acts

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Miles Fenner

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Introduction

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This single-author collection gathers Alexander Maclaren's Expositions of Holy Scripture on the Acts of the Apostles, presenting his sustained engagement with the New Testament's account of the early church. The scope is comprehensive within Acts, moving from the book's opening scenes to its concluding chapters, and the purpose is pastoral and instructive rather than academic. Maclaren, a widely esteemed Baptist preacher, brings the fruit of long pulpit ministry to these studies, aiming to illuminate the biblical text, encourage faith, and shape conduct. Each exposition stands alone, yet together they trace the unfolding witness, worship, service, and suffering of the first Christian communities.

The genres represented here are homiletic and expository: sermons, sermon-like addresses, and meditative essays on discrete passages. They are not technical commentaries, nor literary fiction, but practical, devotional interpretations shaped for hearers and readers. Maclaren's method blends close attention to the scriptural narrative with moral and spiritual application, an approach that keeps doctrinal instruction tethered to the text. These pieces aim to clarify what Acts declares about Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the mission of the church, while guiding conscience and conduct. Their tone is measured, earnest, and pastoral, inviting reflection as much as instruction.

A striking unity emerges across the titles. Whether treating the Ascension, the witness at Pentecost, the trials of apostles, or the travels of Paul, Maclaren repeatedly returns to themes of divine initiative and human response. He emphasizes the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, the authority of the risen Christ, courageous testimony under pressure, and the widening reach of the gospel. Attention to prayer, holiness, generosity, and steadfastness threads through narratives of healing, opposition, and mission. The expositions keep the reader near the text while drawing out its ethical and ecclesial implications for communities seeking fidelity in changing circumstances.

Maclaren's stylistic hallmarks are clarity, structure, and directness. He proceeds by careful analysis of a passage, often marking its movements, then pressing its truths upon life. While he engages historical context and linguistic nuance where needful, he avoids technical apparatus and speculation. His pages favor lucid argument, apt illustration, and contrasts that sharpen moral insight—human weakness and divine strength, apparent defeat and hidden victory, personal vocation and corporate calling. Above all, they are Christ-centered, reading Acts as the continued work of the risen Lord through His Spirit. The result is exposition that is warm, orderly, and persuasive.

The table of contents reveals a progression that mirrors Acts itself. Early chapters focus on events at Jerusalem and the ministry of Peter; later entries accompany the gospel's spread into Gentile regions and the labors of Paul. Interwoven are studies of individuals such as Stephen, Barnabas, John Mark, and Philip, and reflections on crises,

councils, and deliverances. Without attempting a verse-by-verse commentary, Maclaren's sequence of sermons provides steady guidance through the book's chief scenes and speeches. Readers may follow this order alongside the biblical text or approach the expositions topically through themes of witness, guidance, courage, and grace.

As literature of devotion and pastoral theology, these expositions retain wide usefulness. Preachers and teachers will find models of text-driven proclamation shaped for clarity and application. Students encounter a classic example of evangelical exposition that respects the narrative while drawing doctrine from it. General readers gain accessible guidance for prayer and practice, free of needless technicality. The collection's ongoing significance lies in its capacity to unite interpretation and exhortation, to cultivate both understanding and obedience, and to show how Acts speaks to the church's calling in every age and place.

This edition brings together the Acts-related pieces under their original titles, preserving their sequence and distinctive voice. It invites slow, attentive reading in company with Scripture, encouraging meditation rather than hurried survey. The unity of the volume comes not from a single argument imposed upon Acts, but from a shared conviction: that the risen Christ, through the Spirit, forms communities of witness marked by holiness, courage, and charity. Readers who enter these pages will find careful exposition, pastoral counsel, and steady encouragement for the long work of discipleship and service.

Historical Context

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Alexander Maclaren (1826–1910), a Scottish Baptist minister long settled in Manchester, preached the sermons later gathered as *Expositions of Holy Scripture: the Acts* between mid-Victorian and Edwardian years. Serving an industrial metropolis from 1849 to 1903, he honed a lucid, textual homiletic intended for artisans and merchants as much as for theologians. The collection's pieces—on the Ascension, Pentecost, apostolic preaching, persecution, and mission—grow from pulpit work that sought to guide Nonconformist congregations through rapid urban change. In print, his exposition exemplified the nineteenth-century British evangelical ideal: rigorous yet devotional, accessible yet exact, and committed to Scripture's moral authority amid modern pressures.

Maclaren's *Acts* sermons also navigated the era's biblical controversies. German historical-critical scholarship, especially the Tübingen school of F. C. Baur (d. 1860), had questioned *Acts*' early date and harmony between Peter and Paul. In Britain, J. B. Lightfoot, B. F. Westcott, and F. J. A. Hort countered with meticulous philology, issuing the Revised Version New Testament in 1881. Maclaren, sympathetic to their sobriety, treated *Acts* as reliable history while avoiding polemic. His expositions on Peter's speeches, Stephen's witness, or Paul's trials present coherent apostolic testimony, offering lay readers confidence that the Church's

origins were spiritually normative and historically trustworthy.

Preached in Manchester's crucible of mills, railways, and migration, these pieces repeatedly draw practical lessons for congregational life. The Reform Acts (1832, 1867, 1884) expanded civic participation, while urban poverty and factory discipline pressed Nonconformist churches to organize relief, education, and temperance. Maclaren's emphasis on a disciplined, serving fellowship—seen in essays like *A Pure Church an Increasing Church* or *The Servant and the Slaves*—echoed voluntary society models familiar to his hearers. Acts' portraits of shared goods, diaconal care, and courageous testimony functioned as templates for modern churchmanship, urging moral integrity without relinquishing evangelistic urgency in an industrial, plural public square.

Victorian mission was another shaping horizon. The Baptist Missionary Society, founded in 1792, had inspired generations; Hudson Taylor's *China Inland Mission* (1865) and the Student Volunteer Movement (from 1886) renewed zeal to reach "the regions beyond." Maclaren's treatments of Antioch, Paul's itineraries, and the Gentile mission—*To the Regions Beyond*, *The Door of Faith*, *The Charter of Gentile Liberty*—resonate with that momentum. Yet he read Acts pastorally, not imperially: the gospel advances through suffering, persuasion, and integrity, not coercion. Such notes suited an audience enthralled by global expansion yet frequently ambivalent about empire's moral costs and the Church's proper methods.

Manchester's religious marketplace included robust Unitarian and secular currents—figures like James Martineau and, nationally, Charles Bradlaugh signaled a wider confidence in ethical theism or unbelief. Against this backdrop Maclaren's Christology is decisively high. Titles such as *The Name Above Every Name*, *The Prince of Life*, and *The Man Who Is Judge* underscore apostolic claims about Jesus' lordship, resurrection, and eschatological authority. He rarely debates rivals directly; instead, he saturates practical exhortation with confessional clarity, inviting readers to see moral renewal as the fruit of worship rather than its substitute. The approach fitted Nonconformist piety that prized conviction joined to charity.

Late-nineteenth-century Nonconformists wrestled with church-state questions: Irish disestablishment (1869), elementary education (1870), and the Education Act controversies of 1902 rallied the "Nonconformist conscience." Maclaren's expositions on persecution and witness—*Obedient Disobedience, Whom to Obey,—Annas or Angel?*, and *Stephen's Vision*—frame civil disobedience within reverent submission to God. He reassures minorities that fidelity may entail legal peril while rejecting sectarian rancor. His Manchester congregants, negotiating municipal politics, labor disputes, and Sabbath observance, heard in Acts a charter for courageous, courteous dissent. The theme also tempered revivalist fervor, anchoring activism in patient endurance rather than party militancy.

The collection also bears the impress of revival and holiness movements. Dwight L. Moody and Ira Sankey's campaigns in Britain (1873–75; 1881–84) and the Keswick

Convention (from 1875) foregrounded conversion and consecration. Maclaren's essays on the Spirit—The Abiding Gift and Its Transitory Accompaniments, The Fourfold Symbols of the Spirit, Filled with the Spirit—affirm empowerment for mission while cautioning against theatrical displays. He treats glossolalia, visions, and angelic deliverance as subordinate to the Spirit's ethical fruit and scriptural witness. Written on the eve of Pentecostal stirrings, his balance of expectancy and restraint appealed to evangelicals eager for renewal yet wary of excess.

Circulated by London evangelical presses such as Hodder & Stoughton and quickly reprinted abroad, Maclaren's Acts volumes reached ministers and lay readers across the English-speaking world in the 1890s and early 1900s. Their plain style, close engagement with the Authorized Version (with occasional Revised Version notes), and avoidance of technical debates made them staples for Sunday reading and ministers' libraries. The series coincided with the "sermon-as-literature" market and the rise of Bible conferences, ensuring a wide audience. In this setting, Maclaren—often dubbed the "prince of expositors"—offered Acts as both historical charter and present summons to witness, unity, and mission.

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Ascension to Pentecost

These expositions trace the transition from the risen Christ's departure to the church's birth, emphasizing the commission, patient waiting, and the Spirit's descent with emblematic signs.

Maclaren blends close textual analysis with devotional exhortation, stressing Christ's exalted name, the authority of apostolic witness, and the communal bonds that sustain growth.

Signs, Sanhedrin, and the Shaping of a Witness Church

Following a public healing, the nascent community faces interrogation, internal discipline, and miraculous deliverance, framing obedience to God over human threats.

The sermons underscore the potency of Jesus' name, courage under pressure, and ethical seriousness, delivered in Maclaren's lucid, application-driven style.

Stephen: Vision and Martyrdom

Stephen's Spirit-given testimony culminates in a vision of the glorified Christ and the cost of faithful speech before hostile authorities.

Maclaren pairs historical sweep with pastoral tenderness, presenting martyrdom as witness that reflects the Master

without sensational detail.

Philip in Samaria and the Desert Road

The gospel spreads through persecution as Philip ministers in Samaria, confronts counterfeit spirituality, and meets a prepared seeker in the wilderness.

With an eye for providential guidance and the interplay of word and sign, Maclaren contrasts authentic conversion with mere wonder-seeking.

Conversion of Saul and Patterns of Early Discipleship

Grace transforms a persecutor into a herald while the community's life and identity as the Way take recognizable shape.

The tone is hopeful and imitative, urging Christlike conduct in ordinary service and viewing renewal as both personal and communal.

Peter, Cornelius, and the Gentile Opening

Peter's vision and encounter with a Gentile household dismantle ritual barriers and prompt a reasoned defense before cautious allies.

Maclaren highlights divine impartiality and the discipline of explaining change to skeptics, balancing conviction with conciliation.

Antioch: A Mission Church Takes Shape

Preaching to Greeks, Barnabas's character, and the community's new name mark Antioch as a training ground for generosity, teaching, and outreach.

With warm moral portraiture, Maclaren depicts identity formation that readies a church to send and serve.

Herod's Violence and Peter's Deliverance

These pieces set martyrdom beside unexpected rescue, registering the rhythm of unanswered and answered prayer under persecution.

Maclaren mingles sober realism with quiet humor and assurance, stressing providence and the limits of tyrannical power.

To the Regions Beyond: Launching the Gentile Mission

The narrative turns outward as a distinct calling emerges, Saul becomes Paul, and team dynamics test commitment and flexibility.

The exposition emphasizes vocation, adaptability, and Spirit-led initiative, narrated with brisk, missionary urgency.

First Journey: Preaching, Opposition, and Perseverance

Apostolic sermons across Asia Minor draw mixed responses, from receptive hearers to volatile crowds that swing from adulation to violence.

Maclaren contrasts rejection and reception, links apostolic proclamation to later reforming impulses, and

commends steadiness amid shifting acclaim.

Council of Jerusalem and Mission Realignment

Early discord over Gentile inclusion yields a charter for liberty from ceremonial burdens and a practical reshaping of partnerships.

With judicious, conciliatory tone, Maclaren extracts lessons on conflict resolution, gracious freedom, and prudent methods for ongoing work.

Philippi: Providence, Protest, and Personal Faith

Providential openings lead to personal transformations, civic backlash, and a plain answer to life's central question.

The treatment balances narrative drive with pastoral appeal, modeling joy, integrity, and public witness under pressure.

Thessalonica and Berea: Reception and Reason

Contrasting city responses highlight mob hostility versus noble-minded examination of Scripture.

Maclaren champions reasoned persuasion and diligent inquiry as durable evangelistic patterns.

Athens: Apologia to a Thinking City

Paul engages cultured skepticism and announces universal accountability grounded in resurrection.

The tone is irenic and incisive, showcasing contextualized argument anchored in core gospel claims.

Corinth: Encouragement, Labor, and Law

Ministry in Corinth unfolds amid fear and opposition yet is sustained by encouragement, steady work, and the ambiguous shelter of civic indifference.

Maclaren draws counsel from perseverance, the constraints and consolations of calling, and the mixed blessing of legal protection.

Ephesus: Power Encounters and Social Upheaval

Extended work in Ephesus features public power encounters, shallow imitators exposed, and economic disruption as faith challenges idolatry.

The exposition spotlights authentic spiritual authority and the social consequences of belief in vivid, concrete scenes.

Farewell on the Way to Jerusalem

Paul's farewell exhorts leaders, sums a life of service, and frames giving as a distinct blessedness while arrest looms.

The mood is tender and resolute, marrying sober warnings with sturdy hope.

Caesarea and Jerusalem: Hospitality and Hostility

Long-serving disciples extend hospitality before Paul appears in the temple and tensions rise.

Maclaren notes continuity across decades and the friction between sincere piety and public misunderstanding.

Defence Speeches and Imperial Hearings

A chain of hearings turns biography into testimony, exposes plots, and carries the message before governors and a king.

With forensic clarity and ethical earnestness, Maclaren shows providence working through legal structures and appeals to conscience.

Storm, Shipwreck, and Survival

A Mediterranean tempest becomes a stage for tested trust, practical leadership, and a deliverance that spares every life.

The sermons steady readers with understated courage and a compact confession, presenting resilience as shared and actionable.

Rome: An Open-Ended Conclusion

The account closes with constraint and freedom side by side as Paul teaches unhindered within limits, leaving momentum rather than neat closure.

Maclaren's final notes stress the unhindered word and an open horizon, consistent with his theme of advance through all conditions.

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'The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2. Until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen: 3. To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: 4. And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me. 5. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. 6. When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7. And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. 8. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. 9. And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; 11. Which also said, Ye

men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven. 12. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day's journey. 13. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. 14. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.'—ACTS i. 1-14.

The Ascension is twice narrated by Luke. The life begun by the supernatural birth ends with the supernatural Ascension, which sets the seal of Heaven on Christ's claims and work. Therefore the Gospel ends with it. But it is also the starting-point of the Christ's heavenly activity, of which the growth of His Church, as recorded in the Acts, is the issue. Therefore the Book of the Acts of the Apostles begins with it.

The keynote of the 'treatise' lies in the first words, which describe the Gospel as the record of what 'Jesus *began* to do and teach,' Luke would have gone on to say that this second book of his contained the story of what Jesus went on to do and teach after He was 'taken up,' if he had been strictly accurate, or had carried out his first intention, as shown by the mould of his introductory sentence; but he is swept on into the full stream of his narrative, and we have to infer the

contrast between his two volumes from his statement of the contents of his first.

The book, then, is misnamed Acts of the Apostles, both because the greater number of the Apostles do nothing in it, and because, in accordance with the hint of the first verse, Christ Himself is the doer of all, as comes out distinctly in many places where the critical events of the Church's progress and extension are attributed to 'the Lord.' In one aspect, Christ's work on earth was finished on the Cross; in another, that finished work is but the beginning both of His doing and teaching. Therefore we are not to regard His teaching while on earth as the completion of Christian revelation. To set aside the Epistles on the plea that the Gospels contain Christ's own teaching, while the Epistles are only Paul's or John's, is to misconceive the relation between the earthly and the heavenly activity of Jesus.

The statement of the theme of the book is followed by a brief summary of the events between the Resurrection and Ascension. Luke had spoken of these in the end of his Gospel, but given no note of time, and run together the events of the day of the Resurrection and of the following weeks, so that it might appear, as has been actually contended that he meant, that the Ascension took place on the very day of Resurrection. The fact that in this place he gives more detailed statements, and tells how long elapsed between the Resurrection Sunday and the Ascension, might have taught hasty critics that an author need not be ignorant of what he does not mention, and that a detailed account does not contradict a summary one,—truths which

do not seem very recondite, but have often been forgotten by very learned commentators.

Three points are signalised as occupying the forty days: commandments were given, Christ's actual living presence was demonstrated (by sight, touch, hearing, etc.), and instructions concerning the kingdom were imparted. The old blessed closeness and continuity of companionship had ceased. Our Lord's appearances were now occasional. He came to the disciples, they knew not whence; He withdrew from them, they knew not whither. Apparently a sacred awe restrained them from seeking to detain Him or to follow Him. Their hearts would be full of strangely mingled feelings, and they were being taught by gentle degrees to do without Him. Not only a divine decorum, but a most gracious tenderness, dictated the alternation of presence and absence during these days.

The instructions then given are again referred to in Luke's Gospel, and are there represented as principally directed to opening their minds 'that they might understand the Scriptures.' The main thing about the kingdom which they had then to learn, was that it was founded on the death of Christ, who had fulfilled all the Old Testament predictions. Much remained untaught, which after years were to bring to clear knowledge; but from the illumination shed during these fruitful days flowed the remarkable vigour and confidence of the Apostolic appeal to the prophets, in the first conflicts of the Church with the rulers. Christ is the King of the kingdom, and His Cross is His throne,—these truths being grasped revolutionised the Apostles' conceptions. They are as needful for us.

voice and the community's negotiated acceptance of new companions. The movement outward proceeds through internal argument and tested discernment rather than abrupt replacement. These expositions frame inclusion as theological insight joined to hospitality, allowing a Jerusalem-shaped faith to welcome unexpected guests while still recognizing its own story in theirs.

The First Preaching at Antioch, A Nickname Accepted, and What a Good Man Is, and How He Becomes So trace identity formation in a mixed community. Maclaren reads Antioch as an interpretive laboratory where generosity, instruction, and shared labor craft a name and a pattern. The widening horizon is social as much as geographical, with mentoring and recognition shaping durable cohesion. He treats the new designation not as abandonment of roots but as acknowledgment of a broader center of gravity, where mission and belonging reinforce each other.

The Door of Faith, The Charter of Gentile Liberty, and Paul at Athens map the expansion's intellectual and institutional contours. Jewish Rejecters and Gentile Receivers and To the Regions Beyond show Maclaren balancing theological principle with adaptive speech, from synagogues to marketplaces. The widening horizon includes procedural clarity about freedom alongside patient explanation in unfamiliar settings. He depicts the mission as both boundary-crossing and boundary-defining, sustaining core confession while employing varied points of contact. The pattern is outward growth through negotiated consensus and contextual reasoning rather than triumph by assimilation.

Question 4

How do Peter and Paul function as complementary models of apostolic ministry?

Peter's First Sermon, The Name Above Every Name, and The Servant of the Lord present Peter as a herald whose healing and teaching converge on a single center. Maclaren emphasizes readiness, pastoral directness, and a capacity to translate recent events into corporate repentance and hope. The portrait is public yet intimate, attuned to immediate audiences. This early leadership consolidates the community and articulates its memory, offering a ministry of beginnings where clarity and compassion establish durable lines of thought and practice that others will extend beyond Jerusalem.

Peter's Deliverance from Prison, Rhoda, and Peter After His Escape portray vulnerability and humor alongside providential care. Sober Certainty adds reflective steadiness, showing resilience shaped by dependence rather than mastery. Maclaren allows contingency to humanize leadership, valuing attentiveness over control. Peter's ministry becomes a study in responsiveness—receiving help, yielding space, and continuing service without insisting on centrality. This complements the earlier heraldic role, offering an example where humility, prayer, and communal interdependence sustain authority, especially when visibility and danger interact in unpredictable ways.

Why Saul Became Paul, Paul at Philippi, and The Man Who Is Judge introduce a mind and voice calibrated for diverse forums. Parting Counsels, Tempest and Trust, After

the Wreck, and Paul in Rome extend the portrait into strategy, endurance, and teaching that survives confinement. Maclaren highlights legal awareness, adaptive rhetoric, and pastoral instruction as inseparable tools. Paul complements Peter by navigating distance and complexity without diluting conviction, turning movement and trial into platforms for formation. Together, the two figures model a single mission expressed through differing temperaments, situations, and skills.

Memorable Quotes

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1q "Waiting times are not wasted times."

2q "The wind bloweth where it listeth"

3q "'They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine.'"

4q "He has sent Him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

5q "'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard!'"

6q "We may all, if we will, be full of the Holy Spirit."

7q "We walk by faith, not by sight,"

8q "Keep near Christ, and you will be Christlike."

9q "'God fulfils Himself in many ways'"

10q "Prayer, earnest prayer, 'was made of the Church unto God for him.'"

11q "the spirit of lowly self-abasement"

12q "'full of the Holy Ghost'"