

# Acts - Introduction & Background

## Title

The title of the book is "The Acts of the Apostles." The Anti-Marcionite Prologue (150–180 AD) of the Gospel of Luke is the oldest reference to the book as having this name. However, this title is misleading in several respects. First, the ultimate source of the miraculous acts recorded in the book was the Holy Spirit rather than the apostles themselves. Second, the focus of the book is not upon apostolic acts but rather upon the geographical outreach of the early church from Jerusalem to Rome. Third, the book is not a comprehensive treatment of all of the acts of the apostles. Rather, the acts of only two apostles, Peter and Paul, are emphasized.

## Authorship

*External* evidence supports Lukan authorship of Acts. External sources include Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Polycarp, Jerome, Origen, the Muratorian fragment, and the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to the Gospel of Luke (150–180 AD). By the time of Eusebius, a near unanimous consensus existed that Acts should be considered part of the NT canon. *Internal* evidence also favors Lukan authorship. The book contains several "we passages" indicating that the author was a participant in some of the book's events (Acts 16:10–40; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16). Thus, the author claims to have accompanied Paul to and during his imprisonment. According to the prison letters, numerous figures accompanied Paul during his first imprisonment. Among them were Aristarchus, Demas, Epaphras, Epaphroditus, Jesus called Justus, Mark, Onesimus, Tychicus, and Luke (Eph 6:21; Phil 2:25; Col 4:7–14, Phlm 10,23–24). By process of elimination, Luke is the most likely candidate. Epaphras and Epaphroditus did not accompany Paul to Rome but arrived after Paul was already imprisoned there (Phil 4:18; Col 4:12). Aristarchus (19:29), Mark (12:25), Tychicus (20:4), and Timothy (16:1) are spoken of in the third person in Acts. Onesimus also came to Paul after he was already in prison. Because Demas later deserted Paul (2 Tim 4:11), he would be an unlikely candidate for writing Acts. Justus is also unlikely since no tradition exists ascribing the book to him. Luke is the only remaining possibility.

If it is accepted that Luke is the author of the third Gospel, then Lukan authorship of Acts can also be defended on the grounds of the internal similarities between the books. Both works are addressed to Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). The writer of Acts refers to the previous work as his "former account" (1:1). Both books demonstrate a similarity of language and style. A thematic continuity can be found between the works. Similarities include a worldwide outlook, an interest in women and Gentiles, and apologetic purposes. The ending of Luke seems to be in harmony with the beginning of Acts. Both sections

feature Christ's post resurrection ministry, Christ speaking, and an emphasis upon the Holy Spirit. Moreover, both books also refer to Christ's appearing before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:7-12; Acts 4:27).

Other factors make it likely that Luke wrote Acts. For example, the book's orderly content may have required the literary ability of an educated person (Col 4:14). Moreover, Luke' close affiliation with Paul (2 Tim 4:11) qualified him to write such a work featuring the Apostle's exploits. Also, the early church probably accepted the book on the basis of this relationship between Luke and Paul.

*Biographically*, not only was Luke a close companion of Paul (2 Tim 4:11), but he was also a physician (Col 4:14). Most believe that he was a Gentile on the grounds that Paul excludes Luke when mentioning his fellow workers who were of the circumcision (Col 4:11) and because Luke refers to the Hebrew language as "their own language" (Acts 1:19) rather than "our own language." Tradition is divided regarding how Luke died. Some say he died a martyr's death while others say that he died of natural causes.

### **Recipients**

Both Luke (1:3) and Acts (1:1) are addressed to Theophilus. The Gospel of Luke explains to Theophilus what Christ began to do and to teach while Acts explains to him what Christ continued to do and to teach by the Holy Spirit working through the apostles. The title "most excellent" (Luke 1:3) may indicate that Theophilus was some kind of Roman official. If this is true, then Theophilus was a Gentile. However, it is likely that Luke had a much broader audience in mind than just Theophilus. Wallace notes:

Although Luke-Acts is addressed to Theophilus, something must be said for the probability that Luke intended to have this work published and consequently envisioned an audience broader in scope than one man. His prologue to both the gospel and Acts emulates so much the ancient historians' prefaces that it is quite evident that he wanted the work published. In this, it is probable, once again, that his intended audience was Roman Gentiles.

### **Place of Writing**

The "we sections" make it apparent that Luke gathered much of his information for his book from his personal contact with Paul. Thus, Paul's two-year Cesarean imprisonment (Acts 24:27) in 57–59 AD would have been a logical place of Luke to write his book. However, it is also possible that Luke gathered information during the Cesarean imprisonment and wrote the book during the voyage to Rome (Acts 27) or during Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Because the book abruptly ends with Paul's Roman imprisonment, it is likely that it was completed during this time. Thus, a place of writing from Caesarea or Rome or some combination of the two seems most likely.

### **Date**

Acts must have been written prior to 66–70 AD since it makes no mention of the Jewish revolt against Rome or of the destruction of Jerusalem or the temple. Surely Luke would have mentioned these historical events if they had occurred before Acts was completed since they represent God's final break with Israel in this dispensation. Such a break is a theme that Luke seems most interested in developing in Acts. Other historical events suspiciously missing from Acts include the martyrdom of Paul (68 AD), the second Pauline Roman imprisonment (66 AD), Paul's activity between imprisonments (62–66 AD), the first imperial persecution (64–67 AD), and the burning of Rome (64 AD). Thus, Acts must have been written prior to their occurrence. This is especially true regarding the martyrdom and other details about Paul since he is the central figure in Acts 13–28.

If, as many argue, Acts is an apologetic for Christianity's exemplary conduct before Roman authorities, then it must have been written before the Neronian persecution. There would have been no need for such a defense during the reign of Nero since it was already the emperor's intent to destroy Christianity. The book must also have been written prior to 62 AD since it abruptly ends with Paul still under house arrest (Acts 28:16–31) with no mention of the outcome of his impending trial. Because this trial was such a key issue earlier in Acts, it would be unthinkable for Luke to omit the verdict if the book had been written after Caesar's ruling. Luke's archeological accuracy also argues that his book was completed not long after the described events transpired. All things considered, a date of 60–62 AD for the composition of Acts seems appropriate.

### **Method and Sources**

Luke's *method* was to record history. This method is evident from his prologues (Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1), which are similar to those of other ancient historians. However, his history is not comprehensive but rather selective in order to accomplish his goal of presenting Theophilus with an orderly account of the birth of the early church as well as its territorial expansion from Jerusalem to Rome. Luke drew from numerous sources for the purpose of recording history.

First, the "we sections" make it clear that Luke was able to draw from his own personal experiences and first hand involvement with Paul's missionary endeavors. Second, Luke obviously had access to the Apostle Paul. In fact, elsewhere Paul referred to Luke as his friend (Col 4:14). Third, while in Caesarea (24:27), Luke would have had access to other key witnesses such as Philip (21:8), Mnason (Acts 21:16), and James (21:18–19). Certainly Philip and James could have helped Luke reconstruct the events recorded early on in Acts. Fourth, others mentioned in Acts such as Silas, Timothy, Mark, Peter, and John may have been accessible to Luke as well. Fifth, some of those that Luke interviewed for his first book (Luke 1:1–4) could have also provided him with key pieces of information regarding the birth and growth of the early church. Sixth, Luke seems to have had access to certain written sources as well (Acts 15:23–29; 23:26–30).

## Purpose and Message

Luke's primary *purpose* in writing was to present Theophilus with an orderly account of the birth and growth of the early church (Matt 16:18). The *message* of the book is the birth of the church as well as its progress and expansion numerically, geographically, and ethnically. Luke routinely charts the numerical growth of the church through the inclusion of various "progress reports." He also tracks the geographical expansion of the church by tracing its growth from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and eventually all the way to Rome (1:8). Finally, he notes the ethnic development of the church from its beginning as a mere extension of Judaism to its primarily Gentile composition.

## Sub Purposes

In addition, to this over-arching purpose, Luke wrote in order to accomplish several sub purposes. *First*, Luke wrote for the apologetic purpose of confirming Theophilus in the faith. *Second*, Luke wrote to catalogue the northwest expansion of the church.

Interestingly, the book contains no references to the church's expansion into the south (Africa) or the east (Babylon and Persia). However, representatives from these areas are mentioned (2:9-10; Acts 8:27). *Third*, Luke wanted to show the numerical growth of the church. He does so through the inclusion of various progress reports. The six clearest progress reports are found in Acts 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31. Other less clear progress reports are alluded to in 1:15; 2:41; 4:4,31; 5:14,42; 8:25,40; 11:21; 13:49; 17:6.

*Fourth*, Luke wrote to validate Paul's apostleship. Three entire chapters are devoted to detailing Paul's conversion (Acts 9; 22; 26). Also, the lives of Peter and Paul seem to be paralleled.

| Peter  | Paul  |
|--|---|
| Heals a man lame from birth (3:1-11)           | Heals a man lame from birth (14:8-18)           |
| Heals people by his shadow (3:15-16)           | Heals people by his handkerchiefs (19:11-12)    |
| Success is a cause for Jewish jealousy (5:17)  | Success is a cause for Jewish jealousy (13:45)  |
| Confronts Simon, a sorcerer (8:9-24)           | Confronts Bar-Jesus, a sorcerer (13:6-11)       |
| Raises Tabitha (Dorcas) to life (9:36-41)      | Raises Eutychus to life (20:9-12)               |
| Jailed and freed miraculously by God (12:3-19) | Jailed and freed miraculously by God (16:25-34) |

Luke's point in employing such symmetry is to show that Paul's ministry is just as legitimate as Peter's. Perhaps Paul's ministry needed authentication since he was the apostle abnormally born (1 Cor 15:8) who had the responsibility of violating Jewish conventions by evangelizing the Gentiles (Gal 2:7-8).

*Fifth*, Luke wrote to explain to the Roman authorities that Christianity was not a threat to the empire. He accomplishes this by consistently showing that trouble involving the church was instigated by the unbelieving Jews (4:1-3,21; 5:17-18,40; 7:54,58; 8:1-3; 9:23; 12:1-3; 13:50; 14:1-2,19; 17:5-9,13; 18:12; 19:3; 20:3; 21:31; 23:12). In the few instances where the Gentiles persecuted Paul, they did so for purely pecuniary reasons (16:18-19; 19:23-41).

Luke also takes pains to establish that the authorities routinely vindicated Paul's innocence against the false charges from the unbelieving Jews (17:2-7; 19:35-41; 26:31-32). Perhaps he planned on submitting this information in the form of a trial brief at Paul's impending hearing before Caesar.

*Sixth*, Luke wanted to show Gentile receptivity to the gospel in comparison to Jewish unbelief. The Jews continually rejected the Gospel in spite of the fact that Paul dutifully preached it to them first (13:5,14,46; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1,10,17; 18:4; 19:8; 28:17,28). *Seventh*, Luke wanted to show that although the church had its roots in Judaism, it is also distinct from Judaism. Luke does this by transitioning the reader away from Peter's primarily Jewish ministry (Acts 1-12) to Paul's primarily Gentile ministry (Acts 13-28). This transition would demonstrate God's new program of redemption in light of Israel's rejection of her messiah.

*Eighth*, Luke wanted to show the universality of the gospel by showing its accessibility to people in all walks of life. Thus, he shows the gospel going to Samaritans, Ethiopians, Jews, Gentiles, poor, rich, educated, uneducated, men, women, exalted, and humble. *Ninth*, Luke wanted to show how the ministry of Christ continued through the apostles (John 13-17). This point can be seen by comparing the statements of both Christ and Stephen as they died (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:50).

### **Structure**

The structure of the book can be derived from its theme verse found in 1:8. Here, Christ predicts that the apostles will be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the remotest part of the earth. Thus, this verse furnishes a three-fold structure. Part one of the book is the church's outreach in Jerusalem (1-7). Part two of the book is the ministry in Judea and Samaria (8-12). Part three of the book is the ministry to the remote parts of the earth (13-28). This third section can be further partitioned into the first missionary journey into Southern Galatia (13-14), the Jerusalem Council (15:1-35), the second missionary journey into Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Greece (15:36-18:22), the third missionary journey into these same regions (18:23-21:17), and Paul's journey to Rome (21:18-28:31). Part one encompasses a two-year period in between 33-34 AD. Part two encompasses a thirteen-year period in between 35-48 AD. Part three encompasses a fourteen-year period in between 48-62 AD. Thus, the total scope of the Book of Acts is a twenty-nine year period in between 33-62 AD. Acts can be further structured on the basis of the distinction between the ministries of Peter and Paul (Gal 2:7-8).

### **Unique Characteristics**

The Book of Acts boasts several outstanding characteristics. *First*, the book contains numerous first time events (1:23-26; 2:14-40; 3:1-11; 4:1-4; 5:1-11; 6:1-7; 7:2-53,54-60; 10:44-48; 11:26; 12:2; 13:1-2; 15:1-30; 16:12-13). *Second*, the book is transitional. It represents historical transition from the Gospels to the epistles, religious transition from

Judaism to Christianity, divine transition from Law to grace, a people of God transition from Jews to Jews and Gentiles, a program of God transition from the kingdom to the church, and a leadership transition from Christ to the apostles. Because of these transitions, Acts contains numerous non-normative events (1:1-3; 2:1-4; 2:45; 4:34; 5:1-11,19; 12:7; 16:26; 7:55; 8:39; 9:1-6; 10:1-8). Thus, normative doctrine must be established from the epistles rather than merely from Acts. While Acts is descriptive, the epistles are prescriptive. *Third*, Acts mentions the Holy Spirit over 50x, which is more than any other biblical writer. Thus, the title "Acts of the Apostles" is a misnomer. The book is more appropriately entitled the "Acts of the Holy Spirit."

*Fourth*, the book focuses upon prayer (1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 4:24; 6:4; 7:60; 8:15; 9:11; 10:2; 11:5; 12:5; 13:3; 14:23; 16:13; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 27:35; 28:15). *Fifth*, Acts represents the missionary endeavor to testify about Christ to the rest of the world (1:8, 22:232; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39-41; 13:31; 26:16, 22). *Sixth*, the book contains 23 sermons, which provide different evangelistic approaches for different circumstances. *Eight* Most of these sermons focus upon Christ's prophesied death, Resurrection, and Ascension. *Seventh*, Acts is a book of miracles. The different categories of miracles include those wrought by Peter (3:1-11; 9:32-35; 36-43), those wrought by Paul (14:8-10; 16:16-18; 20:6-12; 28:1-6, 7-8), miracles of discipline or wrath (5:1-11; 12:20-23; 13:6-12), miracles of general healing (5:12-16; 6:8; 8:6; 19:11-20; 28:9), and miracles exhibiting unusual phenomenon (1:9; 2:1-4; 5:19; 12:7; 8:39; 10:1-6).

*Eighth*, Acts records non-normative receptions of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2; 8; 10; 19). *Ninth*, Acts furnishes the background for the Pauline epistles by conveying how the various churches mentioned in the letters were founded (Rom: 28:14-31; 1-2 Cor: 18:1-18; Gal: 13:3-14:28; Eph: 19:1-41; Phil: 16:6-40; 1-2 Thess: 17:1-9; 1 Tim: 19:1-41; 20:17-38; Titus: 27:1-13) and where Paul was when he wrote the various letters. *Tenth*, Acts furnishes accurate history by giving precision when citing locations (provinces, cities) and titles (consul, Tetrarch, proconsul, Asiarch). *Eleventh*, Acts is a book of places and names. It gives close to eighty geographical references and mentions over a hundred people by name.

*Twelfth*, Acts is large. Altogether, Luke's writings comprise 28% of the NT. *Thirteenth*, Acts is the only historical, canonical account of the birth and growth of the early church. Thus, only Acts furnishes the necessary bridge between the Gospels and the epistles.

*Fourteenth*, Acts is extremely practical as it relays both the internal and external problems confronting the infant church. Therefore, the book serves as a useful guide for those involved in church organizing, planting, and growth. *Fifteenth*, more than any other NT book, Acts emphasizes the church's continuity and discontinuity with Israel.

*Sixteenth*, Acts stresses the sovereignty of God. Such sovereignty is seen in how God uses the free choice of individuals to accomplish His ends (2:23), how people respond to the

Gospel (13:48), and how the church continues to grow despite opposition. *Seventeenth*, the book emphasizes eschatology. The book opens and closes with eschatological statements (Acts 1:6; 28:31). The phrase "kingdom of God" occurs multiple times in Acts (1:3,6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31). Because the church is an heir to the kingdom, Acts "shows how the kingdom message moved from mostly Jews to mostly Gentiles and from Jerusalem to Rome." *Eighteenth*, the book focuses upon Soteriology. It emphasizes the spiritual benefits that can be instantaneously received through justification by faith alone (Acts 16:31).

## Outline

### I. Outreach in Jerusalem (Acts 1:1—7:60)

- (1) Prologue (1:1-2)
- (2) Christ's post-resurrection appearance (1:3-8)
  - (A) Presentation of the infallible proofs (1:3)
  - (B) Instruction to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit (1:4-5)
  - (C) Church's lack of relation to the Davidic kingdom (1:6-7)
  - (D) Church's geographical mission (1:8)
- (3) Christ's ascension (1:9-11)
- (4) Disciples await the Holy Spirit (1:12-14)
- (5) Matthias appointed (1:15-26)
- (6) Birth of the church on Pentecost (2:1-47)
  - (A) Coming of the Holy Spirit (2:1-12)
    - (a) Miraculous occurrences (2:1-4)
    - (b) The beneficiaries of the miraculous tongues (2:5-12)
  - (B) Peter's sermon (2:13-41)
    - (a) Charge of drunkenness (2:13)
    - (b) Peter's defense (2:14-36)
      - (i) Too early for drunkenness (2:14-15)
      - (ii) Analogy from Joel 2:28-32 (2:16-21)
      - (iii) Explanation of the source of the Spirit (2:22-35)
        - (a) Christ identified through miracles (2:22)
        - (b) Jewish guilt and God's predetermined plan (2:23)
        - (c) Christ's resurrection predicted in Psalm 16:8-11 (2:24-29)
        - (d) Christ is the Davidic descendent of Psalm 132:11 (2:30-32)
        - (e) Christ's present session predicted in Psalm 110:1 (2:33-35)
      - (iv) Conclusion (2:36)
    - (c) Jewish reaction (2:37)
    - (d) Peter's exhortation (2:38-40)
    - (e) Jewish reaction (2:41)

- (C) Activities of the first church (2:42-47)
- (7) Peter heals the lame man at the temple's beautiful gate (3:1-26)
  - (A) Healing (3:1-11)
  - (B) Peter's sermon (3:12-26)
- (8) The arrest of Peter and John (4:1-37)
  - (A) Peter and John arrested (4:1-4)
  - (B) Peter preaches to the Sanhedrin (4:5-12)
  - (C) The Jewish leadership commands the apostles not to preach (4:13-22)
  - (D) The church condemns Israel (4:23-28)
  - (E) The church's prayer for boldness (4:29-31)
  - (F) The unity of the first church (4:32-37)
- (9) The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11)
- (10) Many miracles wrought by the apostles (5:12-16)
- (11) Persecution by the religious leaders (5:17-32)
- (12) Gamaliel's speech spares the apostles (5:33-42)
- (13) Deacons appointed (6:1-7)
- (14) Stephen's martyrdom (6:8—7:60)
  - (A) Stephen's effectiveness and arrest (6:8-15)
  - (B) Stephen's speech (7:1-53)
    - (a) Abram's partial obedience (7:1-5)
    - (b) Israel's pattern of initial rejections (7:6-38)
      - (i) Example of Joseph (7:6-16)
      - (ii) Example of Moses (7:17-38)
    - (c) Rebellion against Moses (7:39-41)
    - (d) God gave Israel over to idolatry because they were not faithful to Moses' teaching (7:42-45)
    - (e) Tabernacle and Temple never intended as permanent manifestation of God (7:46-50)
    - (f) Current generation imitating previous generation (7:51-53)
      - (i) Resisting the Spirit (7:51)
      - (ii) Prophet killers (7:52)
      - (iii) Law breakers (7:53)
  - (C) Stephen's martyrdom (7:54-60)

## II. Outreach in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1—12:25)

- (1) Persecution scatters church into Judea and Samaria (8:1-4)
- (2) Philip evangelizes Samaria (8:5-25)
  - (A) Samaritan ministry (8:5-8)
  - (B) Simon's conversion (the 8:9-13)

- (C) Apostolic approval (8:14-17)
- (D) Simon's remorse (8:18-24)
- (E) Apostolic influence (8:25)
- (3) Philip evangelizes the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40)
- (4) Saul's conversion in Damascus (9:1-31)
  - (A) Converted and blinded (9:1-9)
  - (B) Filled with the Spirit (9:10-19)
  - (C) In Damascus (9:20-22)
  - (D) In Jerusalem (9:23-31)
- (5) Extension of Peter's Ministry into Lydda and Joppa (9:32-43)
  - (A) Healing of Aeneas in Lydda (9:32-35)
  - (B) Raising of Dorcas in Joppa (9:36-43)
- (6) Conversion of Cornelius (10:1—11:18)
  - (A) Cornelius' conversion (10:1-48)
  - (B) Peter's report of Cornelius's conversion to the Jerusalem church (11:1-18)
- (7) Church at Antioch (11:19-30)
  - (A) Birth and maturation (11:19-26)
  - (B) Missionary zeal (11:27-30)
- (8) James martyred (12:1-4)
- (9) Peter imprisoned and miraculously released (12:5-19)
- (10) Death of Herod Agrippa (12:20-25)

### III. Outreach to the remote parts of the earth (Acts 13:1—28:31)

- (1) First missionary journey (13:1—14:28)
  - (A) Paul and Barnabas commissioned (13:1-3)
  - (B) On Cyprus (13:4-12)
  - (C) Pisidian Antioch (13:13-52)
  - (D) Iconium (14:1-5)
  - (E) Lystra and Derbe (14:6-21a)
  - (F) Return to Antioch (14:21b-26)
  - (G) Report to the church (14:27-28)
- (2) Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)
  - (A) Necessity of Paul and Barnabas to travel to Jerusalem (15:1-6)
  - (B) Deliberations (15:7-21)
    - (a) Peter's speech (15:7-11)
    - (b) Paul and Barnabas' speeches (15:12)
    - (c) James' speech (15:13-21)
  - (C) Resolution (15:22-35)
    - (a) Antioch delegation: Paul, Barnabas, and Silas (15:22)

- (b) Letter (15:23-29)
- (c) Ministry in Antioch (15:30-35)

C. Second missionary journey (15:36—18:22)

- (A) Paul and Barnabas split (15:36-41)
- (B) Timothy joins team at Lystra (16:1-5)
- (C) Team divinely rerouted into Europe (16:6-10)
- (D) Philippi (16:11-40)
  - (a) Lydia's conversion (16:11-15)
  - (b) Paul casts out the demon (16:16-18)
  - (c) Jailer's conversion (16:19-34)
  - (d) Team departs for Thessalonica (16:35-40)
- (E) Thessalonica (17:1-9)
- (F) Berea (17:10-15)
- (G) Athens (17:16-34)
  - (a) Paul reasoning in the synagogue (17:16-17)
  - (b) Paul's speech on Mars Hill (17:18-34)
    - (i) Paul brought to Mars Hill (17:18-20)
    - (ii) Paul's sermon (17:21-31)
    - (iii) Mixed response (17:32-34)
- (H) Corinth (18:1-17)
  - (a) Paul's tent making (18:1-4)
  - (b) Paul's ministry among the Gentiles (18:5-11)
  - (c) Unbelieving Jews falsely accuse Paul before Gallio (18:12-17)
- (I) Paul returns to Antioch (18:18-22)

(4) Third missionary journey (18:23—21:17)

- (A) Paul passes through Galatia and Phrygia (18:23)
- (B) Ephesus (18:24—19:41)
  - (a) Apollos' conversion (18:24-28)
  - (b) John the Baptist's disciples converted (19:1-7)
  - (c) Influential Ephesian Ministry (19:8-20)
  - (d) Paul's missionary emphasis (19:21-22)
  - (e) Silversmith's riot (19:23-41)
- (C) Paul passes through Macedonia and Greece (20:1-5)
- (D) Troas (20:6-12)
- (E) Miletus (20:13-38)
  - (a) Journey from Troas to Miletus (20:13-16)
  - (b) Paul's address to the Ephesian elders (20:17-35)
  - (c) Paul's tearful departure (20:36-38)

- (F) Return to Jerusalem (21:1-17)
  - (a) From Miletus to Tyre (21:1-6)
  - (b) From Tyre to Caesarea (21:7-14)
  - (c) From Caesarea to Jerusalem (21:15-16)
- (5) Paul's journey to Rome (21:17—28:31)
  - (A) Paul in Jerusalem (21:17—23:22)
    - (a) Paul's arrest in the Temple (21:17-40)
    - (b) Paul's defense before the Jewish multitude (22:1-30)
    - (c) Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin (23:1-11)
    - (d) The conspiracy to kill Paul (23:12-22)
  - (B) Paul in Caesarea (23:23—26:32)
    - (a) Paul's transfer to Caesarea (23:23-35)
    - (b) Paul's defenses (24:1—26:32)
      - (i) Before Felix (24:1-27)
      - (ii) Before Festus (25:1-27)
      - (iii) Before Agrippa (26:1-32)
  - (C) Paul's voyage to Rome (27:1—28:10)
    - (a) Voyage to Italy (27:1-44)
    - (b) Ministry on Malta (28:1-10)
  - (D) Paul in Rome (28:11-31)
    - (a) Journey to Rome (28:11-15)
    - (b) Paul underhouse arrest (28:16-31)

---

### Title

- Acts of the Apostles
- Misleading?
  - Acts of the Holy Spirit
  - This title also doesn't cover the geographical expansion
  - Not all apostles, only two: Peter and Paul

### Authorship

- External:
  - Earliest and most prominent church fathers
- Internal:
  - "We" (Acts 28:16)

- In the prison epistles, Paul mentions many people who were with him. Many of these people we read about were with Paul later (his first imprisonment lasted 2 years)
- Acts 28:16 talks about the person/people who were with him when he first arrived in Rome
- The only one on the list that makes any sense is Luke (Col 4:14)
- Similarities with Luke's Gospel
  - Luke records the earthly ministry of Christ
  - Acts records the continuation of that ministry, through the church, from the Father's right hand
  - Both Luke and Acts were written to Theophilus
  - The language and style of both Luke and Acts are almost identical
  - The theme of both books is almost identical
- Literary ability (Col 4:14)
  - Educated
- Affiliation with Paul
  - Luke was with Paul at the very end of his life (2 Tim 4:11)

## Biography

- Paul's companion (2 Tim 4:11)
- Physician (Col 4:14)
- Gentile (majority opinion)
  - Col 4:11 - Paul mentions his only ministry partners who were of the circumcision (he doesn't mention Luke)
  - Acts 1:19 - "their" language (referring to Hebrew or possibly Aramaic)
- Jewish? (minority opinion; held by Fructenbaum)
  - Rom 3:2 - the Jews were "entrusted with the oracles of God" (meaning Jews wrote entire Bible)

## Place of writing

- "We" sections: Acts 16:10-40; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16)
- From Paul (not written in one sitting, but gradually, as events unfolded and Luke had opportunity)
  - Caesarean imprisonment (2 years, Acts 24:27)
  - Voyage to Rome (Acts 27)
  - First Roman imprisonment (2 years, Acts 28:16)
  - Combination

## Recipient

- If you can understand who the recipient of Acts is, the meaning of the entire book falls into line and makes sense

- Luke wrote both Luke and Acts to Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1)
- Theophilus
  - Roman official - "most excellent" Theophilus (Luke 1:3) = a title of a Roman official
  - Gentile
  - Believer - Theophilus already knew about Jesus (Luke 1:4) and was a believer; Luke was just adding to his spiritual insight and strengthening his faith
    - The name Theophilus means "God lover"
  - Luke wrote to confirm what he had already believed (Luke 1:4)
    - It's likely that as a Gentile, Theophilus had doubts about Christianity because it was very Jewish at this point in history
    - Matthew, the first Gospel writer, wrote to a Jewish audience about Jewish concerns; his genealogy connects Jesus back to Abraham
    - He also is likely questioning or concerned about his place in the plan and program of God, because he was a Gentile

### **Purpose**

To present Theophilus with an orderly account of the birth and growth of the church so as to affirm him in what he had already believed.

- The purpose of both Luke and Acts are apologetical, not evangelistic
- They are designed to ease Theophilus' mind and doubts by giving him objective evidence, chronologically, about what Jesus said and did, and how the church in Acts continued that same ministry.

### **Message**

- The birth and growth of the church numerically, geographically and ethnically
- Components
  - Numerically (progress reports)
    - Clearest: 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31
    - Less clear: 1:15; 2:41; 4:4,31; 5:14,42; 8:25,40; 11:21; 13:49; 17:6
  - Geographically (from Jerusalem to Rome)
    - Also into Africa via the Ethiopian eunuch
  - Ethnically (from Judaism to Gentile domination)

### **Method**

- Luke records history (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1)
- Chronological order (Luke 1:3)
- Selective rather than comprehensive
- Shaped around his purpose (just like John, John 20:30-31)

### **Sources**

- "We" sections
  - Himself - he was an eyewitness to many of the events in Acts ("We" sections)

- Paul - Luke was with Paul at the end of his life; Paul mentions Luke 2x in his 2 Roman imprisonments
- Caesarean witnesses - while Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea for 2 years before traveling to Rome
- Others mentioned in Acts - Silas, Timothy, Mark, Peter, John, Barnabas
- Those interviewed in his prequel
  - Luke wasn't an apostle or an eyewitness to many of Jesus' teachings or miracles (Luke 1:2)
  - He received his information through interviews and speaking with many of the people who were there, including some of the apostles
- Written records (Acts 15:23-29; 23:26-30)
  - Luke quotes the legal document out of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:23); he obviously had access to that document
  - Luke also quotes the legal ruling of Claudius Lysias, written to Felix, regarding Paul (Acts 23:26)

### **Date (60-62 AD)**

- Luke doesn't mention...
  - Israel's judgment (66-70 AD)
  - First Roman persecution (64-67 AD)
  - Since these events most certainly would have been mentioned if they were taking place, it's very likely that Acts was written prior to 64 AD
- Paul's latter life
  - Martyrdom (68 AD)
  - 2nd imprisonment (66 AD)
  - Activity between imprisonment (62-66 AD)
  - Outcome of trial (62 AD)
    - Since Luke doesn't mention the outcome of Paul's trial, it's very likely that it hadn't happened yet, so Acts was written prior to 62 AD
  - Paul & Luke arrived in Rome in 60 AD (described in Acts 28:16)
    - So Acts must have been written in the time period of 60-62 AD

### **Structure**

Acts 1:8: **but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth."**

- Part 1: Jerusalem (Acts 1-7)
- Part 2: Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12)
- Part 3: Remotest parts of the earth (Acts 13-28)
  - Paul's 1st missionary journey (Acts 13-14)

- Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35)
- Paul's 2nd missionary journey (Acts 15:36—18:22)
- Paul's 3rd missionary journey (Acts 18:23—21:17)
- Trip to Rome (Acts 21:18—28:31)

### Scope

- Jerusalem (Acts 1-7): 33-34 AD (2 years)
- Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12): 35-48 AD (13 years)
- Remotest parts of the earth (Acts 13-28): 48-62 AD (14 years)

### Themes

- Transition from Peter to Paul (Gal 2:7-8)
  - One of the main points Luke writes about, in order to encourage and fortify Theophilus' faith, is that Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was just as authentic and just as God-driven as was Peter's ministry to the Jews.
- This is why Luke gives us three accounts of Paul's salvation (Acts 9; 22; 26); he's making the point that Paul's salvation was just as legitimate as Peter's
- Paul matched, some nearly identically, the same miracles that Peter did earlier in Acts (see chart below). This would be a major encouragement for Theophilus because he likely received the gospel through in Rome through the influence of Paul.

| From Peter to Paul |           |        |                           |          |
|--------------------|-----------|--------|---------------------------|----------|
| Reference          | Center    | Person | Place                     | Outreach |
| Acts 1–12          | Jerusalem | Peter  | Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria | Jewish   |
| Acts 13–28         | Antioch   | Paul   | Uttermost parts           | Gentiles |

| From Peter to Paul                      |  |
|---|--|
| Peter                                   | Paul                                     |
| Heals a man lame from birth (3:1-11)    | Heals a man lame from birth (14:8-18)    |
| Heals by shadow (3:15-16)               | Heals by handkerchief (19:11-12)         |
| Success is a cause of jealousy (5:17)   | Success is a cause of jealousy (13:45)   |
| Confronts a sorcerer (8:9-24)           | Confronts a sorcerer (13:6-11)           |
| Raises Dorcas (9:36-41)                 | Raises Eutychus (20:9-12)                |
| Jailed and miraculously freed (12:3-19) | Jailed and miraculously freed (16:25-34) |

- Universality of the Gospel (Luke 19:10)
  - This is why Luke records the salvation of tax collectors, prostitutes, Gentiles, the rejects of Jewish society
  - The same type thing happens in Acts, but instead of Jesus doing it directly, He does it through the church, to Samaritans, Ethiopians, Gentiles, women, and poor people
- Acts is not a doctrinal book, it's a transitional book that documents the history of the birth and growth of the church for the first ~30 years of its history
  - It documents the dispensational change from Law to the church age (grace)
  - Thus, many of the things recorded in Acts are not normative today, for example:

- Acts 2 - just after Pentecost, the Jerusalem saints sold their homes and possessions in order to fund the living expenses of those travelers from distant lands who got saved and remained in Jerusalem to sit under and learn apostolic teaching
- Acts 8 - Samaritans believe in Christ, but they don't get the Holy Spirit until a later time. The Jerusalem leadership had to lay hands on the Samaritans in order for them to receive the Holy Spirit
- If you want to see something as normative for the church today in Acts, it must be corroborated in the epistles. If something happened in Acts that is not corroborated in the epistles, we can view it as "transitional" and not "normative."
- Transitions:
  - Historical: from Gospels to Epistles
  - Religious: from Judaism to Christianity
  - Divine: from Law to grace
  - People of God: from Jews to Gentiles
  - Program of God: from kingdom (Israel) to church
    - Luke uses the word "kingdom" (*basileia*) 45x in Luke; only 8x in Acts
  - Leadership: from Christ to apostles

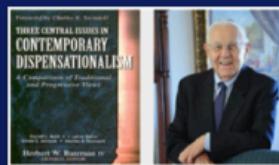
Gal 4:4: But when the fullness of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, **born under the Law**,

- Jesus was born and lived under the dispensation of Law

## Stanley D. Toussaint

"Israel and the Church of a Traditional Dispensationalist," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 242.

"It is difficult to explain why Luke does not use the term if the kingdom is being inaugurated. He employs it forty-five times in the gospel. . . . [O]ne would expect Luke to use the word if such a startling thing as the inauguration of the kingdom had taken place. The fact that Luke uses kingdom only eight times in Acts after such heavy usage in his gospel implies that the kingdom had not begun but was in fact, postponed."



- Sovereignty of God (Acts 2:23; 13:48)
- Soteriology (Acts 16:31)
  - The soteriology of Acts is corroborated in the epistles (Eph 2:8-9)

### Unique Characteristics

- Sermons
  - There are 23 sermons in Acts
    - Peter (4)
    - Paul (6)
    - James (1)
    - Stephen (1)
  - 12x Jesus was presented as the Messiah of Israel entirely from the OT!
    - (1) Acts 2:22-38 - Peter's 1st sermon
    - (2) Acts 3:18-26 - Peter's 2nd sermon
    - (3) Acts 7 - Stephen before the Sanhedrin
    - (4) Acts 8:26-39 - Philip and the Ethiopian Treasurer
    - (5) Acts 9:20-22 - Saul Preaches at Damascus
    - (6) Acts 10:42-43 - Peter's sermon to the Gentiles
    - (7) Acts 13:16-41 - Paul's sermon at Antioch
    - (8) Acts 17:2-3 - Paul at Thessalonica
    - (9) Acts 18:5 - Paul at Corinth
    - (10) Acts 18:24-28 - Apollos, Aquila, & Priscilla at Ephesus and Corinth

- (11) Acts 26:23 - Paul preaches to Agrippa
- (12) Acts 28:23 - Paul at Rome
- **And Jesus, in Luke, for a total of 14:**
- (13) Luke 24:13-27 - On the Emmaus Road
- (14) Luke 24:44-48 - In the Upper room
- Miracles wrought by the Holy Spirit
  - Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles
- Background for Pauline epistles
  - If we didn't have Acts, we'd have no way of tracking Paul's chronology and where/when he wrote his 13 epistles
  - Acts is to most of the NT what 1&2 Kings are to the prophetic (minor & major) books of the OT; these books provide a historical framework

| Paul's Ministry Chronology |                              |             |          |                      |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|----------|----------------------|
| # of books                 | Journey                      | Acts        | Date     | Books                |
| 1                          | 1                            | 13–14       | 48–49 AD | Gal                  |
| 2                          | 2                            | 15:36–18:22 | 50–52 AD | 1–2 Thess            |
| 3                          | 3                            | 18:23–21:17 | 53–57 AD | 1–2 Cor, Rom         |
| 4                          | 4                            | 28:16–31    | 60–62 AD | Eph, Col, Phlm, Phil |
| 2                          | Between Imprisonments        | Post Acts   | 62–66 AD | 1 Tim, Titus         |
| 1                          | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Imprisonment | Post Acts   | 67 AD    | 2 Tim                |

### Order of Paul's Epistles

- (1) Galatians (49 AD)
- (2) 1&2 Thessalonians (51 AD)
- (3) 1&2 Corinthians (56 AD)
- (4) Romans (57 AD)
- (5) Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians (60–62 AD)
- (6) 1 Timothy, Titus (62–66 AD)
- (7) 2 Timothy (67 AD)

- Accurate history
  - Titles, geographical locations, cities, etc.



## Sir William Ramsay

*The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness  
of the New Testament, pp. 37-38, 81.*

**"I had read a good deal of modern criticism about the book, and dutifully accepted the current opinion that it was written during the second half of the second century by an author who wished to influence the minds of people in his own time by a highly wrought and imaginative description of the early Church. His object was not to present a trustworthy picture of facts in the period about A.D. 50, but to produce a certain effect on his own time by setting forth a carefully coloured account of events and persons of that older period. He wrote for his contemporaries, not for truth...The present writer takes the view that Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness. At this point we are describing what reasons and arguments changed the mind of one who began under the impression that the history was written long after the events and that it was untrustworthy as a whole."**

- Places and names
  - 100 names, 80 places
- Volume
  - Luke & Acts make up 28% of the NT
- Gentile
  - Luke & Acts are the only two books in the entire Bible written by a Gentile  
(assuming the evidence of Luke's Gentile background is true)