

~ACTS~

Lesson 1- An Introduction to the Book of Acts

Today we begin our journey through the book of Acts. Today's lesson is going to be an overview of this book, an introduction to the formation of the church, and we will learn about the author and reason why it was written. This book has the common name, "The Acts of the Apostles," but a better suited name for this book might be the "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," but an even better description would be "The Acts of the Holy Spirit bearing witness of Jesus who is the Risen Christ." Because Jesus Christ, who is risen from the dead is the focus of the entire book, and our mission is to be His witness on the earth being led by the Holy Spirit. So as a starting point, let's read the opening eight verses of Acts chapter 1, **Acts 1:1-8**.

The key to the entire book of Acts is verse 8, "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me...*" This was the promise of the Holy Spirit that Jesus gave to His disciples before He went to the cross, **John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26-27; 16:12-15**. The Book of Acts records the fulfillment of this promise at the day of Pentecost. And all who receive the Spirit are led by the Spirit, we are led by the Truth and we are led by His Word, and we are to be witnesses of Jesus unto the ends of the earth.

Verse 8 gives the outline of the book. This witness starts in Jerusalem, spreads a little farther to Judea, then Samaria, then to the ends of the earth, reaching as far as Rome. And that's exactly the progression of the book of Acts. Some people have subtitled this book, "From Jerusalem to Rome."

- The first 7 chapters are based in Jerusalem;
- chapters 8 and 9 brings persecution and disbursts the church to the regions of Judea and Samaria;
- chapter 10 the Gentiles are brought the Gospel with Cornelius and his household;
- chapter 11 Barnabas and Paul help build the church in Antioch;
- and from chapters 13 through the end of the book, Paul begins traveling the Roman Empire preaching the Gospel.

Today we are going to answer 4 questions to get us introduced to this wonderful book:

- 1) Who wrote the Book of Acts?
- 2) To whom is it being written to?
- 3) When and why the Book was written?
- 4) What does this Book mean to us today?

Who wrote the Book of Acts?

It is virtually uncontested that Luke is the author of the book of Acts, and we see in verse 1, that it is a continuation of another account that he wrote previously to a man named Theophilus. He says in verse 1...

¹ The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, ¹ Τὸν μὲν πρῶτον λόγον ἐποιησάμην περὶ πάντων, ὧ Θεόφιλε, ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν,

This former account is the Gospel of Luke, and the book of Acts is Luke Volume 2. The author of the book of Acts is ultimately the Holy Spirit, who inspired and worked through the hand and mind of our dear friend Luke.

History tells us Luke was born in Antioch and studied in the schools of Antioch, Greece, and Egypt. He was learned and skilled in human sciences, philosophy and physick (the practice of medicine). Luke was a physician and called by Paul, "the beloved physician", Col 4:14. Luke was a close friend and companion to the Apostle Paul.

Luke is an amazing man who was chosen by God to write a large portion of the New Testament. The book of Luke and Acts combined make up 27.48% of the writings of the New Testament, which is more than any other writer, even Paul with 27.07%. His writing style and word usage is clearly distinct from any other writer of the NT being of a higher and more formal level of Greek. William Cave, a 17th century historian, says Luke's writing is... "*polite and elegant, sublime and lofty, yet clear and easily understood, flowing with an ease and natural grace and sweetness,*

*admirably accommodate to an historical design, all along expressing himself in a vein of purer Greek than is to be found in the other Writers of the Holy Story” **

Luke’s writing style and grammar is distinct and different than any other writer in the NT. When you compare Paul or John’s writings with Luke’s, you can see the difference, and yet we see hints of his writing style within Paul’s epistles. such as the book of Hebrews, and the pastoral epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. It is my conjecture that Luke co-authored some of Paul’s epistles. These epistles were the thoughts of Paul, but clearly have the writing style and grammar of Luke. These two men shared life together, traveled together, and wrote the New Testament together, and their combined writings make up about 55% of the NT.

Luke began traveling with Paul in Troas, in 51AD, on Paul’s 2nd missionary journey. We see this in Acts 16:10 when the pronoun usage changes from third person to first person, telling us that Luke begins traveling with the Apostle Paul at that point. And if you keep a close eye on the use of these pronouns, you will notice that Luke stays with Paul for about a year in Macedonia until 52AD, and then he remains in Philippi, while Paul and Silas continue on their journey, Acts 17:1. Then Paul comes back through Macedonia on his 3rd missionary journey and picks him up in Philippi in the spring of 58AD, Acts 20:3-5. From this point forward, it appears Luke never leaves Paul’s side and Luke is with Paul until his martyrdom in 66AD. In Paul’s very last epistle of his life, he writes to Timothy saying, “*be diligent to come to me quickly..., only Luke is with me,*” 2 Tim 4:9-11. Paul had many traveling companions throughout his ministry, but the two most faithful men in his life were Luke and Timothy.

Luke was an amazingly accurate historian. In fact, Sir William Ramsay, a famous archaeologist from the 19th century set himself to disprove the writings of Luke. But after traveling throughout Asia Minor and Greece, he discovered that everything Luke wrote was absolutely accurate and he even said, “*This author should be placed along with the greatest of historians.*” †

The writings of Luke are perfectly inerrant and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Luke says in his first Volume, Luke 1:3-*it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account...* The Greek literally says, “*Having taken note of and followed extremely accurately and carefully all that was from the beginning to write to you an orderly account...*” Luke was very detailed, organized, and led of the Spirit, and we can trust every detail Luke gives us.

To whom is it being written to?

Luke is writing to man named Theophilus who he addresses at the beginning of both his Gospel and Acts. He begins his gospel saying, Luke 1:3-4-*it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus,* ⁴ *that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.* And in Acts 1:1- *The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,*

Luke is writing to Theophilus. We don’t know much about this man, and there has been a lot of speculation made about Theophilus. But in Luke’s opening address, he refers to him as, “most excellent Theophilus.” Luke is the only NT writer that uses this word, “most excellent,” *χράτιστος*. He uses it 4 times, and the other 3 times is referring to Roman Governing officials in high authority, namely with Felix and Festus, Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25. This tells us that Theophilus was also a Roman official.

When and why were the books of Luke and Acts written?

Why would Luke be writing to a Roman official? I believe these are trial documents for Paul’s appeal to Caesar. Paul had been arrested in 58AD for being accused of starting a riot in Jerusalem and he was held in prison in

* *History of the Lives of Mark and Luke*, 1676 pg Y₂

† bibleapologetics.org/luke-a-historian-of-the-first-rank/

Caesarea for 2 years until Paul made an appeal to Caesar in 60AD, Acts 24-25. Luke is making a formal statement to Caesar on behalf of Paul and Christianity and Theophilus was probably the Roman official in charge of Paul's trial. So Theophilus would have needed a written record from Paul for his defense. In Luke 1:4, Luke tells us he is writing to Theophilus *so that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.*

Theophilus was instructed in the sense that he, as a Roman official in high authority, was given some sort of briefing of the Way of the Christians. But this instruction, this briefing, was probably full of lies and bias. So, Luke sets out to write an orderly account of the Truth to set the record straight concerning Christianity. To the world, especially in the 1st century, Christians were viewed as the filth of the world, **1 Cor 4:11-13**. And to Roman officials, Christians were looked at as troublemakers who were always causing riots and incidents of civic unrest, Acts 16:20-24; 19:23-41. Therefore, Luke is making the point to prove that Christians aren't the troublemakers.

The Jews were in constant conflict with the Christians, claiming Christianity to be a dangerous new religion contrary to Judaism, but Luke continually makes the appeal that Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism, and since Judaism was an accepted and protected religion of Rome, Christianity should also be accepted. Unbelieving Jews hated Christians, therefore, Luke shows that it was always the Jews attacking Christians, not the other way around, Acts 4:17-18; 5:17-18, 28, 33; 7:54-60; 8:1-3; 9:1-2, 23-24; 12:1-4; 13:45, 50; 14:2, 5, 19; 17:5-8, 13; 18:6; 20:19, 23; 22:22-24; 23:10, 12-15, 21; 24:5-6, 14, 27; 25:7.

And this is why Paul was arrested in 58AD, because a riot broke out in the temple and they thought Paul was the instigator, when in fact, it was unbelieving Jews stirring up the crowds. In fact, Luke makes the Roman soldiers out to be the heroes because they saved Paul's life from being beaten to death, **Acts 21:27-35**. When you read through the book of Acts, you will notice that Luke always makes Rome out to be "the good guys." This is made evident in the last eight chapters of the book. Luke focuses a large part of his document on the detailed accounts of his arrest and imprisonment, the false claims against Paul, and making the appeal for his release.

Luke began writing his two-volume appeal around 60AD after both Luke and Paul arrived in Rome. The Gospel was given to Theophilus first, and shortly after, before 62AD, Luke gave him the book of Acts. The premise to Luke's writings were to prove that Christianity was not a heretical deviation of Judaism. That Christianity was not a threat to the Roman Empire in terms of revolt and insurrection, but rather to proclaim the good news that Jesus is the Christ, the fulfillment of the Jewish Messiah and the fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures and that Jesus alone is the One to bring Eternal Salvation to all who would believe in Him.

This formal appeal to Caesar on behalf of Paul and Christianity was an opportunity for the Truth to be shared to the king and high authorities of the known world at that time, Rome. Paul received a word from the Lord saying he had to bear witness in Rome, **Acts 23:11**. This appeal was an avenue to go directly to Caesar to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is the theme throughout the entire book of Acts, that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead to give us Eternal Life, and we are to be His witness to the world. I just want to take a few minutes to go through the book Acts with this thought in mind, **Acts 2:22-33; 3:13-26; 4:10-12; 10:39-46; 13:23-33; 26:22-23**. This is the Gospel. These are the Words of Life that lead to Salvation.

What does this Book mean to us today?

The Book of Acts is more than just a historical record, it's the Truth of the Church and the Truth of Jesus Christ and our continuation of the work that He began. Many people think that Luke was planning to write a third volume because this second volume ends so abruptly, but when you understand the time frame and the purpose of why Luke wrote the book, it makes sense the way it ends. But it does have a sense of incompleteness to it, and I think this was done on purpose by the Holy Spirit. Because even now, 2,000 years later, the book of Acts is still being written. As I said earlier, the best title for this book is, "The Acts of the Holy Spirit bearing witness of Jesus who is the Risen Christ." And that hasn't stopped. The Holy Spirit is still moving and bearing witness to us, and we are still bearing witness of Jesus who is the Risen Christ. We as the Church are continuing all that "...*Jesus began to do and to teach...*" Acts 1:1.

Jesus' work of Redemption is finished, and there is nothing we can do to add to it, but the work of proclaiming the Truth had only begun with Jesus.

We as Christians are ambassadors for Christ, and we have been given the opportunity to continue the work that Christ began. And it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to do so. And that is what the book of Acts is all about. It's volume 2 of the continued work and teachings of Jesus Christ of all He began to do and teach, and we are His ambassadors on the earth continuing the ministry on His behalf, 2 Cor 5:17-20.

We have been given power through the Holy Spirit, and this power has one purpose: to be a witness of Jesus Christ, **Acts 1:8**. And the most lasting and permanent expression of God's power is the power of Eternal Life in Him toward all those who believe, **Eph 1:17-22**. This is the power that sent His Son to die for us, and it's the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, and it's the same power that is living inside each and every one of us as children of God, Romans 8:11.

So as we journey through the book of Acts, we are going to see God moving on His people through the Holy Spirit and how His written Word came to us through His Spirit so that we can continue to be a witness of the risen Jesus Christ.