



I. INTRODUCTION

Acts is unique among the NT writings...the second part of what could be described as a 2-volume work. The Gospel of Luke is an historical account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Acts then details the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire.

In only 3 decades, a small group of believers in Jerusalem transformed into an empire-wide movement, committed to Jesus Christ, ending with Paul on the verge of taking the gospel to the Emperor of Rome.

Both books are dedicated to **Theophilus**. **Acts 1:1-3** refers back to Luke's Gospel and explains why he is writing this book and what it will contain.

Who was Theophilus?

We don't know. "Theophilus" means "loved by God," but has the idea of "friend of God." So, some believe it is a generic title applying to all Christians. But it appears that Luke is writing to an individual, though his message is intended for all Christians.

- ▶ Luke addresses him as "*most excellent*," a title referring to someone of honor/rank. Paul used the same term addressing Felix (**Acts 23:26; Acts 24:2**) and Festus (**Acts 26:25**). Maybe he was a Roman officer or high-ranking official, and Luke wanted to strengthen his belief.
- ▶ One Theophilus was a wealthy/influential man in Antioch. There are 2nd century references to "a great lord" and leader in the city during the time of Luke. He could have been a benefactor who supported Paul and Luke on their journeys. That would account for his providing an account.
- ▶ There was a Jewish high priest named Theophilus ben Ananus...in Jerusalem in A.D. 37-41 (the son of Annas and brother-in-law of Caiaphus). Another high priest named Mattathias ben Theophilus, served in Jerusalem in A.D. 65-66.
- ▶ A theory is that he was the Roman lawyer who defended Paul during his trial in Rome, so Luke's purpose was to defend Paul in court against charges of insurrection and to defend Christianity against the charge that it was an illegal and anti-Roman religion.

Each is possible. So Theophilus was a high-ranking/influential Gentile for whom Luke provided a detailed, historical account of Christ and the spread of the gospel. Whether He was a wealthy relative of Caesar, a government official, a wealthy benefactor or Paul's lawyer doesn't really matter. We cannot know for sure but we can know what Luke's intentions for writing were. (**Luke 1:3b-4**).

Acts is the only book that tells about the ministry of the apostles, hence its traditional name, "The Acts of the Apostles." It deals primarily with Peter and Paul. Luke shows how events in their ministries parallel each other and the ministry of Jesus as well.

Acts can be neatly divided into two sections, the first dealing primarily with the ministry of Peter in Jerusalem and Samaria (**Acts 1-12**) and the 2nd following Paul on his missionary journeys throughout the Roman Empire (**Acts 13-28**).

AUTHORSHIP

Both the Gospel of Luke and Acts are anonymous, but are attributed to Luke. His name appears 3 times in the NT: **Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24**...all three are in epistles written by Paul.

The first-person narrative occurs throughout the later chapters of Acts (starting at **Acts 16:10**) indicating that the author was a companion of Paul and present with him on these occasions. These passages are the key to the authorship of Acts and Luke.

Colossians 4:11 He wasn't a Jew. **V14** He was a physician. Other than the 3 references, nothing certain is known. Both books are written in excellent Greek. He had knowledge of the OT, so may have been a converted Gentile, attending a Jewish synagogue or gained biblical knowledge after becoming a Christian. He was an educated, observant, careful writer...the only Gentile to pen any books of Scripture.

DATE

The Gospel of Luke was likely written between A.D. 58 and 65. Some date Acts at A.D. 70, written after the Gospel of Luke (**Acts 1:1**) using the Gospel of Mark as a source (**Luke 1:1-2**). Other scholars date Acts as early as A.D. 62, because of the abrupt ending of the book...with Paul in Rome under house arrest, awaiting his trial before Caesar. **Acts 28:30-31**

It seems strange since Luke knew about Paul's release and probably about his defense before Caesar...fulfilling the angel's message in: **Acts 27:24**...that he would also be aware of Paul preaching the gospel as far as Spain...so why not mention these events? He also doesn't mention Paul's death (AD 64-68) nor the persecution of Christians that broke out under Nero (AD 64).

The ending is an indication that he wrote Acts A.D. 62, before these events occurred. **But what happened during this two-year span, where Luke leaves the readers hanging?** Why would Luke deliberately omit this eventful period?

We can conclude that the Holy Spirit restrained the account. Biblical history is designed to trace only the course of events which were essential to His revelation. The Holy Spirit is not as concerned about catering to our curiosity as we are. There are other ways of filling in some of the missing info. During this time-frame, Paul wrote **Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon**. We can learn something of Paul's trials and tribulations from those writings. **Bottom line:** If the Holy Spirit is overseeing the narrative, nothing of importance will be omitted.

GENRE

The book of Acts reports an adventure...the birth of the Church, arrests, imprisonments, beatings, riots, narrow escapes, a resurrection and other miracles, a shipwreck, trial scenes, and rescues.

The book of Acts is structured on a pattern, which is repeated:

1. *Christian leaders arise and preach the gospel.*
2. *Listeners are converted and added to the church.*
3. *Opponents (often Jewish but sometimes Gentile) begin to persecute the Christian leaders.*
4. *God intervenes to rescue the leaders or to otherwise protect the church.*



The most distinctive feature is the speeches/sermons, constituting nearly 1/3 of the total text...all primarily a witness to Christ. Much of the theology of Acts is found in these speeches.

Another distinctive feature is its journey narratives...often only stopping places or ports they pass by. The missionaries are constantly on the move, which is why these trips are called "journeys." Other narratives contain more lengthy stays in major cities, like Corinth and Ephesus.

SUMMARY

Acts chronicles the spread of the gospel...geographically and culturally. It records the transition of taking the gospel to a Jewish audience (Peter), then to the Gentiles (primarily under Paul). **The transition is illustrated** by Peter's vision of the sheet lowered, in which a voice told him, "*What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy*" (**10:15**). Peter then shared the gospel with Gentiles. **The lesson?** God wants His message of hope and salvation to extend to all people: "*...in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*" (**1:8**).

How can we apply this?

Apostles like Peter and Paul powerfully present the gospel. The apostles in Acts show a striking transition from the sometimes fearful and inept disciples of the Gospels. Their faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus produced a change in their hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Often, our lives don't reflect that change. We struggle with fear over how others will react to our faith or with breaking out of our routine long enough to invest in someone who needs to hear the Gospel.

Acts should encourage us to walk more closely with God so we might more boldly make Christ's name known in a lost world, following the example of Peter and Paul, who after being ordered to not teach or speak in the Name of Jesus, responded in **Acts 4:20**: "*As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*"