

>>>>>>> Introduction <<<<<<<<

The Name of the Book

- 1) The name "Acts of the Apostles" was first used by Irenaeus in the late 2nd century.
- 2) It is not known whether this was an existing name for the book or one invented by Irenaeus himself.
- 3) It is clear however that Luke did not give it that name.
 - a) The Greek word *práxeis* which means deeds or acts only appears once in the text (Acts 19:18) and there it refers not to the apostles but to deeds confessed by their followers.

Author

- 1) With Acts, like most, if not all, Biblical writings, there are “scholars” who put forth alternate theories regarding the book’s authorship.
 - a) In this case, they range from saying that “a” person was the inspired writer – just not Luke the physician to claiming that the entire book is a total forgery.
- 2) Within both books, Acts and Luke, the author is anonymous.
- 3) Our assumption (and belief) is and shall be that Luke is the writer of both, his Gospel and Acts.
 - a) There is also some controversy regarding whether Luke and Acts were originally intended as a two volume set.
 - i) Again, some say yes, others no.
 - ii) If you have an interest, there is a nice commentary on this **“A Theology of Luke and Acts (Biblical Theology of the New Testament)”** by Darrell L. Bock
 - b) The first early writer that we know of today who claimed Luke as the writer was Irenaeus (130 to 202 CE)
 - c) At later dates, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen are other church fathers who also attest to Luke as the author.

Some Facts About Luke

- 4) He was most likely a Gentile convert before he began writing. We know this from his introduction to his gospel.
- 5) There are few who think he may have actually been Jewish.
- 6) He was not one of the apostles, and so far as we know, he was not an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus.
 - a) Again, he seems to say that himself in his introduction to his gospel.

Luke 1:1–4 (NASB 2020)

Introduction

¹Since many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ²just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning

were eyewitnesses and servants of the word,³ it seemed fitting to me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it out* for you in an orderly sequence, most excellent Theophilus;⁴ so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

- 7) We can also glean some other facts from these few verses.
 - a) There is science here and, from what he says to Theophilus (the original recipient) Luke is:
 - i) a thorough investigator
 - ii) wants to place things in order
 - iii) wants to be as exact as he can possibly be in accomplishing these things.
 - b) His source(s) seem to be the disciples themselves and perhaps others who knew Christ. From verse 2 we see...

“just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word”

- 8) We know from other sources that Luke was a physician. (Colossians 4:14)

Colossians 4:14 (NASB 2020)

¹⁴Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and Demas *does also*.

- 9) He is a traveling companion of Paul and is mentioned in the conclusions of three of Paul's letters.
 - a) Philemon vs. 24
 - b) Colossians 4:14
 - c) 2 Timothy 4:11
- 10) We also know that he was a traveling companion because of the “we” passages in the book of Acts itself.
 - a) These particular passages begin in chapter 16.

Date of Writing

- 1) As with many of the New Testament writings, there are many and varied opinions among scholars as to the date the book was written.
- 2) Most common accepted date is between 63 and 65 CE.
- 3) Other dates are as late as 120 CE.
 - a) Those that hold to that late date are for the most part the ones that consider Acts to be a forgery.
 - i) Obvious reason – Luke would have passed on by then.
 - b) Considering Luke's approximate age, the latest he would likely have written the book would be around 80 CE.

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- 4) If we conclude that these later dates are wrong (which I definitely do) we can look to the writing itself for some clues as to the earliest and most likely date.
- 5) First, we must assume that Luke would be in his mid to late twenties at the youngest when traveling with Paul.
 - a) Additionally, consider, if you will that he was with Paul when the letters to Philemon, Colossians, (both written around 55-56 CE) and the second letter to Timothy (about 62 CE) were written.
 - b) Finally consider that the closing events of the book of Acts itself deal with Paul's house arrest in Rome – 60-62 CE.
- 6) To me personally, that dates the book with the majority of scholars to the 63 CE to 65 CE time frame.

Target Audience for Acts

- 1) Luke begins both his gospel and the book of Acts indicating a specific name, Theophilus, as the recipient.
- 2) Some scholars do hypothesize that Theophilus is not a real person.
 - a) The name Theophilus in the Greek means “one who loves God”.
 - b) This gives rise to speculation that Theophilus was simply Luke's way of saying it was meant for anyone who was a “lover of God”.
 - c) However, in Luke's Gospel, he makes a statement which I think refutes this claim ...

Luke 1:3 (NASB 2020)

³... it seemed fitting to me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it out* for you in an orderly sequence, **most excellent Theophilus**;

- d) As we know, we do not have the autograph of the Luke's Gospel.
 - i) We have fragments dating back to as early as 120CE but those fragments do not contain the first few verses.
 - e) However, some of the older and trusted full manuscripts, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, do have these verses and they contain this phrase, “**most excellent Theophilus**”.
 - f) This is a term used normally in Roman culture to address soldiers of rank and others of high standing.
 - g) That being said, I think we are on solid ground considering Theophilus as a real living person and likely a close friend of Luke's.
- 3) Beyond Theophilus, it is also assumed by most that, like all the early writings, they were passed on to as many congregations and people as possible for their reading, saying simply the audience was as broad as possible.

Purpose and Message

- 1) Though not stated as clearly in Acts as it is in his gospel, Luke still gives us a good idea of exactly what he is going to accomplish.
 - a) It will be a continuation relating all the things that take place after Jesus' ascension.
 - b) We will see this in the first verses of the book.
- 2) As we proceed on through the study, we will also see two distinct sections:
 - a) The first dealing with the early church, predominately in Jerusalem and the actions of the apostles.
 - b) The second is how the church came to expand outside the area of Palestine and into the whole Roman empire.
 - i) There is an obvious shift in emphasis from the apostles to the apostle Paul, his companions and associates in ministry.
- 3) Acts is a saga.
 - a) Like most sagas (and this is truly a saga of magnificent proportions) there are ups and downs, highs and lows, drama, heartache, heroes and villains.
 - b) Most importantly, in this saga is the triumph of God's Kingdom as it is established in the known world of that day.
 - c) We can also personally take heart in that triumph since it was and is the foundation for the church as we know it today.
- 4) Acts could be called the story of the early church.
- 5) Bruce Barton and Grant Osborne comment that it could be called "**The Miracle of Changed Lives.**"

Bruce B. Barton and Grant R. Osborne, Acts, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1999), x–xi.
- 6) At the end of the Gospels we see the disciples running scared and abandoning their Lord.
- 7) They were disillusioned, even denying their association with Jesus, and truly appear to be lost.
- 8) They have no purpose and, apparently still no complete understanding of what Jesus has been telling them for the past weeks as they approached Jerusalem for the last time.
- 9) What we will see as Acts begins is that these same men have been transformed from cowardly to courageous, from argumentative to articulate, and from selfish to selfless.
- 10) Later, they are then joined by Paul, whom God also miraculously transforms from a persecutor of Christians to a super believer
- 11) Beyond that, as we unfold Paul's actions in the book of Acts we will see a man who has become **not** a "convert" from Jew to Christian but,
 - a) To a Jew who totally understands the fulfillment of God's Law that he, Paul, loved almost as much as life itself.
 - b) I know that for some, this is a distinction without a difference.

- c) However, I truly believe that is a significant thing to consider and we will discuss it more as time goes on.
- 12) Setting that aside, we still know that he comes to understand Jesus Christ as the true Messiah and the freedom that this fact brings,
- a) This is not only to his fellow Jews if they would only accept it, but indeed to the entire known world.
 - b) Paul GET'S IT!!!**
- 13) Of course we will deal with Paul and how he changes when we get to that point in the book of Acts.
- 14) Having said all that, we basically have our introduction to the book of Acts.
- a) We know where we are headed –
 - i) The Church is founded by the Apostles and Paul with many trials and tribulations along the way!
- 15) However, as we have discussed, before we begin that journey we need to look at what happens between the garden, crucifixion, resurrection, and Pentecost.
- 16) What actually happened in that time period that made the difference?
- 17) What changed these guys from what we left them as at the end of Mark to these men who were going to change the world?
- a) First obvious answer is primarily, the gift of the Holy Spirit and all that entails.
 - b) Before that however, I think it was the events of this intervening period that solidified their faith.
 - c) These events brought them to final understanding of what a crucified and risen Messiah really meant.
 - i) For the disciples, this was what the time after the resurrection was all about – interacting with their risen Lord.
- 18) So, next time, we will begin a look at that period - the 40 days the Lord spent here after His resurrection.
- 19) If you have not done so, please read the ends of the Gospels and the short section in 1 Cor 15:
- a) Matthew 28 complete chapter.
 - b) Mark 16:1-8 stop and let that settle in then read 9-20.
 - c) Luke 24 complete chapter.
 - d) John 20 complete chapter.
 - e) 1 Corinthians 15:3–5
- 20) I will include the list in the Prayer List again in case you need it.
- 21) The idea is to look at them from several perspectives:

- a) What things you find that agree AND what things you find that disagree.
- b) Look for things that indicate they might be responsible for a major change in these men.