

# Acts

This will be the second in the somewhat loose series that we are looking at on an analytical study of the various books of the New Testament. **1** The book of Acts is the fifth book of the New Testament and traces the establishment and growth of the early church.

Now, remember the rules of Bible study...

- 2**
- A) Who is writing?  
What do we know about the writer, if anything?
  - B) Who are they writing to?  
What do we know about the target audience? Things like location, traditions, political atmosphere at the time of the writing, religious atmosphere.
  - C) What is the context?  
What is the writer discussing?
  - D) What do other passages say about the same subject?  
What does God say about the topic?

A quick aside, and let's be frank. There are many who hear these types of things and discussions and dismiss them by saying all we need to know is what the Bible says, that the rest of this is unimportant. There is truth to that statement, we need to study the Word of God and know it. But we can read in Ephesians 2 how that we are saved by ...

**3** ***"Grace through faith"***

But we can also read in 1 Peter 3 how that we are saved...

**4** ***"Through Baptism"***

Are these contradictions? Not at all. They illustrate different aspects of the process God implemented to bring salvation to all men. Knowing who the author was writing to and the circumstances they were dealing with helps to understand the impact that the discussion has on what we as Christians are supposed to do and understand. Grace, unmerited favor from God, is vital to man's salvation, as is faith, as is mercy, as is baptism. Some things are God's responsibility and fall into His purview, while others are man's. God provides the grace and mercy, but man has to provide the faithfulness and obedience. Knowing the situations of the recipients of these letters helps us to understand what is being said. The Ephesians needed to know and understand that salvation cannot be earned, ever, rather, it is a response from God to those that are faithful. Then, Peter writes that the faithful are those who understand that their obedient response in baptism brings man into contact with the blood of Christ which forgives him of his sin.

Back now to the discussion of this lesson, beginning with...

**5** ***Who wrote the book?***

For me, one of the best ways to understand who the author of the Book of Acts is, is to recognize its relationship to the Gospel of Luke...

- 6**
- 1) Both books begin with a greeting to a man named Theophilus or *"friend of God"*
  - 2) In Acts, the greeting to Theophilus refers to a previous writing
  - 3) The end of Luke seems to intentionally overlap with the beginning of Acts and provides a continuity between the two volumes

- 4) The author's writing style, vocabulary, and attention to specific themes remains constant throughout both books.

Another quick aside here, as this particular type of evidence will come up again, the idea of looking at style, vocabulary, and specific themes helps, both in telling who wrote the book as well as giving us some insight into how the books were written. In...

### **2 Tim 3:16**

**7**

**16** All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

Make no mistake; the Bible is the Word of God. It was given so that man could come to know God; His love, compassion, grace, mercy, as well as His disappointment, vengeance, and wrath. It reveals God to man. It came from God, and contains everything man needs to live a righteous life here on Earth and it tells man how he might have forgiveness of his sins so that he can inherit the eternal reward of heaven in the next life.

Yet God, very obviously, allowed the personality of the men, who He inspired to record His Word, to be seen in their writings. Paul's style is distinct and different than John's or Luke's, even when discussing the same subjects. These differences help to determine who the author was. That is why many people attribute the writing of Hebrews to Paul. In many areas of the book, Paul's style can be seen, and if it weren't for the fact that there also many areas that differ from his style so radically, the book would be accepted as his 14<sup>th</sup> epistle. But because of those discrepancies, it makes it hard to outright affirm that the book is his.

So, getting back to the rules of Bible study and the Book of Acts, what we see is that the author does not specifically name himself, but does give ample evidence of who he is. Note...

### **Acts 1:1-2**

**8**

**1** The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, **2** until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

Now note the beginning of the Book of Luke...

### **Luke 1:1-4**

**9**

**1** Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, **2** just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, **3** it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; **4** so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

We know that Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke, and it just makes common sense to assume that since the Book of Acts is also written to Theophilus and an earlier letter is referenced that both books are written by the same author.

Luke seems to imply in his introduction in Luke that he was not necessarily an...

**10**

## **"Eyewitness"**

Rather he shared what others had told him about what Christ had done. Now, that fact eliminates any of the eleven disciples, Apostles, as candidates for authorship of Acts. Next, the "we" passages in Acts also offer a major, internal clue to the identity of the book's author. During the account of Paul's missionary journeys, the author occasionally changes his style from that of a third person observer to a first person participant. In *Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-16; 21:1-18; and 27:1-*

**28:16**, the author speaks of "we" and "us" in relationship to Paul's travels. The language indicates that the author himself traveled with Paul. These "we" sections include the time when Paul was imprisoned at Rome. Scholars have determined that Paul wrote Philemon, Colossians, and the Pastoral Epistles during his house arrest in that city. By searching those letters for references to Paul's fellow workers, they compiled a list of companions who could have written Luke and Acts. In **2 Tim 4:11**, Paul says, "Only Luke is with me," making him the most likely person to have written Luke-Acts. So that's a long wordy explanation of why it is understood that Luke wrote Acts.

And that's just one piece of the evidence that points to Luke as the author of both books. In fact, there is a thought that the books of Luke and Acts are in fact a single work which was divided into two parts as the books of the New Testament were gathered together. Interestingly, the size of the contents of Luke and Acts when combined, makes the author of these two books the chief contributor to the New Testament, having written about twenty-five percent of the New Testament. Basically, taken as a whole, Luke and Acts are a larger work than the combined letters of Paul.

Scholars that have studied the first century church, confirm Luke's authorship with what they call the "negative" argument. This negative argument recognizes the early Church's tendency to attribute the authorship of New Testament works to recognized apostles and eyewitnesses of the ministry of Christ. We have no reason to assume early Christians would have given credit for the authorship of Luke/Acts to someone like Luke, who was not an Apostle or even a well-known Biblical figure, unless they possessed firm evidence that the good doctor, a traveling companion of Paul, did indeed write the book.

So, Luke is the accepted author of the book, and he wrote it to present the events of the establishment of the Church and first century Christians in an "Orderly Manner" or "Consecutive Order." Luke was written to reveal God to man, Acts was written to reveal to mankind God's purpose, His plan, and what He wants in His relationship with man so that He can bring him to salvation.

This now brings us to...

**11**

### ***The Purpose of Acts***

It is in the book of Acts that man is told how to come to God through the sacrifice of Christ. It is in Acts that man is introduced to the promised kingdom, the Church. It is in Acts that we see how man is added to that kingdom when he is saved through baptism. It is in Acts that we see the growth and spread of the Church through the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world, and it is in Acts that we see how those saved Christians throughout the world worshipped God.

The opening verses of Luke and Acts mention Theophilus as the recipient of Luke's writings. As mentioned earlier, the name means "**friend of God**" and was common among Jews and Greeks in the first century. So does this indicate that Luke was trying to relate the growth of this new Church to the Gentiles? This is what many scholars like to think. OK, but I think it becomes detrimental to our understanding of the book to try and make too fine of a distinction with who Luke is writing to. Yes, he addressed the book to Theophilus, but there can be no doubt that Luke recorded this history for everyone. There even seems to be some evidence that Luke seems to have perceived himself as a recorder of these first century events. As we have already seen in **1:3** of his Gospel, Luke clearly states he is trying to make...

**12**

### ***"An orderly account"***

Of the events surrounding Jesus' ministry. Maybe I'm wrong, but it makes sense to me, that if Luke's goal in writing his Gospel was to present the events of the life of Jesus in an orderly manner then that would also be his goal in presenting the history of the Church in the Book of Acts. This might lend some credence to the idea that the books of Luke and Acts were originally written as one account. Luke could have set out to record the events of the Life of Christ as well as the events

of the establishing and spreading of the Church. That said, the only question left would be Luke's reason for dividing his record of those events into Luke and Acts as he did. I think the obvious reason, and the one that makes the most common sense, is that the Book of Luke focuses on Jesus Himself, while the Book of Acts focuses on the followers of Jesus who continued their Master's work in the Church.

There is a remarkable lesson that the Books of Luke and Acts teach. Note that in...

**Acts 1:1-2** 13

**1** The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach

Luke says that in his first Book he wrote of all that Jesus had **BEGUN** to do and teach. That absolutely implies that Luke feels that even after His death, which is recorded in Luke 23, the work of Jesus continued on. He is saying that Jesus continued to act and teach, even in His death, and that His story was incomplete where the Gospel of Luke ended. And, in fact, a careful reading of Acts makes it clear that Jesus remained the active and living focus of Luke's narrative. Note...

**Acts 9:3-5** 14

**3** As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; **4** and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" **5** And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,

Here Jesus appears to Saul while he is travelling to Damascus to continue his persecution of the Jews.

Later, in the same chapter...

**Acts 9:34** 15

**34** Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed." Immediately he got up.

Here, Peter tells the lame man Aeneas, that "Jesus Christ heals you" and then in **chapter 10, in verses 9-16**, the Lord makes His will known to Peter that he should go to the Gentiles to preach Christ. Now, these are but three examples of Jesus' vital involvement in the spread of the Gospel that we see in the Book Acts, there are many others.

What this tells us is that despite the fact that Acts begins with the ascension of Jesus, where Luke ends, there is no evidence that anyone in the early Church perceived Christ as being "gone" from their midst. He healed, He spoke, and He directed the work of His disciples. Even when they preached, the disciples thought of Jesus as literally being present in their preaching. They asked the listeners of those first sermons, not merely to believe the facts about Jesus and His life, but to meet, through the Word of God, Jesus the Christ, the One who died, rose again, and lives forever. The ascension didn't mark Christ's departure, but rather, just a change in the way He performs His ministry of salvation and grace. Consequently, Acts is the continuing story of Jesus' work. It simply records the things He did once He was no longer bound by the limitations of the physical body.

Acts begins with the ascension and then follows the events when Jesus started to work through His new body, The Church.

Because the story begun in Luke (**the saving work of God**) continues in Acts with the same central character (**Jesus**), it is only natural that the central themes of Luke continue in Acts as well.

16 1) There is an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit

Luke began his Gospel with stories about individuals upon whom the Spirit descended. He described Zechariah, Mary, Simeon, and Anna as full of the Spirit and, consequently, instruments of

God's plan to save His people. Acts begins in a similar way: at Pentecost the Holy Spirit engulfed the Apostles, who become the vehicles through which the good news of Jesus was proclaimed...

*Acts 1:8*

**17**

**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 even to the remotest part of the earth."

**18**

2) The piety of Jesus and His followers

Piety is defined as a great devotion to God and to worshipping him. All the principal characters of Luke's Gospel, most especially Jesus Himself, demonstrated great personal devotion to God and tremendous personal discipline in their spiritual lives. In the Gospel, Mary and Joseph performed all of Judaism's commandments associated with childbirth and the dedication of a new infant.

*Luke 4:16*

**19**

**16** And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.

In the history of the Book of Acts, the disciples showed the same qualities and characteristics. The first few chapters constantly describe the apostles in the Temple praying. Paul's ministry was punctuated by the same type of spirituality. As we will see in a moment, in the account of the Philippian Jailer, we see Paul and Silas in prison, in chains, and they were singing praises to God.

Here then is the last of the thoughts that we want to look at from Luke that are repeated, or maybe better said, expanded upon, in Acts. In his writings Luke expresses...

**20**

3) A concern for outcasts and sinners

So, both in the Gospel which bears his name and in Acts, Luke showed special sympathy towards people who fell outside the traditional Jewish boundaries of acceptability. The shepherds who attended the birth of Christ would not have been admitted to the Temple or synagogue for worship because keeping sheep made them "unclean." Yet, the Spirit led Luke to record the angels' invitation to these men to gather around the manger. Remember...

*1 Tim 1:15*

**21**

**15** It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

In Acts, Luke fully developed the theme which he began in his Gospel. Note; The Ethiopian eunuch (**8:26-40**), Cornelius (**ch. 10**), and in...

*Acts 16:25-27*

**22**

**25** But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; **26** and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. **27** When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.

All of these represent people rejected by the Jews but were accepted and redeemed by Christ. We have that same opportunity to be accepted and redeemed by Jesus if we will but choose to accept Him through faithful obedience. So, can the God that created all of this and holds it in place, can that God help us develop a game plan so that we can succeed in obtaining His reward?