



Acts

“The Acts of the Apostles”

Acts....A Precious Book

In one sense, Acts is the most important book in the New Testament.

The simple truth...if we did not possess Acts, we would have no information whatever about the early Church (apart from what we could deduce from the letters of Paul).

We usually speak of the Acts of the Apostles. But the book neither gives nor claims to give an exhaustive account of the Acts of the Apostles.

Apart from Paul, only 3 apostles are mentioned in it.

- * *James, the brother of John, was executed by Herod (Acts 12:2)*
- * *John appears in the narrative, but never speaks*
- * *Peter, one of the main characters.*

In the Greek, there is no “The” before Acts; the correct title is “Acts of Apostolic Men.”

What Acts aims to do is to give us a series of typical exploits of the heroic figures of the early Church.

The Writer of the Book

Luke has been held to be the writer...although the book never says so.

*Only 3 references of Luke in the New Testament...Colossians 4:14;
Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11*

From the scriptures, we know 2 things about Luke:

- 1. Luke was a doctor*
- 2. Luke was one of Paul's most valued helpers and most loyal friends...he was a companion of Paul in his last imprisonment.*

.....We can deduce the fact that he was a Gentile (Colossians 4:11-14).

Luke was the only Gentile author in the New Testament.

The Recipient of the Book—

Luke wrote both his gospel and Acts to a man called Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1)

Theophilus....Only guess who he was

- “Most excellent Theophilus”... (Luke 1:3...really means “your excellency”). Indicates a man high up in the service of the Roman government.*

3 Possibilities....

- 1. Theophilus is not a real name at all. In those days it might well be dangerous to be a Christian. Theophilus comes from two Greek words, Theos which means God...and philein which means to love. It may be that Luke wrote to a lover of God...whose real name he did not mention for safety's sake.*
- 2. A high government official...if Theophilus was a real person. Maybe Luke wrote to show him that Christianity was a lovely thing and that Christians were good people. And, in writing to him, was attempting to persuade a government official not to persecute the Christians.*
- 3. A great thought....and story. Since Luke was a doctor and that doctors were often slaves in the ancient days...it has been conjectured that Luke was a doctor of Theophilus, that Theophilus had been gravely ill, and by Luke's skill and devotion, Theophilus was brought back to health. In*

gratitude, Theophilus gave Luke his freedom. Luke, wishing to show how grateful he was for this gift of freedom, wrote about the greatest gift that he had experienced, that of the story and saving knowledge of Jesus, sending this precious gift to Theophilus, his benefactor.

The tie to the two....The story of Jesus...and the work of the promised Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers...the early Church.

Luke truly was doing as Jesus told the Apostles and disciples to do....spreading the good news of the gospel of Jesus to all the world.

Luke's Aim in Writing Acts...

- ***To Commend Christianity to the Roman Government***
Sergius Paulus, the Governor of Cyprus, becomes a Christian (Acts 13:12)
Gallio is impartial in Corinth (Acts 18:12)
The magistrates at Philippi discover their mistake and apologize to Paul (Acts 16:35)
The Asiarchs in Ephesus are shown to be concerned that no harm should come to Paul (Acts 19:31)
Luke takes pains to show that the Christians were good and loyal citizens...Acts 18:14; 19:37; 23:29; 25:25.
- ***To Show that Christianity was for All Men of Every Country***
It was very hard for the Jews to grasp...and understand. They believed they were God's chosen people...and God had no use for any other nation. It should be noted: The Jews were and are "the apple of God's eye."
The Abrahamic Covenant was binding and everlasting...unconditional. However, Luke proves that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...that whosoever believes in Him (Jesus) shall not perish...but have everlasting life." This, of course, opens up Christianity to the Gentile world... to "whosoever."

Luke shows:

- *Philip preached to Samaritans*
- *Stephen making Christianity universal and being killed for it*
- *Peter accepting Cornelius into the Church*
- *Christians preaching to the Gentiles at Antioch*
- *Paul traveling far and wide winning men of all kinds for Christ*

- *The Church making the great decision to accept the Gentiles on equal terms with the Jews (Acts 15).*
- *To Show the Expansion of Christianity Comes When We Are Empowered by the Holy Spirit....Doing What Jesus Told Us to Do.*
To show that Christianity which began in a little corner of Palestine had in not much more than thirty years reached Rome

Acts falls into 6 Panels....each ending with a Progress Report

- *Acts 1:1-6: 7; tells of the Church at Jerusalem and the preaching of Peter...finishing with the summary, “the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem; and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.”*
- *Acts 6:8-9: 31; describes the spread of Christianity through Palestine and the martyrdom of Stephen, followed by the preaching in Samaria....ending with the summary, “So the Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied.”*
- *Acts 9:32---12:24; includes the conversion of Paul, the extension of the Church to Antioch, and the reception of Cornelius, the Gentile, into the Church by Peter.....summarizing at the end “The word of God grew and multiplied.”*
- *Acts 12:25---16:5; tells of the extension of the Church through Asia Minor and the preaching tour of Galatia. It ends “So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.”*
- *Acts 16:6—19:20; relates the extension of the Church to Europe and the work of Paul in great Gentile cities like Corinth and Ephesus. Its summary, “So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily.”*
- *Acts 19:21—28:31; this tells of the arrival of Paul in Rome and his imprisonment there. It ends with the picture of Paul “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered.”*

We in America have even more opportunities than Paul and the Apostles....We can preach and teach about the Lord Jesus Christ openly and unhindered...

Do we take advantage of the opportunity while we have it?

Luke's Sources.....

1. The first 15 chapters...Luke had no personal knowledge.

He got his source of information for these chapters through:

- ***Records of Local Churches (Church at Jerusalem, chapters 1-5 and 15 and 16)...(Church at Caesarea, 8:26-40 and 9:31—10:48)....(Church at Antioch, 11:19-30 and 12:25—14:28)***
- ***Cycle of Stories which were the Acts of Peter, the Acts of John, the Acts of Philip and the Acts of Stephen.***
- ***The Holy Spirit Acting in His Life...Relying on the Holy Spirit to give him the truth.***

2. Personal knowledge of Most of Chapters 16-28....

Luke wrote in 1st person plural on many occasions...Instead of “they” he changed to “we” indicating that he was present (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-16; 21:1-18; 27:1-28)...probably keeping a travel diary, he kept an eye-witness account.

Luke was a great historian, a reputable and dependable writer...what he said, and when he said...people listened.

And...Praise God, there are those of us who still do today.