

Acts of the Apostles

Week 1- Introduction

Unity with the Gospel of Luke

- Luke 1:1-4 - 1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. 3 With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.¹
- Acts 1:1-5 (NIV) - In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Purpose of the Book

- Luke is writing sacred history.
 - o He is not telling us the bare facts.
 - o He writes to encourage the belief of people who are already believers or near to faith.
 - o Luke writes in the style of the Greek Old Testament (LXX) indicating that one of his main purposes was to tell of how the church "embodies the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and the hopes of Israel."²
- Luke writes to encourage the church to continue the mission inaugurated by Jesus and picked up by the disciples of taking the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth 1:7-8.
 - o Luke tells the story in such a way that the task of spreading the good news before Christ returns remains unfinished leaving the reader to pick up the mantle from Peter, Paul, and the rest of the apostles.
 - o Paul's aim in Acts 20:24 is to be the church's aim, "I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."

Authorship and Date of Composition

- The author of Luke/Acts does not identify himself.

- Tradition holds that the author was Luke, the physician and friend of Paul (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11).
- There are sections of Acts where the narrator shifts to first person plural – a strong indication that the author was with Paul in those parts of the story (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16)
- This allows us to illuminate any people mentioned by name as the author.³
- Church history attests to Luke as the author as early as the second century by Irenaeus.
- Acts was written sometime after Festus was appointed as procurator (AD 59/60) and sometime before the work is cited by others in the second century.

Major Themes

- **The Holy Spirit** – The book could be titled *Acts of the Holy Spirit*. God, through Spirit, is the primary actor in the book. The Spirit transformed the disciples from a fearful group in hiding into a missionary force that transforms the world. The Spirit empowered the apostles to perform miracles. The Spirit sustained the disciples during hours of trial.
- **Continuity with the Old Testament** – Luke contains a series of sermons or defenses from Peter, Stephen, and Paul. In each of these sermons, believers explain how Jesus, and not the Spirit, fulfill the promises made in the Old Testament.
- **The inclusion of the Gentiles** – Acts records the process by which the early church came to include Gentiles in the community of faith starting with the conversion of Cornelius by Peter and growing exponentially through Paul.
- **The Church** – The Book of Acts presents the church as the expression of God's new creation at work in the world. The church is marked by prayer, fellowship, baptism, the breaking of bread, and the sharing of possessions. The church also learns to navigate disagreements, trials, and the need for developing systems for meeting the ever-growing needs of its congregants.
- **The role of suffering in the life of the believer** – The early followers of Jesus suffered for their faith. They were often persecuted by religious and civil authorities and faced financial hardships. Sometimes they were martyred, but the work of the gospel continued.

Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1-11)
- II. The Early Church in Jerusalem (1:12-8:3)
- III. The Gospel spreads to Samaria (8:4-25)
- IV. The Conversion of Saul (9:1-31)
- V. The Gospel Spreads to the Gentiles (9:32-15:41)
- VI. Paul's Missionary Journeys (15:42-28:31)
- VII. Conclusion (28:30-31)

¹ All quotations are from [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011) unless otherwise noted.

² David E. Garland, *Acts*, Teaching the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids MI: BakerBooks, 2017), 5.

³ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 46.