

A Journey Through Acts – Acts 1:1-2a

Acts 1:1. We're starting a new series in a new book this weekend, under a new theme.

Compelled – A Journey Through Acts. The graphics for which convey so much.

Can't say enough about our Worship Arts ministry and graphic design staff. *Compelled*.

I chose that theme, b/c every time I read the book of Acts it jumps off the page at me.

The *apostles* were compelled, the *disciples* were compelled, the *church* was compelled; even *unbelievers* were compelled. Everybody it seems, was compelled.

Compelled to believe, compelled to witness, compelled to pray, compelled to preach,

compelled to share, compelled to serve, compelled to go, compelled to stay . . .

Compelled to worship, compelled to follow, and compelled to resist.

Every time you turn a page in this book, it seems somebody is *compelled*. So driven to do something or say something, that wild horses couldn't keep them from it.

And it wasn't b/c they were *passionate* people who whipped themselves into a fury.

They were *humble* people influenced by the Spirit. Captured by his greatness.

Overwhelmed by his presence. Gripped by his message.

IOW they were compelled to do the things they did, b/c of the Holy Spirit within them, the needs of those around them, and the message God had given them.

That's the book of Acts. Ordinary people, who did extraordinary things, b/c they were compelled.

And *my* hope, *my* prayer, is that *we* will be as well.

As much as some of you are, I pray that you will be compelled all the *more* by this study. And that others of you will start – you'll *start* to be compelled.

I pray that the Holy Spirit of God will grip you like he did those in Acts, and you too will pray; you too will share; you too will go; you too will serve. So that together . . . *We're* compelled. For the glory of God and the good of this world. Compelled.

That's the goal, and that's the message.

➤ So let's get started. Acts 1:1 – *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up.* (1-2a)

Let's stop there. That begs 2 questions, and leads to one conclusion. Namely, that the book of Acts was written by a guy named Luke. That's the conclusion.

It was written by Luke.

The same Luke who wrote the 3rd *gospel* in our Bibles.

And I want to show you how and why we know that, b/c it increases our *confidence* in the Bible by pointing out its unity and cohesion . . .

And demonstrates that the Bible is *accessible*. You don't have to be a scholar or *pastor* to see these things. You can figure them out yourself.

The Bible is *unified*, and the Bible is *accessible*. That's what I hope to show you with his authorship.

➤ Back to the verse. The very first phrase – *In the first book, O Theophilus* – begs 2 questions: (1) What's the *first book*? And (2) Who's *Theophilus*?

The answer to which on the 2nd, is nobody really knows. We don't know much about *Theophilus*. But his name *does* give us insight into the *first* question. The *first book*.

B/c he's *also* cited at the beginning of *The Gospel According to Luke*.

And I'd like for you to turn there. Luke 1:1-4. But keep your finger in Acts.

[1] *Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, [2] just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, [3] it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, [4] that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.* (Lk 1:1-4)

B/c Theophilus is a *Greek* name, and b/c he's addressed as *most excellent*, it seems likely that he was a respected member of Roman society . . .

Who had recently come to Christ and needed more information. A better grounding. That we *do* know.

➤ But that's not nearly as important as the link his name provides *between* the two books. Indicating that they're addressed to the same *person*. Theophilus.

And, they're linked by description. With the *first book* described in *Acts*, as an account of Christ's life. *All that Jesus began to do and teach* . . .

Until the day when he was taken up. Acts 1:1. That's *The Gospel According to Luke*. It's an account of Christ's life.

So they're linked by *description*, and linked by a common *recipient*. Leading us to believe that they were written by the same author.

Those are the first 2 reasons for this conclusion.

Which makes Acts a sequel. It was written by Luke **as a sequel**.

Not even Star Wars is that good.

➤ Now, there's only one problem with all that. Nowhere in these books, is Luke named or *claimed* as the author. Neither one.

The title of the *gospel* at the top of your page, that it's *The Gospel According to Luke*, was added later.

But you need to know that it was added, for good reason. Namely, **early sources say so**.

In fact, *both* of these books are attributed to Luke by the earliest sources we have. Like the bishop Irenaeus in the late 2nd century.

And no one from that time says anything different.

So Acts was written by Luke b/c of the description linking it with his gospel, the common recipient, and the testimony of early sources.

➤ And then there's the fact that Acts had to be written by a *traveling* companion of Paul. B/c later in the book, the author uses the pronoun "we" when talking about being in certain places at certain times. Like Acts 16:10.

When Paul had seen the vision [it says], *immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

First-person pronouns, indicating that the author was *with* Paul.

And on 3 different *occasions* in Paul's New Testament writings, 3, he mentions *Luke* as one of his companions (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Ph 24). So **he fits the narrative**.

Yet another reason we're confident he was the author. Luke fits the narrative.

Not to mention the fact that he was a doctor, Col 4:14, and Acts contains some pretty detailed descriptions of medical conditions (Acts 28). That too fits.

All of which is important, b/c it increases our confidence that the Bible is God's Word, by virtue of the fact that it fits together. It coheres. It's a *unified whole*.

And, the process of *determining* Luke's authorship, shows that the Bible is *accessible*.

You don't have to be a scholar or pastor. You can see these things for yourself.

You can find the Scriptures and connect the dots yourself.

➤ So it was written by Luke, as a sequel to his gospel – sometime **around 62AD**.

We can't be absolute about this, but it seems likely given the fact that he *ends* the book pretty abruptly, and doesn't include some very significant events that *followed*.

Like Paul's *release* from house arrest in Rome, where he is when the book ends.

And his ministry in Macedonia and Nicopolis *after* his release.

And then his *re-arrest* in Rome, and the massive fire there in July of 64 that Nero *blamed* on the Christians.

And his subsequent *martyrdom* at the *hands* of Nero sometime shortly after that.

It's an argument from silence, but those are some pretty significant events to leave out, if you're writing *after* they happened.

Leading me to believe that Luke put pen to paper before. Around 62AD.

Which is important, b/c it means he wrote the book about as close to the events as you can get. Lending even *more* credence to his accuracy and truthfulness . . .

Beyond the fact that he was careful, and wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

➤ And then last here, is the *time period* he covered. Which is basically *30 years*! Luke wrote Acts **covering 30-60AD**. The ascension of Jesus to the imprisonment of Paul. In only 28 chapters. No wonder it's so action packed.

And the geographic area is *equally* impressive (**ESV Study Bible, Map 15**).

From Jerusalem in the east and Syria in the north, to Rome in the West and dozens of towns in between. Some of them reached by land, others by sea, and some by both.

It's a *huge* area that Luke covers, over a long period of time. (**Summary**)

All of which makes Acts an amazing book, written by a gifted man. Deserving our utmost attention and study just on *that* basis.

Let alone the fact that it was inspired by God, as part of his revelation.

2nd . . .

It's about the church.

It was written by Luke and it's about the church. IOW it deserves our attention and study b/c it's about *us*. The very thing we have right here.

Back to Acts 1:1 – *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up.*

Implying, that the 2nd book, this one, is all about what happened *after* he ascended.

After he was taken up into the clouds.

And sure enough, it is. Starting with the *formation* of the church, the *growth* of the church, and the *spread* of the church.

Acts is about how the church started, grew, and spread – in key places, via key events, involving key people.

Let's see if we can break that down. 6 parts.

1. It started when the Holy Spirit moved.

Acts is about the church, that started when the Holy Spirit *made* it start. Referred to as Pentecost. B/c that was the name of the festival as we'll see in a few weeks . . .

During which the Holy Spirit moved. 50 days after Jesus resurrection, and just 10 days after his ascension.

2. It grew as the apostles preached.

There are no less than 32 sermons in Acts, starting with Peter's and ending with Paul's.

All of which God used, to add to the church's number – 3000 at Pentecost alone, and another 5000 a little later. Not to mention those who believed and repented . . .

Over the course of the next 3 *decades*. Acts is about the church that *grew*, as the apostles preached.

3. It spread as the believers shared.

Like those who were *scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria* in Acts 8 (v1), and *went about preaching the word* it says (Acts 8:4).

Witnessing. Sharing what they knew. Especially the Gospel, the good news of Jesus.

When they scattered, they spoke. They *talked* about their faith. And the church spread.

4th, Acts is about the church that started, grew, and spread . . .

4. In key places.

Like Jerusalem. And Damascus. Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome.

And those are just the *main* places. The cities from which Paul *based* his journeys, and *stayed* on occasion.

5th, it spread in key places . . .

5. Via key events.

Amazing events. Like Pentecost that I mentioned earlier. And the death of Ananias and Sapphira. *Stephen's* speech and stoning.

Not to mention the conversion of Paul, first contact with the Gentiles, the Jerusalem Council, multiple escapes from prison, 3 missionary journeys, and the list goes on.

All key events that God used to start, grow, and spread the church.

If you're worried about being bored the next year or two, don't. This book rocks.

And then 6th, Acts is about the church . . .

6. Involving key people.

Real people. Just like us. Seriously. People like Peter and John – 2 apostles. And deacons, like Stephen and Philip. Converts like Lydia (Acts 16). Couples like Priscilla/Aquila.

And of course the one who dominates *most* of the book, Paul. (**Summary**)

Real people, key people, who love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength – just like us.

That's what Acts is about. How the church started, grew, and spread – in key places, via key events, involving key people.

And I hope that whets your appetite, and increases your anticipation for what's to come.

B/c we're going to see a lot of those things.

And I hope this *last* point prepares your heart to receive it all, and apply it. That . . .

It's for us.

It was written by Luke, it's about the church, and it's *for* us.

That's the last principle I want you to understand as we start this study.

Acts was written for *us*.

First of all . . .

1. To know our history and be inspired ourselves.

Acts is *history* if you haven't picked up on that. *A narrative of the things that have been accomplished* as it says in Luke 1. Written, that we would *know* it.

And *have certainty concerning the things* [we've] *been taught*. (Lk 1:4)

Just like we study *American* history in order to be certain of what's been handed down to us, we study *church* history to ensure the same.

But it's not just history for the sake of knowledge, it's history for the sake of *inspiration*.

When I read of ordinary men and women who did extraordinary things in times past, I get inspired. Especially if I *benefit* from their efforts.

Think Abraham Lincoln – an ordinary man who took an extraordinary stand, from which we benefit. It's inspiring. And Martin Luther King Jr. the same.

I'm inspired by people like that. I want to be like them.

Or how about all the heroes of our *faith*. From Moses and Joshua to Joan of Arc and Jim Elliot. With Hudson Taylor, Charles Spurgeon, and Lottie Moon in between.

Ordinary men and women, who did extraordinary things for God.

And one of the reasons we read about them, and study their history, is to be inspired *ourselves*. To attempt great things *ourselves*. To do the right thing *ourselves*.

And the book of Acts is no different. As the history of the church, our history, it's filled with people and events to inform and inspire us.

2nd, Acts is for us . . .

2. To appreciate the efforts of those who started things.

A care-less attitude toward those who have gone before, is a sure sign of pride and self-centeredness. Thinking they don't matter, or you know better . . .

Or now is more important anyway. "Who cares?" It's prideful self-centeredness.

Something we're *all* guilty of to *some* extent. Rarely do we fully appreciate the past. And even less so those who were a part of it. Those who *started* the things we enjoy.

It's true of the church, our country, the companies we work for, the heritage of our families, you name it. Far too often we fail to appreciate those who have gone before.

It's just me, myself, and I; in the here, the now, and the present.

And Acts is written to offset that. And prevent that.

So that we would not only *know* our history, the history of the church, but appreciate those who started it. And those who expended great effort to perpetuate it.

Don't miss that. Care more.

3rd, it's for us . . .

3. To marvel at the Spirit and yield to his leading.

The Holy Spirit is all *over* this book.

So entwined and behind it, that a more apt title might be *The Acts of the Holy Spirit* instead of *The Acts of the Apostles*.

He fell on individuals, he gripped entire families, he worked miracles, authenticated the gospel, influenced situations, and overwhelmed crowds.

All of which should leave us in awe. Marveling at him.

Just as Jesus is the author and perfecter of our *faith*, the Holy Spirit is the author and perfecter of the *church*. Including *our* church.

And this book, the book of Acts, is meant to increase our wonder and reverence for him, so that we yield all the more to his leading, all the more quickly.

And then 4th, Acts for us, in order . . .

4. To further the work in our day.

That we would pick up the torch in *our* day, to spread the gospel just like *they* did. And plant *churches* like they did. And strengthen those that already exist, like they did.

Acts isn't just history for history's sake, but history for the sake of *action*.

To live, give, love, and disciple – just like the *first* believers. (**Summary**)

Building up the saints, strengthening marriages, supporting families, influencing our culture, and furthering the work of ministry in *our* day, just like they did in theirs.

It's *about* us, and it's *for* us – that we might be *compelled*.

Pray – Lord, would you stir our hearts, even now, for greater love and good deeds? Would you prepare us to receive your word in the weeks and months ahead, like never before?

We want the zeal of the apostles and the power of your Spirit, more and more.

We trust you for that, and give now of our tithes and offerings. That you might be glorified in us, and through us.