

Acts: Seeing the Spirit at Work
Sunday Morning Bible Study
Introduction and Overview

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

AUTHORSHIP

- The text does not name its author, but we can tell:
 - Proficient in literary Greek
 - Well acquainted with Hellenistic historical conventions
 - Deeply influenced by the Old Testament scriptures in Greek (LXX)
 - Also composed the third Gospel and addressed it to the same recipient
- The author implies his presence with Paul using “we” pronouns instead of “they”
 - On Paul’s second journey from Troas to Macedonia (16:10-40)
 - On Paul’s third journey from Macedonia to Jerusalem (20:5-15; 21:1-18)
 - On Paul’s voyage to Rome (27:1-28:16)
- The early church concluded that Luke was the author
 - Luke, the physician, who was with him in Rome (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24)
 - Paul’s greetings in Colossians 4 place Luke in the category of a Gentile, which indicates why Luke was so interested in the Gospel’s spread to Gentiles
 - *Muratorian Canon*, a list of New Testament books recognized by the church at Rome in the mid-second century, attributes the Third Gospel and Acts to Luke.
 - Eusebius and Jerome concurred.

DATE OF WRITING

- Acts is Luke’s second volume, and the Gospel of Luke is dated not earlier than between 65-70
- Must be after Paul’s death around AD 65
- Most likely written between AD 70-85

RECIPIENTS

- Also called the “audience” – who Luke wrote to/for
- Luke addresses Acts to Theophilus.
 - “most excellent” title probably indicates high class
 - Perhaps he had a governmental office
 - Theophilus needed the reassurance that a carefully researched, orderly account of Jesus’ deeds and words would provide
 - He also needed reassurance that he had not become involved in a movement devoted to disrupting the peace and order of Roman society.
- Scholars have long debated the identity of Theophilus
 - Some posit that the name refers not to a person but to the general Christian.
 - Some think Theophilus funded the writing of Luke and Acts
 - Some think he was an official at the imperial court who could influence the outcome of Paul’s hearing before Caesar

PURPOSE

- To provide a carefully researched, orderly narrative of “the things that have been accomplished,” which refers to the fulfillment of prophesy in the arrival of God’s messiah, Jesus.
- Luke carries the record beyond resurrection (where the Gospels stop) to the early decades of the church’s mission after Jesus ascended to heaven.
- Acts is “theological history”
 - He accurately records events of early Christian history.
 - The scenes that he describes and the angles from which he views them are carefully selected to achieve his theological and pastoral objectives.

STRUCTURE

- Acts traces the expansion of the kingdom of God through the growth of the Word both geographically and demographically.
- The overarching structure is geographic, following the contours of Jesus’ promise and commission (Acts 1:8).
 - Jerusalem: Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost to Stephen’s speech and martyrdom (chapters 1-7)
 - All Judea and Samaria: The church is dispersed throughout Judea and Samaria and even reaches Damascus and Antioch in Syria (chapters 8-12)
 - To the ends of the earth: Paul is sent from the church at Antioch to take the Gospel to the Jewish Dispersion (diaspora) and to Gentiles, beginning with Cyprus and Asia minor, including Macedonia and Greece, and finally to Rome (chapters 13-28). Of course, Paul wanted to make it to Spain eventually, but did not.