

## Introduction to Acts

1. What do you already know about the book of Acts?
2. Who wrote Acts?
3. Why is it called Acts?
4. When was Acts written?
5. Why was Acts written?
6. What genre is Acts?
7. Theological themes in Acts
8. An overview of our journey through Acts

## What do you already know about the book of Acts?

1. Open discussion - use whiteboard
  - a. Second longest book in the NT (29 ¼ pages), behind Luke (31 pages), and before Matthew (29 pages)
2. Remember the brief discussion about presuppositions last week?

## Who wrote Acts?

1. Internal evidence
  - a. The author:
    - i. Was well-educated (the Greek of Luke and Acts, and especially **Luke 1:1-4** is good, literary Greek) [SLIDE]
    - ii. Was not an original (eyewitness) apostle or disciple of Christ (**Luke 1:2**)
      1. Is this a problem?
    - iii. Almost goes without saying, but was a Christian (“us” in **Luke 1:1, 2**)
    - iv. May have been a participant in some of what he narrates, especially in volume two (**Luke 1:1**)
    - v. Familiar with (uses, quotes) the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament
    - vi. Has an excellent knowledge of political and social conditions in the mid-first century (Graeco-Roman world)
    - vii. Thinks highly of the apostle Paul
  - b. The “we” passages in Acts [SLIDE]
    - i. **16:8-17** (with Paul from Troas to Philippi, and for at least a little while in Philippi)
    - ii. **20:5-15** (joined Paul again in Philippi, accompanied him to Miletus)
    - iii. **21:1-18** (with Paul from Miletus to Jerusalem)
    - iv. **27:1-28:16** (with Paul on the voyage to Rome)

- v. There are others named in these passages, and since the author is using the first-person plural we wouldn't expect him to name himself in these passages - that would be weird.
- vi. The author went with Paul to Rome, and probably stayed with him in Rome during the two years Paul was under house arrest. If so, it's possible that Paul mentioned his name in the epistles that were written from Rome by Paul: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and probably Philippians.
  - 1. Mark, Jesus Justus, Epaphras, Demas, **Luke**, Tychicus, Timothy, Aristarchus, and Epaphroditus.
  - 2. Not bulletproof, but it is not out of the question either.
- vii. What was Luke doing when he (apparently) wasn't with Paul?
  - 1. Working on writing Luke-Acts?
    - a. Gathering additional evidence/information (**Luke 1:3**)
    - b. Especially during the two years that Paul was under arrest in Caesarea, between **Acts 21** and **Acts 27**.
  - 2. Being a doctor?
    - a. **Colossians 4:14**, "Luke, the beloved physician"
  - 3. Sent on missions by Paul?

## 2. External evidence

- a. Early church tradition and church fathers said that Luke was the author - the Muratorian Canon (A.D. 190), Ireneus, the anti-Marcionite prologue (end of second century), Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Eusebius
- b. Unchallenged until the rise of critical (skeptical) NT scholarship in the late 18th century
  - i. Critics question the value of the testimony of the early church
    - 1. But why would the early church have named a non-apostle as an author? Naming an apostle would have been far easier to accept.
  - ii. Critics question the "we" passages with various contrived theories, but they are weak.
    - 1. For example, Luke was quoting someone else who was really with Paul, and forgot to change the "we" to "them."
  - iii. Critics say that the Paul of Acts is too different from the Paul of the Epistles, for various historical and theological reasons. Keep in mind these critics also think that Paul did not write the pastoral epistles or Ephesians, for example.
    - 1. In response: "The great distance between the Paul of Acts and the Paul of the Epistles that so many find is, in reality, a distance between a caricature of the supposedly authentic Paul and a one-sided interpretation of the Paul of Acts. To be sure, some distance between the two remains, but no more than we might find

between one's self-portrait and a portrait drawn by a sympathetic friend for a specific purpose." Carson, 190

- iv. Several thoughts on critical (skeptical) scholars
  1. "There are a number of reasons, however, why we should be sceptical of this scepticism." Stott, 22
  2. They question everything about Scripture, and come up with elaborate theories and workarounds. In my opinion this is far different than, say, what happened during the Protestant Reformation.
  3. They tend to remove the Holy Spirit from the authoring of the New Testament. To be fair, there are many "conservatives" who tend to remove the human authors and their quirks from the New Testament.
  4. Why would they do these things?
    - a. To make a name for themselves, in my opinion. Publishing a scholarly paper means that others will almost certainly cite it, and work to refute it or agree with it.
3. So was Luke a Gentile or a Jew?
  - a. **Colossians 4:10-14** seems to make it clear he's not a Jew [SLIDE]
  - b. The earliest tradition says he's from Antioch in Syria
4. Why does this matter?
  - a. For one thing, not only is Christianity for the whole world, both Jews and Gentiles, but God saw fit to allow a Gentile to write a fairly large part of the New Testament.
  - b. For another, knowing who wrote something can help us better understand what their purpose was in writing it.

### Why is it called Acts?

1. Survey of Bibles in the room - what do they call Acts?
2. Who is doing the acting?
3. Title suggestions in early church history
  - a. "The Memorandum of Luke" (Tertullian)
  - b. "The Acts of All the Apostles" (Muratorian Canon)
  - c. "The Acts of the Apostles" (Ireneus, and the anti-Marcionite prologue to Luke)
    - i. This is the name that stuck, more or less
  - d. Luke's preferences?
    - i. Maybe not too excited about it being separated from his gospel?
    - ii. "The Acts of the Holy Spirit"

- iii. "What Jesus Continued to Do and Teach" (see **Acts 1:1**)

### When was Acts written?

1. Three possibilities according to most scholars:
  - a. 62-70
  - b. 80-95
  - c. 115-130
2. 62-70 is probably the best choice for these reasons:
  - a. Luke doesn't mention Paul's letters
  - b. Luke portrays Judaism as a legal religion in the Roman empire, which would have changed after the Jewish rebellion against Rome in 66
  - c. Luke omits any reference to the persecution of Christians under Nero, which seems unlikely had he known about it
  - d. The details of the voyage and shipwreck are vivid, implying that they were a recent experience
3. Why does Acts seem to end so abruptly, leaving us with many questions?
  - a. One possibility: Luke wanted to show how Christianity spread from Jerusalem, throughout the known world, and finally to the center of the Roman empire - Rome itself.

### Why was Acts written?

1. Remember, Acts is volume two of a two-volume work, and the prologue of Luke carries through to Acts.
  - a. Let's look again at **Luke 1:1-4** [SLIDE]
  - b. Specifically in **Luke 1: 4** - "that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."
  - c. For Theophilus, and Luke's broader audience of all Christians, Luke wanted to edify them (build up their faith) by telling "how God's plan, coming to fulfillment in Jesus, had continued to unfold in the history of the early church," showing the "careful linking of the apostolic proclamation of the Word of God with the word that Jesus both taught and fulfilled." Carson, 210
    - i. There are people who think that the early church, and/or the apostles, and especially the apostle Paul, ruined what Jesus had started. Luke would not accept that line of reasoning.
2. Beyond the continuity of the message of salvation from Jesus to the apostles, there are new implications of that message of salvation that unfold through the book of Acts.
  - a. The church eventually moves away from a Jerusalem-centered Jewish orientation to a more universal orientation.

- b. The law no longer plays a central role in how God relates to people.
- c. Gentiles share equally with the Jews in the blessings of God, and being God's people.

### What genre is Acts?

1. Why does identifying the genre of a book of the Bible matter?
2. "The word 'Acts' (πράξεις) denoted a recognized genre, or subgenre, in the ancient world, characterizing books that described the great deeds of people or of cities."  
Carson, Moo, Morris
3. Most scholars agree that the genre category is "history," or "ancient history."
4. More than just history though, Acts is "theological history." Luke is both a theologian and an historian - they cannot be separated from each other.

### Theological themes in Acts

1. Salvation - of people, by God. Surely **the** overarching theme in Acts.
2. The sovereignty of God
3. The providence of God
4. The importance of prayer
5. And many others...

### An overview of our journey through Acts

1. We'll cover three decades of early church history.
2. We'll visit Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Syria, Cyprus, many cities in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), Macedonia, Greece, and Rome.
3. We'll hear stories of daily life, the Roman Empire, preaching, miracles, new churches, Holy Spirit-powered jailbreaks, and shipwrecks.
4. We'll meet many people, though the focus is on two: Peter (**Acts 1-12**) and Paul (**Acts 13-28**).
5. We'll follow the spread of Christianity from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to the rest of the world.
6. We'll see how the timeline of Acts ties in with the rest of the New Testament.
7. And much more...

### Resources

1. *An Introduction to the New Testament*, D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris
2. *The Message of Acts*, John Stott
3. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Testament](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Testament)
4. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic\\_Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_Judaism)
5. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical\\_criticism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_criticism)