



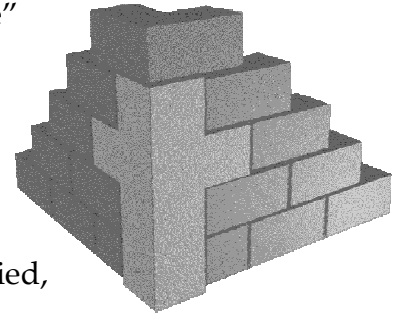
### PREAMBLE

The success of any Bible study is entirely dependent upon three entities: you, your teacher and Holy Spirit. He therefore exhorts you to study—do your homework; encourage your teacher by prayer and active participation; most importantly, continually pray to Father God for Holy Spirit to guide us as we learn what He taught Luke 1900+ years ago.

### WHY BIBLE STUDY

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As workers for the Cornerstone (Acts 4:11; Psalm 118:22), you are working on the foundation laid by the “Christ Jesus Himself as the chief Cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20; Acts 4:11). As you live your daily lives, you are building on a foundation already laid. Consider yourself blessed to do so. Nothing brings you closer to God than doing the “good works which God prepared in advance for you to do” (Ephesians 2:10). It is God who planned good works for you to do. So listen, and pray; pray, and listen. He will be glorified, and you “will know Him better” (Ephesians 1:17).



So, treasure this time—if you talk to God, and listen to God faithfully while you’re alive, you will never be the same! Nothing changes a person more than “sharing your faith ... because you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ” (Philemon 6). Acts is all about what happens when you “share your faith...”

### WHY STUDY ACTS

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Acts is the second volume of a two-volume set written by one Luke, labeled a physician and as one of his fellow missionaries by Paul. Luke provided a history of the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to the remainder of the known world. While his initial audience was Theophilus, it appears Luke wrote to provide not only a description of how Christianity came to be, but to explain it to primarily a Gentile audience. It was this audience who would eventually determine the earthly fate of Paul. As noted below, Acts may be viewed as an amicus brief designed to show that Christianity was a legitimately acceptable religion to Rome because it was a natural fulfillment of Judaism, a currently accepted religion in the Empire.

Before His first ascension (Luke 24:50), the Eleven were advised to stay in Jerusalem until what Father God had promised to come did in fact come forth. “Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Acts 1-5 is the first act of a multiple act, an eternal play which ends when the Christ returns to meet His bride. Chapters 1



through 5 set the stage—the prequels are over, the trailers have been viewed, and the blockbuster begins ... God is among us, forever.

## AUTHOR, DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING<sup>1</sup>

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Although the author does not name himself, evidence outside the Scriptures and inferences from the book itself lead to the conclusion that the author was Luke.

The earliest of the external testimonies appears in the Muratorian Canon (around 170AD), where the explicit statement is made that Luke was the author of both the third Gospel and the "Acts of All the Apostles." Eusebius (c. 325) lists information from numerous sources to identify the author of these books as Luke (*Ecclesiastical History*, 3.4).

Within the writing itself are some clues as to who the author was:

*Luke, the companion of Paul.* In the description of the happenings in Acts, certain passages make use of the pronoun "we." At these points the author includes himself as a companion of Paul in his travels (16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16). A historian as careful with details<sup>2</sup> as this author proves to be would have good reason for choosing to use "we" in some places and "they" elsewhere. The author was therefore probably present with Paul at the particular events described in the "we" sections.

These "we" passages include the period of Paul's two-year imprisonment at Rome (ch. 28). During this time Paul wrote, among other letters, Philemon and Colossians. In them he sends greetings from his companions, and Luke is included among them (Phm 23-24; Col 4:10-17). In fact, after eliminating those who, for one reason or another, would not fit the requirements for the author of Acts, Luke is left as the most likely candidate.

*Luke, the physician.* Although it cannot be proved that the author of Acts was a physician simply from his vocabulary, the words he uses and the traits and education reflected in his writings fit well his role as a physician.<sup>3</sup> It is true that the doctor of the first century did not have as specialized a vocabulary as that of doctors today, but there are some language choices in Luke & Acts which suggest a medical person was the author of these books. Paul uses the term "doctor" (2395ⓄⓄⓄⓄⓄⓄⓄ) in describing Luke (Colossians 4:14).

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted, corrected and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV, © 1996.

<sup>2</sup>Consider, for example, the details Luke provides in his gospel about Mary's feelings about the incarnation, and as an author/contributor to the Scriptures (Luke 1:46-55).

<sup>3</sup>For example, the word *πιμπρασθαι* (*pimprasthai*, 4092, to burn with fever, or metaphorically with passion) is used in Acts 28:6. Translated as "swell up," it is the usual medical term for inflammation. *πιμπρασθαι* is used only by Luke in the New Testament.



Date. Two dates are possible for the writing of this book: (1) 63AD, soon after the last event recorded in Acts, or (2) later but before 70AD (the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem).

The earlier date is supported by:

1. *Silence about later events.* While arguments from silence are not conclusive, it is perhaps significant that the book contains no allusion to events that happened after the close of Paul's two-year imprisonment in Rome: e.g., the burning of Rome and the persecution of the Christians there (A.D. 64), the martyrdom of Peter and Paul (possibly 67) and the destruction of Jerusalem (70).
2. *No outcome of Paul's trial.* If Luke knew the outcome of the trial Paul was waiting for (28:30), why did he not record it at the close of Acts? Perhaps it was because he had brought the history up to date.

Those who prefer the later date hold that 1:8 reveals one of the purposes Luke had in writing his history, and that this purpose influenced the way the book ended. Luke wanted to show how the church penetrated the world of his day in ever-widening circles (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth) until it reached Rome, the world's political and cultural center. On this understanding, mention of the martyrdom of Paul (67AD) and of the destruction of Jerusalem (70) was not pertinent. This would allow for the writing of Acts around 70 or even later.

Importance. The book of Acts provides a bridge for the writings of the NT. As a second volume to Luke's Gospel, it joins what Jesus "began to do and to teach" (1:1) as told in the Gospels with what he continued to do and teach through the apostles' preaching and the establishment of the church. Besides linking the Gospel narratives on the one hand and the apostolic letters on the other, it supplies an account of the life of Paul from which we can learn the setting for his letters. Geographically its story spans the lands between Jerusalem, where the church began, and Rome, the political center of the empire. Historically it recounts the first 30 years of the church. It is also a bridge which ties the church in its beginning with each succeeding age. This book may be studied to gain an understanding of the principles that ought to govern the church of any age.

Theme and Purpose. The theme of the work is best summarized in 1:8. It was ordinary procedure for a historian at this time to begin a second volume by summarizing the first volume and indicating the contents anticipated in his second volume. Luke summarized his first volume in 1:1-3; the theme of his second volume is presented in the words



of Jesus: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” This is, in effect, an outline of the book of Acts.

The main purposes of the book appear to be:

1. *To present a history.* The significance of Acts as a historical account of Christian origins cannot be overestimated. It tells of the founding of the church, the spread of the gospel, the beginnings of congregations, and evangelistic efforts in the apostolic pattern. One of the unique aspects of Christianity is its firm historical foundation. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ are established in the four Gospel narratives, and the book of Acts provides a coordinated account of the beginnings of the church.

This historical focus also provides an apologetics foundation stone because archaeological and other historical sources can be confirmed by Luke’s account. This discovery that Luke’s record is indeed an accurate record supports the position that Scripture is inspired.

2. *To give a defense.* The Way (later known as Christianity) was a rogue religion within the Empire. As such, many found reason to suspect Christianity. For example, members of the Way were prone to give exclusive spiritual, if not political, allegiance to this Christ of Judea, not Rome. This was unpatriotic and members of The Way were accordingly accused of being atheists.

Members of The Way were also accused of cannibalism and homosexuality because of their frequent love feasts where they eat the body and drank the blood of their prophet, Yeshua.

Furthermore, an approved religion, Judaism, was particularly critical of The Way for their founder had been alleged to claim he was the King of the Jews, thus showing contempt for the powers instituted by Rome at the time (Herodian kings). Luke and Acts, thus, may be viewed as a legal brief to demonstrate that Christianity was a naturally evolving fulfillment of Judaism. Therefore, it should also be considered an acceptable and legitimate religion among Roman provinces.

Luke probably wrote this work as Paul awaited trial in Rome. If his case came to court, what better court brief could Paul have had than a life of Jesus, a history of the beginnings of the church (including the activity of Paul) and an early collection of Paul’s letters?

One also finds embedded in Acts a record of Christian defenses made to both Jews (e.g., 4:8-12) and Gentiles (e.g., 25:8-11), with the underlying purpose of



conversion. It shows how the early church coped with pagan and Jewish thought, the Roman government and Hellenistic society.

3. *To provide a guide.* Luke had no way of knowing how long the church would continue on this earth, but as long as it pursues its course, the book of Acts will be one of its major guides. In Acts we see basic principles being applied to specific situations in the context of problems and persecutions. These same principles continue to be applicable until Christ returns.
4. *To depict the triumph of Christianity in the face of bitter persecution.* The success of the church in carrying the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome and in planting local churches across the Roman empire demonstrated that Christianity was not a mere work of man. God was in it (see 5:35-41).

#### ATTRIBUTES OF ACTS AS A TEXT

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1. *Accurate historical detail.* Every page of Acts abounds with sharp, precise details, to the delight of the historian. The account covers a period of about 30 years and reaches across the lands from Jerusalem to Rome. Luke's description of these times and places is filled with all kinds of people and cultures, a variety of governmental administrations, court scenes in Caesarea, and dramatic events involving such centers as Antioch, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth and Rome. Barbarian country districts and Jewish centers are included as well. Yet in each instance archaeological findings reveal Luke uses the proper terms for the time and place being described. Hostile criticism has not succeeded in disproving the detailed accuracy of Luke's political and geographical designations.
2. *Literary excellence.* Not only does Luke have a large vocabulary compared to other writers of the New Testament, but he also uses these words in literary styles that fit the cultural settings of the events he is recording. At times he employs good, classical Greek; at other times the Aramaic of first-century Palestine shows through his expressions. Such nuances indicate Luke's careful practice of using language appropriate to the time and place being described. Aramaisms are used when Luke describes events which took place in Palestine (chapters 1-12). When, however, Paul departs for Hellenistic lands beyond the territories where Aramaic-speaking people live, Aramaisms cease.
3. *Dramatic description.* Luke's skillful use of speeches contributes to the drama of his narrative. Not only are they carefully spaced and well balanced between Peter and Paul, but the speeches of a number of other individuals add variety and vividness to the account. Luke's use of details brings the action to life. Nowhere in ancient litera-



ture is there an account of a shipwreck superior to Luke's with its nautical details (see chapter 27). The book moves fast and is vividly written throughout.

4. *Objective account.* Luke's careful arrangement of material need not detract from the accuracy of his record. He demonstrates the objectivity of his account by recording the failures as well as the successes, the bad as well as the good, in the early church. Not only is the discontent between the Grecian Jews and the Hebraic Jews recorded (6:1) but also the discord between Paul and Barnabas (15:39). Divisions and differences are recognized (15:2; 21:20-21), not swept under the carpet.