



Acts - Introduction (Lesson #1)



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This morning I have **12 background items** to discuss, but most of these we will go through pretty quick. These areas include:

- Title
- Author
- Date
- Place of Writing
- Recipients
- Purpose
- Subject
- Messages of the Book of Acts
- Outline
- Timeframe
- Timing of the Start of the Book
- Unique Characteristics

TITLE:

My **ESV Study Bible** calls this book the “**Acts of the Apostles.**” This is the name that this particular book has been **referred to by the church** for many, many years. In fact, this title dates back to the mid-second century (160-180 A.D.). We do not find that name anywhere in the book itself, but again the church has **historically referred to it with this title.**

In all honesty, it is not the Acts of the Apostles, but really the Acts of the Apostles Peter (first) and then Paul (second). The first **12 chapters** focus on the Spirit working through Peter, while the back **16 chapters** focus on the Spirit working through Paul.

But it is more than that, really for it is a book that chronicles the **Acts of the Holy Spirit working through God’s people.** In fact “**spirit**” is used in **64 verses** in the book of Acts and most of those uses are referring to the Holy Spirit.

While the title Holy Spirit (Greek phrase) **ἅγιος (hagios) πνεῦμα (pneuma)** is used in 40 verses. So, this book is really a book that details the **Spirit of God working mightily** in the life of believers for the **good of, and expansion of, the Kingdom of Christ.**

AUTHOR:

The **author never states his name in the book**, unlike what we find in many of the epistles in the New Testament. But, we are **certain that the same person** wrote the book of Acts who also wrote the fourth Gospel. **Let me show you why we believe this:**

FIRST: Here is what the author says in the book about himself:

“1 ¶ In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.” (Ac 1:1-2 ESV)

So this is the second letter that this person has written and it is addressed to a man named Theophilus. This is very helpful; for here is what we read in the introduction to the fourth gospel:

“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.” (Lu 1:1-4 ESV)

SECOND: Greek scholars also tell us that **Luke and Acts were both written by the same person**, a person who had an amazing command of the Greek language.

They are both very eloquent in their grammar and syntax. In fact, scholars would tell us that Luke and Acts are the highest of Greek writing in the entire New Testament.

But more than that, there are about 700 Greek words that occur only in these two writings.

To put this into perspective: The Greek language as found in the text of the **Greek New Testament** consists of over 138,000 words, coming from more than 5,400 different vocabulary words. Keeping in mind that 700 of those 5,400 words are only used in the fourth gospel and Acts.

So, it seems pretty evident that the same person wrote Acts and Luke.

BUT, HOW DO WE KNOW IT WAS THIS MAN NAMED LUKE?

That is a great question, for the author of the fourth gospel never names himself in the gospel or in the book of Acts.

Maybe you are thinking, ah hah our first conspiracy! Good news, I do not think we have a conspiracy. Let me show you why!

FIRST: Lukan authorship goes back to the **second century and is unanimous**. So, **the earliest traditions** (the early church fathers) held that a man named Luke wrote Luke and Acts. Maybe that is enough for you, maybe not. The good news we have more than that.

SECOND: Whoever wrote Acts served with Paul on the mission field. Let me show you:

"7 And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. 8 So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." (Acts 16:7-9, ESV).

Do you see the use of **third person plural pronouns**. Clearly, the writer is writing about what (**they**) the missionary team did. But Rich, I thought you said the **author of Acts was with Paul** and the missionary team. I did, and beginning in **chapter 16 of Acts**, let me show you what happens:

Picking up in the next verse:

10 And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. 11 So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. 13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. 14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. 15 And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. 16 ¶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. 17 She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." (Ac 16:7-17 ESV)

Did you see the shift to first person plural, "we" did this and we did that, and she prevailed upon "us"? So, it is clear the **author of Acts** also worked with Paul in the mission field and even more specifically he joined Paul and the team in the middle of the second missionary journey, in Troas.

BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN IT WAS A GUY NAMED LUKE! True but...

THIRD: Luke was there in Rome during **Paul's first imprisonment**, let me show you: Luke's name appears two times, in the prison epistles:

"23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, 24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers." (Phm 1:23-24 ESV)

"Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas." (Col 4:14 ESV)

Both Philemon and Colossians are among the prison epistles (Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians) written by Paul during his first Roman imprisonment. One of the people with Paul is this **man named Luke**.

FOURTH: When we compile a listing of everyone mentioned in the prison epistles, and take out those who are mentioned by name in the "we" sections of Acts, the only person that is left standing when we isolate those who came late to visit Paul and those who were named in Acts 16 is **Luke**.

So, all lines of evidence (**external and internal**) point to a man named **Luke** being the **person who wrote Acts and the fourth gospel which now bears his name**.

We have no reason to doubt that Acts was written by this named Luke wrote Luke and Acts.

OK, BUT WHO WAS THIS MAN NAMED LUKE?

FIRST: Luke was a **Physician**, let me show you. While Paul is writing from prison in Rome, he identifies that **Luke is with him and he says this:**

14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas." (Col 4:10-14 ESV)

So clearly Luke was a Physician. When we think about the sophisticated grammar of Luke and Acts **this makes sense**. In fact, a lot of sense!

SECOND: Luke was a Gentile. Let's go back to the text in Colossians, but pick up a little sooner:

"10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions — if he comes to you, welcome him), 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas." (Col 4:10-14 ESV)

So, Acts was written by the **same person** who wrote the fourth gospel. Although not named in either it is **clear from external and internal evidence** that it was a **Gentile Physician named Luke**.

Now what is interesting is that every book of the New Testament is written by an Israelite, with the **exception of Luke and Acts** (written by Luke).

Here is what we know about Luke:

- 1) He was a **Gentile** (Col 4:11, Acts 1:19)
- 2) He was a **physician**
 - a. Intelligent, articulate, and literate, this explains the sophisticated Greek we see in Luke and Acts.
- 3) He worked with Paul in the **missionary field**.

- a. We saw the use of “we” starting in Acts 16, so Luke met up with Paul in Troas on the second missionary journey.
- 4) He was **there** with Paul when Paul arrived in Rome and was placed under house arrest:
“And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.”
 (Ac 28:16 ESV)
- a. We saw he was there later with Paul as well.

DATE:

Many Scholars date the book of Acts to approximately 70AD following the release of the book of Luke at an earlier time. While many other scholars date the book of Acts earlier coinciding with Paul first imprisonment in Rome and see Acts being completed in **approximately 62AD**.

It seems likely to me based on the fact that the book does not include Paul’s outcome of his first Roman imprisonment that **it had to be written early, while Paul was under house arrest** (62-64). I do not know that we can be sure, but it seems the best date is between 62-64 AD. **After Paul made it to Rome, but before he stood before Cesear.**

PLACE OF WRITING:

I talked about the use of “we” in the book of Acts and you and we see the uses of “we” in (Acts 16:10-40; 20:5-21; 27:1-28:16), it appears that Luke joined Paul and those with Paul in the middle of the second missionary journey in Troas and traveled with the team into Macedonia.

So, it appears Luke is writing **this book as the events are happening**.

Equally, Paul’s **imprisonment in Caesarea (Acts 24:27)** and **Rome (Acts 28:16)** would have provided time for Luke to interview Paul and others and to write the entire account.

Paul was in prison in Rome and we know Luke was with him, so it is likely that Luke was compiling Acts as the events were occurring. As well as questioning those who were with Paul before he arrived, and gathering information from Paul during the times of Paul’s imprisonment.

The place of writing, unlike many other books, where there is often a specific place where **the letter was written from, is likely multiples places over a long period of time**.

RECIPIENTS:

Luke is crystal clear who is writing to:

“I ¶ In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.” (Ac 1:1-2 ESV)

The same person who Luke wrote the Gospel to:

“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.” (Lu 1:3-4 ESV)

So Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts to the person named **Theophilus**.

A few observations:

FIRST: The phrase “*most excellent Theophilus*” is a term used by Luke, here in the book of Acts and it is always used for Roman citizens of some importance:

“And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: “Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation,” (Ac 24:2 ESV)

“But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.” (Ac 26:25 ESV)

SECOND: Notice Luke wrote so that Theophilus might *“have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”*

- 1) So, it seems, **Theophilus was a believer**, he had been taught about Jesus, but it appears that he was having doubts. Luke wrote to address those doubts. Do you see that?
- 2) Theophilus’ name is comprised of two Greek words:
 - a. **θεός (theos) - God**
 - b. **φίλος (philos) – friend or lover**

Theophilus’ name means **“Lover of God.”** To cut to the chase **Luke wrote the gospel of Luke and Acts** to an important Roman citizen name **Theophilus**.

WHY WOULD LUKE GIVE SO MUCH OF HIS LIFE TO WRITE THESE LETTERS TO THEOPHILUS?

- 1) Luke was **ministering with and too Paul**. He was first and foremost a **servant of Christ** and part of Paul’s missionary team.
- 2) It appears, at least in some way he was **funded by Theophilus** to go and really look into this **Jesus thing. To do research and to report back what he learned.**
 - a. Many believe that Luke was a **slave to Theophilus** and was **directed** or **allowed to go** and collect data/information on Christianity.

PURPOSE:

Let’s go back to what Luke said in the introduction to Luke, for it really helps us **understand why Luke wrote both works:**

“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.” (Lu 1:1-4 ESV)

So it seems that Theophilus must have been having **doubts about Jesus**. He **sends, funds, dispatches**, or whatever this **Gentile Physician** named Luke to go and research. Both Luke and Acts are his research.

Understanding this point will help make sense out of some of the things Luke focuses on in Acts. **He is building the case**, I believe that Jesus is not just a Jewish Messiah, **but the savior of the Gentiles too!**

This is likely what **Theophilus’ questions were about**.

Luke and Acts are meant to create certainty in Theophilus’ heart that the gospel is true, it is meant for him (Gentile Roman citizen), and to show the ministry started by Jesus while he was on earth is now being fulfilled by the church empowered by the Holy Spirit of God!

That is the purpose. Understanding this purpose will make sense of Luke’s work.

SUBJECT:

The book of Acts says a great deal about the **Holy Spirit**, but the Holy Spirit is not the subject of the book

As I mentioned earlier the title Holy Spirit (Greek phrase) **ἅγιος (hagios) πνεῦμα (pneuma)** is used in 40 verses in Acts.

Jesus is used in **72 verses**. The Holy Spirit is a major player in Acts, but the **subject remains Jesus Christ**.

The volume of the book of the entire Scriptures is about Jesus, He is the grand subject, he is the one to whom all positive types point to, and thus like the entire Bible, Acts is fundamentally about Jesus!

A few of important reminders that Jesus told his disciples in the upper-room discourse:

FIRST: (*Joh 16:7 ESV*)

SECOND: (*Joh 16:8 ESV*)

THIRD: (*Joh 16:12-13a ESV*)

FOURTH: (*Joh 16:13-14 ESV*)

The Holy Spirit will not glorify Himself, He will glorify Jesus! Of course there are **many more points** about the Holy Spirit, but I want you to see **these four** as we consider the **subject of the book of Acts**.

The Holy Spirit is very active, but **Jesus** remains the subject of the book.

MESSAGES OF THE BOOKS OF ACTS:

The book of Acts records the birth and maturation of the church, and it provides the clear messages of the gospel as proclaimed by the early church.

FIRST, this **maturation** is presented in **three key areas**:

- 1) **Numerically** - 3000 are saved on the day of Pentecost and it goes from there! We are going to see multiple amazing reports of numerical growth of the early church.
- 2) **Geographically** – It started in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8) and it will make its way all the way to Rome by the end of the book (Acts 28:16). We are going to see the advance of the gospel as it burst forth from Jerusalem at Pentecost to cover the known world.
- 3) **Ethnically** – It starts in Jerusalem as an off-shoot of Judaism and then at Pentecost is **thrust into many different languages**, where it is carried back to many different countries. Then in Acts chapter 10, Peter preaches to Cornelius (a Roman Centurian) and he and his family got saved. Then we see Paul take the gospel into the Gentile world.

SECOND, In Acts we have the message of the Early church is presented through the **Preaching of the early church** – In the book of Acts we have recorded **11 different sermons** by the early church. **Three of those sermons by the Apostle Peter, one by the Deacon Stephen, and seven of those sermons by the Apostle Paul**. If we want to **understand the message** of the early church, we will find it here in the book of Acts.

Thus, Theophilus would have these early sermons from the earliest preachers:

Sermon #1 found in Acts 2:14-26 by Peter
Sermon #2 found in Acts 3:12-26 by Peter
Sermon #3 found in Acts 7:1-53 by Stephen
Sermon #4 found in Acts 10:34-43 by Peter
Sermon #5 found in Acts 13:16-41 by Paul
Sermon #6 found in Acts 17:22-31 by Paul

Sermon #7 found in Acts 20:18-35 by Paul
Sermon #8 found in Acts 22:3-21 by Paul
Sermon #9 found in Acts 24:10-21 by Paul
Sermon #10 found in Acts 26:2-29 by Paul
Sermon #11 found in Acts 28:25-28 by Paul

Let me show you what I mean from a **small portion** of the **first sermon** ever given in the church of Jesus Christ, by the unlearned fisherman, Peter:

“22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know — 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” (Ac 2:22-24 ESV)

We are going to be studying the **undistilled, unpolluted, uncorrupted, sermons of the early church**. We are going to be studying the gospel from the lips of the Apostles as it was **initially preached in the first 30 years of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ!**

OUTLINE:

Of course, **each week** I will provide an outline of the chapter or chapter section we will be studying.

But in a more macro-sense it is helpful to see the overall basic (50,000 foot) outline of an **entire book or letter**.

First we will look at the **basic outline**, and then the only slightly more **detailed, yet still basic outline**.

First the basic outline of the book of Acts itself, comes the lips of Jesus Himself:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Ac 1:8 ESV)

Here is the more detailed **four-part outline**:

- 1) The **church will receive power to be Jesus’s witnesses** (1:1-2:13).
- 2) The **church will be witnesses in Jerusalem** (2:14-8:3).
- 3) The **church’s witness will extend to include Judea and Samaria** (8:4-12:25).
- 4) The **church’s witness will extend to include the end of the earth** (13:1-28:31).
 - a. **1st Missionary Journey** (13:1-14:28)
 - b. Jerusalem Council (15:1-35). **So you know:** The findings of the council are what ensured that Christianity did not simply become a sect of Judaism, but became a message to the world. The importance of this meeting is lost on us today, but we will deal with it when we get there.
 - c. **2nd Missionary Journey** (15:36-18:22)
 - d. **3rd Missionary Journey** (18:23-21:17)
 - e. **Voyage to Rome** (21:18-28:31) Which by the way turns into a **missionary journey to Rome!**

TIMEFRAME:

- Part 1 (1:1-2:13) – **“You will receive power”** and this happened at Pentecost **33AD**.
- Part 2 (2:14-8:3) – **“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem”** and this happened **33-34AD (2 years)**.
- Part 3 (8:4-12:25) – **“You will be my witnesses in all Judea and Samaria”** and this happened **35-48AD (13 years)**.
- Part 4 (13:1-28:31) – **“You will be my witnesses to the end of the earth”** and this happened **48-62AD (14 years)**.

** The book covers from **33-62AD (almost 30 years!)**

TIMING OF THE START OF THE BOOK:

The timing of the start of the book is **not normally a point worthy of any discussion**. In the case of the book of Acts it absolutely is!

First a little background: There are three Jewish festival days where all men, regardless of where they resided need to travel to Jerusalem. Three Festival days when all Hebrew men had to present themselves in the temple to worship God:

“14 Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. 15 You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. 16 You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. 17 Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord GOD.” (Ex 23:14-17 ESV)

- **First – Passover, Unleavened bread, and First Fruits** are all linked together – The form a weeklong celebration.
- **Second - Pentecost** also known as the **Feast of Weeks** or the **Feast of Harvest**
- **Third - Feast of Booths or Tabernacles or Feast of Ingathering.**

Pentecost occurred 50 days after the first Fruits celebration. So Jesus was crucified on Passover and it will be on Pentecost that God will pour out His Holy Spirit, of which we will have much to say.

UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS:

The book of Acts is **unique in so many ways**. Let me **pull some together**. This listing is by no means exhaustive. It is meant to get your thought processes flowing.

- 1) The gospel starts out in Jerusalem for the Jews (principally through Peter) and ends up around the globe and includes the Gentiles (principally through Paul).
- 2) The book of Acts contains **24 addresses or exerts, nine given by Peter** (1:16-22; 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 8:20-23; 10:34-43; 11:4-17; 15:7-11). Then there are **nine given by Paul** (13:16-41; 14:14-17; 17:22-231; 20:18-35; 2:1-21; 24:10-21; 26:2-23; 27:21-26; 28:17-20). It also contains addresses and exerts by others **Gamaliel** (5:34-39), **Stephen** (7:2-52), **James** (15:13-21), **Demetrius** (19:24-27), **the town clerk at Ephesus** (19:35-40), and **Festus** (25:24-27).
- 3) More importantly **eleven of these addresses** are sermons. By the way, this includes the first sermon ever given by the infant church. We are going to review the earliest sermons of the church of Jesus.
- 4) The book **contains the initial invention of missionary work and the first three missionary journeys** of the infant church outside the general region of **Judea and Samaria**.
- 5) We see the **central hub** of the Messianic Jewish community in **Jerusalem** where it began and we will watch the focus shift to **Antioch, the birthplace and early hub of Christian missionary work**.
- 6) The book of Acts covers **30 years of the Holy Spirit** working through God’s people to share the salvation that is found in Jesus Christ.
- 7) The book of Acts contains many **transitions**, the transition **Judaism to Christianity**, the **gospels to the epistles**, the transition of **worship at the temple and the synagogues to the church**, the transition from **law to grace**, the transition of a **priestly tribe to a priestly people**, etc. Once you understand this, it may help make sense of some of the things you see in the book of Acts and you wonder why don’t we do it that way. In some cases the book of Acts is descriptive and not prescriptive. This is extremely important in understanding and applying the book of Acts.
- 8) Did I tell you it is the only New Testament book **written by a Gentile**?
- 9) The book of Acts deals with many important Theological issues including the sovereignty of God, the person of Christ (Christology), the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology), Angels, Satan, Man, Sin, Salvation, etc!
- 10) I saved this point, it would really follow #3, but I wanted to end on this point. We will see the earliest messages and the call to what men and women needed to do to be saved.

This book shows us a picture of the **early church** in all its **excitement, purity, simplicity**, and all of its **persecution**. This book is **VERY unique**.