

Introduction to Acts

Who was the author, Luke?

Luke may have been part of the church in Antioch, begun by Paul & Barnabas

Years later, writing from prison, Paul mentions Luke:

In Philemon 24 Paul writes that Luke is his “fellow worker”

In Colossians 4:14 Paul calls him “the beloved physician”

In 2 Timothy 4:11 Paul says he’s his only companion

In Acts, Luke uses the word “we”: 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–37; 28:1–16

Luke was a close coworker with Paul, probably his physician who had traveled with him to tend to his medical needs, and who stayed with him in prison

Context of writing

When Luke wrote (perhaps AD 62), Christianity had been spreading for 30+ years

Christianity had broken out of Judaism and reached many people in major cities throughout the Roman Empire, including Rome itself

People were asking questions about this new religion; there were misunderstandings and suspicions

Its founder and leaders had been arrested; there had even been riots

Luke wanted people to understand Jesus, his message, and his followers

Luke & Acts: Volumes 1 & 2

Volume 1 (Luke's Gospel): the life, death and resurrection of Jesus

Volume 2 (Acts): the growth of the church and expansion of Christian communities through Peter and Paul

Shared theme: God's purpose to bring his salvation to all people through his Son Jesus and his followers

Volume 1: Jesus is Son of God and Savior

Volume 2: Jesus is Exalted Lord and Messiah, his name heals & saves

Luke & Acts: Volumes 1 & 2

Acts develops what was presented in Luke's Gospel:

In Luke: if we repent and believe in Jesus, we receive forgiveness

In Acts: if we believe in Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord, we receive the Holy Spirit and experience God's salvation

Acts also stresses how God wants his salvation in Jesus to reach the Gentiles

Other common themes in both volumes: the Holy Spirit, the role of Jerusalem, emphasis on "outsiders," outcasts

Themes in Acts

To advance the teaching of Jesus in the churches (Acts 2:42; 6:4)

To show Christian origins from Jesus, the Twelve and other apostles, esp. Paul

What Jesus began to do in Luke's Gospel (1:1) he continues to do through his followers in Acts

Uncircumcised Gentiles who believe in Jesus belong among Jewish believers

How Christian communities began in so many cities (Jerusalem, Caesarea, Syrian Antioch, Salamis & Paphos, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Perga, Pamphylia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome)

Themes in Acts

Paul's missionary work (chapters 13–28)

Acts illustrates a theology of mission

General mission: Acts 1:8; Paul's commission: Acts 9:15–16; 22:14–15; 26:16–18

- Missionaries take the gospel to places where it is unknown
- Missionaries verbally proclaim the gospel
- Through missionaries' ministry, individual people are saved, communities are born, divisions are reconciled
- Missionary work happens in the midst of opposition and persecution

Themes in Acts

God and his purposes

God's initiative

God's salvation history—began with the Jews and his hope for them

God reveals himself, his plan, his salvation, through the Scriptures

Jesus: Messiah, Savior, Lord

The Holy Spirit, given by the Risen Jesus to his followers to be his witnesses

The Church

Acts is more than history

Accounts are selective

Formal speeches and dialogue are about 50% of the book

Written for the churches

Structure

Chapters 1–7: the church in Jerusalem

Chapters 8–12: the church in Samaria, Ethiopia, Damascus, Caesarea, Antioch

Chapters 13–20: the church in Asia Minor and Europe

Chapters 21–28: Paul's imprisonment, trial, journey, and arrival in Rome

Purpose of our study

- To know Jesus more personally
- To catch God's vision to be his witnesses and spread his good news to the end of the earth