

# ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

## STUDY GUIDE

### **Author**

Once again, the author is not named within the book itself. The books of Luke and Acts have similar prologues (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2), both addressed to the same person, Theophilus. The storyline of Acts picks up where Luke's gospel ends (Luke 24:48-53; Acts 1:1-12). These things all point to the author being the same person, who has historically been recognized as Luke since the mid-second century.

Luke was not an eyewitness observer of Jesus, but was a close companion and travel partner of Paul (Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-21, 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24). Luke was a highly educated man and physician (Col. 4:14), which is demonstrated in his writing style and use of vocabulary common to physicians of that era.

Most scholars believe Luke hailed from Antioch in Syria (different from Antioch in Acts 13), and was a Gentile God-fearer with considerable exposure to Judaism. If true, Luke may hold the honor of being the only Gentile author in the New Testament, though the possibility also exists that Luke was a Jew living in Syria and highly influenced by Greek culture.

### **ORIGINAL AUDIENCE**

There is no certainty as to where Luke was when he wrote the Book of Luke, though it is obvious Luke meant the work to be read by Theophilus, a Gentile Christian. Some believe Theophilus, "lover of God," is not an actual person, but a representative of a larger Greek audience of God-fearers within synagogues who were seriously interested in the works of Jesus and the Christian faith. Luke's advanced literary style indicates the intended audience, whether that be Theophilus or a larger group, were likely also highly educated and held social status, potentially as artisans and urbanites who were familiar with Jewish and Greek cultures.

### **Date**

Acts is the second volume of Luke's work. Luke's gospel was written sometime between the late AD 50s and early AD 60s. However, the date range for Acts is extensive, from AD 6-130, with most scholars dating the book between AD 80-95. Luke's portrayal of Jews as still holding a measure of political power and influence in Roman courts implies a date before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Acts 24:1; 25:15), and Christian hopefulness of Roman justice also suggests its writing prior to Nero's persecutions in AD 65 (Acts 25:10-11, 23-25; 26:2-3). Additionally, the abrupt ending of Acts with Paul's imprisonment and lack of mention of increased persecution during Nero's reign indicate a date closer to AD 63-64 (Acts 28:30-31).

## LITERARY GENRE & STRUCTURE

The Acts of the Apostles, placed immediately after the four gospels, provides a continuous record of Jesus and His works through the apostles and early church. The first few verses of Acts provide a summary of Luke's previous volume (Gospel According to Luke) and instruct the disciples to wait for a future baptism by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1-5). Acts 1:8 serves as the thematic and literary structuring for the entire book: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

Part 1: The Witness in Jerusalem (1:1-8:3)
Part 2: The Witness in Judea and Samaria (8:4-12:25)
Part 3: The Witness to the Ends of the Earth (12:25-28:31)

The book ends suddenly with Paul's home imprisonment in Rome, yet as Richard Longenecker points out, the ending may have been intentional:

*"Luke was showing how the good news of humanity's redemption had begun in Jerusalem, swept through all of Palestine, gone into Asia Minor, proceeded throughout Macedonia and Achaia, and finally entered Rom, the capital of the empire. When Paul's goal was reached, his story was told. So, Luke ended where he did because his purpose in writing was completed...And with that victory accomplished, Luke felt free to lay down his pen."* (Acts, Richard Longenecker)

We will not know this side of heaven why Acts ends where it does, but it does end in such a way that the reader grasps the work is not yet finished and we all as modern disciples have a Spirit-empowered ministry to accomplish.

## PURPOSE FOR ACTS

Several different purposes for Luke's second volume exist.

- **Evangelistic** – to awaken faith (especially through the speeches recorded)
- **Political** – to show Roman citizens that Christianity should be tolerated (Luke features many Roman officials refusing to stand in the way of the new faith movement)
- **Edification of Believers** – confirmation of what they have been taught (Luke 1:1-4)
- **Defense of Paul** – Luke intended to defend Paul against rumors & false charges about his authenticity as an apostle
- **Reconciliation between Jewish & Gentile Believers** – showing Peter & Paul in agreement over the basics of faith
- **Historical-theological** – explain the movement of the church from Jerusalem/Judaism-oriented to worldwide/Gentile-dominated

## OBSERVATION WORDS

- **Jesus**-- Don't just notice the references, but what do you learn about Him through those references? Names, functions, His emotional responses, how others address Him, etc.
- **Holy Spirit** – When He's named directly, what He does, note miracles, etc.
- **God** -- Different ways He's referenced & what you learn about Him, how Jesus speaks of Him, etc.
- **Word** (especially "word of the Lord/God") – What do you learn about the Word? What happens?
- **Baptized** – In what? In who's name? What other connections do you see with baptism?
- **Tongues** – Who speaks? When do tongues happen?
- **Signs and Wonders** – Who is doing them? What things are happening?
- **Witness/Witnesses** – What is a witness? Who is witnessing? What happens to witnesses?
- **Pharisees / Sadducees / Scribes** – Who are they? What are they doing? What do you learn?
- **Church** – What do you learn about the church?
- **Old Testament passages** – Usually identified by all capital letters. How are these references used? What's the purpose of them?

## SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What did you learn about Jesus through this book?
  
- What did you learn about the Holy Spirit through this book?
  
- What did you learn about God through this book?

- What do you learn about the church?
  
- How do you explain baptism in the Holy Spirit to someone? What does it mean to be baptized in the Spirit? Is tongues necessary to be considered baptized in the Spirit? Who does the baptizing?

▪ How did persecution both help and hinder the church?

▪ What do you learn about prayer through this book?

**KEY WORD** – How do you summarize the whole book in one word or short phrase?

**KEY VERSE** – What verse stands out to you as the summary of the whole book, or a verse that the Lord used to teach you something important. Why did you choose the verse you did?

**KEY CHAPTER** – What chapter summarizes the book, is a turning point, or just stands out to you? Why did you choose this chapter?