

Introduction To Acts

The First Chapter in Church History

This book is important to the believer because tells the origins of the Church. Let's take some time to establish the author, audience, and purpose of the book. This foundation will help us as we try to apply this recorded history to our lives.

The evidence points to the author as Luke who also wrote the Third Gospel.

External evidence

- The Muratorian Canon dated AD170 names Luke as the author of Luke and Acts.
- Eusebius in 325 lists many sources that point to Luke as the author of Acts

Internal evidence

- The author includes himself in the narrative with the word "we" in Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-21:18, and 27:1-28:16.
- Chapter 28 tells of Paul's two year imprisonment where Paul wrote Philemon and Colossians. In those letters Luke is listed as one of his companions. This makes Luke a candidate for authorship.
- Paul describes Luke as a Physician in Colossians and the author's use of refined Greek strengthens the argument for Luke, an educated man, as author.

Date

- Around AD63 after the last event recorded in Acts. If it was written later one would expect to hear the outcome of Paul's imprisonment and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. Can you imagine reading a history set in NYC without an account of 9/11?

Recipient

- Theophilus who is named in Luke and Acts. He was most likely a gentile of high position, maybe a Roman official, as evidenced by his title "most excellent" in Luke 1:3. It is fitting that a book about the dawn of the Gospel to the world be written to a non-Jew.

Theme

- The theme is best stated in Acts 1:8 . "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Without Acts we would jump from Jesus' dedicated yet confused followers gazing at the sky to Paul in the trenches with the church. What is the church? Who is Paul and why should I listen to him? What is the role of the Holy Spirit? What happened at Jerusalem?

Acts is Luke part two and serves as an historical bridge for us between the Gospels and the New Covenant that we now enjoy. It helps us to understand our heritage, our stripe. Our allegiance to God will look more like Stephen, who prayed for his persecutors , than King David ,who asked God to crush his enemies. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against evil within and without. Ephesians 6:12

Luke's ascension account in the book of Luke leaves us with a sense of expectation. Luke's parallel account in Acts tells us that Jesus will return but now there is work to be done. We see the birth of the Church and her role in the world.