



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

Introducing Acts, 1

David Anguish

Preliminary Matters

1. Together, Luke (19,481 words) and Acts (18,449; 13.37%) comprise 27.48% of the New Testament's 138,004 words (UBS 5 Greek text); they are the first and second longest books.
2. Acts is a particular type of *narrative writing* (more on its genre later), and should not be read/interpreted in exactly the same way as one of the letters (see Fee and Stuart 2003, 107–125).
3. One cautionary word is pertinent: because Acts is so familiar—and many of us have studied or heard it referenced so often—we need to be especially attentive to trying to look at it with fresh eyes. Doing so will not necessarily alter what we think about the book's content, but it will sharpen our understanding.

Acts in a Nutshell

4. Important facts about the book (details to be elaborated later).
 - a. Author – (likely) Luke.
 - b. Date – (probably) early 60s AD.
 - c. Destination – Theophilus (et. al.)
 - d. Purpose – A defense of the Christian faith showing the expansion of the early church from a Jewish sect to a worldwide movement.
 - e. Theme – Salvation history: the birth and mission of the early church.
 - f. Key verse – 1.8 (the above from Köstenberger et. al. 2009, 331).
5. Other important general details.
 - a. “The book of Acts reflects the continuation of Jesus’ ministry after his death and resurrection (Acts 1:1)” (Arnold 2002, 219).
 - b. As we will elaborate later, Acts is not a comprehensive history of the church, but a focused history centered on its beginnings and early development in Jerusalem and then primarily the ministries of Peter and Paul (Arnold 2002, 220).
 - c. Summary of its central theme: “Luke seeks to show that God’s great plan of salvation has come to fulfillment in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus the Messiah, and continues to unfold as the Spirit-filled church takes the message of salvation from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth” (Arnold 2002, 219).

Authorship

6. Summary of basic facts.

- a. Luke 1.1–4 and Acts 1.1–3 show that both books were written by the same writer.
 - b. No author is named in either writing, but both have been traditionally associated with Luke, an associate and occasional co-worker with Paul.
 - c. We will only summarize the basics here, emphasizing those that relate to Acts; for a more extensive treatment, see Anguish 2021, 1–7.
7. Beginning with the external evidence, ancient historians unanimously assert that Luke was the author of both writings. Irenaeus (ca. 155–191 AD), for example, wrote:
- a. “Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1).
 - b. “But that this Luke was inseparable from Paul, and his fellow-labourer in the Gospel, he himself clearly evinces, not as a matter of boasting, but as bound to do so by the truth itself” (*Against Heresies* 3.14.1).
 - c. In the same passage, after summarizing the passages from Acts where the author includes himself, Irenaeus adds, “As Luke was present at all these occurrences, he carefully noted them down in writing, so that he cannot be convicted of falsehood or boastfulness” (*Against Heresies* 3.14.1).
8. From the writing itself, we discern that Luke was:
- a. A well-educated man.
 - 1) In terms of style and writing ability:
 - a) His writing shows evidence of excellent training in Greek, knowledge of the art of rhetoric, superb research and organizational skills, and familiarity with historical writing in the Hellenistic tradition; as well as strong familiarity with Judaism and the Greek Old Testament (Arnold 2003, 221–222).
 - b) Broadly speaking his style varies between Greek contemporary prose and a Jewish style of Greek influenced by the Septuagint (Keener 2014, 314).
 - c) But we can be more specific: Luke adapts his style according to different situations and subjects: “Jews speak with a Jewish accent. Athenian philosophers speak in Atticism, and Roman officials speak and write in the customary legal style. Luke showed not only a familiarity with such linguistic idiosyncrasies but also the ability to depict them through his style of writing” (Polhill 1992, 43; in Köstenberger et. al. 2009, 339 n. 23).
 - 2) He also shows that he knew the geography of Palestine and the Mediterranean world, as well as various attributes of both the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures (Köstenberger et. al. 2009, 333).
 - b. He was not an original disciple (Luke 1.2), but was a traveling companion of Paul (cf. Col 4.14; 2 Tim 4.11; Phlm 24).
 - 1) Much of the internal rationale for considering Luke the author comes from the presence of the first person accounts incorporated in Acts 16.8–17; 20.5–15; 21.1–18; 27.1–28.16 (see the table below).
 - 2) By process of elimination, Luke is the one named co-worker of Paul who fits as the author of these books (see Anguish 2021, 5–7).
 - c. So, while not an eyewitness of the events recorded in his Gospel, he was witness to a significant portion of events narrated in the second half of Acts.

Date

9. Contemporary scholars generally assign Acts to one of two dates: prior to 70, and between 70–100.¹
- a. The more popular date, especially among less conservative scholars (though some more conservative scholars agree) dates the book somewhere between 75–90 (cf. Keener 2014, 314; also Köstenberger

et. al. 2009, 333).

- b. The abrupt ending of Acts—with Paul still imprisoned—supports an earlier view, as early as 62–64 (Anguish 2021, 7–10; cf. Köstenberger et. al. 2009, 333–334; Arnold 2003, 223).²

Audience

10. Both Luke and Acts are addressed to “Theophilus,” described in Luke as “most excellent” (ESV) (Luke 1.3; Acts 1.1) (see Anguish 2021, 10–12; Köstenberger et. al. 2009, 334–335).
 - a. Other than these references, we know nothing about him, though we do have some clues to his possible identity.
 - b. Luke’s designation of him as “most excellent” (κράτιστος, *kratistos*; Luke 1.3), uses the term Paul uses to address the Roman governors Felix and Festus (Acts 23.26; 24.3; 26.25); these are the only uses of the term in the NT..
 - c. Luke 1.1–4 indicates that he had some awareness of the faith and that Luke was writing to strengthen his faith.
11. A plausible proposal is that “he was Luke’s literary patron, in which case he would not only have paid the price of publication but may have housed Luke during the book’s production and made the manuscript available for copying subsequent to its completion” (Köstenberger et. al. 2009, 334).
12. But Luke probably had a target audience beyond Theophilus, the nature of which we can infer from the kind of information he expected or did not expect his readers to know (Köstenberger et. al. 2009, 335).
 - a. He did not expect his readers to know basic details of Judean topography; cf. his statement that Mount Olivet was near Jerusalem (Acts 1.12).
 - b. He did not expect them to know local language: Aramaic terms are explained (cf. 1.12, 19; 4.36; 9.36; 13.8).
 - c. At the same time, no explanation is given regarding Jewish institutions such as Pentecost (2.1; 20.16), “a Sabbath day’s journey” (1.12), uncleanness (10.14), and “Passover” (12.4), which suggests he expected his readers to be familiar with such information.
 - d. “Likewise, it may be assumed that since the OT quotes are from the LXX, this was the Bible of choice among Luke’s readers” (Köstenberger et. al. 2009, 335).

Some Special Features and Characteristics

13. From Acts, we discern some details about the relation of the earliest churches to historical events of the time.
 - a. The death of Herod Agrippa I (12.20–23) – 44 AD.
 - b. The famine during the reign of the Emperor Claudius (11.28) – 44–48 AD.
 - c. The proconsulship of Sergius Paulus (13.7) – before 51 AD.
 - d. The expulsion of the Jews from Rome by Claudius (18.2) – probably 49 AD.
 - e. The proconsulship of Gallio (18.12) – 52–53 AD.
 - f. The proconsulship of Felix (23.26; 24.27) – 52–56 AD.
 - g. The proconsulship of Festus, Felix’s successor (24.27) – 57–60 AD.
14. We are provided with particular insight into the ministries of Peter and Paul (to be discussed more later).
15. We are also allowed to look at typical speeches and sermons by the earliest preachers (more later).

August 23, 2026

The “We” Passages in Acts		
Passage	Journeys & Locations	Event
16.8–17	Troas to Philippi	Ministry in Philippi
20.5–15	Philippi to Troas or Miletus	On way to Jerusalem
21.1–18	Miletus to Jerusalem via Caesarea	On way to Jerusalem
27.1–28.16	Caesarea to Rome	All the way to Rome

Table from Köstenberger et. al. 2009, 333

Works Cited

- Anguish David. 2021. *Luke 1–9*. Truth for Today Commentary. Resource Publications.
- Arnold, Clinton E. 2003. “Acts.” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*” Volume 2, *John, Acts*. ed. Clinton E. Arnold. Zondervan.
- Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. 2003. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Zondervan.
- Köstenberger, Andreas J., L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles. 2009. *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*. B & H Academic.
- Keener, Craig S. 2014. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament*. 2nd edition. InterVarsity Press.
- Polhill, J. 1992. *Acts*. New American Commentary. vol. 26. B & H. In Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, 2009.

Notes

¹ Many critical scholars of previous generations argued for a second century date, but “virtually no-one today dates Acts in the second century” (Köstenberger et. al. 2009, 333).

² Keener accepts the post-70 date, basing his conclusion on the usual dating of Mark (which he admits is not secure), which he affirms Luke used as a source, and possible allusions in Luke to the destruction of the temple. He sees the abrupt ending as a stylistic “reason to end on the climactic note of the gospel reaching Rome” (Keener 2014, 314–315).