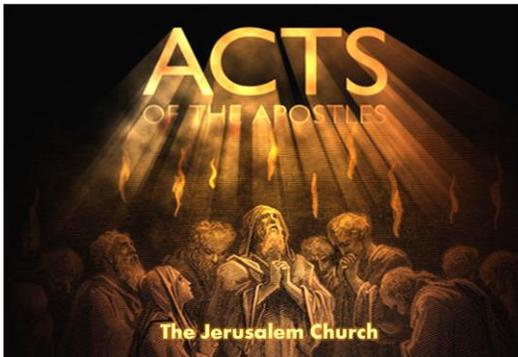


Session #1: Acts of the Apostles

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There are two ways of writing history. There is the way which attempts to trace the course of events from week to week and from day to day; and there is the way which, as it were, opens a series of windows and gives us vivid glimpses of the great moments and personalities of any period. The second way is the way of Acts.

The New Daily Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles

As we begin this year and our adventure and study into the book, Acts of the Apostles we should take a moment to understand what this book is not. The title of this document is almost a misnomer. Just by the title we might think this document is an inexhaustible resource that speaks to the lives of all twelve Apostles. In truth, we will hear of missionary moments of some of Jesus disciples such as Stephen (Acts 6:8-7:60), but apart from St. Paul (who called himself an Apostle of Christ) we will read of only three of the original twelve: James, John (who never speaks) and Peter, of which we hear much. In looking at a true translation of the title we get a better sense of what this document is really about: *Acts of Apostolic Men*. This is the true translation of the title of this book and a better description of what we will find within. As we go through this year's study, what we will be looking at, what this "book" means to tell us is of the work of these early heroes of faith:

- as they spread the gospel,
- establish faith communities in different cities/countries and,
- work to figure out how to be Church, now that Jesus has ascended.

In studying this conversation it sets us up to understand better the rest of the New Testament Letters, documents and the life of the early Church.

There is another name we could give this document. We could call it not the Acts of Men but the Acts of the Holy Spirit, because what we will be studying, in truth, is the work of the Holy Spirit as it inspires the Apostles and Disciples to spread the gospel to the world. To quote Jeff Cavins in *Acts: The Spread of the Kingdom*, this book is about the *Church on Fire with the Spirit of God.*"

READ: Acts 1:6-8. In our study of St. Luke's work we have looked at book one—the Gospel in which we see God gives the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ who suffers, dies, rises and ascends into heavens. This year we study Book two: The Acts of Apostolic Men in which we experience God giving the gift of His Spirit which will descend on the Church giving the Church the power to preach, teach and live the gospel to the ends of the earth, to the end of days. Book One/Gospel – the gift of His Son; Book Two/Acts—the gift of His Spirit which is meant to be lived out in the lives of all believers to the end of time. Interesting that these two volumes each cover approximately 33 years; not counting the Infancy Narratives, the Gospel of Luke covers three years and the Acts of the Apostles approximately 30 years. The one criticism (if you want to call it that) is that the Acts of the Apostles has no strong

ending. We never come to know the fate of key individuals such as Peter and Paul. This volume simply seems to fade out. We have to look to Church history and tradition to find out, to quote Paul Harvey, “the rest of the story.”

One of the reasons that there is no great ending to this document, the Acts of the Apostles is because the story is meant to continue. The mission work of the Church did not end with Paul, Peter or any of the Apostles. This document, this study is meant to inspire us all to realize that we must add our chapter, our story, our missionary work to the whole. We are each meant to pick up the gauntlet of faith handed to us by these great men and women and continue to teach, preach, whatever the Word of God is calling us to do so as to touch the lives of others in the name of Jesus Christ.

Who is the Author?

While this document is not signed, from the earliest days (Irenaeus 180AD, Clement of Alexandria 200AD and Eusebius (325AD) St. Luke has been understood to be the author and was written as the second act of a two volume set, the first volume being *The Gospel of St. Luke*. We know very little about the man, Luke. Much of what we “know” about Luke comes from educated suggestions, ideas and personal desired beliefs. If we look at the New Testament we find the only facts we have. There are only three passages that refer to him:

- **Colossians 4:14:** *Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.* This is supported by the fact that in his writing St. Luke includes the use of medical words which one would not do unless a part of their every day experience.
 - Luke 4:35: In sharing the story of the man possessed by the devil, St. Luke uses the correct medical term for convulsions.
 - Luke 9:38: In relaying the interaction between Jesus and a man whose son is ill, St. Luke uses a word for a doctor paying a visit to a patient
 - Luke 18:25: A very familiar image of the camel going through the eye of a needle. For the word needle both Matthew (19:24) and Mark (10:25) use the word *raphis* which is translated to mean a needle a tailor or seamstress would use. St. Luke uses *balone* which is the technical word for the needle used in surgery.
- **Philemon 24:** *And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.* This is taken from the writings of St. Paul which tells us that St. Luke worked in spreading the Gospel alongside St. Paul.
- **2 Timothy 4:11:** *Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.* Again, a companion of St. Paul.

From these three brief verses we know two things for certain. That St. Luke was a doctor and that he was a valuable companion of St. Paul. In the same way each one of us sometimes are able to “read between the line” of a family member or friend’s conversation and come to a conclusion or action, scholarly research has deduced a few other probabilities about St. Luke.

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- That he was a Gentile (a non-Jew). In the Letter to the Colossians (4:10-11) a list is offered from those who are *of the circumcision*, meaning of the Jews. St. Luke is not listed. St. Paul goes on to offer greetings from two others one of which scholars conclude are disciples but not Jewish. St. Luke is one of the two listed.
- Scholars also believe that St. Luke was a very valued companion of St. Paul and well known member of the growing Christian Community. Why else would his name be offered in greetings and prayers.

On a more personal, less scholarly note – tradition, common belief that has been handed down for centuries is the possibility that St. Luke was not only a physician; he was Mary’s personal physician. It was through his interaction with the Mother of God that St. Luke came to believe in Her Son as his Lord and Savior. There is nothing in scripture or historical documents to support this belief but it is nice to think about.

Who is the Audience

In our understanding any of the documents of the bible it is always helpful to know just who the letter/book/document was meant for. Last year, in our study of the Gospel of St. Luke we discussed some possibilities as to who the gospel and this manuscript was meant for. There are two widely excepted theories regarding who the intended audience.

1. That St. Luke intended this document for a single person. In Acts 1:1 We read: *My dear Theophilus*. Who is Theophilus? Theory one is that St. Luke was writing to one particular individual who could have been but very unlikely named, Theophilus. Most who hold this notion believe that Theophilus is actually a code name to hide the identity of the true recipient. The name literally means “Beloved of God” or “friend of God”. While there could have been someone of this name it is highly unlikely. Why hide their identity? Possibly because this person was a great and noble position within Rome. . In Luke 1:3 we read: *most excellent Theophilus*. “Most excellent” would have only been used for a person of power and position. Some scholars speculate that Theophilus was St. Luke’s benefactor or patron who supported him during the years he traveled researching and writing the texts of the Gospel and Acts.
2. The larger held theory is that St. Luke is not writing to a person but to all people of faith. As an evangelist St. Luke wrote so as to give himself and others a catechetical tool to work from. There are those who believe that St. Luke choose such a name because in truth he was addressing every believer. That this document was not written for just one person but for all who seek to come to know and/or deepen their belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. So with that in mind this gospel is written for you, me and everyone who opens their hearts to read it. You and I are Theophilus – Beloved friend of God.

Purpose in Writing

People who write create with a purpose or direction in mind. Some write to articulate concepts for a larger worldwide conversation, some write to teach or give direction and some write to simply entertain. There are many theories as to why St. Luke put pen to paper.

1. To give support of the Roman government in relationship to Christianity. Remember Rome was a war with the Christian religion for the first few centuries after the death of Christ. While as a whole there were great atrocities that Rome directed at believers, some scholars seem to think that St. Luke wrote to remind the Christian community that there were good people within the Roman government as well. Not only do some of these Roman soldiers themselves become Christian, we will read, again and again how Roman officials were well mannered and respectful to St. Paul. (Acts 13:12, 18:12, 18:14, 16:35, 19:31, 19:37) In fact there is the suggestion within scholarship that this document was the legal brief prepared for Paul's defense as he awaited trial before the Roman emperor.
2. The mostly widely held belief regarding why Paul wrote this document is to show that the teachings of Christ, the call to faith, is meant for every single person of every single nation. In the first century one of the main "discussions" of the early Church was *who should be allowed to follow Christ – who was the message meant for*. There were those who believed the work of Jesus, the Messiah was destined only for the Jewish people, God's chosen people of the Old Testament. In St. Luke's writing we will see the Apostles and disciples preaching to all nations communicating to us that Christ's message is meant for anyone and everyone.
3. Other theories aside, all scholarship agree that St. Luke wrote to put down the words, actions and teachings of Jesus (in Volume #1: Gospel of Luke) and to show the expansion of Christianity where God's Word was carried to all nations (in Volume #2: Acts of the Apostles). As we hear in the words of Jesus: *You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* (Acts 1:3). Church historian C.H. Turner offers that in support and to show fulfillment of this call of Christ, St. Luke wrote Acts in six "panels" ending each section with a progress report:
 - a. 1:1-6:7 – Tells of the Church in Jerusalem and the preaching of Peter. *So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. (6:7)*
 - b. 6:8-9:31 – the spread of Christianity throughout Palestine and the martyrdom of St. Stephen. *Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers. (9:31)*
 - c. 9:32-12:24 – The conversion of St. Paul, the extension of the Church into Antioch and the receiving into the Church of Cornelius, a gentile. *But the word of God continued to spread and flourish. (12:24)*

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- d. 12:25-16:5 – extension of the Church through Asia Minor and the preaching tour within Galatia. *So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. (16:5)*
- e. 16:6-19:20 – The extension of the Church into Europe and the work of St. Paul in cities like Corinth and Ephesus. *In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. (19:20)*
- f. 19:21-28:31 – the arrival of St. Paul in Rome and his imprisonment there. With Rome seen as the center of the world, and with Paul preaching the Kingdom of God with great conviction: *He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance! (28:31)*

In understanding this document in this way we can understand why St. Luke does not give us the answer to the question most have upon concluding this document – What happens to St. Paul? Since this is not the story of St. Paul (although he plays a prominent role), St. Luke did not make that bit of history a part of his book; because the story of the proclamation of the gospel continues to this day in the work and mission of those who continue to believe Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And while there are many theories and “traditions” as to St. Paul’s end, in fact to this day it remains a mystery as to what happened, how he meet his death and where. St. Luke ends this document where he ends it because the purpose of writing was to tell of the early Church progress, the Apostles and disciples success in their commission to: *be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:3).*

Acts is far from being a lifeless chronicle of facts and figures. Luke has given us an artful narrative filled with inspiring heroes, moving speeches and daring adventures.

Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles

Date it was Written

Scholars have generally dated Acts in either the 60’s or 80’s of the first century and there is continued “discussion” as to when this document was written. Most offer the earlier date, some suggesting before 60AD. Why? Not by what they find in the document but by what is not mentioned. There is no mention of the fire that swept through Rome in 64AD. This fire gave Nero reason to persecute the early Christians believing they were the cause. We also do not hear of the deaths of Peter or Paul which is believed to happen in the late 60’s. We do not hear of Rome’s conquest by Vespasian and Titus of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple which happened in 70AD. With Peter and Paul being prominent in the telling of this history and Jerusalem as the center of faith, scholars believe by St. Luke’s silence he knows nothing of either.

Who were St. Luke’s Sources

All scholarship agrees that St. Luke was not only a physician but a historian as well. Where did he get his facts? For instance, St. Luke would have needed resources to the early Christian community

happenings since St. Luke came later to the story of faith, after the death of Christ. Scholars agree that Acts falls into two sections and St. Luke would have relied on different resources for each:

1. The first fifteen chapters which focus on the events and happens of the Apostles and disciples of Christ, St. Luke most likely relied on two sources:
 - a. The accounts and records of the local Churches. While things were not written down as they would today, for millennium people relied on a strong oral tradition. Even today we have our stories of faith and community that are shared and passed down.
 - b. It is very probably that there were both written and oral stories of the Apostles (the Acts of Peter, the Acts of John...) that were shared among the community.
2. From Chapter 16 on Luke most likely had personal knowledge of most of what was written. There are times in this half that sections are written in the first person plural where “they” become “we”. St. Luke was a traveling companion and friend of St. Paul, so what St. Luke did not participate in he would have heard from the lips of Paul.

Structure and Outline

We have already looked at one suggestion for the outline of this document but most scholarship divides the Acts of the Apostles into three sections:

1. Acts 1:1-8:3 – the Gospel preached in Jerusalem. This was most likely a two year time frame in which the action of the Church was directed at converting the Jews. The focus of the book will be on the work of St. Peter.
2. Acts 8:4 -12:25 – the Gospel preached in Judea and Samaria. Now we are beginning to move out further from the city into the surrounding areas of Judea and Samaria. You may remember from past conversations that Samaria was were those Israelites who survived the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Nation of Israel in the 8th century BC settled and inter married with gentiles (becoming Samaritans). No “good” Jew would go into Samaria because it meant becoming “unclean”. Now we have the Apostles and disciples moving their missionary work into this “no-man’s land” for Jews. Peter continues to be the focus of the work. This section of Acts takes about a 10 year time frame.
3. Acts 13:1-28:31 – the Gospel preached to the ends of the earth. This is approximately a 17 year period of time and focuses primarily on St. Paul: His conversion experience and his three missionary journeys. And here we have the Acts of the Apostles missionary work focused proclaiming the gospel to the gentiles.

There is another structure of the Acts of the Apostles I would like to take a look at. My reason for wanting to follow our study of last year (The Gospel of Luke) with St. Luke’s second work (The Acts of the Apostles) is for just this reason. Recent scholarly conversation has brought to the light that if we put these two documents side by side we see that St. Luke followed the same pattern in Acts as in the Life of Christ. So, what we read/study of the life of Jesus, His acts, remarks, obstacles, problems

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and deeds in the Gospel of Luke we will find the parallel of action, remarks, obstacles, problems and deeds of the Apostles and disciples in Acts. What we see is that the early life of the Church parallels the life of Christ. The Church lives the life of Christ. But there is another parallel within Acts we should be aware of and that is that of the mission work of the two Apostles Peter and Paul. The first twelve chapters of Acts focuses on Peter as the Apostle to the Jews and chapter 13 on focuses on Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles. Why would St. Luke construct this document that way? Scholars believe inspired by the Holy Spirit we are to see that both have apostolic authority, both have a genuine call supported by and commission by God. So to sum up there is an intertextual relationship between The Gospel of Luke and Acts – between Jesus and the Apostles and there is an intertextual relationship within Acts between Peter and Paul. SEE HANDOUT.

Main Themes

Since this document is the sequel to the Gospel of Luke, we know from the mere writing of this book that the work that was begun in the gospel through Jesus Christ is not complete. Ultimately there are two themes:

1. In St. Luke's writings he tells the New Testament story of how the Kingdom of God was established here on earth. What began in the Old Testament as God's divine plan for all of humanity's salvation was brought to fulfillment in Jesus Christ in the Gospel. What is different in Acts is that this divine activity transfers from the mission of Jesus into the hands of the Apostles and disciples and is fortified through the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. The second theme: this divine message of salvation is one offered to ALL peoples with the hopes we will join in the fight/mission. What we see in the Old Testament is that God calls the Israelites/Jews to not only be God's people but to call all people into relationship with God. Jesus comes to provide that bridge by winning salvation. In the Acts of the Apostles we will read and experience how the Apostles and the early Church pick up this responsibility to proclaim salvation to one and all, to *all nations*.

Principle Division or Outline

- 1) The Preparation for the Christian Mission 1:102:13
 - a) Ascension of Jesus (1:6-14)
 - b) Replacement of Judas (1:15-26)
 - c) Pentecost (2:1-13)
- 2) The Mission in Jerusalem 2:14-8:3
 - a) The Spirit's Descent on Jerusalem (2:14-47)
 - b) Peter's Ministry and First Imprisonment (3:1-4:31)
 - c) Donations and Discipline among Believers (4:32-5:11)
 - d) Peter's Ministry and Second Imprisonment (5:12-42)
 - e) Selection of the Seven (6:1-7)
 - f) Stephen's Ministry and Martyrdom (6:8-7:60)

- g) The First Persecution of the Church (8:1-3)
- 3) The Mission in Judea and Samaria 8:4-12:25
 - a) Philip's Ministry in Samaria and Judea (8:4-40)
 - b) The Conversion of Saul (9:1-31)
 - c) Peter's Ministry in Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea (9:32-11:18)
 - d) Gentile Conversions in Syrian Antioch (11:19-30)
 - e) The Persecution and Death of Herod Agrippa (12:1-25)
- 4) The Mission of Paul to the Ends of the Earth 13:1-28:31
 - a) Paul's First Missionary Journey: Cyprus and Asia Minor (13:1-14:28)
 - b) The Council of Jerusalem (15:1-35)
 - c) Paul's Second Missionary Journey: Asia Minor, Greece, Ephesus (15:36-18:22)
 - d) Paul's Third Missionary Journey: Asia Minor, Ephesus, Greece (18:23-21:15)
 - e) Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem and Imprisonment in Caesarea (21:16-26:32)
 - f) Paul's Journey to Rome (27:1-28:16)
 - g) Paul's Ministry in Rome (28:17-31)

Reflection Questions

1. Do you think it is important to read the Acts of the Apostles as the sequel to the Gospel of St. Luke? Why or Why Not?
2. What are your thoughts about studying the lives, the testimonies of the early Church? Do you think it is valuable? Explain.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church

141 The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord: both nourish and govern the whole Christian life. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (*Ps* 119:105; cf. *Isa* 50:4).

The Inspiration and the Truth of Scripture

106 God inspired the human authors of the sacred books. "To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more."

107 The inspired books teach the truth. "Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures."

For more read Catechisms 105-108, 132-133

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Bibliography:

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- Agape Bible Study: Gospel of Luke by Michal Hunt. Agapebiblestudy.com
- Acts: The Spread of the Kingdom by Jeff Cavins and Sarah Christmyer