

Introducing . . . Dr. Luke

Acts 1:1

Introduction

We turn our attention today, to the book of Acts. I cannot think of a better time in the history of our church to begin studying the life of the New Testament church.

Acts is the biography of the church, not in meditation, but in action. In fact the word “action” is in the very title of the book, “The Acts or ‘Action’ of the Apostles”. Before we dive into this inspired book, let us take a bird’s eye view.

Outlines of the book of Acts

The book of Acts, or Luke’s sequel, could be outlined in several different ways.

Based upon Acts 1:8

The first outline could be based upon the fulfillment of Christ’s command to the apostles, in chapter 1, verse 8, where He told them to,

. . . be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

This outline includes:

1. The church originating in Jerusalem (chapters 1-7);
2. The church dispersing to Judea and Samaria (chapters 8-12);
3. The church impacting to the ends of the earth (chapters 13-28).

Based upon the key figures of Acts

A second outline could be based upon the key figures in the book of Acts. This includes:

1. The ministry of the apostle Peter (chapters 1-12);
2. The ministry of the apostle Paul (chapters 13-28).

Based upon six progress reports of growth and development

Charles Barclay provided a third interesting outline that is based upon six progress reports of growth and development. This includes the following, with the ending verse of the section giving us the progress report:

1. “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem” (Acts 1:1-6:7);
2. “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up . . .” (Acts 6:8-9:31);
3. “But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.” (Acts 9:32-12:24);
4. “So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.” (Acts 12:25-16:5);
5. “So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.” (Acts 16:6-19:20);
6. “Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.” (Acts 19:21-28:31).

Why was Acts preserved in the canon of Holy Scripture?

Now, as students of God's Word, we hope to rightly divide the word of truth so as not to be ashamed (II Timothy 2:15, paraphrased). So, the key questions become: Who?, What?, Where?, When?, and Why?.

Let me answer the "Why?" question before we go further. Why was Acts preserved in the canon of Holy Scripture? A better way of asking that question is, "What is God's motive behind the manuscript?"

I believe God gave us the book of Acts for several reasons. Let me give them to you.

To provide biographical sketches of His new creation, the church

1. To provide biographical sketches of His new creation, the church!

The book of Acts contains the beginning chapters of the biography of the New Testament Church.

To commend Christianity to the Roman government

2. To commend Christianity to the Roman government.

It is interesting to go through Luke's writings and notice all of the times in which he refers to favorable treatment by Roman officials. It has led some to believe that the book of Acts was nothing other than a brief prepared for Paul's defense when he stood trial before the Roman Emperor.

To reveal the expansion of Christianity

3. To reveal the expansion of Christianity.

The gospels end with a few disciples who have barely recovered from the shock of seeing the resurrected Lord. The next book would be the epistle to the Christians living in Rome, if the book of Acts were not there. The book of Romans lets us know that there were believers in Rome, Italy. If Paul were writing to us today, the letter would be entitled, "North Carolinians". That sounds sort of homespun, doesn't it?! How did believers get to North Carolina? How did believers get to Rome, as well as to other parts of the world? The book of Acts explains it all.

To serve as a bridge between the gospels and the epistles

4. To serve as a bridge between the gospels and the epistles.

The book of Acts is appropriately placed between the gospels and the epistles. It serves as a literary and historical bridge between the life of Christ and the life of the Church. This is the most important purpose that the book of Acts fulfills. I have saved this for last because more needs to be said.

Frankly, there has never been more confusion as it relates to the ministry and power of the Holy Spirit, than today in our generation in the evangelical church. Most of it is entirely due to either a lack of understanding or a conscious attempt to torture the text of this one book, which is the second book of Luke.

We are living, ladies and gentlemen, in what is called the, "Third Wave Movement". Supposedly, the third wave of the Holy Spirit has fallen. The first wave was at the turn of the twentieth century with the birth of Pentecostalism. The second wave was around the 1950's with the growth of tongues and healing phenomena. Now there is the third wave that began in the 1970's with the power movement that spawned a myriad of beliefs. With this wave, tongues and healing were no longer necessary, but some physical evidence of power was necessary. The leading ecclesiastical body of the third wave movement is the Vineyard Church.

The basic belief of the third wave is that everything in the book of Acts should be happening in the church today. Since the birth of the church was accompanied by signs and wonders, then the effectiveness of the church today depends upon signs and wonders.

Now, we will study these issues in detail later, as we move into chapter 2 of Acts. At this time, let me make one point. When we studied the life of Elijah some time ago, we came to the passage where Elijah called down fire from heaven. If you remember, it fell from the sky, burned the altar of sacrifice, and proved undeniably to all the prophets of Baal that someone very powerful lived up there.

Now, if you remember my application in that sermon, and I am sure you do, I did not tell anyone to expect to be able to do the same thing. No, that experience was not an illustration of the normal

everyday Christian experience. Just because Elijah did it, does not mean that when you have slaved over your charcoal grill for an hour trying to get the charcoal lit, you can step back and say, “Okay Lord, smoke it!”

Just because a prophet did this, does not mean you are supposed to do it! For some reason, however, it is much harder for us to say, “Just because the apostles did it, doesn’t mean I’m supposed to expect it in my Christian experience.”

In other words, as you approach this transitional book, which is a book of new beginnings with displays of supernatural power that God had long before announced would happen, there are experiences and there are decisions made that are not intended by the divine Author to become the normal pursuit of everyday Christian living.

You can become like the proverbial man who opened the Bible with the promise to do whatever he saw. He turned to Matthew, chapter 27, and his finger fell upon verse 5, which says, “. . . and he went away and hanged himself.”

The man said, “Oh no, what am I going to do?”

So, he closed his eyes and turned a few pages to John, chapter 13, verse 27, which says, “. . . What you do, do quickly.”

While every experience and decision in this Book is profitable to us, for us to glean principles of application, truths and discoveries, we need to be careful with what I call selective interpretation. In other words, do not think, “I’ll take this verse. Naa, I don’t want that verse.”

You might say, “Stephen, we’re talking about the book of Acts though. I want to experience it all.”

Okay, then we need to immediately re-arrange our calendars so that we can begin meeting every day of the week. And let us dismiss all the elders, including me, and decide the future elder board by the casting of lots. Sir, just think, tomorrow the Senior Pastor of Colonial could be you! He just slid under his chair.

Turn to chapter 4, verses 32 through 35.

And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and

abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles’ feet and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

I love that passage. Let us take a vote!! How many power preachers, how many television and radio pastors and evangelists would be willing to give away everything they own to a community pot where they share equally with the people they have been in the process of systematically robbing?

Let me say to you, those deceiving prophets who parade about healing and performing miracles, claiming to hear the voice of God through the TV screen, claiming to be conduits of supernatural power will be among those who one day, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 7, verses 22b through 23a, stand before the Lord at the judgment day, and say, “. . . ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons. And in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you . . .’”

Did you notice that the Lord never invalidates what they claimed to have done? He simply says, “I never did it through you; you were informed and empowered by the King of Lies.”

That is why I am spending time at the outset on this subject. This is more than some simple, innocent misunderstanding of scripture. To be misinformed about the book of Acts may in fact, mean that you could be led and deceived by a false prophet; a prophet who evidently was able to perform miracles and in the process, fool thousands and mislead many into a futile pursuit. All the while, the Holy Spirit, in truth, stands by, neglected and ignored, when He had intended to be welcomed.

The book of Acts stands as a wonderfully exciting history; a manual that can take the Bible student from the life of Christ, through the beginning of the church, into the doctrine of church life and practice taught in the Epistles.

Now, having said all of that, you might be inclined to think, “Our pastor doesn’t believe in miracles.”

I do, but I do not believe in miracle workers.

“Our pastor must not believe in divine healing.”

I do, but I do not believe in divine healers.

Now, let us leave that and introduce the instrument of divine inspiration. His name is Luke.

Introducing Luke

If we put the clues together, we discover that Luke was a medical doctor who first met Paul in the thriving seaport town of Troas. Troas was the gateway between the civilizations of West and East. Ships were constantly arriving from all over the world at Troas, which was the major hub of the trade routes to Asia. There could hardly have been a more promising place for a young man to begin his medical career than in this thriving city.

We are never told the circumstances that brought Paul and Luke together, but we do know that Paul suffered from more than one physical ailment. When Paul and Timothy came to Troas at the end of a long journey, he evidently needed a doctor's care. Perhaps, as F. B. Meyer suggests, Paul sent Timothy to find an available doctor and, according to the providence of God, Timothy found a young Greek doctor by the name of Luke. At some point, in the course of Luke's visit, Paul shared the story of the risen Christ – and Luke eventually believed.

That, however, was not all. Luke was eventually confronted with the challenge to take his medical skills on the road and accompany Paul himself. Luke would reach the point where he had to decide between a lucrative practice in Troas and a dangerous, difficult ministry with Paul.

Well, we know the answer to that. Luke became a man that Paul would later refer to in Colossians, chapter 4, verse 14a, as,

Luke, the beloved physician . . .

Luke's ministry involvement

Now Luke's ministry involvement would include at least four things. Let me give them to you.

A precise author

1. Luke's ministry would include that of being a precise author.

Let us start by looking at his first words in his first account. Turn to Luke, chapter 1, verses 1 through 4.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Did you catch his passion for precision? He must have been an outstanding doctor. Note his choice of words: "compile" (verse 1), "investigated" (verse 3), "consecutive order" (verse 3), "exact truth" (verse 4).

The way in which Luke employed the use of precise medical language is interesting. For example:

- the word "investigated," in verse 3, is the word that was used by doctors when they investigated the symptoms of someone's illness;
- the illustration that appears in chapter 4 of Luke as he tells of a demon possessed man being thrown upon the ground, includes the correct medical word for convulsions, which only Luke uses;
- the saying about the camel passing through the eye of a needle, which is recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, has the word for "needle," which is an ordinary tailor's needle, in Matthew and Mark's account, where Luke alone uses the word "belone," which is the technical word for a surgeon's needle.

A dedicated missionary

2. Another ministry of Luke was that of a dedicated missionary.

Turn back to the book of Acts and notice something interesting in chapter 16. Luke will change the pronouns to "we" and "us" several times in the book of Acts. One of the most enlightening glimpses into the character and passion of Luke is found in Acts, chapter 16, verses 9 and 10.

A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen

the vision, immediately WE sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that the God had called US to preach the gospel to them.

Luke did not view himself as a medical “tagalong”. He was a member of the missionary team! He says, “God had called US”. Luke evidently preached with his hands.

A faithful comrade

3. Another part of Luke’s legacy is that of faithful comrade.

In II Timothy, chapter 4, verses 10 through 11a, Paul, who is in prison, writes with such pathos,

. . . Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. . . .

The one who stayed by Paul until his execution in Rome was the beloved doctor, Luke.

An anonymous servant

4. One more point about Luke’s ministry is that he remained the anonymous servant.

Nowhere in the gospel of Luke or the book of Acts did Luke ever write his own name. All of the information we have concerning this brilliant, dedicated, gracious man is squeezed from a few verses of scripture.

Introducing Theophilus

Now, let us go back to the beginning of Acts and introduce another man. Turn to Acts, chapter 1.

Another man we know little of was the one to whom Luke was writing. Perhaps by now, you have realized that both of the books by Luke, the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, were written to the same man. Notice verse 1 of Acts, chapter 1.

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach

Now, in Luke’s gospel account, chapter 1, verse 3, Luke referred to Theophilus with the additional words, “most excellent Theophilus”.

Who was Theophilus and why would Luke spend such a vast amount of time writing such lengthy volumes to him?

I find it fascinating that, having read nearly all the current scholarship available on this man Theophilus,

no one really knows with certainty the answers to these questions. However, a few possibilities include:

- The use of the words, “most excellent,” are actually part of a title by Roman officials high in the government. It is very possible that Theophilus was a convert to Christianity, who occupied a role of influence in the empire of Rome.
- Wealthy men often supplied the finances that enabled authors to produce books. Many of the early Greek writings were made possible by wealthy donors, and as a recompense, those books were addressed or rather, dedicated to the donor. Is it possible that Theophilus was a wealthy, Roman official who actually had these books dedicated to his generosity, while the audience was actually anyone and everyone who read the books?
- Theophilus was not a real name after all, but instead, was a name created by Luke as he wrote to the Christian community. He simply combined two important Greek words: “Theos,” or “God,” and “philos,” or “brotherly love,” which is thus translated, “Lover of God” or “A close companion of God”. Luke simply addressed his Christian readers as “the friends of God”.

Now, are you wondering which option I like the best? Frankly, I like them all. While I personally believe that Theophilus was indeed a high ranking Roman official, I think his name is divinely ironic – “Friend of God”!

I cannot help but wonder if the Lord wanted to subtly give the message that this book was written to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus Christ Himself said to His disciples, as recorded in John, chapter 15, verse 15, “No longer do I call you slaves, . . . but I have called you friends . . .”, this book was written to us too. Inspired by the Spirit of God, Luke was writing to Theophilus – and he was writing to us too!

So, when we put the clues together, we actually discover two remarkable men:

- One was named Theophilus. He was a politician who was high up in the halls of political power, but yet a man who was not ashamed of his thirst for the things of God. I cannot help but wonder, as Paul concluded his letter to the believers in Philippi, a Roman

colony, that when he penned a special greeting to the saints in Caesar's administration, if he was sending a greeting to Theophilus.

- The other man, Luke, that we have been introduced to, perhaps for the first time, was a doctor, an author, and a faithful missionary. He is a man who can become a model for us. He is not perfect, but was passionate in his zeal for the exact truth. He was an unselfish teacher who, for the benefit of one student, surviving somewhere in the Roman political system, spent enormous amounts of his time writing. He wrote so that one friend of God, and all of us as well, who are friends of God, would come to know God better.

An Additional Thought About Luke

Let me give one more thought. The life of Luke was highlighted in an interesting manuscript that dates back to just forty years after his death. It is actually a copy of Luke's gospel, but this particular copy is fascinating because it has an introduction attached to it that reads in part,

Luke was an Antiochian of Syria, a physician by profession. He was a disciple of the apostles and later accompanied Paul until Paul's martyrdom. Having neither wife nor children, he served the Lord without blame; and at the age of 84, full of the Holy Spirit, he fell asleep.

This tells us more information about Luke. He was a single man who lived a godly life for the glory of God. It also tells us that when he died as an eighty-four year old man, he had served the Lord without blame. In other words, he finished well. Just like the man he traveled with, Luke fought the fight and finished his course with honor.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 9/1/1996 by Stephen Davey.

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