

## **Welcome to The Book of Acts (aka: The Acts of the Apostles)**

### **Who wrote Acts?**

Like many books in the Bible the writer does not identify himself which was not unusual in the ancient world. This was in order to highlight the content rather than the author. But other early sources (2<sup>nd</sup> century) identify Luke as the author of two New Testament books – The Gospel of Luke and Acts as a two volume set. See the first few verses of the first chapters in each book which make plain that there is one author.

### **Who was Luke?**

Paul's "fellow worker" / Philemon 24.

Paul's "dear friend Luke, the doctor" / Col 4:14.

Paul's sole companion in Roman imprisonment / 2 Tim 4:11.

Participant in some of Paul's missionary journeys (see the "we" passages in Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16).

Was he a Gentile convert to Judaism or a "God-fearer" (sympathizers with the local synagogue and Jewish faith) who became a Christian?

Thought to be a native of Antioch in Syria (now part of Turkey) which became one of the five ancient centers of early Christianity:

Jerusalem; Antioch; Alexandria; Rome; Constantinople.

Traveled widely, wrote in educated standard *Koine* (common) Greek.

### **When was Acts written?**

Many argue for a date between 80-90 AD, but there are compelling reasons for a date in the 60's and before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD.

### **What is the purpose of Acts? Why was it written?**

- The Gospel of Luke is described as a record of "all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1)
- The Book of Acts is then the continuation of the story, tracing the growth and expansion of Christian communities through the work of early missionaries – particularly Peter and Paul. It is a selective account. For example, first it focuses mainly on Peter (chs 1-7, 10-11), then a bit on Stephen, Philip and Barnabas (ch 8), then the majority of the balance

of the book looks at Paul (ch 9, 12—28). It is silent on Peter's later activities (42-67 AD / in Rome?) and quiet on early Paul (32-42 AD in Arabia, Syria, Cilicia) in the period after his conversion. Acts is silent on most of the twelve named apostles in Acts 1. We are also not told how Christianity got to Rome, Damascus, Alexandria, or Cyrene (Libya).

Acts gives a lively and reliable account of the birth and "expansion of the Christian Movement as a work of God through the now exalted Jesus, who in turn distributes his Spirit as a sign that the new era and salvation have come to both Jews and Gentiles." Acts selectively records and promotes the mission of the church whose leaders are obedient to the divine commission, charging them to take the gospel to cities and regions in which the name of Jesus, Messiah and Savior, has not yet been proclaimed (*Acts*, Eckhard Schnabel, 2012).

**How do we read and understand Acts? Read it:**

- As a reliable account -- See Luke 1:1-4 for Luke's historical principles of research and organization while being an ancient text;
- As addressed to "Theophilus" – literally "Lover of God," also the recipient of the Gospel of Luke and who perhaps underwrote Luke's research and composition of this dual writing project;
- As also designed for a broader reading/hearing audience;
- As the story of the spread of the Christian message and movement;
- Thru multicultural eyes - with who we are as a multicultural church in mind, asking what we learn about life and ministry together;
- Asking God to tell us who to be and what to do in order to "be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

**Outline:** (see Acts 1:8)

1—7 / Jerusalem and Judea

8 / Samaria and scattering

9 / "to the ends of the earth"