

ORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY GOD AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE WORD!

BACKGROUND

“The Acts of the Apostles was originally written as the second part of a two volume work, and its inseparable relation to Luke's Gospel must be kept in mind if we are to understand the work. The prologue (Introduction) to the two volume work (Luke Ch1:1-4) suggests, in fact, that the authors intention was to write “an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us” - things that stretched from the birth of John the Baptist to the entrance of the Good News into Rome. And the use of the emphatic verb “began” (erxato) as he commences his second volume (Acts Ch1:1) sets up the parallel between “all that Jesus **began** to do and to teach” as recorded in his Gospel and what he continued to do and to teach through his Church as is shown in Acts”(Cited in Richard Longenecker, Commentary on Acts, pg231-232).

Luke is only mentioned **three times in the New Testament** and each time through the apostle Paul's writings we learn something about the qualities of Luke, **Colossians Ch4:14 (my dear friend Luke the Doctor), Philemon 24 (my fellow worker) and 2 Timothy Ch4:11 (Only Luke is with me).**

What do we learn about Luke? He is a dear friend to Paul and others, along with being a medic! He is regarded by Paul as a fellow worker in the Gospel and remains a faithful friend, helper and encourager to the end, **as he was present in Rome for both of Paul's imprisonments!**

Along with the above references, in the Book of Acts also written by Luke, he is mentioned in the we/us accounts, during Paul's second missionary journey **covered from Acts Ch15:36 – Ch18:22.** Finally he is **mentioned once on the third missionary journey of Paul in Acts Ch20:15,** where we can gather that Luke was part of the team that Paul had assembled to spread the Gospel, **making Luke an evangelist!**

All these years in all these travels, including two years in Palestine, Luke is taking notes about the works and words of Jesus and the progress of the church. Finally, God moves him to write a two-volume work that makes up more of the New Testament than what any other New Testament writer wrote, including the apostle Paul.

The volume of writings contained in both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, not only makes the Gospel of Luke the largest, but combined with Acts, Luke in terms of volume **is the single biggest contributor of the entire New Testament.**

THE CAREFUL INVESTIGATION!

Luke Ch1:1-4 - In his first Book, the “Gospel of Luke”, which he refers to as the “former book” in the beginning of his second book “Acts” the two writings form a pair for his friend “Theophilus” and both are written in the same literary Greek style. Luke records for his friend, Theophilus, how he went about writing what he did:

Luke Ch1:1-4 – Luke is writing to his friend the “most excellent Theophilus” **and is so concerned about his spiritual well-being,** he sets out clearly the Gospel of Jesus Christ.. It's probable at the time of writing the Gospel that Theophilus is not yet saved, notice the way that Luke refers to him, as it is highly unlikely that Luke would greet a Christian in the same way. Theophilus is probably some kind of Roman official because of

the title “most excellent” which Luke uses only for Roman officials like Felix (Acts Ch23:26) and Festus (Acts Ch26:25), the governors of Judea. Theophilus had some knowledge of Jesus and the church, but it was not clear and certain and complete. Luke’s aim was to give him a faithful account of what Jesus did and said and then of the progress of the church in the world.

However, look at how Luke addresses Theophilus in Acts Ch1:1, it’s so different. ***It is probably different because Theophilus is now born again!***

So how did Luke go about his investigation? He kept pure what was “handed down” from the eyewitnesses (v2), and the word “eyewitnesses” is only found in one other place in the New Testament, in ***2 Peter Ch1:16***.

What does Luke mean by the phrase “from the beginning” (v3)? I want to suggest that if we consider Luke’s genealogy in Ch3:21-38, from Jesus right back to Genesis and the Garden of Eden, Luke has investigated, carefully, all of the documents, testimonies, and facts concerning Jesus and now provides in terms of volume, the largest gospel account!

What light will this Gospel shed for us and our lives today?

- The Gospel is truth and therefore tells us what to believe!
- The Gospel is truth and tells us how to live!
- The Gospel is truth and tells who will comfort us!
- The Gospel is truth and tells what is going to happen in the future!

WHY WRITE TO THEO?

John Stott in his commentary on Luke states “Reverting to the question why Luke wrote his two-volume work on the origins of Christianity, at least three answers may be given. ***He wrote as a Christian Historian, as a diplomat and as a theologian-evangelist.***

a. Luke the historian

Luke Ch1:1-4 is the real preface (an introduction to a Book) to Acts as well as the Gospel itself!

Here it is:

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been ***fulfilled*** among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were ***eye-witnesses*** and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully ***investigated*** everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to ***write*** an orderly account for you most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the ***certainty*** of the things you have been taught.

In this important statement Luke delineates five successive stages:

First came the historical events, Luke calls them certain ‘things that have been ***fulfilled*** among us’. And if ***fulfilled*** is the right translation, it seems to indicate that these events were neither random or unexpected, but took place in ***fulfilment*** of Old Testament prophecy.

Next Luke mentions the contemporary ***eye-witnesses***, for the things ‘fulfilled among us were then handed down to us by those who were from the first ***eye-witnesses*** and

servants of the word'. Here Luke excludes himself, for, although he was an **eye-witness** of much that he will record in the second part of the Acts, he did not belong to the group who were **eye-witnesses** 'from the first'. These were the apostles, who were **witnesses** of the historic Jesus and who then handed down (the meaning of 'tradition') to others what they had themselves seen and heard.

The third stage was Luke's own personal researches. Although he belonged to the second generation who had received the 'tradition' about Jesus from the apostolic eye-witnesses, he had not accepted it uncritically. On the contrary, he had '**carefully investigated** everything from the beginning'.

Fourthly, after the events, the eye-witness tradition and the investigation came the writing. 'Many have undertaken to draw up an account' of these things, he says, and now 'it seemed good also to me to **write** an orderly account.' The 'many' authors doubtless included Mark.

Fifthly, the writing would have readers, among them Theophilus whom Luke addresses, 'so that you may know the **certainty** of the things you have been taught'. Thus the events which had been accomplished, witnessed, transmitted, investigated and written down were (and still are) to be the ground of Christian faith and assurance.

Moreover, the Luke who claimed to be writing history was well qualified to do so, for he was an educated doctor, a travelling companion of Paul, and had resided in Palestine for at least two years.

b. Luke the Diplomat

The writing of history cannot have been Luke's only purpose, for the history he gives us is selective and incomplete. He tells us about Peter, John, James the Lord's brother and Paul, but nothing about the other apostles, except that James the son of Zebedee was beheaded. He describes the spread of the Gospel north and west of Jerusalem, but writes nothing about its progress east and south, except for the conversion of the Ethiopian. He portrays the Palestinian Church in the early post-Pentecost period, but then **follows instead the expansion of the Gentile mission under the leadership of Paul**. So Luke is more than a historian. He is, in fact, a sensitive Christian - 'diplomat' in relation to both Church and state.

First, Luke develops a political apologetic (a formal defence), because he is deeply concerned about the attitude of the Roman authorities towards Christianity. He therefore goes out of his way to defend Christianity against criticism. The authorities, he argues, have nothing to fear from Christians, for they are neither seditious (cause people to rebel against authority) nor subversive (undermine authority), but on the contrary, legally innocent and morally harmless. More positively, they exercise a wholesome influence on society.

Luke repeatedly makes **three points of political apologetic**. **First**, Roman officials were consistently friendly to Christianity, and some had become Christians, like the centurion at the cross, the centurion Cornelius, and Sergius Paulus, proconsul of Cyprus. **Secondly**, the Roman authorities could find no fault in either Jesus or his apostles. Jesus had been accused of sedition, but neither Herod nor Pilate could discover any basis for the accusation. As for Paul, in Philippi the magistrates apologized to him, in Corinth the proconsul Gallio refused to adjudicate, and in Ephesus the town clerk declared Paul and his friends to be innocent. Then Felix, Festus and Agrippa all failed to convict him of any

offence – three acquittals corresponding to three times Luke says Pilate declared Jesus innocent.

In the **third place**, the Roman authorities conceded that Christianity was a **religio licita** (a lawful or licensed religion) because it was not a new religion (which would need to be approved by the state) but rather the purest form of Judaism (which had enjoyed religious freedom under the Romans since the second century BC). The coming of Christ was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, and the Christian community enjoyed direct continuity with the Old Testament people of God” (Cited in John Stott commentary on Acts – pg21-27).

c. Luke the theologian-evangelist

According to Howard Marshall “Luke is both historian and theologian, and the best term to describe him is evangelist, a term which we believe, includes both of the others ... As a theologian Luke was concerned that his message about Jesus and the early Church should be based upon reliable history He used his history in the service of his theology” (Cited in John Stott Commentary on Acts – pg 29-30).

“Luke's theology of salvation is already adumbrated (future event, foreshadow) in the `Song of Simeon' or Nunc Dimittis which he records in his Gospel. **Three fundamental truths stand out.**

First, salvation has been prepared by God. In speaking to God, Simeon referred to `your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people' (Luke Ch2:30-31). Far from being an afterthought, it had been planned and promised for centuries. The same emphasis recurs throughout the Acts. In the sermons of Peter and Paul, not to mention Stephen's defence, Jesus' death, resurrection, reign and Spirit-gift are all seen as the culmination of centuries of prophetic promise.

Secondly, salvation is bestowed by Christ. When Simeon spoke to God of `your salvation', which he had seen with his own eyes, he was referring to the baby Jesus whom he held in his arms and who had been `born a Saviour' (Luke Ch2:11). Jesus himself later made the unequivocal statement that he had come `to seek and to save what was lost' (Luke Ch19:10), and he illustrated this by his three famous parables of human lostness (Luke Ch15:1-32). Then after his death and resurrection his apostles declared that forgiveness of sins was available to all who would repent and believe in Jesus (Acts Ch2:38-39; Ch13:38-39). Indeed, salvation was to be found in no-one else (Acts Ch4:12). For God had exalted Jesus to his right hand `as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins ...' (Acts Ch5:31).

Thirdly, salvation is offered to all peoples. As Simeon put it, it had been prepared `in the presence of all the peoples' (literally), to be both a light to the nations and the glory of Israel (Luke Ch2:31-32). Without doubt it is this truth on which Luke lays his major emphasis. In Luke Ch3:6, in reference to John the Baptist, he continues his quotation from Isaiah Ch40 beyond where Matthew and Mark stop, in order to include the statement `all flesh will see God's Salvation'. In Acts Ch2:17 he records Peter's quotation of God's promise through Joel: `I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.' These two words **pasa sarx, `all flesh' or `all humankind'**, stand as a sign-post near the beginning of each of Luke's two volumes, in both cases embedded in an Old Testament prophecy, to point to Luke's principle message. **Jesus is the Saviour of the world**; nobody is beyond the embrace of his love. In his Gospel, Luke shows Jesus' compassion for those sections of community whom others despised, namely women and children, the poor, the sick, the sinful and the

outcast, Samaritans and Gentiles, while in the Acts, Luke explains how Paul came to turn to the Gentiles, and describes the Gospel's triumphal progress from Jerusalem the capital of Jewry to Rome the capital of the world" (Cited in John Stott commentary on Acts, pg 30-31).

WHAT SHOULD THE GOSPEL BE CALLED?

Throughout Luke's narrative there are references to the promise, gift, outpouring, baptism, fullness, power, witness and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It would be impossible to explain the progress of the gospel apart from, the work of the Spirit. Nevertheless, if the title "The Acts of the Apostles" over emphasises the human element, "The Acts of The Holy Spirit" over emphasises the divine, since it overlooks the apostles as the chief characters through whom the Spirit worked. It is also inconsistent with Luke's first verse which implies that the acts and words he reports are those of the ascended Christ working through The Holy Spirit who, as Luke knows, is "The Spirit of Jesus" (Acts Ch16:7). The most accurate (though cumbersome) title, then, which does justice to Luke's own statement in verse 1+2, would be something like "The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus by His Spirit through His Apostles" (Cited in John Stott, commentary on Acts pg33-34).

"STRUCTURE OF ACTS!"

1. It begins, like the Gospel with an introductory section of distinctly Lukan cast dealing with the constitutive events of the Christian Mission (Ch1:1 – Ch2:41) before it sets forth the advances of the Gospel "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Ch1:7).
2. This introductory section is followed by what appears to be a thematic statement (Ch2:42-47). This material, while often viewed as a summary of what precedes, most probably serves as the thesis paragraph for what follows.
3. In his presentation of the advance of the Christian Mission, ***Luke follows an essentially geographical outline that moves from Jerusalem (Ch2:42 – Ch6:7), through Judea and Samaria (Ch6:8 – Ch9:31), on into Palestine-Syria (Ch9:32 – Ch12:24), then to the Gentiles in the eastern part of the Roman empire (Ch12:25 – Ch19:20), and finally culminates in Paul's defences and the entrance of the Gospel into Rome (Ch19:21 – Ch28:31).***
4. In his presentation, Luke deliberately sets up a number of parallels between the ministry of Peter in the first half of Acts and that of Paul in the last half.

Luke includes 6 summary statements or "progress reports" (Ch6:7; Ch9:31; Ch12:24; Ch16:5; Ch19:20; Ch28:31", each of which seems to conclude it's own "panel" of material. Taking all these literary and structural features into account, we may conclude that Luke developed his material in Acts along the following lines:

Introduction: The Constitutive Events of the Christian Mission (Ch1:1 – Ch2:41)

PART 1

1. The Christian Mission to the Jewish World (Ch2:42 – Ch12:24)
2. Panel 1 – The Earliest Days of the Church at Jerusalem (Ch2:42 – Ch6:7)
Summary statement: "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" (Ch6:7).
3. Panel 2 – Critical Events in the Lives of Three Pivotal Figures (Ch6:8 – Ch9:31)
Summary statement: "Then the Church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it

- grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord” (Ch9:31).
4. Panel 3 – Advances of the Gospel in Palestine – Syria (Ch9:32 – Ch12:24)
Summary statement: “But the Word of God continued to increase and spread” (Ch12:24).

PART 2

1. The Christian Mission to the Gentile World (Ch12:25 – Ch28:31)
2. Panel 4 – The First Missionary Journey and The Jerusalem Council (Ch12:25 – Ch16:5) Summary statement: “So the Churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers” (Ch16:5)
3. Panel 5 – Wide outreach Through Two Missionary Journeys (Ch16:6 – Ch19:20) Summary statement; “In this way the Word of the Lord spread quickly and grew in power” (Ch19:20).
4. Panel 6 – To Jerusalem and Thence to Rome (Ch19:21 – Ch28:31) Summary statement; “Boldly and without hindrance he preached the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ” (Ch28;31) (Cited in Richard Longenecker, Commentary on Acts, pg233-234).”

A POTENTIAL OVERVIEW OF PAUL'S CHRONOLOGY!

Birth of Paul	5 BC - 10 AD?
Death of Jesus	AD 29/30?
Persecution of Christians	30 - 33
Conversion	33
Ministry in Arabia/Damascus	34 - 37
Jerusalem (1 st Visit)	37
Syria and Cilicia	37 - 46
Antioch	47
Jerusalem	47 - 48
First Missionary Journey	47 - 49
Antioch (Peter confronted – Gal Ch2:11-14)	49?
Apostolic Council (Acts Ch15)	49
Letter to the Galatians (1)	49
Second Missionary Journey	49 - 52
Letters 1 st - 2 nd Thessalonians (2+3)	51
Antioch via Jerusalem (Acts Ch18:22)	51 - 52?
Third Missionary Journey	52 - 57?
Time in Ephesus	52 - 55?
Letters 1 st - 2 nd Corinthians (4+5)	
Philippi	55
Corinth	55 - 56
Letter to Romans (6)	
Jerusalem (Final Time)	57
Imprisonment in Caesarea	57 - 59
Journey to Rome	59 - 60?
House arrest in Rome	60 - 63?
Letter to Ephesians, Col, Phil, Philemon (7,8,9+10)	
Second imprisonment	63 - 68?
Letters - Pastoral Epistles (11, 12+13)	63 – 68?

