

Introduction to Acts

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I. Authorship of Acts

Luke is the author of the book Acts. He was also the author of its companion work, the Gospel of Luke. Luke-Acts makes up 28% of the New Testament—more than that written by either Paul or John.

A. External Evidence

Luke is uniformly identified as the author of Acts by the second century AD, in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers:

The Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Luke; The Muratorian Fragment; Irenaeus; Clement of Alexandria; See also: Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome.

B. Internal Evidence

1. The Author was the Third Evangelist:

- This is implied in Acts 1:1, “In the first book”
- “Theophilus” is probably the same person as in Luke 1:1-4, “most excellent Theophilus.”

- There close similarity in style and language between Luke and Acts
- The tone of Luke and Acts is similar: world: worldwide outlook, interest in Gentiles, interest in woman, apologetic tendency
- The end of Luke dovetails into the beginning of Acts
- Jesus only appears to his disciples in Jerusalem in Luke and Acts
- Themes left out of Luke as a synoptic are incorporated into Acts by design (e.g., destruction of the temple [Acts 6])
- Luke is the only Gospel which refers to Jesus’ appearance before Herod Antipas in his trial (Luke 23:7-12), and this theme is alluded to in Acts 4:27.

2. The Author Was a Companion of Paul. This is a debated position, but there is good evidence for its support:

- There are movement in the narrative from the 3rd person to the first person plural—the “We” sections (16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1– 28:16). It is most natural to understand these to refer

to the personal memoirs of one of Paul's companions. There is no change in style which demonstrate these to be an external source.

- The prologue to the double work of Luke-Acts allows for Luke to have participated in some of the events of Acts ("having followed all things closely for some time past ..." Luke 1:3)
- Luke's Paul is not necessarily different from Paul's Paul. The differences can be accounted for in style, and context.

3. The Author was Luke the Physician

- The earliest traditions identify the author with the expression of Colossians 4:14, "Luke, the beloved physician" and this epistle probably aligns with Paul's Roman imprisonment which Luke would have been present during according to the "We" sections (see also Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11)
- He is distinct from those named in the "We" sections: Silas/Silvanus, Timothy, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius (of Derbe) Tychicus, or Trophimus

II. The Date of Acts: Before A.D. 64/65

A. The earliest date for the book of Acts is the two year imprisonment which is recorded in Acts 28:30-31 which would have been around A.D. 60 and 61.

B. The latest date for the book of Acts is in the second century writings of the church fathers

C. The abrupt ending of Acts allows for an early date (around the time of the events), but could also be understood theologically to emphasize the continuance of Paul's mission through other believers. Acts 20:25 may hint at Paul's death. Therefore, it is not determinative.

D. The Neronian persecution of c. A.D. 64/65 probably had not taken place by the time the book was written. There is no evidence of oppression by Rome, even if the Roman officials are less than scrupulous. There is also no indication of oppression in Rome (Acts 28). This is an argument from silence and is not determinative.

E. The Jewish revolt of A.D. 66 and / or the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 is / are not indicated in

the book of Acts. This leads many to date the book no later than A.D. 70. This is an argument from silence and is not determinative. There may also be indirect allusions to the fall of Jerusalem in Luke especially (Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24; 23:28-31). But these cannot be limited to the fall of A.D. 70. Rather, it is a part of a greater whole—the final judgment upon the nation (Luke 21:22,24).

F. Many subjects in Acts would have been prominent before A.D. 70: Gentile admission to church fellowship, coexistence of Jews and Gentiles in the church, food requirements of the apostolic decree

G. Many facts: "political, geographical, and social fields," "nomenclature," "titles of officials," and "Roman citizenship" indicate that the work was written not long after the events occurred

H. There are many "primitive" expressions of theology: "the Christ," "the Servant of God," "the Son of Man", Christians as "disciples," use of "laos" for Jews, and the use of Sunday as the first day of the week.

I. Conclusion: The above evidence leans heavily for a date that is prior to A.D. 64/65. The difficulty with this date is in explaining Luke's use of Mark since the Gospel of Luke would have had to have been written very early in this case. However, it is possible that Luke used similar sources as Mark (if "Q" is a stream of oral and written tradition). Also, if Luke's gospel was written in A.D. 60, he could have used Mark's gospel written in the 50s. However, it is not necessary to understand Luke to be altering Mark's eschatological passage in chapter 13. Jesus speaks predictively and Luke understands this.

III. The Sources of Acts

A. It is certain that Luke used sources in his composition of his double work (Luke 1:1-4).

B. In the Gospel of Luke there are parallel sources (the synoptics) from which one can compare Luke's writing and posit sources and his work of redaction, however, in Acts the majority of the material is unique. Therefore, both source and redaction criticism are limited. The speeches in Acts provide a fertile area for suggestions of "Lucan" compositions. While it is certain that they are in an "edited" form, and reflect similar design, they also occurred. Luke's treatment of historicity in Luke allows the reader to assume that he is also careful with his sources in Acts.

C. Although Luke may have been present for some of the events in Acts (the “We” sections), he was not an eye witness for all of them (at least all of Luke; Acts 1 - 12, and probably other units where “we” is not employed).

D. It is not presently possible to isolate Luke’s sources for Acts, but all indications are that he is a credible historian/theologian.

IV. Purpose of Acts

A. There are many candidates: (1) to evangelize, (2) to defend Paul and Christianity in the face of Jewish attacks, (3) to present Christianity as the *religio licita*, (4) to defend Paul’s memory, (5) to explain the delay of the parousia by positing a long term salvation history, (6) to defend against gnosticism, (7) to confirm the gospel, (8) to convey the historical movement of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, (9) to present Jesus as Lord as a defense and present fulfillment of promise against charges of false religion by Jews and explanation of partial Jewish rejection, (10) to reassure second-generation Christians of the truth of Christianity and fulfillment it represents despite Jewish rejection and the presence of persecution because Christians are heirs of promises that Israel has forfeited, (11) to show in

salvation history that the church is true Israel, true Pharisaism, (12) to explain the defeat and rejection brought to Israel and her hope by the events of the fall of Jerusalem, and explain its cause and the answer to it found in Christianity. While all of these play a part in the book, they are not adequate as an overall purpose.

B. Luke-Acts must be approached as a double work with a single purpose that is historical but primarily theological in nature.

C. Suggested purpose: Perhaps the question which is being asked by Theophilus (a Gentile-Christian) and those with him is, “How is it that Christianity is primarily Gentile in nature if it came from Judaism?” Therefore, Luke writes Luke-Acts to argue that the Christian Gospel is not anti-Semitic, but is rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures’ promise of salvation to both the Jews and the Gentiles. “The Way” shares in the initiation of the spiritual promises to Israel. They are the stewards of the promises to Israel. The reason it is primarily Gentile in nature is because the Jews rejected the message of Jesus as Messiah, and pushed the church out. Nevertheless, the Jews as a people are not rejected by God or his servant Paul. The promises will yet be consummated for the nation through the resurrected Jesus—the hope of Israel.