

Introduction to *The Acts of the Apostles*:

Although it's never clearly stated, most understand the author of 'Acts of the Apostles' to be Luke, the author of 'The Gospel According to Luke:' Luke, the physician.

We know, from tradition, that Luke was a Gentile. Paul appears to indicate so, in Colossians, as he writes of Luke and Demas separately from *'those of the circumcision,'* where he writes: *'... with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here. Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)'* ¹¹ *And Jesus, which is called Justus, **who are of the circumcision.** These only are my fellow workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me, Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God'....* then, *'Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.'* Col 4:9, 14 (Luke and Demas are Greek names)

He was a constant companion of Paul, as seen in the many references to *'we and us'* while Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24 clearly point to Luke as companion. In fact, it very well could have been Luke who transcribed Paul's dictation of other letters to various churches while with him in Rome, Philippi, etc.

Luke's Gospel and Acts form a 2-volume sweeping panorama of the history of Christianity from the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ to the death of its greatest Apostle, Paul.

In Acts, he records the spread of Christianity from the time of the Lord Jesus Christ's ascension, from the Mount of Olives, to the Holy Spirit's descension, on the Day of Pentecost, and on to Paul's arrival in Rome to preach and teach in the Capital of the World, with his subsequent house arrest, there, during which this book and his Gospel were probably written. It couldn't have been written much later since it contains no mention of the martyrdom of James in AD 62, the burning of Rome in AD 64, Paul's death or the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

This, as the continuation of Luke's Gospel, records what the Lord Jesus Christ began while on the Earth, His sending the Holy Spirit and what He then continued to do in creating and guarding His Bride, the True Church.

Acts covers the approximately 30 crucial years beyond the birth of the True Church. She began as a primarily Jewish body; at the first, the Gospel was preached only to Jews but, just as they had rejected the Lord Jesus Christ, the Jewish leaders rejected the Gospel so that Paul then went to the Gentiles:

*'And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the multitudes, **they were filled with envy,** and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. ⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, **and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.** ⁴⁷ For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. ⁴⁸ **And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.**' Acts 13:44*

This last verse is important in proving the **Doctrine of Election**; it's one which those who deny the truth of our Election, by God, twist themselves into pretzels in denying what the verse clearly does say while desperately trying to force it into saying that which it clearly does not say.

Paul's further report on his having been sent primarily to the Gentiles from the beginning of his ministry: *'And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; ¹⁸ And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. ¹⁹ And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: ²⁰ And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. ²¹ And he said unto me, Depart: **for I***

will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. ²² And they (the Jews) gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. ²³ And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air,' Acts 22:17

The True Church began with a singular Jewish identity; all those gathered in the Upper Room, on Pentecost, were Jewish and the Church remained confined to Jerusalem for a time. The Lord Jesus Christ came preaching and teaching only to Israel: '... **But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**' Matt 15: 24... this was said when a Gentile woman came begging for help because her daughter was possessed by a demon and He did heal the daughter while commenting on the woman's great faith but He continued His ministry only within the confines of Israel. But, then, He also said: '**And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.**' John 10:16 So, Jesus was alluding to the spread of Christianity out, throughout, the Gentile world, through Paul, which Acts later confirms. But, Jesus also said, '**All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.** ³⁸ For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. ³⁹ And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. ⁴⁰ And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.' John 6:37... this, He said, concerning all whom the Father chose from the foundation of the World: '**as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.**' ... '**all, ordained, will believe.**'

So, we see that, of course, God's plan was always to create the Bride for His Son and that it would, eventually be made up primarily of Gentiles from the entire World. At the time of the Rapture, the moment when the last member of the True Church, the Body and Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ is brought to faith, the vast majority, through all the years of her creation, will have been Gentiles; of course, many Jews will have been included but a minority, nonetheless. The greatest harvest of Jews/Israelis, who will have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, will have been during the Tribulation and during the Millennium.

While the infant Church was mostly Jewish, its form and nature were still similar to Judaism; they circumcised, they observed the feasts and the Law, but understood that the Lord Jesus Christ is truly the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World. But after great persecution came, forcing the Apostles out into the vast World, more and more Gentiles became believers and the Church spread out to the known World while it became wholly distinct from Judaism, as we see, today.

In the first 12 chapters of Acts, the main characters are: Peter, James, Stephen, Philip and Barnabas; then, we find that it's all about Paul who was tasked with knowing, understanding and teaching the true heart of the Gospel, which is, that we are saved by God's Grace alone through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone and, our faith is also the gift of God's Grace; additionally, we see Paul then taking that Gospel of God's Grace out to the World.

Interestingly, Acts follows the spread, and fulfillment, of Jesus' Great Commission: '**When they therefore were come together (on the mount of Olives), they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?**' ⁷ And he said unto them, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. ⁸ But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both **in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.** ⁹ And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.' Acts 1:6

Acts recounts the Church's growth and spread, first in Jerusalem and all Southern Israel, Judea, then to Northern Israel, Samaria, and then, finally, upward and outward to the uttermost parts of the Earth.

Luke's first grand work was his historical account of **The life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ**. His sequel was, then, **The Acts of the Apostles** which continued this momentous account of the history and early growth of the Christian Faith. Without Luke's faithful account, we would know far, far less about the early history of Christianity. And, so, on to **Acts of the Apostles**:

Acts 1:1: *'The former treatise (Luke's Gospel) have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,² Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:'*

This sentence covers the 3.5 years of Jesus' Earthly Ministry up to His last minutes on Earth before being taken up into a cloud and then on up to Heaven, to be seated at the right Hand of the Father, but **who is Theophilus?** Luke addressed both his Gospel and Acts to this person, Theophilus... who was he? The truth is, no one really knows for certain who he was, there are various theories as to his identity. Eventually, I think we will learn that we will have had Theophilus to thank for his keeping safe and preserving both these works.

(Many scholars believe that Theophilus could have been a wealthy benefactor who supported Paul and Luke on their missionary journeys. That would account for Luke's wanting to provide an orderly and detailed account of what had happened.

Another theory about Theophilus is that he was the Jewish high priest named Theophilus ben Ananus who was high priest in Jerusalem in A.D. 37-41. He was the son of Annas and the brother-in-law of Caiaphus.. Another theory is that the Theophilus Luke was writing to was a later high priest named Mattathias ben Theophilus, who served in Jerusalem in A.D. 65-66.

Another theory is that he was the Roman lawyer who defended Paul during his trial in Rome. Those who hold this theory believe that Luke's purpose in writing Luke and Acts was to write a defense of Christianity, somewhat akin to a legal brief. If this theory is correct, Luke's writings were designed to defend Paul in court against charges of insurrection and, at the same time, to defend Christianity against the charge that it was an illegal, anti-Roman religion.

Whether this Theophilus was a wealthy relative of Caesar, an influential government official, a wealthy benefactor who supported Paul or Paul's Roman lawyer does not really matter. We cannot know for sure who Theophilus was, but we can know what Luke's intentions for writing were. His stated reason for writing to Theophilus was "that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" Luke 1:3-4. Luke wrote an historical account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and detailed the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. His intention was to give Theophilus certainty that the "things he had been taught" were indeed true and trustworthy.) <https://www.gotquestions.org/Theophilus-Luke-Acts.html>

... and, so, we too have Luke and Theophilus to thank that we can know that the things we have been taught are, indeed, true and trustworthy.

Acts 1:3: *(the Apostles) 'To whom also he(Jesus) shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:'*

No ancient history is more closely and accurately reported than the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and His 40 days of ministry after having been crucified and then raised up to life; no other event is so clearly proven. That 40 days must have really been something wonderful considering all that the Lord Jesus Christ would have revealed to them but one thing He did not reveal, since it wasn't revealed to Him, was the timing of His eventual return and the setting up of His Millennial Kingdom on Earth, ruling and reigning from Jerusalem.

Acts 1:4: *'And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.'*

Luke had previously recorded that promise in his Gospel: *'And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.'* Luke 24:49

They didn't know what to expect but they had Jesus' promise that they would be endued with power! So, they all knew it was going to be something well worth waiting for. So, they patiently waited...

The Greek word used, here, is: baptizo; it means: to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge, to overwhelm. The idea is of a cloth pushed underwater and squeezed so that it becomes completely filled throughout with

water: soaking, sopping wet! This is what happens at the moment of our 'New Birth;' God's Holy Spirit fills us, throughout and, most importantly, He never leaves or forsakes us; we are IN Jesus Christ and He is IN us... never, ever to be not so.

The first thing I thought when reading this is that we have a promise from Jesus, as well; it's something which we don't fully understand but we have His promise that it is coming and that it is very well worth the wait!

'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.' John 14:1

This is His crystal clear reference to the Rapture; He will come for us and He will cause us to rise up to the clouds where *we will be instantaneously changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye... we will be like Him for we shall see Him as He is!* But we don't always patiently wait for Him... sometimes, we might even doubt the veracity of His promise... we might become discouraged and fearful as we watch all that is happening in the World around us... but His promise is sure! He is the One upon Whom we can always depend without doubt, discouragement or fear. Just as His promise to the Apostles of the coming of His Holy Spirit was sure and true, so, too, is His promise to us, sure and true!

Acts 1:6: *'When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?'*

This is what they hoped for and expected from Jesus, that He would use His mighty power to forcefully conquer Rome and restore the Kingdom as it was under David and Solomon; after all, He had been killed by Rome and the Jewish leaders and He had miraculously been brought back to life! He had fed the 5000! He had calmed the storm! He had raised Lazarus back to life. Obviously He had the ability to do anything He chose; He would be the King of the World! What they didn't understand was, that God had far different plans for each of them; they would take the Gospel to the World and they would be martyred for doing so but because of their faithfulness in ministry, many multiplied millions would come to faith and Salvation over the next many, many centuries but, soon, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, at the end of the 70th Week of Daniel, the Tribulation, He will return in absolute power, majesty and grandeur; He will destroy all His enemies and will rule and reign for 1000 years as King of kings and Lord of lords as we, His Bride, rule and reign with Him for that 1000 years and then, forever!