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I. Introduction

- **Authorship:** Acts, like the four gospels, is an anonymous book. Nowhere in the book itself is the identity of the author asserted. The earliest attribution of authorship is made by Irenaeus in the late 2nd century. Irenaeus identifies Luke, the traveling companion of Paul, as the writer of the gospel now called Luke and the writer of Acts.[1] Thus, "[a]ncient church tradition attributed the third gospel [and acts] to the Luke who appears in Philemon 24 as Paul's 'fellow worker' and is called 'the beloved physician' in Colossians 4.14." [2]
- It is worth noting the most modern scholars are skeptical of or reject the identification of Luke as the author of Luke–Acts. However, virtually everyone agrees the Luke and Acts were written by the same person:[3]

Most modern commentators on the Lucan gospel, however, are skeptical about the validity of this traditional attribution. They regard the tradition as based largely on inferences from the text of the New Testament made when people were first beginning to wonder who had written the Gospels. They further call in question Irenaeus's description of Luke as Paul's "inseparable" collaborator (Adv. haer. 3.14,1), which he inferred from the "we" sections of Acts (esp. 16.10; 20.6). The nature of these sections has since been questioned. Are they fragments of a diary or notebook that the author of Acts kept as he journeyed with Paul? Or are they, rather, a literary form used by the author to enhance his narrative of sea journeys? A still larger part of the problem is the relationship of the author of Acts to Paul. In recent decades it has become evident that only with considerable difficulty can one reconcile much of the depiction of Paul in Acts with that which emerges from Paul's own letters. Hence, was the author of Luke–Acts really the "inseparable" collaborator of Paul? The difference between the Lucan Paul and the Pauline Paul is not minor; even though it is largely an issue of Acts and the Pauline letters, it bears on the authorship of the Lucan gospel. The result is that many modern commentators are uncertain about the authorship of Luke–Acts.

- In my view authorship is an interesting question, but I don't think it is very important here in Sunday School. The important thing is that Luke–Acts is scripture; it is canonized by the church. It tells of the life of Jesus and the fledging apostolic church. Luke, potentially not being the author, does not affect its status as scripture nor its value to us as Christian disciples. Also, in class I will assume Luke is the author and refer to Luke as the author.

- **Date Written:** The last event recorded in Acts is the two year imprisonment (house arrest) of Paul in Rome: 61–62.[3] "All in All, the late 70s or early 80s seems the most likely for the date when Acts was composed." [4] "A date later rather than earlier than 70 CE is probable for the gospel. If we date the composition of the twofold work toward the end of Vespasian's rule (69–79 CE), most of the evidence will be satisfied." [5]
- **The Audience:** Luke is very clearly about the immediate or original audience it is Theophilus (perhaps Luke's patron). This was a very normal Greek name. During this period it might have been used by both Jews and Gentiles.[6] The book of Acts is not a letter or a speech written for the benefit of the single person. The address is probably best considered a dedication, and Theophilus might represent the typical or intended reader; that is "people who have already had some instruction in the faith and need to be assured of reliability." [7]

II. Outline and Structure

- This week's lesson really does cover a lot of ground: the first five chapters of Acts. There is no way I will even make it through a small fraction of the reading material. Still, I do want to give a sense for the big picture, the events, and the themes developed in these chapters. So let me outline the first five chapters. As always, there is more than one way we could outline the chapters but I think the following outline is useful.

- **Outline of Acts 1–5:[8]**

- I. The Development of the Church (1:1–26)
 - A. Witness' Commission and Jesus' Ascension (1:1–14)
 - a. The Prologue (1:1–8)
 - b. The Ascension (1:9–14)
 - B. The Restoration of the Twelve (1:15–26)
- II. The Mission in Jerusalem (2:1–5:42)
 - A. The appeal to Israel (2:1–3:26)
 - a. The Pentecost Event (2:1–13)
 - b. The Pentecost Sermon (2:14–41)
 - c. First Major Summary (2:42–47)
 - d. The Healing in the Temple (3:1–11)
 - e. Peter's Temple Sermon (3:12–26)
 - B. The Trials of the Fledgling Apostolic Led Church (4:1–5:42)
 - a. Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin (4:1–22)
 - b. The Apostles' Prayer (4:23–31)
 - c. Second Major Summary (4:23–31)
 - d. Singular Cases (4:36–5:11)
 - e. Third Major Summary (5:12–16)
 - f. The Second Persecution (5:17–42)

- *After reading this material, what parts stuck out to you? What themes were developed in*

these chapters? Did you notice any themes that were carried forward from the gospel of Luke?

- *Did you notice any contrast with the gospel of Luke?*
- *What literary features are prominent? Can you make any characterization about how Luke likes to tell the story of the fledgling apostolic Church?*
- One feature that is prominent in the first five chapters (and can be seen in the outline) is the importance and prominence of speeches. Peter gives several important speeches. *Why are the speeches given by Peter important? Do you think it is important that Peter is making speeches separate from the content of the speeches?*
- "The popularity of speeches as historiographical devices is well documented in Hellenistic literature." [9] Thus Luke was certainly using an important and common literary device to convey information about the early church. The use of the dramatic speech as a focal point for Acts has led debate over the accuracy of the speeches. Ben Witherington III points out that the speeches reflect the style, vocabulary and syntax of Luke. [10] Thus, I think it may be better to think of the speeches in Luke as edited summaries of speeches rather than transcripts from sources used by Luke.
- Another prominent feature in the first five chapters is that Luke often summarizes the situation or what has happened. *Why does Luke summarize so often? How would you characterize the summaries when you read them?*
- For example, let's look at Luke's summary of the Pentecostal events. Read Acts 2:42–47:

(42) And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (43) And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. (44) And all that believed were together, and had all things common; (45) And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. (46) And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, (47) Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

- *How is it a summary? Is this just a simple summary? How is it different from a simple summary?*
- *What themes does Luke mention in his summary? What developments or part of the pentecostal events were most important in Luke?*

III. The Prologue

- Read Act 1:1–8:

(1) The former treatise 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: (3) To whom also he 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: (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. (5) For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. (6) When they therefore were come together, 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.

- *Luke, reminds Theophilus and any other readers of the previous volume (the gospel of Luke). Are you surprised by any of the details of the brief summary of the previous volume? Does it suggest what are the most important parts or elements of the gospel to Luke*
- *Some Scholars have suggested that Luke breaks with the literary convention of the time because the prologue doesn't provide a preview of what is to come.[10] Do you think this is true? Do you think there is a preview or a summary of what the book of Acts is all about in the first 8 verses? Or is really a review?*
- *What is verse 1 and 2 about? Who is doing the teaching and what is the role of the Holy Ghost?*

(1) In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning (2) until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. , Acts 1:1–2 —NRSV

The NRSV seems clearer, but what does it mean that Jesus was "giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles?" What is this referring to?

- *In Luke 24, Luke seems to pack all the post resurrection action into one day, but here in Acts he makes it clear that the post–resurrection activity last a prolonged period of time (40 days). Why? How does that affect the reader's focus in each case? Why is it important to know of the extended length here in Acts and not in Luke?*
- *Are you surprised that Luke doesn't give any details about or discuss what happens in the 40 day window before ascension? Can you think of the reason why?*

- *What do you think Luke means by "infallible proofs" or "convincing proofs" (NRSV)? What were the appearances of Jesus "convincing proofs" of?*
- *Why does Luke call the Holy Ghost the promise of the father? What does it emphasize? How does it affect the reader?*
- *Are you surprised that the disciples ask if Jesus will restore Israel? What does this tell us about the disciples? How does it related to the rest of the pericope?*
- *How is verse 6 related to verse 8? Does verse 8 answer the question raised by the disciples in verse 6? Does Jesus equate the restoration of Israel and the coming of the Holy Ghost? How are they related? Do verses 4–5 also suggest a close relationship between the Kingdom of God and the Holy Ghost?*
- *Why mention the baptism of John? What does it remind the reading of? How does it help summarize the ministry of Jesus?*

IV. The Ascension

- Read Acts 1:9–14:

(9) And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. (10) And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; (11) Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. (12) Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. (13) And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. (14) These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

- *Luke is the only gospel the mentions the ascension. Why? Can you think of a reason why Luke would include the ascension while the other gospel writers do not (beyond, a simple they didn't know about it)?*
- *One thought that came to my mind is that the other gospel writers leave the reader with an image of the Jesus reunited with the disciples. Adding the ascension scene would detract from the ending image. Whereas Luke narrative continues on into the development of the apostolic church. I think the ascension plays a critical role in underscoring the role of the Holy Ghost. How does the ascension provide contrast with what is to come? With what the early church will face and have to deal with?*

- *Does the ascension remind you of any Old Testament stories or scriptures? Does it, for example, remind you of the ascension of Elijah (2 Kings 2)? In what sense is the ascension of Elijah an appropriate allusion given the themes developed so far in the chapter? Does the story capture any other Old Testament imagery?*
- *Did the two men in white apparel rebuke the disciples? Comfort them? What is going on in verses 10–11?*
- *What does verse 14 tell us about the early Christian community?*

V. Replacement

- I know this is kind of long passage but I really don't want to split it up. Read Acts 1:15–26

(15) And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) (16) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. (17) For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. (18) Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. (19) And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. (20) For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take. (21) Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, (22) Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. (23) And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. (24) And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, (25) That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. (26) And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

- "Note that the word translated 'bishoprick' in verse 20 means simply 'office.' The literal meaning of the Greek word is to have the duty of watching over others." [11]
- *What do we learn about early the Christian community from this story?*
- *What do learn about Peter?*

- *What is the role of the speech by Peter? What does it do? Why is Peter's speech persuasive to his audience? What does the nature of the speech tell us about the Christian community?*
- *How does Luke affect the speech? How does the narrative insertion in verse 18–19 affect the speech and how we understand as readers? What does this verse tell us about the original audience?*
- Note in some modern translations verses 18–19 are put in parenthesis to help the reader see it is a narrative comment but even in the King James Version I think the reader can tell it is a comment by the narrator. *How?*
- *What do we learn about the requirements of Apostleship? What are they expected to do?*
- *Are you surprised that they chose the first new Apostle by casting lots? Why would they choose such a process? What does this tell us about the early Christian community?*

Endnotes

1. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 721.
2. Metzger, Bruce M. (Editor) and Michael David Coogan (Editor), 1993, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Oxford University Press.
3. Witherington, Ben, 1998, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Social Rhetorical Commentary*, Eerdmans, 61.
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5. Metzger, Bruce M. (Editor) and Michael David Coogan (Editor), 1993, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Oxford University Press.
6. Witherington, Ben, 1998, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Social Rhetorical Commentary*, Eerdmans, 63.
7. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1028.
8. Adapted from Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 725.
9. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 724.

10. Witherington, Ben, 1998, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Social Rhetorical Commentary*, Eerdmans, 64.
11. Faulconer, Jim, 2007, Lesson Notes #28, Feast Upon the Word Blog.