

Acts Study 1 – MACC Small Groups

REFLECT ON YOUR LIFE

- 1 Give an example of something in your lifetime (trend, political movement, fad) that began very small but then grew rapidly and took the world by storm.
- 2 What factors caused it to have such a great influence?

WHAT IS ACTS?

If Acts is not a complete history of the Church's first three decades, then what is it? Our first clue is that it is the second of a two-volume work. An early convert to Christianity named Luke wrote a Gospel and Acts for a Roman aristocrat named Theophilus ([Luke 1:1-4](#); [Acts 1:1](#)). Luke was the "beloved physician" ([Col. 4:14](#), NASB) of the Apostle Paul. He traveled with Paul on part of his second missionary journey. Some years later, Luke went from Philippi to Jerusalem with Paul, and when Paul was arrested there, Luke accompanied him on his harrowing journey to Rome. We surmise these facts from the way Luke changed from the third person ("they") to the first ("we") in parts of Acts ([16:10-17](#); [20:5-21:18](#); [27:1-28:16](#)).

We don't know whether Luke was a Gentile, a Gentile convert to Judaism, or a Jew before he became a Christian. His writings show that he was steeped in the urban, Gentile, Greek-speaking culture of the Roman Empire; [Luke 1:1-4](#) is written in the literary Greek of the educated elite, and Acts describes Gentile kings, philosophers, and legal details accurately. On the other hand, Luke was also well versed in the *Septuagint*, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that Jews all over the Empire used.

About Theophilus we can only speculate. His name means "lover of God," but it was a common Greek name and was probably not made up by Luke. In Luke's day, people often wrote for and dedicated their works to wealthy patrons, who helped pay for publishing the books. Theophilus was probably an educated Gentile aristocrat, either a new convert or an interested pagan. Luke may have wanted to help confirm this man and others like him in the faith by showing that it rested on firm historical foundations and the power of God.

When was Acts written? The earliest would be about 62 AD, where [chapter 28](#) leaves off abruptly. However, Luke seems to be looking back on those events from at least some distance. On the other hand, the book gives no hint of the deaths of Paul, Peter, or James, nor of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, nor even of Paul's letters. Would a book written after 90 AD partly about Paul have ignored his letters, which were so influential by then? Most scholars who think Acts is

an accurate account by Luke (as opposed to fiction) guess that the book was written over some time and finished "towards AD 70."

- 1 Look at Luke's prologue to his whole work ([Luke 1:1-4](#)). What does he say Luke-Acts is meant to be?
- 2 In [Acts 1:1-2](#), Luke summarizes volume 1 (Luke's Gospel) as an introduction to volume 2 (Acts). He says the Gospel is about "all that Jesus began to do and to teach" until His ascension into Heaven forty days after the Resurrection. If Luke's Gospel is about what Jesus began to do and to teach, what is Acts probably about?
- 3 What does [Acts 1:8](#) tell you about the purpose of the book?
- 4 Read [1:15](#); [2:41](#); [4:4](#); [5:14](#); [6:7](#); [9:31](#); [12:24](#); [16:5](#); [19:20](#); and [28:31](#).
 - a. What do these verses have in common, and what progression do you see?
 - b. What does this pattern tell you about Acts?

RESPOND TO THE MESSAGE

- 5 In what parts of the world are churches growing most rapidly? Why do you think this is so?
- 6 Where is your Jerusalem? Samaria? Ephesus? Rome?
- 7 How is your church working to take the gospel to those areas?

RESOLVE TO TAKE ACTION

- 8 How does your church support missions and evangelism?
- 9 What barriers might be hindering your church's growth?
- 10 What is your place in God's plan? How can you work for the advancement of his Kingdom? (Here are some possibilities: pray, give financial support, help missionaries, reach neighbors, teach Sunday school, greet guests at church, volunteer for a church leadership position, etc.)

(OPTIONAL) STUDYING OTHER THEMES IN THIS SECTION

- A What were some of the key turning points for the early church? What would it take to turn your church around?
- B What social barriers did the gospel break down? What barriers in your church need to be removed?
- C What did Peter and Paul have in common? How were they different? How did God use each one uniquely to spread the gospel? How might God use your unique abilities to tell others of Christ?