

SECOND EDITION

AN  
INTRODUCTION  
TO  
THE NEW  
TESTAMENT

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APOLLOS (an imprint of Inter-Varsity Press)  
Norton Street, Nottingham, NG7 3HR, England  
Email: [ivp@ivpbooks.com](mailto:ivp@ivpbooks.com)  
Website: [www.ivpbooks.com](http://www.ivpbooks.com)

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*First British edition 1992*  
*Reprinted 1992 (twice), 1993, 1994*  
*Second edition 2005*  
*Reprinted 2008*

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-84474-089-5

Typeset and Printed in the United States of America

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# ACTS

## CONTENTS

The book we know as the Acts of the Apostles belongs with the Gospel of Luke as the second volume in a history of Christian beginnings. Luke probably did not give this second book a title of its own; only when his gospel was separated from its companion volume and placed with the other gospels was there need to give the second part of his story a title. Second- and third-century authors made various suggestions, such as “The Memorandum of Luke” (Tertullian) and “The Acts of All the Apostles” (Muratorian Canon). The name that would eventually stick, “The Acts of the Apostles,” is first used in the anti-Marcionite prologue to Luke (late second century?)<sup>1</sup> and in Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 3.13.3).<sup>2</sup> The word “Acts” (πράξεις [*praxeis*]) denoted a recognized genre or subgenre in the ancient world, characterizing books that described the great deeds of people or of cities. In that Acts narrates the founding events of the church and ascribes most of them to apostles, the title is not inappropriate. Yet, judging from Luke’s own emphases, he may have preferred a title such as “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” or “What Jesus Continued to Do and to Teach” (see 1:1).

In Acts, Luke conducts the reader on a whirlwind tour of three decades of church history. We visit Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Syria, Cyprus, many cities in Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece, and, finally, Rome. We witness everything from preaching and miracles to jailbreaks and shipwrecks. And, while many

<sup>1</sup>For the date of this prologue to the third gospel, traditionally thought to be directed against Marcion (hence its name), see F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 5 n. 6. For a summary of current scholarly views about these prologues, see esp. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, AB 28 (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 39.

<sup>2</sup>See Frederick Fyvie Bruce, “The Acts of the Apostles: Historical Record or Theological Reconstruction?” *ANRW* 25.3 (1985): 2571.

individuals accompany us on our tour, two are rather constant companions: Peter, who is often with us in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria; and Paul, who is our almost constant companion from Syria to Rome. We can, in fact, divide our tour into two major parts based on the prominence of these two individuals: chapters 1–12 and chapters 13–28. Each of these major sections can be subdivided further into three parts, which are marked off by key summary statements. In these brief notes, Luke sums up a series of events by telling us that they have led to the growth of the Word of God or of the church (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20). Each section carries us to a new geographic and/or cultural stage in the itinerary of the gospel, as Luke portrays the fulfillment of Jesus' command to the apostles that they be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8).<sup>3</sup>

*Prologue: Foundations for the church and its mission (1:1–2:41).* Luke begins by rooting the church and its mission in Jesus' acts and words. It is the risen Jesus who prepares the apostles for the coming of the Spirit (1:4–5) and charges them with their worldwide missionary mandate (1:8). Jesus' earthly ministry is then brought to a close with Luke's second narrative of his ascension into heaven (1:9–11; cf. also Luke 24:50–51), a narrative that serves as a hinge between the gospel and Acts. Luke then describes the choosing of Matthias to replace Judas (1:12–26), the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (2:1–13), and the first missionary sermon (2:14–41).

*The church in Jerusalem (2:42–6:7).* Luke begins this section with a summary of the characteristics of the early church in Jerusalem (2:42–47). He then describes Peter's healing of a crippled man in the temple precincts (3:1–10), a notable and public miracle that gains Peter a hearing for another missionary sermon (3:13–26). Opposition arises from the Sanhedrin, but Peter and John boldly resist its request that they cease speaking "in the name of Jesus" (4:1–22). The church as a whole, infused with the power of the Spirit, follows the lead of the apostles, preaching the Word of God boldly after having prayed that God would grant them such opportunity (4:23–31). But all is not perfect, even in these early and exciting days in the life of the church. The lie of a married couple, Ananias and Sapphira, about their participation in the early community's voluntary sharing program (4:32–37) brings swift judgment upon them (5:1–11). The popular healing and preaching ministry of the apostles (5:12–16) again sparks opposition from the Jewish leaders, and again the apostles are arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. Gamaliel, an important rabbi of his day, counsels moderation,

<sup>3</sup>The division of Acts into six sections based on these summary statements was proposed by C. H. Turner, "The Chronology of the New Testament," in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898–1904), 1.421, and is adopted by, among others, McNeile, 97–98, and Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *EBC* 9.234.

and the apostles are released (5:17–42). In order to give themselves fully to the preaching of the Word, the apostles appoint seven men to regulate the distribution of food among the community (6:1–6). In his first summary statement, Luke concludes that in this way "the word of God spread" (6:7).

*Wider horizons for the church: Stephen, Samaria, and Saul (6:8–9:31).* To this point in his narrative, Luke has portrayed the early believers as loyal, if somewhat unusual, Jews. The stories in this next section show how the church began to strain the bounds of traditional Judaism. Stephen is a pivotal figure in this respect. A charismatic figure who attracted a considerable following, Stephen was falsely accused of speaking against the temple and the law (6:8–15). When brought before the Sanhedrin to answer charges about his teaching, Stephen uses a sketch of Israel's history to suggest that God's revelation cannot be confined to one place and to charge the Sanhedrin members themselves with resisting the Holy Spirit (7:1–53). So bold a charge does not go unanswered: Stephen is condemned to be stoned (7:54–60).

Stephen's radical stance sparks opposition to the young Christian movement, and "all except the apostles" are forced to leave Jerusalem (8:1–3). One of those who leaves, Philip, brings the gospel to Samaria, a territory to the north of Judea inhabited by people considered by most Jews to be renegade Jews at best. The Samaritans believe the message of Philip, and Peter and John are sent to confirm that the Samaritans had indeed been accepted into the kingdom of God (8:4–25). Philip, directed by an angel, travels south, where he meets and converts a court official of the queen of Ethiopia (8:26–40). Finally, Luke tells us of the conversion and early ministry of the one chosen by God to be the pioneer in the mission to the Gentiles—Saul of Tarsus (9:1–30). Again Luke summarizes: "The church . . . enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers." (9:31).

*Peter and the first Gentile convert (9:32–12:24).* This section focuses on Peter, and especially on Peter's role in opening the way for Gentiles to become Christians. Peter performs miracles in Lydda and Joppa, cities in Judea to the northwest of Jerusalem (9:32–43). He is then used by God to bring Cornelius, a Gentile Roman soldier, into the church. Through visions and the direct command of the Spirit, God brings Cornelius and Peter together (10:1–23). At Cornelius's house, Peter's preaching of the gospel is interrupted by the sovereign action of God, bestowing the Spirit upon Cornelius in so evident a manner that Peter has to recognize that God had truly accepted a Gentile into his church (10:24–48).

The importance of so clear a witness is revealed in the next narrative, in which Peter is able to reassure Jewish-Christian skeptics in Jerusalem about the reality of Cornelius's conversion (11:1–18). It is surely significant that here Luke tells us of the church at Antioch, where the mixture of Jews and Gentiles

required that believers in Jesus be given a new name: Christian (11:19–30). The section concludes with the story of Peter’s miraculous escape from prison (12:1–19) and the death of Herod Agrippa I, who had initiated the persecution that led to Peter’s arrest (12:20–23). Here again occurs Luke’s transitional summary: “The word of God continued to increase and spread” (12:24).

*Paul turns to the Gentiles (12:25–16:5).* From Peter, Luke turns now to Paul, who dominates the remainder of the book. Paul’s significance for Luke lies in his being used by God to pioneer an extensive ministry to Gentiles, to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth, and to show that the gospel was no direct threat to the Roman government. The vibrant Christian community at Antioch, to which Paul had been brought by Barnabas, is led by the Spirit to send Paul, along with Barnabas and John Mark, on the first missionary journey (12:25–13:3). The journey takes them first to Barnabas’s home, Cyprus, where a Roman official is converted (13:4–12). The band then sails to the south coast of Asia Minor, where they quickly head inland to the important city of Pisidian Antioch. Paul delivers an evangelistic sermon in the synagogue there, a sermon that Luke summarizes, giving us a sample of the way Paul preached to a Jewish audience (13:13–43). Here also what becomes a typical pattern is first enacted: general Jewish rejection of the gospel, leading Paul and his companions to turn directly to the Gentiles, followed by Jewish persecution that forces them to move on (13:44–52).

Paul and his companions travel to Iconium (14:1–7), to Lystra, where Paul is stoned (14:8–20), and to Derbe, planting churches in each city and strengthening the new believers as they retrace their steps again to the coast (14:21–28). Upon arriving back in Antioch, the missionaries are confronted with a serious dispute about their outreach to the Gentiles. A council convened in Jerusalem to discuss the matter endorses the law-free offer of the gospel to the Gentiles, a decision that was of vital importance in establishing the character of the church and enabling its further growth (15:1–29). Paul and Barnabas bring the good news back to Antioch and begin planning a new missionary trip. But their inability to agree about taking along John Mark, who had turned for home before the first journey was complete, leads them to split, Barnabas taking Mark with him back to Cyprus and Paul taking Silas with him overland to Syria, Cilicia, and on to the churches established on the first journey (15:30–41). Here Paul also recruits Timothy for the cause (16:1–4). And thus, Luke again concludes, “the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers” (16:5).

*Further Penetration into the Gentile world (16:6–19:20).* It seems a bit odd that we should divide Luke’s story at this point. Yet by the care with which he shows how Paul was directed by God’s Spirit step-by-step to take the gospel into Macedonia (16:6–10), Luke implies that we have reached a decisive stage. (This is also the beginning of the first “we” passage—see v. 10.) The first stop is Philippi, a Roman colony in Macedonia, where an exorcism lands Paul and

Silas in jail. They (like Peter before them—one of the many parallels Luke draws between Peter and Paul) are miraculously rescued, and Paul turns his Roman citizenship to good account to secure his release (16:16–40). Paul and Silas move on to Thessalonica, but persecution forces them to flee by night to the relatively insignificant town of Berea (17:1–9). Trouble follows them even here, so Paul is sent away to Athens (17:10–15).

Here we are treated to a second sample of Paul’s preaching, this time to a sophisticated, skeptical, Gentile audience on so-called Mars Hill in Athens (17:16–34). The results in Athens seem to be meager, however, so Paul travels across the narrow isthmus to Corinth, the chief city in the Peloponnese. Here Paul spends a year and a half, preaching, defending himself before the Roman official Gallio, and enlisting the Roman Jewish couple Priscilla and Aquila in the work of the gospel (18:1–17). The three leave Corinth for Ephesus, where Paul leaves the other two as he proceeds on to Caesarea, Antioch, and the churches of southern Asia Minor (18:18–23). In Ephesus, meanwhile, Priscilla and Aquila establish more firmly in the faith a gifted young man from Alexandria, Apollos (18:24–28). Paul himself arrives in Ephesus for a stay of two and a half years. We are given glimpses of Paul converting some disciples of John the Baptist (19:1–7), preaching in the synagogue and in his own hired hall (19:8–10), working miracles (19:11–12), and confronting the strong current of demonism for which the city was known (19:13–19). “In this way,” Luke informs us, “the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (19:20).

*On to Rome (19:21–28:31).* Again we may feel that it is rather artificial to insert a major break in the midst of Paul’s stay in Ephesus. But Luke again suggests such a break with his first indication that Paul was determined to go to Rome (19:21–22). This determination drives Luke’s narrative from this point on, but it takes Paul some time to get there. He leaves Ephesus only after a serious public uprising forces him to go (19:23–41). He revisits the churches in Macedonia and Greece and decides to return to Judea by the same route because of a plot against his life (20:1–6). On his way back, Paul stops to preach in Troas and stops again in Miletus to meet with the elders of the church of Ephesus (20:7–38). He arrives in Jerusalem via Tyre and Caesarea, with warnings about his impending arrest in Jerusalem ringing in his ears (21:1–16). The warning quickly becomes reality.

Paul’s willingness to “fly his Jewish flag” for the sake of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem by paying for, and joining in, some purification rites in the temple backfires (21:17–26). Certain Jews think that Paul has brought Gentiles into the temple with him, and the ensuing riot forces the Romans to intervene (21:27–36). Paul is arrested but is allowed to address the crowd before being taken away (21:37–22:22). Paul’s Roman citizenship again stands him in good stead, and he is allowed to state his case before the Jewish Sanhedrin (22:30–23:10). The Lord assures Paul that he will live to testify about him in Rome

(23:11), despite a plot of the Jews to kill him (23:12–15). Paul is moved to Caesarea because of this threat, where he again defends himself, this time before the Roman governor, Felix (23:16–24:27). After Paul has languished in prison in Caesarea for two years, Festus replaces Felix, and Paul forces the issue by appealing to Caesar to hear his case (25:1–12). Before leaving, however, Paul again defends himself before Festus and his guests, King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice (25:13–26:32). Paul is then sent on to Rome. The trip, however, is interrupted by a severe storm, stranding Paul and his sailing companions for three months on the island of Malta (27:1–28:10). Paul finally arrives in Rome, where he is able to live in his own house, under guard, and preach the gospel freely (28:11–31). Here, with Paul in Rome for two years under house arrest, Luke's tour of the expansion of the gospel comes to an end.

## AUTHOR

### The Traditional Case

Both Luke and Acts are, strictly speaking, anonymous. From the preface to Luke, which is probably intended to introduce both the gospel and Acts, we can conclude that the author was well educated (the Greek of Luke 1:1–4 is good, literary Greek), not an original apostle or disciple of Christ (he writes about those things “handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word”), yet one who may have been a participant in some of the events he narrates (“fulfilled among us”).<sup>4</sup> He knows his Old Testament in the Greek Septuagint version, has an excellent knowledge of political and social conditions in the middle of the first century, and thinks a great deal of the apostle Paul.

Further inferences about the author come from the “we” passages in Acts. There are four passages in which the author shifts from his usual third-person narration to a first person plural narration. Note the beginning of the first such passage: “So *they* [Paul, Silas, and Timothy] passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ After Paul had seen the vision, *we* got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called *us* to preach the gospel to them” (16:8–10). The author continues with his first person plural style through 16:17, and then uses it again in 20:5–15; 21:1–18; and 27:1–28:16. The natural reading of these passages is that the author of Acts was present during the events he narrates in these passages and that he kept a diary or itinerary report that he incorporates into the Book of Acts. If this is so, then the author was with Paul on the trip from Troas to Philippi and during the initial evangelization of Philippi on the first missionary journey

<sup>4</sup>See the section on “author” in chap. 5 for more detail on the prologue.

(16:10–17). Joining Paul again as the apostle came through Philippi at the end of the third missionary journey, he then accompanied him to Miletus, and from Miletus to Jerusalem (20:5–15; 21:1–18). Finally, he was with Paul on his voyage to Rome (27:1–28:16).

The author could not have been any of the companions of Paul who are mentioned in these passages. Furthermore, since the author accompanied Paul to Rome and was probably with him during Paul's two-year house arrest in Rome, we might expect Paul to mention him in the letters he wrote during that period of time: Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, and, perhaps, Philippians.<sup>5</sup> Those companions who are named in these letters are Mark, Jesus Justus, Epaphras, Demas, Luke, Tychicus, Timothy, Aristarchus, and Epaphroditus. This line of reasoning is certainly not foolproof: the author of Acts may have left Paul after their arrival in Rome, or Paul may not have mentioned him in his letters, but it is suggestive. At least, this is as far as the internal evidence of Luke and Acts can take us.<sup>6</sup>

External evidence takes over at this point and singles out Luke from the list of possible candidates. The tradition that Luke, a companion of Paul, was the author of the third gospel and of Acts is early and unchallenged: the Muratorian Canon (c. A.D. 180–200?),<sup>7</sup> Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 3.1; 3.14.1–4), the anti-Marcionite prologue (end of second century), Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 5.12), Tertullian (*Adv. Marc.* 4.2), and Eusebius (*H.E.* 3.4; 3.24.15).<sup>8</sup> Luke's authorship of these two books went virtually unchallenged until the onset of critical approaches to the New Testament at the end of the eighteenth century. Since then, doubt about the tradition has been widespread. We now examine the reasons for these doubts.

### The Case against the Tradition

*The external evidence.* Critics of the tradition question the value of the testimony of the early church. Early Christians, it is said, produced many fanciful theories about the origin of New Testament books. Moreover, in an argument

<sup>5</sup>We assume here, as is argued in the relevant chapters, that Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, and (less certainly) Philippians were written during Paul's Roman imprisonment.

<sup>6</sup>Although Rendel Harris developed an argument that the original Western text of Acts 20:13 read, “But I Luke, and those who were with me, went on board.” If this were so, we would have testimony to Lukan authorship from about A.D. 120 (cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952], 5).

<sup>7</sup>On the date of the Muratorian Canon, see chap. 4, n. 7.

<sup>8</sup>See the very full and detailed analysis of the tradition in C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994, 1998), 1.30–48.

*Luke's authorship of the third gospel and the book of Acts went virtually unchallenged until the onset of critical approaches to the New Testament at the end of the eighteenth century.*

echoed again and again in the literature, it is said that the tradition itself is probably no more than an inference from the text of the New Testament itself and has no independent historical value.<sup>9</sup> But as we saw above in our examination of the internal evidence, the New Testament does not furnish enough data to single out Luke as the author of Acts. Fitzmyer's criticism of the idea that the external evidence can be dismissed because it depends on the reasoning of early Christians is fair. "That an individual in the second century—or even several individuals—might have so reasoned is certainly possible; but that such inferences from the NT text are the sole basis of an otherwise uncontested or unambiguous tradition . . . is difficult to accept."<sup>10</sup> We must, then, attach importance to the testimony of the early church—particularly since this testimony runs against form in singling out a nonapostle as the author.

The "we" passages. The traditional argument (given above) is that the "we" passages reveal the presence of the author of Acts. Some think that the author depends on an itinerary or diary that he himself wrote in the first person plural at the time of the events and that he incorporates into his literary product; others, that the author has lapsed into the first person plural at these points as he writes. In either case, however, the "we" passages are thought to point to the author of the book.

But two other explanations for the phenomenon are advanced that would remove the value of this datum for the question of authorship. One is that the author has incorporated into his history a source written by another person in the first person plural.<sup>11</sup> But why would the author leave his source in that form? As critics never tire of pointing out, Luke has consistently reworded his sources, putting the stamp of his own style on everything he writes. And Harnack has shown that the style of the "we" passages is no different than the style of the text around these passages.<sup>12</sup> Why, then, would the author have left these several sections in this first person plural style, especially since it could hardly escape being misunderstood?

A second alternative explanation is that the use of the first person plural is a stylistic device, intended to make a rhetorical rather than a historical point.<sup>13</sup> But the evidence for such a rhetorical use of "we" is not strong, nor is it clear

<sup>9</sup>See, e.g., Gerhard Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, HTKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1980–82), 1.108–10.

<sup>10</sup>Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 41.

<sup>11</sup>E.g., Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 2.xxv–xxx; Stanley E. Porter, *The Paul of Acts*, WUNT 115 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1999), 10–42; Kümmel, 184.

<sup>12</sup>Adolf von Harnack, *The Date of the Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels* (New York: Putnam, 1911), 1–89.

<sup>13</sup>Vernon K. Robbins, "The We-Passages in Acts and Ancient Sea Voyages," *BR* 20 (1975): 5–18.

why the author would have used such a device at the points where he does.<sup>14</sup> The attempts to explain the use of "we" in these four texts as anything other than an indication of the presence of the author are failures.

*Acts and Paul.* These first two points are not so much arguments against the traditional view of authorship as they are attempts to make the data conform to the view that Luke did not write Acts. The reason why so many scholars now conclude that Luke could not have written Acts lies in the picture the book gives us of the apostle Paul. This picture, it is alleged, distorts the "historical Paul" at a number of key points; so serious is this distortion that they find it impossible to think that a companion of Paul could have produced the picture. The alleged distortions are of two kinds: historical and theological.

One of the most frequently cited historical discrepancies is the disagreement between Acts and Paul about the number of trips the apostle made to Jerusalem. But this matter has a plausible solution, which we consider briefly toward the end of this chapter. Other historical discrepancies, such as the claim of Paul in Acts that he had been educated in Jerusalem (22:3), in contrast with Paul's own silence on the matter in his letters, can be resolved through a recognition of the different purposes of Acts and the letters of Paul. Paul tells us very little about his background in his letters, and his failure to mention items that Luke includes should not surprise us.

More serious are the alleged theological discrepancies. Philipp Vielhauer, whose essay on the subject is something of a classic,<sup>15</sup> points out four key areas of contrast between the Paul of Acts and the Paul of the epistles.

1. In the Areopagus speech of Acts 17, the Paul of Acts liberally uses Stoic notions about God, the world, and the relationship of human beings to God to make a case for natural theology. Nature and the world are so constituted, Paul here argues, that they serve as a preparation for the gospel. The Paul of the epistles, on the other hand, as Romans 1 reveals, viewed natural revelation as having only a negative purpose: to confirm the responsibility of people for their sins.

2. The Paul of Acts is utterly loyal to the law: he agrees to impose ritual requirements on Gentile Christians (15:22–35); he circumcises Timothy, who had a Gentile father (16:3); he claims to be a loyal Pharisee (23:6); he even goes so far as to participate in Jewish purification rites in the temple in Jerusalem (21:17–26). Contrast this picture with the Paul of the letters, the Paul who claimed that Christians should not impose ritual restrictions on one another (1 Cor. 8–10; Col. 2), who told the Galatians that their circumcision would

<sup>14</sup>Porter finds no clear affinities to the "we" passages in ancient literature (*The Paul of Acts*, 10–42); cf. also Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, WUNT 49 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1989), 316–21.

<sup>15</sup>Philipp Vielhauer, "On the 'Paulinism' of Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 33–50.

mean their being severed from Christ (Gal. 5:2–4), who viewed his Pharisaic background as so much refuse to be discarded (Phil. 3:5–8), and who proclaimed loudly and often that Christians were no longer “under the law.”

3. The Paul of Acts lacks the emphasis on union with Christ and the expiatory benefits of Christ’s death that is so central in the Paul of the letters.

4. The preaching of the Paul of Acts is uneschatological. Missing is the focus on fulfillment in Christ with the sense of imminence that is so typical of the “authentic Paul.” Related to this lessening of eschatological intensity is the concern for orderly church government manifested by the Paul of Acts (e.g., on the first missionary journey he and Barnabas very quickly appoint elders in the newly founded churches [14:23]). Contrast the Paul of the Epistles, who insists that the Spirit should have sovereign freedom in ruling the churches (1 Cor. 12).

To answer these objections fully would require monographs on both Paul’s theology and the theology of Acts. We will content ourselves with a few remarks on each of these points, along with some general comment.

The attitude toward natural revelation that emerges from Acts 17 and Romans 1 is certainly different, but the question is whether they are contradictory. Could not the Paul who wrote Romans 1, when arguing with sophisticated pagans in Athens, have used as many contacts with their culture as possible in order to establish some common ground as preparation for the gospel? Nothing in the theology of Romans 1 suggests that he could not. True, in Romans 1 Paul teaches that the ultimate effect of natural revelation *by itself* is wholly negative: people cannot be saved by it, only judged by it. But Paul never suggests in Acts 17 that knowledge of “an unknown god” could be saving—it is only by repentance and belief in God as now revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ that salvation can come (see v. 30). Moreover, we should probably view Paul’s speech in Acts 17 more as a preparation for the gospel than his preaching of the gospel as such. The text suggests that Paul’s mention of the resurrection led to a premature conclusion to his sermon.<sup>16</sup>

Two things must be said about the issue of the law. First, Paul’s view of the law as found in his epistles has frequently been caricatured as being far more negative than it really is. Serious revision in the teaching of Paul on the law is now underway. While much of that revision is going too far in the other direction, it does serve to caution us about assuming a certain view of the law in Paul’s letters that is at least unbalanced. Second, and more important, the practices of Paul in Acts are by no means incompatible with the standard interpretation of his teaching on the law. Paul’s agreement with the decree of the apostolic council, which probably applied to mixed Jewish-Gentile Christian communities, is in keeping

<sup>16</sup>A treatment of the speech that is more sympathetic to the possibility that it stems from Paul himself is Bertil Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, ASNU 21 (Uppsala: Gleerup, 1955).

with his principle that a Christian should not be a stumbling block to others (see 1 Cor. 8–10 and Rom. 14:1–15:13). Timothy, whose Jewish mother gave him rights as a Jew, is circumcised, not to enable him to be part of God’s people (the issue in Galatia), but to enable him to carry out his mission more effectively. This is quite in keeping with Paul’s claim that circumcision is a thing indifferent (Gal. 6:15). Paul’s claim to be a Pharisee must be understood in its context to be a claim to adhere to the Pharisaic doctrine of resurrection, as over against the Sadducean rejection of the doctrine. And Paul’s willingness to participate in a Jewish purification rite is in keeping with his expressed willingness to be all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:19–22). Nothing in Paul’s letters suggests that he was opposed to participating in Jewish rites—as long as they were neither being imposed as necessary to salvation nor causing a stumbling block to other believers.<sup>17</sup>

Some of the distinctive Pauline christological and eschatological motifs are indeed missing in Acts. But this may be because the preaching of Paul that we have in Acts is almost entirely evangelistic, and we would not expect to see some of these motifs in such a context. Moreover, the picture of the Paul of the letters that Vielhauer and others set in contrast to the Paul of Acts is itself distorted and lacking in balance. In denying (in our opinion, wrongly) the Pauline authorship of Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles, they eliminate a significant and distinctive part of Paul’s own teaching—teaching that, if integrated into our total picture of Paul, would bring the Paul of the epistles much closer to the Paul of Acts.

Distortion of the Paul of the epistles takes place in another way as well. As Ulrich Wilckens has pointed out, many of those who find a great gulf between the Paul of the epistles and the Paul of Acts do so because they are committed to an existential interpretation of Paul.<sup>18</sup> It is this narrow and distorted understanding of Paul that creates a significant amount of the distance with the Paul of Acts.

The great distance between the Paul of Acts and the Paul of the epistles that so many find is, in reality, a distance between a caricature of the supposedly authentic Paul and a one-sided interpretation of the Paul of Acts. To be sure, some distance between the two remains, but no more than we might find between one’s self-portrait and a portrait drawn by a sympathetic friend for a specific purpose.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup>On the subject of this paragraph, see esp. Richard N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 245–63.

<sup>18</sup>Ulrich Wilckens, “Interpreting Luke-Acts in a Period of Existentialist Theology,” in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 60–83.

<sup>19</sup>To use the analogy employed by F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 17. See further Bruce’s article “Is the Paul of Acts the Real Paul?” *BJRL* 58 (1975–76): 282–305 and especially, Porter, *The Paul of Acts* (summary on pp. 205–206).

*The great distance between the Paul of Acts and the Paul of the epistles that so many find is, in reality, a distance between a caricature of the supposedly authentic Paul and a one-sided interpretation of the Paul of Acts.*



### Conclusion

We have shown that there is no convincing reason to deny that the author of Acts was a companion of Paul. That he was his companion is the natural implication of the "we" passages. That this companion was none other than Luke "the beloved physician" is the unanimous opinion of the early church. We have good reason, then, to conclude that Luke was the author of Acts.

We know almost nothing about Luke's background. That he was a Gentile seems clear from Colossians 4:10–14, where Luke is not included among Paul's Jewish fellow workers. Several scholars have speculated that Luke might have been a "God-fearer," a Gentile who had attached himself to Judaism without becoming a Jew as such.<sup>20</sup> That he had not been a follower of Christ from the beginning is clear from the prologue to the gospel. William Ramsay speculated that Luke may have been the "man of Macedonia" who appeared to Paul in a vision (Acts 16:9).<sup>21</sup> On the basis of theological parallels between Acts and Roman documents, others have suggested that Luke was from Rome.<sup>22</sup> But the oldest and most respected tradition associates Luke with Syrian Antioch,<sup>23</sup> and several scholars are inclined to accept the tradition as probably authentic.<sup>24</sup> But the evidence is far from conclusive, and we would perhaps do better simply to admit that we do not know very much about Luke's background.

### DATE

Suggested dates for the book of Acts range across almost a century, from A.D. 62, the date at which the last event of the book takes place, to the middle of the second century, when the first clear reference to Acts occurs.<sup>25</sup> Most scholars locate Acts in one of three periods of time within this range: 62–70, 80–95, or 115–130.

<sup>20</sup>E.g., Darrell Bock, *Luke, vol. 1: 1:1–9:50*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 5–7; Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, KEK (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 79–84.

<sup>21</sup>William Ramsay, *St. Paul, the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1897), 200–205.

<sup>22</sup>F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1920–33), in "The Internal Evidence of Acts," 2.200–204.

<sup>23</sup>The anti-Marcionite prologue to the gospel of Luke (late second century); Eusebius, *H.E.* 3.4; Jerome, *De vir. ill.* 7. The Western text of Acts may indirectly suggest the same tradition by making Acts 11:28, which mentions an incident that takes place in Antioch, the first "we" passage in Acts.

<sup>24</sup>E.g., Zahn 3.2–3; Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 45–47.

<sup>25</sup>In Justin's *Apology* 1.50.12 (see Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 3–8).

### A Second-Century Date

A second-century date for the Acts is associated especially with the Tübingen School, a number of like-thinking scholars from the famous German university, whose best-known member was F. C. Baur. These scholars attributed to Acts a definite theological tendency—a desire to reconcile the opposing early Christian factions of Jewish Christianity, whose representative was Peter, and Gentile Christianity, whose representative was Paul. The author of Acts plays down the differences between these factions, making Peter more Gentile and Paul more Jewish than they really were. He thus prepares the way for a middle-of-the-road position, the position of the "old catholic church." This attempt at reconciliation could have been made only after sufficient time had elapsed for these factions to have mellowed, so the Tübingen School dated Acts in the middle of the second century.<sup>26</sup>

While remnants of its approach remain, the Tübingen interpretation of early Christian history and the place of the book of Acts within this history are no longer defended. Scholars such as J. B. Lightfoot demonstrated that the apostolic fathers of the late first century reveal none of the factionalism and polemics that Baur and his disciples attributed to this period in the history of the church. An impressive ideological synthesis, the Tübingen approach was without historical underpinnings. But there are still some who date Acts in the second century. One reason for doing so has been the belief that the author of Acts depended on Josephus's *Antiquities* (written c. A.D. 94).<sup>27</sup> But dependence of Acts on Josephus is most unlikely.<sup>28</sup> J. C. O'Neill argues on the basis of theological parallels to *1 Clement*, the Pastoral Epistles, and especially Justin that Acts must be dated in the period 115–30.<sup>29</sup> But the parallels O'Neill finds are both questionable and susceptible of a different interpretation. Few scholars now think that Acts is a second-century document.

### A Date of 80–95

Most scholars now date Acts in the 80s, or a bit later.<sup>30</sup> Acts cannot be dated any earlier than this, it is argued, because it shows signs of having been written

<sup>26</sup>On this approach to the book of Acts, see W. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles*, BGBE 17 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1975), 21–54.

<sup>27</sup>E.g., F. C. Burkitt, *The Gospel History and Its Transmission*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), 105–10.

<sup>28</sup>This has been argued convincingly in Zahn 3.94–100; Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text*, 24–25.

<sup>29</sup>J. C. O'Neill, *The Theology of Acts in Its Historical Setting* (London: SPCK, 1961).

<sup>30</sup>E.g., Kümmel, 185–87; Schneider, *Apostelgeschichte*, 1.118–21; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 51–55.

some years after the first volume of Luke's work, the gospel,<sup>31</sup> which cannot be dated before A.D. 70. Furthermore, Acts cannot be dated much later than 95 or so because of its optimistic attitude toward the Roman government—an attitude that would have been inconceivable after the persecution of Domitian in the middle 90s—and because the author of Acts does not know about the letters of Paul, which were collected and made generally available at the end of the first century.

None of these reasons is convincing. A date after A.D. 70 for Luke's gospel is based on two assumptions: that the gospel reflects the actual circumstances of the Roman sack of Jerusalem in 70, and that the Gospel of Mark, which Luke has probably used, must be dated in the middle or late 60s. But neither of these assumptions is valid (see above, respectively, the section "Date" in chap. 5 and in chap. 9). Acts does not mention the letters of Paul, and the author probably has not used them in writing the book. But this may be because Acts is early, rather than late, or because it was simply not Luke's purpose to refer to the letters. Acts is indeed generally optimistic about Rome's attitude toward the church. Yet one could argue on this basis that Acts must be dated before the infamous persecution of Christians by the Emperor Nero in Rome in 64–65. So while the arguments for dating Acts after 80 are not persuasive, the arguments for dating Acts before 100 suggest, in fact, a date long before the turn of the century—indeed, a date in the early or middle 60s.

#### A Date Before 70

Arriving at a firm date for books within the New Testament is not easy—there are few solid data to go by, and many of the arguments cancel each other or are so subjective that they can only confirm a conclusion reached on other grounds. But a significant number of scholars have thought that the book of Acts furnishes one piece of evidence that determines a relatively firm and exact date for the book: its abrupt ending.

Acts ends with Paul languishing for two years under house arrest in Rome. This conclusion seems to be rather lame and unfulfilling. Is not the best explanation for this ending that Luke had decided it was necessary at this point to publish his work? After all, Luke has spent eight chapters detailing the course of Paul's judicial proceedings. Is it likely that he would have left us in suspense about the outcome of these proceedings? It is almost certain that Paul was not executed at the end of this two-year period. Why, if Luke knew this, did he not tell us that Paul was released from prison, as a final, climactic indication of the innocence of the Christian movement in the eyes of the Romans? Alternatively, if Luke was writing late enough to know of Paul's execution in A.D. 64 or 65,

<sup>31</sup>A few scholars have suggested that Acts was written only after the first edition of Luke's gospel—what they claim to be a proto-Luke—but there is little to commend the suggestion.

why did he keep this from the reader? Would not Paul's execution have made a fitting parallel to the execution of James earlier in Acts (12:2) and brought Acts to a similar climax as the gospel of Luke, with its narrative of Jesus' death? And would Luke have left as it is Paul's solemn assurance to the elders of Ephesus that he would never see them again (20:25, 38) if he had known that Paul had returned and ministered in Ephesus (as 1 Timothy assumes that he did, probably in the years 63–64)? Our difficulty in answering these questions satisfactorily suggests that the simplest and most natural explanation for the abrupt ending of Acts is that Luke finished writing the book when Paul had been in Rome for two years—in 62, according to the most probable chronology.<sup>32</sup>

This line of argument appears to be objective, simple, and persuasive. But there are other possible explanations for the ending of Acts that might invalidate this argument. One explanation is that Luke may have intended to write a third volume and that Acts ends where it does to keep the reader in suspense until he or she can begin that third volume.<sup>33</sup> Indication that Luke intended a third volume has been found in his use of the word *πρῶτος* (*prōtos*, "first") in Acts 1:1 to describe the gospel of Luke. This word is technically a superlative adjective and would thus refer to the first of three or more books rather than to the former of two. But Hellenistic Greek tended to confuse the degrees of comparison in adjectives, and little can be built on the use of this word here. We have no other indication that Luke intended another volume, and this explanation for the ending must be considered purely speculative.

The explanation of the ending of Acts that is most popular today is that Paul's arrival in Rome and his unhindered preaching of the gospel in the capital of the empire bring the book to its intended conclusion.<sup>34</sup> Luke's focus is not biographical but theological—he is not interested in a life of Paul but in the expansion of the gospel. To have the gospel being preached in Rome "without hindrance" (Acts 28:31) brings Luke's epic account of the growth and expansion of the Christian movement to its natural terminus. To argue, then, that Acts is strangely incomplete because it does not tell us the outcome of Paul's appeal to

<sup>32</sup>The most important defenders of this line of argument are Harnack, *Date of Acts*, esp. 90–116; Richard Belward Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, WC (London: Methuen, 1901), 1-lv (and see the updating of Rackham's arguments by A. J. Mattill Jr., "The Date and Purpose of Luke-Acts: Rackham Reconsidered," *CBQ* 40 [1978]: 335–50); and J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 88–92. See also John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 223–30.

<sup>33</sup>Zahn 3.57–61; Ramsay, *St. Paul*, 23, 27–28.

<sup>34</sup>See, e.g., Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 11; Longenecker, "Acts," 234–35; Floyd V. Filson, "The Journey Motif in Luke-Acts," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, Fs. F. F. Bruce, ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 68–77; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 52.

the emperor or the ultimate fate of the apostle is to assume that Luke was more interested in Paul per se than he really was. Perhaps, indeed, Luke knew that the outcome of Paul's trial in Rome was a negative one or that Paul had been executed by the Romans, but he deliberately refrained from giving us this information because it would have spoiled his upbeat conclusion. Perhaps Luke knew that Paul had been freed after this first Roman trial and did not want to get Paul in trouble by publishing the details of his further ministry.<sup>35</sup> Or perhaps—and this is the most probable explanation—Luke knew that Paul was continuing to minister in the churches of the East but did not include this information because it did not make as neat a climax as did Paul's preaching in Rome. In any case, it is argued, the ending of Acts, being the natural climax of the narrative, gives no help at all in dating the book.

This argument carries considerable weight. Further substantiating it is Luke's mention of a specific period of time—"two whole years"—during which Paul preached in Rome. This suggests that Luke knew that Paul's circumstances changed after this two-year period. While it is difficult to be certain, then, we are inclined to think that the ending of Acts does not point conclusively to the date of its writing or publication.

But other considerations suggest a date not long after A.D. 62: (1) Luke's apparent ignorance of the letters of Paul; (2) Luke's portrayal of Judaism as a legal religion, a situation that would have changed abruptly with the outbreak of the Jewish rebellion against Rome in 66; (3) Luke's omission of any reference to the Neronian persecution, which, if it had occurred when Luke was writing, would surely have affected his narrative in some way; (4) the vivid detail of the shipwreck voyage narrative (27:1–28:16), which suggests very recent experience. For these reasons, Acts should be dated in the mid-60s.<sup>36</sup>

## GENRE, ADDRESSEES, AND PURPOSE

### Genre

The earliest identification of the genre of Acts may be reflected in the second-century authors who began calling Luke's second volume the Acts. As noted above, several ancient historians used the word "acts" to describe the narratives in which they recounted the heroic deeds of individuals or cities (e.g., Polybius, 1.1.1; Diodorus Siculus, 1.1.1), and the early church may then have

<sup>35</sup>Hemer, *Book of Acts*, 406–8.

<sup>36</sup>See esp. *ibid.*, 376–90; Longenecker, "Acts," 236–38; McDonald and Porter, 296. E. Earle Ellis further suggests that "the ends of the earth" in Acts 1:8 refers to Spain and that Paul did, indeed, eventually preach the gospel there. Luke's failure to mention this preaching implies that he had not yet done so and so requires an early date for Acts ("The Ends of the Earth' (Acts 1:8)," *BBR* 1 [1991]: 123–32).

thought that this was the category into which Luke's narrative fit. But "acts" was not the name of a technical genre as such,<sup>37</sup> so the title does not help much in establishing a well-defined literary classification for the book of Acts. Most scholars agree that Acts should be put into the category "history."<sup>38</sup> This identification has recently been challenged by some who find the differences between Acts and other ancient works of history too great to admit of their common categorization. C. H. Talbert has styled Acts a "succession narrative,"<sup>39</sup> while Richard Pervo suggests that Acts be read as a historical novel.<sup>40</sup> Both these scholars remind us of important features in Acts—Talbert the relationship of Acts to Luke's gospel, Pervo the element of storytelling in Acts—but neither of their proposed genre identifications has much to be said for it.<sup>41</sup> Others, noting these same differences, argue that Acts is unique and cannot be fit into any known genre.<sup>42</sup> However, while the features unique to Acts (e.g., its theological perspective and its relationship to the gospel of Luke) should not be minimized, we doubt that they are sufficient to take Acts out of the category of ancient history. Ancient historical works differ a great deal among themselves, with most—perhaps all of them—possessing some features unique to themselves.<sup>43</sup>

### Addressees and Purpose

Acts, like the gospel of Luke, is addressed to Theophilus (1:1), who was probably Luke's patron, the person who was putting up the money for the publication of Luke's literary effort. But we learn, and can infer, almost nothing more about him from either book. Moreover, it is almost certain that Luke had a broader audience than one individual in mind. Just who made up Luke's intended audience can be determined only after we have identified his purpose in writing.

<sup>37</sup>See David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, LEC 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 78.

<sup>38</sup>E.g., Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 36–37; W. Ward Gasque, "A Fruitful Field: Recent Study of the Acts of the Apostles," *Int* 42 (1988): 129; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 47–49; Darryl W. Palmer, "Acts and the Ancient Historical Monograph," in *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, vol. 1, *The Book in its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 1–29; Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 12–24; Jervell, *Apostelgeschichte*, 76–79.

<sup>39</sup>Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts*, SBLMS 20 (Missoula: SP, 1974).

<sup>40</sup>Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

<sup>41</sup>See Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, 78–80.

<sup>42</sup>Wikenhauser, 351–52; Kümmel, 165; Schneider, *Apostelgeschichte* 1.73–76.

<sup>43</sup>Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment*, 80.

*The earliest identification of the genre of Acts may be reflected in the second-century authors who began calling Luke's second volume the Acts.*

Identifying Luke's purpose in writing Acts is complicated by the relationship between Acts and the Gospel of Luke. Most scholars stress that these books form a literary unity—"Luke-Acts." Most also think that Luke intends the prologue of the first of these books (Luke 1:1–4) to cover his second volume as well.<sup>44</sup> Ancient writers were severely limited in their verbosity by the need to compress their work into the space of a papyrus scroll. The Gospel of Luke and Acts each would have occupied a full-sized papyrus roll. The division of Luke's work into two volumes was therefore dictated by physical limitations, and like other ancient writers, he has used the opening of this second volume to tie it to the first and to the prologue of that first volume.<sup>45</sup> But recognizing the applicability of the prologue to the matter in hand does not solve all our problems. It is not certain, for instance, how much of the prologue applies to Acts. At least some of its statements—such as Luke's reference to the many who had written before him—seem to apply only to the gospel. Nevertheless, we are safe in concluding that the purpose stated in Luke 1:4, namely, to communicate the "certainty of the things you have been taught," applies equally to the gospel and to Acts. This, the author's own statement, must be considered basic to any discussion of the purpose of Acts. But instilling certainty in his readers is a very broad aim and may not cover all the purposes that Luke had. Moreover, Luke may well pursue some purposes in Acts distinct from what he has done in the gospel. We have argued that some modern scholars have perhaps gone too far in their insistence on the unity of Luke and Acts (see chap. 5). "Since Luke clearly distinguishes the second volume from the first, there is no reason why he could not have accomplished his purpose mainly in the first volume and then continued the story of 'all that Jesus began to do and teach' in the second one to accomplish yet further objectives."<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, any finally satisfactory estimation of Luke's purpose in Acts must at least consider the gospel. We need, then, to examine some of the suggested purposes for Acts and test them against Luke's own claim and against the data of the text.

**Conciliation.** As we noted above, the Tübingen School viewed the book of Acts as a second-century attempt to create a synthesis out of the supposed antitheses of Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity. The author of Acts

<sup>44</sup>E.g., Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 9; I. Howard Marshall, "Luke and His 'Gospel,'" in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher, WUNT 28 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1983), 289–308. For the contrary view, see Loveday Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1:1–4 and Acts 1:1*, SNTSMS 78 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 146; Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 5–8.

<sup>45</sup>A. J. B. Higgins, "The Prologue to Luke and the Kerygma in Acts," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, 78–83.

<sup>46</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," in *EBC* 8.801.

seeks to accomplish this particularly through his portrayals of the two key figures in Acts, Peter and Paul. Texts such as 1 Corinthians 1:10–17 and Galatians 2:11–14 show that there was a sharp division between Peter and Paul, a division between a conservative Jewish theological outlook and a liberal Gentile-oriented outlook that was perpetuated in warring church factions into the late first and early second centuries. But the antagonism between Peter and Paul disappears in Acts. The author of Acts "Gentilizes" Peter, turning him into the initiator (chap. 10) and defender (11:1–18; 15:6–11) of the outreach to the Gentiles. Paul, on the other hand, is "Judaized": he accepts the council decree (15:22–35), circumcises Timothy (16:3), takes Jewish vows (18:18; 21:17–26), and claims to be a loyal Pharisee (23:6). By thus rewriting the history of the early church, the author of Acts hopes to conciliate the factions in his second-century context.

The Tübingen approach to the book of Acts did not survive the criticisms of scholars such as J. B. Lightfoot and Albrecht Ritschl. The assumption that the late-first-century and early-second-century church was torn by factions was shown to be unfounded. More important, the Tübingen critics were guilty of seriously overemphasizing the differences between Peter and Paul. That they differed occasionally is clear (e.g., Gal. 2:11–14). But that they were leaders of opposing theological tendencies in the early church is an idea that finds no basis in the New Testament text. We therefore have no grounds on which to accuse the author of Acts of creating an unhistorical and tendentious scenario, and as little reason to think that the second-century church was in need of conciliation. We may still, however, think that conciliation was Luke's subsidiary purpose; perhaps he knew of continuing tensions between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians and wanted to show that Peter and Paul were in essential agreement over the basics of the faith.

**Evangelism/Apologetics.** Luke's inclusion of a number of evangelistic speeches and his emphasis on the miraculous accrediting of the early preachers suggest that he may have written in order to awaken faith. Many scholars think that evangelism was, then, at least a subsidiary purpose of (Luke-) Acts. Particularly influential is the notion that Acts is intended to create an apologetic for Christianity in the eyes of Romans.

One of the puzzling features of Acts is the amount of time Luke spends describing in detail the trials and defenses of Paul. Almost one-fourth of the whole book of Acts (chaps. 22–28) is occupied with this topic. Why is this, when undoubtedly Luke could have told us much else about evangelistic outreaches in various parts of the world or about Paul's missionary work? The traditional answer has been that Luke wanted to prove to Roman citizens that Christianity was a religion to be tolerated—a *religio licita* in the official terminology. Rome had become quite skeptical about Oriental religions, even fearful of their harmful effects on the population. For Christian missionaries to work effectively

with Roman citizens, it was necessary to stifle these fears and to make Christianity a religion that Romans could embrace without being considered traitors to their country. This Luke does by showing how Roman official after Roman official refuses to stand in the way of the new movement. The city officers in Philippi apologize to Paul for imprisoning him (16:38–39); Gallio, the Roman official in charge of the province of Achaia, declines to forbid Christian preaching in Corinth (18:12–17); King Agrippa II and Festus, the Roman procurator of Judea, agree that Paul had done nothing wrong and could have been released had he not appealed to Caesar (26:31–32).

Most scholars think that this kind of apologetic plays some role in Acts, but a few elevate this to the central concern of the book.<sup>47</sup> As mentioned, some have suggested that Luke intended Acts to be used as a brief for Paul at his trial in Rome, a document that Paul could submit to a Roman magistrate (Theophilus?) or even to the emperor himself as part of his defense. This last suggestion, at least, is most unlikely. Luke would hardly have written as much as he did, had this been his purpose. A few scholars go further and question whether apologetic to Romans plays any role at all in Luke's purpose. They argue that Luke-Acts must be considered as a whole and that apologetic to a Roman audience is not very clear in the gospel. Moreover, Luke gives many indications that he is writing to a Christian rather than to a non-Christian audience.<sup>48</sup> One writer, in fact, reverses the traditional understanding, arguing that Luke was not trying to legitimize the church before Rome, but Rome before the church.<sup>49</sup> These scholars make some good points: Luke-Acts is primarily directed to Christians, and it is easy to overemphasize the theme of Roman apologetic at the expense of other themes. Nevertheless, the way in which Luke goes out of his way to bring out Roman acceptance of the church, seen particularly in the latter chapters of Acts, strongly suggests that apologetic to Romans is one of Luke's purposes. Perhaps, while writing mainly for Christians, Luke knew that Acts would also be read by non-Christian Romans and so included this material. Or perhaps Luke wanted to help new converts from a Roman background understand better the relationship between their new faith and their Roman political and social identity.

A rather different apologetic purpose is discerned in the book of Acts by A. J. Mattill Jr. Reviving the thesis of Matthias Schneckenburger, he argues that Acts is directed to Jewish Christians in Rome and has as its central purpose an apology for the apostle Paul. By emphasizing the parallels between Peter and

<sup>47</sup>E.g., Johannes Weiss, *Absicht und literarischer Charakter der Apostelgeschichte* (Marburg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1897); O'Neill, *Theology of Acts*, 166–77; cf. Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 8–13.

<sup>48</sup>See Schneider, *Apostelgeschichte* 1.139–45.

<sup>49</sup>Paul W. Walaskay, "And So We Came to Rome": *The Political Perspective of St. Luke*, SNTSMS 49 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Paul and by selecting incidents that revealed Paul's continuing allegiance to his own people, Luke wanted to scotch rumors to the effect that Paul was an apostate Jew.<sup>50</sup> There is much to be said for this proposal, for there is no doubt that Paul is Luke's hero and that his emphasis on Paul's Jewishness would be most appropriate for a Jewish Christian audience. In contrast, many other features of Luke-Acts imply a Gentile Christian audience. Apologetic to Jewish Christians may, then, be one of Luke's purposes, but it is not his main purpose.

**Theological Polemics.** No one today doubts that Luke writes with theological purposes. But some scholars think that he has a definite theological ax to grind and that this theological polemic is his central purpose. Charles Talbert, for instance, suggests that Luke is writing to oppose Gnosticism.<sup>51</sup> But it is unlikely that Gnosticism existed as a movement requiring refutation at this stage in history, and there is far too much in both Luke and Acts that would be immaterial for this purpose. Hans Conzelmann and others think that Luke is propagating a new conception of salvation history in response to the problem of the delay of the parousia.<sup>52</sup> More will be said about this theological issue below; here we note simply that while Luke indeed has much to contribute to our understanding of salvation history, there is little evidence that he was the initiator of such a view or that his writing was occasioned by the delay of the parousia. In general, then, we may conclude that Luke was writing with theological purposes and that he has many specific theological points to make but that the evidence for a particular theological polemic as central to his purpose is lacking. Such proposals are reductionistic: they oversimplify Luke's complex and many-faceted work.

**Edification.** We agree with a growing number of scholars who think that Luke wrote with a variety of specific purposes and that these purposes are part of a larger, general purpose—the edification of Christians.<sup>53</sup> Luke tells us in the prologue to his gospel that confirmation of the gospel is his overriding purpose<sup>54</sup> and implies by using the word *κατηχέω* (*katēcheō* ["to teach"]) that this confirmation is directed to a Christian, perhaps a recent convert. Perhaps, indeed, we should

<sup>50</sup>A. J. Mattill Jr., "The Purpose of Acts: Schneckenburger Reconsidered," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, 108–122.

<sup>51</sup>Charles H. Talbert, *Luke and the Gnostics: An Examination of the Lucan Purpose* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966).

<sup>52</sup>See esp. Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

<sup>53</sup>See, e.g., Ernst Haenchen, "The Book of Acts as Source Material for the History of Earliest Christianity," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, pp. 258–278; I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 20–21; idem, "Luke and His 'Gospel,'" 289–308; Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 9.

<sup>54</sup>See esp. the essay by W. C. van Unnik, "The 'Book of Acts' the Confirmation of the Gospel," *NovT* 4 (1960): 26–59.

view this intended reader as a former God-fearer, a Gentile, like Cornelius (Acts 10), who had been an active worshiper of the God of Israel without becoming a Jew.<sup>55</sup> Such a person would have wondered about the place of his new faith within the welter of religious and philosophical options available in the Greco-Roman world of his day. And he may particularly have wondered about the claims of Christians vis-à-vis Jews. Which movement—the Christian “way” or Judaism—could lay valid claim to be the heir of God’s Old Testament people?<sup>56</sup> Luke seeks to secure the full belief and commitment of such a person by describing the historical foundation for Christian faith and by showing, through this historical survey, that the church of his, and Theophilus’s day is the culmination of biblical history.<sup>57</sup> God’s salvation was revealed in, and made available through, his Son, Jesus Christ. The message of that salvation was entrusted by Christ himself to his apostles, and through the empowering and directing of the Holy Spirit, they have now brought that message, and the salvation it mediates, to “the ends of the earth.”<sup>58</sup> Only so broad a purpose is able to accommodate the richness of Luke-Acts. As part of this general purpose, of course, Luke pursues many subsidiary purposes—legitimation of the church in the eyes of Romans, vindication of Paul in the eyes of Jewish Christians, evangelism, and others.

## SOURCES

The search for the sources of Luke’s material in Acts is important for the light it might shed both on Luke’s literary techniques as well as on the historical trustworthiness of his narrative. In the prologue to his gospel, Luke tells us that he has “carefully investigated everything from the beginning” (1:3) and mentions both written records (1:1) and oral transmission (1:2, “handed down”). Luke may be thinking here mainly of the gospel, but we can assume that he would have made the same careful investigation, and used all the sources he could lay his hands on, in writing his second volume. And in any case, the question of the extent to which written sources stand behind Acts naturally arises. The “we” passages that surface in Acts 16 and following, as well as the general shift from

<sup>55</sup>See Liefeld, “Luke,” 8.802.

<sup>56</sup>These points are emphasized by Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 21–25 (see also Achtemeier/Green/Thompson, 266); Johnson, 218–19.

<sup>57</sup>See especially Walter T. Wilson, who argues convincingly that Luke, especially in Acts 10:1–11:18, adapts the “Greco-Roman foundation narrative” style to assure his Gentile readers that they were members of a secure community with historical foundations (“Urban Legends: Acts 10:1–11:18 and the Strategies of Greco-Roman Foundation Narratives,” *JBL* 120 [2001]: 77–99).

<sup>58</sup>This theme is stressed by C. K. Barrett, *Luke the Historian in Recent Study* (London: Epworth, 1961), 56–61; Marshall, *Acts of the Apostles*, 20–21; Gasque, “Recent Study,” 120–21: Luke wanted to scotch rumors to the effect that Paul was an apostate Jew.

*The search for the sources of Luke’s material in Acts is important for the light it might shed both on Luke’s literary techniques as well as on the historical trustworthiness of his narrative.*

a Palestinian to a wider Mediterranean setting that occurs at this point, makes it necessary to separate Acts 1–15 from Acts 16–28 in the investigation of the sources for Acts.

## Acts 1–15

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, scholars working on Acts shared with their colleagues working on the Synoptic Gospels a preoccupation with written sources. Adolf von Harnack’s source proposal for Acts 1–15 stands as a climax to this development. Harnack recognized, along with most scholars of his day and ours, that Luke has so uniformly imposed his own style on whatever sources he has used as to make it impossible to distinguish his sources through style and language.<sup>59</sup> Harnack appealed rather to geographic setting, to theological tendency, and, especially, to the presence of doublets to dissect Acts 1–15 into its component sources. Doublets are apparent duplicate narratives of the same story, and there are five of them, claimed Harnack, in Acts 1–5: two sermons of Peter (2:14–39; 3:12–26), two arrests of the apostles (4:3; 5:18), two appearances of the apostles before the Sanhedrin (4:8–20; 5:27–40), two estimates of the number of converts (2:41; 4:4), and two accounts of the sharing of material goods in the Jerusalem church (2:44–45; 4:32). Source critics often think that such doublets point to an amalgamation of two different sources, each with its own particular version of such incidents. Using these doublets in Acts 1–5 as his starting point, Harnack postulated the existence of three written sources in Acts 1–15: a “Jerusalem A” source, standing behind 3:1–5:16; 8:5–40; and 9:31–11:18; a “Jerusalem B” source, represented in 2:1–47 and 5:17–42; and an “Antiochene” source, which shows up in 6:1–8:4; 11:19–30; and 12:25–15:35.<sup>60</sup> Harnack’s scheme has been very influential and has been adopted, sometimes with modifications, by a significant number of scholars.

Despite its popularity, Harnack’s proposal is unlikely. Its foundation is shaky in that the evidence for doublets in Acts 1–5 is not strong. The narratives concerned are either so different from one another (e.g., the speeches of Peter), so integral to the progression of events (e.g., the two arrests and hearings of the apostles), or so integral to Luke’s plan (e.g., the references to the community of goods and the numbers of the converted) that they are unlikely to be duplicates.<sup>61</sup> Beyond that, there is little basis for differentiating the material in Acts 1–15, beyond the obvious matter of setting, and this can be explained in any

<sup>59</sup>E.g., Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 65–70; Jacques Dupont, *The Sources of the Acts* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964), 88; Haenchen, *Acts*, 81.

<sup>60</sup>Adolf von Harnack, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1909), 162–202.

<sup>61</sup>See Joachim Jeremias, “Untersuchungen zum Quellenproblem der Apostelgeschichte,” *ZNW* 36 (1937): 205–21; Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles*, 23.

number of ways. We simply do not have enough data to identify written sources of this sort behind Acts 1–15.

A source proposal of a very different sort was advanced by C. C. Torrey, who argued from the presence of Semitisms that Acts 1:1–15:35 is the translation of a single Aramaic source.<sup>62</sup> Torrey's theory is now universally rejected. Although it is recognized that his proposal goes far beyond the available evidence, the discussion of the Semitic element in this first part of Acts and of its implications for Luke's sources continues. There is some reason to think that the distribution of Semitisms in these chapters points to the use, at places, of Aramaic sources,<sup>63</sup> but the evidence is not clear enough to justify firm conclusions or the identification of specific sources.

The sources behind Acts 1–15 cannot, then, be definitely pinpointed. It is likely that Luke depends on Aramaic sources for parts of these chapters, particularly for some of the speeches, and other written sources that we now have no means of isolating were perhaps used as well. But we should probably place as much if not more emphasis on oral reports as the basis for Luke's narrative.<sup>64</sup> Certainly Luke's two-year stay in Palestine during Paul's Caesarean imprisonment (his stay is a fair inference from the "we" passages) would have given him ample opportunity to interview people such as Philip, Mark, and Peter himself.<sup>65</sup> And if Luke was a native of Antioch, he could have had firsthand knowledge of the planting and growth of the church there, as well as of the labors of the missionaries Paul and Barnabas, sent out from that church.

#### Acts 16–28

Attention in these chapters is focused on the significance of the "we" passages. Dibelius thought that these passages indicated the existence of an "itinerary" source (perhaps a travel diary) that Luke used for much of this narrative.<sup>66</sup> We have argued above that the best explanation of the "we" in these texts is that Luke himself was with Paul on these occasions. His own eyewitness recollection (combined perhaps with notes he may have taken), along with close personal contact with Paul himself, fully accounts for the material in Acts 16–28.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup>Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Composition and Date of Acts*, HTS 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916), 3–41.

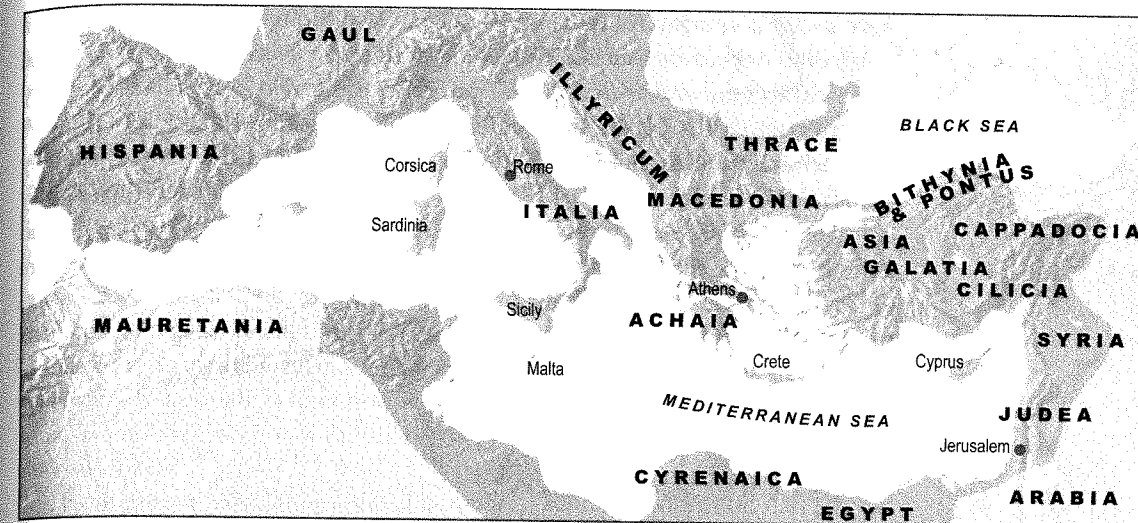
<sup>63</sup>See esp. Max Wilcox, *The Semitisms of Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965).

<sup>64</sup>Haenchen, *Acts*, 82.

<sup>65</sup>See Hemer, *Book of Acts*, 336–64.

<sup>66</sup>Martin Dibelius, "Style Criticism of the Book of Acts," in *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Heinrich Greeven (London: SCM, 1956), 4 (the original German essay was published in 1923); see also Kümmel, 184–85.

<sup>67</sup>Mention should at least be made of the very ambitious and very complicated textual/source scheme of M.-E. Boismard and A. Lamouille, *Le texte occidental des Actes des Apôtres: Reconstitution et rehabilitation*, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les



The Roman Empire

#### TEXT

The text of Acts presents as interesting a problem as the text of any New Testament book. This is because the text has been preserved in two distinct forms: the form that is represented by the great uncials Sinaiticus (S) and Vaticanus (B), which is the basis for all modern Greek texts and English translations; and the form represented by the uncial Bezae Cantabrigiensis (D). The latter form of the text, often called Western because of its alleged geographic origin, is about 10 percent longer than the usually accepted text. These additions are of various kinds, extending from single words to whole sentences.

Some of these additions are very interesting. As we noted above, it is the Western text that identifies Luke as a native of Antioch by inserting in 11:28 the words, "And there was much rejoicing. And as *we* were gathered together. . . ." The Western text furnishes the wholly likely information that Paul used the rented quarters of Tyrannus in Ephesus "from 11 A.M. to 4 P.M.," that is, during the hot hours of the day when Tyrannus himself was not using the hall (19:9). An ethicizing tendency can be observed in the Western version of the apostolic decree (15:20, 29). In place of the shorter text's prohibition of food polluted by idols, sexual immorality, meat of strangled animals, and "blood"—a mixture of ritual and ethical points—Codex D and its allies list idolatry, sexual immorality, and "blood," and add after the list, "and not to do to others what they would not like to be done to themselves."

Scholars take three basic standpoints in their assessment of this Western text in Acts. A few have argued that it represents the original Lukan text, which

civilizations, 1984) (for a convenient summary in English, see J. Taylor, "The Making of Acts: A New Account," *RevBib* 97 [1990]: 504–24).

8, B, and others have abbreviated.<sup>68</sup> Others have thought it might represent a completely separate recension that could have come from Luke himself.<sup>69</sup> The great majority, however, view the Western form of the text in Acts as a secondary modification of the generally accepted text.<sup>70</sup> This is almost certainly right. A comparison between the Western text and the text of 8 and B shows generally that the Western text tends to smooth out grammatical difficulties, clarify ambiguous points, expand references to Christ, and add notes of historical detail and interest.<sup>71</sup> Accepted canons of textual criticism state that such features are typical of secondary texts. This is not, of course, to say that the Western text may not at points preserve the original reading. But the text, as a whole, must be considered a third- or fourth-century revision of the original, shorter text of Acts.<sup>72</sup>

## ACTS IN RECENT STUDY

### Survey of Research

Recent study of Acts must be understood against nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century background.<sup>73</sup> The assumption that Acts gives to us a straightforward historical narrative of the beginnings of the church was first seriously questioned at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the German critic W. M. L. de Wette.<sup>74</sup> He was followed by F. C. Baur and his disciples (the Tübingen School), who argued that Acts pursues a definite theological “tendency” (*Tendenz*; hence, *Tendenzkritik*). This tendency, formulated with the purpose of reconciling second-century church factions, determines what is contained in Acts. Luke does not, then, simply tell us about things “as they really happened.”<sup>75</sup> Predictably, so new and radical a thesis stimulated a strong reac-

<sup>68</sup>Most notably, Clark, *Acts of the Apostles*.

<sup>69</sup>F. Blass, “Die Textüberlieferung in der Apostelgeschichte,” *TSK* 67 (1894): 86–119; Zahn 3.8–41.

<sup>70</sup>E.g., James Hardy Ropes, *The Text of Acts*, vol. 3 of *Beginnings of Christianity*, ccxv–ccxlv; Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles*, 40–47; Kümmel, 187–88.

<sup>71</sup>Eldon Jay Epp also discerns an anti-Jewish bias in Bezae (*The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts*, SNTSMS 3 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966]).

<sup>72</sup>On the date of the text, see Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 69.

<sup>73</sup>This history is thoroughly surveyed in Gasque, *History*. See also Haenchen, *Acts*, 14–50; I. Howard Marshall, “Acts in Current Study,” *ExpTim* 115 (2003): 49–52.

<sup>74</sup>See Gasque, *History*, 24–26.

<sup>75</sup>The fullest treatment of Acts from the Tübingen approach is that of Eduard Zeller, *The Contents and Origin of the Acts of the Apostles, Critically Investigated*, 2 vols. (London: Williams & Norgate, 1875–76); the German original was published in 1854

tion, and numerous objections to the Tübingen approach from scholars of widely varying theological commitments appeared during the course of the nineteenth century. The turn of the century witnessed the work of two great Acts scholars, both of whom made a strong case for the essential historicity of Acts. In a series of books, the famous German historian and theologian Adolf von Harnack argued, among other things, that Acts was written at an early date by Luke the physician and must be considered a serious work of history.<sup>76</sup> William Ramsay went further. Ramsay, an archaeologist, started out as a skeptic but became firmly convinced of Luke’s historical reliability as he discovered detail after detail in Acts that demonstrated firsthand acquaintance with conditions in the Roman Empire in the middle of the first century. Luke, Ramsay concluded, belongs in the first rank of ancient historians.<sup>77</sup>

At about the same time, scholars were showing considerable interest in the sources of Acts. Harnack himself, as we have seen above, was in the forefront of this development. As Ernst Haenchen puts it, scholarly attention had shifted from the question of what Luke was *willing* to say (“tendency criticism”) to what he was *able* to say (source criticism).<sup>78</sup> Shortly after this, in the 1920s, the new discipline of form criticism began to be applied to Acts. The most prominent practitioner of form criticism in Acts was Martin Dibelius, who, in a series of articles, established influential methodological points and conclusions.<sup>79</sup> Dibelius argued that criticism of Acts must focus on the style of the narrative, since, in contrast to the gospels, one does not have written sources with which to make comparison. By analyzing the style of Acts, Dibelius believed we could isolate certain forms or narratives that Luke had used in his composition, from the rest of Acts, which was the product of Luke’s own creativity. The speeches of Acts, Dibelius particularly emphasized, showed every sign of Luke’s own creativity. The unique features of Acts rendered the shift from form-critical approaches to redaction-critical approaches to Acts less obvious than in the case of the Synoptic Gospels. Thus, the work of Hans Conzelmann and Ernst Haenchen builds directly on that of Dibelius, with perhaps slightly more interest in Luke’s theology as a whole.<sup>80</sup> Both writers are quite skeptical about the historicity of Acts, arguing that Luke’s desire to edify the church (Haenchen)

<sup>76</sup>Adolf von Harnack, *Luke the Physician* (New York: Putman, 1907), *The Acts of the Apostles*, and *Date of Acts*.

<sup>77</sup>See esp. Ramsay’s *Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), and *St. Paul: The Traveller and Roman Citizen*.

<sup>78</sup>Haenchen, *Acts*, 24.

<sup>79</sup>The relevant essays are collected in Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*.

<sup>80</sup>See esp. Conzelmann, *Theology of St. Luke*, and also his commentary *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); Haenchen’s major work is his commentary, *The Acts of the Apostles*.



or to explain the delay of the parousia (Conzelmann) has virtually erased any concern on his part with what really happened.

### Recent Contributions

Recent study of the Acts has tended to focus on three areas: historicity, literary phenomena, and theological tendencies.

**Historicity.** Acts is the New Testament book that most nearly resembles historical narration, and it is the only source for most of what it narrates. Scholars have therefore long debated its historical accuracy, some doubting whether we can learn much at all of "what really happened" from Acts,<sup>81</sup> others insisting that Acts deserves to be considered as a serious and generally reliable historical source.<sup>82</sup> The same division of opinion is evident in contemporary scholarship. Gerd Lüdemann, while by no means dismissing Acts as a historical source, is generally skeptical.<sup>83</sup> He acknowledges the importance of the theological approach to Acts that has reigned supreme in recent studies but insists that the study of Acts as a historical source needs to be reopened. He attempts to distinguish Luke's redactional touches from the traditions he has inherited, and from this basis to assess the historical reliability of Acts.

But Lüdemann's generally negative conclusions are more than balanced by the contributions of two scholars who are much more positive toward the historical accuracy of Acts. Martin Hengel, while finding historical errors in Acts, is critical of the tendency in modern scholarship to dismiss Luke as a serious historian. "The radical 'redaction-critical' approach so popular today, which sees Luke above all as a freely inventive theologian, mistakes his real purpose, namely that as a Christian 'historian' he sets out to report the events of the past that provided the foundation for the faith and its extension. He does not set out primarily to present his own 'theology.'" <sup>84</sup> Hengel concludes that Luke deserves to be considered as trustworthy as any ancient historian.

Far more detailed than Hengel is Colin Hemer's *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, a magisterial and definitive defense of the historicity of Acts. Hemer compares Luke favorably with the highest standards of ancient historiography. He updates and expands the list of points at which Luke demon-

<sup>81</sup>E.g., the Tübingen School and many contemporary redactional approaches (e.g. Conzelmann, Acts).

<sup>82</sup>E.g., Harnack, Ramsay; and note also two of the classic treatments from this perspective: Eduard Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1921–23); and Alfred Wikenhauser, *Die Apostelgeschichte und ihr Geschichtswert*. NTAbh 8.3–5 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1921).

<sup>83</sup>Gerd Lüdemann, *Early Christianity According to the Traditions in Acts: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989).

<sup>84</sup>Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*, 67–68.

strates his knowledge of, and accuracy about, first-century political, social, and geographic details. He also defends Luke at those points where he has been considered to be inaccurate and contests the scholars who think that Luke's theological concerns must have overridden his historical reliability. Hemer's work puts the defense of Luke's historical reliability on firmer ground than ever before. In addition to these works, mention should be made of the multivolume *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, which situates Acts in its historical setting with respect to a wide variety of issues.

**Literary Approaches.** The last twenty years have witnessed an explosion of studies on literary aspects of the Bible. Scholars have been particularly interested in fitting the biblical books into ancient literary genres and in using contemporary literary techniques to open up new approaches to, and understandings of, the text of Scripture. Luke-Acts has been the focus of many such studies. The general tendency is to stress the unity of Luke and Acts and to use various literary methods, especially the study of narrative, to illuminate their relationship and the story that together they tell.<sup>85</sup> Charles H. Talbert may be taken as representative.<sup>86</sup> He emphasizes the parallels that Luke draws between the gospel on the one hand and Acts on the other, and between Acts 1–12 and Acts 13–28. Luke has selected and ordered events in such a way that the history of Jesus parallels the history of the church, while the "acts" of Peter parallel the "acts" of Paul. These patterns bind Luke's two works together and serve to emphasize the unity of the salvation-historical drama that is at the heart of Luke-Acts. Talbert also suggests that Luke-Acts may be compared with Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*.

Comparison of Acts with other ancient literature is not new, but in the past comparison was usually made with historical works. Recent scholarship has emphasized the dramatic and novelistic aspects of the book of Acts, with its travel narratives, stories of miracles, and accounts of dangers on the high seas. Richard Pervo takes these characteristics as indications that Luke was not intending to write history, but a historical novel.<sup>87</sup> While this is certainly going

<sup>85</sup>Emphasizing the unity are, for instance, Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 47–48; I. Howard Marshall, "Acts and the 'Former Treatise,'" in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, 163–82; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). See also the evaluation of David P. Moessner and David L. Tiede in the introduction to *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke's Narrative Claim upon Israel's Legacy* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 1–3.

<sup>86</sup>Talbert, *Literary Patterns*.

<sup>87</sup>Richard Pervo, *Profit with Delight*; see also Vernon K. Robbins, "The We-Passages in Acts."

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too far, the reminder from such scholars that Luke has written Acts in such a way that it makes for exciting reading is a salutary one.

**Theological Themes.** In the middle 1960s, W. C. van Unnik noted that Luke-Acts had suddenly become a storm center in contemporary scholarship.<sup>88</sup> This was largely owing, he noted, to the new interest in Luke as a theologian, sparked by the application of redaction-critical techniques to the gospel. It was the proposal of Hans Conzelmann that led the way, and came to dominate, in the new theological approach to Luke.<sup>89</sup> Conzelmann argued that "Luke" (he did not think that Luke the physician was the author) wrote largely in order to explain to the church of his day the delay of the parousia. For some time after Jesus' death, the early church believed that Jesus would return in glory to bring an end to this earth in their own lifetimes. At some point, however, as time went by and Jesus did not return, the church came to realize that Jesus would not be coming back in the immediate future. So basic a shift in eschatological expectation demanded a massive reinterpretation of Christian theology. It is this reinterpretation that Luke provides. The heart of Luke's scheme is the replacement of the early Christian eschatological expectation with salvation history. In place of a church waiting for the Lord from heaven, Luke offers a historical outline of the course of saving events, divided into three periods: the period of Israel, the period of Jesus' ministry, and the period of the church. It is this segmentation of salvation history into its separate stages that the very structure of Luke's two-volume work provides. Luke writes to encourage Christians in his day to endure the pressures of living as believers in an indefinitely continuing world order. He thus tries to establish a role for the church. He stresses its authority by locating its establishment in apostles accredited by Jesus himself. He provides for its effective working by organizing it, with elders and bishops. This attention to the church, its authority and organization, has come to be called "early Catholicism" (*Frühkatholizismus*), because it is seen as leading on to the organized "universal" (catholic) church of the second century.

Reaction to Conzelmann's proposal has been vigorous and varied. Three points may be singled out as particularly important. First, as Oscar Cullmann and others have shown, "salvation history," in the sense of a series of stages through which God has brought his salvation to the world, is integral to the New Testament and to the message of Jesus himself.<sup>90</sup> It is not something invented by Luke. Second, it is questionable whether there was at any time in the early church a broadly held conviction that Jesus was *certain* to come back within a

<sup>88</sup>W. C. van Unnik, "Luke-Acts, a Storm Center in Contemporary Scholarship," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 15–32.

<sup>89</sup>Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*.

<sup>90</sup>Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950).

few short years. Those sayings of Jesus in which he is thought to have said that he would return in glory within the lifetime of the first apostles (e.g., Matt. 10:23; Mark 9:1 par.; Mark 13:30 par.) probably do not mean that at all.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, several texts presuppose that the time of the parousia may be delayed (e.g., Luke 19:11–27; John 21:20–23). It can be demonstrated that the early Christians were strongly imbued with a sense of the Lord's *imminence* (that Jesus *could* return at any time) but not that they held to a notion of the *immediacy* of the Lord's return (that he definitely *would* return within a short period of time). The third important response to the scenario drawn by Conzelmann and others is to question the existence of "early Catholicism" in Luke. Luke has not, as these scholars claim, abandoned a doctrine of imminence: the church has not simply settled down into the world but exists in "the last days," eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus from heaven. Moreover, Luke displays little interest in the church as an institution or in the sacraments.<sup>92</sup>

While Luke's salvation history and "early Catholicism" continue to be debated, two other theological issues are attracting more attention and debate in contemporary scholarship. The first is Luke's social and political teaching. It is well known that Luke's gospel evinces a special interest in the problems of the poor and the outcasts and that Jesus has more to say about the economic aspects of discipleship in Luke's gospel than in any other. Stimulated by the agenda of liberation theology and by a new awareness of the materialistic preoccupations of Western society, scholars have devoted considerable attention to Luke's teaching on these matters. Many of the studies focus exclusively on the gospel, but several important ones bring Acts into the picture as well.<sup>93</sup>

Perhaps the most debated issue in Luke's theology in recent years has been his view of the Mosaic law and of the relationship between Israel and the church. The stimulus of the discussion has come above all from the writings of Jacob Jervell.<sup>94</sup> In opposition to those scholars who have seen in Luke-Acts the theme

<sup>91</sup>See, e.g., A. L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1966).

<sup>92</sup>See, e.g., Kümmel, 170–73, and on this and the subject of this paragraph, see esp. E. Earle Ellis, *Eschatology in Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972); A. J. Mattill Jr., *Luke and the Last Things* (Dillsboro: Western North Carolina Press, 1979); I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), esp. 77–88; Leon Morris, "Luke and Early Catholicism," in *Studying the New Testament Today*, vol. 1, ed. John H. Skilton (Nutley: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974), 60–75.

<sup>93</sup>L. T. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, SBLDS 39 (Missoula: SP, 1977); Richard J. Cassidy and Philip J. Scharper, eds., *Political Issues in Luke-Acts* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983); P. F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>94</sup>See particularly, Jacob Jervell, "The Divided People of God" and "The Law in Luke-Acts," in *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 41–74 and 133–51.

of the church as the new Israel—the new people of God that *replaces* Israel—Jervell insists that it is repentant Jews who constitute Israel in Luke-Acts and that Gentile Christians belong to this Israel as an “associate people.” In keeping with this stress on the continuity of Israel, Jervell also argues that Luke has “the most conservative outlook within the New Testament” on the Mosaic law.<sup>95</sup> Jewish Christians are required to keep the law, while Gentile Christians must keep the part of the law that concerns them (see the apostolic decree). Jervell’s thesis has met with considerable approval,<sup>96</sup> but also with some serious criticisms.<sup>97</sup> While Luke does not “transfer” the title “Israel” to the church, he certainly portrays the church as a new entity, made up of believing Jews and Gentiles.<sup>98</sup> Jervell’s view of the Mosaic law is also vulnerable to criticism, several scholars showing that Luke-Acts takes a far more discontinuous view of the law than Jervell thinks.<sup>99</sup>

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF ACTS

### Historical

Without denying that Acts has as its main purpose the edification of believers and that its theological contributions are significant, we must not lose sight of the fact that Acts purports to narrate historical events. This narrative of historical events—the founding and growth of the church, with its particular emphasis on the career of Paul—is without parallel and therefore invaluable as a source for our knowledge of these events. Without Acts we would know nothing of the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost, the martyrdom of Stephen, the life of the early Jerusalem church, or the way in which the gospel first came to

<sup>95</sup>Jervell, “The Law in Luke-Acts,” 141.

<sup>96</sup>See Robert L. Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews: Conflict, Apology, and Conciliation*, SBLMS 33 (Atlanta: SP, 1987); Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 58–59.

<sup>97</sup>See particularly, Jack T. Sanders, “The Jewish People in Luke-Acts,” in *Luke-Acts and the Jewish People: Eight Critical Perspectives*, ed. Joseph B. Tyson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 51–75. Note also M. M. B. Turner, “The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 99–157. See also the history of research on this question in Joseph B. Tyson, *Luke, Judaism, and the Scholars: Critical Approaches to Luke-Acts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>98</sup>See, e.g., I. Howard Marshall, “‘Israel’ and the Story of Salvation,” in *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel*, 255–57.

<sup>99</sup>S. G. Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, SNTSMS 50 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Craig L. Blomberg, “The Law in Luke-Acts,” *JSNT* 22 (1984): 53–80; idem, “The Christian and the Law of Moses,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 397–416; M. A. Seifrid, “Jesus and the Law in Acts,” *JSNT* 30 (1987): 39–57.

Samaritans and Gentiles. We would have little knowledge of the life and missionary journeys of Paul against which to understand his letters and theology. But can we trust the information that Acts gives us on these matters? As we noted above, the historical reliability of Acts has been widely questioned. The doubts about Luke’s accuracy concentrate on three main issues: Luke and ancient historical standards, the comparison of Acts with other sources of information, and the speeches of Acts.

**Ancient Historical Standards.** It is often suggested that we should not expect Luke to give us an accurate, true-to-life record of the facts because ancient historians were not careful to stick to the facts. They wrote to edify or to draw moral lessons and felt at liberty to play fast and loose with the way things really happened if it suited their purpose or if they did not have access to the facts. To insist on historical accuracy would be unfairly to impose modern standards of history on an ancient historian.

Standards for historical writing in the ancient world were certainly not as uniformly insistent on factual accuracy as those in our day. Many writers who claimed the name “historian” wrote more fiction than fact. But the best ancient historians were concerned with the facts and did not differ very much from the modern historian in this regard. Especially was this true for so-called “scientific” histories, with which Acts favorably compares.<sup>100</sup> Polybius, for instance, criticizes other historians for making up dramatic scenes in the interest of moral lessons or sensationalism and insists that the historian should “simply record what really happened and what really was said, however commonplace” (2.56.10).<sup>101</sup> A similar position is taken by Lucian in his essay “On Writing History.” To be sure, the words of Thucydides are often quoted to substantiate a different position. Describing his procedure in writing his history of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides says:

As to the speeches that were made by different men, either when they were about to begin the war or when they were already engaged therein, it has been difficult to recall with strict accuracy the words actually spoken, both for me as regards that which I myself heard, and for those who from various

<sup>100</sup>See especially Loveday C. A. Alexander, “Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography,” in *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke, vol. 1 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 31–63.

<sup>101</sup>Quoted from the translation of W. R. Paton, *Polybius: The Histories*, vol. 1, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1922). On these points, see esp. A. W. Mosley, “Historical Reporting in the Ancient World,” *NTS* 12 (1965–66): 10–26; Hemer, *Book of Acts*, 43–44, 75–79. See also W. C. van Unnik, “Luke’s Second Book and the Rules of Hellenistic Historiography,” in *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, rédaction, théologie*, ed. J. Kremer, BETL 48 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979), 37–60.

other sources have brought me reports. Therefore the speeches are given in the language which, as it seemed to me, the several speakers would express, on the subjects under consideration, the sentiments most befitting the occasion, though at the same time I have adhered as closely as possible to the general sense of what was actually said. (1.22)

While Thucydides, who is generally highly regarded as an ancient historian, admits that not all his speeches are verbatim reports, two things also need to be noted about this statement. First, he resorted to giving the general sense "befitting the occasion" only when he did not have firsthand data. Second, he did not make up rhetorical flights to match his own purposes but stuck to what was appropriate to the actual occasion.

We will come back to the issue of the speeches in Acts.<sup>102</sup> Here we want simply to point out that ancient authors testify to very high standards of historical reporting, standards that are not much different at all from those with which we are familiar. It is not fair, then, to conclude that a concern for the way things actually happened was foreign to ancient historians.

**Comparison between Acts and Other Sources.** Luke, then, had available to him standards of historiography almost as rigorous as those in our day. The question is whether he successfully met them or not. Only a careful comparison of Luke with other ancient sources for the same data can answer this question. Because of the lack of parallels to Acts, we do not have available to us a great deal of material for comparison. But we can test Luke at three points: his knowledge of first-century society, politics, and geography; his reporting of events recorded by other ancient historians; and his accuracy in depicting the history and theology of Paul.

William Ramsay,<sup>103</sup> A. N. Sherwin-White,<sup>104</sup> and Colin Hemer<sup>105</sup> have demonstrated the accuracy of Luke's knowledge about detail after detail of Roman provincial government, first-century geographic boundaries, social and religious customs, navigational procedures,<sup>106</sup> and the like. This accuracy shows not only that Luke knew the first-century Roman world but that he was intimately acquainted with the specific areas and regions in which his narrative is set.

Luke does not often record events that are also mentioned by other historians, and when he does, he does not usually give us enough detail to enable us to

<sup>102</sup>On Thucydides, see Hemer, *Book of Acts*, 421–26.

<sup>103</sup>Ramsay, *Bearing of Recent Discovery and St. Paul*.

<sup>104</sup>A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

<sup>105</sup>Hemer, *Book of Acts*.

<sup>106</sup>On the shipwreck voyage, see James Smith, *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*, 4th ed. (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1880; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).

make comparisons. In the book of Acts, Luke's mention of the death of Herod Agrippa I (12:19–23), of a serious famine in the middle 40s (11:27–30), of the edict of Claudius expelling Jews from Rome (18:2), of the replacement of the Judean procurator Felix with Festus (24:27), and of an Egyptian terrorist active in the middle 50s (21:38) are all confirmed in secular historical sources. Only at two places has it been claimed that such a comparison finds Luke to be inaccurate. In 5:36–37, Luke has Gamaliel, the Jewish rabbi, mention the false messianic claims of a Theudas and, after him, of "Judas the Galilean." Josephus, however, also mentions a rebel named Theudas but places his activity in the years A.D. 44–46, about forty years after Judas and at least ten years after the setting of Acts 5 (*Ant.* 20.5.1). But Gamaliel may be referring to a different Theudas entirely; and in any case, as F. F. Bruce remarks, "where we have simply the one author's word against the other's, Luke is at least as likely to be right as Josephus."<sup>107</sup> The other problem is the Roman officer's reference to the "four thousand" men whom "the Egyptian" had led in revolt (Acts 21:38); Josephus, however, refers to thirty thousand (*Ant.* 20.8.6). But again, we should certainly prefer Luke to Josephus, especially since Josephus's numbers are often impossibly large.

The most serious challenge to Luke's accuracy involves a comparison between his story of Paul and the apostle's own accounts. We have examined some of the alleged discrepancies above and have concluded that there is no reason to drive a wedge between the Paul of Acts and the Paul of the epistles. The alleged historical contradictions almost all involve matters on which Paul's own evidence is incomplete or ambiguous. This is not surprising, for, granted the nature and purpose of Paul's letters, it is not to be expected that the apostle would have gone into the historical detail that we find in Acts.

Perhaps we should say something further here about one of the most famous problems in a comparison between Paul and Acts: the number of trips Paul made to Jerusalem after his conversion. Paul's own epistles mention only three such trips: three years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18); fourteen years after his conversion or, perhaps, after his first visit (Gal. 2:1); and a projected visit at the time of the writing of Romans (15:24). In Acts, however, we are told of five visits: the postconversion visit (9:26), the famine-relief visit (11:27–30), the visit for the apostolic council (chap 15), a visit between the second and third missionary journeys (18:22), and a visit at the end of the third missionary journey (21:17). Now, it is clear that the first visit in Acts corresponds to the one Paul mentions in Galatians 1:18, and the last to the one mentioned in Romans. But it is common to accuse Luke of fabricating one or more of the other visits, particularly because, it is usually argued, the visit in Galatians 2:1 must be the visit for the apostolic council (Acts 15), leaving no place for the famine relief visit of Acts 11:27–30.

<sup>107</sup>Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles*, 18.

But it is, in fact, more likely that Galatians 2:1 describes the famine-relief visit (see the introduction to Galatians, chap. 12 below). There would then be no contradiction between Paul and Acts, only a difference over the number of trips mentioned. But we have no reason to expect that Paul has told us of all his journeys to Jerusalem, so the problem disappears entirely. A similar situation prevails with respect to the other, less serious alleged discrepancies between the history of Paul in Acts and the details of his life furnished in his letters.

**The Speeches of Acts.** Many scholars think that Luke is most untrustworthy in the speeches of Acts. They point out that the speeches are all in the same general style, a style that is found in the narrative portions of Acts. And they claim that the theology of the speeches is distinctively Lukan, rather than Petrine, Pauline, or whatever. It is therefore concluded that Luke has followed the Thucydidean model (see the quotation above) and put on the lips of his speakers the sentiments that he felt were appropriate for the occasion.<sup>108</sup>

Several responses to this accusation are necessary. *First*, as we noted above, Thucydides claims that only when he did not have information available did he not report what was actually said. Some other ancient historians were far more free in inventing speeches, but there is no a priori reason to compare Luke with them instead of with those who did seek accuracy in recording speeches (e.g., Polybius; see 12.25b.1, 4). *Second*, uniformity of style in the speeches means only that Luke has not given us verbatim reports but has paraphrased in his own words. This is likely in any case, since many of the speeches were probably translated by Luke from Aramaic. It is also likely that almost all the speeches Luke reports were much longer than the summaries he has given us. But paraphrases and summaries of speeches can still accurately convey their contents. *Third*, it is alleged there are differences in the theology of the speeches. Peter's speeches in Acts 2 and 3, for instance, contain formulations of Christology (e.g., 2:36) and eschatology (e.g., 3:19–20) that fit very well the early days of the church and that differ from the formulations found in the speeches of Paul in Acts 13 and 17.<sup>109</sup> In no case can it be shown that the theology or sentiments expressed in the speeches are inappropriate for the occasion or impossible for the speaker. On the positive side, the fidelity of Luke to his sources in the gospel (Mark, Q) suggests that he has been equally faithful to his sources in Acts. This argument is

<sup>108</sup>See esp. Dibelius, "The Speeches of Acts and Ancient Historiography," in *Studies in the Acts of the Apostle*, 138–85; Cadbury, "The Speeches in Acts," in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, 5.405–27; Ulrich Wilckens, *Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte*, WMANT 5 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1961); Eduard Schweizer, "Concerning the Speeches in Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 208–16.

<sup>109</sup>See, on Christology, C. F. D. Moule, "The Christology of Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 159–85; and Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (London: SCM, 1970).

often contested. It is argued that Luke would have much greater respect for the words of Jesus than for the words of the apostles. But there is little to suggest that Luke would have made such a distinction. He claims to have the intention of instilling in his readers "the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:4), and there is every reason to think that he has sought for accuracy in recording what people actually said, in Acts as much as in the gospel.<sup>110</sup>

### Theological and Pastoral

As we argued above, Luke's primary purpose is to edify Christians by recounting how God's plan, coming to fulfillment in Jesus, had continued to unfold in the history of the early church. Perhaps Luke's most important contribution is precisely this careful linking of the apostolic proclamation of the Word of God with the word that Jesus both taught and fulfilled. The "Word of God" thus binds together Luke's two volumes,<sup>111</sup> as the salvation that the angel first announced on the night of Jesus' birth on a Judean hillside (Luke 2:10–12) is brought finally to the capital of the Roman Empire. Luke thus presents "the things that have been fulfilled among us" (Luke 1:1) as a continuation of the salvific history of the Old Testament, showing how this history reaches its culmination in Christ and flows from him through the Spirit-led apostles into a new phase, the church as the eschatological people of God.<sup>112</sup> By doing so, Luke gave to Theophilus, and continues to give to every Christian who reads his two volumes, an assurance that faith is solidly grounded in the acts of God in history and that the message we believe is the same message sent from God.

While Luke makes clear the continuity in the message of salvation, he also reveals the progressive unfolding of new implications from that message. The historical veracity of Luke is seen in the way he makes clear the differences between the early Jerusalem community of believers and the later Gentile churches founded by Paul. The earliest Christians, Jews who believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah and that the messianic age had therefore dawned, continued to worship in the temple and were apparently loyal to the law and its institutions. Only by stages did the church move away from this Jewish outlook to a more universal orientation, as God made clear that he was doing a new work in which the law would no longer play a central role and in which Gentiles would share equally with the Jews in the blessings of God. A major contribution of Acts is the way the progress of this movement is portrayed, coming to a climax with Paul's announcement of judicial obduracy on the part of unbelieving Israel and the offer of salvation to the Gentiles (28:25–29).

<sup>110</sup>See, again, on the speeches, Hemer, *Book of Acts*, 415–26.

<sup>111</sup>Haenchen, *Acts*, 98; Longenecker, "Acts," 218.

<sup>112</sup>On this theme, see particularly Marshall, *Luke, Historian and Theologian*; idem, *Acts*, 20–21; Gasque, "Recent Study," 120–21.

*Luke in his two volumes gives us an assurance that faith is solidly grounded in the acts of God in history and that the message we believe is the same message sent from God.*

Paul is the chief instrument through which this universalizing of the church takes place, and there is no doubt that he is Luke's hero.<sup>113</sup> Childs has suggested that Luke thus portrays a "canonical Paul," a figure who does not necessarily match the historical Paul but who can function as the representative apostle for a later age.<sup>114</sup> But it is questionable whether Luke presents Paul as a representative of the future. Rather, Luke suggests that Paul plays a decisive role in the foundation of a new period of salvation history, and in this sense, his significance is more for the past of the church than for its present or future. As we have already argued, there is little reason to think that the apostle portrayed in Acts is different from the apostle as he really was. Moreover, we must be careful not to give Paul too prominent a place in Luke's presentation. "When everything is interpreted so as to establish the authority and authenticity of Paul's ministry, Paul, rather than Jesus, becomes the key character in Luke-Acts."<sup>115</sup>

The basic theological/pastoral thrust of Acts may be fleshed out by looking more closely at six key themes.

*The Plan of God.* The outworking of God's plan acts as an overarching theme for Luke and Acts together (see chap. 5). The opening of the gospel announces the imminent fulfillment of God's promises to Israel (1:32–33, 54–55, 68–79), penultimately in the events of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection, but ultimately in the creation of the end-time people of God. Luke shows in Acts how the plan of God to bring salvation to the "ends of the earth" is fulfilled in the death of his servant-Messiah and in the ongoing witness of the church, which itself takes on the function of the servant (the phrase "the ends of the earth" is probably drawn from a servant passage, Isa. 49:6 [cf. 13:47]).<sup>116</sup> The specific mechanisms by which the plan of God is announced in the gospel are continued in the book of Acts: the note of divine necessity (1:16, 21; 3:12, 4:21; 9:16; 14:21; 17:3; 19:21; 23:11; 27:24); angelic intervention (5:19, 21; 12:7–11, 23; 27:23–24); visions (10:10–16; 16:9; 18:9; 22:17–21); the fulfillment of Scripture (1:20; 2:16–21, 25–28, 34–35; 3:22–23; 4:11, 25–26; 7:48–49; 8:31–35; 13:33–37, 40–41, 47; 15:15–18; 17:2–3; 26:22–23; 28:25–27).<sup>117</sup>

<sup>113</sup>E.g., Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 2.

<sup>114</sup>Childs, 225–27.

<sup>115</sup>David Peterson, "Luke's Theological Enterprise: Integration and Intent," in *Witness to the Gospel*, 533.

<sup>116</sup>See on this esp. David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, WUNT 130 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2000), 91–93, passim.

<sup>117</sup>Luke's appeal to Scripture, of course, goes far beyond quotations. Along with other NT writers, he reveals patterns of saving events that predict the dawning of the age of salvation—cf. Darrell Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology*, JSNTSup 12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987).

Luke is especially concerned to show that two critical events are rooted in the plan of God: Jesus' crucifixion (e.g., 2:23; 13:27) and the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God (e.g., 10:1–16; 13:47; 15:15–18)—both of which were critical yet controversial components of the early Christians' interpretation of salvation history.

*The Presence of the Future.* Yet another key facet of early Christian self-understanding was the conviction that, with the coming of Christ and the Spirit, the "last days" had dawned. In the prophets, this phrase denotes that period of time when God would fulfill his promises by saving his people and judging their enemies. Luke clearly recognizes that a day of judgment and ultimate salvation lies in the future (cf. 3:21; 10:42), but he is particularly concerned to show that the early Christians were living in those "last days." This conviction emerges programmatically in Peter's claim that the phenomenon of speaking in tongues on the Day of Pentecost is just what Joel predicted would happen "in the last days" (2:16–17). But the notion suffuses the entire narrative, as the many Old Testament quotations reveal.

*Salvation.* As we noted in chapter 5, "salvation" is considered by most scholars to be the central theological theme in both Luke and Acts.<sup>118</sup> That Acts carries on the theme from the gospel is clear from a number of key passages:

"And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (2:21 [=Joel 2:32])

"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (2:47b)

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved." (4:12)

"God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins." (5:31)

"From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised." (13:23)

"Brothers and sisters from the children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent." (13:26)

"For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" (13:47 [=Isa. 49:6])

"They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.'" (16:31)

"Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" (28:28)

<sup>118</sup>Joel Green argues that salvation is the integrating theme of Acts ("Salvation to the Ends of Earth" [Acts 13:47]: God as Saviour in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Witness to the Gospel*, 83–106).

Salvation, the disciples initially expected, would mean the restoration of an earthly kingdom to Israel (1:6). Jesus does not clearly deny that this will be the case, but his emphasis on the witness of the apostles suggests that the saving power of God's kingdom is being realized in the forgiveness of sins offered in the gospel proclamation.

*The Word of God.* An easily overlooked yet vital theme in Acts is the power of the word of God.<sup>119</sup> Again and again, Luke attributes the growth and strength of the church to the dynamic activity of God's word. Preaching the word of God is what the apostles do wherever they go. "Received the word of God" is another way of saying "became a Christian" (11:1). Especially striking are those places where Luke, usually in transitional summaries, claims that the word of God "grew" or "spread" or "increased" (6:7; 12:24; 13:49; 19:20). For Luke the word of God is especially the message about God's gracious redemption through Jesus Christ. For all Luke's emphasis on the importance of apostolic preaching, therefore, he makes clear that it is only as they are faithful witnesses to the Word that spiritual transformation takes place. As C. K. Barrett notes, "Luke's stress on the proclamation of the Word . . . shows that the Word itself was the decisive factor," and that the church is an agency of salvation "only in so far as it provides the framework within which the preaching of the Word takes place."<sup>120</sup> Luke's stress on the power of the word reveals, suggests Talbert, that Luke is not an "early Catholic" but a "proto-Protestant" (using these designations in stereotypical fashion).<sup>121</sup>

*The Holy Spirit.* Attention to the work of the Spirit is another theme that binds together Luke and Acts. Indeed, many point to parallels at this point between the two: as Jesus is anointed by the Spirit at the commencement of his ministry, so the church is endowed with the Spirit's power at the beginning of its ministry; as Jesus performs signs and wonders in the power of the Spirit, so the apostles heal people in the power of the Spirit; as the Spirit guides events in the gospels, so he guides events in Acts. Scholars often note that Luke in Acts concentrates especially on the prophetic activity of the Spirit: emboldening the early Christians for witness (e.g., 4:8, 31; 7:55; 13:9) and guiding the course of apostolic ministry (8:29, 39; 11:12; 13:2; 16:6, 7; 20:22).<sup>122</sup> Key here, of course, is

<sup>119</sup>See esp. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, 147–80; also Brian S. Rosner, "The Progress of the Word," in *Witness to the Gospel*, 215–33.

<sup>120</sup>Barrett, *Luke the Historian in Recent Study*, 72, 74.

<sup>121</sup>Charles H. Talbert, "The Redactional Critical Quest for Luke the Theologian," in *Jesus and Man's Hope*, vol. 1, ed. Donald G. Miller (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1970), 220. He adds, "*Sola Scriptura* is a major plank in the Lucan theological platform."

<sup>122</sup>See, e.g., Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts*, JPTSS 9 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

Peter's quotation of Joel 2:28: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy . . ." (Acts 2:17). There is no doubt that this is an important function of the Spirit in Acts. But we should not ignore another important facet of the Spirit's work.<sup>123</sup> At key points in his narrative Luke introduces references to the Spirit "coming upon" or "filling" people: those who respond to Peter's Pentecost message (2:38); the Samaritans who are converted (8:15–17); Cornelius and his household (10:44). Possession of the Spirit, it becomes clear, is one of *the* indicators that a person belongs to the emerging people of God of the last days (see esp. 11:15–17; 15:8–9)—along with faith, repentance, and water baptism.<sup>124</sup>

*The People of God.* As we suggested above, perhaps Luke's most fundamental purpose in the Book of Acts is to help Christians answer the question "Who are we?" Two thousand years of church history sometimes prevent us from seeing just how basic that question was for the first believers. As long as Jews only were among the faithful, it could always be thought that this new group was just another sect of Jews who had some crazy notion about who the Messiah was. But as soon as Samaritans and Gentiles began entering the picture, identity within Judaism ceased to be an option. Something new had come into being—in continuity with the old, of course, but distinct from it as well. Luke, of course, leaves us in no doubt about whether the inclusion of Gentiles and the casting loose from temple and Torah were directed by God. And so a new name has to be coined to identify this new group: "Christians," followers of Christ (11:26).

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<sup>123</sup>See Green, *Theology*, 45–47.

<sup>124</sup>James D. G. Dunn argues that Acts presents these four as making up, together, "conversion-initiation" (*Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, SBT 15 [London: SCM, 1970])

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