

The Book of Acts

Luke to Theophilus Volume 2

Survey

To overview book two of *Luke to Theophilus*, we will creatively use an introduction to “The Acts of the Apostles” written by B.B. Warfield (v-xxvii in *Acts and Pastoral Epistles*, edited by Warfield, 1902; according to R. Nicole [Bibliography of Warfield, 1974], Warfield wrote these pages on the book of Acts; reading them dispels any doubt).

I. The title of the book

The book of Acts is historical narrative. It has the mostly, but not fully appropriate title “Acts of the Apostles.” This is mostly appropriate because it documents the history of apostolic action that fulfilled the promise of Jesus to build His church on the foundation of the apostles. The book narrates how the apostolic gospel of Jesus shifted from “only the house of Israel” (Mat 10) to “all nations” (Mat 28) by the gift of the Spirit to the church empowering commissioned witnesses. All this was as Jesus promised (Jn 14.26, **the Holy Spirit...will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you; 15.26-27, when the Helper comes...he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning; 16.13, When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth**).

Warfield states that the title (Acts of the Apostles) assigned to this part of Scripture since the second century “quite obviously” is “not...perfectly appropriate” (v). There are a number of considerations in Luke 1.1 and Acts 1.1 that bear on the question of a title, which Luke himself does not provide. We call the first book “The Gospel of Luke” and the second “The Acts of the Apostles.” Some questions for discussion will help us rethink these titles to improve our understanding of these Scriptures.

1) According to the prefaces of each book, how are we to relate the two books to each other (**a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, Lk 1.1 and In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, Acts 1.1**)?

He presents a narrative that continues. These are not as two distinct treatises, but two volumes of a single work; both “books” are part of a continuous narrative.

2) From these verses, what title might be given to the joint Luke-Acts that improves on the title I tentatively suggest at the top of this page? Hint: focus the subject from Acts 1.1 and the action (acts) from Luke 1.1.

“Luke to Theophilus” for both volumes is true but too simple. Using “accomplished” from Luke 1.1 and “Jesus” from Acts 1.1, we may call it “The accomplishments of Jesus” that we have in two parts: books I & II or volumes 1 & 2.

3) From Lk 24.45-49 & Acts 1.1 why is “The Acts of the Apostles” *okay* as a subtitle of the narration, but *deficient*: **Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high”**).

It is okay because Jesus called the apostles to be His witnesses and the content of Acts speaks of their actions.

It is deficient because Luke writes about the Acts of Jesus the He performs through the apostles. Again, we do well to emphasize the accomplishments of Jesus.

4) What is deficient or misleading about the traditional subtitle to the first book: “The Gospel of Luke”? Hint: add the word Gospel to the title of the joint Luke-Acts

Adding we get: The Gospel of the Accomplishments of Jesus. This suggests that Acts is not the Gospel but Acts is part of the Gospel of the Accomplishments of Jesus; that is precisely what Luke tells us it is: the term gospel surfaces in both books summarizing the narrative (Lk 9.6; Acts 14.7). Thus, to provoke thought, we can state that “The Gospel of Luke” is not inspired. Of course, we mean the title, “The Gospel of Luke” is not given to us by inspiration as is the book we know by that title.

5) What should we do with “of Luke” in the traditional title of the Gospel to be technical?

It is not about Luke. “Of Luke” becomes, perhaps, “Luke’s Narration of the Gospel of the Accomplishments of Jesus.” Some translations have “The Gospel according to Luke,” which is good but it is better to pick up the notion of narrative.

6) Why could we call Acts the fifth Gospel in a beneficial thought experiment for a lesson?

It is the good news of Jesus accomplishments, *no less than* what we have in the Gospel of Luke; we have the Gospel of Acts as the fifth Gospel. Of course, since we have the Luke-Acts unit, we can just think of the 4th Gospel as Lk-Acts, but we tend to confine Luke’s account of the gospel of Jesus’ accomplishments to his first book.

7) How can we expand the main title (the improved title for Luke-Acts) to include more detail if we add the notions of where and when?

If we add when, we will add “from the beginning.” Where in the beginning are we? We are in Israel (Bethlehem, Nazareth, etc). How far does the timeframe extend and where are we geographically at this time? The timeframe extends to the present among the nations.

The title of the joint work becomes: Luke’s narration of the accomplishments of Jesus from the beginning in Israel to the present among the nations.

“To the present” specifically refers to the author’s present that occurs at some point after Paul’s two years of imprisonment at Rome because Luke tells us that Paul **lived there [in Rome] two whole years** (Acts 28.30).

8) How then can we expand on and nuance the subtitles of each book to distinguish them?

Luke: the gospel of Jesus’ accomplishments from the beginning in Israel until the resurrection (by the Spirit, training the apostles, promising the outpouring of the Spirit)

Acts: the gospel of Jesus’ accomplishments to the present among the nations after the resurrection (in fulfillment of His promise, by the Spirit, and through the apostles that He trained, prepared, commissioned and empowered).