

Acts 1:1-2 An unsung hero

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Two weeks ago we began our series on the book of Acts and we did an overview covering the terrain of Acts.

Page | 1

We saw that the book could be divided up into various different ways - like the geographical regions where the gospel spread as prophesied by Jesus himself in Acts 1:8

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The divisions of this geographical expansion as found in Acts are:

- Chapters 1-7 Jerusalem
- Chapters 8-10 Samaria and Judea
- Chapters 11-28 The ends of the earth

We also saw that it could also be divided by the two main characters that the writer tends to focus on.

From chapters 1-12 we see Peter taking the forefront in the story and then from chapters 13-28 we see a shift from Peter to Paul as the gospel broadens its reach to the non-Jews, people like you and I - the Gentiles.

All of this expansion that we read about in the 28 chapters of Acts takes place roughly between, AD 33 to about AD 60-65, a period of around 30 years.

During this period the gospel was preached and spread across the then known world without the modern means that we have at our disposal and often at the point of losing your life.

But God provided in history during this period a set of circumstances that kick started and prepared the scene for this rapid, bold and courageous expansion.

1) Pax Romana - Roman Peace

The whole of the Mediterranean world, including parts of Asia, Europe and North Africa at that time was under the control of the Roman Empire and it was during this period through their military and governmental rule they had established a peace that the world had not known for quite some time. And it

was a peace that was to last for just over 200 years.

Pax Romana (Latin for "[Roman peace](#)") was the long period of relative peace and minimal expansion by military force experienced by the [Roman Empire](#) in the [first](#) and [second centuries AD](#). Since it was established by the Caesar [Augustus](#) it is sometimes called **Pax Augusta**. Its timing was approximately 207 years (28 BC to 180 AD). *(Source: Wikipedia)*

- 2) Widespread influence of the Greek language and culture
The Koine or common Greek was known virtually in all areas of the empire.

This was the language of the weekly grocery list, the common language of the people and it also became the language of the New Testament. Not only the New Testament but also the Old Testament had a translation in Greek known as the Septuagint.

- 3) The dispersion or the scattering of the Jews around the world.
Michael Green notes in his book '30 Years that changed the world' that the Jews were everywhere.

Their eye for business took them to all the key points in the Empire. You have only to notice the list in Acts chapter 2 to see that they were to be found all over the world. (Page15)

These Jews established synagogues in many key cities. In fact it only took 12 Jews to be able to begin a synagogue and this allowed Paul and others to preach in many of the synagogues and aided the spread of the gospel.

- 4) The extensive Roman road system throughout the Empire.
The Romans established roads and a road system through many of the Empire's major cities by which they were to quickly move armies, goods and to communicate news. Some of these roads are still in use today.

During the 1st century they established over 400,000kms of roads of which just over 80,000kms was paved. For the Christians this made travel through the empire extremely easy and very safe.

The **Roman roads** were essential for the growth of the [Roman Empire](#).^[1] Roman [roads](#) enabled the Romans to move [armies](#) and [trade](#) goods and to communicate news.^[2] The Roman road system spanned more than 250,000 miles (400,000 km) of roads, including more than 50,000 miles (80,500 km) of paved roads. *(Source: Wikipedia)*

- 5) The resurrection of Jesus himself.
This event was like giving the disciples a lifetime supply of Red Bull and these guys got drunk on the stuff.

They were a rabble after Jesus had been crucified.

The crucifix was one of the world's most infamous torture machines - which led to a slow and painful death and if the guys did not die after a couple of days the soldiers would go around and break the legs of the victims so that they had no way of keeping themselves upright and this suffocated them as their bodies slumped down and cut off oxygen to their lungs.

All of that dramatically changed after the resurrection. The disciples who were about to give up and go home were turned around to the point that their very lives meant very little to them in comparison with knowing him and making him known.

All of these elements combined in an amazing way that aided the rapid spread of the gospel.

Now, we get a lot of this information from history but the majority of what we know about this period church history comes from the pen of one of the many unsung heroes of the Christian faith.

Please turn to Acts chapter 1

Acts 1:1-2

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,

2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

It is accepted that the person who wrote this history is Luke although he never identifies himself as the author.

While Acts focuses on Peter and Paul, we would know none of this without the careful, logical, passionate and historically accurate writings of Luke.

Luke wrote two books of the bible, Acts and the gospel of Luke - which account for around 1/3 of the words of the New Testament.

Who was he writing to and why was he writing?

Please turn to Luke 1

Luke 1:1-4

1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us,

2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us,

3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,

4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

We see in Acts and Luke which in essence is one book in two volumes, that he was writing for a person called Theophilus.

Theophilus in Greek means loved of God or lover of God and could refer to all believers, but the fact that he has the “most excellent” before the name - a title of rank more than likely means that he is writing to or addressing an official of some description, perhaps a Roman official that had become a believer.

And from this introduction to his gospel we see that the reason he is writing is confirm that what Theophilus had been taught was in fact true and that he could have certainty in believing in Jesus.

That’s who he is writing to and why, but what of Luke himself - who was he?

First all Luke was a 1st class Historian who captured 1st century Christian history in an amazingly vivid way.

Archaeologist [Sir William Ramsay](#) wrote that "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy...[he] should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

Dr. Norman L. Geisler observed, "In all, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities and nine islands without a [factual or historical] error."

(Source:Wikipedia)

But he also wrote in such a way that this History came alive. The ESV study Bible says this about his Gospel.

The narrative of Luke as a whole follows the chronology of Christ's life and death. No Gospel encompasses such a complete range of subgenres as Luke: annunciation stories, birth narratives, lyric praise psalms, Christmas carols, prophecies, genealogies, preparation stories, temptation stories, calling stories,

recognition stories, conflict stories, encounter stories, miracle stories, pronouncement stories, parables, beatitudes, sermons, proverbs, passion stories, trial narratives, and resurrection accounts. Stylistically, Luke is known for his vivid descriptive details and ability to make scenes come alive in the imagination.

What else do we know of him?

The Bible itself is very quiet with only three references to Luke mentioned.

Colossians 4:10-14

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions-if he comes to you, welcome him),

11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.

2 Timothy 4:11

Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

Philemon 1:23-24

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

From these passages we know that he was a doctor or physician, a companion of Paul on his travels and with him in prison (2Timothy), an associate of Mark and a Gentile Christian.

But from all of this what is it about this unsung hero, Luke that we can take home with us today.

- 1) **Luke was mobile.** I believe that what we see in Luke is someone who was not willing to settle down but ready to help out in the mission even when his occupation as a doctor could have meant a life of relative wealth and ease.

He allowed God to move him to various parts of the world and to help out not only on Paul's team but also in the churches.

Let's allow God to develop us in our professions in such a way that ours like Luke's can be portable - so that we can be ready to move and to work in various parts of the world as God would direct.

- 2) **Luke was loyal.** This characteristic is in short supply today as many think that loyal people are yes people or lap dogs with no genuine thinking on their own.

Luke was an incredibly intelligent person, but one who was not proud and was willing to play his part, content with the fact the God had called him to something different than he had called Paul to.

And what a work, that of writing the history of Jesus and the early church, which has changed the lives of countless millions of people down through the centuries.

- 3) **Luke was passionate.** Luke's passion comes out in his writings. He wrote history in such a way that gave him the ability to turn our ears into eyes.

You can't write like this without passion for your subject. He also wasn't just an armchair historian but a passionate follower of Jesus who lived the history he was writing.

- 4) **Luke was humble.** He was never out to make a name for himself, but was secure in bringing as much glory as he could to Jesus. His humility is seen in that he writes nothing of himself or his relationship to Paul or of his status as a doctor. He was only interested in humbly working at what God had given him to do.

In conclusion I want to ask each of us here this morning, are we people who are willing to live in such a way like Luke that we simply get on with the things that God has given us to do without any fanfare, pomp or ceremony and do it passionately, humbly, loyally with an eye on where it is in the world that God is placing us both now and into the future?

Are you willing to be one of God's many unsung heroes?

Let's pray.