

# *‘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 end of the earth.” Acts 1:8*

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**Author:** The book of Acts does not specifically identify its author. From Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-3, we know that the same author wrote both Luke and Acts. The tradition from the earliest days of the church has been that Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11), wrote the books of Luke and Acts.

## **Date of writing**

- **Early date (c. A.D. 60–62):** Many conservative scholars and historians argue for an early date. Because Acts abruptly ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome (before his eventual execution), proponents suggest it was written immediately at the end of that two-year period.
- **Late date (c. A.D. 80–90):** The majority of critical scholars date the book to the late first century. This consensus largely relies on the assumption that Acts uses the Gospel of Mark as a source and was composed after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in A.D. 70.

**Purpose:** Luke explicitly states his intention to “write an orderly account” so that Theophilus might “have certainty concerning the things you have been taught,” and he demonstrates from the beginning of Acts that his goal is to present a historical record that resumes the storyline of his Gospel. Luke is also writing a profoundly theological history about God’s work in the world.

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Introduction - June 14, 2026

Tim Morris

### Luke 1:1-4

<sup>1</sup> *Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, <sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.*

### Acts 1:1-5

<sup>1</sup> *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.*

<sup>4</sup> *And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

## Acts facts

- **Luke's writings** make up 28 percent of the New Testament. Paul's epistles are 24 percent, while John's Gospel, epistles, and Apocalypse comprise 20 percent of the New Testament.

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- **The narrative of Acts** is primarily driven by two leaders: Peter (focusing on the early Jerusalem church and Jewish believers) and Paul (focusing on taking the Gospel to the Gentiles across the Roman Empire).
- **The Book of Acts** is heavily populated with speeches and sermons, containing at least twenty-four distinct messages across its twenty-eight chapters.
- **Key theological vocabulary** includes “believe/believed/faith” (appearing 55 times) and “baptized/baptism” (27 times), reflecting the book’s emphasis on conversion and initiation into the Christian community.

## Genre

- **Narrative (history & story):** It makes up the largest portion of Scripture. It tells the historical story of God's interaction with humanity, featuring plot, characters, and settings.
  - *Examples:* Genesis, Acts, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel.
- **Poetry:** Uses artistic, sensory, and metaphorical language to evoke emotion and express human experience.
  - *Examples:* Psalms, Song of Songs, Lamentations.
- **Wisdom literature:** It explores life's deepest questions, offering philosophical reflections and practical guidelines for faithful living.
  - *Examples:* Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes.
- **Law (Torah):** Contains God's commandments, instructions, and covenantal standards for ancient Israel's worship and society.

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- *Examples:* Leviticus, Deuteronomy.
- **Prophecy:** Messages of warning, hope, and future redemption delivered by prophets on behalf of God.
  - *Examples:* Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos.
- **Gospels:** Unique biographical narratives about the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
  - *Examples:* Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.
- **Epistles (Letters):** Formal correspondence written by apostles to early Christian communities to address theology, correct behavior, and offer encouragement.
  - *Examples:* Romans, Ephesians, 1 Corinthians.
- **Apocalyptic literature:** Highly symbolic, visionary literature that uses vivid imagery to reveal cosmic truths and the ultimate triumph of God over evil.
  - *Examples:* Revelation, parts of Daniel and Ezekiel.

The most straightforward classification identifies Acts as a biblical historical narrative that presents a selective yet faithful account of God's redemptive work alongside a theological interpretation of those events.

Scholars debate the precise classification of Acts. Some identify it as "apologetic historiography"—a subgenre in which a member of a community narrates that group's history and traditions using Greco-Roman literary conventions. Luke employs this approach to present Christianity to his audience, though, unlike ethnic histories, he defends a multicultural movement that transcends ethnic and geographical boundaries.

Others have proposed alternative labels: “theological history,” “apologetic historiography,” or Greco-Roman biography composed of mixed subtypes.

## Theology

### The “big four” academic disciplines

- **Biblical theology:** Traces themes and the unfolding of God’s revelation across the storyline of Scripture (e.g., covenant, kingdom), paying attention to historical development and context.
- **Historical theology:** Studies how Christians have understood and articulated doctrine through church history (early councils, Reformation, modern debates), including key figures and movements.
- **Systematic theology:** Organizes the Bible’s teaching into coherent topics (e.g., God, humanity, Christ, salvation, church, last things) and shows how doctrines relate to each other.
- **Practical (or pastoral) theology:** Applies theology to the life and mission of the church—preaching, counseling, discipleship, worship, ethics, leadership, and spiritual formation.

### Other common categories

- **Dogmatic theology:** Closely related to systematic theology, but explicitly framed around the church’s confessions/creeds and authoritative doctrinal commitments.
- **Philosophical theology:** Uses philosophical tools to clarify and evaluate theological claims (e.g., arguments about God’s existence, attributes, the problem of evil).

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- **Apologetics:** Defends and commends the faith, addressing objections and making a case for Christianity (historical, philosophical, and cultural engagement).
- **Moral theology / Christian ethics:** Focuses on how Christians should live—virtues, moral reasoning, social issues, and the shape of discipleship.
- **Spiritual theology/mysticism:** Examines prayer, spiritual experience, and growth in holiness, often drawing on classic spiritual writers.
- **Contextual theologies:** Approaches theology from particular cultural or social locations (e.g., liberation theology, feminist theology, Black theology), emphasizing how context shapes questions and emphases.
- **Exegetical theology:** Critically interprets and extracts the original, intended meaning of Scripture. Derived from the Greek word *exēgeomai* (meaning "to lead out" or "draw out"), it uncovers what a biblical text meant to its original audience.

## Quick way to remember the difference

- **Biblical** = *What does the Bible teach as it unfolds in history?*
- **Historical** = *How has the church understood this over time?*
- **Systematic/Dogmatic** = *How do the doctrines fit together as a whole?*
- **Practical** = *How should the church live and minister in light of it?*

## Worldview

Evangelicals say that their worldview and theology are derived directly from a straightforward reading of an inerrant Bible and thus, by extension, a direct reflection of God's will. But the evidence suggests that it is more accurate to say that some evangelicals, like others who engage the text, read their worldview back into the Bible. **In fallen human hands, the Bible can be as much a screen as a projector.**

## The Holy Spirit

- **Main character:** Rather than treating the apostles as the main characters, recognize that the Holy Spirit serves as the narrative's protagonist.
- **Empowering witness:** The apostles discharge their commission through the Spirit's power, manifested by supernatural signs, while converts' acceptance of the gospel is attended by visible demonstrations of spiritual power.
- **Divine guidance:** The Spirit controls the gospel's advance by directing preachers' movements—Philip, Peter, and Paul—and even guiding the church's corporate decisions, as seen when the Spirit directs the Antioch church to commission Barnabas and Saul.
- **Prophetic voice:** The Spirit speaks through prophets, continuing the pattern established in the Old Testament.
- **Appointing leadership:** The Spirit appoints church elders to provide spiritual oversight.

## Discipleship

### **Acts 2:42**

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

### **Acts 5:42**

*And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.*

### **Acts 14:22**

*[They were] strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*

### **Acts 6:7**

*And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.*

**Next: Acts 1**