

THE PURPOSE OF ACTS

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In working out the purpose of Acts, we consider three items:

- (a) the purpose would best applies to Luke-Acts taken together.
- (b) the purpose ought specifically to relate in some way to Theophilus (1:1).
- (c) the purpose can be a combination of purposes.

Among the suggestions offered for the purpose of Luke-Acts are the following:

(1) Luke-Acts was prepared as a trial brief for Paul's first appearance before the judgment seat of Caesar. It explained the forerunner and founding personality of Christianity and showed its general relationship to Judaism, and then proceeded to outline the pattern of its spread from Judaea throughout the rest of the Roman Empire. The fact that Acts portrays the relationship between Christians and Roman rulers in a good light could corroborate this suggestion. Theophilus could have been Paul's trial lawyer. "*Most excellent*" (Luke 1:3) could be a title of address for such a dignitary (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25).

(2) Luke wrote The Acts deliberately as a historical framework for the Pauline corpus. This possibility goes with the further suggestion that Luke collected the Pauline corpus.

(3) Luke-Acts provided a written record of oral proclamation to confirm the faith of those converted through the missionary endeavors of Paul especially. Theophilus may have been the prospective "publisher" of the two-volume work, being a person of means who could reproduce and distribute authoritative accounts of Christian origins. He would serve as a patron of the Christian literary effort.

(4) Luke-Acts provided primarily for Theophilus an orderly written account of the matters it addresses, matters Theophilus had already learned orally (κατηχέω, *katēchéō*; to instruct orally; cp. *catechism*; Luke 1:4). Theophilus was significant enough to warrant such an involved effort. The two-volume work could then have extended use for the extended Christian community.

(5) "*Lover of God*" is a descriptive title rather than the name of a man.

THE ENDING OF ACTS

Scholars have long asked why Luke stops The Acts where he does. Although he rounds out his account with a summary statement much like others in the gospel and The Acts, the reader is left wondering what happened to Paul. The question may reflect more the scholars' desire to know—so they can deal more confidently with several matters that his release would impinge on—than any real awkwardness in the way the narrative concludes. Nevertheless, scholars have entertained several opinions.

(1) A more liberal perspective has suggested that Luke did not want to confuse the image of Christianity as a law-abiding movement acceptable to the Roman empire (Harris,

Understanding the Bible, p. 257). Paul's release at the end of The Acts would lead to additional activity that occasioned a second Roman imprisonment in which he was executed.

(2) Paul's arrival in the capital finishes the author's purpose in recounting the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome (Acts 1:8). That provides as natural a breaking point as any in an ongoing complex of processes. Having got Paul to Rome, Luke may have felt it anticlimactic from a literary and psychological standpoint to present further information.

(3) The account has caught up with the events.

(4) If Luke prepared it as a trial brief for Paul, events had shown that it would not, after all, be needed since the option period for filing accusations had now expired. A more general re-purposing could make it an instrument of instruction to the Gentile Christian community.

(5) The scope of events Luke records may relate to the size of his scroll. It is almost exactly the same length as the gospel, which may reflect standard writing materials available for purchase. That limitation could have contributed to the combination of depth and scope in his plan of writing. The two scrolls could have provided manageable units to instruct individuals like Theophilus and beyond or to serve as a court document. Something the size of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* would have been unwieldy for official or popular use, especially in scroll form.

NOTE: Dr. Lewis Foster, long-time professor of New Testament at The Cincinnati Christian Seminary, wondered whether *πρῶτον* in Acts 1:1 might imply a third effort, a collection of the Paulline corpus as it stood at the time of writing. Was that possibility somehow related to the comment in 2 Timothy 4:13 about "*the books and parchments*" that Paul requested?