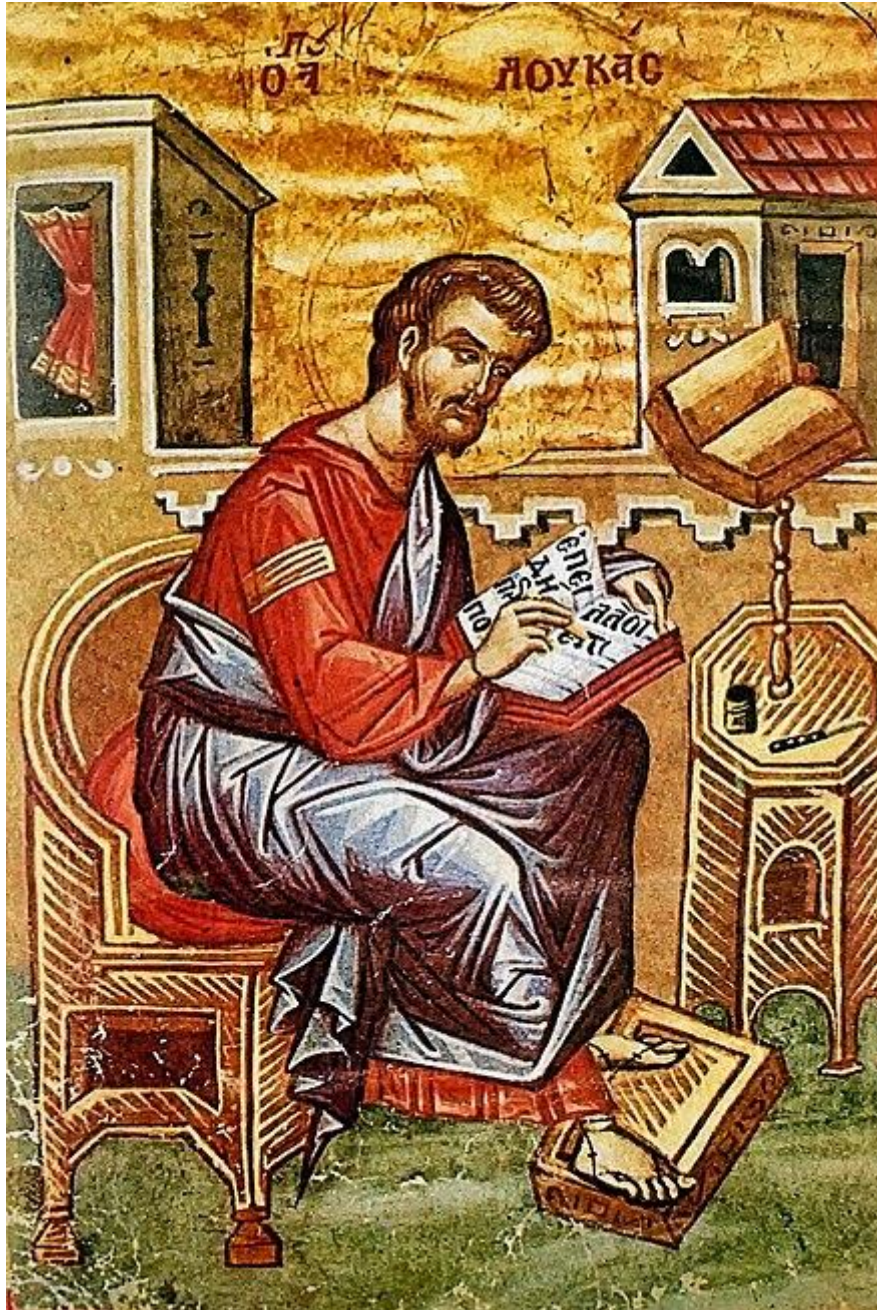


Presentation 11

Summary & Overview of the Acts of the Apostles



Luke of Antioch (15th Century)¹

¹ <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki> (Public Domain)

1. *Luke's Approach in Acts*

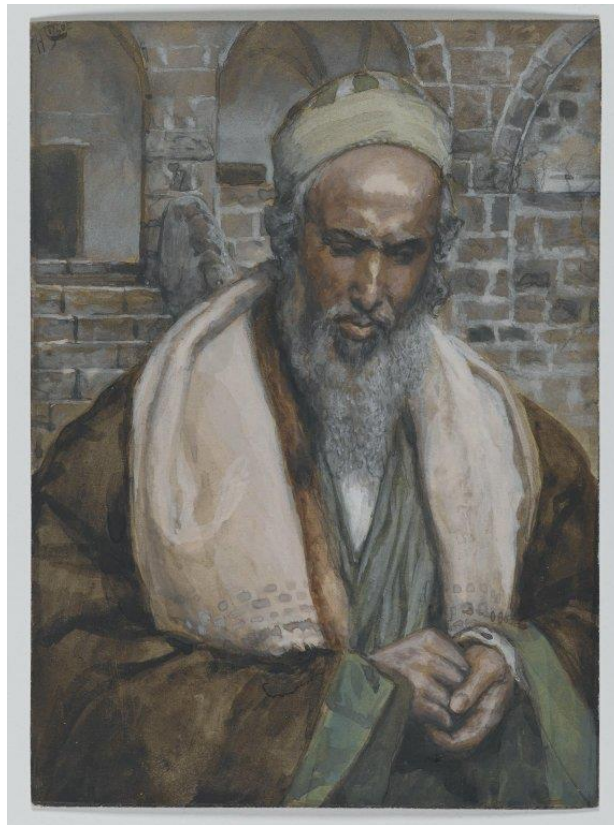
- Luke draws on different sources
- Paul as Hellenistic hero (Paul, for example, at Athens)
- Luke's use of Greek sources and literature with literary license
- Portrait of Paul in Acts is not the same as in Paul's own letters
- Luke crafts the portrait of Paul and others in Acts, shaping the narrative and the history the author projects
- Paul's *apologia*: The apology is about 'theodicy', that is, to defend God's activity in the world (Luke Timothy Johnson). God's continuity between the story in the Hebrew Bible and with the Jesus movement. Luke affirms for the audience of Luke-Acts the reliability and trust in the story and growth of the Jesus movement and the Jerusalem household. It is the action of God's spirit.
- Luke writes an 'orderly account' (Lk 1.1-4), offering assuredness to where the Gentiles have arrived in their religious journey. Luke affirms the 'restoration of Israel' in the Jerusalem household, not to replace Israel but as its continuity.

2. *Luke's theme of anti-Semitism*

- The struggle of the author that the Jesus movement did not attract *en masse* Jews.
- This is revealed in Paul's treatment from his co-religionists.
- Paul begins urban preaching in synagogue, and Luke's desire to address the Jewish world with the story of Jesus.
- Luke affirms the ongoing salvific centrality of the Jewish people. However, Peter's speech has this negative reaction to the Jewish rejection of Jesus.
- Gary Gilbert reflects on this:

Acts makes clear that Scripture, properly understood, foretells who Jesus is and how people will come to respond to him...Jews respond to these teachings in different ways, some accepting what the apostles preach (2.41; 13.42) and others rejecting it (7.54; 17.2). The book culminates with Paul's fiery denunciation of Jewish unbelief, punctuated by a quote from Isaiah that predicts Jewish intransigence and justifies the opening of God's promises to Gentiles (28.25-28). Luke-Acts depicts the believers in Jesus as possessing the proper

understanding of scripture, obedient to God, and serving as the true recipients of the divine promises and blessings. Jesus' followers point to the fulfillment of prophecies (e.g. 2.14-28) as they exhort Jews to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Some Jews, however, generally prove unwilling to convert or are incapable of comprehending God's actions. In contrast the ease with which many Gentiles, including God-fearers, come to this recognition casts further condemnation upon Jews for their unbelief.²



Saint Luke (James Tissot, Brooklyn Museum, 1886-1894)³

3. *Literary Features in Acts*

- Summaries in Acts provide narrative links

² Gary Gilbert, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version*, (ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 189-99.

³ [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brooklyn Museum - Saint Luke \(Saint Luc\) - James Tissot.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brooklyn_Museum_-_Saint_Luke_(Saint_Luc)_-_James_Tissot.jpg) (Public Domain)

- Geographical sweep, from Jerusalem to the ‘ends of the Earth’, recognises that the story of Jesus is missionary and outward, not internally focussed.
- The move from the Temple to the ‘household’. The domestic setting is now the place where the Jesus followers gather in Luke’s day.
- Apostles portrayed as prophets. There is a prophetic pattern which structures Acts (Timothy-Johnson). Paradigm of prophetic understanding continues, reflected in the Gospel.
- Parallelism between the Gospel of Luke and Acts

4. *Theological Themes in Acts*

- Role of the Holy Spirit, intrinsic to the story of Acts and the growth of the Jesus movement into the Mediterranean world. This is reflected in the ‘mini’ Pentecosts.
- The vignettes and descriptors of the ecclesial gatherings: prayer, worship, break bread, listen to the teaching of the apostles.
- The process of decision-making through Acts. Seen esp in Acts 10.15, in the discernment of the status of the Gentiles into the Jesus movement, originally Jewish.
- The theme of universality throughout Acts. Acts 15.11 expressed in terms of ‘all people will be saved’ through the grace of the Lord Jesus.
- God’s Word continues despite struggles. Luke presents a confident picture of God who offers life to humanity. Nothing will frustrate the Word of God. Human history and culture are positive receptors of the Word of God, as seen in Luke’s figure of Paul. Dialogue remains central.

FOR A FINAL REFLECTION & CONVERSATION

- As you look back over the Acts of the Apostles, what have been central insights for you?
- In what ways does the Act of the Apostles remain relevant for us, for the world and our church?
- What issues and themes that arise in the Acts of the Apostles that are still important?