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# Text, Exposition, and Notes

## ACTS 1

### I. THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH (1:1–5:42)

#### A. THE FORTY DAYS AND AFTER (1:1-26)

The first chapter of Acts provides a brief introduction to the narrative of the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit and its sequel. It deals with two topics: the risen Lord's conversations with his disciples on the eve of his ascension, and the co-opting of Matthias to fill the vacancy in the apostolate caused by the treachery and death of Judas Iscariot.

#### 1. Prologue (1:1-3)

- 1 The first volume which I wrote,<sup>1</sup> Theophilus, was concerned with all that Jesus began to do and teach*
- 2 until the day he was taken up, after he had given his commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.<sup>2</sup>*
- 3 It was to them that he presented himself alive after his passion by many compelling tokens: he appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke to them about the kingdom of God.*

**1-2** Theophilus, to whom the second volume of Luke's history is here dedicated, is similarly addressed at the beginning of the first volume, where

1. The "I" of "I wrote" (ἐποίησάμην) is identical with the "me" of "it seemed good to me" (ἔδοξε καί μοι) in Luke 1:3, and is most probably included in the "we" of the "we" narratives of Acts (cf. p.7). See H. J. Cadbury, "'We' and 'I' Passages in Luke-Acts," *NTS* 3 (1956-57), pp. 128-32.

2. The original Western text of v. 2 probably ran: "until the day in which he by the Holy Spirit gave his commandment to the apostles whom he had chosen, and bade them preach the gospel." The omission of "he was taken up" (Gk. ἀνελήμφθη) is noteworthy, because the corresponding words in Luke 24:51, "and was carried up into heaven" (Gk. καὶ ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν), are missing from the Western text (they are among those phrases at the end of Luke which Westcott and Hort bracketed as "Western non-interpolations").

he receives the title "most excellent" (Luke 1:3). There has been much indecisive speculation about him. Some have even suggested that he was no particular individual, but that the name Theophilus—which means "dear to God"—is used here to designate the "Christian reader." The use of the honorific title "most excellent" makes this improbable. We cannot be sure, however, whether the title "most excellent" is bestowed on Theophilus in a technical sense, indicating his rank, or is given him by way of courtesy.<sup>3</sup> Nor is much to be gained by pondering the omission of the title in Acts, as when it is suggested that Theophilus had become a Christian since he received the "first volume" and therefore would no longer expect worldly titles of rank or honor from a fellow-Christian.

Another suggestion is that the name Theophilus masks the identity of some well-known person, such as Titus Flavius Clemens, cousin of the Emperor Domitian.<sup>4</sup> Even this is unlikely: Theophilus was a perfectly ordinary personal name, attested from the third century B.C. onward. Despite the evident apologetic motive in Luke's history, it is equally unlikely that Theophilus was the advocate briefed for Paul's defense at the hearing of his appeal to Caesar.<sup>5</sup> It is quite probable that Theophilus was a representative member of the intelligent middle-class public at Rome whom Luke wished to win over to a less prejudiced and more favorable opinion of Christianity than that which was current among them. This much is certain from the prologue to Luke's first volume (which serves also as a prologue to the twofold work): that Theophilus had already learned something about the rise and progress of Christianity, and Luke's aim was to put him in possession of more accurate information than he already had.<sup>6</sup>

Such dedications were common form in contemporary literary cir-

3. Gk. *χαρίστος* might designate a member of the Roman equestrian order (representing Lat. *egregius*) or it might be a courtesy title (corresponding to Lat. *optimus*). Cf. the later occurrences of the word in Acts, where it is a courtesy title given to the Roman governors of Judaea—Felix (23:26; 24:3) and Festus (26:25).

4. Cf. B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels* (London, 1924), pp. 534-39.

5. Cf. C. A. Heumann, "Dissertatio de Theophilo, cui Lucas historiam sacram inscripsit," *Bibliotheca Historico-Philologico-Theologica*, Cl. 4 (Amsterdam, 1721), pp. 483-505; M. V. Aberle, "Exegetische Studien. I. Ueber den Zweck der Apostelgeschichte," *TQ* 37 (1955), pp. 173-236; D. Plooiij, "The Work of St. Luke: A Historical Apology for Pauline Preaching before the Roman Court," *Exp.* 8,8 (1914), pp. 511-23; "Again: The Work of St. Luke," *Exp.* 8,13 (1917), pp. 108-24; J. I. Still, *St. Paul on Trial* (London, 1923), pp. 84-98. More generally, G. S. Duncan suggests that Luke's narrative was "designed to supply information which it was hoped might reach those who would decide the apostle's fate at Rome" (*St. Paul's Ephesian Ministry* [London, 1929], p. 97).

6. On the significance of Luke 1:1-4 cf. H. J. Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," *Beginnings* II, pp. 489-510; N. B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Luke to Christ* (London, 1951), pp. 24-45; I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids/Exeter, 1978), pp. 39-44; L. C. A. Alexander, "Luke's Preface in the Context of Greek Preface-Writing," *NovT* 28 (1986), pp. 48-74. See p. 6 above.