

Ministerial Musings

Most Bibles give the full name of *Acts* as *The Acts of the Apostles*. It was given that title in the late second century by a bishop named Irenaeus who apparently didn't think it was dignified to call the book *Luke, Volume II*.

But *Luke* begins, "Dear Theophilus (*Greek for "Friend of God"*), many people have done their best to write a report of the things that have taken place" (Luke 1:1). *Acts* begins, "Dear Theophilus, in my first book, I wrote about all the things Jesus did and taught from the time he began his work until he was taken up into heaven" (Acts 1:1). That sounds like *Acts* is building on a story started in *Luke that was* written for believers (or "Friends of God"). Is the story *Acts* continues the story of Jesus?

Not really. Jesus disappears in a cloud in Acts 1:9. So is it the apostles' story that is continuing?

Again, I don't think so: in the first book (*Luke*), the apostles aren't apostles yet, just disciples; their story hasn't started. So whose story is continuing?

I'd like to suggest it's the Holy Spirit's. (Don't be impressed, I'm stealing the idea from pretty much every scholar who's ever written about *Acts*.) In *Luke* 1:35, an angel tells Mary she will soon be pregnant because, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High God will cover you." (Which, apropos of everything, evokes *Genesis* 1:2—"The earth was a formless void, darkness was over the face of the deep and God's Spirit covered the raging waters.")

The Spirit got this story going, and Luke wrote *Acts* to tell where the Spirit took things after Jesus ascended. *Acts* covers the first thirty years of the church, when the Spirit transforms a few believers cowering in Jerusalem into Christians who will carry Christ's message to all the world.

This Sunday, we'll look at a major dividing line in *Acts* (chapter 10) when the Spirit pushes Peter to understand that the message and the Kingdom are to be offered even to Gentiles (like us!).

This should not have been a shock, it was implied in *Genesis* 17:5 when God said, "I will change your name from Abram [honored father] to Abraham [honored father of many] because I am making you the father of many nations." Now, "many nations" includes Roman Centurions, Ethiopian eunuchs, Samaritans, you, me, our friends, our neighbors, even our enemies. It was hard for Peter and the others to absorb, but they eventually realized: when God's Spirit acts, God's friends don't get in the way.

Dave



Abraham Shows Off