

Before the amusing doctor jokes begin, let me inform you the ancient Greeks were making doctor jokes 500 years before the Romans, and the Romans 2,000 years before you were born. Yet, whenever a Roman needed health care, they called for a doctor trained in Greece, like I was. We were the best.¹

Something else... people often want to know whether I was a slave, since many Greek doctors were slaves. Some people even believe I was Paul's slave. Had I wanted you to know if I was a slave, I would have mentioned it in at least one of the two books I've written. You can know this much for certain, my dear friend Paul and I were both slaves....voluntary slaves of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The day before I learned about Jesus, my beliefs were based on Greek mythology and religions. All useless. So, my life... hopeless. In those days, none of the world's religions, except Judaism and Christianity, had anything to do with morality. The purpose of the other religions was to appease the gods and figure out what they wanted in order for cities and people to be prosperous.

That is one of the reasons the world had such a hard time accepting Christianity. Since the beginning of time, the basic human desires and needs were fulfilled whenever you wanted, if you had enough money and they were available, and nobody thought it immoral to do so. In fact, we thought it often pleased the gods to do many things Christians considered immoral. Deep down, I knew the gods didn't exist. What did exist...was a mystery. Probably propelled me to become a doctor in the first place. I love a good mystery.

¹ Colossians 4:10-14

In one day, my life changed entirely. I met Paul, and he showed me a God that deep down I had hoped existed. I soon believed in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, was baptized and received the Holy Spirit. I had hope for eternal life with God Almighty.²

That rascal Paul wormed his way into my heart. I learned to love him more deeply than anyone but Jesus. I was his friend and companion until the end of his life.³ I thought I was pretty smart, I'm Greek! But Paul...that guy was amazing...However, even he would admit that I usually beat him in the games of Latrones and Knucklebones. He spent too much time as a child with that boring Rabbi Gamaliel⁴ to learn how to play board games well. And, he couldn't bluff at all, he was so committed to telling the exact truth all the time.

He could have been a rich businessman. Instead he became a traveling preacher. Don't think Paul was poor though. He never had much money, but he acquired a wealth of valuable scrolls and parchments.⁵ Wonder what happened to those after he died? Let's just say Paul found a way to entice me to write a book on Jesus and the book of the history of the early church.

Paul knew I had access to all of the important Christians who were still alive, he had introduced me to them. But he also knew I would need access to information that he had written down through the years and access to Scriptures that weren't available to most people. He had watched me do examinations, he knew I was meticulous, acquiring every scrap of information I could before making a medical pronouncement.

Most valuable scrolls were made of parchments, which were stitched together pieces of animal skins. Cheaper writings were done on papyrus, which was not nearly as durable. Paper was not available in Israel until almost a thousand years after my time. Which brings me to Julius Caesar, who died about a hundred years before I met Paul.

² The Bible does not say when Luke met Paul or when Luke became a Christian.

³ 2 Timothy 4:11

⁴ Acts 22:3

⁵ 2 Timothy 4:13

Julius Caesar was Rome's first dictator. That title was a play on words. A dictator is a political official who tells people what to do, but the title was derived from someone who tells scribes what to write down by dictating to them. Julius Caesar was famous for being able to dictate multiple letters at the same time to multiple scribes. Scribes were important because they took dictation on cheap papyrus or old parchments, and then smoothed the language and copied it onto more expensive parchments and scrolls. A good scribe was invaluable.

Paul dictated many of his letters. He would pace around and say what he had to say while one of his assistants copied it down, often in shorthand. Then the assistant would write it out on expensive material, and after Paul approved it, the letter would be sent. I'm not saying I was the world's best scribe, or that I ever took dictation from Paul, but if you infer such a thing, that would be reasonable.

I spent years writing about and listening to the stories of important Christians. I combined them to make up the Bible books known as *Luke* and *Acts*.⁶ So, when you are reading those books, you are hearing the echoes of the personal stories of reliable witnesses, as well as hearing my own eye witness account. You see, I traveled with Paul for many years, but that part of my story will have to wait.

Many experts think I may be a literary genius. Humbling really, and that's where I differ from most Greeks, who are well known braggarts. The experts point out that the Greek phrasing in some of my passages is of the highest quality. Some of them quibble a bit that I use too many medical terms, I am a doctor.

It was imperative that I wrote *Luke* and *Acts* well, because I wrote them to my friend and benefactor, Theophilus.⁷ I knew if he liked the books, he would have his copyists make more copies than I could ever afford to do. You can only imagine how expensive... hand copying such lengthy scrolls.

Not everybody in the world has read my first book, but hundreds of millions of people have. It's even attained the title of *Gospel of Luke*. I would not have

⁶ Luke 1-3

⁷ Luke 1:3, Acts 1:1

named it after me, but I'm not entirely surprised that others found it useful to do so. Anyway, that book is about the life of Jesus. I cleverly fit his entire story onto just one scroll.⁸ Granted, the scroll was as long as was practical, but I had a lot to write about.

Since Theophilus loved my first book, and since Paul really wanted me to write a follow-up, I ended up writing a second book, that my fans fondly call "*The Acts of the Apostles*," or to my real fans, "*Acts*." It also is so long that it barely fits on one scroll, but that just shows how creative I can be if needed. I know some people think that *Acts* ends so abruptly, that I just quit when I ran out of room on the scroll, but that simply shows they don't understand the importance of having a concise ending to a well-written story.

Acts covers the period from the Ascension of Jesus in about 30 AD until Paul's first imprisonment in Rome in about 60 AD. It spans the times of Emperors Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. Nero was one of the most evil emperors of ancient Rome. A great fire broke out near the Circus Maximus in 64 AD. Most of the structures in Rome were wood, the fire was out of control. It burned for six days, consuming much of the city. Nero supposedly cavorted around during the burning. According to one historian, Nero blamed the fire on the early Christians and started the first persecution of them. There is reason to doubt the veracity of that historian's claim, but it happened after the period I covered in the *Book of Acts*, so you won't know what I think happened.

At the close of the *Gospel of Luke*, I left my readers in suspense. To many, the ascension of Jesus was the end of the story. But the really insightful readers understood that the ascension of Christ only signaled that the Holy Spirit was coming to the believers, although they were not exactly sure what that was going to mean.

⁸ Viola, pg. 85. A typical sheet of papyrus was about the size of an 8 ½" by 11" sheet of our paper. A scroll of those had a maximum length of about 35 feet, or about 50 pages.

The book of *Acts* opens with a Big Reveal. The resurrected Jesus appeared to more than 500 believers over forty days,⁹ and opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.¹⁰ Toward the end of that 40 days, Jesus announced again that his kingdom would not be a physical kingdom, he revealed the importance of the Holy Spirit, and reiterated that his followers were to spread the kingdom to the ends of the earth. And then, Jesus ascended into Heaven to be at the right hand of God the Father. It was also clearly revealed, *for the very first time*, that Jesus would be coming back again! Imagine the amazement of the apostles! They couldn't wait to be witnesses, but Jesus had told them to go wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came to empower them.

The apostles, Jesus' half-brothers, and the believers all had hope again – a hope strong enough to drive their future actions. They finally understood that the Kingdom of Jesus was not a physical kingdom where Israel was going to overthrow Rome. They were not going to be rulers sitting in luxury next to an earthly king but servants of Jesus for the rest of their lives. It was a harsh reality, especially for the apostle Simon the Zealot, but a trade they all were happy to make...once they had the Holy Spirit.

I hated to follow up such an exciting series of events with a long, and rather dull tone. Peter felt it necessary to replace Judas with another person so there would still be twelve apostles. I tell about that event in excruciating detail, although the replacement, Matthias, is never mentioned again. But, most of the other apostles are never mentioned again in the Bible either.¹¹ I think Paul always liked that story of Matthias because it was proof that there were apostles outside of the original twelve. I always liked the story because the Christians were tossing lots for the very last time since their future decisions would be decided by the Holy Spirit.

When we finally get past the story of Matthias, we come to one of the most exciting stories in the entire Bible! Jesus had promised his followers that the Holy Spirit would come, but they had no idea what to expect. Jesus was usually so

⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:3-6, Acts 1:3

¹⁰ Luke 24:45

¹¹ Acts 1:13 is the last time most of the apostles are mentioned in the Bible.

understated that they probably expected Holy Spirit to come through the door dressed as a poor person or an orphan. What they didn't expect? A tornado in their house! Flames of fire landing over them without burning them! The ability to speak in languages they had never learned! This Holy Spirit was a gift beyond anything they could have imagined. And it was the birth of the Church! (this excitement carries him into his thought segue)

You already know two thousand years of the story of Christianity! Envious! But through the haze of all of that information, you probably don't understand how we saw things when Christianity first started.

From the time of Adam, God started revealing himself to people. God promised Abraham that he and his descendants would inherit the land of Israel. God revealed to Moses that the Israelites were to be his people, if and only if, they obeyed his laws and commandments. What many people misunderstand is that the Old Testament Jews were not trying to go to heaven by being righteous. They had no concept of heaven. In fact, the concept of going to heaven as you think about it was not specifically talked about in the Old Testament. The Old Testament Jews were just trying to be God's people and inherit the land.

In the *Gospel of Luke*, Jesus revealed that God the Father sent him from heaven so that all people, not just the Jews, could be reconciled to God. He showed that all people can have eternal life, starting now and ending with eternity in God's presence, if they believe in Jesus and obey his commandments. In *Acts*, stories were told that people receive the Holy Spirit when they repent and are baptized, that the Holy Spirit empowers both Jews and non-Jews to believe and obey Jesus, and about the importance of the church. But it was decades until all of that was clear to the early believers!

Who could have guessed? The mystery that **God is building his kingdom by growing individual churches through empowering individual believers like you.** **And** it is up to each of you to keep building his kingdom. That mystery revealed in Acts is as true today as it was when I wrote it. (overcome with emotion) I love a good mystery! (pauses, an idea hits him) The book of Acts ... the first great mystery novel.