

How to Write Speeches

In the book of Acts, Luke presents speeches by prominent church leaders. How did he know what the people said? About five hundred years before Luke wrote Acts, the Greek historian Thucydides wrote *History of the Peloponnesian War*. In the preface to that work he describes how he handled the difficult matter of reporting speeches:

With reference to the speeches in this history, some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; some I heard myself, others I got from various quarters; it was in all cases difficult to carry them word for word in one's memory, so my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said. (1.22.1)*

Many scholars believe that Luke followed a similar convention in reporting speeches in Acts. This would explain why there are no significant differences in vocabulary and style of the various speakers (or between the vocabulary and style of the speeches and the rest of Acts): Luke has relayed in his own words the “general sense” of what the speakers said.

*Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley (London, J. M. Dent; New York, Dutton, 1910).