

Acts of the Apostles

Sequel to the Gospel of Luke

Literary World

- Genre is "history" rather than biography
- Two-volume books were not uncommon at the time.
 - E.g., Josephus wrote a 2 vol. work called *Against Apion*, of which the second volume begins "Our first book, O Theodotus, was on the thesis that every base person is a slave."
- Like ancient "histories," Acts includes sub-genres of speeches and travelogues

Ancient Histories

- Roman historian Lucian, a century after Luke, advised in an essay entitled *How to Write History*, "If a person has to be introduced to make a speech, above all let his language suit his person and his subject."
- Lucian goes on to say that the good historian should take the "bare record of events" and form them with "taste and ability," and "to give a fine arrangement to events and illuminate them as vividly as possible."
- In short, the ancient historian was not expected to be accurate in details, but to bring out the underlying meaning of great events.

Centrality of the Holy Spirit

- Acts opens with transition recalling Jesus' resurrection appearances, account of the Ascension, and choosing of replacement for Judas
- Pentecost (50 days after Passover or Shavout) – coming of Holy Spirit
 - At this festival Jews would typically read the Book of Ruth about a Gentile who becomes the great-grandmother of David
 - The Age of the Spirit and the spread of the Church
 - Speaking in "tongues" or "languages" prefigures Gentile mission
 - Note parallels of baptism of Holy Spirit and Jesus' baptism

Centrality of Holy Spirit (cont.)

- For Luke it is the Holy Spirit who is responsible for Jesus' birth (1:35)
- The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus at the beginning of his ministry--a Spirit Christology (4:14)
- The unforgivable sin (worse than blaspheming the son of man) is to blaspheme "say evil things against" the Holy Spirit (12:10)
- Jesus promises the Holy Spirit before his ascension (Lk 24:49 & Acts 1:4)
- The Holy Spirit fills the believers on Pentecost, marking the beginning of new witness (Acts 2:4)
- The sin of Ananias and Sapphira is that they lied to the Holy Spirit (5:3)

Centrality of Holy Spirit (cont.)

- being "full" of the Holy Spirit qualifies one for leadership and authority in the church (6:3 & 20:28)
- the Holy Spirit restores Saul's sight after his conversion (9:17-19)
- the reception of the Holy Spirit makes non-Jews into Christians (8:16-17 & 10:44 ff/11:15 [Peter] & 15:8 [Paul])--note that Peter's story is told twice to reiterate what is basic to being Christian)
- Holy Spirit sends Barnabas and Saul out on their first missionary journey (13:4)

Some Parallels Between Acts and the Gospel of Luke

Introduction to the two volumes 1:1-4	Introduction to the second volume 1:1-5
I. The origin and spirit-indwelling of Jesus 1:5-4:13	I. The origin and spirit-indwelling of church 1:6-2:47
II. The witness to Jesus in Jerusalem and beyond 3:1-12:25 [original witnesses now gather together converts]	II. The gathering of witnesses in Galilee 4:14-9:50 [i.e. call of apostles]
III. The instructing of the witnesses on the journey to Jerusalem 9:51-19:27	III. The journeys that carry the witness to the nations 13:1-19:20 [including instructions for gentile believers 15:22 ff]
IV. The witnessing of the events in Jerusalem 19:28-24:53 [beginning with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, ending with Jesus' death, resurrection & ascension]	IV. The progress of the witness to Rome 19:21-28:31 [Paul decides to go to Rome, by way of Jerusalem, ending with Paul's imprisonment].

Themes

- Continuity between Judaism and the church
 - The appearance of the two strangers (Moses and Elijah – see box on p. 137)
 - Election of a new disciple to replace Judas so that there are 12 (12 tribes of Israel)
 - The Council at Jerusalem that unites Gentile Christians with Jewish Christians under the leadership of the apostles
 - Parallels between Peter and Paul
 - Fulfillment of Jubilee in church (see 2:43-46)
 - Is part of Ananias' and Sapphira's sin a sin against the Jubilee?
 - Paul's apologetic speeches (see pp. 145 ff.)

“Conversion” of Paul

- Common misinterpretation that Saul (Hebrew name) is changed to Paul (Roman name) after the encounter on road to Damascus
 - Use of “Paul” actually comes later when he starts preaching primarily to Gentiles
- As Ehrman points out “never does Paul renounce his faith in the God of Israel” (147)
- Paul's story parallels that of Jesus
- Inconsistencies between Acts and Paul's own accounts

Key Terms

- *ekklesia* [church]--taken from the name for the town meeting during the golden age of Greek democracy in Athens
- Presbyters or elders (local church leaders)
- *episcopos* or bishop (city church leader)
- deacons – taken from the Greek word *diakonos*, meaning to serve (6:2b)
 - Originally 7 who were chosen to take care of practical needs of community, but quickly are identified as preachers, such as Stephen
