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BACKGROUNDS

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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BOOK

The historical importance of the book of Acts is unquestioned. It is the chief source book for the facts concerning Christianity in the first century after Christ. But the book is also important doctrinally, for in it are the seeds of doctrines developed later in the epistles—seeds that were nurtured in transformed lives. The doctrine of Acts is exemplified more in life than developed in systematic statement. It is doctrine in practice. Thus the book shows us what men can do in the power of the risen Savior. It is the record of the continuation of those things that Jesus began to do while on earth and that He carries on as risen Head of the church (1:1). The book furnishes us the principles for revival and missionary work; it shows the divine pattern for church government; and it exhibits not only steadfastness but expansion under persecution. It is a book for the church in any century.

THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK

Dr. Luke was evidently a Greek and not a Jew, for in Colossians 4:12–14 he is distinguished from those who are said to be of the circumcision. His place of birth is unknown to us, though Antioch in Syria and Philippi are often suggested. Of necessity he

would have had to receive his medical training in one of the three universities of the day—in Alexandria, Athens, or Tarsus. We know nothing of the circumstances of his conversion.

Although Luke is usually remembered as a physician, we should realize that he was primarily a missionary. His written ministry in the composition of the gospel of Luke qualifies him as such, but he also did itinerant missionary work. The Macedonian call was answered by Luke as well as Paul (16:13, 17). He was in charge of the work at Philippi for approximately six years, and later he preached in Rome (Philem. 24). He was also with Paul during his second missionary journey (2 Tim. 4:11).

THE DATE OF THE BOOK

Since the record in Acts concludes with Paul's arrival in Rome to begin his first confinement in that city, one would judge that the book was written about AD 63 in Rome during that first imprisonment. If it were written later it would be very difficult to explain why Luke did not mention such momentous events as the burning of Rome, the martyrdom of Paul, and the destruction of Jerusalem itself (particularly if it were written after AD 70).

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK

Briefly, the proof for the Lucan authorship of Acts is usually developed along three lines: (1) The author of Acts was clearly a companion of Paul. This is seen from the “we” sections of the book—sections in which the first person plural is used signifying that the writer was a companion of Paul at those times (16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16). (2) By a process of elimination, that companion has to be Luke. The sections themselves eliminate, by mentioning, Silas, Timothy, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius,

Tychicus, and Trophimus; while the prison epistles point to Luke's being the companion (Col. 4:14; Philem. 24). (3) The same man who wrote the "we" sections wrote the remainder of the book, for the style is the same. (4) This conclusion that Luke was the author is substantiated by the incidence of medical terms found in Acts (1:3, 3:7 ff.; 9:18, 33; 13:11; 28:1–10).

THE SOURCES OF THE BOOK

Luke's statement concerning his method of research is found in Luke 1:1–4. Since his purpose in the writing of both the gospel and the Acts was historical, and since his method was so careful, we may be assured that we have an accurate account of the events. In addition to all the care exercised by the author, the superintending work of the Holy Spirit guarantees the accuracy of the record that we have.

In producing his history of the apostolic age, Luke used several sources.

(1) Of some of the events he was a personal eyewitness. These are the "we" sections of the book; that is, sections in which Luke personally participated (16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:31). These indicate that Luke was personally involved in the journey from Troas to Philippi (on the second missionary journey of Paul) and from Philippi (on the third journey) to Rome, including two years in Caesarea and two years in Rome. For all of these events he had his personal recollections and possibly diary-type written notes.

(2) Since Luke was with Paul during the five or six years before the writing of Acts, Paul could have provided him with information for the record in chapters 7, 9, 11:25–30, 13:1–16:8, and 17:1–20:4.

(3) Luke also had access to other eyewitnesses in gathering

his material—people like Silas, Timothy, Titus, Aristarchus, James, Philip and his daughters (19:29; 20:4; 21:8, 18; Col. 4:10; Philem. 24).

After gathering his facts Luke declares that he “investigated everything carefully” (Luke 1:3), that means that he sifted the facts before he wrote and that he made accurate use in his writing of those sifted facts. The physician’s diagnostic skill was applied to the sifting of the source material in thorough preparation for writing an accurate historical account. And, of course, in all this work Luke was guided by the Holy Spirit of God so that the Acts is that exact historical record correct in every detail that God wanted us to have.

THE RISEN LORD

ACTS 1:1–26

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It has often been said that the title of the Acts of the Apostles ought to be the Acts of the Risen Lord. The idea for such a change comes from the introduction to this first chapter (vv. 1–3). The former treatise (the gospel of Luke) that Dr. Luke wrote to Theophilus (apparently a noble convert to Christianity) had recorded the things that Jesus began to do while in His body of limitation. The present treatise (Acts) continued the record of the works of Jesus, only in His resurrection body in which He was seen by the apostles for forty days (v. 3). Three acts of this risen Lord are recorded in this chapter.

THE RISEN LORD CORRECTING, 1:4–7

Correction Concerning Service, 1:4–5

In His conversations with His disciples during the forty-day post-resurrection ministry, the Lord spoke concerning the kingdom of God. Apparently the disciples had become greatly enthused, and so the Lord cautioned them to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit before they began their service for Him. The ministry of the Spirit was not unknown to them; indeed they had experienced it (John 14:17; 20:22). But the baptizing

work of the Spirit was something they had not yet experienced, for the Lord said, “You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (v. 5). Then they would be ready for service. (And, of course, after the promise had been received there would be no more need for tarrying.)

Correction concerning Seasons, 1:6-7

Jewish minds had long been agitated over the coming of Messiah’s kingdom. When Jesus of Nazareth appeared on the scene of history, the hopes of many of the Jewish satellite people were pinned on Him. But these hopes were dashed against the stones of the hill of Calvary when their conquerors crucified their deliverer. Now that He had risen from the dead, their hopes were revived. “Will the kingdom come now?” was the burning question (v. 6). Questions about the kingdom are pertinent, the Lord implied, but as for answering the question about the time of the coming of the kingdom, this He could not do. To know many things about the kingdom is quite proper (v. 3), but “it is not for you to know times or epochs” (v. 7).

THE RISEN LORD COMMISSIONING, 1:8-11

The Nature of the Commission, 1:8

Until the kingdom should come, the disciples were commissioned to be occupied with witnessing of their Lord.

1. *Its Power.* The power of the commission is the person of the Holy Spirit who would come upon them and baptize them on the day of Pentecost.

2. *Its Personnel.* The commission is to be carried out by the disciples and all who are “My witnesses” (the correct rendering of “witnesses unto me” [κῆρυξ]).

3. *Its Program.* The commission’s outreach is worldwide. In the

Acts the record of witnessing in Jerusalem is in chapters 1–7; in Judea and Samaria, 8–12; unto the uttermost part of the earth, 13–28.

The Need for the Commission, 1:9–11

The commission was given in view of the departure of the Lord. That ascension is described in verses 9 and 10 by three different verbs—“lifted up” (*epaireo*), “received” (*hupolambano*), and “was going” (*poreuomai*). As He ascended there appeared two angels who announced the promise of His return. They declared that the same person would return in like manner (that is, in clouds and great glory, Mark 13:26). This will be fulfilled in that future day when the Lord returns during the battle of Armageddon with His own to set up His millennial and eternal kingdom (Rev. 19:11–16; cf. Zech. 12:10; 14:14).

THE RISEN LORD CHOOSING, 1:12–26

The Necessity for the Choosing, 1:12–20

After the Lord had ascended, the disciples returned to Jerusalem from nearby Mount Olivet (less than one mile—a Sabbath day’s journey). They assembled in the upper room, which many understand to have been in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. There were about 120 there altogether—including the remaining 11 apostles, Jesus’ mother and brothers (who had not believed in Him until after the resurrection, John 7:5), and some other women. They continued in prayer and supplication during the ten days between Christ’s ascension and the coming of the Spirit. As they did, Peter stood up and took charge of choosing a successor to Judas the betrayer. He reminded the group that the Old Testament Scriptures had predicted Judas’s treachery (Ps. 41:9) and that they must now choose someone to take his place.

The Nature of the Choosing, 1:21–26

First Peter declared the qualifications necessary for an apostle. He must be a witness of the resurrection and a companion of the Lord during the whole of His public earthly ministry (vv. 21–22). Two candidates were nominated, Justus and Matthias. Then they prayed not for the Lord to choose but for the choice that the Lord had already made to be made known to them. The two names were put on lots, placed in an urn, and then the one that first fell from the urn was taken to be the Lord's choice. This was in accord with Old Testament practice (cf. Prov. 16:33) and is a method no longer needed by Christians with the coming of the abiding presence of the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:14; James 1:5). The lot fell on Matthias and from that time on he, not Paul, was considered as the twelfth apostle (cf. 2:14; 6:2). Apparently it will be Matthias who will be included in the fulfillment of such promises as Matthew 19:28 and Revelation 21:14 (though Paul is designated an apostle with authority equal to any of the Twelve).