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WORDS FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

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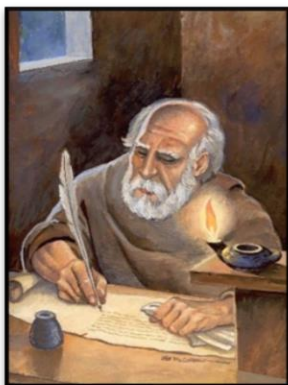
December 2019

Dear Friends,

We had a large, wonderful, family gathering at the farm for Thanksgiving, my very favorite holiday. My 89th birthday occurred while I was there but it was swallowed up in Thanksgiving, which suited me just fine. Jeff and Rosanne were there from Honduras, which made it even more wonderful. People roamed the farm, played basketball and threw the football; the children, including five great grandchildren, had an ongoing wonderful time. But the best part was just being together.

I am back in Ocean Springs, answering mail and e-mail, working daily on the Bible Study Guide, working out at the YMCA and--at last-- going back to work on my unfinished book. It has lain, untouched, for more than 3 years, so I am having a difficult time working out a plan. But I am blessed with a wonderful family, wonderful friends, and a wonderful Redeemer who is helping me get my feet back under me (in every way). May He bless you all (in every way). - Tom

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*The following is the **Introduction to Acts** from Tom's Study Guide to the Entire Bible. There are references to the Ante-Nicene Fathers, a collection of the writings of the Church Fathers from about 57 to 325 AD.*

The book of ***The Acts of the Apostles*** is the story of the founding and growth of the Church in the 1st Century AD. More precisely, it is the history of the Church during its first 30 years, covering the period from approximately 30 to 60 AD. In this book, usually

referred to simply as "Acts," we will see the birth of the Church as an entirely Jewish Church in Jerusalem, and its rapid expansion northward through Samaria and Galilee to Syria, thence westward through Asia Minor and Greece to Rome, growing exponentially by multiplied tens of thousands, mostly gentiles, spreading over what may be thought of as the heart of the Roman Empire, the center of the known World.

From there, the apostolic Church spread farther outward into the lands of what were then called "the barbarians," on the frontiers of the known World. To study that latter history one would have to go to the Ante-Nicene Fathers, Eusebius, and other ancient histories, for Acts will leave us in Rome with Paul a prisoner, accompanied by Luke the beloved physician.

The Book of Acts is a vastly expanded version of the story summarized in the crystalline abridgement of Mark 16:20. In the three decades of the early-to-mid-1st Century covered by this book, the glorious good news of salvation spread like a grass fire, from its amazing beginning in an upper room in Jerusalem, throughout the known World. The gospel was not spread by the sword, nor by clever promotion, nor by lofty argument, nor by demagogues manipulating the masses. No, the Church spread and grew as the simple good news of redemption was told by those whose lives had been transformed by it, and as it was confirmed by the power of the Holy Spirit, exactly as summarized in those 20 words of that 20th verse of Mark 16 (q.v.).

This book opens with the resurrected Jesus, having his last earthly conversation with his closest disciples, and giving them his final commandment. This opening scene is a more complete account of the same, but abbreviated, account found in Luke 24:49-51. In fact, since Luke was also the human author of Acts, the two books could be thought of as one work, with Luke's gospel as Part I and Acts as Part II; this is made clear in the salutations of the

two books and confirmed by other ancient writings, as we are about to see under “**Author.**”

Luke's brilliant history of the birth and beginnings of the Church closes at the end of Paul's first imprisonment (house arrest) in Rome, teaching and ministering to a steady stream of visitors, and writing pastoral letters to the churches he has founded.

The Use of “Christ” and “Jesus” in Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation.

In the gospels the Lord is often referred to simply as “Jesus” (his given name), and less often as “Christ” (his title). This is because the Subject of the gospels is Jesus, the man, the Messiah who becomes the risen Christ.

Beginning here in Acts, however, & continuing through the rest of the New Testament, we are dealing with the risen, glorified Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine Son, who sits at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. Thus, we should not be surprised that, beginning here, we will find Him more often referred to as “Christ,” as “Jesus Christ,” or as “Christ Jesus,” rather than simply as “Jesus.”

A. Author. Although he doesn't identify himself by name in either book, Luke is almost certainly the author of both the gospel that bears his name and Acts. The obvious continuity of the salutations of Luke's Gospel and Acts argues for this, as do the numerous “we”/“us” passages in Acts, in which he includes himself in the events described.

Since earliest times Luke, whom Paul called “the beloved physician,” has been recognized as the author of both. Dionysius, Bishop of Rome (ca 260 AD) quotes from Acts 1:1 and attributes it to Luke. An ancient Syriac document in the British Museum dated ca 275 AD, in which the author identifies himself as “Addaeus the apostle,” says, “Luke, moreover, the evangelist had such diligence that he wrote the exploits of the Acts of the Apostles, and the ordinances and laws of the ministry of their priesthood, and whither each one of them went. By his diligence, I say, did Luke write these things, and more than these; and he placed them in the hand of Priscilla and Aquila, his disciples, and they accompanied him up to the day of his death.” Eusebius (ca 250-300 AD), called the Father of Church History, declared this document to be authentic.

According to Eusebius, Luke was a native of Antioch, the location of the church that sent out

Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13). He was probably a convert of Paul; he traveled and ministered with him, and was with Paul at the time of his execution. Luke was probably a gentile and, if so, he is the only gentile writer of any part of the Bible. For more information concerning Luke, see the introductory material in the study guide to Luke's gospel.

B. Place and Date. The salutations of Luke's gospel and Acts, as well as the subject matter, tell us that Acts was written after Luke's gospel. Acts was written about 55 AD, and before Paul's execution. Had it been written after Paul's execution, that event would surely have been included in the book, as are the executions of Stephen, the first martyr, and James, son of Zebedee and the brother of John the Beloved, one of the Lord's inner circle. The place of writing is unknown.



***NOTE:** There is some reason to speculate that Theophilus may have been Paul's advocate at his first trial before Nero, and that Luke and Acts were sent to him to acquaint him with the facts of Paul's beliefs and*

activities. Things giving plausibility to this speculation are Luke's addressing Theophilus as "most excellent," and the terms "evidence," "infallible proofs" and "setting things in order." This is interesting conjecture, but still conjecture, however; and we know from Acts that Paul was not at all reticent or unskillful when it came to defending himself, beginning with his rescue from the murderous mob at the Temple (Acts 21-23), and he had plenty of practice during his years of imprisonment in Caesarea before he finally appealed to Caesar (Acts 24 and 25).

-Intro.to Acts will be continued in the next newsletter—

A Final Word

Thank you, dear friends for caring, for your encouragement and support. It has been a long road back from the injury, but I am making progress. May you have precious gatherings this season and a new year filled with unexpected blessings.

A handwritten signature in black ink.