

The Ascension and the Authority of the Apostles

All authority has been given me ...

Go therefore and make disciples ... -- Matt.28:18-19

2A : THE CERTAINTY OF CHRISTIANITY (1:1-3)

1:1 On what does Luke claim his authority rests? (Luke 1:1-4)

As it is, in his second book he has left us a document of first-century history, which is accurate in detail, as archaeology and epigraphy most satisfactorily demonstrate; vivid in its narrative; and instructive in matters of Roman law, society, administration, and provincial life. Classical historians -- from William Mitchell Ramsay, in the early years of the century, to A.M. Sherwin-White, and others of more recent years -- have been eager to recognize these facts. -- **E.M. Blaiklock**, *Acts The Birth of the Church* p.9

vv.1,2 Is Acts ultimately the story of the 12, or of Paul?

The former treatise was concerning all that Jesus *began* to do and to teach; and the new treatise is concerning the things that He *continues* to do and to teach. It is not final. -- **G. Campbell Morgan**, *Acts of the Apostles* p.11

In the earlier period, the things which Jesus *began* to do were the proof and support of the things which he *began* to teach; and in the later period, that which he continued to do, in the *acts* of his Apostles, is the pledge that in their *doctrine* also it was he who continued to teach. The inference is natural and is plainly intended, -- *If the introductory historical book manifests the direction of the Lord in the acts of these men, then in the subsequent doctrinal books we must own his direction in their teaching.* **Thomas Dehany Bernard**, *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament* p.108

vv.2,3 Of what does the unique authority of the apostles consist?

(1 John 1:1-4; Luke 24:36-43)

The verb *tekmairo*, to prove by sure signs, is from *tekmar*, a sign. Luke does not hesitate to apply the definite word "proofs" to the evidence for the Resurrection of Christ after the full investigation on the part of this scientific historian. -- **Archibald Thomas Robertson**, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* Vol.3 p.6

These proofs were multiplied until they actually became many. This prodigality was intended to remove all doubt so completely as never to permit it to arise again. -- **R.C.H. Lenski**, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* p.23

The fact of the Resurrection did not spring up in a distant province, like the myth of Nero's reappearance. It did not emerge with the lapse of legend-making years. It was

the core of the apostles' first preaching, as the next chapters will show. It was revealed in Jerusalem, a short walk from the empty tomb, in the presence of those who, with horror or with awe, knew the tomb was empty: Joseph, Caiaphas, Nicodemus. The King James Version is justified in adding "infallible" in verse 3 ("sure tokens" [ROTHERHAM BIBLE], "convincing proofs" [NAS]). -- **E.M. Blaiklock**, *op.cit.*, p.11

2B : WAITING FOR ALL THE WEAPONS (1:4-8)

v.4 Why the command to remain in Jerusalem? (Joel 2:28-32; Zech.12:1-14 esp. vv.2,3,8,10)

The order in which promise and command occur here shows how graciously Jesus considered the Apostles' weakness. Not a word does He say of their task of witnessing, till He has filled their hearts with the promise of the Spirit. He shows them the armour of power in which they are to be clothed, before He points them to the battlefield. Waiting times are not wasted times. Over-eagerness to rush into work, especially into conspicuous and perilous work, is sure to end in defeat. Till we feel the power coming into us, we had better be still. -- **Alexander MacLaren**, *Expositions of the Holy Scripture: The Acts of the Apostles* p.1

From the moment when they saw their Lord ascend, they were in full possession of all the external facts of which they were appointed to bear witness. But they were not in possession of the spiritual meaning, relations, and consequences of those facts, and therefore the hour of their testimony was not come, and the interval was passed not in preaching but in prayer. -- **T.D. Bernard**, *op.cit.*, p.117

v.5 Note the first characteristic of a new work of God -- CONTINUITY with past revelation (Luke 24:44-49; Isa.32:15; Ezek.36:22-38)

v.6 What is the automatic connection in the apostles' minds? (Matt.23:37,38; 24:1-3; Micah 4:1-8; esp. vv.7,8)

In narrating the events of His life, death, resurrection and exaltation the apostles proclaimed 'the good news of the Kingdom' -- the same good news as had been announced earlier by Jesus Himself, but now amplified and illuminated by these great salvation-bring events. We may reasonably infer that the teaching which our Lord gave about the Kingdom of God during these forty days was intended to make clear to the disciples that bearing of His crucifixion and resurrection on the message of the Kingdom. -- **F.F. Bruce**, *Acts [Gk text]* p.67

And now, these specially chosen and tutored men, the Lord's confidants, having accompanied with Him right to the Cross, have had those wonderful forty days of culminating tuition from the lips of the risen Christ, specially pertaining to "the Kingdom of God"; and if, like many of ourselves, they were previously "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken," they are not so now, for Luke tells us that when the risen Christ came to His disciples, "then opened He their understanding, that they might know the Scriptures"! Yet after all this, and in spite of all this we are expected to believe that when the disciples asked, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?", they were asking an irrelevant and unspiritually minded question, and were so completely without understanding that they had taken teaching about a *spiritual* kingdom (the Church) to mean a material and outward kingdom, and had therefore misconstrued the plain teaching of Christ not merely upon a minor matter but upon the

central and most vital communication of all His teaching! Surely this is too preposterous to gain thoughtful credence! If the apostles were such men, then we had better admit them halfwits outright, and have done with it! -- **J. S. Baxter**, *Explore the Book* Vol.6 p.15

vv.7,8 Let us note with what the apostolic witness will NOT be connected! (Matt.24:36)

Since this is God's secret, there is no place for human speculation -- a point that might well be borne in mind by those who still anxiously try to calculate the probable course of events in the last days. Instead of indulging in wishful thinking or apocalyptic speculation, the disciples must accomplish their task of being witnesses to Jesus. -- **I. H. Marshall**, *The Acts of the Apostles* p.60

Ye shall be My witnesses -- My evidences, My credentials, My arguments -- In Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth. -- **G. Campbell Morgan**, *op. cit.*, p.14

v.8 The power of the Spirit is forever tied to what? (when did the great era of missions END?)

Instruction alone, even the very best, and with a pupil never so earnest, cannot qualify for the ministry. The twelve had much precious teaching. They were devoted to the Lord as few have been since. They were ready to enter upon the service, but as yet they were unfitted for its duties. They must be endued with power from on high. Before they spoke a word, took a step, or in any way understood to carry out the last commission of the Master, they must patiently wait and pray in Jerusalem until this promise became a personal experience. -- **J.M. Stifler**, *An Introduction to the Study of The Acts of the Apostles* p.10

They are to be more than heralds (preachers) who proclaim only what they are ordered to proclaim; they are to be herald "witnesses" in the sense of 1 John 1:1, men who have themselves seen, heard, touched, experienced, and are qualified, even called, to testify accordingly. We must not pass too lightly over this word "witnesses." In the sense in which the apostles were Christ's witnesses no others were or could be. All the great things they saw could never be repeated; yet all these things had to be made known and made known properly, not only to the men of that age, but to the men of all ages. For this reason the descent of the Spirit bestowed a special equipment upon the apostles. They received the gift of inspiration in the sense of John 14:26, and 15:26,27. Thus besides filling the world of their own day with the gospel, by their inspired writings they are witnessing to the end of time. -- **R.C.H. Lenski**, *op.cit.*, p.31

2C: THE ONLY 'ASCENDED MASTER' -- LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH (1:9-12)

*... after his ascension, whereby he was declared to be King of both heaven and earth. -- **J. Calvin**, *Acts of the Apostles* p.xxvi*

v.9 What makes the Ascension an essential article of the creeds?

(I Tim. 2:5; I Jn.2:1,2; Heb.2:17,18; 4:14-16)

The Ascension is twice narrated by Luke. The life begun by the supernatural birth ends with the supernatural Ascension, which sets the seal of Heaven on Christ's claim and work. Therefore the Gospel ends with it. But it is also the starting-point of the Christ's heavenly activity, of which the growth of His Church, as recorded in the Acts, is the issue. Therefore the Book of the Acts of the Apostles begins with it. -- **Alexander MacLaren**, *Expositions of the Holy Scripture: The Acts of the Apostles* p.1

vv.10-12 This 'Ascended Master' will return in a manner like, but not like, his departure. Compare JW, New Age conceptions

(Matt.24:23-30; 25:31,32; Dan.7:13,14; Ezek.11:22,23; Zech.14:1-5)

Pause for a moment and consider. This extraordinary story of a risen and ascended Christ shows nothing to any well-trained classicist of the forms and fashions of myth. It is idle to deny that the writer did not derive his information from prime sources. Nor is it possible to doubt his ability, as a historian, to sift evidence and scrutinize his facts. There is no reason why he should write so well and convincingly of a riot scene in Ephesus and report gullibly of a Pharisee's astonishing experience on the Golan Heights, why he should so accurately write the best story of a shipwreck in all ancient literature and then talk nonsense of what eleven men saw near Bethany. Sir William Ramsay, brought unexpectedly to a profound conviction that Luke was a fine historian, rapidly faced this dilemma, as he says in *Was Christ Born in Bethlehem?* : It became more and more clear that it was impossible to divide Luke's history into parts, attributing to one portion the highest authority, as the fist-hand narrative of a competent and original authority while regarding the rest as of quite inferior mould ... The history must stand as a whole ... -- **E.M. Blaiklock**, *op.cit.*, p.14

NEXT WEEK: Called and Consecrated