**Various Ideas on the Date of the Composition of Acts**

Traditionally, European scholarship has placed the writing and final editing of the Book of Acts as taking place after the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70). The rationale for this is that the Gospel of Luke’s prophecy seems to describe that destruction and, of course, Acts is “Volume 2” of Luke-Acts so it would naturally be written after Luke’s gospel [cited in Gloag, Paton J. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1870), p. 29.] Others follow the tradition of the early church father, Irenaeus, who believed the book written after the death of both Peter and Paul. Schneckenberger sees it as written after the death of Paul and during the Jewish War in which Gaza was destroyed (to which he attributes Acts 8:26’s reference to “in the desert”).

As is typical, of course, in such debates over dates of composition, some scholars such as Paton Gloag take the exact opposite approach because there is no specific mention of the destruction of Jerusalem in Acts and they believe there would be [p. 30]. I’m not certain that the destruction of Jerusalem would have been mentioned in Acts since it was clearly designed to end with the recorded mission of Paul. Darrell Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary notes that the earliest possible date would be after the last event in the Book of Acts (circa AD 62-63). Bock also cites the latest possible date for the book being around AD 150 because it is cited directly in the work of Irenaeus and other church fathers after that date. Such a late date would rule out Luke as the contemporary and partner with Paul, however, and is not an attractive possibility to me. I like dating it after AD 70 but before the Book of Revelation sometime in the last decade of the 1st century.

**Summary of Textual Sources**

**א Codex Sinaiticus:** This was found in the Convent of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai in 1859. It most likely dates to the 4th century and is important because it contains the entire book.

**A Codex Alexandrinis:** This was presented to Charles I of England and is still located in the British Museum. It is most likely dated to the 5th century and contains the full book.

**B Codex Vaticanus:** Currently located in the Vatican Library, this text most likely dates to the 4th century and includes the full book.

**C Codex Ephraemi:** Located in the Royal Library of Paris, this is allegedly the work of one Ephrem the Syrian. It was written over the course of the 5th century and contains fragments which include: 1:2-4:3; 5:35-10:42; 22:21-23:18; 24:15-25:19; 27:6-28:4.

**D Codex Bezae:** Presented by Beza to Cambridge University in 1581. It is likely a 6th century manuscript and is missing many sections.

**E Codex Laudianus:** This manuscript is somewhat defective from 26:29-28:26 (due to damage).

**G Codex Bibliothecae Anglicae:** Located in the Anglian Library of the Augustinian Monks in Rome, this is a much later manuscript (probably 9th century) and is missing 1:1-5:9.

**H Codex Mutinensis:** This is another 9th century manuscript and is missing 1:1-5:27.

**A Possible Chronology on the Book of Acts [from Gloag, pp. 36-37]**

In attempting to decipher a chronology, there are many references which are uncertain. The chronology provided in the Excel spreadsheet and in the separate Word document has only a few dates which can be relatively fixed: “…one date which can be determined with certainty, and that is the period of the death of Herod Agrippa 1. Josephus tells us that he reigned three years under Claudius, after he had received from him the whole of the dominions of his grandfather Herod the Great. Now Claudius, immediately on his accession to the imperial throne in the beginning of the year 41, made Herod Agrippa king of Judea and Samaria; consequently the death of that king is to be fixed in the year 44.” [Gloag, p. 34].

Relatively certain was the removal of Felix from the procuratorship and the replacement of Festus. Josephus notes that a Jewish deputation went to Rome to accuse Felix of atrocities before Nero. Since Nero died in AD 62, that narrows it down to the year. Josephus tells us that Sextus Afranius Burrus, an esteemed member of the Praetorian Guard and trusted advisor to Nero was there when the Jewish deputation arrived. Tacitus places Burrus’ death in March of 62 [cited in Gloag, p. 35]. According to Josephus, the deputation was granted their request because they received the favor of Nero’s wife, Poppaea. She didn’t marry Nero until 62. So, the latest date we could have for the removal of Felix would be 62-63. So, those last three-four years may be more fluid.

**The Introduction to the Book (1:1-3)**

The Greek text of verse 1 identifies three main characters: the author-narrator, the reader/honorific, and Jesus. τὸν μὲν πρῶτον λόγον ἐποιησάμην περὶ πάντων ὦ Θεόφιλε ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν

The author is found with the first-person pronoun “I” within the verb: “I accomplished.” Most translations make it “I wrote” or “I made.” This seems a little more active than the “seemed to me” of Luke 1:3, though F. F. Bruce observed that the first-person pronoun plays a similar role in both books (Bruce, F. F. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), p. 28 n. 1.]significant because it identifies the author as being intimately involved with the history of the early church as a participant while the Gospel of Luke shows dependence upon other gospels and the testimony of other sources. The style is that of a highly educated Greek writer and makes sense regarding the rest of what we know about Luke who was associated with Paul.

The first “book” or “treatise” can also be translated as “word,” “argument,” or “philosophy.” The use of this word suggests that Luke had a definite purpose in writing this book and making it available. He wanted to share how the baton was passed from the earthly but perfect and divine Jesus to the human and very fallible disciples (now, as I noted in the introductory preparation, known as “sent ones” rather than “followers”).

The phrase, “…concerning all which Jesus began to do and to teach,” has caused some difficulty for interpreters. Noting that Luke’s gospel doesn’t contain all of the details about Jesus’ life and deeds which are found in other gospels, they have problems with the word “all.” The classic interpreter, J. B. Lightfoot, observes that the word used for “all” is frequently used in scripture to mean “many” or a “significant” number [Lightfoot, John B. *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (London: J. F. Dove, 1823), p. 14.]. I take it that Luke is telling us that he covered all that was vital to communicating what was essential to Greek-speaking audiences who needed to hear about Jesus. Another 19th century commentator reminded readers that John 21:25 tells us that if one could put down everything that Jesus did and said, the world could not contain the books [Du Veill, Carolus Maria, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (London: J. Haddon, 1851), p. 3

Another problem for some interpreters is that the phrase “which He began to accomplish and to teach” implies that Jesus didn’t finish the job. Lightfoot observes that some people take this as Jesus starting the task and the disciples having to finish the job [Lightfoot, p. 14.]. But this would imply that Jesus didn’t finish the job. But the work of salvation and redemption was finished. Now, the kingdom enters a new era in the Book of Acts, but it is spreading the truth about Jesus, not finishing the job. In Greek, many writers used “began to” or “initiated” to suggest a story that is still alive.

The third character mentioned is Theophilus. Since it is Greek for “friend of God,” many interpreters believe it is a clever way of including all readers who are committed to God’s will. However, the use of “most excellent Theophilus” in Luke 1:3, given by Claudius Lysias and Tertullus to Felix, and by Paul to Festus [Gloag, p. 40] suggested that this was a highly influential individual in the early church. Clement, Bishop of Rome, identified him as one of the principal men of the church in Antioch who is reputed to have given of his properties for the church to meet in [Du Veill, p. 4]. Some believe that Theophilus might have been a code name for an individual who didn’t want to lose the emperor’s favor. One suggestion is Titus Flavius Clemens, cousin of the Emperor Domitian [Bruce, p. 29]. Another tradition has him as a magistrate from Achaia who was baptized by Luke [Du Veill, p. 4] so that the two books were a continuation of his discipleship training from Luke.

Verse 2 mentions Jesus giving orders to the disciples and choosing the disciples. In between those two phrases is “by means of the Holy Spirit.” So, the question becomes whether the Holy Spirit was participating in the instructing of the apostles before Jesus’ ascension or in the choosing of the disciples. The order used in the English translation and Latin translation seems to support the former, though the Syriac and Codex Bezae read as though the Holy Spirit participated in the choosing of the disciples. Although I believe the Holy Spirit was active throughout Jesus’ ministry such that the Holy Spirit would be involved in both, I believe the participation mentioned here is about Jesus’ orders to the APOSTLES (notice that the word used is NOT disciples as it would be in the choosing of the twelve) because it fits the theme of the book in that the Holy Spirit was involved in all aspects of the early church [Bruce, p. 30] and because there is no mention of the Holy Spirit specifically in any of the gospel accounts where Jesus chose the disciples [Lightfoot, p. 15].

Following up on the idea of the theme of the Holy Spirit’s involvement, Lightfoot asserted that Jesus’ instructions to His disciples by means of the Holy Spirit is evidenced by the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament, sometimes abbreviated LXX) when, in Zechariah 1:6 the same word is used [Lightfoot, p. 15].

Verse 3 tells us that Jesus showed them the reality of the resurrection in many different ways and that He appeared to them on many occasions over a period of 40 days. I would try to get my students to make a list of significant 40-day events in the Bible. Think of how many times 40 days occurred in the Bible. Noah’s flood began with 40 days and nights of rain. Moses spent 40 days and nights at the top of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:18). Goliath tormented the army of Israel with his challenges for 40 straight days. Elijah had to travel 40 days and nights to reach Mt. Sinai after Jezebel tried to kill him. Jonah preached that Ninevah would be destroyed in 40 days, though he was most angry when they repented and God forgave. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days after His baptism.

We don’t know exactly how many times Jesus appeared to His disciples during the 40 days, though Paul gives us a nice list in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7 [Bruce, p. 31]. What we do know is that each of the 40 days in the Bible was preparation for something new in God’s working with His people: a new covenant with Noah and a new beginning, a new covenant with Moses and Israel, a new king with David’s victory over Goliath (though the kingship didn’t happen right away), a new commission for Elijah at Mt. Sinai after hearing the voice of crushed silence, a new reprieve for Ninevah, and a new understanding of the Kingdom of God both as Jesus began His ministry after the baptism and prepared the apostles for their ministry prior to His ascension. We do know that Jesus taught them about the Kingdom of God because the end of verse 3 tells us so, however, we notice later in the chapter that his followers, soon to be emissaries, just don’t get it (v. 6).

Verse 4 tells us that He gathered them together and gave them orders not to leave Jerusalem. The word, συναλιζόμενος, means gathered them all together, but some observe that this verb often meant to gather around a common table [Gloag, p. 44, citing Chrysostom and Jerome] and others that this word was used to rally together soldiers that had been dispersed after a battle [du Veill, p. 7]. Both are significant to what was happening with Jesus’ soon-to-be-restored-to-twelve. The idea of the meal suggests that Jesus’ instructions weren’t rushed. He took the necessary time to prepare His emissaries. The idea of rallying soldiers would suggest that He knew how disheartened the “twelve” must have been and wanted them to know that they had an important mission to complete.

And the waiting in Jerusalem seems rather strange. Remember that the homes and businesses of these “Twelve” were largely in Galilee. Remember also that Galilee would have been much safer than Jerusalem in that period, especially for the “Twelve.” Yet, Jesus told them, as God sometimes tells you and me, to stay in a difficult position because God isn’t through with us yet. Timing is important and they needed to be there for Pentecost.

Notice also that verse 5 with the promise of a greater baptism than that of John seems to be a call-back to the promise in Luke 3:16. Does this reference suggest that water makes a temporary transformation while fire often has a more permanent effect?

In verse 6, the “Twelve” hope for an earthly restoration of the kingdom of Israel. They could have been astonished that Jesus was still talking about the Kingdom of God after being betrayed by the Israelite populace [Gloag, p. 46], but most likely it was the typical confusion of an earthly state with God’s all-encompassing Kingdom (all realities of existence), much like some people expect a restored modern state of Israel to fulfill prophetic ideas and some people consider the U.S.A. to be the New Israel (when the New Testament clearly identifies the church as the New Israel). Of course, Jesus is quite right to change the focus of the “Twelve,” pointing out the more necessary event that was to occur in receiving power. Verse 7 makes it clear that Jesus’ emissaries aren’t supposed to try to figure out the calendar but follow God’s agenda. That’s where POWER comes from.

Disciples, then and now, can easily become distracted. We shouldn’t. The wording of verse 7 is interesting. Jesus told them that it is not for them to know the amount of time passing (chronological or calendar time) or the optimal time (right time, that God has fixed or established by means of His authority. Indeed, it’s actually a lack of faith when we try to figure out how everything is going to work out—a lack of faith and a waste of time. He doesn’t correct their perceptions of the kingdom, but merely adjusts their focus to what is truly important.

What is important is that God will supply the resources and the power for the “Twelve” to perform their mission. The Holy Spirit brings power—power to change, power to explode, power to illuminate, power to build, and power to grow. The Greek word is δυναμις and is sometimes pronounced “DOO-nah-mihs”... and sometimes “DEE-nah-mees.” It is the word from which we get dynamite, dynamo, and dynamic. In the Bible, it wasn’t used for mere strength or force. It was reserved for the inexplicable, the supernatural and the miraculous. And this means that if we are to be the church God wants us to be, the witnesses God intends for us to be, we can’t be explainable. We must be able to show love that can’t be explained, joy that doesn’t make sense, hope that doesn’t seem reasonable, peace that cannot be understood, and patience that seems illogical. We have to confuse the world by being like Jesus so that they ask why and how this can be.

At Pentecost, the very time when the Old Israel was celebrating their “anniversary,” God was forming a New Israel to do what the Old Israel hadn’t been able to do—save the world by reintroducing humanity to its Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer and Purpose. But notice the dangers to Pentecost that the apostles faced. Read verses 9-12.

They could not have Pentecost if they were constantly looking for Jesus’ return. Verse 11 makes it clear that it is possible to be so heavenly minded, so focused on the end, that we are no earthly good, so unfocused on God’s redemptive purpose. It does not mean that they no longer looked for Jesus’ return. They did and we should, too. Jesus could come at any time, but we shouldn’t dwell on it when we have ministry to do. They were wishing Jesus would come back so that it could be just like it had been when they traveled with Him. That’s not good enough. God wants us to strive for more. We cannot have Pentecostal Power if we are constantly focused on either the past or the future. We have to focus on being obedient to God NOW and hoping for His intervention as we prayerfully prepare for it. Don’t look back. Don’t idealize the past so that you say, “It can never be that way again.” It can’t, but because of God’s grace and purpose, it CAN be better. It depends on our level of obedience and faith.

Further, as you reach the end of the chapter (verse 26), they needed to choose someone to replace the disciple they had lost. Now, to some of us, this doesn’t seem like faith. To be sure, they did pray, but then they threw dice. Now, there is a Proverb that reads, “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” (Proverbs 16:33) To a guy who likes to play board games where you move pieces on the map and fight major battles by rolling a die, this reads: “We throw the dice, but God decides how it lands.” Mind you, I’m not talking about gambling here. What the verse says is that we expect an answer and God provides it. Lots were used throughout Israel’s history to show the will of God. The slide gives the idea of beads drawn, “dice” tossed, and arrows cast. These were all ways lots were drawn, cast, in the ancient world. To the New Testament, post-Pentecost church—the Holy Spirit shows God’s will more clearly than any archaic form of inquiry used before Pentecost. But the experience tells us we need to look to God for the answer when filling the offices of the church—not just pastor.

NOTE that verse 20 brings together a prophecy from Psalms and Zechariah to suggest the idea of scripture being fulfilled [Bruce, p. 45] when Judas Iscariot is replaced. According to Eusebius, Philip’s daughters had the Joseph who was nominated drink snake venom and he survived, showing his righteousness. In addition, Matthias was said by Eusebius to have been one of the 70 disciples referred to in Luke 10:1 [Bruce, p. 46].

And where does this answer come from? Prayer. Continuous, quality, committed and persistent prayer was necessary and even when they threw the dice, they were seeking God’s answer, God’s confirmation. We have an advantage they didn’t have. We are post-Pentecost in that the Spirit is present in the believers and in the church and we have the written Bible so that we don’t need tools of divination.

 Finally,... I want to share one more aspect of spiritual math with you. Note that they wanted to fill out the 12 apostles. Why? It is the divine 3 \* the created order 4 = 12. There were 12 tribes of Israel, Ishmael, 12 thrones on each side of God in the vision of Revelation and 12 pearly gates in the New Jerusalem. To have a NEW ISRAEL, there had to be 12 witnesses. AND to be a NEW CHURCH there needed to be at least 120 members, just like in starting a new synagogue in Judaism. Look at verse 15. What happened? God took the 12 of right relationship and multiplied it by the 10 of sufficiency and there were 120 in the upper room. God and a sufficient number to start a new congregation in the midst of the New Israel and on the verge of Pentecost.