

VV STUDY NOTES: 9th December 2023

Andrew Gebbie

The part of Acts scheduled for this week was significantly covered during last week's discussion. Rather than change the rest of the planned studies I think if we should have an honest discussion on the question of the RELIABILITY of the book of Acts itself. I HOPE THE CONTENT WILL STIMULATE A GOOD DISCUSSION.

In my local Presbyterian church this year there have sermons significantly challenging the writings of Luke's Gospel and Acts, and other scriptural books. It has been asserted that the Lucan Writings were probably not written till late in the 2nd Century and that much of the material gives a distorted view of what happened in the early life of the church.

Last week Steve searched the internet and provided us with a document dealing with the Early Jewish Christian Church, and the Gentile church from the time of the Resurrection through till the beginning of the 4th Century.

Both above disturbed me.

As a group we have repeatedly focused on important realities:

1. **Doctrine & Knowledge is less important than Relationship with God and each other.**
2. **Judgement re: SALVATION is God's Domain, not ours. Only God knows our hearts.**
3. **These two convictions allow us the freedom to communicate with respect. The ability to think aloud and learn from the mutual sharing that takes place.**
4. **These convictions allow us the freedom to respect other Christians, other religions, ethnicities, Language Groups, etc, etc, etc.**

Within this framework: JONATHAN SACKS has become one of my most respected spiritual commentators. *The only thing that saddens me is that his understanding of Jesus, Paul, and Christianity had been tainted by the behaviour of CHRISTIANS throughout the centuries.* Despite that I consider him to be INSPIRED and possibly PROPHETIC.

There are many spiritual giants who have blessed the world throughout the centuries. None have been without fault, even those who we know were called by God at special times in history.

Jesus is the only person who stands out in this regard, yet despite his total commitment to the way of LOVE, he was not afraid to challenge those who by their teachings or deeds were inflicting harm on others.

The very fact that he returned to the Father, and left no constitution or church manuals, but examples of prayer, submission to God, love for others, and instructions to listen to the Holy Spirit suggests that he expected his followers to LISTEN, THINK, PRAY and OBEY.

I have read a very broad selection of Christian Publications and have been greatly blessed by many.

Even when I disagree with their content, I can still recognize their attempts to be honest with the material being studied. I sometimes read Jonathan Sacks comments about Jesus, Paul, or Christianity and am embarrassed to say that if I thought that Jesus & Paul taught what much of Christianity says they do, I would be closer to Sacks than many of my fellow Christians.

I remember Llew telling us about a book on the Sabbath he had read being better than anything he had found, but it had been written by a Sunday Keeper. I think we have probably all experienced this sort of epiphany.

Incidentally, I am working my way through the KINDLE EDITION of the book Mike mentioned by Aulden Thompson on the issue of inspiration. I have not finished it, but to date I believe it is the best quality study I have read from an SDA author for a LONG TIME.

One in a while I come across books or articles that blow my mind by their total lack of integrity.

That has been my reaction to the article Steve found on the internet last week.

I will document a **few** of the reasons for my assessment. There are so many examples that it would require too much time and space to document them all.

1. There are enormous levels of ASSUMPTIONS in the document.
 He uses Luke's record to assert that after the resurrection there were only 40/45 adult believers.
 He uses an estimated number of believers at the beginning of the 4th century, when there is no way of knowing the number.
 He then references the statistical analysis of the numbers by a Sociologist who compares the rate of growth over the decades with those same number of decades of the growth of the Mormon Church. He later backs off the value of that, but still uses it to grab everyone's attention.
 Having spent 20yrs of my life doing detailed statistical analysis that trick -blew a fuse!

2. Most of the scholars who insist that the Lucan literature is unreliable take the view that all the 7 DEACONS were GENTILES /OR HELLENISTS. The GENTILE assertion falls flat on its face when you read Act 6:1-7.
 - The selection was done by ALL THE BELIEVERS.
 - The names listed specifically tell us the last was a Convert to Judaism, who would have taken a vow to be loyal to the TORAH and TEMPLE.
 - Egypt was probably the most important of Judea's business partners. There were far more Jews in Alexandria than in Jerusalem. The Septuagint (OT in Greek) had been around for almost 200yrs. To assume that anyone Judean who could speak Greek was a Gentile or Hellenist, beggars' belief.
 - The successes led many **PRIESTS** to accept the faith. Highly unlikely considering the assertion.
 - He goes on to assert that these HELLENISTS (as he calls them) abandoned the LAW & TEMPLE.
 - The events leading up to the death of STEPHEN tell us that he was FALSELY CHARGED with speaking against MOSES and the TEMPLE.

3. It goes on to assert that PAUL only ever acted against individuals who rejected the MOSES & TEMPLE. He never attacked ARAMAIC SPEAKING CHRISTIANS.
 - Acts 9: 1-19 covers the Conversion of Saul. The authority he carried from the High Priest would have been illegal if the arrestees were gentiles.
 - Ananias was sent to SAUL to commission him and baptise him as a believer.
 - v.15 tells us the commission covered the Gentiles and their kings and the **people of Israel.**
 - In Paul's own defence that we just studied he describes Ananias as someone "Zealous for the Law" and highly regarded among the Jews in Damascus.

4. When it comes to the "so-called council of Jerusalem" it takes on an even more sinister garb.
 - It asserts that JAMES & PAUL assumed exclusive responsibility for JEWS and GENTILES.
 - PAUL no longer ministered directly to JEWS, any converts among the Jews were accidental outcomes.
 - JAMES and the JUDEAN church (including Peter) would only minister to JEWS and any converts of Gentiles were likewise accidental.

5. In 49AD (which is the commonly accepted date of the Council of Jerusalem)
 - He asserts based on Galatians 2:5-21 and an oblique reference to a parable in Matthew.
 - a. That PETER TOOK OVER THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH, turned it into an exclusive LAW AND TEMPLE church and drove out the GENTILE BELIEVERS. When PAUL rebuked Peter he quoted Peter's own statement about faith as the basis of salvation to the Jerusalem Council.
 - b. That Paul had to return and RESTART the Gentile church.
 - c. Such an interpretation is an insult any honest assessment of the passage.
 - d. There is a consistent pattern of cherry picking from the book of Acts to fit in with his views.

6. It asserts that the number of believers (either Jewish or Gentile) were so small that their impact was essentially non-existent throughout the 1st Century.

Once you ADD together the financial impact on the sale of idols in Asia Minor that led to the RIOT IN EPHESUS, together with the information provided by PLINY & TRAJAN and the other attached documents, the above assertion is HIGHLY SUSPECT.

I am attaching 3 pdf files to do with the integrity of Luke as a historian, and the impact of the Christian message in the provinces.

The article below pertains mostly to the BOOK OF ACTS.

Some content in THE GOSPEL OF LUKE is gleaned second hand and may not be as accurate in detail as they would be from direct witness.



Reliability of Luke.pdf

This document is the correspondence between Pliny the Younger and the Emperor Trajan. It was written in 116AD, but references events that had been going on for at least 20 yrs. It once again demonstrates that Roman Justice had a fair amount of integrity, and specifically tells us that Pliny sent any Roman Citizens directly to the emperor. The documentation demonstrates that the presence of Christians had had a significant impact on the empire. THESE ARE OFFICIAL ROMAN DOCUMENTS



PLINY'S LETTER'.pdf

This document relates to both Lukes Gospel & Acts



Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commenta