

C. Survey Notes on the Book of Acts.

1. An Overview:

Tradition assigns the authorship of Acts to Luke, author of the third Gospel. A second-century source says, "Luke, a physician by profession, belonged to Antioch in Syria...and after (writing the Gospel) the same Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles."

Three dates are usually given to the writing of Acts: early second century, late first century (AD 70-85), or AD 61-64. Those who assign Acts to the second century obviously do not believe the tradition of Luke's authorship. There are two main reasons given for this position: 1) Acts was written to heal a breach in the early church between the party of Peter and that of Paul. This breach would have required some time to develop. 2) Parallels between Acts and late first-century writers (e.g. Josephus) require such a date. Neither of these reasons seems to deal with the evidence in a straightforward manner.

Scholars who argue for a date AD 70-85 claim that the Gospel of Luke depends on that of Mark, and that Luke has updated Mark's vague prophecies and made them refer specifically to Titus's siege of Jerusalem in AD 70. This would mean that, since Acts was written after Luke (Acts 1:1), Acts must have been written at some time after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. The upper limit for this dating depends upon how long Luke likely lived. Although Luke's prophecy is often dismissed because predictive prophecy is not allowed, this does not invalidate this date because Luke may very well have written near the end of his life, which could have been during this period.

The most probable date for the writing of Acts, however, seems to be AD 61-64. Acts does not refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. Given the importance of places in Luke's writings, would he have left such a catastrophe unmentioned? There is no hint of the great persecution of Christians by Nero (AD 65-68); the opposition seems true--the Roman officials were on excellent terms with Paul. Tradition says that Peter and Paul were martyred by Nero at some point during this persecution. Would Luke have ended on a such a positive note if Paul were already dead?

In addition to these arguments from silence are several based on the contents of Acts. Many of the concerns of Acts were appropriate only in the early days of the church (the Gentile controversy and the issue of dietary laws). The writer of Acts does not seem to interact with the existence or content of Paul's epistles (although the content of Paul's speeches in Acts is reflected in the epistles). For these and other reasons it seems most likely that Acts was written between AD 61-64.