

The introduction (1:1-5) spells out Luke's purpose in writing this second volume of his history. The reiteration of their mission (1:8) sets the stage for the movement of Acts. The promised Holy Spirit is the end of waiting and the beginning of action (*2:1-4) which does not stop for the rest of the book. The conversion of Paul (9:3-7), who is the dominant character of Acts 13-28 is well-known, but Peter's vision (10:11-16), just as important, is often ignored. The spread of the Gospel to Europe (Greece) was led by the Macedonian vision (16:6-10).

Study tips:

Read through Acts at one sitting. If you must break, stop after chapter 12. Use a Bible atlas to follow the growth of the church. A Bible dictionary or encyclopedia will give background information on unfamiliar places and persons.

Trace the use of the pronouns ("he", "we"). What clues do they give concerning the author's identity? Compare your results with Paul's epistles. Trace the theme of church-empire relations in Acts. How do the various Roman officials evaluate the early Christians? How do they respond to the gospel message? How many speeches (or sermons) are included in Acts? Where are they? Who delivered them? Under what circumstances? How do they differ from each other? How does Luke's two-fold focus on Peter (1-12) and Paul (13-28) reflect his own purpose (1:1-5) and Jesus statement (1:8)?

In the classics:

Andrea Mantegna (1431-1501) painted "The Ascension," and El Greco (1541-1514) did "Pentecost". Rembrandt (1606-1669) portrayed "The Stoning of St. Stephen." Caravaggio (1573-1610) painted "The Conversion of Paul", as did Michelangelo (1475-1564) on a fresco in the Vatican, one of his last paintings. Mendelssohn wrote "Paulus" ("St. Paul) highlighting incidents in the life of Paul.

A twofold resurrection of the Passion and Ascension of the Lord is given dramatically through two massive paintings at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Hollywood, California. It is an enormously evangelical presentation and one of those things not easily forgotten. If you are out that way and visiting the cemetery, it is very worthwhile. Of course, if they are carrying you there you will not need to see the picture.

Further study:

THE BOOK OF ACTS by F.F. Bruce is an excellent commentary. THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES by I. Howard Marshall in the Tyndale New Testament commentaries is good.