

During the Gulf War in 1991, Jordan was at best ambivalent, and at worst appeared to side with Iraq. The position it took then continues to have ramifications. For example, Saudi Arabia remains reluctant to supply oil to Jordan, although relations have reportedly thawed between the two countries recently.⁷ At that time there was fanatical support on the street amongst Jordanians for Saddam Hussein. As the BBC correspondent John Simpson wrote of a visit to its capital: "Amman, I found, was in a high state of excitement. Saddam Hussein's face glared or smiled at me from almost every shop window and the back window of every taxi".⁸

However, Simpson detected a significant difference in the Jordanian line compared with that of Iraq. Jordanians looked to the United States and Britain to undo the wrongs they perceived they had done in the Middle East. In contrast, Iraq was advocating that Arabs should deal with things themselves. As Simpson wrote: "The one was the attitude of postcolonial dependence, still looking to the old imperial power for everything; the other was something far bolder and more aggressive".⁹ This tendency to look to "the old imperial power" no doubt still runs deep within the thinking of Jordan, despite the public rhetoric rejecting its involvement in a Western-led attack against Iraq. These deep-rooted ties between Jordan and the West are helping to pro-

vide a basis for the further involvement of Tarshish and its young lions in the area of Ammon, Edom and Moab in these last days before Christ's return.

Conclusion

At the time of writing (July 14) the Jordanian king is shortly due to visit America to have talks with President Bush. Both men will be aware of the conflicting tensions within Jordan. As *The Times* states: "King Abdullah, who is due to hold talks with President Bush this month, will have to balance strong anti-American feeling in his country and his vital links with the West".¹⁰ Whatever the outcome of these talks, and whether or not America does indeed end up having a military presence in Jordan prior to an attack on Iraq, we can see trends that fit in with what we would expect from Bible prophecy. Regardless of popular feeling and the diplomacy of governments, the nations will eventually be gathered to Armageddon. The signs that we can see, however, should encourage us in these last days.

7. *Middle East Monitor*, East Med, 2002, July, Vol. 12, No. 7, p. 7.

8. Simpson, J. (1991), *From the House of War*, London, Arrow Books, p. 142.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

10. *Op. cit.*



Prophecy, History and Archaeology

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The credibility of the book of Acts

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IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to study the book of Acts impartially without concluding that it is a genuine account of the origin and development of Christianity. The unfolding story suggests no contrivance by unscrupulous clerics nor revision by later editors. In fact, it rings so true that, were it not a religious story with a strong moral message, its credibility would never have been questioned at all.

The teaching of Jesus of Nazareth was so revolutionary to accepted Jewish religion that its

hostile reception by Jewish elders is quite conceivable. That after his death this opposition continued against the teaching of his followers is equally conceivable. Such a reaction is what one would have expected.

Because of this, it is also quite natural that the teaching of the apostles became more quickly established in places like Antioch in Syria where Jewish opposition was not so intense. It is also natural that the acceptance of the gospel by Gentiles was not immediate but evolved more slowly,

following conversions amongst Jewish proselytes, such as the Samaritan converts recorded in Acts 8. Such a trend was exactly as one would have expected.

It is likewise perfectly plausible that the conversion of Gentiles would later create tensions amongst the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, and that some resolution would become necessary. Hence the Council of Jerusalem, as recorded in chapter 15, was a predictable development.

Here, then, is a most credible story of a fast-growing religious community facing stern opposition and increasingly new challenges. It is all too probable to be fictional.

But there is very much more evidence than this. Few other books of the Bible are supported by so much contemporary history as the Acts of the Apostles. We shall begin with a brief consideration of the author himself and his geographical knowledge of the Roman world of that particular time. We shall then look at a few examples of the powerful witness of contemporary history to the veracity of the Acts story. Because the Acts is a record that presents the very cradle of Christianity, its genuineness greatly assists in establishing the veracity of the New Testament, especially the Pauline epistles, which are most fundamental to the Christian message.

The author

We shall not spend much time on the authorship of the book, since from its opening passage it is incontestable that the writer is Luke. He begins by addressing the Theophilus to whom his Gospel was written, and reminds him of this: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen".

There are also some distinctive Lucian expressions in the book that confirm the authorship; for example, the Greek word *atenizō*, meaning 'to look upon', 'to behold steadfastly' or 'to fasten ones eyes upon', is a term almost exclusive to Luke's Gospel and the Acts.

From the content of the book itself we learn that Luke was a regular companion of Paul, as those well-known 'we' passages indicate. Furthermore, when we discover from Colossians 4:14 that Luke was a physician, and from 2 Corinthians 12:7 that Paul had a lingering affliction, it is reasonable to conclude that for medical reasons also Luke was in regular attendance.

Finally, the fact that the narrative does not record Paul's death and lacks a distinct conclusion indicates that Luke either died before Paul did, or that they were martyred together. The Apostle's final few words to Timothy, "Only Luke is with me" (2 Tim. 4:11), could well imply the latter.

The geography of Acts

A telltale indication that the Book of Mormon is false is its lack of named geographical locations in the USA. In contrast, the writer of Acts was obviously fully acquainted with much of the geography of the Middle East of that period. His detailed accounts of Paul's journeys can be traced on a modern map with little difficulty, especially the sea voyages.

For example, how could anyone read the voyage to Rome recorded in Acts 27-28 without believing that it really happened? The routes are valid, all the ports of call can be traced, the type of ships used can be verified, as also can the terrible storm Euroclydon that caused the shipwreck. Everything about the voyage confirms the veracity of the account to such an extent that no honest critic could dismiss it as fiction. The whole geography of the book rings true, and louder still when we consider its harmony with Jewish and Roman contemporary history.

The historicity of the Acts

Much of the following information is from William Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*, which we commend to those readers who require specific references. The whole work is very useful in researching the authenticity of the New Testament in general, but the specific information on Acts is found in Part II of the book, "The auxiliary evidences of Christianity", chapter VI. We shall take the references more or less in the order in which they appear in Acts.*

- 1 In Acts 3:1 we are told that Peter and John went up together into the temple at "the *ninth hour*", called "the hour of prayer". Josephus wrote: "twice every day, in the morning and at the *ninth hour*, the priests perform their duty at the altar".
- 2 He endorses the story of Judas, the rebel Galilean named in Acts 5:37, and clarifies for us

* Although Paley gives references for his quotations they are not given here as they do not always seem to be accurate.—*T.B.*

that the “taxing” to which Luke refers means a census. The passage reads: “After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed”. Of the very same Judas Josephus writes: “he persuaded not a few not to enrol themselves, when Cyrenius the censor was sent into Judea”.

- 3 The “great dearth” prophesied by Agabus, as recorded in Acts 11:28, said by Luke to have occurred in the days of Claudius Caesar, is also confirmed by Josephus, who dates it as being in the fifth or sixth year of Claudius: “In their time, a great dearth happened in Judea”.
- 4 We read in Acts 12:1 that “Herod *the king* stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church”. Paley points out that there was no period for thirty years before or after this event when there was any *king* at Jerusalem except for the last three years of this Herod’s life. Josephus confirms this, calling him Agrippa, and stating that Claudius added Samaria and Judea to his dominion.

That this was at the very end of Herod’s life is also corroborated by Josephus in his own account of his death. The Acts record reads:

“And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the spirit” (12:21-23).

For the sake of brevity, we shall quote only the relevant parts of Josephus’s record of Herod’s death, but it confirms Luke’s narrative:

“He went to the city of Caesarea . . . he came into the theatre, dressed in a robe of silver . . . The rays of the rising sun, reflected from such a splendid garb, gave him a majestic and awful appearance. They called him a god . . . Immediately after this, he was seized with pains in his bowels . . . These pains continually tormenting him, he expired in five days’ time”.

- 5 We read in Acts 21:23,24 that, because Paul was likely to be in trouble with the Jews in regard to the Law of Moses, he was advised

by James and the elders to submit to purification rites with four others:

“Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law”.

Josephus testifies to this practice in a couple of places. One of these reads:

“It is customary for those who have been afflicted with some distemper, or have laboured under any other difficulties, to make a vow, thirty days before they offer sacrifices, to abstain from wine, and shave the hair of their heads”.

- 6 Acts 21:34-37 describes the uproar in Jerusalem from which Paul was rescued in the nick of time by the soldiers of the chief captain and taken up the stairs into “the castle”. The narrative indicates that this was all very close to the temple. Josephus tells us that the Antonia fortress was situated at the angle of the western and northern porticoes of the outer temple, and because it was built on a steep rock there were stairs leading up to the porticoes. He also mentions that a Roman legion always lodged there.

- 7 Verse 38 records the chief captain’s confusing of Paul with an Egyptian rebel:

“Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?”.

Josephus’s account of this rebellion agrees, differing only in the number of followers the Egyptian had:

“but the Egyptian false prophet brought a yet heavier disaster upon the Jews; for this impostor, coming into the country . . . gathered together thirty thousand men who were deceived by him”.

Paley attributes such disparity in numbers to the “errors of transcribers”, adding that such a point of disagreement is not very pertinent, with which we must agree.

- 8 In the account of Paul before Felix, in Acts 24, Luke records that Felix’s wife was called Drusilla (v. 24). Josephus provides us with much more information about her, yet none of it in any way conflicting with Luke. He

tells us that she was originally the wife of King Azizus of the Emesenes, but that the marriage was eventually dissolved and Felix then married her.

- 9 Regarding the appearance of Paul before Agrippa and Bernice, following his appeal to Caesar, Luke writes: "And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus" (25:13). The strong inference from this passage is that, although Agrippa was a king, his dominion was not over Judea, otherwise such a salutation would have been quite inappropriate. Paley comments that this Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa (the one referred to at 4 above), but, according to Josephus, he did not inherit his father's kingdom at his death, because Claudius considered him to be too young. Instead, the emperor appointed one Cuspius Fadus as prefect of the whole kingdom, which included Judea.
- 10 On the privilege of Roman citizenship, Acts 22:27,28 reads: "Then the chief captain came, and said unto him [Paul], Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born". In confirmation of the existence of this special freedom, permitted by Rome and applying to a Jew, Josephus writes: "Lucius Lentulus, the consul, declared, I have dismissed from the service the Jewish Roman citizens, who observe the rites of the Jewish religion at Ephesus". On the matter of some non-Romans being allowed to purchase this

right, Paley quotes one Dion Cassius as saying, with some irony, that Roman citizenship eventually became so cheap to obtain that it was commonly said that it might be "purchased with a piece of broken glass".

- 11 In connection with Paul's appeal to Caesar and his transportation to Rome, we are informed by Luke: "And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band" (27:1). Josephus also reports the sending to Rome by Felix of several priests for trial before Caesar: "Felix, for some slight offence, bound and sent to Rome several priests of his acquaintance, and very good and honest men, to answer for themselves to Caesar".

These are by no means all the historical evidences for the reliability of the Acts record, but enough examples have been quoted to convince any reasonable person that the record is truth.

Conclusion

The veracity of the Acts is crucial to the reliability of the Pauline Epistles on which so much of Christian teaching is based, and in this connection another work of William Paley, *Horae Paulinae*, is most useful in the revealing of many coincidences between these epistles and the Acts, establishing their close association. Thus, in spite of the lack of early documentary evidence for the truth of the New Testament, we can be assured of its reliability from within its own record.

Evidence for false worship in Israel

Tony Benson

ACCORDING TO Scripture, man was originally a worshipper of the one true God, and the worship of other gods was a later development. Abraham was called out of an idolatrous environment as a worshipper of the true God, and the nation which descended from him and his son and grandson, Isaac and Jacob, was founded on the basis of this worship. The worship of other gods is something which occurred from time to time, and indeed was almost universally prevalent in the nation at times during the reigns of the kings, but Scripture is clear that monotheism was at the very basis

of the nation; it was founded by the one true God.

The scholarly world takes a very different view, however, one founded on a belief in evolution. Believing in evolution has as its consequence the idea that monotheism must have developed out of polytheism, and that what really happened in the history of ancient Israel is that monotheism did not come to the fore until late on, where it battled for success against the prevailing polytheism, as for example in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. People like Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon were legendary