

AN EXPOSITION

OF THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

BY THE

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LATE INCUMBENT OF ST. CUTHBERT'S,
CARLISLE.

VOL. I.

LONDON: HATCHARD & CO., 187, PICCADILLY.

CARLISLE: C. THURNAM AND SONS.

—
1860.



Tentmaker Publications
121 Hartshill road
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffs. ST4 7LU

www.tentmaker.org.uk (UK)
www.tentmakerpublications.com (USA)

Originally published in 3 volumes
London, 1860.

This 2 volume edition, © 2008

ISBN: 978-1-901670-71-4

INTRODUCTION.

The course of Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles, by the late Rev. John Fawcett, which is now offered to the public, was commenced about three years after that on the Gospel of St. John, which has already been published, and which the testimonies received by the Editor show to have been very highly valued.

The present course, prepared on the same plan, forms an appropriate supplement to the former; and is now published in full confidence that its value will be appreciated by those who know the writings, or who have known the ministerial labours of the late venerable author.

JAMES FAWCETT.

KNARESBOROUGH VICARAGE,

July, 1860.

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SERMON I.

ACTS I. 1—8.

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 Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen : To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God : And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel ? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upou you : and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

ACCORDING to the plan which I have heretofore repeatedly pursued, I am minded again to undertake the continued exposition of an entire book of scripture. The book which I have now chosen is one of peculiar interest. It contains the history of the infant church of Christ after he was himself withdrawn ; and the visible administration of it was in the hands of men like ourselves—like ourselves in being subject to like passions, compassed with like infirmities, sinful like ourselves, fallible like ourselves, yet endowed with miraculous powers, and taught by the infallible inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

Some little account of the plan intended to be pursued may here be proper. I once thought of making a selection of passages, omitting the less important, and taking only those which seemed the most rich in instruction. Some-

thing of this sort may perhaps occasionally be done : but I apprehend the passages to be omitted will be very few, and that, on the whole, my present mode of proceeding must be as it was in going through the Evangelist John, when I passed by nothing, but only took a longer or shorter text according as the instruction was spread through a greater or smaller number of verses. As there too, so now, I pledge myself to no constant adherence to the series. It may often be interrupted, sometimes from necessity, sometimes from choice. Thus partly from the number of chapters in the book, partly from the occasional, perhaps frequent interruptions, it may be long, probably some years before the course is concluded.

Neither this circumstance, nor my own age, have been overlooked by me. But whatever the uncertainty that the course will be completed may amount to, that uncertainty weighs not against the undertaking. For if it never be completed at all, we are still engaged with the word of God—we could not be better employed—and the discourses may be useful as far as they go.

The subject of the book is a most fruitful one:—The labours of the apostles, their sufferings, supports, manner of preaching, deliberations, successes ; the constitution of the infant church ; the miraculous gifts possessed by the converts ; the character of the primitive Christians ; the opposition offered to the gospel by Jews and Heathens, by Priests and Magistrates ; and the signal deliverance which the Lord wrought for his servants.

In addition to all these, there is another recommendation of the book before us, which has weighed with me. It contains within itself decisive evidence of its own truth and the general truth of Christianity—an evidence very simple and conclusive, and which does not require a man to have read anything more than the Acts and the Epistles of Paul in order to comprehend it. The argument arises from comparing a number of passages in the Acts with a corresponding number in the Epistles ; each separate instance is itself

a distinct and independent proof. This argument has been conducted by the late ingenious Dr. Paley with inimitable clearness ; and when examples occur, which will not be for some time, I shall give them in his own perspicuous language.

These things being premised, and beseeching you to beg the divine blessing on this, most probably, my last undertaking of the kind, I proceed to the text.

The treatise seems to have been written about the year 63, the period to which it is carried down. It bears no name of its author ; but by the almost universal consent of antiquity is ascribed to St. Luke. The author was not an apostle, probably not a Jew, but a Gentile convert, a physician, a companion of Paul in his travels, and therefore an eye-witness of his labours. These labours form a principal part of his history which is addressed by him to the same Theophilus to whom he inscribed his gospel. He opens with a reference to the contents of that gospel, which he describes as comprising what Jesus did and taught till he was taken up. Thus he shows us that as the former treatise was a narrative of the acts and doctrines of Christ before his ascension, so this is a narrative of the acts and doctrines of his apostles after his ascension. They were the men to whom the future care of his church was to be committed. He had from the time of his choosing them been preparing them for this work ; but the forty days during which he was with them after his resurrection, seem to have been particularly employed in this preparatory instruction.

He showed himself alive to them by many infallible proofs ; speaking to them ; walking with them ; eating before them ; allowing them to touch his hands and his side ; and discoursing with them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God ; enlarging their commission from the lost sheep of the house of Israel to the lost sinners of all nations ; bidding them to make disciples of all, and to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ; and promising to be with them always to the end of the world.

He would be with them, but not in his own person. He would be with them by the visitation of that Comforter whom he promised to send—or whom the Father would send in his name—and whom therefore he here calls the promise of the Father. For this he bids them tarry at Jerusalem, and wait till they received it. They were not indeed at that time destitute of the Spirit; they were not men in a state of nature, but in a state of grace; they were now Christians, born of the Spirit, their Master had breathed on them and said, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost;” and no doubt the gift accompanied the act, and a real communion of the Holy Ghost was then imparted.

But they were to look for something greater and more abundant than anything they had yet experienced; and they were to look for it very soon. Not many days would elapse before they would experience a baptism of the Holy Ghost. John baptized with water; but he who was greater than John, whose shoe’s latchet John was not worthy to unloose, would baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

And they needed this baptism: for the answer which they returned to their Lord’s promise showed that the measure of grace which they had as yet received did not so make head against the corruption of nature, as not to leave them in a considerable degree under the influence of worldly and ambitious principles.

What might we have expected regenerate men to say on being told that they should, after the interval of a few days, be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Might we not have supposed that they would express their thankfulness, their joy, their desire; and that the days, though not many, would seem long till they received the promised blessing?

But what do they say? Lord wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? It is not the setting up of a spiritual kingdom such as Israel never had which they look for, but the restoring of an earthly kingdom, such as Israel possessed in former times. They look back to the