

The Acts of the Apostles thus constitutes the one great inspired book of missions, God's own commentary and encyclopædia for all the ages as to every question pertaining to a world's evangelization. In the main it is the account of the apostolic ministry of Peter and Paul. To the former it was given to hold the mystic key which unlocked, first to Jews and then to Gentiles, the door of faith. That door being opened, Peter naturally disappears from the record, while Paul, as the specially commissioned and typical missionary to the nations, comes to the front. This is no displacement of Peter, whose life mission was to Jews, not Gentiles.

We must bear in mind that Luke, the declared author both of the gospel bearing his name and of this book, treats the two books as parts of one continuous and complete narrative. What the author thus links together we must consider as a unit. The purpose of the inspired writer is to give, in these two brief sketches, a complete outline of Gospel history from its infancy in its humble Judean cradle to its mature development as a world-wide power, tracing the seed of the kingdom from its sowing in Syrian soil to its wider scattering beside all waters, borne by the various streams of civilization to the heart of the heathen world.

From first to last the combined narrative is the story of missions. In the Gospel according to Luke we have our Lord offering the good news to the Jews, and foreseeing their continued rejection of Him, commanding and commissioning His disciples to bear the message to all nations and to every creature. Then in the Acts we trace the actual carrying out of this commission, the preaching of the Gospel to the Jews by both Peter and Paul, and its repeated rejection by them, with its subsequent and consequent proclamation to mankind at large at great centres of population.

The Gospel opens with the incarnation and closes with the resurrection and ascension, linking on to the after-narrative by the promise of the endowment of power from on high "not many days hence." Just at this point the Acts of the Apostles forges its new links, and connects with the Gospel its chain of events, beginning with the birth of the Church of Christ on the natal day of Pentecost, and abruptly closing with Paul's unfinished career as a prisoner at Rome.

We have said *closing* rather than *ending*, for the story is plainly incomplete, reaching no proper conclusion. The two narratives, reckoning from Christ's entrance upon His public ministry to the very close of the Acts, cover only about the average history of a generation—and no generation ever reaches completeness; it is linked on to the next—nay, interwoven with the next by many threads; and its history passes gradually and insensibly into that of its successor, as to-day into to-morrow. And so above all is it the true work of missions. It is one work, and no man can tell where the mission of one witness for God ends and that of his successor begins. Paul's preaching and teaching has not yet ceased, nor will it while the ages continue.

But in a sublimer sense the Acts of the Apostles reaches no conclusion.