

conversion of Saul, and his call to preach to the Gentiles; the story of Cornelius and Peter; the debates at Jerusalem; the separating Paul and Barnabas to their mission; the decrees of the Apostles and elders; together with his frequent accounts of Paul's speeches to, and interviews with the Gentiles; and the success attendant on the labours of Paul and Barnabas among them. This view of his design in writing this book also accounts for his having omitted to inform us of the travels and labours of the other Apostles, and of the congregations which they planted in different places, with many other things which could not be accounted for, upon the supposition of his intending to write a history of the Acts of the Apostles, during the period from the ascension of the Messiah till Paul arrives a prisoner at Rome.

It is nevertheless true, that in accomplishing his design he is obliged to give us a very general and comprehensive view of the introduction of christianity throughout the whole world. So that still his history is, in a certain sense, an ecclesiastic one, the oldest and most authentic in the world. As the four preceding histories constitute rather memoirs than biography, so this is rather a mere sketch of what happened during the labours of the Apostles, than a history of the transactions of any one of them.

Of the New Testament historians Luke is the most eminent. He gives us one continued history from the commencement of the Christian era down to A. D. 63 or 64. He records in his testimony concerning Jesus, and his Acts of Apostles, all the grand and important events and transactions connected with the establishment of the Christian religion in Asia, Africa, and Europe. This book is the grand link which connects the previous histories with the apostolic epistles, and constitutes a key to the right interpretation of them, without which they would have been, in a great measure, unintelligible. An accurate acquaintance with the history of the people which composed most of the congregations to which the Apostles addressed letters, with the time and circumstances of their conversion, and with their customs and questions found in this book, greatly facilitates our proficiency in the knowledge of those letters, which explain the meaning and bearings of that one glorious fact, on which the Christian superstructure is reared.

From it alone we learn by what means that great moral and religious revolution was accomplished, which eventuated in the destruction of polytheism and idolatry in the best portions of the world; which desolated so many Pagan temples and caused millions of altars to moulder down to dust, notwithstanding the wisdom and learning of philosophers, the sword of the civil magistrate, and the superstition of the common people, were allied in maintaining them, and suppressing this "wicked and odious heresy," as the Romans called it.

From it we also learn what true Christianity is, and how far the modern exhibitions of it have degenerated from the ancient and apostolic order of things; we discover what was the spirit and temper of the first Christians; and the character and design of their religious meetings. In a word, as Dr. Adam Clarke observes, "in the book of Acts we see how the church of Christ was formed and settled. The Apostles simply proclaim the truth of God relative to the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ; and God accompanies their testimony with the demonstration of the Spirit. What was the consequence? Thousands