

## ***Acts: History vs. Historical Precedent***

### **What is Acts?**

- “A historical account of the life of Jesus lived out through the Holy Spirit in the early Church”
- Written by Luke\*
  - Is Vol. 2 to his Gospel (see Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3)
- The Greek name is Πραξεις Αποστολων (Praxeis Apostolon)
  - “That which was done by the Apostles”
    - Apostle = “One who is sent”
- Like OT historical narratives
  - Which we often mistakenly moralize, allegorize, and personalize
- Unlike OT historical narratives
  - We often use Acts as a model for Christian behavior and church life
  - We often see them as setting precedents for our lives today

### **How do we use Acts?**

- The lack of hermeneutical precision with the handling of Acts has caused divisions in the Church over issues like:
  - Infant vs. Believers’ Baptism
  - Congregationalism vs. Episcopalian Polity
    - Polity: “The way in which a Church is governed”
  - The frequency of observing the Lord’s supper
  - Election of church leadership
  - Selling possessions and communal living
  - Snake handling

### **Acts as History**

- Luke utilized a form of literature known as Hellenistic Historiography
  - Rooted in Thucydides (c. 460-40 BC)
  - Flourished in the Hellenistic period (c. 300 BC- AD 200)
  - Not written *just* to keep chronological records
  - Also written to encourage, entertain, inform, moralize, or offer an apologetic
- Luke was also steeped in the OT
  - OT Narrative form permeates his writings
- Both of these forms are true of both his Gospel and Acts
- Luke is telling a compelling story

- Which he uses to show the divine activity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit as a continuation of God's work in the OT

### **Luke's Intent?**

- Thus, we need to familiarize ourselves with Luke's theological interests to understand his writings
- How we answer the question of Luke's intent dictates how we understand Acts hermeneutical application
  - Was his intent to lay a foundation of behavior for the Church for all time?
  - Or was it to something else?
  - In other words, is Acts to be read as history or historical precedent?

### **How to read Acts**

- Acts must be read in sections dictated by narrative elements
  - Whole stories as part of a larger narrative
  - We must be careful not to take verse out of context
- 1. It is best to read it through 1<sup>st</sup> in one or two sitting
- 2. Reread sections asking exegetical questions
  - Making note of:
    - Key people and places
    - Recurring motifs
    - Natural divisions
- 3. Skim read, writing down references based on your previous observations (step 2)
- 4. Ask yourself, why did Luke write this book?
  - Considering why *this* particular narrative has been included