

Introductory

We start with two basic concepts that will influence our study.

1. Acts is the second part of a two volume work, Luke-Acts. To understand Acts to the full therefore we need to go back into the end of Luke to establish the continuity – of time, of ideas, of evolution of belief. So we will do this.
2. **There's an interesting structural point** about the way Acts is written. It's a history certainly—the history of the Christian church between the years AD 30 and AD 62. But also there's something else. **It has a lot of sermons in it.** Some long, some short, about 15 – 20 in all depending on how you count. They are not strictly necessary for the story so the question arises, why did he put them in? This is important, since if we understand why they are there it will help us to react to them in a constructive way.

So that's **Question 1**: Why has Luke put in so many sermons? Think about it.

Now we start (as in Simply Christianity) with Luke 1.1-4. We need to understand a bit about how the book came into being.

Luke 1.1 - 4

And the question is:

Question 2

- What do we learn from this about Luke's approach, and about how Luke intended the book to be read?
- Do we see a God input in this?
- Is there a supernatural process involved here? If we think there is, what form? How does it influence our reading, if at all?

Now we start with the last chapter of Luke, and we will continue direct into the start of Acts.

Luke chapter 24

There's some overlap between this chapter and the first part of Acts 1, describing the same events in similar language. From these:

Question 3

What did the disciples believe about Jesus and hope for from Jesus:

1. Before the crucifixion?
2. Immediately after the crucifixion and at the start of this chapter?

Question 4

The chapter describes two separate conversations between various disciples and the risen Christ, covering similar topics.

- What topics appear to have been discussed?
- What specific prophecies is Jesus likely to have touched on?
- What do the disciples now believe and hope for? What is their mind-set?

(We need to be careful to avoid reading back into the text conclusions that the Christian Church may have gradually come to many years, decades, or centuries later, and focus on what specifically we are told in the book about what they actually thought at the time)

Acts 1.1-11

This very largely recapitulates Luke 24 in other words.

Question 5

From this passage, and from verse 6 in particular, is there any difference between the disciples conception of what the future holds, and Jesus' conception of what the future holds?

We need to understand the disciples point of view in the light of their previous experiences up to that time. We of course know how the story continues but they didn't!

Acts 1.12 - 26

Question 6

- Anything of interest here? This is not one of Peter's more profound speeches. His use of the Psalms is a bit idiosyncratic—if people wish to discuss it, fine, though I don't think it's worth spending much time on.
- Why (apart from Psalm 109) might they have wanted a twelfth apostle?
- What about casting lots as a means of decision-making?

I think probably this will be about as far as we can discuss in the first week. Chapter 2 is very profound on many levels, and it might just be worth listening through it this week to get a preliminary feel, prior to discussing in detail next week.