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## "A People for His Name" A Guide to Resources on the Book of Acts

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# A PEOPLE For His Name

## *A Guide to Resources on the Book of Acts*

By Randall D. Chesnutt

Compiling a helpful bibliography on the book of Acts is a daunting task for at least three reasons. First, major resources on the Gospel of Luke must also be considered, because Luke and Acts clearly were composed by the same author and share common literary and theological agendas. Second, Luke and Acts are the two longest New Testament books, together comprising more than one-fourth of the New Testament and representing the largest contribution to the New Testament by a single writer. Third, a recent surge of scholarly interest in Luke and Acts from an ever-widening range of disciplines and methods has generated an enormous body of literature which is as diverse as it is voluminous. These factors preclude anything approximating a comprehensive bibliographical survey here. Rather, only selected works in English that represent the range of scholarly views and that provide handles on the major issues in the interpretation of Luke-Acts are included.

### Landmark Studies

Two classic works have so influenced and informed the modern study of Acts that their lasting contributions should be mentioned at the outset. First is the massive five-volume work edited by F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity, Part I: The Acts of the Apostles* (1920–33; reprint, 1965–66). Volume 4 provides a translation and detailed commentary on the Greek text. The other volumes treat the historical setting (vol. 1), issues of composition and purpose (vol. 2), text-critical matters (vol. 3), and miscellaneous topics (vol. 5). Although

flawed in many ways and, of course, quite dated, this landmark work remains a valuable resource.

Second is Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (1927; 2nd ed., 1958), which is still the most complete analysis of the compositional methods and stylistic unity of Luke's two volumes. This pivotal study initiated the now common practice of treating Luke and Acts as a single work in two volumes rather than as separate books. The very label "Luke-Acts" is Cadbury's legacy.

### Orientation

An excellent overview of modern scholarship on Acts with analysis of recent trends and issues can be found in the small volume by Mark A. Powell, *What Are They Saying About Acts?* (1991). This work should be used alongside Powell's companion volume, *What Are They Saying About Luke?* (1989), and updated by reference to Walter L. Liefeld, *Interpreting the Book of Acts* (1995)—reviewed in this issue. Other helpful introductions to the book and current scholarly discussion of it are Charles H. Talbert, "Luke-Acts," in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Eldon J. Epp and George W. MacRae (1989), 297–320; Richard D. Dillon, "Acts of the Apostles," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (1990), 722–67; and Luke T. Johnson, "Luke-Acts, Book of," in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), 4:403–20. Of a more conservative bent is F. F. Bruce, "Acts of the Apostles" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey

W. Bromiley, revised ed. (1979–88), 1:33–47. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 2nd ed. (1989) is useful for putting the current state of research into historical perspective.

### Social and Historical Setting

The most extensive and up-to-date collection of information on the social and historical setting of Acts is the monumental work edited by Bruce W. Winter, *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting* (1993–96). Of a projected six volumes, five are now available. These deal with the literary setting (vol. 1), the Greco-Roman setting (vol. 2), Paul in Roman custody (vol. 3), the Palestinian setting (vol. 4), and the Diaspora setting (vol. 5). Older but still useful is Henry J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History* (1955). Jerome H. Neyrey, ed., *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (1991), reviewed in this issue, is a good example of the use of social-scientific models to illuminate early Christianity.

In addition to works on the setting of Acts in particular, numerous works on the world of the New Testament in general are pertinent. The best single volume of this type is Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (1993). A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (1963); Harry W. Tajra, *The Trial of St. Paul: A Juridical Exegesis of the Second Half of the Acts of the Apostles* (1989); and Brian Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (1994) are instructive about Roman provincial administration and legal proceedings as these figure into Paul's story in Acts. Wayne A. Meeks' pioneering study, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (1983), is important for understanding the social context of early Christianity in Greco-Roman cities. Other recent social-historical studies that relate to the study of Acts include A. J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (1983); Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry* (1980); Gerd Theissen, *The Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (1978), and the same author's *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (1982); Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (1994); and John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment* (1987). This last volume is recommended as a good general introduction to the burgeoning field of social-historical analysis of early Christianity.

### Genre and Purpose

To which Greco-Roman literary genre, if any, does the book of Acts belong? There is no consensus on this issue. David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (1987), finds Luke-Acts comparable to general works of history in the Hellenistic period. Gregory E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts, and Apologetic Historiography* (1992), points instead to a subgenre of Hellenistic history writing that he calls "apologetic historiography." Charles H. Talbert, in *What Is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (1977), and *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (1974), finds the closest analogy in ancient biographies rather than in historical works. Richard I. Pervo, *Profit With Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (1987), stresses the affinities with ancient novels and argues that Acts was written as much to entertain as to instruct or edify. There is likely some truth to all of these views; it seems unwise to squeeze Acts into any one literary straitjacket.

The question of the purpose of Acts is closely related to the issue of literary genre and has evoked equally diverse opinions. Robert F. O'Toole, "Why Did Luke Write Acts (Lk-Acts)?" *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 7 (1977): 66–76, gives a good survey of views. B. S. Easton, "The Purpose of Acts," in *Early Christianity: The Purpose of Acts, and Other Papers*, ed. F. C. Grant (1954), 31–118, and Ernst Haenchen, in his commentary described below, are among the many who discern in Acts an apologetic effort to win legal standing for Christianity in the Roman Empire. Paul Walaskay, *And So We Came to Rome: The Political Perspective of St. Luke* (1983), agrees that Acts is an apology but contends that it is directed to the Church itself to promote good citizenship. Still others, including Robert Brawley and Jacob Jervell, in the works listed below under "Luke as Theologian," see Luke-Acts as an apology directed toward the Jewish opponents of Christianity. F. F. Bruce, in his various studies mentioned throughout this essay, and J. C. O'Neill, *The Theology of Acts in Its Historical Setting* (1961), argue for a missionary purpose. Robert L. Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (1882), maintains that the book was written for Christians and designed to strengthen their faith and offer them pastoral guidance. Philip Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts* (1987), understands Acts to provide "political legitimation" for Roman Christians who need to understand that allegiance

to Rome and allegiance to Christ are not incompatible. Richard Cassidy, *Society and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles* (1987), argues that Luke does not try to foster compatibility between church and state, but to encourage Christians to obey God rather than human authorities in the face of inevitable incompatibility between church and state. Charles H. Talbert, *Luke and the Gnostics: An Examination of the Lucan Purpose* (1966), suggests that Acts is a defense against Gnosticism. The nineteenth-century view of F. C. Baur and the Tübingen School that Acts was written to reconcile the Petrine and Pauline factions in the early church has been rightly rejected by most but is still subtly influential. Again, these diverse proposals are not all mutually exclusive, and there is likely some merit to many of them; one need not suppose that Luke had a single, overarching purpose.

### Commentaries

The two major commentaries in English on the Greek text of Acts are F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (1951; 3rd ed., 1990); and more recently, C. K. Barrett's monumental contribution to the International Critical Commentary, *The Acts of the Apostles* (1994), of which only the first volume (on Acts 1–14) has been published.

The standard commentary on the English text remains that by Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (1971; translated from the 14th German edition of 1965). Haenchen is insightful with regard to the theological perspectives of Acts but is skeptical of the book's historical value. On the other end of the spectrum, I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (1980), takes a much more positive view of the historical value of Acts, often in explicit disagreement with Haenchen, but is not as helpful on the theology of the book. C. S. C. Williams, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (1957; 2nd ed., 1964; reprint, 1971) is dated but still ranks among the best all-purpose commentaries. The most recent technical commentary is that by Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (1987), in the Hermeneia series. Conzelmann shares Haenchen's distrust of the historical reliability of Acts. Three recent and very helpful, if less technical, commentaries are Gerhard Krodel's entry in the Augsburg Commentary series, *Acts* (1986); a smaller but very useful commentary by the same author in the Proclamation Commentaries, *Acts* (1981); and Luke T. Johnson's contribution in the Sacra

Pagina series, *The Acts of the Apostles* (1992). Johnson is especially sensitive to the literary artistry of the narrative, as he is also in his commentary *The Gospel of Luke* (1991) in the same series. William H. Willimon's commentary in the Interpretation series, *Acts* (1988), is not exegetically thorough but has many practical and homiletical insights. Among other commentaries that can be profitably consulted are F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, revised ed. (1988; original, 1954), which, like the same author's commentary on the Greek text, is much better on historical and archeological data than on theological concerns; Johannes Munck's volume in the Anchor Bible series, *The Acts of Apostles* (1967), which is weak as a commentary but has several valuable appendices; R. P. C. Hanson, *The Acts* (1967); and William Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles* (1973).

### Literary Approaches

A salutary trend in recent scholarship is the use of literary-critical approaches in the study of biblical narrative. The most comprehensive application of such methods to Luke-Acts is Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (1986–90; vol. 1 deals with Luke, vol. 2 with Acts). Other works of this type include Luke T. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (1977); Robert Brawley, *Centering on God: Method and Message in Luke-Acts* (1990); Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (1974); Richard I. Pervo, *Luke's Story of Paul* (1990); John Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (1992); Steven M. Sheeley, *Narrative Asides in Luke-Acts* (1992); William S. Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (1993); and W. H. Shepherd, *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts* (1994). In addition, the best recent commentaries and many of the works listed below under "Luke as Theologian" have given long-overdue attention to the literary dimensions of Luke's narrative.

### Luke as Historian

As is evident from the description of commentaries above, there is considerable scholarly disagreement on how Acts is to be used as a source for reconstructing early Christian history. C. K. Barrett, *Luke the Historian in Recent Study* (1961), surveys previous studies of Luke as a historian and clarifies the issues. I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (1970), emphasizes that Luke's

capacity as a historian must be taken seriously if his theology is to be understood. More recently, Gerd Lüdemann, *Early Christianity According to the Traditions in Acts: A Commentary* (1989), attempts to separate tradition from redaction in Acts in order to establish a basis for historical reconstruction. Joel B. Green and M. C. McKeener, *Luke-Acts and New Testament Historiography* (1994), contains a useful annotated bibliography as well as a discussion of Luke-Acts and ancient historiography. Two recent investigations that reach relatively conservative conclusions on the historical value of Acts are Martin Hengel, *Acts and the Earliest History of Christianity* (1980), and Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (1989).

On the presentation of Paul in Luke-Acts, see the old classic by William M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, 3rd ed. (1897; reprint, 1962); and more recently, John C. Lentz, *Luke's Portrait of Paul* (1993); and Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, *Paul the Accused: His Portrait in the Acts of the Apostles* (1995). On the related problems of Pauline chronology, see Robert Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life* (1979); and Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (1984).

The question of what sources Luke may have used in writing Acts and their historical basis has invited much speculation but no consensus. In addition to the commentaries and other works cited above, see Jacques Dupont, *The Sources of Acts: The Present Position* (1964).

Similarly, much discussion has centered on the extent to which the speeches that comprise thirty percent of the book of Acts represent actual early Christian preaching as opposed to Lukan literary creativity. C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (1936), is the classic statement of the view that these speeches do preserve the essence of the apostolic proclamation. For a recent discussion and references to the flood of literature on this subject, see Marion L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (1994).

### Luke as Theologian

The groundbreaking theological study of Luke is that by Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (1961; German original, 1957). Conzelmann suggested that the delay of Christ's return led Luke to present a scheme of salvation history in which there are three distinct historical epochs, with the Church representing the third epoch and therefore filling an important role in God's redemp-

tive purposes. Although most have rejected Conzelmann's neat periodizing of history, issues of how Luke viewed the ministry of Christ and the origins of Christianity within the larger context of an overarching divine plan, and the relative roles of Jews and Gentiles in that plan have continued to occupy center stage in discussions of Lukan theology. Prominent among the proponents of close continuity between Israel and the Church in the Lukan perspective on salvation history are Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (1972); the same author's *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* (1984); Donald Juel, *Luke-Acts: The Promise of History* (1983); and David L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts* (1980). At the opposite extreme is Jack Sanders' view in *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (1987) that Luke is anti-Jewish. Other discussions of salvation history according to Luke-Acts and the place of Jews and Gentiles in it are Helmut Flender, *St. Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History* (1967); Jacques Dupont, *The Salvation of the Gentiles: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles* (1967); E. Earle Ellis, *Eschatology in Luke* (1972); Stephen G. Wilson's two books, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* (1973), and *Luke and the Law* (1983); Robert J. Karris, *What Are They Saying About Luke and Acts? A Theology of the Faithful God* (1979); Robert Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews: Conflict, Apology, and Conciliation* (1987); J. Bradley Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age in Luke-Acts* (1988); Joseph B. Tyson, *Images of Judaism in Luke-Acts* (1992); Craig E. Evans and James A. Sanders, *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts* (1993); and J. T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts* (1993).

Studies too numerous to list here examine individual theological topics in Luke-Acts, such as riches and poverty, the Holy Spirit, Christology, ecclesiology, the role of women, and eschatology. Reference to many of these can be found in the more general theological studies, which cover a range of themes rather than focusing on one. Two slender volumes of this type, highly recommended for beginner and specialist alike, are Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (1989); and Howard C. Kee, *Good News to the Ends of the Earth: The Theology of Acts* (1990). Other general theological studies include John Navone, *Themes of St. Luke* (1970); I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (1970); Eric Franklin, *Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts* (1975); A. J. Mattill, *Luke and the Last*

*Things: A Perspective for the Understanding of Lukan Thought* (1979); Robert F. O'Toole, *The Unity of Luke's Theology: An Analysis of Luke-Acts* (1984); and the mammoth survey of scholarly discussion by Francois Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Thirty-three Years of Research (1950–1983)* (1987). Theological works that mention only Luke's Gospel in the title should, of course, be considered pertinent to the study of Acts as well. Most recent among these is Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (1995), reviewed in this issue.

### Collected Essays

The most important single volume of essays on Luke-Acts is still that by Leander Keck and J. Louis Martyn, eds., *Studies in Luke-Acts* (1966; reprint, 1980). Older but still important are F. C. Grant, ed., *Early Christianity: The Purpose of Acts, and Other Papers* (1954); and Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (1956). Among the more recent collections, the following stand out: two volumes edited by Charles H. Talbert, *Perspectives on Luke-Acts* (1978), and *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature* (1984); Joseph Tyson, ed., *Luke-Acts and the Jewish People: Eight Critical Perspectives* (1988); Earl Richard, ed., *New Views on Luke and Acts* (1990); Mikeal C. Parsons and Joseph B. Tyson, eds., *Cadbury, Knox, and Talbert: American Contributions to the Study of Acts* (1992); and most recently, Christopher M. Tuckett, ed., *Luke's Literary Achievement: Collected*

*Essays* (1995). The journal *Interpretation* has devoted two issues to Acts (vol. 27, no. 2 [1973]; and vol. 42, no. 2 [1988]), both of which include homiletical as well as exegetical, theological, and historical essays. The journal *Review and Expositor*, vol. 87, no. 3 (1990) is also devoted to the book of Acts.

### Bibliographical Tools

Several indices to periodical literature and other specialized studies, and now even electronic means for rapid bibliographical searches, are available in theological libraries. Yet even those who do not have regular access to such facilities can compile fairly extensive bibliographies on virtually any text or topic in Luke and Acts. In addition to the bibliographical recommendations included in many of the commentaries and other works discussed throughout this essay, three "books on books" are useful for research in Acts: A. J. and M. B. Mattill, *A Classified Bibliography of Literature on the Acts of the Apostles* (1966); Günther Wagner, *Luke and Acts*, vol. 2 of *An Exegetical Bibliography of the New Testament* (1985); and Watson E. Mills, *A Bibliography on the Periodical Literature on the Acts of the Apostles, 1962–1984* (1986).

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