As with the preceding lecture on the Gospel of Luke\(^2\) the intention of this presentation is to lay a foundation for our study of Unit Four: The Acts of the Apostles. The research on the book of Acts is extensive; thus the summary nature of this lecture. Of great value is the more abundant bibliographical tools for Acts which provide greater referencing of the research in this area.\(^3\)

The lecture is divided into two areas: the bibliographical tools for doing research and the history of Acts research.\(^4\)

### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TOOLS FOR RESEARCH

Several efforts have been made to provide the researcher with helpful tools for probing the contents of the book of Acts. These usually fall into one of about three distinct categories.

Most basic is the simple listing of publications related to Acts studies. The most significant of these is that by A. J. and Mary Mattill, *A Classified Bibliography of Literature on the Acts of the Apostles* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966). It is a listing of some 6,646 publications related to Acts studies. Arranged topically, it deals with bibliographical studies, general studies (mostly commentaries), textual studies, philological studies, literary studies, form-critical studies, historical studies (including chronology, archaeology & geography, and personalities), theological studies and exegetical studies of individual passages. This volume is a must source for tracing down what has been published on Acts from the time of the Church Fathers up through 1961.

Intended as a supplement to the work by Mattill is that by Watson E. Mills, *A Bibliography of the Periodical Literature on the Acts of the Apostles: 1962-1984* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986). It is volume 58 of Supplements to Novum Testamentum and contains 991 references to journal articles related to Acts research from 1962 to 1984. Unfortunately it is not arranged topically as the earlier work by the Mattills, thus its usefulness is restricted. Some cross referencing to other articles within the volume does provide a rudimentary subject reference, but the listings are sequenced only alphabetically. Still, it is a helpful listing of the more recent work on Acts in the journals.

Of great usefulness for finding publications relating to a specific passage in Acts is the work edited by Günther Wagner, *An Exegetical Bibliography of the New Testament*, volume two on Luke-Acts (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985). This is an undated publication of his earlier release in 1975 in a file card packet entitled *An Exegetical Bibliography on the Acts of the Apostles*. As professor of New Testament at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Rüschlikon in Switzerland, Dr. Gunther has worked through the international nature of the student body there to collect a massive bibliographical collection of works on numerous books of the New Testament out of a wide range of foreign language sources. This work continues and is being periodically updated through releases from the seminary publications. While other bibliographical tools of this nature could be cited, these comprise the most helpful and important in this first category.\(^5\)

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\(^3\) Compare the much more extensive listing under section I of this bibliography to the Lukan bibliography.

\(^4\) These divisions are partially paralleled in the Annotated Bibliography at the end.

\(^5\) Mattill, 1-5, lists some 63 references, many of which are of this first category.
Secondly, there is the category which lists numerous publications but attempts to make some kind of observation about contents as well as an occasional critique. Of great importance here are the numerous articles which have appeared periodically throughout this century in the *Theologische Rundschau*. Well in excess of 500 pages of survey of Acts research have been published by this one journal in the last ninety years. The most important of these are the articles by Professors Gräßer and Plümacher which focus on Acts research from the fifties through the early eighties. Professor Gräßer’s first article, entitled “Die Apostelgeschichte in der Forschung der Gegenwart,” appeared in 1960 and surveyed the developments of the fifties. The following topics were covered: Kommentare, Monographien, Aufsätze (Zum Text und zu den Quellen; Zur Tradition und Komposition; Qumran und die Apostelgeschichte; Zur TheoLOGie der Apostelgeschichte).

Beginning in 1976 there appeared the first of a three part series of articles entitled “Acta-Forschung seit 1960” written by Dr. Gräßer. This massive survey covered the period 1960-1973. First there is the listing of the literature of this period under the headings: Zur Forschungs slag allgemein; Kommentare; Text und Quellen. Then each of these headings is discussed at length: Zur Forschungs slag allgemein, 146-49; Kommentare zur Apg., 149-62 (wissenschaftliche Kommentare, 149-61; allgemeinverständliche Kommentare, 161-62); Text und Quellen, 163-94 (Text der Apg., 163-86; Quellenfrage, 186-94). The second article under the same title continued the survey by dealing with “Die schriftstellerische Methode, der literarische Charakter und die theologische Tendenz des Lukas in der Apg.” as section D with the subheadings: Zur Situation der Forschung, 269-73; Das Programm: TheoLOGie der Heilsgeschichte, 273-90. The concluding article appeared in 1977 and deals with the following topics: Die Erzählungen, 1-34 (nine different narrative texts are treated); Die Reden der Apg., 35-51; Zur TheoLOGie des Lukas in der Apg., 51-66; Schluß, 66-68.

In 1983 Professor Eckhard Plümacher published the first of a two-part series of articles, updating the work of Professor Gräßer, under the title “Acta-Forschung 1974-1982.” After listing the literature (pp, 1-4, under the headings: Forschungs- und Literaturberichte, Kommentare, and Literatur), Professor Plümacher discusses this period under the following divisions: Zur Situation, 4-8; Kommentare, 8-30; Einleitungen, Enzyklopädieartikel, 30-35; Zu Grundkonzeption und Zweck des lukanischen Werkes, 35-56. The following year the second part appeared and continued the discussion, under the following headings: Text, 113-20 (preceded by lengthy bibliography, 105-13); Quellen, Traditionsbasis, 120-38; Literarische Gestaltung, Gattung, 138-53; Paulusbild, 153-58; TheoLOGischer und historischer Ort, 158-69.

These articles by Professors Gräßer and Plümacher in particular thus constitute a most important detailed contribution surveying the current trends in Acts research. A serious treatment of specific issues in Acts studies will be made much easier after having seen their context as set forth in these articles. To be sure, these articles do represent a distinctly German perspective; the counterbalance from the English speaking side is seen in Ward W. Gasque and some shorter treatments by I. Howard Marshall and F. F. Bruce, and to a certain degree from the French perspective in François Bovon.

In the English language, the most important work here is that by the evangelical scholar Ward W. Gasque. In the preface Gasque responds to a gauntlet laid down by Ernst Haechen for a detailed critical history of Acts studies. Gasque picks it up and proceeds to treat Acts research beginning with the pre-critical era (chap. 1) through the old Tübingen school with its critics (chaps. 2-6) to the twentieth century defense of Luke (chaps. 7-8). An entire chapter is devoted to Dibelius (chap. 9) and

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6See section I in bibliography under Bauer, Boussett, Clemen, Gräßer, Kümmel, Plümacher and Windisch.
11Ibid., 1-2.
the concluding two chapters (10-11) are given to the mid-twentieth century scene. Gasque has his critics but on the whole has filled a gap in the history of interpretation.

Thirdly, there are those publications which restrict themselves to a survey of a limited number of works either on a general treatment or else on some specific topic in Acts research. Included among such treatments from the first section of the Bibliography are those of Bieder, Betz, Emmelius, Kremer, O’Neill, O’Toole, Theissen, and Turner. Many of the listings in section two of the Bibliography which treat special topics will also contain extensive bibliography. These will facilitate greater awareness of particular issues in Acts studies. They should be checked to see if bibliography can be gleaned for your particular assignment.

THE HISTORY OF ACTS RESEARCH

The discussion begins with the background which leads into the current situation in Acts research. Because of time and space limitations the survey is of necessity an overview which does not do justice to each aspect of the work.

Antecedents to Current Trends

The pre-critical to the beginning of the modern era does not reflect a great deal of treatment of the book of Acts.

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12These are focused upon the prominence of certain exegetical approaches: Tendenzkritik, Quellenkritik, Formgeschichte and Redaktionsgeschichte. Ibid., 4.


Some nineteen authors treated in either homilies or commentaries this New Testament book. The Reformation era brought new focus on studying Acts and numerous publications emerged during this time. Calvin’s commentaries on Acts stand among the more lasting contributions from this time. But other names should not be overlooked such as Erasmus, Hugo Grotius, John Lightfoot, J. A. Bengel, and William Paley. Certain Catholic exegetes contributed much: Joachim Camerarius, Arretius, Joh. Lorinus, and Caspar Sanctius (Sanchez Gaspar).

The critical era begins with the emphasis of the F.C. Baur Tübingen school in the so-called Tendenzkritik methodology. The older tendency to view Acts as a history of all the apostles for all the church began to weaken as exegetes sensed the very fragmentary nature of Luke’s presentation of history which focused in reality mainly on Peter and Paul. Why did Luke write this way? This question of intentionality began to be probed and generally turned one of two directions: either Luke was unwilling to include more (very pivotal to the Lukan purpose issue) or he was unable to write more (central to the question of sources).

The Lukan selectivity prompted many to contend for various views of purpose, the identification of which was assumed as essential for correct interpretation of the text. The most influential position was the dialectical understanding advocated by F. C. Baur. The resolution (synthesis) of the Jewish (thesis)/Gentile (antithesis) Christian conflict of the apostolic era is to be found in Luke’s effort to bring back together these two feuding parties in early Christianity through demonstrating the basic unity between them by his account in Acts. This position generated enough discussion and debate to last well over a century -- and still is a source of occasional debate!

The rival position focused on the question of sources as the way to account for the selectivity in Acts: it was predicated on the incompleteness of his sources. Numerous names surface here in regard to a variety of postulations about the extent and the trustworthiness of the Lukan sources: B. L. Königsmann, J. G. Eichhorn, Friedrich Schleiermacher, E. Schwanbeck [first phase]; Bernhard Weiss, Paul Feine, Friedrich Spitta [high point]; C. Clemen, Adolf Hilgenfeld. Friedrich Blass’ later revision in Rome thesis, thus creating a later ‘Eastern text’ found adherents in Theodor Zahn and Eberhard Nestle with modifications. But the final major source critical effort before Dibelius in the twentieth century was that of Harnack.

British conservative reaction to these early critical approaches includes such names as Henry Alford, W. J. Conybeare, Samuel Davidson, J. B. Lightfoot, F. W. Farrar, Sir John Hawkins, Richard J. Knowling (EGT volume on Acts) and Sir William Ramsay. Of all these individuals Lightfoot ranks as the major critic and influence on British scholarship, though Ramsay’s mark was deep and pervasive.

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed numerous directions and influences in Acts research. Critical approaches generally come under the Formgeschichte method refined primarily by Martin Dibelius in regard to Acts. He begin

23Gasque, History, 7.

24Gasque, History, 8, counts 187 listings from Mattills’ Bibliography. Bieder, Historie, 11-17, discusses many of the major works during the Reformationszeit including both Protestant and Catholic.

25Gasque, History, 8-20, surveys the Protestant side mainly. Bieder, Historie, 11-17, corrects this imbalance by calling attention to the Catholic contribution, as well as that coming from the circles of Zwingli.


28Gasque, History, 107-35.

publishing individual articles related to Acts in 1923, after his epoch making work on the Synoptic Gospels begun in 1919. These articles were collected and first published together in 1953 after his untimely death in 1947. Dibelius found in Acts only a large “Itinerar” comprising Acts 13.1-14.28; 15.35-21.16 as a single source from which Luke drew. Most of Acts is made up of “in sich geschlossener Einzelgeschichten” which he frequently labeled “Legenden” in association with the same label for the gospel material he earlier had isolated. The pure Lukan insertions into the narrative are the so-called summaries, Lukan reworkings and expansions of some Legenden, Lukan links of various kinds between the sources and the speeches which Luke himself composed.

The issue of historicity which had preoccupied the earlier source critical concerns now had to be determined source by source, rather than by fiat. For him the Itinerar came out much more favorably than did the numerous smaller units. The Lukan composition of the speeches—assumed to have Stoic philosophical presuppositions—became the basis for detecting the theological/historical aim of the author. This was the demonstration of the repeated proclamation of the Kerygma in the early church as the basis of its life and spiritual existence. Luke, in Acts especially, became the Evangelist, much more than just a historian. Thus Dibelius’ work set the agenda for much of critical scholarship on Acts from the fifties on. It remained for Ernst Haenchen to implement fully Dibelius’ methodology in a systematic treatment of the text of Acts in 1959.

During the same era as Dibelius, an entirely different stream of Acts research and writing was taking place in Great Britain and in America. The fountain head of this direction in America was established in the five volume treatment of Acts by F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake which first began to appear in 1920. Growing out of his work in this series were the subsequent contributions of H. J. Cadbury, The Making of Luke-Acts (1927) and The Book of Acts in History (1955). Interestingly, Haenchen observes concerning Cadbury’s later work: “The connections of Acts with all the elements of its time have probably never been so illuminatingly and convincingly presented as here, through the medium of Cadbury’s sovereign command of the primary and secondary literature involved.” Also significant to this era was the work of B. S. Easton, The Purpose of Acts (1936). Easton “argues for a dual purpose for Acts, corresponding to two types of readers which the author has in mind. Luke was concerned to edify his fellow Christians, on the one hand, and to offer a defense of Christianity to Theophilus, ‘a Roman official of some standing’ who was ‘not a Christian’, and hence (presumably) to other cultured non-Christians.” The purely British stream continued to flow in the historically oriented stream as pioneered by Lightfoot and

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30For an essentially positive assessment of Dibelius see Haenchen, Acts, 34-37; for a highly critical one, Gasque, History, 201-250. The term Formgeschichte is a bit misleading, although a commonly applied label to Dibelius’ work. His own term was Stilkritik.


32’travel-journal’

33Dibelius, Aufsätze, 17-28.


36F. J. Foakes Jackson, and K. Lake, eds., The Beginnings of Christianity, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1920-23). Vols. 1 & 2 are background issues such as authorship etc. which gather up the full gammet of scholarly opinion prior to 1920. Vol. 3 is a treatment of textual critical concerns; Vol. 4 the commentary proper on the text; and Vol. 5 contains a series of excurses relating to exegetical issues raised in the commentary. Numerous scholars in America, Great Britain and on the European Continent contributed articles.

37Haenchen, Acts, 43-44.

38Gasque, History, 194.
Ramsay. One particularly vigorous writer in this British tradition was W. L. Knox of Cambridge between 1925 and 1948.

Current Trends

The period from the fifties to the present is intended by this designation. The comment of François Bovon suggests the reason for marking off the fifties as the beginning of a new era: “The early 1950s marked a turning point in Lucan research, beginning with the works of J. Dupont and P. Vielhauer, followed closely by the first redactional study of a gospel, that of H. Conzelmann (1954), and by E. Haenchen’s commentary on the Acts of the Apostles.”

The goal is to survey that new direction in regard to research on Acts.

The central work which has generated extensive response was the commentary by Haenchen in the Meyer’s series, although the earlier work of Philipp Vielhauer sparked a lot of reaction. Vielhauer contended that the Lukan picture of Paul in Acts stands at odds with the Pauline primary sources at almost every major point. Hans Conzelmann picked up on this as a part of his work on the Gospel in Die Mitte der Zeit. Haenchen, however, moderates this more extreme position:

“No, the real subject of Acts is the άποστολή τοῦ θεοῦ and its growth. It is certainly proclaimed by men and authenticated by God through signs and miracles. This theology is no steep tumble from the Pauline heights--for on those heights Luke never stood. His teaching is one of the many variants of Gentile Christian theology which--more or less independent of the great Apostle to the gentiles--grew up alongside and after the theology of Paul.”

In the application of Dibelius’ methods to Acts, Haenchen differed from him in several points. For example, Haenchen found “extraordinarily little evidence that Luke used sources for his work; he exercised his creative genius upon minimal historical materials.” Such brought an objection from Rudolf Bultmann which in turn generated a response from Haenchen. For Haenchen Acts is an Ergauungsbuch, a writing for the edification of the church of the author’s day. The theological perception of Acts is similar to that of Conzelmann.

39The above listed men often were of British birth, although their writings appeared while teaching in American schools.

40Ibid., 250-66; Haechen, Acts, 37-38, 41-44.

41St. Paul and the Church of Jerusalem (1925); St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles (1939); Some Hellenistic Elements in Primitive Christianity (1944); The Acts of the Apostles (1948).


44Haenchen, Acts, 49.


Closely connected to Haenchen’s work was the commentary on Acts first released in 1963 by Hans Conzelmann. Marshall characterizes it as follows:

The commentary is terse and factual, strong on philological details and religionsgeschichtliche parallels, and it does little to bring out the theological message of Acts. The author’s radical historical skepticism often appears highly arbitrary, since he had not space to present evidence for his conclusion.

Conzelmann’s presuppositions in the earlier work are carried out in Acts: “Sein eigentliches Profil gewinnt dieser Kommentar jedoch durch die klar herausgearbeitete Theologie des Lukas.”

More conservative reactions to both these works may be found in a variety of circles. In Germany the 1963 work on Acts by G. Stählin in the Das Neue Testament Deutsch series presupposes a much higher level of historical reliability. Pre-dating these and in dialogue with Dibelius, but still affirming the more conservative position is the work of F. F. Bruce in the New International Commentary on Acts. A revised, updated edition of this commentary appeared in 1988 whereby Prof. Bruce attempts to interact with the scholarly production subsequent to his first release. Also in the same vein is the work of J. Dupont and the work of Etienne Trocmé. The commentary by R. P. C. Hanson in The New Clarendon Bible in 1967 also adopts a more conservative stance about the historical value of Acts, as did the earlier work by C. S. C. Williams in Black’s New Testament Commentaries.

The situation with commentary level work on Acts from the late 70’s into the early 80’s is largely focused in Germany on the works of Schneider, Weiser, Roloff, and Schmithals. Additionally, the earlier works of Haenchen and Conzel-

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49 Marshall, “Recent Study,” 293.
53 See bibliographical listing for him in section 2 of bibliography for several publications. For summation of his work see Gasque, History, 297-98.
55 Haenchen’s pointed critique about Williams’ work is “Since Williams simply fails to see many of the historical and literary problems, they do not disturb him and he has no occasion to avail himself of Dibelius’ ideas” [Acts, 43]. For survey of additional commentaries on Acts post Haenchen see Gräßer, “Acta-Forschung,” 41:159-62.
56 Gerhard Schneider, Die Apostelgeschichte, vols. 5.1 & 5.2 of Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 1980, 1982).
mann have undergone successive revisions. Of the new works the massive two volume treatment by Gerhard Schneider representing a more conservative German Catholic perspective is the most significant: “Ein Werk von beinahe monumentalem Ausmaß stellt Schneiders Kommentar dar.” In American evangelical circles one commentary conversant with critical scholarship is that in 1981 by Richard Longenecker in the Expositor’s Bible Commentary series. Of lesser value because of the non-technical orientation of the series is the 1985 release on Acts in the Harper’s Good News Commentary series by David J. Williams.

Most of the recent work on Acts—and there has been “der immer breiter fließende Strom” to use Plümacher’s term—has been in the form of articles either in journals or Festschrifts dealing with individual topics. These usually fall into the following categories: questions about the text of Acts, especially the Western text; the sources used by Luke in writing Acts; the literary composition of Acts, especially the speeches; and Acts as history and theology.

The summation of the matter is unfortunately well put by Smith:

“Most work on Acts appears to fall into one of two schools of thought: one of these, which may be called conservative, emphasizes Luke’s reliability as an historian, and the other, following form and redaction critical approaches is less tied to questions of historical accuracy. In each case, there is a tendency for scholars to trace the inheritance of their ideas through a particular line of research, frequently associated with the professors under whom they studied.”

More than ever there needs to come about some crossing of the bridges so as to facilitate more dialogue. To be sure this has increasingly become the case in the last decade or so, but there is yet great need for more of it to take place. From the evangelical side, the highly polemical tone characterizing Gasque’s work is out of place and a barrier to this needed dialogue. The work of Longenecker and others in the British and American scenes represents a much more positive, fruitful approach. More awareness of the German scholars of the alternative views is encouraging also.

59Walter Schmithals, Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas. vol. 3.2 of Zürcher Bibelkommentare (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1982.)
66Smith, Review, 64. For detailed summation see 64-71.
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Gräßer, Erich. “Acta-Forschung seit 1960.” *Theologische Rundschau* 41 (1976): 141-94. (A most important assessment of publications and trends in Acts research for the 1960’s and 70’s; the work of Plümacher listed below continues the assessment into the early 80’s; the earlier work of Baur and Bousset deal with prior years in this series.)


__________________. “Quellen für die Geschichte des Urchristentums.” *Theologische Rundschau* 17 (1948/49): 3-50, 103-42.


Studies


Commentaries


67Only a very select listing is given here. For full listing see Mattill, A Classified Bibliography of Literature on the Acts of the Apostles, Section II: “General Studies” containing mostly commentaries (reference listings 64-1181).

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Schneider, Gerhard.  *Die Apostelgeschichte*.  Vols. 5.1 & 5.2 in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*.  Freiburg: Herder, 1980, 1982.  (Excellent commentary; also very important bibliography, pp. 11-52.)


