

COMMENTING ON COMMENTARIES ON ACTS

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In preparation for a thorough study of the Book of Acts, it is worthwhile to take stock of the resources available. For a book which is as pivotal as Acts to our practice of NT Christianity, it is deplorable that there are so few really exceptional commentaries available. Hopefully, this situation is beginning to improve. There are two new books which have just been completed on Acts. The first, by J. Stott (InterVarsity, 1990) is already available. It is written primarily in narrative form and deals with the material by paragraph rather than verse by verse. The second, which will be out in December, is by S. Kistemaker in the New Testament Commentary (Baker, 1990). We look forward to this one because of the thorough approach and careful scholarship. E. Ellis calls it a "'meat and potatoes' book with solid exposition."

Perhaps the best two commentaries available on Acts are those by F. F. Bruce (Eerdmans, 1954) and I. H. Marshall (Tyndale, 1980). Bruce in fact, has two commentaries on Acts: one for the student of Greek and one for the English reader (NIC). The NIC volume is now available in a newly revised edition (Eerdmans, 1989). This work is valuable not only because of its solid exposition and theological insight, but because of its attention to historical details which are helpful to the

Similarly, Marshall's commentary is helpful for the same reasons. is part of the Tyndale New Testament Commentary series and E. M. Blaiklock's work in that series, which was too brief to justice to a lengthy book such as Acts.

Other current works which are worthy of note include E. F. Harrison (*Acts: The Expanding Church*). This work has an especially good introduction to Acts which would be appropriate for an intermediate student of this subject. This commentary, however, deals with

the material by paragraphs, and lacks something in detail as a result. If one desires a more in-depth treatment of Acts, another good work is that by R. N. Longenecker, in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1981). Longenecker uses a verse by verse approach and stops to discuss the theological interpretations of controversial passages such as Acts 2:38. Also included in each section and set apart for easy reference are notes on the Greek text.

Older works which one should obtain if the opportunity arises include R. B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Baker, 1978; reprint of the 1901 edition). This is considered by many to be a classic on Acts, and was called by W. Smith the greatest of all the commentaries on Acts (in *Profitable Bible Study*). This work includes an extensive introduction, including articles on the theology of Acts, and a verse by verse commentary. Another classic work on Acts is the five volume study by F. J. Foakes-Jackson and K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity* (Baker, 1979 repr). This may include more than many want to know about the subject; for instance, volumes 1 and 2 deal only with prolegomena such as background studies and critical matters, and volume 3 deals only with the problem of the text of Acts. Volume 4 contains a full commentary, and the final volume has additional notes and studies relating to the interpretation of Acts, such as roman law, chronology, and titles of Jesus.

If one is looking for a homiletical work on Acts, the best one available is W. H. Griffith Thomas' *Outline Studies in Acts* (Eerdmans, 1956). This volume contains 133 outlines with brief comments on the text interspersed. A brief commentary for Sunday school teachers or other such use is *Acts*, in *The Bible Study Commentary*, by C. Vaughan. Although it is concise, Vaughan gets right to the point and has many insightful observations.

When it comes to works that comment on the Greek text, it is hard to improve on the older works by R. J. Knowling (*Expositor's Greek Testament*) and A. T. Robertson, who has an entire volume devoted to Acts in his *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*. A more recent work of this type is that of F. F. Bruce (*The Acts of the Apostles*, 1951). Do not confuse this volume with the commentary on the English text in the NIC.

One other category which should be included are works dealing primarily with critical issues. While there are many works which deal with critical issues, there is one which definitely deserves attention. It is the work by W. Gasque (*A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles*). This work is a valuable contribution on the history of interpretation. It focuses primarily on the 19th and 20th centuries, and provides information on the scholars involved as well as the material discussed in the Book of Acts.

While none of us need consult all of the works mentioned in order to prepare to teach Acts, it is hoped that this will help guide one to the books that will be most beneficial. Acts is a pivotal work which relates to us the early days of the church, and its development and spread throughout the Roman Empire. Let us ask God to give us the faith and zeal that those early believers had, and give us insight into ways we can apply the same principles they used to spread the faith of Jesus the Christ to all the world.

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