

Acts as Biblical History?

Steve Walton

St Mary's University, Twickenham (London)

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Setting the scene

- “History is the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past.”

J. Huizinga, ‘A Definition of the Concept of History’ in *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer* ed. Raymond Klibansky & H. J. Paton (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936), 9

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Setting the scene

- “History is the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past.”
 - an intellectual exercise
 - a corporate exercise
 - part of a group’s self-consciousness
 - an interpretation of the past

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Acts and Jewish historiography

- Brian S. Rosner. “Acts and Biblical History.” Pages 65-82 in *The Book of Acts in its Ancient Literary Setting*. Edited by Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke. BAFCS 1. Carlisle/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Eerdmans, 1993.
- Daniel Marguerat. *The First Christian Historian: Writing the “Acts of the Apostles”*. SNTSMS 121. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Loveday Alexander. “Fact, Fiction and the Genre of Acts.” *NTS* 44 (1998): 380-99.

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Acts and Jewish historiography

- 35 citations of Scripture in Acts

“the influence, whether literary or theological, of the OT upon the Lucan writings...is profound and pervasive. It is safe to say that there is no major concept in the two books that does not to some extent reflect the beliefs and theological vocabulary of the OT”

C. K. Barrett. “Luke-Acts,” in *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture*, ed. D.A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 231-44, quoting 231.

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Acts and Jewish historiography

- Darrell Bock—Christology
- F. F. Bruce—portraits of Paul in Acts and letters
- Bart Koet—scriptural interpretation key to (Luke-)Acts
- David Peterson—fulfilment theme
- Robert Brawley—voices of Scripture in (Luke-)Acts
- Kenneth Litwak—Scripture as framing Luke-Acts
- Yuzuru Miura—David in Luke-Acts
- Rick Strelan—Luke’s “authoritative” interpretation of Scripture
- David Pao—appropriation of Isaiah
- Peter Mallen—appropriation of Isaiah’s “story”
- Scott Shauf—historiography

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Identifying the issue(s)

- How far is Acts’ approach to historiography Jewish rather than Graeco-Roman?
- How far is the overall story of Acts written in continuity with the people of God in Jewish Scripture?

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Considering key evidence

- Luke as a writer with a personal commitment to his topic
- Lucian, *How to Write History*
first and foremost, let [an historian] be *a man of independent spirit*, with nothing to fear or hope from anybody; else he will be a corrupt judge open to undue influences. (38, my italics)

There stands my model, then: fearless, incorruptible, independent, a believer in frankness and veracity; one that will call a spade a spade, make no concession to likes and dislikes, nor spare any man for pity or respect or propriety; *an impartial judge*, kind to all, but too kind to none; a literary cosmopolite with neither suzerain nor king, never heeding what this or that man may think, but setting down the thing that befell. (41, my italics)

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Considering key evidence

- Luke as a writer with a personal commitment to his topic
 - limited use of authorial voice I:I + “we” passages
 - implied author presenting himself as participant
- “Luke does not have a historian’s intellectual autonomy; his reading of history is a believer’s reading.” Daniel Marguerat

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Considering key evidence

- Luke as a writer with a personal commitment to his topic
- the focus of the history
 - Greek history primarily political and military
 - πράξεις e.g. Arrian, *Anabasis*; Josephus, *Jewish War*
 - biblical history focuses on a small people
 - Acts presupposes and recapitulates the history of Israel 7:2-53; 13:17-25

Luke did not think of Christianity as “an integral part of the world” but saw the story of Acts as “the final part of the history of the people of God of Israel” Jacob Jervell

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Considering key evidence

- Luke as a writer with a personal commitment to his topic
 - the focus of the history
 - the reading of Scripture
 - language and syntax, esp. chs 1–15
 - storytelling techniques
- “then X slept with his ancestors and was buried with his ancestors + location, and Y succeeded him as king”
in 1–2 Kings; cf. Acts summaries

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Considering key evidence

- Luke as a writer with a personal commitment to his topic
- the focus of the history
- the reading of Scripture
 - language and syntax, esp. chs 1–15
 - storytelling techniques
 - speeches of major characters to sum up a section or transition to next, e.g. 4:24-30

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Considering key evidence

- Luke as a writer with a personal commitment to his topic
- the focus of the history
- the reading of Scripture
 - language and syntax, esp. chs 1–15
 - storytelling techniques
 - writing narrative through major characters

“the account of history to be found in the Old Testament and Judaism, which to a large degree are composed of ‘biographical’ sections...One common feature of most of these biographical complexes of Old Testament and Jewish tradition is that they are composed of individual narratives which contain particular striking scenes or anecdotes.” Martin Hengel

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Considering key evidence

- Luke as a writer with a personal commitment to his topic
- the focus of the history
- the reading of Scripture
 - language and syntax, esp. chs 1–15
 - storytelling techniques
 - biblical themes

“Jerusalem provides a bridge between Israel and the church, and thus a link between what a later generation of Christians were to refer to as the Old Testament and the New” W.Ward Gasque

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Considering key evidence

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- the focus of the history
- the reading of Scripture
 - language and syntax, esp. chs 1–15
 - storytelling techniques
 - biblical themes
 - biblical models?
 - Paul’s conversion/call
 - choice of seven Acts 6
// appointing judges Exod 18; Deut 1

15

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- the focus of the history
- the reading of Scripture
 - language and syntax, esp. chs 1–15
 - storytelling techniques
 - biblical themes
 - biblical models?

“the present is encouraged to become part of biblical history...by describing current events, from as it were, the Bible’s perspective” James L, Kugel

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Considering key evidence

- Luke as a writer with a personal commitment to his topic
- the focus of the history
- the reading of Scripture
 - language and syntax, esp. chs 1–15
 - storytelling techniques
 - biblical themes
 - biblical models?
 - a biblical understanding of history
 - God's control of human history

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“The idea of a personal and sovereign God who purposes to fulfil his covenant promises for his people and metes out punishment for moral failure (common to the Old Testament and Acts) is to be distinguished from that of fate in Greek historiography where judgement is more capricious and individualistic.”

Brian Rosner

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Brian Rosner

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God's control of human history

- the plan (βουλή) of God
- the will (θέλημα) of God
- “it is necessary” (δεῖ) 22x in Acts
- key verbs
 - ὀρίζω “appoint in advance” 2:23; 10:42; 17:31
 - προορίζω “predestine” 4:28
 - προοράω “foresee” 2:31

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God's control of human history

- the plan (βουλή) of God
- the will (θέλημα) of God
- “it is necessary” (δεῖ) 22x in Acts
- key verbs
- key events narrated as the action of God
 - pouring out of Spirit chs 2, 8, 10 (note 10:47; 11:17; 15:8)
 - missionary movements 16:6-7
 - angelic direction 5:19; 8:26; 10:30; 12:7-10, 23; 27:23

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God's control of human history

- the plan of God
- the will of God
- “it is necessary” 22x in Acts
- key verbs
- key events narrated as the action of God
- theme of fulfilment

“Our author conceived of his work as the *continuation* of the LXX. His deliberate composition in Septuagintal Greek and the conviction that his story was the fulfillment of the promises of the OT imply that as a continuation, Luke-Acts represents *sacred narrative*.” Gregory Sterling (his italics)

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Greek historiography

- caution about “supernatural” phenomena: “it was told”
 - Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.48.4; 2.20.3; 2.74.5
 - Pliny *Hist. Nat.* 9.18
 - Josephus’ critique of miracles
Ant. 3:25, 32; 4:45-53; 8:349; 10:260-63
- chance or fate, rather than a directly intervening G/god
- aimed at moral or political education

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Conclusion

- Luke at the crossroads of Jewish and Greek historiography
 - confessional history vs “objectivity”
 - quest for human causes vs divine causes
 - Acts closer to Jewish than Greek historiography
- Is Jervell right?

Luke “obviously has the idea that he is contributing to the Scriptures”

 - (Luke-)Acts as a continuation of the story of Scripture
 - Luke-Acts as “the first New Testament”? (C. K. Barrett)

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