

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

in giving his readers an entirely satisfactory appreciation of the baffling personality of the great prophet of Arabia. His loyalty and treachery, abstinence and debauchery, wisdom and ignorance, mediocrity and inspiration, demand the pen of a Boswell." Yet it is clear that he was no worker of miracles. He himself declared that he was not sent by God to work miracles. So later traditions set to work to furnish him with some, lest he should seem inferior to the Christians' Jesus. And they borrowed from the New Testament, for example, from the story of the feeding of the five thousand. Also words of Jesus were transferred to Muhammad. In the traditions, as Mr. Guillaume observes, "the fallible human figure of Muhammad has faded into oblivion," and colours of a semi-divine character have been infused into the picture, drawn largely from the New Testament account of Jesus.

#### *THE TEN BEST BOOKS ON THE APOSTOLIC AGE.*

IN responding to the Editor's request for a list of the Ten Best Books on the Apostolic Age, it is desirable to define the class of readers for which such a list is most suitable. It is obviously not designed for Professors of Theology, who will seek to acquaint themselves with all, or at least most, of the literature relevant to the subjects on which they lecture; nor can it have in view persons who, though not Professors, yet are deeply interested in theology and at the same time possess such means and leisure as allow them to pursue the study of it without restriction of any kind. The readers whose needs it is hoped to serve are those whose library must for various reasons be circumscribed in extent, and who wish for guidance in selecting just those books which are likely to be most helpful. And, since time as well as money may be a consideration of importance, it will be expedient to limit the proposed list almost exclusively

to books that are written in, or have been translated into, English.<sup>1</sup>

At the first glance, the Apostolic Age appears to be a comparatively simple period for study, not, of course, through any absence of complexity (for it is many-sided), but because there is only a single narrative of it, since the *Acts of the Apostles* is the solitary continuous account, of first century origin, which we have of the history of the Christian Church for the thirty years or so that followed the Crucifixion of our Lord. Though a very cursory perusal of it shows that it leaves obscure much that we should like to know, yet, so far as it goes, it seems on the surface to deserve confidence. It is traditionally attributed to Luke, who was a companion and fellow-traveller of Paul and cannot but have come in contact with many other individuals who were prominent in the diffusion of Christianity. Its writer was most deeply interested in the events which he recounts; so that he is not likely to have neglected his opportunities of obtaining information about them. And since tradition also connects Luke's name with the authorship of the Third Gospel, the writer of which claims to have traced accurately from the first the course of the history included in it, there is raised a strong presumption that the continuation of that history in *Acts* has been compiled in the same careful and conscientious spirit.

In point of fact, however, the ascertainment of the facts of the Apostolic Age is an extremely difficult one. For although *Acts* is a work skilfully planned and graphically written, and although it exhibits in numerous passages accurate knowledge of the scenes and conditions of the

<sup>1</sup> Amongst French and German commentaries on *Acts* may be mentioned Loisy, *Les Actes des Apôtres*, and the works of Holtzmann (in the *Hand-commentar zum N.T.*), and of Preuschen (in the *Handbuch zum N.T.*, edited by Lietzmann).

occurrences recorded, it is not really the sole source of information to which we have access. Sidelights upon the history of the time covered by it are thrown by Paul's Epistles, for though these are hortatory, argumentative, or didactic, and not narrative, in character, there are plentiful allusions to the experiences of the Apostle who is more conspicuous than any other figure in the latter half of *Acts*. And these references in several instances are not easily reconcilable with the account in *Acts*, so that we soon become sensible that a history of the Apostolic Age has to be extracted from data which are in some measure conflicting. And inasmuch as any collision between what is stated in *Acts* and what is said by, or may be inferred from, Paul (who for the incidents he relates, or alludes to, is a first-hand authority) cannot fail to affect our estimate of the value of *Acts* for the period of the Apostle's ministry, it is bound also to disturb our confidence in the book for the earlier period for which it is our only authority. And doubts being once started, we are driven to investigate the question of authorship, for Luke's name nowhere occurs in the book, and the nature of some of the discrepancies between *Acts* and the Pauline Epistles are surprising, if the former is really the product of an intimate friend of Paul. And then there is the interesting subject of the text. For whereas in the New Testament books generally the number of variants occurring among the oldest and most trustworthy MSS. is comparatively small, in *Acts* the divergences between the Codex Bezae and the residue of our codices is so considerable that the idea has occurred to more than one scholar that Luke wrote two drafts of his second work, both of which have been preserved. For dealing with the problems thus classified the works most likely to be found useful may be conveniently considered in the reverse order.

The Textual problem relates to the origin and comparative value of the remarkable additions which the Bezan MS. supplies to the text of *Acts* as presented by the large majority of manuscripts, coupled with the absence from the former of a certain number of words and clauses found in the latter. One view is that the Bezan codex preserves *Acts* in the form in which its author first wrote it, whilst the residue of early MSS. have it in a revised and more concise shape, produced by the omission of expressions which the writer came to deem superfluous. The two hypothetical drafts are given in Blass's *Acta Apostolorum* (with Latin notes), 1895, the supposed first draft being distinguished as the  $\beta$  text, whilst the second is styled the  $\alpha$  text. (The symbol  $\beta$ , of course, is here used with a different significance from that which it has in the textual criticism of the New Testament in general, where it denotes what Westcott and Hort call the Neutral Text, represented chiefly by the Vatican MS.) A very useful translation of the Bezan text, with its peculiarities indicated by leaded type, has been supplied recently by Canon J. M. Wilson (*The Acts of the Apostles translated from the Codex Bezae with an Introduction on its Lucan origin and importance*, 1923). A different view of this text is taken by Dr. Rendel Harris, who has offered an explanation of some of its features in *A Study of Codex Bezae* (Cambridge Texts and Studies).

The importance of the Textual question, however, is altogether dwarfed by that of the Historical problem occasioned by the discrepancies between *Acts* and the Pauline Epistles—discrepancies which culminate in the account they respectively give of the controversy concerning the relations of Gentile Christians to the Jewish ceremonial law. Various difficulties attaching to the narrative of *Acts*, when it is brought into comparison with the Pauline Epistles, were pointed out about seventy years ago by Zeller in a work

entitled *The Contents and Origin of the Acts of the Apostles*, 1854 (English Translation, 1875); but the most important books in English at the present time in this connexion are *The Early Epistles of St. Paul*, by Kirsopp Lake, and *The Beginnings of Christianity*, edited by F. J. Foakes-Jackson and K. Lake. The first of these is more immediately concerned with the Epistles of Paul to Thessalonica, Corinth, Galatia and Rome; but it includes discussions of several narratives in *Acts*. There is a valuable chapter on the Judaistic controversy and the text of the Apostolic Decree (in *Acts* xv.); whilst Paul's comments upon Glossolalia (in *1 Cor.* xiv.) are used to elucidate what happened at Pentecost (as recounted in *Acts* ii.). The second of the two works named above is not yet complete, the two volumes already published consisting of a series of essays by various authors, which are preliminary to a commentary upon *Acts*. The editors have contributed to the promotion of theological learning none the less because, as they say, they have been more anxious to state problems than to advance theories. Among the illuminating sections of vol. i. is one on Primitive Christianity, to which reference is made below; whilst in vol. ii. there are valuable discussions concerning the methods of early historians, and the difference in worth between the earlier and later parts of *Acts*, as well as other essays which must be mentioned later. A work of a more conservative character, which should be read by the side of these volumes, is Chase's *The Credibility of Acts*, for it is expedient that the subject should be presented from more than one standpoint.

The historical value of *Acts* depends upon a good many factors, one being the accuracy of the tradition which declares Luke to be the author, and a second (if the truth of the tradition be conceded) being the date at which the book was composed. On the first there is an exhaustive

argument in vol. ii. of *The Beginnings of Christianity*, the traditional view being defended by the late C. W. Emmet, whilst Luke's responsibility for *Acts* is denied by H. Windisch. Two important books, also relating to the authorship and date of *Acts*, are Harnack's *Luke the Physician*, and *The Date of Acts and the Synoptic Gospels*, 1911. On the linguistic relations between the Third Gospel and *Acts* reference should be made to Hawkins' *Horæ Synopticæ*, of which, originally published in 1899, there is a second edition. Formerly, as evidence that *St. Luke* and *Acts* were written by a physician (see *Col.* iv. 14), great stress was laid upon the occurrence, in these two works, of distinctive medical terms, the subject being treated by Hobart, *The Medical Language of St. Luke*. But recently this argument has been much shaken by Cadbury, *The Style and Literary Method of Luke*, who has shown that a number of the medical terms collected by Hobart are also found in non-medical works like the *LXX.* and the writings of Josephus. And it ought to be remembered that the determination of the question of the authorship of *Acts* in favour of Luke is not at once decisive for the historical value of the whole book. If Luke wrote it, we can of course place more confidence in the account of scenes at which he was himself present (the *we* passages<sup>1</sup> being assumed to come from his own diary) than would be possible if the book were the production of an entirely unknown author. But even an eye-witness can draw mistaken inferences from what he sees ; and as it is certain that Luke was not present at all the occasions that he reports, he must have been dependent upon other persons for information respecting many matters ; and the value of his accounts of such will rest partly upon the quality of the evidence available

<sup>1</sup> These are *xvi.* 10-17, *xx.* 5-16, *xxi.* 1-18, *xxvii.* 1-xxviii. 16. The Bezan MS. has a fifth (placed after *xi.* 27).

and partly upon his competence to sift and appraise it.

The volumes just surveyed are of the nature of *prolegomena* to the history of the primitive Church; and from them transition may be appropriately made to books professing to relate that history. Nevertheless, the historian cannot, even after embarking upon the actual course of his narrative, relieve himself of the duty of incidental criticism where the character of the original sources which he is using challenges it. And to this duty two historians of the Apostolic Age show themselves fully alive—Weizsäcker and McGiffert. The first, indeed, is not only critical but hypercritical, and seems more concerned to reject the representations of the writer of *Acts* than to replace them by more plausible explanations; so that if the reader whom he has rendered suspicious of what is reported in *Acts* desires a reconstruction (so far as is possible) of the real succession of events, he sometimes has to undertake it himself. McGiffert, in this respect, is much more satisfactory than the German writer. His conclusions will not always carry conviction; his chronology is inferior to that of C. H. Turner (in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*); and his narrative is rather heavy and unattractive in style. Nevertheless, his work is a most useful one; and is, on the whole, the best of its kind with which the present writer is acquainted. Two others of more limited extent may also be mentioned. One is by J. V. Bartlet. This contains little criticism, but it supplies some account not only of various epistles comprised within the New Testament canon, but also of a few writings outside it, such as the *Didache* and the *Epistle of Barnabas*. The second is by J. H. Ropes, which, though too deficient in detail to suffice a student's needs, yet gives, in brief, a good idea of the circumstances conditioning the activity of the early Church, and of the principal stages in its development.



When a student, after the historical sources have been adequately examined and valued, and the sequence and true nature of the events recorded have been ascertained, wishes to realise in some degree the movement and colour of many of the scenes described, he will derive the greatest help from Ramsay's *St. Paul the Traveller*. Sir William Ramsay, who holds firmly that Luke wrote *Acts*, has an extremely high opinion of him as an historian, and believes that the narrative which he composed, and Paul's incidental references in his letters to many of the occurrences that figure in it, cannot but be substantially in agreement, though they may differ in particulars owing to the distinct aims of the two writers. Whether Ramsay's high estimate of Luke as an historical authority is justified or not, he is eminently qualified by his own experiences of travel in Asia Minor and elsewhere to be an illuminating commentator upon Luke's account of the Apostles' missionary journeys; and the liveliness of his book arrests and holds the reader.

The theological development that took place during the Apostolic Age scarcely comes within the scope of the present paper. Nevertheless, though this is not the occasion for an enumeration of works on the subject, it will impart a certain compass and roundness to the list which is here being compiled if one or two are named. There is an extensive section in the aforementioned book, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. i., where there is traced the divergence of early Christian thought in Jewish and Gentile circles, illustrated by the beliefs reached respecting the Spirit, the Church, and Baptism; and it is concluded by a suggestive chapter on Christology. A thin volume, written by one of the editors of the last named work and entitled *Landmarks in Early Church History*, 1920, throws into relief certain turning-points in the evolution of Christian theology. But a very serious defect in Lake's estimate of the factors that

moulded the conviction entertained by the Apostles about their Lord is the little influence which he attributes to the Personality of Jesus. It is impossible to suppose that their thoughts about Him as Messiah and Saviour could have survived the terrible inference to which His ignominious death pointed (*Deut. xxi. 23*), had not His Personality during their intercourse with Him produced a profound impression upon them, and prepared them to trust subsequently the Resurrection visions. In connexion with the Christological beliefs of the primitive Church two useful books are A. H. McNeile's *New Testament Teaching in the Light of St. Paul's*, and H. A. A. Kennedy's *The Theology of the Epistles*.

As has already been said, dependence has to be placed upon the book of *Acts* alone for a continuous narrative of the period under consideration; and so the choice of a commentary becomes urgent. A commentary in which the historical worth of the varied contents of *Acts* is examined in a dispassionate and perfectly candid spirit has still to be written; and it may be hoped that the next volumes of *The Beginnings of Christianity* will supply the need. Meanwhile students can have recourse to R. J. Knowling's notes on the Greek text in the "Expositor's Greek Testament," and R. B. Rackham's on the Revised Version in the series of "Westminster Commentaries." There is also a conveniently handy volume in the "Century Bible," by J. V. Bartlet; whilst the edition of the Greek text by T. E. Page is very scholarly. In the use of these it is expedient not to lose sight of considerations that are brought to the front in some of the more critical works previously mentioned.

Of the books noticed above, the following may be selected as the Ten Best for the class of readers described:—

- (1) Blass's *Acta Apostolorum*.

- (2) Lake's, *The Early Epistles of St. Paul.*
- (3) Foakes-Jackson's and Lake's *The Beginnings of Christianity*, Part I., vols. i. and ii.
- (4) Weizsäcker's *The Apostolic Age.*
- (5) McGiffert's *The Apostolic Age.*
- (6) Chase's *The Credibility of Acts.*
- (7) Ramsay's *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen.*
- (8) Harnack's *Date of the Acts and the Synoptic Gospels.*
- (9) McNeile's *New Testament Teaching in the Light of St. Paul's.*
- (10) Knowling's or Rackham's *The Acts of the Apostles* (in the "Expositor's Greek Testament," vol. ii., and the "Westminster Commentaries" respectively).

G. W. WADE.

### BIBLE AND KOR'AN.

Oh! East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,

Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great judgment seat.  
(Rudyard Kipling, *Ballad of East and West.*)

THIS couplet is an epigram, and it is as true as many other epigrams. That is to say, it is only half-true. This vivid distinction between East and West needs serious qualification. The further assumption that the East is all one is false.

"East is East." Not at all. East is sometimes North East and sometimes it is South East. And if we take Syria the land of the Bible for the North East, and Arabia the land of the Kor'an for the South East, we are face to face with a significant contrast. Syria is one of the highways of the world: the land in which from the remotest times the East and the West have met: there East and West