

Dr. Robert Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 19, I. H. Marshall: The Historicity of Acts, Value of Acts Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 19, I. H. Marshall: The Historicity of Acts, Value of Acts, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This text is a transcription of a lecture by Dr. Robert A. Peterson on Howard Marshall's perspective regarding the **historicity of the Book of Acts** and Luke's portrayal of Paul within it. Peterson outlines Marshall's exploration of **historical skepticism** towards Acts, including criticisms from the Tübingen School and later form and redaction critics like Debelius, Haenchen, and Conzelmann. The lecture then discusses **historical background accuracy** in Acts, the **problem of identifying Luke's sources**, the nature of the **speeches in Acts**, and the debated **consistency of Luke's depiction of Paul** with his own letters. Ultimately, Marshall, as presented by Peterson, argues for the **essential reliability of Acts** while acknowledging the complexities and limitations in definitively proving its detailed historicity.

2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 19 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels → Luke).



**Peterson_Theo_LkA
cts_Session19.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 19, I. H. Marshall: The Historicity of Acts, Value of Acts

Briefing Document: The Historicity of Acts and Luke's Portrait of Paul

Main Themes:

This session of the lecture focuses on the historical reliability of the Book of Acts, particularly concerning Luke's portrayal of Paul. It examines various scholarly perspectives, ranging from strong skepticism to affirmations of Luke's essential trustworthiness as a historian. Key themes explored include:

- **The Shifting Landscape of Historical Criticism:** The lecture outlines the historical development of scholarly views on Acts, from the 19th-century Tübingen School's skepticism regarding Peter-Paul conflict to the more recent form and redaction criticism that questions the historical interest and capability of early church writers.
- **Arguments for Historical Skepticism:** These arguments often stem from the perceived theological motivations of Luke, the difficulty in identifying his sources, the nature of the speeches in Acts, and alleged inconsistencies between Luke's depiction of Paul and Paul's own letters.
- **Arguments for the Historical Reliability of Acts:** Counterarguments emphasize Luke's demonstrated accuracy in historical background details (supported by figures like William Ramsey and A.N. Sherwin-White), the reasonable assumption of Luke's faithfulness to sources (drawing parallels with his Gospel), the plausible explanation of the "we" passages as indicating eyewitness material, and the understanding of the speeches as summaries based on tradition rather than purely Lukan inventions.
- **Luke's Theological Motivation and Historical Intent:** The lecture addresses the tension between Luke's theological aims and his claim to be providing a historical account. It suggests that theological motivation does not necessarily preclude historical accuracy, especially when a writer explicitly states their historical purpose.
- **The Nature and Reliability of the Speeches in Acts:** The lecture discusses the debate over whether the speeches in Acts are verbatim accounts, traditional summaries, or largely Lukan compositions. It argues for the view that they are

likely summaries based on the "general sense of what they really said" (quoting Thucydides), drawing on traditional material and adapted to the context.

- **Luke's Portrait of Paul and its Consistency with Paul's Letters:** The lecture addresses the significant point of contention regarding the consistency between Luke's depiction of Paul and the image of Paul presented in his own epistles. It highlights criticisms arguing for inconsistency but also presents counterarguments asserting that the tensions are not substantial enough to dismiss Acts as unhistorical.
- **Authorship, Date, and Place of Composition:** The lecture briefly touches on the traditional authorship of Luke, the companion of Paul, supported by internal "we" passages and external early church tradition. It also discusses the uncertainty surrounding the date and place of composition, leaning towards an earlier date (possibly around AD 70) and acknowledging the unknown location.
- **The Permanent Value of Acts:** Despite historical debates and the changing context of the church, the lecture concludes by emphasizing the enduring value of Acts for its pastoral concern, its focus on mission (evangelism and reaching all people without discrimination), its highlighting of the role of the Spirit, and its overarching message of God's sovereign work through the church, encompassing both glory and suffering.

Most Important Ideas and Facts:

- **Historical skepticism towards Acts grew in the 19th and 20th centuries** due to the rise of critical methods like form and redaction criticism, leading scholars to question Luke's historical intent and accuracy. The Tübingen School saw Acts as a "late attempt to varnish over the conflict between Peter and Paul."
- **Sir William Ramsey's archaeological work and later scholars like A.N. Sherwin-White offered strong counterarguments** by demonstrating Luke's remarkable accuracy in detailed historical background, suggesting reliability in the main narrative as well. Sherwin-White states that "for the most part, Luke portrays the first-century Roman scene accurately."
- **The difficulty in identifying Luke's sources is a challenge to assessing its historical reliability.** J. DuPont noted in 1964 that "it has not been possible to define any of the sources used by the author of Acts in a way that will meet with widespread agreement among the critics." However, the lecture argues that this

doesn't necessarily negate reliability, pointing to Luke's faithfulness in using sources in his Gospel.

- **The "we" passages (Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-21:18, 27:1-28:16) are most naturally interpreted as evidence that the author was a companion of Paul and an eyewitness to those events.** The early church also widely attributed authorship to Luke, Paul's companion. Irenaeus around AD 180 "claims Luke as the author of the third gospel in Acts."
- **The speeches in Acts are likely not verbatim reports but rather summaries reflecting the "general sense of what they really said" (Thucydides quoted).** While some scholars see them as primarily Lukan theological compositions, others point to primitive elements and traditional bases.
- **The alleged inconsistencies between Luke's portrait of Paul and Paul's own letters have been a major point of contention for historical skepticism.** However, the lecture highlights counterarguments that these tensions are not substantial enough to dismiss Acts as unhistorical, citing E. Earl Ellis's critique of P. Wilhauer's influential essay.
- **Luke's primary motive was likely pastoral, aiming to help and encourage the church through a historical account.** He demonstrates that "church history is not a cold academic discipline but can be the means of encouraging the people of God."
- **Acts emphasizes mission as the essential task of the church, focusing on evangelism and the universality of salvation.** Luke demonstrates that "in the purpose of God there can be no racial discrimination within the church."
- **The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in guiding and empowering the church for its mission.** "The gifts of the spirit are given for the purpose of mission and not for the private edification of the church or its individual members."
- **Luke presents a "theology of glory" (ultimate triumph of the gospel) intertwined with a "theology of the cross" (triumph achieved through suffering).**

Quotes:

- Regarding the Tübingen School: "Acts presented a picture of smooth compromise and glossed over the harsh realities of the conflict."
- William Ramsey's strong affirmation: "Ramsey no doubt put the point much more strongly than many of his contemporaries would have been prepared to accept..."
- F.C. Burkitt on Luke's use of sources in the Gospel: "'What concerns us here,' said F.C. Burkitt, 'is not that Luke has changed so much, but that he has invented so little. Close quote. It is reasonable to assume, until the contrary has been proved that he acted similarly in Acts.'"
- F.J. Fulks Jackson on source criticism: "'We should constantly remember that source criticism in the New Testament is largely guesswork.' Cited in Bruce, F.F. Bruce, Acts, page 21."
- Thucydides on reporting speeches: "'it was in all cases difficult to carry the speeches word for word in one's memory.' So, my habit has been to make the speakers say what was, in my opinion, demanded of them by the various occasions. Of course, adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said."
- Irenaeus on authorship: "...Irenaeus around AD 180, who claims Luke as the author of the third gospel in Acts."
- Conclusion on Luke's approach: "If we approach it for what it is, we shall appreciate it better than if we demand from its author what he did not try to provide."
- Luke's pastoral concern: "He writes in order to help and aid the church."
- The enduring message of God's word: "But the word of God abides forever. Luke would have appreciated the symbolism."

Conclusion:

This lecture by Dr. Peterson, based on Howard Marshall's work, provides a valuable overview of the ongoing scholarly debate surrounding the historicity of Acts. While acknowledging the challenges raised by historical criticism, it presents compelling arguments for viewing Acts as an essentially reliable account, grounded in historical research, plausible source usage, and a reasonable understanding of Luke's theological and historical intentions. The lecture also highlights the enduring theological value of Acts for the contemporary church, emphasizing mission, the role of the Spirit, and the overarching narrative of God's work in the world.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 19, I. H. Marshall: The Historicity of Acts, Value of Acts

Study Guide: The Historicity of Acts and Luke's Portrait of Paul

Key Concepts:

- **Historical Skepticism:** A critical approach questioning the historical accuracy of ancient texts, particularly applied to Acts due to theological motivations attributed to early Christian writers.
- **Tübingen School of Criticism:** A 19th-century German school of thought that viewed Acts as a late attempt to reconcile conflicting views of Peter and Paul, downplaying historical accuracy.
- **Form Criticism:** A method of biblical criticism that analyzes the literary genres and structures of biblical texts, often emphasizing the oral traditions behind them and sometimes leading to historical skepticism.
- **Redaction Criticism:** A method of biblical criticism that focuses on how the biblical authors edited and shaped their source materials to convey their own theological perspectives.
- **Luke's Theological Motivation:** The idea that Luke's primary purpose in writing Acts was theological rather than strictly historical, which some scholars argue compromised his historical accuracy.
- **Source Criticism:** The attempt to identify and analyze the written or oral sources that biblical authors used in composing their works.
- **"We" Sections:** Passages in Acts written in the first-person plural, often interpreted as evidence that the author was a companion of Paul and an eyewitness to the events described.
- **Speeches in Acts:** The numerous speeches attributed to various figures in Acts (Peter, Paul, etc.), the historicity and purpose of which are debated among scholars.
- **Luke's Portrait of Paul:** The depiction of Paul in Acts, which some scholars have argued is inconsistent with Paul's own letters, raising questions about Luke's historical reliability.

- **Natural Theology:** Knowledge of God derived from reason and observation of the natural world, rather than from divine revelation.
- **Jewish Law:** The body of commandments and regulations that governed Jewish life in the first century.
- **Christology:** The study of the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- **Eschatology:** The study of end-times or final events.
- **Lukan Authorship:** The traditional belief that the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were written by Luke, a companion of Paul.
- **Date of Composition:** The estimated time period when Acts was written, which influences its perceived historical value.
- **Place of Composition:** The likely geographical location where Acts was written, which can provide context for the book.
- **Permanent Value of Acts:** The ongoing relevance and significance of Acts for the contemporary church.
- **Theologia Glorae:** A "theology of glory" that emphasizes God's power and triumph.
- **Theologia Crucis:** A "theology of the cross" that emphasizes God's suffering and sacrifice.

Short-Answer Quiz:

1. What was the central argument of the Tübingen School of Criticism regarding the Book of Acts?
2. How did the research of Sir William Ramsey contribute to the study of the historicity of Acts?
3. According to the lecture, what is the main contention of scholars who employ redaction criticism when analyzing Acts?
4. What observation led A.N. Sherwin-White to support the essential reliability of Acts?
5. What is the primary challenge in applying source criticism to the Book of Acts?
6. What is the most natural interpretation of the "we" sections found in Acts?

7. According to skeptical scholars like Dibelius and Wilkins, what is the likely origin and purpose of the speeches in Acts?
8. What did Thucydides say about the difficulty of recording speeches verbatim, and how does this relate to the speeches in Acts?
9. What is the main point of contention regarding Luke's portrait of Paul when compared to Paul's own letters?
10. What are two reasons provided in the lecture that support the traditional view of Lukan authorship of Acts?

Answer Key:

1. The Tübingen School argued that Acts was a late second-century work intended to smooth over the historical conflict between Peter and Paul in the early church, presenting a false picture of unity.
2. Ramsey's archaeological and historical research in the late 19th century demonstrated Luke's remarkable accuracy in depicting the historical and geographical details of the Roman world described in Acts, lending support to its historical reliability.
3. Redaction critics emphasize that the New Testament writers, including Luke, were creative theologians who freely shaped and adapted the traditions available to them to serve their own theological purposes, potentially impacting historical accuracy.
4. Sherwin-White's research demonstrated Luke's meticulous accuracy in depicting the detailed historical background of the first-century Roman world, leading him to conclude that if Luke was accurate in details, he was likely accurate in the main episodes as well.
5. The major problem with source criticism in Acts is the difficulty in definitively identifying the specific written or oral sources Luke used, as he seems to have thoroughly integrated them into his own uniform literary style.
6. The most straightforward explanation for the "we" sections in Acts is that they were written by a traveling companion of Paul who was an eyewitness to the events, and these sections were incorporated into Acts by the author without significant stylistic changes.

7. Skeptical scholars believe that the speeches in Acts were largely or entirely composed by Luke himself, reflecting his own theological perspectives rather than being verbatim accounts or based heavily on tradition of what was actually said.
8. Thucydides noted that it was difficult to remember speeches word-for-word and that his practice was to have speakers say what the occasion demanded, while adhering to the general sense of what was said; this suggests that the speeches in Acts may also be summaries or thematic representations rather than verbatim transcripts.
9. The main point of contention is whether Luke's depiction of Paul's views on topics like natural theology, the Jewish law, Christology, and eschatology in Acts is consistent with the views expressed in Paul's own letters, with some scholars arguing significant inconsistencies exist.
10. Two arguments supporting Lukan authorship are the internal evidence of the "we" passages, which suggest a companion of Paul wrote parts of Acts, and Luke is a likely candidate, and the strong and consistent external tradition from early church fathers like Irenaeus attributing both Luke's Gospel and Acts to Luke.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Discuss the key arguments for and against the historical reliability of the Book of Acts. Consider the perspectives of historical skepticism, the contributions of figures like William Ramsey and A.N. Sherwin-White, and the challenges raised by form and redaction criticism.
2. Analyze the significance of the speeches in the Book of Acts in the debate over its historicity. How do different scholarly approaches interpret the origin and purpose of these speeches, and what implications do these interpretations have for understanding Acts as a historical document?
3. Examine the complexities of source criticism in relation to the Book of Acts. Why has it been so difficult to identify Luke's sources, and what are the implications of this difficulty for assessing the historical accuracy of the book?
4. Compare and contrast the portrayal of Paul in the Book of Acts with the picture that emerges from Paul's own letters. To what extent are these portrayals consistent or inconsistent, and how does this impact our understanding of Luke's historical intentions and accuracy?

5. Evaluate the enduring value of the Book of Acts for the contemporary church, considering both its historical context and its theological themes. How does Luke's presentation of the early church's mission, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the inclusion of Gentiles remain relevant today?

Glossary of Key Terms: (Definitions provided above)

5. FAQs on Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 19, I. H. Marshall: The Historicity of Acts, Value of Acts, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about the Historicity of Acts and Luke's Portrait of Paul

1. What factors have led some scholars to question the historical value of the Book of Acts?

Increasingly, scholars have questioned the historical value of Acts due to the apparent theological interests of the author, Luke. Influential movements like form criticism and redaction criticism suggest that early church traditions were shaped by theological motivations, potentially at the expense of historical accuracy. The 19th-century Tübingen School viewed Acts as a later attempt to reconcile conflicting views between Peter and Paul, presenting a false picture of harmony. More recently, scholars like Martin Debelius, Hans Conzelmann, and Ernst Haenchen have argued that Luke was primarily a theologian who creatively shaped or even invented material based on scant sources to produce an edifying account, leading to accusations of historical inconsistencies and a lack of factual basis.

2. How has the historical background described in Acts been evaluated by scholars?

Sir William Ramsey's work in the late 19th century, followed by A.N. Sherwin-White and Colin J. Hemer, significantly affirmed the historical accuracy of Acts concerning detailed historical background. Ramsey, initially accepting the Tübingen view, later changed his perspective due to Luke's remarkable accuracy in describing the first-century Roman world. Sherwin-White, while acknowledging potential errors, demonstrates that Luke largely portrays the Roman scene accurately. The argument is that Luke's precision in background details suggests reliability in the main narrative as well, countering the idea that such accuracy could merely belong to a historical novel.

3. What are the challenges in identifying the sources Luke used in writing Acts?

A major challenge is the difficulty in definitively identifying the sources Luke employed. Despite the assumption that Luke, potentially a companion of Paul (who doesn't appear until Acts 16), relied on others for earlier information, no specific sources have been universally agreed upon by critics. Luke's uniform editorial style seemingly conceals any underlying sources. While form-critical analysis suggests the use of tradition, and redaction criticism points to Luke's own compositional role, the inability to clearly trace

sources raises concerns about the reliability of the information, even if Luke was well-intentioned.

4. What arguments support the idea that Luke did utilize sources and traditions in Acts?

Despite the difficulty in pinpointing specific sources, several arguments suggest Luke's reliance on them. Jervel argues that the early church's missionary proclamation would have preserved traditions about the apostles' activities and the establishment of congregations. Furthermore, an examination of Luke's Gospel reveals his generally faithful use of sources like Mark and a shared source with Matthew, suggesting a similar approach in Acts. The "we" passages in the latter part of Acts strongly imply the incorporation of eyewitness accounts from a companion of Paul. Finally, while Luke undoubtedly shaped his material, it is improbable that a writer on the early church would not have sought information from key centers like Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Antioch.

5. What are the differing scholarly views on the speeches recorded in the Book of Acts?

Scholarship presents contrasting views on the speeches in Acts. Some British scholars, like C.H. Dodd and F.F. Bruce, argue that these speeches, attributed to figures like Peter and Paul, are either verbatim accounts or, at least, compositions based on early Christian preaching traditions, reflecting their structure and details. Conversely, scholars such as Martin Dibelius and Hugh Wilkins contend that the speeches have minimal basis in tradition and are largely Luke's own theological compositions, reflecting his specific viewpoints. This skeptical view is based on analyses suggesting the speeches don't always align with other New Testament fragments of early preaching, exhibit a common Lukan structure and style, and collectively present a compendium of Lukan theology.

6. What evidence suggests that the speeches in Acts, while potentially shaped by Luke, are not purely his invention?

Despite arguments for Lukan authorship of the speeches, several points indicate a traditional basis. Even Wilkins, a proponent of Lukan composition, later conceded a greater traditional element in some speeches. Scholars have noted primitive elements within the speeches, including Jewish patterns of Old Testament usage and a style less polished than purely literary creations, often containing redundancies indicative of incorporated traditions. While a general structure exists, the speeches show considerable variation in application, and there is some alignment with other limited evidence of early preaching. Moreover, it is argued that figures like Peter would likely

have addressed Jewish audiences with themes similar to those Luke presents. The brevity of the recorded speeches also suggests they are summaries rather than verbatim accounts.

7. How has Luke's portrayal of Paul been viewed in relation to Paul's own letters?

Luke's portrait of Paul has been a significant point of contention regarding the historicity of Acts. P. Wilhauer argued that Luke's depiction of Paul's views on natural theology, Jewish law, Christology, and eschatology is inconsistent with Paul's own writings, leading many scholars to doubt the historical accuracy of Acts. However, this viewpoint has been strongly challenged by scholars like E. Earl Ellis and F.F. Bruce, who argue that while tensions exist, they are not substantial enough to dismiss Acts as unhistorical. They suggest that Luke provides a complementary, rather than contradictory, perspective on Paul's ministry and theology, given the different contexts and purposes of his writing compared to Paul's personal letters.

8. What is the lasting value of the Book of Acts for the church today, according to the discussed perspectives?

Despite historical debates, Acts retains significant value for the contemporary church. Luke demonstrates a pastoral concern in his writing, aiming to encourage and aid the Christian community by showing that church history can be a source of inspiration. He emphasizes that the essential task of the church is mission, primarily through evangelism and the call to repentance and faith. Acts highlights the inclusive nature of God's purpose, asserting that there should be no racial discrimination within the church and that salvation is offered to all on equal terms. Furthermore, Luke stresses the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in guiding and empowering the church for its mission, emphasizing that the church's work is ultimately directed by God's will, leading to a theology that embraces both the glory of the gospel's triumph and the necessity of suffering and martyrdom (theologia gloriae and theologia crucis).