

Title: Genre and Historiography

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Session 2

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Abstract

This lecture examines the literary genre of the book of Acts, evaluating and contrasting it with genres like ancient biography, novels, and epic poetry. Dr. Craig Keener argues that Acts is best classified as an apologetic ethnographic history in a monograph form, written on a popular level. He highlights how ancient historians prioritized accuracy, utilized eyewitness accounts, and maintained a clear moral or theological perspective without fabricating facts. Ultimately, Luke's method of compiling written and oral sources is shown to align with the standards of ancient historiography, aiming to provide a reliable account of the early Christian mission.

Outline

I. Introduction to Genre and Historiography of Acts

- A. Overview of proposed literary genres for the book of Acts
- B. Comparison with biography, novels, and historical works

II. Critique of the Novel Hypothesis

A. Richard Pervo's arguments for "novelistic historiography" and why they fail

- 1. Caricaturing of opponents is a standard ancient polemical device, not a novelistic trait
- 2. Mobs and adventures are common in both novels and historiography
- 3. Later Christian apocryphal acts (e.g., Acts of Paul and Thecla, Acts of John) are derivative of Luke-Acts, not vice-versa

B. Distinctives of ancient novels vs. Luke-Acts

- 1. Ancient novels were typically romances; Acts is not
- 2. Novels rarely concerned recent historical figures; Acts deals with contemporary/recent generations

3. Absence of historical prologues or source citations in novels
4. Fictionalizing in histories was heavily criticized by ancient critics like Polybius and Lucian

III. Critique of the Epic Hypothesis

- A. Marianne Bontz's proposal of a "prose epic" is structurally problematic because ancient epics were poetic
- B. Epics typically dealt with the distant, legendary, or mythological past, unlike Acts
- C. Helpful element: Acts serves as a "foundation story" highlighting the apostolic legacy

IV. Biography as a Genre Element

- A. The "parallel lives" (Plutarch) and multiple biography models (Diogenes Laertius)
- B. Structural challenges: Acts deviates from strict biography by focusing on multiple figures (Peter, Paul, Stephen, Philip)
- C. Conclusion: Luke uses a "biographic approach to history"

V. Acts as Historiography: Evidence and Scholars

- A. Majority scholarly consensus: Acts is ancient historiography
- B. Key indicators of historiography in Acts:
 1. Set speeches: A standard convention in ancient histories (e.g., Josephus) but rare/different in novels
 2. Historical preface: Luke 1:1-4 is a standard historical preface (similar to scientific/technical treatises)
 3. Massive correspondences with known historical data and external synchronization (e.g., Gallio, Claudius's famine, Roman rulers)
 4. Focus on actual historical events ("things fulfilled among us")
- C. Types of history: Genealogy, mythography, horography, chronography, and history proper
- D. Sub-genres of history: Institutional, political, philosophic-biographic, and ethnographic

VI. Acts as Apologetic Ethnographic History

A. Ethnographic history as a defense for marginalized minority groups

1. Greek ethnocentrism and caricature of other cultures
2. Examples: Berossus (Babyloniaca), Manetho (Aegyptiaca), and Josephus (Jewish Antiquities)

B. Gregory Sterling's thesis: Apologetic ethnographic history

C. Apologetic and political purposes of Luke-Acts

1. Showing that Christianity is embedded in the ancient story of Israel
2. Establishing legal precedence for toleration under Roman law (Pilate, Sergius Paulus, Gallio, Festus)
3. Focusing on the history of the mission of the church

VII. Comparison with Elite Historiography

A. Rhetorical sophistication of elite history vs. Luke's popular level

B. Lack of elaborate rhetorical descriptions (ekphrasis) in Luke

1. Homer's shield of Ajax as a standard model
2. Luke omits descriptions of physical landscapes or wounds (e.g., leaving Philippi)

C. Storytelling and narrative patterns

1. Cohesiveness of the plot (Tannehill, Golder, Talbert)
2. Patterns as a sign of divine Providence, not of fabrication (Appian, Josephus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus)

D. Pathos and emotional displays: Luke is much more restrained compared to elite histories

VIII. Biases, Perspectives, and Purposes in Ancient Historiography

- A. Standard presence of biases or perspective (tendencies) in all history
- B. Selection of facts for a specific focus does not equate to fabrication
- C. Use of moral examples (praise and blame) to teach lessons
- D. Theological perspective: Searching for the divine hand (Providence) in history

IX. Accuracy and Reliability in Ancient Historiography

- A. Accuracy varied by historian (Tacitus, Thucydides, Polybius are highly accurate; Josephus is sometimes careless with numbers but accurate on architecture)
- B. Latitudes on details: Ancient standards allowed rounding out scenes and conversations for storytelling, provided substance was correct
- C. Practices of critical historiography
 1. Questioning sources and examining biases
 2. Testing consistency with geography, ruins, and chronology
 3. Preferring eyewitnesses and recent/contemporary events
- D. Use of sources: Luke's meticulous care shown by comparing Luke and Mark**
- E. Distinguishing ancient historiography from modern standards**
 1. Do not judge by modern rules (throwing out reliability)
 2. Do not treat as completely fictional novels (ignoring real facts)

X. Luke's Methodology (Luke 1:1-4)

- A. Acknowledgment of written and oral sources going back to eyewitnesses
- B. Orderly narrative to confirm what is already known
- C. Impossibility of major fabrication due to the audience's familiarity with events