Historical Issues in Acts 28:11–31

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In this paper, I shall deal first with historical issues in Acts in general, and then turn my attention to a specific passage, namely Acts 28:11–31. I proceed in this way in the interest of transparency, because one's overall approach to Acts necessarily determines how one deals with any specific section of it.

Historical Issues in Acts

Among other things, the author of Luke-Acts intends his work to be taken as historical reportage on early Christianity. The very first verse of Acts invokes the opening of his gospel, in which he claims to have critically evaluated all the available sources and goes so far as to attest the precision of the result.

> [1]Since many have attempted to compose a narrative about the events which have come to fulfillment among us, [2]as they have been handed down to us from those who from the beginning were themselves eyewitnesses and servants of the word, [3]I too have thought it good, since I have investigated everything carefully from the start, to write them out in order for you, excellent Theophilus, [4]in order that you know the certain basis of the teaching in which you have been instructed. (Luke 1:1–4)

This same introduction plainly refers to previous accounts—none of which he deems entirely precise—and promises what today might be called a new critical edition. The opening words of Acts constitute a virtual guarantee that the same intention and criteria guided his account of the spread of Christianity in his second book.

Luke interprets the continuity of salvation as a "course" (*dromos*) or "way" (*hodos*). In the sermon Luke ascribes to Paul in Pisidian Antioch, the apostle speaks of John the Baptist's entrance (*eishodos*) into the world (Acts 13:24) and says, "As John was finishing his course . . ." (*dromos*) (Acts 13:25). Acts perceives Christian life generally as a "way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) and, in looking back on his missionary activity in his farewell speech at Miletus (Acts 20:18–35), Paul describes the end of his missionary work as the completion of his course (*dromos*, Acts 20:24).

As was the case with Jesus, John the Baptist, and the apostles, Luke has a theological purpose for recounting the activity of Paul: he is committed to explaining and defending his concept of salvation history. This history is to be

seen in the movement from Jerusalem (Luke 24:47) to Rome (Acts 1:8 and 28:16–30). The worldwide scope of the mission encompasses the whole Roman Empire (see Luke 2:1) and Paul emerges as the central character in the spread of the good news. Every element of the story—the Galilean genesis; the crisis, tragedy, and exaltation in Jerusalem; the establishment there of the first community; and what Luke sees as the experimental mission of the Hellenists—leads towards the universal availability of salvation. Halfway through Acts, the Jerusalem conference serves as a pivotal event, distinguishing the primitive church from that of the present and laying the foundation for Paul's independent mission (note Acts 15:39–40). The Pauline era grows out of and is validated by the sacred history of the Jerusalem community.

Because Paul's "first missionary journey" antedates the Jerusalem conference, it has a transitional function. First, it illustrates the issues that provoke the conference: the fact and the success of taking the gospel to the Gentiles in Antioch (Acts 11:20–21) were in effect emphasized by the geographical scope of the new itinerary. Second, Luke uses the journey to present the well-known transformation of Saul into Paul (Acts 13:9) and elevate Paul's status to that of "The Apostle to the Gentiles" (see Acts 13:13, 16, 43, 45, 50; 14:20).

Thereafter, Paul advances alone to center stage, and his mission carries him all the way to Rome. Clearly, this narrative strategy has theological motives, for placing it *after* the Jerusalem conference emphasizes the Lukan church's roots in the primitive church and thus the continuity of salvation history. Luke's motives are *not* primarily chronological; chronology is pressed into the service of theological meaning. He is an apologist, not a secular historian. When he has discovered the theological significance of an occurrence, he is able to derive from it the correct chronology.[1] We would be unjust to him if we scrutinize a report of his on the basis of historical research alone, for the litmus test must always be theology: namely, how does this or that fit into the history of salvation.

These discoveries reveal that we should look at the journeys of Paul in the framework of Luke's theology of salvation history. Moreover, the relationship of salvation-history and profane history in Luke-Acts raises a fundamental question concerning the use of secular historical data gathered from Luke-Acts in any valid history of early Christianity.

While it is true that no historian writes without bias, to what degree have Luke's particular biases led him to invent narrative elements? One illustrative issue is his favorable treatment of the Roman state, examples of which appear in Luke's depiction of members of the Roman military.

It is amazing what an important role Roman military personnel play in Luke-Acts. Until around 175 CE there were no Christian soldiers. Late in the second century, however, soldiers ever more frequently encountered the Christian mission and were converted. This raised the question of whether they could remain

1. Cf. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke*, 33.

servants of Rome. The issue had earlier been addressed in Luke 3:10–14—undoubtedly a Lukan invention—in which John the Baptist addresses such pillars of the Empire as publicans and soldiers, and urges them to behave always in strict conformance with their duties. Later, in Acts 10, Luke portrays the first Gentile Christian to be none other than Cornelius, a Roman centurion. How far ahead of his time Luke was! What an anachronistic position he had taken!

One of the clearest examples of Luke's positive portrayal of Roman military personnel appears in his account of the trial and execution of Jesus. Comparison with Mark's narrative shows that he goes out of his way to minimize the involvement of the Roman soldiers. Not only does Luke omit the scourging scene (Mark 15:16–20), so that Jesus is remanded immediately after Pilate's verdict, but he reports that Jews, not Romans, are the ones who led Jesus off to be crucified (Luke 23:24–26, 33). Those who called for Jesus' death have also judged, condemned, and executed him. An often overlooked corroboration is found in Luke 24:20, where we hear two of Jesus' disciples explain to an unrecognized traveler that the chief priests and Jewish leaders not only handed Jesus over to be executed but also actually crucified him. To be sure, one cannot assume that Luke limits the responsibility for Jesus' death to the Jewish elite, for he clearly assigns guilt to the people in 23:4, 13–16, and repeats the charge in Acts 3:15 (note "Israelites" in verse 12).

Having both directed the blame elsewhere and minimized the negative portrayal of the Roman soldiers found in his sources, Luke is free to shine a favorable light on Rome and its agents when he depicts Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and the subsequent events, which resemble nothing so much as a case of protective custody to benefit a threatened prisoner.

Instead of being set free, of course, Paul felt obliged to appeal to the emperor, and was sent as a prisoner to Rome. Even so, Luke has created a tragic complex of circumstances in which Romans often show admiration for Paul and take pains to save his life. To be sure, the Romans eventually executed him, but as in the case of Jesus' death, Luke eliminates the violent expression of Roman rule in their executions. Naturally, the writer of a Gospel could not simply ignore Jesus' death as he did that of Paul. Relieving the Roman authorities of responsibility for Jesus' condemnation and crucifixion by ascribing the stroke to others is a literary *tour de force*; in historical and theological terms, it is *a monstrosity*. History comes in a distant second to the evangelist's zeal in promoting his ecclesiastical program.

How much of Acts is historically accurate has long been subject to argument, but far more important to a useful assessment of the book is to recognize the *framework* Luke has created for the events. For however authentic or fictitious a reported event, its meaning is in considerable measure controlled by its historical context. For example, Paul's implied date for the "Apostolic Council" varies considerably from that proposed in Acts 15—and the difference could well change its significance considerably.

We do know that Acts employs a straight-line narrative: the story proceeds without interruptions or subplots. But if only because it oversimplifies the actual chronicle of events, it cannot be taken to be a valid history of early first-century Christianity. Besides, the story contains many loose ends that Luke did not bother to hide and poses obvious questions he ignored. Yet more troubling is the appearance of puzzling characters like Apollos, who knew only John's baptism (Acts 18:24–28) and the Ephesian disciples who had never heard of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1–7). And strangest of all, we learn nothing about Christianity's arrival in Rome! How can these oddities be explained?

Luke uses carefully selected figures to demonstrate Christianity's triumph. We meet good guys like the disciples, Christian teachers, and martyrs and bad actors like heretics and, distastefully but inevitably, the Jews. And despite a few bumps in the road, the path to ultimate salvation leads straight ahead and has no forks or detours. To be sure, such basic narrative strategies yield stories that are easily remembered and reiterated, and thus likely to be influential. Unfortunately, by avoiding the nuances and complexities that are part of human history, such simplistic dramatization necessarily distorts the truth. Studying the abundant evidence of Christianity's early diversity places Acts in a very different perspective and shows how much Luke has left out. Above all, we may find ourselves reluctant to accept his biases concerning Jews and other troublemakers who hinder what he sees as the monolithic and inevitable progress of Christianity. Today, the good/bad, orthodox/heretic distinctions are at last coming to be seen as judgments made after the fact by those who wish to promote the winners among whom they see themselves.[2]

To put all this in a sharper perspective, let me first list Luke's theological presuppositions and next epitomize the limitations on the historical value of his two-volume work for the study of Christian origins. As for the first, one can make the following observations:

a. The Holy Spirit is instrumental in salvation history.
b. All things are predetermined by the will of God.
c. The spread of the primitive Christian mission is unstoppable.
d. Roman power is sympathetic to Christianity (a corollary of this is that any pro-Roman traits or characterizations in Acts and the third Gospel are open to historical doubt).
e. The unbelieving Jews will go to any lengths to thwart Christian goals and purposes (as with the previous statement, any negative statement about them is likewise open to historical doubt).

Concerning the latter issue, one must conclude that

a. Luke has misrepresented Paul's relationship to the Jerusalem community.
b. Luke has misrepresented Paul's theology.

2. Cf. Bowden, "Appendix: Ideologies, Text and Tradition," 159–60.

c. Luke's description of Paul's actions is in part miraculous, in part false, and deceptively incomplete.
d. Luke makes Peter appear Pauline and Paul appear Petrine.
e. Luke places Paul's major mission immediately after the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15). In reality it had started long before the Jerusalem conference—indeed at least a decade earlier.
f. Since the inner and outer growth of the communities is divinely assured, Luke presumes that strong affirmations of extraordinary growth do not demand sources.
g. Granted that Luke's narrative concerning the various mission sites is unbalanced, it is a striking omission that he fails to say anything about the real beginnings of Christianity in Galilee, northern Galatia, Rome, and Egypt. Instead he spends sixty verses—most of them the purest fiction—on the sea-voyage to Rome.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, one must give credit to Luke for being correct on two points:

a. At the beginning of primitive Christianity, the Jerusalem community played an important role.
b. Paul was a key figure in the proclamation, expansion, and shaping of primitive Christianity. Luke rightly devotes more than half of Acts to him.

Yet Acts cannot profitably be read without the corrective of the authentic letters of Paul, for:

a. Acts presents an inaccurate chronology of primitive Christianity between 30 and 70 CE.
b. The routes reported in Acts are partly inventions, partly duplications, and commonly misplaced in time. Paul's letters allow us to reconstruct the real chronology of his missionary journeys and to integrate the valuable itineraries of Acts into an orderly account.
c. In many cases Acts not only fails to provide solutions to the enigmas of the letters but further complicates these enigmas.

Some have argued, and some continue to do so, that ancient canons of historicity differ so drastically from those of today that any verdict must be anachronistic. Yet such urgings are beside the point, deceptive, or as false as the occasionally advanced statement that the ancients did not care about false attribution of writings.[3]

Among comments of other contemporary authors, note those of Lucian of Samosata,[4] a theorist from the second century who bases his judgment on Thucydides, promoting "him above all others as the paradigm of what a historian should be."[5]

3. In what follows I have used material from Lüdemann, *Intolerance and the Gospel*, 233–44.
4. See Marguerat, *First Christian Historian*, 13–20.
5. McCoy, "In the shadow of Thucydides," 9.

[41]That, then, is the sort of man the historian should be: fearless, incorruptible, free, a friend of free expression and the truth, intent, as the comic poet[6] says, on calling a fig a fig and a trough a trough, giving nothing to hatred or to friendship, sparing no one, showing neither pity nor shame nor obsequiousness, an impartial judge, well disposed to all men up to the point of not giving one side more than its due, in his books a stranger and a man without a country, independent, subject to no sovereign, not reckoning what this or that man will think, but stating the facts.[7] [42]Thucydides laid down this law very well: he distinguished virtue and vice in historical writing, when he saw Herodotus greatly admired to the point where his books were named after the Muses. For Thucydides says that he is writing a possession for evermore rather than a prize-essay for the occasion, that he does not welcome fiction but is leaving to posterity the true account of what happened. He brings in, too, the question of usefulness and what is, surely, the purpose of sound history: that if ever again men find themselves in a like situation they may be able, he says, from a consideration of the records of the past to handle rightly what now confronts them.[8] . . . [47]As to the facts themselves, he should not assemble them at random, but only after much laborious and painstaking investigation. He should for preference be an eyewitness, but, if not, listen to those who tell the more impartial story, those whom one would suppose least likely to subtract from the facts or add to them out of favor or malice. When this happens let him show shrewdness and skill in putting together the more credible story. When he has collected all or most of the facts let him first make them into a series of notes, a body of material as yet with no beauty or continuity. Then after arranging them into order, let him give it beauty and enhance it with the charms of expression, figure and rhythm.[9]

Since Luke places himself in the context of ancient historical writings, he deserves to be measured on the basis of the ancient standards. Let me hasten to add that the ancients who were educated enough to pursue such matters were interested both in what really happened and in whether a document carried

6. Aristophanes or Menander.

7. In Greek, *ti pepraktai legôn*.

8. Lucian, *How to Write History* 41–42, 47, 57. Chapter 42 is a free paraphrase of Thucydides 1.22.4: "And it may well be that the absence of the fabulous from my narrative will seem less pleasing to the ear; but whoever shall wish to have a clear view both of the events which have happened and of those will someday, in all human probability, happen again in the same or a similar way—for these to adjudge my history profitable will be enough for me. And, indeed, it has been composed, not as a prize-essay, to be heard for the moment, but as a possession for all time."

9. Lucian, *How to Write History* 41–42, 47. Chapter 47 is based on Thucydides 1.22.2–3: "But as to the facts of the occurrences of the war, I have thought it my duty to give them, not as ascertained from any chance informant nor as seemed to me probable, but only after investigating with the greatest possible accuracy each detail, in the case both of the events in which I myself participated and of those regarding which I got my information from others. And the endeavor to ascertain these facts was a laborious task, because those who were eye-witnesses of the several events did not give the same reports about the same things, but reports varying according to their championship of one side or the other, or according to their recollection."

the correct name of the writer. Thus my work on Luke-Acts is directly responsive to these criteria and to the goal of modern enlightenment—and ultimately to Luke himself. Despite his glaring inaccuracies, he was without doubt the first Christian historian,[10] and he was part of the Greco-Roman tradition—a careful study of which indicates that historiography did not wait until the Enlightenment to become a self-conscious form of literary art.

A number of Greek and Roman historians engaged in an ongoing discourse about historical truth, including the issues of intellectual deceit and forgery. Moreover, those of the Greek and Roman intelligentsia, though lacking the sophistication of modern critics, had developed clear criteria by which to uncover fraud. Let me first offer the example of the great physician Galen of Pergamum, and following that, two further citations. All three will demonstrate that, if writers of literary works that were intended for an educated audience knowingly employed false attribution or deliberately falsified a text, they were considered guilty of a malfeasance.[11]

In "My Own Books," Galen reports the following incident:

> I was recently in the Sandalarium (= sandal-makers' street), the area of Rome with the largest concentration of booksellers, where I witnessed a dispute as to whether a certain book for sale was by me or someone else. The book bore the title: Galen the doctor. Someone had bought the book under the impression that it was one of mine, someone else—a man of letters—struck by the odd form of the title, desired to know the book's subject. On reading the first two lines he immediately tore up the inscription, saying simply: "This is not Galen's language—the title is false." Now, the man in question had received only the basic education that Greek children were always given by teachers of grammar and rhetoric.[12]

A little later Galen complains:

> My books have been subject to all sorts of mutilations, whereby people in different countries publish (literally, "read") different texts under their own names, with all sorts of cuts, additions and alterations.[13]

Concerning false attributions, Galen's report allows us to draw three conclusions:

1. People of even moderate education learned enough of what we would call style-criticism to enable them to distinguish genuine from false writings.

10. Wilken, *Myth of Christian Beginnings*, 33–51; Marguerat, *First Christian Historian*, xi.

11. Cf. with this the statement in Annette Merz's thorough study, *Die fiktive Selbstauslegung des Paulus*, 198: "An acceptance of pseudepigraphy can be found in antiquity only and sporadically among physicians and philosophers (e.g., Pythagoreans and Epicureans) who justify writings of pupils in the name of the master. Yet, I would stress more that this is according to the sources already a reaction to the results of investigations of authenticity which in turn reinforces the general reservations to writing with a false name." (Trans. my own)

12. Galen, *My Own Books*, 3.

13. Galen, *My Own Books*, 3.

2. Plagiarism, that is, spreading someone else's ideas under one's own name, was considered unacceptable.
3. Pseudepigraphy, that is, publishing one's own ideas under someone else's name, was improper.

Two episodes from "The Lives of Eminent Philosophers" by the Greek writer Diogenes Laertius in the third century CE shed further light on the general disapprobation of false attribution and plagiarism.

> Aristoxenus the musician asserts that Heraclides also composed tragedies, inscribing upon them the name of Thespis. Chamaeleon complains that Heraclides' treatise on the work of Homer and Hesiod was plagiarized from his own. Furthermore, Autodorus the Epicurean criticizes him in a polemic against his tract *Of Justice*. Again, Dionysius the Renegade, or, as some people call him, the "Spark," when he wrote the *Parthenopaeus*, entitled it a play of Sophocles; and Heraclides, such was his credulity, in one of his own works drew upon this forged play as Sophoclean evidence. Dionysius, on perceiving this, confessed what he had done; and . . . the other denied the fact and would not believe him.[14]

The examination of both the authenticity and completeness of writings was a daily task for the librarians of such great libraries of antiquity as Pergamum and Alexandria, to mention only these two. Athenodor, the head librarian of the library of Pergamum, got himself into trouble by altering Stoic writings. Diogenes Laertius gives this report:

> Isidore of Pergamum . . . likewise affirms that the passages disproved by the school were expunged from his works by Athenodorus the Stoic, who was in charge of the Pergamene library; and that afterwards, when Athenodorus was detected and compromised, they were replaced.[15]

When we compare it to the literary meticulousness of the Greco-Roman world, Hebrew literature shows a lack of development in awareness of intellectual property, commitment to historical truth, and sense of authorial individuality. In fact, the literature of what later became the Old Testament was for the most part tradition-literature rather than author-literature. Even the books of the prophets were constantly reworked by their disciples and by later theological schools. And not only is the same true for the panoramic history that stretches from 1 Samuel to 2 Kings, but the Chronicler's account is ultimately a further commentary on those narratives, for he is engaged in the same task as that of his prophetic and historical predecessors: rewriting earlier proclamations or accounts to suit the needs of the present generation. To be sure, it sometimes appears that, when the reworking of earlier accounts produced con-

14. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 5.92–93.
15. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.34.

tradictions too obvious to overlook, the author-redactor felt obliged to observe some elementary literary scruples.

That suspicion gains credence especially if, as is widely accepted, the original text of Deuteronomy (= Ur-Deuteronomy) was discovered in the Temple as the report in 2 Kings 22–23 suggests. For that can mean only that priests had written it and then either staged or simply claimed its discovery before handing it on to King Josiah.[16] In this same vein, one may reasonably wonder why this particular piece of Old Testament literature repeats the so-called "canon formula" of Deut 4:2a at 13:1,[17] which resurfaces in Rev 22:18–19 with its dire threats against any who add to or subtract from the received words (of God). Obviously, two canons of truth—the religious and the intellectual—collide here. Yet most parts of the Old Testament and many Jewish sources recognize only one of these principles and remain oblivious to or unaware of the other. That basic fact makes it extremely difficult for the critical scholar to relate to these writings, let alone establish meaningful dialogue with people who take seriously the historical accuracy of these "holy" texts.

Be that as it may, the necessity of arriving at interpretive conclusions concerning falsely attributed documents cannot be avoided, even when their authors may be lacking in historical reliability or truthfulness. This is especially the case, because many of these very authors are in the habit of asserting their own truthfulness while warning against the forgeries of others. Thus their reliability is doubly undermined, for they not only show themselves untrustworthy but also hypocritically proclaim the untrustworthiness of others who are playing the same game.

In the course of employing the available historical-critical tools, I do not presuppose the impossibility of miracles. I am not taking what Colin Hemer has described as "an absolute position that miracles do not happen, and that *all* alleged instances must accordingly be either rejected or re-explained."[18] Yet I do both recognize and posit that the three-storied universe of the ancients is an outmoded concept and that anything in Luke-Acts and elsewhere that presupposes such an image of reality must be rejected insofar as we are committed to dealing with representations of fact. For the rest, I approach every miracle story of Luke-Acts in search of evidence of its historical veracity and do not base my judgment on preconceived notions as to what can or cannot happen. One note of qualification is in order at this point, however: one's belief in God or god

16. For the details of Deuteronomy's discovery under Josiah in 622 BCE and parallel discovery-accounts of other sacred books from antiquity to modern times (e.g., the book of Mormon), see my *The Unholy in Holy Scripture*, 59–73. In recent times some scholars tend to ascribe the composition of 2 Kings 22–23 (on the basis of Deuteronomy [!]) to exilic or postexilic circles who wanted to connect king Josiah with a radical reform of the cult in Jerusalem (see Kratz, *Propheten Israels*, 73).

17. For the Old Testament, see Prov 30:6 (cf. Eccl 3:14; Sir 18:6; 42:21).

18. Hemer, *The Book of Acts*, 438.

should play no role in the historical investigation. The Acts of the Apostles must be investigated as all other religious or nonreligious texts are examined. The rules that apply for historical science should also apply for theological study when it comes to the investigation of the historical records of Christianity. The assumption that the history of this or any other religion has to be reconstructed as if God does not exist should find common agreement among twenty-first century scholars.[19]

Van Harvey has rightly said that

> what we call historical inquiry is really the formalization by professional historians of our modern, Promethean desire to know, a desire that is actually rooted in everyday life. Historical reasoning is merely the formalization of one method that has, over time, proved to be our best guarantor of achieving this desire and of holding in check the special pleading, obscurantism, and tendentiousness that are omnipresent in human existence.[20]

History, then, is directly related to scientific knowledge as "public knowledge of public facts." By "public knowledge" I mean—following Don Wiebe—nonidiosyncratic knowledge mediated through intersubjectively tested sets of statements. And by "public facts" I mean "states of affairs in the world."

Yet, for whatever reason, Christian scholars are sometimes chary about heeding the strictures of this protocol. Instead, they resort to philosophical reflections calculated to protect the believer against history. Two examples should suffice. Ben Witherington remarks,

> These stories [of Acts] will no doubt continue to create problems for some moderns who rule out in advance the supernatural, including supernatural events such as miracles, and dismiss all history writing that includes such tales as precritical and naive in character. I would suggest that such an a priori approach to miracles is equally uncritical and naive, not least because science has hardly begun to plumb the depths of what is and is not possible in our universe.[21]

And Joseph A. Fitzmyer opines,

> If one is philosophically convinced that miracles do not happen or that God does not so intervene in human history, then all such narratives immediately become unhistorical or nonhistorical. If, however, one accepts the possibility of such divine intervention, judgment is then open to their historical validation. Clearly, Luke reckoned with such possibility, for he did not hesitate to include such items in his narratives in Acts.[22]

19. All this has less to do with a "materialistic worldview" than with common practice among professional historians.
20. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, xx–xxi.
21. Ben Witherington III, *Acts of the Apostles*, 223–24.
22. Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 126.

To this sort of sophistry I reply that we can reckon with the possibility of supernatural events only if the historical analysis of a specific case admits of no other explanation. At any rate, one ought not to begin with the assumption that miracles occur.

My exegesis of the passage below in Acts follows my pattern of dividing passages into series of texts. In the translation, I have employed underlines, italics, and bold-faced type to stress key words and ideas and thus foster a close reading of the text. Sentences printed in boldface type contain elements that require close attention. The highlighting is a reminder not to historicize their content but rather, once the necessary work on Luke's edits has been accomplished, to begin with the investigation of the underlying tradition. Unless otherwise indicated, italics denote Luke's editorial pen. One must always take into account, of course, that Luke's vocabulary, style, and agendas have been so effectually engrafted onto the sources as to give the entire text an undeniably Lukan flavor. The text is then outlined to summarize its content and to provide both an initial insight into its structure and an inkling of the connection between the sentences and clauses, and thus their intended meaning. Both of these issues are further pursued in the subsequent section, which seeks to discover the *purpose* of the passage by means of a brief analysis of Luke's language and the context of the passage.

Next I attempt to discover whether Luke has reworked *tradition.* Its existence may have been suggested in the analysis of Luke's purpose or by un-Lukan expressions. Nevertheless, the possibility of tradition must always be demonstrated separately. While we have particularly good reason for assuming traditions in Acts 16–21, the situation in Acts 1–5, 6–12, and 21–28 is different, for traditions cannot be extracted from or controlled by a comparison with the letters of Paul (as they often can in Acts 16–21). This is true even if in individual sections (here Acts 5, 8, and 12 resemble 28) information from outside Luke can be used as comparative and/or corroborative material. Finally, I attempt to reinforce the broad notion of "tradition" already mentioned—one that includes, not only written sources, but also oral reports and information that were generally available to Luke, including, of course, the results of his apparently wide reading.

After that—under the heading "Historical Elements"—I subject the reconstructed traditions in that block to historical verification. In this pursuit Paul's letters often play a significant role, and specific historical findings may be subjected to criticism and counter-proposals. Some may deem such an approach to be overly reliant on hypotheses, but the alternative path, one that is too often followed, would be merely to restate—and thus tacitly affirm the historicity of—the Acts account. I cannot bring myself to concur with, say, the assertion that in most cases the historicity of narrative elements in Acts is a wide-open question. I rather seek to offer conclusions based on the best evidence and an objective analysis of the existing data.

Last but not least, I separately address the question of the historical value of Luke's account. For one thing, in the shaping of the tradition may be hidden valuable information that my analytic method has failed to evoke. For another, many scholars and laypersons still regard the Acts account as the authoritative source for information about primitive Christianity. Therefore, the issue of historicity must be addressed separately and forthrightly. Third, by focusing specifically on the historical value of Luke's narrative, I can address the possibility that Luke might after all have been a companion of Paul and that his reports therefore deserve a critical evaluation on their own merits.

Historical Issues in Acts 28:11–31[23]

To illustrate these exegetical comments and methods, I have chosen the last twenty-one verses of Acts to serve as an example. It is perhaps ironically appropriate that in this short concluding passage we should encounter such a profusion of the thematic elements and historiographical offenses that characterize the book as a whole. Indeed, it is not too much to see this passage as an epitome of his literary method.

a. Translation

[11]After **three** months we set sail in an Alexandrian ship that had wintered at the island, with the "Twin Brothers" as an emblem. [12]And we landed at Syracuse and stayed there for **three** days, [13]and from there sailing round arrived at Rhegium. A day later, a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. [14a]There we found **BROTHERS** and were invited to stay with them for seven days. [14b]AND SO WE CAME TO ROME.

[15]And the **BROTHERS** there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.

[16a]AND WHEN WE CAME INTO ROME, [16b]Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with only a soldier to guard him.

[17]*After **three** days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, "**BROTHERS**, though I had done nothing against the people or the customs of **our fathers**, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.* [18]*When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case.* [19]*But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—not that I mean to lay the blame on the (whole) nation.*

[20]*For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain."* [21]*And they said to him, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the **BROTHERS** coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you.* [22]*But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against."*

23. In what follows I have used material from Lüdemann, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 343–56.

[23]*After setting a day, a large number of them visited him at his lodging. From morning till evening he explained and testified to* ***THE KINGDOM OF GOD****, appealing to both the Law of Moses and the Prophets in an effort to convince them about Jesus.* [24]*And some were convinced by what he said, but others would disbelieve.* [25]*And so they disagreed among themselves, and as they departed, Paul offered one final statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to* ***your fathers*** *through Isaiah the prophet:*

[26]'Go to this people, and say,
You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive.
[27]For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed,
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.'

[28]*Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; and they will listen to it."*[24] [30]*He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him,* [31]*proclaiming* ***THE KINGDOM OF GOD*** *and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ openly and without hindrance.*

b. Outline

11–16: Journey from Malta via Syracuse, Rhegium and Puteoli to Rome. Welcome by the Christian brothers there. Paul's privileges in his Roman captivity: private quarters watched over by a single guard
17–28: Paul meets with the Jews of Rome and proclaims the kingdom of God
30–31: Living at his own expense, Paul preaches unhindered for two years

c. Luke's purpose

Verse 11: The Twin Brothers are the twin sons of Zeus, Castor and Pollux, who were expected to deliver people from distress at sea.[25]

Verses 12–13: "The ship docked in Syracuse for three days, then in Rhegium, and from there it sailed about 230 miles in only two days, with a south wind blowing, to Puteoli, the chief Italian port for overseas shipping at that time."[26]

Verses 14–16: This section is not without tensions, for while verse 14b reports that Paul and his companions have reached Rome ("and so we came to Rome"), verse 16a seems to depict a second arrival. In keeping with verse 16a but clashing with verse 14b, verse 15a reports that representatives of the Christian community met Paul at both the Forum Appii, some forty-three miles from Rome, and Tres Tabernae, about thirty-three miles from the city.

24. Verse 29 ("And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, holding much dispute among themselves") does not belong to the original text. It is a later addition.
25. Cf. Lucian, *Navig*. 9; Epictetus 2.18.29.
26. Krodel, *Acts*, 482.

Conzelmann[27] explains the tension by saying that in verse 14b Luke anticipates the arrival in Rome, but he gives no reason for this and indeed none seems evident. A more likely proposal offered by Haenchen[28] is that verse 14b is part of the travel account and verse 15 is a redactional expansion by means of which Luke intended a parallel to Paul's reception by the Jerusalem church in 21:17. The trouble with this is that Luke makes no further use of the incident, since further contact with the Christian community would have intruded on Paul's conversations with the Jews. (Note the corresponding neglect of the Jerusalem community in Acts 22-26). Verse 16 once again exemplifies Luke's scheme of showing Romans to be generally well disposed to Paul (cf. 27:3 to 27:16 and recall the deferential attitude of the tribune in 21:40a and the centurion's concern in 22:26). Of course, we must not assume that Luke's purpose and the content of the tradition that he reworked were always in conflict.

Verses 17–20: In this brief apologia Paul repeats earlier protestations: (1) He has traduced neither his people nor his ancestral customs (verse 17; cf. 25:8; 21:21). (2) It was some of his fellow Jews who compelled him to seek safety in an appeal to the emperor rather than be set free by the Romans and be vulnerable to assassination plots (verses 18–19; cf. 25:9–12). (3) It is to secure the future hope of Israel that Paul is in prison.[29]

Verse 21: Although this verse presents the picture of a major split between Roman Jews and Christians, as well as a serious difference of opinion between the Jews of Rome and those in Jerusalem, neither of these situations can claim evidentiary or even inferential support. We can, however, see another of Luke's many portraits of Paul as both triumphant missionary to the Gentiles and interpreter of Christianity to the Jews.[30]

Verse 22: That the Jews knew nothing of Paul and only by hearsay of Christianity is all but incredible in view of seemingly unassailable reports that during the reign of Claudius, Jewish-Christian riots—instigated by "Christ"—led to an expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem (cf. 18:2). Here Luke may well be redacting tradition so as to portray Paul as the putative founder of the Roman church, but he may be equally interested in establishing that Paul is making a fresh start with the Jews of Rome.[31]

Verse 23: The author is the one who has forged a connection between "kingdom of God" and verbs of testimony and proclamation (cf. 19:8 and below, verse 31). Paul's preaching to Roman Jews is one last recapitulation of the Lukan

27. Cf. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 224.
28. Cf. Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 719.
29. Cf. Acts 23:6; 24:15; 26:6.
30. See Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1.1241–42.
31. Cf. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1.1242. Roloff, *Apostelgeschichte*, 372, differs, proposing that Luke is silent about the community because he knows that its relationship to Paul was not clear.

kerygma. His listeners' reaction is so described as to convey the impression that by and large they are a lost cause.

Verse 24: It might at first seem that the statement "And some were convinced by his words but others would disbelieve" fails to accord with the subsequent conclusion in verse 28: "Know then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles: they will listen"—and that verse 24 therefore reflects a tradition. Indeed, verse 24 seems to show a result that does not match the cursing of the Isaiah quotation. On the other hand, 17:4 and 19:9 show similar redactionally created Jewish responses to Paul's preaching. Moreover the verse stresses the divisive effect of Paul's preaching. It is thus eminently reasonable to understand verse 24 as redactional preparation for the subsequent action.

Verse 25: The Jews demonstrate once again that they are at variance among themselves. Note the contrast to verse 17: Paul no longer speaks of "our fathers" but of "your fathers." Thus Luke distances Paul from the Jewish people (cf. his use of the same technique in the speech of Stephen, Acts 7).

Verses 26–28: This citation of Isa 6:9–10[32] is the last of repeated assurances that the gospel will hereafter be preached only to the Gentiles (see 13:46–47; 18:6). Verse 28 is a summary that employs unmistakably Lukan vocabulary. Conzelmann[33] is correct in saying that, as much as we may deplore the historical consequences, the Lukan church is thoroughly Gentile Christian. J. D. G. Dunn strikes a different note,

> (T)he turn to the Gentiles is *simply* part of God's larger scheme of salvation: the turn to the Gentiles does not imply a rejection of Israel (see also on 13.46–47). In other words, the Lukan Paul is no different from the Paul of Rom. 9–11: the mixed and largely negative response of the Jews to the gospel of Messiah Jesus and the positive response of the Gentiles is *simply* a phase in the larger purposes of God to include all, Jews and Gentiles, within his saving concern.[34]

Similarly, Gerhard Krodel remarks,

> Since Luke did not write "all Gentiles," we must assume that the meaning of *all* is inclusive of Jews rather than exclusive. In the epilog Luke did not establish a new Gentile particularism at the expense of Jews—something which would run counter to his whole narrative.[35]

Yet Tyson observes wisely,

> We must seriously consider the significance of the fact that the third Pauline announcement about going to the Gentiles comes at the very end of the book.

32. In Luke 8:10 the third evangelist omitted the quotation from Isa 6:10, which he read in Mark 4:11.
33. Cf. Conzelmann, *Theology of St Luke*, 145-50.
34. Dunn, *Acts of the Apostles*, 356. Italics added.
35. Krodel, *Acts*, 507.

> Narrative endings carry special weight and often supply just the ingredient that is necessary for a full understanding of the text. In the present case we have a motif that has appeared twice before (Acts 13:46–47; 18:6), with some confusion about its implications. At the end it comes again (Acts 28:28), but now with a sense of finality. On principle, there is no reason to reject the supposition that a text may refer to an event that is beyond the temporal scope of its narrative world. But here the only clear reference is to the reception of the gospel by Gentiles: "they will listen" (Acts 28:28), and nothing further is said about Jewish reception.[36]

Verse 30: The report that Paul lodged for two years at his own expense implies that Luke must have known of a subsequent change and something of its conditions; but he is silent on these matters.[37] The phrase "living at his own expense" may recall 20:33–34 and reminds us once again "that Paul does not take advantage of others."[38] The visitors that Paul welcomed included "all"—according to codex D also the Jews—but that latter proposal must be excluded.

Verse 31: This verse gives a description of Paul's missionary activity in Rome. As elsewhere, the object of his preaching is the kingdom of God (see above, verse 23). Significantly, the last word in Acts is "without hindrance."[39]

In short, Luke's purpose shines through here. He pictures the people of Rome as at least tolerant of Paul's ministry as well as the Christian message, and seems thus to be advising the Roman state to leave things alone. For Rome to continue its "hands-off" policy toward Christianity is no doubt among Luke's chief desires, and perhaps the central aim of the book's final chapters is to promote this end. Indeed, it is this motive together with the many echoes we hear from the opening pages of the book that alert us to the great care with which Luke has shaped his ending. Further support for this conclusion appears in the clearly purposeful omission of any mention of the impending judicial crisis or its outcome. We are told that Paul's imprisonment dragged on for another two years (28:30); but his trial—to say nothing of the possibility of his being found guilty—must be expunged from the record to allow for a properly heroic ending.

By not telling the story of Paul's martyrdom, Luke avoided introducing the reader to the ugly side of it. So he did not have to highlight any involvement of false Christian brothers or Jews.[40] Last but not least, he could also spare the Roman state, whose favor he was constantly currying. "Luke had stressed the church's unity in the power of the Spirit from the beginning, and he had shown that, when problems arose, they were solved in a spirit of unanimity (cf. 6:1–6; 15:5, 22–29). He would not possibly mar this story at its conclusion."[41]

36. Tyson, *Luke, Judaism, and the Scholars*, 145.
37. Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 726.
38. Gaventa, *Acts*, 368.
39. In Greek, *akôlytôs*.
40. Cf. Tajra, *Martyrdom of St. Paul*, 84.
41. Krodel, *Acts*, 487.

d. The tradition reworked by Luke

The itinerary from Malta to Rome via Syracuse, Rhegium, and Puteoli likely derives from tradition.

Verse 14: "The information 'Christians in Puteoli' is pre-Lukan."[42]

Verse 15: Paul's reception by members of the Roman community could reflect either a traditional report or an isolated element, but in any case it is clear that Luke obviously knew of the Roman community.

Verses 16b, 30: Descriptions of Paul's imprisonment probably come from a tradition, since Luke would appear to have no reason to create them. The datum "two years" is commonly adduced to demonstrate the author's familiarity with events concerning which he is apologetically silent (note also the hints contained in 20:18–38). Neither elements of the tradition nor editorial hints specify the time of Paul's death.

e. Historical elements

The tradition is no doubt correct in reporting Paul's journey from Malta to Rome.

Details of Paul's imprisonment found in the tradition are probably authentic. In many cases of lenient detention,[43] the accused was guarded by two soldiers; in Paul's case, one sufficed. Given this level of custody, Paul could well have practiced his craft in order to pay his rent and underwrite the expense of his guard. It should be noted that *enemeinen . . . en idiô misthômati* is almost always translated "in his own hired dwelling," but this translation lacks specific evidential support; the phrase could equally well be translated "at his own expense"[44] or "on his own earnings."[45]

1 Clem. 5.3–7—composed in the late nineties of the first century in Rome and sent to the church in Corinth— allows us to conclude that Paul died as a martyr in Rome:

> [3]We should set before our eyes the good apostles. [4]There is Peter, who because of unjust jealousy bore up under hardships not just once or twice, but many times; and having thus borne his witness he went to the place of glory that he deserved. [5]Because of jealousy and strife Paul pointed the way to the prize for endurance. [6]Seven times he bore chains; he was sent into exile and stoned; he served as herald in both the East and the West; and he received the noble reputation for his faith. [7]He taught righteousness to the whole world, and came to the limits of the West, bearing his witness before the rulers. And so he was set free from this world and transported up to the holy place, having become the greatest example of endurance.[46]

42. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 7 n. 1.
43. Tajra, *Trial of St. Paul*, 181.
44. Tajra, *Trial of St. Paul*, 191–92.
45. Lake and Cadbury, *Beginnings of Christianity*, 4.348.
46. Translated by Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*.

Clearly this passage is heavily stylized and contains elements of a "rhetorical panegyric modeled on the classical motif of the truly wise man battling in the arena of the spirit."[47] The phrase "limits of the West" either derives from the fact that the author inferred from Rom 15:24–25, 28 that Paul had carried on a mission in Spain (cf. also the probable use of 2 Cor 11:23–33 at the beginning of verse 6) or it understands Rome as the farthest limit of the West (for the author the westernmost point and the place of Paul's martyrdom are identical.)[48] Despite the stylization mentioned and the fact that nothing is said about the circumstances of Paul's death, that he died a violent death in Rome is not in doubt (1 Clement is a letter from the Roman community), since the words "bearing his witness before the rulers" refer to his martyrdom[49]—an interpretation that is further confirmed by the clause "he was set free from this world" that follows immediately.[50]

The Historical Value of Luke's Account

The ending of Acts is odd. Luke knows perfectly well that the Roman state executed Paul, but besides failing to mention that fact, he stresses Paul's freedom to preach the gospel without any hindrance. (The Roman guard is mentioned in verse 16 but never thereafter.) These strange details are interrelated. Luke has decided that Paul's execution "was not edifying,"[51] and that it is important to emphasize Paul's freedom to engage in unimpeded preaching. Thus he invents a theologically based (but intentionally unhistorical) picture of the Roman state in order to gain present and future privileges of unhindered preaching.

Clearly, one is entitled to be skeptical of such an author's accounts.

47. Bornkamm, *Paul*, 105.
48. Cf. Lindemann, *Die Clemensbriefe*, 39.
49. Cf. 1 Tim 6:13.
50. Cf. Bornkamm, *Paul*, 105–106.
51. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1.1249. Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 732, suggests that Luke has chosen not to relate Paul's execution, because he did not want to enhance devotion to Christian martyrs. Barrett lists other possibilities.

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