NT619 EXEGESIS OF ACTS

Aída Besançon Spencer

An exegesis of the Book of Acts with special attention to its Greco-Roman and Jewish background, the narrative genre, and guidelines for ministry today.

GOALS
This course addresses the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Mission Statement by:
1. encouraging students to become more knowledgeable of the structure and theology of the Book of Acts in its historical milieu and more competent in using language, interpretative and application skills learned in NT502 and Greek 1 & 11 (mission goal 1). Students will be encouraged to become creative, original, careful scholars who employ primary source materials and who allow conclusions to flow from a careful and accurate reading of the text and to further an enjoyment and awe of God and of the New Testament.
2. introducing students to the Christian scholarship issues in Acts (goal 2);
3. helping students mature in their character, outlook, conduct, relationships, and involvement in society by the teacher’s model, class dialogue, mentoring opportunities, and prayer (goal 4);
4. providing resources and strategies that will lead to effective local and global ministry, missions, evangelism, and discipleship as evident in Acts (goals 3, 5, 6).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
1. An original historical context study of the Book of Acts (3-6 double-spaced pp.). Due week 2 - Feb. 9 (grace 9 a.m. professor’s home, 2/13, or postmark 2/11) (10%).
2. A "character"/thematic study (1 p.) and an outline (1-2 pp.) of Acts due week 3 - Feb. 16 (or grace 9 a.m. professor’s home, 2/20 or postmark 2/18) (20%). Assignments # 1 & 2 may be revised for a higher grade through week 10 if both drafts are handed in (April 5).
3. Read all the required additional assignments (5%). Reading the optional assignments and attendance affects in-between grades.
4. Complete an 8-12 page (double-spaced) (Th. M. 13-17 pp.) exegesis study of @ 1-3 sentences in Acts with a one-two page application and a bibliography. Exegesis paper must include every component of an exegesis study. Include the sentence flow in the appendix. Due week 8 (March 22, grace 26 [9 a.m. professor’s home] or postmark 3/24) (50%). Only papers handed in on time can be guaranteed returned in time to rewrite. Optional revision due April 19.
5. Translate required Acts selections (10%) using a word list and, as reference, grammar books. (Do not use analytical lexicons or interlinear Bibles.) Four hours maximum per week. Keep a weekly journal of insights and questions encountered in reading Acts.
6. Complete two quizzes based on the translations. The higher grade is recorded (5%). All students are required to take the quiz and have a passing grade. Remedial work is possible. 10% penalty if second quiz not taken with a passing grade.
7. Th.M. students (elevated)– read and write summary and analysis of an additional book on Acts and extend exegesis paper 5 pp longer.
TEXTS FOR COURSE


Choose 1-2 commentaries of your choice from the bibliography and see other highly recommended resources. Many students have found helpful:

WEEKLY SESSIONS:

Week 1 (Feb. 2)
A. Introduction to course, course procedures, exegesis paper

B. Explain Wider Context Study
   Assignments for next class
   Read Aristotle Poetics sections 6-13, 15, 18, 23, 25 (M Heath trans, 5.1-7.2, 8-8.1, 8.5-8.9, 10.1, 11.1-11.3).
   What are differences between a historian and a poet?
   What aspects of Aristotle's suggestions are helpful for interpreting Acts?
   Complete historical context study of Acts.
   Optional skim read Lucian's How to Write History.

Week 2 (Feb 9)
A. How to Interpret Narrative.

B. Overview of Events in Acts as they relate to New Testament letters and extra biblical events.
   Assignments for next class
   Do sentence flow of Acts 1:1-5. Read Joel, 1, 2 Peter.
   Read Words of Delight ch. 2, pp. 53-90.
   Choose text for final paper.
   Optional read ch. 1 Biblical Interpretation Then and Now.

Week 3 (Feb 16)
   Discussion of insights and questions.

B. Define simile and metaphor. God’s Manifold Wisdom.
   Assignments for next class over Reading Week
   Read Yamauchi, Africa, pp. 149-203
   Begin final paper.

Week 4 (Feb 20-24)
Reading Week – No Classes

Week 5 (March 1)

B. Class translation of Acts 8:26-40.
   Presentation on Ethiopia.
   Assignments for next class
   Read Eusebius History of the Church Book 2, paragraphs 1-16
   Look up date and text-type for 10:30 variant (Was Cornelius fasting?).
   Find date & text-type of consistently cited uncial ms for Acts: Aleph, A, B, C, D², E², Psi, L, H², K², P², earliest italic, syr, cop. Complete final paper.
Week 6  
(March 8)

A. Class Translation of Acts 10:24-36

B. Caesarea Significance of Cornelius' and Peter's vision. Review text criticism. Information on centurions, Caesarea and Jewish-Gentile laws (Acts 9-12)

Assignments
Translate Acts 13:42-52
Read about Greco-Roman religions in Paganism and Christianity, pp. 9-151.

Week 7  
(March 15)

A. Class Translation of Acts 13:42-52

B. Overview of Greco-Roman gods, Synagogue Service, Predestination vs. Free will, Video Paul's Journeys First Missionary Journey

Assignments
Read Eusebius Book 3, paragraphs 27-28
Complete final paper.

Week 8  
(March 22)

A. Class translation of Acts 15:22-41

B. Jerusalem Council - How to Integrate Gentiles Galatians vs. Acts

Assignments for next class over Reading Week
Read Philippians
Read intro & at least 3 chs in Perspectives on Spirit Baptism for class on Ephesus (recommended chs. 1, 2, 4).
Read Acts 16:9-15, 36-40 in Greek.

Week 9  
(March 26-30)

Reading Week- No Class

Week 10  
(April 5)

A. Class translation of Acts 16:9-15, 36-40
Philippi and Place of women

B. Athens (Acts 17)
Paul's talk with Gentiles. Place of suffering in Acts

Assignments for next class
Read selections from Kroeger and Kroeger, I Suffer Not a Woman, ch 3 pp. 47-58, ch. 5 pp. 67-76, App. 193-211.
Read in Greek Acts 19:1-10.
Week 11 (April 12)  
A.  Video-Paul's Journeys (23 min.)-Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth  
   Class translation of Acts 19:1-10  
   Discussion of Spirit Baptism (Acts chs. 2, 8, 10, 19 vs. 1 Cor 14  
   The Coming of the Holy Spirit)  

B. Ephesus & the mother Goddess & Magic (visual power point)  

Assignments for next class  
While translating, note clues to Luke’s goal in Acts.  
Read Eusebius Book 2, chs. 19-26; Book 3, chs. 31, 37 about Felix, Festus, James, Nero, Philip & his daughters  
Complete all evaluation forms by last class.  

Week 12 (April 19)  
A. Quiz. Class translation of Acts 28:16-31  

B. Introduction to Rhetoric, Travel in Ancient Times & Rome (power point), Imprisonment, Strategies of Ministry  
   What is the purpose of Acts? Optional Disciple DVD  
Summary of class: (What was most significant?)  

Week 13 (April 26)  
Class in case of earlier cancellation  

Week 14 (May 3)  
Review through individualized instruction
CRUCIAL REFERENCES

A Greek Concordance:

Key References for Greek exegesis:

Key Greco-Roman Background References:
Grant, Frederick C., ed. Hellenistic Religions: The Age of Syncretism. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1953. BL96.G76

Choose 1-2 commentaries of your choice (* recommended)

Excellent Commentaries for Class Use

For Greek Students:
Written by Luke in Rome (late 70s/80s). Excellent citations by early fathers. Helpful historical lists. Style of many speeches "inferior" to that of the narrative (p. 18). They are "summaries giving the gist of what was really said" (p. 21). Brief but helpful notes. Cautiously believes in miracles (2:3).
Luke wrote Acts @ AD63. Succinct but helpful commentary to Greek.
Luke is author @ AD63 in Rome. Excellent notes on Greek phrases.
Excellent insights on text. The human tongue illuminated by fire was about to be instrument of Gospel's advancement (pp. 20-21). Cites most helpful insights of others. Illustrated.
Luke wrote AD63. Helpful comments on word meanings & parsings. (0-8054-1303-0)
Luke is author. Excellent study of tongues in ch. 2 cf. with 1 Cor. 14. Excellent clear notes.

For English Students:
Luke wrote @ AD63. "All" filled by H.S. is unique because permanent. Written like an encyclopedia, very helpful notes.
Luke wrote Acts @ AD75 because Gospel of Mark written earlier. Speeches show a "great deal of variety" (p. 11). Author "trips up not once" on historical accuracy.

Other Helpful Greco-Roman References:
Meinardus, Otto F. A. *St. Paul in Ephesus and the Cities of Galatia and Cyprus: In the Footsteps
Pivotal work on Tarsus, Antioch, Iconium, Derbe, and Lystra.

Other Helpful Secondary References:
Allison, Dale C. "Peter and Cephas: One and the Same." JBL III (Fall, 1992): 489-495.
Chapter 1 is an overview of first century hermeneutics.
Practical application of Acts for today’s church. Uses few female examples.
Thesis focusing on references to the Spirit. Uses form criticism in gospels. People are a temple filled by "smoke" (Isa. 6:4 P. 57). Helpful comments on Acts.

BS 2625.2.B665 vol 5. Articles on God-fearers and synagogue inscriptions.


**Paul's Journey According to Scripture**.  A Robin Williams Film Production (88 min.).  
BS2505.A3P3


BS2625.2.R52


**Good Commentaries**:


An exhaustive introduction to the textual mss. He does not try to harmonize apparent inconsistencies. Detailed but doesn’t always believe in miracles (e.g. 264. vol. 1).
Exposition.  Footnotes refer to some Greek matters.  Satisfactory notes.

Luke is the author in AD62.  Greek text included.  Sometimes skeptical but good
comments on Greek.

Analyzes Acts in light of its Greek, Roman, and Jewish perspective.  Interesting.

Finsbury, [1851]  1685.BS2625.D957
Cerinthus discounted authority of Acts.  Scholarly comments and very helpful.

*González, Justo L.  *Hechos.  Comentario Bíblico Hispanoamericano.  Miami:  Editorial Caribe,
1992.  Acts written by one of Paul's coworkers, probably the "beloved doctor" in 80.  "En
nuestra iglesia hispana...creemos y hemos creido siempre en un Dios activo, y en un
mundo abierto a la acción de Dios" (120).

Philadelphia:  Presbyterian Board of Education, 1859.  BS2625.J15
Luke wrote Acts @ AD63.  Circumlocutious but extensive notes in tiny print.

Luke wrote Acts before AD64.  Work of a lifetime (1009 pp).  Somewhat verbose and
conclusions sometimes unusual.


near AD70.  Generally helpful notes - no reference to Greek.

Bible.  Garden City:  Doubleday, 1967.  BS491.2.A5 v.31
Coworker of Paul wrote Acts at beginning of the 60's.  Extensive introduction, brief
notes.

Cambridge:  University, 1966.  BS2625.3.P127
For "general reader." Nice introductory notes are very brief.


University, 2003.  BS 2625.5.3.C85 Helpful comments on Greek grammar & parsing.

Did not seek to break new ground, rather preserve insights of past and present.  Luke is
author after AD70.  Luke wrote speeches in own words.  Summarizes secondary data and
takes a moderate position.  Clear maps (58-61).

Revell, 1901.  BS2626.R54 Written before Jerusalem temple destruction (AD 70) and
Paul's death (67-68), between 63-67.  Brief but helpful notes.

Y.M.C.A., 1892.  BS2626.S6
Thorough listing of early church comments.  Luke wrote before AD70.  Thorough, in
outline form, deals with different questions.  Not an exposition of the text.


Popular Commentaries that are Excellent:

Luke is author.  Introductory comments.  Extensive notes on text followed by homiletical thoughts.

Insightful brief sermons, positive to women.

Ten days between ascension and Pentecost.  Insightful comments enmeshed in homiletical comments.  No introductory comments.

Assumes Luke is author.  Acts is the story of all Jesus began to do and to teach by the Holy Spirit through His Body which is the Church (pp 10,13).  Very insightful exposition, but little historical helps.

Literary comments on different verses from someone who believes in the miraculous.

Acts is like biographies of founders of philosophical schools.  Ideas for sermons from different passages.  120 was number of men required to establish a community its own Council (11).  1 Cor. 13:1 "tongues of men" = Acts 2 (p. 15).  Helpful ideas.

iam.classics.unc.edu – ancient maps
Here are some topics for papers that might be narrowed into a text for an exegetical study:

Chapter(s) in parentheses are not intended to be complete.

**Potential theological topical papers based on the Book of Acts**

What is baptism? How and to whom is it done? (chs. 2, 16, 19)

What does it mean to be baptized by the Holy Spirit (ch. 2)? What does it mean to be filled by the Holy Spirit (ch. 7)? Compare to baptism in John's name (ch. 8). Relation between baptism and Holy Spirit.

What is power? (ch. 1) Can evil have power? (ch. 13)

Place of prayer (chs. 1, 9)

Role of Mary in early church (ch. 1). Also use Eusebius.

Predestination vs. Free Will in Acts (ch. 1)

Harmonizing apparent discrepancies (Judas' death ch. 1)

What is an apostle? (ch. 1)
What is a prophet? (ch. 2)
What is a teacher? (ch. 13)
Is Jesus a man or a human? (ch. 2) aner vs. anthropos and significance.

Who is Jesus in Acts?

Relationship - between wonders and persecution (chs. 2, 8)


How was healing done? (chs. 3, 9)

Compare ministry of word to ministry of service (ch. 6). Relate to "deacons" (1 Tim. 3).

Compare Stephen's last prayer (ch. 7) with James' last prayer and Jesus' last prayer (Luke 23:34). Must consider textual criticism.

Are signs and wonders for today? (ch. 8)

What can we learn about angels? How are they messengers in Acts vs. what is role today? (chs. 10, 12, 27)

Widows - importance of and role in early church

"God shows no partiality" (ch. 10). Define biblically and show significance.

Define different kinds of "silence" (ch. 11, 15, 21). Use Greek concordance.
Compare examples of fasting with teachings about fasting (ch. 13). Is fasting ever required?

Significance of blindness (ch. 13) in Acts.

How does God communicate to people (angels, visions, etc.)? Does God still use same methods today?

What is relation between prophetic message and action? (ch. 21).

**Historical Studies**

What was conflict between Hebrews and Hellenists or was it Jews and Greeks? (chs. 6, 11)

Meaning of "right" (ch. 7) in Acts and in other ancient literature.

Show relation of beginning of church in Ethiopia (ch. 8) to the earliest extracanonical traditions about the Ethiopian church.

Significance of alms among Jews, Romans, and Greeks.

Harmonize famines in Acts with extra biblical references (ch. 11)

Study Feast of Pentecost or Unleavened Bread (ch. 2) and draw significance for understanding text.

Read an Epicurean or Stoic philosopher (e.g. Epictetus) and show how that knowledge helps interpret Acts 17.

Find information on ancient Jewish or pagan exorcists and compare methods to Christian exorcists (ch. 19).

**Rhetorical Studies**

Use of Old Testament by preachers.

Study one evangelistic sermon in Acts: format, similarity & difference to another sermon, effect vs. intent. How was it persuasive? Compare to ancient rhetorical methods. In what way is it a model for today? (chs. 13, 17)

**Potential People to Study. Begin in Acts.**

Peter (chs. 1, 15); Gamaliel (ch. 5) - compare to teachings in the Mishnah; Theudas or Judas the Galilean (ch. 5) - find and compare to extra biblical literature. What was political situation during time of Acts?; Stephen (ch. 6); Dorcas (ch. 9) What is a disciple?; Barnabas (ch. 11); John Mark (ch. 12); Paul; Timothy; Aquila and Priscilla; Apollos (ch. 18); Agabus (ch. 21); Philip; Philip's daughters; Felix, Festus, Agrippa, Bernice - pick a key ruler - study New Testament and extra biblical data; Aristarchus (ch. 27)