

TROY M. TROFTGRUBEN

# A Conclusion Unhindered

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe  
280*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

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Troy M. Troftgruben

# A Conclusion Unhindered

A Study of the Ending of Acts  
within its Literary Environment

Mohr Siebeck

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## Preface

This monograph is a slightly revised version of my Ph.D. dissertation, submitted in April of 2009 to the Faculty of the Department of Biblical Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary.

A refined work of scholarship is rarely written without extensive help. I am forever thankful to the many people who aided me, without whom this study would not be. First of all, I am profoundly grateful to Beverly Roberts Gaventa, my dissertation advisor, who encouraged me to pursue this project since I first expressed interest in it. Her wise words and perceptive critiques enabled me to transform a rudimentary idea into a sharpened thesis. She put remarkable care into her feedback, and my work has benefited directly from her refined insight. I am also grateful to George L. Parsenios and J. Ross Wagner, my other examiners, who gave valuable advice and constructive criticism. In particular, George Parsenios directed my attention to important resources on closure in classical literature, and Ross Wagner was an extremely helpful critical reader of every one of my chapters. They have both been delightful partners with me in this journey. I am also thankful for Prof. Dr. Jörg Frey, who both facilitated the publication of this study and directed my attention to recent studies on the topic from the past year. Dr. Henning Ziebritzki and Ms. Tanja Mix, finally, offered both expertise and punctuality as they helped me arrange the final proofs.

Furthermore, I am grateful to Princeton Theological Seminary, whose resources enabled my work to take shape. The doctoral fellowship I received was a very significant means of support, and the academic community of Princeton Seminary itself was a gift. The seminary's library offered exceptional resources – both books and personnel – that make quality works of scholarship possible. Finally, I am very grateful for the housing given to my family and me for five years in Princeton. Living in such a safe and healthy community gives a stability that enables academic work to thrive.

Other individuals also helped me in significant ways. Shannon Smythe proofread drafts of nearly every chapter in this study, giving me constructive advice on style and format. Her help was invaluable. My sister Susan Dub also proofread several chapters, offering input from a viewpoint out-

side of the academy. I am also very thankful for the congregation where I currently serve as pastor, Calvary Lutheran in Grand Forks, North Dakota, for extending to me many weeks of precious time to finish this study. The congregation and staff – and Pastor Roger Dykstra, in particular – have been tremendously supportive of my work since our relationship first began.

More than anything, my family is the reason for my sanity throughout doctoral studies. I am forever indebted to my mother, Judy Troftgruben, who always believed in me and encouraged me to pursue great things in lieu of easier paths that were closer at hand. My son, Timothy Josiah, brought unspeakable joy to me during very difficult times along my journey to this point. My daughter, yet to arrive this summer, has already brought me profound joy even before her birth. My parents-in-law (Rebecca and Ken) and brothers-in-law (Jeff and Dan) also deserve credit: they warmly welcomed me into their family and – even more – supported me in my study despite the fact it required their beloved Maria to move one thousand miles away for four years.

And to my wife, Maria, I owe infinite gratitude. She has supported me and believed in me when I no longer believed in myself. She has listened to my ideas on closure, read several drafts of this study, and walked with me through thick and thin. My thankfulness to her cannot adequately be expressed in words.

This study is dedicated to the memory of my father, Burnell Marvin Troftgruben (1939–2006), who passed away during the course of completing this study, four years ago today. His departure will always remind me that the finest ending is one that concludes a journey without requiring the end of the story.

Grand Forks, 1 May 2010

Troy M. Troftgruben

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## Abbreviations

Abbreviations and citation conventions for modern scholarship and ancient literature follow *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (ed. Patrick H. Alexander et al.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999) and the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3d ed.; ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) where possible. In addition, the following abbreviations are used:

<i>AAntHung</i>	<i>Acta antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i>
ABNT	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
<i>Abh.</i> (Gött.)	<i>Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen: Philologisch-historische Klasse, NF</i> (Berlin, 1897–1939)
<i>ABR</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
<i>AbrN</i>	<i>Abr-Nahrain</i>
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANRW	H. Temporini and W. Haase (eds.), <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i>
<i>Anton</i>	<i>Antonianum</i>
ASNU	Acta seminarii neotestamentici upsaliensis
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3d ed. Chicago, 2000
BDF	Blass, F., A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk. <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago, 1961
<i>Beginnings</i>	<i>The Beginnings of Christianity</i> . Part 1: <i>The Acts of the Apostles</i> (ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake; 5 vols.; London: Macmillan, 1920–1933)
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BGBE	Beiträge zur Geschichte der Biblischen Exegese
<i>BGU</i>	<i>Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden</i> . 15 vols. Berlin, 1895–1983
<i>Bijdr</i>	<i>Bijdragen: Tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
CAGN	<i>Collected Ancient Greek Novels</i> (ed. B. P. Reardon; Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1989)
<i>ClAnt</i>	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>

<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
<i>CTM</i>	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
<i>CW</i>	<i>Classical World</i>
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>Enc</i>	<i>Encounter</i>
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios bíblicos</i>
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses</i>
<i>EvJ</i>	<i>Evangelical Journal</i>
FF	Foundations and Facets
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
HKNT	Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
IBC	Interpretation: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>ICS</i>	<i>Illinois Classical Studies</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation, a Journal of Bible and Theology</i>
<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Interpretation</i> (Hague, Netherlands)
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LCM</i>	<i>Liverpool Classical Monthly</i>
LD	Lectio divina
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
MD	<i>Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici</i>
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
NA <sup>27</sup>	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , Nestle-Aland, 27 <sup>th</sup> edition
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NKZ</i>	<i>Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift</i>
<i>NPNF</i>	<i>A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> . Edited by Philip Schaff. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1956
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
<i>OrChr</i>	<i>Oriens Christianus</i>
<i>PCPS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society</i>
PG	Patrologia graeca. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–1886
<i>PIBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association</i>
PL	Patrologia latina. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–1864
<i>PTL</i>	<i>PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature</i>
<i>PW</i>	Pauly, A. F. <i>Pauly's Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> . New Edition. 49 vols. Ed. G. Wissowa. Munich, 1980
<i>Ramus</i>	<i>Ramus: Critical Studies in Greek and Roman Literature</i>
<i>RBPH</i>	<i>Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire</i>
Readings	Readings: A New Biblical Commentary
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series

<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SHAW	Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften.
SJ	Studia judaica: Forschungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums
SO	<i>Symbolae Osloenses</i>
SP	Sacra Pagina
SSN	Studia semitica neerlandica
<i>StPatr</i>	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
<i>SwJT</i>	<i>Southwestern Journal of Theology</i>
TAPA	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>TBei</i>	<i>Theologische Beiträge</i>
<i>ThT</i>	<i>Theologisch tijdschrift</i>
TLG	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae: Canon of Greek Authors and Works.</i> Edited by L. Berkowitz and K. A. Squitier. 3d ed. Oxford, 1990
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TSK	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Altchristlichen Literatur
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
YCS	<i>Yale Classical Studies</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i> (1920–2005), <i>des Urchristentums</i> (1900–1919)



## Introduction

# The Enigma

No point in a story is as significant for appreciation and interpretation as its ending.

– Donald Harrisville Juel, “A Disquieting Silence,” 1

The manner in which a [work] concludes, becomes, in effect, the last and frequently the most significant thing it says.

– Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 196

How does the book of Acts end? More specifically, how do the final scenes conclude the narrative?

An important event in the final chapter is Paul’s arrival at Rome (28:11–16). Nine chapters have passed since the first indication that Paul would see Rome (19:21–22). In the meantime, chapters 19–28 intensify the questions whether Paul will arrive, and what will happen if he does. Paul does arrive, but questions remain. In view of Jesus’ promise at the beginning of Acts (“you will be my witnesses. . . unto the end of the earth,” 1:8), Paul’s arrival at Rome may serve as a conclusive fulfillment of prophecy. But does Rome truly signify “the end of the earth”? The narrative does not clarify. Moreover, does the narrative draw attention to the arrival as a climactic event? These questions demand answer.

Most of the ending of Acts (28:16–31)<sup>1</sup> is devoted to narrating Paul’s interactions with the Jewish leaders of Rome (vv. 16–28). At first the Jews appear open to Paul’s message (vv. 21–22), but later dialogue concludes with what seems to be an indictment of their indifference: Paul reproaches the Jews, using words from Isaiah (6:9–10 [LXX]; Acts 28:26–27), and states that Gentiles “will listen” to “this salvation from God” (Acts 28:28). On the one hand, Paul’s words recall speeches from the start of his ministry (13:46–47; cf. 18:5–6) and the beginning of Luke’s Gospel (cf. Luke 2:29–32; 3:4–6; Acts 28:28), making this final instance a fitting conclusion.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, some factors diminish the finality of these clos-

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<sup>1</sup> This study understands the ending of Acts as 28:16–31, for reasons discussed on pp. 114–16 below.

<sup>2</sup> This study assumes a narrative unity between Luke and Acts: a coherent and consistent narrative world produced by a single author, as articulated by Robert C. Tannehill (*The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* [2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986, 1990], 1:1–9, esp. 1–4). Therefore, the two narratives demand consideration as a unified work. However, there are also reasons to consider Luke and Acts as separate



ing words: Paul himself is a Jew (28:17); Paul's hearers respond inconclusively (28:24–25a); and soon afterward Paul appears to continue his witness among both Jews and Gentiles (28:30–31). Consequently, perhaps Paul's final word is not so final after all.

The last scene of the narrative is the most interesting, since it appears to generate more openness than closure.

[Paul] remained for two whole years in his own hired house and was welcoming all those coming unto him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with every boldness of speech, in an unhindered manner. (28:30–31)<sup>3</sup>

The scene begins with a time frame – “two whole years” – that could allude to Paul's death. But the passage uses an imperfect verb with three present participles,<sup>4</sup> grammatical forms that suggest ongoing activity. Furthermore, the last words of the narrative (“with every boldness of speech, in an unhindered manner”) highlight the unrestrained nature of this apostolic witness. Altogether, does this ending signify that matters are concluded, or only beginning?

Finally, it is interesting to notice what is *not* narrated. First, the question of Paul's fate pervades Acts 20–28, roughly one third of the book.<sup>5</sup> In these chapters the narrative foretells that Paul will appear before Caesar (27:23–24) and may face death (20:25). But ultimately these expected events never occur in Acts. Second, promises made at the outset are unrealized at the end. For one, Jesus' return is promised at the beginning (1:11), but it is neither realized nor mentioned at the end. For another, Jesus prophesies in the opening chapter that his witnesses will go “unto the end

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works, as articulated by Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard I. Pervo (*Rethinking the Unity of Luke-Acts*, [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993]). Therefore, Acts merits consideration as an independent narrative. For these reasons, this study concentrates on Acts, but with an eye to overarching unity between Acts and Luke's “first volume.” For a survey of recent discussion on the unity of Luke and Acts, see Joseph Verheyden, “The Unity of Luke-Acts: What are we up to?” in *The Unity of Luke-Acts* (ed. J. Verheyden; BETL 142; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 3–56.

<sup>3</sup> All translations throughout this study are my own, except where a note clearly signals the use of another translator's work.

<sup>4</sup> Imperfect verb: “was welcoming” (ἀπεδέχετο); present participles: “those coming” (εἰσπορευομένων), “proclaiming” (κηρύσσων), and “teaching” (διδάσκων).

<sup>5</sup> Acts 20:17–38 and 21:1–26 anticipate an ominous fate for Paul, and the trial scenes of chapters 22–26 foster suspense concerning this fate. The speech at Miletus (20:17–38) takes the form of farewell discourse and alludes to the end of Paul's ministry: “And now I know that all of you, among whom I have been going about proclaiming the kingdom, shall no longer see my face” (20:25; see also 19:21–22). See Jan Lambrecht, “Paul's Farewell-Address at Miletus (Acts 20, 17–38),” in *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, rédaction, théologie* (ed. Jacob Kremer; BETL 48; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979), 307–37. See p. 11 and n. 11 below.

of the earth" (1:8), yet this may be unrealized by the end if Paul's arrival at Rome does not signify the fulfillment. Altogether, this mixed bag of considerations raises the question all the more: How, in fact, does the book of Acts end?

This question defies simple and easy answers. As for those that have been given, Henry Cadbury's observation still holds true: "none is entirely satisfactory, and their variety is a warning against a too easy acceptance of any."<sup>6</sup> Throughout the last century, the most seasoned scholars of Acts have called the ending a "conspicuous" matter of intrigue,<sup>7</sup> a "notorious puzzle,"<sup>8</sup> and an "enigma."<sup>9</sup> Consequently, it is clear that the question "How does the book of Acts end?" both commands respect and, more importantly, deserves further investigation.

This question about the ending of Acts is a question about narrative closure. While studies of the ending are not in short supply, those that use the analytical tools of narrative closure are. Yet, the lens of narrative closure can focus interpretation of the ending of Acts in fruitful ways. The presence or absence of closure profoundly impacts the ending of a narrative, thereby creating lasting impressions that influence interpretation of the entire narrative. For instance, closure may convey completion, coherency, unity, resolution, or finality, whereas the absence of closure (openness) may convey incompleteness, disorder, uncertainty, irresolution, or continuation.<sup>10</sup> The meaning varies from one passage to another, but the significance of closure (or its absence) is rarely minimal. The ending of Acts is no exception to this rule. Further study of closure in the ending of Acts is desirable indeed.

Furthermore, this question about the ending of Acts is a question about an ancient writing. For that reason, comparative analysis of closure be-

<sup>6</sup> Henry J. Cadbury and Kirsopp Lake, "The Acts of the Apostles: English Translation and Commentary," in *The Beginnings of Christianity*. Part 1: *The Acts of the Apostles* (ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake; 5 vols.; London: Macmillan, 1920–1933), 4:349.

<sup>7</sup> Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (2d ed.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999), 321.

<sup>8</sup> Loveday Alexander, "Reading Luke-Acts from back to front," in *The Unity of Luke-Acts* (ed. J. Verheyden), 419.

<sup>9</sup> "Daniel Marguerat, "The Enigma of the End of Acts (28.16–31)," in *The First Christian Historian: Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles'* (trans. Ken McKinney, Gregory J. Laughery, and Richard Bauckham; SNTSMS 121; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 205–30.

<sup>10</sup> On some of these connotations, see Don P. Fowler, "Second Thoughts on Closure," in *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature* (ed. Deborah H. Roberts, Francis M. Dunn, and Don Fowler; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3–22. See also Marianna Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 1–13, 202–10.

tween the ending of Acts and the endings of contemporaneous literature may serve to ground this study of Acts within its proper historical-literary environment. This comparison can offer a perspective on closure that better illuminates the significance of Acts within its original context. Aided by this comparison, a study of the ending of Acts can not only identify the kind of closure therein, it can discuss the significance this may have had for ancient readers.

## Overview of the Present Study

This study is an analysis of closure in the ending of Acts, in comparison with endings from contemporaneous literature. This project uses a refined conception of narrative closure to identify nuances of closure and openness that are typically underappreciated. Moreover, this study puts the closure of Acts in perspective, by comparing it with examples from contemporaneous literature. For the sake of brevity and focus, the study considers four genres<sup>11</sup> of ancient literature: prose fiction, biography, epic, and historiography. While the genre of Acts is disputed, nearly all scholars associate Acts with one of these four genres.<sup>12</sup> Altogether, this study offers an analy-

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<sup>11</sup> The concept of literary “genre” is more modern than ancient. Still, writers as early as Plato and Aristotle distinguish among literary forms according to their goals and purposes (Plato, *Republic* 3.392–97; Aristotle, *Poet.* 3–6; see also Plutarch, *Alex.* 1.1–3; Lucian, *Ver. hist.* 1.4; *How to Write History* 7–10). Furthermore, the lack of differentiation among genres by ancient writers does not diminish the commonalities that exist among certain literary traditions and authors. For this reason, genre categories are helpful for this study. For a concise history of the development of genre consciousness in antiquity, see Frederick Garber, G. N. G. Orsini, and T. V. F. Brogan, “Genre,” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 456–59.

<sup>12</sup> See Thomas E. Phillips, “The Genre of Acts: Moving Toward a Consensus?” *Currents in Biblical Research* 4:3 (2006): 365–96; see also Detlev Dormyer, “Die Gattung der Apostelgeschichte,” in *Die Apostelgeschichte im Kontext antiker und frühchristlicher Historiographie* (ed. Jörg Frey, Clare K. Rothschild, and Jens Schröter; BZNW 162; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 437–75. On Acts and prose fiction, see Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Susan Marie Praeder, “Luke-Acts and the Ancient Novel,” in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1981* (ed. K. H. Richards; SBLSP 20; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 269–92. On Acts and biography, see Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (SBLMS 20; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1974), esp. 125–40; “The Acts of the Apostles: Monograph or Bios?” in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts* (ed. Ben Witherington, III; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 58–72. On Acts and epic literature, see Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), esp. 1–29; Dennis R. MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer?: Four Cases from the*

sis of the ending of Acts that is disciplined by narrative criticism, focused upon narrative closure, and informed by relevant ancient literature of the period.

Chapter 1 offers a brief history of scholarship on the ending of Acts. This survey shows that scholarship has gradually shifted from viewing the ending as abrupt to emphasizing that it offers closure. The chapter also observes that scholars would do well to focus more rigorously on the question “*How* does the ending conclude?” than to speculate about the author’s intentions (i.e., “*Why* does the ending conclude this way?”). Chapter 1 then considers more specifically some important, recent studies on both closure in the ending and comparison of the ending with ancient literature. This final section acknowledges the work that has been done, and in turn identifies what yet needs to be done, particularly by way of clarifying some issues of methodology.

Chapter 2 addresses these important issues of methodology. First, it identifies an approach to narrative criticism that uses traditional analysis of text and structure, but is also attuned to recent emphases on context and the reading process. Second, the chapter clarifies who “the reader” is for this study: a hybrid persona, made up of concerns both ancient and modern, both contextual and textual, and both communal and individual. Third, the chapter uses the work of ancient and modern scholars to define forms of narrative closure and their significance. The chapter identifies specific techniques of closure and openness, with illustrations from well-known writings.

Chapter 3 considers closure in the endings of literature contemporaneous with Acts. Representative works are chosen from four different genres:

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*Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Stefan Krauter, “Vergils Evangelium und das lukanische Epos? Überlegungen zu Gattung und Theologie des lukanischen Doppelwerkes,” in *Die Apostelgeschichte im Kontext* (ed. Jörg Frey, Clare K. Rothschild, and Jens Schröter), 214–43. On Acts and historiography, see Eckhard Plümacher, *Lukas als Hellenistischer Schriftsteller: Studien zur Apostelgeschichte* (SUNT 9; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972); David E. Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (LEC 8; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 77–115; Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (WUNT 49; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989); Gregory Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (NovTSup 64; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992); David L. Balch, “The Genre of Luke-Acts: Individual Biography, Adventure Novel, or Political History?” *SwJT* 33 (1990): 5–19; Loveday Alexander, “Luke’s Preface in the Context of Greek Preface-writing,” *NovT* 28:1 (1986): 48–74; Jens Schröter, “Zur Stellung der Apostelgeschichte im Kontext der antiken Historiographie,” in *Die Apostelgeschichte im Kontext* (ed. Jörg Frey, Clare K. Rothschild, and Jens Schröter), 27–47; Joachim Molthagen, “Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsverständnis in der Apostelgeschichte im Vergleich mit Herodot, Thukydides und Polybios,” in *Die Apostelgeschichte im Kontext* (ed. Jörg Frey, Clare K. Rothschild, and Jens Schröter), 159–81.

prose fiction (Heliodorus, Achilles Tatius, Chariton), biography (Plutarch's *Lives*, esp. *Cato minor*), epic (Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*), and historiography (Herodotus, Thucydides, Sallust, 1–4 Kingdoms, Josephus). Historiography is explored most fully since it is the genre to which Acts is most often compared. Nearly all of these works have been compared with Acts or are thought to have influenced it in some way. These writings offer examples of closure from the literary environment of Luke's<sup>13</sup> world, creating helpful points of comparison for the work of the following chapters.

Chapters 4 and 5 are the heart of this study. Together they constitute an analysis of the ending of Acts from the perspective of narrative closure. Chapter 4 identifies the ending of Acts (as 28:16–31) and offers a sustained reading of that ending. The chapter highlights the many ways in which the ending recalls earlier events and key themes from both Acts and Luke's Gospel. The chapter also shows that the ending provokes more questions than it answers (e.g., Paul's closing word, 28:25b–28), and that it concludes with a scene that implies continuation more than termination (28:30–31). Chapter 5, then, explores closure and openness in the ending of Acts, in comparison with other endings of ancient literature. The chapter shows that the ending of Acts offers a sense of narrative completion by recalling key themes and events from earlier in Luke-Acts. Yet, the same ending also conveys openness. While some specific scholars downplay the presence of this openness, it causes the ending to read as a link (i.e., linkage) to an expansive story that continues far beyond Acts 28. This combination of closure (narrative completion) and openness (linkage) makes the ending of Acts most comparable to the endings of certain epic narratives (e.g., Homer's *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*), which interweave closure and openness in complex ways.

The Conclusion of the study, then, synthesizes these results with a response to the study's opening question: "How does the book of Acts end?" Finally, the Conclusion draws together the implications of the study both for the understanding of closure in ancient literature and for the interpretation of the ending of Acts.

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<sup>13</sup> Throughout this study "Luke" signifies merely the conventional designation for the author of Luke and Acts.

## Chapter 1

# Accounting for an Ending

In literary-critical terms, the ending of Acts is a notorious puzzle. Many readers would query (and have queried from earliest times) whether it even makes a fitting closure to Acts as a single volume.

– Loveday Alexander, “Reading Luke-Acts from Back to Front,” 419

The ending of Acts has fascinated readers for nearly two millennia.<sup>1</sup> This fascination stems, first, from the fact that literary endings often have important marks of an author’s design. When an author envisions specific purposes for his or her writing, presumably they are achieved by the end. For this reason an ending often reveals more about the writing’s purpose than the rest of the book.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the ending of Acts is rarely bypassed in broader discussions of the book’s purpose, provenance, genre, and theology. A second reason for the fascination is that the ending of Acts is anything but simple and unambiguous, as the Introduction to this study has observed. Various themes interact at the close of the narrative in interesting and complicated ways. Understandably, interpretations of the ending have varied widely throughout the centuries.

The history of research on the ending of Acts all serves to underscore the importance of a fundamental question: “How does the book of Acts conclude?” As this chapter shows, a gradual shift has occurred in the interpretation of the ending, from viewing it as inadvertent and abrupt, to viewing it as deliberate and even fitting. Yet, while this shift has brought about refinements, the fundamental question about the ending persists.

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<sup>1</sup> C. K. Barrett rightly comments: “The questions raised by Acts 28 are no new discovery; every student of Acts has encountered them and made some contribution – in some cases a negative one – to their solution. But they constantly call for re-examination” (“The End of Acts,” in vol. 3: *Frühes Christentum, of Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag* [ed. Hubert Cancik, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Peter Schäfer; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996], 545).

<sup>2</sup> Advocated by Marianna Torgovnick (*Closure in the Novel*, 18–19).

## A. The Ending of Acts among Scholars: A Brief Survey

### 1. *The Ending of Acts: Luke Knew no More*

The earliest approach to the ending of Acts finds it abrupt and credits this to a limitation on Luke's knowledge. The idea is further supported by an ancient tradition that sees Luke as the traveling companion of Paul, and consequently the book of Acts as the chronicle of an eyewitness.<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, the simplest explanation for the ending of Acts is that Luke stopped because he knew no more.<sup>4</sup> The first and most common form of the proposal is that the subsequent events had not yet happened.<sup>5</sup> This

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<sup>3</sup> So, for example, Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1; 10.1; 14.1–2), the Muratorian Canon (3–6, 35–39), the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Luke (1–9), Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 2.22.1), Jerome (*Vir. ill.* 7.5), and Euthalius, the fifth-century deacon of Alexandria (PG 85.645b, 709).

<sup>4</sup> So the Muratorian Canon (late 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. C.E.): “For most excellent Theophilus Luke compiled the individual events that occurred in his own presence (*sub praesentia eius*), as he clearly shows by omitting the passion of Peter and the departure of Paul from the city [Rome] when he went to Spain” (35–39). John Chrysostom (ca. 400) mentions this possibility: “Or else [Luke] does this [i.e., ends abruptly], not having it in his power to exhibit it from his own personal knowledge” (*Hom. Act.* 55 [Browne's translation, *NPNF* 11:326]). Translations of Chrysostom throughout this study are mine (from PG 1.1; 55.2), but following the order of Henry Browne's translation (*NPNF* 11:2, 3260) for reasons explained in detail on p. 164 below. Early in the 4<sup>th</sup> century Eusebius suggests that Luke wrote Acts during Paul's “second” imprisonment (*Hist. eccl.* 2.22.1, 6–8; cf. 3.1.3) – an idea that continues long afterward among Medieval commentators (see p. 19 and n. 40 below). Eusebius's suggestion, however, is purely to harmonize the account of Acts with the Pastoral Epistles (e.g., 2 Tim 4:16–18), and so Eusebius differs little from the Muratorian Canon and John Chrysostom.

<sup>5</sup> So Johann A. Bengel (“Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles,” in *Gnomon of the New Testament* [trans. Andrew R. Fausset et al.; 5 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1866], 2:731), Johann D. Michaelis (*Introduction to the New Testament* [trans. Herbert Marsh; 4 vols.; 2d ed.; London: F&C Rivington, 1802], 3:327), Karl G. Wieseler (*Chronologie des apostolischen Zeitalters bis zum Tode der Apostel Paulus und Petrus* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1848], 400–02), Johannes H. A. Ebrard (H. Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on the New Testament* [trans. David Fosdick; 5 vols.; New York: Sheldon & Company, 1866], 3:412–13), Henry Alford (*Greek Testament* [4 vols. London: Rivington & Deighton, 1849–1862], 1:39–40), Richard B. Rackham (*The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition* [London: Methuen, 1901], 1–1v), Adolf von Harnack (“The Conclusion of the Acts of the Apostles and its Silence concerning the Result of St. Paul's Trial,” in *The Date of the Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels* [Crown Theological Library 33; trans. J. R. Wilkinson; New York: G. P. Putnam, 1911], 93–99), Heinrich Koch (*Die Abfassungszeit des lukanischen Geschichtswerkes: Eine historisch-kritische und exegetische Untersuchung* [Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1911], 3–17, 25–30), George Edmundson (*The Church in Rome in the First Century: An Examination of Various Controverted Questions relating to its History, Chronology, Literature and Traditions* [London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1913], 32–34), Julius Wellhausen (*Kritische Analyse der Apostelgeschichte* [Abh. (Gött.)

presumes that Luke and Acts were both composed quite early (ca. 62 C.E.).<sup>6</sup> A second form of the proposal is that Luke composed his narratives using sources, and that the ending of Acts marks the end of these sources.<sup>7</sup> Both forms of the proposal have the same basic idea: Luke ended at Acts 28:31 because he did not know what happened afterward.<sup>8</sup>

These explanations make sense of the abruptness of Acts 28, and the narrative's preoccupation with Paul in chapters 20–28. They also account

15:2; Berlin: Weidmann, 1914], 56), J. A. T. Robinson (*Redating the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976], 86–92), and early on by F. F. Bruce (*The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* [London: Tyndale, 1951], 481). The proposal is also deemed sensible by Ernst T. Mayerhoff (*Historisch – kritische Einleitung in die petrinischen Schriften nebst einer Abhandlung über den Verfasser der Apostelgeschichte* [Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, 1835], 5–6), J. Friedrich Bleek (*An Introduction to the New Testament* [ed. Johannes Friedrich Bleek; trans. William Urwick; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1876], 1:353–54), and Johannes Weiss (*Über die Absicht und den literarischen Charakter der Apostelgeschichte* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1897], 53). Heinrich Koch lists other adherents as well (*Abfassungszeit*, 16–17, n. 1).

Another form of the same argument is that Luke wrote Acts as an apology for Paul in order to sway the outcome of his trial. This is proposed by Daniel Plooij (“The work of St. Luke: a historical Apology for Pauline Preaching before the Roman Court,” *Expositor* 8:8 [1914]: 511–23), Harald Sahlin (*Der Messias und das Gottesvolk: Studien zur protolukanischen Theologie* [ASNU 12; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1945], 30–56), Johannes Munck (*The Acts of the Apostles* [AB 31; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967], 260), and John W. Mauck (*Paul on Trial: The Book of Acts as a Defense of Christianity* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001]). Alfred Wikenhauser also held to this opinion in his earlier work (*Die Apostelgeschichte und ihr Geschichtswert* [NTAbh 8:3–5; Münster: Aschendorff, 1921], 30–34, 45). See p. 11 and n. 14 below.

<sup>6</sup> For a classic argument for an early date for Acts, see Richard B. Rackham, “The Acts of the Apostles II: A Plea for an Early Date,” *JTS* 1 (1899/1900): 76–87.

<sup>7</sup> So Hans H. Wendt (*Die Apostelgeschichte* [3d ed.; KEK 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1899], 31–32). Henry J. Cadbury mentions this possibility (*Making*, 321), and Paul W. Walaskay has a similar idea when he writes, “Luke, writing in the eighties or nineties, simply had no further reliable information about Paul. The apostle has disappeared into the mists of the Spanish moors” (“*And So We Came to Rome*”: *The Political Perspective of St. Luke* [SNTSMS 49; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983], 77).

<sup>8</sup> Another, less popular form of the proposal is that Luke left Paul in prison at Rome (at the point of Acts 28:31), and never learned of Paul's fate by the time of writing Acts. This is first suggested in the 5<sup>th</sup> century by Euthalius (PG 85.709), followed by Ecumenius in the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries (PG 118.305c; cf. 118.31), and Jean de Lorini in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (*In Actus Apostolorum Commentaria*; cited in Koch, *Abfassungszeit*, 7, n. 1). More recently, P. Stephanus Bihel proposes that Luke was sent by Paul to visit his churches (“Notae de tempore compositionis libri Actuum Apostolorum,” *Anton* 5 [1930]: 299–300). T. W. Manson holds a similar argument, but places Luke in Achaia (“The Life of Jesus: A Survey of the Available Materials: 3. The Work of St. Luke,” *BJRL* 28 [1944]: 403). See p. 11 and n. 14 below.



well for the “we” passages of Acts (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16). However, both proposals have problems. The first proposal, that Luke ended at 28:31 because nothing further had yet happened, faces the issue that the majority of scholars date Luke-Acts much later (i.e., 80–90 C.E.).<sup>9</sup> It also does not explain why Luke did not “finish” the book at a later date. The second proposal, that Luke used sources which ended with the events of Acts 28, is complicated by the fact that there is no compelling evidence that Luke used sources for composing Acts.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, since the end of Luke’s sources (Mark, Q, and “L”) does not dramatically impact the ending to his Gospel (24:13–53), there is little reason to expect otherwise at the end of Acts. More importantly, neither of the above proposals accounts for the ominous tone of Paul’s speech at Miletus (Acts 20:17–38), in which Paul speaks of forthcoming events in ways that subtly imply his death (vv. 23–25, 28). Here it seems that Luke is not so unaware of events

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<sup>9</sup> See the appendix “Scholarly Estimates of the Date of Acts” in Richard I. Pervo, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* [Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 2006], 359–63). Assuming Acts cannot have been written before Luke’s Gospel (see Acts 1:1a), the principle reasons for dating Luke-Acts later than 70 C.E. are the following: (1) Luke recognizes “many” other attempts to recount the story of Jesus (Luke 1:1), a situation less likely in the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century; (2) Luke changes Jesus’ vision of the temple’s destruction from an apocalyptic prophecy of the temple’s demise in Mark (13:2, 14) to a description of all Jerusalem under siege, “surrounded by armies” (Luke 21:20), which makes most sense as a prophecy *ex eventu*, after 70 C.E.; (3) Luke 19:43–44 alludes to Roman earthworks that are similarly described by Josephus (*J.W.* 6.2.7), who writes in the later 70s; (4) Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem, “your house is abandoned” (Luke 13:35a), makes most sense after the temple’s destruction (70 C.E.); (5) dating Luke-Acts in the early 60s would require dating Mark’s Gospel in the 50s or earlier, if it was used by Luke as a source. For a summary of arguments for various dates for Luke-Acts, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 51–55. More recent arguments for dating Luke-Acts in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century are offered by Richard I. Pervo (*Dating Acts*) and Joseph B. Tyson (*Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle* [Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006], esp. 1–23).

<sup>10</sup> During the heyday of source-critical work in Acts, F. J. Foakes Jackson and Henry J. Cadbury summarized: “The truth seems to be that although there is a *prima facie* probability for the use of written sources in Acts. . . , the writer wrote too well to allow us to distinguish with certainty either the boundaries of his sources or the extent of his own editorial work” (“The Internal Evidence of Acts,” in *Beginnings*, 2:133). The lack of evidence compelled Archibald M. Hunter to pun: “It has been said that in the early decades of the present century splitting the Acts into sources was almost as popular a pastime with the critics, as splitting the atom is nowadays with the scientists. And to tell the plain truth, the scientists have been much more successful than the critics” (*Interpreting the New Testament, 1900–1950* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1951], 110). For a brief survey of the early history of source criticism in Acts, see A. C. McGiffert, “The Historical Criticism of Acts in Germany,” in *Beginnings*, 2:385–95. For more recent surveys, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 80–89; Richard I. Pervo, *Dating Acts*, 347–58.