

RGB 3611/6611
The Historical Study of Acts
Regis College
Toronto School of Theology
Fall 2018
Fridays, 9:00-11:00
Classroom A

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Course Description

The Acts of the Apostles is our main source of information about the first Christian decades. It covers the movement's initial efforts to regroup following the death of Jesus, as well as its earliest expansion into the Mediterranean world beyond Judea. In this course, we will consider a number of urgent historical issues in the study of Acts, through engagement with close readings of the text and consultation with relevant primary and secondary literature.

Required Course Texts/Bibliography

Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology*. Trans. Doug Stott. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

Access to the Acts of the Apostles in the New Revised Standard Version.

Notable Resources

Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*. Ed. Conrad H. Gempf. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990 (1989).

IM(rarely)HO, Hemer's *The Book of Acts* is the single best monograph in the English language that deals with Acts as a historical volume. In fact, I considered assigning it as required reading for this course. I opted against this for two reasons. First, it is damnably expensive. Second, it was incomplete at the time of Hemer's passing after a brief illness in 1987, and thus is somewhat "rough" in various patch; this vitiated its utility as a text. Nonetheless, despite this "roughness," there is really nothing comparable to it in quality.

Quercus Resources

I will place extended notes on each chapter up on Quercus. These will be found in the "Commentary Material" module. These are not required reading, but they will indicate the matters that we will discuss in class.

Evaluation

N.B.: the evaluation structures set below are the “cookie cutter” versions. I am quite open to working with individual students to set up evaluation structures that better fit their own interests.

Basic Degree Students:

- (1) Participation (20%)—Students are expected to keep up on the readings and attend classes.
- (2) Weekly Prompts (40%; 10 at 4% each)—Students are expected to respond to weekly prompts in no more than 500 words. With the exception of the prompt for Nov. 16, these prompts ask you to engage primarily with the biblical text, rather than secondary literature, and are provided on the course schedule. They are due before class in the respective week.
- (3) Reflection Paper One (10%)—The very first prompt asked you reflect upon the “linguistic miracle” that is Pentecost. In no more than 2500 words, reflect upon how this “linguistic miracle” might serve as a paradigm for Christian ministry. These are due Oct. 19.
- (4) Reflection Paper Two (10%)—Christianity has always been characterized by cultural and linguistic diversity. In no more than 2500 words, discuss how the historical study of Acts can deepen our capacity to negotiate such diversity in our contemporary communities. These are due Nov. 30.
- (4) Final Exam (20%)—The final exam will consist of four prompts that could include any of the ten weekly prompts, or prompts presented by graduate students on the last day of class. Date of exam TBD.

Graduate Students:

- (1) Participation (10%)—Students are expected to keep up on the readings and attend classes.
- (2) Weekly Prompts (40%; 10 at 4% each)—Students are expected to respond to weekly prompts in no more than 500 words. With the exception of the prompt for Nov. 16, these prompts ask you to engage primarily with the biblical text, rather than secondary literature, and are provided on the course schedule. They are due before class in the respective week.
- 3) Short Paper (10%)—Students will be expected to identify a question not covered in the weekly prompts, to formulate a prompt based upon that question, and to respond to that prompt in no more than 500 words. These are due Nov. 23.
- (4) Short Paper Presentation (10%)—On the last day of class, students will ask to present the prompt that they devised for their short paper, and the answer that they gave to the prompt.
- (5) Research Paper (30%)—A substantial scholarly paper (15-20 pages) that addresses either an empirical or a theoretical matter related to the subject matter of the course. Biblical students are encouraged (but not required) to investigate more deeply either one of the weekly prompts or the subject of their short paper, while other students are encouraged (but not required) to relate the subject matter of the course to their own particular areas of concentration. These are due Dec. 14.

Course Schedule

<i>Week</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Prompt</i>
Sept. 14	N/A	N/A
Sept. 21	Acts 1-3 Riesner, 35-58, 241-256	Pentecost constitutes the first Christian “outreach.” What significance is there to the fact that Acts depicts this occasion as a “linguistic miracle,” in which all persons hear the Good News in their own language?
Sept. 28	Acts 4-6:7 Meyer, 53-84*	Who were the Hellenists, and why are they important for the development of early Christianity?
Oct. 5	Acts 6:8-9:31 Riesner, 59-89	Paul famously begins his career as an inveterate opponent of Christianity. How might we account for this hostility on his part?
Oct. 12	Acts 9:32-12:25 Riesner, 90-136	Although Paul is known as the “apostle to the Gentiles,” Acts does not present him as the first Christian to take the Good News to the non-Jewish world. Describe the pre-Pauline outreach to the Gentiles.
Oct. 19	Acts 13:1-14:28 Riesner, 137-156, 245-256	Up until Acts 13:13, Paul is consistently called “Saul.” Suddenly, at 13:13, Acts begins to call him “Paul.” How might we account for this shift in how Paul is referenced?
Oct 26	READING WEEK! And the people rejoice.	
Nov. 2	Acts 15:1-35 Galatians 1-2 Riesner, 1-28	According to Galatians 1-2, Paul went to Jerusalem twice in the first thirteen to seventeen years after his conversion to Christianity. According to Acts, he went three times in that same period (cf. Acts 9:26-30, Acts 11:27-30/12:25, Acts 15). How might we account for this discrepancy?
Nov. 9	Acts 15:36-17:34 Hemer, 308-364.**	Acts 16:10 marks the first instance of the so-called “We-passages” (16:10-17, 20:5-15, 21:1-18, 27:1-28:16), wherein the narrator of Acts describe events in the first-person plural pronoun. How might we account for this shift in pronoun usage?
Nov. 16***	Acts 18-20 Riesner, 194-211, 307-317	Acts 18:12-17 reports that Paul went before Gallio, consul of Achaia, in Corinth. Why has this report become so important for the study of Christian origins?
Nov. 23	Acts 21-24 Riesner, 147-156, 212-219, 327-333	According to Acts 21:18, Paul meets with James and the elders in Jerusalem. In addition to Paul, James, and the elders, the fact that it is a We-passage implies the possible presence of another individual. Who is that other individual, and what significance might his possible presence at this

		meeting have for our understanding of early Christianity?
Nov. 30	Acts 25-28 Romans 15-16 Hemer, 365-410** Riesner, 219-227	The ending of Acts has long puzzled scholars. It simply ends with a notice that Paul spent two years in Rome. It does not narrate his death, although we know that it probably happened within five years of where the narrative ends. How do we account for this puzzling end to Acts?
Dec. 7	Advanced Degree Student Research Presentations	

*Ben F. Meyer, *The Early Christians: Their World Mission and Self-Discovery*. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1986. Available on reserve at the Regis Library, and in the Lonergan Research Institute.

**Available on reserve at the Regis Library.

***This class might need to be rescheduled as the instructor is heading that day to the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in Denver. Because drinks with old friends and, yeah, maybe some papers.

Late Policy

Students are expected to hand in assignments on time. However, life happens and sometimes tardiness is unavoidable. As such, if a student must submit material late, she or he is asked to speak with the instructor with the aim of negotiating an agreement for late submission.

Depending upon the particular situation, this could include a number of penalties. Failure to arrive at such an agreement will result in the assignment being marked out of half its course weight, thus effectively halving the marks received.