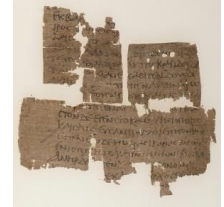




# BRIERCREST

BLST 725 The Acts of the Apostles  
Spring 2023



Professor: David M. Miller, Ph.D.

Email: [dmiller@briercrest.ca](mailto:dmiller@briercrest.ca)

Phone: 306-756-3438

Course Dates: May 8-12, 2023

Online Modular course

3 Credit Hours

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

In recognition of Luke's unique contribution as a literary artist, historian, and theologian, this course provides a forum for study of his vivid account of the emergence of the nascent Christ-believing community. Special attention will be given to the Jewish heritage and Greco-Roman context out of which this group emerged. The study will include serious engagement with the biblical text, critical evaluation of the methods and views of leading scholars of Luke-Acts, and a consideration of how the book of Acts can inform the beliefs and practices of the contemporary church.

## COURSE INTEGRATION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Acts is a riveting account of the progress of the gospel despite shipwreck, persecution, Satanic opposition, and human unbelief. We read of prison escapes, miraculous healings, and disciples who testify to the resurrection of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Though it is far from a conventional history in the modern sense, Acts is our earliest description of—and in many cases our only evidence for—the origins of the church in Jerusalem and its expansion through the Roman world. It is also a virtually indispensable framework for the interpretation of Paul's letters.

But Acts is more than a window on the past. Its author, Luke, was a theologian as well as a historian, who communicated his message through the way he told his story. To recover it we must learn to read well, attending to the clues he provided through repetition, plot development, characterization, and the like. Reading attentively is also essential to discerning the significance of Acts in our own (post)modern contexts.

By the end of the course you will be able to summarize the plot of Acts, to situate major events in their Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts, to identify major themes, to discuss the theology of Acts, and to recognize connections with the Gospel of Luke. You will also be familiar with major issues in current scholarship on Acts and, I hope, grateful for the ways in which contemporary scholarship can contribute to a deeper appreciation of this complex text. I hope too that you will grow more confident in your ability to identify the function of the stories contained in Acts and to consider their contemporary implications for an understanding of the church, its mission, and Christian discipleship.

By enrolling in this class you enter a learning community whose success depends on joint

engagement with the subject matter, with the assigned readings and with each other. Please consider this syllabus your learning contract: By choosing to take this course, you agree to prepare diligently, to participate actively, and to help create a positive learning environment for your fellow students.

## COURSE TEXTS AND REQUIRED READING

**Required Texts** (available in store and online at the Briercrest Bookstore: <http://briercrest.ca/bookstore>)  
Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. *The Acts of the Apostles*. ANTC. Nashville: Abingdon, 2003.  
Jipp, Joshua W. *Reading Acts*. Cascade Companions. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018.

### **Recommended Texts**

Jennings, Willie James. *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.  
Keener, Craig S. *Acts*. NCBC. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.  
Rowe, C. Kavin. *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

### **Required Essays** (available on ATLAS or on Canvas):

Dunn, James D G. "Baptism in the Spirit: A Response to Pentecostal Scholarship on Luke-Acts." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1.3 (1993): 3–27.  
Flemming, Dean. "Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens: Paul's Areopagus Address as a Paradigm for Missionary Communication." *Missiology* 30, no. 2 (2002): 199–214.  
Gregory, Andrew. "Acts and Christian Beginnings: A Review Essay." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 39.1 (2016): 97–115.  
Jervell, Jacob. "The Divided People of God: The Restoration of Israel and Salvation for the Gentiles." Pages 41-74 in *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972.  
Keener, Craig S. "Date." Pages 383–401 in *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 1: Introduction and 1:1--2:47*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.  
Levine, Amy-Jill. "Luke and the Jewish Religion." *Interpretation* 68, no. 4 (2014): 389–402.  
Miller, David M. "Reading Law as Prophecy: Torah Ethics in Acts." Pages 75–91 in *Torah Ethics and Early Christian Identity*. Edited by Susan J. Wendel and David M. Miller. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.  
Schnabel, Eckhard J. "Contextualising Paul in Athens: The Proclamation of the Gospel before Pagan Audiences in the Graeco-Roman World." *Religion & Theology* 12, no. 2 (2005): 172–90.  
Stronstad, Roger. "Forty Years on: An Appreciation and Assessment of Baptism in the Holy Spirit by James D.G. Dunn." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 19, no. 1 (2010): 3–11.  
Thompson, Alan J. "The End of an Era: The Law Is No Longer the Direct Authority for God's People." Pages 175–91 in *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 27. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011.  
Turner, Max. "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts." *Word & World* 23, no. 2 (2003): 146–53.

Students are expected to refer to Briercrest Seminary's Format and Style Guides and Guide for Writing Research Papers, available as PDF documents here: <https://www.mybriercrest.ca/seminary/documents/>.

Students are responsible for course materials and communication on Canvas (<https://briercrest.instructure.com>; cf. <http://briercrest.ca/online/canvas>) and their myBriercrest.ca email account.

## COURSE OUTLINE AND CONTENT

Date	Class Topic & Bible Reading	Essay / Acts Presentation
Mon 8 May AM	Course Introduction; Acts 1	<i>Dating Acts</i> : Gregory, Keener
Mon 8 May PM	Acts 2:1-41; the speeches in Acts	
Tues 9 May AM	Acts 2:42-5:16	<i>The Holy Spirit</i> : Dunn, Stronstad & Turner
Tues 9 May PM	Acts 5:17-8:40	
Wed 10 May AM	Acts 9:1-11:18	<i>Jews and the Gentile Mission</i> : Jervell, Levine
Wed 10 May PM	Acts 11:19-15:35	<i>Torah</i> : Miller, Thompson
Thur 11 May AM	Acts 15:36-18:17	<i>Evangelism &amp; Apologetics</i> : Fleming, Schnabel
Thur 11 May PM	Acts 18:18-21:17	
Fri 12 May AM	Acts 21:18-25:12	
Fri 12 May PM	Acts 25:13-28:31; The Ends of Acts	

**Note:** This course will extend through the afternoon of Friday 12 May.

## ASSIGNMENTS

**PRE-COURSE ASSIGNMENTS** (submitted on Canvas; due by the start of class on Mon 8 May, 2023):

A. **Reading Acts (10%)** – Read (or listen to) the book of Acts at least twice before class begins and at least once during the week of class (see D below). Fill in the Acts Reading Log on Canvas to indicate completion.

B. **Secondary Source Evaluation (30%):**

1. **Beverly Roberts Gaventa and the Theology of Acts (20%)** – Beverly Roberts Gaventa’s superbly-written 2003 commentary remains one of the finest short expositions of Acts, combining insightful and well-considered judgements on the details of Acts with persistent attention to God’s activity in the narrative. As you prepare for our week of class, (1) read through Gaventa’s commentary in its entirety alongside one of your readings of Acts; (2) in 2-3 pages (600-900 words), outline and briefly evaluate Gaventa’s emphasis on God as the subject of Acts and reflect on how Gaventa’s emphasis on this theme changes your reading of Acts; (3) in 2-3 pages (600-900 words) develop 3-5 questions about specific aspects of Gaventa’s interpretation of Acts, explaining why you are not persuaded by Gaventa’s exegesis in each case.

2. **Joshua Jipp and the Restoration of Israel (10%)** – As you prepare for our week of class, (1) read through Jipp’s short introduction to Acts alongside one of your readings of Acts; (2) in 2-3 pages (600-900 words), describe and briefly evaluate Jipp’s understanding of what the book of Acts says about the restoration of Israel, and how Israel’s restoration is related to the Gentile church.

**MID-COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:**

C. **Acts Essays (20%)**

- *Summary*: Read each essay and summarize its argument in your own words (one paragraph / essay). Your summaries should aim to state the problem the essay addresses, its thesis, and (very briefly) the evidence that supports the thesis.
- *Comparison*: For each set of *paired* essays, state which argument you prefer as an interpretation of Acts, and briefly explain why in light of Acts (and/or Luke’s Gospel) (one

paragraph / set of paired essays). The paired essays are as follows:

- *Dating Acts*: Gregory, Keener
- *The Holy Spirit*: Dunn, Stronstad & Turner
- *Torah*: Miller, Thompson
- *Jews and the Gentile Mission*: Jervell, Levine
- *Evangelism & Apologetics*: Fleming, Schnabel
- Your essay summaries are due at the beginning of class on the day they are assigned. For your own sake, aim to complete all the assigned readings before the week of class begins.

**D. Reading Acts** – Read Acts a third time in preparation for each day's class, following the schedule in the course outline. Fill in the Acts Reading Log on Canvas to indicate completion.

**E. Presentation (10%)** – In a five-minute presentation, each student will either (1) review and evaluate the argument of one of the assigned essays OR (2) introduce a passage in Acts. Your grade for this assignment will be assessed primarily on the basis of the presentation itself, but your written notes must also be submitted to aid in the grading process. Essays and passages will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis. Please email me to indicate your preference.

**1. Essay Option:** Briefly review the argument of your essay for the benefit of your fellow students, building on your paragraph summary (2-3 min); evaluate the essay, and raise two or three questions for discussion (2-3 min).

**2. Passage Option:** Introduce a passage we will discuss in class by placing it in its narrative context, outlining its structure, identifying themes that recur elsewhere in Luke and Acts, highlighting major interpretive issues, reflecting on practical implications, and raising two or three questions for discussion.

**POST-COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:**

**F. Major Essay: The Church in the First and Twenty-First Centuries (30%)** – Choose a contemporary theological or practical issue and explore what the book of Acts has to say about it in a 10-12 page (3000-3600 word) thesis-driven research essay. **The essay is due on Friday 7 July, 2023** and must be submitted on Canvas. More details will be provided in class. The following is a partial list of possible topics:

Atonement	Evangelism	Identity	Repentance
Baptism	Exorcism	Idolatry	Resurrection
Christology	Fellowship	Jesus	Salvation
Church	Food / Meals	Leadership	Social justice
Church and Israel	Food laws	Miracles	Suffering
Church leadership	Generosity	Mission	Temple
Church structure	Gospel	Money	Tongues
Church order	Guidance	Persecution	Witness
Death of Jesus	Harmony	Politics	Women
Discipleship	Healing	Prayer	
Ethics	Holy Spirit	Preaching	
Ethnicity	Hospitality	Prophecy	

*Alternatives:* Instead of writing on a theme in Acts, you may request permission from your instructor either to do an exegesis of a passage of your choice or to create a plan for a series of sermons on Acts.

## SEMINARY CALENDAR

Students are expected to be aware of the policies that govern course work at Briercrest Seminary, all of which are published in the current Seminary Calendar:

<https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/academics/calendar/>.

### ***Attendance Policy***

In order to benefit fully from a seminary education, to be good stewards of time and finances, and to be considerate of their classmates and faculty members, students must be in class at every opportunity.

### ***Modular Courses***

Students are expected to attend 100 per cent of each modular for which they register. If this is impossible due to extenuating circumstances, arrangements must be made with the course professor before the first day of class. If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending class, a maximum of one (1) full day of class can be foregone. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

### ***Online Courses***

If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending scheduled meeting times, then up to 20% of meeting time can be foregone. Students missing scheduled meeting times should make every effort to inform the course professor prior to any time missed. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

### ***Semester-Based Courses***

All students missing more than two full weeks of a particular course from registration to the last day of classes will receive an automatic fail (0%). A student may appeal a course failure due to excessive absences. Successful appeals will be granted only in rare cases where all absences are clearly beyond the student's control. Appeals must be made through the Academic Appeal Process.

### ***Course Schedules***

Classes begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday morning and run a minimum of 30 hours through the course of the week. The schedule is determined by the course professor. Students should check the syllabus for specifics. When the syllabus does not state class times, students are responsible to check with the professor prior to making travel plans.

### ***Assignment Submission***

All assignments must be submitted no later than eight weeks after the last day of class as stated in the syllabus. The correct due dates will be clearly noted in the syllabus and each faculty member will state in their syllabus how assignments should be submitted. Assignments submitted within a week after the due date will be accepted with a 10 per cent penalty. For additional information refer to the late assignment policy or the extension policy in the [academic calendar](#).

### ***Return of Graded Assignments***

Professors are expected to return graded assignments within six weeks of the due date. If they fail to do so, students may submit an inquiry to the [Seminary](#). If an extension is granted, the professor is no longer obligated to meet this deadline.

**Academic Honesty**

Students are accountable to perform each task according to principles of academic honesty. Please refer to pages 24-25 in the [academic calendar](#) for more information.

**Academic Accommodations**

Any student with a disability, injury, or health condition who may need academic accommodations (permanent or temporary) should discuss them with the course instructor after contacting the Academic Resource Centre Coordinator in person (L234 in the Library) or by email ([ntooke@briercrest.ca](mailto:ntooke@briercrest.ca)). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.).

**BIBLIOGRAPHY****Selected Commentaries**

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- Bauer, David R. *Book of Acts as Story*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2021.
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- Bruce, F. F. *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952.
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- Calvin, Jean. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Translated by John W. Fraser and W. J. G. McDonald. Edited by David W. and Thomas F. Torrance. 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965.
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- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992.
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Marguerat, Daniel. *The First Christian Historian: Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles.'* Translated by Ken McKinney, Gregory J. Laughery, and Richard Bauckham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

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#### Themes and Theology

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### ***Church, Israel, Jews, Gentiles, Ethnicity, Identity and the Law***

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