

“Acts” by Michal Beth Dinkler  
Review by Daniel L. Smith

Aware of the many challenges facing the twenty-first-century reader of Acts, Michal Beth Dinkler responds with a three-pronged strategy in her contribution to the *Fortress Commentary on the Bible*. Dividing the text of Acts into fifteen sections, Dinkler approaches each text from three different vantage points. First, she explores “The Text in Its Ancient Context,” providing a concise commentary on the passage, with special attention to the ancient context. Focusing on the issues that most commentaries address, Dinkler deftly alternates treatments of narrative context, various parallels with Second Temple Jewish literature, the function of citations from the Jewish scriptures, Greco-Roman background material, and other literary features of the text itself. This orientation gives readers a compact summary of the text at hand, as well as some of the major interpretive issues worth pondering.

Second, Dinkler takes up “The Text in the Interpretive Tradition,” tracing the history of that passage’s influence on later readers. This wide-ranging sampler draws on interpreters from the second century (e.g., Justin Martyr and the *Acts of Paul*) to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (e.g., Marx, Engels, and F. C. Baur), from both literary texts and the visual arts. These later interpretations remind twenty-first-century readers of Acts of the influence exercised by past interpretations of these texts. They also lead us to ponder the ways in which our present context might affect our reading of Acts.

Third, Dinkler speaks directly to our twenty-first-century context in the final section: “The Text in Contemporary Discussion.” If the first two sections have helped to orient readers to significant issues in the interpretation of Acts, this third section points out the questions that generate and enliven current conversations. Dinkler draws together questions from feminist biblical scholarship, disability studies, Jewish-Christian relations, liberation theology, minority biblical criticism, postcolonial theory, interreligious dialogue, and a variety of other perspectives.

Dinkler thus provides a different sort of reference work. Students will not find all “the answers” in her threefold treatment of Acts. They will, however, gain both a solid grounding in the Lukan narrative and a broad familiarity with various interpretive methods and debates. More importantly, they will be introduced to the questions that animate those debates. Dinkler’s rigorous, balanced, and thoughtful commentary offers a helpful new strategy for reading an ancient Christian text.