Darrell L. Bock


Darrell Bock has been a prodigious scholar of Luke-Acts for more than twenty-five years. Taking his Baker Exegetical Commentary alone, he has some three thousand pages on Luke and Acts. This work adds another five hundred in quite small print: mainly analyzing and integrating Luke's major theological themes.

Part 1 attends to ‘Introductory Matters’. Bock begins by noting how Luke-Acts became rather marginalized when the two books (together 27% of the New Testament) were split apart in the canonical process, which separated the Gospels from ‘the Early Church’ stuff. Bock's stated intention is to join together again what humans have put asunder. He argues that the ‘we’ passages in Acts really *are* best understood as indicating the presence of the writer; that the ‘Luke’ of Philemon 24; Colossians 4.14 is the most probable author; that this Luke does not misrepresent the ‘real’ Paul in either theology or chronology; that Luke more probably wrote in the 60s (rather than the 80s); that he is a pretty credible historian, and, yes, he crafted the two volumes as a unity. Chapter 4 provides a probing narrative outline/mini-commentary of Luke-Acts, thereby concluding Part 1.

Part 2 is the major contribution: some thorough 330 pages on Luke’s major theological themes. Here are seventeen chapters on everything from God's plan to fulfill his promises to Israel, through Christology, salvation and kingdom, to Luke's use of Scripture. Although the content of these chapters might be treated as miscellany, which one could dip into anywhere with profit, that would be to miss the point. This is a *thesis*—no less—with a robust backbone. The parts together animate the whole.

Also, there is a probing new method; Bock uses a dual approach. He usually first tackles each subject area in *narrative* order and then proceeds to synthesis. His ‘topics’ are themselves well-orchestrated. He starts with two chapters on ‘God's plan’ and ‘character’ (as these are revealed in narrative order), and then turns to a synthesis of texts on the ‘plan’ in terms of God's promise-and-fulfillment in Lucan salvation. This starting point is not an imposition on Luke of some old order of Systematic Theology; it is driven by his understanding that it is actually *God*—the God of *Israel*—who is the foremost ‘character’ in the plot; Jesus is his central agent and the Spirit his chief enabler. This double-pincer approach—first narratival, then thematic—is one of the most powerful means of presentation I have encountered.

In chapters 7–8, this dual-movement focuses Luke's functional Christology: beginning with the opening fanfare in Luke 1–2—a razzmatazz of Christolog-
Bock's approach enables him (in the blockbuster chapters 7 and 8) to help us understand the subtle shifts from the earlier chapters' focus on the anointed Mosaic prophet/servant (Luke 3–4) to the messianic Christ figure of Jesus as he confronts Jerusalem as its king (in chapters 19 onwards), and towards the Jesus as 'Lord' that dominates in Acts. Luke's narrative marches inexorably towards the proclamation in Acts 2 that Jesus has been given the total Lordship of all at God's right hand. The progress and culmination is almost breathtaking. The Kingdom of God merely 'felt' in Jesus' ministry now becomes a dynamic, palpable, presence at Pentecost; the ensuing chapters of his book spell this out.

It is no accident that the chapter on the Holy Spirit (chapter 9) falls in the middle of his book, because it is also a presenting centre of his 'theology' (both Luke's and Bock's). For Bock, the Spirit brings to subjective experience the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus' death, and first fruits of the multi-faceted 'salvation'/kingdom he announced. Adumbrated in the ministry, God's dynamic 'kingdom' now bursts in as Christ's rule and presence of 'salvation' (see chapters 10–11) until he comes to bring all to climax (chapter 20). Readers of Pneuma will be glad to see Bock's considerable emphasis on the Spirit as leading to, empowering, and validating, the expansion to 'the Gentiles'. But they need also to take on board his view that the Spirit is more than that. Bock is certainly right that the Spirit-poured-out is the real means of this new dynamic presence of Jesus' rule or 'kingdom' (And if not by the Spirit, then by exactly what?).

Bock's chapters 12–18 examine (in narrative and thematic style) the implications of all this for Luke's concept of 'Israel', the Church and the Law: all nicely attenuated, and finally related to the eschatological climax (chapter 20). Here Bock ably defends Luke against any charge of anti-Semitism or supersessionism.

Part 3 (some mere 18 pages), nicely relates all to Luke as 'canon'; multiple significant issues here, including Luke's relation to Paul.

The book reads easily. It is text-based rather than scholar-based, but anyone who knows the literature will recognize Bock is in total command of it (as his commentaries have demonstrated), and his relatively sparse but insightful footnotes decidedly confirm it. Bock provides a magnificent and even enthralling read, especially if you follow him through, rather than just cherry-picking. Though it is written at an entirely 'accessible' level, it is profound and convincing, and all discussion is up-to-date and judiciously critical. I could play with the emphases, and would certainly like to have seen Bock elucidate the theme of 'forgiveness of sins' as synecdoche for the broader Isaianic New Exodus hope. Altogether, I cannot think of—and it would be hard to imagine—a