Craig S. Keener’s Acts: An Exegetical Commentary Encyclopedia in Four Volumes
An Almost Exhaustive and Exhausting Work

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Nearly one hundred years ago, two New Testament scholars, F.J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, published The Beginnings of Christianity, Part I: The Acts of the Apostles, the first volume of what would become a mammoth five-volume project. Foakes-Jackson and Lake assembled a formidable team of scholars and completed their project between 1920 and 1933.¹ This work became the...
standard commentary on Acts for scholars and students for several decades. Fast-forward to the present day. Craig Keener’s four-volume commentary on Acts compares similarly to the aforementioned undertaking’s colossal size with one major difference: Keener produces his series as a single-author project. In his four-volume magisterial set, Keener surpasses the scope of all of his predecessors and surely provides a new standard for many years to come.

The sheer numbers are staggering. Keener began to gather his research on index cards as an undergraduate student around 1980 and launched the writing of the commentary in 2000. Although he submitted his first and second drafts of the entire set to the publisher in 2007 and 2008, Keener continued to update the commentary, works cited, and indices through the publication of the final volume in 2015. The publisher informed Keener that his 2008 draft numbered two and a half million words, and Keener estimates that the final manuscript grew to approximately three million words, roughly forty-six hundred pages. Each volume includes a CD with ever-growing bibliographies and indices. For volume 4, Keener includes four comprehensive bibliographies (categorized by ancient sources, authors and select names, select subjects, and works cited) and indices that total nearly seven hundred pages. This same CD also provides a comprehensive 120-page Scripture index (not included in any of the previous volumes or CDs). Keener estimates that his Works Cited bibliography contains some ten thousand volumes, and the commentary incorporates some forty-five thousand references to ancient sources. He also provides more than fifty invaluable excurses scattered throughout volumes 1 through 3 (not including dozens of unlabeled “excurses”). These excurses could easily become a stand-alone background work on early Christianity.

Keener does this by taking the average of the citations per page and multiplying by the number of pages (email correspondence with Keener, November 23, 2015). Keener also noted that he would have preferred to see the four volumes first published as a set, but the publishers spread out the distribution for marketing purposes. See also 1.37.

The first volume includes a CD comprising more than four hundred pages. Each subsequent volume comes with an updated CD; volume 2 grows to six hundred pages, and volumes 3 and 4 separate the categories noted above.

I find it rather humorous, but fair, that Keener makes no claim to offer an exhaustive bibliography on the secondary literature (1.13).

The excurses include: (Volume 1) ancient physicians; background for Luke’s view of the Spirit; God’s kingdom in early Judaism and early Christian teaching; the Sabbath in early Judaism;