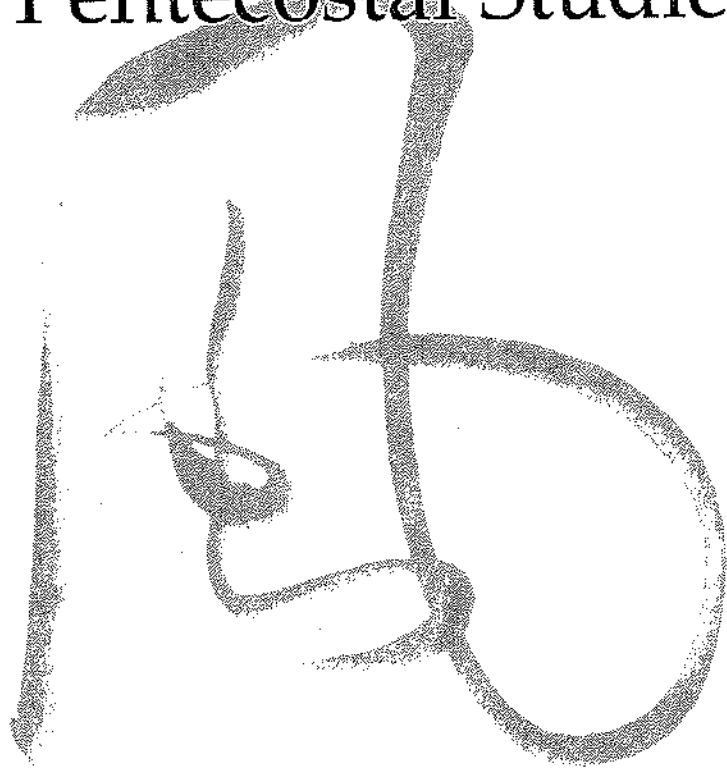


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C. Peter Wagner, *The Book of Acts: A Commentary*. 3rd ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008), 520 pp., paperback, ISBN: 978-08307-4595-1, US\$22.99.

C. Peter Wagner has earned graduate degrees in theology, missiology, and religion from Fuller Theological Seminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, and the University of Southern California. In 1971, Dr. Wagner began teaching at the School of World Missions of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He is now retired, living in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and is active in the restoration of the new apostolic movement. Wagner is the author of over 65 books, including well-known books on spiritual gifts and prayer. Recently, Wagner has focused on the apostolic reformation, writing books such as: *Changing Church*, *Churchquake!*, and *Apostles and Prophets*.

With this book, C. Peter Wagner has written a commentary on Acts, the New Testament book that describes the birth and growth of the early church. After giving an introduction, Wagner starts in chapter three of his book to go through all the chapters of Acts (1-28). His sections in each chapter start with quoting the verses of the biblical text from the New King James Version. However, Wagner's book is not a complete verse-by-verse commentary, since some verses are left out as he focuses on his main topic for this commentary. In his first chapter, Wagner himself identifies two crucial issues: power ministries and missiological issues. Accordingly, one finds an emphasis of these two topics throughout the whole book. Regarding the supernatural, Wagner therefore focuses on topics such as: The coming of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of tongues, miraculous healings and other signs and wonders, hearing God's voice, and spiritual warfare. The other big topic is cross-cultural missions which is why Wagner emphasizes the following stories: How Jesus started by choosing disciples from the culture He Himself grew up in; how the early church established a local leadership for the Hellenist believers; and how the gospel spread beyond the Jewish circles towards the Samaritans and other ethnic groups. The book ends with commenting on the trials of Paul and his journey towards Rome (as described in Acts 21 to 28). Here Wagner spends less time on details, summarizing the main points.

Wagner is one of the more prominent leaders associated with the so-called Third Wave. Being originally from a more conservative background, he was first cautious about the Pentecostal movement. However, as he did more research about church growth and the importance of prayer, he became more interested in the supernatural aspects of the Christian life, including spiritual warfare. Wagner also has a solid background when it comes to world missions: He served as a missionary in Bolivia for 16 years and then was a professor on missions for 30 years. That is why he has a rather pragmatic (and not necessarily academic) approach when writing about the two main topics of this book, power ministries and cross-cultural missions.

One of the teachings that Wagner stands against, and he explicitly says so several times in this book, is cessationism. Cessationism claims that the gifts displayed in the New Testament have ‘ceased’ to exist, that it was only the early church that could experience signs and wonders. The idea is that things like healings and prophetic words were limited to the time of the first apostles. Wagner had this point of view before, but changed it under the influence of people like John Wimber and Jack Deere. He now believes that healing the sick and casting out demons are activities for every believer to get involved in, even if they do so in different degrees of power. According to the author’s research, already 1,398 commentaries (available in the English language) have been written about Acts. Most of them take the cessationist point of view, and that is one of the reasons why he decided to write his own commentary that would emphasize the power of God for both the past and the present.

As mentioned, Wagner himself sees cross-cultural topics and power ministries as the core of his book. I therefore recommend this book for the Christian reader who wants to get a biblical perspective on missions and evangelism. It is not a commentary for the scholar who is looking for a standard volume of interpreting the book of Acts based on an exposition of the original Greek. Wagner himself admits this in his introduction, and says he sees himself more as a pragmatist and a communicator. In that sense, this book will also be valuable for Bible scholars who want to get a new perspective on Acts – by reading it through the eyes of one of the leading (and also one of the most controversial) missiologists of our time.

Daniel Topf