In his timely yet unhurried manner Craig Keener continues to produce this monumental commentary (see my RBL review of vol. 1 at http://bookreviews.org/pdf/8641_9481.pdf). The final part was published in late 2015. Although the author has been engaged with Acts for some years, this has not been his only writing project. Acts is a model of scholarly fidelity and endurance. Some may add that the work also demands of its readers what Luke calls “patient endurance” (hypomonē, Luke 8:15; 21:19). Most scholars are selective, addressing the questions they find pressing, with emphasis upon what is congenial to their gifts. Keener differs. He tackles everything, chasing many rabbits through the back alleys of the ancient world. Readers may decide what they regard as important—or interesting at present. Keener trusts them. This is commendable, even if it does not—could not—always perfectly succeed.

In the case of Athens, for example, he devotes five pages (2574–78) to cults. This material appears not well digested. On the matter of the Epicurean (2584–93) and Stoic (2993–95) philosophies, however, Keener produces good—if rather short for the latter—summaries. My preference would be toward brevity while referring the interested to experts, but I do not fault him here. On Acts 17:26 Keener devotes 2645–48 to Adam speculation. This exemplifies the “vice” of telling all you know. Yes, it is good to have done the work. Give it a footnote and move on. At 2750, the baptism of Crispus raises the question of water sources at Corinth, leading to an excursus on baths (2751–54), not a regular place for
Christian initiations. This excursus may have been omitted or located in an appendix, a form that would have been helpful in some other instances. Keener should teach even the most dogged to be a bit selective. (Having said that, I can say that I did not read a single excursus from which I failed to learn at least one fact.)

The style is clear and flowing, unadorned but not unattractive. Another attractive feature is the absence of rancor. Keener disagrees with many ideas but does not need to attack the morals, piety, or intelligence of his dialogue partners. These volumes have the sturdy packaging works that this genre requires. One complaint: the table of contents (v–xiii) mainly lacks page numbers. Browsers must work from the excursus, which have locations. A commentary of this size would benefit from running heads. The reference system, which requires use of the enclosed CD for bibliographical purposes, is not convenient (for one of my generation, at least). One cannot use Keener apart from the computer.

Despite the large number of citations—232 five-columned pages in the index—Keener is highly abstemious about quotations, even from Acts. Too many extracts are burdensome; a judicious selection of the most apposite is preferable. The most serious defect relates to the text. Metzger’s Textual Commentary is cited for conclusions more than twenty times per volume, but data—specific variants—are absent. Readers are not told what text is the subject of comment. Even clearly secondary readings are useful clues to textual difficulties and early interpretation; in many cases the earliest—not to speak of the “original”—text of Acts is uncertain.

Craig Keener campaigns ardently for both the literal meaning and the historical accuracy of nearly every detail in Acts. For skeptics and hunters of symbolism he is an especially useful potential corrective. In most important matters he attempts to summarize fairly the various arguments—and attempt is all that anyone can do. The focus should be less on where he comes out but on how he got there, the “journey” to use a favorite modern (and Lukan [hodos]) term.

To take as an example one of the more vexatious problems in Acts, Keener discusses the use of “we” on 2350–63, followed by an excursus on the first-person in ancient historians, 2363–74. A comparison is the excursus in R. Pervo, Acts: A Commentary, 392–96. Keener weighs the several arguments and issues in careful detail; Pervo, on the other hand, is more interested in identifying problems, such as the manner in which “we” pops in and drops out or that the first plural narrator of Acts 27–28 can display omniscience and, most importantly, in addressing the “why” question. Some of his proposals, such as identification of the moment when the gospel came to “us” (the audience of Luke’s milieu) or its confessional sense, à la John 1:14, are not inimical to evangelical thought. If
approaches like these tend to unravel the historical knot, assumption of pure historicity can diminish the impulse to ask why.

Into such waters Keener will not dive. This does not mean that he lacks imagination. The fate of the exorcised slave (Acts 16:16–18) occupies 2465–67. After stressing the benefits of exorcism—assuming that the various effects of demonic possession were present—he considers what happened next, beginning with a series of downsides. Still, she would presumably have come to believe in the highest God, which may well have brought her into the community, which might have purchased her freedom... in any case, “She certainly received spiritual manumission” (2467). This is a pleasant little romance that would have found a happy home in the Christian Apocrypha. Less edifying would be a proposal that the owners sold her into a brothel. These and other outcomes reveal the dangers for those who are not writing fiction of transgressing narrative boundaries. Such diversions tend to leak into speculation, including attempts to read minds, such as Paul’s (e.g., 2574), and, even less desirably, ventures into the realm of “coulda, woulda, shoulda” exegesis that identifies what an author equipped with the proper data ought to have written. Scholars must ever be on the lookout for the temptation to become an omniscient commentator. In comparison to earlier authorities such as Theodore Zahn, Keener exhibits commendable modesty, qualification, and reserve, but the danger remains.

Since he finds no important conflicts between Acts and Paul’s Epistles, one might ask why Keener does not admit the possibility that the letters served as a source. (On this subject, see now Ryan S. Schellenberg, “The First Pauline Chronologist: Paul’s Itinerary in the Letters and Acts,” JBL 134 [2015]: 193–213.) At the time of William Ramsay, for example, such use was taken for granted. A major reason for the shift relates to the foregoing criticism: if Luke had the letters, he would have said x and y while avoiding w and z; that is, this is what I should have done in Luke’s sandals. Into those sandals we simply cannot fit.

Because Keener prefers a date in the early 70s for Acts (1:400) and supports a high level of accuracy, the rules for gentile inclusion promulgated in Acts 15 constitute a challenge: How could these prohibitions have come to be accepted so rapidly in the Pauline mission orbit, linked with letter-writing apostles, and deemed acceptable to Paul? One basis of my admiration for this scholar is that he does not attempt to sweep any of the problems under the rug, carefully canvasses a number of solutions, and finds none worthy of firm endorsement (2202–6, 3140). Worse models are readily available. For most this weighty set will be a reference work. I hope that those who came for a quick check on a verse will linger to savor some more.