BIB203 NT1 Life of Christ

Unit 4 Readings

Maile, “The Ascension in Luke-Acts”

Bruce, “The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts”

Unknown, “The Parousia of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts”

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The Ascension in Luke-Acts

John F. Maile

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[p.29]

'Theologically and empirically the Ascension of Jesus Christ is at the very heart of the New Testament.[1] if those words, with which Brian Donne closes his recent study of the significance of the ascension of Jesus in the NT, are true of the NT as a whole, an even stronger statement could be made in respect of the ascension it Luke-Acts. If we may assume for one moment that Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-11 are descriptions of the same incident, Luke has chosen to present the ascension twice, as the culmination and climax of his gospel and as the most striking element in the introduction to his second volume.[2] That in so doing he provides the only description in the NT of a visible ascension of Jesus imparts to these two short narratives an importance out of all proportion to their length; and by using these ascension accounts to form the link between his two volumes Luke would seem to indicate their significance for a proper understanding of his theology and purpose. When one considers the crucial nature of this event for Luke it is perhaps surprising to note the relative brevity with which many commentators deal with these sections of Luke and Acts.[3] Equally noteworthy is the

[p.30]

scarcity of major works devoted to the ascension in general and its place in Luke-Acts in particular. while there has been a reasonable flow of articles and short studies, the last fifty years has seen only two major investigations: V. Larranaga's admittedly exhaustive treatment, and that of G. Lohfink, which, whatever one's response to some of his conclusions, must be considered the definitive modern study of the ascension in the NT, and in Luke-Acts especially.[4] To neglect Luke's ascension accounts is almost certainly to run the risk of missing some of his most

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[1] B. K. Donne, *Christ Ascended* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983) 67.

[2] 'Luke described the event twice because he put such great weight upon it' (E. Franklin, *Christ the Lord. A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts* [London: SPCK, 1975] 35). As is virtually undisputed, it is assumed here that the same author was responsible for Luke and Acts. Cf. W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SCM, 19752), 147-150, 156-185; but see also A. W. Argyle, 'The Greek of Luke and Acts'. *NTS* 20 (1973-4) 441-445.

[3] This is more applicable to commentators on Luke than on Acts; but it applies also to more general introductions to Luke's writings. For example, D. Juel, in an otherwise helpful and informative book (*Luke-Acts* [London: SCM, 1984]), makes almost no mention of the ascension.

[4] V. Larranaaa, *L'Ascension de Notre-Seigneur dans l.e Nouveau Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1938); G. Lohfink, *Die Himmelfahrt Jesu* (Munich: Kosel, 1971). Lohfink's book contains a very full bibliography, which can be supplemented by F. Bovon, *Luc le Theologien* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux Niestlé, 1978) 119-129. In addition to Donne's book (see note 1) the following should be noted: W. H. Marrevee, *The Ascension of Christ in the Works of St. Augustine* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1967); P. Toon, *The Ascension of our Lord* (New York: Nelson, 1984); R. F. O'Toole, 'Luke's Understanding of Jesus' Resurrection-Ascension-Exaltation', *BTB* 8 (1978) 105-114; and W. Baird, 'Ascension and Resurrection: an Intersection of Luke and Paul,' in W. E. March (ed.), *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and Early Church Fathers* (San Antonio: Trinity University, 1980) 3-18.

important emphases. It is not possible here, of course, to attempt anything like an exhaustive study; attention will be focused on three issues in particular which could be expressed by means of the three interrogatives, what? when? and why? That is, what is Luke actually describing in his ascension narratives; how are the 'forty days' of Acts 1:3 to be understood; and what significance does Luke attach to the ascension event?

Some Preliminary Considerations

Any study of these passages in Luke-Acts is immediately confronted with two problems—that of determining the correct text of the closing verses of the gospel and the opening verses of Acts; and the extent to which, if at all, these same verses are the result of post-Lukan interpolations. These are not unimportant

[p.31]

issues as they affect considerably the judgements to be made in all of the areas which form the subject of this paper, and they must, therefore, be discussed, albeit only in summary form.

(i) As far as the text is concerned, the omission of καὶ ἀνεφέρετο τὸν οὐρανόν in Luke 24:51, προσκυνήσαντες αὐτόν in v. 52 and ἀνελήμφθη in Acts 1:2 on the grounds that they are 'western non-interpolations' (perhaps introduced when Luke and Acts were separated in the canon) significantly assists the argument that Luke 24 does not relate the ascension as in Acts 1:9-11,[5] can be used to support the interpretation of Luke 24 as an invisible ascension,[6] and adds considerable weight to the contention that the ascension account in Acts 1:9-11 is the culmination of a gradual development, beginning with the invisible exaltation of the earliest kerygma and ending (as far as the NT is concerned) with the visible phenomenon of Acts 1.[7] However, in all three instances the disputed words should almost certainly be retained: the textual evidence for omission is weak, the use of the unusual ἀναφέρω in Luke 24.51 is unlikely by a later redactor at a time when ἀναλαμβάνω was the more or less accepted term for the ascension, Mark 16:18-19 can probably be adduced as evidence for the longer readings in Luke 24, and the omissions are probably to be attributed either to a harmonising tendency on the part of an editor wishing to remove the apparent contradiction between. an Easter Day ascension in Luke 24 and the forty-day interval in Acts 1, or possibly to a desire to exclude such specific descriptions of the ascension on the part of an editor opposed to any idea of bodily resurrection.[8]

[p.32]

(ii) There is no shortage of suggestions regarding the interpolation of material into the ascension

[5] For example, W. Michaelis, 'Zur Ueberlieferung der Himmelfahrtsgeschichte', *Th Bl* 4 (1925) 101-109; E. E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (London: Oliphants, 1974) 280.
[6] A. von Harnack, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Leipzig Hinrichs, 1908) 128.
[7] For a brief summary of such developmental theories see P. Benoit, 'The Ascension' in *Jesus and the Gospel. 1* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973) 222-220.
[8] Larranaga (*L'Ascension* 345-211) has a very full discussion of this problem. Aiso see Benoit, 'Ascension:' 238-240; B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: UBS, 1971) 273-277.

accounts.[9] While not in itself requiring a theory of wholesale interpolation, the so-called μέν solitarium of Acts 1:1 does present a problem in that, according to normal Greek usage, and particularly in the context of such a prologue as this, there should be a corresponding δέ which introduces a review of the contents of the book. The absence of this δέ clause has led to the suggestion that the original has been suppressed in favour of the present text, either to enable new traditions be included or simply to replace a text which, for whatever reason, the later editor found unsatisfactory. Verses 1 and 2 may still be Lukan but, on this view, vv. 3-5 are a later interpolation.[10] There are, however, notable examples of books which begin with a summary of a preceding volume but which do not proceed to a preview of what is to come,[11] and there are occasions when μέν may be found on its own for the purpose of emphasising that which it introduces.[12] H. Conzelmann's suggestions that the omission of the by is simply the result of negligence is unlikely in respect of Luke of all NT writers, but K. Lake's comment is more to the point when he observes that the absence of such a δέ clause would be

[p.33]

so offensive to anyone conversant with classical Greek that had there been an original δέ clause no editor would have cut it out, and were it missing it would be the first thing an editor would include.[13] Furthermore, while a be clause may be missing, Acts 1:1-2 contain by implication a description of the contents of this volume, in the sense of a continuation of the work begun by Jesus, and in v. 8 this is explicitly stated in terms of the church's mission.

More wide-ranging. interpolation hypotheses have been suggested, however, which regard both Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:1-5 as later insertions, perhaps included to smooth over the break when the originally one-volume work was divided into the two volumes that we know as Luke and Acts. Evidence for such editorial work is found in what is considered to be the clumsiness of these verses, which is so alien to Luke's usual style; the awkwardness of the three references to the ascension; the likelihood that Acts 1:6 originally followed on from Luke 24:49; and the contradiction presented by the forty days in Acts 1:3.

But such 'evidence' is not strong enough to support an interpolation theory. It is at least surprising that the supposed splitting of Luke's originally single volume has left no traces in terms of MS evidence or external testimony. The very awkwardness of these verses tells against later redaction rather than for it, for 'it is harder to conceive of these difficulties as arising from a redactor, whose aim is to smooth things up, than from Luke himself,[14] it was for this reason that P. Menoud, who originally espoused the theory of redactional interpolation, withdrew it on the

[9] For a convenient summary see Lohfink, *Himmelfahrt* 25-27.
[10] For literature see Lohfink, *Himmelfahrt* 25-26. Of special interest is P. Menoud who espoused this view in 'Remarques sur les textes de 1'ascension dans Luc Actes', *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann zu seine siebzigsten Geburtstag*, W. Eltester (ed.) (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1954) 148-156, but later withdrew it in 'Pendant Quarante Jours', *Neotestamentica et Patristica*, W. C. van Unnik (ed.) (Leiden: Brill, 1962) 148-156.
[11] For example, Josephus, *Antiquities*, Books 8 and 13; cited by D. Fuller, *Easter Faith and History* (London: Tyndale, 1968) 197, and H. Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1963) 21.
[12] B. Reicke, 'Zum Sprachlichen Verständnis von Kol. 1:23', *Theologica Studia* 6 (1953) 43.
[13] Conzelmann, *Apostelgeschichte* 21; K. Lake, 'The Preface to Acts and the Composition of Acts', in K. Lake and F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, Vol. 5 (London: Macmillan, 3.933), 4-5.
[14] Fuller, *Easter Faith* 196; cf. Franklin, *Christ the Lord* 37.

grounds that, although there are linguistic peculiarities in these verses which are astonishing coming from Luke's pen, the paragraph is too short and the language of Luke

[p.34]

too irregular, to enable stylistic observations to prevail against the theological coherence of the unit formed by Luke 24 and Acts 1.[15] Such linguistic analysis as is possible in a short section like Luke 24:50-53 shows that 'the diction of this short narrative is distinctively Lukan', as V. Taylor has demonstrated.[16] The suggestion concerning the original connection between Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:6 must contend with the observation made by W. G. Kümmel, that if the latter verse originally followed on from the former, it involves the disciples returning to a building which they have never left![17] Moreover, the Acts passage is intelligible as it now stands, with vv. 6-8 possibly acting as a counter to the apparently Jewish tendency and outlook of the disciples, a tendency perhaps encouraged by the command to stay in Jerusalem in v. 5.[18] As regards the awkwardness of the three references to the ascension, and apparent contradictions between the two accounts, notably the forty days, these will be dealt with in the course of this paper. Suffice it to say at this point that if Luke were responsible for the two-volume format there is nothing inherently surprising in a brief description of the ascension at the end of his first volume, a necessary reference to it in the summary of that first volume at the commencement of the second, and then a fuller description of it as the starting point of that second volume. Such a procedure could have been forced upon Luke by the practical considerations of the length of the scrolls available to him which necessitated a swift conclusion to the Gospel; but it is more probable that the differences between the accounts are due to his theological motivation which has consciously led to the schematic grouping of material in Luke 24, so that episodes and conversations which were in reality separated in time have been narrated as if they all

[p.35]

belonged together on the same day, in the sure knowledge that any misunderstanding to which this might give rise (e.g. with regard to chronology) could and would be resolved in Acts which, again for theological reasons, would present a quite distinctive account. The difficulties raised in this connection, real as they are, and such as deserve more detailed discussion than that provided here, are nevertheless not sufficient to require a theory of redactional interpolation to explain them. Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1 may be confidently accepted as coming from the pen of Luke, and these verses, therefore, retain their crucial significance for the understanding both of the ascension and of Lukan theology.

I WHAT IS THE 'ASCENSION' IN LUKE-ACTS?

It is the very uniqueness of Luke's ascension accounts within the NT which gives rise to this question and to the variety of answers that have been presented. While the NT speaks both

[15] See note 10 for the details of Menoud's work.
[16] *The Passion Narrative of St. Luke* (Cambridge: CUP, 1972) 114-115.
[17] 'Das Urchristentum', *Th R*, n.f. 22 (1954) 195-196.
[18] Benoit,' Ascension' 217-218, following U. Holzmeister, ' Der Tag cries Himmelfahrt des Herrn', *ZKTh* 55 (1931) 44-82, especially 58-59.

separately, and also in a variety of different combinations, of four events in the experience of the post-Calvary Jesus, namely, resurrection, exaltation, ascension and session at God's right hand, the overwhelming majority of references (if not in fact the unanimous testimony) seem to make it clear that while these things may be separated in thought, they in fact refer to four elements which in reality are inseparable, and together they describe the glorification of Christ, so that for every strand of NT thought the risen Christ is the exalted and ascended Lord at the Father's right hand. There would appear to be no indisputable reference outside Luke-Acts to a visible ascension before witnesses.[19] How then are Luke's apparently unique narratives to be understood, and what relation do they have to the rest of the NT and its understanding of resurrection and exaltation?

[p.36]

it is not the purpose of this paper to examine in detail all the various interpretations which have been offered. They can be briefly classified as follows.

(i) Interpretations which regard the accounts as wholly or largely 'legendary'. Often Luke's narratives are seen as the culmination of a process involving the materialisation of the resurrection appearances in which, as the risen Lord was presented in more and more concrete terms it became increasingly necessary to provide an equally concrete mode of departure for him.[20] Particularly with Luke-Acts in mind, a similar developmental theory was advanced by A. Harnack who thought in terms of the gradual evolution of understanding based of the earliest exaltation kerygma. At the outset resurrection and ascension/exaltation were identified, the latter being a matter of faith alone, since it was by nature an invisible event; gradually resurrection and ascension were separated, although ascension still took place on Easter Day and remained an invisible event (as in Luke 24 according to Harnack's understanding); finally the separation lengthened into an interim period of forty days climaxing in a visible ascension as reported in Acts 1.[21] While there are numerous variations within this approach they all rely on the idea of a process of change or development, which in fact is their Achilles' heel, for it presupposes the wholly untenable notion that the earliest exaltation kerygma centred upon a wholly 'spiritual', non-corporeal resurrection and exaltation, of which there is little likelihood in a faith rooted in Judaism and for which there is no evidence in the NT. Furthermore, it must be asked why there is no trace elsewhere in the NT of this ascension 'legend', especially in writings which are later than Luke-Acts. Supporters of these views are obliged either to push the date of Luke-Acts well into the second century, or to appeal to the theory of a later interpolation, which was shown above to be unlikely.

[p.37]

[19] This is the conclusion reached by Lohfink after a lengthy analysis of all the relevant NT passages (*Himmelfahrt* 81-98). It is certainly possible to query Lohfink's exegesis of some of these texts (*cf*. Bovon, *Luc* 184) but the overall conclusion should be accepted.

[20] Lohfink briefly surveys this approach and lists various exponents of it (*Himmelfahrt* 193; see also Benoit, 'Ascension' 222-226.

[21] A lengthy discussion of Harnack's position is found in Larranaga, *L'Ascension* 64-74; see also Lohfink, *Himmelfahrt* 19-22.

(ii) Since there appears to be little or no evidence in the NT for the sort of developing tradition which might explain the presence of the ascension narratives in Luke, and since both Luke 24 and Acts 1 contain numerous distinctly Lukan traits, could it be that both narratives should be attributed solely to Luke who, along with the other Gospel writers, must be recognised as an author and a theologian and not merely a scissors-and-paste editor who hands on the tradition?[22] That Luke writes as a theologian can hardly be denied, but that redaction does not have to imply invention mast be equally stressed. For the most part it is possible to observe the way in which Luke has taken over and shaped the traditions which came to him (at least in respect of the Gospel), and where, because there is no parallel material in the other Gospels this is not possible or at least is not so straightforward, it should not be too readily assumed that Luke has no tradition upon which to work. Matthew 28:15-20, while admittedly not containing the ascension theme, nor even a withdrawal of Jesus, nevertheless provides some points of contact with Luke's ascension accounts (the Eleven, the mountain, worship, the Lordship of Jesus—announced in Matthew, depicted by the cloud in Acts—and possibly even the there of the presence of Jesus with his people); John 20 can be claimed to point to knowledge of some sort of ascension tradition; and 1 Corinthians 15:8 may well imply a tradition of the ending of the resurrection appearances. Luke has undoubtedly shaped the ascension narratives is his own way to present his own theological emphases, but this need not mean that he had no traditional material at

[p.38]

all from which to work, nor that there is no historical basis to his narratives.[23]

(iii) If there is a traditional basis for Luke's accounts, how are they to be understood in relation to the identification of resurrection and exaltation in the rest of the NT? This question has also received a variety of answers from those wishing to take seriously the Lukan narratives. For some, Luke, in common with the NT generally, depicts an Easter Day ascension but which is presented as being before witnesses. The account in Acts is deliberately different, incorporating as it does the forty days, which for Line is a formal contradiction only, enabling him to make full use of the typological possibilities presented by this number.[24] For others, Luke describes in both Luke 24 and Acts 1 precisely that which the rest of the NT refers to whenever it speaks of ascension or exaltation, with the result that the risen Jesus can be considered to have been glorified at the resurrection but not exalted to the right hand of God until the ascension on the fortieth day.[25] In almost total contrast to this is the view which regards the Lukan accounts as

[22] The extent of Lukan redaction, not only in respect of the ascension, but in Luke and Acts as a whole, has been forcefully emphasised by both H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of Saint Luke* (London: Faber, 1960) and E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971). Cf. also S. G. Wilson, 'The Ascension: a Critique and an Interpretation' *ZNW* 59 (1968) 269-281; and Lohfink (*Himmelfahrt*) where one of his main conclusions is that both ascension accounts stem from Luke alone.

[23] For the possibility of an ascension tradition upon which Luke could have built, note the comments by Bovon (*Luc* 184-185), and for a suggestion as to how Luke may have built his ascension accounts, see G. R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives* (Grand Rapids Baker, 1984) 266-270.

[24] J. G. Davies, *He Ascended into Heaven* (London: Lutterworth, 1958).

[25] Larranaga, *L'Ascension* 629-637; J. N. Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1950) 645. Franklin (*Christ* 30) observes that '...the ascension... is understood as the actual moment of the glorification of Jesus.' For Franklin, however, this is theologically rather than historically determined for Luke.

having little or nothing to do with ascension/exaltation as such, in that for Luke the risen Jesus is already the ascended ant exalted Lord, who appears from heaven during the forty days, and whose final departure at the end of the period of the appearances is depicted in Luke 24 and Acts 1. For some exponents of this view Luke 24 and Acts 1 relate the sane final departure, for others Luke 24 is a parting, Acts 1 the final parting.[26] It will become clear as we proceed to an examination of Luke's narratives that each of these approaches has a contribution to make without being fully persuasive as they now stand.

[p.39]

1. ***Luke 2d and Acts 1.***

Reference has frequently been made to Luke's ascension narratives, which assumes that Luke 24 and Acts 1 are in fact relating the same event. Although this has not gone unchallenged there seems little doubt that this is the case. The occurrence of ἀνελήμφθη in Acts 1:2, referring to material contained in the previous volume, makes it clear that the Cosoel contains an account of the ascension, and this can only be Luke 24:50-53 (cf. ἀνελήμφθη in 1:22). Furthermore, while there are obvious differences between the two accounts the similarities are such as to make identity a virtual certainty. Both passages refer to the Eleven, to world mission as the necessary prerequisite to the coming of the Kingdom, to the need to stay in Jerusalem and await the coming of the Spirit, to the role of the disciples as witnesses, to Jesus being received up into heaven, to the same geographical 'Location (Bethany/Mount of Olives), to the return to Jerusalem, and to attendance at the temple and prayer. Not only is the subject matter clearly the same, there are numerous linguistic parallels which underline the identical nature of the incidents recorded.[27] This conclusion is important because it means that both narratives can and must be taken into account in determining, the nature of the event described, and since the similarities serve only to highlight the differences, these must be adequately explained.

In what follows it will be argued that in both Luke 24 and Acts 1 Luke describes the ending of the resurrection appearances in the final departure of the visible presence of the already exalted Lord. in essence this is a position not markedly different from that adopted by W. Michaelis and P. Benoit, but it is perhaps not unfair to say that both of these writers have rightly pointed out. weaknesses in some of the alternative interpretations and have shown the possibility of their own position without in fact demonstrating from the Lukan writings themselves that this possibility is in fact to be preferred. Certainly many scholars remain unconvinced. Lohfink, for example, while acknowledging the value of their work, is far from convinced that the two Lukan accounts reflect a departure tradition, especially as such

[p.40]

a tradition cannot be demonstrated from elsewhere in the NT;[28] and E. Franklin, who argues that for Luke the ascension was the moment of glorification (or the event which immediately

[26] Michaelis, 'Ueberlieferung' 101-109; Benoit, 'Ascension' 250; Ellis, *Luke* 280.
[27] B. W. Bacon, 'The Ascension in Luke and Acts', *Expositor* 7 (1909) 256-257; Davies, *He Ascended* 42, 187.
[28] *Himmelfahrt* 18-19.

preceded the invisible exaltation which took place in heaven) and that Luke's resurrection appearances are devoid of any hint of a glorification already accomplished, feels that the view being presented here 'underplays the significance of the cloud in Acts 1.[29] It would be presumptuous to believe that any arguments presented here might tip the scales decisively in favour of the proposed interpretation, but there are three considerations which may add a little weight. They concern the 'form' of the story, the significance of the resurrection for Luke's Christology, and the presentation of the exaltation of Christ by Luke outside the ascension narratives.

2. *The 'form' of the Lakan narratives*

It is one of the merits of Lohfink's study that he acknowledges the importance of seeking to identify the 'form' of the Lukan accounts, and that he provides such a lucid and full survey of ascension 'forms' in both Hellenism and Judaism.[30] In Greco-Roman antiquity two forms of ascension story can be distinguished: the so-called journey of the soul to heaven, and what can be called the 'rapture' story. For the latter certain verbs were used (ἀφανίζομαι, ἁρπάζω, and μεθίσταμαι) and motifs such as a mountain, a funeral-pile, light, darkness, wind, cloud, and heavenly confirmation frequently occur. Many of these motifs are found also in the Old Testament and Judaism where, however, it is necessary to distinguish between at least four types of story: a journey to heaven to receive revelation and a subsequent return to earth;[31] the taking up of the soul after death;[32] the rapture of a living person, who is taken up to heaven never to return (e.g, Enoch, Elijah, Esdras and Baruch);[33] and the ascension at the end of an

[p.41]

appearance.[34] Lohfink concludes his extremely detailed investigation of these 'forms' by placing the Lukan accounts firmly within the 'rapture' category, on the grounds that numerous rapture motifs are found in Luke's narratives (the mountain, Acts 1:12; the final conversation with the disciples, Acts 1:6-8; the cloud which takes Jesus up, Acts 1:9; the worship offered by the disciples, Lk. 24:52; the heavenly confirmation by the angels, Acts 1:11; and the worship of God, Lk. 24:53), that Luke uses the most important Old Testament word for a rapture (ἀναλαμβάνομαι),[35] that most early church writers as a matter of course conceive of the ascension in terms of a rapture, and, most importantly for Lohfink, the ascension is related by Luke from the standpoint of the observers, from an earthly perspective, which belongs to the fundamental scheme of a rapture.[36]

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[29] *Christ* 30-41.
[30] *Himmelfahrt* 32-79.
[31] Test. Abraham 7:19 – 8:3. See Lohfink, *Himmelfahrt* 51-53 for further examples.
[32] Test. Abraham 14:6-7; further examples, Lohfink, *Himmelfahrt* 54.
[33] Gn. 5:24; Slavonic Enoch 67 (which Lohfink considers the most important parallel to Luke's accounts); 2 Ki. 2:1-18 (*Himmelfahrt* 55-70).
[34] Lohfink (*Himmelfahrt* 70-72) gives the examples, the most significant of which is usually held to be Tob. 12:20-22.
[35] It is not strictly speaking true, however, as Lohfink claims *Himmelfahrt* 761 that both Lukan accounts employ this verb. It is absent from Lk. 24:50-53.
[36] *Himmelfahrt* 74-79.

Lohfink admits, however, that there is no one rapture story, in the Greco-Roman literature or that of the OT and Judaism, upon which Luke is dependent.[37] He also acknowledges the possibility, without attributing great significance to it, of the influence of another 'form', namely, the ascension at the end of an appearance. indeed he concedes that the emphasis on the reaction of the disciples in Luke 24:52-53, and on their role as witnesses in Acts 1, in fact the relating of the story from the disciples' viewpoint, is as much a feature of this 'form' as of the rapture accounts. When it is further noted that to a considerable extent not only in the ascension narratives but also in Luke 24 and Acts 1 as a whole attention is focused upon the disciples and their preparation for the future, and that indeed the theme of preparing the disciples is prominent throughout

[p.42]

the whole of Luke's Gospel,[38] the significance of this particular element in the determination of the 'form' of the story is greatly reduced. Again, although both accounts relate the same event this does not necessarily mean that both are in precisely the scene 'form', and therefore to combine them when compiling a list of features found in a rapture story may be misleading. Lohfink's list of six features appears reasonably impressive, until one notes that four of the features belong to Acts 1 and two to Luke 24. Looked at individually, therefore, neither account is so impressively 'rapture'-like, especially Luke 24. In fact, the reaction of the disciples in rake 24:52-53, coming as it does at the conclusion of an appearance, makes it at least as likely that Luke was thinking in terms of an ascension at the end of an appearance, at least in the Gospel account. To deny this possibility, as Lohfink does, on the grounds that these verses do not only end an appearance but conclude the whole life of Jesus, is unconvincing.[39] Luke does use ἀναλαμβάνομαι three times in Acts 1, but the fact is that he uses ἀναφέρω in Luke 24, which should large caution in drawing too certain conclusions from his choice of verbs. There are elements in both Luke 24 and Acts 1 which are also found in both rapture stories and ascensions at the end of an appearance. This, however, does not exhaust the possibilities. Reference is frequently made to Sirach 50:50-52 in which there are undoubtedly linguistic parallels to Luke 24:50-53—the lifting up of the hands, the use of προσκυνέω and the repeated use of εὐλογέω. While it is true that Luke does not usually picture Jesus as a priest, it is hard to ignore this possibility in this passage.[40] If we leave aside such priestly associations the ending of Luke also recalls many of the parting scenes depicted in the OT. These scenes have been scrutinized by J. Munck who lists their main features as (i) a farewell speech prior to

[p.43]

exaltation or death; (ii) a warning as to the consequences of obeying or disobeying the teaching; (iii) less often, an account of a life, drawing out its lessons; (iv) prophecy regarding the future; and (v) a meal sometimes precedes the final discourse (something which attains greater

[37] In this he is undoubtedly correct. While there are some similarities between the Lukan accounts and, for example, 2 Ki. 2:1-18 and Sirach 50:50-52, it is a mistake to suggest that such passages have had a decisive and formative effect on the way in which Luke has written his accounts.
[38] See P. S. Minear, *To Heal and to Reveal* (New York Seabury, 1976).
[39] *Himmelfahrt* 75.
[40] Cf. P. A. van Stempvoort, 'The Interpretation of the Ascension in Luke and Acts', *NTS* 5 (1958-9) 34-37.

significance if Acts 1:4 refers to Jesus eating with the disciples).[41] M. J. Lagrange draws attention to Genesis 46:14-15, where the aged Jacob blesses his descendants at the close of his life, and in view of the use made by Luke of Moses typology (see Stephen's speech in Acts 7) Moses' farewell address and blessing of the people in Deuteronomy 31-34 may also be relevant.[42] H. slender comments, 'The story in the Gospel is in the first place a farewell scene...'.[43] What is to be made of all this? There appear to be elements of more than one 'form' present in Luke's ascension accounts which suggests that Luke did not feel himself tied by any one 'form', and thus to seek to press his narratives into one such straight-jacket is to do him a disservice. There is a sense in which Luke is seeking to present a unique occurrence, which calls for a combination of elements to be used. We should not deny the rapture elements, which serve to confirm the exaltation rather than describe the event (see below), but due emphasis must be placed on the ideas relating to farewell blessing and departure, especially when it is recalled that Luke, in contrast to the rest of the NT, is regularly at pains in his appearance stories to note the disappearance of whoever has appeared.[44] Since both Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-11 come as the climax of appearances of the risen Jesus, it is not unreasonable to suggest that it is as such that they are primarily intended. That far more detail is given of this disappearance compared with others in Luke-Acts marks out this departure as different from all others, in that it is final. If on other grounds it can be shown that for Luke the risen Jesus is already exalted, then the rapture

[p.44]

elements combine with the end of an appearance motif to present the final departure of the already exalted Lord.[45] It is at this point, of course, that the 'form' becomes the servant of the theology, and to this we shall return later.

3. *The Resurrection and Luke's Christology*

It is sometimes claimed on the basis of the use of Christological titles in Luke and Acts that Luke's Gospel is full of Christological anachronisms, his 'promiscuous use of the titles' being due to 'his tendency to use the normal terminology of the Church'.[46] 'For Luke Jesus is already on earth Christ, Son and Lord', says Conzelmann; 'in the use of the titles he makes no distinction between the historical figure and the Exalted Lord'.[47] However, while it is true, in C. F. D. Moule's words, that 'Acts evinces an unshaken awareness that the exalted Lord is identical with

[41] 'Discours d'adieu dans le Nouveau Testament et dans la littérature biblique' in *Aux sources de la tradition chrétienne: mélanges offerts à M. Maurice Goguel* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1950) 155-170.
[42] *L'Évangile selon Saint Luc* (Paris: Gabalda, 1945) 616.
[43] *St. Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History* (London: SPCK, 1967) 11.
[44] Cf. Lk. 1:35; 2:15; 9:33; 24:31; Acts 10:7; 12:10.
[45] Here we concur with R. J. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978) 177 n.58: 'The point is that the Lucan narratives have incorporated the terms, motifs, and format of the old assumption stories four illustrative purposes, but not necessarily to fit the mystery of Easter into the assumption category.'
[46] Conzelmann, *Theology* 171 n.1.
[47] *Ibid*. 175.

Jesus, the man from Nazareth',[48] that there is no distinction at all for Luke between the earthly Jesus and the exalted Christ, and that the Jesus of the ministry is painted in colours rightly belonging only to the faith of the church, is not borne out by a careful examination of the facts.

Moule seeks to show that while Luke makes extensive use of the word κύριος with reference to Jesus, its use prior to the resurrection on the lips of men is, with rare exceptions, confined to those occasions when Luke as the narrator is referring to Jesus. The absence of this title on the lips of men during the ministry becomes all the more striking when it is observed that immediately the

[p.45]

narrative enters the post-resurrection period, in both the Gospel and Acts, the situation is entirely different. 'In Luke 24:34 and from the beginning of Acts onwards, the disciples are represented as doing precisely what they do not do in the Gospel before the resurrection: they freely apply the term κύριος to Jesus.'[49] In spite of the large number of occurrences involved it might be possible to see here only a remarkable coincidence rather than a careful design on Luke's part (or indeed to use this evidence quite differently) were it not for a number of other factors which point in the same direction.[50] κύριος is not the only title to indicate a carefully maintained distinction. A subtle but precise differentiation is made by Luke between the assessment made by men during the ministry—that Jesus was one of the prophets—and the claim of the post-resurrection church that Jesus was the Prophet like Moses. In similar vein, the reference to the Son of Man in Acts 7:56 is in contrast to all other references to the Son of Man in glory, in that, whereas in the Gospels all such references are future, here in Acts the Son of Man is now in glory. Again, the designation 'Saviour' is significantly different in its application in the Gospel and in Acts; and the same can be said of the tern υἱός. 'The common factor behind the contrasts that have been described is, of course, the consciousness of the resurrection as marking a decisive vindication of Jesus.'[51]

The resurrection is, therefore, the Christological watershed of Luke-Acts, for it is the resurrection which has made Jesus Lord, and in this regard Lukan theology is at one with the rest of the NT. This is borne out by Acts 2:32-36 which shows that when God raised the Jesus who had been crucified, this included as an integral part of that act his being exalted to the right hand of God and his reception of the Spirit. This understanding is

[p.46]

indicated by the reference to David in v. 34. Peter states that David did not go up to heaven and that Psalm 110:1 refers to the exaltation of Jesus; but earlier it had been pointed out that David

[48] 'The Christology of Acts' in L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyr, (ed.) *Studies in Luke-Acts* (London: SPCK, 1968) 159-185; the quotation is from 165.
[49] Moule, 'Christology' 161.
[50] Franklin (*Christ* 30ff.) is not impressed by Moule's thesis, but he does not seem to take the further material into account. He also appears to argue from an already established position regarding the resurrection and exaltation which compels a rejection of Moule's argument, but which is itself mistaken.
[51] Moule, 'Christology' 165.

did not rise from the dead, his tomb still being present: if he did not rise, it is superfluous to say that he did not go up to heaven, unless resurrection and ascension are two aspects of the one act. David did not go up to heaven because he did not rise from the dead. Conversely, the Jesus who was raised is the Jesus who, as a necessary part of that resurrection, has been exalted to heaven. It is the resurrection/exaltation which makes Jesus both Lord and Christ, and if that is the case, then the risen Lord who appears to the disciples is already the exalted Lord, and Luke's ascension narratives, whatever else they may be, are not descriptions of the exaltation of Jesus.

4. ***Exaltation in Luke-Acts apart from the ascension: narratives***

Clearly the ascension narratives cannot be judged in solution from those other passages in Luke-Acts which speak of resurrection—ascension—exaltation, and it is just these passages which prove an embarrassment for those like Lohfink who insist that Luke, in contrast to the rest of the NIT, always separates the resurrection and the ascension. For the fact is, as Lohfink himself acknowledges, that Luke uses ἀνάληψις (Lk. 9:51) and ἀναλαμβάνομαι (Acts 1:2, 22) not of the ascension alone, but of the whole complex of events including death, resurrection and ascension. In Acts 13:31ff. Luke emphasises the resurrection as opposed to the ascension (Lohfink thinks this is the result of a misunderstanding on Luke's part); and in Luke 24:26 the entry of Jesus into glory refers only to the resurrection. In fact, Lohfink's detailed study suggests that only Acts 5:30-32 and Acts 2:32-35 actually emphasise the difference between resurrection and exaltation, in the former by making the exaltation an event to be confirmed by witnesses and in the latter by using a different text of scripture to attest the exaltation from that which points to the resurrection.[52] Not only can both of these passages be

[p.47]

understood differently,[53] but in the light of the majority of references one has to ask whether it is likely that they should be interpreted as Lohfink suggests. It is hard to resist the feeling that these texts are being squeezed into a predetermined mould of an ascension understood as exaltation, rather than allowing these texts to shape the interpretation of the ascension narratives; and that suspicion grows when, in respect of Luke 24:26, Lohfink writes: 'Have we here, therefore, an exaltation text in which the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus are thought of as a connected event—and on this occasion indeed by Luke? So at least many expositors feel. in the coarse of this investigation, however, we have had to confirm that Luke distinguishes most precisely between the resurrection and the exaltation of Jesus.'[54] Is this not to stand exegesis on its head?

A similar lack of logic is surely present also in Franklin's treatment of this same theme. He speaks of 'other statements in Luke-Acts which link the glorification more closely to the resurrection'. Thus for him Luke 24:26 speaks of a glorification already accomplished at the

[52] *Himmelfahrt* 211-241.
[53] See the brief discussion of Acts 2:32-35 above. The use of two texts surely does not have to mean that Luke was thinking of two separate events. That resurrection and ascension can be separated in thought, and different scriptures applied to each, does not necessarily involve their separation in reality. As far as Acts 5:30-32 is concerned, see F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1965) 1.21-122; I. H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Leicester; IVP, 1980) 120; Franklin, *Christ* 33.
[54] *Himmelfahrt* 230-237 (my translation).

resurrection (probably confirmed, he feels, by Lk. 22:69 and 23:42-43); the majority of speeches in Acts 'suggest no intermediate stage between resurrection and exaltation' (Acts 3:15-16; 4:10; 10:40-43); 'only in 2:32-35 are the two treated separately so that different functions are assigned to them'. But instead of drawing what would appear the necessary conclusion about Luke's understanding, having already determined that for Luke the ascension is the glorification, Franklin concludes that 'All this points to the conclusion that Luke's scheme is an artificial one' and demonstrates that 'Luke is not

[p.48]

entirely consistent here'.[55] Who is being consistent and where is the artificiality? If not all, then the great majority of Luke's other references to resurrection and exaltation show him to be at one with the rest of the NT, and while this cannot prove that the ascension accounts are not a direct contradiction of this model, it surely suggests a high degree of probability that these narratives also were seen by Luke to conform to it.

In the light of this brief discussion of the 'form' of the ascension narratives, the Christology of Luke-Acts, and the theology of exaltation found in these writings as a whole it can be argued with a fair degree of plausibility that the ascension narratives themselves, for all their uniqueness in the NT, do not have to be understood as exaltation narratives; on the contrary they can and should be seen as conforming to the resurrection/exaltation pattern of the rest of the NT in describing the final departure of the already exalted Lord.

II THE FORTY DAYS

Even if it is not understood as an attempt to date the exaltation of Jesus, the reference to forty days in Acts 1:3 remains one of the most striking features of Luke's accounts. Not only does it raise the question of the relation between Luke 24 and Acts 1, but it stands alone in the NT as an indication of the duration of the resurrection appearances. Unless it can be shown that Luke has taken over this piece of chronology from the tradition, its inclusion by him would suggest that it has a particular significance for him. There are in fact a number of considerations which make it likely that this element in the narrative stems from Luke himself. The occurrence of the 'forty' in Acts 1:3, but not in vv. 9-12, where it would be quite fitting alongside the geographical information in the description of the ascension, points in this direction. Luke has provided clear dates for the resurrection and the coming of the Spirit, but as Menoud has observed, its absence from vv. 9-12 would suggest that Luke is not intending to date the ascension by means of this 'forty'.[56] The absence

[p.49]

of any reference to 'forty days' elsewhere in Acts, even where there was opportunity for it, as in Acts 10:41 and 13:31, points to a similar conclusion.[57] While the vague ἐπὶ ἡμέρας πλείους

[55] *Christ* 29-41; the quotations come from pp. 32, 33.
[56] 'Pendant Quarante Jours' 152ff.
[57] This would also make improbable the suggestion that Luke learned of this figure only after he had completed the Gospel but before writing Acts. C. F. D. Moule 'The Ascension—Acts 1:9', *Exp T* 68 [1956-7] 205-209) suggests

does not contradict Acts 1:3, it would seem that exact chronology in respect of the ascension was not considered by Luke to have been a part of early Christian proclamation, nor was it important in his own writing generally. Further, it is not only the rest of the NT which is silent in this respect; the number is absent from church tradition until the third century. Even Justin and Irenaeus, both of whom rely heavily on the Lukan writings for their accounts of the ascension, make no mention of the forty days, which would seem to indicate, as Lohfink observes, that 'they saw in this expression no tradition which ought to be furthered'.[58] When it is also observed that Luke has a tendency to introduce numbers into his narratives in Acts, and that these are often both round numbers and numbers which have at least an undercurrent of theological significance, it becomes hard to resist the impression that the number forty in this connection derives from Luke.[59]

[p.50]

What then was Luke's intention in introducing it? There are three possibilities:

(i) The number is meant to indicate an exact chronology. This is by no means impossible in the light of the prologue to the Gospel in which Luke sets out his purpose as to provide information as accurately as possible, and both Benoit and Moule feel that this time reference is perfectly plausible in view of the probable movement of the disciples at this period.[60] But without wishing to suggest that the number is wildly inaccurate, in the light of the observations above, other possibilities must be considered.[61]

(ii) It is intended simply as a round number. It is commonly so used in the OT and NT to indicate a reasonable period of time, be it days or years. By its use in relation to events like the flood, the wilderness wandering and the giving of the Law, it came to be a number imbued with sacred significance. If Luke wished to find a number to express the duration of the resurrection appearances, and the particularly sacred nature of that period, then the most natural choice would be forty.

(iii) It has a specifically theological intention. Both F. Dornsieff and J. Manek, emphasising the OT background, point to incidents in the life of Moses.[62] Dornsieff refers to the forty days Moses spent on the mountain with God and compares it with the forty days which Jesus spent 'between

this, and that the discrepancy with the Gospel was the result of Luke's failure to revise his work. Even less likely is the comment of S. G. Wilson ('Ascension' 271 n.13) that 'we must allow for the possibility that by the time he came to write Acts Luke had quite simply forgotten what he wrote in Luke 24'.

[58] *Himmelfahrt* 178.

[59] Lohfink, for example, observes this principle in Luke's account of the growth of the church. At first there are 12; then there are 120 (10 x 12); then come the 3000 and 5000. No further numbers are given after this, partly because such numbers would lose their vividness, and partly because after 5000+ in. Greek there is only μυριάς and μυριάδες which indicate the limits of counting (*Himmelfahrt* 178-179).

[60] Benoit, 'Ascension' 241-242; C. F. D. Moule, 'The Post-Resurrection Appearances in the Light of Festival Pilgrimages', *NTS* 4 (1957-8) 58-59. Cf. van Stempvoort, 'Interpretation' 34.

[61] Cf. the view of Wilson that forty is not 'meant to be an exact number, though neither is it grossly inaccurate' ('Ascension' 270).

[62] F. Dornsieff, 'Lukas der Schriftsteller' *ZNW* 35 (1936) 136; J. Manek, 'The New Exodus in the Books of Luke', *Nov T* 2 (1957) 8-23.

two worlds'; but this hardly seems a real parallel. Moses was on the mountain to receive the Law from God and then to return to his people, whereas Jesus, on the contrary, is present with his people to give them instructions before he parts from there. Manek, who sees Jesus in Luke-Acts as the new Moses, compares the period of the wilderness wandering with the forty days of Acts l; but, as Menoud

[p.51]

tartly observes, the only thing in common to the two accounts is the number forty, and even this refers to years in the OT narrative and days in Acts 1.[63] In fact, although there are a number of OT incidents which have contributed to the sacred nature of the number forty, thus forming a general background to Luke's use of the number, and although Luke's writings are rooted in the OT,[64] it is unlikely that any one OT incident formed the basis for Luke's choice of this number.[65]

Menoud appeals to contemporary practice. By addressing only the Eleven, and not the larger group as in Luke 24, Luke shows that these witnesses are the authentic depositories of the teaching of the risen One, in that, just as it was the practice of Rabbis to repeat their teaching to their disciples forty times, so that it should be learned by heart, and thus could be transmitted whole and unaltered, so Jesus ensures that his disciples are adequately equipped to be his witnesses. It is Luke's way of distinguishing between the specially instructed Eleven, whose speeches are reported in Acts, and other missionaries, like Barnabas and Philip, whose speeches are not reported because they were not part of this special group. It may well be correct that for Luke much of the importance of this period lay in the instruction which Jesus gave, and the rabbinic practice to which Menoud refers is certainly suggestive (although whether it would have been grasped by Luke's readers must be doubtful). It is odd however, that the incident which follows gives the very opposite impression, for the only glimpse afforded of the disciples themselves in v. 6 suggests that they had not learned the lessons they had been taught. Coming immediately before the ascension this hardly inspires confidence that the forty days' instruction has fulfilled its purpose in making these disciples the authentic

[p.52]

depositories of the Gospel.[66] Equally it is by no means clear that Luke does differentiate between the Eleven and other witnesses. The only detailed reports of missionary preaching by members of this group are found in Peter's sermons, and one wonders why the rest of the Eleven are allowed to drop from sight, nothing of their preaching being reported; and why does Luke give so much space to the speech of Stephen, and devote the second half of Acts to Paul? Such considerations make Menoud's position difficult to maintain.

[63] 'Pendant Quarante Jours' 150-151 n.2.
[64] See J. Drury, *Tradition and Design it Luke's Gospel* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976) 1-14.
[65] *Cf*. H. Balz, 'τεσσαράκοντα', *TDNT* 8. 139: 'It. is hard to find any specific O.T. type for it.'
[66] Cf. Wilson's comment that 'if the disciples really retained the misunderstanding of v. 6f. after 40 days (*sic*) teaching or, the subject, then we would have to assume either that they were exceptionally stupid or that Jesus was a singularly incompetent teacher' ('Ascension' 277 n.39).

Lohfink connects the number forty with the fiftieth day, *i.e*. Pentecost. This Luke takes as his fixed point, which means that he then needs a number for the time of the appearances which is within the fifty days and which also fulfils certain conditions: it must be close to fifty, since the ascension and the coming of the Spirit are closely related chronologically—cf. Acts 1:5, οὐ μετὰ πολλὰς ταύτας ἡμέρας; it must be a round number which no reader would understand as exact chronology, since Luke does not intend to date the ascension: it must be a biblical number, since in texts of this sort Luke is at pains to write in the style of the LXX; and it must be a sacred number which is qualified for use on both Christological and salvation-history grounds. The only number which fulfils all these conditions is forty, which is ideally suited to make the point Luke has in mind—the sacred nature of the 'in-between' time. The number corresponds to Luke's use of Jerusalem as a geographical pointer, both geography and chronology being employed to join together the time of Jesus and the time of the church. The preparation of the apostles for their future role as witnesses involves convincing them of the reality of the resurrection and teaching them about the Kingdom of God so that there is continuity of teaching between Jesus and the church.[67]

[p.53]

It is possible that Lohfink has here uncovered the mechanics which lay behind the choice of forty, and in relating this to the theme of continuity he is, I think, on the right track. But is the continuity between Jesus and the church more than a continuity of teaching (especially as this emphasis on teaching must face many of the criticisms levelled at Menoud's similar position)? Is the forty days simply a theological device to bridge a difficult gap between otherwise watertight compartments in Luke's scheme of salvation-history? Or is Luke pointing to an actual continuation of the ministry of Jesus which, through the resurrection and exaltation has now entered upon a new phase, and the number forty is one of several indications in Acts l in particular and Acts in general of such a continuing ministry?[68] Luke uses the expression 'forty days' on only one other occasion. in Luke-Acts, to denote the period of the temptation in the wilderness (Lk. 4:2). E. Preusschen boldly states that 'the forty days are thought of as an introduction to the work of the exalted Christ just as the forty days' fast was an introduction to the earthly work', and M. Goguel was of the opinion that there was a sense in which Jesus needed to be prepared for his heavenly ministry just as he had prepared for his earthly ministry.[69] Were such a parallel an isolated phenomenon its significance would be greatly reduced, but it should be seen as part of a much wider series of parallels which, as G. W. H. Lampe notes, occur in Luke's writings in such a way as to link the life and work of Jesus with the story and mission of the church.[70] The most thoroughgoing attempt to

[67] *Himmelfahrt* 184-186.
[68] I am developing this theme of a continuing ministry of Jesus in Acts elsewhere. The implication of Acts 1:1 must be taken seriously. In this connection mention should be made of R. F. O'Toole, *The Unity of Luke's Theology* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1934).
[69] E. Preusschen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Tübingen; Mohr, 1912); M. Goguel, *La foi à la résurrection de Jésus dans la christianisme primitif* (Paris: 1933) 354.
[70] G. W. H. Lampe, 'The Holy Spirit in the Writings of St. Luke' in L. E. Nineham (ed.), *Studies In the Gospels* (Oxford: OUP, 1955) 159-200, esp. 194ff. Lampe, in fact, does not place the forty days of Acts into this Lukan parallelism, presumably because he sees the baptism of Jesus as corresponding to the Spirit-baptism at Pentecost.

[p.54]

interpret the writings of Luke in this way has been made by M. D. Goulder.[71] The extreme form of theological interpretation proposed by Goulder must be reckoned unlikely, but the number of apparent parallels between the Gospel and Acts is impressive, and it is not necessary to demonstrate that they are part of a deliberately theological presentation to maintain that they are intentional. The effect of these parallels upon the reader is frequently to remind him as he reads Acts of the ministry of Jesus as recounted in the Gospel. As such they are a literary device which constantly suggests the continued presence and activity of the risen Lord. That the forty days of Acts 1:3 is part of such a presentation is suggested by the way in which Luke 24 and Acts 1 appear deliberately to recall the beginning of the Gospel: in Luke 24:50-53 note should be taken of the priestly motif which recalls the incomplete service rendered by Zechariah (possibly also the blessing pronounced by Simeon), the temple with which the Gospel ends played an important part in the beginning, and the themes of joy and worship are also very much to the fore in the infancy narratives;[72] in Acts 1 mention should be made of the choosing of the apostles, the teaching about the kingdom cf God, the reference to the ministry of John the Baptist, and, of course, the forty days. What Luke is describing is a new beginning, yet a beginning which recalls the beginning already made in the Gospel and with which the story of Acts is continuous. The forty days, therefore, is a vital vehicle for conveying Luke's theology of continuity, and as such this leads us into the final section of this study.

III THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ASCENSION NARRATIVES IN LUKE-ACTS

However the ascension narratives are understood, it must be clear that their presence in Luke-Acts means that they play an important part in Luke's thinking and thus contribute in a crucial way to the message he wishes to convey. That the two accounts differ to some extent in the theological message they convey, as is shown by the

[p.55]

different motifs present in the two narratives, is true, but these differences should not be over-emphasised. The one event of the ascension holds the Gospel and Acts together, yet the Luke 24 account is peculiarly appropriate for the climax of a Gospel just as the Acts account is fitting for the commencement of that story; but many of the same elements and ideas are present in both narratives which are intended to complement rather than contradict one another.[73] No more than a brief summary is attempted here of the main features of Luke's presentation.

(i) *The Ascension is the confirmation of the exaltation of Christ and his present Lordship*. If, as was argued above, the ascension narratives do not describe the exaltation of Jesus, the presence of the exaltation motifs must be accounted for. Again it must be stressed that the forty days of the appearances is for the benefit of the disciples so that the necessarily invisible event of the resurrection can be demonstrated beyond any doubt by means of the appearances, the reality and

[71] M. D. Goulder, *Type and History in Acts* (London: SPCK, 1984); *The Evangelists' Calendar* (London: SPCK, 1978).
[72] Cf. J. Ernst, *Das Evangelium each Lukas* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1977) 672-673.
[73] See especially van Stempvoort, 'Interpretation' 42.

corporeal nature of which Luke emphasises more than any other NT writer. In the same way the disciples and, of course, Luke's readers, must be convinced of the equally invisible exaltation of Jesus and his present reign at the right hand of the Father, and it is this which is dramatically confirmed in the vivid ascension narratives.[74] As at the transfiguration the cloud of the divine presence and glory makes it clear where Jesus belongs, and his parting from the disciples into the cloud which hides him from their sight as well as bears him up confirms his exalted position; the fourfold repetition of the phrase 'into heaven' in Acts 1:10-11 is as clear an indication as there could be of the reality of Christ's Lordship (note also the same phrase in the longer reading of Luke 24:51); and as if this were not sufficient, what they have seen is confirmed by what they

[p.56]

hear from the angelic messengers. While therefore it is necessary to reject Franklin's understanding of the ascension as the moment of glorification, we heartily concur with his statement that 'the ascension is the visible and concrete expression of Jesus' status'.[75] The Lordship of Jesus presented through the ascension narratives makes not only a fitting climax to the Gospel, but a necessary one, for it is that Lordship which gives meaning to the whole Gospel, indeed provides the vantage point from which it can be understood in its full significance; similarly the story of the church is only rightly perceived in the light of the exaltation of the crucified Jesus who even now reigns with the Father, and thus Acts 1 makes it clear that this second volume is not to be simply 'church history' but a further proclamation of the Gospel of the exalted Christ.

(ii) *The ascension is the explanation of the continuity between the ministry of Jesus and that of the church*. It is often said that the ascension accounts mark an ending and a beginning. It might be more accurate to say that they present the point of transition at which the story which has begun in the earthly ministry of Jesus in one mode becomes the same story continuing in a different mode. It is this note of continuity which is central.[76] The ascension must be understood in the light of the implication contained in Acts 1:1, that as the Gospel recounted what Jesus began to do and to teach, so Acts will recount what he continues to do and to teach.[77] In this context it is also important to observe that for Luke this 'going away' of Jesus at the ascension does not lead to an

[p.57]

[74] Franklin (*Christ* 39) is quite .correct, therefore, to say that 'The description of the actual event is given only as it bears upon the disciples; it is seen in terms of its significance for them'; but this is hardly 'a complete contrast with Luke 24:50-1'. It is more a difference of emphasis, the Luke 24 presentation being more fitting for the climax of the Gospel.

[75] *Christ* 30.

[76] Wilson comments: 'Thus while it marks a division between the story of Jesus and the history of the Church, much more significant is the way in which it firmly links these two epochs' ('Ascension' 276). 'As his double account of the Ascension and his concept of Apostleship show, Luke was far more concerned to show how these two epochs were linked than how they were separated' ('Ascension' 276 n.35).

[77] That this is how Acts 1:1. should be interpreted is argued in the thesis on which I am presently working, entitled 'The Ministry of the Exalted Christ in Luke-Acts: An Aspect of Lukan Continuity'. Cf. A. Hilgenfeld, 'Lucas and die Apostelgeschichte', *ZWTh* 50 (1507) 162; Preusschen, *Apostelgeschichte* 4; Bruce, *Acts* 32; Goulder, *Type* 63-64.

absentee Christ, as is frequently asserted;[78] rather, and this helps to explain the joy of the disciples in Luke 24, as H. Schlier puts it so well, Luke 'fain show that the parting is more than a farewell, indeed basically not a farewell at all, but the withdrawal to a greater nearness'.[79]

(iii) *The Ascension is the culmination of the resurrection appearances*. Precisely because Luke has emphasised the corporeality of the resurrection appearances it was necessary that he should emphatically declare that such appearances, and such a presence of the risen Lord, could not be considered in any way the norm of Christian experience. Hence the air of finality that pervades both ascension accounts. Luke understood the importance of this for the disciples themselves, who had spent the years of the ministry in the presence of the earthly Jesus, and had, uniquely, been the recipients of regular appearances of the risen Lord. As Moule comments, 'the decisive cessation of the appearances in one final appearance.... was clearly something needed by the friends of Jesus who had known him so closely as an earthly friend and intimate that for them the problem was how to be weaned of this audio-visual, quasi-physical relationship'.[80] So Luke himself, however, had never seen the risen Christ in this way nor had any of his readers, and thus Luke makes it clear that such appearances are not promised to everyone; indeed once the reality of the resurrection has been established they must end.[81] The

[p.58]

visible presence of Christ is not necessary for faith. In his ascension accounts Luke is depicting what is presupposed in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7, that the appearances came to an end, and so he presents 'an acted declaration of finality'.[82]

(iv) *The Ascension is the prelude to the sending of the Spirit*. Here, as in (iii) above, Lukan theology comes very close to that of the Fourth Gospel, in which the evangelist points out that the Spirit was not yet (given) because Jesus had not been glorified, and that unless Jesus went away the Spirit would not come, but that in the coming of the Spirit, Jesus would return to his people. So for Luke also, 'being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear' (Acts 2:33); and by means of the Joel quotation earlier in Peter's sermon it is made clear that it is the exaltation of Jesus which marks the arrival of the last days in which the Spirit is poured out in abundance. Both Luke 24 and Acts 1 made quite clear the connection between the departure of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit.

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[78] As by Moule, 'Christology' 180; J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1977) 224-225. Nowhere is this suggestion put more forcefully than by J. A. Ziesler, 'Matthew and the Presence of Jesus', *Epworth Review* 11 (1984) 55: 'Luke clearly gets Jesus off the stage at the end of the Gospel (Luke 24:51) and again at the beginning of Acts (Acts 1:2, 9-11) and with almost entire consistency keeps him off.'

[79] H. Schlier, 'Jesu Himmelfahrt nach den Lukanischen Schriften' in his *Besinnung auf das neue Testament* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964) 231.

[80] C. F. D. Moule, *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1966) 5.

[81] Cf. A. Schlatter, *Das Evangelium des Lukas* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1969) 457.

[82] Moule, 'Ascension' 208.

(v) *The Ascension is the foundation of Christian mission*. In both Luke 24 and Acts 1 the Spirit is promised, and the ascension takes place, firmly within a context of mission. The Spirit is promised as the power for mission by the Lord whose exaltation is the very foundation and *raison d'etre* of mission. This too has affinities with John 20 and is reminiscent of Matthew 28:3.8-20.

(vi) *The Ascension is the pledge of the return of Christ*. For Luke the ascension is not just the confirmation of a present reality but also the certain pledge of a future consummation—'This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven' (Acts 1:11; cf. 3:20-21). To say, as U. Wilckens does, that 'Christ's ascension on a cloud has no other significance than to bring Jesus to the place from which he will return at the end' is a considerable overstatement; but it rightly emphasises the connection between these two events.[83] And Luke does this

[p.59]

not to defer indefinitely the Parousia but to make its certainty a constant reality in the life of God's people.

To conclude. Rightly understood, the ascension narratives of Luke are perfectly in keeping with the exaltation kerygma of the rest of the NT and make a vital theological contribution to NT teaching, and provide a crucial key to the unlocking of Luke's theology and purpose.

[83] U. Wilckens, *Resurrection* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew, 1977) 69-70.

Gary A. Tuttle, *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies*, pp.7-17.

1

THE DAVIDIC MESSIAH IN LUKE-ACTS

F. F. BRUCE

While Dr. LaSor is best known as a Hebraist and an Old Testament specialist, he has not excluded the Greek language or the New Testament from his scholarly exploration. His *Handbook of New Testament Greek: An Inductive Approach Based on the Greek Texts of Acts* and his commentary on Acts, *Church Alive!* bear witness to his interest and competence in the latter fields. It is a pleasure for one who first entered the world of biblical and New Testament scholarship with a study of Acts to share in this tribute of admiration and friendship to Dr. LaSor with a brief survey of one aspect of the use of the Old Testament in Luke-Acts.

I. LUKE'S NATIVITY NARRATIVE

One of the most noteworthy negative features in Jesus' allusions to his identity or rule is the absence of any appeal to the promises attached to the house of David. He did not repudiate the designation "son of David" when it was given to him by others,[1] but on the only occasion when he himself is recorded to have raised the subject, it was to point out the inadequacy of the designation "son of David" for one whom David recognized to be his lord.[2] (There is nothing to suggest that his riposte to the Pharisees who criticized his disciples for plucking and eating some ears of grain on the sabbath, "Have you not read what David did... ?" implies that if David could override the law on occasion, so *a fortiori* could the son of David.)[3]

When Jesus was challenged by the high priest, at his appearance before the Sanhedrin, to say whether or not he was the Messiah, he acknowledged that, if this was the title on which his judges insisted, he had no option but to lay claim to it. But he went on immediately to show in what sense he claimed it by using the transcendent imagery of apocalyptic and not the language in which the hope of the restoration of the Davidic monarchy was traditionally couched.[4]

Yet, if it is plain that Jesus did not use this language of himself, it is equally plain that others used it of him, and that from an early date. When Paul introduces his letter to the Christians of Rome with a reference to Jesus' being "descended from David according to the flesh,"[5] he is probably not using the

[p.8]

terminology which he found most congenial but adapting the words of a Christian confession which he assumed would be as familiar in Rome as he knew it to be in the Eastern Mediterranean. When he expresses his own insight into the identity of Jesus, he uses different language,[6] but by the same token he knew the language quoted in Rom 1:3 to be primitive—the language used by some who were in Christ before himself. This is confirmed by the

testimony of non-Pauline writings of the New Testament, and not least by that of the writings of Luke.

The nativity narratives of both Matthew and Luke attest Jesus' descent from David, but Luke's narrative does so with special emphasis. Luke indicates that both Jesus and his forerunner were born into a circle of pious people who looked for the near fulfillment of the ancestral hope of Israel and associated that fulfillment with the coming of the long-expected prince of the house of David. In this regard they show a striking affinity with the pious circle from which, a few decades earlier, the Psalms of Solomon came, with their reprobation of the Hasmonean usurpers who had "laid waste the throne of David," and their earnest prayer that God would soon raise up the rightful heir to that throne to put down the oppressors of Israel and restore his people's fortunes. The prophecies of the wealth of nations being brought to enrich the city of God would then be realized, but above all Jerusalem would once again be known as the city of righteousness: "for all will be holy, and their king is the anointed Lord."[7] Commentators generally regard this last phrase (*christos kyrios*) as a Greek mistranslation of the lost Hebrew original (*m^{e}šī^{a}ḥ YHWH,),* but this is doubtful. If YHWH had been the Hebrew wording, the translators had ample precedent in the Septuagint to guide them to its proper rendering *christos kyriou.* We must bear in mind the occurrence of the same phrase *christos kyrios* in the angelic message to the shepherds near Bethlehem[8] (although this has also, but unconvincingly, been explained as a comparable mistranslation).

Luke's record introduces the Davidic motif when he tells how, six months after the announcement of the impending birth of John the Baptist, the angel Gabriel came to Nazareth to make a similar announcement to Mary, "a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David."[9] Here, as in Matthew's record,[10] it is Joseph who is said to have been of Davidic descent: all that can be known of Mary's family must be inferred from the statement that she was related to John's mother Elizabeth, who belonged to "the daughters of Aaron."[11] Luke leaves his readers in no doubt that Jesus was conceived while his mother was still a virgin, but that in law Joseph was his father; hence in law Jesus ranked as a son of David, while by divine providence he was marked out as *the* son of David in whom the age-long promises were to meet their fulfillment. Hence Gabriel speaks thus to Mary about her coming son:

> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High;
> and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,
> and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever;
> and of his kingdom there will be no end.[12]

It is not difficult to recognize in these words an echo of various Old Testament

[p.9]

passages, such as Isaiah's oracle of the prince of the four names, whose government will be established without end "upon the throne of David, to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore."[13]

The same note is struck in Zechariah' s song of praise at the birth of his son—the more surprisingly, as Zechariah was a priest and did not belong to the royal line which was the subject of the Davidic promises. Yet in the birth of John he greeted a token of what was shortly to be fulfilled in the royal line:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people,
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old….[14]

We may discern this note again in the angels' good news to the shepherds: "to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord (*christos kyrios* 'the anointed Lord')."[15] Why in the city of David? Because, as Luke tells us in his own prosaic narrative, in pursuance of a census decree of the Roman Emperor, Joseph "went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child."[16]

A similarly matter-of-fact datum, albeit in another genre, is provided by Luke in his genealogical table which traces Jesus' lineage back through Joseph to David (and beyond David to Abraham and Adam)—not, however (as in the Matthean genealogy), through the succession of kings descended from David (Solomon and his heirs) but through Nathan, another son of David, and his completely obscure descendants.[17] Whatever significance there is in this curious fact does not lie on the surface; anyone undertaking to lay it bare must explain at the same time why Luke's line coincides with the more illustrious line in the persons of Shealtiel and Prince Zerubbabel.[18]

After the genealogy, however, no mention is made of Jesus' Davidic descent throughout the whole Gospel of Luke except once, incidentally, by the blind man of Jericho.[19] Remarkably enough, Luke's description of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem suppresses the reference to "the kingdom of our father David" which Mark's parallel narrative puts on the lips of the pilgrim crowd.[20] Like an underground stream, nevertheless, the Davidic motif emerges into the light of day again when we come to the apostolic preaching in Luke's second volume. Its absence from the record of Jesus' ministry deserves to be invested with all the importance which is attached, in current gospel criticism, to the "criterion of dissimilarity."

II. PENTECOST IN JERUSALEM

Of the speeches in Acts there are two in particular which insist that Jesus was descended from David and that in him the divine promises made to or through

[p.10]

David were realized: Peter's speech in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and Paul's speech in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch. Although there are differences in detail between the two speeches in their deployment of the Davidic theme, they share sufficient common ground to suggest that both draw upon an early pattern of Christian preaching which maintained that the resurrection of Jesus fulfilled certain well-known scriptures. Of these scriptures, the sixteenth psalm figures in both speeches.

Peter's speech in Jerusalem begins by explaining the phenomena that have amazed his audience—those attendant on the descent of the Spirit—in terms of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-

32; then he goes on to announce that Jesus of Nazareth, so recently put to death in that city, has been raised from the dead. Peter and his associates can bear first-hand testimony to his resurrection, and in it they see clearly the fulfillment of the hope expressed in Ps 16:10:

> thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades,
> nor let thy holy one see corruption.[21]

By common consent this psalm was ascribed to David; what then could be the meaning of the confidence to which these words of David give utterance? We might say today that, whoever the author was, he was voicing his assurance that God would deliver him from death in some critical situation. But this would not satisfy the hermeneutical principles underlying the application of the words in Peter's speech: however many deliverances from death the psalmist experienced, one day death caught up with him, so that his soul was given over to Hades and his body did undergo corruption. (The exegesis here depends on the Greek rather than the Hebrew text: 'corruption,' Greek *diaphthora,* renders Hebrew *šaḥat* 'the pit,' which stands in synonymous parallelism with *šᵉ'ôl* 'Hades.')

The interpretation of the passage in Peter's speech extracts the last ounce of significance from the words, for they were the words of a prophet. The oracle entitled "the last words of David" opens with the claim:

> The Spirit of Yahweh speaks by me,
> his word is upon my tongue[22]

—and everything in the Psalter spoken by David, or attributed to David, is understood in the light of this claim. Every word must be given its full weight, and so the confidence expressed in Ps 16:10 is referred not to an occasional deliverance from death but to absolute deliverance, such as Jesus experienced. The words, then, cannot be applicable to David, since he "died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day."[23] Yet they were spoken by him, and spoken in the first person singular; this must therefore be one of those places where the messianic Spirit spoke in the prophets, "predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories."[24] David, by the Spirit, spoke not *in propria persona* but as the mouthpiece of his greater son, the Messiah, who as a matter of now attested fact "was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption."[25]

But if Jesus' resurrection, to which his followers were witnesses, declared

[p.11]

him to be the Messiah, then other oracles which, by general agreement, pointed to the Messiah must have come true of him. When Jesus, in debate with the scribes during Holy Week, asked how the Messiah could be David's son if David by inspiration called him "my lord," it was accepted by him and them alike that Ps 110:1 ("Yahweh's oracle to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand….'") was a prophetic utterance of David and that the person invited to sit at God's right hand was the Messiah.[26] Peter, having affirmed Jesus to be the Messiah, can now go on to affirm that these words must therefore apply to him (as they could obviously not apply to David): "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear.... Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made this Jesus... both Lord and Messiah *(kyrios* and *christos*)."[27]

The primitiveness of the use of Ps 110:1 as a *testimonium* to the exaltation of Jesus is seen by the way in which it crops up in so many strata of the New Testament. Once again, Paul's evidence in his letter to the Romans is important, for his reference in Rom 8:34 to "Christ Jesus. . . , who is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us," is probably (like his reference to Jesus' Davidic descent in Rom 1:3) taken from an early confession of faith.[28]

III. AT PISIDIAN ANTIOCH

The Davidic-Messiah group of *testimonia* is by no means the only one found in the speeches in the early chapters of Acts—we may think of the combination of the Servant-of-Yahweh theme with the Prophet-like-Moses theme in Peter's speech in the temple court in Acts 3:13-26[29]—but Luke may have reasons of his own for putting it in the forefront of the apostolic preaching. The next outstanding occasion on which the Davidic-Messiah theme is emphasized in the apostolic preaching is in Paul's synagogue address at Pisidian Antioch.

This address begins with an outline of the mighty acts of God in the history of Israel from the Exodus to the rise of David.[30] This outline, as the late George Ernest Wright pointed out, summarizes the Old Testament *kerygma,* Israel's salvation-history as it was recited in the national worship.[31] A good example of this is presented by Psalm 78, which surveys Yahweh's dealings with the nation from the days of Egypt and the wilderness until

> he chose David his servant...
> to be the shepherd of Jacob his people,
> of Israel his inheritance.[32]

But, whereas the psalmist sees the rise of David and his dynasty, with the establishment of the sanctuary on Zion, as the climax of salvation-history,[33] Paul treats it as a stage on the way to the real climax, for he moves directly from David to Jesus, the son of David: "Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised."[34] Then follows an outline of the New Testa-

ment *kerygma* which, as regularly in the gospel tradition, finds its inception in John's baptismal ministry[35] and its culmination in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

After the reference to those who were eyewitnesses of the risen Christ come the *testimonia.* One has not hitherto been used in Acts[36]—the oracle of Ps 2:7, in which Yahweh addresses his anointed one with the acclamation:

> Thou art my Son,
> today I have begotten thee.

This is adduced as a *testimonium* to God's "raising" of Jesus[37]—not, probably, to his being raised from the dead but to his being raised up as Israel's deliverer (just as, earlier in the address, God is said to have "raised up David to be their king"[38]). In the original Lucan account of Jesus' baptism this may well have been the precise wording of the heavenly voice

(it is so read in the Western text).[39] The occasion indicated in the present context is best taken similarly as the baptism of Jesus; it was then that (as Peter put it in the house of Cornelius) "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power."[40] (It might be argued against this that Paul himself thinks of the *resurrection* as the occasion when Jesus was "designated Son of God in power,"[41] but the phrase "in power" there may be understood by way of contrast with his being "crucified in weakness."[42] It was the Son of God that was crucified as truly as it was the Son of God that was raised from the dead—but in being raised from the dead he was effectively shown to be the Son of God.)

One of the *testimonia* adduced at Pisidian Antioch for the resurrection of Jesus is Ps 16:10, as it had been in Jerusalem at the first Christian Pentecost.[43] But at Pisidian Antioch it is associated interestingly with Isa 55:3 where God, restoring his people after exile, promises to give them "the holy and sure blessings of David."[44] Both in Hebrew and in Greek these two *testimonia* are linked by a common term: we have here an instance of the rabbinical interpretative principle *g*^{e}*zer*a^{h} *sawa*^{h} ('equal category'). In the Hebrew text *ḥasîd* ('holy one') in Ps 16:10 is cognate with *ḥasdê* ('covenant mercies') in Isa 55:3; in the Septuagint the same adjective *hosios* is used in both places (in the masculine singular in the former and in the neuter plural in the latter). This provided sufficient ground to join the two in a common exegetical schema. If Jesus, the son of David, was the "holy one" of God who was saved from undergoing corruption, his resurrection was the means by which God kept his undertaking to fulfill for his people the covenant mercies promised to David and his dynasty. As Paul expresses it in 1 Cor 15:25, Jesus, having been raised from the dead, must reign until God "has put all his enemies under his feet."[45]

Is this speech at Pisidian Antioch genuinely Pauline? The point that might particularly give us pause is the statement in it that, after his resurrection, Jesus "for many days appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people."[46] Here at least Luke is reproducing the general terms of the apostolic preaching rather than Paul's dis-

[p.13]

tinctive witness: we may be sure that at this point Paul would say, and indeed did say, "Last of all... he appeared also to me."[47]

But the Pauline authenticity of the speech is not put in question by the emphasis which it lays on the Davidic motif, in contrast to the absence of such emphasis in Paul's letters. This is synagogue evangelism, not Christian instruction, and Paul could have taken the cue for his address from the contents of one or the other of the scripture lessons for the day.[48]

Of the *testimonia* adduced thus far, two have unmistakable reference to the king of Israel and the other Isa 55:3) explicitly mentions David. Ps 2:7 and Ps 110:1 both preserve divine oracles of reassurance and victory addressed to the king, perhaps forming part of the enthronement liturgy. The former certainly[49] and the latter probably[50] were understood as messianic before the beginning of the Christian era; when Jesus was identified with the Messiah, therefore, it was a foregone conclusion that they should be interpreted with reference to him. The same is true of the mention of the covenant mercies promised to David in Isa 55:3. Once Jesus was acknowledged to be the son of David *par excellence,* these covenant mercies were seen to be secured in him, the more so if the end-time David of that context,

given as "a witness to the peoples,"[51] was recognized to be the same person as the suffering and triumphant Servant of chapters 42-53.

Psalm 16, on the other hand, made no reference to any king, and there is no evidence that it was thought of as messianic in any sense before the apostolic age. Its enlistment as a *testimonium* is the result of exclusively Christian insight or inspiration. It was in the light of the Easter event that the appropriateness of the psalmist's confident hope of preservation from death to the resurrection of Jesus was appreciated. Since the psalm was traditionally Davidic, the conclusion was not far to seek that this confident hope was voiced by David through the spirit of prophecy, and came historically true in the experience of great David's greater Son.

IV. THE GENTILE MISSION

There is one further messianic *testimonium* in Acts which will repay attention. Towards the end of the book of Amos there is an oracle relating to the Davidic dynasty which proclaims that, although that dynasty has fallen on evil days, its past glories are nevertheless to be restored. In the heyday of David's imperial power he had extended his sway over the Edomites and other neighboring ethnic groups. These became not only David's vassals but also subjects of Yahweh, whom David worshiped and by whose grace he won his victories.[52] The "shields of the earth" thus belonged to the God of Israel; by his name the subject nations were called.[53] Hence the prophecy of restoration says:

"In that day I will raise up
the booth of David that is fallen
and repair its breaches,
and raise up its ruins,

[p.14]

and rebuild it as in the days of old;
that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations who are called by my name,"
says Yahweh who does this.[54]

The Septuagint rendering of this oracle provides a good example of the spiritualizing tendency of that version. Instead of a program of renewed imperial expansion it presents a picture of religious conversion:

"In that day I will raise up David's fallen tent
and rebuild its wreckage
and raise up its ruins,
and rebuild it as in the days of old;
that the remnant of mankind may seek out,
even all the nations on whom my name has been called,"
says the Lord who does this.

The most crucial change here is the vocalization of *'dm* as *'adam* ('mankind') instead of *'edom* ('Edom'); this has changed the whole tone of the oracle. Here it is reinterpreted so as to convey a promise like that of Isa 55:3-4, where the fulfillment of the covenant mercies

promised to David brings hope for the world at large, in keeping with Israel's mission to impart the knowledge of the true God to her neighbors. The reading of the verb *yîr^{e}šû* ('may possess') as *yidr^{e}šû* ('may seek') may have been due to a scribal slip, but it helps the reinterpretation. Whereas "the remnant of Edom" was the object of the verb "may possess" in the original text,[55] "the remnant of mankind" becomes the subject of the verb "may seek' in the Greek version, while the unexpressed object of this verb is probably to be understood as "me" (the Lord). The point of the Greek version then is that, thanks to the witness of Israel, the nations will seek the God of Israel and become his subjects.

The Hebrew text was used as a *testimonium* in the Damascus Document, where "the booth of David" is identified with "the booth of the king" in Amos 5:26 (a revocalization of "Sakkuth your king") and the two oracles together are interpreted of the restoration of the law to its place of supremacy in the assembly of the saints (the Qumran community).[56] This denudes it of all messianic significance in the proper sense.

The Greek text is used as a *testimonium* in Luke's account of the Council of Jerusalem. Here the apostles and elders meet to consider the terms on which Gentile believers in Jesus may be enrolled among the people of God in this new age. They listen to arguments on this side and that, until James the Just sums up the sense of the meeting. He expresses approval of Peter's exhortation, based on personal experience, not to impose on the Gentiles conditions which God himself had manifestly not required, for "with this," he says, "the words of the prophets agree, as it is written:

> 'After this I will return,
> and rebuild David's fallen tent;
>
> [p.15]
>
> I will rebuild its ruins
> and I will set it up,
> that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
> even all the Gentiles who are called by my name,'
> says the Lord, who has made these things known
> from of old."[57]

Apart from minor changes at the beginning and the end of the quotation,[58] this is essentially the Septuagint rendering. Now the object sought by the remnant of mankind is made explicit: it is the Lord. But now the rebuilding of David's fallen tent has a more precise relevance than was possible for the pre-Christian Greek translator and spiritualizer. The "remnant of mankind," i.e., the non-Jewish nations, by hearing and obeying the gospel of Christ, are yielding allegiance to the Son of David. The Son of David is extending his sovereignty over a wider empire than David himself ever controlled, and extending it by the persuasion of love, not by force of arms. This and similar Old Testament oracles are now receiving a more detailed and literal fulfillment than either the Hebrew prophets or even their Greek interpreters could have envisaged.[59]

V. A DAVIDIC COMPILATION

These messianic *testimonia* in Acts do not stand in isolation from one another. They bear witness to the exegetical activity which was vigorously pursued in the early church—more particularly, to the compilation of a body of texts linked in their original setting by a common reference to David and his line (whether expressly or by implication) and in their new setting by their appropriateness to the saving work accomplished by Jesus, the Son of David, both in his earthly experience and in its far-reaching sequel. This compilation of Davidic *testimonia* is attested in other New Testament documents,[60] but pre-eminently in Luke's nativity narrative and in the speeches in Acts. So basic is it in the Lucan writings that references to David's enemies in the Psalter can be applied, without any need for justifying argument, to the enemies of Jesus—whether to Judas Iscariot[61] or to "Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel."[62]

If, as I have argued elsewhere,[63] the speeches in Acts are not Lucan compositions *in toto,* but are based on material substantially earlier than Luke's own literary activity, then this Davidic strand of Christian interpretation is so much the more primitive: it represents one of several creative lines of Old Testament exegesis to which the Christ-event gave rise in the earliest days of the church's existence [64]

NOTES

[1] Cf. Mark 10:47-48; Matt 15:22.
[2] Mark 12:35-37.
[3] Mark 2:25-26; cf. I Sam 21:1-6.
[4] Mark 14:61-62.
[5] Rom 1:3.
[6] Paul had access to a corpus of Davidic-Messiah *testimonia* but made little use of it. In Rom 15:12 he quotes Isa 11:10, a prophecy regarding the "root of Jesse," with reference to the Gentile mission rather than to the identity of Jesus. In v 9 he has similarly quoted Ps 18:49 = 2 Sam 22:50 without the contextual mention of David. The phrase "descended from David" in 2 Tim 2:8 is repeated from Rom 1:3.
[7] *Pss Sol* 17:5-36.
[8] Luke 2:11.
[9] Luke 1:26-27.
[10] Matt 1:1-16, 20.
[11] Luke 1:5.
[12] Luke 1:32-33.
[13] Isa 9:6-7.
[14] Luke 1:67-79.
[15] Luke 2:10-11.
[16] Luke 2:1-5. In Matt 2:5-6 the birth in Bethlehem is viewed as fulfilling the oracle of Mic 5:2.
[17] Luke 3:23-38; contrast Matt 1:6ff. For Nathan (Luke 3:31) cf. 2 Sam 5:14; 1 Chr 3:5.
[18] Luke 3:27 (cf. Matt 1:12), where "rhesa" probably represents Aram. *reša'* 'prince,' the title of Zerubbabel, not a separate name.
[19] Luke 18:38-39.
[20] Luke 19:38, as against Mark 11:9-10. But Luke replaces Mark's "Blessed is he who comes…" with "Blessed is the King who comes…"
[21] Acts 2:16-28, especially vv 25-28. The superscription in MT and LXX alike designate Psalm 16 (LXX 15) as Davidic.
[22] 2 Sam 23:2.
[23] Acts 2:29.
[24] l Pet 1:11.
[25] Acts 2:31.
[26] Mark 12:35-37.
[27] Acts 2:33-36.
[28] Cf. Heb 1:3, etc.; 1 Pet 3:22.

[29] Cf. J. A. T. Robinson, "The Most Primitive Christology of All?" in *Twelve New Testament Studies* (London: SCM, 1962): 139ff.
[30] Acts 13:16-41.
[31] G. E. Wright, *God Who Acts* (London: SCM, 1952): 70-81.
[32] Ps 78:70-71.
[33] Ps 78:67-72.
[34] Acts 13:23.
[35] Cf. Acts 1:22; 10:37.
[36] The first two verses of Psalm 2 are quoted and interpreted in Acts 4:25-28; cf p. 15 with n. 62 below.
[37] Acts 13:33.
[38] Acts 13:22.
[39] Luke 3:22 (cf. *RSV* margin).
[40] Acts 10:38.
[41] Rom 1:4; cf Mark 9:1.
[42] 2 Cor 13:4.
[43] Acts 13:35.
[44] Acts 13:34.
[45] In fulfillment of Ps 110:1.
[46] Acts 13:31.
[47] 1 Cor 15:8.
[48] For the reading of "the law and the prophets" see Acts 13:15.
[49] Cf. *Pss Sol* 17:26, where Ps 2:9 is applied to the expected Davidic king.
[50] There are messianic overtones, drawn from Psalm 110, in the proclamation of Simon as "leader and high priest forever" in 1 Macc 14:41ff.
[51] Isa 55:4.
[52] Ps 18:43-50.
[53] Ps 47:3, 9.
[54] Amos 9:11-12.
[55] This is plain from the presence before *š^{e}'erît* ('remnant') of the accusative prefix *'et,* to which LXX here offers no equivalent.
[56] CD 7:l4ff.
[57] Acts 15:16-18.
[58] These minor changes may be the result of conflation of *testimonia* in a collection; the wording at the beginning of the quotation resembles that of Jer 12:15, and the wording at the end resembles that of Isa 45:21.
[59] C. C. Torrey argued that even the MT could have served James' purpose, "since it predicted that 'the tabernacle of David,' i.e., the church of the Messiah, would 'gain possession of all the nations which are called by the name [of the God of Israel]'" (*The Composition and Date of Acts* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1916]: 38-39).
[60] Cf. Rev 5:5; 22:16; Heb 1:5,13; 5:5-6. *The* ascription to Jesus of the perpetual priesthood of Melchizedek's order announced in Ps 110:4 (an ascription not found in the New Testament outside Hebrews) is based on the recognition that the oracle in that verse must be addressed to the same person as the oracle in v. 1 (i.e., the Davidic king).
[61] Cf. the quotation in Acts 1:20 of Ps 69:25 and Ps 109:8 (both traditionally Davidic psalms). For other *testimonia* drawn from Psalm 69, see John 2:17; Rom 15:3.
[62] Acts 4:27, interpreting Ps 2:1-2.
[63] F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Tyndale, 1951): 18ff.
[64] Cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1944): 17ff.; *According to the Scriptures* (London: Nisbet, 1952): 28ff., 104-06, *et passim.*

ONE

The Parousia of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts

Parables, meals, healings—all these are emblems of the sovereign rule of God in the public ministry of Jesus. So, according to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus pointed his contemporaries to the realm of God, graciously inviting their participation, but also summoning them to lives of costly commitment and claiming them for God's work in the world. God's rule was not something to be awaited in the future but was even now exerting itself; forces opposed to God were on the run and God's people were experiencing liberation and empowerment for a life of radical service.

One could therefore both proclaim and practice in the present the life of the blessed future promised by God. Yet Israel's experience mirrored another reality as well. Roman domination of the Holy Land and Holy City was not touched in the least by Jesus' mighty deeds. Surely the crucifixion of Jesus—expression of the brutal, coercive power of Rome—put the lie to premature claims for the presence of God's mighty rule. And if the first followers of Jesus embody the possibilities of the new order being fashioned by God, what a fragile order it must be!

For all the signs of God's activity in Jesus' own life and words, in the end, one was still left waiting and hoping. Even the triumph of Easter left the agenda unfinished: Jesus may be installed in power by God's own side in heaven, but life on earth continues much as before. So he will come again to complete his mission, calling evil to account and gathering the faithful into God's eternal realm. This second coming, then, would differ dramatically from the first: he would come in power, in glory, and in triumph. None will escape his coming. The whole world—indeed, the whole universe—will take note.

Mark, Matthew, and Luke witness to this complex array of experiences, hopes, and adaptations of belief, yet each Gospel develops the theme in its own way. The task of this chapter will be to describe the patterns of parousia expectation in each of the Synoptics, beginning with the earliest (Mark) and concluding with Luke and its sequel (Acts).

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

The future beckons. God's mighty rule, with its promise of liberation and peace, is breaking into the world; time has nearly run its course. On this note of intense expectation, Mark's narrative begins. John the Baptizer, whom Jesus will later identify as Elijah, the end-time prophet of restoration (9:12–13), announces the coming of a stronger one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:7–8). Jesus' very first words then mark the present as a time of fulfillment and decisive encounter with God. This is the gospel he proclaims in Galilee (1:14b): "The time (καιρός) is fulfilled, and God's reign has drawn near; repent, and believe in this good news" (1:15).

Jesus is that stronger one in whom the dominion of God begins to reclaim the world from the evil one's domination. Through exorcisms, he liberates those whom Satan has oppressed; the powerful enemy of God is now on the defensive (cf. 3:23–27). And the authority of the Son of humanity extends beyond these clashes with demons. He claims the divine prerogative to offer forgiveness (2:10), and expresses this authority both

in acts of healing (2:1–12) and in fellowship at table (2:15–17). Not even time-honored restrictions on Sabbath conduct can keep him from mighty deeds of healing, for he, the Son of humanity, is "Lord of the Sabbath" (2:28). If we are to believe the confession of Peter and Jesus' own reply to the high priest's query, Jesus' ministry is the work of Israel's Messiah (8:29; 14:61–62). In the first "coming" of Jesus—to preach good news, summon sinners into God's household, and liberate the oppressed (1:38; 2:17; 10:45)—eyes of faith can discern the transformative work of the sovereign God.

Eyes of faith, however, are seldom in evidence, even among Jesus' closest followers: far easier to restore sight to the blind than to give spiritual discernment to the Twelve![1] That the disciples fail to grasp the "mystery of God's reign" opened up to them by Jesus (4:11) is neither surprising nor ultimately discrediting. The Messiah was not expected to encounter rejection, humiliation, and death on a cross. Death in God-forsaken disgrace, deserted by his most devoted followers—this was not to be the Messiah's vocation. The end of the story belies the confident declaration of fulfillment with which the narrative began. Evil is not so easily vanquished after all.

But of course the reader is not caught off guard by these developments. Jesus repeatedly alerts Mark's audience to his approaching fate, beginning with an implicit prophecy of his demise as early as 2:20 ("the bridegroom will be taken away"). The clues become increasingly obvious and specific after the conversation with disciples near Caesarea Philippi (8:31; 9:31; 10:32–34). Jesus is the Son of humanity precisely as one who

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[1] The two healing scenes in which Jesus restores sight to blind men (8:22–26; 10:46–52) frame a section in which Jesus discloses his identity and destiny, but the disciples fail to comprehend either. On the negative portrayal of the disciples in Mark, see S. R. Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 69–82; R. M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 66–73; M. A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 176–230; V. K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

experiences suffering, rejection, and death; the eschatological glory fitting for the Son of humanity (e.g., Dan 7:13–14; *1 Enoch* 46) will have to wait. First comes crucifixion: ironically, this is his royal coronation.[2]

In pointing to his coming death, Jesus also anticipates his vindication by God through resurrection on the third day (8:31; 9:31; 10:34). The specificity of these predictions is matched by the mystery that enshrouds the event itself. After the Last Supper, extending these passion/resurrection predictions, Jesus speaks not only of his resurrection—after the "sheep" have been "scattered" (14:27, alluding to Zech 13:7)—but also of reunion with the disciples in Galilee (14:28). The young man at the empty tomb reminds the women disciples[3] of this promise: "But go, tell [Jesus'] disciples, and Peter, that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you" (16:7). Yet the narrative closes without relating any encounter with the risen Jesus. The last word of the Second Gospel is one of silence and mystery: fleeing the tomb in fear,[4] the women tell no one what they have witnessed.

The reader has good reason to believe that the promised reunion—and implied restoration of the disciples—did actually occur. After all, Jesus is a supremely reliable speaker in this gospel;[5] every verifiable prediction to this point in the story has been fulfilled.[6] And the reader is hearing the account of these

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[2] See F. J. Matera, *Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies: Interpreting the Synoptics through Their Passion Stories* (TI; New York: Paulist, 1986), 7–85; idem, *The Kingship of Jesus: Composition and Theology in Mark 15* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982); D. Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1984).

[3] The women show themselves to be authentic disciples, even if the term is not applied to them in Mark; they follow Jesus to the tomb, while the male disciples have fled.

[4] As the male disciples before them had fled the garden.

[5] Because his point of view squares with the "evaluative point of view of God," which is normative in this narrative. See J. D. Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 47–50.

[6] Most notably Judas's betrayal, Peter's denial, and the "scattering" of the rest of the disciples; cf. D. H. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 114–15.

events; the women must have ended their silence. Still, the story ends with only the tantalizing *promise* of reunion and restoration, and with one final sign of discipleship failure. The effect of this narrative "closure" is that anticipation of encounter in Galilee with the risen Lord and expectation of the parousia of Jesus converge. We are left awaiting Jesus' return to meet his restored community; since the Easter appearance goes unreported, the narrative's close points the reader ahead to the parousia. Not Easter but the still-future parousia is the time of fulfillment toward which faith strains. But what will happen when Jesus returns?

Mark's Gospel presents various images relating to the parousia, many of them concentrated in the eschatological discourse of chapter 13. This discourse, addressed privately to four disciples on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, responds initially to the disciples' query, When will this magnificent temple's destruction, of which you have just spoken, happen? Throughout the speech, however, Jesus broadens the scope of his instruction to include the whole cosmos.

Concern with the timing not just of the temple's demise but of the End itself runs throughout Mark 13.[7] On the one hand, Jesus accents the imminence of these events, with such pictures as the Son of humanity (by implication) at the door (v. 29) and the claim that Jesus' generation will witness the End (v. 30; cf. 9:1). On the other hand, the discourse gives prominence to the motif of delay. The eschaton will not arrive immediately, but only after various events first occur. During the period leading up to the End, God's people will witness cosmic strife and earthquakes (vv. 7–8), and they will experience persecution (vv. 9, 11, 13), family strife (v. 12), and for those living in Judea, suffering

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[7] On the interpretation of this discourse, and of Markan eschatology generally, see T. J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (JSNTSup 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993); V. Balabanski, *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew, and the Didache* (SNTSMS 97; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 55–100.

of unprecedented intensity (vv. 14–20). All the while, the community of disciples is charged with carrying the gospel to all nations in the time that stretches out before the End (v. 10). The parousia will *follow* this period of worldwide mission (v. 10) and unprecedented distress (vv. 24–25). Twice, Jesus also mentions deceivers who will bring confusion into the community with claims to be or to be able to identify the Messiah (vv. 5–6, 21–22). The parable at the discourse's close reinforces this theme of delay. Servants awaiting their master's return must perform their assigned tasks faithfully during his absence, because the time of the master's return is unknown (vv. 33–36). In the same way—despite all the specific information the discourse provides regarding the End and its timetable—Jesus insists that the timing of the End is known only to God (v. 32). The eschatological discourse, therefore, holds the imminence of the parousia and its delayed arrival in tensive balance. Jesus will surely come, and soon, but not immediately—and no one knows precisely when.

The parousia of Jesus will occur soon but cannot be predicted. The only posture that squares with such a belief is unwavering alertness and readiness. And this is precisely the approach Jesus commends in Mark 13. As a refrain throughout the last half of the discourse, the appeal to "be alert" or "stay awake" (vv. 23, 33, 35, 37) confronts the reader. This message is not confined to Jesus' immediate audience of Peter, James, John, and Andrew, but is emphatically addressed "to all" (v. 37). The entire community must remain ever vigilant.

Mark 13 shows considerable interest in the question, When will the parousia happen? As we have already begun to discover, however, other questions are of greater significance. What will happen when Jesus returns? And above all, what are we to do, and how are we to live, in the light of this hope? How do these images of the parousia and related end-time events work on the reader of Mark's Gospel?

In a passage laced with imagery borrowed from Old Testament prophetic oracles, Mark associates Jesus' future coming with cosmic portents affecting sun, moon, stars, and other heavenly

forces (13:24–25).[8] In stark contrast to the hollow claims of messianic pretenders and other eschatological deceivers ("I am he" [13:6]; "Look! There's the Messiah!" [13:21]), the parousia will be accompanied by remarkable events no one will miss. The scale is grand and cosmic.

Three times in Mark, Jesus taps Daniel's vision of the Son of humanity (Dan 7:13–14) to portray his own future coming in glory (8:38), or with clouds and great power and glory (13:26; 14:62). As in Daniel 7, Mark assigns the parousia both negative and positive functions. Negatively, the majestic presentation of the Son of humanity renders judgment against evil; positively, it vindicates the Son of humanity (and with him, the chosen people), and it is the occasion for the gathering or constitution in power of the elect community of God's faithful.

After revealing (or rather, attempting to reveal) to the disciples his messianic destiny of suffering and rejection as the Son of humanity (8:31–33), Jesus warns the crowds as well that the call to follow him is a summons to a life of adversity and self-surrender (8:34–37). Despite the great peril and cost of discipleship, Jesus expects his followers to remain loyal. They are to hold firm in their public witness to him; otherwise, he (as the Son of humanity) will in turn repudiate them "when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (8:38). Mark 9:1 shifts from the language of the coming of the Son of humanity to that of the coming of God's dominion. Jesus assures his audience that some of them will live to see that the reign of God has come "with power." The parousia is evidently a crucial element of the future expression of God's sovereign rule, with which it is so closely linked here. Like 13:30, then, this passage affirms the imminence of the eschatological appearing of Jesus—within a generation—and implies that it will bring vindication for the faithful, even as it calls to account those whose allegiance has wavered. The image of Jesus' final coming therefore supports this discourse's appeal for courageous, steadfast commitment to the path of discipleship.

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[8] See Isa 13:10; 34:4; Ezek 32:7–8; Joel 2:10, 31; Amos 8:9.

Even more clearly, the parousia serves to vindicate (Jesus) and indict (his adversaries) in 14:62. Under interrogation by the high priest after his arrest, Jesus again turns to the vision of Daniel 7, this time in combination with the exaltation text of Ps 110:1. Not content to affirm his messianic status in reply to the high priest's query, Jesus embellishes: "[Y]ou will see the Son of humanity seated at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."[9] Jesus, the one about to be condemned to death, will soon be installed in power by God and, as an expression of that power, will return to turn the tables on his accusers. Once again, Jesus' future coming vindicates those who remain true to God in the face of suffering, and at the same time judges those who condemn him.

The end-time discourse of chapter 13 develops the positive aspect of the parousia. On the occasion of sustained and severe suffering for God's people, Jesus will come to deliver the saints. Dispatching heavenly messengers on the four winds, he gathers the chosen of God from even the most remote locations on earth. For all who persevere in faith and commitment to the ways of God, the final coming of Jesus means not condemnation but salvation. In the context of social crisis and intense suffering for one's faith, therefore, the parousia sustains hope and thereby undergirds persevering religious commitment on the part of a hard-pressed community. It may seem that deliverance will never come, but God is merciful and may be trusted to act on behalf of the faithful. Parousia hope challenges the wavering to stay the course, despite adversity, and it consoles and reassures the community still caught in the grip of oppression and suffering.

To summarize: how does expectation of Jesus' return work on Mark's reader? (1) It reinforces belief that Jesus—the apparently disconfirming evidence of the crucifixion notwithstand-

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[9] See the discussion of this saying by D. Bock, "The Son of Man Seated at God's Right Hand and the Debate over Jesus' 'Blasphemy,' " in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (ed. J. B. Green and M. Turner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 181–91.

ing—is the agent of divine salvation. (2) In association with the fearful prospect of end-time judgment, it holds the community accountable and warns how much is at stake in continuing faithful witness to the gospel. (3) It sustains hope in a community facing intense social pressures, and reassures them that hardship will soon fade and they will experience liberation for eternal life from a gracious God.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Only in Matthew among the canonical Gospels does the word *parousia* (παρουσία) appear (see 24:3, 27, 37, 39), a detail that suggests the cardinal importance of Jesus' future coming—and of the end-time events generally—in this narrative. Yet it is not Jesus' return but above all else imagery relating to eschatological judgment that dominates the apocalyptic vision of Matthew.

Parousia and Matthew's Narrative: Literary Features

Although the structure of this narrative has been described in various ways, the contribution of Jesus' major discourses to the structure and thematic coherence of Matthew is widely recognized and can scarcely be overstated.[10] Eschatological images and themes are prominent in each of these six discourses, especially in their culminating sections.[11] The Sermon on the Mount

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[10] For a recent discussion of the problem of Matthew's literary structure, see D. Senior, *Matthew* (IBT; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 24–32; cf. J. D. Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 40–42; idem, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 1–39; D. R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1993), 1–2.

[11] A point made by D. Hagner, "Apocalyptic Motifs in the Gospel of Matthew: Continuity and Discontinuity," *HBT* 7 (1985): 63–68. Although Hagner (with most Matthean commentators) speaks of five discourses, the clear change of location and audience (just the disciples now) in 24:1 suggests that a new (sixth) discourse begins in ch. 24. On the coherence of chs. 23–25, see F. W. Burnett, *The Testament of Jesus*

(5:3–7:27) warns listeners that they must refrain from judging others, if they are to avoid being judged themselves (7:1). Hints of judgment are interspersed throughout the discourse (5:22, 29–30; 7:13), alongside the fearful prospect of exclusion from the company of those blessed by God (5:20; 7:21–23). The second discourse, in which Jesus authorizes and instructs his disciples for their mission (10:5–42), incorporates some of the material contained in Jesus' eschatological discourse in Mark 13 (see Matt 10:17–22—the rest appears in Matthew 24), and enriches it with further pictures of final judgment (10:15, 28, 33) and eschatological urgency: "… you will not come to the end of the cities of Israel before the Son of humanity comes" (10:23). So Matthew 10 places the church's mission, and the missionary context of opposition and persecution, in an eschatological frame. The parables of God's sovereign rule (13:3–50) cast the spotlight on the reality of eschatological judgment. For the present, God is patient with evil in the world, but in the end, separation of the just and the wicked is certain (vv. 36–43, 47–50). The ecclesial discourse (18:2–35) summons the community of disciples to the ideals of humility, mercy, and accountability, reinforcing these moral appeals with stern warnings of future judgment (vv. 8–9, 35). Jesus' indictment of the "scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites" (23:2–39) concludes on this note as well. For a grim history of violence against God's righteous ones, Jesus' contemporaries ("this generation") will pay the price. The Holy City and Holy Residence of God will from now on know desolation and divine absence (vv. 34–39). Naturally, the end-time discourse of chapters 24–25, with its fervent appeals for vigilance, readiness, and faithful service and its closing picture of final judgment of the nations, clinches a prominent concern of Jesus' public teaching in this gospel.[12]

Sophia: A Redaction-Critical Study of the Eschatological Discourse in Matthew (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981).

[12] For recent discussion of Matthean eschatology, see Balabanski, *Eschatology in the Making*, 24–54, 135–79; D. C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* (SNTSMS 88; Cambridge: Cambridge

It is fitting, therefore, that the risen Messiah's (and the gospel's) final words point ahead to the "close of the age" (28:20). Yet Matthew's story shows keen interest in what happens in the meantime; this is, in fact, the situation of the reader.[13] This situation presupposes the experience of delay in the completion of the divine agenda with Israel and with the world (e.g., 24:8, 14, 48; 25:1–30). And during this time of waiting, the community will encounter severe tests of its fidelity to its Lord. Even within the community of disciples, law keeping will be relaxed and love will "grow cold" (24:12). Only those who persevere in faith, those who remain faithful during this time of waiting before the Lord's return, will know the eternal blessing of heaven. Between resurrection and parousia, however, the community is not left to its own devices. It has a mission: to carry the teaching of the Messiah to all nations, making disciples everywhere (28:16–20). And in fulfilling this task, the community of disciples will be guided and empowered by the Messiah present among them (28:20, forming with 1:23 a frame around the entire story of Jesus: "God-present" in Emmanuel, 1:23; cf. 18:20; 25:40). One must be ever ready for the Messiah's second coming, but the Messiah who will come is the same one who has brought Israel's entire history to its goal (the point of the genealogy in 1:2–17), and whose death and resurrection have already inaugurated the eschatological era.[14]

University Press, 1996); B. Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel* (JSNTSup 79; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); D. E. Orton, *The Understanding Scribe: Matthew and the Apocalyptic Ideal* (JSNTSup 25; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); note also the recent dissertations by J. Gibbs, " 'Let the Reader Understand': The Eschatological Discourse of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel" (Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1995), and K. Weber, "The Events of the End of the Age in Matthew" (Catholic University of America, 1994).

[13] See Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 147–48.

[14] Especially evident in the apocalyptic signs of Matt 27:51–53. See J. T. Carroll and J. B. Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 48–49; R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion*

Parousia and History: Matthew's Apocalyptic Perspective

From the very beginning, Matthew announces that the history of God's people has reached its goal: Messiah has come! (1:16–17). For the characters we meet in Matthew's story, it would not miss the mark to borrow a line from Paul: these are the ones "upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor 10:11). Jesus distinguishes "this age" from "the age to come" (12:32), and in allegorical explanations of two parables about God's reign speaks of the "end of the age" (13:39–40, 49). With the recurring image of the harvest—a vivid image of the end of the age—Matthew indicates that the transition to the new age (cf. 19:28) is imminent (see 3:12; 9:37–38; 13:30; cf. 13:39).

John the Baptizer associates Jesus with this eschatological harvest (3:12). Jesus, in turn, identifies John as "Elijah who is to come" (11:14)—that is, as Jesus later instructs the disciples, the Elijah who "is coming and will restore all things" has already come (17:9–13). John's suffering and violent death prefigure the suffering and death of the Son of humanity. And that latter death is the pivot on which history turns. Borrowing imagery from the prophetic scriptures (Ezek 37:7, 12–13; Zech 14:4–5; Joel 2:10), Matthew paints Jesus' death in apocalyptic colors. Darkness covers the land (27:45), and when an earthquake attends the moment of death, the tombs are opened and "many saints" are resurrected (27:51–53). While this stunning set of events, narrated only by Matthew, anticipates and does not constitute the eschatological resurrection, such a rendering of the crucifixion highlights its eschatological significance. Much more prominent in this gospel, however, is the imagery of end-time judgment. Underlying and reinforcing this temporal dualism of the ages is a strident ethical dualism.

Narratives in the Four Gospels (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:1118–34; D. Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1985), 143–49.

Parousia and Judgment

Warnings and depictions of eschatological judgment permeate Jesus' teaching in Matthew. Fundamentally, judgment means separation of the good and the bad, the righteous and the evil that are so thoroughly intertwined in this age—even within the community of disciples. As the parable of the wheat and the weeds makes clear (13:24–30, together with the allegorical exposition in vv. 36–43), Satan is the source of the world's evil, which often masquerades as good. The community must therefore exercise careful discernment, yet it is not charged with the responsibility of rooting out evil in the present; while it is to embody the highest ideals of justice and accountability (18:15–20), its primary charge is to seek out and restore the lost (18:10–14). In fact, even God patiently allows good and evil to coexist for the time being. Only at the eschaton will evil be definitively named and condemned. The Son of humanity, who as the sower of good seed—the children of God's realm—is Satan's counterpart in the world's conflict (13:37–38), also serves as God's agent to administer judgment "at the end of the age." The Son of humanity will send his angels, and they will remove evil from the midst of the righteous (13:41). A furnace of fire awaits the wicked, while the righteous will enjoy the brilliant splendor of God's realm (vv. 42–43).

The parable about good and bad fish, for a time tossed together in the net but eventually separated on the shore (13:47–50), and the judgment scene of the sheep and the goats with which Jesus' teaching concludes (25:31–46) return to the theme of eschatological judgment as separation.[15] If we take our cue from the picture of judgment in Matthew 25, the glorious parousia of the Son of humanity sets the stage for the judgment of the nations, and there will be some surprises. Whether commended for actions of love and mercy or called to account for neglecting the needy among them, people express surprise at their good (or

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[15] In this connection one thinks also of the abrupt expulsion of the wedding guest who lacks appropriate attire (22:11–13).

bad) fortune. In their action, or in their inaction, they had not realized that in these "little ones" they actually encountered the King/Judge himself.[16] The element of surprise in this passage works with the motif of the intermixture of good and bad until their eventual separation at the End to undergird the moral appeals of Jesus in Matthew. A community shaped by such teaching will be marked by humility and will never become self-assured and complacent before the challenges to faithfulness that life in this age presents.

Judgment involves an ultimate separation of good and bad for which only God, through the agency of the Son of humanity, is the arbiter. What are the criteria for judgment? A number of images come into play:

1. Has one performed the will of God (7:21; 12:50)?

2. What kind of fruit does one produce (3:8, 10; 7:16, 20; 12:33)?

3. Has one acknowledged Jesus (10:32–33)?[17]

4. Does one manifest the humility of a child, who lacks social status (18:3–4; cf. 19:14)?

5. Has one extended forgiveness to others before expecting to be the recipient of divine mercy (6:14–15; 18:35)?

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[16] For recent discussion of the interpretation of this parable, see J. P. Heil, "The Double Meaning of the Narrative of Universal Judgment in Matthew 25.31–46," *JSNT* 68 (1998): 3–14; U. Luz, "The Final Judgment (Matt 25:31–46): An Exercise in 'History of Influence' Exegesis," in *Treasures New and Old: Contributions to Matthean Studies* (ed. D. R. Bauer and M. A. Powell; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 271–310, esp. 304–8. Luz makes a strong case that the Matthean community belongs to the πάντα τὰ ἔθνη and will be judged by the same criterion (305). Such a reading of the parable accords well with Matthew's concern with the formation of this community's moral life.

[17] Contrast the Sanhedrin's hostile reception of Jesus in 26:57–68. Since they have refused to acknowledge him, his glorious coming (v. 64) can only mean trouble for his accusers.

6. Has one kept the commandments and, specifically, surrendered possessions (19:16–22)—that is, does the pattern of one's life display radical obedience to God?[18]

In order to withstand the eschatological judgment, the community is called to a life that conforms to the will of God, disclosed in the Torah and the prophets and definitively expounded by Jesus. He has taught the will of God, and at his parousia (as Son of humanity) he "will repay everyone for what they have done" (16:27).[19]

The penalties for failing to perform the will of God are harsh. Matthew develops the judgment theme with severe images of torment and exclusion. One who fails to hear and heed the teaching of Jesus is like a house that comes to ruin (7:26–27). Persons who should have inherited God's realm and enjoyed the company of the patriarchs are displaced from the table and find themselves in darkness, where they "weep and gnash their teeth" (8:11–12)—an ominous refrain that returns with variations in 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30. Cities that did not repent after witnessing the Messiah's acts of power and compassion will fare worse "on the day of judgment" than Sodom (11:20–24). A fiery furnace awaits evildoers at the eschaton (13:41–42, 49–50). In a parable about a slave who receives mercy but insists on justice in dealing with another slave, Jesus warns that when mercy fails, justice will be swift and severe (18:23–35). An unfortunate wedding guest who lacks appropriate attire is bound and thrown into the "outer darkness" (22:11–13). A slave who takes advantage of the master's protracted absence and abuses other slaves will be cut in pieces and consigned to a place of torment "with the hypocrites" (24:48–51). Members of the wedding party who are unprepared for the bridegroom's arrival will be excluded from the wedding feast (25:1–13). A cautious and fearful

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[18] One might point also to 5:20, which offers as a condition of entry into God's realm the living out of a righteousness surpassing that of scribes and Pharisees. The antitheses (5:21–48) exemplify the higher righteousness Jesus requires of his disciples.

[19] Including careless and malicious speech (5:22; 12:36–37).

slave who fails to invest a talent entrusted to his management is—no surprise here!—cast into the outer darkness among those who weep and gnash their teeth (25:30). And those who neglect the needy among "the least" are sent to eternal punishment in the form of a perpetual fire (25:41, 46).

Even this partial list makes the point. Matthew's readers learn that they are accountable for what they say and do, and if they prove unfaithful the consequences will be dire. Membership within the community of disciples is no guarantee. As in apocalyptic texts generally, pictures of end-time judgment in Matthew undergird the moral appeals advanced in the course of the narrative.[20] The community addressed by this gospel is to exemplify the highest ideals of righteous living. Underscoring with this haunting judgment imagery how much is at stake, this narrative will not let its audience off the hook. The parousia will be for the community—as for the rest of the world—a time for accounting. And that means anticipation of the parousia has as much to do with the community's present life as with its future.

The Parousia and the Community's Present

Responding Appropriately to the Experience of Delay

Although Jesus speaks in Matthew of the near approach of the parousia for his generation (10:23; 16:27–28; 24:34; cf. 23:36), the narrative addresses an audience that has experienced a delay in the fulfillment of the promised eschatological events. The delay motif is especially prominent in the eschatological discourse (chs. 24–25), but it is already implicit in the symbolism of the parable on wheat and weeds (13:24–30). Troubled by the appearance of tares, the slaves who work the field ask their master whether they should proceed at once to uproot these weeds

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[20] J. J. Collins (*The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* [New York: Crossroad, 1984], 32) contends that apocalyptic literature, by opening up a transcendent perspective on reality, typically serves the twin functions of consolation and exhortation. Matthew sharply accents the latter.

(v. 28). The owner of the field counsels patience, however; the weeds will be allowed to grow with the wheat until the harvest (vv. 29–30). Just so, the wicked will coexist with the righteous until the close of the age. At the parousia, evil will be rooted out of God's realm; for now, judgment—and the righteous—will have to wait.

The end-time discourse (chs. 24–25) develops the theme explicitly. The disciples ask Jesus a two-part question: (1) when will the temple's destruction occur, and (2) what signs will prefigure the parousia and the end of the age (24:3)? Jesus' response begins by applying the brakes. A period of international crisis and warfare, of earthquake and famine, does not signal the End but marks the onset of the eschatological distress that precedes it (vv. 6–8). The End will arrive only after the church's mission to all nations, which will also be a time of persecution and community strife (vv. 9–14). Still, at the close of this period, the parousia of the Son of humanity will be universal, unmistakable, and immediate—to the consternation of the nations but for the deliverance of the chosen (vv. 15–35).

This juxtaposition of delay and imminence sets the stage for the urgent appeals for vigilance in 24:36–25:30. Since the precise chronology of the end-time events is unknown, readers are admonished to be continually awake and alert, if they would avoid the fate of Noah's contemporaries (vv. 36–39). For that generation, the day of the flood began with business as usual, and because they were unaware and unprepared it ended in their destruction. The arrival of the Son of humanity will happen so suddenly that workers in the same field and women grinding grain together will be separated (vv. 40–41). Like a thief, the Son of humanity will come unexpectedly (vv. 42–44).

Jesus combines the motifs of delay and unexpected arrival in two parables drawn from household life (24:45–25:13). The first parabolic narrative (24:45–51) contrasts (1) a faithful and discerning (φρόνιμος) slave, who at his master's return (as usual) is carrying out his assigned duties, and (2) an evil slave, who at the realization of his master's delay (χρονίζει) parties and beats other slaves. When the κύριος ("master" or "Lord")

does come, the unfaithful slave will be severely punished. The ensuing parable turns on a contrast between discerning (again, φρόνιμοι) and foolish young women (25:1–13). When a bridegroom delays (χρονίζοντος) on his way to the wedding banquet, the five bridesmaids who come prepared with an ample supply of lamp oil are privileged to enter, while the door is shut on the five who did not consider the possibility of delay and so were unprepared. Verse 13 drives home the point for Matthew's community of readers: "So be alert, for you do not know the day or the hour." Their Lord may well delay, and they do not know the chronology of the parousia, but if they remain vigilant they will be ready for his glorious return.

How should the community of readers respond to the experience of delay? The importance of constant vigilance and readiness is clear from the materials we have treated so far, but so too is the summons to faithfulness. During a time of waiting, the household slave or the member of the wedding party is to perform the task allotted to him or her. The parable of the talents further develops this theme: a wealthy master's lengthy delay tests the faithful service of three slaves (25:14–30). Only those slaves who take the risk of investing their master's money and produce a profit receive commendation and reward. The one slave who, immobilized by fear, simply buries the talent entrusted to him is branded "evil" and consigned to the outer darkness. The Matthean community will not doubt that they too must produce a return on the wealth—including above all the message of God's reign and the teaching of Jesus—that has been entrusted to them.

If the culminating parabolic scene in the chapter—the judgment of the nations (25:31–46)—is to be read as a universal judgment scene that includes the disciples among "all the nations,"[21] then this passage, too, reinforces the connection between eschatological judgment at the parousia and the community's faithful performance of the will of God. In this case, it is the active expression of love and mercy toward the needy "least ones" that

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[21] So, e.g., Heil, "Double Meaning."

makes all the difference. During the time that stretches out before the Lord's return, the community must extend hospitality and compassionate care to those in need.[22]

Present Crisis and Threats to Community: Solidarity and Faithfulness

Faithfully serving God will not come easily during the time that stretches out between the Messiah's resurrection and his parousia. Jesus warns that dissension within the church and conflict with outsiders will seriously threaten community solidarity and fidelity. The ecclesial discourse (ch. 18) pictures a community in which grievances may go unresolved, requiring the expulsion of some members (vv. 15–17).[23] And the eschatological discourse (chs. 24–25) anticipates a period of such intense and frequent persecution that many within the community will turn against their brothers and sisters in faith. Matthew's church will know acts of betrayal, the confusing claims of false

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[22] For some scholars, the needy "least ones" with whom the king identifies are the disciples—or, more specifically, the community's missionaries. The message would therefore be that the rest of the world will be judged on the basis of their treatment of the disciples (missionaries). The passage, on this view, consoles a community undergoing adversity in the course of its mission. See, most recently, Hare, *Matthew*, 288–92; G. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 207–32; D. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (SP 1; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 357–60. Nevertheless, the parenetic thrust of the end-time discourse as a whole, with the continuity between its picture of final judgment as separation and earlier examples of such judgment extending to the community of disciples, supports the argument that the disciples are judged here along with the rest of the nations. Unlike the rest of the nations that fail to bear fruit, however, they can prove to be a nation (ἔθνος) that produces fruit (21:43).

[23] Given the roles played by "Gentiles and toll collectors" in Matthew, ironically, those expelled—now as outsiders ("a Gentile and a toll collector," v. 17)—become the target of the community's mercy and mission. Sim (*Apocalyptic Eschatology*) sharply exaggerates the anti-Gentile animus of Matthew. His treatment of Matthean eschatology emphasizes the element of group solidarity and social control (esp. 235–41).

prophets, and the dissolution of communal norms (ἀνομία [*anomia*], "lawlessness," 24:9–12). Jesus effectively captures the social crisis that will beset Matthew's church with this disturbing image: "[T]he love of many will grow cold" (24:12).

These haunting images near the close of Jesus' public teaching reinforce the picture that the mission discourse (ch. 10) had already painted of the disciples' mission as "sheep [sent] into the midst of wolves" (v. 16). Interrogation and physical abuse before synagogue and town council (vv. 17–20), family division and betrayal (v. 21), widespread animosity and rejection (vv. 22–23)—this is the character of the disciples' mission on behalf of a messiah who was likewise rejected as an agent of evil (vv. 24–25). If the Matthean church is to remain true to its calling as it awaits deliverance at the triumphant return of its Lord, it has its work cut out for it.

The Church in Mission to Israel and to the Nations

"But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (10:22; the promise reappears in 24:13): the perseverance of which Jesus speaks includes persistence in mission activity in the face of opposition and persecution. In the course of his own ministry among the lost in Israel, Jesus initially directs his followers to heal and proclaim God's reign among the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," bypassing Gentile and Samaritan alike (10:5–6; cf. 15:24). This mission among the towns of Israel—in the face of adversity and persecution—would not be completed before the parousia of the Son of humanity (10:23).

Yet in the narrative's impressive culminating scene, the risen Jesus broadens—indeed, universalizes—the scope of the disciples' mission. Now they are sent to "all nations" to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach (28:19–20a).[24] They do so confident that they are not on their own; the presence of the risen

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[24] Some understand πάντα τὰ ἔθνη to mean "all Gentiles," excluding Jews (e.g., the scholars mentioned in n. 22 above). It seems much more likely that, as in the earlier judgment scene (25:32), the expression means "all nations," including Gentiles and Jews.

Lord sustains them for as long as their mission may last, until the close of the age (28:20b). Even though this last scene in the narrative appears to mute the earlier expectation of an imminent parousia before the close of the mission to Israel (10:23), the last words of the gospel—"until the close of the age"—reinforce the message that despite the passage of time and the obvious reality of a delay in Jesus' return, Matthew's community conducts its mission to Israel and to the world in the shadow of the End.

Effects of Parousia Imagery in Matthew: One Reader's Reflection

The parousia of Jesus is closely tied to the pivotal Matthean theme of eschatological judgment. With these images of the future toward which the community strains, the teaching of Jesus in this gospel clearly aims to motivate readers to lead lives that express obedience, justice, and mercy. One must hear and then put into practice the wise teachings of the Messiah Jesus. Confronted over and over again by glimpses of the contrasting eschatological destinies that await the just and the wicked, readers get the point that much is at stake in the community's response to the treasure that has been entrusted to it.

A reader today will likely struggle with the imagery the narrative employs, and will come to acknowledge its limitations even while affirming the fundamental values of justice and mercy Matthew seeks to promote. Be merciful, or face eternal torment! Act generously and compassionately toward others, or you will be cut off from the company of heaven! How effectively do threats like this support the appeal to show mercy? If Matthew's first readers were not troubled with such questions, they do give many a modern reader pause. And yet we may readily affirm Matthew's insistence on the divine commitment to justice—with all that means for our own commitment to justice. It matters how we live, how we respond to divine grace. The gospel is only heard—really heard—when it springs to life in acts of love and mercy and faithful service. If threats of punishment fall on resistant ears today, Matthew also lures us toward its moral vision with more subtle and positive charms. Above all, there is

the reality of divine graciousness, as modeled in Jesus' own life among toll collectors and sinners, pressing outward beyond the lost sheep in Israel's house and extending even to Gentiles. Having experienced undeserved mercy, one cannot but be impelled to extend mercy also to others. And then comes the surprising discovery: in serving others out of love one is in fact serving the sovereign God before whom nations, history, and time itself bow in reverence (25:31–46).

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Matthew and, to a lesser degree, Mark both enable readers to come to terms with the experience of delay. Despite the delay in God's deliverance of the faithful and in Jesus' promised return, hope directed toward these eschatological events is reaffirmed. They will happen in the near future, and the community must live faithfully and vigilantly in preparation for the End. Luke's Gospel charts a similar course, addressing with even greater clarity the problem of delayed fulfillment. At the same time, Luke throws the spotlight on the presence of salvation in the public ministry of Jesus and—already by anticipation in the gospel and by narration in its sequel, Acts—on the extension of God's saving work to all people.

Jesus Embodies Salvation for the People of God

From its opening lines, the Gospel of Luke celebrates the fulfillment of God's saving purposes. This narrative, according to the preface, concerns "the things that have been fulfilled among us" (1:1), and the story begins by recalling ancient promises of deliverance and blessing for Israel. These promises, given ages before to Abraham (1:55, 73), to David (1:32), and to all the people through the prophets (1:55, 70–72)—promises long deferred and seemingly long forgotten—will now be honored by God. John will ready the nation for the deliverance the Messiah will bring, and Jesus will embody divine salvation for the people, though in ways that surprise, astonish, and even provoke many within Israel.

The air is charged with expectancy as the story opens. Bards heavenly and human sing of the hope that the era of fulfillment has arrived. The angel Gabriel takes the voice away from an aging priest named Zechariah when he greets with incredulity the prophecy that he would have a son destined to take up Elijah's mantle (1:17–20). Gabriel then amazes a more trusting Mary with the news that she will give birth to a king who will sit on David's throne forever (1:31–33). Displaying greater discernment than her husband, Elizabeth acclaims as "Lord" the child Mary carries, and praises her believing reception of the word of promise (1:43, 45). This is Mary's cue, and she responds with a song of praise (1:46–55) that rings with echoes of Hannah's prayer (1 Sam 2:1–10). God's honoring of the young peasant girl signals a sweeping program of reversal that will succor Israel by disenfranchising the powerful and empowering the powerless.[25] At the birth and naming of John, even Zechariah finds his voice (1:68–79) and joins the chorus singing praise to God, who has acted to bring salvation to Israel—liberation from enemies by the hand of a deliverer from David's line (1:69, 71, 74), but also, with a nod to the adult John's message, forgiveness of sins (1:77).[26] When an angelic herald directs a band of shepherds to

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[25] The aorist tenses throughout Mary's song point with prophetic confidence to the accomplishment of events that are actually still in prospect. Yet, as exemplified already in an act of benevolence toward Mary, God's work of salvation has actually begun.

[26] R. C. Tannehill (e.g., "Israel in Luke–Acts: A Tragic Story," *JBL* 104 [1985]: 69–85) contends that these promises of salvation for Israel—notably, deliverance from enemies—have a tragic character in Luke's narrative, which in the end shatters such hopes. In my view, the meaning of Israel's salvation is redefined as the accent shifts to the theme of repentance and forgiveness and the horizon extends to embrace Gentiles. The apparent shattering of hopes (e.g., 24:21) points to the need for a new perspective on Israel's salvation. On Luke's development of the theme of salvation, see J. B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (NTT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22–101; cf. idem, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); idem, " 'Salvation to the End of the Earth' (Acts 13:47): God as Saviour in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*

the newborn Savior, who is Messiah and Lord (2:10–11), this announcement recapitulates for the reader the bold claims and promises expressed by inspired speakers in chapter 1.

Israel's salvation is finally on the horizon; the era of fulfillment has dawned. As the story unfolds, however, blessing will not be confined to the Jewish people. Ironically, the prophetic voice that first anticipates the incorporation of Gentiles into Israel's salvation[27] belongs to a pious old man who has spent a lifetime awaiting "the consolation of Israel" (2:25), and the scene for this disclosure is the temple at Jerusalem (2:25–35). Simeon, holding the infant Jesus in his arms, has indeed glimpsed the salvation from God (v. 30) that means glory for Israel (v. 32b). Yet revelation will illumine also the Gentiles (v. 32a), and since some within Israel will resist the agent of divine deliverance, this child will cause "the fall . . . of many in Israel" (vv. 34–35). Simeon's oracle about the "fall and rising of many" recalls the Magnificat's picture of the divine program of reversal, which elevates the lowly and demotes the mighty (1:51–53). This pattern of reversal dominates the narrative of Jesus' ministry: rich and poor, powerful and powerless, righteous and sinner exchange places. When they encounter Israel's Savior, some fall and others are raised up. And resistance begins at Jesus' very first stop, when before a hometown crowd he links his own care for the marginalized (4:18–21) to the favor God had extended to Gentiles through the prophets Elijah and Elisha (4:25–27).

The opening words of John the Baptizer pick up the theme of Gentile inclusion within the salvation promised by God. Quoting Isaiah, John draws all humanity ("all flesh") into the arena of God's salvation (3:4–6, citing Isa 40:3–5).[28] Even though Jesus addresses his ministry almost entirely to the Jewish people,

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(ed. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 83–106.

[27] Cf. also the hint given by the genealogy, which traces Jesus' roots all the way back to Adam (3:23–38).

[28] Only Luke extends the Baptizer's quotation from Isaiah 40 to include the line "all flesh will see God's salvation."

these signals of Gentile participation in Israel's salvation early in the narrative are reinforced explicitly in Jesus' response to the centurion's faith (7:1–10) and implicitly in the healing of the Gerasene demoniac (8:26–39).[29] Jesus' final words in the gospel then show the disciples that Scripture impels them to take the message of repentance and forgiveness to all nations (24:46–47). Returning to the birth narrative, one then realizes that the juxtaposition of Augustus as the emperor of "all the world" (the census in 2:1) and the newborn Jesus as the "Savior" (2:11) intimates that the salvation he brings extends not only to Israel but also to the whole world.

With the births of John and Jesus, salvation from God has burst into Israel's history; this is the era of fulfillment of ancient promises to the people. Nevertheless, the work of forming a people who will participate in that salvation continues through the narrative of Acts and beyond it, until the parousia. The same pattern of present fulfillment coupled with future completion is suggested by two other images, the Holy Spirit and the reign of God. One of the indicators that the heralds of salvation in Luke 1–2 are reliable speakers who give voice to the purposes of God is the frequent ascription of their speech to the inspiration of God's Spirit. The Spirit prompts the words of Elizabeth (1:41), Zechariah (1:67), and Simeon (2:25, 27). Moreover, John (1:15), Mary (1:35), and Jesus (1:35; 3:16, 22; 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21) are all associated with the activity of God's Spirit. In fact, the narrator emphatically portrays the beginning of Jesus' ministry under the powerful impulse of the Holy Spirit (baptism, 3:22; testing in the wilderness, 4:1; first teaching in Galilee, 4:14, 18). If the dramatic presence of the Spirit points to the arrival of the eschatological era—as Luke evidently reads Joel (Acts 2:16–21)—the story Luke tells concerns the final movement in God's symphony with Israel.[30]

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[29] Jesus' positive remarks about Samaritans (10:30–37; 17:11–19) also anticipate the inclusion of Samaritans in the mission in Acts (8:4–25).

[30] For further discussion of Luke's eschatological perspective, see J. T. Carroll, *Response to the End of History: Eschatology and Situation in*

The motif of God's reign points in the same direction.[31] To discerning eyes, God's sovereign rule is in evidence in Jesus' activity. The exorcisms he performs demonstrate the vanquishing of evil and the powerful presence of God's realm (11:14–23): "If by the finger of God I cast out demons, then God's rule has come to you" (v. 20). Pharisees curious about the warning signs of the coming reign of God hear a similar message. Why should they be on the lookout for observable signs? The rule of God is already in their midst (ἐντὸς ὑμῶν, 17:21).[32] And when the penitent evildoer crucified with Jesus asks to be remembered in Jesus' (future) realm, he replies with the promise of paradise that very day (23:42–43). God's rule is already operative in Jesus' acts of mercy and power. Yet the agenda remains unfinished. Jesus may have witnessed Satan's fall from heaven (10:18)—emblematic of the evil one's defeat—but the prince of evil returns to orchestrate Jesus' death (22:3).[33] And the obvious fact of Roman oppression justifies the disciples' post-Easter query, "Is this the time when you will restore dominion to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). During the mission of the church "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), the exalted Jesus "sits at the right hand" of God, while his enemies are being subdued (Luke 20:42–43 and Acts 2:33–35, citing Ps 110:1; cf. Acts 7:55). God's sovereign rule has not yet been established in its fullness; it remains a matter of hope.

A Resistant Generation and the Offer of Repentance

Ancient promises fulfilled, a savior born for Israel and for the world, God's Spirit unleashed with end-time power, demonic forces routed, God's mighty rule pressing into history and re-

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Luke–Acts (SBLDS 92; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); J. B. Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age in Luke–Acts* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1988); cf. J. Nolland, "Salvation-History and Eschatology," in Marshall and Peterson, *Witness to the Gospel*, 63–81.

[31] On the reign of God in Luke, see Carroll, *Response*, 80–87.

[32] On the interpretation of this text, see Carroll, *Response*, 79–80.

[33] On this text, see S. R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 46–57.

drawing the maps of human society—all these images so prominent in the narrative advance the claim that Jesus' ministry brings salvation to the people of God. Yet Jesus' contemporaries ("this generation") do not fully embrace the salvation he offers. He summons a resistant generation to repentance, but the window of opportunity is of limited duration.

Jesus claims that the exorcisms he performs demonstrate the approach of God's realm, which liberates persons oppressed by evil powers. This claim is prompted, though, by his critics' charge that his exorcisms betray an allegiance to the prince of evil (11:15). With the haunting image of seven unclean spirits taking the place of one that had been banished, the narrative—Jesus—warns that in a world like ours even the gift of exorcism can fail to set one free (11:24–26). The forces antagonistic to God are potent indeed. Jesus goes on (11:29–32) to indict a sign-seeking generation that demands convincing proof of divine commissioning but is unwilling either to listen (as the queen of the South listened to Solomon) or to repent (as Nineveh repented in response to Jonah's preaching). Such a generation is ripe for judgment; in fact, it will be held accountable not only for its own evil but for that of previous generations that had also martyred God's righteous prophets (11:47–51).

Even the crowds that flock to Jesus to hear his teaching are faulted for their failure to discern the significance of the time in which they live. They are able to predict the weather on the basis of their observation of the sky, but they are clueless when it comes to the moment of eschatological decision that greets them in the activity of Jesus (12:54–56). When Jesus later asserts the presence of God's sovereign rule in the midst of his audience, he is addressing Pharisees (17:20–21), whose resistance to Jesus' ministry throughout the narrative suggests that they are unable to perceive that divine activity.[34] Their final appearance in the

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[34] See Carroll, *Response,* 76–80; idem, "Luke's Portrayal of the Pharisees," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 604–21; J. A. Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke–Acts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992) 85–126.

narrative—demanding that Jesus silence the shouts of acclamation from crowds of his disciples as they enter Jerusalem—confirms this impression (19:39). Once again, Luke does not fault the Pharisees alone. Jesus has just told a parable to dampen the fervent eschatological expectation of the people—"they thought the reign of God would appear at once" (19:11)—that accompanied the approach to Jerusalem, and immediately followed his declaration of salvation "today" at the home of Zacchaeus (v. 9). This parable merges two plots: (1) a master calls servants to account for the service they have rendered in his absence; and (2) a king-designate deals with repudiation by his own citizens (19:12–27). Like this man who would be king, Jesus too will be rejected by his people and will be acclaimed king in a distant land (heaven), not in Jerusalem. He will return (at the parousia) to call his servants to account for the service they have performed while he has been away (exalted at the right hand of God). The parable of the pounds and throne claimant paints a vivid—and tragic—picture of the hostile reception Jesus receives from his contemporaries.

The Passion Narrative enacts this rejection that Jesus has expressed metaphorically in the parable. Despite their attraction to Jesus and their genuine interest in his teaching—an interest that posed a serious obstacle to the religious authorities who were plotting his demise (e.g., 19:47–48; 20:19; 22:2) —the Jewish public in Jerusalem in the end reject him and join their leaders in demanding his death (23:18–25).[35] This pattern of resistance and rejection is not the whole story, of course. There are many who embrace Jesus' offer of salvation—notably, the sick, sinners, and toll collectors. They gladly come to the feast other invited guests decline to attend (cf. 13:24–30; 14:15–24). Nevertheless, in the Lukan narrative, the generation of Jesus stands in need of repentance. The apostles in Acts will have ample reason to invite their listeners to repent (e.g., see Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31).

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[35] A portrayal of the people reinforced by the speeches of Peter and Paul in Acts (2:36–38; 3:13–15, 17, 19; 5:30–31; 10:39; 13:27–29). See Carroll and Green, *Death of Jesus*, 77–79.

And repentance is a central theme in the Gospel (Luke 3:8; 5:32; 7:36–50; 15:7, 10, 17; 16:27–31; 19:1–10).

The call to repentance continues to ring out, but only for a time. Luke places the parable of the barren fig tree (13:6–9) as the culmination of a series of eschatological instructions that appeal for watchfulness (12:35–48), warn of divided households (vv. 49–53), challenge listeners to read the times the way they read the weather (vv. 54–56), and urgently commend initiatives of reconciliation and repentance so that listeners may avoid destructive judgment (12:57–13:5). In the parable an unfruitful tree on the verge of destruction receives a temporary reprieve when the gardener pleads with the owner of the land for one more year. This allegorical commentary on Israel's present circumstance suggests that while God may be patient, extending the opportunity for repentance and forgiveness through Jesus (and later through the apostles), God's wrathful judgment against the unjust and unfaithful will not be deflected much longer. The expansiveness of Jesus' mercy toward sinners does not nullify John's earlier call to repent in the face of imminent destruction, underscored with the vivid image of an ax poised to strike at the tree's roots (3:7–9, 17). The people receive one more chance to align themselves with the purposes of God—in Jesus' ministry and the mission of the apostles after Easter—but dare not presume upon the mercy of God.

The crucifixion scene dramatically portrays the opportunity and the peril that attend the call to repent. The religious leaders, soldiers, and one crucified criminal treat Jesus with contempt to the bitter end (23:35–37, 39). He saved others but cannot save himself. Nor, in the face of such implacable hostility, can he save them. Or can he? Luke introduces this unrelieved ridicule by recording Jesus' request that God forgive those who were killing him (23:34).[36] The apostolic invitation to repentance and a second chance in Acts will extend even to them.

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[36] On the authenticity of this verse, see Carroll and Green, *Death of Jesus*, 71 n. 40.

Alongside the adamant refusal of some characters to repent, the crucifixion scene also pictures the blessing that awaits the penitent. The Jewish public mourn as Jesus goes to his death (among them the "daughters of Jerusalem," 23:27–28), express remorse as they return home afterwards (23:48), and do not join the mockers who heap verbal abuse upon Jesus (23:35). In large numbers, they will respond to the apostles' summons to repentance by joining this new community (e.g., Acts 2:37–42). More immediately and more dramatically, the penitent criminal who defends Jesus' honor and asks to be remembered in Jesus' future kingdom—an act of repentance, though the word is not used—receives assurance that he will enter the domain of the righteous that very day (23:43). At the point of death himself, he seizes the opportunity for deliverance; under the pressure of true repentance, the kingdom script is rewritten and paradise welcomes a sinner "today."

Delay and Persevering Faith: Eschatological Instruction

The prominence of such motifs as salvation, the Holy Spirit, repentance, and God's reign gives the Lukan narrative a strongly eschatological tenor. The present fulfillment and future completion of end-time hopes are nicely balanced. In fact, Luke presents eschatological instruction with care and considerable finesse. Readers find proper orientation to the end time particularly in the discourses of Jesus, especially in 12:35–48; 17:20–18:8; 21:5–36. The problem posed by delay in the parousia of Jesus is all the more acute within the narrative because of its many signals that the present is the era of fulfillment, the time of salvation, the inauguration of God's eschatological reign. In Luke's Gospel Jesus addresses this concern directly and clearly.

Within a larger narrative unit in which Jesus is teaching the disciples (12:22–53), he commends the virtues of vigilance and faithfulness during the time preceding their master's return (vv. 35–48). Slaves waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet—all night if necessary—will be rewarded if they stay awake and ready to open the door for him (vv. 35–38). However long the wait, they must constantly be ready for immediate

action (v. 35). The next parabolic image on prevention of burglary (vv. 39–40) emphasizes the element of uncertainty that is already implicit in the preceding verses. Verse 40 makes the crucial point: the coming of the Son of humanity will be no more predictable than a burglar's arrival, and one must therefore be ready at all times for Jesus' return.

Peter's question about the intended audience for this parabolic teaching (v. 41: "for us or for all?") then sets up a further parabolic narrative on slaves and their household tasks (vv. 42–48). Jesus poses a question of his own: Who will be entrusted the responsibility of supervising and caring for the household slaves? Jesus contrasts a trustworthy, discerning household manager and an abusive, intoxicated slave. What is the difference between these two slaves? One was performing his assigned duties at the time of his master's return (v. 43), while the other lived as if the delay in his master's return would be indefinite (v. 45). Their rewards are commensurate with the quality of their service. So far the reply to Peter's question has been indirect, as the parable portrays certain slaves charged with household management and the care of other slaves. Verses 47–48 then develop the theme. Of two slaves who fail to carry out their master's wishes, one who acts in ignorance will receive lighter punishment than one who willfully disregards the master. Jesus concludes with the observation that persons to whom more has been entrusted will be expected to produce more. The images throughout this passage suggest that some members of the community will be assigned greater responsibility. More will be expected of them. Yet all are to perform the tasks given them, and all are to be alert and ready at any time. So the answer to Peter's question—"for us or for all?"—is yes.

Luke 12:35–48 joins the motifs of the Lord's delayed return and his arrival at an unexpected hour. This pattern marks the extensive eschatological discourses in 17:22–18:8 and 21:5–36 as well. Luke introduces the first of these discourses with the exchange between Jesus and Pharisees on the signs of God's reign (17:20–21). Those who cannot perceive its operation in the present should not expect to see signs announcing its arrival in the

future. Verse 22, addressed to the disciples, signals a shift in perspective; now Jesus brings into the foreground the future and a protracted period of waiting for the parousia. Twice he refers to the days (plural) of the Son of humanity (vv. 22, 26), in analogy to the days of Noah and Lot (vv. 26, 28). The parousia of Jesus will come on "his day" (v. 24; cf. vv. 30–31), but only after a lengthy period that includes the suffering and rejection of the Son of humanity (v. 25). The path to glory passes through rejection and adversity.

Verses 26–29 set up two analogies:

(1) As in the days of Noah (v. 26a),
so in the days of the Son of humanity (v. 26b)—
while they were eating, drinking, and marrying . . . destruction for all (v. 27).
(2) As in the days of Lot (v. 28a),
while they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building . . . destruction for all (vv. 28b–29)—
likewise on the day the Son of humanity is revealed (v. 30).

The eschatological crisis will resemble these catastrophes seared in Israel's memory. Disaster swept away an entire generation (the flood) and an entire city (Sodom). Why? There is no mention of the wickedness of the victims; rather, their absorption in the routine activities of life left them unprepared for the destruction that struck so suddenly. Luke's audience is left to conclude that the parousia will in the same way threaten the security of those who are preoccupied with life's routine affairs and so are caught off guard. Once again, the experience of delay and surprise at the unexpected onset of the End are both at play. Corresponding to the emphatic "destroyed them all" that culminates the Noah and Lot elements (vv. 27, 29), a haunting image closes chapter 17: "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather" (v. 37). For those who are not prepared for the parousia, its sudden occurrence means disaster.

The lesson is clear: one must always be prepared. This discourse also spells out the manner in which the Son of humanity will appear. The parousia is not a matter of a specific location, nor will it be an ambiguous event. It will be as unmistakable and

as universally (and suddenly) evident as a lightning flash that illumines the whole sky. In part, this depiction of the parousia gives a second answer to the Pharisees' query in v. 20. This connection is suggested by the way Luke stitches vv. 22–37 to vv. 20–21 through the repetition of "Look, here!" and "Look, there!" (though in inverse order). One need not seek out empirical signs of the coming of God's reign because it is already operative, though undetected by Jesus' listeners, and because there will be no missing and no mistaking—and therefore no escaping—the parousia with which God's realm comes to earth in its fullness.

Jesus' eschatological discourse to the disciples concludes on a practical note. The parable about a widow who perseveres until an unsympathetic judge grants her justice (18:2–5), together with the narrative frame Luke supplies (18:1, 6–8), brings eschatological instruction home to the community's life of faith and prayer. The narrator predisposes readers to hear in the parable an appeal for persevering prayer (v. 1). The woman models persistence that overcomes every obstacle to justice, including a judge who "has no fear of God and no respect for human beings"—even a widow (v. 4). Verses 6–8 employ a lesser-to-greater argument to convey the parable's message. If a corrupt judge will finally intervene to deliver justice, how much more can Luke's readers trust God to vindicate them—and without delay! Yet both the plot of the parable and the picture of the faithful crying out "day and night" (v. 7) counter any naïve expectation that God will immediately act to deliver the community of readers. Their prayers must continue through every ordeal, and their faith must endure. That such persevering faith will be a genuine achievement is clear from the disturbing rhetorical question with which the discourse ends: "Nevertheless, when the Son of humanity comes, will he find faith on earth?" In the difficult time that stretches out before the parousia, faith will be put to the test.

Prompted by the temple setting, in 21:5–36 Jesus links his future parousia to the traumas of history: the Roman siege against Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E.

Despite the obvious indicators of disaster within this speech—war, earthquake, famine, plague, and Jerusalem's desolation—this discourse develops the parousia itself in more positive terms. The discourse in 17:21–18:8 issues warnings against being unprepared for the unexpected arrival of the Son of humanity (so building on the imagery of 12:35–48). There the tone is ominous. Chapter 21 does not minimize the strife and suffering the end-time events will bring, but strikes a more reassuring balance between menacing threat and the promise of deliverance. While summoning readers to enduring faithfulness and at the same time inspiring steadfast hope, Jesus' temple discourse also clearly describes the course of events that will lead from the time of the speech through the Jewish rebellion and on to the deliverance of the faithful at the parousia.[37]

As in Mark and Matthew, the speech responds to a question of the disciples, but the setting and audience are markedly different in Luke. The discourse is part of Jesus' public teaching within the temple, rather than private instruction set on the Mount of Olives. Not a select group of disciples (Mark) or the disciples in private (Matthew), but the disciples "in the hearing of all the people" (Luke 20:45) receive this instruction. The eschatological discourse forms part of a larger narrative unit (20:45–21:38) that is framed by references to "all the people" as auditors of Jesus (20:45; 21:38).

When Jesus prophesies the temple's destruction, the disciples inquire when this event will occur and what signs will precede it (21:7). The reply to this question about the temple runs through v. 24. Jesus characterizes the era of strife and crisis that will precede the siege against Jerusalem and its devastation (vv. 8–19), and then depicts the fall of Jerusalem as an act of judgment in fulfillment of scriptural prophecy (vv. 20–24). During this turbulent period leading up to the temple's destruction, some will claim that the time (καιρός) is near, but they should not be followed (v. 8). This is not the time of the End but the time

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[37] For a redaction-critical analysis of Luke 21:5–36, see Carroll, *Response,* 103–19.

that precedes the End. This is a time of persecution and family schism, but also an opportunity for bearing witness in the assurance of divine empowerment and protection (vv. 12–19). Readers of Luke's second volume encounter example after example of this pattern.

In the last part of the speech Jesus presses beyond the desolation of Jerusalem to picture the eschatological events proper: the coming (again!) of God's realm, the parousia of the Son of humanity, and his activity as judge of humanity (vv. 25–36). Sometime after the fall of Jerusalem, when the era of Gentile domination has run its course, cosmic portents will signal the return of Jesus (the Son of humanity) in glory and power (vv. 24–28). There will be no mistaking—and no missing—these events. But fearsome as these phenomena may be, this is a time for consolation; the parousia means liberation ("redemption") for the faithful (v. 28).

From the temporal perspective of Jesus and his disciples within the story, the End appears to be delayed, requiring patient endurance. But in the later situation of Luke's community of readers, the temple's destruction is already a painful memory, and the period of witness and crisis prophesied by Jesus in the first half of the discourse now lies in the past. For such an audience, the parousia looms on the horizon, just as a tree in leaf signals the approach of summer (vv. 29–31).[38] There will be no escaping the end-time events, which will overtake all humanity (v. 35). The faithful, however, will at long last be delivered; therefore they are to pray to escape eschatological judgment—that is, to stand blameless before their heavenly judge (the Son of humanity, v. 36). Jesus issues one final appeal for unceasing vigilance: "Be alert at all times" (v. 36). The discourse closes with an explicit statement of the aims of this speech, and of Jesus' eschatological instruction throughout the gospel—to enable listeners to persevere in their faithful service of God and to emerge unscathed from

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[38] For a sustained argument for this view of Lukan eschatology, see Carroll, *Response*.

final judgment. For them, the parousia will be an answer to prayer (cf. 18:6–8).

In the meantime, readers are called to keep faith and hope alive. Although the present is the era of Jerusalem's desolation, the expression "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (21:24) takes on new meaning, as the mission to the ends of the earth draws more and more Gentiles into the people of God (in Acts). Luke's God is the God of surprising reversals; history in the hands of such a God is laced with irony. And the deepest irony of all is the heavenly reign of the one who was rejected by the nation and crucified. He has been vindicated by God and installed in the seat of power, where he waits "from now on" (22:69) while his enemies on earth are vanquished (20:42–43). Meanwhile, his "name" and the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit continue to direct and empower his followers until he returns to complete the work of salvation he has already begun.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The language and imagery of eschatological hope become much less prominent in the Acts of the Apostles. The ending of the book—Paul preaching without hindrance from his mission headquarters under house arrest in Rome—opens onto an extended period of witness, particularly among Gentiles (28:17–31). There is no mention of the parousia of Jesus after chapter 3, although his role as eschatological judge does form the climax of Paul's appeal to his sophisticated audience in Athens (17:31). For the most part, the narrative betrays little concern with the return of Jesus in the future, highlighting instead the expansive mission of the church in the present. Luke celebrates the triumphant spread of the word despite every obstacle.

Acts begins, however, by diverting the attention of the apostles, and the reader, from the ascending Jesus to the returning Jesus: he will come back in the same way in which they see him now departing (1:9–11). Eschatological images remain important in the foundational mission speeches of chapters 2 and 3. While the challenges and successes of the church's early de-

cades dominate the narrative, these opening chapters point forward to the future events that will bring Israel's story to closure.

The book of Acts begins, as the Gospel of Luke ends, with an ascension scene (Luke 24:50–53; Acts 1:9–11).[39] Both accounts are oriented toward the future, but while the end of Luke anticipates the empowerment of the disciples for their mission to the world, the Acts account points beyond the ascension to the parousia. Jesus' eschatological return will mirror his departure, according to the two men in white (vv. 10–11).[40] So why should the apostles stand staring into heaven? This rhetorical question posed by the two men—in concert with Jesus' answer to the query introducing this unit (v. 6: will Jesus now restore dominion to Israel?)—redirects attention from the future (parousia) to the present task entrusted to the apostles. The timetable of the End is God's business and not their concern (v. 7). Rather, they are to bear witness for him in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the whole world. During the period that stretches from ascension to parousia, while Jesus resides in heaven, the community of the faithful does not simply wait for his return. Energized by the Spirit he grants (2:33), they take the word of repentance and forgiveness to the ends of the earth. The proleptic mention of the parousia as Jesus ascends to heaven, therefore, instills in the apostles the confident hope that will free them for the mission that lies before them.

Immediately after the Pentecost descent of the Spirit, the mission commences. Peter finds himself speaking to a crowd of Judean and Jerusalem Jews representing many countries of origin. Appropriately, he builds his case for Jesus the Messiah by means of a dense web of Scripture quotations.[41] It is striking that

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[39] Although the chronology differs: in Luke the ascension occurs on Easter day, while Acts places the event forty days later.

[40] E.g., each event is associated with a cloud (Luke 21:27; Acts 1:9), as is the transfiguration christophany (Luke 9:34–35).

[41] See Carroll, *Response,* 128–37; idem, "The Uses of Scripture in Acts," *SBLSP 1990* (ed. D. J. Lull; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 520–21; D. Juel, "Social Dimensions of Exegesis: The Use of Psalm 16 in Acts 2," *CBQ* 43 (1981): 543–56.

the first prophetic text cited, Joel 3:1–5 LXX (Acts 2:17–21), marks the Pentecost intervention of the Spirit as an explicitly eschatological phenomenon. God will pour out the Spirit "in the last days," a Lukan enrichment of the Joel passage. The Spirit will make visionaries of young and old alike, and will turn men and women into prophets. These scriptural prophecies are realized as the narrative progresses. With imagery reminiscent of Luke 21:25–27 (cf. 17:24, 29–30), however, vv. 19–20 anticipate the cosmic upheaval just before the parousia; this remains a matter of hope for the future even at the end of the narrative. This first step in the discourse closes by affirming the offer of salvation for all who call upon the name of the Lord (v. 21, citing Joel 3:5).

The balance of the sermon (2:22–36) proves that the Lord in whose name salvation resides is none other than the crucified and resurrected Jesus. He was put to death by the very persons Peter is addressing (vv. 23, 36), but God vindicated him by raising him from the dead (v. 24), thereby fulfilling the scriptural promise that the "holy one" whom David called Lord would not be abandoned to death but would be raised up to the right hand of God (vv. 25–35, quoting Pss 16:8–11; 110:1). From this position of honor and power in heaven, the risen Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit, whose effects prompted Peter to speak in the first place. In the exchange between Peter and his listeners that follows the speech, the offer of salvation for all (through repentance and forgiveness) is rehearsed one more time. The mission to the ends of the earth has begun, and the access to salvation that featured so prominently in Luke's narrative of Jesus' ministry continues in the preaching of the apostles. Acts ends on this same note: despite the mixed reception with which a Jewish audience in Rome greets Paul's message, he predicts with his last words in the story that Gentiles will hear (i.e., heed) "this salvation from God" (28:28). And as the curtain falls he is still preaching the message of Jesus and God's reign to all who will listen (vv. 30–31). This is the situation of Luke's community of readers. In the final chapter of Israel's history that has been inaugurated by Jesus' ministry, and by his resurrection, ascension, and pouring out of God's Spirit, the mission to all nations—in the shadow of the coming parousia—is in their hands.

Peter's second mission sermon continues to play the eschatological tune (3:12–26). The discourse is triggered by the healing of a lame man at the temple gate. The echoes of Isa 35:6 ("the lame shall leap") already suggest that the healing fulfills eschatological prophecy.[42] Peter, explaining the significance of the event to the amazed crowd that has gathered, further develops the eschatological import of what is happening. He begins to deflect credit for the healing miracle from himself (and John) to the "God of our ancestors" who has honored Jesus (3:12–13). But before explicitly attributing the healing to Jesus ("through faith in this name," v. 16), Peter pins responsibility for the death of God's "holy and righteous one" on his auditors (vv. 13–15). The effective rhetorical shaping of this part of the speech employs a chiastic form:

a God has glorified the servant Jesus,
  b whom you handed over and rejected before Pilate (who had decided to release him).
  b[1] You rejected the righteous one in exchange for a murderer; you killed the author of life,
a[1] whom God raised from the dead (and we are witnesses).

This narration sets up the point of the speech: the appeal to the listeners to repent. They opposed God's righteous one out of ignorance (v. 17; cf. Luke 23:34), but now have the opportunity to receive forgiveness (v. 19).

This appeal for repentance is embedded in a passage thick with eschatological imagery (vv. 17–26). Peter characterizes the Messiah's death as divinely purposed in fulfillment of scriptural

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[42] On the interpretation of this healing, see D. Hamm, "Acts 3:1–10: The Healing of the Temple Beggar as Lukan Theology," *Bib* 67 (1986): 305–19; idem, "Acts 3:12–26: Peter's Speech and the Healing of the Man Born Lame," *PRSt* 11 (1984): 199–217. On the speeches of Acts as a whole, see M. L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); cf. H. F. Bayer, "The Preaching of Peter in Acts," in Marshall and Peterson, *Witness to the Gospel*, 257–74.

prophecy (v. 18). He then announces as the goal and benefit of repentance the experience of "times of refreshing"—namely, the sending (again) of the Messiah Jesus (v. 20). Although he resides in heaven for the present, he will return when the time of the "restoring of all things," as declared by God through the prophets, has arrived.[43] This universal restoration encompasses the reconstruction of David's "house" through the Messiah's resurrection and the forming of a renewed people of God that incorporates Gentiles (15:14–18),[44] but presses beyond the mission Luke narrates to embrace the whole world. Thus as Paul later affirms before the cultured Athenians, God is the creator of all that is; all nations fall under God's sovereignty, "all people everywhere" must heed the summons to repent, and they will be held accountable by the righteous cosmic judge whom God has raised from the dead (17:24–31; cf. 14:15–16).

After mentioning God's universal restoration project, which is now underway but will be completed only in the eschatological future, Peter shows what is at stake for his listeners: their participation in God's covenant people (vv. 22–26). Just as Moses promised, God has raised up a prophet like Moses—raised up, that is, from the dead—whom the people must hear and heed if they are to remain within the people of God (vv. 22–23, citing Deut 18:15–20 and borrowing a phrase from Lev 23:29). Returning one more time to the theme of prophetic promises fulfilled (v. 24), Peter concludes the speech on a positive note. The aim of the divine activity he has been describing is to extend to "all families of the earth" the covenantal blessings promised so long ago to Abraham (vv. 25–26). To have a share in that divine blessing, the audience must turn away from evil—that is, repent. So the sermon underscores its rhetorical goal one final time.

After the rich eschatological materials in Acts 1–3, the story unfolds, for the most part, with the parousia nowhere in view.

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[43] On the translation and interpretation of this difficult text, see Carroll, *Response*, 142–48; L. T. Johnson, *Acts* (SP 5; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 68–74.

[44] As James puts it, drawing upon Amos 9:11–12.

Yet if we take our cue from the eschatological teaching Jesus provided in the gospel, this is not a surprise. The apostles, and later, with their endorsement, Philip and Paul and others, are taking the invitation to God's salvation to the farthest reaches of the earth. This is the church's business in the period—of uncertain duration—before the parousia brings history to closure. Although the parousia is not a prominent motif in Acts, enough has been said at the commencement of the apostles' mission to the nations to remind the community of readers where they are in this grand story. The parousia will come, and may come in the very near future. But what matters in the meantime is that they faithfully and persistently carry out the mission that God has entrusted to them.