WITNESS ACTS

by

Celia I. Wolff

The Divinity School
Duke University

Date: 11/26/18

Approved:

C. Kavin Rowe, Supervisor

Douglas A. Campbell

J. Ross Wagner

Brittany E. Wilson

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Theology in the Divinity School of
Duke University

2018

ABSTRACT

WITNESS ACTS

by

Celia I. Wolff

The Divinity School

Duke University

Date: 11/26/18

Approved:

C. Kavin Rowe, Supervisor

Douglas A. Campbell

J. Ross Wagner

Brittany E. Wilson

An abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology in the Divinity School of Duke University

2018

Abstract

"Witness" is widely recognized as an essential descriptor of Christian life, in large part because of Jesus' final words to his disciples Acts 1:8, and yet little agreement exists about what practices constitute Christian witness. Despite Acts' pervasive interest in "witness" as the shape of apostolic life, no one has yet engaged its entire narrative in order to illuminate its portrait of "witness." This dissertation fills that gap in Christian scriptural scholarship via cohesive and comprehensive narrative analysis that, following Acts' lead, privileges a theological hermeneutical lens in order present the epistemic and political aims embedded in Acts' vision of witness. In Acts, apostolic witness originates with God, and God's character and power comprehensively shape witness as a communal life-pattern of integrated epistemology and politics that repudiates all forms of falsehood and violence and, instead, embraces truth, resilience, and creativity as exemplified in Jesus' resurrection. Acts' portrait of witness urges Christians today toward essential practices of truth telling as well as creative and resilient responses to injustice. This twofold exhortation offers both great encouragement and a strong corrective to Christians engaged in contemporary politics in the United States and beyond.

Dedication

For Dr. Kerry Dearborn,

Dr. Frank A. Spina,

and in memory of the Rev. Jane Esdale

with gratitude for their inspiration and encouragement

Contents

Acknowledgements

If you are reading this dissertation, more than likely you are partly to blame for its existence. Even so, many mentors, colleagues, family, and friends deserve to be implicated by name:

My director, Kavin Rowe, taught me Greek, then Luke, then Acts, and a great deal in theological hermeneutics. The marks of his influence on this project go well beyond the abundant citations of his scholarship. I am grateful to him and to my committee members—Douglas Campbell, Ross Wagner (also an unusually involved Th.D. program director!), and Brittany Wilson. Ellen Davis, Richard Hays, and Samuel Wells have not been directly involved with this project, but their pedagogy and scholarship were instrumental to my formation as an interpreter of scripture; they have profoundly shaped what I wrote, and their encouragement and mentorship helped it get written at all. On the administrative side at Duke, I must also thank Diane Decker for coordinating program details with efficiency and humane care.

At Duke I journeyed with many wonderful Th.D. colleagues (TWBs, you know who you are!), among whom I wish particularly to thank Rebekah Eklund and Mindy Makant, who read portions of this project and provided generous and insightful feedback.

Because I wrote most of this project during my first four years of teaching at Northwest Nazarene University, the support of Dan Nogales, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences has been crucial to its completion. My colleagues in the School of Theology and Christian Ministries at NNU have supported me beyond words, and none more than Richard Thompson, whose generosity with his time, insights, Acts library, and encouragement went well beyond the duties of a department chair. Similarly, I can scarcely imagine having

completed this dissertation without the companionship in work and recreation, countless kindnesses, and unremitting generosity of Devon Van Essen, for whom "colleague" and "friend" are pale descriptors.

From undergraduate days I must thank Kerry Dearborn, who taught my first theology class, and Frank Spina, who introduced me to close reading of scripture. They opened the doors into my field of study, but I blame Ken Himma for first suggesting I go to graduate school. Randy Maddox also has been generous with wisdom, kindness, and practical assistance across many years of my development as a scholar and teacher. He taught classes I took at both Seattle Pacific University and Duke, helped me connect with the Methodist church in Germany for a ministerial internship, provided references for both my programs at Duke, brought procedural clarity to the Th.D. program as one of its first directors, and helped me connect with his alma mater, NNU, where I now teach.

My parents, Armin and Ehrentraud Wolff, instilled in me a conviction that pervades this project: the Bible matters for how Christians live. Their support, patience, and confidence throughout many years have facilitated my perseverance more than they know, as have that of my sister and brother-in-law, Emilie and Milan Young, and their growing family.

It is customary at about this point in dissertation acknowledgments for the exhausted candidate to thank a longsuffering spouse and oblivious child(ren), without whom the author could not imagine having written a dissertation. In such light, this writer's lack of both spouse and children makes the completion of this work nothing short of a miracle. She therefore declares, with apologies to Eve, "I have begotten a dissertation, with the help of the Lord," and, having wondered aloud like Mary to the angel Gabriel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" was duly assured, "For nothing shall be impossible with God."

Chapter 1: Introduction

Late on a breezy summer Saturday morning during my struggle to write chapter six of this project, I heard voices through my front screen door and snippets of conversation that sounded like a pair of solicitors going house to house. Not wanting to be interrupted, I closed my front door, but too late. They saw me. And then they knocked. On a wave of irritation, I opened the door to find two middle-aged men in suits and ties. One of them greeted me and began, "We're out in the neighborhood today talking with folks about Jesus and what's going to happen in the Last Days. Do you know how to read the times about what's happening?" Wanting to dismiss them quickly, I replied with a viciously polite smile, "I'm not the least bit interested. Thank you, have a good day," and began closing the door while they hurried off with a stammered, "You have a better one, ma'am." As I returned to my work I marveled at the irony that, while writing about "witness" in the book of Acts, I had chased two Jehovah's Witnesses off my porch who doubtless now assumed that I am both clueless about "witness" and not among the deserving ones destined for salvation! Despite interrupting me, however, they had done me a service: they provided a clear and mundane example showing why my writing project serves a directly practical purpose. Words, of course, are not inert containers of meaning; their function changes depending on context, and the more people use one word in many different kinds of contexts the slipperier its "meaning" becomes. A word so variously deployed begins to mean everything and nothing. Within a wide swath of Christianity, and particularly American evangelicalism, "witness" is one such word.

Christians across a substantial spectrum can most likely agree that "witness" usually has something to do with spreading the message about Jesus, but agreement about what is the

essential message about Jesus or how Christians ought to communicate it is another matter. "Witness" is applied as a label to many and various activities that purport to be "spreading the Gospel," and not all of them—if measured on the terms of Acts of the Apostles—deserve the name. Of all the books in the New Testament, Acts of the Apostles is the book that ought most to shape Christian understanding of what witness entails despite coming in second to John's Gospel in the number of times it includes "witness" in its various forms. Acts is the book that introduces the notion of witness as mission—the work of spreading news of Jesus. But Christians' varied application of the word suggests that most engagement with Acts toward shaping an understanding of Christian witness begins and ends with a decontextualized and superficial reading of Acts 1:8, the widely acknowledged programmatic verse of the whole book,[1] in which Jesus tells his disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and up to the end of the earth." Beginning here is no mistake, but extracting this verse from its narrative context can quickly lead to malformed evangelism practices shaped by grave errors of theology, epistemology, and politics that, thus, do far more harm than good. A sound and well-developed portrait of Christian witness requires engagement with the entire narrative context of this programmatic verse, which includes Luke's Gospel and all of Acts. This project presents such a portrait, arguing that Acts portrays witness as integrated proclamation and community life aimed toward two distinct but united purposes: 1) reflecting the character and

[1] See e.g., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1998): "Verse 8 is, in fact, the programmatic verse of Acts; it sets the scope of the spread of the Word of God, the goal that the commissioned apostles are to attain as they bring that Word from Jerusalem to 'the end of the earth.' It is important because it outlines the spread of the Word and gives a summary of the development of the narrative in Acts itself: testimony will be carried by these witnesses from Jerusalem to 'all Judea and Samaria' and to 'the end of the earth,' from Jerusalem to Rome" (200). See also Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 245 n. 144; 120.

power of God as revealed in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and 2) inviting all people into life with God.

This chapter attends first to the three principal reasons why a full-length close narrative study on witness in Acts is warranted: 1) Acts' portrait of witness ought to be a first-order shaping influence on Christian life and, in particular, on practices of evangelism; 2) no such comprehensive engagement of the entire narrative's portrait of "witness" exists; and 3) Acts' portrait of witness offers a salutary corrective to church practices of evangelism and public engagement that have developed without adequate attention to this pivotal New Testament book. This chapter proceeds with an outline of the method and broad structure of the project, which are both intended as much as possible to follow the grain of the text. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of the argument and provisional description of its significance; Acts' portrait of witness urges the formation and maintenance of a community shaped by the life of God as revealed in Jesus, which has surprising and intriguing implications for Christian pursuit of theological knowledge and engagement in political life.

1.1 Warrant

1.1.1 Why Learn Witness from Acts?

Acts has a unique canonical role because it is the only narrative book in the Christian Bible that takes place in its entirety within what Eugene Boring and Samuel Wells both identify as Act Four of the Five-Act Drama of scripture, "Church," which takes place between Act Three (Christ) and Act Five (Consummation/Eschaton).[2] This part of the scriptural story

[2] Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 1-2; Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004) 53-55. See also Wells, "God's Story" (sermon preached in Duke University Chapel, Durham, NC 4 Dec 2005).

begins in Acts, loops out into the ongoing life of the church into the present, and will only tie back into the pages of scripture when the time of the Eschaton arrives. As the beginning of the story that, in these terms, the church today is still living, Acts ought to be a first-order resource for Christian ethical reflection, especially on the ethics of evangelism.

Other than Acts of the Apostles, no New Testament book has the purposeful spread of the message about Jesus as its principal subject matter. The Gospel of Matthew concludes with Jesus' commission to his disciples that they should make more disciples (Matt 28:19), and Paul's letters show his interaction with communities still being formed in the life of following Jesus, but no other book in the Christian Bible shows Jesus' followers actively engaged in the work of spreading the message about Jesus to people who have not already heard it. Acts presents a well-developed narrative reflection upon how the story of Jesus ought to shape how his followers go about communicating to others Jesus' identity and significance.

Also uniquely among New Testament books, Acts labels this public mission of interpreting Jesus' identity in expanding geographic circles as "witness." While John's Gospel includes "witness" and its cognates more frequently (forty-seven times to Acts' thirty-nine), John does not use this language to describe or enjoin Christian missionary impulse or ethics of Christian life. Only twice does John intimate that Jesus' disciples have a role of bearing him witness and, even then, the outward direction of that witness remains implicit or ambiguous (John 15:27; 19:35). Acts, by contrast, begins with Jesus calling his disciples "my witnesses" who will bear his name in Jerusalem and outward into the world from there (Acts 1:8). And the narrative shows them consciously responding to this prescriptive promise with no fewer than twenty of the remaining thirty-eight times some version of the word "witness" appears

in the narrative.[3] Among scriptural books Acts is, therefore, the one that best informs a vision of Christian evangelism, of a Christian activity called "witness," and, especially, any understanding of "witness" that connects it or makes it synonymous with spreading the message of Jesus.[4] Gaining such insight from the book of Acts requires close exegetical and theological engagement with its entire narrative in its literary and historical contexts, which, to this point, has not yet been done.

1.1.2 Lacuna

Despite much interest in "witness" as a significant term in Christian theological reflection, none of a wide array of studies on witness in Christian life fully engages the book of Acts for its portrait of witness.[5] At best, as in Ariaan Baan's study of "witness" as the central motif Stanley Hauerwas's theological work, witness in Acts gets brief and useful but far from comprehensive attention. Baan rightly flags the significant contribution Acts makes to a Christian theology of witness, but his treatment leaves room for a much more thorough study that yields further insights toward and beyond interacting with Hauerwas's vision of Christian

---

[3] See Appendix A for a complete list of how μάρτυς and its cognates occur in context throughout Acts. See Appendix B for a chart categorizing the various ways "witness" occurs in Acts. Where an instance has more than one clear sense I have placed it in all appropriate categories.

[4] See Allison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 128

[5] See e.g., Ariaan Baan, *The Necessity of Witness: Stanley Hauerwas's Contribution to Systematic Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015) 137-47; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/2 § 19.1, "Scripture as Witness to Divine Revelation," and IV/3.1 § 70.1, "The True Witness," as well as John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: the Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010); David Haddorff, *Christian Ethics as Witness: Barth's Ethics for a World at Risk* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010); Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2001); and Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004) See also Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1983); Stanley Hauerwas, "Believing is Seeing" (sermon preached in Duke University Chapel, Durham, NC, 30 March 2008)

witness. The principal reading of Acts that informs Baan's and Hauerwas's[6] examinations of witness in Acts, C. Kavin Rowe's *World Upside Down*, does treat Acts' narrative holistically and certainly attends with care and nuance to how Acts develops a portrait of witness, but as a whole the book does not focus on witness.[7] Similarly, Allison Trites's *The New Testament Concept of Witness* rightly dedicates a full chapter to Acts and offers especially important insight regarding how the book of Acts functions as witness, but a single chapter cannot treat the whole narrative and leaves much room for further exegesis and theological development.[8]

Indeed, biblical scholarship on the book of Acts treats "witness" with a peculiar combination of acknowledged importance and neglect. On the one hand, "witness" is recognized at the heart of the book's programmatic verse so that, for example, I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson's edited collection of essays engaging Acts' theology bears the title, *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*,[9] but contains only one rather brief essay that purposefully engages Acts on witness and does not present "witness to the Gospel" as the principal theological framework of Acts.[10] Many other available titles mentioning or alluding to Acts and witness feel, upon closer examination, like false advertising. John Franklin Hall's *New Testament Witnesses of Christ: Peter, John, James & Paul* sounds promising, but it scarcely

---

[6] Brian Goldstone and Stanley Hauerwas, "Disciplined Seeing: Forms of Christianity and Forms of Life," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109 (2010): 765-90.

[7] C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 120-22.

[8] Trites, *New Testament Concept of Witness*, 128-53.

[9] I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, eds., *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

[10] Peter G. Bolt, "Witness and Mission," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

touches upon how the language of witness develops in Acts.[11] Jack J. Blanco's *Witness: Acts through Revelation* simply adopts the word "witness" as a title for the author's paraphrase of the New Testament books from Acts through Revelation and offers no exegetical engagement.[12] Stephen Pimentel's *Witnesses of the Messiah: on Acts of the Apostles, 1-15* is a popular Bible study commentary on the book's first fifteen chapters. The word "witness" occurs only ten times in the book, and Pimentel does not develop a cohesive vision of what, according to Acts, being "witnesses of the Messiah" entails. It might be a useful Bible study tool, but it is not about witness in Acts.[13] In another popular commentary, *The Book of Acts: Witnesses to the World*, author Stephen Ger notes the importance of "witness" as "a key, perhaps the key word, in the book of Acts,"[14] but after scarcely more than a page devoted to "witness" in the opening chapter, he does not provide further examination of how Acts' whole narrative contributes to its portrait of witness. Perhaps this oversight results from his judgment that Acts is "a series of vignettes, or 'postcards,' some historical, some biographical, still others theological."[15] Seeing Acts' portrait of witness requires a sense of the book's narrative cohesion; an atomistic reading will not do.

---

[11] John Franklin Hall, *New Testament Witnesses of Christ: Peter, John, James & Paul* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2002).

[12] Jack J. Blanco, *Witness: A Fresh Look at the New Testament Church* (Hagerstown, MD: Autumn House, 2009).

[13] Stephen Pimentel, *Witnesses of the Messiah: on Acts of the Apostles 1-15* (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Road, 2002).

[14] Steven Ger, *The Book of Acts: Witnesses to the World*, ed. Mal Couch and Edward E. Hindson (Fort Worth, TX: AMG Publishers, 2004), 25.

[15] Ger, *Book of Acts*, xi.

Works in missiology also tend—often by necessity, no doubt—not to take Acts' entirety into account when developing a vision of Christian mission. Stanley H. Skreslet's *Picturing Christian Witness*, while offering many helpful observations showing how specific passages in Acts shed light on a vision of Christian witness, does not look at Acts holistically, and so no cohesive vision of Christian witness in Acts emerges from the study.[16] Richard Bauckham's short but powerful *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Post-modern World*, the published text of his Easneye and Frumentius lectures, concludes with a vision of witness deeply consonant with that of Acts, but the genre prohibits extended close exegesis of Acts.[17] The length of Beverly Gaventa's essay, "'You Will Be My Witnesses': Aspects of Mission in the Acts of the Apostles," similarly prohibits substantial depth of engagement despite its holistic viewpoint.[18] Acts is rarely treated as a coherent theological narrative,[19] with the result that—even when its importance for shaping Christian witness is acknowledged—the full spectrum of Acts' concerns about Christian theology, epistemology, and political engagement fails to emerge, and, as David L. Tiede observes, its parts are easily conscripted to serve ideologies contrary to its purpose:

---

[16] Stanley H. Skreslet, *Picturing Christian Witness: New Testament Images of Disciples in Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006) The same holds true of Darrell L. Guder, *Be My Witnesses: The Church's Mission, Message, and Messengers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), which contains many helpful observations and insights, but is primarily a work of missiology and not sustained exegesis of Acts. For a similar but more recent study, see Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

[17] Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003).

[18] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "'You will be My Witnesses': Aspects of Mission in the Acts of the Apostles," *Missiology* 10 (1982): 413-25.

[19] Rowe's *World Upside Down* is an exception that proves the rule, but, as mentioned above, it does not focus specifically on witness.

> The urgency of this inquiry arises from the wild and undifferentiated use of this text [Acts 1:6-8] for every kind of religious crusade, popular campaign, and zealous promotion. … Highly sensitive to the power and appeal of this passage, such usage seizes the image and the words of Jesus' departure as a direct warrant for a host of plans, techniques, and programs, under the assumption that the specific content of the commission is fully in concert with whatever enterprise is being promoted. … The net effect may be that Acts is often used to underwrite the same kind of modern theo-political rhetoric and programs that it intended to critique in its own age.[20]

Tiede's essay provides a properly contextual reading of Acts' programmatic verse and, thus, significantly illuminates Acts' portrait of Christian witness. But as any writer knows, the thesis of an argument is not the whole, and Tiede's essay offers but a beginning point. Comprehensive engagement with Acts as a coherent narrative, attending carefully to the narrative context in which "witness" language appears, is the remedy and what this project is aimed to offer.

1.1.3 Corrective

As a whole, Acts urges a practice of witness that runs contrary to conventional wisdom about the nature of power just as much today as when Luke wrote of Jesus pronouncing blessing on the marginalized and woe upon the privileged (Luke 6:20-26).[21] Already in Acts, as argued in this project's treatment of Paul (chapter 6), the church has difficulty acting according to a vision of power defined by the God revealed in Jesus rather than the power of statecraft (Acts 21:20-25). Indeed, in every age Christians have struggled against or been lured

---

[20] David L. Tiede, "Acts 1:6-8 and the Theo-Political Claims of Christian Witness," *WW* 1 (1981): 41-51 (43).

[21] See Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 76-94. Green helpfully discusses the term "poor" as a term denoting ascribed status and degradations related to injuries and diseases as well as economics.

into exercising a kind of power antithetical to Jesus often, purportedly, in order to spread the message of Jesus. Constantinianism, Christendom, Colonialism, American civil religion, and most forms of Christian apologetics rely on a version of power learned not from Jesus, but from the kind of forces that brought about his execution.[22] Through its portrait of witness Acts commends a pattern of power learned from Jesus and, thus, urges Christians to repent of any allegiances, evangelistic practices, or exercises of power that conflict with the way of Jesus. This vision of witness has implications beyond Christian evangelism; in Acts it is a total way of life that encompasses the shape of Christian knowledge as well as how it is known, practiced, and communicated.

1.2 Method and Structure

In his chapter examining the function of "witness" language in Acts, Allison Trites also, rightly, notes that the book itself is presented as witness.[23] If this is so, the structure and internal logic of Acts itself shed light on its vision of witness, and any efforts at further illumination should run, as much as possible, with the grain of the text. By contrast with what might be termed a lexical study as exemplified in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and the like,[24] this project's principal method, therefore, is close exegetical attention to the entire narrative as a whole and in order, and its structure is intended to reflect the structure of Acts.

---

[22] For a helpful outline of American civil religion and its pitfalls see Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 50-56.

[23] Trites, *New Testament Concept of Witness*, 133-39.

[24]Eg., H. Strathmann. "μάρτυς κτλ.," *TDNT* 4: 474-514.. See also Ernst Nellessen, *Zeugnis für Jesus und das Wort: Exegetische Untersuchungen zum lukanischen Zeugnisbegriff*, BBB 43 (Köln; Bonn: Hanstein, 1976).

Acts' opening sentence defines the aim of Luke's Gospel to relate "all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1) while, simultaneously, implying a shift in purpose for the second volume addressed to Theophilus.[25] Although Acts remains deeply interested in communicating Jesus' identity and significance, it does not simply repeat Jesus' story but, rather, shows how Jesus changed his followers' lives and how they made him known in the world after his ascension. In other words, Acts of the Apostles is centrally about the apostles' (and their successors') witness. Even so, however, Acts presupposes—and proceeds on the assumption—that Luke's story of Jesus is real and true and the basis for the witness recounted in Acts. This presupposition takes seriously the essential starting point of any activity deserving the descriptor "witness," namely, the reality that gives rise to witnesses, which is the feature that distinguishes their message as witness rather than sheer invention.

This project's account of "witness" in Acts, therefore, begins with Jesus not only for the obvious reason that Jesus calls the witnesses "mine" or "of me" (1:8), but also because, by beginning with Jesus, Acts' narrative demonstrates its priority to identify its animating theological claims before turning to how they are known or borne out politically. And of course, the essential substance of Acts' theological claims is the identity and significance of Jesus. Acts' introduction highlights "all that Jesus began to do and teach" (1:1) and that he spent his last forty days with his disciples demonstrating his real presence with them and

[25] The last fifty or so years have seen renewed interest in the significance of narrative as a communicative category particularly for the theological disciplines. See, e.g., Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997); Hayden V. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987). If, as Frei suggests, one comes to know the identity of Jesus "by means of the story told about him" (Frei, *Identity of Jesus*, 133) one might expect by similar means to become acquainted with the contours of the community his life, death and resurrection brought into existence.

"speaking about the reign of God" (1:3). After Jesus commissions his witnesses (1:8), the narrative portrays (with some overlap of their stories) how Peter and the apostles, Stephen, and Paul fulfill this prescriptive promise. Taking cues from Acts thus shapes the structure of this project in three specific ways. First, as a whole, it begins by attending to Jesus' portrait of God's reign in Luke's Gospel. Second, the chapters focus on the principal witnesses in the order of the narrative. And third, because Acts displays first the reality that gives rise to apostolic witness, second how the apostles arrive at knowledge of this reality and learn how to communicate it, and third how the apostles become publicly engaged as witnesses, each chapter starts with matters of theology before proceeding to epistemology and, then, politics.

1.3 Argument and Perspective

The argument takes shape as follows. Acts' opening with Jesus' teaching on the reign of God and proving the reality of his resurrection turns the reader first to recall the totality of Luke's Gospel, particularly its presentation of Jesus as a living portrait of God's reign, the power of which is most definitively demonstrated in Jesus' resurrection. God's raising of Jesus quintessentially expresses God's creative and resilient power, and promises that such power is not only sufficient but, also, will be ultimately effective to overcome the death-dealing powers of the world (chapter 2). In the days before his ascension, Acts portrays Jesus commissioning his apostles to a pattern of life and speech that, through the Holy Spirit's empowerment, puts their whole selves in service to embodying, proclaiming, and portraying how God overcomes death-dealing power (chapter 3). The principal human actors in the drama are Peter and the original apostles (chapter 4), Stephen (chapter 5), and Paul (chapter 6), who each through their distinct experiences and personalities fulfill Jesus' commission to be his witnesses and offer a

unique perspective on what witness entails. Together, however, they also present a cohesive vision of witness: a way of life rooted in the reality of God and Jesus' summons to put integrated and Holy Spirit-empowered words and actions in service to the work of communicating their hope in the present and coming reign of God.

Carefully considering Acts' portrait of witness also yields surprising insights about relationships between theology, epistemology, and politics, and, in particular, leads to provocative suggestions for what sort of concerns ought to shape a Christian vision of theological epistemology. Attending to "witness" in Acts reveals a profound concern for how the people of God know what they know about God, and how they communicate that knowledge. Acts' epistemology of witness suggests that the unique perspective each person in the community brings is essential to the development of sound ecclesial knowledge of God, and sometimes outside voices are also needed.

My own changing awareness of perspective and the importance of social location has profoundly influenced this project. I first became interested in "witness" as a category of Christian theological reflection in the spring of 2009, and particularly wanted to investigate it for its hermeneutical implications. A conversation with Stanley Hauerwas helped me to see the essential non-violence of witness as a category, and I found that "witness" was a helpful description for the character of Christian scripture: it constantly points toward a truth it cannot and does not attempt to prove. I had already been interested in the book of Acts and had studied it more closely than many other books when I realized how pervasively concerned it is with witness. But coming to any cohesive understanding of Acts' vision of witness took years and far more spilling of words than the final version of this project contains. Indeed, nearly all of what I wrote between 2011 and 2015 has gone the way of all flesh. Had I finished

writing this project in a timely manner, it would have been very different and, I think, diminished, because in its present form it draws upon my own significant development of the last four years, shaped by my move from North Carolina to Idaho and first foray into undergraduate teaching beginning in 2014.

Sometimes a drastic change of context is necessary in order to reveal one's blind spots. I was on contract in my new teaching job at Northwest Nazarene University for nine days when Darren Wilson shot Michael Brown on a street in Ferguson, Missouri. I soon observed, with a growing sense of dismay, that while many friends from Duke were invested in the events that followed and drawing attention to ongoing concerns of racial injustice, my new local community ignored them or kept silent about them almost entirely. Part of my dismay originated in dawning awareness of my own complacency and ignorance about matters of racial injustice; I knew I had not given enough of myself toward righting racial injustices. In my new context, it felt like I was the only one who cared and was, therefore, helpless to create any movement for positive change. While neither of those feelings accurately reflected reality, the deafening silence nudged me awake to worlds of injustice and perspectives beyond my own in a new way. I began to realize how much I had missed by not attending to the epistemic significance of social location, and what was missing in my knowledge because of the limited variety in the kinds of perspectives I had heard, read, and pondered. I also began to take my own social location more seriously as a significant shaping factor in my perspective, and I put a great deal of work into interrogating its assets and liabilities as a vantage point for interpreting Christian scripture. I am astonished that it took me until about three years ago to notice that all of the Christian Bible is written from the margins of empires—Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman—and that being in a position of social privilege within an empire

obstructs one's vision of life on the margins and, thus, one's ability to read with the grain of scripture. Luke's Gospel, and Acts, particularly pressed me on this point, as Jesus' way of talking about "the poor" particularly privileges a perspective from the margins (Luke 6:20).

Meditating on witness in the book of Acts has alerted me to the epistemic significance of social location as well as the political power of that recognition. Being heard and believed is one of many privileges often tied to social location. People in dominant social locations are usually deemed more credible than people whose social locations place them on the margins,[26] which makes Acts truly revolutionary in portraying the "common" and "unlettered" apostles' unique access to reality in contrast to the ignorance of the aristocratic Sanhedrin (Acts 4:13). When those who hold the reins of power do not determine the measure of reality, their power—as Acts shows in dramatic fashion—is greatly diminished. I recall coming to this realization late in the summer of 2015, but it continued to strike me forcibly as the candidates in the U.S. presidential election of 2016 began campaigning, the election took place, and a new occupant moved into the White House. Reading Acts for its theology, epistemology, and politics of witness during the first two years of the forty-fifth U.S. presidential administration—and writing the bulk of this project between 2016-2018—has given me a constant sense of urgency and relevance as I have written, even as sometimes the preservation of my mental health has required me to ignore the news! Teaching classes about Luke, Acts, and politics in Acts, ethics, and Christianity and social justice in the last four years has, likewise, contributed to my conviction that Acts exerts a salutary pressure to attend to epistemology

[26] For a list of contemporary examples both real and fictional, see Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 195-96.

and politics through the lens of theology, and to shape one's (Christian) theology through primary and concerted attention to Jesus.

I include all this context here at the beginning because I think Karl Barth, who knew a thing or two about "witness," was right to enjoin pastors to read both the Bible and newspapers, and the newspaper through the hermeneutical lens of the Bible.[27] I think the text of Acts pushes the attentive reader in precisely that direction. At the same time, I think Acts—particularly in its portrait of witness—urges the reader toward something that Barth did not always do well: self-consciously and transparently bringing one's whole person (including some awareness of the privileges and liabilities of one's social location) to the reading of scripture. In keeping with conventional academic style, the following chapters contain almost no self-referential language, but they are nonetheless deeply self-involving, implicitly in conversation with the teaching work I have done in Luke, Acts, ethics, and Christianity and social justice, and written with awareness in the U.S. political climate of 2016-18. Indeed, this project is part of my own attempt at the kind of witness Acts enjoins.

[27] "Barth recalls that 40 years ago he advised young theologians to 'take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.'" From "Barth in Retirement - TIME," *TIME Magazine* 89.22 (1963), http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,896838,00.html.

Chapter 2: Jesus, the Embodied Reign of God

Luke's introduction to his second volume sets up the story of Acts as the interpretation of everything Jesus did and taught from the first day of his ministry until his ascension (Acts 1:1-2).[1] Three verses in, Luke introduces the narrative of Acts by reporting that Jesus spends the forty days after his ascension appearing to his disciples and teaching "about the reign of God" (1:3). The first dialogue begins with the disciples' last question of Jesus, which seems only logical, given the subject of Jesus' final teaching: "Lord, are you at this time establishing the reign in Israel?" (1:6). Jesus' response to their query reintroduces the theopolitical vision that animates all of Luke's Gospel—one that imagines power in terms of God's reign, as revealed in his own person, and frames human involvement in God's reign as "witness to Jesus": "It is not for you to know the times and seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and up to the end of the earth" (1:7-8).[2] This introduction indicates that, to be intelligible, the narrative of Acts requires readers

[1] As is obvious from the texts of Luke and Acts, the latter continues the story of the former. The significance of the narrative unity of these two books has been thoroughly studied. See, e.g., Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986). But in an important sense Acts is its own story—one that reflects upon and interprets the story that precedes it. Every story that offers commentary on the God of Israel's involvement with the created order is, effectively, part of a longer ongoing story in which God is the main character. The continuity of the biblical story derives also in part from its focus on the same family and the people into which that family grew—Abraham's family and the people of Israel. In Jesus these main characters unite into one person, and Acts considers how that union changes the created reality, the human main characters, and their perception of God. So despite the "narrative unity of Luke-Acts," Acts serves Luke's Gospel better when one also recognizes the narrative integrity of both books. Moreover, recent studies in Acts' canonical history and reception have called into question the modern practice of reading "Luke-Acts" as a single literary work. See esp. the essays collected in *Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2010).

[2] The location and content of Acts 1:8 leave little doubt that it conveys the "programmatic thesis" of Acts [Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 120; 245 n. 144] C. K. Barrett observes of Acts 1:8: "it expresses the content of Luke's second volume" [C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 1:79] See also, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AB 31 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1998): "Verse 8 is, in

who have internalized a vision of Jesus as presented in Luke's Gospel, which places Jesus at the center of God's plan to renew the earth through establishing a political order that functions on the power of inexhaustible creativity and resilient mercy.

Luke's Gospel presents God's project as a carefully constructed and ongoing plan to rescue the world from self-destruction through Jesus and the tenaciously peaceable and subversive politics he embodies. God's "plan" is a major narrative feature in both Luke's Gospel and in Acts.[3] Luke's Gospel indicates early on that 1) God has a plan to save the world, 2) Jesus is at the center of this plan, and 3) this plan involves a constructive and peaceable politics that overturns the status quo. That God has a plan is evident from the language of "fulfilled" that Luke puts in his Gospel's first verse. That Jesus' story does the "fulfilling" is the foremost signal among many that God's plan centers on Jesus, whom Luke casts as the epitome of God's character and manner of reign, the living image of God's plan and its premier earthly executor, and who inaugurates the new moment in God's plan and catalyzes the apostles' participation in that plan. Luke discloses the political heart of God's plan early in his Gospel—first in the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), and then in episodes where three characters offer interpretive commentary on God's purpose in bringing Jesus on the scene: Mary in her *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55), Zechariah in his *Benedictus* (1:67-79), and, finally Jesus himself in his

---

fact, the programmatic verse of Acts; it sets the scope of the spread of the Word of God, the goal that the commissioned apostles are to attain as they bring that Word from Jerusalem to 'the end of the earth.' It is important because it outlines the spread of the Word and gives a summary of the development of the narrative in Acts itself: testimony will be carried by these witnesses from Jerusalem to 'all Judea and Samaria' and to 'the end of the earth,' from Jerusalem to Rome" (200). See also I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970) 157.

[3] See Charles H. Cosgrove, "The Divine Δεῖ in Luke-Acts: Investigations into the Lukan Understanding of God's Providence," *NovT* 26 (1984): 168-90; Green, *Theology*, 28-29; John T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts*, ed. Margaret E. Thrall, SNTSMS 76 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

manifesto at Nazareth and declaration in Capernaum (4:16-43). In these passages Jesus' advent means salvation and redemption for Israel, the toppling of status quo patterns of power, and the extension of God's mercy through Abraham's posterity to those beyond Israel in order to establish a reign of peace. Jesus' earthly life reflects these aims—particularly in his healing ministry, his teaching, and key interpersonal interactions with friends and enemies alike—and God confirms Jesus' portrait of God's manner of reign by raising Jesus from the dead.

2.1 Genesis to Manifesto

Luke's opening sentences promise a story unfolding according to plan. By introducing his Gospel as a "narrative of the events that have been fulfilled [πεπληροφορημένων] among us" (Luke 1:1), Luke connects the story he tells about Jesus to God's saving acts in the past. The immediate allusion to Abraham and Sarah throughout the first description of Zechariah and Elizabeth recalls the promise that marked a major turn in God's efforts to redeem the world. After Babel's rebellion and dispersal God stopped dealing with all humanity collectively and, instead, chose one man and his family to be the conduit of blessing to the whole world: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse, and through you all the families of the earth will gain blessing for themselves" (Gen 12:2-3).[4] By also invoking the promise to Abraham in both Mary's and Zechariah's commentary on what God is doing with Jesus (Luke 1:55 and 1:73, respectively), Luke implies that God's promises in Genesis 12:1-3 are the ones

[4] See Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, ed. Peter Ackroyd, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 154; and Ellen Davis, *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Cambridge, Mass: Cowley, 2001) 59-60.

fulfilled in the events his Gospel recounts.[5] If so, the "events fulfilled" in Luke's Gospel are a key piece in God's plan to bless the world through Abraham's posterity. And, of course, Jesus is the central figure of the Gospel story. These connections bear out two noteworthy consequences: 1) the events of the Gospel are part of God's ongoing plan and 2) God's specific saving work begun with Abraham is being fulfilled through Jesus. Since the events that represent "fulfillment" in Luke's narrative are the events of Jesus' life, the narrative places Jesus at the center of God's saving plan begun with Abraham. As the central figure of God's plan, Jesus' role particularly includes mediating knowledge of God's character and manner of reign, revealing the heart of God's plan and carrying it forward, and commissioning apostolic ministers to live into God's ongoing plan once Jesus no longer walks the earth.

2.1.1 Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38)

Luke first clearly communicates Jesus' simultaneously theological and political role in Gabriel's annunciation of his birth to his mother, Mary (Luke 1:30-33). The child she will conceive in her womb is to be called "great" and "son of the Most High," and, Gabriel promises, "the Lord God will give him the throne of David, his father, and he will reign [βασιλεύσει] over the house of Jacob forever, and of his reign [βασιλείας] there will be no end" (vv. 30-33). That Jesus will be both "great" and "son of the Most High" as well as the rightful heir of David's eternal kingdom provides the first hint in Luke that Jesus' role unifies theology and politics—he will reign over David's dominion according to God's character.[6]

---

[5] See further Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 195-200.

[6] Inheriting David's throne but reigning according to God's character entail some important divergences from David's activities. David fought battle after battle to establish his own kingship and secure Israel's borders (2 Sam 5-9), conceived his heir in a relationship that began with possible rape, definite adultery, and murder (2 Sam 11:1-12:24), and who ordered his son to accede the throne in a bloodbath worthy of the Roman emperors (1

Jesus wears his Davidic-heritage royalty as the "son of the Most High," whose visitation Zechariah prophesies will "guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78-79) and whom Jesus himself later calls "kind to the ungrateful and the wicked" (Luke 6:35). Luke begins to develop these aspects of Jesus' simultaneously theological and political identity even before Jesus is conceived.

As noted above, Luke attributes the title "Lord" (κύριος) to Jesus while he is yet in the womb (1:43), which likewise illumines his purpose to reveal God's character and manner of reign. Rowe has argued persuasively that Luke's use of the κύριος title early in his Gospel signals Jesus' co-identity with Israel's God. That κύριος is also one of the favored titles for the Roman emperor—as Rowe has likewise argued[7] and Luke is doubtless aware (Acts 25:26)—provides Luke a convenient intersection of the theological and political when he attributes this title to Jesus. This title in itself hints at the political significance of the human being who shares God's identity. If Jesus walks the earth representing the God who made and rules the universe and he bears a title frequently given to the highest human officer in his world, he cannot help being a both theologically and politically significant figure. As the narrative unfolds, Luke reveals that Jesus' theopolitical role in God's plan entails subverting conventional expressions

Kings 2:5-9). But there is another David, the one in 2 Sam 22-23, who is presented as the ideal—whom God rescued from death and established "in a broad place" (2 Sam 22:20) because of his righteousness, blamelessness, and faithfulness to God's commands (vv. 21-25). These traits fit the shape of Jesus' life much more than the activities the Deuteronomistic narrative attributes to David.

[7] C. Kavin Rowe, "Luke-Acts and the Imperial Cult: A Way Through the Conundrum?," *JSNT* 27 (2005): 279-300 (292-94, esp. notes 46-55).

of political power and authority.[8] These subversive consequences for status quo power begin to emerge as Mary, Zechariah, and Jesus himself interpret Jesus' identity and role in the *Magnificat,* the *Benedictus*, and in Jesus' first public preaching and ministry in Nazareth and Capernaum.[9]

2.1.2 *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55)

While Jesus is yet in the womb, Mary interprets what God has done for her as a microcosm of what God will do for all the children of Abraham: God will end their oppression and fulfill the promise of blessing through the birth of her son.[10] Many a scholar has identified in Mary's words a series of "reversals," notably Amanda Miller following and building upon John York's *The Last Shall Be First*.[11] To York, the *Magnificat* is the quintessential "explicit bi-polar reversal" in Luke's Gospel, a pattern that takes two opposites and reverses their positions

---

[8] See, e.g., Amanda C. Miller, *Rumors of Resistance: Status Reversals and Hidden Transcripts in the Gospel of Luke*, Emerging Scholars (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014) and John O. York, *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke*, ed. David Hill, JSNTSup 46 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

[9] York fruitfully cites both David L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 24; and John Drury, *Tradition and Design in Luke's Gospel: a Study in Early Christian Historiography* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1976) 50. Tiede points out that the birth and infancy narratives of Luke serve as a prologue that introduces themes and motifs developed more fully later in the story; Drury, in *Tradition* (50) notes the particular role the songs have of highlighting central thematic elements of the narrative as a whole. York notes that only the *Magnificat* includes the theme of status reversal, which is true (York, *The Last Shall Be First*, 44). But the *Benedictus* is the indispensable second half of a diptych that portrays the transvaluation of conventional power because it, like the *Magnificat*, speaks of God bringing victory through the birth of a child and not through traditional warfare.

[10] Cf. Kathryn Sullivan, "His Lowly Maid," *Worship* 36 (1962): 374-79. "We now see the connection between Mary and Abraham and understand how this new beginning is related to the beginning of the people of God. At the dawn of its history the whole future of Israel was concentrated in Abraham to whom were entrusted the divine promises, and now the whole future of mankind depends on Mary in whom those divine promises are to be fulfilled" (378).

[11] See, e.g., Amanda C. Miller, "A Different Kind of Victory: 4Q427 7 I-II and the Magnificat as Later Developments of the Hebrew Victory Song," in *"What Does the Scripture Say?": Studies in the Function of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias (New York: T & T Clark, 2012), 192-211.

to raise one high and put the other in its former low place.[12] Mary's words, taken at face value, seem to fit that pattern; but placing the *Magnificat* in in its narrative context complicates it. Taken in their narrative context, Mary's words do not foretell a mere transfer in who may use blunt-force power in an unjust system. "Reversal" does not capture the move toward systemic justice that Barbara Reid rightly sees in Mary's words: This is no "reversal of fortunes that would only invert the systems of domination"; rather, "Mary exults in God's might that brings a leveling of the distribution of goods and power."[13] In the so-called "reversals" Mary names—the proud scattered, the powerful demoted and the lowly exalted (vv. 51-52), the hungry filled, and the rich deprived (v. 53)—the losses of the proud, powerful, and wealthy serve to offset oppression of the humble and the hungry. But even "leveling" does not suffice; Mary's words call for an end to systemic domination and the reimagining of power in God's terms—the power to bring life.

What God has done with Mary does not merely redistribute power but reconfigures and restores the very notion of power to a pattern more closely resembling God's use of it. Embedded within a narrative that has repeatedly tied both Israel's God and her unborn child to the title κύριος, Mary begins, in vv. 46-49, by praising God as Lord (κύριος), Savior (σώτηρ), and the Mighty One (ὁ δύνατος). The titles of κύριος and σώτηρ, while not reserved for the Roman emperor, were applied to Caesars, pagan divinities, and persons of high status often enough to lend these words a political critical edge when Mary attributes them to God.[14] Reid

[12] York, *Last Shall Be First*, 46.

[13] Barbara E. Reid, "An Overture to the Gospel of Luke," *CurTM* 39 (2012): 428-34 (430).

[14] For a helpful summary of the titles κύριος and σώτηρ associated with Roman emperors, see Barbara E. Reid, "Women Prophets of God's Alternative Reign," in *Luke-Acts and Empire: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Brawley*, ed.

calls Mary's reassignment of these titles "a direct affront to imperial claims."[15] Mary's words may be intended to undermine imperial authority by saying, as Reid suggests, that Caesar is neither Lord nor Savior; these titles belong properly only to God.[16] But ancient usage of these honorifics does not suggest that they may apply to only one entity. These titles' challenge to imperial authority resides in the stark contrast between God's use of power and the emperors', whose history of war, subjugation, and bloody accession is well documented.[17] If the "kings of the Gentiles dominate" their subjects (Luke 22:25-26) and wield "humiliation" (ταπείνωσις) as a weapon of that domination,[18] then those who learn the meaning of "Lord" and "Savior" from looking at God might well doubt that emperors deserve these titles.

In Mary's account the God who scatters the proud, exalts the humble, brings down the powerful, fills the hungry, and dismisses the rich empty is the God who mercifully helps Israel and remembers the promise to Abraham and his descendants (Luke 1:50-55). In Genesis Abraham's first appearance (Gen 12) marks the point where God turns from destructive or coercive means of addressing creation's corruption (first the flood [Gen 6-8] and then scattering the people of Babel [Gen 11]) and, instead, shapes the remedy to mirror the

---

David Esterline David Rhoads, and Jae Won Lee (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 52-53. For σώτηρ applied to Augustus, see Philo, *Flaccus*, 74.

[15] Reid, "Women Prophets," 53.

[16] Reid, "Overture to the Gospel of Luke," 429.

[17] See, e.g., T. S. Johnson. "Roman Emperors," *DNTB* 968-74.

[18] See, e.g., Polybius, *The Histories*, IX.11, where Polybius reports Lysciscus chastising Cleonicus and Chlaeneas for allying with "barbarians" in an effort to "get the better of Philip and humiliate [ταπεινῶσαι] the Macedonians" [Paton, LCL]. See also Reid, "Women Prophets": "In contrast to the powerful elites who delight in humiliating those whom they dominate, God "looks upon," ἐπέβλεψεν, Mary's "humiliation," ταπείνωσις, with the intent of alleviating her affliction" (54).

constructive power God exercised in creating the world. In the creation story (Gen 1-2), God expresses power only in order to build the world; God makes a world that can sustain life and fashions myriad swarming life forms to inhabit it. With Abraham God returns to this pattern of constructive abundance: instead of eradicating evil, God will overwhelm it by disseminating blessing worldwide through one man and his family. And it will all begin with the birth of a child whose improbable conception God actively causes (Gen 21:1-2).[19] God's relationship with Abraham is how God deals with the world at large; the relationship likewise illuminates the shape of God's power.

When Mary invokes Abraham's God and calls God "Lord" and "Savior" she places this God's power in contrast to any others who would claim those titles. Such rulers, who sit enthroned and command armies, God demotes in favor of raising up the "lowly," ταπεινούς (1:52), a status Mary has already claimed for herself (1:48). God exalts humble Mary, but not as a warrior or queen with an army at her disposal;[20] such exaltation would validate the unjust system. Rather, God raises up Mary in a manner commensurate to the power God expressed in calling Abraham to bless him and the entire world through him: by the Holy Spirit's life-giving power Mary conceives—even more improbably—a child who will anchor God's plan to enact an alternative political vision (Luke 1:32-33). These are the ways of the one who

[19] The idea that God would use the same power both to create and redeem the world resonates with Athanasius' famous argument for Jesus' divinity and preexistence in *On the Incarnation* that it was fitting for the instrument of creation (the Word) and of human redemption (the Word made flesh) to be the same (*Inc.* 44).

[20] For an illuminating distinction between Mary and her militant foremothers, Jael and Judith, see Brittany E. Wilson, "Pugnacious Precursors and the Bearer of Peace: Jael, Judith, and Mary in Luke 1:42," *CBQ* 68 (2006): 436-56 Mary is "blessed among women" (Luke 1:42) as Wilson points out, not "for killing enemy commanders," as are Jael and Judith, but "for believing the words of the Lord and bearing a son" (437).

exemplifies true power (ὁ δύνατος), who "has done great things [μεγάλα]" for her (Luke 1:49). With Mary, God's power makes a life through extraordinary means, and Mary's words signal that the wholesome power God exerts in Jesus' conception will be reflected in the political order promised at his annunciation.

2.1.3 *Benedictus* (Luke 1:67-79)

Zechariah, responding to his own son's unlikely birth, likewise praises God for the peaceable political order God will usher in through Jesus in John's wake (Luke 1:68-79). Zechariah begins by blessing "the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited [ἐπεσκέψατο] and made redemption [λύτρωσιν] for his people and raised up a horn of salvation [σωτηρίαν] for us in the house of David, his servant" (Luke 1:68-69). Though John's birth prompts these words, most of Zechariah's speech refers to what God will do through the yet-unborn Jesus: God's means of redemption and salvation for the people of Israel comes from the "house of David," the throne of which Gabriel promised Mary would belong to her son (1:32). Zechariah's inspired speech distinguishes additionally between his son and Mary's: John will be called the "prophet of the Most High" (1:76), whereas Mary's child will be called "son of the Most High" (1:32)—descriptions that, when compared with Jesus' own portrait of the "Most High" as the one who is "kind to the ungrateful and the wicked," cast both John and Jesus as representatives of the extravagantly merciful God. Referring to John as "prophet of the Most High" immediately before predicting that John will "go before the Lord to prepare his ways" (1:76) once again draws the yet-unborn Jesus into the story's foreground. The "Lord," whose ways John will prepare, is not just the "Most High," but also Jesus, who is already Lord in Mary's womb (1:43). Just as John prepares the way for Jesus, Zechariah's

speech on the occasion of his son's birth mainly outlines God's purpose in bringing Jesus on the scene.

Zechariah portrays God's purpose with Jesus as a redemptive act reminiscent of the Exodus. Zechariah describes God saving God's people from "our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us… so that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies might serve [God] without fear" (1:71, 74; cf. Exod 3:18, 4:22, 5:1). With God's people now under Roman occupation, Zechariah's words suggest God will deliver Abraham's children from this oppression and so free them to give themselves completely to God without fear, but he goes on to describe a surprising manner of rescue. God's agent will not foment an armed uprising but, instead, manifest God's "tender mercies," offering "light for those sitting in darkness," and "guiding our feet into the way of peace" (1:77-79). Zechariah's final lines foreshadow God's gentle and creative power fully manifest in the human "son of the Most High"—Jesus. The kingly status Gabriel promises to Mary that her son will hold, along with the title "son of the Most High," will be realized in Jesus' becoming his people's pioneer of a peaceable politics.

2.1.4 Jesus in Nazareth & Capernaum

Jesus himself outlines his mission twice in Luke 4: once in his first public speech—the centerpiece of the dramatic scene in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30)—and the second time just as he is concluding his teaching and healing ministry in Capernaum (4:31-43). At Nazareth Jesus assembles from Isaiah 61:1 and 58:6 a manifesto of inspired mission to give special attention and restoration to the downtrodden of his people. He promises the proclamation of good news to the poor, release to captives, restored sight to the blind, and release to the oppressed (Luke 4:18). The Nazarenes receive these as "words of

grace," λόγοις τῆς χάριτος (4:22)—good news, indeed! They are the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed, and Jesus promises to restore their fortunes. They claim him as one of their own, as "Joseph's son," implying an expectation that the good news of release and healing he brings is reserved for them (4:22). Releasing them from oppression would, by necessity, diminish the power and influence of the rich, the captors, and the oppressors; his audience would be content with this bare reversal. So the Nazareth congregation delights in Jesus' message; everyone there bears favorable witness of him (πάντες ἐμαρτῦρουν αὐτῷ; 4:22).

Jesus, however, has no agenda merely to redistribute power; his victory is but piecemeal if he frees and rescues the oppressed of Israel while its oppressors remain untransformed. He reframes the agenda of his scripture reading by striking a note that resounds throughout Isaiah, promises of reprisal on Israel's enemies notwithstanding: God's interest to save, bless, and redeem people is not limited to Israel.[21]

---

[21] Isaiah 11 promises a righteous ruler from "the stump of Jesse," on whom "the spirit of the Lord will rest" (vv. 1-2). He will end war and establish justice and peace and righteousness among his people (vv. 3-5). The result will be a peace that extends among powerful and vulnerable nations, represented in the vision of wolf and lamb, leopard and kid, calf and lion, and so on, living together in safety "because the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord" (11:3-9). See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 3 vols., vol. 19-19B, AB (Garden City, NY Doubleday, 2000-2003) Blenkinsopp notes that the distinctive vocabulary of Isaiah 11:1-9, especially the expression "my holy mountain" in v. 9, is "frequently heard in the last section of the book, the so-called Third Isaiah (cf. 56:7; 57:13 65:11, 25; 66:20), and, in general, the sentiments expressed in this verse are those of this last section (56-66)" (1:264).

Isaiah 19 particularly foregrounds God's gracious care toward Israel's enemies. After pronouncing a litany of judgments on Egypt, the prophet promises a transformation of Israel's former enemy so complete that it is scarcely recognizable (19:18-25). Egypt will learn to worship the Lord, and make and keep vows to the Lord, and in turn the Lord will rescue Egypt from oppressors and hear and heal Egypt (vv. 18-23). The point is not special favor for Egypt but reconciliation of Israel's former enemies to one another, to Israel, and to God. There is to be a highway between Assyria and Egypt enabling peaceable worship by the people of Egypt in Assyria and vice versa. And Israel is to be the conduit—the literal pathway—of this blessed peace: "On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of Hosts has blessed saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage" (19:24-25). This passage from Isaiah fills in the blessing promised to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3 with particular nations who have enslaved, oppressed, and threatened God's people. Here, instead of destroying Israel's enemies, God reconciles them through bringing Israel's enemies from both north and south to worship Israel's God.

When Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61:2 he stops short of the line about God's vengeance.[22] That line forms the second colon of the parallelism that begins with "the year of

---

The beginning of Third Isaiah (Isaiah 56-66), the section from which Jesus reads in Nazareth, also contains key passages that demonstrate God's compassion toward those outside Israel. Under the heading of the command to "maintain justice" in anticipation of God's promised salvation and deliverance (56:1), the prophet enjoins the people not to ostracize foreigners who seek Israel's God: "Let not the foreigner, who has joined himself to the Lord say, "the Lord certainly will separate me from his people" (56:3). The Lord promises to make a place of joyful flourishing for foreigners who would worship Israel's God (56:6-7). Chapter 60 begins with the command to God's people, "Arise, shine, for your light has come" (60:1). God's light and glory shining on God's people will attract foreign nations to Israel's God: "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (60:3). At first it seems that the nations will come as welcome worshipers of Israel's God, but just a few verses later, it appears that the nations' move toward Zion mainly in order to return the captives' descendants and bring a tribute of wealth in precious metal and livestock.

While Blenkinsopp does not move to identifying the animals as symbols of nations, he does suggest, "Powerful, predatory animals like the wolf can also stand for the arbitrary and unjust exercise of power" (1:265). The poetry may be intended as peace among literal animals whose relationship is usually determined by their status as predator and prey, but there is no reason to limit interpretation of the passage to animals and not view them as (at least possibly) symbolic not just of the arbitrary or unjust exercise of power but of particular nations where such use of power is the norm. If v. 9, about the universal knowledge of God precipitating an end to hurt and destruction, is meant to be as universal as it sounds then the text certainly admits of the idea that the peace and justice that begins with God's people is intended ultimately to extend to other nations.

Although Third Isaiah does promise a place for foreigners among God's people, this section also contains plenteous passages where Israel's former foreign enemies have the tables turned on them: they will return Judah's captives and bring wealth of camels and gold and frankincense (60:4-7), they will build Israel's walls and their kings will serve Israel (60:10), and those who refuse to serve Israel will perish (60:12). Former oppressors will bow before and show deference to Jerusalem (60:14). Foreigners will serve as the shepherds and vinedressers of Israel while Israel serves as priests and enjoys the wealth of nations (61:5-7). Even the end of Isaiah seems to emphasize God's generosity toward Israel in contrast to the destruction wrought on those who remain God's enemies (66:14-16). The book's last impression is of God's rescued people, having received the tribute of the nations and the promise that "all flesh shall come to worship" before the Lord, then going out to look upon the accursed dead who persisted in rebelling against God (66:24).

The people in Nazareth, if they recall what Isaiah has to say all around the passage Jesus reads for them, have good reason to suppose that they have much to gain—and their enemies much to lose—from Jesus' ministry. The strong presence of the theme of God's reprisal upon enemy nations within Third Isaiah, especially immediately before and after the passage from which comes the bulk of Jesus' reading in Luke, makes Jesus' omission of it all the more striking. Moreover, his words to the congregation upon concluding the reading leave no doubt: Jesus' mission serves both God's people and their enemies.

[22] No manuscripts of the LXX omit "vengeance" entirely from v. 2, but at least one adds "of our God." The MT notes a possible transposition of this line with the line that ends the verse but mentions no manuscripts where the line is omitted. Lacking manuscript evidence of this line's omission, the idea that Luke intends to show Jesus purposely stopping short of including divine vengeance in his mission seems, at least, plausible. See also Joseph

the Lord's favor," which makes plausible the portrait Luke appears to draw of Jesus intentionally excluding divine vengeance from his mission. The wider context of Third Isaiah would give Jesus ample reason to include "vengeance," but it is not part of his manifesto in Nazareth. Instead of striking the tone his audience might well expect—that divine rescue entails a reversal of fortunes where their former enemies will serve them—Jesus declares his mission of rescue covers all people, whether Jew or Gentile. Jesus anticipates the Nazareth congregation's exclusive perspective; he predicts they will quote to him a well-rehearsed proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself," which, as Joel Green explains, could serve "to insist that one must not refuse to do to one's own relations the favors that one does to others" (4:23).[23] Jesus surprises them with undeniable evidence of God's wide mercy on vulnerable outsiders, powerful enemies, and everyone in between.

The widow at Zarephath as well as her son would have died had Elijah not arrived begging food, then miraculously extended her supply of flour and oil until the drought and famine ended (1 Kings 17:10-17). Jesus presents her circumstances as comparable to any Israelite widow's but, he points out, God sent Elijah to her in Sidon and not to one of his own people. When the prophet brings the widow's son back to life she confesses her faith in both Elijah and the God he serves (1 Kings 17:24). Jesus emphasizes her foreignness and that it did not place her outside God's care. Her poverty, vulnerability, lack of worldly power, and that

---

A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel of Luke*, AB 28-28A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982, 1985) Fitzmyer contends that the omitted words are "scarcely suited for the salvific period now being inaugurated" (28:533).

[23] Green, *Theology*, 82. Green cites John Nolland, "Classical Rabbinic Parallels to 'Physiscian, Heal Yourself' (Luke iv 23)," *NovT* 21 (1979): 193-209, and especially the appendix to S. J. Noorda, "'Cure Yourself, Doctor!' (Luke 4.23): Classical Parallels to and Alleged Saying of Jesus," in *Logia: Les Paroles de Jésus - The Sayings of Jesus. Mémorial Joseph Coppens*, ed. Joël Delobel, BETL (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1982), 459-67, esp. 466-67.

she, therefore, presents no threat to Israel—these traits set her up as one end of a spectrum of foreigners to which Naaman supplies the opposite end.

Naaman is army commander of Syria, a nation that, at that point in the narrative, poses one of Israel's preeminent threats (2 Kings 5). He exemplifies the enemy whose experience of divine healing transforms his understanding of power. He first hears of Israel's God's ability to heal his condition because of an Israelite captive slave girl who serves his wife—an unlikely source (2 Kings 5:2-3). Being in favor with the Syrian king, Naaman asks permission to seek the "prophet in Samaria" who can heal him, and so the Syrian king gives him a letter to take to Israel's king. Naaman and his master expect to find healing power with Israel's king—not with a commoner prophet (vv. 5-7). Then Elisha shows Naaman no deference when he arrives, and the affronted Naaman is about to leave angry when his servants persuade him to do as the prophet said and wash seven times in the Jordan (vv. 9-14). Having experienced the healing power of Israel's God, Naaman confesses the Lord as the only God and vows to worship no one else (vv. 15-17). Naaman recognizes that the God introduced to him by a slave girl and the eccentric prophet is the only God "in all the earth" (v. 15), and he makes that discovery because this God has demonstrated the power not to destroy, not to give victory in battle, but to heal Naaman of an otherwise incurable illness.

By naming God's gracious provision through Elijah for the poor widow of Zarephath and healing Naaman, the wealthy Syrian army commander through Elisha (Luke 4:25-27), Jesus constructs a merismus that has the effect of extending God's saving power to every Gentile from the least to the greatest whether benign or hostile. Both the poor foreign widow and the enemy general receive God's notice and care and, the construction implies, so does

everyone in between.[24] Jesus works for the God who rescues a foreign widow from starvation and an enemy army commander from disease.[25] The God whom Jesus represents rescues the oppressed from oppression and oppressors from oppressing—regardless of whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Jesus is inspired and anointed not only for the sake of Abraham's offspring but also for Gentiles—even such Gentiles as Zechariah calls "enemies" from whom God's people need deliverance. Those enemies, like Naaman, need deliverance from the bondage of conceiving prestige, wealth, and violence as worthy forms of power.[26] As it turns out, the people of Nazareth require a similar reconstruction of categories. They were content with reversal, but the transvaluation of power that includes an aim to transform enemies rather than reversing oppression on them or annihilating them enrages the Nazareth congregation enough to try killing Jesus (4:29). But he slips from their grasp and goes on his way to preach and heal in Capernaum instead (4:30).

In relation to the episode at Nazareth Jesus' ministry in Capernaum looks much like the second half of a diptych meant to image Jesus' purpose in word and deed; the scene ends with Jesus declaring the thesis of his mission in a way that forms an inclusio with his scripture reading at Nazareth (Luke 4:31-43). After he has preached in the synagogue, healed many sick

---

[24] For detailed description of merismus as exemplified in Hebrew and other ancient near eastern poetry see Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), 83-84. According to Schökel, "Merismus reduces a complete series to two of its constituent elements, or it divides a whole into two halves. 'Mountains and valleys' represent the whole of the countryside. 'Heaven and earth' is the universe. The two elements must represent the totality" (83). See also Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 321-24.

[25] And, again, God's compassionate purpose toward foreigners and enemies is writ large in Isaiah 19.

[26] On the matter of the extension of Jesus' ministry to include the marginalized all the way to the Gentiles, see further Green, *Theology*, 84-92.

and demon-possessed people in Capernaum, and is preparing to leave, the people beg him to stay. Jesus demurs, and for a reason gives in his own words a programmatic statement of his purpose to complement the words he read from Isaiah in Nazareth. In this statement he uses a term that points to the divine agency within his mission, and he explicitly names his mission's political interest: "Also in the other cities it is necessary [δεῖ] for me to spread-as-good-news (εὐαγγελίσασθαι) the reign of God (τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ), because for this purpose (ἐπὶ τοῦτο) I was sent" (Luke 4:43).[27]

Cosgrove, Green, and Squires, argue persuasively that the unusual verb δεῖ holds a prominent place in the distinctive vocabulary Luke employs to evoke God's providential plan throughout the Gospel and into Acts. Cosgrove focuses on exploring the significance of δεῖ to denote a specific understanding of God's providence in Luke-Acts—especially "describing the necessity that God's plan, as expressed in Scripture, must be fulfilled."[28] Green groups δεῖ among a list of terms that allow the reader to "discern Luke's interest in the design of God: … βουλή ('purpose') βούλομαι ('to want'), δεῖ ('it is necessary'), θέλημα ('will'), θέλω ('to will'), ὁρίζω ('to determine'), πληρόω ('to fulfill'), and προφήτης ('prophet')."[29] Squires gives the fullest account of the language Luke uses to describe divine providence, especially clustering

[27] The verb εὐαγγελίζω with possible senses of both *bringing* and *proclaiming* good news allows Jesus' announcement of his purpose to have a dual sense of both telling and showing how God's reign is good news. See W. Bauer et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), hereafter BDAG, s.v. "εὐαγγελίζω."

[28] Cosgrove, "The Divine Δεῖ in Luke-Acts," 174.

[29] Green, *Theology*, 29.

around the theme of "the plan of God," extending through the vocabulary of εὐδοκία[30] and εὐδοκέω,[31] θέλημα,[32] δεῖ,[33] μέλλω,[34] πληρόω,[35] τελέω,[36] προορίζω,[37] προκαταγγέλλω,[38] προγνῶσις,[39] προχειρίζομαι,[40] προχειροτονέω,[41] ὁρίζω,[42] τάσσω,[43] and τίθημι.[44] Green notes that these words are not, for Luke, "technical terms, nor is each developed in a discrete way by the Evangelist. Rather, employed in a variety of co-texts they help shape an understanding of God's purpose that occupies a central place in the theology of the Gospel of Luke."[45] Thus

---

[30] Luke 10:21

[31] Luke 3:17; 12:32

[32] Luke 22:42; Acts 21:14; 22:14

[33] δεῖ occurs eighteen times in Luke and twenty-four times in Acts, which together account for over forty percent of all occurrences (102) in the whole NT. Squires especially calls attention to Luke 2:49; 4:43; 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 21:9; 22:37; 24:7, 26; Acts 1:6, 21; 3:21; 4:12, 5:29; 9:6, 16; 14:22; 16:30; 17:3; 19:21; 20:35; 23:11; 24:19; 25:10; 26:9; 27:24. See Squires, *Plan of God*, 2.

[34] Luke 9:31, 44; 22:23; 24:21; Acts 17:31; 26:22-23

[35] Luke 4:21; 9:31; 21:24; 22:16; 24:44; Acts 1:16; 2:28; 3:18; 12:25; 13:25, 27, 52; 14:26; 19:21

[36] Luke 12:50; 18:31; 22:37

[37] Acts 4:28

[38] Acts 3:18; 7:52

[39] Acts 2:23

[40] Acts 3:20; 22:14; 26:16

[41] Acts 10:41

[42] Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 10:42; 17:26, 31

[43] Acts 13:48; 22:10

[44] Acts 1:7, 13:47, 48; 19:21; 20:28

[45] Green, *Theology*, 29.

far in Luke δεῖ has only appeared once, also in the mouth of Jesus, also to mark his engagement in the things of God. At age twelve in the temple he asks his parents, "Did you not know *it is necessary* for me to be about my father's affairs?" (Luke 2:49).[46] Eighteen years later at the start of his public ministry Jesus reaffirms his orientation toward God's plans while delineating his mission "to spread-as-good-news the reign of God" (4:43).

The plan of God, with Jesus at its center, is political. The placement of this pronouncement, as a statement of Jesus' purpose in his own words rather than in the lection, places it as either a complement to his reading at Nazareth or heading for the Nazareth reading. God's reign is good news for the poor, downtrodden, captive, blind—the marginalized, whether Jew or Gentile—because in God's way of ruling the world they all will receive God's saving notice and care through the person of Jesus. By his own declaration Jesus, in his ministry, will embody and proclaim the good news of God's life-giving politics.

When read together, these passages near the beginning of Luke's Gospel—the Annunciation, *Magnificat*, *Benedictus*, and Jesus' public appearances at Nazareth and Capernaum—present God's purpose with Jesus as a politics and wielding of power meant to promote the flourishing of all human life. Mary's song places this life-giving power in deliberate contrast to the tyranny of worldly rulers. Zechariah and Mary both recall God's promises to Abraham, which sound the first notes in Genesis that God's election of a particular people is for the sake of blessing all people. Zechariah emphasizes the Exodus-like

[46] BDAG (p. 326) and the NRSV translate ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρός μου as "in my father's house," but the wider sense of Jesus needing to be about God's agenda appears to make better sense of the grammar (as "house" would be a singular noun, not the plural represented in τοῖς) and of the wider context of Luke in which it is manifestly *not* necessary for Jesus to be in the temple most of the time.

deliverance from enemies that God will bring through Jesus while also anticipating a peaceable politics that implies the elimination of enemies. Read through Jesus' sermon at Nazareth, those enemies will be eliminated not by annihilation but by transformation. At Nazareth Jesus preaches not mere reversal of who has coercive power, but a notion of power unlike that of the world's rulers and, instead, like God's. The real "reversal" in the Annunciation, *Magnificat*, *Benedictus*, and Jesus' first public appearances is not *who* has power, but *what kind* of power [viz., in naming God ὁ δύνατος (Luke 1:49)], deserves the name. True power causes an aging couple to conceive, puts a child in a virgin's womb, rescues a widow from famine, restores life to a dead boy, and by healing an enemy turns him into a friend.

2.2 God's Reign in Healings and Exorcisms

A purpose to transform conventional conceptions of power then makes Jesus' stated agenda in Capernaum and constant references to "God's reign" throughout his ministry only logical. In his ministry Jesus establishes the reality and character of God's reign in both words and deeds: he demonstrates its nature and nearness through 1) abundant healings of many kinds and exorcisms, 2) teaching about its resilient power and generous mercy both directly and in parables, and 3) living what he teaches even up to forgiving his executioners.

Jesus' ongoing ministry of healing and exorcism, begun in Capernaum (4:33-40), provides the most obvious sign that he wields therapeutic power as an expression of God's reign, ultimately making the connection explicit five times. Both before and not long after Jesus' statement of purpose in Capernaum about his message of God's reign he heals many people suffering from ailments, diseases, and demons. In Capernaum he expels a demon from a man in the synagogue (4:33-37), then goes to Simon's house and heals his mother-in-law of

a fever that had kept her bedridden (4:38-39), and finishes the day by curing all the sick who come to him and casting out more demons (4:40-41). After leaving Capernaum, and for most of chapters 5 and 6, Jesus' ministry once more consists in restoring health to a succession of afflicted people—e.g., a leper (5:12-14), people with other diseases (5:15), a paralytic (5:18), a man with a withered hand (6:6-10), and all who came to him with other diseases and unclean spirits (6:18-19). This catalogue of healings underscores with deeds the political platform Jesus outlined in Nazareth and Capernaum. These are the "poor," or as Green has argued, "those on the margins of society, able neither to participate as full partners in social interchange nor completely rejected."[47] These are the people whom Jesus promised "to good-news-ify," εὐαγγελίσασθαι, (4:18) with the message of God's reign (4:43), which shows that God's reign means restoration to literal health, life, and wholeness, as well as to full participation in community.[48] The catena of healings begins, after all, with a leper who asks Jesus to make him clean, καθαρίσαι, (5:12), which restores him to communal life as well as to bodily health. God's reign is revealed in a power that heals physical bodies and restores the ostracized to community.[49]

Luke tightens the connection between healing and God's reign as the narrative progresses. Between Jesus' declaration at Capernaum (4:53) and his first teaching about "the

---

[47] Green, *Theology*, 84.

[48] Green, *Theology*, 81-84.

[49] For a thorough examination of the connection between physical healing and social restoration as part of Jesus' mode of establishing "kingdom order," see Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom, "Recalling Luke's Healer: Slave Doctoring as Liberative Healing," *ExAud* 21 (2005): 128-49. See also Pierson Parker, "Early Christianity as a Religion of Healing," *SLJT* 19 (1976): 142-50.

reign of God" (6:20), Jesus spends most of his time healing everyone who comes to him from around the region—from Jerusalem and all Judea to Tyre and Sidon (6:17-19). From his teaching on the plain he goes without delay to Capernaum and Nain, where he heals the slave of a Centurion and raises the dead son of a widow (7:1-17). Then Luke makes the first explicit connection, since 4:43, between Jesus' healing ministry and the reign of God: Luke places a heading at the top of ch. 8 describing Jesus as κηρύσσων καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ: "proclaiming and bringing-as-good-news the reign of God" (8:1). Under this heading, Jesus teaches about God's reign through parables (8:1-18), identifies his true family as those who obey God (8:19-21), rescues his disciples by calming a storm (8:22-25), exorcises the Gerasene demoniac (8:26-39), heals a sick woman and raises to life a dead girl (8:40-56). The dual verbs of "proclaiming" and "bringing-as-good-news" prove apt here to unify Jesus' teaching about God's reign and its manifestation in the life-giving power Jesus employs to rescue his friends, cast out demons, heal a sick woman, and raise a dead girl. Luke shows Jesus proclaiming God's reign and then showing how such a message is good news through the healing works he does.

Luke's second such explicit connection between the proclaimed and embodied reign of God appears when Jesus sends out the twelve to imitate his work of proclaiming God's reign as good news proven in works to bring wholeness: "And calling together the twelve, he gave to them power [δύναμιν] and authority [ἐξουσίαν] over all demons and to cure [θεραπεύειν] diseases, and he sent them to proclaim [κηρύσσειν] the reign of God and to heal (ἰᾶσθαι) the sick" (Luke 9:1-2). Like the power Jesus himself wields, the power Jesus gives the twelve equips them not to dominate others but to ameliorate afflictions. Sending them out as

both healers and proclaimers of God's reign shows once more not only that God's power manifest in Jesus is peaceable and salubrious, but also that such wholesome power is not reserved for Jesus alone. Jesus' disciples emulate his use of power and, as he does, unite the work of healing with the announcement of God's reign. When the apostles return Jesus withdraws with them to Bethsaida, but the crowds follow and here Luke links Jesus' healing with his words about God's reign a third time: "he spoke to them about the reign of God, and those who needed healing he cured" (9:11). Luke makes the fourth explicit connection between the words and actions of God's reign when Jesus sends out the seventy, telling them to "cure the sick and say to them, 'the reign of God has come upon you'" (10:9). Jesus makes equally clear that the exorcisms he performs provide evidence of God's reign (11:20).

In summary, the healings and exorcisms Jesus performs provide the evidence that God's reign is revealed through Jesus and, similarly, characterize the kind of power God wields. The healings function not just as reality but also as a metaphor portraying the heart of God's reign. Even so, every metaphor has limits and requires interpretation. Jesus' healing power images God's reign, but the connection is not so unmistakable that those accompanying Jesus would understand without Jesus' additional teaching about God's reign. In keeping with his declarations at Nazareth and Capernaum, Jesus carries out his mission in speech as well as action: he will "proclaim good news to the poor" and "proclaim" God's reign as well as bring-it-as-good-news. He does so first on a "level place," where a diverse crowd consisting of people from all Judaea and Jerusalem, as well as Tyre and Sidon, gathers to hear him and be healed (6:17). Up to the moment Jesus begins teaching he is healing and exorcising people in the crowd (6:18). Luke draws Jesus as an uncontainable dispenser of health and wholeness: "power was going out of him and healing everyone" (6:19); Jesus' power is healing power.

Jesus' healing and exorcising ministry is fresh in his audience's mind when they first hear him speak about the reign of God. Like his audience, the reader may already understand something important about Jesus' ministry of healing and exorcism in relation to the reign of God—his is a constructive power. But the significance of Jesus' healing ministry emerges far more clearly on the other side of Jesus' teaching about God's reign.

2.3 God's Reign in Teaching

Jesus' teaching about God's reign juxtaposes "the poor" and "the rich," which becomes the predominate theme of his teaching throughout the rest of Luke. "Poor" and "rich" are comprehensible socio-economic and political categories that Jesus uses to illuminate God's character and power, which, in turn prescribe socio-political habits conformed to the pattern of God's reign.[50] As one might expect, Jesus' teaching begins with some good news for the poor.

2.3.1 ὑμετέρα ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ

Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοί, ὅτι ὑμετέρα ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (Luke 6:20). Several standard translations of this sentence read, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God,"[51] which obscures that the nominative feminine singular adjective ὑμετέρα appears where one would expect the genitive plural pronoun ὑμῶν. While "yours" is a perfectly acceptable translation, it does not capture the work of an adjective, namely, to modify a noun

[50] See again Green, *Theology*, for a helpful sketch of socio-economic strata in first century Judea and Galilee (3-11), and particularly the sense of "poor" and "rich" as social categories beyond mere economics (76-94).

[51] Specifically, the NASB, NRSV, NIV, and ESV.

(βασιλεία). Since ὑμετέρα is a pronominal adjective, it stands in for οἱ πτωχοί but modifies and agrees grammatically with βασιλεία, which allows "poor" to modify "reign of God."[52] The reign of God is like the poor, or for the poor, or functions on the same kind of power that the poor wield in order to persist through the hardships of their lives.

This is indeed good news for the poor: God's reign is congruent with something essential about their identity. Moreover, the reign of God will turn the deficiencies of their lives to surfeit: fullness instead of hunger, laughter instead of weeping, and a place at the center instead of marginalization (6:20-23). God's reign signals the end of the political order that has put the poor in their current marginal social position, in which they lack the material goods needed for their flourishing and cannot change their lot. What the poor do have, however, is the power of resilience and numbers that far outstrip the social classes above them, both of which enable the poor to persist—individually and collectively—in the face of great hardship.[53] Jesus' words suggest that something about how the poor deal with the world reflects how God deals with the world, and the world that flourishes under God's manner of governance bodes well for the poor whose life patterns already rely on a power like God's. Jesus' last beatitude places the poor on the side of the prophets who suffered for throwing their lot in with God's political order of justice while the leaders of God's people turned away to follow the gods and politics of other nations (6:22-23).

The bad news Jesus gives to the rich underscores the notion that, as in Mary's *Magnificat*, the good news for the poor is good not because they switch places with the rich in

---

[52] See BDAG, s. v. "ὑμέτερος."

[53] Green, *Theology*, 76-101, esp. 79-86.

a political system that remains basically unchanged. Rather, the system that keeps rich people rich and in power and poor people poor and on the margins—that system is coming to an end. The end of the system that marginalizes the poor and keeps the rich in power is good news for the poor and, at least initially, bad news for the rich: their finite wealth will run out, their comfort and laughter will turn to mourning, and the good reputation they enjoyed for how well they fit in the prevailing political order will come to naught when that order ends (6:24-26). The rich who are accommodated to the status quo Jesus likens to false prophets (6:26)—well regarded because they reinforce the system, but false prophets persist only as long as the political system they support. Jesus proclaims a politics inhospitable to the habits of the rich, which they have cultivated in a doomed system antithetical to God's reign.

Remarkably, Jesus directs these dramatically oppositional messages to the poor and rich in the same audience. Having finished his beatitudes and woes, Jesus seems aware that he may have lost some of his audience, especially some of the rich. If God's manner of reign eventually will prevail, they must wonder if there is anything they might do to avoid the grim existence Jesus predicts for them. And, indeed, he has a message for those who will listen—one that will land rather differently depending on whether one is closer to rich or to poor:

> But I say to you who listen, love your enemies:
> do good to those who hate you,
> bless those who curse you,
> pray about those who abuse you.
> To the one who strikes you on the cheek offer also the other,
> And from the one who takes your coat do not withhold even your undershirt.
> To everyone who asks of you, give
> And from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back.
> Even as you wish that people might do to you, do likewise to them.
> That is, if you love those who love you, how is that grace (χάρις) on your part?
> For even sinners love those who love them.

And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, how is that grace on your part?
For even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back a commensurate amount.
In any case, love your enemies,
and do good and lend without expecting return,
and your reward will be great,
and you will be children of the Most High,
because he is kind to the ungrateful (ἀχαρίστους) and the wicked. (6:27-36)

Jesus urges the poor to exercise a power of revolutionary subordination in relation to their oppressors, even to the point of being profligate with the few resources they have. Such practices by the poor aimed toward their oppressors have, in Kate Manne's words, "the potential to expose unjust power relations in a way that leaves the powers-that-be looking ridiculous, threatened, and petty."[54] For the poor, what Jesus urges them to do provides them with a subversive power easy to see in the pattern, ultimately of crucifixion and resurrection. Such inexorably gentle and resilient power is the power of God's reign, in which the poor are at home.

Jesus' words land rather differently for the rich, and they begin with bad news: the habits of the rich make them dramatically unfit for living under God's reign. That is not good news because the reign of God is real and, as it stands, they are apt to find themselves shut out. Additionally, the politics of God's reign will not flex around the rich. The adaptation will not be coming from God's side. For the rich to belong in the world that runs on God's expression of power will require dramatic changes on their part—not God's. Only via a dramatic shift in thinking and practice—repentance—can the rich accommodate themselves

[54] Manne, *Down Girl*, 245. Manne illuminates powerful case study of this logic of performing subversive subordination through a reading of Nobel Laureate Halldör Laxness's 1934 novel, *Independent People* (240-45).

to a political order that requires them to give up the wealth that keeps them privileged vis-à-vis the poor and gives them the power to dominate others. They will have to renounce retaliation and, instead, absorb hatred with love, give away their possessions to those in need, not expect a return on money they lend, and give to whoever asks something of them—even if it costs them everything. They must exchange habits of anxious grasping and careful accounting for habits of gracious giving. They must relinquish the wealth and social status that afford them privilege and the power to dominate. For the wealthy, these represent drastic changes; one neither gains nor retains wealth and status by acting so profligately with one's belongings or status markers. The good news, however, is that the rich can change to become suited to God's reign. To be told that they must repent of anxious greed and the will to dominate others and, instead, develop habits of profligate grace suggests that it is possible for them to do so. God has not despaired of them. Not surprisingly, the example of kindness and grace Jesus raises up for his audience to follow is God—the God who is "kind toward the ungrateful and the wicked" (6:35). He concludes, "Be merciful in the way that your father is merciful" (6:36).

2.3.2 God's Power as Resilience and Generosity

Jesus' respective messages for the poor and rich highlight in turn the resilient power by which God governs the world and the extravagant generosity with endless mercy that enable God to outlast evil and overcome it with goodness. God's kindness "to the ungrateful and the wicked" is also kindness "on" or "against" (ἐπί) them—it is a kindness exerted against these habits of being in order to transform those held captive by them and, ultimately, the entire system that functions on greedy hoarding and domination. Jesus' subsequent teaching

marks an elliptical path around these opposing foci: The reign of God is good news for the poor because their resilience reflects God's power and God's victory promises them release. By contrast, the reign of God confronts the rich with their need to repent of miserliness and of their participation in a system that oppresses the poor and wields a power antithetical to God's, and learn, instead, to practice habits of generosity and gentleness in imitation of God. By continuing to juxtapose poor and rich, the parables of the sower (8:4-15), the good Samaritan (10:27-35), the anxious rich man (12:16-21), the extravagant father (15:11-32), the shrewd manager (16:1-9), the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31), the persistent widow (18:1-8), and the nobleman with the minas (19:11-28), as well as Jesus' teaching encounters around these parables, all illuminate this essential feature of God's character and reign: A patient power that eschews violence and wins, instead, through resilience, persistence, and boundless beneficence.

2.3.2.1 The Extravagant Sower

God's extravagant generosity is the fundamental premise of the first parable Jesus tells under the heading of "proclaiming and spreading-as-good-news God's reign" (8:1). The parable of the sower portrays God wantonly sending out the word into the world, scattering seed on every kind of ground regardless of quality (8:4-8).[55] The sower spreads the seed "without expecting return" (μηδὲν ἀπελπίζοντες; cf. 6:35). Three out of four places the seed falls yield nothing, but one kind of ground does produce—even more abundantly than was sown (8:8). For Jesus to say, then, "Let the one having ears to hear, hear" (8:8), compounds

[55] Kenneth Carder, "The Extravagant Sower: Luke 8:4-8, 11-15," (a sermon preached at Cedar Grove United Methodist Church, Cedar Grove, NC; 22 Sept 2006). Carder was the first to draw my attention to the sower's extravagance in the parable.

the metaphor: be the good soil that grows the seed to maturity, i.e., be those with ears to hear the word represented in the seed. Jesus interprets the parable, revealing the "mystery of the reign of God" (8:10) to his disciples, underscoring via the second pair of soils how social location plays into people's receptivity to God's word.[56]

Jesus calls the thorny ground those who hear initially, but whose response is crowded out (συμπνίγονται) by anxieties (μεριμνῶν), wealth (πλούτου), and pleasures (ἡδνῶν) [8:14]. These "thorns" are the obstacles the rich and powerful face when attempting to inhabit God's reign: they wish to retain and so anxiously guard the comfort, pleasures, and power their wealth affords them, which leaves no room for the word of God. This thorn-growing system works for them; the thorns—that aptly represent the violence of their power—do not prick them. And these thorns compete directly with the seed of God's word; one cannot grow both thorns and good seed at once. The wholesome word meant to bring a nourishing harvest is choked out by an ideology that preserves its power through anxious hoarding and oppression; any initial sprouts grow spindly and stunted, never yielding mature fruit (οὐ τελεσφοροῦσιν). The habits of God's gentle reign cannot grow where habits of wielding violence and oppression are already firmly rooted. The life patterns of those who inhabit God's reign cannot flourish in those who allow the habits of an oppressive and violent politics to dominate their lives.

On the other hand, some of the seed of Jesus' parable falls "on ready soil" (ἐν καλῇ γῇ), which Jesus interprets as "those who, upon hearing the word absorb it in a ready and

[56] The first two soils Jesus describes—the hard-packed path and the shallow soil—do not appear to have particular markers of social location, but the second pair does.

good heart, and bear fruit in patient endurance" (8:15).[57] The soil most hospitable to the seed of God's word exercises the quality of "patient endurance" (ὑπομονῇ). Ascribing this characteristic to the most hospitable soil both extols ὑπομονῇ as an exemplary kind of power and draws a connection to the poor, whom Jesus described as particularly suited for God's reign (6:20). The power that allows the word to flourish is power suited to God's reign, and that power is patient persistence. The power that allows the poor to endure hunger, grief, and ridicule for standing with Jesus and the politics he represents, the power suited to the reign of God, is ὑπομονῇ. The soils from whom the seed of the word was snatched, where the seedling withered, or where the fruit did not mature—these soils lack ὑπομονῇ. To draw in a metaphor from Jesus' teaching in the next chapter, the people who allow the word to be taken from them, or wither rootless, or be crowded out by riches, comforts, and anxieties, they are like those who "put a hand to the plough and look back" and are, therefore, not "suited [εὔθετος] to the reign of God" (9:62). Jesus' interpretation of the parable ends on the word ὑπομονῇ, but the parable began with the sower who went out to sow, and without whose indiscriminate extravagance no seed would fall—either on ready soil or inhospitable ground. Though Jesus never explicitly identifies the sower, the seed as "the word of God" is suggestive. Perhaps Jesus means to point obliquely to himself as the sower, but there still remains the supplier—the seed originates with God, regardless of who the sower is. And so the parable begins with the extravagant God whose profligate kindness extends even to the ungrateful and the wicked.

[57] I have translated κάλος as "ready" because it occurs alongside ἀγαθός in 8:15, is used to describe both the soil and the heart. It seems appropriate to call "good" soil prepared soil (soil that is ready for seed), and a "ready" heart as a prepared and eager one.

2.3.2.2 The Compassionate Samaritan

The contrast between a high-status person's miserliness and a low-status person's generosity also forms the backdrop of the parable of the "good Samaritan" (Luke 10:30-37). The occasion for the parable arises when a "lawyer" (νομικός) approaches to test Jesus with a question, "Teacher, what must I get done [ποιήσας] in order to inherit eternal life [ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω]?" (10:25). The aorist participle, ποιήσας, implies he is not looking for an ongoing project, but a once-off box to check—something to "get done"—that ensures a recompense of life in the age to come. He reckons eternal life as something he can inherit if he accomplishes the right tasks. As a lawman, he resembles Hugo's Javert, whose moral calculus has room for receiving only and always what one deserves.[58] Jesus reminds him to keep the law that he knows so well, but also that keeping the law is no momentary task—to love God with his whole being and his neighbor as himself (10:26-28) requires continuous rather than once-for-all effort. Not content with Jesus' answer, and "wanting to justify himself," he asks, "and who is my neighbor?" (10:29). In both of his questions the lawyer seeks to limit the work of following God to a manageable task and the results to something he deserves. He seeks to reduce the requirements in a system of deeds and rewards.[59] If he must

[58] Javert takes this zeal for a scales-balanced version of justice to an extreme level, refusing even the mercy that would allow him to retain his occupation as a police inspector: "Mr. Mayor, I do not desire that you should treat me kindly; your kindness roused sufficient bad blood in me when it was directed to others. I want none of it for myself. … That is the sort of kindness that disorganizes society. Good God! It is very easy to be kind; the difficulty lies in being just" [Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. Isabel F. Hapgood (San Diego: Canterbury Classics, 2015), 183].

[59] cf. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997): "Whereas Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Plain had eliminated the lines that might be drawn between one's 'friends' and one's 'enemies,' this legal expert hopes to reintroduce this distinction. He does so by inquiring, 'Who is my neighbor?'—not so much to determine to whom he must show love, but so as to calculate the identity of those to whom he need not show love" (426).

love his neighbor in order to live, perhaps he can restrict who qualifies as a neighbor. His attitude suggests a degree of stinginess—if not with money, then with love; he seems to regard his love as a scarce commodity to be meted out as sparingly as possible. His question backfires when, in response, Jesus' parable of the merciful Samaritan expands the definition of "neighbor" about as wide as it could go and, to add insult to injury, upholds the despised foreigner as the exemplary keeper of the law.[60]

Robbers attack a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, stripping, beating, and leaving him half dead—they take all the material goods he had and endanger his life as well. The first two people to happen upon him, a priest and a Levite, ought to know very well the law's mandate to love their neighbor, but they see him and pass by without helping (10:30-32). The third passerby, a Samaritan—a foreigner far from Jerusalem's temple leadership—seeing the half dead man is "moved to compassion" (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη). Green attends incisively to the Samaritan's extravagant mercy that, unlike the circumscribed moral system the lawyer wishes to construct,

> "risks much more than could ever be required or expected. He stops on the Jericho road to assist someone he does not know in spite of the self-evident peril of doing so; he gives of his own goods and money, freely, making no arrangements for reciprocation (cf. 6:32-36); in order to obtain care for this stranger, he enters an inn, itself a place of potential danger; and he even enters into an open-ended monetary

[60] Green points out that Luke's narrative references to "Samaritans" rely for their intelligibility on "common knowledge of the traditional animosity characterizing Jew-Samaritan relations" (Green, *Luke* 404-5). See also H. G. M. Williamson. "Samaritans," *DJG* 724-28. Williamson explains, in brief, some of the original hostility between Samaritans and Jews: "From [Samaritans'] perspective, Israel's apostasy began as early as the time of Eli (eleventh century B.C.), when the nations' cultic center was removed from Gerizim to Shiloh (and thence eventually to Jerusalem) … The hostilities between Judah and her northern neighbor recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrate the antiquity of the division between the two groups" (725-26). See further Alan D. Crown, ed. *The Samaritans* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989).

> relationship with the innkeeper, a relationship in which the chance of extortion is high."[61]

The Samaritan practices costly generosity—disregarding his wealth and even his own safety. Moreover, he does so as a Samaritan to a Jew; he goes beyond love of neighbor to loving an enemy. The Samaritan greatly excels the story's priestly figures in both material benevolence and compassion. The lawyer correctly characterizes the Samaritan as "the one who did mercy [ὁ ποιήσας τὸ ἔλεος]" to the injured man (10:37). Jesus presents the Samaritan who demonstrates extravagant, costly mercy to an enemy as the one who truly fulfills the law, in contradistinction to the lawyer who is focused on determining what is the bare minimum.[62] Ending with the mandate, "go and do likewise [ποίει ὁμοίως]" enjoins the lawyer to inhabit a different ethical paradigm: Do not ask what lower limit of compassion, mercy, and material goods you must give in order to earn eternal life. Instead, imitate God, who expends boundless mercy even on enemies without expecting return.

---

[61] Green, *Luke*, 432.

[62] In the following chapter Jesus makes much plainer the criticisms implied here against the lawyer (11:37-52). Jesus excoriates Pharisees for greed and wickedness and lawyers for obscuring the heart of God's law so that they neither participate rightly in life with God nor allow others to do so. The Pharisees tithe herbs of "all kinds," but "pass over the justice and love of God" (11:42). They love to have places of honor and respect, but Jesus pronounces woe upon them for being dead inside (11:44). Jesus speaks woe against the lawyers for burdening people with a checklist of requirements they do not follow themselves even as they construct monuments to the prophets whom their ancestors killed (11:45-48). These pronouncements of woe, of course, echo the woes against the rich in the sermon on the plain, which end with an indictment of those who are held in high honor, because so their ancestors regarded the false prophets (6:26). Here, when Jesus admonishes the Pharisees for their love of money and status (11:43), the lawyers also feel *angesprochen*. But Jesus does not leave it there; he goes on to accuse the lawyers of complicity in their ancestors' murder of the true prophets. The hypocrisy, greed, and violence that Jesus condemns here stand in stark contrast to the gentle generosity of the God who is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked (6:35).

2.3.2.3 The Acquisitive Rich Man

The lawyer's grasping search for security via a moral checklist in Luke 10 reverberates in Jesus' parable of the rich man who built barns in a quest for security via material possessions (Luke 12:16-21). Jesus tells the parable to illustrate his warning to guard against πλεονεξία, which connotes insatiable acquisitiveness.[63] Through the parable of the rich man and the figural instruction that follows, Jesus returns to the recurring theme of his teaching but provides additional nuance: not wealth, per se, but covetous desire for it and placing one's trust in it make a person ill-suited to God's reign. Jesus introduces the man as already rich (πλούσιος) when his land produces so abundantly that he decides to tear down his barns and build larger ones to store the bountiful harvest and all his goods (12:16-18). He demonstrates an anxiety leading to selfish hoarding: he responds to a superabundant harvest not by giving away the excess, but expanding his ability to keep more for himself, and he tells his "soul" (ψυχή) that his hoard will grant him security, contentment, and peace of mind (12:19).

In the parable, God disabuses the rich man of his false sense of security; his riches will not prevent his soul (ψυχή) being taken from him (12:20), which echoes Jesus' teaching from Luke 9:25 on discipleship leading into God's reign, "For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world but lose or forfeit himself?" Jesus puts this question in contrast to those who take up their cross daily in discipleship and do not hold their lives more precious than living toward the reign of God (9:24-27). Jesus makes that lesson yet more explicit following the parable of the rich man, pointing to ravens and lilies as exemplars of the carefree attitude of

[63] BDAG, s. v. "πλεονεξία."

those who are well-suited to God's reign (12:24-27). Anxious striving after food and drink befits a Gentile politics (12:30); it does not characterize those who seek after God's reign (12:31). Here, as in the parable of the sower, wealth and anxiety go together and hinder a person's ability to take part in the world of God's reign. By designating anxious hoarding as the operative trait of the rich who are unfit for God's reign, the parable makes openhearted generosity the hallmark of a wealthy person who is fit for God's reign. It is not wealth, per se, but the inability to part with it that prevents a rich person from participating in the world governed by God's politics. God, after all, lacks nothing. A rich person may imitate God by giving away goods and lending money without expecting a return (cf. 6:35).

2.3.2.4 The Generous Father

Perhaps no parable of Jesus draws the portrait of God's profligate generosity more vividly than that of the generous father of two sons in Luke 15. As the story begins, at the younger son's request of his inheritance in advance, the father divides his property between his two sons (15:12). The younger son goes "to a far country" and squanders his inheritance, but then returns to the father's intemperate and celebratory forgiveness. Upon learning of his father's unqualified acceptance of his errant younger brother, the elder son feels slighted by his father's generosity toward his undeserving younger brother. He gives the impression of believing he has earned a celebration at least as extravagant as his brother's: "Look! So many years I slave for you, and never once neglect a command of yours, and to *me* never once have you given even a young goat so that I could celebrate with my friends! But when this son of yours—who's devoured your livelihood with prostitutes—when *he* returns, you kill the fatted calf for him!" (15:29). Apparently he has forgotten his own early receipt of his inheritance and

needs his father to remind him: "All that's mine is yours" (15:31). If the younger son is "wicked" (πονηρός) the elder is certainly "ungrateful" and "ungracious" (ἀχάριστος).

As in Jesus' teaching about "the ungrateful and the wicked [τούς ἀχαρὶστους καὶ πονήρους] in Luke 6:35, however, the parable emphasizes not mainly the character of the sons, but of the father—not the ungrateful and the wicked, but God who overcomes ingratitude and wickedness with mercy. The parable begins and ends with the father's generosity toward both his sons, and Jesus tells it third in a catena of three parables meant to illustrate God's relentless seeking of the lost and extravagant joy at sinners' repentance (15:10). The father seems to have endless resources and deserves the descriptor "prodigal" perhaps even more than his younger son.[64] Having already divided his property between his sons (15:11), he still can and does not hesitate to throw an extravagant party for the younger one who returns (15:22-24). At the end he can yet declare "all that's mine is yours" to his elder son (15:31). This father's wealth knows no bounds, and he distributes it accordingly—without a hint of parsimony or any sense of his resources' finitude. Like the sower who scattered the seed of God's word on every kind of ground whether receptive or not (Luke 8:4-8), God gives mercy even—as in the parable of the sower—to those who are unlikely to do any good with it.[65]

---

[64] In light of the apparently endless wealth the father has, Jesus' introducing him as "a father" instead of as a rich man (ἄνθρωπος πλούσιος), as in the parables of Luke 12:16-21, 16:1-8, and 16:19-31, distinguishes him from those men by his generosity. The rich men in those parables hoard their wealth; this father gives as if his wealth will never run out.

[65] Spending money on those who cannot repay one's gift and whose recognition affords one no special status is the theme of Jesus' teaching and parable of the banquet in Luke 14, esp. vv 12-25, a chapter that ends with Jesus pronouncing relinquishment of all one's goods as a prerequisite for following him as a disciple (14:33). When a dinner guest at the Pharisee's house says, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in God's reign" (14:15), Jesus tells a parable where the invited guests to a banquet make excuses not to come—one has bought land, another oxen, and a third has just been married (vv. 18-20). Their investment is clearly elsewhere than in friendship with the person giving the banquet—an image of those who are already "rich" or "full." So the person giving the banquet disinvites them in favor of "the poor, blind, crippled, and lame," who will appreciate the dinner (vv. 21-

Sometimes, despite the odds, that mercy effects change, but God gives it unconditionally. These parables present a picture of a God who delights at the one spot of ground that grows seed, the one coin and sheep found, the one son who returns, and the one sinner who repents, and who meets small repentance with yet more abundant grace. Through these parables, Jesus shows God absorbing humanity's every ingratitude and insult and overwhelming them with mercy in inexhaustible supply.

2.3.2.5 The Shrewd Steward

Without intermission, Jesus tells another parable beginning with yet another rich man (16:1-8)—this one no more generous than the previous man Jesus introduces as such (12:16).[66] In fact, at the start of the parable the rich man calls his steward to account for "squandering" (διασκορπίζων) the rich man's resources—the same verb used of the younger son in the previous parable (15:13; 16:1). Unlike the generous father, the rich man wants an accounting of where the money went (16:2). Foreseeing his dismissal and knowing his options are limited, the steward decides to use the master's money to make some friends to take care of him after he loses his job (16:3-4). One by one, he reduces the bills his master's debtors owe (16:5-7). His master's commendation of his shrewd action seems odd, given the master is defrauded in the process, but in the context of Jesus' original juxtaposition of poor and rich, the

24). The parable stands as yet another that contrasts poor and rich, showing the former's fitness for God's reign and the latter's unsuitability, echoing Jesus' teaching in 6:20-26.

[66] To underscore the connection between wealth and privilege, it is worth noting that each time Jesus introduces "a certain rich person" (ἄνθρωπός τις πλούσιος) the person turns out to be a man (12:16; 16:1, 19; 19:2). Jesus never tells a parable of a rich woman, or a rich leper, demoniac, or paralytic. Putting a rich (and healthy) man at the center of these parables underscores his privileged status. Although the concept of gender has, of course, not yet been introduced in Jesus' day, the privilege of maleness vis-à-vis femaleness is undeniable. The people whom Jesus identifies as having the greatest need of repentance tend to stand at several intersections of privilege, usually including gender.

commendation could appear as grudging respect for someone who won something more important than wealth by his clever use of money. If the poor are in any wise the gatekeepers of God's kingdom, or if the poor have a special insight into the way of life that fits in God's reign (cf. 6:20), then the rich do well to make friends with them. In this case, the poor are represented in the master's debtors. They have a real lack that the steward has opportunity to fill. This is a parable that tells the rich—or those who have access to the wealth, status, or power of the rich—to use those resources not first for their own gain, but for others. Beyond this short life, keeping wealth for oneself does no good; but use it for the good of others and the rewards are ongoing (16:9). Here as in the previous parables, the problem is not so much the possession of wealth but being ruled by it (always recognizing that having wealth usually leads to being ruled by it!). God and wealth are jealous masters demanding exclusive allegiance: "You cannot serve both God and wealth," Jesus concludes (16:13). The shrewd steward makes the right choice.

2.3.2.6 The Money-loving Pharisees

The "money-loving" (φυλάργυροι) Pharisees who are listening (16:14), however, stand on a precipice of irrevocably choosing wrong. They "scoff" at, or "ridicule" (ἐξεμυκτήριζον) Jesus for the antithesis he names between serving God and wealth. Luke does not provide the words, but one can imagine responses, "Here he goes with the hyperbole again! His expectations are unrealistic! How is anyone to live without money? Don't forget the great prosperity of Abraham, our father. Did he not serve God wholeheartedly?" Jesus is wrong; from their perspective, one *can* serve both God and money. They count themselves the proof—exemplary keepers of the law who, apparently, think they can dedicate themselves to

acquiring wealth without contradiction. At least, so it seems Luke presents them in light of the statement for which they mock Jesus and their characterization as φυλάργυροι; Jesus' response to their mockery reinforces that impression.

Jesus classifies them in the same group as the lawyer who accosted him in chapter 10, and the other Pharisees he castigated in chapter 11. The lawyer of chapter 10 sought to "justify" (δικαιόω) himself, and so asked the question meant to reduce the law's requirements of compassion (10:29). The Pharisees of chapter 11 clean their dishes inside and out, wash their hands, check every box of herb-tithing, and love thereby to have the respect of the people and places of honor, but inside are full of "greed" or "stolen goods" (ἁπαργή) and "wickedness" (πονηρία), and neglect practicing the kind of justice and love that truly fulfills God's law (11:37-44). Here, in chapter 16, Jesus notes that they "justify" (δικαιόω) themselves before human beings (16:15). The "justify" here echoes the lawyer from Luke 10 who knows that law entails loving one's neighbor but does not really want to do as the law requires, let alone love his enemy as he must in order to fulfill the law's true spirit and as demanded of those who would be true citizens in God's reign (10:25-37; cf. 6:32-35). The "before human beings" echoes the respect Pharisees hold because of their exemplary law-keeping in chapter 11. But Jesus deems the respect of other people worthless because the things human beings hold in high esteem (i.e., wealth and the kind of power and status it affords those who possess it) God holds in contempt (16:15).

By drawing connections with the lawyer of Luke 10 and Pharisees of Luke 11, Jesus' subsequent teaching for this audience explicates how these Pharisees have fallen short of the standards of "the law and prophets" by which they were to have been judged previously. "The

law and prophets until John; since then the reign of God is spread-as-good-news and everyone is compelled into it" (16:20).[67] The law and prophets are contiguous with God's reign, but the reign of God demands more than the law and prophets did. The law has not been reduced, rather, heightened (16:17-18).[68] If the Pharisees failed to meet the standard of loving their neighbors and caring for the vulnerable as the law and prophets command, they fall yet further short of the reign of God, which requires that they love even enemies (6:27, 35). Having failed to respond rightly to the law and the prophets, they demonstrate still greater unfitness for God's reign. Yet the reign of God is coming inexorably; a person cannot avoid it. Not to dwell in the sphere of God's reign is not to exist. The reign of God does not present the question "will I enter it?" but "will I be a fitting citizen there or an ill-fitting one?" So Jesus teaches the Pharisees that if they prioritize accumulating wealth over practicing compassion and thus fall short of the law and prophets, they fall still further short of God's reign and risk abandoning the way of God altogether. The only solution for them is to repent before it is too late. To

[67] Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, "Luke 16:16: The Good News of God's Kingdom Is Proclaimed and Everyone is Forced into It," *JBL* 127 (2008): 737-58. Ramelli argues persuasively via an extensive study of the verb βιάζομαι that it should be read as a divine passive in Luke 16:16: Ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται μέχρι Ἰωάννου· ἀπὸ τότε ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίζεται καὶ πᾶς εἰς αὐτὴν βιάζεται. "The law and the prophets [were] until John; from then the reign of God is spread as good news, and everyone is compelled into it" (my translation). While such "compulsion" might appear to undermine presentation of God's reign as expressed in non-coercive power, it does so only insofar as God created the world without its consent. The sphere of God's reign is the world God created.

[68] Jesus' particular example of the law not being the least reduced, namely, about disallowing a man to divorce his wife and marry another, could be both generally and more specifically important. He could be just pulling out any example of a law that is heightened in the reign of God, but the specific example is interesting in light of Luke's sensitivity to the dynamics of social location. Jesus' phrasing of the commandment, addressed to men about wives, implies that women had no right of divorce, and so a heightening of the prohibition against divorce provides socio-economic security for women whose husbands might wish to be shut of them for selfish reasons. Given that the parable with which Jesus follows blames a rich man for neglecting the sick, poor, vulnerable man at his gate, a heightened law to protect the more vulnerable person in the relationship might be the point of using that particular example from the law.

illustrate the point, Jesus tells a parable of yet another rich man (ἄνθρωπος πλούσιος) and the beggar, Lazarus, at his gate (16:19-31).

2.3.2.7 Lazarus and the Rich Man

Jesus introduces this rich man's selfish extravagance and luxurious living exaggerated to the point of absurdity—clothed in purple and fine linen and celebrating lavishly daily (16:19). The chasm between his sumptuously indulgent lifestyle and the degraded misery of poor, hungry, sick-with-sores Lazarus at his gate compares to the unbridgeable span that separates him and Lazarus when they die: angels carry Lazarus to be with Abraham, and the rich man is buried and goes to Hades (16:19-24).[69] Even in his torment, the rich man retains his sense of entitlement; he asks Abraham to send Lazarus to him with a drink of water to relieve his suffering.[70] When Abraham responds the rich man learns that the gulf that separated him and Lazarus to the rich man's benefit in life now does so to his disadvantage. The reversal promised in Jesus' early teaching comes true in this parable: Being rich at Lazarus' direct expense, he received all the goods he could expect in life; none remain for after his death (cf. 6:24-26). And Lazarus, having been poor, sees his fortunes reversed (cf. 6:20-21). Now the rich man has no claims on Lazarus; moreover, Abraham informs him, the distance between them remains impassable (16:25-26). Thus put off in his own behalf, the rich man still thinks to command Lazarus as a witness[71] to warn his five brothers who, presumably, practice a

[69] cf. Green, *Luke*, 605.

[70] cf. Green, *Luke* 608.

[71] The verb here is διαμαρτύρομαι, which, as Green points out, appears frequently in Acts to describe "missionary proclamation — 2:42; 8:25; 10:42; 18:5; 20:21, 23, 24; 23:11; 28:23" (Green, *Luke*, 609 n. 347).

similar lifestyle of excess and entitlement devoid of compassion (16:27-28). Abraham demurs a second time on Lazarus' behalf: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them" (16:29), implying that his brothers do not follow the commands of scripture just as the rich man did not. But should a messenger visit from the dead, so the rich man claims, his brothers will repent (16:30). Abraham counters, "If they do not heed Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead" (16:31).

Telling this parable to the Pharisees in the context of criticizing the covetousness that leads them to prize what God despises casts them as the rich man's brothers. The parable starkly illustrates a person's inability to serve both God and money (16:13) and urges the Pharisees to reckon with their propensity to seek money and status at the expense of following truly the law they claim to know and keep so assiduously.[72] Like the rich man's brothers, they have Moses and the prophets to guide them. They may still repent, and only if they do will they not find themselves on the wrong side of God's reign. If they cannot be faithful to the little demanded by the law and the prophets' requirement that they be openhanded with the poor, they will certainly fall short of the reign of God's demand that they give away their goods even at cost to themselves (cf. 6:29-31; 16:10). Jesus' earlier question lands firmly on the Pharisees: "If you have not been trustworthy with the unjust wealth, who will entrust to you true riches?" (16:11). By showing their captivity to acquisitive desire, the Pharisees prove themselves unfit for God's reign.

[72] As Green points out, "the Scriptures of Israel are replete with texts speaking to the axiomatic responsibility of the community of God's people to care for the poor. …[I]n neglecting the poor, they have disregarded the will of God so clearly expressed in the Scriptures" (Green, *Luke*, 610 incl. n. 351).

That Jesus addresses them at all demonstrates his hope for them; this life is the theater wherein the rich may yet repent of oppressing the poor. And he tells them where they must begin, namely, with following the law they study with such devotion, which entails serving God wholeheartedly and disowning wealth and the privilege it affords as unworthy masters. Jesus' teaching of the Pharisees, bracketed by the parables of the shrewd manager and of the rich man and Lazarus, commends using money in a way that dissolves the unholy marriage of wealth and conventional power. In God's reign wealth provides comfort to the needy. To participate in God's reign the rich must repent of their service to "mammon" and, like the generous father and the shrewd manager, squander their wealth for others' benefit in a manner that indicates contempt for hierarchy and hoarding.

Jesus has no illusions that such an about-face will come easily to his audience. Indeed, the last words of the parable anticipate the Pharisees' ongoing rejection of both their scriptures' ethical teaching and Jesus—even after he does rise from the dead (16:31). But here the Pharisees do not respond at all; the parable has an open ending and so does the context. Whether they will repent or not remains unresolved, but repent they must if they are to dwell in the world of God's reign. When they inquire of Jesus the timeline of God's kingdom coming, he responds that God's reign does not come with observable signs (17:20-21). It is no cataclysmic spectacle. Rather, God's reign is present now, and there is no escaping it (16:16); "the reign of God is among you" (17:21) ready or not.[73] The question is not when the

[73] On the current presence of God's reign, including an argument for translating "ἐντός" as "among" in Luke 17:21 as above, see Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 134-36.

reign of God is coming, but when—or if—people like the money-loving Pharisees will repent and become fit for the world of God's reign.

2.3.2.8 The Persistent Widow

Those who are ready for God's reign may well experience God's hopeful patience with an unrepentant world as justice delayed or denied. To remind his disciples not to despair of God's promised justice, Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow (18:1-8). While most of Jesus' parables after his sermon on the plain focus on the behavior of the rich, here a woman with little social status or power takes center stage as the exemplar of someone who rightly wields persistence and resilience.[74] She contends with a judge who has no reverence for God or regard for people and relentlessly demands justice (18:2-3). Even this ungodly judge responds to the widow's persistence because he knows she will not cease bothering him until she gets the justice she requires. In the parable, the widow does not seek justice from a different judge, or bring a delegation with her, or threaten the judge with violence. She merely keeps insisting on her right to justice to the point that the judge does what she wants just to keep from being bothered further. Jesus addresses this parable to his disciples in order to assure them that God hears their prayers for justice and will answer them. At the same time, the parable commends the power of persistence—particularly in the pursuit of justice. The short parable suggests that the native power of the poor serves them well in seeking justice

[74] The widow is not the only exemplar of discipleship befitting the reign of God between 17:11-19:10 and, as Green observes, the "list of candidates is instructive: a leper, Samaritan, foreigner (17:11-19); a widow who exemplifies God's 'chosen ones who cry to him day and night' (18:1-8); a toll collector (18:9-14); infants, little children (18:15-17); and a toll collector and sinner (19:1-10)." Green, *Luke* 617. Everyone in the list has a low ascribed status. Green points out that Jesus' introduction of judge and widow in turn sets them up "as occupants of different ends of the continuum of power and privilege" (639), which highlights how this parable fits in Jesus' ongoing juxtaposition of poor and rich.

from God as well as from human rulers who do not feel compelled to act justly out of reverence for God or regard for public opinion (18:6-8). Jesus teaches his followers that persistence wins justice, which is certainly a different sort of power than the rich wield, but is very much like the power Jesus has commended from the beginning of his ministry and continues to teach as he proceeds toward Jerusalem.

The disparity in social status between the widow and the judge compares to the distance between the real life figures of little children (παιδία) and ruler (ἄρχων) whom Jesus encounters on one of the few occasions when Jesus does extended teaching about the reign of God without using a parable. The little children, for whom Jesus must intercede for them to be allowed even to approach (18:16), and the ruler, who comes to Jesus without hindrance (18:18), stand as antipodal exemplars of fitness for the reign of God. The contrast between the little children and the rich ruler, therefore, illuminates essential features of God's reign, particularly with regard to the power and generosity by which God governs.

2.3.2.9 Little Children vs. Rich Ruler

Jesus intervenes with his disciples to allow little children to approach him, "because of such character as these (τοιούτων) is the reign of God" (18:16). Jesus' comparison here recalls his earlier claim that the reign of God is for or like the poor (6:20), but as on that occasion, Jesus does not specify exactly what trait of little children resembles God's reign. His follow-up sentence escalates the ambiguity: ὅς ἂν μὴ δέξηται τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς παιδίον, οὐ

μὴ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς αὐτήν (18:17).[75] The sentence construction, in which παιδίον can be either nominative or accusative, implies the elision of a clarifying clause. Here are the three most plausible ways of filling in the blanks: 1) "Whoever does not welcome the reign of God *when* [he is] a little child will never enter into it," or 2) "Whoever does not welcome the reign of God *as* [he might welcome] a little child…" or 3) "Whoever does not welcome the reign of God *in the same way that* a little child [might welcome it]…" Each of these readings accommodates the idea that the reign of God is for or like children or the childlike, so the previous sentence (18:16) does not adjudicate between them. But the story that follows immediately (with the conjunction καί!) contrasts the little children with the very rich ruler who grieves when he hears what Jesus names as prerequisites for his entry into God's reign (18:18-25), which illuminates the political dynamics of God's reign.

Scarcely has Jesus finished saying, "…will never enter into [the reign of God]" when "a certain ruler" (which sounds much like an introduction to one of Jesus' parables of rich men, cf. 12:16; 16:1; 16:19) "put a question to him saying, 'Good Teacher, what must I get done that I might inherit eternal life?'" (18:18). Apart from the addition of "Good" to the title of "Teacher," the ruler phrases his question exactly as did the lawyer in Luke 10:25, which encourages the reader to view him through the same hermeneutical lens; like the lawyer, this ruler appears to seek a finite task list he can complete and thereby merit life in the age to come (cf. Luke 10:25). Additionally, Green plausibly reads his address to Jesus, "Good Teacher," as

[75] Luke agrees with Mark (10:15) to the letter on these words from Jesus, where Matthew has an alternative version and includes it not in the same incident (Matt 19:13-15), but a chapter earlier (Matt 18:3).

evidence that "the ruler is engaged in a word game deeply rooted in concerns of status."[76] The status concerns in the ruler's address could well link him to the Pharisee in the short parable Jesus tells between the story of the widow and the approach of the children. Jesus contrasts the high status law-abiding Pharisee who "trusts in his own righteousness and views others with contempt" (18:9) with the humble tax collector; the latter, and not the former, goes back to his home "justified" (18:10-14). The Pharisee who classifies himself as "good" reckons his status highly; the ruler's address to Jesus suggests an effort to set terms where the ruler and Jesus are both in the "good" category, and are both close to completing every task on the "what to do in order to inherit eternal life" checklist. By reserving "goodness" for God (18:19), Jesus refuses from the outset to allow the conversation to become a status transaction governed by, in Green's words, "the standard values to which the ruler has already paid homage."[77]

In addition, since this ruler, like the lawyer of Luke 10:25-37, seeks "eternal life," the reader should expect Jesus to reroute the ruler's desire along similar lines as he does for the lawyer—beyond keeping the law and toward the heightened demands of God's reign (cf. 16:16). In response to the ruler's question about inheriting eternal life Jesus tells him what he must do in order to become a fit citizen of God's reign. The life that the ruler seeks requires him to adapt to the political dynamics of God's reign, and Jesus tells him how.

Jesus begins by reminding the ruler of some specific aspects of the law that are nothing new: five commandments that enjoin God's people to community responsibility (18:20)—love

[76] Green, *Luke*, 655.

[77] Green, *Luke*, 655.

of neighbor, in the parlance the lawyer invoked and Jesus affirmed in Luke 10:27-28.[78] Jesus does not contradict the ruler when he claims to have kept all these commandments since his youth (18:21). He merely points out that despite having kept these commandments, the ruler still lacks something that can be amended by his selling everything he has (πάντα ὅσα ἔχεις), distributing the proceeds to the poor (which will gain him treasure in heaven), and following Jesus (18:22). These requirements grieve the ruler because he is "exceedingly rich," πλούσιος σφόδρα, (18:23).

Green interprets Jesus' words to the ruler—particularly "the disposition of material goods on behalf of the poor" as "an interpretive expansion of the Ten Commandments" and as "a behavioral definition of the community of Jesus' followers," emphasizing that "Jesus' message does not foreground poverty as an ascetic ideal; he does not counsel simple renunciation. Rather, the disposition of one's material goods is for the sake of the poor."[79] Green parses the significance of such an act:

> First, it embraces the biblical concern for the poor (e.g., Exod 23:11; Lev 19:9-16; Deut 15:1-18, et al.). Second, it participates in the orientation of Jesus' Spirit-anointed ministry toward "the poor" — those who live on the margins of society for reasons of economic destitution and/or status deprivation (see above on 4:18-19). Third, it signifies a thoroughgoing rejection of concerns with status and the predominant system of giving and receiving tied to enhancing one's honor in the community and to augmenting one's power over others. Such giving as that counseled by Jesus must be without expectation of return since its recipients are those incapable of reciprocation. Fourth,

[78] Green uses the language of "kinship and community relations," which likewise tends toward "love of neighbor" (Green, *Luke*, 655).

[79] Green, *Luke*, 656.

> it denotes identification with Jesus, who possesses no home and for whom hospitality is never assured (9:58).[80]

While none of Green's theses about the significance of Jesus' mandate completely misses the mark, because he interprets the significance of Jesus' prescription before reaching the end of the encounter, Green places the emphasis of the episode on the wrong point. Jesus enjoins renunciation because the ruler needs a transformed vision and practice with respect to questions of status and power. Status and power do not work the same way in the reign of God, which should already be in the reader's mind because of Jesus' words about children immediately before the ruler arrived. The ruler's renunciation may not be for the sake of an "ascetic ideal," but it is far from incidental to what Jesus asks of him—it is supposed to have an effect on him as well as on the poor who receive his goods. Jesus does not tell the man he may retain part of what he possesses as long as he gives something to the poor; Jesus clearly says, "everything you have" (18:22). Complete renunciation of his goods is the "active ingredient" in the remedy Jesus prescribes for the "exceedingly rich" ruler that is supposed to enable his entry into the world of God's reign and, thereby, eternal life. The prescription for entering God's reign is confirmed as such when Jesus, seeing the man's sadness, says, "With what difficulty do those who have riches (χρήματα) proceed (εἰσπορεύονται) into the reign of God; for it is easier for a camel to go into (εἰσελθεῖν) the eye of a needle than for a rich person to go into (εἰσελθεῖν) the reign of God" (18:24-25). The episode of the ruler begins with the little children who share the character of God's reign; it ends with Jesus placing the second bookend: the rich enter God's reign only with great difficulty. In this light, the whole encounter

[80] Green, *Luke*, 656.

reads best as a characterization of God's reign: the reign of God is like little children; it is not like—or for—the rich.

This contrast between the rich ruler and the little children, and the fact that Jesus' remedy for the rich ruler is to strip him of wealth, suggests that the characteristics that make children fit for God's reign are those traits they possess exactly because they have no possessions. Children have no wealth of their own, no concept of money or hierarchical social status, no power to coerce, no social status or cachet of their own, no particular ascribed respect or authority, and no independence. Infant children are among society's most vulnerable members; people do not fear the consequences of crossing them. Their power derives from their caregivers' commitment to their wellbeing—they may cry persistently until their needs are met (like the widow of 18:1-8), but in that they are also subject to neglect. Even the power of persistence will only get them so far. But these traits make them suited to God's reign, because God is pleased to give God's children what they need when they persistently ask (13:30-34; 18:7-8).

By contrast to the children, the exceedingly rich ruler's high social status and privilege has already been introduced by his ease in gaining access to Jesus and underscored by the acknowledgement of his great wealth (18:18, 23). Indeed, as Green suggests, "Jesus' answer to the ruler's question takes seriously how wealth is intricately spun together with issues of status, power, and social privilege."[81] His wealth anchors his power, privilege, and security within the established social system, and his continuing participation in that system perpetuates it. What Jesus asks of him, therefore, is not merely renunciation of personal wealth and status; Jesus

[81] Green, *Luke* 656.

also asks him to reject the unjust social structure that attaches wealth to status, power, and privilege. Especially in light of Jesus' words about a person's inability to serve both God and wealth, Jesus' remedy for the ruler resembles cutting off an addict's supply. Jesus wants this rich ruler to demonstrate a contempt for wealth that will prove his exclusive loyalty to God (cf. 16:13) and his fitness for God's economy of grace. In that economy, the only way to get on well with wealth is to give it away profligately—thoughtlessly, without expectation of a return (6:21-35). Jesus knows how difficult it is to relinquish conventional power and serve only God if one retains wealth (16:10-13). The contrast between children and the rich ruler shows that the reign of God does not function by using wealth to dominate, control, or manipulate others. Rather, Jesus teaches, God's reign runs on persistence and profligacy.

The end of this encounter marks the beginning of a transition between Jesus' teaching about God's reign and a narrative turn that focuses less on what Jesus teaches and more on how he presents and embodies God's manner of reign through his way of being in a hostile world. The despairing remark of those who hear Jesus' words to the ruler, "Then who can be saved (σωθῆναι)?" (18:26), allows Jesus a response that echoes his mother's question about his improbable conception and Gabriel's response: What is impossible with human beings is possible with God (1:34-37; 18:27). The same power that brought about Jesus birth will affirm the truth of the way of renunciation through Jesus' resurrection. Jesus promises that no one who has left behind possessions, family, or security for the sake of participating in God's reign will fail to receive complete recompense and life eternal besides (18:29-30). Jesus exemplifies this way of renunciation already in his dependence on others and apparent homelessness (8:3; 9:58), but what will happen to him in Jerusalem completes his pattern—he will relinquish even

his life, but God will restore it. Jesus explains exactly this sequence of events to his disciples (18:31-33), but they fail utterly to understand (18:34) what he has been explaining and showing to them throughout his entire ministry.

Jesus himself declares that the reign of God is revealed in his healings and exorcisms (9:11; 10:9). These acts demonstrate what profound power Jesus has over the physical world and illuminate his purpose in wielding such power. If Jesus wished to use his ability to manipulate the physical world merely in order to draw notice or wreak havoc, presumably he could. He commands wind and water (8:25) not in order to destroy anything or create a spectacle but, rather, to save his disciples' lives. When some Samaritans refuse Jesus hospitality on his journey toward Jerusalem his disciples want to call down fire from heaven on them. But Jesus rebukes his disciples; he does not use his power to incinerate those who insult him (9:51-54).[82] Apparently, Jesus could lay waste to the world or force people to submit to him, but he uses his power to bring life rather than death. Jesus defuses the storm's violence and brings health and sanity to those afflicted with demons and diseases. For Jesus consistently to use his power over the physical world in order to heal exemplifies the power God wields in the world: Like God, Jesus uses his power to create and construct rather than destroy, to bring life rather than death. And, like God, Jesus spends his power to heal like an inexhaustible

[82] Hays reads this passage against the backdrop of Jesus' transfiguration, which links him to Elijah, but here Jesus presents more of a contrast to Elijah: "Since the great Elijah had summoned fire from heaven to annihilate his adversaries (1 Kgs 18:36-39; 2 Kgs 1:10-12), Jesus' disciples wrongly assume he will do the same. Their question, 'Do you want us to call fire to come from heaven and consume them?' (Luke 9:54), closely echoes the language of 2 Kings 1:10, 12. Firmly rejecting their suggestion, Jesus rebukes them. Some later manuscripts then add an additional word of instruction: 'And he said, "You do not know what Spirit you belong to, for the Son of Man did not come to destroy human lives but to save them"' (Luke 9:55-56). On text-critical grounds, this is almost surely not part of what Luke originally wrote, but it represents an early and theologically astute interpretation of Luke's portrait of Jesus. In this story, he appears as the anti-Elijah, the bearer of salvation rather than violent retribution" (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 239).

supply; he heals all who approach or ask, never denying anyone. The benevolence of Jesus' power and his generous spending of it enact what he teaches—both explicitly and in parables—about the reign of God and so illuminate the character of God's power. Jesus fulfills his two-fold promise to "preach and bring-as-good-news the reign of God" (8:1).

Jesus' teaching about the reign of God throughout Luke's Gospel puts into words what his healing ministry demonstrates: the reign of God functions on the power of resilient, inexhaustible, unrelenting, and indiscriminate benevolence. In teaching about God's reign, Jesus presents God's power as imaged in the poor's resilience and persistence (6:20; 8:1-15), but extravagantly and abundantly merciful in ways that befit God's infinite resources (6:35). In his parables Jesus commends people who give away wealth with profligate disregard for supply limits, little or no concern for personal gain, and without considering the deserts of the recipients (8:1-15; 10:25-37; 15:11-32; 16:1-9). God reigns through the power of mercy extended to the oppressed and oppressors according to their respective needs for succor and repentance (10:25-37; 16:10-31; 18:18-30; 19:1-10). In Jesus' teaching, the reign of God is the way of wholesome peace glimpsed in comparisons to mustard seeds and leaven in dough (13:18-20)—its power seems small but grows to impressive heights or transforms everything it touches. It does not consult those whom it encompasses any more than a seed chooses to grow or a person elects to be born (10:11; 16:16), and yet it emphatically rejects practices of domination and violence (19:11-28; 22:24-28). In light of Jesus' healing and teaching ministries, "peaceable" is at once apt and far too pale a term to describe the power of God's reign. God exercises a resilient, gentle, relentless power that can absorb an ocean of evils and overwhelm it with constructive compassion and mercy—this power can turn death into life. This is the power that animates Jesus and that he exercises from the beginning of his ministry in

Capernaum up to the moment of his death in Jerusalem, and that God confirms as true by raising Jesus from the dead.

Just before Jesus enters Jerusalem, knowing that trial and death await him, two key encounters and one last parable recapitulate Jesus' presentation of the reign of God in his ministry: he restores a blind man's sight, recalling his promise of 4:18 and the spree of healings with which he began bringing good news of God's reign (18:35-43; cf. 4:31-5:26; 6:6-19); he brings chief tax collector Zacchaeus to a repentance befitting the profligacy toward the oppressed that Jesus requires of the rich who seek God's reign (19:1-10)[83]; and he tells a parable that accentuates the outlines of his earlier teachings on the kingdom of God by drawing a contrasting portrait—a country dominated by a harsh, greedy, and vengeful king (19:11-27).

2.4 God's Reign in Parody

Jesus tells this particular jarring parable to his audience (presumably still including his disciples) "because he was close to Jerusalem and since it seemed to them that the reign of God was about to be made manifest without delay" (19:11).[84] Gabriel's promise, in Luke 1:32, that Jesus would have David's throne (which was, of course, in Jerusalem) and the pervasive royal language and imagery in and after the parable suggest that Jesus' audience rightly expects

---

[83] On the social status of Zacchaeus, Tannehill writes, "Jesus has spoken harsh words about the rich. Zacchaeus is rich; he is also a *chief* tax collector, not one of the underlings like Levi (5:27) who sit at toll booths helping people like Zacchaeus rich …. These mixed signals prevent the audience from making a quick judgment about Zacchaeus based on the narrative so far. He may not fir the previous image of responsive tax collectors" (Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 275). See further Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbach, *Social-science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993), 415; and Green, *Luke*, 668-69.

[84] Cf. Green, *Luke*: "According to recent events, the identification of disciples in Jesus' audience is particularly apropos, since Jesus had anticipated that they would be concerned with seeing the coming kingdom (17:20-37) and because of their ongoing miscomprehensions regarding the nature of the events awaiting Jesus in Jerusalem (18:31-34)" (677).

the imminent revelation of God's reign through Jesus in Jerusalem, but they are unprepared to recognize it as such. What Jesus describes in the parable might be exactly what his audience expects of messianic kingship; indeed, many a modern scholar, partly by conflating this story with Matthew's parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30), has taken Luke's version as a straightforward presentation of Jesus' ultimate victory and eschatological vengeance. But taken in its integrity and Lukan context, the parable much more persuasively sketches a portrait and critique of Rome's first century client kings in Judea. The parable dramatically contravenes the image of God's reign that Jesus has presented since he said, "Blessed are the poor, for like you is the reign of God" (6:20). It celebrates the power of domination (19:12, 14, 15), wealth acquired from others' labor (19:13), enriching the rich and further impoverishing the poor (19:24-26), and violent retribution upon one's enemies (19:27). Jesus tells this parable not as a comparison to the reign of God, as he sometimes has done (13:18-23); rather, this is an anti-reign-of-God parable. Jesus tells this parable as a parody of God's reign rather than a paradigm—like a film negative of how God's reign will be revealed in how he enters Jerusalem and in what will befall him there.[85]

---

[85] Reading the entire parable as a parody or inverse paradigm via parallels with first century Judean client kings is unusual but not unprecedented. A compelling recent exemplar is Richard B. Vinson, "The Minas Touch: Anti-kingship Rhetoric in the Gospel of Luke," *PRSt* 35 (2008): 69-86, following and expanding on the reading of R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Leander E. Keck, NIB 9 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 361-64. Culpepper introduces commentary on this parable by noting that it "contrasts the coming of the kingdom of God with the typical pattern of the establishment of a political kingdom. Thus the greedy and vengeful king of this parable serves as an antitype for Jesus as he enters Jerusalem as 'the king who comes in the name of the Lord' (19:38)" (361). Vinson begins by summarizing the more common reading of the parable "as an allegory of the Passion Narrative. Jesus, who is acclaimed king by his disciples but rejected by the leaders of Jerusalem, will have to go away to receive his kingdom from his Father. Read in this way, the Parable affirms Jesus as King and counsels patience for Jesus' followers: the Kingdom will not appear immediately, but eventually, and Jesus will return to reward his diligent slaves, to punish the sluggards, and to slaughter his enemies" (69). Vinson then enumerates the scholarly works that present this interpretation: Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 28A:1223; Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 307-10; Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* rev. ed. (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2002), 207-09; Jack T. Sanders, "The Parable of the Pounds," *TS* 42 (1981): 660-68; Arland J.

Jesus introduces the parable's central figure as "a certain man of noble birth [εὐγενὴς]" who traveled, like the younger son of Luke 15 "into a far country [εἰς χώραν μακρὰν] in order to acquire for himself a kingship [λαβεῖν ἑαυτῷ βασιλείαν] and then return" (19:12). The Greek included above reveals the sentence's ambiguities, but taken together, the pieces fit to portray a person of high status who goes into Gentile territory in order to gain self-serving royal power, which he can then impose on his homeland. Before departing, he entrusts his slaves with ten "minas"[86] and orders them, as Green translates, to "turn a profit" (πραγματεύομαι) while he is gone (19:13).[87] Green explains that this translation reflects the sense of "exploitation in the service of managing profitably the capital at one's disposal"; "to do business" is too weak a translation.[88] The nobleman apparently has no compunctions

Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 283-90; Joachim Jeremías, *The Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribners, 1954), 59-60; E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, NCB (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 221-23; I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 700-02. By contrast, Green argues that Jesus should not be associated with the nobleman's "harshness and exploitative practices. … Such qualities do not comport well with the Lukan picture of Jesus thus far in the narrative!" (Green, *Luke*, 676). Green identifies the parable as essentially ironic but stops short of treating it as a wholesale parody. Having already noted key characteristics that configure Jesus and the parable's nobleman as opposites Green leaves open the question of whether Jesus is "the heir apparent," suggesting, "Those who hear the parable are left to take sides" (677). But the persuasiveness of Green's case for reading the parable as a partial image of the upset the reign of God entails relies, in part, on his use of "faithful" and "unfaithful" to describe the responses of nobleman's slaves charged with "turning a profit," which Green himself acknowledges "refers to exploitation in the service of managing profitably the capital at one's disposal" (678). Even the nobleman never calls them faithful or unfaithful, but "good" (ἀγαθός) or "bad/wicked" (πονηρός) (see 19:17, 22, respectively). Vinson cites, further, Luise Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), noting that "the traditional allegorical interpretation encounters difficulties when 'it describes the economic and political structure of an exploitative kingship' (182-87)" (70).

[86] A mina amounts to about four months wages for a day laborer, according to Green, *Luke*, 678.

[87] Green, *Luke*, 678.

[88] Green, *Luke*, 678.

against profiting from his slaves' labor and conscripting them to participate in exploitative investment practices.

Since he is a ruler who profits by exploitation, Jesus may intend to portray the hatred his country's citizens nurture toward him as well founded.[89] At any rate, they send a delegation after him to contest the right to rule he seeks (19:14). Upon returning with his royal authority he summons his slaves to learn the results of his investment and confronts the citizens who attempted to thwart his bid for power (19:15-27). To the slaves who have turned a profit he gives commensurate authority over cities, but one slave has seen through him and refused to fill the nobleman's coffers with money the nobleman did not earn himself: "Lord, look, here is your mina, which I was keeping wrapped in a cloth. For I was afraid of you, because you are an austere man: you withdraw (αἴρω) what you did not deposit and reap what you did not sow" (19:20-21). The nobleman does not dispute this description of himself; indeed, he shamelessly confirms it, and then punishes the slave for failing to invest the money profitably, telling the bystanders to take away this slave's one mina and give it to the one who has ten (19:22-24). The bystanders protest the nobleman's treatment of the poor slave—the other one already has ten minas, they say (19:25), implying the injustice in giving him more while taking it from the other. But the nobleman enlightens them about how his economy runs: The haves will be given more and the have-nots will be stripped (αἴρω) even of what they have (19:26). In this case, the "haves" are those who participated in the nobleman's unjust system and profited by it (19:16-19). The citizens who did not want his reign in the first place, however, will not fare

[89] See further Vinson, "Minas Touch," 74-75.

so well. He names them his enemies (ἔχθρους) and orders them brought there and slaughtered before (ἔμπροσθεν) him (19:27). There ends the parable with no interpretive comment. Jesus abruptly proceeds onward (ἔμπροσθεν) to Jerusalem (19:28).

This parable illumines God's reign not by presenting a final paradigmatic portrait but an anti-paradigm. In Jesus' teaching, God's reign spells an end to high status and dominance for the exalted rich (as this nobleman doubtless is[90]) and comfort and wholeness for the lowly poor (1:52; 6:20-27). In light of Jesus' other parables, the nobleman is an anti-hero. He contrasts starkly with the generous father of Luke 15, whose only transactions with material wealth involve giving it away or using it for others' benefit (15:12, 22-24, 31-32), and deals in extravagant mercy rather than vengeance (15:22-24). Unlike the compassionate Samaritan, the nobleman exhibits no love or mercy toward his neighbors, much less his enemies (10:33-36). Jesus has enjoined those who hear him to guard against greedy acquisitiveness (12:15), but this nobleman unapologetically desires more and does not mind exploiting people—slaves—in order to increase his wealth (19:13-23). Those who do not serve his interests he crushes, either economically (19:24-26) or with violent slaughter (19:27). In his economy the poor and hungry will be deprived still further, and the plenitude of the rich will increase (19:26), rather than the reverse, as in God's reign (6:20-21; 24-25). Whereas the sower of Luke 8 spreads seed extravagantly and indiscriminately (8:5-8), this nobleman reaps what he did not sow; he takes what does not rightfully belong to him and—with his newly acquired "kingly" power—punishes or kills anyone who opposes him (19:20-27). Instead of loving his "enemies" and

[90] According to Green, the man's "description as 'noble' marks him as one of lofty position on the scale of power and privilege on account of his birthright." Green, *Luke*, 678; see also p. 60.

those who "hate" him (6:27, 35), he names his country's citizens his enemies and orders them brutally murdered in front of him (19:27). The nobleman's dealings with his slaves and money paint him as the antithesis of those who are suited to God's reign either by their poverty or through their profligate generosity with material resources. His final words prove him likewise unfit for God's reign by his use of violence: instead of meeting resistance with resilience or loving his enemies, he orders them slaughtered before him.

This telling of the parable illumines the nobleman's resemblance to Rome's client rulers in Judea and Galilee, namely King Herod the Great, Archelaus the Ethnarch, and his brother Antipas, and effectively contrasts their Romanized politics with Jesus' presentation of God's reign.[91] According to Josephus, Herod held a tenuous claim to rule over Judea before he went to Rome and had his right confirmed by a triumvirate of Roman authority: Antony, Octavius, and the Senate (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.381-385, 14.390-393; *J. W.* 1.282-285; Strabo, *Geogr.* 26.2.46; Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.74; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.9). Upon returning from Rome, Herod won control of Galilee and Jerusalem, and fortified his legitimacy by marrying the daughter of Antigonus, his Hasmonean rival, and then having Antigonus beheaded (Josephus, *Ant.* 14. 439-480; *J.W.* 1.320-357; Plutarch, *Ant.* 36). He further consolidated his power by rewarding his supporters and punishing any who opposed him because he was too cozy with Rome's culture and oppressions and insufficiently Jewish in both ancestry and practice (Josephus, *Ant.*

[91] Green notes the nobleman's resemblance to Herod and Archelaus, particularly as Josephus describes them (Green, *Luke*, 676, 678). That they are client kings to Rome is not incidental; Rome provides the template for their manner of rule as well as their right to govern. For example, Josephus notes that in Herod's ultimately successful effort to take Jerusalem, he planned to imitate the Roman General Pompey's manner of attack (*Ant.* 14.465-467). After establishing his kingdom in Judea, according to Josephus, Herod continually aggravated his own people by being thoroughly accommodated to Rome's customs and ever vigilant to maintain favor with Rome (*Ant.* 15.326-330). See further Vinson, "Minas Touch," 74, 77-78, and Culpepper, *Luke*, 362-63.

14.163-167; 14.399-405; 15.1-4; 15.326-330). He also killed forty-five leading men of his rival's supporters, plundering their wealth and taking it for his treasury (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.5-10). Josephus reports that Herod governed unworried about insurrection because he enforced his people's obedience by inducing fear through punishments and rewards, and carefully cultivated Rome's favor—often at the expense of his subjects' approval (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.326-330).

Archelaus continued key aspects of his father's legacy relevant to Jesus' parable. Before being confirmed in Rome, having received the provisional right to kingship from Herod the Great, Archelaus went in grand processional from Jericho to the temple in Jerusalem where he made sacrifices befitting a king, sat on a throne, and suppressed riots against him "in a kingly fashion."[92] When he traveled to Rome to seek the right to govern Judea as bequeathed him by his father, the Jewish people sent a delegation to Rome to oppose Archelaus's reign, protesting his brutal treatment. Augustus nonetheless made him ethnarch, and upon his return Archelaus retaliated against both the Jews and Samaritans who had opposed him (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.16; 2.80; 2.111). Archelaus was deposed when his brother Antipas brought charges against him in Rome, and persuaded Tiberius to allow him to rule in place of Archelaus (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.342-44; *J. W.* 2.111, 167).

Though Tiberius denied Antipas the title of "king," as a tetrarch Antipas nevertheless bore his father's legacy, if not nearly so grandly. He founded the city of Tiberias on the southeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee and made it his capital (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.38).

---

[92] See David R. Catchpole, "The 'Triumphal' Entry," in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*, ed. Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 319-34, 321, citing Josephus, *Ant.* 17.194-239, 195; *War* 1.570, 235.

Josephus likewise notes Herod's coming to Jerusalem on at least once to make sacrifices in the temple on the occasion of Passover (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.122), which lends credence to Luke's claim that Herod was in Jerusalem already at the time of Jesus trial (23:7), which took place on the day after Jesus' Passover meal with his disciples (22:7-16). Philo notes one additional occasion on which Antipas was likely in Jerusalem; given the timing, he was probably one of the "the king's four sons, who in dignity and good fortune were not inferior to a king, and his other descendants and the persons of authority in their own body" who, in response to Pilate's having brought shields emblazoned with images into his Jerusalem palace, participated in an embassy asking "Pilate to redress the infringement of their traditions" (Philo, *Embassy* 38.300 [Colson, LCL]). Jensen, following Smallwood, suggests that these "other persons of authority" might be the Sanhedrin, which "indicates a positive connection between Antipas and the Sanhedrin,"[93] which might account for what appears to be something between vague tolerance for or alliance with the chief priests and scribes who accused Jesus before Herod Antipas in Luke 23:10.

At the same time, Antipas had no particular personal commitment to the brand of Jewish piety exemplified in the delegation to Pilate; his own palace in Tiberias "was graced with figures of living creatures (Josephus, *Life* 65); and at Delos he was honored for his benefactions to a temple of Apollo.[94] Antipas's adherence to the ban against images was

[93] Morten Hørning Jensen, "Herod Antipas in Galilee: Friend or Foe of the Historical Jesus?," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 5 (2007): 7-32 (16).

[94] Alexander Panayotov David Noy, and Hansvulf Bloedhorn, *Eastern Europe*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 101 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 234-35.

grounded not in personal preference but in concern for his Jewish subjects."[95] Although Antipas appears not to have practiced extraordinary cruelties, greed, or political mismanagement, he was deeply accommodated to Roman culture and the emperor's local enforcer for Galilee, which is among the reasons Josephus gives that Antipas had John the Baptist arrested and later executed (cf. Luke 3:19-20; 9:7-9; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.118). His claim to kingly authority among the Jews is not grounded in Judah's royal line, but in his father's Rome-underwritten kingship and the emperor's approval of his own status as tetrarch. If he did cultivate good relations with Jerusalem's elite leadership, such a posture only places him further inside the realm of high status and wealth that Jesus repeatedly calls to renunciation and repentance.

The notes of violent accession and greed, along with having his right to govern confirmed by traveling to Rome and returning to punish opponents and reward supporters, reverberate in Jesus' description of the nobleman, which is not to suggest that Jesus means to draw a direct line to Herod, Archelaus, or Antipas in particular. The parable does not name any of these rulers specifically, but not doing so allows it to address the Herodian dynasty generally as well as the currently reigning Herod Antipas, who has already appeared as an antagonist in the narrative by his execution of John the Baptist (9:7-9) and his alleged murderous intentions toward Jesus (13:31). The dynasty's greed, violence, and accommodation to Rome's constructs of political power show that the criticism inherent in Jesus' parable has a specific real life political target. In the context of Jesus' teaching, his forthcoming manner of entry into Jerusalem, and the collective of Jewish and Roman leaders who conspire to kill Jesus

[95] Morten Hørning Jensen, "Antipas: The Herod Jesus Knew," *BAR* 38 (2012): 42-46 (46).

in Jerusalem, this parable criticizes, through its ghastly parody of God's reign, Rome's manner of reign through wealth, dominance, and violence and those among Jesus' own people who have accommodated to Rome's politics. The parable also sets up Jesus' embodied critique of political violence and confirmation of resilience as the fundamental dynamic of God's reign. The nobleman portrays a kind of kingship that takes violent vengeance on enemies who reject his far-country-confirmed right to rule them (19:27). By contrast, Jesus is born into his right to rule in Jerusalem (1:32) and, when he is rejected there as he predicts (18:31-33), will show how God overcomes violent rejection with resilience and mercy.[96]

2.5 God's Reign in Encounters with Friends, Strangers, & Enemies

From this point, the narrative shifts from emphasizing Jesus' teaching to focusing on what he does and what happens to him. He is all but finished with the telling of God's reign; the time for showing approaches. Of course, Jesus already has shown in his healing ministry some key features of God's reign that emerge with greater clarity on this side of his teaching. Particularly Jesus' promises of comfort for the poor (a term often used as a synecdoche for a range of afflictions, injuries, and impoverishments[97]), his exhortations to indiscriminate generosity and compassion toward both neighbors and enemies, and his favoring the power of resilience over violence are vividly portrayed because of how Jesus uses his power.

The key events that reveal the power of God's reign at the heart of Jesus' identity occur mainly on either side of Jesus' principal teaching about God's reign, that is, in Luke 7 and 19-

---

[96] See further Elizabeth V. Dowling, *Taking Away the Pound: Women, Theology, and the Parable of the Pounds in the Gospel of Luke* LNTS 324 (New York: T & T Clark, 2007) and Adam F. Braun, "Reframing the Parable of the Pounds in Lukan Narrative and Economic Context: Luke 19:11-28," *CurTM* 39 (2012).

[97] See Joel B. Green, "Good News to the Poor: A Lukan Leitmotif," *RevExp* 112 (2014): 173-79 esp. 176.

23. Jesus' encounters with the Centurion in Capernaum (7:1-10), the widow at Nain (7:11-17), John the Baptist's disciples (7:18-23), and the unlikely pair of a "sinful" woman and a Pharisee (7:36-50) reveal Jesus' character as commensurate to the pattern of God's reign he established through his early teaching and healing ministry. He shows love toward someone who should be an enemy outsider to him. He heals and does good to those who cannot repay him and extends kindness to a pair of people who fit the paradigm of "ungrateful" and "wicked," respectively. Following the nearly eleven chapters dominated by teaching about God's reign, Jesus' final confrontation with Jerusalem's authorities reveals him as the person in whom God's reign is realized and who inaugurates its realization in the world at large (Luke 19-23).

2.5.1 The Centurion and the Widow

Jesus' sermon at Nazareth (4:16-30) and his preaching on the level place (6:17-49) together set a context for his encounters with the centurion in Capernaum and the widow at Nain.[98] Jesus' interactions with them mirror Elijah and Elisha's respective encounters with the Sidonian widow and Naaman, and occur between the first time Jesus teaches about God's reign (6:20) and the beginning of his itinerant teaching (8:1).[99] In that teaching, as outlined above, Jesus enjoins his audience to love enemies, do good, and give to those who cannot

[98] Karin Schöpflin, reading about Naaman in both 2 Kings 5 and Luke 4, makes two key observations that help relate Naaman to Luke's portrait of the centurion in Luke 7, but Schöpflin herself does not make connections between Naaman and the centurion. First, as with Jesus and the centurion, Elisha and Naaman never speak with one another directly or interact face to face; all their communication goes through intermediaries (35). Second, Schöpflin observes that in 2 Kings 5, the only persons named are Elisha and Naaman; in Luke 7 the centurion is called by his office and Jesus is the only one with a name (36). See Karin Schöpflin, "Naaman: Seine Heilung und Bekehrung im Alten un Neuen Testament," *BN* 141 (2009): 35-56.

[99] For thorough analysis of the similarities between the stories of Luke 7:11-17 with 1 Kings 17:17-24 and their purpose, see Thomas Louis Brodie, "Towards Unravelling Luke's Use of the Old Testament: Luke 7:11-17 as an *Imitatio* of 1 Kings 17:17-24," *NTS* 32 (1986): 247-67 esp. pp 257-59.

repay—in short, to imitate the profligate mercy of God (6:35). On the plain he ends by telling a parable showing that he intends his words as not objects of disinterested reflection, but as a guide to a flourishing life (6:46-49). It were then the height of hypocrisy did he not follow his own teaching, but Luke sets up chapter 7 to confirm Jesus' integrity. He keeps his promises and lives his teaching.

Jesus has already planted the notion that the good news and ministry of restoration he brings extend beyond Israel to the sort of people who received God's gracious care through Elijah and Elisha (4:23-27)—a foreign widow and an enemy military commander—so that Jesus' attention to a centurion in Capernaum and a widow in Nain mirror his earlier words. His teaching on the plain, wherein he enjoins his hearers to love enemies, give to everyone who asks, and imitate God's mercy, are particularly reflected in his dealings with the centurion. The social location of the centurion marks him as an enemy with great privilege, but he has an unusual friendship with the Jews of Capernaum who serve as his emissaries and ask Jesus to heal the centurion's cherished slave, who is dying (7:1-3). They say he "loves" the Jewish people and built their synagogue for them. Both actions liken him to the Samaritan of Luke 10:30-35, whose compassion and monetary generosity across social boundaries make him an exemplar of neighborly love (10:36). Commensurate with Jesus' commands to love enemies and give to everyone who asks, Jesus goes without hesitation to heal the centurion's slave, who surely counts among the "poor" to whom Jesus promised good news (4:18; 6:20). But the centurion sends messengers to stop Jesus along the way, calling him "Lord" (κύριος) and professing his unworthiness to have Jesus enter his home—which Jesus is fully willing to do even for a Gentile and a commander in Rome's army (7:6-8). Jesus registers surprise at the

centurion's profound and unprecedented faith in him, but Jesus' willingness to do the centurion a kindness depends neither on this faith nor on the centurion's recognition of Jesus' authority (7:9). He helps both centurion and slave merely because he is asked, without expecting compensation (7:10; cf. 6:32-35).

Jesus' kindness toward the widow at Nain is completely unsolicited. In this encounter Jesus fills the needs of two people who can aptly be classified as "poor"—a dead man and his widowed mother (7:12).[100] Jesus has compassion (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη) on her, raises her son back to life, and returns him to her (7:13-15). Once again, Jesus does good without expecting recompense and, as promised, brings tangible good news to the poor.[101]

Luke inclusion of the people's responses—fear, glorifying God, and exclaiming, "A great prophet has risen among us," and "God has visited his people!" (7:16)—cluster around the theme of explicating Jesus' identity.[102] If these actions embody what Jesus teaches of God's reign they also begin to delineate his role in it. While the crowds are not necessarily reliable sources of information about Jesus' identity, the use of dramatic irony allows them to say

---

[100] See Green, *Theology*, 79-84, and Green, "Good News to the Poor," 176.

[101] By touching the bier, Jesus shows he is willing to incur corpse impurity (Num 19:10-22) for the sake of bringing life. Green cites, E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1992) 217-19: "Sanders notes that, although corpse impurity was not a bad thing (in this case it kept one from entering the temple until the proper time period had elapsed and washings performed), purity was so highly valued in practice that corpse impurity was to be avoided if possible whether or not one had plans to enter the temple" (Green, *Luke*, 292).

[102] See Hanna Stettler, "Die Bedeutung der Täuferanfrage in Matthäus 11,2-6 par Lk 7,18-23 für die Christologie," *Biblica* 89 (2008): 173-200. Stettler shows how the works Jesus enumerates in his response to John's disciples help to identify him: they show that he does not merely announce God's reign—he inaugurates it, which testifies to the tight connection between God and God's Messiah: "Dass Jesus mit dem Anspruch auftrat, die Gottesherrschaft nicht nur zu verkündigen, sonder zu inaugurieren, indem er die Werke tat, die von Gott in der Heilszeit zu erwarten waren, weist auf eine denkbar enge Verbindung zwischen Gott un seinem Messias hin" (200). See also pp. 194-95.

truths that, as characters, they do not fully comprehend. [103] The likeness between Jesus' behavior toward the centurion and the Nain widow and Elijah and Elisha's treatment of the Zarephath widow and Naaman gives ample reason why the people might identify Jesus as a prophet, even if Luke has already taken pains to present Jesus as transcending prophetic identity. Glorifying God and calling Jesus' appearance an instance of divine visitation (ἐπεσκέψατο) echo the angels' and shepherds' rejoicing at Jesus birth (2:13, 20) and Zechariah's anticipation of John the Baptist's preparing the way for the visitation (ἐπεσκέψατο) of God that Jesus embodies (1:76-78).

2.5.2 John the Baptist's Disciples

Drawing these particular parallels with the earlier narrative proves a natural segue into the scene wherein John the Baptist sends his disciples to question Jesus about his identity and purpose (7:18-23). That the episodes with the centurion and widow are meant to explicate Jesus' identity, in addition to showing him embodying his own teaching about how to live within God's reign, becomes clear through the episode with John the Baptist's disciples. Luke reports John's disciples bringing news of all Jesus' doings to the imprisoned Baptizer, which prompts him to send two of them to Jesus with the question, "Are you the one who is coming or should we expect someone else?" (7:19). John's question rings with hollow hope. John's father, Zechariah, predicted God would deliver God's people from enemies (1:68-74), but John languishes in prison for speaking out against Herod's wickedness already four chapters

[103] This literary device is well documented in Luke's writings by Jerry Lynn Ray, *Narrative Irony in Luke-Acts: The Paradoxical Interaction of Prophetic Fulfillment and Jewish Rejection*, Mellen Biblical Press Series 28 (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1996).

ago (3:19-20). If Jesus is the Lord whom Zechariah anticipated, why is John still incarcerated? Did Jesus not promise to free captives and bring release to the oppressed (4:18)? Whatever John expected of Jesus, he has yet to see it come to fruition.[104]

Jesus tells John where to focus in order to see him as "the coming one." Having just healed and exorcised a great many people, Jesus tells John's messengers, "When you go, report to John what you have seen and heard: blind people see again, lame people walk, lepers are cleansed and deaf people hear, dead people are raised, poor people are brought good news, and blessed is anyone not scandalized by me" (7:22-23). This list of signs, as Hays points out, echoes Isaiah 35:5-6 and, together with Jesus' earlier citation of Isaiah 61 (Luke 4:18), "Jesus' reply [to John's disciples] fuses together the new exodus with the Isaian image of the Spirit-anointed Servant. … The passages from Isaiah should signal to John—or to any hearer steeped in Israel's Scripture—that Jesus' activity is indeed to be understood as the inauguration of the coming kingdom of God for which Israel had longed and for which John was waiting."[105] Via these allusions and his earlier teaching, Jesus self-identifies as the one who turns deficiency to wholeness under the rubric of good news for the poor—those who are blessed because God's reign is like them (6:20). Living into his teaching about God's reign and bringing tangible restoration to those who suffer want epitomize Jesus' embodiment of God's reign. Therefore, any who accept him accept God's reign and are blessed. When John's disciples leave, Jesus continues teaching about his own identity by comparison to John: John is a prophet, but more than a prophet—he is the messenger who goes ahead of Jesus (7:26-27); John is the greatest,

---

[104] See Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 249-51.

[105] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 250-51.

but the least in God's reign is greater (7:28).[106] But in the final scene of the chapter Jesus returns explicating his identity by doing as he has taught—juxtaposing a privileged Pharisee and a marginal woman to reiterate the lesson of God's kindness toward the "ungrateful" and the "wicked" (6:35).

2.5.3 A Woman and a Pharisee

When a woman of the city, a "sinner," learns that Jesus has gone to dine at the home of Simon the Pharisee, she comes to wash his feet with her tears, dry them with her hair, kiss them, and anoint them with ointment from her alabaster jar (7:36-38). When Simon scorns the woman as a sinner—and Jesus for allowing this attention from her—Jesus sets up a contrast between Simon and this woman. Simon and the woman are both like debtors, but her debt is far greater than his; if the person they owe forgives both of them, she will love that person more than Simon does on account of her greater debt (7:40-43). In the story, Simon comes across as the "ungrateful" or "graceless" person; the woman stands in for the "wicked." Simon did not offer Jesus any special hospitality, whereas this woman was extravagant in hers—so her many sins are forgiven (7:44-47). Jesus' kindness extends to both—enjoining Simon toward gratitude expressed in love and extending forgiveness to the woman (7:44-46, 48). The encounter shows Jesus living into the character of God he enjoined his audience on the plain to imitate—kindness to the ungrateful and the wicked, and mercy (6:35).

[106] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 251-52.

2.6 God's Reign in Jerusalem: βασιλεύς of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ

Jesus never ceases living into the pattern of God's reign while he teaches on his travels between Galilee and Jerusalem, but the way he approaches Jerusalem and what happens to him there provide the most dramatic evidence that Jesus epitomizes the character of God's reign and inaugurates it on earth. The language and imagery of kingship in Luke 19-23 cast Jesus as the paradigmatic βασιλεύς of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. Jesus is the inaugurator of God's reign and exemplar of how God wields power—especially in contrast to the authorities who oppose him during his last days in Jerusalem and, ultimately, crucify him. The pattern of Jesus' final journey toward and into Jerusalem (19:29-48), following his parable against the vengeful client ruler (19:12-28) and his confrontations with the chief priests and scribes in Jerusalem, shows Jesus embracing his identity as the legitimate Davidic king who is also "Son of the Most High" (1:32-33), which delegitimizes and criticizes the Herodian dynasty as well as the Roman power behind it, and exposes the Jerusalem authorities' unholy alliance with both.[107] Jesus comes as Jerusalem's legitimate king who would guide the people toward the peaceable politics of God's reign, but Jerusalem's Jewish leadership rejects Jesus and the politics he represents in favor of Rome and its brand of power. Nevertheless, Jesus persists in defining his identity as the peacemaker king; he remains the king who exemplifies the way of peace, which is the heart of the threat he represents toward Rome and those captivated by its power. The βασιλεύς of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ does not wield the sort of power that the "kings of the earth" exercise.

[107] On Jesus as the Davidic messiah in Luke, see Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 230-37, and Kenneth E Guenter, "'Blessed is He Who Comes': Psalm 118 and Jesus' Triumphal Entry," *BSac* 173 (2016): 425-47 esp. 444-47. On Jesus' delegitimization of others' claims to kingship, see again Braun, "Reframing the Parable of the Pounds," 446-48; Culpepper, *Luke* 361-64; Brent Kinman, "Jesus' Royal Entry into Jerusalem," *BBR* 15 (2005): 223-60; and Vinson, "Minas Touch," 75-79.

Therefore, throughout his trial in particular, he shapes the terms "messiah," "Son of God," and "king" to fit who he is rather than allow conventional notions of these terms to determine his identity. Particularly in contrast with the nobleman who was given "kingly" power in 19:12-28, and despite his legitimate claims to kingship in Jerusalem, Jesus does not slaughter the enemies who do not want him to rule over them (19:27). Rather, he submits to execution at their hands in a way that reveals the truth about the political dynamic the Jerusalem leadership embraces in rejecting him. He does not wield the power of a conventional king or a military messiah. Earthly kings (and emperors) and the usual sort of revolutionaries who oppose them operate on the same kind of power—violence, coercion, and domination. Jesus enacts God's paradigmatic response to the political dynamic that crucifies him—he absorbs the ultimate injustice of suffering capital punishment in innocence and turns it inside out. Jesus' resurrection decisively reveals resilience as the heart of God's power.

2.6.1 "Son of David" and "Son of the Most High"

Whether trumpeted explicitly in direct queries or slipping into a cello-register pulse under dramatic events, questions and claims about Jesus' identity take a central role in Luke 19-23, in which are recapitulated angelic and inspired declarations about Jesus first sounded in Luke 1-2 and scarcely since. By now the reader might have forgotten Gabriel's promise to Mary, that Jesus would be David's heir with an everlasting reign as well as "Son of the Most High" (1:32-33), and Zechariah's confirmation (1:67-79) of Jesus in these roles, but Luke reintroduces the notion that Jesus is David's son at the end of chapter 18, when the blind man outside Jericho addresses him thus and asks for mercy and healing (18:35-43). Shortly thereafter, approaching Jerusalem gives Jesus' companions visions of God's royal authority in

connection with Jesus (19:11), and with some good reason: Jerusalem is the city of David's kingship (2 Sam 5:5-15). If Jesus is David's son and the rightful and ultimate heir to David's throne, entering the city from which David ruled makes a powerful political statement. Jesus, who embodies God's manner of reign, is about to confront Jerusalem's illegitimate rulers and oppressors. Were he like the nobleman of the parable he tells before his final approach to Jerusalem (Luke 19:12-28), he would deal rather differently with the opposition than he does. Jesus makes his final journey toward Jerusalem in a way that embraces his royal right but also fulfills Zechariah's prophetic promise that Jesus' reign would lead his people in the "way of peace" (1:79). Jesus is the representative of God's "visitation" (ἐπισκοπή/ἐπισκέπτομαι) as both the Son of David and Son of the Most High (1:32-33; 68, 78). As Son of David, he has the right to reign in Jerusalem, and brings salvation (σωτηρία) and redemption (λυτρώσις); as Son of the Most High, his essential character is "mercy," even to the extent of being "kind to the ungrateful and the wicked" (6:36-36).[108] Gabriel's and Zechariah's words about Jesus, from before his birth, come to life when he enters Jerusalem as the king who possesses the very character of God.

2.6.2 Entering Jerusalem

The setup of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem begins as far back as Gabriel's promise about Jesus' royal lineage and expectations, and in John the Baptist's question about whether Jesus is the "one who is coming" (7:18-20), but in bare practicalities it begins with procuring an animal to ride. Jesus sends two of his disciples into a village near the Mount of Olives and

[108] Cf. Vinson, "Minas Touch," 78-79.

tells them to bring back a "colt" (πῶλος) they will find tied there, telling the owners, "the Lord needs it" (19:29-30). Jesus' choice of animal reflects at least one of those named in the parallelism describing Zechariah's eschatological Davidic king:

> "Rejoice greatly, daughter Zion! Tell it abroad, daughter Jerusalem! Look! Your king comes to you, righteous and saving, he is gentle and riding upon a donkey, even a young colt (πῶλος). He will root out the chariot from Ephraim and horse from Jerusalem; even the bow of war, and a great peace will begin from the nations' waters unto the sea and from the rivers to the edges of the earth" (9:9-10 LXX).

Luke evokes rather than quoting or naming this text, but it resonates here. Jesus is presented as the Davidic king entering Jerusalem, but what that entails looks very different from, as John J. Collins writes, the concept of "the Davidic messiah as the warrior king who would destroy the enemies of Israel and institute an era of unending peace," which "constitutes the common core of Jewish messianism around the turn of the era."[109] Jesus' approach evokes the gentleness of the king riding on the colt and the prospect of peace among God's people and with the nations, partly by resonance to the rejoicing of the angels at his birth (2:14) with the disciples' acclamation of "peace in heaven, and glory in the highest (ὑψίστοις)" (19:38).

Although Jesus' manner of proceeding from the Mount of Olives to the temple in Jerusalem looks similar to other royal and triumphal processionals—of both Jewish and Gentile rulers—the details Luke includes seem to signal most strongly Jesus' status as the true king of David's lineage and his ultimate heir.[110] Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a πῶλος, the

---

[109] John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 68; cited in Kinman, "Jesus' Royal Entry," 242.

[110] See Catchpole, "The 'Triumphal' Entry," 319-21. Catchpole summarizes twelve different accounts of Greek, Jewish, and Roman processionals and compares them mainly to the Markan account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

animal named in Jacob's blessing of the royal tribe of Judah (Gen 49:11) and the mount that the eschatological king of Zech 9:9 rides to Zion. No one rides this πῶλος before Jesus does (Luke 19:30), which, as Catchpole observes, "recalls … the rabbinic insistence (Sanh 2:5) that no one should use the animal on which a king rides" and "matches the word νέος in Zech 9:9."[111] So Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on a πῶλος that no one else has yet ridden reads as a kingly act. In addition, Jesus approaches Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, whence Zechariah (14:4-9) predicts the Lord will come to reign as king over all the earth (Luke 19:37), and his disciples acclaim him quoting a Psalm replete with Davidic tradition, Psalm 118, "Blessed is the coming one, the king in the Lord's name" (19:38). As the exclamation point on Jesus' display of his royal status he ends his processional in the temple (19:45).[112] Through these details Luke presents Jesus coming to Jerusalem as its rightful king, publicly affirming his identity as David's legitimate heir (Luke 1:27) and the divine promise that he would inherit his ancestor's throne (1:32-33). Because Jesus has been called "Lord" since well before his birth and co-identified with the Lord God of Israel, his life and his own description of God's character and manner of reign here set the parameters for what "king in the Lord's name" entails.

The specificity of the kingship ascribed to Jesus and the fact that only Jews even notice his arrival signals that the target audience for this display is Jesus' own people.[113] Jesus shows Jerusalem what the legitimate heir and divinely chosen king looks like, and presents a contrast

---

[111] Catchpole, "The 'Triumphal' Entry," 324.

[112] Like Alexander, Antigonus, and Archelaus; see Catchpole, "The 'Triumphal' Entry," 319-21.

[113] On the relative smallness of the crowd, see Kinman, "Jesus' Royal Entry," 250-53.

with both Herod and Pilate, both of whose rights to rule depend on the emperor's pleasure. As "king in the Lord's name," and not in Caesar's, Jesus has a right to rule that Herod and Pilate lack. The king of God's people, according to Deuteronomy, is to be chosen by God from among the people of Israel; he is not to be a foreigner, nor consolidate his power through accumulating horses, foreign marriages, or wealth (Deut 17:14-17). In other words, he is to be a king neither like nor from any of the other nations. When Jesus enters Jerusalem as David's heir immediately after telling the parable against the oppressive and violent client ruler of Luke 19:12-28, he exposes Herod and Pilate as illegitimate rulers of God's people on three counts—they are not of God's people, not chosen by God, and wield a power antithetical to God's. By contrast, Jesus is David's true son chosen by God to be Israel's king, and as "Son of the Most High" (υἱός ὑψίστου) he possesses the essential character of God that signifies his kingly power will resemble God's power (1:32-33).

2.6.3 Recapitulation: Annunciation & *Benedictus*

The υἱός ὑψίστου title places the power of peace-making mercy at the heart of Jesus' character. In the *Benedictus* Zechariah predicts his own son will be called, "prophet of the Most High," who will "go before the Lord to prepare his ways" (1:76), which distinguishes John the Baptist from Jesus: John is prophet of the Most High, but Jesus is Son of the Most High. The verses that follow additionally differentiate John's preparing the way for the Lord from what the Lord will do personally as and through Jesus: "through the compassionate mercy (σπλάγχνα ἐλέος) of our God in which a scion from the heights (ἀνατολή ἐξ ὕψους) will visit (ἐπισκέψεται) us, to illuminate those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into a way of peace (εἰς ὁδόν εἰρήνης)" (1:78-79). The phrase ἀνατολή ἐξ ὕψους resonates

with the υἱός ὑψίστου title; "scion from the heights" expresses poetically the same idea as "Son of Most High." But ἀνατολή also carries the sense of illumination: the scion of God is a torch as bright as dawn that lights a way of peace amid the darkness of oppression, violence, and death. Jesus confirms this characterization when, in the heart of his sermon on the plain, he calls his hearers to be "sons of the Most High (υἱοί ὑψίστου), because he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked," and to be "merciful as your Father is merciful" (6:35-36). By making this connection, Jesus reveals his own character as well as God's. Jesus does not abandon this character of kindness and mercy toward the utterly undeserving when he enters Jerusalem. Jesus' power in Jerusalem will be like God's, who overcomes through gracious mercy—not violent vengeance.

The narrative of Jesus' final journey into Jerusalem contains only oblique reference to his identity as "Son of the Most High." The crowd of disciples, in addition to acclaiming Jesus as "king in the Lord's name," declare "peace (εἰρήνη) in heaven, and glory in the highest (ὑψίστοις)" (19:38), but Jesus' own words make direct verbal links back to the *Benedictus* that clarify his identity and purpose in coming to Jerusalem as "Son of David" and "Son of the Most High." At his first glimpse of the city Jesus weeps and laments,

> "If only you, especially you, recognized in this day the things that make for peace (τά πρός εἰρήνην); but now he is hidden[114] from your eyes. Because days will come upon you when your enemies will build barricades around you, surround (περικυκλωσούσιν) you, and oppress you on all sides. They will raze you to the ground and your children with you. They will not leave a stone on a stone within you, because

[114] The verb is third person singular; Jesus is the one who makes for peace.

> you did not recognize the time of your visitation (τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς σοῦ)" (19:42-44).

Jerusalem does not recognize the path to peace precisely because it does not recognize Jesus as the "scion from the heights" who would guide his people's feet into the path of peace. Jesus' lament evokes from Zechariah's *Benedictus* resonances that connect Jesus' identity and character with God's, and particularly with the promise of peace.

2.6.4 Not like Other Kings

Long before Jesus enters Jerusalem at the climax of Luke's narrative, Zechariah begins the *Benedictus* by prophesying that God's raising up of a "horn of salvation" or "mighty savior" (κέρας σωτηρίας) in the house of David provides evidence that God has "visited" (ἐπεσκέψατο) God's people (1:68). Invoking the "house of David" as the origin of the one who manifests God's visitation signals that Zechariah refers to Mary's unborn son—he is the only one (other than Joseph; 1:27) explicitly identified as David's descendant by this point in the narrative (1:32). When Zechariah speaks, Jesus has already been conceived and named "Lord" (1:43), but not yet born. God has already "visited" (1:68), but the "scion of the heights" yet "will visit" (1:78).[115] Zechariah prophesies that the savior God has raised up from David's house will save and rescue God's people from their enemies and all who hate them (1:71, 73), but if he is the "scion from the heights" he will do so not by leading an army, but will "visit" to guide his people's feet in the "way of peace" (1:79). Zechariah draws the link between "visitation" and the "way of peace" tightly enough that when Jesus notes Jerusalem's failure

[115] The word for God's causing Sarah's conception of Isaac is the same as Zechariah's word here in Luke 1:68, "The LORD visited (ἐπεσκέψατο) Sarah as he said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had spoken" (Gen 21:1).

to recognize the path to "peace" and its "visitation" at his coming, the connection is clear. Jesus is the embodied visitation of God—the scion-torch who now comes to Jerusalem aiming to give light to those who are captivated by death-dealing powers and guide God's people into the life-giving way of peace.

The contrast between the kind of king Jesus is and the kind that Jerusalem's leaders expect and have already accepted becomes evident in Jesus' lament that Jerusalem does not know the things that make for peace or recognize the time of its "visitation." Even as Jesus claims his identity as God's embodied visitation he anticipates Jerusalem's failure to recognize that the way of peace he illumines invites his people to participate in God's expression of power. One might read that Jesus predicts Jerusalem will be destroyed in punishment for rejecting him, but such vindictiveness hardly befits the character of the God who is "kind to the ungrateful and the wicked" (6:35) and the narrative does not require it. Rather, Jesus' words read like a lament for a blind person who, seeking protection from lions, has bedded down with vipers—a deadly strike is inevitable, and from that stems Jesus' proleptic grief. Jerusalem fails to recognize Jesus' way of peace as the same path that leads to rescue from enemies; this failure to see puts Jerusalem in thrall to those very enemies and the kind of power they wield, which ultimately leads—in 70 CE—to Jerusalem's destruction.[116] Rome's rulers are not Jerusalem's friends and its power will not serve Jerusalem, but Jerusalem does not see that. Jesus mourns because Jerusalem's unseeing eyes overlook the life-giving, peaceable power he represents and accept Rome's thin offer of pacification instead. Given Jesus' earlier lament and indictment against Jerusalem as the city that "kills the prophets" and has resisted his desire

[116] Luke's awareness of Jerusalem's destruction appears clear, here.

"to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (13:34), Jerusalem's rejection of Jesus' "way of peace" is tragic but not surprising.

2.6.5 Indictment of Temple Leadership

Jesus' lament over the city invokes "Jerusalem" as a synecdoche, but his direct criticism focuses on misappropriation of the temple; its custodians appear most enthralled by Rome's power and become Jesus' principal opponents. When Jesus enters the temple, drives out the sellers, quotes from Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 in order to reclaim the temple as a "house of prayer" from those who have made it a σπήλαιον λῃστῶν, and begins teaching there daily, the chief priests, scribes, and the most prominent among the people immediately look for a way to kill him (19:45-47). Their instant turn to murderous conspiracy confirms Jesus' diagnosis—the power of violence holds their imaginations hostage. Quoting these two scriptures evokes their larger contexts,[117] which cast the temple's custodians as feckless leaders who abuse and mislead the people and whose lip-service to God is a sham—a cover for the violent foreign gods they actually worship by their actions. These λῃσταί are disqualified as leaders of God's people. Having publicly delegitimized those who have misappropriated the temple, Jesus begins teaching there daily, taking his rightful place of leadership among his people. The quotations

[117] Richard Hays identifies this device as "metalepsis," wherein an "allusive echo functions to suggest to the reader that text B should be understood in light of a broad interplay with text A, encompassing aspects of A beyond those explicitly cited" (Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 20). See also Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*: "Luke's scriptural allusions frequently depend on the trope of *metalepsis*. In order to grasp the force of the intertextual reference, the reader must recover the unstated or suppressed correspondences between the two texts" (198).

from Isaiah and Jeremiah that introduce his new habit come from contexts that diagnose Jerusalem's condition as grave indeed.

Both Isaiah 56 and Jeremiah 7 connect matters of justice with right worship in the temple, but Isaiah particularly inveighs against Israel's leaders: they are incompetent, lead the people astray, and abuse their power. Isaiah 56 begins with a call to "guard judgment (κρίσιν) and do justice (δικαιοσύνην), for soon my salvation (σωτηρίον) will come and my mercy (ἐλέος) be revealed" (56:1). Under this heading the Lord blesses all those who observe the Sabbath and keep covenant with God—even foreigners, eunuchs, and the dispersed—and welcomes them to the "house of prayer for all the nations" (56:2-8). Immediately following this stirring promise of restoration, however, the LORD castigates Israel's "watchdogs" for being ignorant, thoughtless, voiceless, and slumberous, while also nursing an unquenchable appetite and multiplying their ignorance and wickedness by imitating one another (vv. 10-11). If the chief priests hear this scathing rebuke of Israel's leaders as a word against them when Jesus calls the temple "a house of prayer," their ire already begins to make more sense. Jeremiah's words, though critical beyond Israel's leaders, still focus on the temple and can only fuel its leaders' further opposition to Jesus.

2.6.5.1 Jeremiah 7

In Jeremiah 7, the LORD sends Jeremiah to warn the people to amend their ways and business dealings (ἐπιτήδευματα), and not to trust in spurious promises of the temple's inviolability (Jer 7:3-4 LXX). The people's continued existence in Judah and worship in the temple is contingent upon their amending their ways: "If you truly straighten your paths and your business dealings, and truly practice good judgment (κρίσιν) between a man and his

neighbor; if you do not oppress the foreign proselyte, the orphan, and the widow; if you do not spill innocent blood in this place and make yourselves evil by going after other gods, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your ancestors since time out of mind" (7:5-7). But the people vainly trust in false words about the temple's inviolability, and endanger it by specific actions of injustice and idolatry: murder, adultery, theft, making unjust oaths, offering incense to Baal, and making themselves evil by going after other gods whom they have not known (7:8-9). "And then," the LORD exclaims incredulously, "you come and stand before me in the house upon which my name has been invoked and say, 'We are set apart!' in order to do all these abominations? Do you consider my house, upon which my name has been invoked, a sanctuary for outlaws (σπήλαιον λῃστῶν)?" (7:10-11). Calling the temple a "sanctuary for outlaws," as Jesus does, evokes Jeremiah's litany of Israel's sins as well as the warnings about Jerusalem's destruction that follow (Jer 7:12-15). Having already predicted Jerusalem's destruction because it does not recognize him as its guide toward peace, Jesus publicly warns and rebukes those associated with the temple insofar as they commit the sins Jeremiah summarizes in the term λῃστῶν.

No single English term adequately captures the semantic range of λῃστῆς, though "outlaw," as above, comes close. Usage of the word appears to fall into two main categories with violence as a common factor between them: 1) robber, brigand, pirate, bandit, etc., namely, those who take what does not belong to them by force or violence rather than stealth, and 2) revolutionary, insurrectionist, rebel, guerilla, public enemy—those who would stage a

violent revolt against the government.[118] Jeremiah's—and, by extension, Jesus'—use of the term seems to encompass both categories and applies principally to the socially and economically privileged among the people of Israel. In Luke's Gospel, they resemble those whom Jesus has called "rich" (6:24-26; 12:15-21; 16:1, 19-22; 19:1-2). In Jeremiah, they practice both physical and economic violence: they make crooked business deals, oppress the vulnerable, and spill innocent blood. They also have rebelled against God, worshiping Baal and other foreign gods. Worshiping foreign gods betrays their allegiance to the LORD and causes them to resemble the other nations who worship those gods—thus do God's people make themselves evil. For Jesus to quote Jeremiah in order to call the temple a sanctuary for λῃσται presents Jerusalem with a dire warning: repent of this comprehensively unjust, wicked, and idolatrous way of life or suffer utter destruction. Having condemned the way of injustice, violence, and idolatry, Jesus begins teaching in the temple. Thus does he present his teaching and way of life as the divinely sanctioned alternative to what he encountered in the temple.

By immediately conspiring to kill Jesus, the chief priests, scribes, and other leaders out themselves as the principal perpetrators of the behaviors Jesus condemns. Those very habits impel their murderous intent, in which they are thwarted only because "all the people [ὁ λαός ἅπας] were utterly caught up in what they heard" from Jesus (19:48). The leaders' first resort to violence in order to remove the threat to their authority reveals which gods they have chosen: "other gods"—perhaps the same ones Rome worships in order to ensure its ongoing

[118] See BDAG, s. v. "λῃστής." Luke's only previous use of the term occurs in the parable of the Good Samaritan to describe those who beat, rob, and leave for dead the man whom the Samaritan helps (Luke 10:30, 36).

hegemony.[119] In relation to Israel's God, these leaders have become outlaws; they have colonized the temple as a sanctuary for those who rebel against God's manner of reign and so they violently oppose God's earthly representative. By contrast, Jesus comes as the legitimate and divinely chosen Davidic king who possesses the character of the Most High. The narrative presents two alternatives: Jesus' divinely sanctioned way of peace, or the Jerusalem leadership's idolatrous injustice and violence. From here until Jesus' death, Luke narrates the escalating conflicts between the Jerusalem leaders in their accommodation to Roman imperial power and the way of peace Jesus offers as the βασιλεύς of the βασιλεῖα τοῦ θεοῦ. This collocation contrasts the power that animates God's wholesome politics with that of the human resistance arising from those among God's people who enjoy social power because of their association with imperial authorities.

Luke dramatically paints the divide between these Jerusalem leaders and Jesus when they first interact publicly (20:1-26). While Jesus is teaching the people (τόν λαόν) in the temple and offering the good news (εὐαγγελιζομένου), the chief priests, scribes and elders take a stand (ἐπέστησαν). They begin by questioning his authority: where does it come from? who granted it? (20:1-2). In response, Jesus backs them into a corner with a clever question: Was John's baptism from heaven or human beings? The leaders muse together, "If we say, 'from heaven,' he will say, 'then why did you not believe him,' but if we say, 'from human beings,' all the people [ὁ λαός ἅπας] will stone us, for they have been persuaded that John is a prophet"' (20:5-6). So they refuse to answer, as does Jesus (20:7-9). Instead, he tells a parable that forecasts

[119] On the connection between Roman worship and political life see Simon R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

how the conflict between him and Jerusalem's leaders will unfold and, through scriptural allusion, shows the leaders how to change the story's outcome: they must extricate themselves from their cozy relationship to Roman power and ally themselves, instead, with God and the political agenda Jesus represents.

2.6.5.2 The Vineyard and the Wicked Tenants

Jesus casts the chief priests, scribes, and elders as the tenants of a vineyard (Jerusalem/the temple), who have rejected a series of the owner's (God's) slaves (prophets, including John the Baptist; 20:5, 10-12). Finally, the owner sends his son and heir (Jesus), whom the tenants kill in an attempt to seize the vineyard for themselves (20:13-25). Jesus ends the parable by warning that the owner will evict (possibly "destroy," ἀπολλύμι) those tenants and give the vineyard to others. The events of the first part of the parable have already taken place. Jesus more than once has mentioned the maltreatment God's prophets have suffered, historically, at the hands of some within Israel even to his own day (6:23, 26; 11:49-51). In the same vein, Jerusalem is the city that "kills the prophets" (13:34). Moreover, the leaders who question Jesus have just admitted they did not listen to John the Baptist, who was called "prophet of the Most High" from his birth (1:76). Jesus, called "Son of the Most High" from before his conception (1:32), enters the parable's stage here, where the owner of the vineyard sends his beloved son (20:13). Thus far everything Jesus tells in the parable has occurred just as he said, though the Jerusalem leaders would not allow that Jesus is the owner's son. But as Jesus stands teaching in Jerusalem, the end of the parable has not yet played out—he still lives, and the Jerusalem leaders could still heed his warning. He predicts, however, that they will not. They will reject him and kill him and, as a result, they will lose their "tenant" rights in God's

"vineyard" in favor of others (20:16).[120] Only when confronted with this negative outcome for themselves do they object, μή γένοιτο (20:16). Given that they have already been plotting to kill Jesus, the part to which they object seems clear—they want to be able to get rid of Jesus without suffering the consequences he predicts, but Jesus, in effect, tells them they have to go further back in the story. If they wish to avoid these results, they must listen to the son whom God has sent, who, by quotation and allusion to three scriptural texts, sounds a call to God's people not to place their hope in human empires and to trust, instead, in God's surprising and superior power.

2.6.5.3 Psalm 118:22 (LXX)

At the leaders' objection to the end of the parable Jesus responds, in effect, "No? Then consider these words from scripture," and begins by quoting Psalm 118:22 (117:22 LXX) and then alluding to Isaiah 8 and Daniel 2 respectively: "The stone that the builders rejected [ἀπεδοκίμασαν; also "judged useless"] has become the keystone. Everyone who trips over that stone will be shattered, and the one on whom it falls will be ground to dust [λικμήσει; literally, "it will winnow"]" (20:17-18). Allusions to and quotations of Psalm 118 (117 LXX) appear throughout Luke's narrative, most recently v. 26 in Jesus' disciples' acclamation as he went from the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem (Luke 19:38).[121] First, however, the psalm opens

[120] Although Jesus has predicted Jerusalem's destruction both explicitly and implicitly already, and will do so explicitly again, one need not read this parable as an additional such prediction. It fits right into the categories of subversion that have the hungry filled and the rich sent away empty in Mary's *Magnificat* and implied in Jesus' juxtaposition of poor and rich at the beginning of the sermon on the plain. The stewards who have abused their position of power and those who tried to gainsay them will lose that power and their place be given to others. One could look at this ending to the parable as a prediction that the chief priests, scribes, and elders will be replaced as leaders of the people by Jesus' own disciples, which turns out to be so, at least in part, in Acts.

[121] For the role Psalm 118 plays throughout Luke's Gospel and Acts, see J. Ross Wagner, "Psalm 118 in Luke-Acts: Tracing a Narrative Thread," in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals*,

with a litany of praise for God's mercy (ἐλέος) and then turns to the theme of the LORD's matchless ability to defend God's people against any nation's onslaught:

> The LORD is a helper to me;
> I do not fear what a human being might do to me.
> The LORD is a helper to me even as
> I look upon my enemies.
> Better to depend on the LORD
> than to depend upon a human being;
> Better to hope in the Lord
> than to hope in rulers.
> All the nations surrounded (ἐκυκλώσαν) me,
> and in the name of the LORD I warded them off (ἠμύναμην).
> They thoroughly surrounded me,
> and in the name of the LORD I warded them off.
> They surrounded me like bees, and were inflamed as a fire among thorns,
> and in the name of the LORD I warded them off.
> Being pushed down, I was overthrown to fall,
> and the LORD came to my aid.
> The LORD is my strength and my song of praise,
> and has become my salvation.
> The sound of gladness and salvation is in the tents of the just;
> the right hand of the LORD did powerful deeds (δύναμις).
> The right hand of the LORD raised me up;
> the right hand of the LORD did powerful deeds.
> I will not die, but live,
> and recount the works of the LORD.
> The Lord surely disciplined me,
> but did not betray me to death.
> Open to me the gates of justice;
> entering through them I will acknowledge the LORD.
> This is the LORD's gate;
> the just enter through it.
> I give thanks to you that you have heard me
> and have become salvation for me.
> The stone that the builders rejected,
> this one has become the keystone;
> From the LORD this has come about,
> and it is marvelous in our eyes. (Psalm 117:6-23 LXX)

---

ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, JSNTSup 148 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 154-77. On the passage Jesus quotes directly at the end of the parable of the wicked tenants, see esp. 170-72.

Jesus' quotation of v. 22 recalls the preceding sixteen verses in which the psalmist proclaims his dependence on God's protection and the evidence undergirding that trust. The psalmist recites the whole litany of God's saving acts under the heading the LORD's ability to help against the psalmist's enemies—far more than any human beings, even rulers (vv. 6-9). After thirteen verses extolling the LORD's power to save, the psalmist reveals the surprising means of salvation the LORD chose; this is the verse Jesus quotes. God's power is constructive and redemptive. God's way of winning is to build rather than destroy, and to take the stone other builders have counted useless and use it as the keystone—the piece at the apex of an arch that gently keeps all the other stones in place and so supports the whole structure. Here Jesus casts himself as this keystone from Psalm 118—the essential piece that holds together God's constructive victory and makes God's protection superior to anything human beings might offer. Jesus' words evoking Isaiah 8 and Daniel 2 forecast what will happen if God's people, instead of trusting in God for protection, make unholy alliances with other nations.

2.6.5.4 Isaiah 8:14

When Isaiah 8 opens, Judah under Ahaz trembles before the Syro-Ephraimite alliance despite God's promises of presence and protection represented in the child named "Immanuel" (Isa 7:13-16). Judah does not trust in God's deliverance from Syria and Samaria, and so the LORD promises to send the king of Assyria to teach Judah not to fear any nation but, rather, only the Lord:

> Do not say "fierce" for whatever this people says is fierce; and do not fear its fears, nor be terrified. The LORD himself shall you deem holy, and he will be your fear. And if you depend on him he will be to you a holy place, and you will not encounter him as a stumbling stone or a rock to cause a fall. (Isa 8:12-14a LXX)

Ahaz's Jerusalem is, in Brevard Childs's words,

> filled with great fear and foreboding of impending violence. In contrast, the prophet is called upon to direct his attention to the real source of power and dread: "None but the LORD of hosts will you regard as holy." He is the one to fear; he is the object of terror. In a word, the true issue at stake is between two visions of reality. Does the future lie in the throes of power politics and clever human machinations, which evoke fear and uncertainty? Or does the future lie with God, the Holy One of Israel, who is the real power to be reckoned with?[122]

Jesus presents a clear answer to these questions during his last week in Jerusalem. He is the stone representing the LORD here. He is the keystone that fortifies the city against all human powers, but if denied that place he will be the stumbling stone that causes the people to fall and shatter (Luke 20:18). If the people of God place their trust in human political powers instead of in Jesus, it will backfire on them. Jesus does not spell out exactly what the negative consequences will be, but his earlier prediction of Jerusalem's destruction suggests that Luke's readers would know very well what did happen. Rejecting the way of peace is the way of violence, which has a way of rebounding on those who perpetrate it.

2.6.5.5 Daniel 2:34, 44

Jesus' third allusion takes him to Daniel 2:31-45. In the story that makes Daniel's reputation with Nebuchadnezzar, this Judean exile tells the Babylonian king both the content of the king's dream and its interpretation. The king has dreamt of a magnificent statue (εἰκών) made head to toe of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay. As the king watches, a stone is hewn without the use of hands from a mountain and then hurled against the statue's feet, crushing

[122] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 74. Childs comments on the MT, which differs significantly from the LXX in Isaiah 8:5-15, but the above point applies to how Jesus' words interact with the LXX.

them, toppling the statue and pulverizing it "like fine chaff on a threshing floor blown away by the wind, but the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (2:35).[123] In Daniel's interpretation, the statue represents a series of empires; the stone that crushes it and fills the earth represents "a kingdom" (βασιλεία) that the "God of heaven" will establish and that "will stand forever" (2:44).

When Jesus speaks of the stone that will "winnow" the one on whom it falls, he evokes the imagery of this episode without making an exact verbal connection (Luke 20:18). But Jesus has spent his entire ministry telling about and portraying the reign of God, which opposes imperial power in an echo of Dan 2:44. This stone—representing Jesus, who inaugurates God's reign—exposes imperial power's inherent weakness and imminent demise and, therefore, the vulnerability of any who have allied themselves with empires. When examined closely in context, these three passages at the end of the parable send a clear message: through Jesus, God is establishing a reign the power of which exceeds all human kingdoms, toppling them through their inherent weaknesses. To reject Jesus is to reject God's reign and to choose the path of fear and violence that leads to destruction either by or along with the world's empires.

Even though Jesus initially tells this parable "to the people," πρός τόν λαόν, (Luke 20:9) the scribes and chief priests realize that what Jesus has said particularly addresses themselves, but only after their fear of the people stays their initial urge to arrest him on the spot: "And the scribes and chief priests sought to seize him in that hour (ἐπιβαλεῖν ἐπ' αὐτὸν

[123] The longer Old Greek text of the LXX has "struck" (ἐπάταξε) where the Theodotion has "filled" (ἐπλήρωσεν). The latter seems to fit the context of Jesus' ministry better than the former.

τὰς χεῖρας ἐν αὐτῇ ὥρᾳ), and they feared the people, for they knew that he had spoken this parable against them (πρός αὐτούς)" (20:19). Even before realizing that they are Jesus' primary target, they confirm again that (in contrast to Jerusalem's general population) Jesus' criticisms particularly apply to them. They want to arrest him but, as those who hold social power and privilege often do, they fear "the people." "The people" side with Jesus against the leaders, spotlighting the threat he has posed to their authority ever since his arrival.[124] He approached Jerusalem in a way that announced his Davidic heritage and kingly status, drove the merchants from the temple and called its custodians useless leaders and rebels against God's reign, and began teaching there himself in their place (19:28-48). When they question his authority he tells a parable that exposes them again as corrupt and rebellious administrators of God's reign, sets himself up as its heir and rightful administrator, and ends by exposing their doomed alliance with Rome and revealing—if cryptically—his own opposition to imperial power (20:1-19).

Jesus' refers to Daniel's empire-crushing stone obliquely enough that one might wonder whether the chief priests, scribes, and elders recognize the threat he implies against Rome. It is a real threat, even if non-violent; Jesus' portrait of God's reign has no place for the oppressive hierarchies inherent in imperial power structures. He has told the rich they must relinquish their possessions in order to participate in God's reign (18:24-25). Jesus' words against imperialism mesh with his entire teaching ministry to this point. The leaders' response, however, suggests that they do understand the threat to imperial power in Jesus' allusion, and

[124] Rebekah Eklund, "From 'Hosanna' to 'Crucify': The Fickle Crowds in the Four Gospels," *BBR* 26 (2016): 21-41, esp. 30-31. Although "the people" at first ally with Jesus and protect him against the "crowd" that ultimately arrests him (22:47), Eklund points out a dramatic shift by the time Jesus faces trial (23:13).

apparently they intend to use this information to their advantage. They already wanted his demise (19:47); now they think turning him over to the Roman governor might be a means to that end. If they can convincingly present him before the governor as a political threat against the emperor, they will at once both dispose of Jesus and strengthen their relationship to Rome. So the chief priests and scribes double down on their imperial alliance and set about getting Jesus to speak more directly subversive words against Rome that will mobilize the governor's judicial process against him: "Putting him under surveillance (παρατηρήσαντες), they sent spies who presented themselves as honest that they might catch him in his words in order to betray him to the rule and authority of the governor" (20:20). This strategy removes all doubt of their collusion with Rome. They prefer imperial power to the reign of God—violence, privilege, and oppression rather than wholesome, constructive peace. They twist Jesus' words and act upon him in a way that aims to paint him as a political threat the Roman governor can understand and consider worth the trouble of executing. Against the backdrop of their vicious machinations Jesus' self-presentation makes a vivid contrast: He is the king whose power is diaconal, who opposes imperial power without violence, and who gains victory through resilience.

2.6.5.6 Accommodation to Caesar

The scribes' and chief priests' strategy begins with the aforementioned attempt to elicit seditious words from Jesus against the emperor. After the spies attempt to flatter Jesus' vanity, they ask whether or not it is right to pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus perceives their scheming and slips their trap. Asking to see a denarius he asks, "Whose image (εἰκόνα) and inscription does it bear?" They answer, "Caesar's." So he replies, "Accordingly, give back to Caesar what is

Caesar's and to God what is God's." (20:21-25). Instead of settling the question of what a person might owe to Caesar, Jesus prompts these overmatched spies to consider a far more serious matter. Caesar's image on a coin marks it as Caesar's, but human beings bear God's image (εἰκόνα; Gen 1:26). Jesus does not need to say, "You may owe Caesar some of your wages, but you owe to God your very self. Have you truly given yourself to God, or are you in default? Consider the relative power of Caesar vis-à-vis God. Which debt do you think should concern you more?" No wonder the questioners retreat, astounded and silenced (20:26). When the leaders' try to trap Jesus into treasonous speech, Jesus changes the context in a way that neither simply accepts the terms they offer (either allegiance to the emperor or not) nor directly resists the question. He flips the script on them. They ought to ask not, "Should we pay taxes to Caesar?" but "How do we give ourselves fully to God while living under Caesar's domination?" Indeed, Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching respond to exactly this question—that is the heart of living in God's reign on this side of its full realization. By contrast, the leaders have done the reverse—they have given themselves to Caesar. Jesus may have escaped their agents' verbal trap, but the temple leaders still seek to bring Jesus before the governor on charges of capital treason.

The evidence of the chief priests' and scribes' accommodation to Roman power accumulates rapidly in their meeting with Judas. As Passover approaches, they still seek a way to put Jesus to death, which they have still not found because Jesus spends his days surrounded by a sympathetic crowd. The people still side with him, and the leaders fear them (22:1-2). Judas becomes the key to their scheme's success when he approaches them with an offer to

betray Jesus.[125] Luke reports that Judas confers with the chief priests and the στρατηγοί, soldiers associated with the temple (22:4), which suggests another level of the temple leadership's acculturation to Rome's use of power. An additional layer appears in the next verse: they agree to give Judas money in exchange for betraying Jesus to them when he is away from the crowds (22:5-6). Using money to harm rather than help is antipodal to Jesus' many teachings about the use of wealth and makes an unsurprising link between money and the use of violent power.

When Judas does betray Jesus, the temple leadership finally acts explicitly against Jesus in the manner of Rome's agents. The more tightly they ally themselves with Rome the more expedient they find it to cast Jesus as a traitor fomenting revolt against Rome. When Jesus addresses the chief priests, temple soldiers, and elders who have come to arrest him that night on the Mount of Olives, he observes that they have approached him in such a way as to brand him an insurrectionist: "Have you come out with knives and clubs as against an outlaw (λῃστήν)? I was with you in the temple every day and you didn't stretch out your hands against me, but this is your hour and authority—darkness" (22:52-53). Had they approached him in daylight in the heart of the city, a charge of insurrection might have been less convincing. Instead they have come as if to drag a criminal from his lair. Whereas Jesus had previously identified them as λῃσταί in rebellion against God's reign (19:46), here they aim to present him as a λῃστῆς instigating sedition against Rome.

[125] That Satan enters Judas and impels him to betray Jesus recalls the episode of Jesus' temptation by "the devil," a translation of "the Satan" into Greek. Imperial power through idolatry was the devil's second offer to Jesus—one that Jesus' words suggest the temple leaders have already accepted. Now, Judas is snared by the same net (cf. 4:1-13).

The question of who really deserves this label exposes several layers of irony: The temple leadership rightly perceives that Jesus presents a real threat to Rome's socio-political order, though Jesus has neither committed nor allowed any violence done in his name. Jesus opposes the imperial power, but he does so in a manner so subtle and unexpected that none of Rome's representatives notice without the temple leaders' intervention. But violence is an essential element in the semantic range of λῃστῆς, which disqualifies Jesus as one. On the other hand, all the temple leadership's efforts to resist Jesus' accusation that they are λῃσταί have only confirmed it. They violently oppose him who represents God's reign; they seek Jesus' death in an effort to wrest back from him their position of power and influence in Jerusalem. True to form, after arresting him in the dark they take him away and, bringing him to the high priest's house, allow the men holding him in custody to mock, beat, and abuse him all night (22:54, 63-65). By contrast, Jesus has taught publicly in daylight and actively avoided using violence (Luke 22:49-51). Jesus desires not a military revolution but repentance: an active turn away from violence and greed toward life and wholeness. In attempting to paint Jesus as a λῃστῆς the charge redounds on them: he is not the one staging a violent rebellion—they are.

2.6.6 Jesus' True Kingship

Nearly every moment of interaction between Jesus and the temple leaders, from his accusing them of being λῃσταί to their arresting him in the manner of a λῃστῆς, has confirmed their collusion with Rome and resistance to God's reign, but along the way Jesus has also been establishing his own identity. His manner of entry into Jerusalem presents him as David's heir and Son of the Most High (19:30-44). His teaching in the temple demonstrates his authority: he captures the people's attention with little effort (19:48). In his teaching he implies that he

is God's son, who will abolish imperialism and establish God's reign (20:1-19). He has revealed his undivided allegiance to God (20:20-26). And he has begun to establish that though he is the Messiah and heir to David's throne, he also differs from David in some important ways (20:41-44). Tradition says that the Messiah is the Son of David, but Jesus questions how, since, in Psalm 8, David calls him "Lord." Jesus indicates that the Messiah is the Lord, as Jesus has been called since before his birth. And Jesus has shown that his character differs from David's in just the ways that Zechariah predicted David's heir would diverge from his forefather: he comes to usher Jerusalem into the way of peace (Luke 1:68-79; 19:42-44). Jesus does not come to Jerusalem as a competing Caesar; he brings a peacemaking power that dismantles imperial hierarchy.

2.6.6.1 Diaconal Power

This agenda escapes even the most sympathetic audiences to the extent that, after being with Jesus for his entire Galilean ministry and journey to Jerusalem, after supper on the night of his arrest, Jesus' disciples begin arguing with one another about which of them is "the greatest" (22:24). Despite hearing all his teaching about the special status of the poor in the reign of God, they have still not grasped what that means for their own communal life or the political dynamic Jesus commends. Thus, before Jesus goes on to demonstrate the extreme degree of his commitment to living what he has taught about God's power, he gives them one last lesson on the difference between human politics and God's. "But he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῶν ἐθνῶν) dominate them and their authorities are called "benefactors," but not so with you. Rather, let the greater one among you become like the younger, and let the one who governs become like the one who serves' " (22:25-26). The usual

order of human civilization is hierarchical, and those who have the power of wealth and influence use it in relationships of paternalistic dominance in order to maintain their place in the hierarchy. Such people are the typical bearers of the descriptor, "great." The disciples should not seek such greatness. They should seek, rather, to be like Jesus who is with them as "one who serves" (ὁ διακονῶν; 22:27). Being someone who serves does not diminish Jesus' power—it is exactly the expression of his power. His is a constructive, life-giving power extended to support others' flourishing and that is the pattern of governance he commends to his disciples, urging them once more to picture the power of God's reign in those terms. They must gain proficiency in this exercise of power because they have a future in God's reign as judges of Israel's twelve tribes (22:28-30). They witness Jesus' complete commitment to this gentle exercise of power when they see him face his enemies without retaliation or violent resistance at his arrest, trials, and death.

2.6.6.2 Non-violence

Setting up the chief priests and other temple officials as rebels against God's reign puts them in a similar role to the citizens of the country in Jesus' parable of Luke 19:12-27, who did not want the client ruler to reign over them. In that parable, the client ruler takes vengeance on those citizens, ordering them slaughtered before him (19:27). But Jesus is not that ruler. Though the chief priests and their confederates greatly fear the people (19:48; 20:6, 19; 22:2), Jesus does not exercise the influence he has with the crowds in order to stage any kind of coup—either against the temple leaders or any Roman rulers. When the chief priests, temple guard, and elders come to arrest Jesus on the Mount of Olives and Jesus' disciples want to fight them off, Jesus stops his disciples and heals the ear of the high priest's slave, which one

of his disciples cut off in the initial skirmish of his arrest (22:50-51). Throughout his arrest and trials he offers no resistance—not even returning insults—and ultimately even forgives his crucifiers.[126] He exemplifies the love toward enemies and return of blessing for cursing that he commended in his first public teaching. These very acts, however, signal his uncompromising allegiance to God, which renders him far from benign vis-à-vis any powers set up in rebellion against God's manner of reign. Although Jesus is innocent in a way that Rome's representatives repeatedly acknowledge, he is also a genuine threat to Roman power. Throughout his trial and crucifixion, the innocent threat Jesus poses is evident in the partial truth of the temple leaders' accusations against him (23:2, 5, 13-14), his comparison to Barabbas (23:18), Pilate's willingness to crucify him despite declaring that Jesus does not deserve death (23:4, 13, 22, 24), and the centurion's observation that Jesus—though crucified with criminals—was innocent (23:47).

Part of the power of the charges against Jesus is that they contain a kernel of truth—he is a real political threat even though he has no plans to stage a coup. When the assembly of elders, chief priests, and scribes bring Jesus before Pilate they first dehumanize him (as a nameless "this one"), and then accuse him of being a danger to Rome both economically and politically: "This [is someone] we found corrupting our nation (διαστρέφοντα τό ἔθνος ἡμῶν)—forbidding the giving of taxes to Caesar and presenting himself as 'Christ,' a king"

[126] There is a textual problem on Luke 23:34—it is missing from some reliable manuscripts but, as Nathan Eubank rightly argues ("A Disconcerting Prayer: On the Originality of Luke 23:34a," *JBL* 129 (2010): 521-36), its representation is sufficient to be plausibly original and its echo in Stephen's death (Acts 7:60) gives it an important theological connection to the narrative of apostolic witness. For these reasons is inclusion here is more than defensible.

(Luke 23:2).[127] Although Jesus never directly forbid anyone from paying Roman taxes, he declared his exclusive allegiance to God well before arriving in Jerusalem when he insisted that no one can serve two masters (16:13); his words about giving to Caesar and to God what is due to each (20:25) makes the matter political and—for those who hear with a certain twist—potentially seditious. Teaching the people to privilege their allegiance to God whenever the demands of God and Caesar come into conflict obviously does not resolve in Rome's favor, but Jesus makes that point in a way that people would hear only if they know Israel's God's historic insistence on exclusive loyalty. The assembly of temple leaders translates the threat for a Roman audience and put a seditious spin on it in the process.

They do likewise with Jesus' claim to be Messiah. Jesus condoned his disciples' hailing him as "king in the Lord's name" (19:38) as he came to Jerusalem, and alluded to his messianic identity, kingship, and lordship when addressing the scribes just a few days prior (20:41-44). But even in that very exchange Jesus refused to allow preconceptions of "Messiah" to determine what it signifies when applied to him. Rather, these terms of Messiah, king, and Lord shift and change to how he embodies them, which is a threat to Rome's power, but not because he would set himself up as a rival king. Jesus has no imperial aspirations, and no

[127] This is yet another moment in the narrative that proves the temple leader's accommodation to Roman cultural patterns and power. They call Israel, "our nation," instead of "our people." Although words are not inert meaning containers, the difference between ἔθνος and λαός is usually the difference between Gentiles and the covenant people of God. Wherever the people in Jerusalem have sided with Jesus, they have been λαός. For the leaders to call themselves part of an ἔθνος when they address Pilate suggests they view themselves their people primarily as residents in one among Rome's many provinces and as loyal subjects under Rome's cultural, political, and religious norms who pledge due allegiance to the emperor. The total accommodation of the Jewish temple leadership to Roman authority means that the governor before whom they bring Jesus does not need to be particularly cruel or malevolent. He can trust that these minions will bring before him any real threats to his power and, by extension, Rome's, because they have demonstrated their investment in maintaining the place of influence they hold at Rome's pleasure.

interest in a kingship Herod's. The power of Jesus' kingship is the constructive and wholesome power he has wielded throughout his life. Pilate, however, has no such category for kingship; the temple leaders seem to hope that when Pilate hears Jesus has called himself a king he will think Jesus seized a title that Caesar has reserved the right to bestow or withhold, as demonstrated in the Herodian dynasty.[128] While he has clearly done nothing of the kind, he does aspire to usher in a political structure that would undermine imperialism's socio-economic hierarchy.

Both the accusation of his forbidding the people to pay taxes and claiming to be a king are a subset of the charge that he "stirs up (ἀνασείει) the people" with his teaching all the way from Galilee to here, as the temple leaders put it (23:5) and is "leading the people astray (ἀποστρέφοντα τόν λαόν)," as Pilate puts it (23:14). This charge, too, applies to Jesus even as he is innocent of breaking any law. Jesus has scarcely begun teaching in Jerusalem when Luke reports, "all the people (ὁ λαός ἅπας) hung upon what they heard from him," and that already the leaders view this development as a threat to their authority and security (19:48). Jesus began leading the people away from trusting the temple authorities as soon as he arrived in the city. Later he explicitly accused the scribes in a way that echoes some of his woes upon the rich (6:24-26); they love public recognition, taking the best seats in synagogues and when they dine as guests, but they devour widows' homes and pray long, pretentious prayers (20:46-47). Jesus intends to lead the people into a very different life than that of the scribes; he has studiously

[128] Catchpole, "The 'Triumphal' Entry," 321; see Josephus, *Ant.* 17.235.

dismantled the notion that people can worship Israel's God and yet live according to the socio-political hierarchies of Rome, but he does not urge anyone to stage a violent revolt.[129]

Even though Jesus has not engaged in insurrection the temple leaders treat him as an "outlaw," as he himself noted at his arrest (22:52), and present him to Pilate as a threat to Rome. While no one uses the term λῃστῆς again, the leaders compare Jesus with Barabbas, "who had been imprisoned because of an insurrection [στάσιν] in the city and for murder" (23:19), and ask for Barabbas's release in lieu of Jesus' (23:18). This preference suggests that Jesus and Barabbas belong in the same category, and that Jesus poses the greater danger. Once again, the comparison borders on truth while remaining basically false. Jesus is far more dangerous to Rome than Barabbas, but he occupies an altogether different category because he wields the power to give life rather than deal death. Barabbas simply represents the power of Rome writ small. As such, Barabbas poses no real threat to Rome—he could never muster a militia to match much less defeat Rome's legions. Jesus does want an end to the oppressions Rome sanctions, but he aims to do so with God's power to overwhelm death with life. Rome has no sufficient answer to such power.

Pilate, perhaps, does not realize the threat Jesus poses to Rome's kind of power; or perhaps he is very shrewd and plans to set up the Jewish leaders as scapegoats should anyone in question his actions. Perhaps his many protestations that Jesus does not deserve death are a ploy to goad the Jewish leaders into demanding Jesus' crucifixion, but regardless, Pilate

[129] In Jesus' pattern of destabilizing political structures without violence he sets his followers' example for the pattern Rowe identifies in Acts: "New culture, yes; coup, no" (Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 5, 91).

clearly pronounces three times that Jesus has committed no capital offense (23:4, 13, 22).[130] And indeed, the leaders only bring hearsay against Jesus—he has spoken a lot, but he has not done anything seditious.[131] But Pilate does not require actual evidence of Jesus' criminal activity; he wants to appease the temple leaders, and nothing but Jesus' crucifixion will do. Jesus may not deserve death, but Pilate still finds a reason to execute him. He gives the order, and Jesus is crucified (23:24-25, 33). None of Pilate's actions indicate that he understands how Jesus threatens Rome, but Pilate apparently considers an alliance with the temple leaders worth cultivating, and they demand Jesus' death. He finds it expedient to execute Jesus despite having acknowledged repeatedly that Jesus did not deserve to die. For Pilate, expedience trumps justice. Jesus may be innocent, but he stands in the way of Pilate's political goals—in even more ways than Pilate appears to realize.

The centurion who observes Jesus' death takes his pronouncement a step further. Jesus has not only done nothing deserving of death; he is "innocent," or "just" (δίκαιος). Far from deserving death, Jesus was guiltless and good—a model citizen. That pronouncement coming from a Roman army commander gives it the same sort of layering that all accusations of Jesus' guilt have had, but in reverse. Jesus is not model citizen of the Roman Empire which has systematized injustice, and that is exactly because his way of being is true justice. A politics of true justice is innocent, and exactly as such it threatens the sustainability of a political order

[130] Luke gives no clear view of Pilate's motivations in Jesus' trial; the foregoing sentences are an attempt to speculate on some reasons for Pilate's odd reluctance to pronounce Jesus guilty in light of the fact that Pilate ultimately accedes to the temple leaders' demands to order Jesus' crucifixion.

[131] The closest moment is at Jesus' arrest where one of his disciples attacks the high priest's slave, but Jesus quickly puts a stop to that and heals the slave (22:49-51). The moment of violence is brief, not done by Jesus, and Jesus puts an immediate stop to it and Jesus mends the damage immediately. It is almost like and "exception that proves the rule" moment.

that runs on injustice. Jesus is king of a just and peaceable political order—the reign of God—wherefore he is both innocent and a threat to the kind of power that crucifies him. But once again, he threatens it not through violent resistance but, instead, through persistent resilience.

2.6.6.3 Resilience

Throughout Jesus' trial and crucifixion he exhibits resilience in maintaining his integrity and his own sense of identity even as he is denied his autonomy, isolated, and abused, and his accusers attempt to define his identity. As soon as the chief priests, temple guard, and elders accost Jesus on the Mount of Olives and take him away to the high priest's house (22:54), they—and not he—set Jesus' agenda. Having been thwarted in their earlier attempts to gather evidence of Jesus' seditious tendencies, the council has consolidated their power over Jesus by separating him from all the people who might advocate for him—both his disciples and the crowds people who had protected him from these leaders until now. Before long, even Peter has denied and deserted him (22:54-62), and Jesus is alone among his enemies. Being beaten, mocked, and derided all night before facing the council of his accusers emphasizes his helplessness. They strategically render him powerless, at least as they understand power—he is alone, battered, and exhausted. Before Jesus is brought to stand before the council he already has absorbed all of this abuse without responding.

Their manner of questioning likewise denies him any say in the agenda. The council accuses and cross-examines him, avoiding open-ended questions and not allowing Jesus any influence over the proceedings. Their questions indicate their hope for a quick indictment; they do not exhibit any desire truly to understand him. The questions are aimed to accomplish that which they could not when they feared the crowds who surrounded Jesus: they want to

trap him in his words and finally gather the evidence of his sedition (cf. 20:20). Instead of allowing Jesus to give a narrative account of himself, the council interrogates him about whether certain titles apply to him—"Messiah," and "Son of God." But such titles are fraught because of their long history. Jesus has never applied these labels to himself in a straightforward statement, "I am the Messiah. I am the Son of God." He did imply both in his earlier teaching of the people in Jerusalem (20:9-17; 41-44), but he also designated their context. The temple council applies these titles to Jesus without specifying the context, and Jesus refuses to participate in their labeling of him. Insofar as these terms apply to Jesus, his life supplies their context, and not the reverse. Moreover, the council has little stake one way or the other if these terms apply to Jesus; they merely want to hear him say something they might construe as seditious.

When Jesus responds to the council's initial demand, "If you are the Messiah, tell us," he reminds them how his previous encounters with them have gone (22:67-68). For the purposes he has in mind—drawing Israel away from the oppressive practices of imperialism and back to total allegiance to God—he has been telling them who he is all along. They have understood well enough what he said before; they just want him to say words that will brand him a political threat and get the Roman governor to order his execution. Jesus reminds them of the impasse that resulted previously, when they questioned him about his authority shortly after his arrival in Jerusalem (20:1-8): they will not believe what he says now if they did not believe him before, and they will not answer any question that implicates them in the charges he has leveled against them (19:46; 20:9-19, 45-47). But, as on that occasion, he does give an oblique answer. He does not say he is the Messiah but, having previously redefined "Messiah" to include the title of "Lord" (20:41-44), here he declares, "from now on the Son of

Humankind will be sitting at the right hand of the power of God" (22:69). If they would assign him the title of "Messiah," Jesus takes it on his terms—he wields not the power of a seditious earthly king, but the power of God. If they want to attach aspirations of seditious kingship to him, he will not supply the incriminating words.

Hearing this response, the leaders try another title: "Then are you the Son of God?" Again, they take a title Jesus has not used and apply it to him on their terms. Jesus resists their portrait of him: "You say that I am" (22:70). In effect, "Your words, not mine." Jesus does not apply titles to himself that might be used against him, even if they are true. Were Jesus to confirm his claim to that title it would not save him; the wicked tenants of Jesus' parable knowingly and purposely kill the owner's son (20:14-15). Jesus' reticence and the fact that this title never appears in all the rest of the accusations against him suggest that the leaders' real problem with Jesus is not his claim to be God's son. They do not even call it blasphemy. What they do say implies their frustration at the uselessness of questioning him: "What need have we still of testimony? We ourselves heard (ἠκούσαμεν) from his mouth!" (22:71). The completed aspect of the aorist verb ἠκούσαμεν (where one might expect the perfect) could refer to an event further past—one where Jesus did speak against imperialism (20:18). They have gained no ground toward getting him to say something truly damning, but why bother continuing? They have no need to let him speak more; they have him in custody and can take him to Pilate with the charges they already had in mind.

Jesus' pattern of reticence continues as various actors in the drama apply the titles "king," "King of the Jews," and "Messiah" to him. He responds verbally only once—when Pilate asks him whether he is the "King of the Jews." Jesus answers, "You say" (23:3). Jesus is

the King of the Jews, but whatever context Pilate has for that title is not the one that applies to Jesus. Jesus is not like the "kings of the nations"; his kingship relies on a form of power alien to his accusers. Jesus' answer points once more to the difference in Pilate's context for the term "king" and his own. Thereafter, Jesus keeps silent in the face of every question, insult, and accusation. He answers none of Herod's many questions (23:9). When the leaders (23:35) and the criminal on his left (23:39) tell him to save himself if he is the Messiah, and the soldiers likewise if he is "King of the Jews" (23:37), he says nothing. All three reveal their accommodation to imperial categories in the expectation that Jesus would save himself were these titles true of him.

In the midst of this grisly spectacle of crucifixion the truth proceeds from unlikely quarters—the words above him and the criminal crucified on his right. The inscription above him as he dies reads, "this is the King of the Jews" (23:38), which invites those who see it to shape their understanding of this title in terms of the man they see dying on the cross. Jesus' crucifixion confirms rather than revokes his claim as the βασιλεύς of the βασιλεῖα τοῦ θεοῦ. The criminal on Jesus' right evidences recognition of that fact; he still anticipates Jesus will "come into [his] kingdom" (23:42)—a hope Jesus affirms (23:43). This criminal's words do not prescribe for Jesus what his kingship must mean; the man looks to Jesus to determine his manner of reign.

Throughout Jesus' trials and execution, the various parties to his death use "king," or "messiah," and "Son of God" to circumscribe and define Jesus' identity. Jesus never denies these epithets, but neither does he accept the definitions his interlocutors would assign them. "King," applied to him, asserts his aim to topple—without violence—the kind of powers that,

in this moment, are allied to crucify him. He does not deny these epithets but transposes their significance by putting them into a new context—his life, and, especially, his submission to the unjust and innocent death from which he has long anticipated God will raise him (18:33). Three days later, his prediction comes true exactly as he said (24:5-7). Jesus' resurrection is God's essential response to the violent powers that crucified him—the quintessential act of resilience, rather than retaliation, and confirms that the pattern of power operative in Jesus' life is God's power.

2.7 Conclusion: Jesus Establishes the Reign of God

Communicating and drawing God's people into the political dynamic that functions on God's sort of power has been the heart of Jesus' mission in his healing ministry, his teaching, and in the whole shape of his life through the climactic events in Jerusalem. Jesus commends the reign of God, which his life, teaching, ministry, death, and resurrection reveal and inaugurate on earth. This work of Jesus is the heart of God's project in Luke: Jesus establishes how God's power overcomes constructively the destructive forces of the world, and additionally moves God's project of renewal forward by establishing a community, beginning with Jesus' disciples, that functions on the power of God's reign rather than on the paternalism and domination found in conventional human civilizations (Luke 22:24-30). The founding of that community and the beginning of its work of living together publicly according to the politics Jesus inaugurated is the story of God's project in Acts.

Chapter 3: Witness Jesus

The introduction of Acts confirms Jesus' role as the mediator of God's politics by portraying him telling his disciples about the "reign of God" for forty days after his resurrection (Acts 1:3) and answering their last question about his political aims by commissioning them as his witnesses (Acts 1:6-8). Jesus' commission presents the disciples with a new role in light of his own work on behalf of God's reign—they will be his witnesses. The unfolding narrative of Acts confirms what this commission foreshadows; the apostles must portray for the world around them the pattern of thought and life revealed in the life-giving power of resurrection and the Holy Spirit rather than the death-dealing powers of coercion and violence. Thus Jesus' commission specifies a theological shape for apostolic witness with both epistemic and political consequences: the theological shape of the witness Jesus commissions determines what sort of power the apostles may wield in their work as witnesses, which includes the attempt to impart knowledge of Jesus and commend the political pattern his life realizes and reveals.

The following argument begins with the theology of witness presented in Acts 1:1-8 before turning to implications for the epistemology and politics of witness, respectively. As Jesus' witnesses, the apostles' identity derives from and reflects the identity of God; they exist and act as witnesses reflecting God's character only because of God's original initiative. Because Jesus commissions his apostles to be his witnesses, they ultimately must bear witness to the whole divine project, in which Jesus has an essential role, and to the manner of God's reign, which Jesus' life, death, and resurrection realize. So knowing both the fact and significance of Jesus' resurrection is critical for the apostles to become witnesses, because

Jesus' resurrection—as the epitome of God's power—is at the heart of both *what* they are meant to convey as well as *how* they are to do so. How they are to communicate this knowledge, therefore, mirrors how they acquire it; together, both the form and the content legitimize witness as a way of knowing and communicating the truth of theological claims. Because bearing witness to Jesus entails a message about God's power and how it is at work in the world, Jesus' commission portends a story rife with conflict: inevitably, the apostles will encounter those who view divine power—and therefore politics—differently. But "witness to Jesus" also specifies what sort of power the apostles may wield and, particularly, how they may respond to conflict. If, as argued in the previous chapter, the reign of God takes shape in the pattern of Jesus' life, it is not a way of ruling that can guarantee its success by using force; and so those who would bear Jesus witness must shun violence and, instead, learn to exercise the life-giving power they receive by the Holy Spirit.

3.1 Theology: God-shaped witness

Apostolic witness begins with God. Without Jesus there is neither an object of witness nor a commission, and without God there is no Jesus. Luke shows how God brings these witnesses into existence, engineers their preparation and commissioning, and promises their inspired empowerment for God's own purposes. Parsing apostolic witness in terms of Aristotelian causality demonstrates the point systematically.[1] The *material cause*—the substance—of witness to Jesus is, of course, Jesus' existence and identity, which are inextricable from God and God's saving work. The *formal cause* of apostolic witness is closest

[1] See Aristotle, *Physics* 2.3/*Metaphysics* 5.2.

to the name that it bears—witness as an activity of proclamation derived from the witnesses' perception and experience of a particular reality. Apostolic witness has two *efficient causes*. First is Jesus' own commission; his words provide the impetus that turns his followers from those who have perceived his identity into those who proclaim his identity. He promises them the second efficient cause; the Holy Spirit will empower their witness. These efficient causes reiterate the witnesses' dependence on God for their existence and ability to function as witnesses. The *final cause*, or raison d'être, for apostolic witness is God's wider project to extend salvation universally through establishing a peaceable and wholesome reign. The apostles are to form the nucleus of a community that, by imaging Jesus' identity in its life together, puts God's character and manner of reign on display from Jerusalem "up to the end of the earth."[2] This parsing of causes shows that apostolic witness to Jesus is God's project from beginning to end. God orchestrates the making of apostolic witnesses in order to present to the world an image of God-shaped political order.

3.1.1 Material cause: Jesus' identity inextricable from God

When Jesus prescribes for his apostles the title μου μάρτυρες he does not specify any particular aspect of his character or moment of his life as the primary substance of their witness. They are to be *his* witnesses, or witnesses *of him*, which implies they are to meant to communicate who Jesus is in a holistic way. They are to bear witness to Jesus' existence and identity. Acts 1:1 has already telegraphed this second volume's dependence upon the first for understanding who Jesus is, and Luke's Gospel emphatically portrays Jesus' origin from God

[2] In chapter two of *World Upside Down*, "Collision: Explicating Divine Identity," Rowe calls "Christian ecclesial life" … "the cultural explication of God's identity," and the whole narrative of Acts "a rich exposition of this cultural explication of divine identity" (18).

and co-identity with God. Jesus comes into being by God's action and shows God's character in his way of life, which God vindicates by raising Jesus from the dead.

3.1.1.1 "The events fulfilled among us" (Luke 1:1)

Luke highlights God's providential purpose and Jesus' central role therein from the beginning of the Gospel.[3] From its first verse Luke's Gospel conveys the sense that all the events recorded in the book have unfolded according to a plan that has now come to a point of completion: Luke writes "a narrative about the things that *have been fulfilled* among us [διήγησιν περὶ τῶν πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων]" (Luke 1:1). This way of introducing the Gospel presents the ensuing narrative as the account of a purposefully ordered sequence of events that fulfills and completes God's past saving acts according to Israel's scriptures. The pattern is perhaps nowhere more explicit than in the birth-infancy narrative of Luke's Gospel which, as Joel Green shows, draws forward so many key motifs and tropes from Israel's scriptures that marking the "beginning" of the Gospel story proves difficult.[4] So Squires rightly notes how Luke portrays God as the subject of a story that begins with creation, continues through Israel's history, focuses on Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and exaltation, and moves toward its denouement through the life of the early church.[5] The language of fulfillment in v. 1 comes as the first of many signals that the purposeful design outlined in

[3] See Green, *Theology*, 22-24; Cosgrove, "The Divine Δεῖ in Luke-Acts," 169-70; Squires, *Plan of God*, 2. Carl R. Holladay, in *Acts: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), highlights the "Fulfillment of God's Purpose" as one of the major themes of Acts (48-52).

[4] See further Joel B. Green, "The Problem of a Beginning: Israel's Scriptures in Luke 1-2," *BBR* 4 (1994): 61-85.

[5] Squires, *Plan of God*, 37.

Luke's "orderly" narrative has an agent behind it, and puts the reader on the alert for the literary markers and vocabulary that reveal the agent as God.

3.1.1.2 Adam and Abraham

Luke begins his account by telling of God's intervention to bring about the birth of John the Baptist and, shortly thereafter, of Jesus (Luke 1:6-2:20). In an important respect, this "beginning" is already in the middle of the story. By allusion to Abraham and Sarah through Zechariah and Elizabeth, Luke's Gospel begins, in a sense, in Genesis 12. Indeed, it begins even earlier, with Jesus' genealogy tracing all the way back through Adam to God (Luke 3:38).[6] The multiple appearances of Gabriel and other angels (1:11, 26; 2:9-13), Elizabeth's and Mary's confirming God's intervention in the births of their sons (1:24, 46-55), and multiple characters inspired to speak by God's Spirit (1:41-45, 67-79; 2:25-32) all denote a special concentration of God's activity in the events around Jesus' birth.[7] In these ways Luke builds into his narrative the unmistakable signs that God is the original and ongoing architect of a universally extended redemptive plan, centered in Jesus, that Luke calls "salvation" (2:30), which, as Green demonstrates, has both spiritual and socio-political dimensions.[8] Luke's beginning reminds readers that God's gracious acts of creation and election remain effective. Perhaps even more

---

[6] Green makes a thorough study of these motifs from the birth and infancy narratives of Luke's Gospel in "Problem of a Beginning," esp. 66-79.

[7] For a more detailed catalog and analysis of Luke's prologue that definitively categorizes everything Luke narrates afterward as fitting in God's plan, see Squires, Squires, *Plan of God*, 27-31.

[8] See Green, *Theology*, 136, 152. Also Douglas Buckwalter, "The Divine Saviour," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 107-24; Joel B. Green, "Salvation to the End of the Earth: God as the Savior in Acts of the Apostles," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 83-106; Guy D. Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, AcBib 4 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002) 25; Squires, *Plan of God*, 31; Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 123.

to the point, Luke's opening signals how the events of Jesus' life complete the work God began in the acts of creation and election and, at the same time, inaugurate a new moment in God's redemptive plan.

3.1.1.3 Conceived by the Holy Spirit

Both Jesus' existence and the shape of his life signal the ongoing effect of God's redeeming purpose. So Green is right to note, "*that* Jesus arrive[s] on the scene *at all* is itself a revelation of God's gracious design."[9] Readers of Luke's Gospel know, of course, that Jesus' identity—even his very existence—has a great deal to do with God. Most conspicuously, God engineers Jesus' conception. In Luke 1 God sends the angel Gabriel to Mary to tell her that she, though a virgin, will conceive a child who will be called "Son of the Most High" when the Holy Spirit comes upon her and the "power of the Most High" overshadows her (Luke 1:26-35). God brings about Jesus' conception, and not by allowing a barren couple finally to conceive. In contrast to Zechariah and Elizabeth's conception of John the Baptist (Luke 1:23-24), with Mary, God skirts those natural processes and, instead, causes her to conceive through the Holy Spirit—a narrative character[10] that, while a distinct entity is not other than God. The Holy Spirit is not like Gabriel, an angelic being separate from God; the Holy Spirit is God's life-giving power.[11] That power causes Jesus' life to begin.

---

[9] Green, *Theology*, 28 (emphasis original).

[10] William H. Shepherd, *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts*, SBLDS 147 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994): "Insofar as Luke presents the Holy Spirit as an actor in the plot, Luke presents the Spirit as a character. And inasmuch as Luke presents the Spirit in conflict with other characters, again, the Spirit can be considered a character" (66).

[11] See C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 47-48.

3.1.1.4 Κύριος

After outlining God's work to bring about Jesus' miraculous conception, Luke's narrative develops Jesus' identity in even closer connection to God. Even before his birth, Jesus bears the title of "Lord" (κύριος), by which title Luke also most frequently names Israel's God. Rowe provides the evidence: "The divine identity as narrated in the opening of the Gospel is one in which to be God is to be κύριος ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ (1:16, 32, 68), or simply and more frequently, ὁ κύριος (1:6, 9, 11, 17, 25, 28, 38, 45, 46, 58, 66, 76; 2:9 [2], 15, 22, 23, 24, 26, 39)."[12] Rowe goes on to explain how, in the midst of establishing God's identity as κύριος, Luke introduces Jesus by that title while he is yet in the womb (Luke 1:43), implying Jesus' intimate connection—even co-identity—with Israel's God.[13] Such co-identification spotlights Jesus' ability to reveal God's character and, especially since "Lord" is frequently a political title,[14] also God's manner of reign. Jesus' identity as "Lord" develops through Luke's entire Gospel and into Acts, which is possible only because of another act of God—raising Jesus from the dead.

3.1.1.5 Resurrection

Acts' introduction does not specify that *God* raised Jesus from the dead, but Jesus is plainly alive after having died (Acts 1:3; Luke 23:46). The fact of Jesus' life after his death requires an explanation beyond the natural. Life does not naturally follow death. In the Jewish

---

[12] Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 34.

[13] See further Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 34-49.

[14] As is evident in Acts 25:26, Acts' author is certainly aware that the title of κύριος, was sometimes attributed to Caesar. See further Rowe, "Luke-Acts and the Imperial Cult," 291-94.

imagination from which Acts' cosmology derives, there is only one source of life—the one God who created the world and everything in it (Gen 1-2; Psalm 24:1-2; Acts 17:24-25).[15] That Jesus appears before the disciples alive after his death results from nothing less than an unprecedented act of God.

God both brings Jesus into existence and raises him from the dead, so God is the root source of the substance, or material cause, of apostolic witness to Jesus: Jesus' existence and identity. But Luke's Gospel does not present God as merely the source of Jesus' existence; Luke also co-identifies Jesus with God by attributing to both the title "Lord." If Jesus' existence and identity are the material cause of apostolic witness and Jesus exists by God's design and action and is co-identified with God, then, by extension, apostolic witness ultimately originates in God and God's work.

3.1.2 Formal cause: Bearing witness as essentially derivative

The idea of dependence inheres in the concept of witness no matter what its substance or material cause. The formal cause of the activity to which Jesus commissions his apostles, that is, bearing witness, implies the occurrence of a prior event that those who bear witness perceived and now attempt to communicate. In the case of Jesus' witnesses, their witness depends on the material cause (Jesus himself) and the efficient causes (Jesus' commission and

[15] Israel's God as the creator and source of all life (and, thus, the author of Jesus' resurrection) becomes a central theme of apostolic preaching which, because of its roots in Israel's scriptures, would be firmly embedded in Acts' author's imagination even though it has not yet emerged in the first chapter of the narrative. See, e.g., Acts 2:23-24, 36; 3:15; 5:30-31, 13:28-30; 14:15; 17:24-26). See further John L. Drury, *The Resurrected God: Karl Barth's Trinitarian Theology of Easter*, Emerging Scholars (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 20; Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 120-24; Charles H. Talbert, "The Place of the Resurrection in the Theology of Luke," *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 19-30; and Andy Johnson, "Resurrection, Ascension and the Developing Portrait of the God of Israel in Acts," *SJT* 57 (2004): 146-62.

the Holy Spirit). The understanding of witness as derivative or dependent is essential to it, and yet, remarkably, unstated in seminal philosophical work analyzing witness as a concept.

In C. A. J. Coady's philosophical analysis of testimony through the lens of English law, this derivative quality of witness appears to fall into the category of what Dorothy Sayers calls, "something so obvious it is apt to escape attention altogether."[16] Coady describes the essential elements of both formal (legal) and natural (everyday life) testimony in such a way as to overlook the idea of the "thing" to which the witness testifies as a constitutive element of such testimony. Only between his first and second "marks of formal testimony" does the thing or event to which the witness points make an oblique appearance:

> (*a*) [Formal testimony] is a form of evidence.
> (*b*) It is constituted by persons *A* offering their remarks *as* evidence so that we are invited to accept *p* because *A* says that *p*.[17]

Calling testimony a form of "evidence" raises the question "evidence of what?" So the idea of testimony pointing back to something real, or arising from something real is implied, but Coady does not make the point explicit. Similarly, in (*b*) one could imagine that "*p*" derives from some *thing*—an event or object—that *A*, at least, believes is real or true. That is to say

[16] Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 24.

[17] C.A.J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 32-33. See also Axel Gelfert, *A Critical Introduction to Testimony*, Bloomsbury Critical Introductions to Contemporary Epistemology (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014). Like Coady, Gelfert describes testimony as a category of "epistemic dependence," but in terms of reception of testimony depending on the knowledge of someone else rather than the witness depending on an event or experience in order to have something to communicate and, so, even to be a witness (11-13). Jennifer Lackey's introduction to the volume *The Epistemology of Testimony* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006) proves helpful for giving further definition to what testimony is, but she, too, focuses on conveyance of information—witness as an "*act of communication*"—and says nothing explicit about the witness's own sources of knowledge. Not attending to this aspect of what makes a witness seems like a significant lacuna in recent philosophical work on the epistemology of testimony.

"witness," as a category of communication, is distinct from mere invention yet still involves the perspective and interpretive input of the person who bears witness.

From the perspective of the honest firsthand witness (and, as Coady rightly notes, false witness is possible[18]), bearing witness depends on having perceived some real thing that the witness then aims to describe faithfully. Witnesses tell of their experiences from their own perspectives in order to point to a reality beyond themselves.[19] Although "witness" presupposes the agent, the act of communication, and the message, from the perspective of those who receive the message it does not assume the occurrence of the event—or the reality—to which the agent testifies. On the other hand, from the perspective of the witnesses themselves, their identity as witnesses is nonsensical (or self-deceived) if there is no reality external to themselves to which or whom they testify. So Stanley Hauerwas: "there can be no witnesses without the One to whom they witness."[20] The category of witness is always derivative—pointing to a particular event, person, or reality.

3.1.3 Efficient causes: Jesus' commission and the Holy Spirit's empowerment

The apostles' witness certainly derives from its material cause—Jesus' identity and the events of his life that constitute his identity. The apostles' experiences of Jesus result in their having something to say about him, but the experiences alone do not suffice to transform them from receptive to active witnesses. They do not become active witnesses until Jesus'

[18] Coady, *Testimony*, 33.

[19] Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, 225.

[20] Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, 212.

prescriptive promise in Acts 1:8 is fulfilled at Pentecost. Jesus' commission and the Holy Spirit's empowerment, then, together constitute the efficient cause for apostolic witness.

3.1.3.1 Jesus' commission

God's initiative and sustaining presence in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus create the basis for and content of the disciples' witness, but the resurrection alone does not generate Christian mission.[21] The disciples saw Jesus' crucifixion and death (Luke 23:49), and afterward saw him alive again (esp. Luke 24:31, 35-39; Acts 1:3). These experiences, however, make them passive or receptive witnesses. Simply having seen Jesus alive again does not make them proclaim and display what they have seen and heard. They do not decide on their own initiative that the world needs to know about what happened with Jesus. So Ernst Haenchen rightly observes that

> To Luke it is of the utmost importance that Acts should begin not with the disciples left to their own devices, but with the Lord, who visits and instructs them for forty days more. In this way the Christian mission on which they then embark becomes not a merely human enterprise but a process which the Lord himself has guided on its way.[22]

Jesus' last words are the first element of the efficient cause that turns the disciples—passive witnesses—into apostles: those sent as active witnesses who tell Jesus' story and represent him in their communal life. François Bovon observes that apostolic identity depends upon Jesus and his commissioning them: "etymologically, an apostle is a witness of Christ who 'is sent'

[21] On Luke's theocentrism, see Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*, 1:2-3.

[22] Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1971), 145-46.

by his Lord to testify of the historical and suprahistorical truth."[23] So the witnesses' existence derives from their experience of Jesus, but their activity begins in the first place because Jesus directly commissions them to be his witnesses. Jesus' commission alone, however, does not suffice to make the apostles active witnesses; the Holy Spirit—the second element of the efficient cause—must first fulfill Jesus' promise of empowerment.

3.1.3.2 Empowerment by the Holy Spirit

Before Jesus commissions his disciples as witnesses he exhorts them to wait in Jerusalem to receive the "promise of the Father," which is implied to be the very Holy Spirit who, as Jesus assures the apostles, will empower them as his witnesses (Acts 1:4-5, 7-8). Accordingly, the apostles undertake no active witness to Jesus until immediately after the Holy Spirit comes upon them in a fashion too conspicuous for Jerusalem's inhabitants to ignore (Acts 1:9-2:6). Jesus' commission and the Holy Spirit's empowerment together comprise the efficient cause of apostolic witness. The efficient cause of apostolic witness, therefore, demonstrates additionally how the apostles' existence and activity as witnesses both result from God's initiative. The final cause of apostolic witness confirms the point about God's agency in creating witnesses a fourth time by establishing the narrative context and purpose of apostolic witness within God's providential purpose.

[23] François Bovon, "The Church in the New Testament, Servant and Victorious," *ExAud* 10 (1994): 45-54 Bovon's word choices of "historical and suprahistorical" raise questions about what kind of event the resurrection is and how Bovon understands what constitutes the "historical." These are important concerns that receive their due in chapter six. The important point here is the etymology of "apostle" as someone "sent by his Lord."

3.1.4 Final cause: God's project

The final cause of apostolic witness is God's plan that Luke often calls salvation—a plan that takes incarnate shape in Jesus' lived expression of God's reign as portrayed in Luke's Gospel. As outlined in the previous chapter, Jesus puts God's reign on display in his ministry of healing, teaching, and encounters with friends, strangers, and enemies. Jesus teaches and demonstrates how God's power is essentially creative and life-giving, and that God's power to rescue the world resides in God's power to bring life—not in the power to deal out death. Jesus' lived portrait of God's power is validated when he is raised from the dead. When the risen Jesus continues to teach his disciples about God's reign and commissions the apostles to participate in God's reign as his witnesses, he gives them a template for their new way of being in the world. In the communal life they are to teach and embody the kind of power that animates God's reign as they saw in Jesus' own life. For the world to be drawn into Jesus' way of living is its salvation, and to the end of making that salvation possible, Jesus commissions the apostles as his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judaea and Samaria, and everywhere else.

3.1.4.1 The reign of God in Acts' introduction

As Acts opens, the risen Jesus has spent the last forty days with his disciples "telling them matters concerning the reign of God" (λέγων τὰ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ; Acts 1:3). That the principal subject of Jesus' teaching remains "the reign of God" shows that the central emphasis of his life has not changed and remains critical for his disciples to understand. In light of the substance of Jesus' post-resurrection teaching, the disciples' final question of him makes perfect sense: "κύριε, εἰ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ ἀποκαθιστάνεις τῆν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ;" (Acts 1:6). Their question is often translated along these lines: "Lord, are you at this time

restoring the kingdom to Israel?" Many a scholar has taken this question as evidence of the disciples' continued misapprehension of Jesus' peaceable mission and hope for the immediate restoration of Israel's sovereignty.[24] David Pao makes a noteworthy exception; Acts 1:7 addresses "the timing of the restoration raised by the question. The fact of the restoration, however, is not denied; and the disciples were not rebuked for their question."[25] Pao goes on to cite Conzelmann, who "rightly has noted that 'it is not the hope of this that is rejected, but only the attempt to calculate when it will happen.'"[26] The disciples' psychological state is, of course, impossible to determine, but the prospects for faithful transmission of Jesus' political agenda look gloomy indeed if, at this point, the disciples still misunderstand it so fundamentally.

An alternative translation renders the Greek just as adequately, does not hinge on the disciples' persistent miscomprehension, and fits the context better: "Lord, are you at this time establishing the reign in Israel?" Since Jesus spent his entire ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem and forty days after his resurrection teaching his disciples about God's reign, asking whether God's reign will now be established in Israel seems only logical. And indeed, Jesus does not rebuke them for misconstruing his agenda; he only says the timelines of God's work are not

---

[24] See, e.g, F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988) "[The disciples] had at an earlier date been captivated by the thought that in such a restored order they themselves would have a position of authority (cf. Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-27). … The present question appears to have been the last flicker of their former burning expectation of an imminent theocracy with themselves as its chief executives" (35-36). Also Barrett, *Acts*, wherein Barrett views the question and Jesus' response as Luke's way of underscoring the "the non-nationalist character of the Christian movement" (76). See similarly Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 205.

[25] David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, WUNT 2/130 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 95; see also Goheen, *Light to the Nations*, 125-28.

[26] Ibid., citing Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 163.

theirs to know (Acts 1:7). What they need to know right now is not when the reign of God will be established in Israel, but what their role in God's work is. Therefore, Jesus promises them empowerment by the Holy Spirit to be in the world as his witnesses. Since Jesus' whole life was shaped to portray and enact the good news of God's reign, witness to Jesus is witness to the reality and character of God's reign as revealed in Jesus and, quintessentially, in his resurrection. The final cause of apostolic witness is God's whole project with Jesus and, specifically, the alternative politics he inaugurates called "the reign of God." Since the apostles are commissioned as Jesus' witnesses, their work is to proclaim and portray publicly through their communal life Jesus' character and use of power—allowing themselves to be caught up in God's project.

3.1.4.2 "Witness to Jesus" as participation in God's project

"Witness to Jesus" is how the apostles will participate in God's activity after Jesus' ascension. The apostles have a role in God's project, but it is, for that, no less God's project. That their power to be witnesses will come from the Holy Spirit likewise underscores the point: the mission is not in the apostles' control; it is God's project inaugurated on earth by Jesus and energized by the Holy Spirit.[27] The apostles will be carried along on the Spirit's power. So it is, too, that Jesus' commission is not a command; it is a statement of fact.[28] God

[27] One need not (and indeed should not) attribute to Luke a realized sense of a Trinitarian God in order to recognize the agency of God in what Jesus and the Holy Spirit do. See George K. A. Bonnah, *The Holy Spirit: A Narrative Factor in the Acts of the Apostles*, SBB 58 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk GmbH, 2007), 120 Bonnah attends substantially to the role of the Holy Spirit in the mission of the early church. See esp. 120-22; 267-390.

[28] As is the principal thesis of Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions: Pentecost and the Missionary Witness of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961).

is the providential orchestrator of the whole project in which the apostles will be willing, responsive participants.

Parsing apostolic witness in terms of Aristotelian causality leaves no doubt: God is the source of and reason for the apostles' mission; their existence and activity are not products of human imagination or initiative. Without Jesus the witness has no subject matter. Without Jesus' final words the disciples are not sent. So the outward moving witness, which propels all of Acts, begins with Jesus—the Jesus who is about proclaiming and bringing as good news the reign of God. Jesus speaks the first instance of μάρτυς in Acts with all the disciples' eyes fixed on him as he ascends into heaven (1:8-9). His words make plain what the setting and imagery imply: witness in Acts both comes from and points toward Jesus. Moreover, Jesus' very existence results from God's action, and he is co-identified with God. By presenting Jesus' own words as the impetus for apostolic witness to Jesus' identity, Acts establishes from the outset that the project of bearing witness to Jesus originates not with the apostles, but with God.

3.1.5 God-shaped witness and apostolic authority

Establishing from the start the divine source of the apostles' witness makes for sound strategy on Luke's part, particularly given the cultural context(s) in which their witness is deployed. Squires's investigation of divine providence in Luke and Acts demonstrates how, in a significant span of Hellenistic historiography, the "activities of the gods serve the fundamental purpose of justifying and reinforcing the required ritual actions of the Romans (for Dionysius) or of other nations (Diodorus), and therefore share the apologetic function of

providence, asserting the validity of traditional religious customs."[29] Squires contends that for Luke, God's providence plays a similar role of legitimizing—even necessitating—the apostolic mission.[30] To an audience accustomed to accepting divine guidance as sufficient reason for action, portraying the divine origin and sanction of the apostles' witness is powerful a strategic move. The divine source of the apostles' witness establishes once and for all the narrative's perspective on their harmony of purpose with "the measure of all things."[31] If the apostles' witness originates with God at every level of causality, the apostles enjoy unique legitimacy and authority. Perhaps surprisingly, however, this complete security and the confidence it engenders do not turn the apostles into a collective bludgeon sent to punish Jesus' enemies; instead, they enable the apostles to exercise the sort of gentle power that bearing witness to the God revealed in Jesus requires.

Because Jesus' way of communicating God's reign unifies the form and content of his message, witness to Jesus must do the same. Witness to Jesus entails communicating his character through imitating his expression of God's gentle and constructive power in both word and deed. This unity of form and content means that how the apostles come to know the truth of the power expressed in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection provides an essential guide for how they communicate that truth. The epistemology of witness—that is, the apostles' process of coming to know the truth of Jesus' resurrection and the significance of

---

[29] Squires, *Plan of God*, 43.

[30] Squires, *Plan of God* 53, 185.

[31] Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 17.

this process for their becoming active witnesses—therefore, provides the subject the following section.

3.2 Epistemology: Unity of Form and Content

At a 1979 panel discussion titled, "The Personal and the Political," Audre Lorde argued that feminists would not achieve social equity without imagining and practicing an alternative to patriarchy's construction of power. The power that built patriarchy would not end it, she argued, "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."[32] Lorde generated her metaphor from the context of historic slavery in the United States, but it translates to shed light on why Jesus enjoins the apostles to convey the significance of his identity by being his witnesses: "You can't use death-dealing tools to communicate a message about resurrection." How the apostles transmit the message of Jesus is a primary concern of Acts' introduction; but their manner of communicating is decisively shaped by how they are equipped and empowered, as well as the content of the intended message.

Before arriving at Jesus' directive of Acts 1:8, "You will be my witnesses," Luke summarizes how the apostles learned the reality and significance of Jesus' resurrection: "To them he presented himself alive after his suffering in many sure signs [ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις], for forty days appearing to them and speaking about the reign of God [τὰ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ]" (Acts 1:3). Such "sure signs" are observable events or phenomena that provide evidence of a certain state of affairs. With Jesus' resurrection, τεκμήρια provide evidence that

[32] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 110-13 (112). Lorde presented these remarks at "The Personal and the Political Panel," Second Sex Conference, New York, September 29, 1979.

though Jesus was dead, he truly lives again, but they appear effective only among those who have already begun to order their lives according to the pattern of God's reign. Receptivity to the pattern of power Jesus commends and to knowledge of his resurrection are of a piece; those who live into Jesus' message about God's reign are also the most likely to perceive his resurrection's reality and understand its significance. As Jesus suggests through his parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31), those who reject God's reign will not be persuaded otherwise even if they see someone risen from the dead. This lesson from the parable bears out in the three post-resurrection scenes of Luke 24; the degree to which the women (vv. 1-12), the Emmaus-bound pair (vv. 13-35), and the whole gathering in Jerusalem (vv. 36-48) exhibit habits shaped by God's reign corresponds to the ease with which they come to knowledge of Jesus' resurrection. Embracing God's reign is exactly the precondition of receptivity to Jesus' resurrection one would expect from attending closely to Luke's summary of the risen Jesus' time with his followers: he assured them he was truly alive and continued telling them about God's reign (Acts 1:3). By the logic of this collocation, Jesus' resurrection provides the evidence that God truly reigns. One can know Jesus has been raised from the dead only if one accepts the superior power that Jesus' resurrection puts on display—the power of God's reign. Thus Acts summarizes Jesus' post-resurrection teaching as "about the reign of God" (1:3). But in Luke 24, Jesus reveals his resurrection's significance by interpreting "Moses and the prophets" (24:27, 44). Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man resolves the apparent conflict: Moses and the prophets point toward God's reign, of which Jesus' resurrection is the primary evidence. Jesus' interpretation of scripture to illuminate his identity and place in God's plan affirms and shapes scripture's ongoing role in the community of his followers. What Jesus says about his resurrection's significance when he turns to scripture

corresponds to his consistent message about the nature of God's power: the Messiah had to suffer in order to come into his glory, but the consequence for those who inflicted his suffering is not vengeance, rather, a call to repentance and a promise of forgiveness (Luke 24:25-26, 46-47). Because Jesus' post-resurrection strategy of "appearing in many τεκμηρίοις and speaking about the reign of God" conforms to the content of his message, he provides the template—both form and content—for his apostles' witness. Jesus reveals his resurrection as the emblematic event of God's reign with communication strategies suited to his message: he interacts with his followers physically, interprets scripture through the lens of what happened to him, shares their hospitality, and, with playful humor, invites them into a new vision of reality. Having reminded them of all they have seen and heard of him, Jesus promises them that the same power that animated his mission will empower them: the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:14; 24:49; Acts 1:8). If his apostles emulate Jesus' strategies and accept the Spirit's empowerment as they convey the message about him, they will truly be his witnesses—those who portray in the ways that Jesus did both the reality and significance of his resurrection as the emblematic event of God's reign. The message of God's life-giving power requires a life-giving mode of delivery, and that is what Jesus commissions when he tells the apostles that they will be his witnesses.

3.2.1 "In many τεκμηρίοις"

One could scarcely overestimate Luke's esteem for firsthand experience of Jesus both throughout his life and after his resurrection.[33] Early in Luke's Gospel, the pervasive influence

[33] See Trites, *New Testament Concept of Witness*, 136-38.

of both scriptural writings and eyewitness (ἀυτόπται) accounts of Jesus' life implies that Luke considers such sources critical to the reliability (ἀσφάλειαν) of his narrative (Luke 1:2-3). Shortly before his death, Jesus describes the disciples as those "who have remained consistently with me [οἱ διαμεμενηκότες μετ' ἐμοῦ] in my trials" (Luke 22:28). At his death, "All those who had known him, even the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance seeing (ὁρῶσαι) these things" (Luke 23:49). And among Jesus' last words in Luke, he reminds his followers, "You are witnesses of these things" (24:48). Firsthand accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are vital in Luke's Gospel and remain so in Acts, as the summary in Acts 1:3 indicates: Jesus presents himself truly alive among his followers, making them into witnesses of his resurrection "via many sure signs," ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις, which are a specific kind of evidence.

Although, as David Mealand demonstrates, the phrase πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις is quite usual Hellenistic Greek, neither this phrase nor the word τεκμήριον appears anywhere else in the New Testament.[34] As Mealand shows, it does occur in some of the Hellenistic writings of the first century and earlier. Aristotle defines τεκμήριον as a species of sign (σημεῖον) that is a "sure symptom," differing from signs that are "unsure:"[35] "a τεκμήριον is something that

[34] Mealand offers an annotated list of ancient extra-biblical texts in which the dative plural phrase πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις appears (as Luke uses it here but without ἐν). Mealand concludes, "There is therefore ample evidence for phrases like that in Acts 1,3 being normal in Hellenistic Greek. That such normal Hellenistic Greek is used in a context which is very far from being normally Hellenistic or Greek is another and much longer story" [David L. Mealand, "The Phrase 'Many Proofs' in Acts 1:3 and in Hellenistic Writers," *ZNW* 80 (1989): 134-35

[35] See editor's commentary in Aristotle, *Prior and Posterior Analytics*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), 500

causes information to be known" (τὸ γὰρ τεκμήριον τὸ εἰδέναι ποιοῦν φασὶν εἶναι).[36] For example, in the following syllogism,

> The tulips are blooming.
> Tulips only bloom in the spring.
> Therefore, it must be spring.

if the premise, "tulips only bloom in the spring," is true, and one can find a blooming tulip, it follows without exception that it is now spring. The actual blooming of tulips—the τεκμήριον—is *a posteriori* evidence proving that the conclusion of the above argument ("it must be spring") is true. If tulips bloom only in spring, then blooming tulips are a "sure sign," a τεκμήριον, of spring. In *Rhetoric,* Aristotle specifies that only evidence proving a valid syllogism truly qualifies as a τεκμήριον. So there may be signs and harbingers that a certain state of affairs obtains, but only such evidence as would *prove* that state of affairs incontrovertibly realized is properly a τεκμήριον.[37]

---

[36] Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 70b.1; see also Aristotle, *Prior and Posterior Analytics*, 500

[37] See Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.17-19 (Tredennick, LCL): τῶν δὲ σημείων τὸ μὲν οὕτως ἔχει ὡς τῶν καθ' ἕκαστόν τι πρὸς τὸ καθόλου, τὸ δὲ ὡς τῶν καθόλου τι πρὸς τὸ κατὰ μέρος. τούτων δὲ τὸ μὲν ἀναγκαῖον τεκμήριον, τὸ δὲ μὴ ἀναγκαῖον ἀνώνυμόν ἐστι κατὰ τὴν διαφοράν. ἀναγκαῖον μὲν οὖν λέγω ἐξ ὧν γίνεται σθλλογισμός, διὸ καὶ τεκμήριον τὸ τοιοῦτον τῶν σημείων ἐστίν· ὅταν γὰρ μὴ ἐνδέχεσυαι οἴωνται λῦσαι τὸ λεχθέν, τότε φέρειν οἴονται τεκμήριον ὡς δεδειγμένον καὶ πεπερασμένον· τὸ γαρ τέκμαρ καὶ πέρας ταὐτόν ἐστι κατὰ τὴν ἀρχαίαν γλῶτταν. … τὸ δέ, οἷον εἴ τις εἴπειεν σημεῖον ὅτι νοσεῖ, πυρέττει γάρ, ἢ τέτοκεν ὅτι γάλα ἔχει, ἀναγκαῖον. ὅπερ τῶν σημείων τεκμήριον μόνον ἐστίν· μόνον γάρ, ἂν ἀληθὲς ᾖ, ἄλυτόν ἐστιν: "As to signs, some are related as the particular to the universal, others as the universal to the particular. Necessary signs are called *tekmeria*; those which are not necessary have no distinguishing name. I call those necessary signs from which a logical syllogism can be constructed, wherefore such a sign is called *tekmerion*; for when people think that their arguments are irrefutable, they think that they are bringing forward a *tekmerion*, something as it were proved and concluded; for in the old language *tekmar* and *peras* have the same meaning (limit, conclusion). … If one were to say that it is a sign that a man is ill, because he has a fever, or that a woman has had a child because she has milk, this is a necessary sign. This alone among signs is a *tekmerion*; for only in this case, if the fact is true, is the argument irrefutable."

Luke appears to use τεκμήριον as Aristotle prescribes. Luke's use implies a syllogism in which Jesus' many post-crucifixion visits to his disciples supply the evidence that he truly has been raised. If Luke intends the πολλά τεκμήρια to prove this syllogism, he might rely on a precedent that occurs in Diodorus of Sicily's *Library of History*, 17.51.2-3 (Welles, LCL): Alexander, standing in the Temple of Ammon contemplating the god, asks the prophet there,

> "[H]ave I punished all those who were the murderers of my father or have some escaped me?" The prophet shouted: "Silence! There is no mortal who can plot against the one who begot him. All the murderers of Philip, however, have been punished. The proof of his divine birth [τεκμήρια δ' ἔσεσθαι τῆς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γενέσεως] will reside in the greatness of his deeds; as formerly he has been undefeated, so now he will be unconquerable for all time."

Luke's use of τεκμήριον corresponds in form with Aristotle's definition, but the content he gives to the term coincides more with the above passage from Diodorus, in which observable signs in the natural world can demonstrate the presence of the supernatural. A seemingly ordinary person can do works that manifest his deity. By analogy, a previously dead person can do things that prove him alive. Luke does not specify which τεκμήρια demonstrate the reality of Jesus' resurrection, but if they accord with Aristotle's examples they should imply an argument: "Only a person alive in the flesh does x, y, and z. Jesus did x, y, and z after his crucifixion. So Jesus is alive again." The near certainty that τεκμήρια provide might lead the reader to assume that such signs alone would suffice to bring someone who witnessed them to believe in Jesus' resurrection. But that turns out not to be so. Jesus' resurrection is no bare fact; it is an event that creates and reveals a new reality, and, as Jesus' own disciples demonstrate, anyone whose way of life is still governed by the old reality can neither see it nor

rightly interpret the evidence of it.[38] Luke's narrative indicates that knowledge of the reality and significance of Jesus' resurrection proves elusive and demands, in the words of Stanley Saunders, "constant practice" and "the cultivation of a peculiar form of imagination."[39]

3.2.2 The Reign of God and Recognizing Resurrection

Twice in Luke's Gospel, Jesus predicts his suffering, death, and resurrection (Luke 9:22; 18:33); both times his disciples fail to understand. On the second occasion, by which time the apostles have seen most of Jesus' ministry, Luke emphasizes the disciples' utter bewilderment by describing it three times in a row: "they did not understand any of these things, and this matter was hidden from them, and they did not know what was said" (Luke 18:34). Despite having heard all of Jesus' teaching about the reign of God and having seen his many healings and exorcisms, the logic of a Lord whose power is revealed in suffering, death, and resurrection escapes them—even when, on Easter morning, the evidence starts to trickle in (Luke 24:8-11). Great is the temptation to regard Jesus' disciples with smug derision for their thick-headedness, but that would be a mistake. Jesus asks his disciples nothing less than to apprehend the ways of God, and, in the prayerful words of Rich Mullins, "Your ways and you are just plain hard to get."[40]

---

[38] Stanley P. Saunders, "Discernment on the Way to Emmaus: Resurrection Imagination and Practices in Luke 24:13-35," *Journal for Preachers* 20 (1997): 44-49: "…while the New Testament consistently affirms the reality of the resurrection and the continuing presence of Jesus and the Spirit in human experience, the New Testament authors also make it clear that not everyone is able to discern the presence of the resurrected one…" Seeing the risen Jesus "requires that disciples nurture a peculiar set of practices and ways of seeing. … In other words, discerning the presence of the risen Lord requires the nurturing of a peculiar imagination—one shaped by the gospel stories and the practices of discipleship" (46).

[39] Saunders, "Discernment on the Way to Emmaus," 44.

[40] Rich Mullins, "Hard to Get," *The Jesus Demos*, (Liturgy Legacy Music/Word Music/ASCAP, 1998).

The reality Jesus reveals requires those who would participate in it to reject clear evidence and received wisdom about what constitutes power and about the finality of death: the rich, people of high social status, and those who command armies are considered most powerful; and death is the end of life.[41] Jesus' resurrection controverts these "givens" of human experience. So Stanley Saunders: "The resurrection destroys our notion that death is the final boundary of human experience. The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth challenges our notion that the powers of this world are the final arbiters of reality."[42] These "notions" that Jesus' resurrection "destroys" and "challenges" are far from peripheral to human experience—they frame our expectations and mold our imaginations. To reject them in favor of, in Saunders's phrase, a "resurrection imagination" requires a radical change in the shape of resurrection itself—inversion, movement away from death toward life, the end of captivity to death-dealing power, and commitment to the sort of power that brings life.[43] That is the power that Jesus has employed in his healing ministry, his encounters with enemies, and throughout his teaching about God's reign. Jesus' resurrection makes a dramatic display of that power and, in Saunders's words, "is the ultimate vindication of Jesus' way in the world. It is an affirmation that his perception of reality, his organization of relationships, and his way

[41] See further Willie James Jennings, *Acts*, Belief (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 13.

[42] Saunders, "Discernment on the Way to Emmaus," 46; Saunders's language of "the powers of this world" is scriptural, but easily misread to suggest that the use of force is the sort of power rightly at home in this world, and that God's power does not hold sway in this world. "Worldly" is not that useful of a term to describe the kind of power that is antithetical to God's power, because this world is the one God created and in which God reigns.

[43] Saunders, "Discernment on the Way to Emmaus," 44. Note the article's full title.

of dealing with the powers of this world is the only true way."[44] Jesus' resurrection requires those who would see it to reject those basic "truths" of human experience—the finality of death and the superiority of death-dealing power—and to embrace the ways of God. Embracing the ways of God presents challenges for everyone, but the broad social locations of "rich" and "poor" present their own peculiar difficulties.[45]

Jesus continually emphasizes the particular difficulty the rich have in living according to the power of God's reign (Luke 6:20-26; 16:1-31; 18:24-25). For the rich to live according to God's reign requires them to repent of their thought and practices with regard to money—they must not keep the wealth that affords them high status within the imperial social hierarchy. They must jettison this power in order to participate in the community governed by creativity and resilience. To believe that such power wins the day is no small feat; the historical record militates against it. To trade one's wealth for the hope of heavenly treasure defies reason and experience; someone who had riches, security, and high social position would be counted non compos mentis to relinquish such power for the sake of participating in an unprecedented, unseen utopia. The received wisdom tells those who have resources and influence to seek to preserve and expand them—not to waste or give them away. Moreover, those who comfortably benefit from injustice need not long for justice; they have little to gain from it. The rich, as Jesus knows well, have ordered their lives according to the logic of power as

[44] Saunders, "Discernment on the Way to Emmaus," 46.

[45] See the social categories in Green, *Theology*, 10, citing Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1984), 284.

force,[46] place little stock in creative power, and do not really desire to see God's reign established.

By contrast with the rich, the poor have much to gain from the reality of the world where resilience wins. It is their native power, and they have little else. The doubt of the poor falls into the category of "too good to be true," which indicates a strong wish to believe but an inability to overcome the preponderance of evidence to the contrary. The poor can see the pattern of history from its underside yet more clearly than the rich can from above. The poor persist through resilience, but the need to employ it quickly reveals the precariousness of their existence.[47] They know intimately the brevity and fragility of human life. They cannot absorb the world's evils and emerge victorious. A power that wins through resilience must be infinitely resourceful, and the resources of the poor are all too scarce. In recognizing human limits and finding infinity unimaginable, doubting the power of infinite patience comes naturally. Even Jesus, by his death, showed that human beings cannot out-create, out-wait, or outlast evil; only God can. Both rich and poor have far more experience of the victory of force—whether from above or below—than of the victory of creativity and resilience.

---

[46] Simone Weil, in her essay, "The Iliad, or The Poem of Force," *Chicago Review* 18 (1965): 5-30, helpfully employs the language of "force" to illuminate patterns of power that include but also extend beyond violence: "To define force—it is that *x* that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing. Exercised to the limit, it turns man into a thing in the most literal sense: it makes a corpse out of him. Somebody was here, and the next minute there is nobody here at all; this is a spectacle *The Iliad* never wearies of showing us" (6).

[47] See, e.g., Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014). See also, Gene Demby, "This Racism is Killing Me Inside," *NPR's Code Switch*, Podcast audio, 9 January 2018, <https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=576818478>. From the episode description: "Black women in the United States are 243 percent more likely than white women to die of pregnancy- or childbirth-related causes. There's evidence that shows this gap is caused by the 'weathering' effects of racism."

Jesus' resurrection provides the evidence that God's power of resilience ultimately wins over the violent and oppressive forces that dominate human life; he absorbs the violence and injustice done to him rather than returning it and his death is turned to life. If Jesus' resurrection is real, it makes a compelling case that the power to give life overcomes the power to deal death, but because resurrection breaks one of the basic "rules" of human experience it is as difficult to believe as the idea that creativitity ultimately wins the day. Life on the other side of death is as difficult to believe in as the ultimate victory of gentle creativity and resilience, but some people appear more receptive than others. In Luke's Gospel, those who appear most readily to accept Jesus' resurrection as a real event and the prolepsis of God's reign are already living according to some of its logic. The poor and the generous are more apt to perceive the reality of Jesus' resurrection; those who jealously guard their privilege, or who still are captivated by the power of force, less so. The reign of God is like the poor, after all (Luke 6:20), and spells woe for the rich (6:24-25). Those who practice generosity and hospitality befitting God's reign exhibit greater epistemic hospitality to evidence of resurrection's reality and its significance as the event that both evidences and inaugurates God's victory. Conversely, those who resist God's reign will not be persuaded of it even when faced with the evidence of resurrection—a point vividly illustrated in Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

3.2.2.1 Lessons from Lazarus and the Rich Man

Because Jesus tells the parable of Lazarus and the rich man after characterizing "the law and the prophets" as the precursor to the heightened demands of "the reign of God" (16:16-17), the parable's punch line shows the unity of logic between God's reign and

resurrection—resistance to one coincides with resistance to the other. The parable's setup begins in Jesus' interpretive remarks near the end of the previous parable (about the shrewd steward): "Whoever is faithful with a little is faithful with much, and whoever is unjust with a little is unjust with much. If, then, you have not been faithful with unjust wealth, who will entrust to you true riches?" (Luke 16:10-11). These words strike at the heart of the Pharisees' principal failing in light of the whole chapter: in exhibiting inordinate love for money (16:14) the Pharisees show they do not really heed the demands of the "law and prophets," and so are still less suited for God's reign. They present a false front of being just, seeking public approval but garnering God's disdain (16:15). Their outward displays of law-keeping cannot offset their comfort with injustice.

All of these failings are evidence that the Pharisees have not really taken to heart "the law and prophets," which Jesus implies gave guidelines for God's people "until John," and have not been diminished or discarded, but rather, lead into "the reign of God" now brought as good news (16:16-17). "The law and prophets" command love of neighbor (10:27); the reign of God demands more—love of enemies and kindness toward the ungrateful and wicked (6:27-36). Since they have not done the little expected of them in the scriptures, they are unprepared to take the more demanding step of living holistically into God's pattern of power. Generosity and hospitality, especially in the face of great need, are essential habits to those who would inhabit God's reign. Like the rich man and his brothers in the parable, if they listened to "Moses and the prophets," they would practice such habits.

In the parable, when the rich man wants to send Lazarus as a witness to his brothers, Abraham says, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (16:27-29). In his own life, the rich man also had Moses and the prophets, but did not listen to them, and so he

ignored Lazarus at his door. He hopes a messenger from the dead will arrest his brothers' attention enough to make them repent (16:30). But, like the Pharisees, if the rich man's brothers have not taken to heart the instructions of Scripture, they are not ready for the greater demands of God's reign, and even an extraordinary sign of God's power will not persuade them to repent. That is the logic of the parable's punch line: "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded even if someone should rise from the dead" (16:31). Those who will not shape their lives according to the pattern of God's power in response to Moses and the prophets will not be persuaded to do so even if confronted with extraordinary evidence of God's power—someone raised from the dead. The scriptures and resurrection both point to the same reality—the reign of God, where the "poor" are at home and the "rich" are out of place. Those who do not heed Moses and the prophets, or even a witness raised from the dead, ultimately reject the reign of God. On the other hand, those who embrace the reign of God and shape their lives accordingly, are immediately amenable to the reality of Jesus' resurrection. So it is with the women who discover the empty tomb on Easter morning.

3.2.2.2 Women Witnesses

When Jesus proclaims that the "poor" are most suited for God's reign, he opens the door wide for women. If "poor" indicates those whose "ascribed status" places them on the social margins, women qualify among the poor—indeed, they are, perhaps, among the poorest.[48] Joel Green writes, "This was a patriarchal world, with women, as a whole, held in

[48] Green draws upon Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism: An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 195-216, for the phrase, "ascribed status," which "is imputed on the basis of family heritage, one's sex, and other inherited/genetic attributes." See Green, *Theology*,

low esteem."[49] No wonder, then, that among Jesus' followers, the ones most invested—literally—in his message are women. Luke first mentions them at the beginning of Jesus' itinerant ministry around Galilee: "he was traveling about the cities and villages proclaiming and bringing-as-good-news the reign of God, and the twelve with him, and some women who had been healed from evil spirits and diseases, Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; and Susanna and many others; who supported [διηκόνουν] them from their own resources" (8:1-3).

Despite being women in a patriarchal society, they appear to have some independence as well as means; they are free to travel and have resources at their disposal, but they do not use them in order to gain status. They never speak their acceptance of Jesus' teaching, but their actions reflect having heard Jesus' words about the reign of God and shaped their lives accordingly. Those who are suited for God's reign "give without expecting anything in return" (6:35). These women bankroll the spread of the gospel of God's reign. If they are rich, they distribute their wealth with the generosity of those who disregard social hierarchies. They support Jesus' ministry not as benefactors, as the Gentile authorities do, but with the same verb that Jesus uses to describe his own way of being with his followers; just as he is "among them as one who serves [ὡς ὁ διακονῶν]," so these women "serve" (διηκόνουν) Jesus and the twelve in the work of spreading the good news of God's reign (8:1-3; 22:25-26). And they are

80. Also Green: "The status of women in Roman antiquity also marks this population group as living on the margins…" (91).

[49] Green, *Theology*, 93. See further Léonie Archer, *Her Price is Beyond Rubies: Jewish Women in Graeco-Roman Palestine*, JSOTSup 60 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); and Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Graeco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995).

ideal donors—they give without attempting to influence Jesus' ministry or expecting a return. Indeed, they never speak a word of dialogue and are not even mentioned again until the moment of Jesus' death, when Luke reports that they had followed him all the way from Galilee (23:49).[50]

Upon his death, the women continue their quiet service. They watch as he dies and is placed in a tomb (23:55), and then prepare spices and salves for his burial as the Sabbath approaches (23:56). Immediately after the Sabbath they go to his tomb with their burial preparations (Luke 24:1). Luke does not explain why only Jesus' women followers performed this service, but Jesus' male disciples are conspicuously absent. Perhaps preparing a body for burial was usually women's work, although, in John's Gospel, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus share the task with no women present (John 19:38-40).[51] But Luke has no Nicodemus to supply the burial spices or to prepare Jesus' body. Since, in Luke's narrative, the women have been supporting Jesus and the twelve from the beginning of his ministry in Galilee, perhaps they alone among Jesus' followers can afford the expense of embalming spices, yet even that should not have prohibited Jesus' male disciples from participating with

---

[50] The list of named women who discover Jesus' empty tomb in Luke 24:10 overlaps with the list in 8:2-3, but both lists include a mention of "others," and Luke specifies that these women had followed Jesus all the way from Galilee (23:49), so it seems likely Luke means to identify them as the same women on the whole.

[51] While "professional mourner" was a women's occupation, aside from Mark's and Luke's accounts of Jesus' burial (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:51, 24:1), no other stories or laws of first century Palestinian Judaism designate preparing a body for burial as women's exclusive work. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus might be the exception that proves the rule (John 19:40). See Ilan, *Jewish Women* 188-190. See also Byron R. McCane, *Roll Back the Stone: Death and Burial in the World of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003). According to McCane, "Some rabbinic texts argue that the task of "wrapping and binding" [a corpse] must be gender specific: men, the rabbis suggest, may wrap and bind the corpse of a man, but not that of a woman. Women, by contrast, may wrap and bind either a male or female corpse" (32). Such a restriction, obviously, does not bear on the situation with Jesus; by this measure his male disciples were equally as eligible as the women to participate in his burial.

the women in caring for his broken body.[52] And yet the women act alone. Their actions recapitulate the generosity and unassuming service that they have practiced since the beginning of Jesus' ministry and keep them close to Jesus. Having supported Jesus and his spread of the good news of God's reign with their resources and presence during his life, they remain devoted to him in his death. Their literal investment in the spread of God's reign seems to have developed in them a habit of generous service and puts them in a position to learn of Jesus' resurrection before any of the apostles; they alone go to his tomb to look after his body and so are first to discover it missing (24:2-3).

Despite initial bewilderment at the empty tomb and terror at the men in shining garments who appear to them (24:4), the women are immediately receptive to news of Jesus' resurrection. The dazzling messengers proclaim that Jesus lives (24:4-5), and then remind the women of Jesus' own words about his passion, death, and resurrection (vv. 6-7). By reporting, "then they remembered his words," Luke reiterates that, like the twelve, these women were with Jesus throughout his ministry and internalized his teaching (24:8). The messengers at the tomb do not tell the women something new; rather, they remind them of something they already know and give it a context. Murray Rae makes a fair point that Luke does not fully describe the women's cognitive state: "At this point in the narrative it is not yet clear that anyone believes that Jesus is alive, including the women themselves. They were simply amazed at the sequence of events and, as yet, as far as we can tell, they do not know what to make of

[52] If, as seems to be the case in Luke 8:3, the women are supporting Jesus' disciples as well as Jesus himself, it is logical to suppose that the women had means that the twelve lacked. The Johannine account of Jesus' burial specifies that Nicodemus supplied one hundred pounds of myrrh, aloes, and spices (John 19:39-40).

it."[53] This reading, however, glosses over the significance of the women remembering Jesus' words (24:8) about his suffering, death, and resurrection on the third day; Rae simply skips this verse in his exegesis. The women's bewilderment only explicitly lasts up to that moment of remembrance. Once they remember his words they act immediately. The women return to the eleven and others gathered, and report what they discovered at the tomb (24:9).

Throughout the whole experience, they express no doubt and ask no questions; they see evidence, hear what the men at the tomb say, remember Jesus' words, and go tell Jesus' other followers what they saw and heard. While Luke does not write, "And the women believed Jesus was raised," their actions lean more toward belief than unbelief, especially compared to the eleven and other men who explicitly do not believe (24:11). Perhaps they skip "belief" entirely and go straight to action; they could do worse. They have been living into the logic of God's reign ever since Luke 8; they continue this pattern when they see the evidence and hear the message of Jesus' resurrection. Their orientation toward God's reign puts them in the right place and time to be the first to learn Jesus is raised and primes them to perceive the event that inaugurates God's reign. Their receptivity suggests that those whose lives conform to the power of God's reign are also apt to apprehend the event that confirms its reality.

The women's orientation toward God's reign and receptivity to Jesus' resurrection makes a particularly striking impression in comparison to Jesus' male disciples. First, even up to their last night with Jesus, the apostles do not understand the nature of his power. They argue with one another about who among them is "greater" than the others (22:24), suggesting

[53] Cf. Murray Rae, *History and Hermeneutics* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 82.

that they have judged God's kingdom the greatest among the kingdoms of the earth. Their mistake elicits Jesus' remedial teaching. The reign of God is not like earthly kingdoms, and in God's reign the greatest is the one who "serves"—the verb that characterizes the activity of the women who have seen to his and the twelve's needs since Galilee (8:3; 24:26-27). Later, at the scene of Jesus' death, Luke writes that "all those who knew him" saw everything from afar, but Luke makes special mention not of the twelve, but of the women who had come with him from Galilee (23:49). If the twelve are at the scene of Jesus' death, they are undifferentiated from the general crowd of those who knew Jesus. Even if they were present at his death, Jesus' male disciples do not participate in the preparation of spices for Jesus' burial, and so do not discover the empty tomb or hear the news from the shining messengers. Finally, they do not believe the women's report (24:11), which particularly illuminates the difference between them. So Green: "[the women's] faithful witness is set in contrast to the response of the male disciples, who regard their news as only idle talk (24:11) until it is confirmed by other men (24:34-35)."[54] In contrast with the women, Jesus' male disciples still misunderstand what kind of power governs God's reign, do not minister to Jesus' body, and do not believe the news of his resurrection. The contrast sharpens further when one notes that the women act upon the reality of Jesus' resurrection without having seen Jesus alive, but, starting with the disciples on

[54] Green, *Theology*, 93. Being thus disbelieved is, perhaps, one more mark of the women's marginal status. Certainly, what they report strains credulity (see, e.g, Rae, *History and Hermeneutics*, 83), but the pattern of disbelieving women or disallowing women's witness to count as evidence is well attested in Judaism throughout its history, and particularly beginning in the first century. See also Ilan Fuchs, "Women's Testimony in Jewish Law: A Historical Survey," *HUCA* 82 (2012): 119-59. Fuchs's investigation provides a thorough backdrop showing the many reasons why, across a spectrum of Jewish cultural history, women's testimony might be disallowed or deemed unreliable. It does not prove that Jesus' disciples held similar assumptions, but certainly provides some evidence for why Luke would portray them as disbelieving the women exactly because they were women.

the way to Emmaus, the male disciples do not recognize the risen Jesus or immediately believe even when he appears to them in the flesh.[55]

3.2.2.3 "Two of them," to Emmaus and Back

Luke introduces the pair of disciples who leave Jerusalem for Emmaus as "two of them" (24:13), which refers to two of the "apostles and others gathered" who heard the women's report but deemed it "nonsense," or "gibberish" (24:11). So "two of them" who thought the women's report was nonsense depart Jerusalem for Emmaus (24:13) and leave behind "their crucified dream."[56] Later in the episode Luke calls one of the two "Cleopas," which is the first time that name appears in the Gospel. In contrast with the women, there is no indication that Cleopas and his companion had been with Jesus for long. And indeed, their discussion of him seems to focus on what had just happened in Jerusalem in his final days (24:14). Then Jesus joins them (24:13-15), "but their eyes were held back from recognizing him" (24:16). Through the device of the unrecognized risen Jesus, the Emmaus episode fulfills the promise that those who weep will turn to laughing (6:21). It is full of all the humor and authorial winks of Tom Sawyer attending his own funeral; knowing Tom is alive puts readers

[55] Luke only names and specifies the sex of one of the disciples on the way to Emmaus—Cleopas (24:18). I used to speculate whether Luke means to present a married couple—the second disciple Cleopas's wife—but there is no particular evidence for that in the text. Although that possibility remains open, Luke's way of presenting discrepancies in openness toward the work of God along gendered lines (e.g., Zachariah versus Mary) suggests that these two disciples were men. In Luke 24:10-11, the women bring news from the tomb and the men do not believe. In Luke 24:13 the "two of them," who leave Jerusalem for Emmaus, appear to be two of the "all the rest" (24:9) who did not believe the women.

[56] John Shea, "The Resurrection Prayers of Magdalen, Peter and Two Youths," in *The Hour of the Unexpected*, (Allen, TX: Tabor Publishing, 1977), 48-49.

inside the joke and renders the funeral comedic rather than tragic.[57] In the Emmaus story, too, perspective matters. As long as these two disciples remain in the pattern of thought where force wins and death is final, the joke is on them. The joke escalates as the clues accumulate—even in these disciples' own words—and they still do not get it. But Jesus promised that those who were suited for God's reign would see their sorrow turned to laughter (6:20-21), and, indeed, these two disciples get the joke only after they demonstrate how the logic of God's reign has shaped them. When, in the context of offering Jesus hospitality, they recognize him, their sorrow turns to joy and wonder (24:31-32). As Saunders suggests, the Emmaus story "not only sets forth the essential content of a 'resurrection imagination,' but also points us toward the settings and practices wherein this peculiar imagination can take shape."[58] In other words, the story shows the unity of domestic and epistemic hospitality; practices of generosity and hospitality conditioned by the logic of God's reign make possible the context wherein these disciples can recognize what they initially do not—the ultimate sign that God truly reigns.

From the outset, the Emmaus episode sets up these two disciples as the only ones not in on the joke. Jesus and the reader both know the crucial information that he is alive. When Jesus comes to these two disciples unknown, he noses into their conversation with the aspect of a person in costume approaching dear friends and waiting for them to recognize him with tongue in cheek and a twinkle in his eye. "What are these words you're tossing back and forth to one another as you walk along?" (24:15-17). They stop, looking sad, and reply with a hint

[57] The connection to Tom Sawyer comes to me from Richard B. Hays, "'Did Not Our Hearts Burn Within Us?'" (commencement address given at the Faculty of Arts Graduation Ceremony, Charles Sturt University, Canberra, Australia, 7 June 2002).

[58] Saunders, "Discernment on the Way to Emmaus," 46.

of exasperation that this Johnny-come-lately interrupts their discussion and forces them to rehash the obvious: "Are you the only stranger [παροικεῖς] in Jerusalem and don't know what has happened there in these days?" (24:18). Jesus baits them into telling him about himself (24:19). They thought him "a prophet powerful in word and deed," and expected he was "the one who would redeem Israel," but his demise abolished that hope—they are leaving Jerusalem. The story is over. True, they heard that morning's reports from the women and others who went to the tomb and found it empty as the women had said, but the start of the episode designates them among those who judged the women's words "nonsense." They do not believe Jesus is alive. After all, no one saw him (24:24). Had someone seen Jesus, that would change matters—especially if they saw him themselves. So their words imply—to great ironic effect since the women did not need to see Jesus in order to accept his resurrection, and Cleopas and his companion see and speak these words to the risen Jesus himself and do not recognize him. They have missed the joke at every opportunity.

No wonder Jesus calls them "ignorant and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets spoke!" (24:25). Both Green and Saunders suggest that "slow of heart" points to a deficiency in their disposition to apprehend and follow in God's ways. So Green:

> "Slow of heart" calls attention to their failure to orient themselves fully around Jesus' teaching, not to their need merely for remedial education. "Heart" refers here as in the LXX to the inner commitments, the dispositions and attitudes, of a person that determine his or her life. Failure of insight comes from failure to embrace the ways of God.[59]

[59] Green, *Luke*, 848.

Or, as Saunders puts it, "'Slow of heart' is another way of describing the stupor induced by the world,"[60] where the ways of the world contrast with Jesus' portrait of how God reigns. This diagnosis corresponds to their having judged Jesus' mission to redeem Israel a failure—if they have not seen the fulfillment of God's plan in what happened to Jesus, they are looking for the wrong evidence and not attending rightly to scripture. So far, these two disciples present a stark contrast with the women who put their resources in Jesus' service and were the first to learn of his resurrection. Even as Jesus interprets to them (διερμήνευσεν) about himself from "all the scriptures" (24:25-27), they persist in incomprehension and non-recognition. They indicate no understanding—and certainly do not recognize him—throughout all his teaching. Saunders enumerates all the offers by which these disciples could come to believe, but do not:

> Reports of missing bodies are not enough. Stories of visions are not enough. The scriptures are not enough. Not even a good sermon, not even one preached by Jesus himself, will penetrate the fog that surrounds these disciples. Discernment of the resurrected Lord requires all these, to be sure.[61]

But they are not enough.

The compounding of all these facts and experiences does not suffice because, as Rae and Jean-Luc Marion agree, "it was not a sense of the facts that they lacked but rather the conceptual framework that would enable them to make sense of what they had seen and

---

[60] Saunders, "Discernment on the Way to Emmaus," 47.

[61] Saunders, "Discernment on the Way to Emmaus," 47. See similarly, Rae, *History and Hermeneutics*: "The two disciples saw clearly enough that there was a man walking with them on the road, and they heard him tell of all the things that had happened among them and of their relation to the scriptures. But, to begin with at least, they did not believe. … There is no fault with the sensory apparatus of the two disciples. They can see and hear just as well as they ever did. But they do not have the capacity to understand what is before them, and so, in another sense of the word, they have not really 'seen' at all" (100-01).

heard."[62] As most people do, these disciples believe "that dead men are not raised. They were kept from recognizing him because the reality before them contradicted their entire conception of how the world is constituted. … The resurrection is the beginning of a world *re-constituted* as the new creation of God."[63] Rae is right that Jesus' resurrection begins God's new creation, but it is also just the sort of evidence one would expect if Jesus' teaching about and embodying of God's reign reflect reality. Jesus' resurrection is the definitive demonstration that and how creative power ultimately wins. If creative power has ultimate victory, then death is no longer final. The narrative structure presents Jesus' resurrection as the proof that God reigns; there is no discontinuity between the reality that constitutes Jesus' life and the event of his resurrection.

Rae suggests that, because Jesus' resurrection re-constitutes the world, the Emmaus disciples "could not be expected to see that on their own."[64] But Jesus has been speaking about and demonstrating the power of God's reign since the very beginning of his ministry. While Jesus' resurrection is an unprecedented event inaugurating a new reality, its logic is completely at home in Jesus' life and teaching. Moreover, Jesus has been clear from the beginning, when revealing "the mysteries of the reign of God" (Luke 8:10) that not everyone receives the "word of God" with equal readiness (Luke 8:4-15). But some people do receive the seed of the word with joy, nurture it, and bear fruit through patient endurance (8:15). Perhaps the Emmaus disciples cannot be expected to know, without divine intervention, that Jesus is raised; the

---

[62] Rae, *History and Hermeneutics*, 101, drawing upon Jean-Luc Marion, "They Recognized Him; and He Became Invisible to Them," *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 145-52.

[63] Rae, *History and Hermeneutics*, 101.

[64] Rae, *History and Hermeneutics*, 101.

women at the tomb also do not simply understand what has taken place when they discover it empty. But in relation to the degree of "divine intervention" visited upon the male disciples, the women required very little in order to remember his teaching and accept the news of Jesus' resurrection. The women, after seeing the empty tomb, required the message from the men in shining garments to remember Jesus' words predicting his resurrection; Cleopas and his companion, on the other hand, hear all about the women's encounter, then see and interact with Jesus himself, listen to seven miles worth of ambulatory interpretation of scripture by and about Jesus, and sit down to supper with him before their eyes are opened.

The difference between the men and women in this case seems to be about how well they have, respectively, received Jesus' teaching and shaped their lives accordingly. The women's material commitment to the spread of God's reign and ongoing ministry to Jesus even in his death make a stark contrast with these disciples' (apparent) expectation of a conquering messiah and their departure from Jerusalem after Jesus is executed. These habits and thought patterns affect their readiness to apprehend Jesus' resurrection. If fitness for God's reign comes by degrees, the women who discover the empty tomb are further along in the process than the Emmaus disciples. The Emmaus disciples do not yet comprehensively see the world through the logic of God's reign, wherein God's creative power gains ultimate victory, inaugurating the new creation and the end of death with Jesus' resurrection. But they do offer hospitality to a stranger, and that act proves decisive for enabling their vision.

Saunders rightly observes that the turning point for these disciples' discernment occurs "neither in intellectual pursuit nor in words alone, but in the practices of table fellowship with strangers and enemies"—the very sort of practices that form people as fit citizens of God's reign. As they arrive at their destination they express concern for the stranger who has joined

them on the way and urge him to accept their hospitality: "Stay with us, because it is toward evening and already the day is far spent" (24:29). Perhaps they would judge night travel unsafe, or they expect Jesus is weary and would want a place to rest. Whatever their reason, they welcome this stranger as their guest. From the perspective of what practices characterize citizens at home in God's reign, in Saunders's words,

> this is an act of ideal discipleship. Although [Jesus'] words are already burning in their hearts, he remains a stranger to them. But Jesus has taught and shown them by example that following in his way consists of relentless, surprising acts of hospitality. They have been well-trained, and now, in this most crucial moment, their training pays off. They invite the stranger in.[65]

Of course they could not have invited Jesus to stay with them at all had he not approached them first; Jesus' initiative to reveal himself is primary.[66] But their invitation is nonetheless critical to the transformation of their view on reality. Welcoming Jesus as their guest creates the context that allows them, finally, to recognize the risen Jesus. When Jesus reciprocates their hospitality, sharing bread with them, their eyes are at last opened to understand the reality before them, and he vanishes (24:28-31). Only then do they understand the burn of dawning perception they experienced "on the way, as he opened to us the scriptures" (24:32). Now they are in on the joke, too, and their despair turns to delight. Once they realize what has happened, they decide it is not too late to travel after all, and rush back to Jerusalem to tell the eleven and the rest what they have witnessed (24:33).

---

[65] Saunders, "Discernment on the Way to Emmaus," 47.

[66] Cf. again Rae, *History and Hermeneutics*, 102.

The humor of the Emmaus story does more than provide comic relief after the catastrophe of Jesus' crucifixion. The use of humor, especially dramatic irony, underscores the importance of perspective and context for acquiring the knowledge that makes the whole episode funny rather than tragic. These disciples did not understand that they had witnessed Jesus' way of redeeming Israel in his suffering and death, and mere words—even from Jesus—did not suffice to reconstitute their conceptual framework. They remain enthralled with conventional power. Even so, they exhibit a practice at home in God's reign; practicing hospitality opens them to the perspective that allows the Emmaus disciples to join Luke's readers in appreciating the joke and the sacred laughter that resurrection makes possible.

3.2.2.4 The Disciples Gathered in Jerusalem

When Jesus appears to the gathered disciples in Jerusalem he takes a straightforward approach rather than teasing a story out of the apostles. He greets them and seeks to dispel their fear and doubts, assuring them that he is not a ghost, as they suppose, by inviting them to look upon his hands and feet (24:36-40). But to the disciples, Jesus alive again is too good to be true—they "disbelieve for joy, and wonder" (24:41). So Jesus asks them whether they have anything to eat; he gives them a reason to offer him hospitality and they give him a "piece of broiled fish," which "he took and ate before them" (vv. 42-43). Most scholars agree that, by including these details, Luke means to show that Jesus has been raised bodily. Joel Green, Murray Rae, Charles Talbert, and others rightly note that physical acts like Jesus' breaking of the bread in Emmaus and eating fish in Jerusalem provide, in Rae's words, "the evidence establishing a continuity between the risen one and the one who had died—that convinced

[the disciples] that Jesus was alive in their presence."[67] This continuity is not inconsequential, but at the same time, the significance of the disciples offering Jesus food should not be reduced to a proof of his corporeality.

As at Emmaus, sharing food is a hospitable act commensurate with the generous logic of God's reign. The disciples do not think to offer Jesus something until he asks, but one can hardly expect they would naturally offer food to a ghost. They respond immediately when Jesus asks and he eats what they provide. Both here and in Emmaus the disciples share food with him before they are fully persuaded that he is Jesus, raised from death, and their hospitality plays a critical role in creating the context wherein Jesus convinces them that he truly is alive and teaches them what his resurrection signifies. When Jesus first taught about God's reign, he told his audience to "give to everyone who asks of you" (6:30). Here his disciples do just that—they give to the yet-unrecognized Jesus—and so are ushered into knowledge of the too-good-to-be-true reality: Jesus truly is raised from the dead.

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man, the women's narrative arc, and the stories of Jesus' disciples' induction into knowledge of his resurrection all point toward a central truth: when it comes to apprehending the ways of God, receptivity matters. Not everyone who encounters Jesus is equally ready to hear what he has to say or to apprehend his identity. Jesus himself points to this truth at the end of his first parable of God's reign: "Let the one having ears to hear listen" (Luke 8:8). Jesus' words imply that not everyone has senses attuned to

[67] Rae, *History and Hermeneutics* 83-84. See also Joel B. Green, "'Witnesses of His Resurrection': Resurrection, Salvation, Discipleship and Mission in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 229; Talbert, "Place of the Resurrection," 21.

apprehending the ways of God. The above-named episodes demonstrate that the degree to which God's expression of power already shapes a person's life (often related to the person's social location) corresponds to their degree of epistemic hospitality to the event that demonstrates the reality of God's reign—Jesus' resurrection. To believe Jesus has been raised from the dead is to accept the reality of God's reign as Jesus portrayed it and shape one's life accordingly. Those who resist or disbelieve in Jesus' portrait of God's reign will also resist or find difficulty believing Jesus truly has been raised. These conditions of receptivity emerge all the more clearly upon close examination of Jesus' last encounter with his disciples both at the end of Luke's Gospel and at the beginning of Acts, where Jesus takes on two main tasks: he persuades his disciples that he truly has been raised to life in the flesh, and he continues telling them about God's reign.

3.2.3 Unifying Knowledge of God's Reign and Resurrection

Acts' opening summary of Jesus' last forty days with his disciples presents him engaged in two principal activities: "appearing to them in many sure signs and speaking about the reign of God" (Acts 1:3). In other words, he persuaded his followers of his resurrection through his real bodily presence and spoke on the same theme as always—the reign of God. Highlighting and collocating these two activities as Jesus' last earthly work indicate their importance and common purpose, and suggest this relationship between them: Jesus' real resurrection is a sign of the reality of God's reign and a promise of its ultimate full realization. Such a judgment about the relationship between Jesus' resurrection and the reign of God corresponds to the previously articulated conditions of receptivity: Welcoming and living by the logic of God's reign fosters a person's ability to accept the reality of Jesus' resurrection. So it is that, in their

fitful commitment to the ways of God, the disciples require both τεκμήρια and reminders about God's reign in order to know that Jesus truly has been raised. In Luke's Gospel accounts of Jesus' appearances to his disciples after his resurrection, however, he never once uses the phrase, "the reign of God"; instead, Jesus interprets what happened to him through "Moses and the prophets" (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). This omission (or substitution), however, does not render the summary of Acts 1:3 inaccurate because, in his parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus already has shown that "Moses and the prophets" are guides to living in God's reign, of which resurrection is a sign (Luke 16:19-31). If Acts 1:3 is intended as a summary of Jesus' resurrection appearances as outlined in Luke, it suggests that for the risen Jesus to interpret "Moses and the prophets" is to speak about "the reign of God," and invites the reader to consider how Jesus' post-resurrection teaching in Luke's Gospel reflects the logic of God's reign. Jesus' teaching about his resurrection builds upon the parable of Lazarus and the rich man to reaffirm the role of scripture in mediating God's plans to God's people, and offers his death and resurrection as both the appropriate hermeneutic through which to read scripture's accounts of God's saving acts in the past and the template for how to live toward God's reign in the present and future. Jesus' resurrection is the emblem of God's reign and the event toward which the scriptural portrait of God's plan has been leading since the beginning. Jesus' resurrection, through an exemplary expression of God's power, effects God's victory over the violent and oppressive forces that oppose the way of God. God's victory thus gained authorizes the apostles not as tools of God's vengeance, but as witnesses to Jesus and his portrait of God's way in the world and instruments of God's mercy. Having witnessed everything that happened to Jesus, they are to proclaim a message of repentance toward

forgiveness as they receive, operate by, and manifest the same gentle power that animated Jesus' life—the Holy Spirit.

3.2.3.1 Sure Signs of Resurrection's Reality

Acts 1:3 suggests that Jesus' assuring his followers of his bodily resurrection is now complete—the "many sure signs" and his "speaking about the reign of God" persuaded them. Acts does not enumerate what those "sure signs" were, but if the sense of τεκμήριον found in other Hellenistic literature coincides with Luke's, then the resurrection narratives of Luke's Gospel include several activities of Jesus that would provide precisely the specified type of *a posteriori* knowledge. Jesus goes for a walk with Cleopas and his companion, teaches them about himself in scripture (Luke 24:13-27), and breaks bread with them (24:30). He appears to Simon (24:34), and then to all the gathered disciples (24:36). When he appears to the whole group of disciples together he teaches them further, allays their doubts, invites them to observe his hands and feet and to touch his flesh-and-bone body (24:38-40). When they still "were disbelieving for joy, and wondering," he eats broiled fish in their presence (24:41-43).

Presumably, Jesus could not do any of these activities if he were still dead or a mere spirit (24:39). Jesus has an animated, visible, tangible body that can affect the physical world. If, in principle, a person must be alive in order to appear, speak, walk, be physically palpable, and eat, these post-crucifixion acts of Jesus serve as τεκμήρια that Jesus has been raised, and present this reality to Jesus' disciples via a valid syllogism. Eating the fish does seem to settle the matter of Jesus' bodily reality; he does not seem compelled to provide additional physical evidence. Even so, his next step builds a bridge between persuading his disciples that he is truly alive and teaching them the significance of his resurrection: he begins his teaching by

reminding them of the words that he spoke to them while with them in his life (24:44). In so doing he demonstrates his memory of the time he had with them before his death and indicates that the key to understanding the significance of his death and resurrection is in what he had taught them all along, "because everything written about me in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled" (24:44). In this way Jesus leads his disciples into understanding the significance of his resurrection by reminding them of the substance of his teaching (which, of course, primarily concerned the reign of God) via interpretation of "the scriptures" (24:45).

3.2.3.2 Scripture Interprets Resurrection, and Vice Versa

Both on the way to Emmaus and in Jerusalem, Jesus presents his suffering and exaltation as integral features of his messianic identity transparently foretold in Israel's Scriptures. Indeed, Jesus never interprets his resurrection without turning to Scripture. At the same time, he never points to a particular text. His interpretation is sweeping; rather than doing detailed exegesis on selected pericopae, he speaks of what has happened with him as a comprehensive fulfillment of everything written about him in the scriptures (Luke 24:27; 44). Jesus' insistence that the scriptures bear witness to the Messiah who suffers before being exalted shows that the power of "the reign of God" that Jesus has represented all along is not his invention. God's power has always been creative and gentle. Even so, it is newly revealed because of Jesus' suffering and exaltation. The reign of God, which Jesus has preached from the beginning of his ministry and toward which "Moses, all the prophets, and the psalms" (Luke 24:44) lead, is established and its power dramatically revealed because of his being raised to life after having been killed because of the conflict between his embodiment of God's reign

and the Jerusalem leadership's accommodation to Rome's power. Jesus' resurrection decisively indicates the superiority of God's creative and resilient power over those whose power resides in the ability to deal death. For Jesus to draw upon a comprehensive reading of scripture to confirm that his suffering and exaltation were always God's plan is appropriate for his present audience, who already accept the scriptures' authority to mediate the things of God but need the new hermeneutic that Jesus supplies. So it is that Jesus' post-resurrection reading of scripture includes both a backward and a forward look. The scriptures predict Jesus' suffering and resurrection, and these events reveal afresh the scriptures' portrait of God's character. Jesus models such fresh reading when he specifies the scripturally mandated consequences of his suffering, death, and resurrection: not vengeance, but Spirit-empowered witnesses sent into the world bringing a message of repentance and forgiveness of sins and beginning with Jerusalem—the city whose leaders lately crucified him (Luke 24:47-48; Acts 1:8).

Many a reader of the Emmaus road episode has wondered exactly which passages from "all of scripture" Jesus interpreted for his two uncomprehending companions. Some scholars have speculated that, since Jesus speaks of the Messiah's suffering and exaltation, he might have focused on Isaiah's "Servant Songs."[68] In bare logistical terms, walking seven miles would not have allowed Jesus adequate time to reinterpret "all of scripture." Luke would be well

[68] See, e.g., Richard B. Vinson, *Luke*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2008): "The Servant Songs from Isaiah as well as some of the psalms of lament speak of how a just man, rejected by others and numbered with the lawless, is handed over to death but then rewarded by God (Isa 53:12 LXX; Ps 30:5 LXX [Eng 31:4]—note that the next verse is 'into your hands I commit my spirit')." While these passages describe the trope of the righteous sufferer vindicated by God, they are not specifically about "the Messiah" nor do they call the suffering "necessary." Vinson suggests the "necessity" arises because "God's plan, revealed in Scripture, had to be fulfilled… it was all pre-scripted" (749-50). Apropos as these suggestions may be, the faithful reader must resist the urge to distill Jesus' interpretation to some reduced essence or limit it to a passage or set of passages. Jesus' comprehensive reinterpretation encourages the reader to examine all of Scripture in light of the events that precipitate Jesus' teaching here at the end of Luke—his death and resurrection.

aware of that impossibility, so his insistence on Jesus' comprehensive coverage of the scriptures must not be intended to induce speculation about which texts Jesus interpreted. Rather, Luke contends that the whole of scripture bears witness to Jesus. So Richard Hays: "Luke tells us that the veiled risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus 'thoroughly interpreted for them the things concerning himself *in all the Scriptures*' (Luke 24:27). Luke thus implies that Scripture in all its parts *comprehensively* bears witness to the identity of Jesus."[69] Indeed, the key point that Jesus twice claims scripture makes about him, that the Messiah must suffer leading to his exaltation (24:26, 26), cannot be found as a single citation; finding that claim in scripture requires, rather, a wide re-reading of "Moses, the prophets, and the psalms" (24:44).[70]

Jesus' post-resurrection teaching thus urges the reader to re-examine Israel's scriptures for herself and so find how Moses, the prophets, and psalms prefigure the Messiah's suffering and vindication. By Jesus' own claim, when read comprehensively, the scriptures indicate that what happened to him in Jerusalem was not a temporary setback in God's agenda, but its fulfillment. Showing scripture's prefiguring of his crucifixion and resurrection changes their significance—his death is not a defeat, but the peculiar form of victory wrought when God absorbs the world's evils and, in Jesus' resurrection, turns them inside out to make glory and

[69] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 224.

[70] Hays does just such a re-reading—both of Luke's whole Gospel and of the Old Testament—in order to show how Luke illuminates Jesus' identity through Israel's Scriptures and, in turn, impels the reader to view those texts through the hermeneutical lens of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. See Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* §13 "Jesus as the Redeemer of Israel," 221-64, and especially "The Davidic royal Messiah," 230-37. Hays's reading of Jesus' peculiar reshaping of Davidic sonship through the lens of the psalms proves an apt example of how a key scriptural image both illuminates Jesus' identity and is redefined by Jesus. To define Davidic kingship through Jesus reinforces and draws forward the Davidic lament psalms' trajectory of suffering, supplication, praise and vindication.

wonder. This way of reading scripture shows that Jesus' death and resurrection epitomize the way God reigns and promise that God's reign will ultimately be established on earth.

The re-reading, however, must also go in the other direction. Jesus specifies, on both occasions of his post-resurrection teaching, that the scriptures prophesying his suffering and exaltation must be fulfilled (Luke 24:26-27; 44-46), implying that the significance of scripture's comprehensive witness to his identity is seen most truly through the lens of his death and resurrection. In Luke's view, the whole of scripture reveals the ways of God and illuminates Jesus' place in God's plan, but Luke also presents Jesus' death and resurrection as the pattern of God's victory through which all of scripture must now be read. Jesus' manner of victory thus compels a reinterpretation of scriptural texts where, for example, the Davidic sufferer urges God's reprisal upon his enemies (e.g., Psalm 30:18 LXX). As Hays indicates, Luke 24 requires a re-reading of such psalms with a modified focus. To Hays, Luke 24 "gestures" toward

> a reading strategy that proposes the crucified and risen Jesus as the hermeneutical key to Israel's Scripture, while finding the key to understanding Jesus' messianic vocation in the Davidic psalms. On this reading, the release and redemption of Israel depends not on triumphant conquest through violence but rather on the martyrdom and exaltation of a paradoxical Davidic messiah whose identity is narrated through these scriptural intertexts that sing of lament, suffering, and final vindication by God.[71]

Lament, suffering, and vindication are not foreign to the Davidic messiahship, but violent reprisal has no place with Jesus as either the means or the consequence of his vindication. As is consonant with all Jesus' teaching about God's reign, the Messiah who gains victory through

[71] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 237.

suffering rather than through violent conquest is raised to life to reconcile with rather than retaliate against his enemies. Jesus proposes a reading of scripture wherein is prescribed "that in his name repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (24:47). Jesus has won a way for human beings truly to live into the pattern of God's reign without fearing death because his resurrection proves God's power to restore those who suffer and die because they live according to God's power and resist death-dealing powers. Those who have accommodated death-dealing power will have to repent of that pattern and be forgiven the wrongs they did while living in it. The good news Jesus offers through his apostles is that repentance is possible for all—even for his enemies. Jesus tells the apostles to begin preaching the message of repentance and forgiveness in Jerusalem, the city of his crucifixion. For Jesus to send his apostles first to Jerusalem shows once more his embodiment of God's character. The "Most High" who is "kind toward the ungrateful and the wicked" (6:35) gives even enemies the opportunity to repent and be forgiven. For this very purpose Jesus commissions his apostles as his witnesses and purveyors of a message of repentance and forgiveness in Jesus' name. If they remain faithful to their commission from Jesus, their manner of conveying the message will reflect how he revealed himself to them.

3.2.4 Jesus as the Apostles' Template for Witness

Throughout his ministry Jesus uses a manifold approach to communicating what sort of power is at work in God's reign. Sometimes he speaks very directly and sometimes obliquely through parables and comparisons. His principal use of miraculous power, namely, healing, bears witness to the nature of God's power in his actions. And his encounter with his enemies, even to the point of forgiving them as they put him to death, shows his commitment to the

life-giving power God wields. After his resurrection, as in the summary of Acts 1:3, Jesus is chiefly dedicated to assuring his disciples that he truly has been raised and continuing to speak of God's reign. These two acts complement one another because his resurrection demonstrates the victory of God's life-giving power over the powers that deal death. As Jesus' approach with the skeptical apostles shows, the reality that Jesus' resurrection reveals cannot be communicated effectively merely through words, even if they come from a trustworthy source. If the women who followed Jesus and his male disciples set the pattern, the targets for persuasion will require some evidence in order to believe in Jesus' resurrection unless they already have a complete commitment to live into the pattern of God's reign. Such audiences will be rare, but Jesus does not leave the apostles without resources for persuading others. His post-resurrection pattern of "τεκμήρια" and "speaking of the reign of God" outlines the strategy by which, as he did, they will convey the message of God's power in a way that suits the content of the message. In addition, Jesus promises that the same Spirit who animated his whole ministry will empower their witness to him.

3.2.4.1 Strategies: τεκμήρια and the Reign of God

The point of the "many sure signs" in which Jesus appears to his apostles after his resurrection is, of course, to demonstrate that he truly is alive. The thing of which they need to be persuaded is that he has, in fact, been raised from the dead. The particular things Jesus did when he appeared to his apostles indicate that his real, physical, aliveness is what matters. He gives them the signs—walking with them, talking, breaking bread, eating fish, engaging with them playfully and sharing their hospitality—that demonstrate he truly has been raised. One might wonder, if some sort of assurance of Jesus' real bodily resurrection is so important,

why Jesus did not go present himself alive before the Sanhedrin. Jesus could, perhaps, have spared his apostles a great deal of trouble and persecution had he simply proven his enemies wrong by showing up in person. But Luke's portrait of the key role that commitment to God's reign plays in a person's ability to receive knowledge of Jesus' resurrection suggests that such an appearance would have been fruitless. Instead of forcing the matter, Jesus sends his apostles as his witnesses. In a way, they are to become the living signs—the τεκμήρια—that Jesus truly has been raised. And if they provide the τεκμήρια of Jesus' resurrection in the ways that Jesus did, they will do so in the form of physical presence with one another, sharing hospitality, breaking bread, engaging the world with a sense of freedom and play, and, of course, re-reading the scriptures as Jesus taught them. Reading the scriptures toward the portrait of God's reign revealed in Jesus shows the significance of his resurrection. The τεκμήρια and the context for making sense of them are mutually necessary, and so Jesus' apostles are to become living signs of Jesus' resurrection and active interpreters of that event's significance.

3.2.4.2 Unity of Form and Content

To hold together being living signs of God's reign as revealed in Jesus' resurrection with the work of teaching scripture in light of what God did in Jesus emulates Jesus' pattern of unifying the form of his message with its content. The power of God's reign cannot be communicated with a bludgeon, whether physical or figurative. Jesus on the road to Emmaus exemplifies a kind of patient waiting that allows the benighted disciples to arrive at the truth at their own pace; Jesus matches his stride to theirs (Luke 24:15). The witness in court may have a stake in the outcome of the trial but is compelled, regardless, simply to tell the truth and let others judge the evidence without making threats or employing manipulative tactics.

Thus does witness, as a tactic of communication, conform to an essential requirement for spreading the word about Jesus: the form must not violate the content of the message. The message that brings life cannot be communicated through means that tend toward death. Rather, the means of communication must conform to the essence of the message. Thus, witness to Jesus becomes not simply a commitment to telling the truth, but to a life that comprehensively communicates the particular truth that Jesus' life revealed. It is no accident, then, that Jesus promises his witnesses the same power that animated his whole life and ministry—the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).

3.2.4.3 Spirit-empowered

"He was conceived by the Holy Spirit," says the Apostles' Creed, affirming the words of Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1:35. Jesus exists at all through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism (3:22) and fills him as he is led by the Spirit in the wilderness (4:1). When Jesus returns from his temptation Luke once again reports that Jesus is "filled with the Spirit's power" as he arrives to preach for the first time in Nazareth (4:14). Jesus himself puts the exclamation point on this litany announcing the Spirit's presence by reading from Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me…" (4:18) and then declaring that scripture fulfilled (4:21). There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit empowers Jesus. The promise that the Spirit will empower the apostles as Jesus' witnesses, therefore, strongly suggests that their witness will consist in a communal life that mirrors Jesus' life, and that the power Jesus exemplified will be manifest in them. The empowerment of the Holy Spirit can be expected to enable the apostles not merely to speak of Jesus, but to put on display the power essential to his way of being in the world.

3.2.5 Why Witness?

Attempting to communicate Jesus' identity and significance by using any form of power not consonant with the power at work in Jesus' life would fail by contradiction. Jesus commissioning his apostles as Spirit-empowered witnesses forestalls their use of such power both by invoking the Spirit and by calling them "witnesses." Their power is not of the sort that kings and Gentile rulers use (Luke 22:25), and they are not, for example, mercenaries, soldiers, or guerillas. The importance of their commission to exemplify the power Jesus revealed and that the Spirit provides is evident in the correlation between commitment to God's reign and receptivity to the reality of Jesus' resurrection. They must learn to exercise patience and persistence with those who do not listen or believe at first, because they know firsthand that even for those who greatly desire to see it, Jesus' resurrection—and the kind of power and destiny for the world that it images—does not admit easy apprehension.

Believing in Jesus' resurrection corresponds to a hope that God's way of life-giving, creative generosity—which Jesus embodies and proclaims as "the reign of God"—ultimately wins the day. The truth of Jesus' resurrection is not mere propositional knowledge to be gained by evidentiary proof, even as Jesus' post-resurrection physical reality is essential. If Jesus' resurrection provides real evidence in this world that God truly reigns, it must be a truly this-worldly event. After Jesus' ascension, the evidence of Jesus' resurrection shall be the community that Jesus commissions as his witnesses. As a claim about the ways of God, the reality of Jesus' resurrection shall be known through a community that lives according to the logic of God's reign of which Jesus' resurrection is the essential emblem. A community that embodies in its common life the ways of God revealed in Jesus can become, in the words of

Samuel Wells, "a context that demands an explanation"[72] that points straight back to Jesus. Or, as Gerhard Lohfink puts the matter, "the primary issue is not the private holiness of the individual Christian. The point is that *an entire people give witness* to God's plan for the world … The entire New Testament sees the church as a contrast-society which stands in contrast to the world,"[73] where "world" is best understood as the status quo governed by the kind of patterns Jesus describes in Luke 22:25. Such a community bears witness to Jesus, to his resurrection and, thus, to the reign of God. To resort to any form of coercion would violate the substance of the message as well as the form of communication that is witness. The work of Jesus' witnesses is to make such a communal life compelling, but not compulsory, through strategies shaped by Jesus' own ways of communicating. They will stand as a sign of Jesus' resurrection through being a hospitable and playful community. They will continually return to Scripture to reinterpret it through the lens of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and so continue both to show and to tell—as Jesus did—the alternative that God's reign presents vis-à-vis other politics on offer in the world. And they will participate in God's patience with a world that persistently resists God's political aims.

3.3 Politics: Witness to the Reign of God

For those with "ears to hear," Acts signals its political interest in its very first verse by referring to "everything that Jesus began to do and teach" as described in "the first book," namely, in Luke's Gospel (Acts 1:1). Lest the reader not recall the constant theme of Jesus'

---

[72] Samuel Wells, "How Does Jesus Save Us," (sermon preached in Duke University Chapel, Durham, NC, 1 April 2007).

[73] See Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimensions of Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 131-32.

words and actions in that book, the third verse of Acts describes Jesus continuing in the same vein: "speaking about the reign of God" (Acts 1:3). Should the reader still overlook Acts' political interest, the sixth verse raises the issue yet again when the disciples ask, "Lord, are you at this time establishing the reign in Israel?" (Acts 1:6). In the context of his post-resurrection appearances and teaching about God's reign, they address Jesus using a title with both theological and political dimensions (κύριος) and ask him a question about the βασιλεῖα in Israel.[74] In his response Jesus deflects the matter of the timeline but promises that they will receive power by the Holy Spirit and be his witnesses (Acts 1:7-8). Jesus commissions the apostles as his witnesses for a politically interested purpose. Acts' introduction shows Jesus commissioning his disciples as his representatives committed to the same political aims and using the same pattern of power that animated his life. The commission thus recalls Jesus' earlier mandate that his disciples should form a community that embodies the measure of power they saw in him rather than the one by which the kings and lords of the Gentiles operate (Luke 22:25-27). When Jesus commissions the apostles as "my witnesses" he gives them the

[74] Jesus' disciples address him here, of course, with the vocative κύριε, which certainly can be translated "sir" or "master," or some other form of courteous address. In examining Luke's use of κύριος, Rowe gives particular attention to the vocative form and concludes that, despite widespread scholarly agreement that it is the most "mundane" of the ways κύριος appears, Luke never uses it so casually (Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 85-89). Within the Luke-Acts narrative, κύριε first appears at Luke 5:8, where Peter confesses that he is a sinner and tries to send Jesus away from him. While some scholars take this as the exception that proves the rule (e.g., John Nolland takes this instance as "probably not Luke's usual 'Sir,'" arguing that Luke intends here "to set forth an experience of the numinous as present in Jesus and his deeds" [*Luke*, 3 vols., WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989-93) 1:222]), Rowe takes this first instance of κύριε as the precedent setting hermeneutical parameters for all subsequent occurrences. "Luke 5:8 is the first time κύριε is used, and this usage sets the tone … for the reader's encounter with and understanding of the other vocatives" (Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 89). As Rowe likewise notes, characters addressing Jesus as κύριε can say more than they know: "Luke's careful deployment of the vocative in the story" leaves "open the possibility that the one in whose mouth κύριε occurs need not possess "post-resurrection" fullness of knowledge at every point in the story—or, indeed, at any point prior to the resurrection" (89). Here in Acts 1:6, of course, the disciples *do* use the title after Jesus' resurrection, but it still can mean something more than they know or have yet come to understand.

work of proclaiming and portraying communally the message that he presented individually, namely, the good news of God's reign. The "programmatic thesis" of Acts is thus suffused with a political vision that, despite being essentially life-giving and peacemaking, confronts those who remain committed to Gentile politics and may well occasion a violent response. Given the subject matter of the message, Jesus' prescribed means of communication, and the source of the apostles' power to spread the message of Jesus, the apostles have no grounds for resorting to violence either in order to persuade anyone of the message or in retaliation for violence perpetrated against them. If, as the introduction to Acts suggests, witness to Jesus is witness to the reign of God as portrayed in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, then witness to Jesus must take the form of a community embodying a political alternative to the kingdoms of the world; it must eschew violence and operate, instead, by the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit at work in Jesus.

Acts' presentation of the political shape of apostolic witness begins with the assumption that a culture's theological claims determine its politics, or at least that political structures are inseparable from the sweeping claims about the nature of reality that support them. Modern efforts to distance theology from politics are foreign to both the Jewish and Graeco-Roman thought patterns that shape the context of Acts. Political embodiments of competing theologies existing in the same locale are, therefore, liable to come into conflict when their adherents encounter one another and espouse their viewpoints publicly. Jesus himself made explicit to his disciples that the politics he embodies and expects among them is incongruent with the general pattern among the Gentiles and their kings (Luke 22:24-26). If the apostles proclaim publicly in a "might-makes-right" world that Jesus' way of being is God's way, they will encounter resistance—and, very likely, violent opposition—everywhere they go.

Since Jesus enjoins his apostles to bear public witness to the politics he embodies beginning in the very city whose political authorities put Jesus to death, violent conflict is almost inevitable. Barring that these authorities have repented of their commitment to the pattern of power that engineered Jesus' violent death, they will very likely resist with similar violence the apostles' message about the alternative power Jesus manifested. The pattern of power to which Jesus' apostles bear witness opposes the pattern of power that brought about Jesus' crucifixion. Moreover, if they publicize the message that Jesus is alive again, they bring to the authorities who killed Jesus the unwelcome news that their work is undone and, if undone by God, they have committed an unthinkable crime against God. The complete reformulation of theological and political commitments that the message of Jesus' witnesses would urge upon Jerusalem's authorities is, thus, very likely to meet multivalent resistance. The likelihood of resistance, however, does not alter the essential need for the apostles to maintain their commitment to using life-giving and peacemaking power, even when that resistance turns violent. Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit's empowerment upon the apostles to be his witnesses includes the power to meet conflict without violent retaliation; the Holy Spirit's power gives life rather than taking it. True witness to God's reign demands that the apostles absorb violence, trusting God for vindication, rather than retaliating and escalating. And, of course, they must not resort to any form of violence in order to communicate the message of Jesus in the first place. The reign of God cannot be communicated using Gentile patterns of power. As Jesus' witnesses, the apostles must, rather, embody as a community a way of being that illuminates and participates in the gentle and life-giving power that animates God's reign.

3.3.1 Congruence of Theology and Politics

Luke and Acts both evidence a two-sided assumption that is far from unique in their original context: political constructs reflect theological commitments and theological claims commend commensurate political frameworks. Even before Jesus is conceived, Gabriel's proleptic description of Jesus traces back and forth between theological and political titles—"Son of the Most High," "the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor, David" (Luke 1:32), "he will reign over the house of Jacob forever," "of his reign there will be no end" (1:33), "he will be called holy, the Son of God" (1:35). Jesus' very identity is simultaneously theological and political, and his ministry no less so. From the start of his ministry Jesus speaks and acts always to illuminate "the reign of God," always without Matthew's circumlocution ("the kingdom of heaven"), and nearly always presented in terms of the dynamics of human social relationships and ascribed status.[75] Jesus' message of the "reign of God" enjoins those who receive it to relate to one another in patterns of power that are like God's rather than like "the nations." That Jesus commissions his apostles as his witnesses in the context of "speaking about the reign of God" after his resurrection shows that his simultaneously theological and political agenda has not changed.

The idea of a link between a community's theology and its politics is neither original nor unique to Jesus; the idea is embedded in the story of Israel's origin by God's initiative and for God's purposes (Gen 12:1-3). God calls Abraham as the ancestor of a nation that will mediate God's blessing to all other nations, and, in his first chapter, Luke constructs narrative echoes of that foundation that effectively close the distance between God's political projects

[75] Green, *Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 76-94.

with Israel and with Jesus. That a community's politics reflect its theology is one of the essential principles on which the prophets rebuke God's people for the twin sins of idolatry and injustice (cf. Isa 1-2; Amos 4-5). False worship tends toward oppressive and unjust social practices perpetrated by the high-status rich against the poor and marginalized. Luke's opening chapters, in particular, demonstrate a comprehensive awareness of this heritage, culminating in Jesus' manifesto at Nazareth spoken in his reading from Isaiah (Luke 4:18). Jesus' persistent association of theological claims with prescriptions for political life is well rooted in Judaism's scriptural heritage, and not particularly a matter up for debate with Jesus' Jewish interlocutors.

Indeed, Jesus' threat to Jerusalem's leadership lies in his persuasively bringing the weight of theological claims to his criticisms of their embodied politics. Jesus names their accommodation to Roman political patterns as apostasy, and they confirm the accuracy of his criticism by using the machinery of Rome to eliminate him in a highly public and politically significant fashion[76] After the chief priests and scribes accuse him of blasphemous pretensions to divinity (Luke 22:66-71), and, before Pilate, declare that he has been attempting to draw the people's allegiance away from Caesar and unto himself as a God-ordained alternative ruler—"Christ, a king" (23:2)—Jesus is executed in the way of insurrectionists and traitors. Pilate exhibits no surprise that the Jewish religious title that the chief priests and scribes accuse Jesus of claiming also has a political dimension that might conflict with Rome's authority.

Pilate appears well accustomed to considering religious commitments concomitant with political ones, and that viewpoint appears to bear out in sources beyond Luke's Gospel

[76] See Luke 19-23 and section 2.6 in chapter 2 of this project; see also John Granger Cook, "Roman Crucifixions: From the Second Punic War to Constantine," *ZNW* 104 (2014): 1-32, esp. 4-8.

from across the Graeco-Roman world. The prevalence of this assumption in Western antiquity is so well-documented that Rowe opines, "I take it now for granted that religion in pagan antiquity was a public and political affair, that the attempt to privatize beliefs or piety perpetuates a modern mistake in the study of antiquity, and that these matters have been amply demonstrated in recent study."[77] Jesus' constant theme of the "reign of God" in Luke's Gospel and in Acts' introduction evidences the same basic assumption about the congruence of theology and politics evident in both the Jewish scriptural heritage and the Graeco-Roman world. This shared assumption across the span of cultures in play in the book of Acts entails that wherever the apostles go with a message about what God has done in Jesus, their audience will also hear the political consequences of their theological claims.

3.3.2 Foreshadowed Conflicts

The conviction that theological claims have political consequences, shared among all the actors on Acts' stage, means that any publicly espoused theology will rouse disagreement among adherents to conflicting theologies or politics. The conflict that the apostles' presentation of a unified theology and politics via witness to Jesus will evoke is foreshadowed in Jesus' teaching about the contrast between his way and that of the nations (Luke 22:24-26) and in his own showdown with the authorities in Jerusalem that led to his death. Jesus has commended to his disciples his own purposefully alternative politics vis-à-vis the way of the

[77] Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 181-82 n. 4. Rowe cites Price, *Rituals and Power* 15-16; 234-48; Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003) x. See also Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 50-51; Douglas R. Edwards, *Religion and Power: Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greek East* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1996) esp. 3, 8, 149; M. Reasoner. "1.3 Roman Religion and Politics," *DNTB* 1011-13. The link between gods and governments was not limited to Rome. Johnson argues, "neither the Romans nor Jews separated their religion from the existence and welfare of the state. The power of one's god(s) was evidenced in the strength of the nation" (Johnson, "Roman Emperors." 972).

world and has commissioned them to put this way of being on public display. Moreover, he wants them to begin in Jerusalem, which, due to its traditional significance for God's people, would be a theologically and politically fraught beginning point even if it weren't the site of Jesus' recent trial and execution, and even if the leaders who contrived Jesus' crucifixion were not still in power. Given the circumstances, when Jesus' witnesses go public they are bound to face conflicts immediately and from various quarters.

3.3.2.1 Conflicting Theologies, Conflicting Politics

Jesus in Luke clearly expects his followers to practice patterns of governance distinct from the norm among the Gentiles and that differ exactly in the ways that Jesus' leadership among his disciples differs from that of kings, lords, and authorities (22:24-30). Jesus portrays worldly power as domination and paternalism; if leaders practicing domination or paternalism are not obeyed, the former threaten violence or coercion and the latter threaten the removal of benefits or expect recompense for benefaction. Such patterns are a far cry from Jesus' exhortation to love one's enemies and give to anyone who asks without expecting a return (6:27, 30, 35), which Jesus identifies as the essence of God's character (6:36). The political pattern that functions by reconciling enemies and practicing gracious generosity reflects the God who is essentially merciful. Jesus commends this way of being in his teaching, in his many unrecompensed healings, and in encountering his enemies with hope for their transformation and with forgiveness when that fails (23:34). If God alone can make the dead live, his resurrection marks his life with a divine stamp of approval.

In Luke's portrait, the way of Jesus is a God-endorsed political pattern in direct conflict with those of the world. If the apostles go about the Roman Empire publicly proclaiming the

theopolitical alternative that Jesus showed them, they are bound to meet resistance. Jesus' witnesses bring the same threat Jesus did, and are thus likely to encounter similar violent resistance. Such encounters are likely not simply because the kind of power they proclaim differs from worldly power, but because the alternative they present implies the illegitimacy of powers rooted in violence and the patronage of other gods. As Rowe has demonstrated, the threat that the way of Jesus poses to those who hold violent power is not that of a coup; Jesus does not send the apostles to overthrow either the temple authorities or Roman governors and set themselves up in the same place and system.[78] But contrary to the widely argued thesis that Luke means to present "the church as politically harmless,"[79] the apostles present the same threat to Roman political order that Jesus did. The power of God's reign and Gentile power are not compatible, and the conflict between them will sometimes turn violent because those whose power is rooted in violence will likely meet threats with violence. The likelihood of Jesus' witnesses facing violent conflicts increases all the more because he sends them to first into the very city where he was publicly tried and executed by an array of both Jewish and Roman authorities, that is, into Jerusalem.

---

[78] See Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 5, 91: "New culture, yes; coup, no," is the pithy version of the principal thesis Rowe argues throughout the book; another key passage, connected to the conflict in Thessalonica (Acts 17:4): "The tension that surrounds the earthly nature of the Kingdom mirrors that of the charges against the Christians in Thessalonica. For the opponents' accusations are at one and the same time both true and false. They are false in that they attempt to place Jesus in competitive relation to Caesar. Such a positioning can only lead to a politics of revolt. The accusations are true, however, in that the Christian mission entails a call to another way of life" (101).

[79] See, e.g., Holladay, *Acts*, 55-58; also Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 177 n.1. For summaries of the long history of scholarship arguing that Luke's political thesis consists in an argument for the church as non-threatening toward Rome, see Alexandru Neagoe, *The Trial of the Gospel: Reading of Luke's Trial Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Steve Walton, "The State They Were In: Luke's View of the Roman Empire," in *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*, ed. Peter Oakes, SNTSMS 116 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 1-41.

3.3.2.2 Jerusalem

Jerusalem's significance in the heritage of Judaism makes it a charged context for anyone publicly proclaiming a theopolitical message. The city first gains prominence in Israel's scriptural story when David makes it his capital city for the bulk of his reign (2 Sam 5:6-12). Solomon reinforces its status as Israel's political and theological center by making it the site of the temple as well as the king's palace (1 Kings 5-7). The city retains its prominence throughout the period of the Divided Kingdom because Judah's kings reign from it and the temple remains the center of Judah's worship life. After the exile the Judean captives do not choose another site as the theological center; they rebuild the temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-4, Neh 2:17-18). Both major and minor prophets have much to say about Jerusalem—more than about any other city. The prophets of Israel's scriptures portray Jerusalem as God's chosen dwelling place,[80] the center of Israel's worship life,[81] the city of God's particular notice and care,[82] the epicenter of God's redemption and salvation,[83] under judgment toward its wellbeing, holiness,

[80] God's chosen dwelling place: See Isa 2:2, 4:2, 12:6, 18:7b, 24:23b, 33:5, 44:28, 60:14; Jer 8:19; Ezek 43:7; Joel 2:27, 3:17, 21 (4:17, 21 LXX); Zeph 3:8, 15, 17; Zech 1:16, 2:5, 10, 8:3

[81] The center of Israel's worship life: See Isa 12:4-6, 27:13; Jer 51:10 (28:10 LXX); Joel 2:15

[82] The city of God's particular notice and care: See Isa 28:16, 31:5, 33:20-22, 37:32, 35, 38:6, 40:1-2, 49:16, 62:1, 11-12, 65:19; Jer 8:19-22; Dan 9:16; Joel 2:23; Zech 2:12, 8:2

[83] The epicenter of God's redemption and salvation: Isa 12:6, 28:16, 33:5-6, 35:9-10, 40:1-2, 41:27 46:13, 51:11, 52:1-3, 9, 57:13, 59:20-21, 62:1, 11-12, 66:10, 13, 20; Jer 30:18 (LXX 37:18), 31:6b, 12, 23, 50:4-5; Ezek 17:22-23, 34:26; Joel 2:1, 2:32 (3:5 LXX); Ob 1:17; Zech 8:8, 15

and truthful reflection of God,[84] the ongoing object of prophetic exhortations to repentance,[85] the recurring recipient of good news and promises for a bright future,[86] and the city that mediates the knowledge and blessings of God both within Israel and to the foreign nations.[87] These descriptions do not represent one unified or universally acknowledged "prophetic view" of Jerusalem, but indicate that across this span of perspectives in Israel's scriptures the prophets exhibit pervading interest in Jerusalem as a city of both theological and political significance. God's efforts to restore Jerusalem's faithfulness (against the efforts of many idolatrous kings) and God's judgment of exile for the sake of ultimate restoration indicate that God is unwilling to relinquish an exclusive claim to Jerusalem's loyalty. Luke's reasons for portraying Jesus' insistence that his witnesses begin in Jerusalem appear rooted in the conviction that Jerusalem remains the earthly epicenter of God's political activity, and that messages about God and politics proclaimed in and proceeding from Jerusalem have

---

[84] Under judgment for the sake of its wellbeing, holiness, and truthful reflection of God: Isa 1:10, 16-18, 25-27, 3:1-26, 4:2-6, 12:1, 16:5, 28:14-17, 30:18-21, 32:1, 14-18, 33:14, 17, 35:4, 40:2, 10, 51:5, 57:16-21, 59:20, 60:10, 61:8; Jer 1:15, 4:1-13, 16-18, 6:1, 2, 6, 8, 23, 8:19-22, 11:3, 11, 12:14-17, 13:27, 16:14-21, 18:11, 19:3-15, 21:1-14, 22:1-30, 26:6, 12, 25:17-38, 32:36-44 (39:36-44 LXX), 33:8 (40:8 LXX), 34:2, 13-22 (41:2, 13-22 LXX), 35:17, 36:30-31, 51:10 (28:10 LXX); Ezek 34:10, 22-23; Dan 9:16-25; Micah 3:8-12, 4:7, 7:8-9, 18-19; Zeph 3:8, 11-15, 18-20; Zech 1:16-17, 2:12, 3:4, 9:9-10, 12:10; Mal 3:1-7

[85] Receiver of prophetic calls to repentance: Isa 1:10, 16-18, 31:6, 51:9, 55:2-3, 6-7; Jer 3:14, 4:14, 25:5-6, 26:13, 35:15; Joel 2:12-13, 15

[86] Receiver of good news: Isa 12:1-6, 30:18-21, 33:14, 17, 34:16-17, 35:1-10, 40:1-2, 10-11, 41:27 (although ambiguous in the LXX), 44:26, 28, 51:3, 11, 15-16, 52:6-9, 59:20-21, 60:1, 11, 15-22, 61:1-4; Jer 30:3, 8-9, 17-21 (37:3, 8-9, 17-21 LXX), 32:37-44 (39:37-44 LXX), 33:7-8, 10-13; Ezek 16:60, 62, 17:22-23, 34:22, 25-31, 36:34-35; Joel 2:23-29, 32, 3:16-17, 20-21 [Joel 2:23-3:1, 2, 5, 4:16-17, 20-21 LXX]; Amos 9:11; Micah 4:1, 6, 8, 7:19-20; Zeph 3:10, 14-17; Zech 1:16-17, 2:4-5, 10, 9:9-10, 12:10, 14:11

[87] Mediating knowledge and blessings of God: Isa 2:2-4, 4:2-3, 8:18, 9:1-7, 12:4-6, 24:23b, 25:6-9, 27:13, 37:20, 40:9, (49:6-7 sounds like other invocations of this role for Jerusalem. Here the "servant" acts as "light to the nations" and "covenant of peoples," but the "servant" could well be Jerusalem, in light of the context), 51:4-5, 55:4-5, 12, 56:3-8, 60:1-4, 61:9, 62:1, 2, 7, 65:18, 25; 66:13-14, 18-23; Jer 3:17, 4:1-4, 22:8-9, 33:9 (40:9 LXX); Ezek 17:22-23; Daniel 1:1, 6, 19-20, 2:28, 37, 47, 3:28-29, 4:2, 34-37, 6:16-28; Joel 2:27; Amos 1:2; Micah 4:1-2, 7:10, 15-17; Zeph 3:19-20, 9, 19-20; Zech 2:11, 8:22-9:1, 14:8-10, Mal 3:12

authoritative weight.[88] This portrait of Jerusalem's significance emerges through Jesus' lifelong engagement with the city in a manner that calls forth echoes of the indictments and promises of Isaiah 1:1-2:4.

Jesus has a relationship to Jerusalem even before he is born. Luke begins "in the days of King Herod of Judea" (Luke 1:5). In those days, the angel Gabriel visits Mary to promise her a son whose right to reign derives not, as Herod's does, from Roman patronage, but from his Davidic heritage and, indeed, something more.[89] Gabriel outlines that Mary's son will be called "Son of the Most High" and "Son of God," will inherit the throne of his ancestor David, and will reign forever (Luke 1:31-35). If Jesus is both David's heir and God's son, he has an indisputable right to rule in Jerusalem. He is destined to take David's office but reign with God's life-giving power, which shapes his whole approach to the city.

Upon Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem, when his parents bring him to the temple "to present him to the Lord" (Luke 2:22), two devout elders recognize his significance. Simeon calls Jesus the Lord's "salvation (σωτήριον), which you have prepared in the presence of all the peoples; a light to reveal you to the nations and glory for your people, Israel" (Luke 2:30-32). While in Jerusalem's temple, Simeon recognizes Jesus as the one who will bring God's salvation by revealing God to the nations. Simeon also sees Jesus bringing glory to Israel, but not unmitigated by conflict or upheaval. Simeon addresses Mary, telling her that the social subversion she prophesies in the *Magnificat* will leave neither her son nor herself

---

[88] See further J. Bradley Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age in Luke-Acts* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988); and Peter H. Rice, *Behold, Your House Is Left to You: The Theological and Narrative Place of the Jerusalem Temple in Luke's Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016).

[89] For a summary of the Herods in relation to Rome, see Vinson, "Minas Touch," 74.

unscathed (Luke 2:34-35). Many people in Israel will "rise and fall" because of Jesus. He is "destined" to be "a sign spoken against" so that "the inner logic of many hearts might be revealed" (2:34-35). Because of Simeon, Jesus is recognized in Jerusalem as God's salvation, but also as a bringer of conflict because he will not meet universal acceptance. And as it turns out, Jerusalem is the city where the conflict will peak.

On the heels of Simeon's words, the aged prophet Anna, who stays in the temple constantly fasting and praying, sees Jesus in the temple, praises God aloud, and then speaks of him "to all who were waiting expectantly for Jerusalem's redemption" (2:36-38). While Simeon's words forecast conflict, Anna's suggest that some people in Jerusalem are longing for exactly what Jesus brings. What that looks like is not clear; Luke gives her no dialogue. But her response certainly deems Jesus' appearance a praiseworthy act of God, and a positive sign for those who long for "Jerusalem's redemption" (λυτρώσιν Ἰερουσαλήμ). Since Luke only uses λυτρώσις or λυτρόω three times and always in reference to Jesus (Luke 1:68, 2:38, 24:21), his own engagement with Jerusalem throughout his life provides the best measure of what Luke believes constitutes Jerusalem's redemption.

Even though Jesus spends comparatively little of his life in the city, he speaks both his first and last words of his dialogue in the Gospel in Jerusalem (2:49; 24:49). Indeed, his first words in the Gospel designate the Jerusalem temple as the starting point of his work as God's son. When he is twelve years old and his parents accidentally leave him behind in the city after celebrating the Passover, and they return to find him in the temple listening to the teachers and asking and answering questions (2:46-47). When his mother scolds him for rousing his parents' anxiety, he answers as though where he would be in Jerusalem should be obvious:

"Why did you search for me? Didn't you know I must be about my Father's affairs?" (2:49).[90] Jesus stops short of staking a claim to Jerusalem's temple, but that he speaks there his first words about the necessity (δεῖ) of his minding his Father's work paints Jerusalem as the starting place and epicenter of God's work in Jesus.

In Luke's narrative, Jesus does not actually enter Jerusalem again until the last week of his life. The closest he gets is when the devil takes him up to the pinnacle of the temple and urges him to cast himself down in order to force a divine rescue (4:9-11), which Jesus will not do. Jesus will not test God (4:12), or create a spectacle that would, no doubt, get Jerusalem's attention. Aside from his final week, Jesus' other interactions with Jerusalem are on its periphery; people come to him from Jerusalem for his teaching and healing (5:17; 6:17), but Jesus does not enter the city. Even so, the majority of his ministry is oriented toward its consummation in Jerusalem (9:31); from there, despite many intervening circuitous travels before arriving there, Luke reports, "he set his face to go toward Jerusalem" (9:51).[91] Jesus may have more work to do, but he has determined his ultimate destination. He must go there because "it is not possible for a prophet to perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33). Prophets have the annoying habit of voicing God's objections to the people's idolatry and injustice. As Jesus describes, Jerusalem responds to prophets by killing them, stoning them, and resisting

---

[90] The Greek phrase ᾔδειτε ὅτι ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρός μου δεῖ εἶναί με does not make the smoothest English, which might account for the popularity of translations that say Jesus had to be "in my Father's house" (NRSV, NIV, NASB, CEB). This rendering captures something important about the spirit of Jesus' words here but can also mislead the reader into believing that Jesus is staking a recognizable verbal claim to the Jerusalem temple. While such a claim might be implied by Jesus' location when he makes it and the inference that where he would be is obvious if he is to be about God's business, it is not so clearly spelled out in Jesus' words as "my Father's house" suggests. He never uses the word "house" here.

[91] What follows summarizes the relevant discussion of Jesus' illumination of God's reign and final days in Jerusalem as detailed in chapter 2, sections 2.4 and 2.6.

his own specific efforts to enfold it in a protective embrace like a mother hen with chicks (13:34). Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem in full knowledge of his likely rejection.

Exposition of Jesus' final encounter with Jerusalem takes up nearly half of the chapter preceding this one, but a few aspects of the whole portrait and some essential details bear repeating. All along the way to Jerusalem Jesus tells parables and performs healings illuminating God's reign. On the cusp of his entry into Jerusalem, he tells the parable that parodies God's reign and provides an inverse example of what sort of king he intends to be when he finally enters the city (19:11-27). The context suggests that the reign of God is about to be revealed, just as his audience supposes (19:11), via what Jesus does and what happens to him in Jerusalem. The parable forecasts his rejection in Jerusalem but, by its setting amid Jesus' teaching about God's reign, also his response of foregoing vengeance in favor of a manner of victory that truly displays God's power. Jesus comes to Jerusalem with the "Son of David's" right to rule but fills that office as "Son of the Most High" (1:32-35); Jesus is "the coming one, the king in the Lord's name" (19:38). Jesus arrives to teach Jerusalem the "things that make for peace," as Zechariah prophesied in the *Benedictus* (1:79) but anticipates the city's blind resistance and resulting destruction (19:41-44).

But not all of Jerusalem rejects Jesus—at least not at first. Some people listen to him eagerly (19:48), which recalls Anna's audience of those who were hopefully awaiting "Jerusalem's redemption" (2:38). Jesus clashes particularly with the temple authorities whom he judges accommodated to patterns of power that kings and Gentile rulers use (19:45-20:47). He destabilizes their smug assurance of Jerusalem's inviolability and their secure place within it by quoting from Jeremiah's indictment against Jerusalem's leaders in his own day (19:45-46). He slips the trap of their loaded questions (20:8) and then condemns their abuse of power and

violent rejection of God's authority by telling the parable of the wicked tenants (20:9-16). He invokes Psalm 118 to illumine God's unconventional way of winning, and Isaiah 8 and Daniel 2 to warn against accommodating the political patterns of other nations at the expense of living according to God's power (20:17-18). He urges them to consider far more gravely what they owe to God than what they owe to Caesar (20:20-26). And he warns his disciples against the scribes' self-aggrandizement, pretentious prayers, and rapacious abuse of widows (20:45-47). At his arrest Jesus reproves them one last time for using strategies indistinguishable from Gentile use of power (22:52-53). Jesus does not get so far as rebuking them for their participation in his own unjust condemnation and execution, though he is innocent of any crime, but their complicity is clear and confirms his assessment of their accommodation to the politics of Rome (23:1-4, 13-25). Even so, Jesus' last words referring to his crucifiers are a prayer asking God to forgive them (23:34).

Throughout the days leading up to his death Jesus diagnoses a manifold moral disease among Jerusalem's temple authorities: They have accommodated violent and oppressive politics and make a mockery of God's character because of their position of religious authority. They retain the trappings of Jewish religious life but exhibit practices indicating allegiance to Rome and its gods. The consequence Jesus prophesies is destruction. Jerusalem will be leveled (and by the time Luke writes, that has already occurred),[92] and stewardship of the "vineyard," God's people, will be taken away from them and given to others (19:41-44; 20:16). In the condemnation of hypocritical worship, accommodation to violence and unjust politics, and

[92] For helpful analysis on the evidence for the approximate period when Acts was written, see Barrett, *Acts*, 2:xlii-xlv, who suggests the likeliest range approximately matches the reign of Domitian, 81-96.

prediction of consequent destruction, Jesus' rebuke against the temple authorities in Jerusalem resembles God's opening indictment against Jerusalem through the prophet Isaiah.

In Isaiah's day, at least as the book begins, Jerusalem's apostasy takes the form not of blatant idolatry but, instead, lip service and observance rendered void by antithetical actions. In Isaiah 1 God reproves Jerusalem for ritually flawless worship that—because practiced by those who do violence and murder, take bribes, and neglect care of widows and orphans—makes a mockery of justice and, thus, of the God of justice (Isa 1:10-17, 21-23). God has a special word of rebuke for Jerusalem's leaders, calling them "rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah" (1:10). God urges Jerusalem to cease the pretensions of worship and instead, put an end to bloodshed and pursue a just society: rescue those who have suffered injustice (ἀδικούμενον), defend orphans and give justice to widows (1:16-17). God laments the formerly just and righteous city's having "become a whore" (1:21), which appears to be a metaphor for false worship (cf. 1:29) and its accompanying crimes and injustices: murder, economic dishonesty, and corruption exemplified in faithless rulers who keep company with thieves, love gifts, and pursue recompense for judgments rendered, rather than defending orphans and ignoring the cause of widows (1:21-23). Jerusalem's sin consists in praising God's name in ritual while accommodating social practices commensurate to idolatry. In response, God has a word for the "strong ones of Israel": God is bringing a judgment of destruction that will purify God's people of injustice and lawlessness, and God will set up just judges and counselors as Jerusalem had at the beginning, who will restore the city to righteousness and faithfulness (1:24-26). Sinners and the lawless will be destroyed and idolaters put to shame as Jerusalem is made whole through judgment and mercy (1:27-29). The destruction in Jerusalem

is not merely God's vengeance upon enemies or rebels; its purpose is Jerusalem's restoration to the habits that make for flourishing—habits of justice and righteousness.

Isaiah 2:1-4 forecasts a still more glorious destiny for Jerusalem. Ultimately, that is, "in the last days" (Isa 2:1), Jerusalem and its temple will be raised up to the highest mountain heights and induce all other nations to say, "Come, let us go up to the house of the God of Jacob that he may teach us his ways and that we might walk in his paths" (Isa 2:2-3a). God will teach a God-shaped politics to the nations who come to Jerusalem. But the movement will also go the other direction: "For out of Zion will go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge among the nations and convict many people. They will beat their swords into plows and their spears into sickles. Nation will no longer lift up sword against nation; neither will they learn war any longer" (Isa 2:3b-4). The nations will learn from the God whose house is in Jerusalem a politics of constructive, life-giving flourishing rather than studying (μάθωσιν; Isa 2:4) war; they will turn soil into life rather than life into soil.[93]

The problems of Jerusalem in Jesus' day resonate with the opening of Isaiah, as do Jesus' predictions of destruction with God's promises of judgment. But if Isaiah's pattern of Jerusalem's past prefigures its future, the predicted destruction is a precursor to its restoration and destiny as a beacon summoning the Gentiles to the kind of politics that Jesus portrays as "the reign of God" and of which he continues to speak among his disciples after his resurrection (Acts 1:3). The disciples who have witnessed Jesus' whole ministry centering on

[93] David Pao sees specific verbal references in Acts 1:8 to Isa 49:6, 32:15, 42:1, 61:1-2, 43:10, and 44:8, which all help to support his claim that, given the role of Acts 1:8 as the programmatic thesis of the book, Isaiah forms an important part of the "hermeneutical grid" for the story of Acts. See Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, 91-93.

God's reign will be the means by which word of Jesus and the politics he represents spread first in Jerusalem and then from Jerusalem everywhere else.[94] Luke may not mean with this pattern to evoke Isaiah 1:1-2:4, but the pattern of a word going out from Jerusalem meant to invite all the nations to know God and participate in God's peaceable politics makes a strong resonance. Pao makes the connection more emphatically: "Jerusalem as the center from which the word of God will go forth is … crucial to the development of the narrative of Acts."[95] Given Jesus' own insistence that "everything written about me in the law, prophets, and psalms must be fulfilled," (Luke 24:44), one reason for the beginning of apostolic witness in Jerusalem could well be the connection to Isaiah's opening. Just after mentioning the fulfillment of Scripture, Jesus also invokes the purpose of sending a message of repentance and forgiveness of sins (24:47). Jesus' commitment to loving enemies and providing opportunity for repentance gives a strong rationale for sending his witnesses first to the place where Jesus was violently rejected. His resurrection means that the leaders who saw to his death could still repent and be reconciled—the vineyard has not yet been taken from them and given to others (Luke 20:16). They still have opportunity to reconcile with the owner and join the newly appointed stewards (22:28-30) in caring for the vineyard according to the specifications of the owner.

---

[94] Earle Ellis considers the possibility that Luke intends "the end of the earth" to designate a particular distant location, e.g., Spain, Rome or Ethiopia. Regardless of the plausibility of such definite referents, however, Ellis argues persuasively that the primary impulse is geographic and does not point to the movement from Jewish to Gentile mission. See E. Earle Ellis, "'The End of the Earth' (Acts 1:8)," *BBR* 1 (1991): 123-32 For close analysis of how the narrative actually follows the progression "Jerusalem, Judaea and Samaria, end of the earth," see Trites, *New Testament Concept of Witness*, 140.

[95] See Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, 51; also, 156: "The journey of the word from Jerusalem naturally recalls Isa 2:2-4…"

Some years still remain between Jesus' resurrection and 70 CE. Sending his witnesses into Jerusalem, especially with a message of his resurrection and vindication by God, is very likely to attract the attention of the authorities who conspired against Jesus and engineered his condemnation and execution. Hearing this message will give them opportunity to repent of what they did to Jesus and turn, instead, toward the politics he portrays. The same holds for Jerusalem's people more broadly, who did eventually participate in Jesus' condemnation (Luke 23:13). Because Jesus sends his witnesses first to Jerusalem, the people most directly to blame for his death will have opportunity to repudiate their wicked deed and embrace the way of Jesus instead.

Jesus sends his witnesses first to the city that epitomizes Israel's vacillation between loyalty and apostasy and where the same leaders that contrived his demise retain their positions of authority. While sending his witnesses might result in Jerusalem's and its leaders' repentance and transformation, to the extent that they remain captive to the politics that drove their opposition to Jesus, the odds are slim. They will likely oppose his witnesses as well. And given the violence and coercion inherent in that politics, some of their conflicts with Jesus' apostles will likely resort to coercion and turn violent. But if the apostles are sent as a community embodying Jesus' way in the world in order to convey the message of God's alternative politics, they can hardly do so effectively if they respond to such resistance in kind.

3.3.3 Responding to Conflicts

Jesus provides the apostles' template for responding to the conflicts they are likely to meet if they act as his witnesses in Jerusalem and beyond. The kind of power represented in both Jerusalem's authorities and in the rest of the Empire means that Jesus' response can

effectively guide them regardless of where they go. Jesus' template does not prohibit them from arguing with authorities, dodging questions, leaving places where they are threatened, or resisting the categories offered them. To the contrary, Jesus used all these strategies in his effort to communicate the ways of God with recalcitrant audiences. But he never resorted to coercion or violence, and when faced with violence he could not avoid, he chose to absorb it rather than return it. So his disciples must also resist any attempt to convey the identity of Jesus by using power antithetical to his character. Indeed, Jesus promises his apostles the same power by which his very life was conceived (1:35) and which animated his ministry from the moment of his baptism (3:22): the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells them, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses..." (Acts 1:8). The power of the Holy Spirit is not under the apostles' control, but if the Spirit functions for them as with Jesus, the Holy Spirit will empower the apostles to resist accommodation to life patterns inimical to Jesus' character and be, instead, Jesus' true witnesses.

3.3.4 Witness to Jesus as Witness to the Reign of God

Witness to Jesus is inherently political because it involves claims about God in a world of widespread agreement that the theological is political. Even if that were not so, Jesus' embodiment of God's reign in contrast with other politics on offer is central to his identity throughout his life, epitomized in his death and resurrection, and remains the theme of his teaching in Acts' introduction (Acts 1:3). Commissioning the apostles as his witnesses draws them into his political project equipped with the same power that made Jesus' life and ministry possible—the Holy Spirit. They are to embody as a community the political pattern Jesus showed them. Thus, witness to Jesus is witness to the reign of God as Jesus portrayed it, which

cannot be conveyed using Gentile patterns of power. Such witness will encounter—even generate—conflict but will remain faithful to the character of God that Jesus portrayed and trust God for vindication in the face of injustice and even death.

3.4 Conclusion: Witness as Integrated Theology, Epistemology, & Politics

Why Jesus commissions "witnesses" has everything to do with the substance of the message he wants his apostles to convey. Witness is an essentially derivative and yet actively communicative enterprise, which allows it to be God-sourced and God-shaped without precluding human agency and involvement. The apostles' credibility as witnesses is rooted in the reality of God, which they are commissioned not to prove but to portray just as Jesus did. If they are Jesus' witnesses, they can scarcely expect to communicate more effectively than he. The theological foundation of the apostles' witness gives them nothing to prove, and so allows them to communicate with commensurate epistemology and embodied politics. Witness is epistemically gentle and yet inexorable; witnesses insist upon the reality of their experiences not without any evidence, but with an appreciation of the limits of evidence and no need to prove the reality of what they have seen and heard to those who persistently resist. Witness is politically confrontational, but non-violent. In short, witness is the way of Jesus. Jesus bore witness to the reign of God through his life, death, and resurrection. He invites his apostles to do the same by being his witnesses "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and up to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Chapter 4: Witness Peter

Jesus' commission creates the expectation that his apostles, starting in Jerusalem, will go throughout the world reflecting, communally and by using the same means of persuasion and forms of power that he did, Jesus' lived portrait of God. Jesus expects the apostles to proclaim and embody in their community life, as Jesus did with them and publicly, the message and character of the God he showed them. Acts' portrait of the early apostolic ministry, in which Peter emerges as the central figure, shows Peter's and his companions' efforts to embrace faithfully the prescriptive promise of Jesus' commission to be his witnesses. The theological, epistemological, and political dimensions of the prescribed witness foreshadowed in Jesus' commission, as outlined in chapter 3 above, come to fruition in the apostles' early activities as they respond to the Holy Spirit's empowerment with bold preaching, healing, and a community of generosity that all draw attention and, by turns, lead to conflicts as well as the community's growth. The narrator affirms the apostles' conscious acceptance and public insistence that their witness has a divine mandate and consists in a message about God's work through Jesus, centered in Jesus' resurrection, and—although sometimes imperfectly—they follow Jesus' patterns of persuasion and use of power in order to spread the message of God's resurrection politics.

The argument of this chapter begins, as the previous one did, focused on the theological grounding and content of apostolic witness, but turns from attending to what Jesus' commission forecasts to how the apostles begin to fulfill it. The opening narratives of Acts portray God as the source and substance of apostolic witness. The apostles' first act following Jesus' ascension signals their expectation that a special prompting from God would

precede their public witness; in obedience to Jesus' command to stay in Jerusalem in expectation of "power from on high" (Luke 24:49) or "the promise of the Father," they return to Jerusalem and wait (Acts 1:12-14). They do not make any moves to be Jesus' witnesses publicly until the Holy Spirit makes them too conspicuous to ignore, and then they respond with bold preaching and acts of healing in Jesus' name, which draw the attention of new potential converts and old adversaries alike. Through all these encounters, the apostles consistently proclaim God as the source of and reason for their witness; no human authority can countermand for them God's directive (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29-32). The God who empowers the apostles also makes the essential substance of the apostles' witness—Jesus, God's son and co-identified with God as "Lord" throughout Luke's Gospel, is the central character of their witness. And his resurrection, characterized as an act of God, is the central event whenever Peter speaks for the apostles and summarizes the substance of apostolic witness (2:32; 3:15; 5:30-32; 10:39-42). The event that was so difficult for the apostles to apprehend becomes the heart of their witness.

Here, this chapter's argument turns to show how the apostles work within the epistemology that witness from and about the God revealed in Jesus requires. The apostles no longer exhibit doubts that Jesus has truly been raised; they identify his resurrection as the essential event of their witness (1:22). But such assurance does not lead them to any attempts to persuade others via manipulation or coercion, regardless of the varying levels of receptivity they encounter. The apostles communicate the news of Jesus' resurrection with the power and gentleness appropriate to the message. They insist upon the reality of their experience and their mandate from God, and they boldly call Jerusalem's residents to repentance, but they never resort to violence or coercion. They simply bear witness and allow those who hear their

words and see their way of being to decide for themselves, as Gamaliel urges, whether or not the movement is from God (5:34-39). What the apostles preach will be confirmed or denied in how well it is reflected in their community life—whether they practice generosity and hospitality toward one another, meet one another's needs, and entrust themselves to one another. The grave epistemic importance of community life is evident in the contrast between the open generosity of Barnabas and the deceitful greed of Ananias and Sapphira (4:32-5:11), as well as the in the community's response to the case of uneven distribution between Hellenist and Hebrew widows (6:1-6). A visibly wholesome community life becomes essential to the witness of the apostolic community and inseparable from the proclaimed message about Jesus; separating word from deed does violence to the message and would threaten the essentially peaceable mode of witness. The unity of word and action makes for a powerful message that nevertheless leaves its audience free to participate or not. In the use of this gentle power, the apostolic community contrasts with the Jerusalem temple authorities who oppose them and seek to quash their message through threats, imprisonment, and violence.

At this point the argument turns to the politics of apostolic witness, particularly revealed in the contrast between what kinds of power the apostles use vis-à-vis the authorities in Jerusalem. Whereas the chief priests and Sadducees use arrest, threats, and beatings, the apostles rely on the power of inspired truthful speech and a commensurate community life. In their captivity to death-dealing power, these authorities demonstrate their allegiance to a God or gods other than the one revealed in Jesus, whom the apostles claim is the one God of Israel. The apostolic message confronts Jesus' executioners with the dismaying news that their work of killing Jesus has been undone in dramatic fashion and revealed their deed as a violently wicked act of opposition against God. No wonder proclaiming this message leads to violence

against the apostles. But the apostles remain faithful to the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. They draw attention through inspired multilingual proclamation of God's great works and through healings, and, when confronted with violence, they do not return it in kind. Instead, they suffer it with joy and redouble their efforts at building up a community that bears witness in both word and deed to the way of Jesus. In all these aspects, the apostles aim to mirror Jesus' way of portraying God's reign, beginning in the days after Jesus' ascension.

4.1 Theology: God as the Source and Substance of Apostolic Witness

The perspective of Acts is clear from the outset: the apostles bear a message from God and about God. Acts' opening verses lay the groundwork for this conviction and the apostles' early ministry, beginning from the moment the "men in white robes" address them while they stand gazing after Jesus' ascending form (Acts 1:9-11), confirms it. Moreover, the apostles exhibit total assurance that their message is of divine origin and steadfastly place "God's great deeds" (Acts 2:11) in Jesus at the center of their message. In obedience to Jesus and anticipating the fulfillment of the "promise from the Father" (Acts 1:4), they return after Jesus' ascension and wait in Jerusalem (1:12-26). Following Jesus' example, they intentionally ally themselves with God's purposes and turn to Scripture as a witness to God's activity fulfilled in and through Jesus. When the fulfillment of their waiting in Jerusalem arrives as the Holy Spirit descends on them, they respond by faithfully proclaiming the message of Jesus and become a community shaped by his way of life (Acts 2:1-43). And at every occasion of public preaching, they declare that God—not any human authority—has prompted their witness and requires their obedience. On each of these occasions, Peter takes center stage as the apostles' spokesperson, as he does in identifying the specific content of the apostolic message as Jesus'

resurrection—a dramatic act of God that reveals the essence of God's power and purpose to bring salvation. Acts' insistence upon the divine source and substance of apostolic witness lends the message the unapologetic and gentle power of the God revealed in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

4.1.1 God as the Source of Apostolic Witness

Even before Jesus commissions his disciples, he enjoins them to wait for an act of God before they begin acting as his witnesses (Acts 1:4). Affirming the divine source of the apostolic ministry begins with the apostles' obedience to that command; following Jesus' ascension they wait in Jerusalem (1:12-26). During that period of waiting, Peter steps into the role of spokesperson for the apostles and begins to set a pattern for their self-understanding by using language that evokes divine providence—especially in the fulfillment of scripture. Peter voices the apostles' consciousness of God's ongoing plan (1:15-20), in which the apostles may participate by bearing witness to Jesus' resurrection (1:21-22). But the apostles do not become active witnesses on their own initiative. They wait obediently for the promised empowerment by the Holy Spirit, and when it comes and draws a crowd, Peter, speaking for all of the apostles, responds faithfully to the Spirit's prompting and Jesus' commission by bearing the first publicly spoken witness to Jesus in Jerusalem. Each time Peter addresses an audience, and particularly when he confronts opposition, he declares the apostles' assurance that they act in obedience to God. The divine source of the apostolic witness is essential; if the prompting for the apostles' public proclamation is some other source—e.g., wishful thinking, self-delusion, or intent to deceive—it is not "witness" and the apostles have no

authority to speak of God. Much hangs, therefore, on establishing that the message about God comes from God.

4.1.1.1 Waiting in Jerusalem

Only seven verses before Jesus' ascension he commands his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they should receive "the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). As soon as Jesus ascends, the apostles do as he told them and return from Mount Olivet to Jerusalem. In this act of obedience, their unity of will with one another, and their devotion to prayer (1:14), the apostles appear actively oriented toward God. They attend as a group to the purpose of God. They do not get ahead of themselves, marching into the streets and proclaiming the message about Jesus from the moment they return to Jerusalem. Instead, they wait for the empowerment Jesus promised would make them his witnesses, and, as they wait, establish their community identity and attend to God in prayer. The apostles' posture in the few verses following Jesus' ascension signals their commitment to be faithful to God and not act on their own initiative. At the same time, their waiting is far from passive. Beginning between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost and continuing into the apostles' ministry of witness, Peter leads the apostles in considering what God's providential plans are and how they might participate in those plans.

4.1.1.2 Embracing God's plan

The first action Peter initiates among the apostles following Jesus' ascension indicates both awareness of God's plan and willingness to participate in it by responding faithfully to Jesus' commission. Peter's first words in Acts contain a verbal echo of Luke's opening sentence, which, as noted in chapter 2 above, characterizes Luke's Gospel as a narrative

unfolding according to plan—God's plan. Indeed, the first two words of Peter's first sentence are both prominent among the vocabulary that Squires, Cosgrove, and Green identify as frequent markers signaling constitutive events in God's saving plan: ἔδει πληρωθῆναι—"it had to be fulfilled." Peter's words, as Cosgrove suggests, exemplify a typical Lukan pattern in which δεῖ describes "the necessity that God's plan, as expressed in Scripture, be fulfilled."[1] Moreover, in taking the necessity of scripture's fulfillment as a divine mandate for the apostles' action, Peter follows Jesus' example in Luke 22:37: "This scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.'"[2] This pronouncement about the necessity of scripture's fulfillment, in Cosgrove's words, "functions both as a proof of divine endorsement and as an imperative to be obeyed."[3] Cosgrove identifies Peter's first words after Jesus' ascension as a "striking example" of this function for δεῖ. "The scripture had to be fulfilled" (Acts 1:16) about Judas, that someone else should take his office (1:20), and so the apostles proceed to fulfill it by selecting a replacement for Judas (1:26). In taking the fulfillment of scripture as a divine mandate, the apostles orient themselves toward God's plans and—whether consciously or not—begin imitating Jesus, just as witnesses ought.

Peter uses δεῖ there and a few verses later when he says, "one of them must [δεῖ] become with us a witness to his resurrection" (1:21), in a way that exactly imitates how, up to this point the narrative of Luke and Acts, only Jesus has used this term. Among the terms

[1] Cosgrove, "The Divine Δεῖ in Luke-Acts," 174.

[2] Cosgrove, "The Divine Δεῖ in Luke-Acts," 174.

[3] Cosgrove, "The Divine Δεῖ in Luke-Acts," 174.

Squires identifies as particularly pointing toward God's providence, none occurs more frequently than δεῖ. Erich Fascher observes rightly that Luke uses this term more than any other Evangelist, and that Luke carries the term over from Jesus life into the apostolic community: "läßt er es [δεῖ] doch nicht nur im Leben Jesu, sondern auch in der Urgemeinde wirksam werden."[4] But Fascher does not remark further on the significance of bringing this term from Jesus' life into the apostolic community. In the Gospel, sixteen out of the eighteen times that the word appears, Jesus speaks it.[5] Jesus *must* be in his Father's house (2:39). He *must* preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other villages of Galilee (4:43). He, the Son of Humanity, *must* suffer many things, be rejected, killed and be raised on the third day (9:22; 17:25), and the scriptures that speak of his suffering and betrayal *must* be fulfilled (22:37; 24:7; 24:26, 44). Jesus' use of δεῖ recapitulates his single-minded commitment to advancing the divine project toward its ultimate consummation.

No other human character uses the word δεῖ in Luke's Gospel; most notably, none of the disciples ever uses it. Indeed, as their dispute about who is the greatest among them suggests, they do not appear to understand Jesus at all when he speaks of what *must* occur (Luke 22:24-27); they appear not to comprehend God's plan with regard to Jesus. Even after the risen Lord appears to them he still has to teach them to see what happened in his death

---

[4] Fascher notes that of 102 occurrences of δεῖ in the NT, 44 of them occur in the Lukan writings. The Third Evangelist "allows the term to have an effect not only in the life of Jesus, but also in the early [Christian] community" (Erich Fascher, "Theologische Beobachtungen zu δεῖ," in *Neutestamentliche Studien Für Rudolf Bultmann zu Seinem 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Walther Eltester, BZNW 21 (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1954), 228-54, esp. 245-46.

[5] One of these, Luke 24:26 is one of the men at the empty tomb reminding the women of Jesus' own words, so it is not exactly Jesus' voice in that moment. A heavenly messenger mediates Jesus' words in this instance. The other two times the word appears in the mouth of the narrator.

and resurrection as the fulfillment of God's plan in the scriptures (24:26, 44). But instead of dropping the use of the term after Jesus' ascension Luke gives this term to the apostles, which begins to suggest that the plan of God at work in Jesus is being carried forward through the apostles.

Only three verses after Jesus' departure, Peter becomes the first person after Jesus to use the word δεῖ. Using δεῖ twice in rapid succession in just the same patterns that Jesus uses indicates Peter's recognition of God's purposes and the apostles' willingness to participate in God's plans going forward. Peter uses δεῖ to say not only that the apostles must participate in fulfilling God's purposes as foretold in scripture, by replacing Judas, but also to suggest the plans of God are fulfilled in the apostles' faithfulness to Jesus commission. Peter's second use of δεῖ points to the necessity of scripture's fulfillment, but also hints at a divine mandate for the apostles to fulfill Jesus' commission to be his witnesses. The gap Judas left, the scriptural mandate to fill his office, and Peter's judgment that the essential qualification was having been present with Jesus throughout his ministry all the way through to his resurrection (1:21-22), all work together to make bearing witness to Jesus' resurrection a fulfillment of scripture and, therefore, also an instance of apostolic obedience to God.

4.1.1.3 Fulfillment of Scripture

By treating the necessity of scripture's fulfillment as a divine mandate, as evidenced above, the apostles begin imitating Jesus even before their first act of public witness. They show their commitment to act according to God's plans as revealed in scripture. Peter leads the apostles in their first communal action, namely, replacing Judas, in direct response to scripture (Acts 1:16, 20-22). In this instance, the necessity of scripture's fulfillment gives the

apostles a mandate that they must fulfill if they would participate in God's plans, which they proceed to do, and thus demonstrate their commitment. At Pentecost and beyond, however, the fulfillment of scripture becomes not so much a mandate as a token of God's approval — a retrospective sign of God's agency at work in Jesus' life and, by extension, in the apostles' witness. Both functions of scripture's fulfillment, however, emphasize that God is the ultimate source of the apostles' public witness and the one whose plan they further as they proceed to bear witness of Jesus.

Peter's first words among the apostles after Jesus' ascension acknowledge scripture as an instrument for communicating God's plan. The necessity (δεῖ) of scripture's fulfillment both explains Judas's apostasy and calls for his replacement (1:16, 20). Both texts Peter cites in order to explain what happened with Judas and what must happen next come from Psalms. Peter names the true agent of these words as the Holy Spirit—the same Spirit whom the apostles now await to empower them as Jesus' witnesses. Peter's declaring the Spirit the true speaker of the psalm helps reveal the Spirit's longstanding role in advancing God's restorative plan. Peter first recalls a verse from Psalm 69:25 (68:26 LXX):

Acts 1:20a	Psalm 68:26 (LXX)
γενηθήτω ἡ ἔπαυλις	**γενηθήτω ἡ ἔπαυλις**
<u>αὐτοῦ ἔρημος</u>	<u>αὐτῶν ἠρημωμένη</u>,
καὶ	**καὶ**
	ἐν τοῖς σκηνώμασιν αὐτῶν
μὴ ἔστω ὁ κατοικῶν	**μὴ ἔστω ὁ κατοικῶν**
ἐν αὐτῇ	
Let <u>his</u> homestead become a <u>desert</u>	Let <u>their</u> homestead become <u>deserted</u>
and	and
	in their habitation
let there be no one dwelling	let there be no one dwelling
in it	

Peter's version of the text does not significantly alter what appears in the Septuagint;[6] apart from omitting a few words, he only changes "their" to "his," which conforms more to the context in which Peter uses it—he speaks not of the psalmist's many enemies but of Jesus' one betrayer.

This psalm first appears in the Lukan writings through an allusion to v. 21 (68:22 LXX) in the passion narrative: the soldiers mock Jesus and offer him vinegar to drink (Luke 23:36). The psalmist's portrait of suffering occupies much of the psalm, but vv. 22-28 (68:23-29 LXX) imprecate the psalmist's enemy tormentors. The psalmist speaks in first person, but Luke does not report Jesus quoting this psalm. The allusion allows the reader to see how Jesus could deservedly speak those words, but he does not. Because Jesus never quotes any of this psalm and, indeed, prays not for vengeance but, instead, forgives his killers (23:34), Luke shows how Jesus' suffering fulfills the psalm without becoming vengeful. Accordingly, Judas's demise fulfills the psalm not because Jesus wished it upon him, but because its circumstances fit a particular situation that the Holy Spirit spoke ahead of time by the mouth of David (Acts 1:16). Judas had bought a field, a rural piece of land (χωρίον), which Peter interprets as (at least the makings of) a "homestead" (ἔπαυλις), but the land does not see habitation because Judas dies (1:18-19). Luke sees in Judas's death the fulfillment of this single line from the psalm apparently because the circumstances corresponded to the words.[7] As Luke tells it, Peter turns to scripture and the necessity of its fulfillment, effectively assuring his fellow disciples and the reader that God's saving plan can and does accommodate even blatant betrayal.

---

[6] Rahlfs-Hanhart (2006) lists no textual variants.

[7] Barrett, *Acts*, 1:93.

Peter points out that this psalm explains why Judas abandoned his post, but another requires the apostles to replace him: "Let another take [λαβέτω] his ἐπισκοπή" (Acts 1:20). Peter interprets these words as the Holy Spirit's command to the apostles: in order to carry on the part in "this ministry" (τῆς διακονίας ταύτης) originally allotted to Judas, the apostles must elect someone to fill the ἐπισκοπή that Judas's apostasy left vacant.[8] Commentators have speculated further about the significance of replacing Judas. For example, the apostles' number must be restored to twelve because Israel's reconstitution precedes the incorporation of the Gentiles.[9] Or there must be twelve apostles because they will judge the twelve tribes, and the twelve tribes must have twelve witnesses (Luke 22:30).[10] Rengstorf proposes that bringing the number of the apostles back to twelve signifies that Jesus' disciples maintained a sense of responsibility toward Israel; God is not finished with Israel and neither are the apostles.[11] Barrett's appreciative criticism, however, finds its mark: "There is much to be said for this view, though it was hardly Luke's own, since he does nothing to suggest it."[12] Luke surely

---

[8] Barrett, *Acts*, 1:100.

[9] See, e.g., Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, SP 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992): "The defection of Judas posed a unique problem and demanded a unique solution. When others of the Twelve died, there would be no need to replace them. Why? Because once the Twelve had definitively been reconstituted at the heart of the people *and the Spirit bestowed,* the faithful Israel would have come into existence, and the promise of God would have reached fulfillment. This is why Judas had to be replaced before Pentecost, because the integrity of the apostolic circle of Twelve symbolized the restoration of God's people" (38-39).

[10] William H. Willimon, *Acts* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1988), 28; also K. H. Rengstorf, "The Election of Matthias," in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto Piper*, ed. W. Klassen and G. F. Snyder, Election of Matthias (New York: Harper, 1962), 178-92; K. H. Rengstorf, "Die Zuwahl des Matthias," *ST* 15 (1961): 35-67; cf. Nelson P. Estrada, *From Followers to Leaders: The Apostles in the Ritual of Status Transformation in Acts 1-2*, JSNTSup 255 (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2004).

[11] Rengstorf, "Zuwahl des Matthias," 185-87.

[12] Barrett, *Acts*, 1:94.

knows how to add eleven and one, but he does not mention that the election of Matthias returns the number of the apostles to twelve, or that this number has any special significance. It is not out of character for Luke to expect his readers to make such connections for themselves—his scriptural allusions are often plenty subtle—but he also gives an explicit reason for filling the gap Judas left. It involves the apostles' response to the Spirit's command from Psalm 109 (108 LXX): "Another shall receive his ἐπισκοπή." As noted above, the word ἐπισκοπή presents a translation problem.

'Επισκοπή can disappear entirely in an English translation because of its wide semantic range. In much of the Septuagint it has to do with enrolling military lists or taking censuses of the people.[13] The psalm from which Peter quotes here sets up "let another take his ἐπισκοπή" as a heading for the maledictions that follow. The psalmist wishes all the people and goods "under the care" (ἐπισκοπή) of his enemy bereft and ruined (Psalm 109:8-11 [108:8-11 LXX]. Since Judas was one of Jesus' disciples, it appears unlikely that Luke means to invoke the entire context of the Psalm. Luke transforms the sense of the text by placing it into a different setting, but it could evoke more in its new context than commentators have noted. Barrett represents a reasonable consensus: in this context, "[ἐπισκοπή] means simply *office* and contains no more indication of the nature of the office than readers of Acts may have brought to the text."[14] But readers of Acts might well bring with them Luke's own previous use of this word. Most

[13] See, e.g., Exod 30:12; Num 7:2; 14:29.

[14] Barrett, *Acts*, 100. See also BDAG, s. v. "ἐπισκοπή."

modern English translations render the word as "office," but it can also denote "visitation," or "divine activity of a salutary kind."[15]

This third sense corresponds to several other key points where Luke uses this noun or the cognate verb ἐπισκέπτομαι: twice in Zechariah's song that both celebrates and anticipates God's saving acts (1:68, 78); when the crowds acknowledge God at work in Jesus (7:16); and in Jesus' lament over Jerusalem for not recognizing the time of its visitation (Luke 19:44). If the work to which the apostles are commissioned in some way participates in the ἐπισκοπή of God, then "office" will not render the term adequately in this context. Translating ἐπισκοπή into English, of course, introduces hermeneutical problems not present in the Greek; Greek does not force a choice between one sense of the word and another. On the contrary, it is quite possible—and theologically sound—to hold together the ordinary office of a human being with the work of God. Such convergence of agency characterizes the nature of the apostles' witness.[16] The apostles' new office (ἐπισκοπή) requires them to bear witness to the divine visitation (ἐπισκοπή) that Jerusalem failed to recognize in Jesus (Luke 19:44). The ἐπισκοπή Judas left vacant must be filled in order to fulfill scripture, and the job description is "witness to Jesus' resurrection" along with the rest of the apostles. And so, after specifying

[15] BDAG, s. v. "ἐπισκοπή."

[16] By "theologically sound" I mean to refer to the longstanding assumption of the Christian theological tradition that human and divine agency are not competitive because of the qualitative distinction between Creator being and creaturely existence. This assumption pervades such early Christian texts Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, and Cyril of Alexandria's *On the Unity of Christ*. For a helpful articulation of the idea, see Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1991): "…a free action is one which *I* cause and which is not caused by anything else. It is caused by God. … [T]his is not the paradox it seems at first, for God is not *anything else*. God is not a separate and rival agent within the universe. The creative causal power of God does not operate on me from outside, as an alternative to me; it is the creative causal power of God that makes me *me*" (13).

the qualifications and proffering two qualified candidates, the apostles pray that the Lord would show which is the right one and cast lots to select Matthias (1:21-26). This episode between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost demonstrates that the apostles attend to scripture to help them discern God's plans so that they might participate in them. The apostles' commitment to obey divine mandates revealed in scripture readies them to be swept up in God's plans through the empowering action of the Holy Spirit, and to continue interpreting scripture in a way that reveals the events of both Jesus' life and their witness as active participation in God's plan.

As the apostles begin their public witness to Jesus, the fulfillment of scripture tends to function more as a signal of God's approval than a mandate. When the inhabitants of Jerusalem who witness the inspired speech of Pentecost believe the glossolalists to be drunk (Acts 2:5-13), Peter first corrects their erroneous assumption (2:15) and then begins his explanation by turning to scripture (2:16-21). What has happened in the community of Jesus' followers fulfills the words that the prophet Joel spoke about "the last days" (2:16-17), in which God's poured out Spirit would cause God's people to prophesy (2:17-18). Claiming the apostolic community's Pentecost experience as the fulfillment of this scripture has the dual function of legitimizing the event as an act of God and giving the authority of divine sanction to what Peter says next. Viewing the Pentecost event as an act of God in fulfillment of scripture looks backward as well as forward. Peter brings the scriptural words of Joel as a witness to the Spirit's inspiration of the glossolalists as well as of the speech Peter is about to give, which has the effect of putting a divine stamp of approval on what Peter says even before he begins speaking about Jesus. He primes his audience to accept his authority by invoking the fulfillment of scripture and the Holy Spirit's inspiration.

When Peter begins to speak about Jesus he continues the pattern of invoking scripture's fulfillment to portray the events of Jesus' life within the scope of God's plan. Peter proclaims that Jesus' betrayal and death accomplished God's purposes, and that Jesus' resurrection fulfilled first-person scriptural words spoken by David that could not have been true of David himself (Acts 2:22-31). In Peter's interpretation of Psalm 16 (15 LXX), David prophesied, by expressing his hope for life beyond the grave, that a descendent of his—the Messiah—would be resurrected (2:31), and God fulfilled the scriptural words of David by raising Jesus from the dead (2:32). Jesus' exaltation at God's right hand fulfills yet more words of David: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'sit at my right hand until I set your enemies as a footstool for your feet'" (Acts 2:34-35; Psalm 109:1 LXX). At Pentecost, Peter's proclamation that God raised Jesus in fulfillment of scripture draws only from these two Psalms, and mostly from Psalm 16. On the next occasion, Peter quotes only from Deuteronomy 18, but speaks in terms of what God did with Jesus fulfilling the scriptural story more broadly.

In Acts 3:17-26, Peter emphasizes God's agency in making Jesus' death and resurrection a fulfillment of scripture, and, by the context in which Peter speaks, implies God's agency in the apostles' witness just as much as with the prophets of scripture. God spoke in scripture about the Messiah's suffering in advance "through the mouth of all the prophets," and then God made Jesus' crucifixion a fulfillment of that prediction, whereas the people who brought it about "acted in ignorance" (3:17). Even so, the people who got Jesus executed bear responsibility for what they did; Peter exhorts them to repent and turn to God, who, also through God's "holy prophets," has announced a time of "restoring all things," with the risen Jesus at the center (3:21). Quoting Moses' words from Deut 18:15, Peter casts Jesus as the

prophet like Moses whom God has now "raised up" (ἀνίστημι)—a verb given new meaning in the context of Jesus' unique resurrection and exaltation—to whom Moses exhorted the people to listen (3:22).

Pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of this text implies divine endorsement of not only Jesus, but also those who bear him witness. So much so that quoting further, "and it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be completely rooted out from the people" (3:23), reads as a double warning against those who do not listen to the prophet Jesus or to his witnesses—the apostles who prophesy by the power of the Holy Spirit as Joel predicted (2:18). The inspired words of Moses give divine legitimacy to Jesus as the God-sent prophet and to his witnesses as those who prophesy on Jesus' behalf while he "must remain in heaven" at God's right hand (3:21). By declaring what God did in Jesus the apostles follow in the wake of "all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him" who "foretold these days" (3:24). In fulfillment of yet another scripture, namely, the covenant of blessing for all the families of the earth through Abraham's descendants (Gen 12:3), God sent Jesus first to them, "to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways" (3:26). Peter's claim that God fulfilled scripture by sending Jesus to turn his people toward repentance puts the apostles' witness-bearing activity within the same framework. Jesus, co-identified with God, personally commissioned the apostles as his witnesses so that they would do precisely what Peter is doing—speaking a message of repentance to Abraham's descendants.

Peter's pattern of reference to scripture as corroborating evidence of God's action in Jesus continues into his speech before the high priests, rulers, and elders (4:5-12). Peter does

not give them a long sermon about Jesus, but he communicates the main point: God raised Jesus from the dead, whom they had put to death, which fulfills Psalm 118:22 (117:22 LXX): "This one [Jesus], is the one who was rejected by you, the builders; he has become the keystone" (Acts 4:11). Quoting the verse underscores the divine agency in what happened with Jesus and, therefore, also signals the ultimately divine source of the apostles' message. Coupled with the public sign of healing the man born crippled by invoking Jesus' name (3:1-10), Peter's proclamation backs the Jerusalem leadership into a corner. They recognize that the power that Peter and John have wielded by invoking Jesus' name looks divine, and Peter verbalizes the point with his direct claim about God raising Jesus and fulfilling the lines from the psalm. Peter's point rings out clearly: Jesus' name would not have the power to heal a man crippled from birth if he were not co-identified with God as proven by his resurrection from the dead. The Jerusalem leadership remains unconvinced that Jesus is who Peter claims, but they cannot deny the public sign that everyone in Jerusalem has seen (4:16), and so feel compelled to release the apostles despite remaining unconvinced that Jesus is who Peter claims. But the apostolic community only sees their own perspective on Jesus further reinforced by the Jerusalem leadership's resistance, and they turn once more to scripture to interpret both what happened with Jesus and what is happening with them.

When Peter and John are released, return to their companions, and report what happened with the council, the apostolic community affirms univocally that Jesus walked a path of fulfilling divine words in scripture, spoken through David, that it hopes and expects to follow (Acts 4:23-30). The community begins by addressing God as the sovereign Lord (δεσπότα) of all creation and then speaks the opening lines of Psalm 2: "Why are the nations

(ἔθνη) arrogant and the peoples (λαοί) conspiring to no purpose? The kings of the earth stood by and the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah" (Acts 4:25-26). In these words the community sees an image of the events of Jesus' trial—where "Herod and Pilate and the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel gathered together" against Jesus, but end up unknowingly doing God's work, namely, "whatever your [God's] hand and plan had foreordained to occur" (4:28). The experience of seeing the plans of God that the community understands from scripture fulfilled through what happened with Jesus strengthens its commitment to being Jesus' witnesses, and as one they pray for the courage to speak publicly the message for which Peter and John had just been detained. The fulfillment of scripture continues to support the apostolic community's assurance that God was active in what happened with Jesus. Seeing the fulfillment of scripture also appears to confirm their conviction that God initiated the apostolic witness and wants it to continue. And so the community prays for courage "to speak your word with all boldness," which is immediately answered by the Holy Spirit filling all of them so that they do exactly that (4:31).

Throughout Peter's Jerusalem preaching the sermons get shorter and the references to scripture fewer, suggesting that one need not cover the same ground with the same audience once the point has been made. The final time Peter speaks before the council of leaders in Jerusalem he does not mention scripture at all; he and his companions only reiterate what the fulfillment of the scriptures also shows, namely, that God is the agent of both Jesus' life and their proclamation about him (5:29). Peter's final public witness to Jesus, before Cornelius and his household, makes no reference to a particular scripture, but includes the summative claim that "all the prophets bear witness" to Jesus (10:43). This pronouncement makes plain what

the specifically cited passages imply—the scriptural writings (and the psalms and prophets in particular, as Jesus himself emphasized in Luke 24:44) fulfilled in Jesus' life confirm his status as God's unique agent of both judgment (10:42) and forgiveness (10:43). As Peter concludes his speech, the Holy Spirit comes upon everyone who hears it, which recapitulates Pentecost and underscores one of the key points of that event—the Holy Spirit's coming upon people and inspiring speech provides evidence of God's agency.

4.1.1.4 Responding to the Holy Spirit's Initiative

The apostles first demonstrate their intention to respond faithfully to Jesus' last words by returning to Jerusalem following his ascension (Acts 1:12), and Peter voices this commitment by describing their role going forward as "witness to [Jesus'] resurrection" (1:22). What they do ahead of Pentecost prepares them to respond immediately when the Holy Spirit empowers them, just as Jesus promised (1:8), but they do not strike out on their own. They do not take into their own hands either the timeline or manner of beginning their public witness. Instead, they prepare and wait for the Holy Spirit and respond to the opportunities that arise because of the Spirit's activity. This pattern begins at Pentecost (2:1-41), recurs in the apostles' clashes with temple leadership (4:8, 31; 5:32) and ministry in Samaria (8:17, 29), and culminates in the response to Peter's last sermon at Cornelius's house (Acts 10:44-48). The narrative pattern makes the apostles' earliest public witness essentially an act of response—not an undertaking on their own initiative. The Holy Spirit both instigates and sustains the apostolic witness, providing yet further evidence that God is the ultimate source and power that makes Jesus' disciples into his witnesses and authorizes them in that role.

No event shows more clearly than Pentecost that the apostles' active public witness begins because of an act of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus described as "the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4), and whose empowerment he told his disciples to expect (1:8). There is no doubt that the work of the Holy Spirit aligns with God's purposes. Acts' telling of Pentecost leaves many logistical questions unanswered: Who all was gathered—just the twelve (1:26) or the whole group of about one hundred twenty, including the women (1:13-15)? If the rushing wind, tongues of fire, and inspired speech took place in a house (οἶκος), how did they draw public attention such that a crowd could gather (2:6) that, by the end of Peter's subsequent speech, "about three thousand persons were added" to the community (2:41)? The initial event appears to take place in a private home, which, perhaps, further underscores the apostolic community's reticence to begin with public witness apart from the special empowerment that Jesus promised. But the Holy Spirit makes a public spectacle of the apostles quite apart from their own initiative. The Spirit causes the gathered followers of Jesus to speak, which draws the attention of certain Jews in Jerusalem (2:5), who then demand an explanation (2:6-13) that Peter willingly supplies (2:14-36, 38-40). Attributing the Pentecost events to the Spirit's agency is, on one level, obvious. But the fact that the apostles studiously avoided any public witnessing activity until the Spirit thrust them into public view is easy to overlook and, nonetheless, essential to remark. For when the question arises about whether the apostolic movement originates with God or with human beings the answer is meant to be obvious to the reader even if not to some of the characters.

Acts' early chapters portray the Holy Spirit as both the spark that ignites the apostles' public ministry and the catalyst for specific acts of witness. The Holy Spirit does not exit the

stage after Pentecost but remains with the apostles as an ongoing source of power and guidance. In Acts 3:1-16, the freshly Spirit-empowered apostles Peter and John invoke Jesus' name in order to heal a man who was crippled from birth (3:1-10). Healing bookended by preaching follows the pattern of Jesus' ministry, but this specific miracle also persuasively identifies the power of Jesus' name as divine (for what other power could strengthen the legs of a man who had never walked?) and, therefore, legitimizes the apostles as servants of God. Peter and John do not appear to perform this act of healing in order to draw a crowd, but upon learning of the lame man's healing, "all the people" rush together and gather in Solomon's Portico, which gives Peter the opportunity to explain what has happened in terms of God's work in Jesus and the power of Jesus' name (3:11-16).

The priests, the captain (στρατηγός) of the temple, and the Sadducees, having apparently missed Peter's entire preceding speech, give him opportunity to make exactly the point they do not wish made public when they ask him, "By what power, or by what name, did you do this?" (4:7). And here, as though to confirm what Peter says in advance, Luke specifies that Peter speaks out of "having been filled by the Holy Spirit" (4:8). Peter's speech additionally legitimizes the apostolic ministry by casting the apostles as Jesus' messengers and Jesus as the "keystone" of God's earthly building project (4:9-10). That Peter declares these words in response to being filled by the Holy Spirit answers for the reader that the council members pose both explicitly to Peter (4:7) and among themselves implicitly on the occasion of their next clash with the apostles (5:38-39). The Holy Spirit continually empowers the apostles (4:31), which assures both the apostles and the reader that the apostolic project is not their own human agenda, but part of God's plan. Indeed, on the occasion of the apostles' final

appearance before the temple leadership in Jerusalem, Peter states directly that the Holy Spirit's presence with the apostles is a mark of their obedience to God (5:32). By implicit contrast, of course, the Jewish rulers' and elders' lack of the Holy Spirit signals their non-cooperation with God and, therefore, their lack of authority to speak on God's behalf.[17] But the point of the contrast appears to be less the apostles' special authority than which message is true, specifically, who has judged Jesus' identity rightly: the apostles or the temple leaders. Where the Holy Spirit shows up answers, clearly, that it is the apostles.

The Holy Spirit acts among the apostles not simply to confirm what they already are doing, but to push them into unfamiliar territory and guide them in it. This activity of the Spirit

[17] Among the difficulties of reading New Testament literature in the twenty-first century is the reality that words like "Jew" and "Jewish" play rather differently on this side of the Holocaust and ongoing anti-Semitism, which has seemed to escalate in the wake of the 2016 election. It feels fraught to represent faithfully Acts' criticisms, both implicit and explicit, of Jewish characters—particularly on grounds of complicity in Jesus' death or ignorance about or resistance to the ways of God. Acts certainly names, on multiple occasions, Jewish involvement in Jesus death and sometimes in rather blunt terms (2:23; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:30; 7:52; 13:27-29). Each of these occasions, however, consists in one of the Jewish apostles (all the apostles were Jewish!) speaking to other Jewish people. They addressed their own people not in order to condemn them or invoke punishment upon them, but to urge them to see what the apostles understood God was doing through Jesus and to renew their commitment to the God they had always served. Every bit of criticism and rebuke appears aimed toward that goal. Moreover, Acts repeats what can be clearly seen in Luke's narrative of Jesus' trial and crucifixion: the unholy alliance that puts Jesus to death involves everyone—one of Jesus own disciples, the leaders associated with the temple, Pilate, Herod (Antipas), and all the people of Jerusalem (Luke 22:2-6, 52, 66; 23:1, 4, 6, 10, 18, 23, 35). Even Peter actively denied and then abandoned Jesus (22:54-62). For none of these figures is complicity in Jesus' crucifixion cause for ultimate condemnation. The point of naming such complicity is always a call to look honestly at the action and seek forgiveness for the wrong done. And in no case does blaming the present audience mean that no one else is to blame. All this to say that despite the harsh and judgmental words that Acts includes toward Jewish characters, there are no grounds for reading any particular scene or the book as a whole as "anti-Jewish" or "anti-Semitic." The God preached in Acts calls upon "all people everywhere to repent" (17:30). On Luke's view of the Jews in both the Gospel and Acts see further David Smith, "Luke, the Jews, and the Politics of Early Christian Identity" (PhD diss., The Graduate School, Duke University). In the abstract, Smith summarizes his argument as follows: "I argue that Luke's theological presentation of Christian and non-Christian Jewish identities exhibits a consistent parallelism in Luke's call to the church and to those outside its community to repent and gather with Jesus in the face of coming judgment. I argue further that this rhetorical characteristic of Luke's gospel is best accounted for by positing a social context in which the evangelist lived in close proximity to both the Christian church, which he called to greater faithfulness, and to non-Christian Jews, whom he called to repent and sought to persuade to accept his vision of the fulfillment of hopes of Israel in Jesus of Nazareth."

confirms the apostles' alignment with God's purposes to the extent that they respond receptively. When Philip, guided by "an angel of the Lord" (Acts 8:26), walks along the road to Gaza and sees the Ethiopian eunuch reading the prophet Isaiah, he obeys the Spirit's prompting to approach the chariot and engage its occupant. As a result, the first foreigner embraces the message of Jesus and is baptized (8:32-38). Philip did none of these things on his own initiative, but because of the Spirit's urging. Similarly, Peter when staying in Joppa, had no particular intention to go to Cornelius and preach to his household, but the Spirit told him to expect the men who summoned him to the centurion's home, and he went with them, according to the Spirit's words, "without hesitation" (10:19, 23). The Spirit does not tell Peter everything he should say, but he speaks, as always, about what he saw and heard of Jesus. When everyone who hears his preaching receives the Holy Spirit he declares with full assurance that they should be baptized, regardless of being Gentiles (10:44-48). As far as Peter is concerned, the Holy Spirit's action demonstrates God's acceptance of those who heard Peter's words, which overrides any humanly constructed cultural barriers.

Throughout their early ministry the apostles do not undertake any specific act of witness without the initial prompting and ongoing guidance of the Holy Spirit. Their commitment to act always and only in response to the Holy Spirit continually signals to the reader that they pursue not their own agenda, but God's. Inside the narrative, the Holy Spirit's activity both assures the apostles of their alignment with God's purposes and points them in the right direction when they face uncertainty. Those who view the apostles' ministry from the outside and can discern the Holy Spirit's presence are also assured that the apostles' work begins with God. For those who are open to seeing it, the Holy Spirit's presence with the

apostles demonstrates that they are God's legitimate agents who bear a true message about God's work in the world.

4.1.1.5 Conscious public obedience to God

While the Holy Spirit's presence with the apostles shows implicitly that their work serves God's agenda, Peter also declares the point explicitly as occasion demands. As the disciple who thought he was too sinful to keep company with Jesus (Luke 5:8) and later denied him (Luke 22:54-62), perhaps no one knows better than Peter that the apostles' work did not begin as their idea. At the very beginning, Jesus approached him—not the other way around (5:3), and at the end the risen Jesus appeared individually to him (24:34) before coming to commission all the disciples together (24:36-49). Peter has known from the beginning that the disciples did not set Jesus' agenda. By the beginning of Acts he is also persuaded that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection furthered God's plan and that, therefore, being Jesus' witnesses makes the apostles party to the divine project as well. On the occasions where the apostles elicit questions from their audiences about the source of the power at work in them, Peter declares confidently that the power comes from God. Even when these announcements prove unpersuasive to Peter's audiences they portray the apostles' consciousness of their divine sanction and effectively confirm what the narrator shows by the presence of the Holy Spirit: the apostles bear witness to Jesus in obedient response to God.

On both occasions where Peter declares the apostles' allegiance to God rather than to any human agenda he stands answerable to a council of temple leaders whose ranks at least overlap with those who arrested and first questioned Jesus (Luke 22:52, 66). Peter and John are brought before the "rulers [ἄρχοντας]," "elders [πρεσβυτέρους]," "scribes [γραμματεῖς]",

Annas the "high priest [ἀρχιερεὺς]," Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and the entire high-priestly family (4:5-6). They pose a question echoing the one that the high priests, scribes, and elders asked Jesus in Luke 20:2, "By what authority are you doing these things?" Here they ask, "By what power, or by what name did you do this," (4:7) namely, heal at the temple gate the man who was born crippled (3:1-10). Peter more than answers the question: Peter and John healed the man by invoking the name of Jesus, whom "you crucified," but whom God raised from the dead (4:10). The assembly silently observes the evidence that backs them into a corner: 1) Peter and John have a boldness beyond what they ought for being "unlettered" and "common" men; 2) they recognize that Peter and John had been with Jesus, which gives them the authority of their own eyes and ears (4:13); 3) the formerly lame man is undeniably cured (4:14). The narrator opens a window into the assembly's private conference that shows them deliberately suppressing what they suspect to be the truth—they "cannot deny" that a "recognizable sign has come about" through the apostles (4:16), implying that the source of this sign probably is God.

The narrator portrays the assemblymen tying themselves in knots to avoid admitting that God has done something in their midst that urges an about-face. But given the evidence, they find they have no grounds to prosecute Peter and John further, and so release them with the command never again to speak or teach in Jesus' name (4:18). Peter and John's answer plays on the council members' discomfort with the truth that they appear to recognize but refuse to admit: "Whether it is right before God to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; we cannot do other than speak of what we have seen and heard" (4:19-20). According to Peter and John, the apostles' public speech about Jesus constitutes a deliberate choice to

obey God, which assumes God's prior command. This encounter is the first of two wherein the apostles publicly claim that God is the ultimate source of their mandate to bear witness of Jesus.

The second instance occurs when the apostles' appear once more before the assembly of the high priest and Sadducees. On this occasion, the narrative neither reports nor portrays the apostles teaching about Jesus. Instead, their witness is embodied in healings and exorcisms—actions that certainly would elicit memories of Jesus to a knowing audience (see Luke 6:18-19). The success of the apostles' ministry draws the attention and jealousy of the high priest and Sadducees, who have the apostles arrested and imprisoned (5:17-18). Their detention is short-lived when—in what surely counts as a divine joke played on the angel-and-spirit-disbelieving Sadducees—"the angel of the Lord" releases the apostles from the prison and commands them, "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life" (5:19-20).

The ensuing comedy showcases the high priest's and the Sadducees' remove from reality: even as the apostles stand teaching in the temple starting at daybreak (5:21), the high priest and Sadducees know nothing of the prisoners' escape. The high priest summons the council to try the apostles and sends the temple soldiers to fetch them, but the soldiers find the apostles have vanished—the prison remains locked and guarded, but with no one in it (5:21-23). The bewildered temple leaders find themselves at loose ends until an unnamed messenger tells them that the apostles have returned right under the council's nose and are engaged in the exact activity the council had forbidden them—teaching the people (5:24-25). The narrator lampoons the temple leaders by juxtaposing their blundering scramble with the apostles' bold defiance. Not only do the apostles speak about Jesus in the chief priests' domain

and knowingly violate the council's explicit command (4:18); they also dare to preach to the council about what to do in cases where the commands of God conflict with what human authorities demand. They say, "It is necessary to obey God rather than human beings" (5:29). The apostles press the temple leaders to consider whom they really serve. Do they serve God, or some human agenda? The end of the apostles' speech implies an answer: If the temple leaders truly served God, they, like the apostles, would have the Holy Spirit (5:32). The apostles self-consciously intend to obey God despite the temple leaders' commands, and the Holy Spirit's presence with them confirms that their actions—not the chief priests' and elders' attempts to silence them—conform to what God wants.

Acts' opening narrative, from the days immediately following Jesus' ascension and throughout the early period of the apostolic ministry, shows in multiple different ways that the ultimate source of the apostles' witness is God. The apostles wait in Jerusalem (1:12-14) for "the promise of the Father" (1:4). They look for evidence of God's plan and try to act accordingly (1:16, 22). They act in fulfillment of scripture and seek through it guidance and confirmation that God approves their specific acts of witness (2:16; 4:24-31). They respond enthusiastically whenever the Holy Spirit gives them opportunity to bear witness to Jesus (2:14-42; 4:8-12, 19-20). And they twice declare publicly that their mandate to speak of Jesus comes from God, to whom they have pledged unmitigated allegiance (4:19; 5:29). These features of the narrative work together both to show and to tell that the apostolic ministry is neither a product of their own imagination and will nor contingent on their wherewithal. So Kavin Rowe:

> …[T]he ultimate origin of the Christian mission lies in the act of God. That is why the Christian mission is a *novum*: it does not, it cannot, arise naturally out of the mundane sphere—death is the final boundary of

> natural human life—but comes directly from the new life given by God to Jesus on the other side of death. The location of the origin of Christian mission according to Acts, that is, is beyond death, and in this way Christian mission exceeds dramatically all human possibilities of creation and initiation. It not only is but must be the *missio Dei*.[18]

It is God's plan driven by God's power, and it will not be thwarted by human impediments. In other words, in contrast to those who oppose the apostles' message in service to their own security and advancement, the apostolic witnesses serve the one true God and, therefore, the truth and reality that God has revealed to them and sent them to communicate.

4.1.2 God's Reign in Jesus as the Substance of Apostolic Witness

When Jesus commissions the apostles as his witnesses he designates the substance of their message but, at the same time, leaves the specifics unclear. As any biographer knows, and Luke certainly does, any telling of a life requires selectivity; one need not recount every detail nor would doing so serve the truth about the subject. Luke's Gospel itself is, of course, already a selective telling of Jesus' life, but Acts would be poorly constructed indeed were it to reproduce Luke in its entirety. Acts, therefore, portrays the apostles learning to hone in on the essential event of Jesus' earthly sojourn that reveals the heart of God's character and plan: Jesus' resurrection. Although they witnessed Jesus' life from his baptism until his ascension, the apostles focus on his resurrection as the key to his significance and bearing witness to his resurrection as the heart of their witness to Jesus (Acts 1:22). At the start of their public witness the apostles do not give the impression of having grasped the full significance of Jesus' resurrection; readers of Luke's Gospel have an advantage there. Even so, however, the apostles proclaim without wavering that Jesus' resurrection was an act of God (2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:10;

[18] Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 122

5:30; 10:40). The apostolic witness consists, then, in a message about God's character and work in the world as shown in Jesus and, particularly, in his resurrection.

4.1.2.1 "Witness to his resurrection"

While the apostles wait in Jerusalem between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost, Peter designates a specific emphasis for apostolic witness-bearing activity that appears to meet universal agreement among his companions: the essential piece of being Jesus' witnesses is to "witness to his resurrection with us [μάρτυρα τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ σὺν ἡμῖν]" (Acts 1:22). In Acts 1:21-22, Peter declares the apostles' comprehensive witnesses to Jesus' earthly presence and names Jesus' resurrection the key to his identity. Jesus did many impressive works and spoke many powerful words in his life that now, in Peter's framing, must be understood through the lens of his resurrection. Peter's declaration makes God the substance of apostolic witness in three principal ways.

First, to speak of "witness" at all is to posit a reality or event that the witness has observed; witness requires connection to reality in order to distinguish it from fiction or fabrication. For Peter to claim that the apostles are witnesses assumes a reality outside of themselves that provides the subject matter of their witness. That subject matter is Jesus' resurrection. Jesus, the person raised, has been co-identified with God ever since his conception (Luke 1:32) and borne the title of "Lord" from the womb to the tomb and beyond (Luke 1:43; 24:34; Acts 1:6). Jesus is inextricable from the identity of God, and so witness to Jesus is also about God.

Second, the narrative circumstances of Jesus' resurrection already telegraph what Peter and the apostles later announce no less than six times: God caused this event to occur. Jesus

was truly dead, and God alone is capable of bestowing life at will. If the apostles are witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, the apostolic message originates with God because of what kind of event resurrection is. Rowe rightly associates "the primary grammar of mission in Acts" being "witnessing to the resurrection of Jesus" with the claim that "Christian mission arises from God's side of death."[19] If God is the agent of Jesus' resurrection, an act of God is the substance—as well as the source—of apostolic witness. Since the apostles would not be bearing witness to anything at all without Jesus' resurrection—a work that could only come from God—the primary substance of their witness also reveals and corresponds to its source.

Third, the Gospel account of Jesus' life and Acts' opening scene have already set up Jesus' resurrection as the event epitomizing God's power and inaugurating God's reign (Acts 1:3). Identifying their work as bearing witness to Jesus' resurrection makes the reign of God central to the apostles' message even when it is not directly named. The work and power of God in Jesus, climactically revealed in his resurrection, are to be the essential substance of the apostles' witness. When that witness goes public beginning at Pentecost, Peter asserts at each occasion of his preaching that God raised Jesus from the dead.

4.1.2.2 "This Jesus God raised"

"This Jesus God raised [τοῦτον τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀνέστησεν ὁ θεός]" (Acts 2:32) is Peter's succinct and essential summary of the apostolic message. He makes some version of this claim six times (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40)—at least once at each occasion where he gives a verbal account of the good news of Jesus. Despite its simplicity and brevity, this claim bears

[19] Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 153.

substantial theological weight. It particularizes Jesus to highlight the specific shape of his life and to emphasize that the same Jesus who lived and ministered and died was also raised. It highlights God's agency in Jesus' resurrection, and invites reflection upon God's purpose in raising Jesus from death. Anchored by this claim, Peter's speeches communicate how God vindicated Jesus with an act of life-giving power—an act that itself reflects the way Jesus lived as portrayed in Luke's Gospel—and how that act of God makes salvation through repentance and forgiveness possible even for people who were actively complicit in Jesus' death. This particular work of God in Jesus and its consequences for salvation comprise the substance of the apostles' witness.

Essential to God's vindication of Jesus through his resurrection are an understanding of who Jesus was, what he did, and what happened to him. His vindication through his resurrection depends on his being distinguishable from others who share his name, on his earthly life having met God's approval, and on his being the same person both before and after his resurrection. Peter's first statement at Pentecost is structured to meet all three specifications in one long and rather jumbled sentence: "Jesus of Nazareth, a man commended by God among you by works of power and wonders and signs, which God did in your midst—as you yourselves know—this person [τοῦτον], betrayed according to the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God and having been crucified by the hands of the lawless, you condemned to death, whom [ὅν] God raised up after abolishing the agonies of death, because it was not powerful enough to restrain him" (Acts 2:22-24).

Beginning as Peter does meets the first condition named above; his subject is "Jesus of Nazareth," introduced with all the abrupt energy of "Two households…" as the first words

of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Peter speaks not of some other Jesus, but the one from Nazareth. Second, Peter claims that Jesus was "approved," or "commended," or "endorsed" (ἀποδεδειγμένον) by God, the evidence thereof being the wondrous deeds God did through Jesus throughout his life (2:22). Third, halfway through the sentence, Peter uses the substantive demonstrative pronoun τοῦτον, "this one" or "this person," to remind his listeners that this same person is the one in whose execution they lately participated (2:23). Without ending the sentence, however, Peter continues with the connecting relative pronoun ὅν, "whom," to identify this same person as the one whom God raised (2:24). Peter's first speech thus appears specifically crafted to show that Jesus' resurrection nullifies the judgment brought against him in his death and vindicates his life.

Peter's speeches are not systematic treatises, but he does return to these matters on the first several occasions where he proclaims Jesus' resurrection. When speaking of Jesus' resurrection, Peter refers to Jesus in a way that unequivocally identifies him and establishes the continuity of his personhood before and after the resurrection. Later in his speech at Pentecost, Peter deploys the demonstrative pronoun about Jesus again, specifying that it was "this [τοῦτον] Jesus," and not some other, whom "God raised up" (2:32). Moreover, this is the place where Peter first claims publicly, "we [the apostles] are all witnesses" (2:32). Specifically, they are witnesses not simply that God raised Jesus, but that it was the same Jesus who died whom God raised. The apostolic witness is not simply to Jesus' resurrection, but also to his vindication. The pattern recurs on the next occasion where Peter stands to bear witness to the people.

After having healed the man born lame "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (3:6), Peter tells the gathered people, "the God of our ancestors glorified his servant Jesus, whom you betrayed and denied before Pilate" (3:13), and "you killed" the one "whom God raised from the dead" (3:15). Calling Jesus God's servant signals, if briefly, that God approves Jesus' earthly deeds. The point in specifying Jesus' name and blaming the people for his death is not merely to assign culpability, but, more importantly, to stipulate that the Jesus who was familiar to them is the same one who was raised to life and through whose name the man born lame was healed (3:15).

Jesus' vindication is particularly on display when Peter and John stand before the temple leaders in Jerusalem for the first time. They are summoned to answer, "By what power or in what name did you [heal this man born lame]?" Peter declares that the healing was wrought "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised" (4:10), and that "this [οὗτος] person is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the keystone" (4:11). Again, Peter's words specify clearly that the known person from Nazareth whom these leaders remember (4:13) and brought to Pilate to have him crucified is the one whom God raised from the dead. He was rejected by these leaders but approved and glorified by God.

On the final occasion where Peter proclaims Jesus' resurrection, he speaks before a very different audience, namely Cornelius and his household, and some of his expression changes accordingly. Even so, the essential elements that secure Jesus' vindication appear in this speech of Peter's that acts as a bookend to the one at Pentecost. By now the message has spread enough that Peter believes his audience will already know the story in outline, but he

recounts the key points in a style mirroring his original speech at Pentecost: "[You heard of] Jesus, the one from Nazareth—how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power—who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him (we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of Judea and in Jerusalem) whom they also killed by hanging him on a tree, this person God raised up on the third day…" (10:38-40). Here, as at Pentecost, Peter begins by specifying Jesus as the one from Nazareth. Peter intimates God's approval of Jesus evidenced by God's anointing him with the Holy Spirit and power, his many good deeds, and God's presence with him. As Peter did later in the Pentecost speech, he names the apostles as witnesses who can speak from their own experience that the same Jesus who lived in this way is the one who died and whom God raised (10:39-40). These patterns in Peter's speeches show that one critical function of the apostles' witness is to provide the on-the-ground information necessary to make a persuasive case for Jesus' vindication through God's act of raising him from the dead. Bearing witness that Jesus really was raised and declaring his resurrection an act of God is another essential element of the apostolic task.

Just as one might expect, given Peter's original description of the apostolic task as witness to Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1:22), whenever Peter preaches on the apostles' behalf, he focuses on the event of Jesus' resurrection. And each time, Peter emphasizes that God raised Jesus (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40). God's agency in raising Jesus is an essential element in Jesus' vindication; God approved of Jesus so thoroughly as to reverse the judgment of his executioners and not to allow his death to last beyond three days. This repeated insistence upon God's agency in raising Jesus tightens the association between Jesus' character and God's. How God overcomes Jesus' death, that is, with an infusion of superabundant life,

reflects and escalates the way Jesus wielded power in his teaching and healing ministry. Put another way, Jesus' resurrection is the mold in which his ministry was cast. Perhaps even more importantly, Jesus' resurrection dramatically reveals the essential nature of God's power, and particularly the power by which God overcomes the world's evil. Peter repeatedly spotlights the comprehensive difference between the tactics of those who put Jesus to death and God's way of gaining victory. They fastened him to a cross (προσπήγνυμι), executed (ἀναιρέω; 2:23), crucified (σταυρόω; 2:36; 4:10), betrayed (παραδίδωμι), rejected (ἀρνέομαι; 3:13), killed (ἀποκτείνω; 3:15), and laid violent hands (διαχειρίζομαι) on him and executed (ἀναιρέω) him by hanging him on a tree (κρεμάσαντες ἐπὶ ξύλου; 5:30; 10:39), but God raised him up (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40). The stone that the builders had tossed aside God used as the keystone—the one at the top of the arch that holds all the other stones in place (4:11). Their strategy was to take Jesus' life; God's strategy is giving life. Their strategy was destructive; God's is constructive.

The result of God's act of raising Jesus is not merely that Jesus is seated at God's right hand (2:35), publicly declared "Lord and Messiah" (2:36), glorified (3:13), exalted as "prince and savior" (ἀρχηγὸν καὶ σωτῆρα; 5:31), and called "Lord of all" (πάντων κύριος; 10:36). Jesus' vindication and exaltation are not incidental, but from the very first, the purpose of Jesus' coming was "salvation" (Luke 2:30), and his suffering and resurrection on the third day were the necessary precursor (Luke 24:44) to the preaching of "repentance and forgiveness of sins for all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). And so it is that when Peter's Pentecost listeners are "cut to the heart" and inquire of him, "what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37), Peter has a ready response: "Repent and be baptized—each one of you—in the name of Jesus

Christ for forgiveness of your sins and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, and for your descendants, and for all who are far away—as many as the Lord our God calls" (2:38-39). And, in summary, "Be saved [σώθητε] from this crooked generation" (2:40), a construction that images a communal pattern of living previously diverted from the ways of God that must now turn back. Jesus' resurrection opens, "to everyone whom God calls," a path to salvation—restoration to the ways of God—via repentance and forgiveness.

The listeners' initial grasp of their culpability in Jesus' rejection and crucifixion signals their despair. What could they possibly do in the face of having committed such a terrible evil? Their grief suits a grave error that they cannot repair. But Peter's words remind them that God has already mended the principal damage they did; it remains to them to admit their wrongdoing, turn from it, and receive the forgiveness and life with the Holy Spirit that God offers. They are invited to turn away from the death-dealing power they employed through participating in Jesus' death and, instead, to live in the pattern of Jesus' life and gifted with the same Holy Spirit that led Jesus and empowers the apostles.

Peter's message to the people of Jerusalem at Pentecost contains key elements that recur in subsequent speeches: repentance, forgiveness, and a salvation from a way of being contrary to God's character. After healing the man born lame Peter calls his audience to "repent and turn to God so that your sins may be erased" (3:19), and that the purpose of God's sending Jesus first to the descendants of Abraham was "to bless you by turning each one of you from your wickedness" (3:26). The blessing consists in a changed way of living—one that is diverted away from death-dealing power and toward the ways of the "Originator

of Life" (ἀρχηγὸν τῆς ζωῆς) whom they had killed (3:15).[20] On the two occasions where Peter speaks before the temple leaders, he speaks of Jesus as the sole bringer of salvation (4:12), and as ἀρχηγὸν καὶ σωτῆρα, in order "to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (5:31).[21] At Caesarea, when Peter speaks before Cornelius and his household, he does not speak of repentance, presumably because his listeners were not directly involved in Jesus' death in the way that his Jerusalem audiences were. But he does still call them to live in a shaped by the Jesus who "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (10:38), promising through the witness of "all the prophets" that "all who entrust themselves to him receive forgiveness of their sins through his name" (10:43). The salvation offered in Jesus' name, because of his resurrection, is a life lived in the shape of resurrection's power—a life turned away from death and being subjugated by diabolical forces, and empowered, instead, by the Holy Spirit (10:44).

Especially on a retrospective re-reading, Peter's suggestion that the apostolic task is to bear witness to Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1:22) encapsulates the idea that God's character and work are the primary substance of the message they must convey. Jesus' resurrection both

---

[20] BDAG, s. v. "ἀρχηγός" includes several occasions where ἀρχηγός can denote a "founder," and one where the founder is divine (139). See Plato, *Timaeus* 21e, (the Egyptian goddess Neïth [Gk Athena] is said to be the ἀρχηγός of the city of Sais). For a more ordinary human "founder," see Isocrates, Oration 4, "Panegyricus" 61. Also of note is Diodorus of Sicily, "…The Idaean Dactyli of Crete, so tradition tells us, discovered both the use of fire and what the metals copper and iron are, as well as the means of working them, this being done in the territory of the city of Aptera at Berecynthus, as it is called; and since they were looked upon as the originators [ἀρχηγοὺς] of great blessings for the race of men, they were accorded immortal honours" (Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 5.64.6 [Oldfather, LCL]). Such a title suits Jesus as the divine founder of a community known by his name.

[21] A satisfactory English rendering of ἀρχηγός in this context seems impossible. Its resonances of creative original agency, authorship, archetype/exemplar, inauguration, primacy, leadership, rule etc., simply cannot be captured in a single English word, but in this context all of them should nevertheless be thought at once. Jesus is the agent and source who both makes possible and exemplifies the resurrected life in which those who follow him participate. See BDAG, s. v. "ἀρχηγός" and Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 286.

realizes and symbolizes God's strategy of bringing salvation to human beings, and, by vindicating Jesus' life, upholds him as the exemplar of a human being united with God in character, purpose, and the use of power. The unity of God and Jesus is revealed not only through sharing the title of "Lord," but in how both exercise power.[22] Jesus' resurrection makes salvation possible even for those who participated in his death because, in Jesus' resurrection, God repaired the damage they did in putting him to death. Through repenting of that complicity and the mindset that led them to take part in Jesus' condemnation and execution, they may find forgiveness and salvation. By raising Jesus from the dead, God both dramatically displays the kind of life-giving power by which God overcomes evil and makes a way for human beings' repentance and forgiveness leading to salvation—turning away from death-dealing power toward the life-giving power exemplified in Jesus' earthly ministry and in God's raising him from the dead. This is the heart of the apostles' witness.

[22] For example, Peter's recitation of Joel in Acts 2:17-21 draws into Acts Luke's characteristic use of κύριος to refer, in one breath, unmistakably to the God of Israel and, in the next, to Jesus. Rowe gives thorough description of this typically Lukan strategy for developing Jesus' Christological identity throughout his Gospel in Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology* This rhetorical move has the effect, as Rowe describes in some detail, of revealing Jesus and the God of Israel as equal and non-competitive bearers of the title, κύριος: "… Luke's use of Joel here involves a christological extension of the use of κύριος in the OT. Whereas κύριος in the Joel text taken alone refers only to the God of Israel, in the context of Acts 2, κύριος refers *both* to the God of Israel *and* to Jesus… It is not the case, that is, that what we see in this text is a simple substitution of one κύριος for another—as if the κύριος of Joel 3:5 no longer applies to God. Instead, Luke's hermeneutical appropriation of the OT reflects a rather more complex theological move, one in which the prophecy of the text of Joel is expanded—not negated—to say that the *Lord God's* coming is actually and really fulfilled in the appearance of the *Lord Jesus*. That such a christological expansion of the identity of God does not, in the Acts of the Apostles, threaten the God of Israel is at once confirmed by taking notice of the actual speaker of the Joel text. It is God himself who proclaims that his eschatological coming is the coming of the κύριος Jesus." Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 111-12 (emphasis original). On Paul's similar reading of Joel 3:5 in Romans 10:13, see Rowe, C. Kavin Rowe, "Romans 10:13: What is the Name of the Lord?," *HBT* 22 (2000): 135-73.

4.1.3 Theological conclusions

Four times, while in the act of making a speech about Jesus, Peter makes a point of identifying himself and his companions as "witnesses": 1) at Pentecost (2:14-36, esp. v. 32), 2) in Solomon's portico (3:12-26, esp. v. 15), 3) before the High Priest, Sanhedrin, and Sadducees (5:29-32), and 4) when preaching to Cornelius and his household (10:34-43, esp. vv. 39-42). As noted in the previous chapter and in the above discussion, witness is an inherently derivative category. And so when someone claims to be a witness, the right question to ask is, "a witness of what?" When Peter declares that he and the rest of the apostles are witnesses, the answer to that question boils down to this: "God raised Jesus from the dead." Since the event to which the apostles bear witness is an act of God, God is the subject—in both senses of that word—of their witness. God is the agent of the principal event to which the apostles bear witness; they are not fabricating this story and it is not about them. On both counts the early apostolic witness reflects Jesus' commission from Acts 1:8; they fulfill it faithfully through careful attention to Jesus' words, ready response to the Holy Spirit's empowerment, and public insistence upon the reality of God's work in their midst. For without the real work of God their witness would not be witness, but mere imagination or fabrication. If God did not do what Peter and his companions attribute to God, then they have no good reason to speak as they do. Of course, Acts portrays the apostles' message as firmly rooted in reality and the apostles' assurance of God's activity as fully justified. Because the apostles' witness begins with God, Rowe suggests, "The early Christian mission in Acts is best seen, therefore, not in terms of daring initiative or social creativity but in terms of *response*. It moves on the basis of a

prior reality."[23] Accordingly, the apostles proclaim their message with astounding boldness, but also—in harmony with the message itself—with a gentleness and hospitality that itself bears witness to the risen Lord whom they serve. The message of resurrection, after all, must be conveyed through life-giving expressions of power. How the apostles communicate the truth of Jesus' resurrection, therefore, reflects the patterns by which they learned it themselves.

4.2 Epistemology: Gentle Boldness and Hospitality

Jesus' disciples learned the reality of his resurrection through a combination of factors none of which was sufficient on its own. Jesus appeared to his disciples, spoke with them of his resurrection's reality and significance, and shared their hospitality (Luke 24:13-49; Acts 1:1-8; 10:40-42). The apostles' journey from doubt to assurance shows that even among those who would greet Jesus' resurrection as good news, it is a difficult reality to apprehend. After Jesus commissions his disciples and ascends to heaven, however, the apostles no longer exhibit any doubts about what they have seen and heard. When Peter identifies Jesus' resurrection as the heart of the message that the apostolic witnesses will proclaim, it reads as a given. No one expresses any doubts. Given the "sure signs" (τεκμήρια) of Acts 1:3, one might even say they are certain. Even so, certainty that Jesus is alive does not make them into a collective bludgeon of proselytization. Their certainty about Jesus' resurrection would be exposed as false if they had to manipulate or coerce anyone into accepting its reality—regardless of how receptive the audience was at the start. As Jesus did with them, the apostles convey the reality of Jesus' resurrection in a way that reflects its significance. Apostolic witness to Jesus' resurrection

[23] Rowe, Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 122.

unifies the form with the content of the message; the message is meant to give life. Therefore, the apostles boldly insist on the reality of what they saw and heard, but—in contrast with the temple authorities who oppose them—never use violence or resort to coercion. Rather, they speak and act in ways meant to reflect the reality of Jesus' resurrection and to interpret its significance, and then allow their audiences to decide for themselves whether the apostles have rightly observed and interpreted what God is doing in the world. As when Jesus persuaded the apostles that he was truly alive, both the words and the actions matter. The reality of Jesus' resurrection will be shown true or falsified in the apostolic community's life together. The incident with Barnabas contrasted with Ananias and Sapphira, as well as the crisis of uneven distribution among Hellenist and Hebrew widows, both indicate how the community's integrity and mutual care influence the persuasiveness of the apostolic message. A wholesome, integrated, life-giving apostolic community becomes crucial to communicating faithfully the message of resurrection's power.

4.2.1 Witnesses to Jesus' Resurrection

Although the apostles certainly struggled to believe Jesus was raised when he first appeared to them (Luke 24:11-24; 26-43), in the days following his ascension all their doubts are put to rest. They are persuaded of the reality of Jesus resurrection enough to place it at the center of their witness work. Peter identifies the apostolic task as witness to Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1:22) and everyone appears to agree. None of the apostles objects to the idea of proclaiming publicly that Jesus is raised from the dead. It appears that all their doubts are now put to rest. But they do not run immediately into the streets of Jerusalem and attempt to persuade all and sundry of the event they now take for certain. They do not begin a public

witness until after the Holy Spirit makes them so conspicuous that they draw the attention of a crowd in Jerusalem (Acts 2:6) and are urged to explain themselves (2:12-13). And their tactic when they do begin speaking of Jesus has nothing of violence or coercion about it; they issue no threats or even promises of God's vengeance even as they speak to the people of Jerusalem about the wrong they did by participating in Jesus' condemnation and execution. Rather, although the apostles speak the truth boldly and with little concern for palatability, they maintain an attitude consistent with the posture of being witnesses and with the life-giving power exemplified in Jesus' resurrection. They are prepared to speak the truth as they have seen and heard it, allowing audiences of varying receptivity to take it or leave it as such, and to convey the message of repentance and forgiveness using the gentle power they have seen exemplified in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

4.2.2 Receptivity and Resistance

The risen Jesus' reception among those who followed him suggests that one's readiness to participate in the political pattern that Jesus called "the reign of God" provides a good measure of one's receptivity to knowledge of Jesus' resurrection. The women, who supported Jesus throughout his ministry of preaching and bringing good news of God's reign (Luke 8:1-3) up to the moment of his death and burial (23:49, 55), were the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (24:1-10) and believe more readily than any of Jesus' male disciples (24:8). Indeed, no one believes in the reality of Jesus' resurrection as readily as "Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women who told [of their findings at Jesus' tomb] to the apostles" (24:10). Even those who see the risen Jesus and converse with him extensively do not recognize him until he both teaches them how to interpret what they are

seeing and shares food with them (24:13-43). The post-resurrection stories in Luke's Gospel show both that seeing Jesus alive again is neither necessary nor sufficient for believing in his resurrection, and also that having oriented one's life toward the political pattern imaged and effected in Jesus' resurrection proves far more decisive than physical sight toward readying a person to accept that Jesus is alive. And, according to the opening lines of Jesus' sermon on the plain, orientation toward God's reign is tied to low social status and marginalization (Luke 6:20). Conversely, throughout Jesus' ministry, entitlement tends to inhibit a person's receptivity to the ways of God (cf. Luke 10:25-37; 18:18-25), and that remains true in the early apostolic ministry in Acts.

Despite some variance among them, the "devout" Jews who witnessed the events of Pentecost (2:5-13)—common people with no distinguished social status—prove far more positively responsive to Peter's preaching than do the temple leaders. The temple leaders do have high social status, and they used it to orchestrate Jesus' execution—an act directly opposing God's reign (Luke 22:52, 66; 23:1, 13; Acts 4:1, 5-6; 5:17, 24, 27). The "devout" common people hear the message of the apostles with an open heart (2:6-13, 37, 41-42; 3:11-26; 4:4); the elite temple authorities arrest the apostles and ask questions later (4:3-7; 5:17, 26-28). This juxtaposition of audiences illustrates that both social location and the orientation of one's life in relation to the reign of God powerfully influence whether one receives or resists the news of Jesus' resurrection and its call to repentance, forgiveness, and salvation.

4.2.2.1 The Devout

The events of Pentecost already begin to that people of lower social status who are oriented toward the ways of God make for a receptive audience even when they cannot tell

simply by witnessing an event that it arises from God's initiative. Acts describes the people who converge on the apostles at Pentecost as, "Judeans dwelling [κατοικοῦντες] in Jerusalem, devout men [ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς] from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5).[24] They are not ascribed any particular social status, but they are called εὐλαβεῖς, which bodes well for these men. The etymology of εὐλαβής, namely the prefix "ευ" (good) and a root related to λαμβάνω[25] (receive), makes for the connotation that these people will give the message a "good reception." Additionally, this description of the Pentecostal audience echoes the introduction of Simeon in Luke's Gospel, who is the first to recognize Jesus as God's means of salvation for Israel and all nations (Luke 2:30-32). Luke introduces Simeon with the words, "there was a person in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this one was righteous and devout (εὐλαβής)…" (2:25). Luke uses εὐλαβής only this once, which makes its appearance in Acts the more significant. Moreover, Luke also writes of Simeon, "the Holy Spirit was upon him" (2:25). Indeed, Luke mentions Simeon's communion with the Holy Spirit and additional two times: the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die before seeing "the Lord's Christ" (2:26), and he came to the temple "in the Holy Spirit" just as Jesus' parents presented him there (2:27). The verbal associations made by the Jerusalem context, the work of the Holy

[24] Ernst Haenchen offers, by my reckoning, the most persuasive proposal about who exactly these Jews are, which is at first confusing. They are from *everywhere*, but the participle that describes them, κατοικοῦντες, does not suggest pilgrimage *to* Jerusalem, but that they dwell *in* Jerusalem. Haenchen explains: "Luke [does not] think of the crowd gathered at Pentecost as pilgrims in Jerusalem for the feast. No, he is speaking of diaspora Jews who have taken *residence* in Jerusalem, and for this he has a reason: he can hardly have the mission's first 3,000 converts, the nucleus of the community secured from among them, streaming off to the four corners of the world within a week of conversion!" [Haenchen, *Acts*, 175.]

[25] Pierre Chartraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots* vol. 3 (Paris: Éditions Kincksieck, 1974), 616.

Spirit, and the descriptor "εὐλαβής" show the Pentecost audience in a favorable light. Acts introduces them in a way that forecasts their receptivity to the Holy Spirit's activity; they respond to the apostolic glossolalia with curiosity (Acts 2:6-13).

Despite this display of interest, the audience is not homogeneous. Some marvel and wonder that they hear Galileans speaking of God's great deeds in a multiplicity of languages that they, being from the lands where those dialects are spoken, can understand (2:7-11). They are all astounded and say to one another, "What would this be?" (2:12). This audience appears to understand the apostles' Spirit-given speech and hear in it a coherent message about the great things God has done. They understand the words, but how the apostles come to speak as they do and what the event as a whole signifies, they appear not to understand. Others, however, scoff and have their own explanation for the apostles' multilingual speech: "They are filled with new wine!" (2:13). These scoffers appear to hear not words extolling God, but drunken gibberish. Even among those who appear to number among the "devout" and have come to investigate the marvel that has occurred, some do not see anything beyond ordinary human idiosyncrasies. And yet, if they stay to listen as Peter directs (2:14), there is no reason to suppose that the scoffers do not number among the three thousand that Acts reports were added to the apostolic community that day (2:41).

Acts makes no mention of anyone who heard Peter's Pentecost message rejecting it. No one expresses any doubts or resistance to anything Peter has said. Instead, Acts paints a vivid image of their stabbing regret and desperation to repair the damage they have done. Upon hearing Peter's speech about what God did in Jesus, including naming his audience's culpability for Jesus' death, "they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of

the apostles, 'What should we do?'" (2:37). Peter leads them through repentance and baptism to join a community dedicated to the apostles' teaching and common life, including sharing meals and prayer (2:38-42). With a "devout" audience attracted to the work of the Holy Spirit—even including some scoffers—Peter's preaching easily persuades his listeners to a radical change in their thought and life.

Peter's second speech, after he and John have healed the crippled man who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, has a similar effect. The people here receive no pious descriptors, nor do they appear to have any particular status, but they exhibit interest similarly to the crowd at Pentecost. Upon seeing the formerly lame man "walking and praising God," they are all "filled with wonder and astonishment [ἐπλήσθησαν θάμβους καὶ ἐκστάσεως]," and "they ran together [συνέδραμεν]" toward Peter and John, to whom the healed man clings (3:11). These phrases indicate the people's curiosity, but they do not appear to imply any hostility. Seeing their wide-eyed wonder as an opportunity, Peter speaks again of God's work through Jesus (3:17-21). On this occasion a second massive group of people—five thousand, as Acts reports—responds favorably to Peter's preaching (4:4).

Peter's last audience, Cornelius and his household, shows another ideal of receptivity. One might suppose that Cornelius breaks the rule of social status and receptivity because he is a Roman centurion (Acts 10:1). But being a Gentile makes him marginal in an important respect, and his status as a centurion and the way he enters the story connects him both with Naaman the Syrian, mentioned as an exemplar in Jesus' Nazareth speech (Luke 4:27), and with the centurion of Luke 7:1-10 who asks Jesus to heal his slave. Cornelius has a certain high status, but he is not by any means a natural fit to join the apostolic community. Nevertheless,

he is "pious and God-fearing" (εὐσεβὴς καὶ φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν; Acts 10:2), and he responds to divine prompting by seeking out Peter. The event that moves him is subtler than the tongues at Pentecost; he receives a vision in response to his prayers and alms rather than ecstatic speech (10:3-6).

Cornelius stands out among all those who hear the apostles' witness because he seeks after it. He sends the messengers to summon Peter (10:7-8) and waits expectantly for Peter to arrive (προσδοκῶν; Acts 10:24). In an echo of Simeon's expectant waiting (προσδεχόμενος) for the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25), Cornelius and his household become some of the first to fulfill Simeon's inspired words that Jesus would bring "light to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:25, 32). While Peter is still speaking about what God has done in Jesus, and that everyone who puts faith in Jesus' name receives forgiveness of sins, "the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word" (10:44). The most openly hospitable audience for Peter's preaching accepts it most quickly and dramatically. Indeed, when recounting the event, Peter claims that the Holy Spirit came upon his audience as soon as he started speaking (11:15). If the Holy Spirit's presence is a sign of people's obedience to God (5:32), then Cornelius and his household are proven obedient immediately upon hearing Peter's words. Indeed, Peter does not distinguish how the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles at Pentecost from the experience of this Gentile household (11:15). The receptivity of Cornelius and his household—as well as the apostles' first audiences—presents a stark contrast to those who arrest the apostles at their first encounter and attempt to suppress the message about Jesus.

4.2.2.2 The Elite

Peter's first two audiences and Cornelius receive the news of Jesus' resurrection with alacrity, but the message meets far from universal acceptance. Acts names an array of authorities who participate in opposing the apostles, but the ones who initiate action to suppress the apostles' message are the high priest and his associates, namely, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees (4:1; 5:17).[26] Their relative wealth,[27] social position, and obligation to the Roman governor,[28] all place them in the category of people whom Jesus

---

[26] Among those who arrest, detain, and interrogate the apostles for speaking of "Jesus" and "resurrection" in the same sentence (Acts 4:2), Acts includes the priests (4:1), the captain (στρατηγός) of the temple (4:1; 5:24, 26), the Sadducees (4:1), rulers (4:5), elders (4:5, 23), scribes (4:5), "Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and as many as were of the high priestly family" (4:6), the council (συνέδριον; 4:15; 5:27), the chief priests (4:23; 5:24), "the high priest and all who were with him, namely, the sect of the Sadducees" (5:17), "the whole court of Israel's elders [πᾶσαν τὴν γερουσίαν τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραήλ]" (5:21), and bailiffs (ὑπηρέται; 5:22, 26). These citations indicate a wide range of offices and parties involved in opposition against the apostles. Both occasions where the apostles appear before gathering of authorities, Fitzmyer suggests, that it is "a formal session of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin … the highest group of religious authorities in Jerusalem" (Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 299), though he acknowledges that the description of who is present varies slightly, and that others disagree [cites Schneider, *Apg.* 1.390] (335).

[27] Josephus claims that the Sadducees, unlike the Essenes and Pharisees, were able to persuade only the rich to adopt their doctrines (*Ant.* 13.10.6), which, if true, suggests that on the whole the Sadducees would have been wealthier than the other two sects Josephus describes.

[28] When Rome took over direct administration of Judea (6-41 CE) following the deposition of Archelaus, the Roman governors took the right, as Herod had begun (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.2.4), of appointing the Jewish high priest. Josephus writes that Cyrenius, who had jurisdiction in Syria after the deposition of Archelaus (*Ant.* 18.1.1), came to Judea and removed Joazar, who had been chosen as high priest by the people, and appointed Ananus in his stead (*Ant.* 18.2.1-2). Valerius Gratus, predecessor to Pontius Pilate, deposed and appointed five high priests in his eleven years as governor of Judea (*Ant.* 18.2.2). In addition to maintaining the right to appoint the high priest, according to Vincent Scramuzza, Roman governors kept custody of the high-priestly garments and oversaw the temple finances, "but in all other respects the national leadership of the high priest became a greater reality, because, with the procurator of living in Caesarea in deference to do Jewish sentiment, he was the only great authority in the holy city. Under the new form of government, the nation 'had larger room to manage their own affairs in their own way than under Herod' [G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Century of the Christian Era,* 3 vols. Cambridge, MA (1:82)]. The Sanhedrin became once more the constitutional body governing the country, as it assumed the powers once wielded by the king. Local officials, now free from Roman interference, became amenable to it. As of old it had complete control over the administration of civil justice, while its authority in criminal cases was limited only in those instances in which it pronounced a death sentence, for the execution of which the ratification of the procurator was necessary" [Vincent E. Scramuzza, "The Policy of the Early Roman Emperors towards Judaism," in *The Beginnings of Christianity, Part I: The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1966), 277-97 esp. 281-82]. On Herod and the Roman governors appointing the high priest see also Eusebius, *Church History* 1.VI.7-9 [NPNF 201 (90)].

declared enter the reign of God only with great difficulty (Luke 6:20-26; 18:24-25). Not only this, the party that seized and interrogated Jesus before bringing him to Pilate in order to secure his crucifixion consisted of many of the very same people who now oppose the apostles.[29] Moreover, the Sadducees' disbelief in any resurrection or afterlife at all is well attested.[30] To this assembly, Jesus' resurrection is comprehensively objectionable news. As the event that images and inaugurates God's reign, overturns this very council's action against him, and disproves one of the Sadducees' signature ideological commitments preached at them by "unlettered commoners" (Acts 4:13), Jesus' resurrection is impossible to accept. This council's hostility to the apostles' message would not surprise Jesus, but he sent his disciples into Jerusalem as his witnesses despite knowing both the council's complicity in his death and with what difficulty the rich enter the reign of God (Luke 18:24).[31] At the time Jesus made the latter observation, the people around him wondered aloud, "then who can be saved?" (18:26). Jesus' response: "What is impossible with human beings is possible with God" (18:27). Peter's manner of addressing these leaders does not betray much hope of their repentance; indeed, he neither suggests they repent nor invites them to accept God's forgiveness. Even so, before he and the other apostles are ultimately released, cracks appear in the council's resistance (Acts

[29] Jesus was arrested by "the chief priests and the temple guards and elders [ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ στρατηγοὺς τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ πρεσβυτέρους]" (Luke 22:52), held at the house of the high priest overnight (22:54), and then brought before a "council" (συνέδριον) consisting of "the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes" (Luke 22:66), before they univocally condemned him and dragged him to Pilate to get him crucified (22:71-23:1).

[30] Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8; Josephus also writes of the Sadducees that they believe the soul dies along with the body (*Ant.* 18.1.4).

[31] See again, n. 17 in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

5:33-40), suggesting that faithful witness can be an instrument of God's possibility—no matter how hostile the audience.

The apostles' reception with the council shows how deeply these leaders' investment in maintaining their social position and power impairs their access to reality. Their need to maintain that they were justified in eliminating Jesus is no small part of their resistance to the apostles' message. As they see it, if Jesus was raised and, thus, vindicated, they are guilty of his blood (5:28). But the greater barrier, and the one they share more widely with others who hold wealth and high status, is the social position that narrows their entry point into the reign of God, makes them beholden to the Roman governor, and inflates their self-image to the extent of being impervious to the witness and evidence brought to them by people of low social position. For them to accept the message of Jesus' resurrection and the reign of God would require them to extricate themselves from being beholden to the Roman governor in a way that was, very likely, unthinkable. At least some among them are in too deep with Rome for the stakes not to be life and death. The higher their rank the more they would have to lose by upending their life to follow the way of Jesus. But their social position presents a barrier beyond how much they would stand to lose; their privilege also impedes their ability to see from the perspective of the marginalized.

These leaders view themselves as superior to the apostles by both position and education (Acts 4:13). Openness to the apostolic message would require of these authorities the humility to believe there was a truth about the world that they could not, or at least did not, see that the apostles did. The ability to gain knowledge from witness, as Murray Rae rightly argues, "depends crucially upon the hospitality of one's worldview to any new item of

knowledge,"[32] but it also requires the humility not to dismiss others' accounts of their experiences simply because they occupy a lower social status in relation to one's own.[33] Compounded with their other epistemic barriers, viewing the apostles as "unlettered commoners" (4:13) so obstructs the leaders' vision of reality that, despite recognizing Peter and John as companions of Jesus (4:13), seeing the man born lame standing healed beside them (4:14), and admitting that the apostles did a "recognizable sign" among the people that they could not deny (4:16), their primary concern is not uncovering the truth but preventing the message from spreading (4:17-18). They continue in attempt to suppress the message even as their resistance to the possibility of its truth falters (5:33-40).

Even so, the apostles indicate no disappointment or concern at not having brought the council to their point of view on either occasion where the council attempts to quash the message (4:5-21; 5:17-42). The apostles' aim before the council, as everywhere else, is to obey God in bearing faithful witness of what they have seen and heard (4:19-20; 5:29-32). Their attitude reflects a conviction about the true agent behind the growth of their numbers that is first suggested at the conclusion of the Pentecost event: "And the Lord added to them daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). Whether or not people who hear their message repent and join the community is the Lord's affair, and, amazingly enough, initial resistance is not even the last word. The collective council's inability to deny the evidence before them

---

[32] Rae, *History and Hermeneutics*, 117-18.

[33] The suggestion of the privileged epistemic status of the marginalized, particularly with regard to access to the reign of God, appears already in Luke 6:20, when Jesus tells "the poor" who are present, "the reign of God is like you." Marginalized people understand the reign of God better because it is like them; they have insider's view of it. The idea that marginalized people have privileged access to their own experience is among the assumptions that undergirds standpoint epistemologies, such as feminist standpoint theory. See further Sandra Harding, ed. *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

(Acts 4:16-18), implied self-doubt about the rightness of killing Jesus (5:28), and Gamaliel's "wait and see" approach all signal cracks in the leaders' resistance. Moreover, just eight verses after the apostles' second release from trial before the temple council, the narrator reports that "the number of disciples in Jerusalem was increasing greatly," and "a great many of the priests" (πολύς τε ὄχλος τῶν ἱερέων) also "responded to the faith" (Acts 6:7). But regardless of the audiences' response, the apostles' work is to present a faithfully recounted and embodied witness to Jesus.[34]

4.2.3 Reflecting Jesus

The requirement that witness to Jesus unify verbal and lived communal expression of the message derives from Jesus' way of communicating both the reality of God's reign throughout his life and, especially, the reality of his resurrection to his disciples (Luke 24:13-48; Acts 1:3). Since the apostles have discerned that the witness to which Jesus has commissioned them should focus on his resurrection (Acts 1:8, 22), Jesus' way of revealing his resurrection's reality and significance to his disciples lights their way forward. Jesus appeared to them in "sure signs" (τεκμήρια), spoke of the reign of God through re-reading scripture in light of his suffering and resurrection, and promised the Holy Spirit to empower them (Acts 1:3-8; Luke 24:27, 44-49). The Holy Spirit's arrival ushers the apostles into a series of episodes where the apostolic community recapitulates key moments of Jesus' life. Evoking memory of Jesus is part of the apostles' witness. Of course, since they are not the risen Jesus, their personal

[34] It is stunning to note here how the council members' resistance is so great it is even impervious to the facts in front of them and, therefore, to the most likely conclusion (4:13-17). In addition, they do not appear ever to argue that God is on their side—they make no theological argument, and do not make a counter-claim that the Holy Spirit is with them. Guilt is apparently also a factor in their resistance (5:28).

presence and teaching cannot have quite the same effect that his did, but their task is to image him as closely as possible as a community—sharing hospitality and resources, breaking bread, and seeing to one another's needs—and follow his example of continuing to speak of the reign of God through re-reading scripture in light of his resurrection. The content of their message is as important as how they present it; their manner of presentation, too, must follow Jesus' own pattern of bold gentleness, or else contradict the message about God's gentle power exemplified in Jesus' resurrection. That knowledge of Jesus' resurrection depends on the unity of the apostolic teaching with its lived expression in the community is nowhere more evident than in the moments when the community's trust and unity fractures. When they do not hold this unity, the whole community's participation in God's project is at risk. The community's own knowledge of Jesus' resurrection and ability to witness faithfully to it depend on its living according to the power of God's reign that Jesus' resurrection exemplifies.

4.2.3.1 Inspired Recapitulation

The apostles' public witness to Jesus begins simply with the narrative resemblance of their ministry to Jesus' life as portrayed in Luke's Gospel. As Rowe suggests, "the main characters in Acts, to put it plainly, look like Jesus."[35] The Holy Spirit conceives Jesus (Luke 1:35), and gives him special empowerment at his baptism, temptation, and first time speaking publicly (3:22; 4:1,14, 18). The apostles have almost as little to do with the incident that makes them a public spectacle as Jesus had with his own conception, but the same agent causes both. The Holy Spirit's descent upon the apostles at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-5) begins the apostles' narrative recapitulation of Jesus' life.

[35] Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 153.

The Holy Spirit fills Jesus to empower his ministry, beginning with preaching in the synagogues of Galilee (Luke 4:14-15). In Nazareth, where he was conceived and raised (Luke 1:26; 4:16), he reads a passage from the prophet Isaiah about the purpose of the Spirit's being upon him, and declares the scripture fulfilled (4:18-21). Similarly, Peter speaks his first public words in the city where he and his companions first encountered the Holy Spirit, and turns to a prophetic text (this one from Joel) that he declares fulfilled in order to interpret the Spirit's activity (Acts 2:14-21). The two texts set up the movement from Jesus to his apostles while making a connection of resemblance; Isaiah has a first person singular speaker announcing the Spirit's presence on him (Luke 4:18), and Joel speaks in God's voice the promise of the Holy Spirit "upon all flesh" (Acts 2:16-17). Jesus' promise of "release" and "the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:19) is drawn forward into Peter's quotation that, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21). Peter's first public proclamation mirrors Jesus' own in substance, context, and connection to the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus' visit to the Nazareth synagogue, he goes to Capernaum where his principal reported activity is not preaching, but exorcism and healings that elicit amazement and wonder about the source of his power (Luke 4:31-41; 5:12-15, 17-26; 6:6-11, 17-19). Against this backdrop Jesus preaches his longest sermon, outlining the patterns of life suited to God's reign including the call to imitate God's kindness "to the ungrateful and the wicked" (Luke 6:20-35). Peter and John's first activity after the massive success of the Pentecost message was to go to the temple and heal the man born lame who sat at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:1-8). As soon as the man is healed, a crowd gathers and the people express wonder and astonishment at the kind of power that would allow a man who had never walked to go about leaping for joy (3:11-12). Peter makes one of his longest speeches in response to the people's stares of

amazement, calling their attention to Jesus as the "originator of life" (3:15) and to God's graciousness in having sent Jesus first to them, "blessing you in turning each of you from your wickedness" (3:26). Both the healing and the message make a connection to key elements of Jesus' life without exact imitation.

This healing and Peter's preaching in Solomon's Portico leads the temple leaders to notice the apostles in much the same way that they did Jesus when, at the end of his travels, he arrived in Jerusalem and made the temple his first stop (Luke 19:37-47). In fact, the apostles' Jerusalem ministry mirrors Jesus' own in at least these three regards: teaching daily in the temple (Luke 19:45-47; 20:1; 21:37-38; Acts 3:1-26; 5:12-17, 21, 42), having favor from the people and hostility from the temple leaders (Luke 19:48; 20:6, 19; 22:2, 6, 52-53; Acts 2:47; 4:1-2, 5:13, 33), and facing arrest in the evening with trial the next day (Luke 22:54, 66; Acts 4:3, 5; 5:18, 27). The apostles are even made to image Jesus' resurrection. When the high priest and Sadducees arrest the apostles the second time, they are thwarted by an angel—in which the Sadducees do not believe any more than in resurrection. They are then confronted with news echoing Jesus' resurrection when the temple guards return from the jail the next morning having found it still locked and guarded, but empty. Like the women who were perplexed (ἀπορέω) upon discovering Jesus' empty tomb, the captain of the temple and high priests are bewildered (διαπορέω) and wonder what this report of the securely locked but empty jail means (Luke 24:1-4; Acts 5:17-24). Shortly afterward, the apostles speak for the last time before the high priest and council and declare themselves witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (5:32).

The apostles proclaim a message in different words than Jesus did, but it has the same essence; he spoke of God's reign and they speak of his resurrection and its consequences.

Jesus spoke of God's manner of rule and the apostles proclaim the event that exemplifies it. In Jerusalem, they address the same audience and elicit similar responses, though the apostles' arrests end in their release even though the temple leaders would like to kill them (Acts 5:33). The apostles' reflection of Jesus' Jerusalem ministry does not constitute exact mimicry or make them perfect images of Jesus. Indeed, whereas the movement of Jesus' story is concentric toward Jerusalem, his apostles' is centrifugal from it; his ministry ends in Jerusalem, and theirs is just beginning. But imitating Jesus, especially in his work of communicating the character of God's power, appears constitutive of being his witnesses.

4.2.3.2 Witness vs. Force

Being empowered by the Holy Spirit, as Jesus was, appears to play a substantial part in allowing the apostles to imitate Jesus and, especially, follow in his way making a bold, truthful proclamation with the message about God's life-giving power in a manner commensurate to that power. Like the prophet Micah, they are "filled with power… with the Spirit of the Lord, with authority and with might; to declare to Jacob his crimes, and to Israel his sins."[36] The power of a world-remaking truth told from firsthand experience by people filled with the Holy Spirit's dynamic presence is great indeed; Spirit-filled witnesses have great power. But it is not force. It is not violence, coercion, manipulation, or control of resources. The apostles have no wealth (3:6), hold no official religious or political office, have no alliance with the Roman governor, have no prestigious education or status (4:13), and do not command

[36] Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Reading the New Testament (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005). Talbert compares the apostles who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, declare to the Jerusalemites their sin of putting Jesus to death (32).

any troops.[37] But they do not need this kind of power for their message, sometimes, to meet a highly favorable reception. Indeed, attempting to exercise force would falsify the message.

The apostles use the power they have been granted in order to proclaim the message compellingly without employing coercive methods, whether the physical violence that the temple leadership inflicts upon the apostles, spurious claims to objectivity, or appeals to any evidence beyond their own witness. Whereas the temple authorities arrest and imprison (4:3; 5:18), interrogate (4:7; 5:27), command (4:18), threaten (4:21), and flog the apostles (5:40), the apostles never plot to retaliate. They do not gather swords or train a militia; rather, they rejoice at being counted worthy to suffer dishonor for Jesus' name (5:41). They also avoid appeals to external evidence for Jesus' resurrection, such as the empty tomb, in an attempt to bolster their witness. A skeptic could always find a way to dismiss such evidence. While they do claim special insight into what God would have them do (4:19; 5:29), they cannot prove divine sanction and do not try. All the evidence they present—the story they tell with such boldness, the wonders they work, their miraculous escape from prison (5:19), and their claim about the Holy Spirit's presence with them (5:32)—is of the sort that suggests the truth without forcing the listener's judgment. The apostles insist only upon their status as witnesses (2:32; 5:32)—that they speak of what they have seen and heard, and, indeed, cannot do otherwise (4:20). But they present it as a story about the world that their audience may either embrace or reject, and they never try to enforce the truth of it.

---

[37] Relevant here for further exploration are fascinating recent developments in philosophical engagement with epistemological concerns relative to social location. See, e.g., Lorraine Code, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. definition of "social power" 9-14, esp. 13, and José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

That insistence without coercion is at the heart of communicating knowledge—especially knowledge of the God whose reign looks like Jesus—through witness. How they communicate reflects what they seek to convey. The apostles, mainly represented by Peter, speak directly without varnishing the truth, but allow their audiences to draw their own conclusions. They want each audience to know what God has done in Jesus, but precisely because the subject of their message is Jesus they use a mode of imparting knowledge—witness—that does not rely on coercion or violence but, instead, reflects and employs Jesus' gentle and unstoppable power. And so the apostles witness faithfully; they never retaliate when they meet a hostile response or attempt to enforce their message. Rather, they display a commitment to the unity of truth and peace, and trust God to make their witness effective.

4.2.3.3 Word and Life

Jesus' own disciples, who doubtless wished he were still alive and had witnessed his entire ministry of embodying and announcing God's reign, could not accept the reality of Jesus' resurrection apart from his sharing their hospitality along with his teaching them how to understand it through re-reading scripture. Imitating Jesus' way of communicating the same message seems not only sensible but also necessary, given that Jesus' strategy held the spoken and lived expression of his message inextricably together. Just as Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were the signs and inauguration of God's reign, so too is the apostolic witness of word and community life the sign of Jesus' real resurrection and a living interpretation of its significance. That is to say, Peter's and his companions' witness is not only spoken or lived, but both together. Or as Rowe puts it, "Acts does not construe 'witness' monothematically as the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection—preaching the word, as it were—but more

comprehensively as living out the pattern of life that culminates in resurrection."[38] Acts repeatedly describes holistic teaching verbalized in re-reading scripture through the lens of Jesus' life death and resurrection and embodied in the apostles' community life. On the occasions when the community does not live into the requisite patterns of generosity, truth-telling, and mutual care, their ability to know and communicate the reality of Jesus' resurrection, as well as their existence as a community, come under threat. The community's flourishing under lived teaching and disintegration under violated teaching shows the need for congruence between the apostolic words and common life.

At Pentecost, once the audience repents in response to Peter's speech incorporating passages from Joel 2, Psalm 16, and Psalm 110 to interpret the coming of the Holy Spirit and identify Jesus as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:14-40), the narrative turns immediately to a description of generous and hospitable community life (2:41-47). Acts 2:42 supplies a summary heading: "And they were holding fast to the teaching of the apostles and common life, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers" (2:42). They supply one another's needs, worship together in the temple and at home, and share their food with gratitude and generosity (2:44-46). Juxtaposing Peter's first foray into interpreting scripture to illuminate the identity of Jesus alongside this description of the growing community's hospitable common life suggests an important relationship between them, and Acts 2:42 makes the bridge. The community clings to both together—both the apostolic teaching and common life, which is the first of several signals in acts of their interdependency.

[38] Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 153.

The pattern repeats with Peter's second speech (Acts 3:12-26), he names Jesus the fulfillment of God's promise through Moses to "raise up a prophet" like himself whose followers will be truly God's people, while those who reject him will be "cut off" from the people (Deut 18:15-19). Finally, Peter gives his audience a new beginning by linking Jesus' significance to the blessing to Abraham from Genesis 12:1-3. When the authorities who arrest the apostles upon hearing them teach the people about Jesus, Peter continues the pattern: Jesus fulfills Psalm 118:22 as the rejected stone become the cornerstone (Acts 4:11). When the apostolic community prays together, after Peter and John's release, the principal request of the prayer consists in a petition to enable the apostles to "speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders come about by the name of your holy servant, Jesus" (4:29-30). In this prayer, the apostolic community self-consciously unites the work of bold preaching with lived expression through acts of healing. When their prayer is answered, evident in their being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking "the word of God with boldness" (4:31), another description of hospitable community life follows (4:32-35). The apostles' words and community life go together as one witness.

The community that grows out of the apostles' witness embodies knowledge of Jesus' resurrection with its whole life through habits of hospitality, truth-telling, commitment to unity, and economic sharing (2:42-47; 4:32-35). Besides embodying a character suited to the reign of God as Jesus taught and portrayed, their common life exhibits how the epistemology of witness relies upon and generates relationships of trust. Someone who would receive knowledge from a witness must first trust the witness.[39] "Witness" works as a way of

[39] Heidi E. Grasswick in "Scientific and Lay Communities: Earning Epistemic Trust through Knowledge Sharing," *Synthese* 177 (2010): 387-409, gives a sophisticated account of the detrimental effects the erosion of trust

communicating among the people because they are building relationships of trust through practices that sustain common life. The community's life, its knowledge of Jesus, and its ability to communicate the truth about Jesus all depend on its members' honesty, harmony, and mutual care. Sharing worship and food results in increasing favor with "all the people," and the Lord adds to their numbers daily (Acts 2:44-47).

As the community expands, it continues to be "of one heart and soul" and to "hold all things in common" (4:32). This pairing itself speaks to the unity of thought and life; to be unified in "heart and soul" is to "hold all things in common." Similarly, Luke tells of the community's pervasive generosity that results in "no one needy among them" in the same breath that he reports the power of the apostles' ongoing "witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (4:33-35). What the apostles preach in words the community shows with its life. Johnson and Gaventa rightly draw attention to Luke's juxtaposing of community sharing with apostolic witness to Jesus' resurrection.[40] The community shows its understanding of Jesus' resurrection and lordship through a common life that makes "good news to the poor" real; the community's generosity and honest mutual care confirm the apostles' spoken witness to Jesus' resurrection and the reality of God's reign. Conversely, deceit, neglect, disparity, or greed threaten to undermine the apostolic witness to Jesus' resurrection. The Ananias and Sapphira incident (5:1-11) and the dispute between the Hellenists and the Hebrews concerning the distribution of resources to widows (6:1-3) both show the life of the community in jeopardy

---

has within a community's ability to communicate truths, especially within a marginalized community such as the apostolic community appears to have been in its original context.

[40] Johnson, *Acts*, 86, 91. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, ANTC (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 100.

because of economic disorder. These two episodes—as negative examples—demonstrate the unity of apostolic witness with a community constituted by an economics of generosity.

4.2.3.3.1 Barnabas vs. Ananias and Sapphira

Luke introduces Ananias and Sapphira in contrast with Barnabas (4:36). Barnabas exemplifies the sort of person who makes the new community's life of economic sharing possible (2:45; 4:34-35): he is a person of property who sells some of it and brings the total sum of the proceeds (implied in the singular τό χρῆμα) "and laid it at the apostles' feet" (4:37). Acts never calls Barnabas "rich," but he does appear to have some means. Perhaps Barnabas is among the rich who find it difficult to enter the reign of God, but with whom God enables the possible (Luke 18:24-27). Perhaps he is an echo of the rich man Jesus encountered, whom he advised to sell all his belongings, give away its proceeds, and follow him (Luke 18:22). Unlike that man, Barnabas does sell his field, gives away the proceeds, and is (apparently) following the way of Jesus (Acts 4:37). Or perhaps, in giving the total proceeds of his land sale to the apostles for distribution "to each as any had need," Barnabas acts like the extravagant sower of Luke 8 and the generous father of Luke 15. In either case, his honest generosity signals alignment with the reign of God. With this act, Barnabas gives the community a gift; he also entrusts himself fully to the community and its way of sustaining itself. He throws his lot in with this community without reserve. He puts an honest "hand to the plow" without looking back (Luke 9:62).

The same cannot be said of Ananias and Sapphira. They, too, sell some property, but then conspire to retain some of the proceeds for themselves while they donate only a portion in a context that implies they give as unreservedly as Barnabas (5:1-2). Acts does not specify

why. Whatever the reason, they give with reserve, and so exhibit and foster mistrust within the community. Peter denounces Ananias not primarily for stinginess but for "lying to the Holy Spirit" (5:3), or as Barrett puts it, "not avarice … but deceit."[41] Peter points out that the property and its proceeds were always at Ananias's disposal (5:3-4), implying that no one forced Ananias either to sell it or to donate its proceeds to the community. On Gaventa's reading, vv. 3-4 imply that "once property has been sold and *declared to belong* to the community by presenting it to the apostles, then *all* of the proceeds are those of the community."[42] By giving only a portion in a way that implies a gift of the entire sum Ananias and Sapphira enact a lie; in Johnson's words, they "'falsify' the Spirit's work."[43] Both fall down dead when they hear that they have sinned against the Holy Spirit (5:5, 10).

Acts specifies no agent of their deaths—not Peter, not God, not the Holy Spirit, which suggests that who killed them is far less important than why they died, which has everything to do with the context in which they enact and speak a lie about money.[44] Ananias and Sapphira's lie about money in a context where the picture of healthy inner life for the church looks like unity of "heart and soul [ψυχή]" and complete sharing of possessions alongside

[41] Barrett, *Acts*, 1:262.

[42] Gaventa, *Acts*, 102.

[43] Johnson, *Acts*, 88.

[44] While Gaventa, Barrett, and Haenchen may be right that the context suggests divine judgment, Acts does not make that as clear as a reader and many commentators might wish, and so they fill in the gaps. Gaventa, *Acts* 103; Barrett, *Acts* 268; Haenchen, *Acts*, 239; 241 Haenchen, in agreement with Rieu, blames Peter: "…Ananias is not stoned by the community but Peter's accusation causes him to fall dead. The end of his wife Sapphira resembles Achan's more closely: Peter *kills* her by announcing her husband's demise and her own imminent death. … Peter does not merely prophesy Sapphira's death but, as Rieu rightly asserts (p. 124), wants to kill—and succeeds." Haenchen, *Acts* 239; D.C.H. Rieu, *The Acts of the Apostles by Saint Luke: Translated with an Introduction and Notes* (Penguin Books, 1957) Barrett notes that Luke does not accuse Peter of Ananias's death, but allows that Peter may have caused Sapphira's death by eliciting her lie. Barrett, *Acts*, 268-70.

powerful apostolic witness to the resurrection (4:32-33). In Richard Thompson's words, "the deceptive scheme that they plotted together contradicts the united nature of the community. These two characters provide a narrative 'counter-community of avarice' opposite the 'spirit-community' of generosity and sharing."[45] And indeed, the verb by which both Ananias and Sapphira die, ἐκψύχω, (5:5, 10), connotes the exit of the soul.[46] Having sowed deceit in the community where there was one heart and soul causes them to lose their soul, not unlike the rich man with his barns in Luke 12:16-21, who lost his soul despite having stored up wealth for himself. Jesus declared, "Thus is it for the one who lays stores for himself but is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21). Ananias and Sapphira enact a deed of deceit and greed in the midst of a community seeking to speak and embody the improbable truth of Jesus' resurrection and reality of God's reign.

Reserving money for themselves suggests that they also reserve themselves apart from the community, and by both greed and deceit, cast doubt on the reality of Jesus' resurrection in the process. Ananias and Sapphira's enacted lie impedes the community's witness to Jesus' resurrection in both word and deed. The apostles speak of Jesus' resurrection on the strength of their honest recounting of what they saw and heard. If trust in the community is undermined, so is the message. Moreover, the community is meant to be an embodied witness of what the lived power of Jesus' resurrection and the economics of God's reign look like. If

---

[45] Richard P. Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2015) 132, citing Johnson, 80.

[46] See Henriette Havelaar, "Hellenistic Parallels to Acts 5.1-11 and the Problem of Conflicting Interpretations," *JSNT* 67 (1997): 63-82. In English, the word ἐκψύχω along with the context of Ananias and Sapphira's economic deception makes a ready bit of "Dad humor," which Richard Thompson gleefully articulated to me as "they souled out." Here he articulates it a bit more formally: Thompson, *Acts*, 133.

Ananias and Sapphira sabotage the community economics, they undermine it for those inside and destroy its witness to the outside. They threaten the community's ability to participate in the divine commission of witness at all; its continued existence depends on excision of the habits they represent. Despite the fear the event induces in the community and among all who hear of it, the surgery is a success—the apostles continue doing signs and wonders, preaching and healing, and the community continues to grow "more than ever" (5:12-16).

4.2.3.3.2 The Hellenist and Hebrew widows

As the community expands further, it continues confronting aberrations from the economics of God's reign, especially as new members are added. In Acts 6 Luke recounts how as the disciples increased in number, the group became large enough for a dispute to arise along cultural lines, between the "Hellenists" and the "Hebrews" of the community.[47] The Hellenists objected that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution (6:1). In light of Luke's presentation of the centrality of good news to the poor within the message of God's reign embodied in Jesus, and Jesus' special condemnation of those who "devour widows' homes" even as they make long prayers (Luke 20:47), the neglect of the Hellenist widows spells another strike at the root of community life and, with it, knowledge of the Gospel. A community economics of sharing depends on trust in the distribution as well as in the gathering of resources. Those who entrust their lives to the community that embodies the

[47] The exact identity of these two groups not precisely relevant to the dispute, that is, whether "Hebrews" designates Jews and "Hellenists" Gentiles, or whether it is an entirely Jewish group with "Hebrews" speaking Aramaic and "Hellenists" speaking Greek. Given the moment before the apostolic mission's decisive expansion to the Gentiles, I tend to agree with Johnson that the distinction has to do with the primary language of each group (Johnson, *Acts*, 105). For the purpose of showing the gravity of disparity between two groups within the community, the exact nature of the division does not matter.

Gospel must be able to trust that their needs will be met—they will not be overlooked because of cultural differences.

The apostles view the distribution problem as a grave concern in the community's life, which cannot sustain the neglect of its vulnerable members. The apostles tell the gathered disciples to select from among themselves seven men whom the apostles may appoint to oversee the distribution. And yet even this solution is imperfect, because it divides the work of preaching from the work of hospitality; the whole problem arises from incongruence between the preached and lived word. Here the apostles introduce a kind of hierarchy even as they wisely choose seven men who are "witnessed-to" (μαρτυρουμένους) within the community and filled with the Spirit, and wisdom (6:3). The men are trusted in the community, and that is no small thing. The trust that makes knowledge of resurrection possible is of a piece with the trust that makes possible a community life reflecting God's generous and gentle power. Practices of hospitality and community care make knowledge of resurrection possible not only because they provide a living image of the kind of power resurrection exemplifies, but also because they make communities of trust possible. The apostles' commitment to telling the truth about Jesus extends through their whole lives and makes truth-telling as central to the life of the community as its mutual hospitality. Both bear witness to Jesus' resurrection, and the gentle power of God's reign exemplified in God's having raised Jesus from the dead.

4.2.4 Epistemological conclusions

Having moved from doubt to faith in the reality of Jesus' resurrection and an apprehension of its significance imaging the reign of God, the apostles understand firsthand the difficulty of that movement. Their understanding is in evidence in their patience with both

receptive and hostile audiences, whose readiness for the message appears to mirror the apostles' own conditions for accepting the reality of Jesus' resurrection. Believing in the power of the life patterns at home in God's reign makes for receptivity; believing, rather, in the power expressed in the way the Gentiles wield power makes for resistance. These connections show why the lived expression of resurrection power in the apostolic community is essential for making their spoken witness compelling. Accurately reflecting Jesus' character, especially in the kind of power that animated his life, is a *sine qua non* of apostolic witness, and so that is its basic premise. The apostles make a living portrait of Jesus in accepting the Holy Spirit's movement of their life and ministry, performing healings, speaking boldly (especially when confronting religious authorities), and foregoing retaliation in the face of resistance. The apostles and their companions aim to embody as a community the power that Jesus proclaimed and portrayed in his life. The moments when the community's integrity falters, and the apostles quickly seek to mend the rifts, show the need for unity between the apostles' words and the life patterns of the apostolic community. "Witness to Jesus" demands this strategy of integrated word and deed because it both follows Jesus' way of showing the truth of his words in the patterns of his life, and wields a power like his—a gentle, truthful, resilient power that nevertheless preserves his audience's ability to resist it. Because the apostles' work is witness to Jesus, their message would be rendered less rather than more persuasive by any attempt to enforce it by means of violence, coercion, manipulation, or social control.

The apostles' way of going about sharing the message of Jesus shows a profound unconcern about their lack of control. Although they do exhibit complete commitment to being Jesus' witnesses—reflecting Jesus' life, proclaiming and embodying a community life expressing the reality of Jesus' resurrection—Acts includes no accounts of their strategizing

how to spread the message. The extent of their strategy is to proclaim that God raised Jesus from the dead at every opportunity the Holy Spirit gives them, and to live together in a way that reflects their commitment to operate on the kind of power that wrought Jesus' resurrection and governs the reign of God. The apostles aim to communicate and invite others into the reality where resurrection repairs death and infinite goodness cures evil. The bearers of such a message cannot use the tactics of those who deal death; to do so would contravene their identity and trustworthiness as witnesses to Jesus' resurrection and contradict the message of God's life-giving power. The apostles embrace a comprehensive lived and preached witness to Jesus' resurrection as the way into knowledge of what God is doing in the world in contrast to the powers that put Jesus to death, who attempt to quash the apostolic message and retain both religious and political control by using threats, coercion, and force.

4.3 Politics: People of the Risen Lord

Jesus' life portrayed the power of God's reign embodied in an individual; the apostolic witnesses to Jesus' resurrection portray the politics of God's reign in a community.[48] The early apostolic witness consists in lived and proclaimed interpretation of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, that urges people to repent of accommodation to the political patterns of domination and paternalistic benefaction exercised by Gentile kings (Luke 22:25), accept rescue from the oppression they suffer under such regimes (Luke 4:18; Acts 2:40; 3:19-21), and participate in a political order exhibiting the generous hospitality and resilience of Jesus (e.g., Luke 6:17-19; 24:13-49; Acts 2:42-47; 4:24-34). The apostolic community's commitment

[48] Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 173.

to a peaceable politics does not, however, lead them to shrink from conflict any more than Jesus did (cf. Luke 12:51); quite the contrary. Proclaiming Jesus' resurrection in Jerusalem draws the hostile attention of the authorities who colluded with Pilate to get him executed, and, by their harsh treatment of the apostles, exposes these leaders' accommodation to political patterns and power antithetical to God's reign. The apostles, on the other hand, exercise a power commensurate to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and foster a flourishing community life in contradistinction to the hierarchical and inequitable politics in which the temple leaders are complicit. And remarkably, the temple leaders are ultimately thwarted in their attempts to quash the message of Jesus' resurrection, or prevent its lived expression in the apostolic community. Given Gamaliel's proposed test of authenticity (Acts 5:38-39), the apostolic community's persistence is strong evidence of its divine origin and compliance with God's will. As a result, even amid some occasional stumbling, the apostolic community fosters hope that a politics shaped according to God's reign can flourish even before the "time of restoring all things" (Acts 3:21).

4.3.1 The Reign of God vs. the Kings of the Nations

Jesus' directive that the apostles should begin bearing witness to him in Jerusalem appears almost calculated to generate conflict; the leaders in this city who contrived his execution remain in power,[49] and with less than two months having elapsed since Jesus' death,[50] it is far too soon for them to have forgotten their animosity toward him. The apostles

[49] Compare notes 26 and 29 above, under "4.2.2.2 The Elite."

[50] As far as the narrative is concerned, Jesus was crucified on the day after Passover (Luke 22:7-23:33). Jesus was with his disciples for forty days after his resurrection (Acts 1:3), and Pentecost takes place fifty days after Passover

are well aware of what these authorities did to Jesus in Jerusalem, but they begin proclaiming his resurrection there anyway (Acts 2:5, 14). Proclamation of Jesus' resurrection, particularly in Jerusalem, is a fraught endeavor regardless of the apostles' commitment to the life-giving politics of Jesus. The authorities who arrested Jesus and ensured his execution have no such commitment, and so acting against their wishes is a dangerous enterprise.

The apostles' conflict with the Jerusalem authorities is personal as well as political. The message of Jesus' resurrection offends the high priest and his companions personally because they colluded to execute Jesus and, if he truly is alive again by the work of God, their heinous act is undone and they must face the reality that they were wrong as well as the possibility of divine judgment for it. Proclaiming that God raised Jesus is also a political power play, because Jesus preached and embodied a politics contrary to theirs. Jesus' resurrection by God's act vindicates his politics and condemns theirs. Jesus' resurrection exposes their collusion with the kings and rulers who dominate and oppress their people and indicts them for so egregiously violating the way God wields power. The apostles insist that God is on the side of Jesus' way of wielding power. Because of a broad cultural understanding that makes divine approval synonymous with political legitimacy,[51] and the view of at least some that the high priest has divinely sanctioned authority (Acts 23:4), the apostles' proclamation undermines simultaneously both the political and theological authority of the council leaders.[52] The leaders'

(source/cite). The narrative makes no mention of how many days had elapsed before the authorities first confront the apostles, but the time is measured in days (Acts 3:1)—not months.

[51] See outline in "3.3.1 Congruence of Theology and Politics."

[52] Interestingly enough, however, the high priest and his companions never have an argument with the apostles on theological grounds. One might, at least, have expected that the Sadducees would have made an objection to

violence against Jesus and the apostles puts them on the side of opposing God—on two counts and in two different ways—just as Gamaliel warns them (Acts 5:38-39). First, the narrative has established Jesus' identification with God and the apostles' unwavering loyalty to God, as well as divine sanction for the apostles' acts of witness. Second, the leaders, by their persistent violent opposition to the apostles who proclaim Jesus' resurrection, reinforce the impression of their allegiance to patterns of power more suited to Gentile kings than to the reign of God. The leaders' confrontations with Peter and his companions illuminate the apostles' contrasting politics and use of power. Whereas the high priest, Sadducees, and other temple leaders use their social position, arrest, interrogation, and flogging in an attempt to bully the apostles into silence (Acts 4:1-21; 5:17-27, 40), the apostles operate by a different kind of power.[53]

4.3.2 Arresting and Arrested

The apostles' alignment with the ways of God is revealed in the kind of power they wield. First, they rely on and respond to power originating in God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter and his companions make inspired speeches that draw attention and confront the people of Jerusalem and their leaders with the need to repent. By invoking Jesus' name, Peter and John heal a man who had never walked, and then explain to the gathered crowd and to the council of leaders why Jesus' name has such power. When the apostles are arrested for the

---

the idea of resurrection regardless of whom the apostles were saying was raised from the dead, but no such rebuttals occur.

[53] See further Karl Allen Kuhn, *The Kingdom According to Luke and Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015) and Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

second time, an angel releases them and commands them to return to the temple and go on preaching, and so they do. The apostles' do not shrink from the confrontations that result from the authorities' reactions to their submission to the Holy Spirit's power, healing in Jesus' name, and obedience to the angelic messenger who releases them from prison. The apostles do not seek conflict for its own sake, but to the extent that the Jerusalem authorities object to the apostles' divine mandate, conflict is inevitable. When those conflicts occur, the apostles neither recant nor seek to defend themselves by means of any power like what the Jerusalem leaders us against them. They insist upon what they have seen and heard without any need to enforce the acceptance of their message. Rather, they speak boldly, absorb the injustice done to them, pray for the strength to persist, and rejoice in the dishonor that shows their faithfulness to Jesus.

4.3.2.1 Divine Empowerment

The apostles' principal empowerment is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit inspires the multilingual speech of Pentecost and draws the attention of Peter's first audience (Acts 2:1-14). Peter's first speech is his faithful response to the Holy Spirit's prompting in addition to Jesus' commission (1:8). The narrative structure of the next occasion where the Holy Spirit acts highlights the source of the apostles' empowerment even though that is not the primary subject matter. When Peter and John are brought before the high priest and assembly of elders and rulers after their first arrest after they healed the lame man, the assembly asks them, "By what power or in what name did you do this?" (4:7). The next words of the narrative read, "Then Peter, having been filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them…" (4:8). Placing these sentences alongside one another emphasizes that Peter's being filled with the Holy Spirit

infects him with power—a power to speak, as at Pentecost, the truth about God's great deeds even if this audience finds it offensive (2:11; 4:8-12).

After Peter and John are released, and the whole apostolic community prays for courage in the face of threats, the Holy Spirit fills the whole group and they are empowered to "speak the word of God with boldness" (4:31). The apostles' boldness does not come from within; as Willie Jennings observes, "It comes from without, from the Spirit of God."[54] In Peter's last speech before the council of leaders in Jerusalem he invokes the Holy Spirit as a witness to all that God did in Jesus, just as the apostles are, and that the Holy Spirit's presence with them validates their obedience to God and, thereby, the truth of their message (5:32). These multiple descriptions of the Holy Spirit's presence and activity among and through the apostles show decisively that the apostles have not undertaken this witness-bearing mission under their own power. To the extent that they bear witness to Jesus, the power that moves them is the Holy Spirit's power. That the apostles' principal empowerment comes from the Holy Spirit is significant because of the Holy Spirit's creative and life-giving role both in the original creation and in Jesus' conception (Gen 1:1; Luke 1:35). If that is so, the power that moves the apostles is a life-giving power. The words that the apostles speak by the power of the Holy Spirit are meant to give life to those who hear them.

Likewise, there is life-giving power in Jesus' name, which Peter invokes in order to strengthen the feet and ankles of the formerly lame man and send him dancing through Solomon's Portico. They heal the man who had never walked not by their own authority, power, or innate ability, but by invoking the name of Jesus, and say so both to the crowd that

[54] Jennings, *Acts*, 49.

gathers and to the leaders who interrogate them. Peter asks the crowd why they wonder and stare, as if he and John had healed the man "by our own power or piety" (4:12). No; this powerful act giving "perfect health" to the previously lame man was wrought not by Peter and John's native power, but through Jesus' name (4:16). The deed speaks for itself. For those who consider the God who created the world the only source of life, this healing whispers of the power of God at work in Jesus, and by extension, in the apostles. This and the other healings and exorcisms the apostles perform (5:12-16) show them drawing on a power not their own—God's power—and using it, as God does and as Jesus did throughout his life, to restore life and health. They do not invoke Jesus' name to gain status for themselves or to control others. Indeed, they do not even control what happens to them.

The high priest arrests and imprisons the apostles, interrupting their ministry of signs and wonders, healing, and exorcising unclean spirits for all the people who gathered in Solomon's Portico (5:12-18). But then "an angel of the Lord" intervenes both to rescue them from imprisonment and to expedite their return to the work of proclaiming "all the words of this life" (5:19-20). They do as the angel tells them, returning to the temple early in the morning and continue teaching (5:21), and confront the authorities with an image of Jesus' resurrection when the empty prison is discovered (5:22-24), before the captain of the temple fetches them again (5:26). The episode demonstrates, yet again, that the apostles rely on and respond to a power beyond themselves—the same divine power that raised Jesus from death—in the carrying out of their mission of bearing witness to Jesus in both word and deed. Many of the incidents where the apostles respond to and exercise the life-giving power of God results in a conflict with the same authorities that arrested Jesus and brought about his execution, but that does not shake the apostles' commitment to exercising life-giving power. They respond by

invoking their status as witnesses of God's activity, insisting upon what they have seen and heard, praying for renewed courage, and resiliently and joyfully absorbing the injustices they suffer.

4.3.2.3 Witness Power

On both occasions where Peter finds himself answerable to the council led by the high priest, first with John and then with the rest of the apostles, he insists that he and his companions have seen and heard events wrought by God, and that having witnessed these events gives them a divine mandate to speak of them (Acts 4:10, 19; 5:29-32). These claims, especially paired as they are with works of healing (3:1-8; 5:12-16), constitute a use of power that does not resort to force, coercion, manipulation or violence. Declaring themselves witnesses to God's act of raising Jesus from the dead, on the one hand, exposes the apostles as people willing to challenge the status quo. That the council leaders target them makes sense. On the other hand, being witnesses to what God has done makes the apostles not the principal actors in the drama. The primary agent is God. If the council leaders intend to oppose the apostles' message, the council must be sure that this message does not, in fact, come from God. A majority among them does seem invested in not opposing God—or at least, not appearing to do so (5:39).

In order to stop the apostles effectively, the council would need to cast doubt on what the apostles claim to have seen and heard (for example, claim that the apostles are delusional or disqualified as credible witnesses by their low social status); deny the divine source of what the apostles witnessed as well as their divine mandate to speak of what they have seen and heard; and disregard or discredit the signs and wonders of healing and exorcism that the

apostles do in Jesus' name as well as the Holy Spirit's presence with them. The council leaders do not appear to have enough traction on any of these counts—particularly the last—to silence the apostles effectively. Were all of that insufficient, the apostles' resilient persistence provides enough evidence of God's presence and work through them that the council leaders ultimately are persuaded, after Gamaliel's intervention (5:34-39), to release them: "if this plan or work comes from human beings, it will be destroyed; but if it is from God, you will not be able to destroy it, lest you find yourselves fighting against God" (5:39). That the apostolic community persists and grows despite high profile and concerted opposition is its own powerful witness to the reality that grounds the apostles' message as well as to the kind of power that constitutes that reality. The reign of God runs on resilience, just as the apostles demonstrate on both occasions that the council releases them.

The apostles respond resiliently each time they are released from the custody of the temple authorities. On the first occasion, as soon as Peter and John report what happened, the whole community prays together (Acts 4:24-30). The petition at the heart of this prayer is not an imprecation against the leaders who have just arrested and threatened two of their number, which would be a plenty logical choice given the tradition of the psalms. They could quote, for example, Psalm 3:5-7 instead of Psalm 2:1-2 (Acts 4:25-26). But they do not ask God for protection from or reprisal upon their enemies. Instead, the apostles remain focused on what God is doing and on how they might cooperate with God's plans, and, although they do ask God to "notice" the leaders' threats, the gift the apostles request of God is the ability to continue the work of bearing witness—speaking boldly, being conduits of God's healing power, and bringing about (γίνομαι) signs and wonders (σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα) through Jesus'

name (4:29-30). The only power they desire is what they need to proclaim and display a true representation of Jesus.

The apostles are detained a second time after they have been engaged in exactly the activities they prayed for the ability to do when last they were released—even using the same verb "many signs and wonders [σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα] were being done [ἐγίνετο, from γίνομαι] by the hand of the apostles" (5:12). "And many were gathering together from the towns all around Jerusalem, bearing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, who were all being healed" (5:16). The agent of this sentence is hidden in passive grammar, but if the apostles' prayer in Acts 4 is being answered, God is the one doing the healing (Acts 4:30). Missing from the litany of activities in which the apostles are engaged in Acts 5:12-16 in Solomon's Portico is any mention of their "speaking the word of God with boldness," but that is exactly what they do when released from the jail by an angel in the night (5:19). The angel commands them to go to the temple and "announce to the people all the words of this life" (5:20). And so the apostles do so immediately; they "entered the temple at dawn and continued their teaching" (5:21). It is a profound image of resilience.

When they are released after their third detention, the narrator's comment on their response is spare but striking. This time, the council has had the apostles flogged before releasing them (5:40). Nonetheless, the apostles leave the presence of the council "rejoicing" (χαίροντες) that they were "deemed worthy to be dishonored for the sake of the name" (5:41). The narrative does not couch this response in the form of a prayer, but their joy appears, nonetheless, directed toward God. They had, of course, asked God to cause them to speak boldly and do all the things they had done to catch the high priest's attention (5:12-17). It must

be God who has "deemed [them] worthy" to face the unjust punishment that these leaders, who have set themselves "against the Lord and against his Messiah" (Acts 4:26; Psalm 2:2), have meted out upon them. Opposition from these leaders confirms the apostles' alliance with God, and that is just cause for their rejoicing. Once again, the apostles are undeterred from the work to which they understand themselves called. Despite having been beaten and ordered "not to speak in the name of Jesus" (Acts 5:40), the apostles do "not stop teaching and bringing good news of the Messiah—Jesus" (5:42).

Through each of these episodes, the apostles respond to the threats and violence against them without violence, or even conspiring to overthrow, replace, or infiltrate the high priest's council. They do not stage a coup or even make any plans to summon a militia. They simply refuse to back down from the work to which Jesus commissioned them and ask God for the resilience to persist doing the constructive work of bearing witness to Jesus in word and deed despite forceful opposition. The kind of life they live together both helps to sustain this resilience and witnesses against the truth of the power that opposes them.

4.3.3 The Power of Community Life

The apostolic community does not embody perfectly Jesus' way of wielding power, but despite some hiccups in its members' commitment to egalitarian solidarity, it still makes a stark contrast to the temple leaders' accommodation to Gentile power. When the apostle leave the council's presence for the first time and lift their voices to God in prayer, their quotation and reading of Psalm 2 both criticize the kind of power that the Gentile kings and rulers—and even their own people—employ, and indicate how the apostles aim to participate, instead, in God's life-giving power (Acts 4:23-31). The apostles begin to show their commitment to

operating by the power that governs God's reign along the lines that Jesus sketched during his last meal with them before his crucifixion (Luke 22:24-27). The kind of community governed by service and generosity rather than domination has no regard for status or need to hoard wealth, but instead shares its goods and exercises mutual care. And so the apostolic community does. These patterns of common life are part of what make the community's persistence possible, portray what a community looks like that attempts to live according to the power of God's reign as Jesus taught and portrayed it, and bear witness to the reality of God's reign.

4.3.3.1 "Not so among you"

On the apostles' last evening with Jesus before his crucifixion, they dispute with one another about which one of them should be accounted greater than the others (Luke 22:24). At that time, the disciples still seemed to reckon power according to the measure of conventional politics, because he tells them to reject the politics of dominating (κυριεύω) kings and benefactors (εὐεργέται) who exert their authority (ἐξουσιάζω), and embrace, instead, the politics of serving (διακονέω) one another (Luke 22:25-27).[55] At that point in the narrative, the apostles had not yet learned what Jesus was teaching them about the politics of God's reign, but after Peter and John are arrested, tried, and released, the apostles show greater comprehension of Jesus directive to practice a politics distinct from "the kings of the nations" (Luke 22:25). The apostles' prayer, after Peter and John are interrogated and released by the

[55] See S. C. Mott, "The Power of Giving and Receiving: Reciprocity in Hellenistic Benevolence," in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 60-72; D. D. Walker suggests that the objection to the "lionizing the powerful as benefactors" in this passage might arise from "recognizing the freedom of the wealthy and powerful to inflict indignities on their lesser and disavowing the wealth that status accrued" [D. D. Walker. "Benefactor," *DNTB* 158-59., esp. 158].

temple leaders, indicates their understanding that God's way of wielding power differs from the "kings of the nations," and they willingly pledge their allegiance and partnership with God in God's way of confronting such earthly rulers, just as Jesus predicted (Luke 22:25-26; Acts 4:23-31).

How the apostles address God at the start of their prayer differentiates God's power from that of earthly rulers. The apostles address God as δέσποτα, which might carry frightening connotations of tyranny if not for its context in the rest of the sentence: "who made the sky and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them" (Acts 4:24). God's right of sovereignty derives from God's having made the world, certainly, but having done so through the power of sheer creativity also makes such power superior within the world as well. Indeed, the idea that entities who wield only the power of destruction would pose any real challenge to the sovereignty of the creator God is laughable. And any attempt on the part of earthly kings and rulers to mutiny against the God who made the whole sphere of human existence is doomed to fail.

Something like this reasoning appears to form the backdrop for the apostles' quotation and interpretation of Psalm 2:1-2, words that they attribute to God, through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of David: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot vanities? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers gathered together in the same place against the Lord and against his anointed one" (Acts 4:25-26). The apostles stop short of quoting verses 3-6, which celebrate the sheer lunacy of kings and rulers thinking they could rebel effectively against God and the rightful king, but they need not because bringing these two verses into their present context evokes them and the futility of earthly rulers resisting God's rule. The

apostles cast Herod and Pilate, "with the nations and the peoples of Israel," as the nations, peoples, kings, and rulers who had gathered together "in this city against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed" (4:27). But instead of these rulers' conspiracy against Jesus resulting in his demise, God turned their violence inside out used it for God's own purpose (βουλή). Indeed, the apostles read the psalm as if the rebellious leaders and peoples gathered for the very purpose of carrying out what God had planned. From this perspective, they are consigned to co-conspiracy with that thwarted "power which ever wills evil, and ever works good,"[56] because God incorporates its deeds for a constructive purpose by life-giving means.

The principal act by which God redirected the conspiring leaders' action was, of course, Jesus' resurrection, which is the primary substance of the apostles' witness and the event by which they now shape their lives. When they pray now, they do not expect God to take vengeance on those who colluded against Jesus or who now oppose them; rather, they ask to participate in God's way of overcoming evil: they want to speak boldly of what God has done in Jesus' resurrection, and participate in God's work of healing and making signs and wonders that point to the true power embodied in Jesus (Acts 4:29-30). Their prayer demonstrates their commitment to exercising the power that Jesus commended to them when he said their community would not be governed according to the power of Gentile kings and benefactors, but by the power he demonstrated among them—the power of the Holy Spirit embodied in life-giving service (Luke 4:18; 22:25-27). In such a community, the needs of the weakest and most vulnerable are given first priority.

---

[56] "Ich bin ein Teil von jener Kraft, die stets das Böse will, und stets das Gute schafft," from Johann W. von Goethe, *Faust*, part 1, lines 1334-36; found translated as epigraph to Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, trans. Hugh Aplin (Richmond, UK: One World Classics, 2008).

4.3.3.2 "All things in common"

On both occasions where the Holy Spirit inspires bold speech, the episode ends in a description of the apostolic community's generous and non-hierarchical mutual care. At Pentecost, after the first group of people beyond the apostolic circle joins the community, Acts offers this description:

> And attending to the teaching of the apostles, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers, fear came upon every soul, [as] many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. And all the faithful were together and had all things in common, and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all as any had need. And each day, with one accord attending the temple [and] breaking bread in their homes, they received their share of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. (Acts 2:42-47)

The mutuality and egalitarian practice of the community is striking on its own; this is the kind of community that results from those who would turn away from the way of being that put Jesus to death and toward the way he lived, filled by the Holy Spirit (2:38-40). The community portrait is all the more remarkable when placed alongside alternative politics, as it is following the apostles' prayer after Peter and John's release (4:23-30). Immediately following their prayer, the place where they are gathered shakes and they are filled with the Holy Spirit, inspiring them all to "speak the word of God with boldness," echoing the events of Pentecost (4:31). Immediately afterward, Acts offers another similar description of community life:

> The whole group of those who entrusted themselves was of one heart and soul, and not one of them said that his possessions were his own; rather, to them everything was common property. And with great power the apostles were giving their witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all, because there was not anyone needy among them; for as many as owned fields or possessed houses were selling them, bringing the proceeds of the sale, and setting it at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made to each as anyone had need. (Acts 4:32-35).

This description, in particular, connects the power of Jesus' resurrection with a community life of justice, where no one ends up with more or less than each needs. When Jesus spoke on the plain about the blessedness of the poor and the woe of the rich, he commended a community that operated not on reciprocation, but on grace (Luke 6:32-34). The key to such gracious community was giving without expecting return (6:30-31, 35), and its pattern plays out in the apostolic community here. The apostles, here, appear to be fulfilling the role Jesus described as "one who serves," ὁ διακονῶν, (Luke 22:27). The apostles serve as conduits of the community's benevolent distribution. This is a community governed by the power that animates God's reign, rather than running on domination, reciprocation, or violence. Such a community bears witness to the reality of God's reign and its emblematic event—Jesus' resurrection.

4.3.4 Political conclusions

The principal work of the apostolic community is to embody the alternative politics of God's reign, of which Jesus' resurrection is the sign and inaugural event. Given that the apostles begin this embodied and preached witness in Jerusalem, where Jesus was executed and his executioners still hold governing authority, conflict seems inevitable. The apostolic witness generates conflict because some of those who exercise authority in Jerusalem, whether or not they admit it, have given their allegiance to an entity other than God, and that entity uses coercion, force, manipulation, status, and sometimes violence to enforce political authority. When the apostles claim that they must obey God rather than human beings (Acts 5:29), they both cast their own way of being as evidence of their alignment with God, and subtly indict the temple leaders for prioritizing their allegiance to Rome over their obedience

to God. The apostles' proclamation of Jesus' resurrection and lived response to it present God's alternative to the form of power to which Jerusalem's authorities declared their allegiance when they executed Jesus.

The apostolic witness is political precisely because it calls God's people to resist the patterns of power that earthly kings wield, and conform, instead, to the generous and resilient power exhibited first in Jesus' life and now in the apostolic community. The growth of the apostolic community placed alongside the Sanhedrin's inability to prevent Jesus' resurrection from happening or the news of it from spreading, or ultimately to do anything to the apostles, shows the weakness of the kind of power the Sanhedrin wields as well as the true strength of God's power as represented in the apostles. In the world where resurrection is real and faithfully proclaimed and embodied, it has a real power to make a flourishing political order—one that cannot be created by attempts to suppress the truth, ignoring real evidence, or jailing and beating truth-tellers. Violence is not too strong a tool, but too weak. It can only destroy; it cannot construct.

The point of witness to Jesus' resurrection is to foster a political order where all, especially the formerly marginalized, can flourish. Therefore, it opposes and resists those who strive to exert social control by means of status, wealth, or force. The apostles' message exposes the viciousness of the authorities who remain committed to the convictions and exercise of power that resulted in Jesus' death. The reality of Jesus' resurrection means that the reign of God will be realized. So the apostles' proclamation of and embodied commitment to Jesus' resurrection bear witness to the promise and reality of God's reign.

4.4 Conclusion

The importance of the source and substance of the apostles' witness in the work and character of God cannot be overstated. The character of God as revealed in Jesus is the basis for the apostles' commitment to patterns of communication and an exercise of power that marries form to content and persistently foregoes and resists violence. Moreover, the narrative order provides ample evidence that the apostles do not undertake their work on their own initiative well before any character in the narrative questions "by what power or by what authority" (Acts 4:7) they do such things as bear witness to the power of Jesus. Confirming through the apostles' obedient waiting in Jerusalem, embrace of God's plan, participation in scripture's fulfillment, response to the Holy Spirit, and claims asserting their alliance with God that they truly have a divine mandate to communicate Jesus' significance to the world places the reader of Acts in the same place as the apostles' audiences who must question, now, what their actions signify about their allegiance either to God or to some other power. The apostles aim to emulate Jesus' gentle and bold way of communicating, whether their audiences resist or embrace the message wholeheartedly. The apostles aim to unify the message they preached with a communal embodiment of the power that Jesus portrayed in his life and that raised him from death. The apostles' early witness, with Peter at is center, shows the plan of God in action in a community that aims to proclaim and bring the good news of God's reign as embodied and inaugurated in Jesus' resurrection. With Stephen, who is the other main character of the apostles' Jerusalem ministry, the narrative showcases an individual seeking to proclaim and embody faithful witness to Jesus. Stephen's witness provides the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Witness Stephen

Before the book of Acts ends its most illustrious figure acclaims the man introduced in chapter 6 as "Stephen" as a paradigmatic "witness" of Jesus (Acts 22:20). When he first appears, however, his qualifications for this title are by no means assured. There is no reason to suppose that Stephen ever encountered Jesus on earth either during his earthly ministry or after his resurrection. Stephen is never mentioned before Acts 6:5, but even before his name appears his reputation precedes him, as does the idea that he could bear witness to Jesus. He is chosen among the "seven men from among you who are well-witnessed-to (μαρτυρουμένους), full of the Spirit and wisdom," (Acts 6:3) whom the apostolic community appoints "to serve tables [διακονεῖν τραπέζαις]" (6:2). Stephen is listed first among the seven, called, "full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (6:5), and becomes the center of the story that unfolds for the next sixty-nine verses. The account of Stephen shows that a witness to Jesus need not have been with him during his earthly life and, indeed, may include those who are simply "full of faith and the Holy Spirit" as Stephen's speech and actions demonstrate (Acts 6:3-8:1). Indeed, Stephen becomes an exemplar of faithful witness to Jesus; like the apostles before him, he speaks an inspired message from and about God's work in Jesus, emulating Jesus' own patterns of communication and use of power and, thereby, exposing the impotence of violent opposition in contrast to the resilient power of God.

The argument of this chapter, like the previous two, offers a view on the "witness" of its central figure through the successive lenses of theology, epistemology, and politics—that is, from the divine source and substance of witness to Jesus, to its holistic mode of communication, and then to its lived embodiment and use of power especially in contrast to

powers that trade in violence or coercion. Acts shows the divine source of Stephen's witness even before he is personally named; his connection to the Holy Spirit is mentioned three times before he speaks a word of dialogue (Acts 6:3, 5, 10). His "grace" and "power," and performing of "wonders and signs" (6:8), which have previously legitimized the apostles (4:30, 33; 5:12), likewise show his authorization to speak on God's behalf. Moreover, Stephen does eventually get a look straight into the heavenly dwelling of God, where he sees Jesus risen and exalted at God's right. He immediately bears witness of this glorious vision (7:55-56), which, at the climactic moment of his speech, unites the divine source with the substance of his message. Stephen's speech begins, is sustained, and ends with God as its primary agent and subject. He presents a story about what God has done throughout all of Israel's history—through Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and the story of the temple—and into the present, culminating in the betrayed and slaughtered Innocent revealed as the exalted Human Being (7:52, 55-56). Turning to epistemology—how Stephen communicates as a witness—Stephen tells the story of God's power climactically revealed in Jesus' death and exaltation, and he does so with multivalent reflection of Jesus, namely, 1) recapitulating specific events and description of Jesus, 2) telling the scriptural story of Israel as imaging Jesus in the person of Moses and culminating in his death and exaltation, and 3) living a life that imitates Jesus–especially in his use of power—even to the point of death. Here the argument turns to the politics of Stephen's witness, which is especially revealed in the contrast between his way of wielding power and his accusers'. Stephen's accusers use secrecy, false witnesses, specious accusations, and bring him before the council that has already shown its allegiance to Rome's violent use of power by its role in Jesus' death (6:9, 11-14, 7:1). Ultimately, they kill him (7:60). By contrast, Stephen is a person of integrity, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and he speaks truth so powerfully

that his accusers cannot prevail against him without resorting to deceit and violence (6:3, 5, 10). Ultimately, he remains faithful to Jesus, even praying for his executioners' pardon while he dies (7:60). The contrast between Stephen and his accusers shows the persistent, truthful power of God vis-à-vis the impotence of lies and violence, despite Stephen's death. His death, far from stopping the news of Jesus from spreading, moves it beyond Judea for the first time (8:4) and makes a lasting impression on one Saul, who eventually carries the message "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8; 28:14-31).

5.1 Theology: "Spirit and Wisdom"

Because Stephen appears for the first time in Acts 6:5, it seems safe to assume that Luke does not mean to portray him as one of Jesus' followers during his earthly ministry. Lacking experience of Jesus' earthly life would seem to disqualify Stephen as a witness to Jesus and his resurrection, since according to the precedent of the apostles, a "witness to his resurrection" should have been with Jesus from his baptism to his ascension (Acts 1:22). But the whole episode about Stephen presents him as a legitimate witness of Jesus by showing that, like the apostles, the Holy Spirit has empowered him to speak boldly about God's work among God's people culminating with Jesus (7:2-53, 56; cf. 4:31). And as he concludes his speech, Stephen looks into heaven, sees the risen and exalted Jesus, and immediately bears witness of him (7:55-56). While the apostles, who were with Jesus throughout his life and who spent forty days with him after his resurrection, have a unique ability to recount the "sure signs" by which Jesus revealed himself to be truly alive (1:3), Stephen demonstrates that a

witness to Jesus need not have known him in his earthly life.[1] Like the twelve apostles who, together with the "whole company of disciples," appoint Stephen to the ministry of distribution (6:3-6),[2] Stephen is made a witness by God's initiative and the Holy Spirit's empowerment, and bears witness of God's work throughout Israel's story and its climax in Jesus. As with the twelve, the source and substance of Stephen's witness are both the God revealed in Jesus.

5.1.1 Source: Spirit, Wisdom, and a Look into Heaven

The stipulation that Stephen is "full of the Spirit and wisdom" precedes his introduction by name. Indeed, the narrative provides almost no conclusive information about Stephen personally; his origin, social status, family, how he came to be "full of faith" (6:5), and what sort of deeds led to his "good repute" (μαρτυρουμένους) within the apostolic community (6:3) all are left unspecified.[3] None of these characteristics is the decisive qualification for the role the twelve seek to fill when Stephen's story begins. But that he is full of the Holy Spirit (6:3, 5) matters a great deal. The original qualifications were a good reputation and being "full

[1] See Nellessen, *Zeugnis für Jesus und das Wort*, 107.

[2] Barrett makes the point that the apostles alone do not appoint Stephen (*Acts*, 1:315); indeed, they ask others to choose the ministers and then approve them afterward (Acts 6:3).

[3] Although it seems likely that Stephen is a "Hellenist" (Acts 6:1) and that a Hellenist is a Greek speaking Jew, neither can be established conclusively. Acts never specifies that the men dedicated to distributing community resources are Hellenists, and "Hellenist" appears infrequently enough in the NT and ancient Greek texts to remain ambiguous (Barrett, *Acts* 307-10; 312-13). Gaventa argues that "the 'Hellenists' are almost certainly Jewish Christians speaking Greek, and the 'Hebrews' then would be Jewish Christians speaking Aramaic" (Gaventa, *Acts*, 112). See also Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 347-48. Fitzmyer suggests that Stephen, in particular is "probably a converted Hellenist, originally a Jewish settler in Jerusalem coming from somewhere in the diaspora" (350). Such an origin might give him some access to the perspective of his eventual opponents, but Acts provides insufficient information to render this judgment conclusive. Perhaps Stephen was a Greek speaking follower of Jesus who had come from somewhere in the diaspora to settle in Jerusalem, but even if Acts established this much it still remains silent about the details of his life before he is selected as a minister.

of the Spirit and wisdom" (6:3), and Stephen is described as "full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (6:5) when he is appointed. As is well established early in Luke's Gospel and reiterated in Acts multiple times, this Spirit is the Spirit of God, who empowers apostolic witnesses (Acts 1:4, 8; 2:16-17; 4:8, 31) and serves as a sign of their obedience to God (Acts 5:32). The Spirit's presence with Stephen is his essential qualification. At the end of his one long speech, he is given another: he is allowed to gaze into heaven and to see "the glory of God and Jesus standing to God's right" (7:55). Stephen generates neither the Spirit's presence with him nor this vision of the exalted Jesus; both originate with God and supply the reality and agency that make Stephen's witness possible.

5.1.1.1 Spirit and wisdom

The construction of the narrative around Stephen makes plain that without the prior action of the Holy Spirit, Stephen would never have been appointed to a position of ministry within the community. Stephen emerges as a significant figure in the apostolic community in Jerusalem primarily because he is filled with the Holy Spirit, which the whole community of disciples, including the twelve, recognizes (Acts 6:2-5). The descriptors of Stephen between the apostles' original outlining of the qualifications for the ministers of distribution (6:3) and his trial before the council (6:12) emphasize his connection to the Holy Spirit. He is "full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (6:5). Afterward he is called, "full of grace and power," does "great wonders and signs among the people" (6:8), and has such "wisdom and Spirit" that his opponents cannot refute him (6:10). Indeed, while being appointed to the service of distribution seems nearly irrelevant to anything he does afterward (since Acts includes no description of him actually "serving tables" [6:2]), the Holy Spirit moves Stephen to the public

action and words that first draw opposition (6:8-10), and ultimately to his last declaration before his accusers drag him out of the city to stone him (7:55-58). From the moment the apostles begin specifying the qualifications of distribution ministers to Stephen's final words before the council, the Holy Spirit's empowerment of Stephen is indisputable (6:3-7:56). The Holy Spirit's presence with Stephen signals his legitimacy as someone who obeys God (5:32) and confirms the truth of his words. Perhaps even more importantly, the Holy Spirit fills him when, at the end of his speech, he gazes into heaven to see Jesus at God's right hand (7:55).

5.1.1.2 Witness to "The Human One"

Uniquely among those filled with the Holy Spirit thus far in Acts, Stephen has a vision of the risen and exalted Jesus (Acts 7:55). Immediately upon receiving this vision, Stephen bears verbal witness of it, saying, "Look! I see the heavens being opened and the Human One [τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου] standing at God's right" (7:56). When filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen sees the risen Jesus with God and immediately describes the scene to his audience. Although this particular experience of the Holy Spirit is unique in Acts, it corresponds to Jesus' last promise to his apostles that they would receive power at the Holy Spirit's coming that would enable them as his witnesses (Acts 1:8). The vision Stephen has as he is filled with the Holy Spirit empowers him exactly so. Although Stephen likely did not see Jesus during his ministry in Galilee and Judea, when filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen sees Jesus, recognizes him as the exalted "Human One," and at once bears witness of him. Stephen's inspired vision of the risen Jesus confirms the divine source of his witness and, thus, legitimizes it. Stephen bears witness because of the Holy Spirit's prior action and a vision given to him of God's glory

and the risen Jesus. And of course, God's action throughout Israel's history culminating with Jesus is the principal subject matter of Stephen's witness.

5.1.2 Substance: The God of Glory

Stephen responds to his accusers (Acts 6:13-14) by telling a story about God's activity among God's people. When the high priest asks him whether his accusers are right about him (7:1), Stephen addresses his audience: "Men, brothers and fathers: listen" (7:2). The first words of the speech proper reveal the subject matter of the story Stephen tells: "The God of glory" (7:2).[4] Stephen starts with the principal subject matter of the story he tells, and throughout his speech reiterates God's agency in moving the story along. "The God of glory" begins the story by appearing to "our ancestor, Abraham," and calling him to leave his country and family, so that Abraham first settled in Haran (7:2-4). Eventually God moved Abraham to "this land where you are now living" (7:4). Stephen continues telling what happened with Abraham by speaking of God: God did not give him the land that his descendants were to inherit, but God spoke to Abraham of his descendants' future enslavement and God's promised rescue (7:5-7). God likewise made with Abraham "the covenant of circumcision" and established Abraham's family line (7:8).

God remains the agent of the story Stephen tells when he shifts to speak of Joseph: his brothers sold him as a slave into Egypt, but "God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles" (7:9). God granted to Joseph "grace and wisdom" in Pharaoh's sight, so that Pharaoh made Joseph deputy governor in all things (7:10). The next phase of the story, about

[4] See Thompson, *Acts*: "Stephen begins with Abraham. But the true subject of his remarks is the God of glory, a rare expression found only in Ps 29:3 (anticipating his vision of "the glory of God" in Acts 7:55" (156-57). See similarly Gaventa, *Acts*, 131.

the Exodus, Stephen tells as "the time of the promise that God declared to Abraham approached" (7:17), again describing God as the story's principal agent. In the context of the new Pharaoh's rise, Moses is born, and counted "pleasing to God" (7:20). When Moses grows up and visits his people, defending one of them by killing his Egyptian oppressor, Moses expects that the Israelites would see "that God, through [Moses'] hand, was giving salvation to them, but they did not understand" (7:25). Here, again, Stephen attributes primary agency to God; God acts through the hand of Moses. The pattern recurs when God appears to Moses in the burning bush and recalls him from his self-imposed exile, sending him to Egypt as his people's "ruler and liberator" (7:30-35). Stephen recounts Moses reiterating God's agency in declaring to Israel that just as God raised him us as a prophet for them, God would raise up Moses' successor (7:37). When the people rejected Moses and God, God gave them over to their idolatry and promised to send the people into exile "beyond Babylon" (7:72-43). At every turn of the story with Moses, Stephen speaks of God as the principal agent—the story is more about how God deals with God's people than about any human character.

That pattern continues when Stephen makes the transition to speak of the temple. The temple's origin was with the "tent of witness," built according to God's specifications (7:44). When God drove out the nations from the land promised to Israel, the people brought the tent of witness with them into the new land where it remained until God allowed Solomon to build the temple (7:45-47). Stephen declares, "it was Solomon who built a house for [God], yet the Most High does not dwell in houses of human making" (7:47-48). Stephen paints God unrestricted by domestic boundaries set by human beings. The story Stephen has been telling all along climaxes in this point: human beings do not control God's agenda; rather, human beings are expected to attend to God's shaping of history and adjust accordingly. In Stephen's

telling, God's people are expected to follow the Holy Spirit's lead, but they continually resist, and this time, they have betrayed and murdered God's innocent and just representative in the process (7:51-52). The story about God's action that Stephen tells culminates in his heavenly vision and immediate witness to it (7:55-56); Stephen's speech begins with "the God of glory" (7:2) and ends with his vision of "the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right" (7:55).[5] Although Stephen never uses Jesus' name, the story he tells of God's work culminates with Jesus as the exalted "Human One standing at God's right" (7:56). The substance of Stephen's witness is "the God of glory" (7:2), revealed in saving works throughout Israel's history and particularly in Jesus' resurrection (7:55-56).

5.1.3 Theology conclusion

Like the apostles before him, Stephen's witness begins with God. The Holy Spirit fills and empowers Stephen so that, before he speaks a word, his status as a witness to God's action is credibly established (6:5-8). His witness to the risen Jesus is further legitimized by his unique heavenly vision of the risen and exalted Jesus (7:55). From the beginning of his speech to the end, the substance of his witness is God's saving action on behalf of God's people (7:2-56). That God is both the source and substance of Stephen's witness reinforces the narrative's perspective that the witnesses to Jesus do not summon themselves or generate the message they proclaim, but that it is grounded in reality and serves God's plans—it does not arise from some merely human construct or agenda. As with Jesus and the apostles, the source and

[5] Thompson, *Acts*, 166; Gaventa, *Acts*, 131.

substance of the message likewise shape how Stephen communicates it. As both Jesus and the apostles modeled, the form suits the content.

5.2 Epistemology: "Like an Angel"

Just as Jesus' own teaching bore out in his life of healing, generosity, and non-retaliation, and the apostles' preaching is accompanied by healings and a community of generous mutual dependence, so too does Stephen's life reflect the one to whom he principally bears witness. Indeed, Stephen need not mention Jesus' name in order for the description of him to evoke an image Jesus. Starting with how Stephen is introduced all the way to the moment of his death, the narrative's details about him include striking verbal connections to key moments in Jesus' life. Stephen's declarations at his death resemble those of Jesus in reverse order, presenting Stephen as a mirror image of Jesus at his death. As Peter does on multiple occasions of bearing public witness, Stephen makes a speech—the longest one in Acts—wherein he recounts from the scriptural story God's actions that culminate in Jesus, the prophet like Moses sent to bring salvation to his people (7:25, 34, 37). This way of telling Jesus' story proves so subtle that his audience appears not to realize what Stephen has done until the end, when he paints their betrayal and murder of Jesus as their version of betraying Moses and the obvious most recent step in Israel's history of rejecting God's chosen leaders (7:51-53), and then proclaims Jesus' exalted status (7:56). Stephen underpins his words about God's action definitively revealed in Jesus by living the kind of life that Jesus' teaching commended, which the apostolic community recognizes (6:5). Stephen commends the message of Jesus holistically—with his words and his whole life—and with such power that those who oppose him cannot resist except by killing him. Given the pattern's congruence

with Jesus' life, Stephen quickly is proven an ideal witness of Jesus, who follows Jesus not only in the content of the message but also in how he conveys it.

5.2.1 Inspired Recapitulation

Acts emphasizes traits, experiences, and behaviors of Stephen's that mimic Jesus at key moments of his life. Stephen "looks like Jesus,"[6] and because Stephen's story is comparatively brief and told all at once in just over a chapter, the marks of his resemblance to Jesus are easily spotted. Even before Stephen is named, the twelve specify that the men selected as ministers of the distribution should have a good reputation within the community (Acts 6:3), which echoes how Luke describes Jesus on the occasion of his first public speech. The ministers of the distribution are to be "well-witnessed-to [μαρτυρουμένους]" (Acts 6:3); everyone in Nazareth "spoke well [ἐμαρτύρουν]" of Jesus (Luke 4:22). This particular connection to Jesus hints at Stephen's trajectory toward martyrdom even before he is mentioned by name; the Nazareth crowd speaks well of Jesus just six verses before getting angry enough to attempt killing him (Luke 4:28-29).[7] Similarly, Stephen faces arrest within nine verses of being "well-spoken-of," and only seven verses after he is first mentioned by name (Acts 6:5, 12).

The apostles' second requirement for the distribution ministers, that they be "full [πλήρεις] of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3), and the first description of Stephen by name,

---

[6] Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 153.

[7] Holladay cites another connection to a point closer to the end of Stephen's story: "Removing Stephen from the city [Acts 7:58] recalls Nazareth's earlier response to Jesus (Luke 4:29; cf. Acts 13:50; 16:37)" (Holladay, *Acts*, 176).

"a man full of … the Holy Spirit" (6:5), also find precedent in Luke's description of Jesus as "filled [πληρούμενον] with wisdom" (Luke 2:40) and "full [πλήρης] of the Holy Spirit" (4:1) even before his ministry begins. Similarly, before the apostles confirm Stephen and his colleagues to their ministry, they call the office "serving tables [διακονεῖν τραπέζαις]" (Acts 6:2), which recalls Jesus' own description, near the end of his life, of his ministry among his disciples; he is among them not as "one who reclines at table" but "as one who serves" (ὡς ὁ διακονῶν; Luke 22:27). These key descriptors, ascribed to Stephen before he even does or says anything publicly, prime the reader to find resemblances between the character and ministry of Jesus and Stephen.

Although Stephen has been elected to help oversee the equal distribution among the Hellenist and Hebrew widows, the narrative never shows him fulfilling that specific office. Rather, as his public ministry begins he appears to mirror Jesus more broadly. Stephen is "full of grace [χάρις] and power [δύναμις]," and does "great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8), recalling Luke's portrait of Jesus having "the grace [χάρις] of God" upon him (Luke 2:40), growing "in wisdom and grace [χάρις]" (2:52), and that he speaks "gracious words [τοῖς λόγοις τῆς χάριτος]" that cause his audience to marvel (4:22). Additionally, just before Jesus' longest discourse, Luke paints a scene where a crowd gathers around him, trying to touch him, "because power [δύναμις] was going out of him and healing everyone" (Luke 6:19). In Acts thus far, "signs and wonders" appear as a circumlocution or synecdoche for a variety of works of power, principally healing and exorcism (e.g., Acts 4:30; 5:12-16), which is precisely what Jesus was doing before his speech on the plain (Luke 6:17-19). These ways of introducing

Stephen establish, as Wall and Robinson write, his "spiritual authority," especially the "catch phrase 'signs and wonders' (Acts 2:17-22, 43; 4:16, 30; 5:12)" which "recalls Joel's prophecy of the last days and enables the reader to more clearly discern Stephen's identity as a prophet-like-Jesus."[8] That Stephen does "wonders and signs" shows that he uses power as Jesus does, and categorizes him with the apostolic witnesses of Jesus—all before he speaks a word.

Stephen, like Jesus and the apostles, follows up his "signs and wonders" with spoken words—speech so powerful that those who have arisen "from the Freedmen's Synagogue" to dispute with him cannot "stand against [ἀντιστῆναι] the wisdom [σοφίᾳ] and Spirit with which he was speaking" (Acts 6:10). Confounding the opposition with mere words is also Jesus' signature move in several conversations with various leaders, particularly during his ministry in Jerusalem in the final days of his life—likewise the current situation of Stephen. Jesus disputes with chief priests, scribes, elders (Luke 20:1), and they are silenced in wonder at his answer (20:26). The Sadducees ask him a question in bad faith (20:27-32), but he answers it so well that even the scribes acknowledge it (20:39), and they do not dare to ask him anything else (20:40). Moreover, while Jesus is in Jerusalem, he predicts that what Stephen experiences among the authorities will happen to many who follow him, not least because, when he says these words, Jesus is about to go through something similar. He will stand trial before the council of temple leaders, Pilate, and Herod (Luke 22:66-23:25) shortly after he says these words:

> [T]hey will arrest you and give you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for the sake of my name; it will result in your bearing witness [μαρτύριον]. Set your hearts,

[8] Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall, *Called to be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006) 95.

> therefore, not to prepare in advance to answer, for I will give to you a mouth and wisdom [σοφίαν] that none who oppose you will be able to stand against [ἀντιστῆναι] or contradict. (Luke 21:12-15)

That the opposition to Stephen arises from a synagogue (or several synagogues),[9] and that none is able to stand against him because of the wisdom and Spirit with which he speaks, both make specific verbal connections between Jesus' prediction and reflect Stephen's imaging of what happened to Jesus himself.

The reflection sharpens as Stephen's arrest approaches. As with Jesus, the opposition sends clandestine agents in an attempt to use his words against him (Luke 20:20; Acts 6:11). With Jesus, the chief priests, scribes, elders, and other leaders foment an ongoing conspiracy seeking his death, which is unsuccessful until Judas's betrayal because the people [ὁ λαός] esteem Jesus so highly (Luke 19:47-48; 20:19, 26; 22:2-6). With Stephen, the opposition stirs up "the people [τόν λαόν] as well as elders and scribes," thus expediting the process of Stephen's arrest, which occurs even more suddenly and violently (ἐπιστάντες συνήρπασαν αὐτὸν; Acts 6:12) than Jesus' own (Luke 22:47-54). Jesus is "led away [ἤγαγον]" and taken first to the house of the high priest (Luke 22:54) before being brought before "the council" (τό συνέδριον) the next day (22:66); Stephen is "led away [ἤγαγον]" to "the council [τό συνέδριον]" (Acts 6:12), where the high priest asks him the one question that prompts his fifty-two-verse speech (Acts 7:1). Jesus, of course, says very little at his own trial, but like Stephen, his own words suffice to condemn him (Luke 22:71; Acts 7:54, 57-58). Indeed, Stephen's words that precipitate his stoning reflect his vision of the destiny Jesus predicted for himself before this

[9] See 5.3.1 for a more detailed investigation of Stephen's accusers' identity.

very council. Jesus said, "from now on the Human One will be sitting at the right of the power of God" (Luke 22:69); Stephen sees "the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right" (7:55), but in an echo of Jesus' words, he describes his vision as "the Human One standing at God's right" (Acts 7:56). As Robinson and Wall suggest, "The inference to be drawn from Luke's literary interplay is that Stephen is a prophet-like-Jesus whose vocation is to bring the Word of God to Israel, but whose destiny is rejection and death."[10]

How Stephen dies epitomizes his recapitulation of key moments in Jesus' life—enough similarity to identify a specific connection, but not exact imitation. Stephen dies by stoning rather than crucifixion, and his final words and exclamations mirror those of Jesus in the opposite order. As he is being stoned, Stephen begins where Jesus ended; where Jesus says, "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit" (Luke 23:46), Stephen prays, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). The middle term for both Jesus and Stephen is calling or crying out "in a loud voice" (φωνῇ μεγάλῃ; (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:60) leading both into their final words. Stephen ends with words recalling those of Jesus when he is crucified. As Stephen dies, he speaks of those stoning him and prays, "Lord, do not count this sin against them" (Acts 7:60), echoing Jesus' first words from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they have not known what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).[11] Where these petitions lack an exact verbal connection, the similarity in form and substance is clear. Finally, as Brittany Wilson helpfully observes,

---

[10] Robinson and Wall, *Called to be Church*, 97.

[11] Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) 154; Eubank, "A Disconcerting Prayer," esp. 524-26. As Eubank also observes, the fact of Stephen's words echoing these of Jesus argues for the early inclusion of these words from Jesus (526). See also Holladay, *Acts*: "Stephen's response to the crowd's action emulates that of Jesus at the crucifixion (Luke 23:46, echoing the words of Ps 31:5). His willingness to forgive conforms to Jesus' own teaching and practice (Luke 6:37; 23:34)" (176).

"Luke specifically notes that there are 'witnesses [μάρτυρες]' present at Stephen's death (7:58), reminding us of those who witnessed Jesus' death (Luke 23:35, 48-49)."[12]

Acts presents Stephen not as an exact copy of Jesus but his story connects to Jesus' at the most significant points in both. Stephen is not a mere repetition of Jesus, but his life follows Jesus' trajectory; he evokes hallmarks of Jesus' identity while remaining his own unique self. Being a witness of Jesus does not require Stephen to jettison his personality; neither does it prohibit him from diverging at all from the pattern of Jesus' life. And most of his resemblance to Jesus as presented in the narrative does not derive from his words, but from his character and activities. His words, however, also play an essential role in how he communicates the reality to which he bears witness—the work of God throughout Israel's story culminating in Jesus.

5.2.2 Words

Stephen's recapitulative imaging of Jesus' life has much to do with specific words that Acts' author uses to tell his story. Without the particular words that make the verbal connections between the stories of Stephen and Jesus the casual observer might not notice the similarity. The words do not generate the connection, but they reveal it by calling attention to the key points of likeness. Such is the task of verbal witness, which Murray Rae helpfully describes: "Witnesses clear the scene for us of details that they don't count as significant. …the representation of *everything* seen and heard is neither possible nor helpful. …The skilled witness … directs our gaze to the details of genuine significance, thus enabling us to see. Such guidance

[12] Brittany E. Wilson, "Hearing the Word and Seeing the Light: Voice and Vision in Acts," *JSNT* 38 (2016): 456-81 (465).

is also required if we are to see the truth of Jesus Christ."[13] The written witness of Luke and Acts help to reveal the lived witness of Stephen. Similarly, Jesus' own words in Luke draw attention to the way his life bears witness to God's reign. Peter, for example, speaks to interpret the significance of the signs and wonders he and the other apostles do in Jesus' name and of what God did through Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection. Beyond imaging Jesus in the ways that Acts portrays, Stephen joins in the work of verbal witness by contributing the longest speech in Acts, in which he retells Israel's story as God's saving work that prefigures Jesus as the God-appointed ruler and liberator and culminates in his death and exaltation (Acts 7:2-56).[14] That Stephen's audience can see, even before he begins, that he has "the face of an angel" (6:15) suggests that they very much ought to listen. In response to the accusation that he constantly says things against the temple and the law (Acts 6:13) and has claimed, "Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place and change the customs that were given over to us by Moses" (Acts 6:14), Stephen speaks, according to Rae's description, as a witness. Contra Dibelius, Haenchen, and others,[15] Stephen does not give a bare account of Israel's history. Rather, as Emily Dickinson suggests one should, he tells the truth "slant."[16] Stephen retells

---

[13] Rae, *History and Hermeneutics*, 100.

[14] Questions and theories about the origin of Stephen's speech have been well rehearsed, but whether Stephen's speech is "merely a rhetorical device created *in toto* by Luke himself" (Brian K. Peterson, "Stephen's Speech as a Modified Prophetic Rîb Formula," *JETS* 57 (2014): 351-69 [352]), or is a verbatim report of the historical Stephen's words makes no difference to the present argument. For a thorough accounting of arguments both for Luke's having composed the speech and for its authenticity, see Peterson, "Stephen's Speech," 352 notes 5 and 7.

[15] Martin Dibelius, "The Speeches in Acts and Ancient Historiography," in *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: SCM, 1956), 167; Haenchen, *Acts*, 288-89.

[16] Emily Dickinson, "Tell All the Truth but Tell it Slant," in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition* ed. R. W. Franklin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 494.

Israel's story focused on the people's enslavement in Egypt in order to highlight Moses as God's chosen liberator whom the people reject and, thus, descend into idolatry in spite of both law and temple. This may look, initially, like a simple "account of the history of Israel,"[17] but when he provides his audience the hermeneutical key at the end, it is clear that he tells this history as a prefiguring and reproof of his audience's recent violent rejection of Jesus, as well as a rebuttal and reversal of the accusations they bring against him.[18] By telling the story of Jesus as the story of Israel, Stephen catches his audience unawares; they let him make a well-developed argument wherein he both bears witness to Jesus and responds to the charges against him. Focusing on Moses and not revealing the hermeneutical key until the end allow Stephen to make an uninterrupted speech about Jesus, who was God's chosen agent of the people's liberation, but whom they—in their idolatry and lawbreaking—rejected and killed.[19]

5.2.2.1 Like Moses

---

[17] Dibelius, "Speeches in Acts," 167.

[18] On whether Stephen's speech is meant to address the accusations against him, see Peterson, "Stephen's Speech," 353 n. 8, citing Craig C. Hill, *Hellenists and Hebrews: Reappraising Division within the Earliest Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 53-92; Todd Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins: Stephen and the Hellenists in Lukan Apologetic Historiography*, Emory Studies in Early Christianity (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 90-93, 96-97, 99, 324-25; and James D. G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2006), 86-93. Peterson argues that Stephen's speech is a modified *rîb* formula (prophetic rebuke a la Micah 6) to the exclusion of it being a defense against the accusations he faces, but there is no reason to think that the same speech—especially a narrative—cannot have multiple functions at once.

[19] Cf. Joshua D. Garroway, "'Apostolic Irresistibility' and the Interrupted Speeches in Acts," *CBQ* 74 (2012): 738-52. Garroway argues that Stephen is "interrupted right after the crucial point has been made: Stephen is stopped when he turns his accusations of disobedience, murder, and lawbreaking against his Jewish audience" (739-40). The gnashing of the audience's teeth might count as an interruption (Acts 7:54), but Stephen has gone on uninterrupted for fifty-two verses before that happens. It is, perhaps, telling that Stephen does not get interrupted until his audience understand that he is accusing them of Jesus' unjust execution, among other sins; perhaps the placement of the interruption helps to prove the point above, namely, that Stephen needed to present his argument in covert terms in order to speak uninterrupted. As soon as his audience understands his climatic point, they cease any evidence of receptivity and begin efforts to silence him.

Stephen's witness to Jesus through the story of Moses must begin with how the people of God came to be enslaved in the first place. So he tells how God called Abraham as the ancestor of a people who would suffer enslavement in a foreign nation, but that God promised to judge that nation and bring the people out into their own land to worship God (Acts 7:2-7). Stephen also recounts how God gave to Abraham "the covenant of circumcision" (7:8), which remains the physical mark distinguishing God's people from foreign nations.[20] Stephen then goes on to tell how the people came to be enslaved in Egypt. First, Joseph's brothers sold him into Egypt (7:9), and later, when there was insufficient food in their homeland, Jacob and his sons moved to Egypt to live under Joseph's deputy rule and care (7:10-15). Just a few verses later, Stephen recounts how as the time of God's promise to Abraham approaches, the people are oppressed under a new king of Egypt (7:17-19). The people need a liberator, and so, at this time, Moses is born (7:20).

Stephen unveils Jesus to his accusers by telling the story of Moses, at whose divinely given direction the people of Israel built the precursor to the temple (7:17-44). His accusers' charges, after all, imply that they esteem Moses and the temple very highly (6:11, 13-14). Stephen tells Moses' story to show that if his opponents revere Moses and the temple so fervently, they should, all the more, recognize and honor Jesus. In Stephen's account, Jesus is greater than both Moses and the temple (7:48-56). But the people in front of him have treated Jesus even worse than their ancestors did Moses and all the prophets after him (7:52-53). As Stephen begins telling Moses' story, however, his audience likely hears nothing amiss; Stephen

[20] See Fitzmyer, *Acts*: "Though Stephen's speech will become quite critical of the Jerusalem Temple, it implicitly admits the validity of the law and its prescription of circumcision" (372).

never mentions Jesus name. Even so, at the end, he makes plain that his words about Moses are also, on another level, about Jesus. But those who look for Jesus in the story Stephen tells of Moses may see the signs from the beginning of Stephen's account.

Stephen begins Moses' story by noting that the time of God's promise to Abraham, of which Stephen has already spoken, finally drew near (Acts 7:6-7, 17). Luke invokes this promise, namely, for rescue from enslavement and deliverance into the people's own land so that they could worship God, in Zachariah's prophecy at John's birth (Luke 1:68-79). In Zachariah's words, the time when God would fulfill the promise to Abraham approaches anew with the coming birth of Jesus (Luke 1:68-75). At this moment, just before Jesus' birth, God has "visited [ἐπεσκέψατο]" God's people (Luke 1:68) in order to fulfill a series of promises: God would save the people "from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us" and "treat our ancestors with mercy"; God would remember God's "holy covenant—the oath God swore to Abraham, our ancestor," which was that "after being rescued from the hand of our enemies" the people might worship God without fear (Luke 1:71-74). Stephen cites this promise as God's central speech in Acts 7:7, and recalls it ten verses later: the time approached for God to make good on this promise to Abraham (7:17), and shortly afterward, Moses was born (7:20). Moses and Jesus, therefore, are born at the same time with the same purpose—to be the agent by which God fulfills the promise to Abraham.

Stephen continues to portray Moses in a way that resembles Jesus. Both children are specially acknowledged as remarkable at their birth. While Jesus is hailed by angels as "a savior who is the Messiah, the Lord" on the night he is born (Luke 2:11), Stephen maintains that when Moses was born, he was accounted "beautiful" or "well-pleasing" to God (ἀστεῖος τῷ

θεῷ; Acts 7:20). Jesus grows "in wisdom and grace" (Luke 2:52), and Moses grows up and is "instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22). Stephen calls Moses "powerful in his words and deeds" as a heading before describing anything Moses actually does (Acts 7:22), similar to how the disciples on the way to Emmaus called Jesus "a prophet powerful in word and deed" as a summary of his life (Luke 24:49). The connections between Stephen's portrait of Moses and Luke's presentation of Jesus strengthen once Stephen begins telling how Moses becomes God's agent of Israel's liberation and, so, fulfills the "promise to Abraham."

Stephen describes how when Moses was forty, "it arose in his heart to visit [ἐπισκέψασθαι]" his kin, the people of Israel (7:23). In the Exodus version of the story, Moses appears to see his kindred being mistreated by happenstance and to intervene almost on a whim (Exod 2:11-12). Stephen ascribes more deliberate intent to Moses. Given how the verb ἐπισκέπτομαι and its cognates appear in Luke and Acts, Moses' determination to "visit" his kin likely entails more than idly showing up to look in on them. Ἐπισκέπτομαι is the word by which, in Genesis, Joseph promises that God will "visit" the people of Israel to bring them out of Egypt (Gen 50:24-25), and by which, in Exodus, God does "visit" and so sends Moses back to Egypt to bring the people out (Exod 3:16), in both texts translating the infinitive absolute construction פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד. It is also the verb Zachariah uses to prophesy that God has visited and will visit God's people for their redemption (Luke 1:68, 78) and that the people use when they recognize that, in Jesus, God has "visited" God's people (Luke 7:16). And it is the noun by which Jesus describes his arrival in Jerusalem, lamenting that the city does not recognize the time of its "visitation [ἐπισκοπή]" (Luke 19:44). Moses, then, is not simply dropping by to put an eye on his kin, but purposefully showing up for their liberation. As with

Jerusalem and Jesus, however, Moses' people do not view him as their liberator when he goes to "visit" them.[21]

When Moses defends one of his fellow Israelites, striking down an Egyptian in the process, his people reject his intervention and his attempt to reconcile them by "push[ing] him aside [ἀπώσατο]," and saying, "Who made you ruler and judge over us?" (Acts 7:27). At their first encounter, Moses' people reject his leadership. Even after Moses experiences the burning bush and heeds God's express call to lead the people's rescue, with God saying, "And now come, I will send you to Egypt" (Acts 7:34), the people resist. Stephen emphasizes the disparity between God's affirmation of Moses and the people's rejection by repeating the words from earlier in Moses' life immediately after the story of Moses' call: "This Moses, whom they rejected—saying, 'who made you ruler and judge'—*this one* God sent as ruler and liberator by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush" (7:35). This initial rejection of Moses evokes some of Jesus' experience in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). Jesus begins there by claiming an anointing, having been sent by the Spirit to bring liberation (Luke 4:18), just as Moses "supposed his kin would understand that by his hand God was giving salvation to them" (Acts 7:25). Similar to Moses, Jesus is rejected in his hometown before his ministry even really begins (Luke 4:28-29).

Stephen reminds his audience of the obvious wrong the people of Israel did in despising Moses' leadership not only in contrast to his divine calling, but also because of the evidence of Moses' deeds for and among the people of Israel. By repeating the demonstrative

[21] Barrett, *Acts*, commenting on Acts 6:3, highlights ἐπισκέπτεσθαι as "a particularly Lucan word (Lk. three times; Acts four; rest of the NT four), but it is used in different senses" (1:312). Of course, the Greek can hold them together where translation into English would force a decision. Moses' "visitation" of his kin can remain complex.

pronoun οὗτος Stephen emphasizes that the same Moses whom the people had rejected also acted for their liberation at God's behest: "*this* Moses led them out, after having done wonders and signs in Egypt, in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years" (Acts 7:36). Here Stephen reminds his audience that Moses himself predicted that God would "raise up a prophet for you from your kin" just as God raised up Moses (Acts 7:37), which, without naming Jesus explicitly, introduces the idea that the people should expect at least one Moses-like figure whom God would choose as their leader.

Given that Peter has already invoked the "prophet like Moses" language with respect to Jesus (Acts 3:22), Stephen's quotation of the same passage makes an oblique reference to Jesus, implying with Peter that Jesus is the promised prophet. That Jesus, like Moses, did many powerful works among his people for their good scarcely need be repeated. Throughout the early chapters of his ministry, he heals people and exorcises demons abundantly (Luke 4:35, 39, 40-41; 5:13, 15, 24-26; 6:19) and arranges an extraordinary catch of fish (5:1-10), inducing awe and amazement in those who witness these acts (5:9-10, 26). And like Moses, who received "living oracles [λόγια ζῶντα]" to give to the people (Acts 7:38), Jesus, too, spent a great deal of his time teaching the people, doing so on the "level place" (Luke 6:17) in a way that both reflects and alters Moses' pattern of bringing the message from Mount Sinai (Acts 7:38). Both Jesus and Moses taught and did works of power among the people of Israel, but Stephen concludes Moses' story with his rejection, and that point of resemblance between him and Jesus ends up carrying the most weight in Stephen's speech.

Stephen describes the second rejection of Moses in language that echoes the first instance: "Our ancestors did not wish to be obedient to him, but pushed him aside [ἀπώσαντο],

and in their hearts they turned toward Egypt" (Acts 7:39). In Stephen's account of Moses' story, he is ultimately rejected. When the people push him aside and turn toward Egypt in their hearts and get Aaron to make idols for them (Acts 7:39-41), there is no story of repentance or return, or Moses interceding with God on the people's behalf for their forgiveness, as is written in Exodus about this event (Exod 32:30-32). As Stephen tells it, Moses' story essentially ends when the people reject him and turn toward Egypt in their hearts. Substitute "Rome" for "Egypt," and one has a reasonably apt description of what the very council before whom Stephen speaks did to Jesus. They repudiated his teaching and his lived expression of God's reign, and showed their allegiance, instead, to Gentile patterns of power, ultimately handing Jesus over to his death (Luke 20-23). His own people rejected Jesus even more violently than they did Moses, which becomes a crucial element of Stephen's speech by the end.

In Stephen's telling, Israel spurned God's chosen leader, Moses, as part of its descent into idolatry. Turning their hearts toward Egypt (7:39) was a turn away from the God who rescued them from Egypt and its oppressions, and Israel made its idolatry explicit by fashioning a calf to worship instead of God (7:41). Beginning with Moses, rejecting God's chosen leaders and turning to idolatry becomes Israel's pattern, which Stephen alludes to by quoting from Amos 5:25-27 (LXX). Israel did not make sacrifices to God faithfully for forty years in the wilderness but, rather, to idols (Acts 7:42-43).[22] Moses mediated to the people both the law and the instructions for the "tent of witness" (7:38-39, 44), the precursor to the

[22] Barrett suggests, "The interpretation of the line will depend on where the stress is laid. It may lie upon the action of the verb; in English, *Did* you bring me sacrifices…? With an implied negative answer, No, at that time we did not (cf. Jer. 7.22). Or it may lie upon μοι: Was it *to me* that you brought …? With the implied answer, No, it was to false gods that sacrifices were offered" (Barrett, *Acts* 368).

temple that Solomon eventually built (7:47). Stephen need not say that the temple proved insufficient to keep Israel from idolatry; even its builder succumbed (1 Kings 11:1-8). What he does say effectively brings the temple down to size: God does not live in human-made buildings (7:48). The temple never guaranteed God's presence in Israel or prevented the people's idolatry. Neither did the law, as Stephen tells it, because from the first when Moses brought "living oracles" to the people, they refused to obey him (7:38-39). As Stephen tells it, Israel's rejection of Moses sets its pattern vis-à-vis God's chosen leaders thereafter. Since the people so resisted Moses, who brought them both law (7:38) and temple (7:44, 47), neither the law nor the temple fare any better than Moses and his successors as safeguards against the people's wickedness and idolatry.

Stephen makes the rhetorical coup de grâce of his speech by closing the gap between his audience and their ancestors—the temple and the law have served his present audience no better than Israel in the past. Indeed, they have done a great deal worse than their ancestors. They have rejected not Moses only, but also the prophet like him (7:37)—the one in whom God dwells in a form "not made with [human] hands" (7:48)—and broken God's law by executing an innocent person:

> Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always oppose the Holy Spirit! As your ancestors did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the just/righteous/innocent one [δικαίου], of whom you have now become betrayers and murderers—who received the law at the direction of angels, yet you have not kept it. (Acts 7:51-53)

These lines of Stephen's speech draw back the veil on his previous words; they act like what David Steinmetz calls a "second narrative," a feature near the conclusion of a mystery novel

in which the detective retells the story to highlight the key moments that reveal who committed the crime.[23] As Stephen went about telling the story, the council seems to have heard a fairly straightforward account of Israel's story through the key figures of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, without allusions to Jesus and what happened to him before this very council (Luke 22:66-71). But then, here at the end, Stephen reveals that each time he spoke about "our ancestors" as he addressed the council and his accusers, he was speaking also of them and, specifically, of their most recent and most egregious repudiation of one of God's chosen leaders. In Stephen's "second narrative," the guilty party is not he, who stands on trial, but his accusers—they are just like their ancestors, who sold Joseph, rejected Moses, worshiped idols, did not keep the law and, now, have betrayed and killed Jesus.[24]

Stephen answers the charges against him by revealing his audience's hypocrisy: their supposed reverence for Moses and the temple are a front for other allegiances altogether, which are revealed in their complicity in Jesus' death. If his audience really understood the temple, they would not be so concerned about the future of a building (6:13-14), because God's life cannot be contained in human-made houses (7:48). If they esteemed Moses and the law he gave them so highly (6:14), they would have listened to Jesus, the prophet like Moses (7:37); they would not have rejected Jesus and colluded in the death of "the Innocent One" (7:52), doing even worse to him than their ancestors did to Moses. If they honestly believed that they received the law "at the direction of angels" (7:53), they would listen to the one who

---

[23] David C. Steinmetz, "Uncovering a Second Narrative: Detective Fiction and Historical Method," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 54-65.

[24] Stephen's words are among the harshest spoken to a Jewish audience in Acts and, for that reason, it is especially important to remember that this is an intra-Jewish conversation aimed not at condemnation but repentance and salvation. See again chapter 3 n. 17.

stands before them, of whom they have all already discerned that "his face was like the face of an angel" (6:15). They would follow their ancestor Abraham, who kept God's "covenant of circumcision" (7:8), rather than breaking covenant by being "uncircumcised in heart and ears" (7:51). In short, they would listen to Moses and the prophets like him and keep the law. Stephen has turned the tables on his audience: it is not he who disrespects Moses, the law, and the temple, but his arrayed accusers.

Stephen's "second narrative" reveals his accusers' complicity in all the persecutions and rejections wrought against every one of God's prophets and in Jesus' death. In telling the story this way, Stephen closes the loop on his version of Israel's story centered on Moses: In Jesus, God gave to Israel an even greater and more exemplary leader than Moses, and God's people responded by rejecting him yet more comprehensively than they did Moses. In Stephen's witness to Jesus, this rejection provides evidence of Jesus' true identity because this is what Israel does to all prophets (7:52). If that is so, then the council's treatment of Stephen will also shortly signal the legitimacy of his own prophetic office, but not before he does his most direct act of bearing witness to Jesus.

5.2.2.2 Risen and Exalted

Until Stephen's last moments before the council, there is no reason to suppose he has ever seen Jesus. And Stephen's way of bearing witness to Jesus up to this point is allusive—he never mentions Jesus' name and only briefly refers to anything that happened to him, namely, that the council before which he stands has become "betrayers and murderers" of the Just/Righteous/Innocent One (7:52). When he concludes his words to the audience whom he criticizes for always resisting the Holy Spirit (7:51)—Stephen is "filled with the Holy Spirit"

and allowed to "gaze into heaven," where he sees "the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right" (7:55). The narrator leaves no doubt of what Stephen beholds—he sees Jesus glorified in God's presence, risen and exalted. Having seen Jesus alive in heaven, Stephen wastes no time in describing what he sees; no interval elapses between Stephen's vision and his words bearing witness of Jesus: "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Human One standing at God's right" (7:56). Stephen's verbal witness is direct—true to form—even though he never invokes Jesus' name. He need not, given how richly he has evoked Jesus' identity not only with his words, but also with the shape of his life.

5.2.3 Life

Apart from the narrative's presentation of many points of direct verbal connection between key moments in Jesus' portrait in Luke and Stephen's in Acts, Stephen bears witness to Jesus more broadly in his character—particularly in ways that show Stephen's congruence with the life patterns of God's reign. Stephen's life reflects Jesus' particularly in using power in a manner that accords with God's way of wielding power. He emerges in the narrative at all because he is suited to the kind of work by which Jesus described himself when contrasting the reign of God with how Gentile rulers wield power (Acts 6:2-5; Luke 22:24-27). He is "full of grace" (Acts 6:8) which recalls Jesus' teaching about the logic of God's reign (Luke 6:32, 34). And he uses his "power" in life-giving ways, as Jesus does (e.g., Luke 6:18-19), to do "signs and wonders" (Acts 6:8), which in Acts are healings and exorcisms (cf. Acts 4:30; 5:12). In his final moments, Stephen mirrors Jesus' submission to death and forgiveness of his executioners, which accords with Jesus' teaching about meeting enemies with love rather than

retaliation (Acts 7:59-60; Luke 6:27-35). In these ways, despite the brevity of his story, Stephen uses power in a way that bears living witness to Jesus.

Stephen comes on the scene at all because the Hellenist widows are being neglected in the daily food service (διακονία), and twelve apostles do not think it right that they should "abandon the word of God to serve tables [διακονεῖν τραπέζαις]" (6:2). That the apostles have dichotomized "the word of God" and "serving tables," and that they opt for the former, signals a problem. Jesus, when teaching about greatness and power, tells his disciples that, in contrast to the domination and benefaction of Gentile authorities and kings (Luke 22:25), leaders among his disciples should be "as one who serves [ὡς ὁ διακονῶν]" (Luke 22:26), which is exactly how he describes himself in the next verse. Jesus is among his disciples "as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). Stephen is highlighted among those chosen for an office of "serving" that the apostles were willing to cede to others, which effectively elevates him to likeness with Jesus even, perhaps, above the apostles. Stephen steps into a role the title of which has a clear etymological link to a pattern that Jesus specifically contrasts with Gentile patterns of power, identified as his own way of being among his disciples, and prescribed for his followers who would be leaders in their community. It is exemplary witness to Jesus, and he has not said a word.

Stephen's lived witness to Jesus continues in the narrative's description of his public presence after he has been chosen among the overseers of the daily food service: "And Stephen, full of grace [χάριτος] and power [δυνάμεως], did great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). Being full of "grace" echoes, of course, early description of Jesus, but it also reflects some of his first teaching about the logic of God's reign. When Jesus speaks on

the level place, beginning with beatitudes for the poor and woes for the rich, he urges his listeners toward an ethic of generosity by raising up "grace" as the ideal for which they should strive: "If you love those who love you, how is that grace on your part?" (Luke 6:32), and, "If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, how is that grace on your part?" (6:34). Jesus summarizes his teaching about gracious generosity with love and money as a mandate to imitate God, who is "kind [χρηστός] to the ungrateful [ἀχαρίστους] and the wicked" (6:35). In this teaching from Jesus, grace is the logic of God's reign. To say that Stephen is "full of grace" suggests that his character is like God's as Jesus describes in Luke 6:35. That Stephen is full of grace and power together, and does "great wonders and signs," reinforces the picture.

Just before Jesus began speaking of the blessings of the poor, Luke describes how Jesus used "power." He had been going throughout the region around Galilee calling disciples, teaching, and healing (Luke 4:31-5:16) and then came to a "level place" where a crowd from all around "Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon" gathered "to hear him and be healed of their diseases" and exorcised of demons (Luke 6:17-18). Luke then makes an astonishing claim that boggles the imagination: The people were crowding around him and trying to touch him "because power [δύναμις] was going out from him and was healing all [πάντας]" (Luke 6:19). The language evokes a body electrified, sparking with uncontainable energy that heals anything, anyone, everyone, and everywhere it makes contact, perhaps even apart from the wielder's wishes. It is as though Jesus cannot help but heal everyone and everything that touches him. Life-giving power overflows from Jesus into everyone around him.

The description of Stephen in Acts 6:8 suggests that his being "full of power" leads to his doing "wonders and signs," but the narrator does not specify the nature of those works. Twice before in Acts, however, "signs and wonders" have been works of healing. When the apostles pray for God to "stretch out your hand to heal," they call their own participation doing "signs and wonders" (Acts 4:30). The heading on the apostolic ministry in Jerusalem after the incident with Ananias and Sapphira reads, "And through the hand of the apostles many signs and wonders were being done among the people" (Acts 5:12), which turn out to be many healings of various kinds and exorcisms (5:15-16). Stephen's being "full of power" and doing great "wonders and signs among the people," recall Jesus' power in Luke 6:19 and the apostles' "signs and wonders" in the previous chapter, and appear to signify that the "wonders and signs" he did were healings and exorcisms. If so, Stephen uses power just as Jesus and the apostles do, that is, in order to give life and as a witness to the reign of God and Jesus' resurrection.

Stephen's final witness to Jesus is, of course, his manner of death—not least because the last thing he does before he is dragged out of the city to be stoned is to describe aloud his vision of the risen and exalted Jesus (Acts 7:55-56). Stephen could very likely have figured out something to say that would have appeased the council members, but he chooses to speak boldly the truth of their hypocrisy and crime, even knowing that he stands before the council that arranged Jesus' execution. To speak with such blunt candor in that context shows Stephen's profound trust in the reality of Jesus' resurrection and, thus, makes a powerful witness. Despite the apostles' previous escapes, Stephen must know that throwing in his lot with Jesus before the very council that condemned him could consign Stephen to a similar fate. When the council does drag him out to his death, he does not resist, and meets death

with the attitude toward enemies that Jesus commended, namely, loving one's enemies and praying for one's abusers (Luke 6:27-28). As they are stoning him, Stephen prays on behalf of his executioners that God would not count this sin against them (Acts 7:60). It is his final act before he dies. He bears witness to Jesus in life and in death.

5.2.4 Epistemology conclusion

As Stephen stands accused before the council and high priest, just before he makes his long speech, all the members of the council see that "his face was like the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). Stephen's face was like a messenger from God and they all saw it. It seems that if they view Stephen thus that they should have no difficulty accepting his message, but Acts has already established that Sadducees make up a substantial and influential portion of the council, and they do not believe in angels, spirits, or resurrection (Acts 23:8; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.16-17). This comment on how the council sees Stephen highlights the role of an audience's receptivity in a witness's ability to communicate with it. Seeing Stephen as angelic both legitimizes his message as coming from God and forecasts his audience's resistance. Seeing Stephen as angelic yet violently opposing his message shows that their desire to maintain their innocence outstrips their commitment to the truth, and doing such violence to the truth ends up just one step removed from doing deadly physical violence to Stephen. Stephen, however, remains true. He shapes his character, works, and words to bear witness to Jesus faithfully—reflecting Jesus implicitly and proclaiming his exaltation explicitly—regardless of his audience's hostility. Indeed, Stephen's efforts to bring his audience to knowledge of Jesus' resurrection unify the form and content of the message, and reveal the stark contrast between the kind of power that governs and enables his witness versus the power his accusers wield against him.

5.3 Politics: A Clash of Powers

Stephen is scarcely on Acts' stage before he ends up in the conflict that results in his death; indeed, most of the story about him is his engagement in this confrontation. The brevity and density of Stephen's story in this regard especially draws attention to the clash between him and his opponents and to the kind of power each wields. Attending to how each uses power makes a study in contrasts. Stephen's opponents covertly plant accusations against Stephen (Acts 6:11) to "stir up" the people, the elders, and scribes (6:12), and use physical force (6:12), false witnesses (6:13), and specious charges (6:13-14) against Stephen before the same council that condemned Jesus and brought him to Pilate. The accusers and the council together, at the end, use deadly violence against Stephen (7:59-60). Stephen, on the other hand, wields the power of inspired and wise words that his opponents cannot gainsay—the power of true witness as contrasted with the false witnesses his opponents conjure. He does not resist being dragged before the council (6:12), and, in response to the specious charges against him, he inverts the narrative context to reveal the truth: he does not view the temple and the law as his opponents do, but that is because they are hypocrites and do not actually care what God wants (esp. 7:51-53). And when his opponents rise up together against him, drag him out of the city, and begin to stone him, he absorbs the blows with grace toward his executioners (7:57-60). Whereas his opponents use deceit and violence to achieve their ends, Stephen uses truthful speech and resilience. Because of the unity of theology and politics, Stephen's and his opponents' respective uses of power reveal their contrasting convictions and commitments—demonstrated through their actions—about the God or gods they serve. Whatever Stephen's opponents might profess, using deceit and violence evidences their commitment to gods who operate through such means. Stephen, by contrast, shows integrated commitment to the God

revealed in Jesus by clinging to the power of truthful speech and resilience rather than resorting to deceit, manipulation, violence, or retaliation. Stephen's faithful witness to Jesus exposes his opponents' distorted worship, even as he dies. His death, far from curtailing the expansion of the community and the message about Jesus, causes it to spread for the first time beyond Jerusalem. Stephen's death, in this way, bears witness to Jesus' resurrection—his death, like Jesus', becomes a new beginning.

5.3.1 The Prosecution

Just one verse after Stephen begins his ministry of doing "great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8), opponents arise against him. Their exact identity and specific reasons for their grievance against Stephen cannot be unequivocally established. They come "from the synagogue that was called 'Freedmen's,' both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia [ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῆς λεγομένης Λιβερτίνων καὶ Κυρηναίων καὶ Ἀλεξανδρέων καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ Κιλικίας καὶ Ἀσίας]" (6:9). Scholars note the text's ambiguity: this description could indicate one synagogue of former slaves including diaspora Jews from the four places named, four different synagogues each consisting of one of these groups, or even five different synagogues.[25] The paucity of evidence makes the matter difficult to adjudicate. A "Freedmen's" synagogue is mentioned only ever here in the New Testament, and contemporaneously outside it apparently only once; an inscription mentioning a "Freedmen's" synagogue was found not in Jerusalem, but in Pompeii.[26] It cannot be proven whether the

[25] See, e.g., Gaventa, *Acts*, 117-18; Thompson, *Acts*, 154.

[26]Fitzmyer, *Acts* cites Giovanni Battista de Rossi, *Bullettino di archeologia cristiana*, vol. 2 2 (Tipi del Salviucci, 1864) 70, 92-93, who contends the inscription provides evidence of a "Freedmen's Synagogue" at Pompeii. Cf. Holladay, *Acts*: "There exists no other literary or archaeological evidence of a synagogue with this name" (157).

constituents of the Freedmen's synagogue in Jerusalem were Roman former slaves who had been emancipated and adopted Judaism or were formerly enslaved people of Jewish heritage, but, given the evidence, the latter seems more likely.[27]

Two principal items of ancient evidence appear to best to illumine Stephen's opponents' identity, though neither proves conclusive. Philo writes of formerly enslaved Jews residing in Rome, who met in "houses of prayer [προσευχάς]" (used synonymously with "synagogue") and periodically sent money to Jerusalem. This account allows the conclusion that some formerly enslaved Jews of the diaspora had a relationship to and investment in matters in Jerusalem. The "Theodotus Inscription," though it mentions nothing about former enslavement, draws an even tighter connection between Jews hailing from Rome and a synagogue in Jerusalem, to the extent that a fair number of scholars suppose that the

[27] Thayer discusses three proposals about who the "Freedmen" of this synagogue in Jerusalem were. The first, citing Tacitus, proposes Λιβερτίνων refers to Roman former slaves who adopted Judaism. The first option rests on tenuous evidence; Tacitus writes of "four thousand descendants of enfranchised slaves [*quattuor milia libertini generis*]" who had been "tainted with [Jewish] superstition" being "shipped to Sardinia," [Tacitus, *Ann.* 2, 85 (Moore and Jackson, LCL)], which places them geographically nowhere near Jerusalem. The second option, owing to the mention of Cyrenians and Alexandrians, speculates "that the Jews spoken of" were "dwellers in Libertum, a city or region of proconsular Africa." Thayer finds the second option improbable because "the existence of a city or region called Libertum is a conjecture which has nothing to rest on but the mention of a bishop with the prefix libertinensis at the synod of Carthage A. D. 411." The third option, by appeal to Philo, supposes that the Λιβερτῖνοι were "Jews who had been made captives by the Romans under Pompey but were afterward set free; and who, although they had fixed their abode at Rome, had built at their own expense a synagogue at Jerusalem which they frequented when in that city." This description does seem promising, and yet what Philo writes does not entirely support it. Philo writes, "the great section of Rome on the other side of the Tiber is occupied and inhabited by Jews, most of whom were Roman citizens emancipated. For having been brought as captives to Italy they were liberated [ἠλευθερώθησαν] by their owners and were not forced to violate any of their native institutions" (Philo, *Embassy* 23.155-56 [Colson, LCL]). Philo reports that these Jews in Rome have "houses of prayer [προσευχάς]" in which they meet (he does not call them "synagogues"), and that "they collect money for sacred purposes from their first-fruits and send them to Jerusalem by persons who would offer the sacrifices [καὶ χρήματα συνάγοντας ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπαρχῶν ἱερὰ καὶ πέμποντας εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα διὰ τῶν τὰς θυσίας]" (23.156). Philo does not mention their establishing a synagogue in Jerusalem, or of the emissaries they sent with money using it to build a synagogue. His not having written of it does not eliminate the possibility of their having done so, but neither can a firm connection be established between these Jewish emancipated slaves in Rome and the "Freedmen's Synagogue" in Jerusalem. See Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 377.

"Freedmen's" synagogue of Acts 6:9 must be the one named in the inscription (Philo, *Embassy* 23.155-56). While such a precise referent is possible, Acts' mentioning of Stephen's opponents coming from four disparate regions of the diaspora and the way they interact with Stephen render Robinson and Wall's suggestion plausible:

> This reference to "synagogue" is neither to a particular building nor a local institution but to a religious movement within Diaspora Judaism that included vast regions of the Roman Empire, including Asia and Africa. … Many Jews who had once been enslaved by Romans have now been set free. A few of these freedmen became Roman citizens and had influence in the Roman politics related to Judaism. Apparently, a substantial number of these freedmen had settled in Jerusalem out of a sense of religious devotion and founded a local chapter, or "synagogue," of this religious movement.[28]

Regardless of exactly which scenario of synagogues and their constituents Acts 6:9 is intended to represent, a signal intersection of experiences marks Stephen's opponents, namely, 1) having been a diaspora Jew, 2) either they or their parents having been enslaved within the Roman Empire, and 3) now residing as free persons in Jerusalem. These experiences doubtless influence their impression of Stephen and shape the charges they bring against him.[29]

If these diaspora Jews or their ancestors were formerly enslaved, they have, perhaps, a special affinity with the captive people of Israel whom God brought out of Egypt by the leadership of Moses. The experience of having been enslaved outside their ancestral homeland and yet having managed to come back to Jerusalem might make them especially protective of the traditions of their heritage and of the temple, in which they had previously been denied opportunity to participate by their captivity and exile. Willie Jennings poignantly imagines their

---

[28] Robinson and Wall, *Called to be Church*, 96.

[29] Recall n. 17 in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

perspective: "Stephen's words and ministry are opposed not by evil God-haters but by faithful Jews who understood slavery, that ancient yet contemporary horror that reduces humans to utility-bodies and nameless tools. These were those who knew slavery either personally or of parental memory, and their commitment to Israel and its way of life was woven into their legacy of hard-won freedom (v. 9)."[30]

Acts provides no record of the words in their disputes with Stephen, but their charges against him—even if presented by "false witnesses [μάρτυρας ψευδεῖς]"—center on an ostensible desire to preserve the temple and the law (Acts 6:13-14). What exactly Stephen said to elicit their response is also not included in the narrative. What they perceive in Stephen is, as Jennings observes, a threat to their identity as God's people and ability to worship God rightly: "They only hear one who would take away hard-won freedom to be true to the ancestors and one who would render unrecognizable the identity of the faithful to God."[31] They respond out of the fear that their recently restored status as God's faithful people will be denied them if, as they accuse Stephen of predicting, Jesus of Nazareth destroys the temple and changes the customs that Moses passed on to them (6:14). They confront this threat not in a way that expresses trust in God to preserve their identity and ability to worship, just as God promised to Abraham (Acts 7:7) and fulfilled through Moses (7:17, 25, 34-36); rather, they respond with fear and futilely attempt to preserve the markers of their identity by using power like the Gentiles (Luke 22:25).

---

[30] Jennings, *Acts*, 66.

[31] Jennings, *Acts*, 67.

The tragedy of the diaspora freedmen's encounter with Stephen is that, in their very effort to preserve their identity and practice as God's faithful people, they subvert them. As Jennings writes,

> The freedmen saw their fears collapse onto their faith, and they descended into worldly captivity by taking on themselves the same political operation that brought on the torture and assassination of Jesus. They will get others to lie for them, leaving their hands clean. They will get others to grab Stephen and drag him to the religious authorities, leaving their hands free to worship God uninterrupted by Stephen's witness.[32]

In the perspective of Acts, participation in such politics—specifically, making an alliance with the very council that, led by the Roman-appointed high priest, condemned Jesus and brought him to Pilate (Luke 22:66-23:1; Acts 6:12; 7:1)—is the very antithesis of faithfulness to God. Inciting men to make misleading public accusations (6:11), conjuring false witnesses (6:13), making specious charges (6:13-14), and colluding in deadly violence against an innocent person (7:58-60) are not the works of those who love God and keep Mosaic law; still less do they reflect the politics of reign of God. The freedmen's actions reveal the truth of the charges Stephen ultimately brings against them and the council: they are not faithful worshipers of God, but idolatrous lawbreakers (7:40-41, 51-53).

5.3.1.1 Incite

Acts introduces Stephen's opponents using the verb ἀνίστημι; they "stood up [ἀνέστησαν]" and "argued" or "debated" (συζητέω) with Stephen (Acts 6:9). Although ἀνίστημι often describes Jesus' resurrection at the end of Luke and beginning of Acts

[32] Jennings, *Acts*, 67.

(Luke 24:7, 46; Acts 2:24, 32; 3:26), it also appears when, after questioning Jesus, the whole assembly at the high priest's house "arose" and brought him to Pilate (Luke 23:1), and when the high priest and Sadducees "stand up" against the apostles and arrest them in an attempt to quash their message (Acts 5:17-18). Here with the freedmen from the diaspora, ἀνίστημι signals their resistance to Stephen because of the "wonders and signs" he has been doing among the people (6:8), just as the apostles were doing when the high priest and Sadducees "stood up" against them (5:12-18). The verb is the first word in the sentence introducing the opponents, and so forecasts their resistance even before they are identified or the specific action of "debating" or "discussing" is named. In short order, however, their "standing up" against Stephen is proven futile—they "could not stand against [ἀντιστῆναι] the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke" (6:10). When bested in fair debate they resort to foul tactics, recruiting a series of accomplices who collaborate with them to eliminate Stephen.[33]

The first part of the sentence describing the start of their resistance presents some ambiguities: τότε ὑπέβαλον ἄνδρας λέγοντας… (Acts 6:11). The ambiguity begins with the first verb, ὑποβάλλω, the subject of which is not in the sentence, but must be tracked down two verses back. The "they" of the third person plural in the verb are, fairly clearly, the people from the "Freedmen's" synagogue, etc., who first "stood up" to "argue" with Stephen in Acts 6:9. Exactly what they are doing here in 6:11, however, is not obvious, since ὑποβάλλω appears only here in the New Testament. With the root "throw" and prefix "under," its etymology evokes underhanded strategy. The opponents "incite," "instigate," "suborn," or even "bribe"

[33] See, similarly, Robinson and Wall, *Called to be Church*, 96.

some men to stir up public resistance to Stephen, and the means by which they appear to persuade these men to do as they wish is by telling [λέγοντας] them their accusation against Stephen that they want published abroad: "We have heard [ἀκηκόαμεν] him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God." The use of ὑποβάλλω implies that this charge is not quite true, or is misleading, or at least does not stand on its own feet. But it appears effective; the men do their part as public agitators, though there is no reason to suppose that the freedmen from the diaspora exit the stage. But now they have accomplices who, as Jennings suggests in the quotation above, allow them the illusion of innocence in what happens to Stephen as a result of their perfidy.

The action verbs that lead to Stephen's trial before the council and bring the charges are third person plurals without distinct subjects; each one could indicate a new subject or a growing crowd including every group previously named. The discrete role of each group that acts to bring Stephen before the religious authorities cannot be completely distinguished. After the freedmen from the diaspora incite the men something like a chain reaction ensues, where each third person plural verb could correspond only to its immediate antecedent noun, or to the whole snowballing ensemble of Stephen's accusers: The freedmen from the diaspora "suborned [ὑπέβαλον]" the men (6:11); "they stirred up [συνεκίνησαν]" the people and the elders and scribes (6:12); "having attacked [him] suddenly [ἐπιστάντες], they seized [συνήρπασαν]" Stephen, and "they conducted [ἤγαγον]" him to the council (6:12), and "they set up [ἔστήσαν]" false witnesses who say (λέγοντας), "This person never stops speaking things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this 'Jesus of Nazareth' will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed on to us" (6:13-14), which

rehearses, rewords, and expands the original charge against Stephen. While these verbs might each refer to a distinct group, the referent of a growing conglomerate of accusers makes for a more dramatic reading and recapitulates the diverse array of prosecutors and judges who, in the apostles understanding, opposed Jesus (Acts 4:27). Regardless of which specific group did which distinct part, all of them together are complicit in what happens to Stephen once they participate in bringing him before the council. Moreover, the words themselves integrate to reveal a pattern of subterfuge, manipulation, deceit, force, and violence among Stephen's accusers.

5.3.1.2 Lying witnesses

"Lying witnesses [μάρτυρας ψευδεῖς]" (6:13) play a key role in exposing the political allegiance of Stephen's accusers via the form of power they use. That they must rely on witnesses who do not simply and truthfully report their experiences signals the weakness of their position and foreshadows further violence; Stephen's accusers have already shown their willingness to enforce a version of reality that they cannot successfully argue against him. Here they show they will also resort to recruiting witnesses willing to present accusations that, in Acts' view, are not precisely true and, thus, present an instructive contrast to the witnesses Jesus commissioned (Acts 1:8). That the "lying witnesses" accuse Stephen of "speaking against the law" (6:13) presents, as Robinson and Wall note, an additional irony: "while falsely accusing Stephen of breaking the law that prohibits blasphemy against God (Lev 24:11-26), they break

the ninth commandment of the Decalogue, which forbids bringing false witness against another person (Exod 20:16)."[34]

The violence proximate to these μάρτυρες who lie about experiences they have not had makes a stark contrast to the gentle boldness of the apostles who speak truthfully from their own experience and, of course, to Stephen who by this point has shown himself a worthy witness of Jesus by his actions. Unlike the apostles and Stephen, who speak what they understand as true through their own experience, Stephen's accusers "set up [ἐστήσαν]" witnesses who will speak not from their own experiences what they know of him, but whatever words his accusers want them to say. The context hints again at bribery; these "witnesses" are little more than mercenaries. The credibility of these "witnesses'" words rests not on the simple power of someone recounting personal experiences as truthfully as possible, but on their sponsors' willingness to spend resources or exert influence in order to ensure the public recognition of their preferred version of reality. Of course, no amount of money and influence will render true something that is false, Stephen's accusers manage to bring charges that, though not precisely true, are serious and believable enough to warrant the council's attention and elicit Stephen's response.

5.3.1.3 Specious charges

The charges against Stephen all revolve around a perception of his disdain for the temple and for the law. The words of the false witnesses at Stephen's trial echo the accusation by which his accusers initially "incited" (Acts 6:11) the men who "stirred up the people and

[34] Robinson and Wall, *Called to be Church*, 97; see also Thompson, *Acts*, 155-56.

the elders and scribes" (6:12): "We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God" (6:11). And the "witnesses" say, "This person never stops speaking things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this 'Jesus of Nazareth' will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed on to us" (6:13-14). By the verb ὑποβάλλω, the substantive connection between the original charge and this accusation before the council, calling the "witnesses" who say these words "false," or "lying," or "deceitful" (ψευδεῖς), and the entire introduction of Stephen, Acts sets up the expectation that these charges are, at least, not entirely true. On a quick reading, one might even suppose them entirely false. And Acts does not report anything Stephen said before his arrest, making comparison impossible. Yet the charges must resonate enough with what Stephen actually said in order to persuade Jerusalem's residents to participate in arresting him and bringing him before the council. Moreover, after reading Stephen's speech, one can see how such accusations might have originated in Stephen's words, even if misrepresented. All told, they are misleading and not presented in good faith, which contributes to the overall portrait of vicious politics that Stephen's opponents practice.

5.3.1.4 Deadly violence

The violence of Stephen's opponents begins with deception, but in short order turns physical—even before they stone him to death. Acts represents Stephen's arrest as a sudden, unexpected, violent attack. The arresting party, "having attacked suddenly [ἐπιστάντες], seized him violently [συνήρπασαν] and conducted [ἤγαγον] him to the council" (6:12). The action words alone indicate the abrupt force of the encounter, and the destination at the end of the sentence recalls Jesus' similar arrest and eventual trial before the same council (Luke 22:52, 54,

66-71), and foreshadows for Stephen a similar result. Those who seize Stephen, bring him before the council that condemned Jesus and saw to his execution, and then accuse Stephen of allegiance to Jesus over Moses and God—over the law and the temple—doubtless hope that this council will treat Stephen much as it treated Jesus. They can scarcely be disappointed with the result.

Though the council hears many more words from Stephen than from Jesus, his condemnation and execution take place with startling immediacy. Just before Stephen begins speaking, the whole council sees that his face is "like the face of an angel" (6:15), but at the first pause in his speech, near the end, they become near apoplectic with rage. The language evokes a fierce sense of their fury's violence—it saws through them to their hearts (διεπρίοντο ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν), and they grind their teeth at him (ἔβρυχον τοὺς ὀδόντας ἐπ' αὐτόν), providing a vivid image of bone-deep anger (7:54). Either unafraid or oblivious as he gazes into heaven to see the glory of God and Jesus (7:55), Stephen pays no heed to their rage and dauntlessly reports his vision of the exalted Human One (7:56). Upon hearing his words they "shouted aloud and stopped their ears" (the ones he just called "uncircumcised"; 7:51), and "surged upon him as one [ὥρμησαν ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐπ' αὐτὸν]" (Acts 7:57) recalling the crowd of leaders and people that, in unison, shout to crucify Jesus (Luke 23:13, 18, 21). "And having thrown [him] out, outside the city they were stoning [him]" (7:58); they pelt him with stones until he dies (7:59-60).

They might suppose that in giving him the ritual punishment due to blasphemers (Lev 24:13-16) they prove their faithfulness to God, but in Acts' perspective they demonstrate the opposite. They have resisted the gentle power of the Holy Spirit and betrayed themselves,

instead, to the patterns of manipulation, deceit, and violence that characterize not God's faithful people, but the rulers of the Gentiles. What started out in "disputing" or "arguing" with Stephen (Acts 6:9) and escalated through manipulation of the truth, active deception, force, and seething rage (6:11-14; 7:54, 57), ends with lethal violence (7:58-60). Stephen—full of grace, power, wisdom, faith and the Holy Spirit (6:3, 5, 8, 10; 7:55)—makes a stark contrast.

5.3.2 The Accused

Acts provides even less information about Stephen than about his accusers. One might suppose that, since he is among the ministers chosen to oversee the food service when the "Hellenists" complain against the "Hebrews" (Acts 6:1), he is himself a "Hellenist." But even that label provides little insight since the word Ἑλληνιστής "is first attested in Greek literature in Acts of the Apostles," is "not attested after Acts for three hundred years, and then it appears in passages dependent on that book."[35] If Stephen and his fellow ministers are "Hellenists," one will learn a great deal more about what a Hellenist is from observing him (and Philip, the other of the ministers whom Acts describes in any detail; see Acts 8:4-12, 26-40) than from other sources. Moreover, despite their Greek names,[36] the ministers chosen were not necessarily Hellenists, as they were chosen from and by "the community of disciples [τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν]" (6:2), not, apparently, just the Hellenists.[37] Among the group of seven is also "Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch" (6:5), which implies that the others, including Stephen,

[35] Greg R. Stanton. "Hellenism," *DNTB* 464-73. (468-69).

[36] Barrett, *Acts*, 1:314-15.

[37] See further, Gaventa, *Acts*, 115.

were born into Judaism.[38] Perhaps Stephen signals this relationship to Jewish heritage by using first person plural pronouns when, addressing his accusers, he speaks of "our ancestor(s)" (7:2, 11, 19, 39, 44). Acts gives no information about Stephen's family history or provenance; given that he is a follower of Jesus and the apostolic message has not yet spread outside Jerusalem, he must reside there. But the first people to hear and accept the apostolic message were Jews and proselytes from all over the diaspora (Acts 2:5, 9-11), so Stephen could have had roots nearly anywhere in the Empire. Perhaps the paucity of specific information about Stephen's social location, and Acts' emphasis on markers of his comprehensive commitment to Jesus,[39] suggest that Stephen's identity is to be reckoned in the context of God's reign rather than Gentile politics. Stephen has a good reputation within the community of disciples (6:3), is full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, faith, grace, and power (6:3, 5, 8), and speaks with inspired wisdom (6:10). These are the qualities that indicate his political commitments, especially in contrast to his accusers. Stephen is a witness like the apostles: empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak and act in ways that portray the reality and significance of Jesus' resurrection as the emblematic event of God's reign, in contrast to his accusers who, by their use of power, show their ultimate allegiance to Rome—or, at least, to Rome's way of wielding power.

5.3.2.1 Insight

Stephen's good reputation, being full of the Spirit, faith, wisdom, grace, and power, as well as the "wonders and signs" he does "among the people" (Acts 6:3, 5, 8), set the context

[38] Barrett, *Acts*, 1:304; Stanton, "Hellenism," 469.

[39] Barrett, *Acts*, suggests that the description "full of faith means of very strong faith; a firmly convinced believer" (315).

in which his opponents arise (6:9). Remarkably, Acts makes no mention of Stephen saying a word until his opponents "stand up" (ἀνίστημι) to "argue" with him (6:9), and immediately reports that they could not "stand against [ἀντιστῆναι] the wisdom and spirit [τῇ σοφίᾳ καὶ τῷ πνεύματι] with which he spoke" (Acts 6:10). Stephen responds with inspired wisdom to the arguments that his opponents bring against him, and his speech proves effective. They have to "stand down," at least, no completely truthful words they bring against him are effective in refuting his arguments. From the first time Stephen speaks, therefore, he wields the power of wise inspired speech.

5.3.2.2 True witness

In contrast with the "lying" or "false witnesses" who speak against Stephen at his trial, Acts presents Stephen as a true witness—one whose words and actions integrate to communicate truthfully about reality. The principal signs are his being filled with the Holy Spirit (6:5; 7:55) and his angelic face—evident even to the council (6:15). No doubt Stephen speaks with "wisdom and spirit" (Acts 6:8) because he is full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5), as Jesus was in order to proclaim the message of liberation (Luke 4:18-19). Even more to the point, Jesus' last words to his disciples promised that the power to be his witnesses would come upon his apostles through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Stephen being filled with the Holy Spirit (6:3, 5) and with power (6:8) before Acts shows him uttering a word suggests a connection to Jesus' commission of his witnesses. While the apostles did their "signs and wonders" (5:12) after several rounds of speaking the message of Jesus (2:14-40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12), Stephen reverses the order. When he is "filled with grace and power" he does "wonders and signs" (6:8) first, and speaks with "wisdom and spirit" (6:10) afterward. And, of course,

he makes the longest uninterrupted speech in Acts, showing the scriptural narrative's connections to and culmination in Jesus, and confronting his accusers with the truth of Jesus' identity and their wrongdoing against him (7:2-53, 56). In the end, he reflects Jesus back to them even as he dies, because he receives his death at their hands much as Jesus did from his executioners (Acts 7:59-60; Luke 23:34, 46).

Stephen is a true witness of Jesus—a person empowered by the Holy Spirit whose words and actions together reflect the reality of Jesus' resurrection by commitment to wielding power as Jesus did. Stephen's witness makes a lasting impression on the young man from Cilicia who stood by, a pile of cloaks at his feet, as he watched and approved Stephen's execution (7:58; 8:1; 21:39). Years later, when Saul-turned-Paul defends himself before the Jews from Asia in Jerusalem (21:17, 27, 40; 22:1-21) he recounts his own prayerful words to Jesus admitting his complicity in Stephen's death and calling him "your witness" (22:20). Paul thus confirms explicitly what Stephen's portrait in chapters six and seven implies: in contrast to the "false" or "lying" witnesses his accusers set up at his trial (6:13), Stephen is a true witness. And indeed, his commitment to the truth is such that he takes his opponents' charges seriously even as they are brought by "lying witnesses." He does not either quite accept the accusations or deny them. Instead, he changes the charges' context and so alters their significance. In Samuel Wells's terms, he "overaccepts" them.[40]

5.3.2.3 "Yes, and…"

Stephen's opponents originally accuse him with the claim, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God" (6:11). When Stephen stands before the council,

[40] Wells, *Improvisation*, 131-34.

the opponents charge him more specifically: he ceaselessly speaks "against this holy place [the temple] and the law, for we have heard him saying that this 'Jesus of Nazareth' will destroy this place and change the customs [ἔθη] which Moses handed on to us" (6:13-14). The high priest prompts Stephen to answer these charges with the question, "Are these things so?" (7:1). It is a "yes-or-no" question, but the charges are such that Stephen cannot truthfully either confirm or deny them. A truthful response requires the "yes, and" and resetting of context native to the practice of improvisation.[41] Stephen recasts the context of the charges against him by retelling the story of Israel not just to bear witness to Jesus, as outlined above, but also to emphasize Israel's history of enslavement, release, and struggle to live as free people—a struggle against Egypt and the places within the people where Egyptian habits persist long after the Exodus. Four hundred years of bondage in a foreign empire have left their mark (7:6), and the people do not find it so simple to escape them—both immediately and generations later. The people reject Moses, whom God chose as their leader and the agent of their rescue; their hearts turn back toward Egypt, and they fall into idolatry (7:39-40). Stephen tells this account of Israel's past also, as is clear by the end, as a story about his audience—specifically, the freedmen from the diaspora. His audience may suppose they are the new "free Israel": their enslavement has ended, they have returned to Jerusalem, and now may keep themselves ritually pure and faithfully sacrifice to God in the temple. In the reality Stephen sees, however, they have rejected God's "prophet like Moses," Jesus, who was also the living presence of God in a form "not made by [human] hands" (7:48). They have abandoned the "covenant of circumcision" (7:8) that God gave to Abraham, and become like

[41] Tina Fey, *Bossypants* (New York, NY: Little, Brown, 2011), 84-85.

Gentiles—"uncircumcised in hearts and ears" (7:51). Like their ancestors who "in their hearts turned back to Egypt" (7:39), they have turned back in their hearts toward Rome. Allied with the council and its Roman-appointed high priest (who have already led the way in executing Jesus), and using deceit and violence in order to achieve their ends, their actions prove their worship idolatrous and reveal their transgression of God's laws. It is not Jesus who will destroy the temple and change the "customs" from Moses; rather, they have already made a mockery of the temple and the law by rejecting Jesus in favor of Roman politics. And as Acts' readers already know, it is Rome, in fact, that will destroy the temple and render sacrificial rites impossible. Stephen's "defense" thus consists in showing his accusers how their current practices will lead to exactly the result that their accusations against him suggest they wish to avoid. They are recapitulating Israel's story, and, after rejecting God's appointed leader in favor of idolatrous political alliances, the next phase is destruction of the temple and exile (7:39-43).

Stephen begins his speech by addressing his audience as "brothers and fathers" (Acts 7:2), terms of kinship and respect. Stephen tells the story of his own ancestors as well as theirs. He begins with God appearing to Abraham, emphasizing his departure from the "land of the Chaldeans," his descendants' enslavement in a foreign land and God's promised rescue, and Abraham's faithfulness in the "covenant of circumcision" (7:2-8). This beginning includes a significant alteration of the Genesis narrative. Whereas in Genesis God first speaks to Abram when he already has left Ur and settled in Haran (Gen 11:31-12:3), in Stephen's account, God appeared to Abraham "before he lived in Haran" (Acts 7:2) and called him out of the "land of the Chaldeans" in order to live, ultimately, in "this country in which you now live" (7:3-4). In Stephen's account, Abraham leaves "proto-Babylon" not because his father does (as in Gen 11:31), but because God tells him to do so and go to the land that God will show him (Acts

7:3). Telling the story this way—emphasizing God's call to Israel's primal ancestor to depart Babylon in order to live in the Promised Land—makes something of a thesis for Stephen's story. God's people must exit the empire of their captivity, divest themselves of imperial habits and thought patterns, and live, instead, according to the patterns of the land God graciously gives. Stephen tells his audience, "you now live" in the land God promised to Abraham (7:4), but living in that geographical region does not—in the past or now—necessarily signal the people's faithfulness to God. The freedmen from the diaspora might think that, being Abraham's descendants and now living in the land God promised would be theirs, they are experiencing a new fulfillment of that promise. In Stephen's account, however, they are recapitulating something else altogether.

Their story, as Abraham's descendants, begins with God's words to Abraham about his posterity: they will be "strangers in a land belonging to others, who will enslave and mistreat them four hundred years. 'But I myself will judge the nation whom they serve,' said God, 'and after these things they will come out and worship me in this place'" (7:6-7). God promises to "judge" the yet-unnamed oppressing nation precisely for its exploitative enslavement of God's people and to rescue the people from its clutches, and this rescue will allow the people to worship God in their own land. Stephen continues, recounting God's giving Abraham "the covenant of circumcision," and Abraham's faithful response in circumcising Isaac "on the eighth day" (7:8). In Stephen's version of the story, circumcision acts as a sign that God will be faithful to rescue Abraham's descendants. By circumcision, Abraham's descendants will also remain distinct from their taskmasters even as they are enslaved in a foreign land. Being "strangers" and "enslaved" in a land not their own, being released, returning to their ancestral land, and worshiping God in it may well be intended to resonate with the freedmen from the

diaspora. Acts' account of their history and their accusations against Stephen suggest both that they have experience with being enslaved in a foreign land and that being able to worship God rightly matters a good deal to them. So far, they cannot greatly object to Stephen's narrative, and he continues to the story of Joseph.

The journey into slavery begins with Joseph. Joseph found himself enslaved through the wrenching trauma of fraternal betrayal (Acts 7:9), "but God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles" (7:10). Joseph manages to win Pharaoh's favor such that he more or less rules in Pharaoh's stead: "over Egypt and over all his household" (7:10). On the one hand, Joseph has risen very high and has a great deal of authority. On the other hand, he is still a certain kind of slave—a very influential one, but nothing would prevent Pharaoh from taking everything away should the whim strike him. Joseph, however, apparently feels secure enough to invite his entire family to settle in the land of his enslavement (7:14). It turns out, of course, that his family is only as safe in Egypt as living memory of his reputation (7:18), which highlights what his position always was in Egypt. For a time, Joseph wielded the power of Egypt to save his family and preserve many lives, but he did not change its fundamental metric of power.

The result for Joseph's and his family's descendants turns out to be a cautionary tale about making comfortable alliances with empires. In a sobering and ironic way, Jacob and his sons go down to Egypt and sell their descendants into slavery for food; Jacob betrays his descendants for "a mess of pottage" (Gen 25:29-34).[42] He and his sons entrust themselves to the very nation to which God had explicitly commanded Isaac not to go at a previous time of

[42] Richard P. Thompson helped me see the connection to Esau.

famine (Gen 26:1-2), and that has already proven itself oppressive and exploitative by its treatment of Joseph. Indeed, Stephen's way of telling the story suggests that the clock on the "four hundred years" (Acts 7:6) of Egypt's enslaving Abraham's descendants began with Joseph. Stephen never mentions that the enslavement has begun before saying that, "the time of the promise [ἐπαγγελία] which God declared to Abraham drew near" (7:17). Given how the word is most often used when the "promise" comes from God, that "promise" seems more likely the people's rescue from slavery—not the prediction of their enslavement in the first place. Additionally, what happens when a king arises who "did not know Joseph" includes no remark about his enslaving the people from that point (cf. Exod 1:8-14), but, instead, skips straight to his brutal attempt to control their population by mandating the exposure of their infants (Acts 7:19).

In Stephen's account, Israel's enslavement is not the uniquely vicious tactic of a tyrannical and fearful king, but simply part of the fabric of Egyptian politics and the natural extension of Joseph's actual social position. Joseph was enslaved. Just as some enslaved people in the Roman era had great responsibility and influence due to their particular expertise and the social position of those whom they served, Joseph was Pharaoh's highly skilled and wise deputy ruler, but still enslaved.[43] He remained so his whole life, never leaving Egypt, and brought his whole family to join him and share in his position. Stephen's telling of Joseph's story shows that alliance with Egypt, though it might include relief from famine (7:11-15), results in enslavement. Of course, Stephen's audience might not hear his words quite this way—not, at least, until he provides them the hermeneutical key to his speech near the end.

[43] S. Scott Bartchy. "Slavery (Greco-Roman)," *ABD* 6: 65-73, esp. 66, 69-70.

But Stephen's account of Joseph shows how seductive the dynamics of an empire can be for those positioned to use or otherwise benefit from its power and social structures; but such position and benefit are tenuous, and those who support a politics of exploitation often end up exploited. Acts gives no information about how the freedmen came to be enslaved, the nature of their former enslavement, or how they came to be freed. Perhaps they or their parents were captured, born to enslaved people, sold by family members, or sold themselves.[44] Depending on the nature of their work and the social position of those whom they served, they could have enjoyed a measure of power and status—much as Joseph did.[45] And they could have been freed in a few different ways; purchasing their freedom or being emancipated were the most likely means, and might very well have been granted Roman citizenship upon their manumission.[46] The process would not necessarily have left them with a complete abhorrence for the institution of slavery or contempt for their Roman former masters, especially since their masters' social status could still influence their own social position.[47] Acts again gives no specific background information about them other than their having been enslaved. Being now liberated from their enslavement, they might suppose they enjoy the freedom God promised to Abraham's descendants. But Stephen casts them more like Joseph, who is raised high but remains ensnared in Egypt's power structures. Joseph's story shows that the solution to imperial slavery is not to use the system for the good of a few, but to

[44] Bartchy, "Slavery (Greco-Roman)," 6:66-67.

[45] Bartchy, "Slavery (Greco-Roman)," 6:66, 69-70.

[46] Bartchy, "Slavery (Greco-Roman).", 6:71-72.

[47] Bartchy, "Slavery (Greco-Roman).", 6:69, 71.

abandon the system. God's agent to rescue Israel from enslavement in Egypt is not a new Joseph, but Moses.

Moses is born at the time when God's promise to Abraham is about to be fulfilled, when the new king who did not know Joseph has escalated Israel's oppression by forcing them to expose their infants (Acts 7:17-19). At this precarious and horrifying moment Moses arrives (7:20). He is abandoned at three months, but, in a marvelous reversal, ends up adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and raised as her own son (7:21). Moses grows up in the privilege of the Egyptian royal household, "was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was powerful in his words and deeds" (7:22). As Stephen presents him, Moses was granted the privilege of Egypt's power, having both peak social position and an education to match. Having grown up in Pharaoh's household and received the education of a prince, he understands Egyptian politics from the inside and has access to the benefits of royalty. He could have assimilated to Egyptian habits and practices, forgetting his oppressed kin entirely, but he did not. Indeed, by saying that "it arose in Moses' heart to visit [ἐπισκέψασθαι]" his kin, Stephen makes Moses' renunciation of his privilege and position look almost premeditated rather than the regrettable byproduct of a spontaneous violent outburst of righteous vengeance (cf. Exod 2:11-15).

As Stephen tells it, when Moses defended his oppressed kinsman, he already saw himself as the agent of God's rescue for his people: "He supposed" that they would understand that "God, by [Moses'] hand was giving salvation [σωτηρίαν] to them, but they did not understand" (Acts 7:25). Moses' attempt to bring "salvation" to his kinsman by violence fails. He rightly believes himself God's agent to liberate his people, but he goes about it using Egyptian strategies. That is to be expected, given how he has been raised, but he quickly learns

that Egypt's ways of wielding power will not rescue his people from Egypt. His kinsman's question, "Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?" (7:28) holds up a mirror to Moses; he cannot liberate Israel with Egypt's tools.[48] But as Stephen presents him, when Moses goes out to visit his people he has already deliberately cut ties with Egypt and cast his lot with his oppressed kin. He confirms his allegiance by violently defending them. When they reject him, he cannot go back to his comfortable life in Pharaoh's household, and so flees to Midian (7:29). In Stephen's account, Moses leaves Egypt "when he heard" his kinsman's question (7:29); Stephen says nothing about Pharaoh seeking to kill Moses (cf. Exod 2:15). Although Moses has not yet abandoned Egyptian habits when he first defends his kinsman, he has already renounced his place of privilege in Egypt if not its use of power. When his people reject him as their liberator, he also leaves Egypt physically. As when Abraham left Haran immediately at God's command (Gen 12:1-4) but then took many years of wandering and blunders to learn how to be faithful to God (Gen 22:11-18), Moses leaves Egypt behind when he is forty (Acts 7:23, 29), and lives as a "resident alien [πάροικος]" in Midian forty years before God calls him back to Egypt as Israel's liberator with a different strategy (Acts 7:30-34). Stephen says nothing of Moses' resistance to God's summons (cf. Exod 3:13; 4:1, 10, 13), but skips to recalling and predicting the people's once and future rejection of the same Moses whom God now sends as "ruler and liberator" (Acts 7:35).

When God sends Moses as the agent of the people's salvation, he brings them out of Egypt. Moses does not make the people more comfortable in Egypt; he does not seek to help them advance within Egypt's social system or reverse it so that they become the slave masters.

[48] See again Lorde, "Master's Tools," 112.

Rather, he extracts the people from Egypt—not by personally killing Egyptians or leading an armed revolt, but by "wonders and signs" which he did "in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years" (7:36). He does not use Egyptian methods to get them out; rather, he does so by the power of God. Having brought the people out of Egypt, he continues as God's agent by accompanying the people in the wilderness and receiving "living oracles to give to [the people]" (7:38). These words from God are meant to help expunge the Egyptian habits of thought and life from God's people, but the people resist obeying Moses, reject him, and "they turned back in their hearts to Egypt" (7:39). Even though they have left Egypt behind physically, Egypt's culture and comforts have so formed them that they, apparently, forget its oppressions and long for the land of their captivity. If a principal reason that God extracted them from Egypt was so that they could worship God freely and without fear (Luke 1:73-74; Acts 7:7), it is little surprise that when their hearts turn back toward Egypt they also turn to idolatry (7:40-41). It is unclear whether rejecting Moses precipitates or results from the people's longing for Egypt and propensity to ally themselves with foreign gods, but it makes little difference. Neither Moses with them in the flesh nor the "living oracles" he gave them sufficed to keep the people faithful to God. Neither, as it turns out, did the temple. Indeed, Stephen urges his audience to consider that their reverence for the temple, particularly at the expense of embracing Jesus, comes dangerously close to idolatry.

On the way to telling the story of the temple and its inadequacy, Stephen describes two distinct idolatries that the Israelites practiced. The first begins with the golden calf that they make, and they "rejoiced in the works of their hands [εὐφραίνοντο ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν]" (7:41). Inordinate reverence for a construction of their own making is precisely

what Stephen condemns when he tells the history of the temple. The story of the temple begins with the "tent of witness," built according to the pattern God gave to Moses and was with the people during their wilderness sojourn (7:44). It remained with them throughout the days of Joshua and then David (7:45-46) until, finally, "Solomon built a house" for God (7:47). Immediately upon relaying this history, Stephen deconstructs it by asserting, "But the Most High does not dwell in [houses] made by human hands [χειροποιήτοις], as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne and the earth my footstool; what kind of house will you build for me,' says the Lord, 'or what is my place of rest? Did not my hand make all these things?'" (7:48-50). Just as idols made with human hands cannot represent God (7:41), neither can a temple built by human hands contain God (7:48). Stephen's declaration that "the Most High does not inhabit human-hand-made constructions" is the first time in his speech that he makes a declarative theological statement aimed to inform or correct his present audience. Stephen warns them that reverence for the temple must not impede worshiping the God it was built to honor. But "rejoicing in the works of their hands" is not their only failing.

The second form of idolatry that Stephen attributes to Israel is worshiping "the host of heaven," (7:42). Stephen quotes from Amos a passage that blames the people's ultimate exile on their worship of foreign nations' gods: "Did you bring offerings and sacrifices to me for forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? No! You took up the tent of Moloch, and the star of your god Rephan—statues that you made in order to worship them. And so I will deport you beyond Babylon" (7:42-43; cf. Amos 5:25-27 LXX). Here the people are not just worshiping images but worshiping the gods of other nations. This idolatry is a political as well as theological violation; worshiping other nations' gods is tantamount to making a political

alliance with that nation and adopting its practices. In the case of these gods, Moloch in particular, the demand of child sacrifice recalls the mandated exposure of infants in Egypt (7:19). This is the price the people demonstrate that they are willing to pay when their hearts turn toward Egypt, when they choose the politics and worship practices of Egypt over the politics and worship of God. In quoting from Amos, and particularly marking the destination of exile as "Babylon" rather than Damascus (cf. Amos 5:27 LXX), Stephen demonstrates that the idolatry begun in Israel's wilderness sojourn persists throughout the era of the Divided Kingdom and results in the Babylonian exile. And all that time, the people had the tent of witness and then the temple, and all along the people worshiped idols anyway (7:44-47). By telling the story as he does, Stephen connects the people's rejection of Moses, their ensuing idolatry, and the Babylonian exile—an event that began with destruction of the temple and the people's deportation to Babylon (2 Kings 25:8-11).

When Stephen reveals that every time throughout his speech where he invoked "our ancestors"—the betrayals that led to their enslavement, rejection of Moses, descent into idolatry despite the temple, and exile as punishment—he actually has been speaking of his current audience, it becomes clear that his constructed scenario credibly elicits their murderous reaction. As Stephen tells Israel's story, God's recurring aim is to extract God's people from empires, purge them of an imperial imagination, and establish them in their own land so that they can flourish and freely worship God. But the people insist on going to Egypt, reject God's deliverer, and continually give their hearts over to imperial worship and politics rather than to God. As Stephen tells it, his current audience has fallen into this same pattern and gone even deeper into it than their predecessors. Having escalated the sins of their ancestors, Stephen's speech implies that their punishment will also be harsher.

They have accused Stephen of disparaging Moses and God—the law and the temple—but Stephen inverts the charge to fall on them. This is his "yes, and…": Yes, he abhors what they have made of both the law and the temple, and what they have done constitutes the true rejection of Moses and God. Venerating the temple and observing rituals are mockery when those who perform them prove themselves undifferentiated from Gentiles by their use of deceitful and violent power, oppose God's Holy Spirit, persecute and kill the prophets, and have betrayed and murdered the just/righteous/innocent Jesus (7:51-52), whom God sent, like Moses, to rescue the people from Rome's oppressive clutches and the colonization of their imagination by its politics of domination. They guard the "customs" from Moses with zealous rigor (6:14) but have rejected the "prophet like Moses" (7:37) and not kept the law (7:53). By venerating the temple more than God and joining themselves to the Roman political machinery that executed Jesus, who was not only innocent but also the presence of God dwelling among the people in a form "not made by human hands" (7:48), they have recapitulated their ancestors' idolatrous political alliances.[49] If previously the people's idolatry resulted in the temple's destruction and the people's exile to Babylon, Stephen's narrative implies that a similar catastrophe will result now. Acts' post-70 CE audience can fill in the details: the disaster will mirror what Stephen's accusers claim to have heard him predict. The temple will be destroyed and its sacrificial rites ended—not by Jesus, but by the very entity with whom the freedmen and council have made their idolatrous alliance: Rome. For freedmen

[49] I use the term "idolatrous" advisedly; the inseparability of theology and politics entails that political alliances with entities that operate on a power antithetical to that of Israel's God as revealed in Jesus constitute, effectively, lived allegiance to other gods. Using the word "idolatry" takes seriously that, when it comes to worship, one's actions are as important as—and possibly more important than—one's words.

of the diaspora, who believe themselves to have escaped bondage to Rome and established themselves once more as God's faithful people, Stephen's casting of them understandably elicits defensive outrage no less than for the council, who know very well their role in Jesus' death and have very recently tried to justify it (5:27-40). Stephen portrays his audience in a manner that comprehensively contradicts their self-perception: they are not God's faithful people, but idolatrous lawbreakers. And, in another moment of irony, they prove Stephen correct and facilitate his final witness to Jesus by killing him, mirroring what the council did to Jesus.

5.3.2.4 Resilience

Stephen's accusers and the council demonstrate allegiance to politics of domination when they rise up against him in a murderous rage, but he bears witness to Jesus by using the same power of resilience that Jesus wielded as he suffered execution (7:54, 58-60). Throughout his speech Stephen cleverly has spoken in a way that has allowed him to bring a comprehensive case against his accusers and the council before they realize what he was doing and can make a move to silence him. Only at the end do they appear to understand how he has subverted their narrative with words bearing the power of an unexpected truth. Given the accusations he has leveled at them, their response cannot surprise him, and Stephen makes no effort to avoid his death. Even as his whole audience grind their teeth at him in rage after he concludes his speech (7:54), he does not retreat. He reports to them his vision of the exalted Jesus, which he must suspect will provoke them further—and it does (7:55-57). When he sees the vision of Jesus at God's right in heaven, he charges forward, bearing witness to the exalted Jesus with

deliberate boldness and speaking the truth of what he sees. He does not seek to escape death by recanting, or by resorting to falsehoods or half-truths.

Stephen also does not appear to resist being dragged out of the city or to attempt escape from his stoning (7:58-60). Rather than resist or retaliate, he absorbs the blows against him—quite literally—and meets his executioners' fury with forgiveness, asking God not to count "this sin" against his executioners, and dying immediately afterward (7:60). Indeed, like Jesus, Stephen has remained faithful to use only power appropriate to the reign of God even when it costs him his life. Stephen exemplifies Jesus' teaching that the reign of God expresses power in resilience, love of enemies, mercy, and generosity (Luke 6:20-36). His execution makes the climactic contrast between him and his executioners. While they have used lies and violence, Stephen has spoken truthfully and absorbed their brutality. In a reversal resembling the pattern of Jesus' death and resurrection, Stephen's execution does not result in the suppression of the message he proclaims. The word about Jesus spreads as never before (Acts 8:1, 4), and Stephen's speech before the council remains preserved as the longest one in Acts. The power of truthful speech, resilience, and forgiveness that Stephen wields is shown to be greater than the power of lies and violence.

5.3.3 Politics conclusion

The entirety of Stephen's public ministry, as portrayed in Acts, consists in a conflict with a growing contingent of opponents. When they can gain no ground through fair argument with him, they resort to deceit, manipulation, coercion, and finally, violence. They plant damaging public rumors, forcibly detain him and bring him before the council that condemned Jesus and got him killed, set up lying witnesses, and at the end they all rise up against him, drag

him out of the city and stone him to death (Acts 6:9-14; 7:57-60). Stephen, by contrast, begins his ministry with grace, power, and wisdom, and does great wonders and signs, indicating his congruence with the kind of power that Jesus and the apostles have wielded. When his opponents stand up to argue with him, he speaks with such "wisdom and spirit" that they cannot stand against him. He does not resort to lies or backpedal, even to save his life. And he answers his accusers in a way that neither simply accepts the charges nor dismisses their element of truth. Stephen does not, in fact, think of the temple or its associated rituals in the same way that his audience does, but that is because their treatment of both recapitulates the worst of Israel's sins—the ones that resulted in the temple's destruction and the people's exile. Stephen answers his accusers by placing their charges in the context of the story of God's salvation for God's people that culminates in Jesus. Such a strategy takes the accusations seriously but strips away any real connection to him and reveals the charges' true target—his accusers. Stephen's rhetorical strategy does not involve stretching any truths or telling any lies; he simply tells Israel's story in a way that reveals his accusers' crime. When lies and arrest do not suffice to silence Stephen, his audience resorts to deadly violence. Even as they stone him to death, however, Stephen bears eloquent witness to Jesus in his words of forgiveness and actions of non-resistance (Acts 7:59-60). And death itself does not silence his witness. The young Cilician who watches approvingly as he dies (7:58; 8:1), speaks of him years later with reverence (22:20). And in the meantime, in the wake of the persecution that comes after Stephen's death, the word about Jesus continues to spread (8:1, 4). The gentle, truthful, power of the God to whom Stephen bears witness reveals the weakness of lies and violence.

5.4 Conclusion

Stephen's story displays the unity of witness to Jesus as a message about and originating in God, that must be communicated through faithful words and a life imitating Jesus, the gentle, truthful, and persistent power of which is most profoundly revealed in stark contrast to violent opposition. Stephen arrives on the scene at all because the Holy Spirit already fills him when the apostles recognize a need for administrators of the food service (Acts 6:3, 5). God elects Stephen well before the apostles do. What Stephen has to say also begins and ends with God; the story he tells about Israel is the story of God's attempts to call, rescue, and establish a people who worship God faithfully in both ritual and all the rest of life. It is a story of God's persistence at sending prophets even when Israel rejects and resists them, even up to the last and most egregious episode, when the people betrayed and murdered Jesus. When Stephen sees the exalted Jesus, at the climactic end of his speech, he wastes no time in speaking of what he sees (7:55-56). God is the impetus for Stephen's witness, and the substance of his message begins with "the God of glory" (7:2) and ends with Jesus "standing at God's right" (7:56). The Human One whom God exalted is the template for Stephen's way of being; Stephen's witness to Jesus begins with the verbal connections that show Stephen's recapitulation of key moments in Jesus' life. His witness continues with words that show how Israel's story culminates in Jesus, and unified with a use of power that follows Jesus in the pattern appropriate to God's reign. In his use of power, Stephen particularly contrasts with his accusers. Where they use deceit and violence, he speaks truthfully and forgives them even as they kill him (7:60).

The power of Stephen's truthful speech and lived faithfulness to Jesus is such that his death, rather than silencing or refuting his witness, serves to confirm it. Even in death Stephen witnesses to Jesus, since after his death the word about Jesus spreads to new regions (8:4).

Moreover, his words in the book of Acts continue to speak—and do so especially powerfully because he did not count his life more precious than bearing truthful witness to Jesus. Stephen's witness did not change Saul's mind about Jesus' followers; Acts reports that he approved Stephen's death (8:1), and shortly afterward launched a campaign of persecution against the church (8:3). Stephen's witness is not wasted on Saul by the time he has long since been called Paul, but it is not Stephen who transforms Saul's perspective and makes him, too, into a witness to Jesus. Paul's witness to Jesus provides the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Witness Paul

Paul's first moments on Acts' stage appear to cast him as the story's principal antagonist.[1] As he stands by, holding the cloaks of Stephen's executioners and approving their killing him (7:58-60); when he goes house to house seizing adherents to the church and imprisoning them (8:3); and when he presents himself as the high priest's agent to persecute "disciples of the Lord" as far as Damascus (9:1-2), one could be forgiven for imagining he might become the story's Sheriff of Nottingham. Paul's later fearless fervor to spread news of Jesus as Son of God and Messiah (9:20, 22) can overshadow his early presentation as an equally zealous enemy of the way of Jesus, but the repentance he undergoes becomes central to his witness to Jesus. Much has been made of whether or not to call what happened to Paul a "conversion," with a great deal depending on what one means by the word.[2] Paul still worships Israel's God, but his understanding of God and, therefore, his own way of being in the world change dramatically after his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road (9:3-22). As long as Paul allies with the high priest, he considers it fully legitimate to oppose conflicting beliefs and practices using deadly violence, arrest, and imprisonment. After encountering Jesus, however,

---

[1] Acts, of course, introduces Paul as "Saul," and only begins using the name "Paul" at Acts 13:9. For the sake of smoother style, I use the name "Paul" exclusively in this chapter, even when discussing Acts' account of him before chapter 13, unless quoting directly.

[2] Thompson suggests five different possible definitions of conversion: "from one general way of life to another, from a lack of knowledge to a particular philosophy, from one school of thought to another, from paganism or polytheism to monotheism, even from one form of Jewish thought and life to another (as may be true regarding Saul)" (Thompson, *Acts*, 196). Thompson titles the episode "The Healing and Call of Saul" (186). The inclusion of "call" makes a nod to Krister Stendahl, who contends that what happened to Paul was a "Call Rather than Conversion," (Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 7-23). Here, what to call Saul's/Paul's change is less important than the practical outworking of that change in Paul's life and, specifically, in what kinds of power he wields before and after the Damascus events. See further Holladay, *Acts*, 203-22 and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament*, OBT 20 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

he does not simply turn his violent zeal in a different direction; he does not attempt to serve Jesus by the same means that he used to serve the high priest. Becoming a follower of Jesus changes Paul's theological convictions and, consequently, his approach to those who do not share his convictions. Paul's Damascus experience exemplifies the pattern of his witness as it is recapitulated throughout his life. It begins with his arresting experience of Jesus' words (9:5-6), his designation by "the Lord" as "chosen vessel … to carry my name before nations and kings and the people of Israel" (9:15), and being filled with the Holy Spirit (9:17-19). Immediately he begins proclaiming—without violence—that Jesus is "the Son of God" (9:20) and "the Messiah" (9:22). Plots to kill him follow shortly afterward (9:23, 29), but Paul speaks and acts boldly in the name of Jesus (9:27-28). Acts' account of Paul shows dramatically that witnesses to Jesus do not make themselves; nor do they operate using conventional power. Paul's summons as a witness to Jesus takes him by surprise and transforms his understanding and use of power so that he spreads the news of Jesus in a manner suited to the content of the message—with persistence and resilience in the face of violent opposition and "proclaiming the reign of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ boldly unhindered" (28:31).

This chapter's argument recapitulates the structure of the previous three, examining Paul's witness through the lenses of theology, epistemology, and politics, tracing the thesis that witness begins with God's original action and shares a message about God through means of communication and use of power commensurate to the message. Like Peter and Stephen, Paul becomes a witness to Jesus because of God's original action. Jesus personally summons Paul (Acts 9:4-17) and continues guiding and empowering him, through the Holy Spirit and additional visions, throughout his ministry (14:3; 18:9-10; 19:8). The substance of Paul's

witness focuses on the revelation of God in Jesus, whom he boldly calls "Lord," "Son of God," and "Messiah"; in Paul's telling, Jesus is the earthly representative of the one God of all, whose power and manner of reign are definitively revealed in Jesus' resurrection. Paul's focus on the central event of Jesus' resurrection bring him to speak of its political consequences, and even to the last verse of Acts he does not cease speaking of God's reign and its Lord, Jesus Christ (28:31). Turning to epistemology, the content of this message shapes both Paul's turn from persecutor of the church to proponent of the Gospel and the way he goes about broadcasting the message of Jesus. As with the apostles and Stephen, signal events of his life mirror key moments in Jesus' story. Like Jesus, Peter, and Stephen, Paul also puts the message into words—so many words, in fact, that the narrator has a little fun at his expense on this point. But Paul does not only talk; he also acts in a way that reflects Jesus' character, particularly in his use of power. What sort of power the members of his audiences possess seems also to have an effect—as with Peter's and Stephen's audiences—on their receptivity or resistance to his message. Those who profit by the power of domination are in no hurry to see such power nullified. Here, of course, the argument turns to politics. Paul is perhaps particularly well suited as a midwife for those struggling to be born into the political vision where such power is voided because he was once in thrall to it himself. Paul's sharp turn from violent zeal to bold witness starkly exposes the political consequence of his commitment to Jesus; the "threats and murder" he once wielded against Jesus cannot be turned, instead, to serve him. When Paul turns to Jesus, he immediately leaves violence behind. Given that witness to Jesus and proclamation of God's reign compete with a political vision predicated on domination, violent resistance to this message is near inevitable. Indeed, Jesus predicts that carrying his name "before nations and kings" and Israel will lead to Paul's suffering (9:15-16).

And indeed, Paul has scarcely begun bearing witness to Jesus when he must flee a threat on his life (9:23). Such clashes occur throughout his ministry wherever his audiences remain captivated by the power of domination, culminating in the trials that send him, finally to Rome. Whereas Paul's opponents use violence and force against him, Paul faithfully represents Jesus with resilience and persistent commitment to the power of God's reign revealed in Jesus' resurrection. Such witness, Acts argues, cannot be stopped—not by stoning, beating, detainment, trial, incarceration, shipwreck, snakebite, or house arrest. With undaunted tenacious power, Paul bears witness to Jesus, the risen Lord and anointed ruler who embodies God's reign and will govern the world accordingly.

6.1 Theology

Acts' narrative leaves no doubt: becoming a witness to Jesus is anything but Paul's idea. He first appears as the approving bystander who keeps the cloaks of those who perpetrate Stephen's murder (Acts 7:58; 8:1), and his zeal to persecute the church is well established (8:3; 9:1-2) by the time he encounters Jesus in a flash of light on his way to Damascus (9:3-4). Jesus stops Paul in the act of working forcibly against the way of Jesus and turns him, instead, into its most ardent and outspoken proponent. Paul's Damascus experience demonstrates in dramatic fashion that witness to Jesus begins with divine action. Paul becomes a witness to Jesus because of this transformative encounter and receives ongoing confirmation of his calling as he travels bearing witness to Jesus and facing various trials. God makes Paul a witness through Jesus' dramatic summons, and Jesus as the revelation of God becomes the essential substance of Paul's witness. Paul begins with calling Jesus "Lord" (9:5), and in short order

declares publicly that Jesus is "the Son of God" (9:20) and "Messiah" (9:22).[3] Paul's early preaching opens up the significance of these declarations by showing Jesus' role at the center of the saving work of the one God of all people—whether Jew or Gentile. When Paul is on trial in Jerusalem and Caesarea, he discerns that the principal matter at stake is the resurrection, and what it reveals about God's power. After Jesus summons him, Paul's service reflects the God who overcomes opposing powers through resurrection, and he goes on proclaiming the message of God's power thus embodied in Jesus through the last verse of the book (28:31). As with Peter and Stephen, the source and substance of Paul's message are the same—the one God revealed in Jesus.

6.1.1 Source

By the point in Acts where Paul departs for Damascus with letters from the high priest authorizing him to arrest Jesus' followers (Acts 9:1-2), the narrative has demonstrated Jesus' co-identity with God on multiple occasions, particularly through application of the title κύριος to point, ambiguously, either to Israel's God, or Jesus, or both (e.g., Acts 2:17, 20-22).[4] The

---

[3] Paul declares Jesus' Lord and Messiah without using his name but, in a pattern Peter also uses (οὗτος ἐστιν πάντων κύριος [Acts 10:36]), says, οὗτος ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ: "this one is the Son of God" (9:20), and οὗτος ἐστιν ὁ χριστός: "this one is the Messiah" (9:22). Because Paul here uses the same construction as Peter in Acts 10:36, Rowe's interpretive argument on that passage applies similarly to Paul's declarations here: "Many commentators and contemporary translations take the sentence οὗτος ἐστιν πάντων κύριος to be parenthetical and translate 'he is Lord of all.' But, in fact, Luke did not leave ἐστιν to imply the subject 'he'; nor did he write the relative ὅς. Instead, he wrote the demonstrative pronoun οὗτος. Interpretations that (if unwittingly) ignore the grammar here end by downplaying the directive force of οὗτος—*this one*. Taken seriously, οὗτος excludes the idea that the sentence is parenthetical in importance and instead points to the dramatic nature of Peter's claim: Jesus Christ, this one, is the κύριος πάντων. The underside of the stress that the demonstrative places on this claim is that there are others who are acknowledged as κύριος. Οὗτος thus serves as a countering device and raises the volume of the πάντων: *this one*—and not someone else—is the κύριος of all" (Rowe, "Luke-Acts and the Imperial Cult," 291). By the same logic, Paul's way of identifying Jesus here as "Son of God" and "Messiah" suggests Jesus' exclusive right to those titles.

[4] See again Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, esp. 34-49.

perspective of Acts is clear: Jesus' agency and God's are one; if Jesus does something, that action may also rightly be attributed to God. And it is Jesus who confronts Paul in an unprecedented move: Jesus confronts his enemy and turns him into Jesus' chief ambassador (9:5-6, 15). Paul's stunning reversal in his commitments and conduct begin with Jesus' direct intervention and summons, but God's involvement in Paul's ministry does not end there—this is not even Paul's last special communique from Jesus. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit empower, encourage, and direct Paul at pivotal moments throughout his ministry (14:3; 18:9-10; 19:8). Paul becomes a witness of Jesus at all because of the direct encounter with him outside Damascus, but it is no once-for-all event; divine action both makes and sustains Paul as a witness of Jesus.

6.1.1.1 Summons

Paul's excursion to Damascus goes not at all as he planned. He sets out with letters from the high priest authorizing him to arrest any who hold to the way of Jesus and bring them back to Jerusalem as prisoners (Acts 9:1-2). Instead he ends up arrested himself and his life is turned in the opposite direction. The architect of Paul's about-face is Jesus. Just before Paul arrives in Damascus a light suddenly flashes from heaven; as he falls to the ground a voice addresses him, saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (9:3-4). The voice, as Paul learns when he asks, "Who are you, Lord?" belongs to Jesus: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (9:5). Jesus stops Paul while he is in the process of acting against Jesus' followers and makes it personal—Jesus counts Paul's harassment and imprisonment of adherents to the Way as persecuting Jesus (9:4-5). Immediately Jesus commands Paul, as if the latter has already been transformed from Jesus' persecutor into his servant, "Arise, and enter the city, and you will be

told what it is necessary [δεῖ] for you to do" (9:6). Paul, blinded, does as Jesus commands (9:8). Jesus personally initiates Paul's change from persecutor to witness.

Accosting Paul on the road to Damascus is only Jesus' first move in making Paul into his witness. Jesus continues the process by speaking in a vision to "a disciple in Damascus named Ananias" and enlisting him to restore Paul's sight to him and usher him into the community he will now turn from persecuting to promoting (9:10-16). That it is Jesus as divine agent who acts here is signaled in the narrative's describing "the Lord" speaking to Ananias, which is initially ambiguous—it could refer to Israel's God or to Jesus, or both together. But when Ananias first addresses Paul, he removes the ambiguity: "the Lord has sent me—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road" (9:17). Ananias's words highlight Jesus' as the agent of Paul's transformation and confirms Jesus' co-identity with the Lord God of Israel. Jesus sends Ananias to Paul so that he will be healed and filled with the Holy Spirit (9:17), and so empowered to embark on the work for which Jesus has told Ananias he chose Paul: "This one is a chosen vessel [σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς] to me to carry [βαστάσαι] my name the nations and kings and the descendants of Israel" (9:15). One might also translate σκεῦος as "instrument" or "tool," which could suggest Jesus will wield Paul as a special communicator before the projected audiences, but the passivity of "vessel"—a "container" or "receptacle" that contains and pours out Jesus name wherever it is carried—places still further emphasis on Jesus' agency in giving Paul his vocation.[5] Paul's ministry begins through Jesus' direct act upon him, and that

[5] Commentators tend to focus more on the chosen-ness of the "vessel" or "instrument" rather than on the passivity suggested in Paul being a "tool" wielded by Jesus. See e.g., Gaventa, *Acts*, 151-52; Holladay, *Acts*, 197-98.

is far from the end of the divine intervention that encourages, empowers, and directs Paul throughout his ministry.

6.1.1.2 Confirmation

Divine confirmation of Paul's commission begins with the Holy Spirit. Although Ananias promises Paul that he will "be filled with the Holy Spirit" when Ananias lays hands on him to restore his sight, the narrator does not yet Paul as "filled with the Holy Spirit," And yet, when the time comes the Holy Spirit personally chooses Paul for particular work, and shortly afterward the narrator does describe Paul as "full of the Holy Spirit" (13:9). When Paul and Barnabas are both at Antioch, the community gathered in worship discerns the Spirit saying, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul to the work to which I have called them" (13:2), and so the community in Antioch sends them off on their first circuit of preaching "the word of God" throughout the northeastern Mediterranean (13:2-5). The Holy Spirit confirms Jesus' choice of Paul as the bearer of his name and sets him to work traveling and preaching in Asia Minor, and the "Spirit of Jesus" directs Paul's journey to Macedonia (16:7). The Spirit propels Paul's ministry—so much so that Paul describes himself as "captive to the Spirit" (20:22) when he turns toward Jerusalem for the last time.

"The Lord" and "God" also empower Paul to do great works that serve to confirm his calling as well as his message. As Paul and Barnabas preach in Iconium, they encounter opposition from "resistant [ἀπειθήσαντες] Jews" (Acts 14:2). The two missionaries nonetheless speak "boldly for the Lord, who was bearing witness [μαρτυροῦντι] to the word of his grace by granting signs and wonders to be done through their hands" (14:3). Here the Lord "bears witness" to corroborate the message Paul and Barnabas speak, which, besides

showing their audience additional evidence that their message is true, also authenticates their commission as bearers of Jesus' name through the region. The "signs and wonders" confirm the message and legitimize the messengers. The "uncommonly powerful works" that "God did through the hand of Paul" (19:11) function similarly to confirm Paul's bold speech in the Ephesian synagogue (19:8). In both instances, Paul does not do the "signs and wonders" or "works of uncommon power" through his own native ability; rather, God empowers him.

As a third kind of divine confirmation, Paul receives additional visions beyond the first one that precipitates his repentance; they verify his status as Jesus' witness and encourage him in the face of opposition and hardship. The first occurs in Corinth, after Paul has once again encountered opposition from Jews when speaking in the synagogue: "The Lord said at night in a vision to Paul, 'Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent, for I am with you and none shall set upon you to harm you, for many in this city are my people" (Acts 18:9-10).[6] In response, Paul stays there for a year and a half "teaching the word of God among them" (18:11). "The Lord" appears to Paul again the night after his trial before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem: "That night, the Lord stood by and said, 'Take courage! For just as you have borne witness about me in Jerusalem so also it is necessary [δεῖ] for you to bear witness in Rome" (23:11). This word from the Lord encourages Paul to bear witness without fear of dying in Jerusalem, and it assures both him and the reader that he bears truthful witness of Jesus. And indeed, Paul moves toward Rome immediately afterward when his nephew learns of the plot

[6] These words from "the Lord" to Paul make an interesting point of connection to Elijah's encounter with God after he flees for his life into the desert (1 Kings 19:10-18). Paul does not exhibit the despair over his people's idolatry and fear for his life that Elijah does (1 Kings 19:14), but the divine reassurance takes a similar form. Both in 1 Kings 19:18 and Acts 18:9-10 the Lord exhorts a prophetic figure not to be afraid, because he is not alone among God's faithful people. See further Gaventa, *Acts*, 258-59; Holladay, *Acts*, 353.

against Paul's life and thwarts it via a word with the tribune, who quietly shuttles Paul out of Jerusalem to Caesarea (23:12-33). The narrator does not report how Paul's nephew learned of the plot but, coming so soon after the Lord's most recent assurance of Paul's ongoing mission, a hint of divine direction lurks in the background. Paul receives one last divine message—this one also assuring his safe arrival in Rome despite the coming storm that will wreck the ship on which Paul travels. Paul speaks this encouragement to the men with whom he sails: "Last night there stood by me an angel of the God I worship and to whom I belong, saying, 'Do not fear, Paul, for you must [δεῖ] stand before Caesar, and look! God has given to you all who are sailing with you" (27:23-24). These divine messages confirm Paul's status as Jesus' witness and encourage him to remain faithful to his calling; they also remind the reader that Paul has not gone off on a mission of his own making. God has accomplished the principal event of which Paul speaks, and God specifically summons and repeatedly encourages Paul's active witness. God initiates and sustains Paul's mission, and he responds with bold abandon.

Acts' narrative portrait of how Jesus summons Paul, the Holy Spirit directs him, and God empowers and encourages him provides clear evidence that the entire endeavor that overtakes his life, starting in Acts 9:3, was not his plan, but God's. Indeed, the three times when Paul is told what he "must" do, "the Lord" or "Jesus" uses the word δεῖ, which, as previously shown, frequently correlates to the necessity of God's plan. The necessity that compels Paul is participation in God's plan. Showing that God initiates and sustains Paul's witness reminds the reader that the point of the narrative is not so much what happens to Paul or what Paul does, but what God is doing. The narrative emphasis on God's agency certainly underscores Paul's credibility, but, more importantly, it does what a good witness should—

namely, draw constant attention to the object of witness. For both Paul and the narrative of Acts as a whole, the God revealed in Jesus—particularly his resurrection—is the object of witness as well as its origin.

6.1.2 Substance

When Jesus recruits Ananias to lay hands on Paul to restore his sight, Ananias at first objects that Paul had wreaked havoc in the Jerusalem church, "and here he has authority from the high priests to bind all who call upon your name" (9:14). But Jesus responds that he has chosen Paul to "carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the descendants of Israel" and that Paul will suffer "for the sake of my name" (9:15-16). The substance of Paul's message about Jesus reflects the mission Jesus lays out for Paul in his words to Ananias. Paul's work centers on the name of Jesus—proclaiming his name and interpreting his identity for a wide span of politically constituted audiences, with the implication that Paul will suffer persecution at their hands exactly because what Jesus represents conflicts with his audiences' constitutive theological convictions or political interests. Where the emphasis falls in Paul's message evolves throughout the course of his ministry and depends somewhat on the audience and context of his proclamation, but, in summary, Paul bears witness to the Lord who confronts him on the Damascus road as Son of God and Messiah—the human embodiment of Israel's God and the risen and anointed ruler of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, in which the power of God exemplified in Jesus' resurrection prevails.

6.1.2.1 Lord, Son of God, and Messiah

For Paul to begin by addressing Jesus as κύριε makes masterful dramatic irony. The setup suggests that Paul both does and does not know who addresses him. His question, "τίς

εἶ, κύριε" (Acts 9:5), contains both confusion and understanding not least because κύριος can translate variously, especially in the vocative, as "lord," "master," and "sir" as well as "Lord," referring to Israel's one God. "Lord," of course, is Luke's most frequent title for Jesus as well as the one that consistently identifies him with Israel's God.[7] With this simple question, Paul says more than he yet knows or believes; he uses a form of address appropriate to being confronted by a figure deserving respect, a heavenly messenger, or even God personally. But the gap in Paul's knowledge is filled quickly: Jesus identifies himself and immediately Paul's address of κύριε becomes more significant (9:5). The one whom Paul has addressed as "lord," "sir," or "Lord" turns out to be Jesus, whom Paul has been persecuting, but who is rightly addressed by the full spectrum of possibility within the κύριος title. Lest the reader doubt that, the term κύριος appears six more times (9:10 [x2], 11, 13, 15, 17) before Paul is baptized and his sight restored (9:18). The final time, Ananias identifies the κύριος who confronted Paul and summoned Ananias to minister to him; this κύριος is "Jesus, who appeared to you on the way" (9:17). This sequence builds to a conclusion similarly constructed in Peter's Pentecost speech (2:21-22): the name of the κύριος is Jesus.[8] This is the Lord for whose name Paul will suffer (9:16). While κύριος is not the first title by which Paul proclaims Jesus' identity,[9] it is the first

[7] See again Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 82-89.

[8] For a similar exegetical move connected to the same text Peter quotes at Pentecost ("everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" [Joel 3:5; Acts 2:21]) see Rowe, "Name of the Lord?," 141, 147, 151-60: "The name which is the God of Israel alone, is now the name which is Jesus. The saving name in its original context was YHWH, now 'the saving' name is Christ's. In Joel the Israelites would have called out 'YHWH' to be saved, and now in Romans, all would call out 'Jesus.' 'The name of the Lord' = YHWH has become, through Paul's OT citation, 'the name of the Lord' = Jesus" (160).

[9] See Acts 9:20, 22.

by which Paul names Jesus—even if unknowingly. And, before the chapter concludes, Acts summarizes Paul's proclamation in Damascus and Jerusalem, respectively, thus: "he spoke boldly in the name of Jesus" (9:27) and "speaking boldly in the name of the Lord" (9:28). Identifying Jesus as "the Lord" implicitly co-identifies Jesus with God, and Paul emphasizes this connection in his first public declaration of Jesus' identity: "this one [οὗτος] is the Son of God" (9:20).

Only one sentence separates the restoration of Paul's sight and his baptism (Acts 9:18) from his public witness to Jesus beginning in Damascus and then, "immediately in the synagogues he began to proclaim Jesus: 'This one is the Son of God'" (Acts 9:20). Placing this declaration as Paul's first public act after his encounter with Jesus underscores the significance of both the action and its content. Paul's first action is to speak publicly about Jesus in emphatic, powerful, and unique terms: Jesus, *this one* and not another, is the Son of God.[10] Paul is the only human being in the entire Lukan narrative to declare this truth—the essential one about Jesus' identity first revealed in the mouth of the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation (Luke 1:35). After Luke 1:35, however, all the way through the book of Acts, no one else calls Jesus the Son of God.[11] The devil tempts Jesus to prove he is the Son of God (Luke 4:3, 9), and demons call him by that title, shrieking as they are driven out of people (4:41). At his transfiguration, a voice from the overshadowing cloud says, "This is my Son, my chosen one; listen to him" (9:35). Jesus speaks once of himself as "the Son" in relation to "the Father" (10:22), but the closest he comes to calling himself "the Son of God" is in response to the

[10] See again Rowe, "Luke-Acts and the Imperial Cult," 291.

[11] See Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 435.

council's collective question at his trial: "Are you then the Son of God?" to which he replies, "You say that I am" (22:70). Luke clearly believes the title "Son of God" applies to Jesus, a fact which, along with the title's sparse attribution to Jesus, indicates the depth of Paul's understanding and makes his unparalleled public declaration all the more powerful.

For Paul to call Jesus "the Son of God" recalls these key moments, beginning with Jesus' annunciation, where this title was applied to him and invites the reader to fill in what being "the Son of God" means in light of the shape of Jesus' life. *This one* is the Son of God—most lately so identified just before his crucifixion and resurrection (Luke 22:70). To say that Jesus is God's Son is to say, as Jesus once himself declared, that the Son reveals the Father (Luke 10:22). In calling Jesus God's son, Paul declares that the character of God can be known through examining the character of Jesus. Perhaps no less blunt a declaration could account for the abrupt reversal in Paul's behavior. If Jesus is God's son, then God cannot be served by persecuting those who follow Jesus as his disciples. Indeed, aiming to serve God by persecuting anyone is revealed as an utterly misguided enterprise if the character of God is revealed in Jesus, who accomplished his intentions through generosity, persistence, and resilience. Paul's second public declaration in Damascus, "this one is the Messiah," underscores the point. If Jesus is God's anointed ruler as well as God's son, then Jesus' way of wielding power and God's are one.

In declaring Jesus the Messiah, Paul does nothing unique. Indeed, Peter's Pentecost speech comes to a climactic finish with the words, "God has made him Lord and Messiah—this Jesus, whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36), and Acts summarizes the early apostolic ministry with, "Every day in the temple and from house to house they did not cease teaching and bringing good news [of] the Messiah—Jesus" (5:42). In calling Jesus "Messiah," Paul echoes

the apostles' teaching, but with this initial statement Acts includes no more explanation from Paul about what this term signifies when applied to Jesus. Previously, however, it has served to highlight Jesus' Davidic lineage (Luke 20:41) and allowed the council to accuse him of royal pretensions (23:2), but Jesus took care after his resurrection to define "Messiah" in terms of what happened to him in fulfillment of scripture: it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer, be raised, and enter his glory (24:26, 46). Jesus fulfills the office of Messiah through his death and resurrection—not through mustering a band of guerrillas and staging a rebellion, or any number of other death-dealing tactics.

Since Paul makes these two statements about Jesus' identity—"this one is the Son of God" and "this one is the Messiah"—without elaborating, Luke's narrative of Jesus and the early apostolic teaching supply the significance of these titles. The title of "Son of God," which occurs sparsely in Luke's narrative and only here in Acts, disappears after this.[12] Identifying Jesus as God's Son once at the beginning of Paul's ministry follows the pattern of Luke's use of the title at Jesus' annunciation and scarcely thereafter. At his first public speech in the synagogue in Antioch (Acts 13:16-41) Paul speaks briefly about Jesus as the savior whom God promised would come from David's line (13:22-23). Later, Paul echoes Jesus' own teaching about the Messiah, that it was necessary for him to suffer and be raised from the dead (17:3). As with the apostles, "proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah" (5:42) becomes a tidy way of summarizing Paul's spoken witness (18:5). While speaking of Jesus as the Messiah, he even

[12] One could read Paul's reference to Psalm 2, "You are my son…" (Acts 13:33-34) as additional interpretation of what Jesus' being God's Son entails, or how his resurrection points to his identity as God's Son, but this seems a tenuous connection. Commenting on the phrase, "that he was the son of God" from Acts 9:20, Fitzmyer notes that the title "Son of God" is "implied in Pauls' speech in 13:33, where Ps 2:7 is cited" (Fitzmyer, *Acts* 435). It is, nevertheless, only implied—not articulated—and never mentioned again in Acts.

invites the Roman governor, Felix, to express faith in Jesus through practicing justice and self-control (24:24). The "Son of God" whom Paul proclaims is consistent with how both Gabriel and Jesus characterize him in Luke; the "Messiah" of Paul's preaching corresponds to Jesus' self-description and apostolic teaching about him. Paul uses these titles mostly when he speaks in synagogues to Jews, proselytes, and God-fearers (e.g., in Damascus [9:20-22], Thessalonica [17:1-3], and Corinth [18:4-5]). When he speaks to majority Gentile audiences, he uses these terms less frequently and emphasizes that Jesus represents the one God of all people.

6.1.2.2 The God of All

Paul announces his mission "to be a light for the Gentiles" (Acts 13:47) in Antioch shortly after his first synagogue speech and his first experience of opposition from Jews. As with Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth, Paul meets a favorable reception in Antioch until his Jewish audience becomes "filled with jealousy/zeal [ἐπλήσθησαν ζήλου]" at the suggestion of Gentile inclusion in the ambit of God's saving plan being enacted through Jesus (Luke 4:22-30; Acts 13:42-50). Paul reenacts this pattern repeatedly when he goes to a new city, for example, in his next destination—Iconium.

He begins in the local synagogue bringing news of God's inclusive salvation (14:1), and when Jews resist his message (14:2), he persists in publicly proclaiming the message to Gentiles (14:3) until the opposition from both Jews and Gentiles becomes life-threatening (14:4-5), at which point Paul (and, in this case, Barnabas with him) leaves to begin the cycle in a new city. Acts does not include an account of Paul's public speeches to primarily Gentile audiences in every city he visits, but where Paul's words are included, a common theme emerges that readers of Romans (esp. Rom 3:29) will recognize: by virtue of having created all

that is, the God revealed in Jesus is not the God of Jews only, but also of Gentiles. Paul presents this message sometimes explicitly to his Gentile audiences (Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-26), and sometimes implicitly by deliberately proclaiming the good news about Jesus to Gentiles (24:24-25; 26:20; 26:23-29; 28:26-28). But the message is plain: the God revealed in Jesus is the God of all, and so the message about Jesus is for all. Paul proclaims to Gentiles both a word of grace and a call to repentance: they are included in God's work of salvation through Jesus, and must, therefore, repudiate any ideologies and practices that conflict with the character of God revealed in Jesus.

Paul, and Barnabas with him, first declare this message publicly in Lystra, where they have fled from Iconium due to the threat of stoning (Acts 14:5), In Lystra, Barnabas and Paul (here called "the apostles") "were bringing good news" (14:7), which appears to include some proclamation, since the people recognize Paul as the "chief speaker" (14:12). But Acts gives no account of a speech before their first act under the heading of "bringing good news": Paul heals a lame man who had never walked (14:8-10). As a result, the people take Paul and Barnabas for gods and prepare to worship them (14:11-13). The people's reaction suggests that they consider healing power evidence of deity, but Paul and Barnabas rush to point out that the Lystrans have ascribed this power to the wrong gods. It is not Zeus and Hermes who have given the formerly lame man the ability to walk, nor the merely human Paul and Barnabas, but, rather, the "living God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them" (14:15).

The God who can give life is the living God, who created the whole world and all creatures that inhabit it. This God likewise continues to nourish the world, "giving you rain and fruitful seasons, satisfying you with food and your hearts with joy" (14:17). As Rowe

summarizes, "[t]o be the 'living' God is to be Creator, to possess the life giving power to do good and to bring rain and sustenance."[13] These acts of "doing good" bear "witness" to God's reality and character, as well as to God's universal and exclusive right to be recognized as earth's creator and sustainer. Paul and Barnabas called on the creative, life-giving power of this God in order to heal the man who had never walked. The God who created and sustains the world through this life-giving power is the God of all life—not just the God of Jews. On this occasion, Paul does not mention Jesus at all, but the narrative context suggests that he and Barnabas were first concerned with halting the Lystrans' preparations to sacrifice to them, and before they could continue, the opposing Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived, stoned Paul, and left him for dead (14:19). Even so, the whole context makes it plain: Paul believes the message about Jesus, whom he has already named "Son of God" (9:20), is for all people. And so Paul and Barnabas present the message of both grace and rebuke: "We are human beings like you, bringing you good news that you might turn away from these impotent things toward a living God" (14:15). Worshiping of the living God cannot be added on top of the worship of Zeus, Hermes, and so on, but must replace such worship.[14]

In his encounter with the "spirit of divination" within the enslaved girl in Philippi, Paul takes a similar point a step further by identifying Jesus with the one God of all. After "many days" of the girl following Paul and Silas about and crying out, "These men are slaves

---

[13] C. Kavin Rowe, "The Book of Acts and the Cultural Explication of the Identity of God," in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, ed. A. Katharine Grieb, C. Kavin Rowe, and J. Ross Wagner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 244-66 (255).

[14] In Rowe's words: "Luke's call through the mouths of Paul and Barnabas is not simply an admonition to tweak a rite or halt a ceremony. It contains, rather, the summons that simultaneously involves the destruction of an entire mode of being religious" (Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 21).

of god the most high who are proclaiming to you a way of salvation," Paul's irritation peaks and he casts the spirit out of her in Jesus' name (Acts 16:17-18). Rowe points out Paul's aim to eliminate the ambiguity contained in the girl's proclamation and identify the "Most High God" exclusively as the one revealed in Jesus: "The ambiguity in the phrase τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου… lasts only until the exorcism, at which time the identity of the Most High receives christological specification: ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὕψιστος is not Ζεὺς ὕψιστος (or any other "supreme being"), but the God who works σωτηρία through the name of Jesus (cf. Acts 4:12!)."[15] The one God of all is not Zeus, but the God revealed in Jesus. Paul's act releases the girl from the spirit and implicitly condemns her owners' profiting from her affliction and its resulting dissemination of false theology. In this episode, the exhortation to repent and the word of grace are implicit; the spirit that possessed the girl was impotent (μάταιος; cf. 14:15) against the power of Jesus' name, which reveals his superiority to such spirits. Those who read the encounter rightly and love the truth will turn away from allegiance to such spirits and turn, instead, toward Jesus.

Had Paul and Silas not been arrested and imprisoned immediately after the exorcism, they might have said more. And indeed, when their jailer asks, "κύριοι, what must I do that I might be saved?" (16:30), they give him a response that, because "[t]heology … is never merely ideation, [but] always and inherently a total way of life,"[16] unites the word of grace with the exhortation to repent: "trust on the Lord Jesus [πιστεύσον ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν] and you will

[15] See Rowe, "Identity of God," 260.

[16] Rowe, "Identity of God," 244.

be saved" (16:31). The jailer must now recognize a new "Lord"—not the gods and spirits of Philippi and not Paul and Silas, but Jesus—and live accordingly. Evidencing his new pledge of fidelity to the Lord Jesus, the jailer is baptized and immediately treats Paul and Silas like "lords" instead of prisoners, and "he rejoiced with his whole household, having trusted in God" (16:33-34). In this episode, once again, to trust in Jesus is to trust in God, and precipitates a turn away from death-dealing to life-giving practices. The message remains consistent, though more subtly and fully articulated, when Paul speaks before the Areopagus in Athens.

Paul arrives in Athens alone and wanders about the city while waiting for his companions to join him. Acute dismay assails his spirit as he observes the city is "full of idols" (17:16). Paul showed profound distress over idolatrous worship already in Lystra and Philippi; he explicitly told the Lystrans that their gods were impotent and showed the Philippian masters of the slave girl as much. Athens's pervasive devotion to "gods who are not gods" appears, at least briefly, to overwhelm Paul. Even so, he begins as usual with the synagogue, and then moves to arguing publicly with anyone who will engage him, which ends up including some "Stoic and Epicurean philosophers" (17:18). Here in Athens Paul gives his longest speech to a Gentile audience without interference from Jews. The heart of his message in the public center is "Jesus and the resurrection" (17:18), even before he is taken to the Areopagus to give an account of himself and this "new teaching" (17:19).

Before the Areopagus, Paul explains the message about "Jesus and the resurrection" by speaking about "the God who made the world and everything in it," and who is thus "Lord of heaven and earth" (17:24).[17] The Athenians have shrines to many gods and even "to an

[17] Rowe makes a persuasive case that "Paul is actually on trial. This fact has often been overlooked by NT scholars who assume that the phrase ἐπὶ τὸν Ἄρειον πάγον refers simply to the hill of Ares where Paul made his speech.

unknown god" (17:22-23), a feature Paul uses to his rhetorical advantage to show that they neither know nor worship rightly the one true God. The creator of the world and of all human beings "does not live in temples made with hands" (17:24), nor are the worship practices appropriate to the Athenians' gods fitting for the one God of all. This God cannot rightly be worshiped as one among many gods; rather, being the sole source of all that is, this is the only true God and the God of all people (17:30). God's status as the God of all derives not from the ability to dominate, but from having created everything that exists. Paul allows that God has been patient with the Athenians' (and other Gentiles') ignorance, but now the God of all "commands all people everywhere to repent" (17:30), because the day approaches when the man whom God has chosen will "measure the world according to justice [κρίνειν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν δικαιοσύνη]" (17:31). God has given a sign assuring that this day will come—the day when a true justice will be established—and that sign is Jesus' resurrection. Paul address the Athenians candidly: their worship does not serve the one true God, but that God graciously gives them opportunity to repent and shape their lives, instead, according to the justice that Jesus will establish.[18]

But in fact, 'the Areopagus' refers more precisely to ἡ ἐξ Ἀρείου πάγου Βουλή, which, unsurprisingly, took its name from its meeting place: the hill of Ares. As T. D. Barnes convincingly showed, the frequent assertion that the council no longer met at this place is basically groundless [Timothy David Barnes, "Apostle on Trial," *JTS* 20 (1969): 407-19]. Its sole piece of (alleged) hard ancient evidence is a single statement in Pseudo-Demosthenes, and even that has now been discredited by Barnes. The reason, therefore, that Luke does not distinguish between 'Areopagus as hill upon which Paul spoke' and 'Areopagus as city council before which Paul spoke' is because such a distinction would have been pointless" (C. Kavin Rowe, "The Grammar of Life: The Areopagus Speech and Pagan Tradition," *NTS* 57 (2010): 31-50 [37]). This argument is the necessary backdrop to describing Paul as speaking "before the Areopagus" not just as a location but a body before whom he is obliged to defend the words he spoke in the ἀγορά (Acts 17:17, 20-21).

[18] See again Rowe, "Grammar of Life," 40-45 and Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 39-41.

Paul speaks the Gentiles in Lystra, Philippi, and Athens a consistent word of God's comprehensive grace and of exhortation to repentance. Thereafter, Paul makes no long speeches to Gentile audiences, but he never abandons the idea that God's salvific mission extends beyond the people of Israel. Indeed, even when he is tried and imprisoned he reiterates this point—implicitly by trying to persuade the governors who question him, and explicitly by telling his last Jewish audience that he will bring the message to Gentiles. To Felix Paul speaks of "faith in Christ Jesus" and of "justice, self-control, and the imminent judgment" (24:24-25). Before Agrippa Paul tells his whole story beginning with his persecution of Jesus' followers, recounts his experience on the road to Damascus and his ministry to both Jews and Gentiles, and ends by trying to persuade even Agrippa about Jesus (26:2-29, esp. vv. 17, 23, 27, 29). In the final scene of Acts Paul speaks to some of the Jewish leaders in Rome, trying to persuade them about Jesus (28:23). When some of them resist, Paul employs the same rhetorical tactic as at the scene of his first sermon in Antioch. If Jews will not receive this message, he will take it to Gentiles: "Let it be known to you, then, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen" (28:26). And the penultimate verse of the book reports that Paul spent two years living in Rome, and "welcomed all who came to him" (28:30). Paul's actions thus coincide with his words: he welcomes all because he serves the God of all—the God who is the God of all by virtue of having created the whole world and all people. This living creator God gives life to all and offers salvation to all through the act of power that reveals God's essential character: raising Jesus from the dead.

6.1.2.3 Resurrection

As with the original apostles, Paul's message about what God has done through Jesus focuses on his resurrection. Paul emphasizes God's agency as the one who both chose Israel (13:17) and raised Jesus (13:31, 33). When Paul first speaks in the synagogue in Antioch, he interprets Jesus' resurrection within the framework of Israel's story. God's promises of salvation for Israel (13:23) are fulfilled through Jesus, and particularly through his resurrection (13:33). Jesus' resurrection is also God's response to the violence of Jerusalem's residents and Pilate. The "residents of Jerusalem and their leaders … asked Pilate to have [Jesus] killed, … but God raised him from the dead" (Acts 13:27-30). Because God raised Jesus, the apostolic witnesses of his resurrection (13:31-32) bring a message of forgiveness and freedom from sin that exceeds the possibilities of the law of Moses (13:38-40). Because God responded to Jerusalem's death-dealing act by overturning and exceeding it with undying life (13:34), forgiveness and freedom now are on offer for those who put faith in Jesus (13:39). Paul speaks in the Antioch synagogue to an audience of both "Israelites and God-fearers" (13:16), and at the end Paul and Barnabas cite Isaiah 49:6 as their mandate for going to Gentiles with this message, so that they "bring salvation to the end of the earth" (13:47). The message of forgiveness and liberation from sin through Jesus' resurrection is not only for Jews, but also for Gentiles.

Acts does not portray Paul speaking in full about Jesus' resurrection and its significance again, but the resurrection remains central to his message even when he does not name it explicitly or mentions it only briefly. In Lystra, Paul and Barnabas begin "bringing the good news" by healing a man who had never walked (14:7-10)—an act of life-giving power that images resurrection without Paul invoking either Jesus or the resurrection. Paul and Barnabas

again do not mention Jesus at all when they frantically exhort the Lystrans not to sacrifice to them (Acts 14:15-17), but Paul bears witness to resurrection even without words when he gets up (ἀναστάς) after having been stoned and left for dead (14:20). Similarly, in Philippi, Paul need not mention Jesus' resurrection in order to bear witness to it. For Paul and Silas to respond to beating and incarceration with "praying and singing hymns to God" (16:22-25), and then caring more for the jailer's life than for their own freedom (16:27-28), demonstrate their conviction that, with God, life overcomes death. When Paul and Silas tell the Philippian jailer that his salvation depends on putting faith in Jesus (Acts 16:31), their words recall Paul's sermon at Antioch that stipulates Jesus' resurrection as the event that makes forgiveness and liberation from sin possible for all who put faith in Jesus (13:31-39). In Athens, Paul frames everything he has to say in terms of "Jesus and the resurrection" (17:18), but in his speech before the Areopagus he only invokes Jesus' resurrection at the end of his speech. Jesus' resurrection is the sure sign that the day God has appointed for Jesus to judge the world according to justice will, eventually, arrive. Jesus' resurrection is the signal for those captivated by death-dealing power that its days are numbered, and that, therefore, now is the time to repent and turn to the way that leads to life—to God.[19]

The call to repent and turn to God remains the principal consequence of Paul's message about Jesus' resurrection when Paul faces trial. Indeed, Paul identifies resurrection—the hope that it promises and the way of life it commends—as the principal reason he faces trial at all. Paul has shaped his life and message to reflect resurrection hope, and for this, he contends, he is on trial: "I am being tried concerning hope and resurrection of the dead" (Acts

[19] See again Rowe, "Grammar of Life," 43-44.

23:6). This claim also proves expedient to divide the council against one another instead of univocally targeting Paul, but it is not, for that reason, any less sincere. Paul persistently presents resurrection as the crucial matter; he is on trial for his hope that God will raise the dead (24:15, 21; 26:6-8). At his final defense, facing Agrippa and Festus, Paul begins accounting for his entire ministry by exclaiming, "Why is it judged unbelievable among you that God raises the dead?" (26:8). Paul's whole ministry begins because Jesus was raised; it was the risen Jesus who summoned Paul in a vision on the Damascus road. Paul recounts that the risen Jesus promised to rescue him both from his own people and the Gentiles, "to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins and a portion among those sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:17-18). Paul relates his faithfulness to this commission—that wherever he has gone he has exhorted both Jews and Gentiles "to repent and turn to God, and do works in keeping with repentance" (26:20). The repentance that abandons "darkness" and "the power of Satan" for "light" and "God" is made possible because of the suffering and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus, which is the heart of the message Paul summarizes for Festus and Agrippa: "Therefore, having obtained help from God up to this day, I have stood bearing witness before both small and great nothing but what the prophets and Moses said must happen: the Messiah would suffer, be first of the resurrection from the dead, and he must proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles" (26:22-23). In Paul's witness, Jesus' resurrection both makes possible and calls for repentance away from "darkness" and "the power of Satan" and toward "light" and "God." In other words, Jesus' resurrection summons people to live according to the reign of God.

6.1.2.4 The Reign of God

The phrase, "the reign of God," for all its centrality and pervasiveness in Jesus' ministry, occurs relatively little in Acts. Even so, its placement summarizing Jesus' post-resurrection teaching (Acts 1:3) and Paul's last preaching (28:31) signal its importance for Acts as a whole. Indeed, as shown above, the point of the repentance made possible and shaped by Jesus' resurrection is the creation of a political order in the pattern of God's creative, generous, life-giving power (26:18-19, 23). Paul (with Barnabas) first invokes the language of "the reign God" after experiencing violent resistance to it, being nearly killed, and "rising" again as if undamaged (14:22). Paul and Barnabas find themselves nearly worshiped as gods because of Paul's display of life-giving power in causing a man lame from birth to walk (14:10-13). In the process of preventing such worship, they decry the gods as *ματαία*—"impotencies," "vanities," or "emptinesses"—and juxtapose them with "the living God" (14:15). The life-giving power Paul wielded comes from the God whose power is giving life and whose reign is thus governed. This speech narrowly prevents the Lystrans from sacrificing to Paul and Barnabas (14:18), but also, apparently, primes the crowd of would-be worshipers to make an even sharper reversal once Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrive: together they stone Paul, drag him out of the city, and leave him for dead (14:19). But as happened with Jesus, whose death and resurrection image and enact how God's reign defeats death-dealing power, the story takes a surprising turn: "But when the disciples surrounded him, after getting up [*ἀναστάς*] he went into the city" (14:20). At the end of this episode of healing a man born lame, exhorting a crowd of Gentiles to turn to the living God, being stoned and left for dead by a crowd of both Jews and Gentiles, and "rising" alive, Paul (with Barnabas) first speaks of

the reign of God: "through many hardships [θλίψεων] it is necessary for us to enter into the reign of God" (14:22). The heralds who announce the end of the not-gods and the coming of God's reign will tread no smooth course; they are bound to suffer violence, but they will not use violence themselves. Paul first invokes "the reign of God" after he has experienced the hardship of nearly deadly stoning and almost-resurrection firsthand, but the circumstances of these experience comprise part of his comprehensive witness to the reign of God in both actions and words and provide the first evidence that for Paul, as for the witnesses before him, witness to Jesus includes witness to the reign of God.

Indeed, the phrase "reign of God" (on one occasion abbreviated to "the reign") becomes a shorthand summary of Paul's message, just as it was in Jesus' ministry. Acts summarizes Paul's preaching in Corinth thus: "After entering the synagogue, he was speaking boldly for three months, making arguments and persuasive speeches about the reign of God" (Acts 19:8). When Paul bids farewell to the Ephesian elders, he summarizes his ministry among them as "preaching the reign [κηρύσσων τὴν βασιλείαν]" (20:25). When Paul begins sharing his message with the Roman Jews, he does so by "bearing witness to the reign of God, persuading them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets" (28:23). Here, "the reign of God" explicitly summarizes Paul's message about Jesus, and his witness to Jesus is witness to the reign of God. And so it is until the very last verse. Acts ends with Paul "preaching the reign of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered" (28:31). For Paul, the reign of God is the political reality that the God of all is establishing through Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus—the Lord, Son of God, and Messiah—is the sign revealing the reign of the life-giving, creator God of all.

6.1.3 Theology conclusion

Paul becomes a witness to Jesus through an initial divine summons and ongoing confirmation at pivotal moments in his journeys, and his witness reflects the character of the one who summons him—the Lord Jesus. Jesus' initial and recurring communication with Paul serves the critical function of underscoring the rightness—the divine sanction—of Paul as a witness and of the message he brings. Without such validation, the reader could doubt that Paul was right to persist against the dogged opposition that follows him from city to city, particularly since the source of resistance appears to be Jews who are sympathetic to the message about Jesus as long as it is reserved for Jews (Acts 13:44-51) or as long as including Gentiles in the people of God does not eliminate the distinct identity of Israel maintained through circumcision and keeping "the customs" (21:20-21). Paul's witness to Jesus as the one through whom salvation is offered to Gentiles as well as Jews proves profoundly culturally and politically disruptive—for Gentiles as well as Jews. The call for "all people everywhere to repent" (17:30) is staggering and lends credence to the claim of the mob in Thessalonica that Paul and his associates have been "turning the world upside down [τὴν οἰκουμένην ἀναστατώσαντες]" (17:6). Of course, Paul has not been inciting insurrection (στάσις); rather, he has preached Jesus' resurrection (ἀνάστασις). But the shared etymology of these words (in English as well as Greek) alerts the reader to the (intentional!) seismic effect of Paul's theological claims even, and perhaps especially, if he shuns violence as a tool of persuasion.

Paul's message—that the God of all people is revealed in Jesus and is making a new universal political order governed by the sort of power demonstrated in Jesus' resurrection—does require the utter reorientation of the world. Conventional notions of power and former

political modes involving hierarchical social divisions are abolished, but not by Paul or any of his associates. Rather, God authors this disruption. Acts' insistence that Jesus personally commissions and confirms Paul's witness reveals God as the agent who, through Jesus' resurrection, creatively subverts the world's many manifestations of destructive power and opens for all the way of salvation. Neither Acts broadly nor Paul as a character within the book present any irrefutable proofs of this claim—that God has done the new thing that results in the world's upheaval and salvation. This claim cannot be hammered home through the blunt force of proof; it must be communicated in a manner suited to the message. Paul's way into becoming a witness—both learning the reality of God's act in Jesus and communicating it to others—resembles the path of the apostles before him. Paul has an encounter with God that comprehensively upends his worldview; as a result, he persistently works to communicate through both words and actions the message of what God has done.

6.2 Epistemology

Before encountering Jesus on the way to Damascus Paul's actions demonstrate no doubt that the apostles' and Stephen's preaching is false and an affront to God. Indeed, Paul later accounts for his persecuting the church out of "being a zealot [ζηλώτης] of God" (Acts 22:3), but apparently he did not accept the apostles' central teaching, namely, that God raised Jesus from the dead. Encountering the living Jesus begins, for Paul, the process of his epistemic transformation; but the scales do not fall from his eyes until Ananias visits and prays for him (9:2-8, 17-18). The Damascus disciples play a key role in Paul's becoming a witness of Jesus; Paul "sees" rightly only after Ananias's hospitable treatment and he only speaks after having spent several days with the disciples in Damascus (9:18-20). As a result of his direct

encounter with Jesus and Ananias's confirmation, Paul ceases opposing the message and representatives of Jesus, renounces violence altogether, and begins spreading the word about Jesus with astounding tenacity, courage, and resilience. Acts presents Paul's witness in a pattern similar to the apostles and Stephen: pivotal scenes and patterns from Jesus' life are recapitulated in his, he speaks boldly of what God has done in Jesus, and he lives the message he proclaims through acts of life-giving power and generosity even toward enemies. Paul's generosity, however, does not guarantee the receptivity of his audience. Indeed, Paul's own repentance as well as the responses to his ministry reveal much about Acts' perspective regarding the effects of sincere love for truth, socio-political status, and economic interest on a person's receptivity to the message about the reign of God revealed in Jesus. Paul could certainly guess he would lose his role as the high priest's sheriff and turn from persecutor to persecuted, but, when confronted by the living Jesus, Paul exhibits the same single-minded devotion to truth that qualified him as "a zealot for God" in the first place. Among Paul's audiences, however, many people—whose position of privilege, income, or retention of political office or status depend on their not accepting his message—display near imperviousness to it and, sometimes, they resist violently. Acts' portrait of Paul's opponents, therefore, bears out Jesus' declaration that the rich enter God's reign with less ease than a camel proceeding through a needle's eye (Luke 18:23). Paul's witness to the good news of God's reign revealed in Jesus thus showcases not only how social location affects receptivity to the message, but also how the impulse to dominate extends beyond physical force to controlling the conditions for knowledge—especially theological knowledge. In Paul's witness, no less than in the apostles' and Stephen's, Acts commends communicating the reality and significance of Jesus' resurrection in a manner suited to the message: without coercion,

manipulation, or misrepresentation; rather, with bold proclamation and acts of life-giving power. Paul's way into such witness begins, as it did for the apostles, with encountering the living Jesus.

6.2.1 Repentance

Compared with the apostles, Paul's becoming Jesus' witness involves a far more dramatic turn away from his former purpose. While they were still captivated by conventional conceptions of power and greatness even on the day before Jesus' crucifixion (Luke 22:24-25), met the arresting party on the Mount of Olives with ready violence (22:49-51), and perceived the reality of his resurrection only with great difficulty (Luke 24:11, 41), they were with Jesus from the beginning and only resisted believing he was alive because it seemed too good to be true. Even when Jesus' words left them blinded in a dust cloud of ignorance and confusion (18:34), they stayed with him. By contrast, Paul enters the narrative as the facilitator of Jesus' exemplary witness, Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1), and escalates his violent campaign against the rest of the church broadly thereafter (8:3). Paul's volte-face probably should not be called "conversion" in the modern sense of word; all signs suggest he believes he still worships the same God, ontologically speaking (24:14).[20] But his understanding of God's character and of what, therefore, constitutes faithful service to God, changes dramatically. The change Paul undergoes is aptly called "repentance" because it involves his recognition of a previously unacknowledged truth that leads him to reject former constitutive habits of thought and action and changes the whole course of his life. One might call Paul's repentance a coup

[20] See again Holladay, *Acts*, 203-22; Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*; and Thompson, *Acts*, 195-97.

for the way of Jesus, but in the pattern of resurrection rather than insurrection. Paul's abrupt turn from violent persecution to bold witness constitutes a stunning victory for the life-giving power of resurrection vis-à-vis Paul's death-dealing zealotry. Because of the stark contrast between Paul's purpose before and after his Damascus experience, and because how people becomes a witnesses shapes how they bear witness, the events and actions that influence his repentance warrant careful examination. Paul becomes a witness to Jesus' resurrection and the reign of God through, first, a direct encounter with the risen Jesus (9:3-5) and, second, through a gracious and hospitable encounter with someone who should view him as a deadly enemy, but treats him, instead, as a brother (9:17-18). How Paul becomes a witness of Jesus' resurrection shapes his witness to Jesus' resurrection.

On the road to Damascus, after the bright flash and initial question, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" and Paul responds, "Who are you, κύριε?" he hears the owner of the voice self-identify as "Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:4-5). Immediately, Paul learns two life-altering truths: 1) Jesus is not dead, but alive, and 2) he responds to a title that, while it could denote mere respect, also rightly belongs to the God of Israel. And if Jesus is alive, having been dead, his identification with Israel's God seems all the more apt. Paul does not yet exhibit much response to or even comprehension of these new items of knowledge, but he does obey Jesus' imperative: "Get up [ἀνάστηθι] and enter the city, and it will be told to you what it is necessary [δεῖ] for you to do" (9:6). And so Paul does, fasting and waiting for three days, still blinded (9:8-9). Like the apostles who wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit until Pentecost in obedience to Jesus' command (1:4-2:4), holding off on any active witness,

Paul does nothing immediately after his encounter with the risen Jesus except wait to be directed as Jesus promised (9:6).

Paul does not know how he will be instructed; but if he going into Damascus he would have every reason to fear for his life. Being blinded such that he must be led by the hand (9:8), he is utterly vulnerable, and as Ananias demonstrates, Paul's murderous purpose in coming to Damascus is common knowledge (9:13-14). Dispatching Paul quickly would seem an expedient course. But when Ananias comes to visit Paul, the disciple treats the persecutor not as the enemy he is but, instead, lays gentle hands on him and calls him "brother" (9:17). Rather than exploiting Paul's vulnerability and eliminating his threat by killing him, Ananias speaks the restoration of Paul's sight and his empowerment by the Holy Spirit (9:17). Ananias's generosity toward Paul is not mere obedience to specific and direct commands from Jesus; it is also faithful witness to Jesus' character of peacemaking power. And Ananias leaves no doubt about who has commanded and enabled him to visit Paul with such grace, and he confirms that the one who encountered Paul on the road was "the Lord Jesus" (9:17). Ananias thus bears witness of Jesus to Paul in both words and deeds. Paul is then baptized (implying but not making his being filled with the Holy Spirit explicit), eats some food, and spend several days "with the disciples in Damascus" (9:19).

Acts opens no window into Paul's psychological state between his entering the city blind and his explosive declaration about Jesus that "*this one* is the Son of God" (9:20). But by presenting the direct encounter with Jesus, the generosity and words of Ananias, Paul's baptism, and his welcome among the disciples in Damascus as intervening events, the narrative suggests that all of these factors contribute to Paul's transformation from an enemy of Jesus to the "selected instrument" who will bear Jesus' name "before Gentiles, kings, and Israel's

descendants" (9:15). Encountering the risen Jesus was the critical first step, but being shown how obedience to Jesus leads Ananias to treat his enemy as a brother ought not be discounted as a factor in Paul's transformation; the scales do fall from Paul's eyes "immediately [εὐθέως]" when Ananias finishes speaking (9:18). The importance of how Ananias witnesses to Paul emerges still more clearly when one marks that it follows the pattern that the apostles learned from Jesus, namely, mutually confirming words and actions, and gives Paul a basic model for his own witness. And like the apostles and Stephen before him, Paul's witness also involves recapitulating in his own life events that image distinct critical moments in Jesus' life, beginning with his Damascus experience.

6.2.2 Recapitulation

As observed about the apostles and Stephen in the previous two chapters, at signal moments in Acts' narrative Paul "looks like Jesus."[21] One need not assemble an exhaustive catalog of these occasions for the point to stand; they are plentiful. Paul images Jesus' death and resurrection at three main points—at his initial repentance, his stoning in Lystra, and the events around the shipwreck on Malta (9:4-9, 18-19; 14:19-20; 27:33-28:6). Like Jesus, he also elicits and escapes multiple death threats from the start of his ministry until and even during his final incarceration (9:23, 29; 14:19; 21:30-33; 23:12-30; cf. Luke 4:29-30; 6:11; 11:53-54; 13:31; 19:47; 20:19; 22:2). Like Jesus in Nazareth, Paul in Antioch experiences initial favor and then rejection on the occasion of his first synagogue sermon because he declares that God's salvation extends to Gentiles (13:44-51; cf. Luke 4:22-30); his further insistence on Gentile

[21] Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 153.

inclusion (at Jesus' behest) elicits additional conflict (22:21-22). As his ministry draws to a close, he purposefully heads to Jerusalem despite expecting to face trial there (20:22-23; 21:10-13), which he does, like Jesus, before the high priest's council, two Roman governors, and the last Herod—Agrippa (23:1-10; 24-26). As with Stephen, Acts' narrative portrays Paul similarly enough to evoke Jesus and differently enough to make a distinct portrait. Paul's personality does not disappear because he images Jesus; it is not comprehensive mimicry, but witness.

6.2.2.1 Death and Resurrection

Traces of Jesus appear in Acts' portrait of Paul even before his active witness begins. Paul's turn from zealot to witness evokes the pattern of Jesus' death and resurrection. On the Damascus road, the initial flash of light from heaven leads to Paul "falling on the ground [πεσών ἐπί τήν γῆν]" (Acts 9:4), a phrase that resonates with Jesus' words about the seed that dies in John 12:24 "falling into the ground [πεσών εἰς τήν γῆν]." Paul's being knocked to the ground diverts him from his murderous path (9:1), creating an image of Paul dying to death-dealing power, which the narrative reinforces by revealing him is left blind, helpless, and not eating or drinking for three days (9:8-9). Although Paul is not actually dead, his state is death-like: the dead see nothing, go nowhere on their own, and they neither eat nor drink. Moreover, the three-day duration evokes the three days of Jesus' death before his resurrection (Luke 18:33; 24:1-7).

In addition, Paul is peculiarly passive throughout the experience, especially as regards his restoration after being knocked to the ground and blinded. Jesus commands him to "get up [ἀνάστηθι] and enter the city" (9:6), but the verb by which Paul gets up is passive: he "was raised [ἠγέρθη] up from the ground" (9:8) and led into Damascus, much as Jesus returned to

Jerusalem after his resurrection (Luke 24:33-36). Paul likewise does not retrieve himself from this blind state. Another, whom the Lord sends, must visit him to restore his sight (9:17), which corresponds to the much-repeated declaration that *God* raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:10; 5:30)—he did not spontaneously come back to life. Paul's taking food after his sight is restored (9:19) also evokes Jesus' post-resurrection eating among his disciples (Luke 24:41-43). But the overall shape of what happens to Paul in this encounter makes the most striking image of death and resurrection because the Damascus experience leads Paul to die to his former life, where he was captivated by death-dealing power, and raises him, instead, to a life governed by the bold and creative power exemplified in Jesus' resurrection. Indeed, considering Paul's Damascus experience as movement from death to life reflects the words he uses to describe the great turn of his life in Gal 2:19-20, namely, dying to the law, being crucified with Christ, and living toward God not in his own former identity but rather through and in Christ. Paul goes to Damascus ready to wield the power of death, but while he is there and ever after he abandons death-dealing power and is governed, instead, by the power of resurrection.

The conclusion of Paul's encounter with the Lystrans makes an evocative reminder that resurrection power is the new hallmark of Paul's life. The entire encounter begins with Paul healing a man who had never walked (14:10), which indicates what sort of power Paul instinctively wields now that he serves Jesus. And when the combined Gentile Lystrans and Jews from Antioch and Iconium attack Paul (recalling Jesus' allied executioners), they stone him and believe him dead (14:19), "but when the disciples surrounded him, after getting up [ἀναστάς] he went into the city" (14:20), verbiage that again evokes Jesus' resurrection. It is

not clear whether he was actually dead and raised back to life by the mysterious "disciples"' surrounding him, or whether he was not quite dead and their presence restored him. Either way, his apparently instantaneous recovery from a stoning that left him looking dead appears miraculous. The involvement of the disciples in his "getting up," along with his entering the city, once again evoke Jesus' resurrection; Paul appears not to raise himself, but being alive, he returns briefly, as Jesus did with Jerusalem, to the city whose inhabitant aimed to kill him.

The third and final episode of Paul's life that recapitulates Jesus' death and resurrection does so more subtly, or perhaps even tenuously. Still, the shipwreck to Malta, as well as its prelude and aftermath (27:33-28:6), prove tantalizing. The night before the wreck that breaks up the ship and sends everyone on it into the sea (27:35-44), Paul orchestrates a curious scene that recalls Jesus' final supper with his disciples (Luke 22:14-20). The words describing Paul's action on the ship closely follow the description of Jesus with the bread. Of Jesus, Luke writes, "And having taken bread he gave thanks, broke [it] and gave [it] to them [καὶ λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς]" (Luke 22:19). And Acts reports of Paul, "And having taken bread he gave thanks to God before all of them, and after breaking [it] began to eat [καὶ λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐχαρίστησεν τῷ θεῷ ἐνώπιον πάντων καὶ κλάσας ἤρξατο ἐσθίειν]" (Acts 27:35). That Paul's thanksgiving and bread-breaking occurs just before he and everyone with him are tossed into the sea and, yet, still all arrive safely on land (27:43-44) makes a subtle image of death and resurrection. Paul's neither dying nor suffering any harm from the viper bite afterward singles him out as a special survivor among the shipwrecked. Indeed, the Maltans' initial assessment that he must be a murderer (28:4) that swings to viewing him as a god when he takes no hurt from the bite (28:5-6) tracks a similar trajectory as the implicit

judgements imaged in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus is executed in place of Barabbas, a murderer (Luke 23:19; Acts 3:14), but vindicated and exalted through God's raising him from the dead (Acts 2:32-33; 3:15, 4:10). What happens with Paul is not as dramatic as the events of Jesus' passion and resurrection, but being struck what ought to be a death-dealing blow and yet emerging unscathed is a pattern Paul undergoes several times, and bears witness to Jesus' resurrection through imaging the form of its power: persistent, abundant life that cannot be extinguished because, as Paul informs his captors and companions aboard ship, God has determined that Paul must survive to stand before Caesar (27:22-25). Despite not actually dying and being raised, these three places in Paul's story symbolically evoke death and resurrection. But Paul's story intersects with Jesus' not only at the end, but in the many times he is threatened with death and manages, nevertheless, to escape.

6.2.2.2 Death Threats and Escapes

From the moment when the crowd from the synagogue in Nazareth tries to push Jesus from the edge of a cliff outside the town (Luke 4:30) to the chief priests' and scribes' hunt for a way to put him to death (22:2), threats on his life haunt Jesus' entire ministry. Sometimes, as in Nazareth, the threat looks like an actual attempt to kill him; sometimes it is just a stirring of vague hostility (6:11; 11:53-54); and sometimes it is a report that someone (or a group of people) wants to kill him or is actively plotting how to bring about his death, e.g., Herod (13:31), or some combination of chief priests, scribes, and leaders of the people (19:47; 20:19; 22:2). Luke notes all of these occasions before Jesus' arrest that leads to his trial and death; once he is arrested, there is no escape, but before Judas's betrayal (22:3-6) every attempt on his life is thwarted.

Paul likewise escapes many threats on his life, the first before he even leaves Damascus. Indeed, this very threat precipitates Paul's abrupt departure from the city. Only three verses separate his first declaration in a synagogue (9:20) and Acts reporting that "when some time had passed the Jews plotted to kill him" (9:23). This is no casual plot—they are surveilling the city gates day and night in order to kill him, and the context suggests that this watching tips Paul off about the threat (9:24). But Paul, new adherent of the Way that he is, already has disciples; they help him with a daring escape: they lower him through the city wall in a basket and so evade the gate surveillance (9:25). Having fled Damascus, Paul returns to Jerusalem for the first time after having turned from persecutor to proponent of the Way (9:26). After Barnabas persuades the Jerusalem disciples to accept Paul, he begins "speaking boldly in the name of the Lord" in Jerusalem just as he had done in Damascus (9:27-28), including "arguing with the Hellenists," but then "they were attempting to kill him" (9:29). Once again, Paul's allies shuttle him out of the city, this time sending him to his hometown of Tarsus (9:30), and he escapes the second attempt on his life. The first two plots against Paul occur within ten verses of his first public declaration about Jesus' identity.

The next attempt on Paul's life goes well beyond a threat. In Lystra, Jews from Antioch and Iconium allied with Gentile Lystrans cooperate to stone Paul and drag him out of the city, thinking he is dead (Acts 14:19). This event is not so much a death threat as an incomplete or thwarted assassination attempt. Whether he is actually dead but then raised to life again or appears dead but then revived when the disciples gather around him (14:20) is not completely clear. But that Paul once again escapes an attempt on his life is unmistakable; he gets up and goes back into the city the very next day (14:20).

Before Acts ends, Paul escapes from two more attempts on his life. The first occurs shortly after he arrives back in Jerusalem after he left because the Hellenists were trying to kill him (9:29). Paul is seized in the temple and already being beaten when the tribune, later revealed to be Claudius Lysias, intervenes "while they were trying to kill him" (21:31). It turns out to be something of a dubious rescue, as Paul is a prisoner from that moment through the end of the book, but imprisonment does not end Paul's life or his witness. And indeed, Paul enjoys one more dramatic escape from yet another conspiracy to kill him while he is a prisoner.

A group of more than forty Jews in Jerusalem take a vow with one another not to eat or drink anything until they have killed Paul (23:12-13). They approach the chief priests and elders, telling asking that they request the tribune to bring Paul on the pretext of further examination before the council. They aim to kill Paul on his way there (23:14-15). But, as in Damascus, Paul learns of the plot in advance—this time through his nephew (23:16)—and Paul sends the young man to relay the message to the tribune, who thwarts the plot by sending Paul to Caesarea that very night under heavy guard (23:17-33). Paul remains a prisoner, but he is alive and allowed to speak many more times to a variety of audiences—even to the last verse of the book.

While Jesus' escapes from the threat of death are mostly not as dramatic as Paul's, their stories share the recurring theme of deadly conspiracies that do not meet with success. Paul's escapes likewise reinforce the death-and-resurrection pattern by which he also reflects Jesus. Both themes mark Paul's whole ministry. But Paul's story also reflects two more circumscribed pivotal scenes in Jesus' life—the rejection at Nazareth over Gentile inclusion (Luke 4:18-30), and the journey to Jerusalem that results in his final trial (9:51-23:25). In Paul's story, the rejection scene occurs in Antioch (13:16-51).

6.2.2.3 Nazareth and Antioch

As with the points of connection outlined above, Jesus' first recounted public speech in in Nazareth resembles Paul's in Antioch enough to warrant the comparison while remaining distinct enough to ward off any suggestion that witness is sheer mimicry. In Nazareth, Jesus enters the synagogue, stands up to read, and then sits down with all eyes in the synagogue fixed upon him (Luke 4:16-20). Luke makes no mention of his being granted a special invitation to read or speak, but when he declares the scripture fulfilled, he receives a favorable response (4:21-22). They all say favorable things about him, recalling his connection to Nazareth as Joseph's son—they readily lay claim to him and accept the "gracious words that came from his mouth" as word for them (4:22). As with Jesus in Luke, Paul's speech in Antioch is the first in Acts that includes an account of his words—both Luke and Acts report Jesus and Paul, respectively, saying a good deal before including a speech in the narrative (Luke 4:14-15; Acts 9:20, 22, 28; 13:5). Paul and his companions, including at least Barnabas, enter the synagogue in Antioch and sit down (Acts 13:14). They do not appear to go there with the intent of reading the scripture or commenting on it; indeed, passages from the law and the prophets have already been read when they synagogue officials invite them to speak (13:15). Luke does not recount Jesus having received an invitation to read or speak in Nazareth, but no one tries to stop him until after they take offense at what he says. In Antioch, the invitation to speak comes to Paul's companions as well as to him, but Paul does not hesitate to accept it, and he speaks for the next twenty-five verses. Paul's audience does not appear to receive the message quite as readily as the congregation at first warms to Jesus in Nazareth, but the attendees of the Antioch synagogue do want to hear from Paul and Barnabas again the next Sabbath (13:43).

The events of that day make another connection with Jesus' words in Nazareth and his audience's response. Jesus loses his audience's favor when he attempts to disabuse them of the notion that God's gracious care always has and will be reserved exclusively for the people of Israel. Jesus points out that God's faithful prophets, Elijah and Elisha, ministered to foreigners—the Sidonian widow in Zarephath and the Syrian army commander, Naaman—even when there were plenty of starving widows and lepers in Israel (Luke 4:25-27). His audience's rage at these words implies their jealousy, which is exactly the emotion of which Acts' narrator accuses the Jews in Paul and Barnabas's audience when they see that "nearly the whole city" has come to the synagogue to hear the message, and Paul and Barnabas have not reserved "the word of the Lord" for Jews alone (Acts 13:44-45). Like Jesus provoking his audience when he has initially garnered favor, Paul and Barnabas double down their course after the Jews' display of jealousy—this message is not for Jews alone, and it never has been. Completing the episode's echo of Jesus in Nazareth, who began with a reading from Isaiah, Paul and Barnabas reinforce their point by quoting the same prophet: "I have placed you as a light of nations, that you might be for salvation up to the end of the earth" (Acts 13:47; cf. Isa 49:6). Jesus' declaration of God's grace to Gentiles enrages his audience and to the point they nearly toss him off a cliff (Luke 4:28-29). The Antiochian Jews do not try to kill Paul and Barnabas outright, but they "stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas," and drive the two men out of the area (13:50). Like Jesus in Nazareth, they suffer no harm and proceed on their way undaunted. Given the remarkable points of resemblance between these two episodes at the respective beginnings of Jesus' and Paul's ministries, the similarities in the endings present no surprise.

6.2.2.4 Jerusalem

Jesus saying that "it is impossible for a prophet to perish outside of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33) should doubtless be considered hyperbolic, but, as hyperbole is wont to do, it communicates a truth. Jesus gives these words as the reason why he must go to Jerusalem. And indeed, as the city of David's kingship, the temple, the seat of the Roman-appointed high priest, and the location of the Sanhedrin's assembly, Jerusalem is the logical place for a showdown between conventional political power and God's way of ruling. Given Jesus' his identity as both "Son of the Most High" and descendant of David (1:32), as well as his constant theme of "the reign of God" in both words and actions, Jesus' Jerusalem trajectory only makes sense. That Jesus' witnesses—the apostles, Stephen, and Paul—should also end up in conflicts in Jerusalem also comes as no surprise. Paul's resolute journey toward Jerusalem despite his prescience about what will happen to him there, as well as key features of his trials in Jerusalem and beyond, particularly resemble pivotal moments and the final stages of Jesus' earthly ministry.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus visits Jerusalem twice before "finishing his work" (Luke 13:32) takes him there. The first time, his parents bring him there as an infant (2:22-38); the second time, he is twelve and goes with his parents to Jerusalem for Passover (2:41-42). Thereafter, he does not return to the city until the end of Luke 19, but already at his Transfiguration, Luke reports that the subject of Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah was his "exodus, which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem" (9:31). Shortly thereafter, "he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (9:51). From then on, although he takes a slow and circuitous path, he consciously moves toward his destination. As he goes "from city to town, teaching while making his way toward Jerusalem" (13:22), some Pharisees warn him off, claiming that Herod wants to kill

him (13:31), but he refuses to deviate from his purpose (13:33). Just before he and his disciples approach Jericho on this journey, he spells out for them in detail what will happen to him in Jerusalem: "Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything written about the Human One by the prophets will be brought to completion. For he will be betrayed to the Gentiles, and he will be derided and abused and spit upon. After flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again" (18:31-33). The narrative portrays Jesus knowing precisely what awaits him in Jerusalem (unlike his disciples, who remain ignorant, bewildered, and confused; 18:34), but foreseeing these events does not divert him from his destination.

In Jerusalem, Jesus comes to the attention of the temple authorities almost immediately as a threat; he scarcely arrives before they begin plotting his demise (19:47). Luke recounts their thwarted hostility three times (19:48; 20:19; 22:2) before Judas' betrayal provides them the opportunity they seek. A group of council members and temple police seize him in the dark on the Mount of Olives and bring him to the high priest's house, allowing him to be beaten and abused and by the soldiers overnight (23:47-65). The council that gathers the next morning quickly condemns him and drags him off to Pilate (22:66-23:1). Pilate, the Roman governor, questions him but does not know quite what to do with him until learning that Jesus hails from Galilee, where Herod has jurisdiction (23:3-6), so Pilate sends Jesus to Herod (23:7). Although Herod questions Jesus at length, Jesus does not respond (23:9), and finally, after mistreating him further, Herod returns Jesus to Pilate (23:11), who eventually sentences him as the people of Jerusalem and their leaders demand (23:13, 18, 23-25). Thus the population of Jerusalem, the Jewish authorities, the Roman governor, and Herod each have a hand in the trial that leads to Jesus' execution.

Acts first introduces Paul in Jerusalem, where he presides over the garments of Stephen's executioners (Acts 7:58). He leaves the city for Damascus (9:2-3) and then, like Jesus, returns there for only brief visits before his final arrest. Paul returns to Jerusalem for a short time after he flees a threat on his life in Damascus (9:23-26), but just a few verses later he must leave Jerusalem for the same reason (9:29). Acts makes a reference to a second visit to the city by Paul and Barnabas, but it is ambiguous and includes little their activities before returning to the subject of their associates in Antioch and their commissioning as missionaries (12:25-13:3). Paul returns to Jerusalem another time—for the council where the church reasons through what the law requires of "Gentiles who are turning to God" (15:19). Once the question is settled, Paul and Barnabas depart Jerusalem once again for Antioch (15:22, 30). The purposes of Paul's visits to Jerusalem little resemble Jesus' reasons for being there on those first two occasions, though the mention of a "Simeon" (Acts 15:14) recalls the old man's prophetic words over the infant Jesus about "light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory for your people, Israel" (Luke 2:32), and this pronouncement resonates with Paul's own professed purpose (Acts 13:47).[22] But the main points of resemblance between Paul's and Jesus'

[22] The "Simeon" named in Acts 15:14 is only rarely taken to be the same figure as the Simeon who spoke a benediction over the infant Jesus in Luke 2:32, but a few readers, going all the way back to John Chrystostom, have seen the connection. See Rainer Riesner, "James's Speech, Simeon's Hymn and Luke's Sources," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ* ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 263-78. Riesner writes that according to E. Haenchen, the speech is not original to James, but "Luke has taken pains … to give a certain fitting coloring: 'Mit der Form Συμεών deutet Lukas an, daß Jakobus, der Herrenbruder, aramäisch spricht.' This is indeed the opinion of many modern commentaries on Acts, of which that of J. Roloff may be representative: 'Lukas hat diese archaisierende Form wohl gewählt, um das Lokalkolorit zu verstärken'" (264). (Translations: Luke uses Συμεών to show that James, the brother of the Lord, speaks Aramaic [Haenchen]; Luke probably used this archaic form in order to write with greater verisimilitude [Roloff]). Riesner goes on to cite six twentieth century commentaries of whom Roloff is supposedly representative: Cadbury, Bauernfeind, Conzelmann, Schneider, Schille, and Lüdemann (264 n. 3). On the other side, Riesner cites Rupert Feneburg, who follows a description of Peter's speech with, "Dann ergreift Jakobus das Wort und errinert an die Weissagung des Simeon [Lk 2,32], in der die besondere Sendung Jesu inhaltlich benannt ist: Jesus soll aus Heiden ein Volk für Gott gewinnen (Apg 15,14)" (Rupert Feneburg, "Johannes und Jesus – Zwei Rivalen," *Entschluss* 39 (1984): 4-7 [6]). Cited in Riesner (265 n. 9). (Translation: Then James grasps the word and remembers the

respective relationships to Jerusalem consist in having comparatively little narrative contact with the city before their respective arrests, and that facing arrest in Jerusalem surprises neither.

As Luke portrays of Jesus, Acts shows Paul determining to go to Jerusalem as a long-range target. Acts first names Jerusalem as Paul's destination just before Paul visits Asia, principally Ephesus, and includes his intention to proceed afterward to Rome (Acts 19:21). Given what happened to Jesus in Jerusalem, as well as to the apostles and Stephen, the words have an ominous overtone. They do not yet betray Paul's understanding that he will face trial in Jerusalem and take his journey to Rome as a prisoner headed for examination before Caesar, but for those who know the bare outlines of Paul's story the words foreshadow his final trials and imprisonment. A little later, Paul does seem to know some of the troubles that await him in Jerusalem. When he bids the Ephesian elders farewell, he says, "I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit bears witness to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me" (20:22-23). Paul does not know what will happen to him in Jerusalem in the sort of detail that Jesus does

---

prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:32), in which is named the content of Jesus' particular mission: Jesus shall extract from Gentiles a people for God.) Feneburg's suggestion has an ancient precedent in John Chrystostom, who in two different texts of his *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, does not even consider the possibility that the referent of Symeon in James's speech is Peter. Chrysostom writes, "And what does he say? 'Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has explained to us.' Some say, this is the one that Luke told about; some that it refers to another person who had the same name. But it is not necessary to say definitely whether it was this or that one, what is necessary is to accept what he has pointed out" [St. John Chrysostom, *Joannis Chrysostomi … opera omnia IX*, vol. 60, PGM (Paris: Migne, 1862), 239; cited in Riesner, 266 n. 16]. In a shorter text of the same sermon Chrysostom specifies clearly that the referent of the "Simeon" in Acts 15:14 is the same as with the infant Jesus in the temple: "And what does he say? 'Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has explained' —the one that in the Gospel of Luke prophesied: ('You now dismiss your servant in peace')" [St. John Chrystostom, *Ioannis Chrysostomi opera omnia: Homiliae LV in Acta Apostolorum*, vol. 9 (Paris, 1731), 253 D. Cited in Riesner, 266]. While the reading of "Simeon" in Acts 15:14 as a reference to the "Simeon" in Luke 2:25-35 is not the majority reading, the above analysis supplies good reason to read a connection between the two, even if one does not, as Riesner does, make an exclusive choice between Peter and Simeon. See further Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 253 n. 216.

(Luke 18:31-33), but he has a correct general sense, and like Jesus, the knowledge deters him not at all. Indeed, when Paul and his companions land in Caesarea, Agabus the prophet comes from Judea, takes Paul's belt, binds his own hands and feet, and predicts, "thus will the Jews in Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt and betray him into the hands of the Gentiles" (Acts 21:10-11). Paul has no trouble believing the words, and (unlike Jesus' disciples with his predictions) neither do his friends, but he holds firmly to his purpose, and he and his companions proceed to Jerusalem (21:13-16).

As Jesus did at first, Paul and his companions initially receive a warm welcome (21:18), but before too long the reception cools, and the established leadership of the Jerusalem church expresses concern that Paul's arrival will rouse the animosity of some among the faithful who suspect Paul of advocating the abandonment of Mosaic law and the practice of circumcision (21:20-21). The elders of the church want Paul to appease the Jewish believers who are "zealots for the law" (21:20-24). But just as in the days leading up to Jesus' arrest he can give no answer to satisfy the chief priests, elders, and scribes (Luke 19:47-22:46), Paul's public display of law-keeping does not protect him: before Paul says one word in public, a group of Jews from Asia rouses the crowd with spurious accusations against Paul, and they seize and beat him until the tribune orders his arrest (21:26-33). Paul has far less time in Jerusalem before his arrest than Jesus does, but like Jesus, arrest in Jerusalem marks the end of his free movement and results in a series of trials before both Jews and Gentiles.

In Jerusalem, Paul faces trial first before the original crowd that accosted him (22:1-21) and then before the Sanhedrin (22:30-23:10), both mediated by the tribune who arrests him, Claudius Lysias. When Paul's life comes under threat in Jerusalem, Lysias sends him to Caesarea (23:12-33), where Paul faces trial before two Roman governors in succession—first

Felix (24:1-21) and then Festus (25:6-12). Festus consults with Herod Agrippa, and the two of them are the last in Acts to hear Paul's case (25:23-26:32). In summary, the cast of judges in Paul's case looks similar to Jesus'—Jewish people in Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin, two Roman governors, and a Herod. The duration of Paul's trials, his contributions to his defense, the change in location midway, and the results differ from what happened to Jesus in Jerusalem. But again, the accounts overlap enough to signal poignant resemblance without sheer repetition. Acts portrays Paul not as the reincarnation of Jesus, but a faithful witness; thus, the sorts of things that happened to Jesus also happen to Paul, particularly because Paul does in his own way what Jesus did, namely, persistently proclaim and embody the reign of God.

6.2.3 Words

From the Damascus synagogues to his ongoing proclamation and teaching in Rome at the book's end, words play an indispensable role in Paul's witness to Jesus. And so they should, given the integral role that speech plays in Jesus' ministry as well as in Peter's and Stephen's witness. Luke portrays Jesus spending much of his earthly life in verbal teaching, and both Luke and Acts show the important role that words play in Jesus' leading his disciples into knowledge of his resurrection's reality and significance (Luke 24:25-49; Acts 1:1-3) and in the early apostolic witness. Acts tells the reader that Paul speaks persuasively and powerfully about Jesus well before showing how he does so. Mere days after regaining his sight, Paul begins "proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues," but beyond declaring Jesus "the Son of God" and persuasively communicating Jesus' identity as "Messiah" to the Jews in Damascus, relates little of his words and, instead, emphasizes their effect (9:20, 22). Paul "became still more empowered and was muddling [μᾶλλον ἐνεδυναμοῦτο καὶ συνέχυννεν] the Jews who were

living in Damascus by piecing together [συμβιβάζων] that this one, [Jesus], is the Messiah" (9:22). Not until Paul's being invited to speak in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch does Acts fully recount one of his speeches (13:16-41, 46-47). Delaying an account of Paul's preaching until later in his ministry while emphasizing the effect of his words establishes Paul's verbal power (9:22, 27-28), which, especially placed at the beginning of his witness, indicates the essential role that spoken words play in Paul's witness, just as they did with Jesus, Peter, and Stephen.

In Acts, Paul's words principally serve his witness to Jesus; very little of his dialogue does not contribute directly to this purpose, and Acts reports Paul saying far more than the book includes fully recounted. In Paul's first sermon included in Acts' narrative he makes connections of content as well as form and does just what one might expect of a witness—he conveys a message not of his own making but does so by means of his particular perspective and personality. Despite his irrepressible verve, Paul is no lone wolf evangelist spreading a message he devised himself for his own ends; rather, he stands within a tradition that channels his energy, gifts, and perspective to serve God's life-giving reign. Paul's words of witness take the form of scripturally informed discourses and disputes in synagogues (13:16-41; 46-47; 14:1; 17:17; 18:4; 19:8), public philosophical engagement (14:15-17; 17:16-33), interpersonal conversation (16:15-16, 28-34; 18:8), interminable group conversation (20:7-11), farewell exhortation (20:18-35), personal narratives that double as trial defense (22:1-21; 24:10-21; 26:2-23), and defense argument (23:1, 6; 25:8, 10-11; 26:25-29). Paul wields enormous power through his words, but ever in service to bearing faithful witness of "the reign of God and … the Lord Jesus Christ" (28:31) both in his subject matter and in his rhetorical strategies: he

speaks truthfully of God's salvation on offer through Jesus in a manner suited to the message and shaped by scripture, apostolic teaching, his own experiences, and careful attention to the context of his audience.

The first speech of Paul's that Acts includes shows him bearing witness to Jesus not only in the particular words he says, but also by imitating Jesus and his key witnesses in Acts thus far, Peter and Stephen, in some aspects of his rhetorical strategy. Paul's turn to scripture in order to interpret Jesus' identity and significance has its first precedent with Jesus (Luke 24:27, 44-47); Peter's and Stephen's speeches, of course, also follow this pattern, and Paul's discourse resembles both at different points. In framing what he says within the context of God's election of Israel and exodus from Egypt, Paul relies heavily on Stephen's speech—especially its beginning (7:2-36). Paul echoes Peter extensively. Mentioning Jesus' Davidic ancestry (13:22-23), referring to his audience as Abraham's descendants (13:26; 4:25), recognizing the ignorance of Jerusalem's residents and leaders (13:27; 3:17), recounting the circumstances of Jesus' death (13:28-29; 2:22-23; 3:13-15), declaring that God raised Jesus from the dead (13:30; 2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:10), calling the apostles "witnesses" (13:31; 2:32; 3:15), quoting one of the same passages from Psalm 16 and interpreting it similarly (13:35-37; 2:27, 29-32), declaring that forgiveness of sins is on offer because of Jesus (13:38-39; 2:38-39), and maintaining that the news of Jesus must first be declared to Israel (13:46; 3:26) all appear in Peter's Jerusalem speeches. This continuity anchors Paul's witness to apostolic precedent and establishes his trustworthiness as a witness to Jesus, and it is appropriate to the context given the apparently similar composition of Peter's Jerusalem audiences with Paul's in Antioch. In both contexts the primary framework is God's saving work in and through Israel as told in the scriptures (13:17-23). But Paul's words are genuinely witness—neither mere imitation nor

sheer innovation, which means that beginning in Peter's and Stephen's patterns makes a solid foundation for the unique perspectives and strategies Paul will employ when he brings the message of Jesus into new territory.

Acts portrays Paul's first speech constructed to follow the form and echo the themes of Jesus' earlier witnesses, but Paul also employs some new strategies. He warns his Jewish audiences not to miss out on God's marvelous salvation through incredulity (13:40-41), and then incites their jealousy by declaring, in the face of their rejection, that he will take God's word of salvation, instead, to Gentiles (13:46-47). This pattern recurs. Paul declares his determination to preach to Gentiles after multiple instances where Jewish audiences reject him (18:6-7; 22:21-22; 28:23-28). Given that Paul ends up preaching "the word of the Lord" or "the word of God" or "the reign of God" in yet another synagogue (or next door to one [18:7]!) after nearly all such declarations, it is clearly a rhetorical strategy and not a description of how Paul actually understands his mission. Even up to the final scene of Acts, Paul welcomes "all" who come to him, and gives everyone the same message of "the reign of God" and the "Lord Jesus Christ" (28:29-31). Paul never gives up speaking about Jesus to the people who share his heritage, but his resolve to preach to Gentiles is no bluff. When Paul speaks about Jesus to Gentile audiences, he makes a sincere effort to persuade them and adjusts his tactics to his new audience—he foregoes references to scripture altogether and begins to exercise a bit of rhetorical subtlety, especially after a few experiences of violent resistance.

Paul's attention to context is good persuasive strategy as well as faithful witness, which must aim for communication and, therefore, avoid preemptive alienation. Although Paul does not shy from confrontation, he appears to learn some subtlety from the occasions where his impetuous direct approach leads to violence erupting against him and his companions (Acts

14:15-19; 16:16-24; 17:16-34).[23] In Lystra, where Paul and Barnabas make their first attempt to spread the message about Jesus to Gentiles unaffiliated with synagogues, they are so appalled and desperate to halt the Lystrans sacrificing to them as gods that they rush into a crowd of devout worshipers and tactlessly call the objects of their worship *ματαία*—impotent, vain, or empty things (14:15). In the perspective of Acts, they are not wrong, but they clearly insult and threaten the Lystrans' constitutive practices of religious and political life. In this light, the reader will not be surprised at the ease with which the antagonistic Jews from Antioch and Iconium enlist the Lystrans in a violent attack against Paul that is meant to kill him (14:19).

Paul takes a little more time to think on his next encounter with pagans, but still ends up acting rashly. In Philippi, he forbears responding for "many days" while the enslaved girl with the spirit of divination follows him and Silas around and repeatedly cries out her misleading message; but eventually his aggravation reaches surfeit (16:16-17). He calls upon Jesus' name to exorcise the spirit, rendering her useless to the masters who had made money from her fortune-telling (16:18-19). Seeing their economic loss, the masters drag Paul and Silas to the city authorities, and Paul and Silas end up stripped, beaten, and jailed (16:19-24). The fact the Paul and Silas pass their hours in jail by "praying and singing hymns to God" (16:25) should not lead the reader to suppose that Paul intentionally seeks to provoke violence against them. When Paul recapitulates his ministry to the Ephesian elders he characterizes "trials" as something to be "endured"—not courted—even as he emphasizes that the trials did not deter

[23] Rowe notes that these events belong in the same category while noting the differences between them: "Athens is not little Lystra, of course, and so the collision is more subtle or layered—in a word, philosophical. But it is, at bottom, a collision nonetheless" (Rowe, "Grammar of Life," 46).

him from proclaiming the message about Jesus (20:19-20). The incidents in Lystra and Philippi do not curtail Paul's efforts, but his strategy does appear to shift in Athens.

When Paul arrives in Athens he has just escaped additional violent attacks in Thessalonica and Beroea that, while they do not touch him, do affect some of his associates and result in his being brought to Athens alone (Acts 17:1-15). These experiences do not deter Paul from judging Athenian worship idolatrous (17:16), following his usual pattern of synagogue argument and public debate (17:17), or speaking about "Jesus and the resurrection" (17:18). As a result his life is no less imperiled here than in Lystra, Philippi, Thessalonica, or Beroea. One could argue that the death the Athenians infamously offered Socrates for, in part, introducing "foreign divinities" (17:18) was a more genteel form of execution than what Paul faced in Lystra, but hemlock kills as effectively as stoning.[24] And Paul's speech before the Areopagus—not merely the place but the council that meets there—is not an innocuous friendly chat.[25] As Rowe argues persuasively, when Paul is "seized [ἐπιλαβόμενοί]" and "brought [ἤγαγον]" (17:19) before the Areopagus he is on trial for his life.[26]

The substance of Paul's message in Lystra does not much differ from his speech in Athens, but he manages to call the Athenians "superstitious [δεισιδαιμονεστέρους]" and "ignorant [ἀγνοοῦντες]" while appearing to praise their religiosity and thoroughgoing piety (17:22-23).[27] And he averts the charge of bringing in new divinities by appearing, initially, to

[24] Rowe, "Grammar of Life," 38-39.

[25] Rowe, "Grammar of Life," 37.

[26] Rowe, "Grammar of Life," 38-39.

[27] Rowe, "Grammar of Life," 39-41.

associate the God of all things with an altar they have already erected (17:23-24) before criticizing their having attempted to house the God of all things in "hand-made temples" (17:24-25). As Rowe demonstrates, Paul's word choices indicate shrewd calculation.[28] They thus allow him to speak at some length in a way that engages those who have "ears to hear"—even as he comprehensively undermines the theological framework of Athenian worship life—but that does not result in precipitous violence against him and, so, allows him to finish his speech, go on his way, and continue spreading the message of Jesus (17:32-34).[29] Certainly, Paul appears less concerned about averting attacks against him than ensuring the message of Jesus gets a fair hearing, which he achieves far more successfully in Athens than in either of his public encounters in Lystra and Philippi. Moreover, the latter purpose serves the former. If Paul attends to his audience's context so that he can shape his speech in a way that remains truthful—and confrontational when necessary—but also allows him to speak a little longer before violence erupts, he will prolong his days and effectiveness as a witness to Jesus. That purpose continues to guide Paul when he accounts for himself before the various audiences and authorities that try him in Jerusalem and Caesarea.

Even when Paul tells his own story, he does so with an eye to his audiences' particularity and his relationship to them. The greetings with which he begins each of his trial speeches indicate Paul's acute consciousness of whom he addresses and how he might best redress his audiences' grievances against him. When the tribune in Jerusalem allows Paul to defend himself before the Jerusalem mob who had been assaulting him until the tribune

[28] Rowe, "Grammar of Life," esp. 46, 50.

[29] Rowe, "Grammar of Life," 50.

intervened, Paul begins with an attempt to establish affinity with them and reassure them that any concerns about his disregard for the law are unfounded. He calls them "brothers and fathers" and speaks to them "in Hebrew" (Acts 22:1-2)—that is, the vernacular of Galilean and Judean Jews. Speaking their language gains him their attention, and he proceeds to emphasize his affinity with them both in his heritage and esteem for the law: "I am a Jewish man, having been born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but raised in this very city at the feet of Gamaliel and educated precisely in our ancestral law, being a zealot of God, just as all of you are today" (22:3). Paul chooses his words carefully to address the ostensible concerns of his audience as and establish his credentials as a Jew who is as passionately devoted to God as they are. Partly as a result of this rhetorical strategy, Paul's audience allows him to speak for twenty verses, including the whole story of his former campaign against the church, his original and subsequent encounters with Jesus, and his mandate—ever since his return to Jerusalem from Damascus—to bear witness of Jesus to the Gentiles (22:2-21). They listen to him until this last sentence, but as soon as he declares that Jesus sent him to the Gentiles they shout him down and urge the tribune to do away with him (22:22). Perhaps Paul believes that his audience's hostility toward him stems from a mere misunderstanding. Perhaps he hopes that telling his story and revealing the source of his burden to bear witness to Gentiles will legitimize his mission in their sight and, so, assuage their unfounded fears. The narrator gives no insight to Paul's mental state here but, given his past experiences nearly every previous time he has declared his mission to preach the good news of Jesus to Gentiles or attempted to fulfill that mission, he would have to be ludicrously optimistic to hope that his words could possibly mollify his audience. Paul's words do, however, bear clear witness to the risen Jesus who appeared to him on the road to Damascus and in Jerusalem, and they confirm that Jesus

represents the God of all, whose mission of salvation extends to Gentiles (22:8, 10, 18, 21). Even to this hostile audience Paul finds a way to speak in a way that allows the essential message a hearing.

Paul speaks next before the Sanhedrin. Despite professing some initial confusion about the high priest's identity (Acts 23:5), he begins by addressing the council as "brothers" (23:1), quickly takes the measure of his audience, and shapes his words to divide his them into allies and adversaries so that they argue with one another instead of maintaining a unified front against him. Paul perceives that some of the council are Sadducees and others Pharisees (23:6), which makes them ripe for a dispute over their theological differences. Paul identifies himself as "a Pharisee, son of Pharisees" (23:6), which establishes his solidarity with some council members. But again, Paul's principal purpose is not necessarily to deflect hostility, as he accomplishes the division of the council by declaring the indispensable center of the apostolic witness as the reason he has been brought before the council: "Concerning hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged [κρίνομαι]!" (23:6). Even where Paul's word allowance shrinks to a single sentence, he manages to say the thing that both exposes the central truth about Jesus in a way that lands with his audience and allows him another trial and another day to speak about Jesus.

That next trial occurs in Caesarea before Felix, where Paul begins with a note of ironic flattery, claiming his good fortune to make his case before a governor who for "many years" has been a "judge over this nation" (Acts 24:10). Paul implies that Felix grasps the issues at stake even as Paul explains what, then, Felix should already know: "the Way" does not conflict with his or his accusers' ancestral faith, and that he has committed no crime—unless it was

his having called out in the council "concerning resurrection of the dead I am judged before you this day!" (24:11-21). Again Paul shapes his words to prolong his speech and to speak of the central matter of importance on which the entire message about Jesus stands or falls—the resurrection of the dead. Acts does not make explicit whether Paul's words have any bearing on why Felix adjourns the hearing at that point, but the narrative invites speculation that Paul has at least piqued Felix's curiosity, since he sends for Paul to hear more from him (24:24). The deferred trial and summons give Paul opportunity to speak to Felix about "faithfulness toward Christ Jesus [τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν πίστεως]," and "justice, self-control, and the judgment to come" (24:24-25). Paul interprets for Felix specifically what his faithfulness toward Jesus would entail and puts Felix's role as "judge over this nation" into the context of "the coming judgment," an event where, as Paul outlined in Athens, Jesus will preside (17:31). Paul's theme with Felix carries forward and expands on his exhortations in Athens: repent now, do justice now, practice self-control now, because the limit on God's patience with Gentile ignorance has been set. The connection between Paul's words to the Areopagus and to Felix suggests Paul has judged his context similarly and adjusted his message accordingly. Here with Felix, Paul's words do not effect his release, but neither do they precipitate his condemnation. Paul does not win Felix over, but neither does the governor find sufficient reason to sentence him, which leaves Paul ample opportunity to keep talking—to Felix, to Festus and Agrippa, and ultimately to whoever wishes to visit him while he remains under house arrest in Rome (Acts 25-26, 28).

Paul's first interaction with Festus is less a substantive speech than a last effort to escape a mob death at the hands of the "chief priests and leaders of the Jews" in Jerusalem

(25:1-2). When Festus ascends to the governorship of Judea and takes his seat in Caesarea, Paul has languished up to two years in prison awaiting the resumption of his trial (Acts 24:27). When Festus confers with the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, they request that he bring Paul back to Jerusalem to stand trial there, but in fact they plan to ambush and kill Paul on the way (25:1-4). Festus seems unaware of their plot, but foils it unknowingly by inviting them, instead, to Caesarea where Paul is held prisoner. When Paul faces these accusers before Festus, he only maintains his innocence vis-à-vis Jewish law, the temple, and the emperor (25:8) and, when Festus suggests he go to Jerusalem for trial, Paul appeals to the emperor (25:10-11). It is not clear whether Paul knows of the Jerusalem leaders' specific plot to kill him should he return. But given that they have conspired this way before (23:12-15), remain antagonistic toward Paul two years after his initial arrest, and accuse Paul to the new governor a mere three days after he takes office (25:1-3), Paul need not know of the specific plot this time in order to believe—and rightly so—that his life will end abruptly if he is brought to Jerusalem or even released from Roman custody anywhere nearby. Appealing to the emperor is a strategic move for Paul and indicates, again, his careful attention to his context. Appealing to Caesar ensures Paul's safety a little while longer and allows him to make one more speech in Caesarea, this one before Festus the governor and Agrippa the king.

Paul's speech before Agrippa is worthy of having had two years to hone his story into a defense that centers on faithful witness to Jesus. As at his previous trials, Paul begins with words that signal his conscious crafting of an address for his particular audience—and with a bit of strategic flattery. Paul introduces his defense by noting that, since all his accusers are Jews, he is fortunate to be making his defense before Agrippa, whom Paul calls "especially knowledgeable" of the "customs and debates" of Jews (Acts 26:1-2). Paul may believe that,

and may be true of Agrippa, but it nonetheless functions to buy Paul a bit of goodwill and establishes that Paul is purposefully shaping his address for someone already familiar with the issues at stake. Indeed, near the end of Paul's speech, he reiterates his conviction that Agrippa already knows the principal matters: "The king knows about these things… for I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner" (26:26). Whether or not Agrippa already knew everything Paul told him, declaring to Festus that Agrippa has knowledge of Paul's activities from his early days in Jerusalem up to the latest controversy casts Agrippa in a good light. He should know what is happening in his jurisdiction, especially if it involves mob violence. Paul has thus primed his judge to hear him and, even if he gains new information in the course of Paul's speech, not to betray any surprise or worry. Paul implies that were he truly a threat, Agrippa would already have taken action against Paul. In this way, Paul sets himself up not only to be heard, but also to mitigate any negative response from Agrippa.

In substance, Paul's defense before Agrippa draws together and expands on key features of his earlier accounts of himself as well as his preaching witness. He leads with his credentials as a lifelong devoted Pharisee (26:4-5), and then claims that the thing for which he is on trial—hope in God's resurrection of the dead—is squarely within the bounds of what Jews (particularly Pharisees) believe (26:4-8). Paul thus at once centers the resurrection and renders absurd the accusations against him. To continue making his case, Paul outlines how his mind—indeed, his whole life—was changed so that he went from adversary to advocate of the name of Jesus (26:9-18). This life-changing encounter occupies the bulk of Paul's speech, and most of it consists of Paul recounting Jesus' words summoning and commissioning Paul as his witness (26:14, 16-18). In this account, Jesus' words legitimize

Paul's preaching about Jesus and his mission to the Gentiles, naming the universal scope of God's salvation through Jesus (26:17-18). Paul maintains that he did just as Jesus commanded, namely, preaching about Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles. Moreover, Paul describes the substance of his preaching in a way that connects it to Jesus' and the apostles' way of interpreting scripture to bear witness to Jesus and also gives a nod to Agrippa's knowledge of Judaism. Paul declares that his preaching has stayed squarely within the bounds of what "the prophets" and "Moses" said would happen, specifically reflects Jesus' final summative teaching (Luke 24:46-47): "the Messiah would suffer, and, being first of the resurrection of the dead, would proclaim light both to the people and the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23). In his last trial appearance Paul encapsulates his verbal witness to Jesus in a way that attends to the concerns of his audience, emulates Jesus' and the apostolic example (Luke 24:46), and maintains his distinct emphasis on the "light" that extends through Israel to the nations because the God of all raised Jesus from the dead. After Paul's appearance before Festus and Agrippa, Acts shows no further trials for Paul. He is shipped off to Rome because he appealed to the emperor (Acts 26:32), but although he has been told in a vision that he must stand before Caesar (27:24), Acts does not include that scene. Paul does, however, arrive safely in Rome despite shipwreck, nervous soldiers, and snake bite (27:39-28:6).

Acts shows Paul wasting no time in attempting to make a sympathetic audience of the Jewish leaders in Rome, with the ultimate goal of persuading them to follow in the way of Jesus. He addresses them with his customary greeting for fellow Jews: "Brothers," he calls them (28:17). Paul then takes advantage of his privilege to tell his own story without interference or accusations from the Jews in Jerusalem because of whom he has been brought to the Empire's capitol in Roman custody. Paul emphasizes that his betrayal into Roman hands

is unwarranted because he has "done nothing hostile to the people or to the customs of the ancestors" (28:17). As he maintained before Felix and Agrippa, Paul names his commitment to "the hope of Israel" as the principal reason for his incarceration (28:20), but, at this first meeting, he does not mention the resurrection as the framework within which he interprets Israel's hope. Paul is trying to gain an audience, and he succeeds despite the lukewarm-to-negative reception from these leaders (28:21-22). As Acts tells it, the first group of leaders and even more of them come to where Paul is staying on the appointed day (28:23). Paul spends the entire day speaking to them, "bearing witness [διαμαρτυρόμενος] of the reign of God and persuading them about Jesus from both Moses and the prophets" (28:23). Paul's message focuses on the principal theme of Jesus' teaching before his resurrection (the reign of God) and interprets Jesus' significance just as he did—through the scriptural lens of "Moses and the prophets" (Luke 24:27, 44). Paul's reliance on scriptural argumentation is also appropriate here because Paul speaks to Jews. Paul, once again, adjusts his communication strategy to his audience and appeals to the texts they consider authoritative. Just as he quoted Aratus after encountering Stoic philosophers in Athens (17:18, 28), here when faced with some of the Jews' resistance, he quotes Isaiah by way of rebuke (Acts 28:26-27) and recapitulates the strategy he first ventured in Pisidian Antioch (13:46-47): inciting their jealousy by declaring that "this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen" (28:28). Paul's sensitivity to context and audience do not guarantee his success, but even here, some of those who hear Paul are persuaded (28:24). And Paul goes on preaching.

That Acts ends without Paul's preaching coming to an end is perhaps the most powerful sign of the central place that speech plays in Paul's witness. From the earliest days

of his witness in Damascus (9:20-22) to the last verse of the book, Acts prominently features Paul's dogged commitment to proclamation and refusal to be silenced. Paul's preaching bears witness to Jesus not only in what he says, but also in his strategy of public proclamation. Even though Paul remains in Roman custody at the end of Acts, he welcomes whoever comes to see him (28:30) and goes on "proclaiming the reign of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus with all boldness, unhindered" (28:31). Paul's message at the end is for all—whoever comes to him—and he goes on proclaiming it tirelessly.

6.2.4 Life

Given Paul's loquacity and proficiency with words, one might easily overlook the witness of his life. Acts even allows a little fun at Paul's expense for being so verbose. In Lystra, when the locals take him and Barnabas for gods in human form, they assign Paul the role not of the more powerful god, Zeus but, rather, Hermes, "because he was the chief of the word [ὁ ἡγούμενος τοῦ λόγου]" (Acts 14:12). Later, in Athens, Acts describes Paul as "disputing in the public square every day with whoever happened to be there" such that he garners a derisive moniker from some of the Athenians, "what does this scavenging wordmonger [σπερμολόγος] want to say?" (17:18).[30] And there is, of course, the unforgettable scene in Troas, where Paul speaks so long in a warm upstairs room that a young man, Eutychus, who sat in the window (doubtless for a respite from the heat), succumbs to sleep, falls out the window, and is taken for dead (20:7-9). Paul goes down to find that "his life is yet

[30] Rowe's analysis informs this translation: "Σπερμολόγος, as Demosthenes, Dio Chrysostom, and other public intellectuals knew, was a word used to brand opponents as posers, loafers in the agora who had, at best, picked up a few prooftexts from one of the florilegia floating around the cities [E.g., Demosthenes, *De Corona* 18.127 (269); Dio Chrysostom *Discourse* 32.9]. Their 'scraps' of knowledge, so the term suggests, hardly amounted to true philosophical understanding" (Rowe, "Grammar of Life," 37).

in him" (20:10), returns to the house, and speaks until dawn with the people gathered there (20:11). Acts sometimes portrays Paul as comically long-winded—especially when it comes to telling people about Jesus. But Paul's witness is not limited to his words; it extends, of course, to actions that reflect and reinforce the substance of his message. Paul lives into the substance of his proclamation—"the reign of God" and "the Lord Jesus" as the Messiah who suffered and whom God raised—through his resort to resilience instead of violence, acts of healing and exorcism, and generosity toward enemies. These patterns of behavior have one critical feature in common—the wielding of life-giving power. Paul's former violence makes his turn to life-giving power all the more dramatic and renders his comprehensive witness to Jesus uniquely compelling within the book of Acts.

From the beginning of Paul's active witness, controversy, violent conflict, and the threat of death follow him like a shadow, but Paul never either retaliates against his opponents nor abandons his mission. Some Jews in Damascus plot to kill Paul a mere three verses after his first public declaration about Jesus (Acts 9:20-23). Six verses later, in Jerusalem, the Hellenists are trying to kill Paul (9:29). Acts does not provide full description of these events, but they suffice to foreshadow the pattern that will develop beginning after Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch (13:16-41; 44-47). On that occasion, Paul declares to a mixed audience that God promises salvation to Gentiles as well as Jews, and they become jealous and angry; when Paul rebukes them, they incite persecution against him and drive him out of the area (13:44-50). A similar pattern recurs in Iconium (14:1-6), Lystra (14:19), Thessalonica (17:1-10), and Beroea (17:10-14). Paul faces additional conflicts and violence in Philippi (16:19-24), Corinth (18:12-17), and Ephesus (19:23-41). Each time Paul, the extent of Paul's engagement in the conflict is argument or prophetic rebuke, but then, rather than resort to violence, Paul leaves

the area and continues preaching elsewhere. On at least two occasions Paul absorbs literal blows—from stones (14:19) and rods (16:22)—rather than raise a hand even to defend himself. Paul persists with dogged determination despite ongoing violent opposition and never responds in kind. Paul's resilient abstention from violence is all the more striking because he considered it a fully legitimate tool of persuasion before his encounter with Jesus and the visit from Ananias (9:1-19). Paul's rejection of violent power and embrace of resilience may be the most dramatic of the ways his life bears witness to Jesus and, especially, to his resurrection. But Paul images Jesus and his resurrection not only in absorbing death-dealing blows and plots, but also in wielding life-giving power in the form of healing and exorcism.

Paul heals and exorcises many people throughout the course of his ministry, and his first act of healing strongly resembles Peter and John's interaction with the man born lame who sat at the temple's Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:1-11; 14:8-13). The resemblance shows not only that Paul performs a powerful life-giving act, but also that he does so in the same pattern as the apostles' witness to Jesus resurrection. Like the man in Jerusalem, the man in Lystra has been crippled since birth; neither has ever walked (3:2; 14:8). Paul, like Peter and John, first stares (ἀτενίσας) into the face of the potential recipient of healing (3:4; 14:9). The actual healing takes place via a command to get up, with Peter and John telling the man, "arise [ἔγειρε]" (3:6) and Paul saying "stand up [ἀνάστηθι]" (14:10)—both words are used elsewhere to describe Jesus' resurrection (e.g., 4:10 for the former; 2:24 for the latter). With Peter and John, Acts describes, "leaping up, he stood and was walking [ἐξαλλόμενος ἔστη καὶ περιεπάτει]" (3:8); with Paul, similarly, "he sprang up and was walking [ἥλατο καὶ περιεπάτει]" (14:10). Just as Peter and John's healing of the lame man in Jerusalem draws the attention of a crowd (3:9-

11), so does Paul's in Lystra even to the extent that he and Barnabas are taken for gods (14:11). This response, too, has its counterpart in the Jerusalem healing, evidenced in Peter's admonishing the crowd for wondering and staring "as if by our own power or piety we have made him walk" (3:12). Paul and Barnabas, to an even greater degree, must quash the ceremony of sacrifice that the crowds and the priest of Zeus in Lystra are already beginning to prepare after seeing the lame man healed (14:11-18). And Paul, like Peter after the healing, takes the opportunity to give a speech exhorting his audience to repent and turn to [the living] God (3:19; 14:15). Narrating the event with this spate of connections to Peter and John's first work of healing establishes that Paul, like Jesus, exercises the power to heal and, like the apostles, bears witness to Jesus' resurrection through the exercise of healing power.

Paul goes on to exercise life-giving power to heal and to perform exorcisms in other contexts. The first instance of the latter is with the enslaved girl in Philippi who has the "spirit of divination [πνεῦμα πύθωνα]" (Acts 16:16). One could speculate about why Paul does not exorcise the spirit from the girl immediately. Perhaps he foresaw that, since her enslavers were making money from the fortunetelling she was able to do through the spirit, his exorcising the spirit would not be met with grateful enthusiasm. The exorcisms that Jesus and the original apostles perform appear to be solicited, or at least welcomed (e.g., Luke 4:33-36; Acts 5:16). But those exorcisms took place mainly in Jewish contexts, where the people appear to take for granted that to have a spirit other than one's own or the Holy Spirit is deleterious. The exception that, perhaps, proves the rule is Jesus' exorcism of the demon-possessed man in the region of the Gerasenes (Luke 8:26-39). When Jesus exorcises a man in Gentile territory it turns out to be bad for business (as the swineherds lose all their pigs [8:33]), and when the

people see the restored man they are "seized with great fear" (8:37) and ask Jesus to leave. Paul's expulsion from Philippi following the slave girl's release from the spirit takes a rather more violent turn, but after mob seizure, a beating, a night in prison, and an earthquake, the magistrates come to Paul and Silas and request that they leave the city (Acts 16:20-39). The narrative of Paul performing an exorcism in Gentile territory shows him not only exercising life-giving power—freeing the girl from the spirit and, possibly, from her enslavers' service—but also having a similar experience to Jesus' own such foray. Paul's exorcism of the Philippian slave girl thus bears a double witness to Jesus and his life-giving power.

Acts 14 and 16 include full narratives of Paul performing a healing and an exorcism in Lystra and Philippi, respectively. Acts 19 provides a more summative account of both kinds of acts similar to the sketch of the apostles' ministry of healing and exorcism in Jerusalem immediately following the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-10). That episode ends with the comment, "great fear came upon the whole church and all who heard these things" (5:11), and then the narrative moves straight to a summary of the apostles' subsequent ministry of healing and exorcism (5:12-16). The brief account emphasizes the potency of Peter's healing power, implying that merely having his shadow fall on sick people who were carried into the streets sufficed to cure them, and all unclean spirits were, likewise, exorcised (5:15-16). Paul wields similar healing power; in Ephesus, Acts reports that handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul's skin had the power to heal the sick and exorcise evil spirits (19:12).

In neither case, however, does this healing or exorcism amount to magic. Paul is not attempting to manipulate God or to make money off of what God gives freely. These works image the generosity Jesus enjoins in his sermon on the plain when he exhorts his audience to give without expectation of return (Luke 6:35). The impropriety of doing such works in the

manner of magic, or attempting to gain material wealth through them, is illustrated in the catastrophic efforts of the seven sons of the chief priest Sceva, "itinerant Jewish exorcists," who undertake "to invoke the name of Jesus over those who had evil spirits" without themselves being committed to that name (19:13). They command a spirit "in the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches" (19:13), to which the demon responds, "Jesus I acknowledge, and Paul I know, but who are you?" The possessed man overpowers all seven men and they flee the house where they attempted exorcism "naked and wounded" (19:16). The episode shows that Paul not only wields the power to heal and cast out evil spirits successfully; he also does so in a way that reflects Jesus' unrelenting generosity. Paul is not an itinerant peddler of exorcisms; Paul heals and casts out evil spirits because God does these things through him. Indeed, the preface of the whole summary of Paul's healing works indicates that "God did uncommon powerful deeds by the hand of Paul" (19:12). Paul does not seek remuneration or even credit for what is, in point of fact, God's work. And these works do bear witness to Jesus, because when the people in Ephesus hear of Paul's work in contrast to what happened with Sceva's sons, "the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (19:17).

After the episode in Ephesus, Paul does not have as much opportunity to heal people or cast out evil spirits because he spends most of the rest of Acts either traveling to Jerusalem and meeting with old friends (Acts 20-21), or imprisoned (Acts 22-28). But incarceration does not stop Paul from doing good. Even while a prisoner bound for Rome, Paul takes the opportunities presented him to preserve life and heal the sick. Paul proves instrumental in helping everyone aboard survive the shipwreck that befalls them. He encourages the sailors, assuring them of God's protection (27:24-25); he advises the centurion and soldiers to stop the sailors from abandoning the ship (27:30); and he reminds the sailors to eat after they had

gone fourteen days without food, which encourages and strengthens them on the eve of the wreck (27:33-36). Once all the sailors, soldiers, and prisoners reach Malta safely and are welcomed by Publius, Paul returns Publius's hospitality by healing his father of fever and dysentery (28:7-8). When word spreads of Paul's having cured the man, "the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were healed" (28:9). Paul's witness on Malta consists almost entirely in this generous exercise of healing; indeed, he does all of it without saying a word. Healings and exorcisms, along with Paul's resilience, make up a critical part of his lived witness to Jesus; the third essential aspect of Paul's lived witness could be called "love of enemies."

Although Paul can certainly deliver a strident rebuke, on several occasions he also exhibits astounding kindness and generosity toward people who oppress or imprison him. His consideration for the Philippian jailer especially illustrates the point. The jailer, following the orders of the Philippian magistrates, has put Paul and Silas in an inner room and fastened their feet in stocks—this after they have been stripped of their clothes and publicly beaten with rods (Acts 16:22-24). When an earthquake shakes the bonds off all the prisoners and swings open the door of the jail, Paul and Silas subordinate their potential escape to preserving the jailer's life. Paul anticipates the jailer's impending suicide and calls out "in a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!'" (16:28). Instead of absconding and leaving the jailer to take the customary punishment for allowing prisoners to escape—as one might consider just comeuppance for his participating in unjust imprisonment—Paul and Silas show compassion to the jailer. Instead of viewing him as an enemy, Paul and Silas treat the jailer as an object of God's mercy. When he asks them humbly, "What must I do to be saved?" they do not scoff or scorn him as a pawn in the miscarriage of justice; instead, they extend him an

invitation to follow Jesus that would make him as kin to them (16:30-31). Accepting the jailer's hospitality afterward (16:33-34) does not merely serve Paul and Silas's needs; it is also an expression of forgiveness and reconciliation. In their generosity toward the jailer Paul and Silas obey Jesus' commands to love enemies (Luke 6:27, 35), and in allowing him to dress their wounds and provide them a meal they mirror Jesus' accepting hospitality and eating with his disciples after his resurrection (Luke 24:29-30, 41-43). Perhaps Paul and Silas act in response to the judgment that the jailer is primed for turning to faith in Jesus, but that he even remains alive after having discovered the jail door open itself results from Paul's generosity and well-timed arresting shout. But even were that not so, Paul and Silas's reconciliation with someone who abused them bears witness to the life-giving power of Jesus.

Beyond the jailer in Philippi, Paul has many encounters with people who wish him ill or who sit in judgment over him with the power to sentence him to death (Acts 23:29; 25:11, 25; 26:31). Unlike with the Philippian jailer, Paul has no opportunity to intervene to save these rulers' lives, but he nevertheless appears to view them not particularly as his enemies, but as objects of mission. When Felix delays Paul's sentence and sends for Paul to hear him speak, Paul does not hesitate in his attempt to bring even Felix to repentance (24:24-26). Felix hopes for a bribe (24:26); Paul gives him not "silver or gold," but the name of "Messiah Jesus" and the message of faith, justice, and self-control as well as a warning about "the judgment about to come" (24:24-25). Paul does not seek escape from prison; neither does he urge his friends to stage a coup in order to secure his release. Paul acts, instead, on the thin hope that his way out of prison leads through someone like Felix rather than around him—specifically, through the transformation of Felix's character. Were Felix truly just or a faithful disciple of Jesus, the Messiah who suffered and was raised, he would no longer imprison Paul. Of course, Acts does

not include explicit analysis of Paul's mental states here, but speaking to a Roman governor about Jesus and justice is an act of hope—one that flexes the same muscles that hope in resurrection does—as well as an act of generosity, not to say love, toward an "enemy" who holds the power of life and death over Paul. And Felix is not the only such figure toward whom Paul acts generously.

When defending himself before Agrippa, Paul ends by turning a question on the king: "Do you believe, King Agrippa, in the prophets? I know that you believe!" (26:27). Agrippa may not believe the prophets, but he is perfectly clear on Paul's aim: Paul wants to make Agrippa "a Christian" (26:28). Paul responds the he wants to make everyone a Christian (if that is what Paul is), and he makes no exception for Agrippa merely because the king stands in judgment over Paul. Paul's enthusiasm to spread the life-giving news of Jesus even to "enemies" reflects the universal mission of the God of all. Paul's is a practical kindness that looks beyond the potential for injury to himself and, instead, to the wellbeing even of those who could bring about his death. As already outlined above, while Paul is aboard ship bound for Rome, Paul renews his practice of treating his incarcerators generously. He provides needed encouragement and guidance to the centurion, soldiers, and sailors that ensures their safety alongside his own when the storm smashes the ship to flotsam (27:21-26, 31, 33-36). Paul's generosity becomes evident in his gratification at having received a word from God that not only he but also everyone with him would survive the shipwreck, due to the necessity of his standing before Caesar (27:24). Paul practices kindness toward those who ensure his ongoing imprisonment and the trial before Caesar that will certainly bring about his demise. His willingness to subordinate even his own survival to the wellbeing of those who are complicit in his incarceration demonstrates profoundly what "love of enemies" looks like.

Paul's generosity toward those who try and imprison him is an essential part of his life's witness to Jesus, which consists in multiple ways of wielding life-giving power. That Paul has turned from violent zealotry to resilience, healing and exorcism, and kindness toward enemies is, likewise, a profoundly significant aspect of Paul's witness. The way Paul is introduced within Acts' narrative fully sets him up to be the story's principal antagonist. Given that Paul is not unique in his violent opposition to the way of Jesus, the traits and assumptions that make Paul receptive to the vision of Jesus—especially in contrast to those who persist in violent resistance—merit particular attention.

6.2.5 Receptivity and Resistance

Paul's story demonstrates that even the most ardent opponent of the way of Jesus can repent to become a dedicated witness to the reign of God. Acts presents Paul, before his Damascus experience, as comprehensively persuaded that the way of Jesus was wrong and a threat to truthful practice of Jewish faith. Both in the narration and in Paul's own words, Acts presents Paul's clear conviction that the apostolic message was both not true and detrimental enough to warrant violence to quash it. Paul describes himself as having been "a zealot for God" (22:3), which indicates the fervor with which he held his beliefs. That someone like Paul could make the dramatic change that he does is nothing short of astonishing; the way Acts portrays his turn to Jesus expresses profound hope that even the most resistant person can change. At the same time, Acts tempers this hope; there are several groups of people and individuals who remain adamantly hostile to the message of Jesus or to Paul's presentation of it. Some of them actively resist and oppose Paul in a fashion similar to his own former persecution of Jesus' disciples. This juxtaposition of Paul's receptivity alongside many of his

audiences' resistance brings to light Acts' perspective on what preconditions either facilitate or inhibit a person's ability to repent of other lived theologies in favor of the way of Jesus and exposes for critique those who prioritize such considerations as maintaining the status quo, expediency, or economic advantage, over hospitality to the truth.

Paul's calling himself "a zealot for God," while the term accommodates a use of violence that he disavows as soon as he turns to Jesus, also indicates the sincerity of his devotion to God. For Paul, the truth about God is paramount—even if accepting a new truth about God means upending his entire life and relinquishing the former privilege and security he enjoyed when he served the high priest. Paul would not, necessarily, have had to accept the reality and mission presented to him when Jesus confronted him and Ananias visited him; he could have refused to change. But he does accept them and allows them to transform his life. Paul's intellectual honesty puts into context his impatience with those who, for reasons of expediency, economic gain, or the preservation of power or calcified tradition, refuse to acknowledge the dynamic movement of God that he proclaims. By setting up this contrast between Paul and his audiences, Acts constructs a powerful critique of those who cynically resist the truth in a fashion that goes beyond simply rejecting Paul's message to the attempt to dominate others through shaping the conditions for gaining knowledge as well as through violence. That is, these characters—the Jews who object to the message of Gentile inclusion (13:44-50; 21:17-22:22), the enslavers of the παιδίσκη in Philippi (16:16-23), Demetrius and the artisans in Ephesus (19:23-27), as well as Felix, Festus, and Agrippa (24:22-27; 25:1-12; 26:24-32)—will not accept a truth if it does not serve their personal interest or the maintenance

of the status quo.[31] Those who derive their wealth, social status, and political power from systems predicated on death-dealing power will refuse to know the truth offered in Paul's preaching about "the reign of God and the Lord Jesus" (28:31), namely, that true power is the ability not to take life, but to give it. But resistance to the reign of God is only part of the story. Some people—often those with little status or political power—welcome Paul's message. Acts is thus hopeful about the coming reign of God and, also, clear-eyed about the reality of ongoing and deeply entrenched resistance to it. Against this form of resistance, a unified witness of words and life is particularly important, powerful, and threatening—both epistemically and politically—to those who wish to see the status quo maintained. A message spread through words and action preserves the integrity of the messengers. Indeed, in Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian elders he makes a point to remind them of his economic independence—he did not peddle the Gospel for money, but, instead, set an example of

[31] While I wrote this paragraph, U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin held a joint press conference in the course of which Trump, according to Aaron Blake of *The Washington Post*, "stood by as Putin denied interfering in any U.S. affairs—a position Trump's entire government regards as a lie" and "sided with Russia over his own government, repeatedly and with the whole world watching." (Aaron Blake, "Analysis: Trump's News Conference with Putin was Everything Putin Could Have Dreamed," *The Washington Post*, 16 July 2018). On the same day, Director of National Intelligence David Coats released a brief statement: "The role of the Intelligence Community is to provide the best information and fact-based assessments possible for the President and policymakers. We have been clear in our assessments of Russian meddling in the 2016 election and their ongoing, pervasive efforts to undermine our democracy, and we will continue to provide unvarnished and objective intelligence in support of our national security." (David Coats, "Statement from DNI Coats," https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/press-releases/item/1888-statement-from-dni-coats#content. A more flagrant modern example of a person with tremendous political power choosing to accept only such facts and truths as serve his interests would be difficult to supply, although additional instances from the same source are plentiful. See, e.g., Carlos Lozada, "Can Truth Survive this Presidency?: An Honest Investigation," *The Washington Post*, 13 July 2018. While discussing the reality-deficient rhetoric of the current administration, Lozada identifies this pattern as a hallmark of American imperial thinking: "Back in the summer of 2002, long before 'fake news' or 'post-truth' infected the vernacular, one of President George W. Bush's top advisers mocked a journalist for being part of the 'reality-based community.' Seeking answers in reality was for suckers, the unnamed adviser explained. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality.' This was the hubris and idealism of a post-Cold War, pre-Iraq War superpower: If you exert enough pressure, events will bend to your will."

supporting those without enough (20:33-35). Such integrity between Paul's words and life has tremendous persuasive power and, therefore, brings a formidable challenge to those who wish to shape what counts as true for their own ends. As happened with Stephen, Paul's encounters with these opponents expose the correlation between deceit and violence. Paul's opponents, like Stephen's, cannot withstand the power of his witness or refute him through honest engagement, so they resort to deception, shouting him down, physical attacks, multiple attempts on his life that he eludes, and imprisonment. None of these setbacks, however, keeps Paul from continuing in his witness through the last verse of the book and beyond.

When Paul accounts for himself before the crowd of Jewish people who had seized him and were beating him until the tribune Lysias intervened (Acts 21:27-33), he emphasizes his single-minded devotion to God through a Jewish, and specifically Pharisaic—theological perspective. Paul calls himself "a zealot of God [ζηλωτής ... τοῦ θεοῦ]" (22:3) and claims this zeal as his motivation for persecuting "this Way even to death" (22:4). When he speaks before Festus and Agrippa, Paul recalls, "I myself was convinced [ἔδοξα] I must [δεῖν] do many things against the name of Jesus" (26:9), indicating both his sincere conviction and understanding that he served God by opposing the way of Jesus. Given that Acts provides no insight into Paul's motivations when he first appears in the narrative, there is no reason to suppose that Acts presents Paul's later accounts of himself as anything other than honest. Acts shows Paul repeatedly claiming to have persecuted Jesus' followers out of honest allegiance to God and, by implication, due to having mistakenly understood the apostolic message as false and a threat to right worship. Perhaps, in addition to an understanding of God's patience with ignorance, Paul's own formerly misguided convictions contribute to his grace toward those lack

understanding of God's ways (14:15-16; 17:23, 30). Paul regards with generosity those who resist his message out of honest ignorance, doubt, or misunderstanding. By contrast, he has little patience for those who, for example, uncritically reject his message out of a desire to maintain the status quo (e.g., 13:44-51). Acts thus portrays Paul as a person with rigorous integrity and, even, a self-denying fidelity to the truth, whatever it might be.

This commitment to ground his convictions and actions in a true representation of reality appears to play no small part in bringing Paul from persecutor to proponent of the church. Paul accepts the life-altering reality that Jesus and Ananias present to him even though he cannot be ignorant of what such a change will cost him. Instead of remaining the chief priests' darling he will throw his lot in with the man whom the Jerusalem leaders condemned and handed over to Pilate for execution. Again, Acts does not spell out what goes through Paul's mind in the process of his transformation, but it requires little imagination to judge that Paul knows from the outset that following Jesus will be no easy road. Having persecuted Jesus' followers himself, the prospect of facing similar adversity must occur to Paul. Acts, of course, makes Paul's future clear even before he has demonstrated his positive response to his vision from Jesus. When Jesus summons Ananias to go visit Paul, Jesus promises, "I myself will show him how much he must suffer on behalf of my name" (9:16). Paul never recounts that exact vision, but a portent of his suffering is implied in Jesus' promises of rescue that Paul, when accounting for himself before Agrippa, describes having received at the same times as his original encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road (26:12-18). Paul thus has the integrity to accept the truth presented him through his encounters with Jesus and Ananias even though it strips him of privilege and security for the rest of his life. With Paul, the integrated witness of his words and life is all the more powerful because of what he gave up in order to fulfill his

commission faithfully. Acts thus upholds Paul as an exemplar and a challenge to any who would object that the costs of following Jesus are too high, or who have sacrificed their integrity on the altars of economic gain, political power, or security. Within the narrative of Acts such idolaters are in plentiful supply.

It might seem odd to call the Jews who first reject Paul's message "idolaters," given that they ostensibly worship Israel's one God and initially appear receptive to Paul's and Barnabas's preaching (Acts 13:42-43). But their response to the expansion of Paul's mission to include Gentiles reveals that they esteem an exclusive right to God's gracious care and the preservation of the traditions that constitute their distinct identity—more than they do God's saving care in itself or the mission for which God made them distinct in the first place. After Paul speaks in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, those had gathered "begged for these things to be told to them again the next sabbath" (13:42), and "many of the Jews and worshiping proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas" (13:43). As long as Paul and Barnabas give the message only to the usual synagogue congregation, the reception seems quite positive. Things change, however, on the next sabbath when, Acts reports, "almost the whole town [σχεδὸν πᾶσα ἡ πόλις] gathered together to hear the word of the Lord" (13:44). This is a greatly expanded crowd; it is no longer the usual Jews and a few interested and devout Gentiles content to remain on the fringes of synagogue life. It is "almost everyone" who lives in Antioch, they hear the "word of the Lord" just as Paul it spoke to the synagogue gathering the week before. This inclusivity changes the dynamic, specifically, "when the Jews saw [ἰδόντες] the crowds they were filled with ζήλου" (13:45). Ζῆλος, typically rendered as "zeal" or "jealousy," in this case requires both words at once for an adequate translation.

In this context, ζῆλος gives a sense of these Jews' fervor to guard their exclusive right to God's notice and care, their distinct identity, and the practices that maintain their unique status as the covenant people of God. It is a double-edged word connoting both positive and negative qualities—fervent devotion to God as well as isolationist exclusivism that, sometimes, can turn violent. The Jews in Antioch abhor the implication, arising from Paul's readiness to share "the word of the Lord" with "almost the whole city" (13:44), that the message is not reserved for them. Seeing the crowds absorbing Paul's words, and thus being filled with ζῆλος, "they spoke against [ἀντέλεγον] the things said by Paul, blaspheming [βλασφημοῦντες]" (13:45). Acts paints the caprice of their response: out of jealousy and purism they reverse course and contradict the message they had previously accepted. Despite having found Paul's message initially compelling, the Jews in Antioch reject Paul's message because the Gentile inclusion that his witness communicates in both words and actions threatens to obliterate the distinct and exclusive identity of Israel as the people of God. They appear to view God's salvation as a limited commodity, wherefore they believe Gentile inclusion diminishes either their value or what is on offer for them.

Paul and Barnabas, in a deft rhetorical move, criticize the Jews' rejection of the message they had previously embraced, legitimize their own witness to Gentiles, and admonish the Jews for failing to participate with them in God's expanding mission (13:46-47). Their brief speech, especially via reference to Isa 49:6, suggests that God has always planned to extend salvation to the Gentiles, and that Israel has an important role in fulfilling that plan. Paul and Barnabas say that they are turning to the Gentiles with their message, "for thus has the Lord commanded us: 'I have set you for a light to the Gentiles, in order for you to be salvation up

to the end of the earth'" (13:47). These words, in one nimble move, highlight their own obedience to "the Lord" (as both the one God of Israel whose voice speaks in the quotation and Jesus) and castigate their Jewish audience for disobedience. By virtue of the quotation from Isaiah, the "us" that "the Lord" commanded can refer just to Paul and Barnabas and all of Israel at the same time. Highlighting that including Gentiles was God's plan already in Isaiah, however, does not win back the Jewish audience. Indeed, far from admitting their argument is based on what they wish were true rather than in reality, they go beyond "contradicting" and "blaspheming" (13:45) to "persecution" and expel Paul and Barnabas from the region (13:50-51). When fair argument fails, they resort to violence.

The incident in Pisidian Antioch is only the first among many instances where Jews stir up trouble for Paul when he brings the news of Jesus to Gentiles. Indeed, the scene in Antioch has its bookend seven chapters later in Jerusalem. When Paul arrives there, the elders of the church inform him that there are "many thousands among the Jews who have believed, all of them ζηλωταί of the law" (21:20). Moreover, the elders warn Paul that these "zealots of the law" have judged Paul a threat to the heritage they cherish and guard—they believe Paul has authorized Jews in the diaspora to "abandon Moses" and told them "not to circumcise their children or observe the customs" (21:21). Like the Jews in Pisidian Antioch, these many thousands appear ready to accept the message about Jesus so long as it is reserved for them and does not undermine their privileged position in the community of Jesus' followers. Paul encounters them when, on the elders' advisement, he has undergone ritual purification and is completing the rite in the temple (21:22-26); there they seize him, crying out, "Men, Israelites, help! This is the person who is teaching everyone everywhere against our people and the law

and this place; even now he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place!" (21:27-28). The elders' warning about the inaccurate impression the "zealots of the law" have of Paul (21:21-24) preserves the possibility that these "Jews from Asia" believe everything of which they accuse Paul when they seize him, but their charges against him indicate that they prize the distinguishing traditions and exclusive access to the temple that Jews have and that afford them a privileged position above any Gentiles who might join the community of Jesus' followers. Their response to Paul's defense speech reinforces this impression; they listen without objection to the entire account of how he came to be a missionary on Jesus' behalf—until he declares that Jesus directly commanded him to depart Jerusalem and go preach to Gentiles (22:21). Then they shout him down and begin calling for his death (22:22). They have judged that Paul's way of fulfilling what he understands is his commission from Jesus entails an inclusion of Gentiles that eliminates the privilege of their position and, thus, diminishes their power. Rather than honestly entertaining the possibility that Paul has discerned Jesus' commission rightly, like the Jews in Pisidian Antioch, they make the preservation of their power the standard by which the truth of Paul's message must be measured.

Jews, however, by no means have a monopoly on dishonest resistance to Paul's message. Gentiles likewise find disingenuous ways and reasons for opposing Paul. The incident with the fortune-telling girl and her enslavers in Philippi is one such episode. Acts introduces the story with a great deal of crucial information in the first sentence: the girl is a παιδίσκη, an enslaved girl, who has a "spirit of divination" and she "brought much business [ἐργασίαν πολλὴν παρεῖχεν] to her masters [κυρίοις] by fortunetelling" (Acts 16:16). The enslavers are making a good deal of money due to this girl's affliction with this "pythian spirit"

and money ends up at the heart of their conflict with Paul. Whereas other instances where the apostles or Paul exorcise "unclean spirits" from people trigger admiration from the people (e.g., 5:12-16; 19:11-17), here her enslavers are unimpressed because, with that spirit goes her fortunetelling capability and, thus, their profit from her. Any wonder they might feel at the power Paul unleashed when he invoked the name of Jesus they suppress and, instead, focus on their financial loss. Acts explicitly cites the reason for their sudden and violent seizure of Paul and Silas: "Her masters, after seeing [ἰδόντες] that their hope of profit had gone away, seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the public square before the rulers" (16:19).

What these "masters" say before the authorities also proves instructive regarding their motivations. They do not claim cite the loss of their business as the reason for their upset; rather, they claim that Paul and Silas "are agitating our city" and "being Jews, they are proclaiming customs that it is not lawful for us, being Romans, to accept or practice" (16:20-21). These Philippian slave masters might speak correctly that Paul and Silas proclaim a message that undermines many assumptions and customs of Roman society, but it is an instance of characters saying more than they know. They do not appear to have observed any actions of Paul and Silas other than Paul's exorcising of the spirit from the girl, and so they can hardly have grounds for accusing the two missionaries of promoting out-of-bounds customs. Acts presents their real reason for attacking Paul and Silas as principally, if not purely, mercenary. Paul has taken away their business; that is the reason for their upset. For them, desire to avenge the loss of their exploitative business either blinds them to the wonder of what Paul has done or they deliberately ignore it because they prioritize their economic gain. In the picture Acts paints, these "masters" accuse Paul and Silas in a deliberate effort to

suppress their epistemic hospitality. Their economic gain is more compelling than the life-giving power they have seen at work through Paul's calling on Jesus' name to exorcise the spirit. Instead of admitting or at least wondering about the power that has brought release to the girl, they bring a violent punishment down on Paul and Silas.

After Upton Sinclair ran for governor of California in 1934, he claimed to have said in multiple campaign speeches, "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on not understanding it."[32] Sinclair could have pointed to Demetrius of Ephesus as an ancient exemplar of this claim, who, like the Philippian slaveholders, protests against Paul's preaching for economic reasons.[33] The incident with Demetrius takes place after a two-year period during which Paul spoke "about the reign of God" (Acts 19:8-10) and demonstrated its power through a potent ministry of healing and exorcism, which leads to a massive rejection of magic among people who witnessed Paul's activities and became faithful to Jesus (19:11-22). The episode opens on an ominous note with two successive litotes: "At that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way" (19:23). Acts introduces what is at stake for Demetrius in much the same language as it presents the "masters" of the girl in Philippi. Demetrius is "a silversmith who, making silver shrines of Artemis, brought the artisans no little business [παρείχετο τοῖς τεχνίταις οὐκ ὀλίγην ἐργασίαν]" (Acts 19:24). He worries that Paul's preaching undermines his business, so he organizes the artisans and others of his trade in a protest. When they have gathered, he addresses them with concerns that

[32] Upton Sinclair, "I, Candidate for Governor and How I Got Licked," *Oakland Tribune*, 11 December 1934, (19).

[33] Rowe, *World Upside Down*: "Demetrius's actions against Paul are fully intelligible. As Pliny the Younger would also learn, Christianity can be bad for religious business" (44).

revolve around his—and their—potential for economic loss because of Paul's preaching. He opens directly and makes a plain argument:

> "Men, you know that from this business we get our wealth. And you see and hear that, not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia, this 'Paul' has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying 'they are not gods if they come into existence by human hands.' But there is danger not only that this trade of ours will be proven vain, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be reckoned worthless; even her majesty is about to be destroyed—she whom the whole of Asia and the whole world worship!" (19:25-27)

Demetrius declares that Paul principally threatens the lucrative business that he, his fellow silversmiths, and the artisans enjoy because Artemis is highly and broadly esteemed. His concern for the stature of Artemis derives from the connection between her continuing popularity and the flourishing of the silver shrine-making business. He never contradicts Paul's declaration that human-made objects are not gods. To him, Artemis's legitimacy as a truly living goddess worthy of worship is not the main point. He appears more concerned about whether he will continue to have a market for his silver shrines if Paul keeps drawing people away from worshiping her. It is, perhaps, a legitimate fear. Because of the persuasive power of Paul's words and deeds just a few verses earlier, some people who had previously practiced magic gathered together a pile of magic books worth "fifty thousand silver pieces" (19:17) and burned them publicly. This wanton disregard for the monetary value—measured in silver, no less—of items that conflict with "the way" that Paul preaches shows that Demetrius's worry is far from groundless. If Paul can divert people from their previous convictions so effectively—even to their economic loss—he has exceedingly great persuasive power, indeed, and poses no small threat to any systems of economics that depend on the believability of truth claims incompatible with Paul's message. Demetrius takes a comprehensively pragmatic

approach with little regard for any difference the truth of Paul's claim, "they are not gods if they come into existence by human hands" (19:23) should make in how Demetrius conducts his life and his business. Instead of wondering whether the "great number of people" who have joined the movement of Jesus have actually encountered something real that made their economic loss worth it, Demetrius has counted his continued accumulation of wealth more important than knowing and living according to the truth. He becomes, therefore, yet another figure whose epistemic hospitality suffers from his refusal to know truths that are not economically expedient for him. But business is not the only interest that inhibits the receptivity of Paul's Gentile audiences; additional considerations, such as the maintenance of power, shape the epistemic hospitality of rulers like Felix, Festus, and Agrippa.

Felix hears the case against Paul and his defense but refuses to render a verdict promising to do so when Lysias arrives in Caesarea, which he never does. Felix's promise ends up looking calculated and disingenuous. First, Felix takes advantage of Paul's continued incarceration by using him for entertainment. Felix sends for Paul to hear him, but not for the sake of pronouncing a verdict. When Paul begins speaking of matters that would require dramatic changes in Felix's life, namely, about "faith in Christ Jesus," as well as "justice, self-control, and impending judgment" (Acts 24:24-25), Felix becomes afraid and tells Paul, "Go away for now; when I have time, I will summon you" (24:25). Felix does not want to hear what Paul has to say with any idea of changing his mind as a result; rather, he sends for Paul often because he hopes Paul will give him money—perhaps a bribe to secure a favorable verdict (24:26). Felix gives Paul multiple opportunities to bribe him, but Paul, apparently, never gives him anything. So it is that Paul fails to buy Felix's favor and, when Felix leaves his office, he does for Paul's opponents a service instead, keeping him in prison (24:27). Felix rather

clearly has a far greater regard for whatever course will gain him advantages of money and power than for what is true. He prolongs Paul's incarceration in the hope of reaping bribe money; when it is not forthcoming Felix favors the Jews, perhaps hoping that they will reciprocate by supporting him should his activities as governor come under scrutiny. Self-interest and expediency shape Felix's decisions far more than does regard for truth.

Festus presents little improvement. Although he does finally give Paul's case a hearing he, too, seems more interested in securing the support of those who are bringing a suit against Paul than in discerning the truth. Paul comes to Festus' attention at all because the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem approach him and ask him to do them "a favor" to Paul's detriment—they ask to have him returned to Jerusalem, not mentioning that they are planning an ambush to kill him on the way (Acts 25:3). Felix does not make any promises, but he invites them to come with him to Caesarea to accuse Paul (25:5). When they do so, they are unable to prove any of the charges, but Felix, "wanting to grant the Jews a favor," asks Paul whether he is willing to be tried in Jerusalem (25:9). Favoring the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem would be a strategic move to secure one's power as a new governor of the region, but it has little to do with actually discerning the truth. And indeed, the way Festus describes his decision-making process about Paul to Agrippa raises questions about Festus' commitment to truthful speech. While Acts' narrator says that Festus suggested Paul be tried in Jerusalem because he wanted to do a favor for the Jews, he gives no such reason when he explains the situation to Agrippa. To Agrippa, Festus declares that he asked Paul if he wished to go to Jerusalem to be tried because Festus was "at a loss" about how to settle the debate about Jesus between Paul and the Jewish authorities (25:20). How changing the trial's location would assist Festus' discernment is unclear, and he does not admit to Agrippa his more strategic reason for wanting

to send Paul to Jerusalem. Festus' principal concern in his dealings with Paul is not whose side of the debate is true, but whose allegiance would benefit him the most. Given the social position and number of Paul's opponents, the choice is obvious; Festus seeks the political advantage of doing the Jews a favor and only fails to follow through because Paul appeals to the emperor.

While Paul makes no active effort to persuade Festus about Jesus, he does make the attempt with Agrippa. Agrippa, unlike Felix and Festus, does not exhibit any particular interest in currying favor with the Jewish leadership. One might suppose he already has sufficient influence there. He does, however, appear to think Paul's attempt to persuade him to "become a Christian" is as ludicrous as Festus has judged Paul's message (26:24, 28). Paul appeals to Agrippa, claiming a certainty that Agrippa knows and believes the prophets (26:27). Agrippa responds derisively, "Would you so quickly make me a Christian?" (26:28). Paul claims that Agrippa knows all about the Way, because everything about the movement has been public (27:26). If that is so, perhaps Agrippa does understand what following Jesus would entail for someone like him. Paul presses him to admit that he believes the prophets, which, in Paul's view, leads logically to following Jesus. For Paul to question Agrippa in this way in front of the Roman governor puts some pressure on the king; a turn to Jesus on Agrippa's part would disrupt his friendship with Rome. And, of course, like his predecessors he rules only at Rome's pleasure in the first place. Agrippa could not follow the one who overcomes through resilience and maintain his position as a king appointed by Rome and governing on Rome's principles. With his position at stake, he clearly does not even entertain the idea that Paul might have the right of matters.

All of the above people who resist Paul's message—or never even seriously entertain it—have in common that they possess a certain level of social or political power and, in some cases, have something significant to lose by admitting the truth of what Paul preaches. The Jews who object to Paul's message of salvation for Gentiles appear to have a privileged place among Jerusalem Jews in that they manage to influence the church elders (Acts 21:18-24), rouse a crowd against Paul (21:27), gain the attention of Lysias (21:31-36) and, through him, have Paul brought before the Sanhedrin (22:22-24, 30). They have determined that the communal application of Paul's message threatens the distinctly and separately Jewish identity of God's people and, thus, their privileged position. Including Gentiles without requiring them to keep all the food laws or be circumcised—as the council in Jerusalem agreed (Acts 15:1-35)—entails that privileges associated with being Jewish will be diminished or eliminated within the new community of God's people, and perhaps the community will come under threat from outside, as well, if they are no longer considered Jewish but, rather, something new. If they do not want to lose this privileged status, they cannot accept Paul's message. The Philippian enslavers of the fortunetelling girl lose their means of making money, but instead of asking what power exorcised the spirit from the girl, they lash out in violence (16:19). Demetrius explicitly worries about losing his business if Paul's message prevails (19:23-27). Felix, Festus, and Agrippa all hold roles of leadership in a political system predicated on the power of dealing death; for them to admit the power of the resurrection that Paul proclaims would subvert an essential principle of the government in which they participate. None of these losses is trivial, but in each case the affected person or group of people regards money, status, security, or political office more highly than a truth that would strip them of such advantages. Their resistance to Paul's message rings true to Jesus' claim that

the rich enter God's reign only with great difficulty (Luke 18:24-25). That Paul is willing to accept and live according to what he understands is true—despite the privileges he loses in the process—shows how unusual he is.

The more receptive audiences—the Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch (13:48-49), Lydia (16:14-15), and the Philippian jailer (16:27-34)—are among the marginalized and more socially vulnerable. Before Paul and Barnabas preach in Pisidian Antioch, the Gentiles attached to the synagogue are classed separately from the Jews—any Gentiles interested in the God of Israel, even if they attach themselves to the synagogue, remain distinct from the Jews (Acts 13:43). One has the sense, from the reaction of the Jews to Paul's inclusive message of God's salvation, that they believe themselves the guardians of God's generosity, which puts them in a position of privilege and authority vis-à-vis the Gentiles. No wonder that when Paul proclaims "light to the Gentiles" they receive his message with joy and many of them become faithful to Jesus (13:47-48). Similarly, Lydia is a person on the margins in Philippi. One might suppose that because she was "a merchant of purple cloth" that she was rich, but, as Gaventa notes, "the question is complicated. Various forms of purple dye were used, ranging significantly in price, and nothing in the text indicates how Lydia is involved in the business."[34] Nevertheless, she is also not penniless—"she has a house and the resources to entertain Paul and his company."[35] And yet she lives on the literal margins of Philippi: she lives outside the gate (16:14). Moreover, she is a woman, very likely a widow, and "perhaps a freedwoman (i.e.,

[34] Gaventa, *Acts*, 237.

[35] Gaventa, *Acts,* 237.

a former slave), apparently operating without a male protector."[36] In contrast to the enslavers of the fortunetelling girl, whom Paul and Silas meet shortly after Lydia, she is the epitome of receptivity to Paul's message: "the Lord opened her heart to attend carefully [προσέχειν] to what was said by Paul" (16:14). She and her whole household are baptized, and she extends hospitality to Paul and his companions (16:15). On the other side of the hostile enslavers of the fortunetelling girl, the Philippian jailer provides closure to the story recapitulating Lydia's epistemic as well as conventional hospitality. As Gaventa rightly clarifies, the jailer in this instance "is not the oppressor but is himself in need of rescue."[37] Acts has already shown the vulnerability of jailers whose prisoners escape in the account of what happened to the soldiers charged with guarding Peter when he was miraculously released (12:19). As soon as the Philippian jailer realizes that Paul and Silas have ensured his life is spared, he begs to listen to them and accepts their message just as readily as Lydia did; he extends hospitality to Paul and Silas, and he and his whole household are baptized (16:29-34).

The responses of the Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch, Lydia, and the Philippian jailer suggest that people on the social margins are more receptive to Paul's message about Jesus than are people in positions of dominance; the close-mindedness of the Asian Jews, the Philippian slave-masters, Demetrius, and representatives of Rome's government underscore the point. In both Philippi and Ephesus, for example, Paul's opponents recognize that his theology conflicts with the theologies that undergird their respective businesses. But finding that they cannot prove the substance of his message wrong—especially when, in Philippi, the

[36] Gaventa, *Acts*, 237.

[37] Gaventa, *Acts*, 240.

name of Jesus has directly defeated the "Pythian spirit" who brought the slaveholders their business (16:16-18)—they seek to define the terms on which a theological claim may be accepted in such a way that Paul's message must be denied. The slaveholders in Philippi declare before the magistrates that Paul and Silas are "promulgating customs [ἔθη] which it is not permitted for us, being Romans, to accept or practice" (16:21). When they see the threat to their business, they construe it in theological terms and forcibly reject Paul's theological construction of power by seizing, beating, and imprisoning him and Silas (16:19-24). Similarly, economically expedient theology motivates Demetrius's protest against Paul's preaching in Ephesus; he, too, incites violence as a means of enforcing the economically expedient theological counternarrative (19:23-29). These episodes particularly demonstrate Acts' viewpoint that those who wish to maintain social dominance have a stake in a culture's theology and, therefore, in how people acquire theological knowledge. As C. S. Lewis observes in relation to the close-minded "Uncle Andrew" in *The Magician's Nephew*, "[W]hat you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing: it also depends on what sort of person you are."[38] The privileged social location of Paul's opponents within a culture wherein power is conceived as domination means that they have ample reason to fight any construction of reality that redefines power in ways that threaten their position of privilege—and to do so in a manner consonant with their understanding of power. Their adamant violent resistance to Paul's message is not unexpected, but neither is it inevitable.

[38] C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 125.

6.2.6 Epistemology Conclusion

The fact of Paul's own transformation signals that even the privileged are not beyond hope of redemption. They must learn, however, to prize the truth above social advantage—above expediency, economic gain, and the retention of governing authority. Acts is under no illusions that such integrity will become a widespread phenomenon, but it proffers the hope even the most ardent opponent of Jesus can repent; when such a person does repent, that witness proves especially compelling. In Paul's case, after his turn to Jesus, not only do his story, words, and life point unanimously to the same truth; this truth is one he formerly opposed with violent fervor. Such an extraordinary transformation invites scrutiny and wonder, particularly if—as with Paul—it is demonstrated in a new life of resilient boldness and inextinguishable joy. Paul's dramatic repentance coupled with his ongoing unified witness to Jesus give him formidable persuasive power of a different sort than his opponents wield, with their privileged social status and positions of political authority. Paul's encounters with these opponents particularly demonstrate a relationship between access to the power of force and the inclination to manipulate others' sense of reality. Of course, no army or weapon can render false something that is true, but those who brandish weapons and command armies can exert deadly force upon those who do not act according to the version of reality that undergirds their power. Paul's witness, of course, threatens his opponents by undermining the whole cultural construction of power that privileges them in the first place. Paul is worth opposing because, despite his never using violence, he poses a genuine threat to those for

whom the coming reign of God means the end of their privilege and dominance. This threat without violence is at the heart of what makes Paul's witness to Jesus political.[39]

6.3 Politics

Paul's abrupt turn from "zealotry" to bold spoken and lived proclamation starkly exposes the political shape of witness to Jesus and makes him an especially apt guide into God's reign for those who struggle in thrall to a vision of power as domination. Paul's repentance is no simple about-face—a mere transfer of allegiance; rather, recognizing Jesus as Lord leads Paul to a comprehensively different understanding of power that bears out in his behavior afterward. Before encountering Jesus and being ushered into the community of disciples through his summons and Ananias's gracious welcome (Acts 9:3-19), Paul is convinced that violence is an acceptable tool of theological enforcement if not persuasion (7:58; 8:1, 3; 9:1-2). Afterward, however, he does not simply divert his violence to serve a new master; instead, "zeal" immediately and completely drops from Paul's persuasive strategy. Violence has no part in Paul's service to Jesus; instead, Paul serves Jesus through bold, resilient, and persistent witness. Paul both speaks and lives a message of Jesus' life-giving power. This strategy proves compelling because it communicates one truth in two ways, shows that truth's power to shape a life through its effect on Paul, and presents a compelling image of flourishing through creativity rather than existing through parasitic destruction. Paul offers a life-giving truth that he need not enforce; indeed, violence would undermine his message. Because Paul's message does not depend for its persuasiveness on his ability to enforce it, his witness exposes

[39] "Threat without violence" connects, once more, to Rowe's refrain, "New culture, yes; coup, no" (Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 5, 91). See also 101.

the weakness of violence and threatens the position of those whose power derives from the ability to do violence. As soon as Paul presents this (albeit non-violent) threat to those who hold such power, their violence targets him. The conflict shocks no one; Jesus even predicts it, telling Ananias that Paul will suffer for the sake of Jesus' name (Acts 9:16). Jesus' words are fulfilled almost immediately with two threats on Paul's life in rapid succession (9:23, 29), and those instances are only the beginning. Many more attacks and threats follow wherever Paul goes. Paul's encounters with such violence, however, further expose its weakness, because violence never deters Paul, derails him from his purpose, or drives him to respond in kind. Paul in Acts exemplifies the power of God's reign through his witness to Jesus and, because of that, no death-dealing power can quash the message he lives to communicate.

6.3.1 Repentance

Paul's story begins, of course, not with bold witness but with zealotry. When accounting for himself to the Jews who seize him shortly after he arrives in Jerusalem at the end of his ministry, Paul describes his old self as "a zealot of God [ζηλωτὴς τοῦ θεοῦ], just as all of you are today" (Acts 22:3). Paul names his former affinity with them in terms of a fervor to serve God even to the point of using violence. By way of explanation, he recounts how deliberately he went about persecuting the "Way" (22:4-5), recapitulating Acts' earlier narrative account of his violence against Jesus' followers (9:1-2). After recalling the murderous aims that took him to Damascus and the surprise that overtook him on the way, Paul describes in further detail the persecution he wrought, and reminds his audience of his involvement in Stephen's death by quoting his own protesting response to Jesus' summons: "Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I was binding and beating those who were faithful to you; and

when the blood of Stephen, your witness, was being poured out, I myself was standing by, approving, and keeping the garments of those who murdered him" (22:19-20). Later, when Paul tells his story before Festus and Agrippa, he describes his former persecution of the church in similar terms:

> "I myself was convinced [ἔδοξα] that it was necessary for me to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth; and that is what I did in Jerusalem. After receiving authority from the chief priests, I locked up many of the saints in prison, and when they were condemned to death I cast my vote against them. In every synagogue, punishing them often, I was urging [ἠνάγκαζον] them to blaspheme, and growing enraged to the point of madness [περισσῶς τε ἐμμαινόμενος], I persecuted them even into foreign cities" (Acts 26:9-11).

In these narratives of his life prior to encountering Jesus, Paul emphasizes his former violence. Since his Damascus experience, however, his life has looked strikingly different. Despite remaining just as (if not more) engaged in single-minded service to God from that point, Paul has not used violence since the light blinded him on the road (9:8). For Acts to portray Paul twice telling of his former violence against "the Way" thirteen and seventeen chapters later effectively highlights the comprehensive change not just in his allegiance, but in his tactics. Paul once did violence against Jesus, believing he served God. After encountering Jesus as "Lord"—personally and through the witness of Ananias (9:5, 17)—Paul serves God with new understanding, and abandons violence.

The change in Paul's behavior after encountering Jesus provides compelling evidence of his transformed thinking, particularly about power. After encountering Jesus, Paul does not simply turn his violence in a new direction; rather, he abandons violence altogether. Paul's behavior suggests that formerly he had been persuaded allegiance to Jesus was antithetical to

serving God, and violence was an acceptable way to discourage such allegiance. When Paul comes to recognize Jesus as the "Lord" who encountered him on the road (9:5), as well as "Son of God" (9:20) and "Messiah" (9:22), his behavior changes to suggest that he no longer views theological claims as enforceable, or violence as an appropriate tool of theological persuasion. Paul's behavior maps onto a conviction that perpetrating violence violates the character of God revealed in Jesus. Acts presents this change in Paul, however, not as diminishing his ability to persuade, but as the start of his burgeoning power as a witness. As he begins boldly proclaiming Jesus as "Son of God," Paul grows "still more empowered [μᾶλλον ἐνεδυναμοῦτο], and was bewildering [συνέχυννεν] the Jews who lived in Damascus by constructing an argument [συμβιβάζων] that 'this one [Jesus] is the Messiah'" (9:22). Paul's power is his ability to build, without resort to violence, a compelling case for the truth that has transformed his life.

Paul's transformation spotlights the creative character of God's power and indicates that those who would serve God or live according to the truth must, like Paul, abandon violence in favor of the way of Jesus. Paul embodies this way, and, wherever he goes, he commends it in terms appropriate for his audiences. But because most of the world remains captivated by the power of violence, Paul meets resistance at nearly every turn—even before he leaves Damascus (9:23). Each occasion of violent resistance highlights the contrast between the creative, life-giving power that animates God's reign as revealed in Jesus' resurrection, versus the death-dealing and parasitic "power of Satan" at work not only among the Gentiles, but also among God's own people (26:18). Paul bears witness to the reign of God in the image of Jesus by his resilience and persistence: absorbing the suffering his opponents inflict upon

him and carrying on despite the hardships he faces. His opponents, on the other hand, use violence against him and, even so, do not prevail. The recurring collisions between Paul and his opponents reveal a compounding contrast between the thwarted power of violence and the enduring power of God. By way of this contrast, concluding with Paul's ongoing comprehensively bold and unhindered proclamation, Acts commends the politics of "the reign of God" and "the Lord Jesus Christ" (28:31).

6.3.2 Collisions

Paul's turn from violence to peaceable power, perhaps counterintuitively, does not result in his having a peaceful life. But when one considers the shape of Jesus' life, seeing Paul's witness to Jesus dogged by violent resistance becomes less surprising. One of Jesus' more confounding statements within Luke's Gospel seems like a reversal of everything he represents. He puts a rhetorical question to his disciples: "Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? Not so! Division [διαμερισμόν], rather!" (Luke 12:51). For the one whom Zechariah predicted would "guide our feet into a way of peace" (1:79) and whose birth the angels hailed with a pronouncement of "peace upon earth" (2:14), these words appear to negate his essential purpose. Instead, however, they present a paradox. Division and violence result from Jesus' coming not because he uses violence or seeks to divide; he does neither. Rather, he reveals the falseness and ultimate impotence of violence in a world where those who wield it hold dominant social positions. Under threat from the truth Jesus reveals, they use the tools at their disposal—their dominant position enforced with violence—to resist and suppress the message that threatens their power. Violence, thus, predictably finds the peacemaker.

Jesus' witnesses fare similarly, and Paul not least among them. Violent conflict erupts with predictable regularity wherever Paul goes, and yet, being a faithful witness to Jesus, he never initiates it. Paul abandons the use of violence as soon as the scales fall from his eyes in Damascus (Acts 9:18). From Damascus onward, Paul uses the power of truth integrated in his words and life—speaking of Jesus and demonstrating in his actions the life-giving power of God's reign. Violence erupts around Paul, but he suffers it rather than perpetrating it. Even so, he is regularly blamed for it. While his opponents stir up crowds against him, and beat, imprison, and threaten him, they call Paul an agitator, a disturber of the peace, a plague, nuisance, and menace, because he will not allow either Jews or Gentiles to remain complacent in comfortable falsehoods. Acts' portrait of Paul's ministry particularly showcases the ongoing "collision"—to borrow Rowe's words—between two total ways of life, manifest in bold witness on one side and violence on the other.[40] Paul's witness to Jesus results in conflict because he confronts those who are captivated by violent power with the truth that their violence is weak and the need to enforce their preferred version of reality reveals it as false. In contrast to his opponents' violence, Paul uses the power of bold witness and resilience from the beginning of his ministry in Damascus all the way through to his story's end in Rome.

6.3.2.1 Damascus and Jerusalem

The earliest days of Paul's witness show writ small the kind of conflicts he will continue to face. A mere three verses after Paul first declares in the Damascus synagogues that Jesus is "Son of God" (Acts 9:20), "the Jews conspired together to kill him [συνεβουλεύσαντο οἱ

[40] "Collision" is the primary title Rowe gives to the second chapter of *World Upside Down* (4-5, 17-51), which focuses on the conflict that results when Paul brings the message about Jesus into the pagan world.

Ἰουδαῖοι ἀνελεῖν αὐτόν]" (9:23). This moment plays a critical role in revealing Paul's transformation in that whereas formerly he was the aggressor in such plots, now others scheme against him. Moreover, Paul's response to the plot shows a change in what strategies he views as available to him. Paul already has "disciples" (9:25) in Damascus, but he does not assemble them as a guard to fight off his attackers. Rather, when he learns that the conspirators watch for him at the city gates day and night, his disciples help him escape by the unlikely means of lowering him in a basket through the city wall (9:24-25). Faced with the prospect of deadly violence against him, Paul chooses the option that both allows him to live and not commit violence—he stealthily flees the city. Paul takes this option on a recurring basis, and he often has help. Such is the case in Jerusalem where he visits next; after he speaks and argues with "the Hellenists," they begin trying to kill him (9:29). Paul's new allies ("the brothers") once more help him escape from those planning his demise; they send him away from Jerusalem to his hometown of Tarsus via Caesarea (9:30). In both instances, Paul does nothing more to provoke these conspiracies than proclaim the truth that has transformed his life by "building a case that *this one* [Jesus] is the Messiah" (9:22) and "speaking boldly [παρρησιαζόμενος] in the name of the Lord" (9:28). Paul's growing power ("grew still more powerful [μᾶλλον ἐνεδυναμοῦτο]" [9:22]) manifests in his bold speech, which his escapes allow him to continue. His opponents, on the other hand, are proven impotent when they cannot gainsay his arguments (Paul "befuddled" or "confounded [συνέχυννεν]" them [9:22]) and he eludes their attempts on his life. These first incidents where Paul faces a deadly threat because his bold witness to Jesus and, yet, escapes begin to establish the power Paul wields as superior to the

violence that fails to stop him. This pattern continues as Paul embarks on his ministry in earnest, beginning in Antioch.

6.3.2.2 Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia

Although the narrative reveals the reasons for Paul's and Barnabas's eventual expulsion from Pisidian Antioch in more detail than previously in Damascus or Jerusalem, the basic outlines of the incident are the same. Paul and Barnabas speak boldly (Acts 13:46) about what God is doing through Jesus, and their audience—or at least a substantial portion of it—responds with violence so great that they compelled to leave. While the previously marginalized or excluded Gentiles rejoice at the promise of sharing in God's salvation (13:47-48), "the Jews" leverage the social privilege of the "prominent [εὐσχήμονας] pious women" and the "foremost [πρώτους] men" of the city, rousing them (παρωτρύνω) to stir up (ἐπεγείρω) "persecution [διωγμὸν] against Paul and Barnabas and cast them out [ἐξέβαλον] of their region" (13:50). The opponents exercise both social dominance and violence against Paul and Barnabas. They, on the other hand, do not try to force their message on a resistant audience; neither do they seek to incite those who received their message against those who resist it. Rather, they depart the area, follow, Jesus' advice to shake "the dust from their feet against them" (Acts 13:51; see Luke 9:5), and go to Iconium. The episode concludes with a comment on "the disciples'" attitude, perhaps in contrast to the disgruntled Jews they leave behind: they are "filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (13:51), of which both are markers of God's life-giving power at work in them. Paul and Barnabas remain undaunted by the hostile reception that saw them expelled from the area, a posture likewise signaled in their immediate return to the same pattern in Iconium and Lystra.

Acts signals the repetition of the pattern from Antioch quite obviously: "The same thing happened in Iconium" (Acts 14:1). Acts summarizes the Iconium episode: Paul and Barnabas "entered the synagogue of the Jews and spoke so that many became faithful—both Jews and Greeks" (14:2). But again, some who hear them, this time the "unpersuaded Jews [ἀπειθήσαντες Ἰουδαῖοι] stirred up [ἐπήγειραν]" others in the city, this time Gentiles, in an effort to keep the message from landing. Eventually, violence arises against Paul and Barnabas, once again from a position of social privilege: a coalition of "both Gentiles and Jews with their rulers" bands together with a plan to "abuse and stone [ὑβρίσαι καὶ λιθοβολῆσαι] them" (14:5). Paul and Barnabas learn of it, just as Paul did in Damascus, and they flee to Lystra where they go on "good-newsifying [εὐαγγελιζόμενοι]" (14:6-7). This episode again casts the respective modes of power that Paul and his opponents employ in distinct contrast. Paul and Barnabas declare good news and their opponents hatch violent plans against them. Paul and Barnabas then take the approach of non-violent survival, and flee before the plot comes to fruition, but they do not stop spreading the message of good news.

In Lystra Paul's "good-newsifying" takes the form of an act of healing—a work of life-giving power—that allows a man crippled from birth to walk again (14:7-10). When Paul interprets this life-giving power as the definitive sort that God wields in contradistinction to the "vain" gods, the Jews who opposed him and Barnabas in Antioch and Iconium see an opportunity to implement their previously thwarted plan (14:15-19). They "persuaded the crowds, and after stoning Paul they dragged him out of the city, presuming him dead" (14:19). Acts presents a profound picture of their violence's weakness in that even when they attack Paul successfully, he appears dead for only a moment, and in the next verse is standing up

(ἀναστὰς) and going back into the city before he and Barnabas depart the next day for Derbe (14:20). In Iconium and Lystra, Paul exerts life-giving power for the crippled man and responds to the violence against him with stunning resilience; against these tactics his opponents' hostility and hurling of stones quickly prove impotent. Paul and Barnabas both go on ministering and specifically place the difficulties they encountered in the context of those who pursue the political pattern Jesus commended: "Through many oppressions [θλίψεων] it is necessary for us to enter into the reign of God" (14:22). Given their commitment to the reign of God, Paul and Barnabas expect to see further violent opposition. And of course, they do.

After the council in Jerusalem, at which "the apostles and elders" (15:6) determine the specific parameters under which Gentiles are to be included in the people of God (15:7-19), Paul takes Silas with him and begins visiting faithful communities in the cities where he most recently met with persecution—Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium (16:1-2)—before heading into Macedonia, landing "for some days" in Philippi (16:12). Acts identifies Philippi as "a leading city of Macedonia, a [Roman] colony" (16:12), which signals its political importance and also that this is principally Gentile territory, as does the location of the "place of prayer" (which may be a small synagogue) outside the city gates (16:13).[41] Philippi does not appear to be a city where Jews are particularly welcome, which sets the context and foreshadows the conflict that arises during Paul's and Silas's visit.

[41] See Gaventa, *Acts*, 236-37.

They follow Paul's usual practice when he comes to a new city—they seek out a synagogue, or, in this case, the closest thing to it. When they do, as usual, the initial reception is positive (16:13-15). But one day, on the way to this "place of prayer [τὴν προσευχὴν]" the Pythian-spirit-possessed girl accosts them and begins following them crying out a message that undermines the one they are there to spread (16:16-17). As previously noted, her repeated announcement that "these men are slaves of the Most High God/god who proclaim to you a way of salvation" (16:17) at first appears a fair translation of Paul's message into pagan terms, but the change in context destroys the message.[42] The God whom Paul and Silas serve is not the chief god of the pagan pantheon—not "Zeus, the most high"—but the one living God who made all things and gives life to all creatures (14:15; 17:24). By contrast, this Pythian spirit traffics in death-dealing power; it allows the girl's enslavers to exploit her because it enables her fortunetelling, a practice that plays upon people's fears about the future, and, especially, of death. Paul confronts the Pythian spirit with the name that quintessentially represents the life-giving God—Jesus Christ—and drives the possessing spirit from the girl (16:18). Paul bears witness to Jesus in Philippi by demonstrating the life-giving power in his name; the girl's enslavers, on the other hand, demonstrate still further captivity to death-dealing power by how

[42] Rowe makes the point that "to translate something is simply to say the same thing in another language," and goes on to say that "translation" is not what Paul ends up doing in Athens when he takes their poets' and philosophers' words and drops them into the context of the Gospel narrative: "But reading Paul's speech through the conceptual grid of 'translation' entirely overlooks the crucial fact that in Luke's text the pagan philosophical vocabulary has been incorporated into a radically different overall interpretive framework: the biblical story that stretches from Adam to the return of Jesus Christ" (Rowe, "Grammar of Life," 13). What Paul does in Athens looks a great deal like what this girl does here—she takes words that sound like a reasonable summary of the Gospel and puts them into a pagan context, thereby nullifying Paul and Barnabas's message. That Paul discerns the result and adopts the same tactic when he speaks in Athens in the next chapter suggests that he may learned some rhetorical strategy from this enslaved girl—or from the spirit that speaks through her. Paul may be annoyed that she has co-opted his message, but he is not above using the same strategy in chapter 17. See further Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 24-25.

they respond when they see that Paul's witness to Jesus has destroyed their lucrative business (16:19).

Once again, Acts shows Paul's life-giving power met with violence: the girl's enslavers "seized [ἐπιλαβόμενοι] Paul and Silas and dragged [εἵλκυσαν] them into the public square before the rulers" (16:19). They accuse Paul and Silas of "disturbing" or "agitating" (ἐκταράσσω) "our city" by advocating customs, as Jews, that are prohibited to Philippians as Romans (16:20). But indeed, Paul has done nothing but command the possessing spirit to leave the girl; Acts reports nothing else that Paul and Silas did other than walk around the city for several days. The narrative includes no description of any other public speech or action. Whatever "disturbance" Paul and Silas may have been fomenting, if any, they did not do it through violence or directly advocate anything illegal. The girl's enslavers, however, not only charge them with agitating or disturbing their city, but also instigate the violence against them, in which the crowd gathers to attack them and the magistrates tear their garments from them and order them beaten with rods (16:22). Confronted with Paul's exercise of life-giving power as he exorcises the spirit from the girl, her enslavers respond by bringing the full weight of their privilege as "Romans" against these "Jews" and the violent enforcement of the crowd and city officials. The scene makes yet another striking contrast between the life-giving power that animates Paul's witness and the death-dealing power that his opponents wield, and it is far from the last. In this case, Paul said very little before the response turned violent. In others, he says more, but in no case does the violence begin with Paul. This pattern continues as Paul and Silas continue journeying through Macedonia and into Achaia.

In Thessalonica, as usual, Paul enters the synagogue and, this time, "on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, opening [διανοίγων] and setting out [παρατιθέμενος] that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and be raised from the dead, and '*this one* is the Christ—Jesus, whom I proclaim to you" (17:3). As usual, the initial reaction is positive until some of the Gentiles who hear the message accept it; then, as in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, the Jews become "zealous" or "jealous" (ζηλόω) and Acts describes their violence thus: "Taking aside some ne'er-do-wells in the marketplace, they formed a mob [ὀχλοποιήσαντες], started a riot in the city [ἐθορύβουν τὴν πόλιν], and attacked [ἐπιστάντες] Jason's house as they sought [Paul and Silas] to bring them before the public assembly" (17:5). Not finding Paul and Silas, "they dragged [ἔσυρον] Jason and some others of the community before the rulers of the city yelling [βοῶντες], 'these [people] who have been turning the world upside down [τὴν οἰκουμένην ἀναστατώσαντες] have arrived here also, and Jason has harbored them. They all act contrary to Caesar's decrees, saying that there's a different king—Jesus'" (17:6-7). The violence of the mob juxtaposed with the specific language of the accusation against Paul and Silas highlight the oppositional forms of power upon which the relevant parties rely. The "zeal" of the opponents turns into forming a mob, rioting, attacking a house, dragging away its residents, and making accusations against Paul and Silas that echo the charges against Jesus before Pilate (Luke 23:1-2)—and everyone knows how that turned out.

These opponents in Thessalonica leave no doubt of their deadly intentions toward Paul and Silas, but the charges particularly accentuate the contrast between the two forms of power on offer. The language in the first part of the accusation, "turning the world upside down" (17:6), suggests that Paul and Silas have engaged in activities tantamount to

insurrection. The verb ἀναστατόω can connote armed rebellion, so for the accusers to couple it with the claim that Paul and Silas act against Caesar's decrees and posit a rival king constitutes a serious charge. This moment, perhaps more than any other in Acts—shows that despite Paul's resolute commitment to non-violence, he is neither powerless nor harmless vis-à-vis those whose principal strength is force. By proclaiming the suffering and risen Messiah, Jesus, Paul truly is "standing universal convention on its head [τὴν οἰκουμένην ἀναστατώσαντες]," even if he is not "fomenting comprehensive insurrection" (17:3, 6). The shape of power in Paul's witness is, again, not στάσις, but ἀνάστασις; not insurrection, but resurrection. Through his proclamation and lived witness, Paul presents the threat of a transformed world where the nullification of force as power means that those who wield violence will lose their social position; his opponents, on the other hand, threaten bodily harm and, even, a torturous and humiliating death like Jesus suffered.

One need not examine every episode where Paul's resurrection-shaped words and actions meet with a violent response in order to demonstrate the source and nature of the conflict, which is a question about what kind of power the God (or gods) who made and governs the world wields, and, therefore, what sort of power human beings may wield in both governance and service to God. Paul preaches the God of life while constantly under the threat of death, not least in the "extremely religious/superstitious" city of Athens, where the officials of the Areopagus "demand" to know the details of Paul's preaching, quick to squelch the introduction of "new divinities" in a manner like with Socrates, if necessary (Acts 17:18-21).[43]

[43] Rowe provides a sense of the resonance between Paul's trial before the Areopagus and Socrates's trial in Rowe, "Grammar of Life," 32, 38-39.

The pattern continues in Corinth: Paul preaches in the synagogue, gets expelled from it, preaches to receptive Gentiles, and ultimately is attacked by Jews and brought before Gallio (18:5-12). When Gallio refuses to intervene, declaring that Paul has committed no "injustice or serious crime" (18:14) they direct their angry violence to Sosthenes, the synagogue official, beating him before the tribunal (18:17). Acts again highlights Paul's persistent peaceable witness in contrast to his opponents' violence.

The last such instance during Paul's missionary activity occurs in Ephesus under the heading about the "not small disturbance [τάραχος οὐκ ὀλίγος]" that "occurred concerning 'the Way'" (Acts 19:23). Paul spends his time in Ephesus speaking boldly and engaging in persuasive dialogue "about the reign of God" (19:8) and being the conduit of God's powerful acts of healing and exorcism that lead many to abandon their hope in magic and turn, instead, to God (19:11-20). Paul's words have been about God's life-giving power, and their truth has been demonstrated in the many people who were healed or released from demons because of Paul. Paul does no violence; he only bears witness to the living and life-giving God. The "disturbance" arises, however, because Paul's persuasive campaign against idolatry is hurting Demetrius's business (19:23-27). If handmade gods are exposed as not-gods, Demetrius worries that the temporary lull in sales of his silver shrines of Artemis will become permanent through the damage to the goddess's reputation even beyond Ephesus. His previously reliable source of revenue will run dry. In contrast to Paul's life-giving words and actions, Demetrius's rallying words quickly elicit a violent reaction that lands upon Paul's companions and results in the town clerk exhorting the Ephesians to disperse lest they be charged with "insurrection" (στάσις; 19:40). The need to enforce with violence a particular theological vision in service to

a city's business interests makes a stark contrast to Paul's witness to God's reign in the form of bold speech, healings, and exorcisms. The incident in Ephesus exposes clearly that the violent responses to Paul arise from conflicting visions of theologically defined power as creativity, in Paul's reckoning, or force in the understanding of Demetrius and his associates. The violence that results from the outworking of these rival visions of theologically constructed power has followed Paul from the Antioch to Ephesus among both Jews and Gentiles, and it escalates when Paul's story reaches its climax in Jerusalem.

6.3.2.3 Jerusalem and Caesarea

The conflict over what sort of power characterizes the God of all things comes to a head in Jerusalem, where Paul bears witness to the peaceable power of Jesus and everyone else exhibits allegiance to domination or force. That Paul faces violent opposition in Jerusalem surprises no one—certainly not Paul. Well before he arrives in the city he knows he will suffer incarceration and persecution there (Acts 20:22), and on his way, Agabus in Caesarea warns him that "the Jews in Jerusalem will bind [Paul] and hand him over to the Gentiles" (21:11). This prediction mirrors Jesus' Jerusalem experience, and, as with Jesus, explicitly distributes responsibility for what happens to Paul among Gentiles and Jews alike (Luke 22:66, 23:1-2, 13, 25). It also shows that both Jews and Gentiles in Jerusalem have pledged allegiance to the same kind of power—the Jews will bind Paul and hand him over to Gentiles for further violent discipline and, so the context implies, even death. Both Jews and Gentiles wield death-dealing power. And indeed, it is not only those Jews who reject Jesus' messiahship who have succumbed to the lure of power as force. Paul's cool reception from "all the elders" who are with James when Paul visits him in Jerusalem (21:18) shows that "zealotry" has infected even

the community of Jesus' followers (21:19-21). Acts has already presented criticisms of both Jewish and Gentile allegiance to the powers of domination and force, but here the criticism also reaches the new community that claims to follow Jesus. Here Acts begins to show that Christians, likewise, are not immune to the desire for privilege and dominance. In contrast to all the various actors in Jerusalem and Caesarea who guard their status to the point of violence, Acts portrays Paul as the one person who faithfully declares and embodies the generous and resilient power by which God governs the world.

Paul's visit to Jerusalem begins on an ominous note with "all the elders" who are present when he meets with James a day after his arrival (Acts 21:18).[44] One can imagine Paul's anticipation of their joy mirroring his when he gives them an itemized account of "the things God did among the Gentiles through his service" (διακονία; 21:19). Among the Gentiles, Paul has been engaged in similar service as were the women who followed Jesus (διακονέω; Luke 8:3), as Jesus commended to his disciples on their last evening together (διακονέω; Luke 22:26), and to which Stephen and his companions were commissioned (διακονία; Acts 6:1; διακονέω; Acts 6:2). Paul has stopped being a "zealot [ζηλωτὴς]" (Acts 22:3) in favor of being "one who serves [ὁ διακονῶν]" (Luke 22:26) The elders, however, hear Paul's story with faint enthusiasm and are far more captivated by those among the community who are "zealots of the law [ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου]" (Acts 21:20). After a brief positive response that Acts puts into three

[44] See Richard P. Thompson, *Keeping the Church in its Place: The Church as Narrative Character in Acts* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 228-34. Thompson begins analysis by noting Paul's initial positive reception with Jerusalem church followed by a sharp negative turn when the elders enumerate the charges against him—which might have some basis in reality, given how Paul's earlier ministry has been described. Thompson also notes that the Jerusalem believers abandon Paul as soon as the conflict with the "zealots of the law" begins, leading to an overall negative portrait of the Jerusalem church in Acts 21, after which it is never mentioned again.

terse words ("they praised God [ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεὸν]"), they launch into a worried lecture that characterizes Paul as little better than a wayward child whose enthusiastic blunderings require damage control. They appear scarcely interested in what God did among the Gentiles except insofar as they foresee an impending conflict between Paul and a large and influential group within the community who violently object to his ministry. After their faint praise, they say to Paul,

> "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have become faithful, and all of them are zealots of the law; they have been told about you, that you teach apostasy from Moses to all the Jews among the Gentiles, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk in the customs. What then? They will doubtless hear that you have come. Therefore, do this that we say to you: among us are four men who have a vow upon them. Take them and be purified with them, and pay for the shaving of their heads, and everyone will know there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you follow and personally keep the law. But as for those who have become faithful among the Gentiles, we wrote a letter, having decided that they should keep themselves from sacrifices to idols, blood, strangled things, and sexual immorality (Acts 21:20-25).

The sheer quantity of verbiage in this warning, contrasted with the brevity of their positive response, demonstrates substantial anxiety over a theological problem that, as the leaders of "those who have become faithful [τῶν πεπιστευκότων]" both "among the Jews" (Acts 21:20) and "among the Gentiles" (21:25), they ought to have addressed before Paul ever arrived and made it urgent. The elders ought to have been working to correct these "Jews who have become faithful" of the notion that being "zealots" is an appropriate way to follow Jesus. They might also have attempted to set the record straight about what Paul actually taught in the diaspora. Acts certainly includes no account of Paul teaching Jews to abandon their distinguishing practices; Paul has only acted exactly according to the written decision that they

mention here (21:25). Those were the conditions under which the elders had, supposedly, approved James's declaration that "God visited to take out of the Gentiles a people for his name [ὁ θεὸς ἐπεσκέψατο λαβεῖν ἐξ ἐθνῶν λαὸν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ]" (15:14).

Ever since Acts 15, Paul has undertaken his ministry among the Gentiles under the assumption that, if Gentiles abided by the four listed restrictions, they could be full participants in the people of God and recognized as such by the leaders in Jerusalem. That the elders invoke this judgment as if it should be news to Paul, is especially odd. Paul was among the agents of this letter's delivery (Acts 15:25)! For the elders to cite it here hints at the real issues: Gentile inclusion and the fact that these "zealots" either do not know of the elders' letter or deem its provisions insufficient. The problem ultimately is not these "zealots"' misunderstanding about what Paul has taught diaspora Jews, but that Paul has defiled the people of God by persistently opening the door to Gentiles. Indeed, Paul himself is defiled by his having lived and ministered for so many years among Gentiles—he must "be purified" (21:24).[45] These elders, rather than reminding the "zealots of the law" of their written judgment recognizing God's gracious action regarding Gentile inclusion among God's people, seek to appease the zealots by cajoling Paul into a public display of law-keeping—going through the rite of purification with four men who are under a vow and paying for the shaving of their heads (21:21-24). The elders make no attempt to correct these "zealots" of either exclusivity

[45] While it is not unusual that a person would need to be purified before entering the temple, this instance is conspicuous and serves a particular purpose in the narrative not least because Luke nowhere else mentions ritual purification preceding temple entry, and yet Jesus and the apostles are constantly in and out of the temple at the end of Luke and beginning of Acts. Here, however, the elders ask Paul not only to participate in the usual purification rite but, also, to pay for the shaving of the heads of four men who are under a vow (Acts 21:23-24). The purpose is not just to purify Paul as he would wish to do anyway since he is a devout Jew, but to put his piety on display so that the "zealots of the law" might not be provoked to violence by his presence.

or violence[46]; they could stand with Paul and teach the contents of their letter publicly in Jerusalem, but they do not. They are uninterested in changing the minds of the "zealots of the law" and, instead, charge Paul to appease them with the assurance that he keeps the law (21:24). In doing so, they isolate Paul and make him vulnerable to the attack in which he is dragged from the temple and the doors slammed behind him (21:27-30). From there, Paul is on his own. None of the elders comes to his defense, and Paul remains under arrest to the end of the book.

The elders' treatment of Paul upon his arrival in Jerusalem and their complacency about the "zealotry" that has infiltrated the community of Jesus show how easily commitment to the way of generosity and resilience can be compromised by fear in the face of violence. One might well ask how long this movement, of "many thousands among the Jews who have become faithful, all of them zealots of the law" (21:20), has been building in Jerusalem under their noses, and they have failed to correct it. They appear either comfortable with it or resigned to it, and they do not welcome the disruption to the "peace" that Paul will certainly bring. Indeed, although the elders do not actively arrest Paul the way the "chief priests, temple officers, and elders" did Jesus (Luke 22:52), they treat him as a problem to be solved, rather than as the one person who has proclaimed and lived the Gospel (and the message they themselves approved!) with integrity. Although they do not order Paul's arrest, their treatment of him makes it well-nigh inevitable; without confronting any of these "zealots" in advance or trying to change their minds, they send Paul out to "fix" the problem alone, and when it

[46] Wishing to preserve the practices that distinguish Israel as God's faithful people is certainly no sin, but the willingness to use violence and, especially, the violent guarding of boundaries, in order to do so are the very practices of which Paul repented when Jesus confronted him on the Damascus road (Acts 9).

backfires they completely disappear from the narrative and are never seen again. This moment in Acts suggests that when the church becomes unwilling to disrupt the status quo that is contrary to its essential character—whether out of fear or any other reason—it becomes irrelevant. It becomes compromised and no longer bears faithful witness to Jesus. In Jerusalem, Paul stands alone, just as Jesus did (Luke 22:63-23:25). In contrast to the elders' complacency, Paul continues his course of bold witness rather than zealotry, and attempts what the elders failed to do, namely, to persuade the "zealots of the law" away from jealous and violent guarding of their exclusive privilege in favor of the generous hospitality that characterizes God's reign. Even as he faces yet another beating and arrest (21:32-33), he still refuses to use violence or anything but the truth in his defense, and still proclaims the message of God's inclusive reign as imaged in Jesus' resurrection. And because he continues bearing witness to God's reign, those who remain captivated by the power of force repeatedly use violence in vain attempts to stop him.

Paul is doing just as the elders bid him (21:23-26), completing the rite of purification in the temple, when "the Jews from Asia … were stirring up [συνέχεον][47] the whole crowd and they laid violent hands on him" (21:27). The context suggests that these are among the "many thousands among the Jews who have become faithful, all of them zealots of the law" (21:20). As becomes even clearer later, they have not rejected the notion that Jesus is Messiah and Lord, but they violently object to Paul's extending the message of Jesus to Gentiles. They eventually listen throughout Paul's whole defense, while he describes having interacted with

[47] This is the same verb by which Paul initially "confounds" the Jews in Damascus with his teaching about Jesus as Messiah (Acts 9:22).

the risen Jesus (22:6-11, 17-21), calling him Lord (22:8, 10) and, in an echo of Stephen, "the Just One" (22:14). Only when Paul claims that Jesus personally sent him to the Gentiles do they shout him down and call again for his death (22:21). While their failure to object to how Paul speaks of Jesus suggests that they might wish to remain committed to Jesus as Messiah, the rhetoric of their original complaint against Paul combined with their reaction to his claim of being sent to Gentiles indicate their priority: maintaining their distinct Jewish identity.

Rather than welcoming the inclusive new community of God's reign, they jealously guard their privilege as the exclusive people of God. For help against Paul, they recruit men who identify as "Israelites," and their list of grievances against Paul indicates fear that his actions threaten the distinct identity of a people called "Israel." They claim that Paul—who, of course, is himself an Israelite—"teaches everyone everywhere against the people, the law, and this place [the temple]; what's more, he even brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place!" (21:28). These charges are not strictly true. Although Paul has included Gentiles in his mission, he has not brought Greeks into the temple (21:29) or taught against the people, the law, or the temple. But the charges need not be true in order to serve their purpose; indeed, they list a spectrum of grievances expansive enough to render laughable the notion that one public display of piety could protect Paul from their attack. They are persuaded that Paul is a threat to "Israelite" identity, and readily use falsehoods and violence in order to stir up a mob against him.

In response to the "zealots'" incendiary words, "the whole city was roused [ἐκινήθη] and the people rushed together [ἐγένετο συνδρομὴ τοῦ λαου]; they seized [ἐπιλαβόμενοι] Paul and were dragging [εἷλκον] him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut"

(21:30). In the next verses, the mob is "trying to kill [ἀποκτεῖναι]" Paul, and only stop "beating [τύπτοντες]" him when the tribune arrives after hearing that all of Jerusalem is "stirred up [συγχύννεται]" (21:31-32). Paul has not said one public word in Jerusalem before all of this occurs; indeed, he has only done exactly as the elders told him, but his public display of law-keeping obviously did nothing to prevent this attack. The "zealots of the law" made up their minds about Paul and prepared to do whatever was necessary—even violence—to nullify the threat he brings. And so they resort stirring up, rousing, seizing, dragging, trying to kill, and beating, which reveal their imagination just as captive to death-dealing power as the "rulers of the Gentiles" (Luke 22:25). All the while they object to Paul's extension of a message that has been transforming Gentiles into God's people, they themselves have already embraced a Gentile understanding of power and rejected the power of God revealed in Jesus' resurrection. Their concern over defilement is belated and misplaced.

When the tribune who arrests Paul allows him to address the mob, he attempts to persuade them away from this misguided allegiance by telling his own story. He establishes that he is one of them by speaking in Aramaic (21:40, 22:2), and calling them "brothers and fathers" (22:1). This manner of address gains their attention, and Paul continues to establish both rapport and a basis for his authority to redefine what is essential to Israelite identity: "I am a Jewish man, having been born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but raised in this very city at the feet of Gamaliel and educated precisely in our ancestral law, being a zealot of God, just as all of you are today" (22:3). In this introduction, Paul outlines not only his stellar credentials as a good Jew, but also describes his former (and their current) "zealotry" in a way that suggests it merits both praise and blame. Paul was honestly committed to serving God, and here he gives

his audience the benefit of the doubt while also calling them to a better way by repudiating the persecution he perpetrated under the banner of "being a zealot of God" (22:3-5). Paul's account of repentance from violent persecution upon encountering Jesus (22:6-15) suggests that his audience's commitment to the God revealed in Jesus should entail similar renouncement. Moreover, Paul declares quite clearly that he believes he is still serving the same God—the "God of our ancestors" (22:14)—and, though he says nothing of abandoning the law, he prioritizes obedience to Jesus. For indeed, Paul did not dream up the idea of going to the Gentiles; rather, Jesus commanded Paul to go, and thus he declares to the audience of zealots before him (22:21). They reject his words and call for his death. Paul is already in Roman custody, so by shouting that he ought "not be permitted to live" (22:22), the end result is a scene that recalls Agabus' prediction that Jews in Jerusalem would hand Paul over to Gentiles (21:11). Paul remains in Gentile power and, while it sometimes protects him from immediate death, none of the rulers who wield it is particularly interested in releasing him. Indeed, both the Roman governors involved appear more inclined to do a favor for the Jews, who persistently try to kill Paul (24:27; 25:9), than to ensure his release—even when, as Agrippa tells Festus, that Paul deserves neither death nor imprisonment. Neither releases him.

The remainder of Paul's stay in Jerusalem and later in Caesarea showcase his resilience in the face of constant threat from this unholy alliance of Jews and Gentiles who remain in bondage to "the power of Satan" (26:18) rather than open to the reign of God. The Jews who oppose Paul see him brought before the Sanhedrin, where he is struck on the mouth almost as soon as he opens it (23:2). The "chief priests and elders" and other leaders of the Jews in Jerusalem then maintain a years-long agenda of trying to kill Paul, involving two attempted conspiracies to ambush him en route within Jerusalem or between Caesarea and Jerusalem

(23:12-15; 25:3), and persistently accuse him before the Roman governors in charge of his case (24:2-9; 25:2-7).

None of the Roman authorities singles out Paul for special abuse, but they act as high officials within the system that runs on death-dealing power, and none of them is particularly concerned that justice be done in his case. They treat him as a fairly typical prisoner, affording him only scant privilege as a Roman citizen. The tribune who originally arrests him orders him "bound [δεθῆναι] with two chains" (Acts 21:33) before he knows anything about him, and later, in order "that he might know why [the crowd of Jews] were shouting thus against him" (22:24), prepares to flog him until Paul mentions his Roman citizenship (22:25). In the letter to Felix that accompanies Paul to Caesarea, the tribune, Claudius Lysias, conveniently avoids mentioning that he bound and nearly flogged Paul and even lies about when he learned of Paul's citizenship (23:26-30). Lysias claims to have rescued Paul from the Jews about to kill him because Lysias had learned that Paul was a Roman citizen, and to have discovered that Paul deserves neither death nor even imprisonment (23:27-29). In the scene where Lysias first seizes Paul, however, the rescue seems incidental to the tribune's primary concern, which is putting a stop to the uproar centered on Paul. To be seized and bound is a dubious sort of rescue. Moreover, even though Lysias has determined by now that Paul does not deserve death or imprisonment, he does not release him but, rather, sends him to Felix to face further trial.

Felix has no more reason to condemn Paul than does Lysias, but sees in Paul a potential opportunity to line his pockets and curry favor among the Jews who oppose Paul, and so keeps Paul imprisoned rather than rendering a verdict (24:22-23, 26-27). Festus, too, would like to do the Jews a favor and so tries to find a way to send Paul to Jerusalem to stand

trial (25:9). Festus' allegiance to the Jewish leaders compels Paul to appeal above the governor to the emperor, which effectively prolongs Paul's incarceration. Festus still has no proper charges to bring against Paul and has found he has done nothing deserving death, so he enlists Agrippa's assistance to determine what charges should accompany Paul to Rome (25:24-26). In the end, they still have no charges, remain convinced that Paul deserves neither death nor imprisonment, and send him to Rome as a prisoner anyway (26:31-27:1).

Agrippa's observation that Paul "could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar" (26:32) reveals these leaders' complicity in a system of injustice; their following due process does not result in the release that Agrippa ultimately judges that Paul deserves. Nowhere along the way has any of them seen fit to charge Paul with any crime; they all determine that he does not deserve either death or imprisonment. Any of them along the way could have released Paul; instead, they keep him imprisoned. When Festus' threat of sending Paul to Jerusalem compels him to appeal to Caesar, Agrippa's words appear to blame Paul for his own continued incarceration when, in fact, Paul could have been released many times over before he made his appeal. But he remained imprisoned, and Lysias, Felix, and Festus each could have released him. None of them either sentences or executes him, but by continuing to imprison him undeservedly they show themselves complicit in the injustice against Paul, who remains incarcerated until the end of the book. These Roman authorities perpetrate a more genteel form of violence than the mob that originally seizes Paul, but they still exercise death-dealing power. At every turn, Paul knowingly faces the possibility that one of these leaders will condemn him to death (see, e.g., 26:11). But although the exercise of death-dealing power restricts Paul's movement, his witness remains bold and "unhindered," even to the last verse of the book (28:31).

6.3.3 Resilience and the Reign of God

Paul continues bearing witness of Jesus' resurrection and the reign of God throughout his imprisonment, and he does so not only through the many speeches he makes in the course of his trials, but also through his resilience and persistence in the face of ongoing and compounding hardships. When he is first arrested, he shows no signs of resistance or intent to attempt retaliation (21:27, 30-33). He also appears to believe that the mob's treatment of him arises from a misunderstanding, and that explaining himself could solve their complaint and avert further violence (21:39). He invokes his Roman citizenship to protect himself (22:25), and the tribune reacts with fearful knowledge of his misstep in having bound Paul (22:29), but Paul does not wield either his privilege of citizenship or his knowledge of the tribune's error as a weapon or as leverage to manipulate him (22:29). When Paul learns of the plot on his life, he merely sends the message about it to the tribune and cooperates with the plan to escort him out of Jerusalem to Caesarea, still a prisoner under guard (23:16-33). Throughout his trials, Paul never accuses his opponents of any misdeeds; even when observing before Felix that "there were some Jews from Asia" (24:19), Paul does not mention that they seized him by force and were beating him until the tribune took him from their hands. Rather, he diverts the topic to remind his audience what is really at stake: Paul stands for life-giving the power by which the dead are raised, and that, he claims, is why he is on trial (24:21).

Both the original Jewish accusers and the Gentile governors who hear Paul's case remain captivated, however, by the sort of power that Jesus ascribes to Gentile rulers in Luke 22:25. In his final trial speech, before Festus and Agrippa, Paul attributes such power to the figure who tempted Jesus toward it in Luke 4:1-13. Paul declares this comprehensive mission when he recounts that Jesus promised him deliverance "from both the people and from the

Gentiles, to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan [τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σατανᾶ] to God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are being sanctified through faith in [Jesus'] name" (26:18). Both Jews and Gentiles have exhibited their captivity to such power in that, as Paul tells it, the Jews in Jerusalem tried to kill Paul because he preached repentance to Gentiles (26:20-21). Meanwhile, he is incarcerated in Gentile custody, but persists in declaring the message of Jesus as the Messiah, who had to suffer, but who also, as the "first of the resurrection of the dead, is about to proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles" (26:23). Up to his last words on trial, Paul stands as the lone witness to both Jews and Gentiles for the power of the resurrection, praying that all people would become as he is (26:29) since he gave up his role as the high priest's sheriff in favor of the peaceable reign of God.

Paul's solitary witness to God's reign recalls not only Jesus' own trials in Jerusalem—standing alone as Jews and Gentiles collude against him—but also Jesus' earlier words about the "narrow door" into the reign of God (Luke 13:24). Jesus claims that even some among those who "ate and drank" with him will be barred, while others who come from "east and west, north and south … will eat in the reign of God" where "last" and "first" will be reversed (13:26-29). Paul's reception from with "elders" in Jerusalem, as he reports his ministry among the as Gentiles, begins to look like a fulfillment of Jesus' words. Those who "ate and drank" with Jesus might find themselves excluded if they do not welcome those who come from "east and west, north and south." Paul's time in Jerusalem and Caesarea underscores Jesus' words about the narrow way into the reign of God; the kind of power Paul employs—self-forgetful generosity, hospitality, bold declaration of the truth, and patient endurance—is neither

conventional nor flashy. But it is very difficult to stop. None of those before whom he stands trial effectively silences him; not his own people, the Sanhedrin, the sequence of Roman officials, or King Agrippa. Indeed, they provide him a platform and, eventually, passage to Rome where he continues "proclaiming the reign of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered" (28:31) through the last verse of the book. That Paul continues unhindered in his witness—despite the many and various opponents and obstacles who use various levels and kinds of force against him—shows the tremendous power that one truthful witness to Jesus' resurrection wields.

In contrast to his opponents' violence, coercion, and force, Paul bears witness to Jesus' resurrection and the reign of God through persistent resilience—from his first days in Damascus to the last verse in Rome. Rather than fight against those who plot his death, he escapes multiple times (9:23-25; 29-30; 14:20-22; 17:10, 14, 33; 20:3; 23:16-33). Rather than assembling a guard or returning the favor to those who stone or beat him, he absorbs the blows, gets up, and goes on his way (14:19-20; 16:22-24). When he is able, he uses his privilege for his protection, but he never wields it as a weapon against his opponents (16:37-39; 21:37-39, 25:10-11). He sometimes uses careful rhetoric to avoid being killed immediately, but still speaks both prophetically and truthfully (17:22-31). And he maintains hope and persists in his witness even in the midst of lengthy incarceration and ongoing opposition, extending the message of God's hospitality even to those who hold the power to sentence him to further imprisonment or death (24:24-25; 26:16-23, 25-26, 29). Acts' final verse demonstrates the power of Paul's unified witness of words and deed: although still incarcerated, his proclamation and teaching remain bold and unhindered (28:31). The content of his proclamation and teaching make explicit what his persistence amid imprisonment presents as

an image: the life-giving God, who raised Jesus from the dead, truly does and will reign. Until the time when God's reign becomes fully established (3:21), Acts' ending implies that, as long as one witness remains faithful, both the message and the way of life it commends will persist "with all boldness, unhindered" (28:31).

6.3.4 Politics conclusion

What to call the dramatic change that reshapes Paul's life has occupied much debate, but, without a doubt, Acts portrays it as the abandonment of violent tactics and the commencement of a unified witness of words and life in the wake of encountering Jesus and some of his followers. Paul repents of being a "zealot" and pursues a path that faithfully displays the character of Jesus by relying on the power of truth both spoken and lived. Putting this image of Jesus into the world and then calling him "Son of God" (9:20) and "Messiah" (9:22) entail a specific conclusion about the shape of God's power: it need not coerce because it is true, and it operates through the persistence and resilience epitomized in Jesus' resurrection. Since Paul declares this God not merely the God of Israel's heritage but, consonant with that tradition, the creator of all things, this God's manner of governing the world provides the model not for Jews alone but for all people. This God "commands all people everywhere to repent" (17:30). Paul's own exchange of zealotry for witness thus becomes a model for those who would participate in the alternative political order that Paul, like Jesus, proclaims as "the reign of God" (19:8; 28:23, 31). While many audiences welcome Paul's message, the way into God's reign remains just as narrow as Jesus once declared (Luke 13:24). People from the entire spectrum of Acts' characters violently reject the inclusive, hospitable, and generous politics of God's reign as revealed in Jesus' resurrection, or quietly

cling to status quo patterns of privilege and power. Indeed, Paul's witness to life-giving power makes for recurring confrontations with those who remain committed to the power of violence, domination, and force; predictably, these are violent encounters for which Paul is reliably blamed. Even the "elders" who meet Paul upon his arrival in Jerusalem, who ostensibly have accepted the apostolic message about Jesus, hold Paul responsible for the violence that attends his ministry (21:18-26). Their complacency with status quo patterns of power and even violence is particularly sobering, as they show how seductive conventional power often can be. Paul, however, continues his exercise of resilience and bold proclamation through the last verse of the book, which is its own signal that the power of God's reign cannot, ultimately, be defeated even if the way is narrow. Paul persists. And if he does, so will some who come after him. Paul's witness to Jesus' resurrection and the reign of God, thus, merges with that of Acts as a whole—the power that gave life to the crucified Jesus and, indeed, to the whole world, will not be thwarted by death but, like Paul, will persist "with all boldness, unhindered" (28:31). Paul's witness does not end at Acts' conclusion; rather, it pushes forward into the future with the promise that God of life ultimately will prevail.

6.4 Conclusion

Paul's story occupies nearly two thirds of Acts' entire narrative, so one would rightly expect it to make a substantial contribution to Acts' portrait of "witness"; it certainly does. At the same time, Paul's ministry would not be "witness" if it were pure innovation; like the apostles and Stephen before him, Paul is a witness because of a divine summons and the substance of his message centers on the revelation of God in Jesus and, particularly, his resurrection. But Paul also demonstrates that the particular experiences and skills a person

brings to following Jesus are incorporated into the individual's witness rather than flattened or rendered inconsequential. To some degree, Paul's experiences shape the substance of his witness, but they especially affect how he goes about communicating about Jesus' identity. The dramatic turn of his life plays a key role in how he makes his message persuasive; the fact of his repentance from zealotry to the way of Jesus itself bears witness to God's life-giving power, and Paul tells this story as part of his witness to Jesus' resurrection and the reign of God. Paul neither turned himself around nor originated the message he proclaims; both come from God. Like the apostles and Stephen, Paul's witness integrates his words with a life embodying them and, like them, he elicits conflicts wherever he encounters those who remain unwilling to relinquish death-dealing power in favor of citizenship in the reign of God. Amid all this conflict, Paul presents an even more poignant portrait of the resilience that animates God's reign, vis-à-vis the apostles and Stephen, due to the sheer quantity and variety of obstacles he faces across many years of ministry, and the fact that he remains utterly undaunted and continues speaking even beyond the book's last verse. As someone who struggled against Jesus before turning toward him (26:15), Paul's ongoing invitation to those who remain resistant reflects the one who so relentlessly pursued him even as it reverberates beyond the book's last words. And he presents a continuing challenge to those who resist God's reign because of the kind of threat his witness makes toward conventional power. Paul neither advocates Rome's overthrow nor absolves it of wrongdoing; rather, Paul truly acts as a witness to Jesus' resurrection and the reign of God—he insists upon the truth as he has received and lived it, but he refuses any attempt to enforce it. That powerful union of truth and peace both proclaimed and lived as the power of God's reign exemplified in Jesus' resurrection is at the

heart of Acts' portrait of witness, which has much to offer Christians who would attempt to define and embody faithful witness in the present.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This project is aimed primarily to bring to light Acts of the Apostles' portrait of witness through careful attention to the entire narrative in its relevant contexts—literary, historical, social, political, and so on. In Acts as a whole, faithful witness to Jesus does not entail exact mimicry or completing an itemized to-do list. Peter and the apostles, Stephen, and Paul each bring their distinct personalities, experiences, and strategies to being Jesus' witnesses and—notwithstanding the disproportionate narrative space given to Paul—Acts neither presents one of them as "the right way" nor any of them as perfect. Each of them shows a unique way of being a witness of Jesus, but taken together, they present a cohesive pattern that charts a way for Jesus' followers into the present. Acts presents "witness" as a Holy Spirit-empowered, reality grounded, communal way of being that begins with God's action and integrates knowledge, words, and deeds in order to reflect faithfully God's character and power as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, with the purpose of inviting new participants from every nation and social location to join in this way of life.

This chapter recapitulates the argument of the foregoing five chapters by attending to how each element of the above thesis plays out within Acts' narrative around its principal characters—Jesus, Peter, Stephen, and Paul. The outline of Acts' vision of witness below begins with the origin of witness in God's action, and proceeds with its being empowered by the Holy Spirit, grounded in reality, and communal; and integrating thought and life, imaging the God of resurrection, and operating on a consistently hospitable impulse aimed to expand and diversify the community of God's people. Given Acts' status as Christian scripture, its portrait of witness entails a host of consequences for Christian life in the present. Providing

an account of those consequences with the requisite level of depth and sophistication—even were one to limit the context to Western Christian theological tradition in the United States—is beyond the scope of possibility for this project. Instead, this chapter concludes with six theses: results of the study within the previous five chapters that express the prescriptive pressure that Acts' portrait of witness might exert on Christian ecclesial life and that merit further investigation and reflection.

7.1 Acts' Portrait of Witness

Jesus' commission of his witnesses (Acts 1:8), which is widely regarded as Acts' thesis,[1] names directly many of the constitutive elements in the book's portrait of witness and implies the others. The fact that it is Jesus speaking and that he identifies the witnesses as his implies the origin of witness in God's action. He promises the empowerment by the Holy Spirit. The fact that Jesus is truly present, as signaled in Acts 1:4, shows that the apostles' witness is grounded in reality. That Jesus commissions not one witness but "witnesses" suggests that Jesus' followers are not meant to be a collection of individuals, but a group that works and lives together with a unified purpose. That the message of witness is the God of resurrection is signaled in the witnesses being "of Jesus," whose existence because of God's special action and co-identity with God are established early in Luke, and whose death did not end his life. Finally, the impulse toward hospitable mission in "witness" is clear in the expanding movement Jesus outlines with the words "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and up to the end of the earth." While all these elements are present in Jesus' commission or, at least, in the

[1] See again Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 200; Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 120, 245 n. 144.

first eight verses of the book, how the principal witnesses go about fulfilling this commission gives them further substance. Acts presents Peter and the apostles', Stephen's, and Paul's ways of being witnesses in order to offer a variety of models of what fulfilling Jesus' commission looks like and, thus, set some broad parameters for how Jesus' followers can be his witnesses into the future.

7.1.1 Beginning with God

Acts' introduction leaves little doubt that "witness" is the way of being on offer for Jesus' followers after his ascension (Acts 1:8), and, while what such witness entails is not portrayed in full the first time the word appears in the book, the necessity of God's prior action is clear. The first line of Acts indicates that this second book is written in light of Jesus as presented in Luke's Gospel (1:1). At every level of causality, apostolic witness originates in God's initiative. There can be "witnesses of [Jesus]" only if Jesus exists, and Luke has already established that Jesus comes into existence through God's initiative, is co-identified with God, and raised from the dead by God. Jesus' existence because of God and co-identification with God are the principal subject matter of the apostles' witness. And, of course, the activity of bearing witness essentially requires an event or reality that the witnesses observe and then attempt to communicate; without such a reality, witness is nothing more than either fabrication or delusion. Acts clearly presents God as the reality and initiator of the events to which the witnesses bear witness. Acts also portrays the witnesses' direct commission as a divine summons: Jesus directly commissions the apostles (1:8) and dramatically interrupts Paul (9:3-5). With Stephen, the divine summons does not come in the form of a visit or vision from Jesus, but the Holy Spirit upon him empowers and ushers him into being a witness (6:3, 5, 10),

and his ultimate vision from Jesus confirms his witness moments before his death (7:56). Paul, too, receives a great deal more confirmation than original commission (18:9-10; 23:11; 28:23-24). But the Holy Spirit's empowerment is common to all of them. Pentecost is the most obvious moment for Peter and the apostles (2:1-5), and although their experiences are not accompanied by such a dramatic event, Stephen (6:3, 5, 10) and Paul (9:17; 13:9, 52) are no less filled with the Holy Spirit and, thus, empowered for the work of witness. Throughout the narrative Acts clearly portrays the divine initiative that creates and empowers witnesses of Jesus. Of course, God does not only generate the witnesses; God also provides the subject matter of their witness. The witness is "of Jesus," or about Jesus, which Acts first declares in the words of Jesus' commission (1:8), and then pervasively shows in the spoken and lived witness of Peter and the apostles, Stephen, and Paul.

Despite including many speeches, Acts does not recount what the witnesses say every time they, for example, "proclaim Jesus as the Messiah" (Acts 5:42) or "bring the good news" (14:21). But, having already invoked the "first book," such spelling out of the subject matter is not necessary on every occasion. Acts is for its readers, and it assumes access to Luke's Gospel. Indeed, even the speeches that are included are best read with prior knowledge of Luke's portrait of Jesus, particularly in his teaching about and lived expression of the reign of God. By bookending the whole narrative with Jesus' post-resurrection speaking "about the reign of God" (1:3) and Paul "proclaiming the reign of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ" (28:31), Acts signals that God's reign as expressed in Jesus' life is the central and encompassing substance of the witnesses' message. Acts need not, and indeed cannot fully, rehearse how Jesus portrays the reign of God because it is the primary subject matter of Luke and should already be well developed in readers' minds if they have attended to Acts' first line:

"all" (or nearly all) "that Jesus began to do and teach" has to do with portraying and inaugurating the reign of God. Acts carries forward Jesus' portrait of God's reign as resilience and generosity that disrupt status quo patterns of power.

In Luke, the unconventional power of God's reign is forecast in the narrative leading up to Jesus' first public appearance, displayed in Jesus' healings, exorcisms, and generosity toward friends, strangers, and enemies, and articulated in Jesus' teaching where the marginalized "poor" embody the reign of God and the "rich" must jettison the wealth that gives them privilege if they would enter God's reign. But the central display of God's reign is Jesus himself, particularly in the way his entry into Jerusalem, the teaching he does, and the events that befall him reorient the notion of "kingship" and what sort of "king" governs God's kingdom. Jesus overcomes the death-dealing powers that confront him not through armed revolt, but through death and resurrection. Jesus images and embodies the God who overcomes death with life. The witnesses' teaching focuses on Jesus' resurrection, and thus centers Jesus' revelation of the truth about the nature of power. Jesus' resurrection is the evidence and promise that God's creative power can and will overcome all powers that deal in force[2]; that promise, no doubt, gives courage to the witnesses to continue speaking even under the constant threat of violence or death. But their empowerment to bear witness at all, and in a way that maintains the integrity of the message, is the work of the Holy Spirit.

[2] See again Weil, "Poem of Force," 6.

7.1.2 Holy Spirit-empowered

Jesus names the Holy Spirit's role of empowering his witnesses when he commissions them. And indeed, the Holy Spirit's presence and movement are the primary evidence that, even after Jesus is no longer physically with his followers, their witness remains grounded in the reality and initiative of God. The apostles do not undertake the work of active witness until the Holy Spirit comes upon them in an unmistakable fashion that also draws public notice. Peter and his companions could be forgiven were they to proceed on the conviction that, because they knew Jesus personally, they would not have to wait for a special visit from the Holy Spirit in order to go out into the streets and start telling people about him. But they do not; their patience suggests not only obedience to Jesus (Luke 24:59; Acts 1:4-5) but, also, humility that the guidance and power that the Holy Spirit offers might have a salutary effect on both how the apostles would bear witness to Jesus and how their message would be received. Peter's Pentecost audience accepts his message at an unparalleled rate and to extraordinary effect—three thousand persons are added to the community and live together in generous harmony with one another (Acts 2:37-47). On this first occasion where the Holy Spirit appears to empower the witnesses, the effect is dramatically positive.

The Holy Spirit's presence does not guarantee that the witnesses or their message will meet a warm welcome; at the same time, none of the witnesses operates without the Holy Spirit. Peter and the apostles' encounter with the Holy Spirit is most dramatic; Stephen is already full of the Holy Spirit (6:3, 5) when he is chosen for ministry in the community. Paul is promised the Holy Spirit when Ananias first visits him and, it is implied, is filled with the Holy Spirit at the same time he receives his sight again (9:17-18). Moreover, in every case, the Holy Spirit continues to guide the witnesses. Peter is specifically described as "filled with the

Holy Spirit" (4:8) the first time he speaks about Jesus before the array of temple leaders who had orchestrated his execution. Stephen's opponents find him impossible to refute because of "the wisdom and Spirit with which he spoke" (6:10). The Holy Spirit personally selects Paul and Barnabas for a particular ministry (13:2), and just a few verses later Paul is "filled with the Holy Spirit" when he confronts Elymas the magician (13:9). The first chapter of Paul's preaching ministry ends with the note that "the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (13:52).

The Spirit's guidance plays a critical role in shaping the witnesses' work all the way through the end of the book, and Paul demonstrates his consciousness of the Holy Spirit's past and ongoing engagement with God's people when he describes the Spirit as the true agent of Isaiah's words about the people's resistance to the word of God (28:25-27). With these words, Paul suggests that his own openness toward the inclusive movement of God results from his attending to the Holy Spirit, and the converse is true for his audience. The witnesses remain receptive and responsive to the dynamic movement of God through consciously attending to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's empowerment is vital to the witnesses' work not only in keeping them receptive to the new things that God is doing through Jesus and moving them to spread the word about Jesus, also, to do so in a way that remains congruent to the message. The power of the Holy Spirit is essentially life-giving; when the witnesses match their movement and way of being to the Holy Spirit, they are equipped to share the message with the powerful gentleness that its subject matter requires. But the Spirit's presence and guidance are not the subject matter of the witness; that, rather, is the event God has wrought in the world through Jesus, which Acts takes care to portray as fully real—not the product of the apostles' wishful imagination.

7.1.3 Grounded in Reality

The apostolic witness begins with God and is empowered by the Holy Spirit, but the work of God that gives rise to apostolic witness takes place in the world of human existence and includes an essential physical reality: Jesus raised bodily from the dead. Acts' introduction emphasizes that Jesus truly lives again after his death and makes plain that his disciples have ample experience of his bodily presence. Summarizing that Jesus appears to his disciples in many "sure signs" (τεκμήρια) throughout forty days (Acts 1:3) recalls the episodes at the end of Luke's Gospel where the risen Jesus comes to his disciples, breaks bread and eats fish with them (Luke 24:30, 41-43), show them his hands and feet (24:39), and continues teaching them (Luke 24:26-27, 44-49) as Acts puts it, "about the reign of God" (Acts 1:3). As Acts tells it, those who live and speak the truth of God's reign as revealed in Jesus' resurrection truly have experienced the reality of this event. Despite its breaking the rules of what is usually considered possible—and, indeed, Acts does not present it as a "usual" event but as an act of God (Acts 2:24, 32; 4:10; 13:30)—Acts presents Jesus' resurrection as a real event of which there is physical evidence that Jesus' disciples observe firsthand. They proclaim Jesus' resurrection not out of wishful thinking, delusion, or deception, but due to their own experience of this event as real. This rootedness in reality is an essential trait of witness, and not only with respect to Jesus' resurrection.

Throughout Acts, the witnesses demonstrate a fearless commitment to the truth as it is revealed to them. The fearlessness works at two levels—they appear unthreatened by truths they previously would have rejected, which means that they begin to accept the new ways that they understand God is working, and they proclaim the truths of which they are persuaded

before hostile audiences with little regard for the consequences. Peter's vision and experience with Cornelius in Acts 10 show some of this dynamic at work. He begins the process still persuaded that Gentiles are "unclean," and that he ought not associate with them (Acts 10:14, 28). By the end of his preaching, when he sees the Holy Spirit coming upon the whole audience that just heard him, he has no doubt of the work of God he has witnessed and recognizes these Gentiles' equal standing with God (10:44-48). Paul, having had an even more dramatic experience of subverted epistemic categories, takes even less persuasion to expand his notions of God's people to welcome Gentiles. When the whole town of Antioch gathers and the Gentiles are listening eagerly, "the Jews" who witness it see a threat, but Paul and Barnabas perceive a sign of scripture's fulfillment and a summons to participate in it (13:44-47). Given Paul's later description of Isaiah as the Holy Spirit's mouthpiece (28:25), his response to the Gentiles' receptivity in this moment reads similarly to Peter's experience with Cornelius's household. Paul and Barnabas exhibit no fear about or reticence to accept the new thing God is doing in their presence and through them. Indeed, in contrast to the Jews who were receptive until the whole town arrived (13:42), Paul and Barnabas embrace it without missing a beat and do not back off their conviction in the face of the hostility of their Jewish audience (13:50-51). They remain committed to publicly declaring the truth even under the threat of death.

Such commitment to declaring the truth publicly even in the face of threats is among the hallmarks of witness already the first time Peter and the apostles are summoned to account for themselves before the Sanhedrin. The council members agree to admonish the apostles "to speak to no one further in this name" (Acts 4:17), but Peter and John respond that they must, rather, obey God and, moreover, "cannot but speak of what [they] have seen and heard"

(4:18-19). The public proclamation about Jesus is not simply about what God has done, but about what they have seen and heard with their own eyes and ears. They refuse not merely to recant a theological opinion, but also the evidence of their own sensory experience. They remain committed to this truth even when they know, not least because they declare it before some of the very same authorities who brought about Jesus' execution, that it might cost them their lives.

These certainly are the circumstances in which Stephen speaks before this same council, and his bold commitment to the truth makes a stark contrast to the deceptive tactics of his accusers (6:8-14). While his accusers must drum up opposition and false witnesses (6:11, 13), Stephen needs nothing but the truth to make his point. Indeed, any attempt to manipulate the truth in order to make the point one wishes is utterly foreign to Acts' portrait of witness. Over and over again, the witnesses maintain an uncompromising commitment to what is true, even when it proves inconvenient, reshapes their categories, or endangers their lives. What is true is more important than what is expedient.

The same cannot be said for many of the witnesses' opponents. Stephen's accusers provide but one example. Before Stephen appears in the narrative, the council of elders and priests in Jerusalem, faced with the man born crippled standing before them healed in Jesus' name, "cannot deny" the sign before them (4:16), but they wish to suppress news of it because it casts doubt on whether Jesus deserved to die and transfers his supposed guilt to them (5:28). They stop short of publicly manipulating the facts, but they do try to conceal a truth that, at best, paints them unfavorably and, at worst, reveals their culpability in a grievous injustice.

Paul's accusers often take a dubious relationship with the truth to another level; he faces numerous occasions where their accounts of his actions conflict with the narrative or

spin it into a partial truth intended to result in Paul's punishment. Such occasions occur in Philippi, where the slave-girl's masters accuse Paul and Silas of violating Roman customs (16:20-21); in Thessalonica, Paul and Silas are accused of "turning the world upside down" (17:6) and "opposing the decrees of Caesar, saying that there's another king—Jesus" (17:7); and similar accusations with a grain of twisted truth are lodged in Corinth (18:13) and Ephesus (19:26-27). What Paul actually has done appears to have little bearing on why he is arrested in the temple shortly after arriving in Jerusalem (21:28), and later, when Paul faces trial, his accusers resort to false (24:6) or unprovable (25:7) charges. Paul, on the other hand, keeps unrelentingly to the truth when he speaks of his activities and experiences. Most of his words correspond closely with the narrative, and where his own account diverges it amounts to filling in previously unreported detail and not a contradiction (20:3-21; 24:17-21; 26:4-23). In this vein of contradicting the narrative, Lysias the tribune provides the key negative example; he acts rashly in his early treatment of Paul, only treating him well after discovering he was a Roman citizen (22:25-29). When accounting for his actions in his letter to Felix, however, Lysias claims to have intervened to rescue Paul in the first place because of his Roman citizenship, and never mentions having bound and nearly flogged him (23:26-30). Those who are party to Paul's imprisonment routinely manipulate the facts for their own ends, whereas Paul consciously and purposely speaks the truth (26:25).

Acts' portrait of the witnesses shows their relentless commitment to truth at every level. Acts affirms both that God truly raised Jesus from the dead, and that those who bear witness to Jesus' resurrection have sound reasons for believing their experience of it. And indeed, their experience of Jesus' resurrection as a real event appears to have renewed their commitment to truth and "opened their minds" (Luke 24:45) to new possibilities within the

realm of reality. Learning the reality of Jesus' resurrection opens them to the unexpected ways God is at work among them as well as making them fearless communicators relentlessly committed to the truth. The apostles' commitment to truth expresses their trust in God, who created and governs all things with gracious care. Trusting in God's goodness and power to bring the world to justice—a trust founded on Jesus' resurrection—enables the witnesses to embrace whatever they learn to be true within that framework and live without fear even in the face of death. Perhaps because it expresses such trust, truthfulness is a *sine qua non* for participating in the community of witness. As the episode of Ananias and Sapphira suggests, when truthfulness—even (or perhaps especially) about mundane matters like money—disintegrates, the community's very existence comes under threat. And, it turns out, community is as indispensable as truth for Jesus' witnesses.

7.1.4 Communal

In the larger scriptural narrative of which Acts is part, the theme of God's gathering a people who function as a collective witness to God's character has a long history. God blesses and multiplies Abraham's family partly so that they will mediate that blessing to all people (Gen 12:1-3). In Exodus, Abraham's family becomes a people, God has had a people rather than a person, or even a mere family, ever since. Moreover, the Mosaic law tradition in Deuteronomy requires a plurality of witnesses—at least two or three—not only in a case where the death penalty might be imposed, but whenever someone within the community is charged with a crime (Deut 17:6; 19:15). Jesus' calling of multiple witnesses—not just one—thus stands within a tradition shaped by and extending the epistemology of justice within the people of God. Jesus shall be known in the world through the words and actions of not just one person

but of people in community. Indeed, the shape of the community's life together is central to the witness; when the community's integrity falters, so does the effectiveness of the witness.

Luke signals the importance of a particular kind of community (or political) life well before Jesus commissions his witnesses. Jesus not only chooses twelve apostles (Luke 6:13-15); he expects them to remain together even after he is no longer with them and be a community governed not according to who is "the greatest," but by generosity and mutual care (22:24-26). Shortly after he commissions them as his witnesses (Acts 1:8), they become such a growing and flourishing community—dedicated to the apostles teaching, relying on one another for their needs, and "having grace toward all the people [ἔχοντες χάριν πρὸς ὅλον τὸν λαόν]," [3] and, as a result, the community keeps growing (2:42-47). Acts emphasizes the importance of the community's integrity for its witness through reiterating an account of its mutual generosity, the positive and negative examples of Barnabas versus Ananias and Sapphira, and the continued unity on the other side of the threat that the deceptive and greedy couple posed (4:32-5:16). The removal of the couple bolsters the community's reputation (5:11), the community remains unified and well-regarded ("they were all together in Solomon's portico" and "the people greatly esteemed them" [5:12-13]), and its numbers continue to increase (5:14). Indeed, on the other side of this trial of its integrity, the apostolic community withstands its most direct early confrontation with the authorities in Jerusalem. The apostles

[3] For insight and analysis supporting this translation, see Thompson, *Acts*, 97-98: "First, there is no grammatical support for translating the preposition *pros* in this construction (with an accusative noun as the object of the preposition) as 'from' or 'with.' Second, in first-century texts written by the Jewish historian Josephus and the Jewish philosopher Philo, when this particular preposition follows the word *charis* … it always describes the person *toward* whom *charis* is expressed [see T. David Andersen, "The Meaning of *ECHONTES CHARIN PROS* in Acts 2.47," *NTS* 34 (1988): 604-10]. Third, it fits the context as those who praise God also respond in gracious ways to those around them. Fourth, such actions would account for the daily growth of the community of believers" (98).

are arrested and dramatically rescued from prison, continue their public preaching immediately, are arrested again, win through to Gamaliel's caution that they might truly have a divine mission, and leave the council rejoicing despite the flogging that precedes their release (5:17-42). Meanwhile, the community continues growing, but in the community's response to that growth its move toward division of labor appears to threaten the community's integrity and security (6:1-8:3).

Appointing this group of ministers, including Stephen, to oversee the equitable distribution of the community's resources appears to contribute to his isolation and make him an easier target for opponents of the community. Individual witnesses' separation from the community does not always result in violence against them but being alone does the witness no favors. Indeed, the Jerusalem elders' abdication of responsibility to guide the community allows Paul to be singled out as a threat and, in short order, seized and arrested from the temple (21:18-33). Paul spends most of his successful ministry with a partner or a team and faces significant threats on the rare occasions he ends up alone, as in Athens (17:15-20). Indeed, it appears that each of Acts' principal witnesses faces death or the proximate possibility of it when he emerges as a leading figure and can be singled out from the community. The witnesses require one another's support.

Moreover, despite focusing on the activities of a few witnesses and ending with Paul alone, Acts does not suggest that one witness from one perspective can adequately represent Jesus to the world. The work of knowing and communicating the identity of Jesus cannot be done by an individual independent of the community whose life is shaped toward the reign of God. Paul is not the single heir to Jesus' mission; in addition to the apostles and those who came to faith through their ministry, Paul's journey back to Jerusalem confirms that he has led

the establishment of many communities full of diverse people who now also bear witness of Jesus. Peter and the apostles, Stephen, and Paul have all come to knowledge of Jesus from different perspectives and, thus, communicate from these different vantage points. Expanding the community of witness to include the vast diversity of Gentiles makes the number of witnessing perspectives still broader, and that inclusive impulse extends all the way through the end of the book, where Paul is welcoming "all who came to him" (28:30). But despite the differences in their background, Peter and the apostles, Stephen, and Paul have a template for witness common to all of them—words by which they declare the reality and significance of Jesus' resurrection and which they confirm in their way of life.

7.1.5 Integrated Words and Life

Acts portrays witness as a pattern of communication that relies on words and actions that work together to impart the same truth. Neither is sufficient on its own; witness to Jesus requires both. This integrated pattern is the mechanism of the witnesses' communication. They put their words and their whole way of life in service to the truth about Jesus. As such, they bear witness to him not only in the substance of their message, but in the manner of their communication. The witnesses, particularly those who were with Jesus from the beginning, learn his identity and significance through both his words and the non-verbal actions of his life—healings, exorcisms, raising the dead, generosity toward enemies, bold gentleness, and his own crucifixion and resurrection. The words and actions confirm one another. The kind of reality Jesus communicates to his disciples and to which they bear witness is too rich for either words or actions alone. Jesus' resurrection as the inaugural event of God's reign is a world-shaping reality. Thus, proclaiming that Jesus has been raised from the dead is necessary

but not sufficient to communicating the reality of this event; if those who declare Jesus is raised from the dead do not shape their lives in a way that reflects this reality, they undercut their message. If Jesus' resurrection does not reshape a community that lives according to the power at work in the reign of God, it becomes less plausible as an event that will transform the whole world.

On the other hand, while a community might be able to live in a way that reflects the reality of Jesus' resurrection without ever articulating such a purpose, that seems unlikely in practice. A community that fails to articulate its vision will more likely lose its constitutive way of life, not to mention open itself to a great deal more misinterpretation about the significance of its common life. The events of Pentecost in Acts provide a straightforward example: some who see the tongues of fire and hear the speech interpret the event as an act of God, and some think the apostles are drunk, but before Peter speaks, no one takes the event as a sign of God's expanding salvation because of Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation (Acts 2:5-36). The event requires interpretation, but without the event there would be no occasion for the words.

This logic appears to inform all the witnesses throughout Acts. Peter and the apostles oscillate between actions that put God's power on display and speeches that interpret these events for their confounded audiences. Pentecost is the first occasion (although the apostles do not cause the Holy Spirit's presence, they do receive the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues). In the days afterward, Peter and John heal the man who had been crippled from his birth, draw a crowd, and give speeches first to the people and then to the Sanhedrin (Acts 3:1-4:12). In between this and other accounts of the apostles' healings and exorcisms (5:12-16), Acts also provides accounts of the apostolic community's generosity and mutual care (2:42-47; 4:32-37). Stephen recapitulates the pattern; he is commissioned to the kind of service Jesus commends

in Luke 22:26 (Acts 6:1-5), performs powerful works publicly (6:10), gives the longest speech in Acts (7:2-53), and shows grace to his enemies as he dies (7:60). Paul's words are likewise united with his actions, not least in his persistent verbal and active welcome toward Gentiles beginning in Pisidian Antioch (13:44-48). Acts includes many summary accounts of Paul's proclamation (e.g., 14:1, 3, 21; 15:36, 16:10; 17:2-3, 13; 18:11; 19:8; 28:23, 31) and works of healing, exorcism, and generosity toward opponents (14:3, 8-10; 16:18, 28; 19:11-20; 20:7-12; 24:24-25; 26:29; 28:1-9). The witnesses' exercise of life-giving power—particularly in contrast with their opponents—underscores the truth of the message they proclaim about Jesus' resurrection. As they continue to persist and prevail despite violent opposition, while maintaining a witness proclaiming Jesus' resurrection and wielding generosity and resilience, they present a comprehensive and compelling message that tells as well as shows the truth about God's power. The witnesses' message consists, of course, in this: a true portrait of the God whose character and power are epitomized in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

7.1.6 The God of Resurrection

Whether stated directly or evoked subtly, all the witnesses put Jesus' resurrection at the center of their message and interpret its significance for their various audiences. Peter makes repeated direct claims that God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:24, 32; 4:10; 5:30). Stephen narrates his vision of the risen and exalted Jesus in real time (7:55-56). Paul declares "God raised [Jesus] from the dead" (13:30) in his first sermon that Acts includes in the text, summarizes the message about Jesus in terms of the necessity of the Messiah's suffering, death, and resurrection (17:3), and identifies his hope in the resurrection as the reason why he ends up on trial (23:6). The witnesses declare that Jesus' resurrection was God's act and make it the

center of their message because of what it reveals about God. Jesus' resurrection says that God's way of overcoming the patterns of power that lead to death is to overwhelm them with life. The God who made the world through the power of sheer creativity mends the world through that same power. The witnesses' focus on Jesus' resurrection as God's act calls attention to God's resilience and creativity as the powers that will bring salvation to the world. The mission to extend God's salvation to Gentiles arises from Jesus' resurrection's significance as the event inaugurating God's reign on earth. When his disciples ask whether he will at this time "establish the reign in Israel" (1:6), Jesus skirts the issue of the timeline and gives them a mission to be his witnesses in ever expanding geographical circles (1:7-8). Jesus' resurrection signals that the reign of God is coming not just for Israel, but for everyone. As Paul declares in Athens, God's raising Jesus is the sign that God's justice will be established universally (17:30-31). The witnesses proclaim and rely on the power of the God who raises the dead; by speaking of the resurrection and living according to its power, they bear witness to both the coming and the present reign of God and offer an ongoing invitation for others to join them.

7.1.7 Hospitality

There can be no doubt that Acts portrays "witness" with persuasion among its central aims but that persuasion takes the form of invitation and hospitality rather than manipulation, threat, or compulsion. As at a trial, the job of the witness consists in communicating as fully and accurately the truth as she understands it and allowing the jurors to reach a verdict based on their own assessment of the evidence presented. Such a posture does not mean that the witness must be completely disinterested in the outcome of the trial, but the witness's principal commitment is to the truth. A witness hopes that the truth will prevail but uses no resources

beyond comprehensive and accurate accounting for the reality he has experienced. Acts' witnesses issue constant invitations to accept the truth they seek to spread about God's work in Jesus, but they never berate anyone who resists the message. When confronted with hostile responses to their initial telling of the message, the apostles do not attempt to argue the Sanhedrin, for example, into agreement, but merely reiterate that they speak because of what they saw and heard (4:20); and even Paul leaves the area rather than continuing to engage an unreceptive audience (e.g., 13:50-51). They also never mention hell as a consequence of not accepting the message; the witnesses work is to offer the truth as they have understood it to their audiences—not to force their audience to accept it, and certainly not by manipulation, dissembling, or threatening them. Such tactics would undermine the message of the God whose power is essentially life-giving and creative—the God of resurrection.

The witnesses undertake their work in the spirit of welcome and openness to surprises in a way that mirrors Jesus' hospitality to Gentiles and strangers from the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4:23-27) and their own journey into the knowledge of his resurrection (Luke 24:12-42). The "eucatastrophe"[4] of Jesus alive again after his death opens the apostles' imagination to further surprises and, as evident with the episode with Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48; 11:17-18), makes them hospitable toward those whom God welcomes. The

[4] J. R. R. Tolkien, who coined this neologism, describes it as "the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears" (Letter 89), or "it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*" (On Fairy-Stories). Quoted in "Eucatastrophe," *Tolkien Gateway*, http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Eucatastrophe.

surprise of encountering Jesus on the way to Damascus dramatically changes Paul's worldview from the anxious and violent guarding of zealotry to the open embrace of Gentiles among the people of God (8:1-3; 9:1-17; 13:44-47; 22:3). Stephen, too, embodies such hospitality that he can even pray for his executioners' pardon (7:60). Such openness accompanies the abandonment of fear that arises from knowledge of Jesus' resurrection's reality and significance; they exhibit lived assurance that God is good and that God's way will ultimately prevail. Living in the reality of Jesus' resurrection allows the witnesses continually to invite others to participate in the kind of life they have found, but they remain free from any need to control others' responses. Not by accident does Acts' final scene portray Paul welcoming all who visit him and continuing his bold and profligate proclamation of God's reign and the Lord Jesus Christ (28:31). At the last, the book of Acts itself extends the witnesses' gently persistent invitation to be among those who will listen and become part of the community shaped by the reign of God as portrayed in Jesus and his witnesses.

7.2 Acts and the Theology, Epistemology, and Politics of Witness

Since Acts portrays witness as a comprehensive way of being that begins with God's action and is measured in terms of how accurately a community reflects God's character in its words and common life, Acts' portrait of witness exerts pressure on every aspect of ecclesial life. Cataloging exhaustively the particular places where this vision of witness puts prophetic pressure on Christians in the United States today is neither possible nor necessary in this context. Offered here instead are six theses about Christian witness in light of Acts' portrait that, one hopes, will inspire further inquiry and reflection. They are presented in the categories

that have provided the broad structure of each chapter, namely, theology, epistemology and politics.

7.2.1 Witness Theology

7.2.1.1 Thesis 1: God as Source

1. Christian witness begins with God's initiative. This is the founding theological conviction of Christian witness. Without the reality of God, Christian witness collapses into invention. Acts' narrator's recurring declarations of God's reality and agency assure the reader that the apostolic mission truly is witness to divine activity and not fabrication, but those assurances also expose the distance between Acts' narrative world and the world of today. We today, much like the characters in Acts, do not have an authoritative omniscient narrator informing us unequivocally of God's actions. This thesis, therefore, exposes the categorical distance between the reality and knowledge of God, and underscores the importance of developing a sound theological epistemology—a branch of inquiry toward which Acts' portrait of witness supplies substantial and salutary resources.

7.2.1.2 Thesis 2: God as Substance

2. God's saving work in and through Jesus, especially his resurrection, is the principal subject matter of Christian witness. The apostles' witness consists in a message about Jesus' revelation of God's character and plans. The apostles urge repentance wherever their audiences either have rejected or remain ignorant of the true narrative about what God has done and, so, do not reflect the character of God as revealed in the narrative, but the apostles consistently frame the message in terms of God's gracious action. Noteworthy by its absence is any mention of hell, or even of heaven as a postmortem destination. This thesis,

therefore, offers a corrective to any practices of Christian evangelism that minimize the this-worldly aspects of salvation or focus primarily on the afterlife, and commends ongoing reflection upon the this-worldly significance of Jesus' resurrection.

7.2.2 Witness Epistemology

7.2.2.1 Thesis 3: Gaining Knowledge of God

3. People who experience social marginalization, and those who practice solidarity with the socially marginalized, are better equipped to witness the truth of God's character than those who have or identify with a position of social privilege. The epistemic privilege of marginalized people is amply in evidence from the beginning of Luke's Gospel with Mary's *Magnificat*, through the women who first witness to Jesus' resurrection, to the apostles before the Sanhedrin, to Paul before Roman officials. This thesis encourages Christian theological engagement with philosophies and hermeneutics that take seriously the intersections of knowledge with social location, such as feminist standpoint theory, womanist theology and biblical interpretation, and epistemic (in)justice.

7.2.2.2 Thesis 4: Communicating Knowledge of God

4. ***Christian witness must integrate words and life that accurately reflect God's character as revealed in Jesus and, therefore, cannot exercise force or subordinate truth to expedience.*** Acts consistently shows Jesus' witnesses engaged in clear speech about Jesus' resurrection and life patterns that demonstrate the power of his resurrection, signaling that neither words nor life patterns alone suffice to bear witness to Jesus. Integrity between words and actions as a function of credibility is nothing new, but its importance is emerging all the more powerfully because such a measure of theological or religious truth makes religious

power less accessible to politicians who use religious language as a cover for policies antithetical to the character of the God indicated by that language. This thesis urges Christians to insist upon integrity of words and action, and upon unity between the form and content of the message about Jesus; it likewise offers some tools for Christians to resist any packaging of Christianity co-opted by failing to meet these essential standards. This thesis, therefore, exerts specific pressures within the realms of evangelism, apologetics, and Christian political engagement.

7.2.3 Witness Politics

7.2.3.1 Thesis 5: The Political Shape of Witness

5. Christian witness involves individuals, but it is essentially communal; its active context is a community of people who together reflect and communicate the character of God through the practices of their common life. Correlatively, Christian witness is inescapably political (in important distinction to the word "partisan"). The Christian community bears witness to an alternative *polis* vis-à-vis "the nations of the world" (Luke 22:25), and God extracts "from the nations a people" for God's name (Acts 15:14). This thesis urges further reflection upon political engagement as an essential aspect of ecclesiology and offers a corrective for any forms of evangelism focused exclusively (or even primarily) on the "conversion" of individuals.

7.2.3.2 Thesis 6: The Political Content of Witness

6. Christian witness is witness to the reign of God. The political reality to which Christians must bear witness and seek to dwell in is the reign of God—not any political entity governed through the use of force. Acts' portrait of "witness" urges Christians toward actions

and attitudes of resilience, commitment to truth, generosity, and hospitality in order to reflect communally God's creative and constructive power, which continually confronts and defeats death-dealing power. Acts itself shows places where even the church fails to maintain unmitigated allegiance to God's manner of reign; Paul's isolation before the Sanhedrin and various Roman authorities is a product of the church's failure to maintain single-minded commitment to the life-giving power at the heart of God's character (Acts 21:17-26:30). This thesis urges further examination of the places where Christian communities today have compromised their witness to the reign of God, particularly through the use of force or alliance with death-dealing systems. It likewise raises questions about how Christians can bear faithful witness to the reign of God when Christian language and symbols are routinely placed in service to civil religion.

7.3 Witness to Jesus and the Reign of God

Acts' portrait of witness draws attention to the power and inseparability of theology, epistemology, and politics. Theological claims have a political embodiment—overtly so in the first century Graeco-Roman world. That is, claims about the nature of the God (or gods) who made and governs the world have implications for a vision of social welfare and governance. One need not believe in a particular God, or any god at all, for the point to hold. As Dostoyevsky famously argued through his character Ivan, atheism implies a political vision of permissive license. Whatever claims people make about God—or any other ultimate ground and measure of reality—will set certain political parameters. That being the case, the prerogative to make theological claims will prove advantageous to those who might wish to establish a particular political vision or wield political power. A tyrant could force his subjects'

assent to abide by the consequences of certain theological claims, but a person will not necessarily change their actual beliefs even when faced with the threat of violence.

The power to manipulate people through their own beliefs is, therefore, much more potent than violence—if one aims to construct rather than destroy social order. But violence is not the only avenue by which someone seeking political power might hope to gain the prerogative to dictate a culture's prevailing theological vision. The persuasive power of theological claims largely depends on whether they fit into the epistemic framework of the audience. For this reason, those who wish to exert political power through making theological claims will find it equally expedient to influence the culture's prevailing epistemology. Determining parameters for what and how something can be "known" within a given social context also sets boundaries on theological knowledge. Acts' insistence upon the reality of God known from the margins of social power and communicated through integrated words and communal life thus provides Christians indispensable resources for resisting patterns of power that deal in death, violence, and deceit, as well as for living, instead, toward the reign of God as embodied in the risen Lord Jesus.

Appendix A

διαμαρτύρομαι, μαρτυρέω, μαρτυρία, μαρτύριον and μάρτυς

in context throughout the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles

1:8 ἀλλὰ λήμψεσθε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐφ' ὑμᾶς, καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου **μάρτυρες** ἔν τε Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ ἐν πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρίᾳ καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς.

1:22 ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τοῦ βαπτίσματος Ἰωάννου ἄχρι τῆς ἡμέρας ἧς ἀνελήμφθη ἀφ' ἡμῶν, **μάρτυρα** τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ σὺν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι ἕνα τούτων.

2:32 τοῦτον τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀνέστησεν ὁ θεός, οὗ πάντες ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν **μάρτυρες**.

2:40 ἑτέροις τε λόγοις πλείοσιν **διεμαρτύρατο**, καὶ παρεκάλει αὐτοὺς λέγων, σώθητε ἀπὸ τῆς γενεᾶς τῆς σκολιᾶς ταύτης.

3:15 τὸν δὲ ἀρχηγὸν τῆς ζωῆς ἀπεκτείνατε, ὃν ὁ θεὸς ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, οὗ ἡμεῖς **μάρτυρές** ἐσμεν

4:33 καὶ δυνάμει μεγάλῃ ἀπεδίδουν τὸ **μαρτύριον** οἱ ἀπόστολοι τῆς ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου, χάρις τε μεγάλη ἦν ἐπὶ πάντας αὐτούς

5:32 καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν **μάρτυρες** τῶν ῥημάτων τούτων καί τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ὅ ἔδωκεν ὁ θεὸς τοῖς πειθαρχοῦσιν αὐτῷ.

6:3 ἐπισκέψασθε δέ, ἀδελφοί, ἄνδρας ἐξ ὑμῶν **μαρτυρουμένους** ἑπτὰ πλήρεις πνεύματος καὶ σοφίας, οὓς καταστήσομεν ἐπὶ τῆς χρείας ταύτης·

6:13 ἔστησάν τε **μάρτυρας** ψευδεῖς λέγοντας, ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος οὐ παύεται λαλῶν ῥήματα κατὰ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ τοῦ νόμου·

7:44 Ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ **μαρτυρίου** ἦν τοῖς πατράσιν ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, καθὼς διετάξατο ὁ λαλῶν τῷ Μωϋσῇ ποιῆσαι αὐτὴν κατὰ τὸν τύπον ὃν ἑωράκει

7:58 καὶ ἐκβαλόντες ἔξω τῆς πόλεως ἐλιθοβόλουν καὶ οἱ **μάρτυρες** ἀπέθεντο τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας νεανίου καλουμένου Σαύλου

8:25 Οἱ μὲν οὖν **διαμαρτυράμενοι** καὶ λαλήσαντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου ὑπέστρεφον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα, πολλάς τε κώμας τῶν Σαμαριτῶν εὐηγγελίζοντο.

10:22 οἱ δὲ εἶπαν, Κορνήλιος ἑκατοντάρχης, ἀνὴρ δίκαιος καὶ φοβούμενος τὸν θεὸν **μαρτυρούμενός** τε ὑπὸ ὅλου τοῦ ἔθνους τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ἐχρηματίσθη ὑπὸ ἀγγέλου ἁγίου μεταπέμψασθαί σε εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκοῦσαι ῥήματα παρὰ σοῦ.

10:39 καὶ ἡμεῖς **μάρτυρες** πάντων ὧν ἐποίησεν ἔν τε τῇ χώρᾳ τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ, ὃν καὶ ἀνεῖλαν κρεμάσαντες ἐπὶ ξύλου

10:41 οὐ παντὶ τῷ λαῷ ἀλλὰ **μάρτυσιν** τοῖς προκεχειροτονημένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἡμῖν, οἵτινες συνεφάγομεν καὶ συνεπίομεν αὐτῷ μετὰ τὸ ἀναστῆναι αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν

10:42 καὶ παρήγγειλεν ἡμῖν κηρύξαι τῷ λαῷ καὶ **διαμαρτύρασθαι** ὅτι αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ ὡρισμένος ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ κριτὴς ζώντων καὶ νεκρῶν.

10:43 τούτῳ πάντες οἱ προφῆται **μαρτυροῦσιν**, ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν λαβεῖν διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ πάντα τὸν πιστεύοντα εἰς αὐτόν.

13:22 καὶ μεταστήσας αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν τὸν Δαυεὶδ αὐτοῖς εἰς βασιλέα, ᾧ καὶ εἶπεν **μαρτυρήσας**, εὗρον Δαυεὶδ τὸν τοῦ Ἰεσσαί, ἄνδρα κατὰ τὴν καρδίαν μου, ὃς ποιήσει πάντα τὰ θελήματά μου.

13:31 ὃς ὤφθη ἐπὶ ἡμέρας πλείους τοῖς συναναβᾶσιν αὐτῷ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ, οἵτινες νῦν εἰσιν **μάρτυρες** αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸν λαόν.

14:3 ἱκανὸν μὲν οὖν χρόνον διέτριψαν παρρησιαζόμενοι ἐπὶ τῷ κυρίῳ τῷ **μαρτυροῦντι** ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ, διδόντος σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα γίνεσθαι διὰ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν.

15:8 καὶ ὁ καρδιογνώστης θεὸς **ἐμαρτύρησεν** αὐτοῖς δοὺς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον καθὼς καὶ ἡμῖν,

16:2 ὃς **ἐμαρτυρεῖτο** ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν Λύστροις καὶ Ἰκονίῳ ἀδελφῶν.

18:5 Ὡς δὲ κατῆλθον ἀπὸ τῆς Μακεδονίας ὅ τε Σιλᾶς καὶ ὁ Τιμόθεος, συνείχετο τῷ λόγῳ ὁ Παῦλος, **διαμαρτυρόμενος** τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις εἶναι τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν.

20:21 **διαμαρτυρόμενος** Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἕλλησιν τὴν εἰς θεὸν μετάνοιαν καὶ πίστιν εἰς τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν.

20:23 πλὴν ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον κατὰ πόλιν **διαμαρτύρεταί** μοι λέγον ὅτι δεσμὰ καὶ θλίψεις με μένουσιν.

20:24 ἀλλ’ οὐδενὸς λόγου ποιοῦμαι τὴν ψυχὴν τιμίαν ἐμαυτῷ ὡς τελειῶσαι τὸν δρόμον μου καὶ τὴν διακονίαν ἣν ἔλαβον παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, **διαμαρτύρασθαι** τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ.

20:26 διότι **μαρτύρομαι** ὑμῖν ἐν τῇ σήμερον ἡμέρᾳ ὅτι καθαρός εἰμι ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος πάντων.

22:5 ὡς καὶ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς **μαρτυρεῖ** μοι καὶ πᾶν τὸ πρεσβυτέριον· παρ’ ὧν καὶ ἐπιστολὰς δεξάμενος πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς εἰς Δαμασκὸν ἐπορευόμην ἄξων καὶ τοὺς ἐκεῖσε ὄντας δεδεμένους εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἵνα τιμωρηθῶσιν

22:12 Ἀνανίας δέ τις, ἀνὴρ εὐλαβὴς κατὰ τὸν νόμον, **μαρτυρούμενος** ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν κατοικούντων Ἰουδαίων,

22:15 ὅτι ἔσῃ **μάρτυς** αὐτῷ πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὧν ἑώρακας καὶ ἤκουσας.

22:18 καὶ ἰδεῖν αὐτὸν λέγοντά μοι, σπεῦσον καὶ ἔξελθε ἐν τάχει ἐξ Ἱερουσαλήμ, διότι οὐ παραδέξονταί σου **μαρτυρίαν** περὶ ἐμοῦ

22:20 καὶ ὅτε ἐξεχύννετο τὸ αἷμα Στεφάνου τοῦ **μάρτυρός** σου, καὶ αὐτὸς ἤμην ἐφεστὼς καὶ συνευδοκῶν καὶ φυλάσσων τὰ ἱμάτια τῶν ἀναιρούντων αὐτόν.

23:11 τῇ δὲ ἐπιούσῃ νυκτὶ ἐπιστὰς αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος εἶπεν θάρσει ὡς γὰρ **διεμαρτύρω** τὰ περὶ ἐμοῦ εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ, οὕτω σε δεῖ καὶ εἰς Ῥώμην **μαρτυρῆσαι**

26:5 προγινώσκοντές με ἄνωθεν, ἐὰν θέλωσι **μαρτυρεῖν**, ὅτι κατὰ τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην αἵρεσιν τῆς ἡμετέρας θρησκίας ἔζησα Φαρισαῖος.

26:16 ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ στῆθι ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας σου· εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ὤφθην σοι, προχειρίσασθαί σε ὑπηρέτην καὶ **μάρτυρα** ὧν τε εἶδές ὧν τε ὀφθήσομαί σοι,

26:22 ἐπικουρίας οὖν τυχὼν τῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄχρι τῆς ἡμέρας ταύτης ἕστηκα **μαρτυρόμενος** μικρῷ τε καὶ μεγάλῳ, οὐδὲν ἐκτὸς λέγων ὧν τε οἱ προφῆται ἐλάλησαν μελλόντων γίνεσθαι καὶ Μωϋσῆς,

28:23 ταξάμενοι δὲ αὐτῷ ἡμέραν ἦλθον πρὸς αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ξενίαν πλείονες, οἷς ἐξετίθετο **διαμαρτυρόμενος** τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ πείθων τε αὐτοὺς περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἀπό τε τοῦ νόμου Μωϋσέως καὶ τῶν προφητῶν ἀπὸ πρωῒ ἕως ἑσπέρας

Appendix B

διαμαρτύρομαι, μαρτυρέω, μαρτυρία, μαρτύριον and μάρτυς
by category in the Acts of the Apostles

<table>
<tr><td>Jesus' Commission

Acts 1:8</td><td rowspan="2">Human witness for Jesus/the Gospel

Acts 1:22
Acts 2:32
Acts 2:40
Acts 3:15
Acts 4:33
Acts 5:32
Acts 8:25
Acts 10:39
Acts 10:41
Acts 13:31
Acts 18:5
Acts 20:21
Acts 20:24
Acts 22:15
Acts 22:18
Acts 22:20
Acts 23:11 (x2)
Acts 26:16
Acts 28:23</td><td rowspan="2">God/Holy Spirit bear witness

Acts 5:32
Acts 13:22
Acts 14:3
Acts 15:8
Acts 20:23</td></tr>
<tr><td>Jesus' Commissioning of Paul

23:11 (x2)
26:16</td></tr>
<tr><td>"Well testified of" (Good reputation)

Acts 6:3
Acts 10:22
Acts 16:2
Acts 22:12</td><td>Human witness about human events / legal or trial scene

Acts 7:58
Acts 20:26
Acts 22:5
Acts 26:5</td><td>The prophets bear witness

Acts 10:43</td></tr>
<tr><td>A false witness

Acts 6:13</td><td>The Tent of Witness

Acts 7:44</td><td>A witness is a martyr

Acts 22:20</td></tr>
</table>

Bibliography

"Barth in Retirement - TIME." *TIME Magazine* 89.22 (1963). http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,896838,00.html.

Andersen, T. David. "The Meaning of *ECHONTES CHARIN PROS* in Acts 2.47." *NTS* 34 (1988): 604-10.

Appian. *Roman History, Volume III: The Civil Wars, Books 1-3.26*. Translated by Horace White. LCL 4. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913.

Archer, Léonie. *Her Price is Beyond Rubies: Jewish Women in Graeco-Roman Palestine*. JSOTSup 60. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990.

Aristotle. *Art of Rhetoric*. Translated by J. H. Freese. LCL 193. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.

———. *Metaphysics, Volume I: Books 1-9*. Translated by Hugh Tredennick. LCL 271. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933.

———. *Physics, Volume I: Books 1-4*. Translated by P. H. Wicksteed and F. M. Cornford. LCL 228. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957.

———. *Prior and Posterior Analytics*. Edited by W. D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon, 1949.

Baan, Ariaan. *The Necessity of Witness: Stanley Hauerwas's Contribution to Systematic Theology*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015.

Barber, Daniel Coluciello. "Epistemological Violence, Christianity, and the Secular." Pages 271-93 in *The New Yoder*. Edited by Peter Dula and Chris K. Huebner. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010.

Barnes, Timothy David. "Apostle on Trial." *JTS* 20 (1969): 407-19.

Barrett, C. K. *The Acts of the Apostles*. ICC. 2 vols. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994.

Bartchy, S. Scott. "Slavery (Greco-Roman)." *ABD* 6: 65-73.

Barth, Karl. *The Church Dogmatics*. Translated by G. T. Thomson and H. Knight. Edited by T. F. Torrance and G. W. Bromiley. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956.

Bauckham, Richard. *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003.

Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich (BDAG). *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Binder, Donald D. *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of Synagogues in the Second Temple Period*. SBLDS 169. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999.

Blake, Aaron. "Analysis: Trump's News Conference with Putin was Everything Putin Could Have Dreamed." *The Washington Post*. 16 July 2018.

Blanco, Jack J. *Witness: A Fresh Look at the New Testament Church*. Hagerstown, MD: Autumn House, 2009.

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Isaiah*. AB 19-19B. Garden City, NY Doubleday, 2000-2003.

Boer, Harry R. *Pentecost and Missions: Pentecost and the Missionary Witness of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961.

Bolt, Peter G. "Witness and Mission." In *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*. Edited by I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

Bonnah, George K. A. *The Holy Spirit: A Narrative Factor in the Acts of the Apostles*. SBB 58. Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk GmbH, 2007.

Boring, Eugene. *Revelation*. Interpretation. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989.

Bovon, François. "The Church in the New Testament, Servant and Victorious." *ExAud* 10 (1994): 45-54.

Braun, Adam F. "Reframing the Parable of the Pounds in Lukan Narrative and Economic Context: Luke 19:11-28." *CurTM* 39 (2012).

Brodie, Thomas Louis. "Towards Unravelling Luke's Use of the Old Testament: Luke 7:11-17 as an *Imitatio* of 1 Kings 17:17-24." *NTS* 32 (1986): 247-67.

Bruce, F. F. *The Book of the Acts*. NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988.

Buckwalter, Douglas. "The Divine Saviour." Pages 107-24 in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*. Edited by I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

Bulgakov, Mikhail. *The Master and Margarita*. Translated by Hugh Aplin. Richmond, UK: One World Classics, 2008.

Carder, Kenneth. "The Extravagant Sower: Luke 8:4-8, 11-15." Sermon preached at Cedar Grove United Methodist Church. Cedar Grove, NC. September 22, 2006.

Catchpole, David R. "The 'Triumphal' Entry." Pages 319-34 in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*. Edited by Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Chance, J. Bradley. *Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age in Luke-Acts*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988.

Chartraine, Pierre. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots* Vol. 3, Paris: Éditions Kincksieck, 1974.

Childs, Brevard S. *Isaiah*. OTL. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001.

Chrysostom, St. John. *Joannis Chrysostomi … opera omnia IX*. PGM Vol. 60, Paris: Migne, 1862.

Chrystostom, St. John. *Ioannis Chrysostomi opera omnia: Homiliae LV in Acta Apostolorum*. Vol. 9. Paris, 1731.

Clifton-Soderstrom, Michelle. "Recalling Luke's Healer: Slave Doctoring as Liberative Healing." *ExAud* 21 (2005): 128-49.

Coady, C.A.J. *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

Coats, David. "Statement from DNI Coats." https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/press-releases/item/1888-statement-from-dni-coats#content.

Code, Lorraine. *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Collins, John J. *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.

Conzelmann, Hans. *The Theology of St. Luke*. Translated by Geoffrey Buswell. 2nd ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1960.

Cook, John Granger. "Roman Crucifixions: From the Second Punic War to Constantine." *ZNW* 104 (2014): 1-32.

Cosgrove, Charles H. "The Divine Δεῖ in Luke-Acts: Investigations into the Lukan Understanding of God's Providence." *NovT* 26 (1984): 168-90.

Crown, Alan D., ed. *The Samaritans*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989.

Culpepper, R. Alan. *The Gospel of Luke*. NIB 9. Edited by Leander E. Keck. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995.

Danker, Frederick W. *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel*. rev. ed. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.

David Noy, Alexander Panayotov, and Hansvulf Bloedhorn. *Eastern Europe*. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 101. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004.

Davis, Ellen. *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament*. Cambridge, Mass: Cowley, 2001.

de Rossi, Giovanni Battista. *Bullettino di archeologia cristiana*. Vol. 2. Tipi del Salviucci, 1864.

Dibelius, Martin. "The Speeches in Acts and Ancient Historiography." In *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*. London: SCM, 1956.

Dickinson, Emily. "Tell All the Truth but Tell it Slant." In *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition* Edited by R. W. Franklin. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.

Diodorus Siculus. *Library of History, Volume III: Books 4.59-8*. Translated by C. H. Oldfather. LCL 340. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939.

Dowling, Elizabeth V. *Taking Away the Pound: Women, Theology, and the Parable of the Pounds in the Gospel of Luke*. LNTS 324. New York: T & T Clark, 2007.

Drury, John. *Tradition and Design in Luke's Gospel: A Study in Early Christian Historiography*. London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1976.

Drury, John L. *The Resurrected God: Karl Barth's Trinitarian Theology of Easter*. Emerging Scholars. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.

Dunn, James D. G. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996.

———. *The Parting of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*. 2nd ed. London: SCM, 2006.

Edwards, Douglas R. *Religion and Power: Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greek East*. Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Eilberg-Schwartz, Howard. *The Savage in Judaism: An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Eklund, Rebekah. "From 'Hosanna' to 'Crucify': The Fickle Crowds in the Four Gospels." *BBR* 26 (2016): 21-41.

Ellis, E. Earle. *The Gospel of Luke*. NCB. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981.

———. "'The End of the Earth' (Acts 1:8)." *BBR* 1 (1991): 123-32.

Estrada, Nelson P. *From Followers to Leaders: The Apostles in the Ritual of Status Transformation in Acts 1-2*. JSNTSup 255. London; New York: T & T Clark, 2004.

Eubank, Nathan. "A Disconcerting Prayer: On the Originality of Luke 23:34a." *JBL* 129 (2010): 521-36.

Evans, Craig A., and Stanley E. Porter, eds. *Dictionary of New Testament Background*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.

Fascher, Erich. "Theologische Beobachtungen zu δεῖ." Pages 228-54 in *Neutestamentliche Studien Für Rudolf Bultmann zu Seinem 70. Geburtstag*. Edited by Walther Eltester. BZNW 21. Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1954.

Feneburg, Rupert. "Johannes und Jesus – Zwei Rivalen." *Entschluss* 39 (1984): 4-7.

Fey, Tina. *Bossypants*. New York, NY: Little, Brown, 2011.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The Gospel of Luke*. AB 28-28A. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982, 1985.

———. *The Acts of the Apostles*. AB 31. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1998.

Flett, John G. *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.

Freedman, David Noel, ed. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Frei, Hans W. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

———. *The Identity of Jesus Christ*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997.

Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Fuchs, Ilan. "Women's Testimony in Jewish Law: A Historical Survey." *HUCA* 82 (2012): 119-59.

Garroway, Joshua D. "'Apostolic Irresistibility' and the Interrupted Speeches in Acts." *CBQ* 74 (2012): 738-52.

Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. "'You will be My Witnesses': Aspects of Mission in the Acts of the Apostles." *Missiology* 10 (1982): 413-25.

———. *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament*. OBT 20. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

———. *Acts of the Apostles*. ANTC. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003.

Gelfert, Axel. *A Critical Introduction to Testimony*. Bloomsbury Critical Introductions to Contemporary Epistemology London. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

Ger, Steven. *The Book of Acts: Witnesses to the World*. Edited by Mal Couch and Edward E. Hindson. Fort Worth, TX: AMG Publishers, 2004.

Goheen, Michael W. *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.

Goldstone, Brian, and Stanley Hauerwas. "Disciplined Seeing: Forms of Christianity and Forms of Life." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109 (2010): 765-90.

Gorman, Michael J. *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011.

Grasswick, Heidi E. "Scientific and Lay Communities: Earning Epistemic Trust through Knowledge Sharing." *Synthese* 177 (2010): 387-409.

Green, Joel B. "The Problem of a Beginning: Israel's Scriptures in Luke 1-2." *BBR* 4 (1994): 61-85.

———. *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

———. *The Gospel of Luke*. NICNT Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997.

———. "'Witnesses of His Resurrection': Resurrection, Salvation, Discipleship and Mission in the Acts of the Apostles." in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*. Edited by Richard N. Longenecker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

———. "Salvation to the End of the Earth: God as the Savior in Acts of the Apostles." Pages 83-106 in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*. Edited by I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

———. "Good News to the Poor: A Lukan Leitmotif." *RevExp* 112 (2014): 173-79.

Green, Joel B., Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. 2nd ed. Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2013.

Gregory, Andrew F., and C. Kavin Rowe, eds. *Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2010.

Guder, Darrell L. *Be My Witnesses: The Church's Mission, Message, and Messengers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985.

Guenter, Kenneth E. "'Blessed is He Who Comes': Psalm 118 and Jesus' Triumphal Entry." *BSac* 173 (2016): 425-47.

Haddorff, David. *Christian Ethics as Witness: Barth's Ethics for a World at Risk*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010.

Haenchen, Ernst. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1971.

Hall, John Franklin. *New Testament Witnesses of Christ: Peter, John, James & Paul*. American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2002.

Harding, Sandra, ed. *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Hauerwas, Stanley. "Believing is Seeing." Sermon preached in Duke University Chapel, Durham, NC. March 30, 2008.

———. *The Peaceable Kingdom*. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1983.

———. *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2001.

Havelaar, Henriette. "Hellenistic Parallels to Acts 5.1-11 and the Problem of Conflicting Interpretations." *JSNT* 67 (1997): 63-82.

Hays, Richard B. "'Did Not Our Hearts Burn Within Us?'" Commencement address given at the Faculty of Arts Graduation Ceremony. Charles Sturt University, Canberra, Australia. June 7, 2002.

———. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.

———. *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016.

Hill, Craig C. *Hellenists and Hebrews: Reappraising Division within the Earliest Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

Holladay, Carl R. *Acts: A Commentary*. NTL. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016.

Hugo, Victor. *Les Misérables*. Translated by Isabel F. Hapgood. San Diego: Canterbury Classics, 2015.

Hultgren, Arland J. *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000.

Ilan, Tal. *Jewish Women in Graeco-Roman Palestine*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995.

Jennings, Willie James. *Acts*. Belief. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2017.

Jensen, Morten Hørning. "Herod Antipas in Galilee: Friend or Foe of the Historical Jesus?". *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 5 (2007): 7-32.

———. "Antipas: The Herod Jesus Knew." *BAR* 38 (2012): 42-46.

Jeremías, Joachim. *The Parables of Jesus*. 2nd ed. New York: Scribners, 1954.

Johnson, Andy. "Resurrection, Ascension and the Developing Portrait of the God of Israel in Acts." *SJT* 57 (2004): 146-62.

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Acts of the Apostles*. SP 5. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992.

Johnson, T. S. "Roman Emperors." *DNTB* 978-74.

Josephus. *The Jewish War, Volume I: Books 1-2*. Translated by H. St. J. Thackeray. LCL 203. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927.

———. *Jewish Antiquities, Volume VIII: Books 18-19*. Translated by Louis H. Feldman. LCL 433. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965.

Kim, Seyoon. *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.

Kinman, Brent. "Jesus' Royal Entry into Jerusalem." *BBR* 15 (2005): 223-60.

Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976.

Kuhn, Karl Allen. *The Kingdom According to Luke and Acts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015.

Lackey, Jennifer, and Ernest Sosa, eds. *The Epistemology of Testimony*. Edited by Jennifer Lackey and Ernest Sosa. Oxford: Clarendon, 2006.

Lenski, Gerhard. *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. 2nd ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1984.

Levine, Lee I. *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

Lewis, C. S. *The Magician's Nephew*. New York: Macmillan, 1955.

Lohfink, Gerhard. *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimensions of Christian Faith*. Translated by John P. Galvin. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982.

Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House." Pages 110-13 in *Sister Outsider*. Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984.

Lozada, Carlos. "Can Truth Survive this Presidency?: An Honest Investigation." *The Washington Post*. 13 July 2018.

Maddox, Robert. *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982.

Malina, Bruce J., and Richard L. Rohrbach. *Social-science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993.

Mangina, Joseph L. *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004.

Manne, Kate. *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Marion, Jean-Luc. "They Recognized Him; and He Became Invisible to Them." *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 145-52.

Marshall, I. Howard. *Luke: Historian and Theologian*. Exeter: Paternoster, 1970.

———. *Commentary on Luke*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978.

Marshall, I. Howard, and David Peterson, eds. *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

McCabe, Herbert. *God Matters*. Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1991.

McCane, Byron R. *Roll Back the Stone: Death and Burial in the World of Jesus* [in English]. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003.

Mealand, David L. "The Phrase 'Many Proofs' in Acts 1:3 and in Hellenistic Writers." *ZNW* 80 (1989): 134-35.

Medina, José. *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994.

Miller, Amanda C. "A Different Kind of Victory: 4Q427 7 I-II and the Magnificat as Later Developments of the Hebrew Victory Song." Pages 192-211 in *"What Does the*

Scripture Say?": Studies in the Function of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity. Edited by Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias. New York, N.Y.: T & T Clark, 2012.

———. *Rumors of Resistance: Status Reversals and Hidden Transcripts in the Gospel of Luke*. Emerging Scholars Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014.

Mott, S. C. "The Power of Giving and Receiving: Reciprocity in Hellenistic Benevolence." Pages 60-72 in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*. Edited by G. F. Hawthorne. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975.

Nave, Guy D. *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*. AcBib 4. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002.

Neagoe, Alexandru. *The Trial of the Gospel: Reading of Luke's Trial Narratives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Nellessen, Ernst. *Zeugnis für Jesus und das Wort: Exegetische Untersuchungen zum lukanischen Zeugnisbegriff*. BBB 43. Köln; Bonn: Hanstein, 1976.

Nolland, John. "Classical Rabbinic Parallels to 'Physiscian, Heal Yourself' (Luke iv 23)." *NovT* 21 (1979): 193-209.

———. *Luke*. WBC. 3 vols. Dallas: Word, 1989-93.

Noorda, S. J. "'Cure Yourself, Doctor!' (Luke 4.23): Classical Parallels to and Alleged Saying of Jesus." Pages 459-67 in *Logia: Les Paroles de Jésus - The Sayings of Jesus. Mémorial Joseph Coppens*. Edited by Joël Delobel. BETL. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1982.

Pao, David W. *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*. WUNT 2/130. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000.

Parker, Pierson. "Early Christianity as a Religion of Healing." *SLJT* 19 (1976): 142-50.

Penner, Todd. *In Praise of Christian Origins: Stephen and the Hellenists in Lukan Apologetic Historiography*. Emory Studies in Early Christianity. New York: T & T Clark, 2004.

Peterson, Brian K. "Stephen's Speech as a Modified Prophetic Rîb Formula." *JETS* 57 (2014): 351-69.

Philo. *Every Good Man is Free. On the Contemplative Life. On the Eternity of the World. Against Flaccus. Apology for the Jews. On Providence*. Translated by F. H. Colson. LCL 363. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941.

———. *On the Embassy to Gaius*. Translated by F. H. Colson. LCL 379. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962.

Plutarch. *Lives, Volume IX: Demetrius and Antony. Pyrrhus and Gaius Marius*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. LCL 101. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920.

Polybius. *The Histories, Volume IV: Books 9-15*. Translated by W. R. Paton. LCL 159. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Price, Simon R. F. *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Rae, Murray. *History and Hermeneutics*. New York: T & T Clark, 2005.

Ramelli, Ilaria L. E. "Luke 16:16: The Good News of God's Kingdom Is Proclaimed and Everyone is Forced into It." *JBL* 127 (2008): 737-58.

Ray, Jerry Lynn. *Narrative Irony in Luke-Acts: The Paradoxical Interaction of Prophetic Fulfillment and Jewish Rejection*. Mellen Biblical Press Series 28. Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1996.

Reasoner, M. "Roman Religion and Politics." *DNTB* 1011-13.

Reid, Barbara E. "Women Prophets of God's Alternative Reign." In *Luke-Acts and Empire: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Brawley*. Edited by David Esterline David Rhoads, and Jae Won Lee. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011.

———. "An Overture to the Gospel of Luke." *CurTM* 39 (2012): 428-34.

Rengstorf, K. H. "Die Zuwahl des Matthias." *ST* 15 (1961): 35-67.

———. "The Election of Matthias." Pages 178-92 in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto Piper*. Edited by W. Klassen and G. F. Snyder. Election of Matthias. New York: Harper, 1962.

Rice, Peter H. *Behold, Your House Is Left to You: The Theological and Narrative Place of the Jerusalem Temple in Luke's Gospel*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016.

Riesner, Rainer. "James's Speech, Simeon's Hymn and Luke's Sources." Pages 263-78 in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ*. Edited by Joel B. Green and Max Turner. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

———. "Synagogues in Jerusalem." Pages 179-212 in *Palestinian Setting*. Edited by Richard Bauckham. The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting, 1995.

Rieu, D.C.H. *The Acts of the Apostles by Saint Luke: Translated with an Introduction and Notes*. Penguin Books, 1957.

Robinson, Anthony B., and Robert W. Wall. *Called to be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006.

Rowe, C. Kavin. "Romans 10:13: What is the Name of the Lord?" *HBT* 22 (2000): 135-73.

———. "Luke-Acts and the Imperial Cult: A Way Through the Conundrum?". *JSNT* 27 (2005): 279-300.

———. "The Book of Acts and the Cultural Explication of the Identity of God." Pages 244-66 in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*. Edited by A. Katharine Grieb, C. Kavin Rowe and J. Ross Wagner. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.

———. *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

———. *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009.

———. "The Grammar of Life: The Areopagus Speech and Pagan Tradition." *NTS* 57 (2010): 31-50.

Sanders, E. P. *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE*. Philadelphia: Trinity, 1992.

Sanders, Jack T. "The Parable of the Pounds." *TS* 42 (1981): 660-68.

Saunders, Stanley P. "Discernment on the Way to Emmaus: Resurrection Imagination and Practices in Luke 24:13-35." *Journal for Preachers* 20 (1997): 44-49.

Sayers, Dorothy L. *Are Women Human?* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.

Schökel, Luis Alonso. *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000.

Schöpflin, Karin. "Naaman: Seine Heilung und Bekehrung im Alten un Neuen Testament." *BN* 141 (2009): 35-56.

Schottroff, Luise. *The Parables of Jesus*. Translated by Linda M. Maloney. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006.

Scramuzza, Vincent E. "The Policy of the Early Roman Emperors towards Judaism." Pages 277-97 in *The Beginnings of Christianity, Part I: The Acts of the Apostles*. Edited by F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1966.

Shepherd, William H. *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts*. SBLDS 147. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994.

Sicily, Diodorus of. *Library of History*. Translated by C. Bradford Welles. LCL 422. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Sinclair, Upton. "I, Candidate for Governor and How I Got Licked." *Oakland Tribune* (December 11, 1934) 19.

Skreslet, Stanley H. *Picturing Christian Witness: New Testament Images of Disciples in Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006.

Smith, David. "Luke, the Jews, and the Politics of Early Christian Identity." PhD diss., The Graduate School, Duke University, 2018.

Squires, John T. *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts*. SNTSMS 76. Edited by Margaret E. Thrall. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Stanton, Greg R. "Hellenism." *DNTB* 464-73.

Steinmetz, David C. "Uncovering a Second Narrative: Detective Fiction and Historical Method." Pages 54-65 in *The Art of Reading Scripture*. Edited by Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003.

Stendahl, Krister. *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976.

Stettler, Hanna. "Die Bedeutung der Täuferanfrage in Matthäus 11,2-6 par Lk 7,18-23 für die Christologie." *Biblica* 89 (2008): 173-200.

Strabo. *Geography, Volume I: Books 1-2*. Translated by Horace Leonard Jones. LCL 49. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917.

Sullivan, Kathryn. "His Lowly Maid." *Worship* 36 (1962): 374-79.

Tacitus *Histories: Books 4-5. Annals: Books 1-3*. Translated by Clifford H. Moore and John Jackson. LCL 249. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931.

Talbert, Charles H. "The Place of the Resurrection in the Theology of Luke." *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 19-30.

———. *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel*. rev. ed. Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2002.

———. *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005.

Tannehill, Robert C. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*. 2 vols. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986.

———. *Luke*. ANTC Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.

Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988.

Thompson, Richard P. *Keeping the Church in its Place: The Church as Narrative Character in Acts*. New York: T & T Clark, 2006.

———. *Acts: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2015.

Tiede, David L. *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.

———. "Acts 1:6-8 and the Theo-Political Claims of Christian Witness." *WW* 1 (1981): 41-51.

Trites, Allison A. *The New Testament Concept of Witness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Vinson, Richard B. "The Minas Touch: Anti-kingship Rhetoric in the Gospel of Luke." *PRSt* 35 (2008): 69-86.

———. *Luke*. SHBC. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2008.

von Rad, Gerhard. *Genesis*. OTL. Edited by Peter Ackroyd, et al. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973.

Wagner, J. Ross. "Psalm 118 in Luke-Acts: Tracing a Narrative Thread." Pages 154-77 in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals*. Edited by Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders. JSNTSup 148. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997.

Walker, D. D. "Benefactor." *DNTB* 158-59.

Walker-Barnes, Chanequa. *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014.

Walton, Steve. "The State They Were In: Luke's View of the Roman Empire." Pages 1-41 in *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*. Edited by Peter Oakes. SNTSMS 116. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002.

Watson, Wilfred G. E. *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*. New York: T & T Clark, 2005.

Weil, Simone. "The Iliad, or The Poem of Force." *Chicago Review* 18 (1965): 5-30.

Wells, Samuel. "God's Story." Sermon preached in Duke University Chapel. Durham, NC. December 4, 2005.

———. "How Does Jesus Save Us." Sermon preached in Duke University Chapel. Durham, NC. April 1, 2007.

———. *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004.

White, Hayden V. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987.

Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. 2nd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

Williamson, H. G. M. "Samaritans." *DJG* 724-28.

Willimon, William H. *Acts*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1988.

Wilson, Brittany E. "Pugnacious Precursors and the Bearer of Peace: Jael, Judith, and Mary in Luke 1:42." *CBQ* 68 (2006): 436-56.

———. "Hearing the Word and Seeing the Light: Voice and Vision in Acts." *JSNT* 38 (2016): 456-81.

York, John O. *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke*. JSNTSup 46. Edited by David Hill. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991.

Biography

Celia I. Wolff was born in Redwood City, California on June 13, 1980. She attended Seattle Pacific University, graduating magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy and Christian Theology in June 2003. At Duke Divinity School she was a Duke Scholarship recipient, earning her Master of Divinity summa cum laude in May 2007. In the Doctor of Theology program at Duke, she was awarded a fellowship in New Testament studies. She has given presentations in both academic and ecclesial settings, and recently published "How Do We Read the Bible for All It is Worth" in *Essential Beliefs: A Wesleyan Primer* (eds. Mark A. Maddix and Diane Leclerc). Since 2014, she has served as Assistant Professor of New Testament in the School of Theology and Christian Ministries at Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho.