

A Theology Of Luke-Acts

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INTRODUCTION

Of the 7,947 verses in the New Testament, Luke-Acts comprises 2,157 verses, or 27.1 percent. By comparison, the Pauline Epistles have 2,032 verses and the Johannine writings have 1,407. In addition, only Luke-Acts tells the story of Jesus Christ from His birth through the beginning of the church into the ministry of Paul. This linkage is important for it gives perspective to the sequence of these events. Many Christians consider Matthew and Acts together, because canonically Matthew is the first gospel and Acts includes the history of the apostolic church. But the canonical link is Luke-Acts, not Matthew-Acts, since Luke authored both Luke and Acts. As such, it is appropriate that Luke-Acts should be treated as a unit.

With all the attention given to Jesus and the disciples in these two biblical books, one might think Luke's main subject is the history of Jesus and the church. However, Luke's main burden was much deeper. He portrayed the plan of God as worked out in fulfillment of divine promise. The inauguration of this fulfillment came through Jesus and through the church, which consists of both Jew and Gentile. The completion of this fulfillment will come when Jesus returns (Acts 3:18-26). These books stress the continuity of God's promise, and they present this progress in a pastoral way that instructs and comforts.

Luke wrote to Theophilus to give him assurance about the things he had been taught (Luke 1:4). A major supposition of that assurance is the recognition that God was at work in recent events, events that were in fulfillment of God's promises (vv. 1-2). Two aspects of that claimed fulfillment, however, would be troubling: a dead Savior and a persecuted community of God that included Gentiles, when Israel held the hope of the promise. Since the church was undergoing persecution, as Acts so vividly portrayed, Theophilus, or anyone like him, might have wondered if that persecution was God's judgment on the church for being too racially broad with His salvation. Was God really at work in the church, and was Jesus really at the center of the plan? How did the promise become so broad and how could a dead Savior bring it to pass?

Luke—Acts assured Theophilus that persecution of the church was not a sign of judgment. Instead the persecution had been predicted and was a means by which the message could go out to even more people across the world. The work details how Jesus is at the center of God's plan, a plan that anticipated not only His death, but also more significantly His resurrection-ascension to God's right hand where He offers the benefits of salvation as Lord to any who come to Him. Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles pictured the outworking of the broad mission of the promise. His role, like that of others in the church, was not undertaken on his own initiative, but was the direct result of the work of God. Thus God and His activity are at the center of Luke-Acts.

God's Plan of Salvation

THE GOD OF DESIGN AND CONCERN

At the beginning of his two volumes, Luke emphasizes that God has made promises. The material on the birth of Jesus in Luke 1-2 makes it clear that God is carrying out a plan according to His promise and that He will deliver His people. Luke 1:14-17 describes the mission of John the Baptist as Jesus' forerunner and the one who came in the spirit of Elijah to reconcile fathers and children to the way of God. John was to produce a "prepared people." Verses 31-35 describe Jesus as the promised Son and Messiah. He will sit on David's throne and rule over Israel. Verses 54-55 show that these events of mercy are grounded on God's promises made to Abraham. Verses 68-75 speak of the raising up of a horn of salvation out of the house of David as promised by the prophets. Jesus' task is to deliver God's people from their enemies, so that His people might serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness. Also mentioned in this passage is God's promise to Israel's "fathers" or patriarchs. Luke 2:34 states that Jesus will bring division in Israel. Thus the infancy material overviews the plan of God and various elements in it. It does not relate the parts of the plan in detail to each other; rather, it introduces them as any overview might do. The key note is that God fulfills His promises in Jesus. God is a God of design and concern.

Acts reinforces this picture. Acts 2:17-21 speaks of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit as a fulfillment of God's promise about the last days. Verses 38-40 make the point that forgiveness of sins and the Spirit are available to those who respond to God's call. Acts 3:22-26 indicates that Jesus is the promised Prophet like Moses who must be heeded (Deut. 18:15). Acts 13:22-33 portrays Jesus as the promised Savior descended from David. Acts 23:4-8 speaks of Paul on trial for the hope of the promise of resurrection. Acts 26:22-23 argues that the prophets and Moses testified of Christ and His subsequent mission. In the middle of Luke—Acts stands Luke 24:44-49. Its theme is the same. Jesus' death, resurrection, and the church's message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all men reflect Old Testament promise. So also the promise of the Spirit is the "Father's promise."

God is graciously at work to save a people for Himself. A forerunner, the Messiah, fulfillment of promises to Israel, the execution of a plan revealed in the prophets, the inclusion of the Gentiles, and division in Israel—all these are in His plan.

Enhancing the picture of God's design are those elements of the plan (*hē boule*) that are called "foreknown" (*proginōskō*), "foretold" (*prokatangellō*), "predestined" (*proorizō*, *procheirizōmai*, and *procheirotoneō*), "promised" (*hē epangelia* and *epangelomai*), ordained (*tassō*), or things that are "worked out through God's choice" (*hoizō*). Included in these descriptions are Christ's crucifixion (Acts 2:23), the promise of the Spirit to those near and far off (v. 39), Christ's suffering and return (3:18-20), the persecution of Jesus and the community (4:27-28), the witnesses who testify to Jesus (10:41), the Gentiles appointed to eternal life (13:48), His sovereignty over men (17:26), a judgment day and a Judge (17:31), and the appointment of Paul as a witness to the Gentiles (22:10, 14). Behind the events recorded in Luke-Acts stand the presence of the sovereign God and His compassionate acts.

GOD'S DIRECTION OF THE PLAN

How does God direct His plan? God administers it through four means: revelation, divine intervention, the work of human agents, and the work of Christ Himself. Revelation fundamentally involved the declared promise of the Old Testament, a theme so pervasive that it will receive more attention later.

God also revealed His plan through angelic announcements. John's mission was revealed to Zechariah by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:11-20). Gabriel also declared Jesus' mission to Mary (vv. 26-38). Jesus' birth was announced by angels to shepherds (2:9-14). Angels proclaimed Jesus' resurrection to women (24:1-7) and the promise of Jesus' return to the disciples (Acts 1:10-11). Philip was directed to the eunuch by an angel of the Lord (8:26). Cornelius was instructed about Peter by "an angel of God" (10:3-7), and an angel announced that Paul would survive a shipwreck (27:23-24). At key points in the story God intervened and provided direction. Each of the events of Acts is a turning point in God's direction of the church's expansion.

Besides providing revelatory detail to the direction of events, divine intervention came in two additional ways. Some people were aided by angelic mediation, usually in deliverance from prison (Acts 5:19; 12:7-15). In one case Philip was re located after ministering to the eunuch (8:39). A more direct means was visions, which also brought instruction. Stephen saw his heavenly reception as he observed the Son of Man rising to meet him (7:55-56). Saul was called through a heavenly appearance of Jesus (22:6-10; 26:13-18). In addition, Ananias was directed to lay hands on Saul (9:10-16). This double appearance to both parties—Saul and Ananias—shows God's direct hand in choosing Saul, something that the multiple telling of His appearance to Saul also emphasizes. Another double intervention is Cornelius being directed to send for Peter, while Peter had a vision in which God declared that all foods are clean. This intervention makes the point that Gentiles are welcomed in God's plan (10:3-7, 10-16). Paul was directed to Macedonia in a similar way (16:9-10), and he was called to preach in Corinth (18:9-10). All these examples from Acts show how God sovereignly directed the foundational events of the church, especially those related to her expansion into the Gentile community.

Besides angelic hosts, human agents were another major vehicle God used. God worked through Jewish prophets of piety like Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25-38). He used John the Baptist (7:24-30), the disciples (9:1-6; 10:1-12), the testimony of the church (Acts 4:24-31; 5:38-39), and the activity and witness of the apostolic band (1:8). His agents included the work of church prophets such as Agabus and the daughters of Philip (11:27-30; 21:9-10), as well as missionaries including Barnabas (13:1), Paul (13:13), Timothy (16:1-3), and Silas (16:22). In Acts much of this ministry is Spirit-directed as Acts 1:8 makes clear, so even the agents in their activities relied on God's provision.

Of course, the most significant revelation is Jesus Himself. His ministry is often summarized in the predictions about the Son of Man (Luke 9:22, 44; 17:24-25; 18:31-33; 22:22), in which His betrayal, death, and resurrection are the main focus. It was God's will and plan that these events occur (22:42; Acts 2:23). The rejection of Jesus (4:27-28) and His resurrection are part of the revealed promise (13:32-37; 24:14-15; 26:22-23, which stresses the promise according to the prophets and Moses).

PROMISE AND FULFILLMENT

Within God's plan, Luke set forth Christ's role as the fulfillment of promise. This perspective is evident not only in the references to fulfillment, as noted earlier, but also at key structural points in the two books. First, the Lucan prologue clearly speaks of fulfillment in the first verse. Luke described Jesus' activities as events "fulfilled among us" (*peplērophorēmenōn en hēmin*). Second, the prologue to Acts speaks of the completion of God's plan in terms of times and seasons, a phrase that indicates a set schedule (Acts 1:6-7). Verses 4-5 repeat the reference to the coming of "the gift my Father promised," that is, the Holy Spirit, a promise introduced in Luke 24:49. So both prologues discuss the same theme.

"The gift my Father promised" links the closing chapter of Luke with the opening chapter of Acts (Luke 24:49 with Acts 1:4-5). Like an unbreakable chain, Luke related the promise of God about the Holy Spirit, and this theme ties the two volumes together. Preceding the reference to the promise of the Spirit's enabling power is a summary of the center of the plan as promised in Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:44-47, "the Lucan Great Commission"). In this passage three infinitives are prominent. Christ would suffer (*pathein ton christon*), on the third day He would rise (*anastēnai ek nekron*), and forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations (*kērychthēnai . . . metanoian eis aphasin hamartiōn*). Here several themes come together. The work of Christ, His exaltation, and the message of repentance for forgiveness, which is available to people of every race are key Lucan themes. As important as the cross is to salvation, for Luke the exaltation of Jesus is even more crucial, since it not only shows that Jesus is alive but also is the basis of His investiture into authority (Acts 2:30-36).

Just as Luke 24 summarizes the plan, so Acts 1:8 outlines the progress of the early church. Here geographical advance is described. The message went from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. Spirit-enabled and Spirit-directed, the church took up the mission described in Luke 24:47 and carried it out from generation to generation.

OLD TESTAMENT FULFILLMENT

Luke spoke of the fulfillment of three themes that were predicted in the Old Testament: Christology, Israelite rejection and Gentile inclusion, and justice at the end. The warnings to heed the prophets are a recognition that irreversible authority resides in the message about Jesus. The prophets are to be believed (Luke 16:31; Acts 3:22-26; 13:27, 32, 40-41; 26:27). At the center of this message from the Old Testament was Christology, as Luke 24:44-47 reveals.

This Christological emphasis also permeates the infancy material. John the Baptist is the forerunner, as Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6 promised (Luke 1:14-17; Luke 3:4-6 adds the reference to Isaiah 40:3-5). Jesus is the promised Davidite, the Son of God, who will rule over Israel forever (Luke 1:31-35). God's accomplishment of this plan reflects His mercy promised to Abraham and to the fathers (vv. 46-55). The promise of the "raised horn" from the house of David is found in Jesus (vv. 68-79). The title "raised horn" alludes to Psalms 132:17, which in turn alludes to 2 Samuel 7, which records the Davidic Covenant. Psalms 132 is part of another key allusion in Acts 2:30, thereby

linking the infancy declaration to the key introductory speech in Acts. Promise also pervades the end of Acts. Christ's death and resurrection and the spread of the gospel to Gentiles were predicted of Moses and the prophets (26:22-23). Moses and the prophets also testified to Jesus and the kingdom (28:23). "The Way," as Christianity is called in Acts, is in accord with the Law and the Prophets (24:14).

Numerous Lucan texts also speak of Israelite rejection and Gentile inclusion. Luke 2:34 introduces the point of division and rejection. Luke's quotation of Isaiah 40 emphasizes the theme of the appearance of salvation before all flesh (Luke 3:4-6). Current Jewish rejection was like the pattern of ancient Israel. Certain passages raise the specter of the covenant curses for unfaithfulness, stated in Deuteronomy. Other Lucan texts recall that Israel had earlier responded with unfaithfulness (Luke 11:49-51; 13:31-35; Acts 3:23; 7:51-53; 28:25-28).

The reality of judgment at the end is stressed in the Old Testament allusions to the eschatological discourses of Luke 17:20-37 and 21:5-38. In addition, the apostles stressed the reality of coming judgment (Acts 2:38-40; 3:23; 17:26-31). The God of design and concern has carried out His plan in Christ Jesus and through Him in the church. Luke also noted other points of fulfillment from the hand of God in these events. John's birth (Luke 1:20, 59-64), Christ's mission and message (4:17-21), the times of the Gentiles (21:24), the Passover meal in the future kingdom (22:16), Judas (Acts 1:16-20), and the apostles' preaching ministry (13:47) are other events that picture fulfillment.

THEMES THAT REVEAL THE PLAN'S OUTWORKING

"Today" passages. Numerous other concepts relate to God's outworking of His plan. One theme is the emphasis on fulfillment "today" (*sēmeron*). This expression is unique to Luke. The theme begins with the announcement of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:11). In Jesus' synagogue speech, in which He outlined His mission, He spoke of Isaiah 61:1-2a and 58:6 as being fulfilled "today" (Luke 4:21). As a result of the paralytic's healing and receiving the forgiveness of sins, the people said they had seen "remarkable things today" (5:26). The journey of Jesus to Jerusalem was put in terms of what must happen "today" and tomorrow (13:32-33). Jesus declared the immediacy of salvation to Zacchaeus when He told the tax collector that salvation had come to his house "today" (19:5, 9). A variation of this theme was the lament over Jerusalem and her failure to know what had come to her "this day," that is, on the day of Jesus' Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem (19:42). To the thief on the cross, Jesus promised that "today" the lowly but repentant man would be with Him in paradise (23:42-43). The emphasis on "today," besides underscoring fulfillment, also highlights the immediacy and availability of that blessing. Right now God makes available such blessings and promises. Such immediacy informs the background of other elements of the plan. Salvation is here and now.

John the Baptist. John the Baptist was a bridge in God's plan. The "last of the old order," he was also the transition to the new. Luke 1:14-17 made this role clear when John was called "the one who goes before the Lord God in the spirit and power of Elijah." Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6 had predicted that such a one would come in the end. Jesus pointed out that John had an "Elijah-like" ministry in his preaching of repentance and his call to people to turn to God (Luke 7:27). His role was to make ready "a prepared

people" (*laon kateskeuasmemon*), a phrase unique to Luke that has a rich Old Testament background. The language recalls verses like Isaiah 43:7, where Israel is prepared for the Lord, and 2 Samuel 7:24, where the reference is to a prepared people in the context of Davidic hope. Luke 1:76-77 summarizes the mission of this prophet as preparing God's way, recalling the preparation language of verses 16-17. According to verses 76-77, John also presented "the knowledge of salvation in the forgiveness of their sins." Luke 3:1-6 underscored John's role as forerunner by referring to Isaiah 40. John affirmed that he was not the Christ and that one greater than him was coming who would bring the Spirit (Luke 3:15-18).

In Luke 7:19-35 a question was raised about John's ministry. In Jesus' answer, He affirmed that John was related to Elijah, and He also made a comparison between the old era and the new. Whereas John was the greatest born among women up to that point, the least in the kingdom is greater than John (v. 28). In other words, the difference between the two eras is so great that the greatest of prophets, even a prophet of the eschaton, is less than any member of the new era of fulfillment! In Luke 1-2, John is a bridge figure, but in Luke 7 he pictured the old era only. Together the two passages show that John was a bridge in the plan of God, which with Jesus' coming leaped forward to a significantly higher plane.

Jesus' mission. An examination of Christology later will detail Jesus' role in God's plan. This section is concerned only with "mission statements," in which Jesus or others described His mission or spoke of Himself as sent (*apostellō*) by God. These statements represent Jesus' timeless mission. They describe what He was called to do in His life and what those who followed His message are called to proclaim in His name. The statements represent why He came and why He is raised. Jesus said that He was sent to preach release to the captives, as well as to offer sight to the blind and forgiveness to the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus was sent to release the needy from the burden of sin. In this text Jesus appealed to the Old Testament year of Jubilee. Like that event, the current period is one in which people can be graciously released from debts (Lev. 25:1-12; Deut. 15:2-3; Ps. 82:1-2; Isa. 52:7; 61:1-2).

Comparing Himself to a physician sent to make the sick well, Jesus said His mission was to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). This is one of many places where Luke emphasized repentance. Jesus offers spiritual restoration to those who recognize they are spiritually sick. Jesus was sent as the Father's representative (10:16) to seek and save the lost (19:10). Acts 3:20 speaks of the sending of the appointed Christ in the future, while 3:26 emphasizes that He was sent to bless those Jews who turn from their evil. In His earthly ministry He was sent to "the people of Israel" (10:36). These mission texts describe a ministry of compassion and forgiveness made available through Jesus to those who seek relief from their spiritual needs. The God of design and concern makes His will known through Jesus.

Geographical progression. The advancement of God's plan into fulfillment receives attention in the Lucan portrait of geographical progression that pervades the two books. In Jesus' initial mission He moved from Galilee to Jerusalem (Luke 4:14-15; 9:51). In fact, of the gospel writers only Luke stressed repeatedly that Jesus was headed for Jerusalem (9:51; 13:33; 17:11; 18:31). This progression is reviewed in Acts 10:35-39. The advance of the church is similar. Acts 1:8 speaks of movement from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. The book of Acts follows that

movement, as Judea and Samaria are mentioned in Acts 8:1, and as the missionary journeys of the book extend the church's outreach far into Gentile regions. Paul's long journey by ship to Rome in Acts 27 seems to highlight how difficult it was to get to the capital of the empire. Though Rome was at the ends of the earth, the message of salvation was penetrating the entire inhabited world.

"It is necessary." Perhaps no theme underscores divine design more than the Lucan "it is necessary" (*dei*) theme. This Greek word is used 99 times in the New Testament, of which 40 are in Luke-Acts. The references cover a wide variety of topics. Christ *must* be in the Father's house (Luke 2:49). He *must* preach the kingdom (4:43). He *must* heal women tormented by Satan (13:16). In looking at events associated with His death or His return, certain things *must* precede the end (21:9). A Passover lamb *must* be sacrificed, as Jesus and His disciples gathered for a final meal (22:7). The Son of Man or the Christ *must* suffer, perish in Jerusalem, and be raised (9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 24:7, 26; Acts 17:3). The Scriptures *must* be fulfilled in that Jesus *must* be numbered with transgressors (Luke 22:37, quoting Isa. 53:12), and certain events predicted of Christ *must* occur (Luke 24:44). Judas's fall was a *necessity* according to Acts 1:16. The gospel *must* go to Gentiles after the Jews rejected it (13:46). Entrance into the kingdom to come *must* come through trials (14:22). Christ *must* remain in heaven till the appropriate time (3:21). Paul *must* suffer for Jesus' name sake (9:6, 16), he *must* stand trial before Caesar (25:10; 27:24), and he *must* go to Rome (19:21) where he *must* witness (23:11). Much in God's plan was carried out by commissioned agents, some of whom knew what they must do.

Other categories of necessity (*dei*) do not reflect this plan, but grow out of its nature as directed by God. Ethical necessity also exists. In critiquing the Pharisees, Jesus noted the *necessity* of justice (Luke 11:42) and the appropriateness of healing on the Sabbath (13:16). It was *necessary* to respond with joy to the prodigal son who repented (15:32). It is *necessary* to respond to Jesus with belief, since there is no other name under heaven by which it is *necessary* to be saved (Acts 4:12; 16:30-31). Persistent prayer is *necessary* (Luke 18:1). One *must* obey God, not man, when magistrates ask that believers not proclaim Christ (Acts 5:29). Jesus promised that in times of persecution the Spirit would give what is *necessary* to speak (Luke 12:12). Again Luke showed that the Lord is a God of design.

The kingdom. Another key theme in Luke-Acts is the kingdom. This is a vast concept with many elements in it that relate to other areas. Here the major features are surveyed. Four points about God's kingdom program should be noted: the kingdom as present, the kingdom as future, the kingdom promise as political, and the kingdom promise as spiritual. The presence of the kingdom is suggested in Luke by the picture of John the Baptist as the bridge into the new era (Luke 7:28). John was pictured as the last prophet of an old age and the new age of the kingdom has come, since the least in the kingdom is greater than John.

Jesus gave instructions to the seventy-two disciples to proclaim that the kingdom was near (Luke 10:9). The debated term here is *ēngiken*. Does it mean "to draw near" or "to arrive"? Lexically the term can carry either meaning. But the use of the preposition *epi* ("upon") makes it likely that the sense in Luke 10:9 is "to arrive" or "to approach" (cf. Matt. 26:45-46). This is confirmed by the fact that Luke normally used the term this way (12:33; 15:1; 18:40; 22:47; 24:15; Acts 21:33).

The picture of a current ruling authority is presented in Luke 10:18-19. Jesus said He saw Satan falling like lightning, a clear image of his defeat. Jesus expressed this picture as a result of the miraculous activity of the seventy-two and related it to the authority He bestowed on them (v. 19). In Judaism there was the belief that with Messiah's coming Satan's rule would end (1 Enoch 55:1; Jubilees 23:29; Test. of Simeon 6:6).

The third passage dealing with this theme in Luke 10-11 is 11:20-23, where Jesus made the point in verse 20 that if He were casting out demons by the finger of God, "then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (NASB, *ephthasen eph' humas*). The allusion to the finger of God points to a formative era like the Exodus, since the allusion is to Exodus 8:19. Also verses 21-23 show that arrival is meant, since Jesus is the stronger one who plunders Satan's house. This picture of victory and authority parallels other New Testament passages (Eph. 4:7-10; Col. 2:14-15). All these texts point to a plundering and victory that has already occurred.

In Luke 17:21 Jesus said that the kingdom was in the midst of the Pharisees (*entos humōn*), that is, the kingdom was in their presence. It was "within your reach in the present." The parable of the ten minas (19:12-27) is also instructive. Like the nobleman, Jesus has gone away to receive a kingdom, and, having already received that kingdom, He will return. In other words, His departure, not His return, initiates His reign. Luke 22:69 is another key verse. Here Jesus said, "from now on" (*apo tou nun*) the members of the Sanhedrin will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power (Mark 14:62). The "right hand" is an allusion to Psalms 110:1, which portrays investiture. It pictures Jesus' rule at the side of God in a "coregency" in which He is actively distributing salvation benefits to those who believe (Acts 2:30-36). Psalms 110:1 is a text that the New Testament relates to Davidic sonship and the promise to David, as Luke 20:41-44; 22:69; and Acts 2:30-36 show (Heb. 1:5-13).

The distribution of the Holy Spirit, as recorded in Acts 2, and Peter's explanation of that event show that Jesus is now at the side of God the Father. As Lord, Jesus is exercising salvific authority and the prerogatives of rule from God's side. Thus in Luke's view, the kingdom is present not in its final form but in an inaugurated form, in which the promises of the last days have begun to be fulfilled. Further fulfillment is anticipated in the future.

This second, future form of the kingdom receives detailed attention in several Lucan texts. Most crucial are the two eschatological discourses in Luke 17:22-37 and 21:5-38. In these passages the kingdom is still anticipated, and the passage depends heavily on the Old Testament. This is the kingdom of culmination foreseen in many Old Testament prophecies. Peter spoke of the return of Jesus from heaven, when He will bring about the "period of restoration" (*chronon apokatastaseōs*; Acts 3:20 NASB). This restoration involves all the things God spoke through the mouth of the prophets. Here is hope for the world and particularly for Israel, since this verse recalls the disciples' question in Acts 1:6 about the time of the restoration of Israel (*chronō and apokathistaneis*). The future kingdom is first and foremost the realization of Old Testament kingdom promises.

In certain verses, Luke described the kingdom in political terms. Luke 1:32-33 points to Jesus ruling from the Davidic throne over the house of Jacob forever, and verses 51-55

relate the messianic task in direct terms to Israel, Abraham, and His seed. Mary's hymn is expressed in the tone of Jewish messianic national hope. In Luke 1:69 Zechariah referred to salvation from a horn out of the house of David. That Davidic-led salvation combines political and spiritual elements is seen in the rest of the hymn (1:69-79). In this last hymn, the career of the promised Son of David is summarized. Some of what the Son of David does meets with fulfillment in His first coming (vv. 78-79), while other elements anticipate Jesus' activity in the future (vv. 71-75).

Some aspects of the kingdom are spiritual rather than political. In the same infancy texts, Jesus' mission is described as a visitation from "the rising sun," which shines on those in darkness and those seated in the shadow of death (Luke 1:78-79). Jesus' task is to lead them "into the path of peace." This imagery comes from Isaiah 9:1-2; 58:8; 60:1-2; and Psalms 106:10, 14 (LXX). It is spiritual in focus. Some argue that the kingdom is not present until both political and spiritual elements are present, but Luke's view of the presence of the kingdom speaks against this distinction. Luke's kingdom comes in two phases, "already" and "not yet." It has been "inaugurated" already, but it is not yet "consummated." The kingdom is present, but not all its promises have come. What is to come relates to the Old Testament and its covenant promises to the nation Israel. What is present now is related to the church and the exercise of her mission by the Spirit's power.

The Holy Spirit. Another key element in God's plan is the Holy Spirit's work. The Spirit's role indicates the inauguration of the fulfillment of God's promises (Acts 2:17-33 appeals to the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32; also see Acts 2:38-40). John the Baptist, summarizing Old Testament hope and announcing what the "stronger One to come" would bring, promised the coming of the Spirit with Jesus' coming as the Christ (Luke 3:15-18). In fact, the provision of the Holy Spirit was evidence of Jesus' superiority to John. With Jesus' own reception of the Spirit at His baptism came one of two divine endorsements of Jesus (Luke 3:22, alludes to Psalms 2:7, thus marking Jesus as the messianic Son, and to Isaiah 42:1, which pictures Him as the beloved Servant).

The Spirit's activity extends to the community and includes a variety of functions. Luke did not emphasize the individual reception of the Spirit as much as he pointed to its corporate reception. This community reception was promised in Luke 24:49, which states that the Father's promise of the Holy Spirit looks back both to John the Baptist's pronouncement about the Christ to come and to the promise of new covenant hope. In Acts 1:4-5 Jesus repeated the promise. The initial bestowal in Acts 2 was so important to Luke that he alluded to it in numerous passages. Acts 10:44-47 notes a similar bestowal on the Gentiles, comparing it to the original provision in Acts 2 (cf. 11:15-16; 15:8). Another community reception of the Spirit that involved those who knew only of John's baptism is recorded in Acts 19:6. It pictures the initial movement from the forerunner into the believing community. In Acts 19 the old age is swallowed up into the new. The last of the transition groups comes in. This communal pouring out of God's Spirit not only shows the presence of the "last days" (2:17), but also indicates (when He was poured out again in Acts 10) that Gentiles and Jews are equal in God's plan (11:15-18). They participate in the same new community. In fact, Acts 11:15 looks back to Acts 2 as the beginning (*en archē*). A new community, which came to be known as the church, emerged from this special work. The reception of the Spirit represents the presence of both blessing and enablement, since the Spirit is also called

"power from on high" (Luke 24:49; cf. Acts 1:8). The beginning of a new period in God's work had dawned.

What functions does the Spirit have in this plan? The Spirit's primary activity is filling (*eplēsthē pneumatos* and its variations). Filling is a general Lucan term for presence and enablement. Before he was born, John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit (Luke 1:15). In fact, while still in the womb, he testified to Jesus with joy (v. 44). Filling here was enablement to testify to Jesus, the ability to function as a prophet. Elizabeth and Zechariah were filled and gave praise to God (vv. 41, 67). Filling was related to testimony and praise.

In Acts 2:4 all the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. Again there was enablement to testify to Jesus and to offer praise (v. 11). Here filling also described the Spirit's reception by the community, the Spirit's "outpouring" (*ekcheō apo tou pneumatos mou*) according to Joel 2. Later in Acts, the Spirit's filling again enabled believers to testify to Jesus, whether through an individual like Peter (Acts 4:8) or by means of the entire praying community (v. 31). Another phrase, *plēreis pneumatos* ("full of the Spirit"), is parallel in force. In Acts 6:3, 5 the phrase refers to the mature quality of the seven who were chosen to help the widows. This term speaks here of an abiding quality of spirituality. Stephen, one of these men (v. 5), was full of the Spirit at the time of his martyrdom, and in a vision he saw the standing Son of Man. Stephen testified to this vision as he died (7:55-56). Though Stephen was stoned for blasphemy, he was full of the Spirit, was received by Christ, and was vindicated in heaven. Saul was enabled for ministry and filled with the Spirit through the laying on of hands by Ananias (9:17). Barnabas is described as full of the Spirit, as he showed maturity and ministered encouragement to believers (11:24). Paul, filled with the Spirit, pronounced judgment on Elymas (13:9-11). A variation of the phrase appears in the description of Apollos, who was "fervent in spirit" (*zeōn tō pneumati*, 18:25).

The Lucan phrase "filled with the Spirit" describes an important role for the Spirit in God's plan. It is the gift of enablement, either bestowed initially, as in Acts 2:4, or in a later moment of special spiritual direction. Usually the gift describes enablement to testify to Jesus boldly. On a few occasions the phrase describes an individual's general spiritual character. The words show that the Spirit is the driving power behind the early church's effectiveness. Jesus gave the Spirit not only to show that the promise was being fulfilled, but also to equip the church to perform its mission of taking the gospel message to the world.

The Spirit performs other functions in God's plan for His community. Through prophets He speaks to Israel (Acts 1:16, David; 4:25, David; 28:25, Isaiah) and to the church of the apostolic era (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11, Agabus; 21:4, disciples). These prophetic utterances of the church involved information about things like famine as well as exhortation and advice. In at least one instance, Paul seemed to have had a choice about an issue the Spirit raised, since the Spirit-led Agabus pleaded for Paul not to go on to Jerusalem where he would face Jewish rejection (21:11). Paul decided to go anyway and the passage ends on the note, "the Lord's will be done" (v. 14). Apparently the Spirit's prophetic exhortation and warning here was something about which Paul could reflect. He chose to go, knowing he would face rejection. Those present responded and agreed that what would happen would occur in the the will of God.

In Acts 5:3, 5 the Holy Spirit guarded the community from the lie of Ananias and Sapphira. In executing judgment in the community, the Spirit jealousy guarded the church's integrity. He sees what happens in the church.

The Spirit guided the believing community as she made decisions and took action. In the letter emerging from the Jerusalem Council, the leaders declared that the decision made was that of the community and the Spirit (15:28). The Spirit gave elders to the Ephesian community (20:28). The Spirit comforted or encouraged the church as she grew (9:31). The Spirit enables obedience, especially under the pressure of persecution (Luke 12:12; Acts 5:32; 6:10). The provision of the Spirit is God's way of empowering the church to complete her task.

Whether leading the way in discipline, guidance, the supply of leadership, or encouragement, the Holy Spirit in Acts was a driving force in the new community. Along with the presence of the Holy Spirit, God called those in the new community to lead lives honoring to Him. In the emerging church, God through His Spirit is at work in molding a new, exemplary group of faithful people. That is a part of His plan as well. The God of design and concern has called His people to a life of discipleship and service, a life that differs from the world's way of selfish living.

The new community's ethic. One of God's goals within His plan is to call His people to a righteous life, a life that honors Him. Design and compassion provided the enablement, but with that provision comes a call for believers to live in light of God's goodness. The call to discipleship contrasts with the Jewish leaders' way to God. Most of these passages come in the "Jerusalem journey" section of the gospel (Luke 9:51-19:44). As Jesus headed toward the place of suffering, He instructed the disciples on what God desired of them and what He planned for them. When Jesus condemned the current ways of official piety, He issued a call to new piety and prepared them for His absence.

Luke's look at the Jewish leadership in Jesus' day provides the negative portrait against which Christian discipleship is defined. The note of trouble for those leaders came early. John the Baptist stated that the axe of judgment sits at the root of the tree, ready to be wielded against anyone who does not respond with repentance (Luke 3:7-9). Genealogy is no guarantee against judgment. God wants responsive people with hearts open to Him.

No section is stronger in its condemnation of the old way than Luke 11:37-52. Here Jesus, like a classic Old Testament prophet, railed against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus said they were morally filthy inside, no matter how clean they were outside. They followed all kinds of tithing rules about herbs, but neglected justice and love. They loved the attention of the first seats and thought they led others, but in fact their teaching was like an open grave, leading to death. They burdened others with their rules, but did not lift a finger to help those so burdened. They thought they had the key of knowledge, but instead their way of thinking was a wall that prevented entry. Their actions were like the nation's failure in earlier eras to heed God's message. Jesus' imagery is strong here. This long condemnation destroys the popular portrait of Jesus as a mild-mannered teacher who avoided confrontation. Though not blatantly immoral, the Jews had a form of piety that was not honoring to God at all.

That is what Jesus condemned here. By contrast, the new community is not to be selfishly and arrogantly pious.

Jesus' warning about the wrong way continued in Luke 14:7-14, where He admonished His host and the guests at a meal not to seek places of honor. The next passage shows that many, who think they will be present at the great banquet will miss it (vv. 15-24). Jesus also condemned self-righteousness (Luke 16:14-15), a flaw seen in the Pharisee in contrast to the tax collector-sinner (18:9-14). Here the humble sinner was commended. Jesus' confrontation closed with a word of weeping lament (Luke 19:39-44) and with His cleansing of the temple (vv. 45-48). The way to please God was not found in the Jewish leadership.

The way to God stands in contrast to the way sought by the Jewish leaders. His new way is a life of love and service. His followers are called to a unique kind of love. Luke 6:27-36 is a declaration to love in a way different from that of sinners. While Paul defined the attributes of love in 1 Corinthians 13, Jesus described here in concrete terms what love is and how it acts. Love is giving. It reaches out to enemies as well as friends. It is vulnerable and sensitive to others, treating them as one wishes to be treated. Love exposes itself again and again to abuse by turning the other cheek in the hope of helping others. It is generous and expects nothing in return. In short, love continually and consistently displays mercy, compassion, and honesty. It is slow to judge others (Luke 6:37-42). It senses responsibility for others. It does not dictate to them, but aids them. This love recognizes that similar spiritual dangers and faults exist anywhere, especially in oneself. The disciples' major responsibility is to deal with their own faults first and then to help others deal with theirs.

Love for one's neighbor is described in Luke 10:25-37. Here the issue is not who one's neighbor is but rather the challenge to be a neighbor. Such was the Samaritan to the man who fell among the thieves. Love for Jesus is exemplified in Mary seated at His feet (vv. 38-42). This pictures the dedicated disciple, as does responding to the call to pray (11:1-13).

Love for God expresses itself in a variety of ways besides listening to and talking with God. The disciple gives all of himself to the Lord (9:57-62; 14:25-35). This means that generosity is the characteristic of his life and that life is not defined by excessive attachment to material things (12:13-21; 16:1-31). The disciple is called to confess Christ and fear God (12:4-12), to seek the lost (15:1-32), to have faith (17:5-6), and to view his spiritual labor as his duty (17:7-10). Fundamentally discipleship involves giving to God and to others.

The God of design and concern has devised His plan, in part, to produce such transformed people. Such ethics are to typify the community He has molded and saved through Jesus Christ. Such a life pictures promise realized and enablement received. As seen in Luke 1:73-74, God made an oath to Abraham "to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days." That is a key goal of the plan at an individual level.

God and Christ's direct intervention. A final way that Luke reveals God's plan is through the direct intervention of God and His representative. Early on in Acts, an opponent, Gamaliel, stated the driving observation of the second volume as the

Sanhedrin deliberated about how to handle the apostles (Acts 5:38-39). The respected rabbi states that if this movement is of human origin, then it will fail of its own accord. But if it is of God, then nothing can destroy it. To oppose it is to become an enemy of God. This statement poses the choice for the reader of Acts: the new movement is either divine or human in origin. Luke showed his preference even in the way the question is framed. Luke had Gamaliel state the divine option with a first-class condition (*ei* plus a present indicative), a grammatical touch that has Gamaliel present the divine option with more certainty than the other approach.

With this question posed, Luke described a series of events that reveals God's hand in the activity and that indicates the presence of a movement of God. Such activity extended beyond the numerous miraculous signs done in Jesus' name. For example, before Gamaliel's speech, the prison doors had been opened, so that Peter and his company were released (Acts 5:17-20). This act is probably what gave Gamaliel pause. Stephen's reception into heaven at the time of his martyrdom was yet another sign that God was with this movement and believers were on the side of God (7:55-56). God's direction of Philip also makes this point (8:26-29). The reversal of Saul's life vocation from persecutor to persecuted witness for the Lord involved an appearance by Jesus (9:1-31). In fact, it took a second appearance to Ananias to insure that Saul was properly received (9:10-16). God was directing in amazing ways and in surprising directions. The opening up of the door to Gentiles also required a combination of visions, divine activity, and the public bestowal of the Spirit to make sure all saw what God was doing (10:1-11:18). In a very real sense, Luke's argument for the church's direction and activity is very simple. God made us do it. This guidance required engaging in such practices as giving the gospel to Gentiles. It also declared freedom from the law's dietary restrictions. In fact, in some cases when these visions initially came there was resistance (9:12-16; 10:13-16), but God insisted, so the new community responded with obedience.

In the second half of Acts, such direction continues. God directly protected Peter and judged Herod in a picture of how the judgment of God functions (12:1-23). Such direction continues in Paul's ministry. Whether in mission (13:1-3; 16:6-10) or in travel (27:1-28:10), God actively directs and protects His witness. Luke is showing that this new movement is of God; He has a plan. He has watched over His newly forming community and has sovereignly directed its mission, growth, and practice.

In examining how Luke portrayed God and His plan, it is important to see these themes as they are developed in Luke-Acts. Theophilus and others like him could be reassured as they examined what God is doing in Christ (Luke 1:3-4). But details in the basic categories of the plan need examination as well. Who is this Jesus who saves (Christology)? How does He do it? How does one respond to Him (Soteriology)? What institution does God work through? What is that community's structure and task (ecclesiology)? Where is the plan of God headed and how is it structured (eschatology)? This study turns to these questions to fill out the picture of Lucan theology, a picture that focuses on the salvation of a caring, gracious God of design.

Christology

THE PERSON OF CHRIST

From Messiah-Servant-Prophet to Lord. A study of Lucan Christology indicates that Luke consciously revealed who Jesus is with a step-by-step approach. Luke's presentation of Jesus begins mostly in regal and prophetic terms and ends with an emphasis on His lordship. In the infancy section, Jesus is described as Son and as King (Luke 1:31-35). There is some ambiguity in this initial description of Jesus as "Son," since a regal figure could be described as God's "son." In the Old Testament the Davidic successor was said to have God as his Father, as promised in the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:14). The dynastic Davidic ruler inherited the hope of this promise (Ps. 2:7). But Jesus' unique birth by the Spirit makes it clear that "something more" is here, but it is not explicitly clear in this initial context of Luke 1-2 what that "something more" is since the passage emphasizes Jesus as a Davidic, regal figure. Mary and those around her took the promise only in messianic terms. What that "something more" involved became clear as Luke developed his description of Jesus. In short, Luke built his Christology "from the earth up," though in the infancy section, it is suggested that this Child is unique, coming from heaven itself.

Other regal references in Luke 1-2 include the mention of the presence of the "horn of salvation" (*keras sōtērias*) in the house of David (1:69). This title alludes to Psalm 132:17 and brings in the hope of Davidic promise. The picture of the "morning star" that shines in darkness (Luke 1:78-79) also indicates that fulfillment is present (Isa. 9:1-2; 58:8; 59:19; 60:1-2). The grouping of three titles in Luke 2:11—"a Savior," "Christ," "the Lord"—sums up the descriptions in the infancy portrait. Of these titles, only "Lord" is not defined through an appeal to the Old Testament in this introductory section. Luke 2:34-35 pictures Jesus as the one who divides Israel. Here the conceptual imagery comes from Isaiah 8:14. The pain that Jesus' ministry would cause Mary is the first hint of trouble, alluding to His suffering. Jesus would be like a rejected prophet, as well as a rejected messianic King.

The first reference to Jesus' self-understanding came in Luke 2:49. Here Jesus spoke of "my Father's house" (*eis tois tou patros mou*). Jesus' first words about His relationship to God speak of an intimacy that reveals filial and familial self-consciousness. Luke thus showed that Jesus knew He had a special relationship to God. This is Luke's first indication of where things are headed. Important is the fact that this infancy material is only in Luke.

In the baptism of Jesus, regal and servant categories come together as the divine voice spoke about Jesus for the first time (3:22). "You are My Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" refers to Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, bringing together the king and the servant imagery. The prophetic and regal marriage continues in Luke 4:18-19, where Isaiah 61:1-2 and possibly Isaiah 58:6 are cited in another passage that has detail unique to Luke's gospel. Though strictly speaking Isaiah 61 is probably not a "servant song," the prophetic figure in that chapter serves much like the servant in earlier Isaianic passages, so the parallel could be made. The citation pictures Jesus in an anointed prophetic mode, as Luke 4:24-27 makes clear. However, the anointing by the Spirit, which Jesus declared was fulfilled, also alludes back to Jesus' baptism. This anointing was of Jesus as King and Prophet. (In Luke 3:21-22, Ps. 2:7 points to the

King, while Isa. 42:1 looks to the Suffering Servant who declares and brings God's deliverance.) This union maintains the Lucan focus up to this point. The imagery of Luke 4 pictures the Old Testament declaration of Jubilee, a release from debts and a declaration of freedom (Lev. 25:1-12; Deut. 15:2-3). It pictures one released to serve God, because of who Jesus is. He is the center of God's plan.

Jesus is superior to the greatest figure of the old era, John the Baptist (Luke 7:18-35). Jesus is more than a prophet, though that is how the populace viewed Him (9:7-9). He is the Christ (9:20). At His Transfiguration, He was presented, as in His Baptism, as "Son," but He was also called "elect" (the One "whom I have chosen," Luke 9:35). In addition there is the call to hear Him. Here Psalms 2:7; Isaiah 42:1; and Deuteronomy 18:15 come together. Jesus is King, Servant, and Prophet, but not just any prophet. He is the "prophet like Moses," who has ushered in a new era.

In Luke 9-19, predictions of the Son of Man's suffering are evident (9:22, 44; 18:31). But other descriptions of Jesus as the Son of Man also are present (9:58; 11:30; 12:10; 19:10 give descriptions of His present ministry; and 9:26; 12:8, 40; 17:22, 24, 26, 30; 18:8 give descriptions of His ministry when He returns). The title "Son of Man" is also ambiguous in Luke until Jesus used it in Luke 21:27, with clear reference to Daniel 7:13-14. This title pictures the authority He has received from the Father to serve over a kingdom. This position is made clear in the present ministry texts, which state that the Son of Man can forgive sin, and in the texts describing His return to judge. However, that "Son of Man" ministry also involves seeking the lost and suffering rejection, as well as returning to judge the world. The texts on the suffering Son of Man point out that the road for Jesus led to the cross. These images are still rather regal, since they look at rule, but such total authority also suggests something more.

Luke 19-20 include a series of parables in which Jesus is portrayed as "Lord." In these pictures that summarize His ministry, Jesus functions as an intermediary with authority. Jesus receives a kingdom and then grants authority to others (19:11-27). He is heir to the vineyard, "the son" who is slain so that the vineyard goes to others (20:9-19). Jesus' central role is clear in these parables.

The key passages for Lucan Christology come in the middle of his two books as Jesus headed for death followed by resurrection. In Luke 20:41-44 Jesus raised a question (cf. Ps. 110) that stumped the religious leaders. He asked how Messiah can be called David's son, since David himself called Messiah his "Lord"? Jesus did not answer the question. He simply raised the messianic dilemma. The suggestion is that "Lord" is a better title than Davidic son.

The answer began to come in Luke 22:69. Answering the question of whether He is the Christ, Jesus replied using the title "Son of Man." He said "from now on" the Sanhedrin would see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God. This alludes to Psalms 110. The picture is of Jesus seated in authority at God's side, invested as a regal figure and ruling with Him. The implications of this reply are staggering and Jesus' own response led to His being condemned for blasphemy. Jesus was claiming that He could go directly into God's presence and sit and rule with Him at His side, alluding again to Psalms 110. This title of "Lord" was a more important title than Messiah, for it pictured Jesus' total authority and His ability and right to serve as an equal with God the Father.

This emphasis is confirmed in Acts 2. Here as Peter reviewed the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection, he also appealed to Psalm 110 in Acts 2:32-36. Jesus is the Lord at God's right hand. Peter explained how the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus led to His being seated at the right hand of the Father and to the distribution of the Spirit as promised in Joel 2. The citation of Joel alludes to the initial fulfillment of the new covenant and the presence of the new era. Joel urged men to "call on the name of the Lord" (Acts 2:21). The "Lord" to be called on here is Jesus (2:34-38).

In addition, Jesus' position at the right hand of God is an initial fulfillment of a promise made to David that one of his descendants would sit on his throne. Here Peter alluded to Psalm 132:11, which in turn alludes to the promises of 2 Samuel 7 and the Davidic Covenant. In Acts 2, the Psalm 132 allusion leads into the discussion of Psalm 110 about the descendant of David. Peter linked the two psalms in fulfillment. Each of Peter's allusions to these psalms uses the word "sit" (*kathisai* in Acts 2:30 and *kathou* in v. 34). So the two images are one and meet their initial realization in Jesus' resurrection-ascension. Jesus is portrayed as ruling at God's side as the Mediator and intermediary source of divine blessing, an act that is an initial realization of promises made long ago. In Peter's speech the title "Lord" in verse 36 is in the emphatic position. Jesus' authority over salvation is absolute and the title "Lord" is the comprehensive Christological title that summarizes that total authority over salvation's benefits and as the One who rules at God's side.

The significance of Jesus' title of "Lord" appears again in Acts 10:36-42, where Peter made the point that Jesus is Lord over all humanity (Rom. 10:12 is similar in meaning). Since Jesus is Lord over all, Peter could proclaim to Cornelius and other Gentiles that the gospel is available to all. This is one of the most central points in Luke-Acts. Christology is the ground for the scope of the salvation message, and the fact that Jesus is Lord and that He has authority over salvation to distribute its benefits is one of the crucial theological conclusions of Luke's two books. The movement from regal-prophetic categories to the title "Lord" is one of the most basic theological themes in Luke-Acts. It reveals that Jesus, being intimately related to God, functions with a full array of divine prerogatives. In fact, the identity is so strong that one now acts in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus even bears the title "Lord," the title normally used of Yahweh. The exalted position of Jesus can be seen through comparison with Old Testament statements about Yahweh. In the Old Testament, such actions occurred in the name of Yahweh, so the transition to "in the name of Jesus" is significant. To act "in the name" is a major Lucan theme that stresses Jesus' total authority to exercise divine prerogative (Acts 2:38; 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 18, 30; 5:40-41; 8:12, 16; 9:15, 27-28; 10:43, 48; 15:26; 16:18; 19:13, 17; 21:13; 22:16; 26:9). Acts 15:17 speaks of the name of God in a similar way. Jesus' name means that when one deals with Him, that person deals with one who has the authority of God. In short, to deal with Jesus is to deal with God.

Having noted this fundamental Christological progression in Luke-Acts, it is necessary to examine the variety of Christological titles in Luke, since his portrait of Jesus is multifaceted.

THE TITLES OF JESUS

Savior. Though it is popular today to refer to Jesus as Savior (*sōtēr*), Luke rarely used this title. It appears in the infancy summary in [Luke 2:11](#), when the angel announced Jesus' birth. The deliverance alluded to in the title is clarified by the hymns and declarations of the infancy material. That deliverance is both national and spiritual ([1:70-75, 77](#); [2:30-32](#)).

A similar picture is seen in [Acts 5:31](#) and [13:23-25](#), passages that present Jesus as the Savior of Israel. Jesus is the exalted Savior lifted up to the right hand of God to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. He is the Savior promised to David, one who is his descendant and to whom John the Baptist pointed ([Luke 3:15-18](#)). For Luke, Jesus is the Savior and the Christ, the One to come who brought the Spirit. So for Luke the title Savior has particular reference to God's whole program of promised deliverance, as well as to Israel, to exaltation, to forgiveness, and to the offer of the Spirit.

Christ. Though the title "Lord" points up Jesus' ultimate authority as ruler, "Christ" (*christos*) is Luke's most frequent title for Jesus and serves as his foundation point in building his "from the earth up" Christology. The title "Christ" refers to Jesus as the promised Anointed One ("Messiah" in Hebrew means "Anointed One"). The first use of the title in Luke is in the angelic confession ([Luke 2:11](#)), and its force is clearly defined in Luke by the description of Jesus' role in [1:31-35](#). Here is a regal deliverance figure promised to David. The hope He stirs for the redemption of the nation was noted by Simeon ([2:26](#)).

John the Baptist refused the title for himself and spoke of One who would come after him ([3:15-16](#)). The promise that would reveal His presence is the distribution of the Spirit. A key usage of the word "Christ," unique to Luke, occurs in [Luke 4:41](#). Demons confessed that Jesus is the Son of God, and then Luke explained that they "knew that He was the Christ." In this way Luke shows Jesus' sonship is linked to the promise of the Messiah. "Christ" was also the title used by Peter in his confession ([9:20](#)). The role the title plays in this scene shows its foundational character, since Jesus revealed more of God's plan after this confession. As already noted, the issue of Jesus' identity as Christ was at the center of a key question asked by the Jewish leaders and was a key issue at Jesus' trial ([22:67](#)). The issue of Jesus as Christ the King continued to be central in His movement toward crucifixion ([23:2, 35, 39](#)). In reflecting on the resurrection, Luke made the point (in material unique to him) that Christ's suffering was necessary and was foretold ([24:26, 46](#)). In this concept of a suffering messiah, the Christian portrait of Messiah clashed with Jewish expectation. To Jews, a suffering messiah was incongruous, an impossibility. They thought that the nation might suffer, but not their Deliverer. However, His suffering and death make it possible for Him to purchase a people who will serve the Lord ([Acts 20:28](#) does not use the term "Christ," but does use the image of purchase). Then being exalted as Christ, He can bring both deliverance and forgiveness of sins.

In the book of Acts a number of things are said to happen "in the name of Christ": baptism ([2:38](#)), salvation ([4:10](#)), healing ([9:34](#)), peace ([10:36](#)), baptism of the Spirit ([10:48](#)), risking of life ([15:26](#)), and exorcism ([16:18](#)). Several things were predicted about the "Christ": resurrection ([2:31](#)), suffering ([3:18](#); [17:3](#); [26:23](#)), and being

appointed for humankind (3:20). Christ was the subject of the apostles' preaching (5:42; 8:5; 9:22; 17:3; 18:5; 28:31). Because of all He is and all He does, He is to be the object of trust (24:24).

Son of David. This title is another way of presenting Jesus as a regal authority. This emphasis is also part of the Christological foundation Luke presented in the infancy material. Jesus' connection to David was noted numerous times (Luke 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4, 11). Of these passages, the most descriptive ones are 1:32, 69. Here one reads of Jesus occupying the throne of David and emerging from David's house to rule and deliver. When blind Bartimaeus asked for healing, he addressed Jesus as Son of David (18:38-39). The relationship between a regal role and healing is not clear, though some have suggested that in Judaism Solomon was believed to have possessed miraculous skill, as well as wisdom. The question Jesus raised about David's Son in 20:41-44 focused on His messianic connection.

In Acts 2:25-31 Peter made the point that David as a prophet anticipated that his son would be resurrected (Ps. 16:8-11). Peter used this passage to explain that Jesus' resurrection was a part of God's promise. Acts 13:22-23 also refers to the promise to Israel of a Savior from David's lineage. Acts 13:34 added a note, citing the promise of Isaiah 55:3. The promises given to David are also promises to the nation Israel and to Paul's audience, since Paul noted that David's "holy and sure blessings" belong to the nation. In Paul's exposition that followed, part of the holy things promised through the Messiah were the forgiveness of sins and justification. So part of the promises to David are inaugurated through Jesus' resurrection.

The final passage relating to David is Acts 15:16, which refers to the promise of the rebuilt Davidic booth made in Amos 9:11. Jesus' resurrection and recent events in the church showed that God was rebuilding the Davidic house. So James argued that Gentile involvement in that process should not surprise anyone. It was a part of the promise as well. Thus the title "Son of David" is a major link in the chain that points to God's completing His promise.

Son of God and King. Another title of Jesus used by Luke is "Son of God" (*ho huios tou theou*). This full form rarely appears. As noted earlier, the title is used in Luke 1:35 in association with the Virgin Birth. The term is a foretaste of Luke's high Christology, but its sense is so ambiguous in this initial setting that it is difficult to express its clear intent without the help of Luke's later development. The title is used by Satan at the temptations as the claimed title of Jesus ("If you are the Son of God," 4:3, 9). A significant use of the title appears in 4:41, where it is linked to and explained by the title "Christ." The linkage shows that the title does have regal overtones for Luke. Demons called Him the "Son of the Most High God" (8:28). The title seems predominant when spiritual beings addressed Jesus. The use acknowledges that Jesus possesses a high level of authority. "Son of God" was a position in dispute at Jesus' trial, as seen in Luke 22:70.

The use of the simple title "Son" is more complex. Sonship is associated with the Virgin Birth in Luke 1:31-32, expressing a unique origin of the "Son." Jesus spoke of God as His Father (2:49). Again "Son" suggests a unique relationship to God. "Son" is the title in the heavenly voice at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration (3:22; 9:35). These are the only occurrences of this title in the gospel of Luke.

Acts 9:20 is the only place where the full title appears in Acts. Early in Luke the term "Son" may be ambiguous as to whether it stresses a regal position or unique Sonship, but in Acts it clearly describes the exalted Messiah who sits next to God the Father with total authority. As such, it is a title of high Christology. This is confirmed by the reference to Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33. This allusion looks back to the Father's voice at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration. An examination of Luke's two volumes shows that although "Son of God" is not used frequently in Luke, the title did ultimately express Jesus' unique relationship to God the Father, though in some contexts it might have been simply another way of saying Jesus is the King or the Christ.

Jesus was called the "King" (*ho basileus*) at the time of His triumphal entry (Luke 19:38, which alludes to Ps. 118:26). "King" is the title discussed in the legal proceedings surrounding Jesus' trial before Pilate (Luke 23:3: "Are you the King of the Jews?") and in connection with His death (vv. 37-38). One thief recognized he was dying with a king, for he asked to come into Jesus' kingdom (v. 42) and was promised paradise that day. Some Jews in Thessalonica accused Christians by saying the believers called Jesus a king (Acts 17:7).

Prophet. In the midst of the messianic Christology, one should be careful not to miss Luke's focus on Jesus as prophet (*prophētēs*). The outstanding example of this "submerged" category is Luke 4:16-30. Here Jesus said He fulfilled Isaiah 61:1-2a, in which Isaiah described a prophet who would be anointed by God and would bring the message of hope to God's people. However, Jesus is more than a prophet, for He brings the salvation He proclaims. Jesus' prophetic function receives confirmation in Luke 4:24, when He said that a prophet is without honor in his own country. In addition, the comparison to the period of Elijah and Elisha also makes the prophetic connection clear (Luke 4:25-27).

Much popular speculation about Jesus centered in a prophetic confession. Luke 9:7-9, 19 shows the strength of such speculation, as did the popular reaction to Jesus' raising the son of the widow of Nain ("A great prophet has appeared among us," 7:16). For many, Jesus was only a prophet. But even that was doubted by the Jewish leaders as His associations led them to question that Jesus held that position (v. 39). Luke 7:36-50 is significant because the leaders claimed Jesus' willingness to receive anointing from a woman of questionable reputation showed He was not a prophet. And yet, as a prophet, He knew all the while what they were thinking! This point of irony, expressed with literary flair, affirms that Jesus is a prophet.

Disappointed that Jesus had been crucified, one of the Emmaus followers called Jesus a "prophet powerful in word and deed" (24:19). These men also had hoped Jesus would redeem Israel (v. 21). Luke loved to place Prophet-Redeemer themes side by side. Jesus was both, not one or the other.

The prophetic description of Jesus received more emphasis as the narrative moves on. Luke 9:35 ("Listen to him") points to Jesus as the "prophet like Moses" by alluding to Deuteronomy 18:15. The disciples needed to hear what Jesus said, since He is the bearer of a New Way, as was Moses. In particular, the message of the Messiah's suffering needs to be heard (9:43-45). The title "prophet like Moses" indicates that Jesus not only brought the message of God but also introduced a new era. These descriptions of Jesus receive attention in Acts 3:22-23 and 7:37.

One other point emerges from the prophetic theme. As a prophet, Jesus shared the fate of earlier prophets, namely, national rejection. Luke 13:33 brings this point out explicitly, and it is implicit in 11:47-51. It is particularly seen in the teaching of His journey toward Jerusalem (Luke 9-19), when Jesus as a prophet, rebuked the Jewish leaders and called disciples to righteousness. Many of the passages in Luke 9-14 are strong prophetic rebukes of current religious practice. There is a piety that is false and dishonoring to God, no matter how good it may seem outwardly. Such hypocrisy received stronger judgment in this section than did blatant sin, possibly because hypocrisy is deception. Luke 11:39-52 presents Jesus at His prophetic best.

Son of Man. This key title (*ho huios tou anthrōpou*) is the way Jesus preferred to speak of Himself. Late in the gospel (21:27), Jesus indicated that "the Son of Man" alludes to the authoritative figure of Daniel 7:13-14, who received authority from the Ancient of Days over the kingdom. In Daniel, the term is not a title but a description, "one like a son of man," that is, a human. The title "Son of Man" is prevalent in all three gospels. Though Mark emphasized the suffering Servant, Luke's treatment is divided between uses that describe Jesus' current ministry, suffering, and return.

As the "Son of Man," Jesus has a wide variety of ministries. He has authority to forgive sins, a claim that stirred much reaction, since in the Jewish view only God could do that (Luke 5:24). This claim shows the extent of the authority suggested in the title. He is Lord of the Sabbath (6:5). Jesus recognized that some will be hated for the Son of Man's sake (v. 22). Though Jesus has authority, some reject Him. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, an allusion to His open lifestyle and particularly to His associating with tax collectors and sinners, another area where he differed from the leaders, who tended to be separatistic (7:24). Rejection again is the note when Jesus lamented that the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head (9:58). Because of His rejection, it is hard to follow in the footsteps of the Son of Man. In Luke 11:29-31, the Son of Man gave no sign to that generation except that of Jonah. Verse 32 explains that this sign is the message to repent, not of Jesus' resurrection, for it was Jonah's preaching in Nineveh to which Jesus drew attention. Men may speak against the Son of Man, but if they speak against the Holy Spirit, that is, reject the Spirit's testimony about Jesus, they cannot be forgiven (12:10). The mission of the Son of Man is to seek and save the lost (19:10).

Most of the Son of Man sayings pertaining to His suffering are predictions or point to the necessity of His suffering (9:22, 44; 18:31; 22:22; and 24:7, a passage unique to Luke, that notes the fulfillment did come). Jesus added tension to the point of Judas's betrayal by noting the disciple betrayed the Son of Man with a kiss (22:48). Here the hypocrisy of the disciple is contrasted to the submission of the Son to His calling, despite His high position. Luke 22:69 affirms that the result of Jesus' suffering is His glorification: "From now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." Only Luke, among the Synoptic Gospels, omitted the reference to Jesus' coming back in the clouds; his focus was on Jesus' current authority.

The apocalyptic Son of Man is a figure with great authority who judges. He will be ashamed of those who are ashamed of Him (9:26). Those who confess Him, He will confess before the angels (12:8). He will come when He is not expected (v. 40). Luke 17 includes several facts about His return. Many long to see His days (v. 22), yet when He comes it will be like lightning and the judgment in the days of Noah (vv. 24, 26).

When He is revealed, that is, when He returns, He will judge (v. 30). Later Jesus asked whether the Son of Man will find faith on earth when He returns (18:8). Will people continue to wait for His return? Luke 21:27 notes Jesus will ride the clouds as He returns (cf. Dan. 7:13-14), a figure of speech that was an Old Testament picture of deity (Ex. 34:5; 14:20; Num. 10:34; Ps. 104:3). People are to watch so that they have the strength to stand before the Son in that day (Luke 21:36).

When Stephen was martyred, he saw Jesus, standing as the Son of Man to receive him (Acts 7:56). Here Jesus, functioning as Judge, welcomed Stephen into heaven, showing that despite earthly rejection, Stephen was honored in heaven. The Son of Man for Luke is a title that allowed Jesus to describe Himself, since only He used the title. Included in the title is authority, rejection, and reign.

Lord. The pivotal role of the key title "Lord" (*kyrios*) has received attention already. As the title of Jesus, the term is much more prevalent in Acts than in Luke. There are numerous uses of the term "Lord" in the gospel of Luke, but they are used as a title of respect to one who is viewed as socially superior, much as people today use the word "Sir." In everyday Greek usage the title often referred to a master or to a leader who had authority over another. The Christological use of the title first appears in Luke 2:11 and reappears in 24:3. Its use is ambiguous in certain gospel texts like Luke 5:8, where Peter distinguished himself from the righteousness of Jesus.

The force of the title is made clear in Acts 2:21 when Peter cited Joel 2:32, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." In that Old Testament passage "Lord" translates the Hebrew "Yahweh." The call was the cry of one needing God to deliver him from peril, namely, the day of the Lord. In Acts 2:36-39, Peter made the point that Jesus is the Lord to whom one calls. So "Lord" refers to Jesus' authority. Jesus resurrection-ascension, revealed in Acts 2:30-33, testifies to His lordship. The essence of Jesus' lordship is His authority over salvation and the right to distribute its benefits. He also has such authority over people of all races (Acts 10:35-36).

The centrality of the title becomes clear when one sees how many verses speak of people believing in the Lord (Acts 5:14; 9:42; 16:30-31; 18:8; 20:21). These texts show the title was appropriate to confess in response to the gospel, whether one was a Jew or a Gentile. The confession recognized Jesus' right to distribute the benefits of salvation, His authority over them, and His authority over humanity. Jesus is the one with authority over salvation, who is worthy to receive honor and to be followed. To come to God, a person must come through Jesus (Acts 4:10 says the same thing, while not using this title).

Servant. Another title that Luke used with interesting variation is "servant" (*pais*). Only in Acts did Luke use this term to refer to Jesus. These involve allusions to the servant passages in Isaiah. But before considering those passages in Acts, two other occurrences of the term are significant. In Luke 1:54 Israel is called God's servant. Having Old Testament precedent (Isa. 49:3), this points to the special role Israel had as an object of God's grace and as His representative. God was helping His servant Israel by bringing justice to His people (Luke 1:52-53) and by being merciful (vv. 54-55). In Luke 1:69, Zechariah called David God's servant for similar reasons. He was God's regal representative ruling over His people, and he was the recipient of God's promises. Out of the lineage of this servant, the promised Deliverer came.

Luke presented Jesus as the glorified Servant, not the suffering Servant. Jesus is God's Servant glorified (Acts 3:13) and exalted (v. 26). This is the emphasis in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 as well. For Luke, the fact that Jesus was vindicated and exalted to rule was as important as the fact that He suffered. What good is His death without His exaltation? Nonetheless, Jesus as the rejected Servant is also a part of this theme. Luke 22:37 cites Isaiah 53:12, where it is noted that Jesus' death must be fulfilled, as Isaiah declared that Jesus would "be numbered with the lawless." The title "your holy Servant Jesus" in Acts 4:27 and the allusion to Isaiah 53 in Acts 8:32-33 refer to Jesus' rejection. Jesus suffered as the Servant. Acts 4:30 simply notes that "your holy Servant Jesus" performed healing and signs through His disciples. This corporate identity with Jesus is also brought out in 13:47 where servant imagery from Isaiah 49:6 was applied to Paul and Barnabas. They were a light to the nations to "bring salvation to the ends of the earth." The mission of the Servant, Jesus Christ, is the mission of His servants (cf. Luke 2:30 about Jesus). They are to be one in their goals.

Some observe that it is significant that the idea of substitutionary imagery from Isaiah 53 was not applied directly by Luke to Jesus. This is really an insignificant complaint. What Luke was stressing is the person of salvation more than the means of salvation. Luke was certainly aware of Jesus' substitutionary death (Luke 22:19; Acts 20:28), but he did not highlight it. Preferring to stress the position and person of Jesus, Luke did not detail the means of His work as much as Paul did. The two emphases show how various parts of the New Testament message supplement each other.

Less frequently used titles. Other titles of Jesus appear in Luke-Acts with less frequency. Some refer to His authority. For example, Peter spoke of Jesus as the "Prince" or "Leader" (*archēgos*, Acts 5:31). This depicts a royal figure who leads the way for His people in redeeming them. The redemptive emphasis is seen in its use alongside the title "Savior" in the same verse. The demons confessed that Jesus is "the Holy One of God" (*ho hagios tou theou*, Luke 4:34). These spiritual beings were silenced by Jesus, who had authority over them. (A similar title was used in Acts 3:14-15.) Jesus was called a "judge" in Acts 10:42 and 17:31. Another title of respect is "Master" (*epistatēs*) used in Luke 5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49; 17:13. This title indicates little more than that Jesus was held in high regard.

A centurion referred to Jesus' innocence by affirming that He was "a righteous [*dikaios*] man" (Luke 23:47). In Acts 4:11 Peter spoke of Jesus as the "rejected stone" (*ho lithos ho exouthenētheis*), an allusion to Psalms 118:22.

Still another title referred to Jesus' role as instructor. Twelve times He was called "Teacher" (*ho didaskalos*, Luke 7:40; 9:38; 10:25; 11:45; 12:13; 18:18; 19:39; 20:21, 28, 39; 21:7; 22:11). This title is the most popular title used by the scribes and Pharisees for Jesus, though others also used it occasionally. It described Jesus as a "rabbi," at least of sorts, since He did not receive official training.

In summary, Luke used numerous titles to describe Jesus. Most suggested His authority or His role as the promised regal Messiah. He also exercised a prophetic role. In addition, some day He will return and judge. He is at the center of God's plan. For Luke, the person of Jesus is as crucial as His work. Because of who Jesus is, He is able to save, and He is worthy of people's trust. Because of who Jesus is, one must respond to Him. For not only is He a prophet and the Messiah, but also He will return to judge

all as they stand before Him. In fact, even now He sits at the right hand of God exercising authority and distributing the benefits of salvation, even the Spirit of God, to those who call on Him for salvation. In Luke, when a person responded to Jesus, it is more to who Jesus is than to what He has done. What Jesus does is also of importance to Luke, but Luke's priorities are shown by how little time he spent explaining how Jesus saves when the gospel is given. Nonetheless, an examination of Jesus' work reveals the ground of human salvation.

THE WORK OF JESUS

Earthly ministry. Much of Jesus' ministry revolved around teaching and miracles. Several summaries in Luke's gospel, as well as a major summary in Acts, point up this fact (Luke 4:15, 31-32, 44; 6:17-19; 7:22; Acts 10:36-38). In particular, Jesus' teaching often included parables. The gospel of Luke has a concentration of parables in the "journey section" (Luke 9:51-19:44). There are thirty-five parables or pictorial aphorisms in Luke, with nineteen of them unique to his gospel.

Jesus' miracles served as signs that attested to God's vindication of Jesus' identity and claims (Acts 2:22; 10:38). When John the Baptist's disciples asked Jesus if He was "the one who was to come" (Luke 7:20), an allusion to His messianic position, He pointed to a series of miracles (v. 22) that allude to Old Testament promises of what would happen in the eschaton (Isa. 29:18-19; 35:5; 42:6; 61:1). His reply indicated that His healing ministry marked the beginning of the eschaton. Such activity also depicted the fall of Satan, as indicated in Luke 10:18 and 11:14-23. This event indicates that Jesus' coming impacts heavenly realities and also portrays the beginning of the eschaton. The new era is a special era for Luke, and Jesus' work is particularly unique.

The message of Jesus has two parts: a message of hope and a call to a life of ethical honor before God. Luke 4:16-30, which summarizes His message of hope, is a representative presentation of Jesus' preaching. Luke's record here includes more than is found in the other Gospels (cf. Mark 6:1-6). He declares that the time of Jubilee is present and that the Anointed One has appeared. Jesus was commissioned to preach to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, give sight to the blind, release the oppressed, and offer forgiveness. "The poor" refers especially to the materially impoverished (cf. 1:53; 6:24), as well as to the spiritually poor. Luke established such a spiritual element in the definition when he referred to the humble in the context of covenant promise, who are exalted, while the proud are brought down (1:49-54). Luke's concern for such material categories is seen in Luke 6:20-26 (1 Cor. 1:26-29 is similar). This group seems to have been the most responsive to Jesus. He said the message is for them. Such people understand what it is to stand humbly before God.

The Sermon on the Plain summarizes Jesus' ethical message (Luke 6:20-49). The sermon closely parallels the Matthean Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), except that Luke omitted those elements that focused on Jewish issues. Luke's including the Sermon in a form that relates to Gentiles shows the message is timeless. The Beatitudes (Luke 6:20-22) stress the present situation of His disciples: poor, hungry, weeping now, and rejected. But all will be changed later (vv. 23-26). The ethic of love (vv. 27-36) is the cornerstone of the community's ethic, both as individuals and as a body. Jesus' new commandment to "love one another" is similar in force (John 13:34). Jesus' disciples are to display a slowness to judge and an awareness of one's own faults (Luke 6:37-42).

A person's character is reflected in his or her actions, revealing the character of the heart, just as fruit reveals the nature of the tree (vv. 43-46). Foolishness is a failure to respond to Jesus' teaching, while wisdom means responding to it (vv. 47-49).

Part of Jesus' work is to reveal the way to God (4:17-19) and the will of God (6:20-49), but more detail comes from several of Jesus' parables. Some parables explain why Jesus spent time with tax collectors and sinners (15:1-32). God is committed to finding the lost. The way to God is open to all, but the message must go out so that all can hear. When Jesus associated with social outcasts, the Pharisees repeatedly grumbled at these relationships (5:27-32; 7:36-39; 15:2-3). The parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son (chap. 15) were Jesus' apologetic for spending time with such people. His commitment and labor reflected the love of God in seeking out the lost. This series of three parables is unique to Luke's gospel.

Other parables outline God's plan and the coming change of focus from Israel to the Gentiles because of rejection by the nation Israel. The parable of the tenants (20:9-18) overviews the rejection of God's messengers all the way back to the Old Testament prophets. However, the slaying of the Son caused the owner to give the vineyard to others. The rejected stone is the head stone, and those on whom it falls are crushed (Ps. 118:22; Isa. 8:14; Dan. 2:34, 44). Everyone knew against whom Jesus spoke when He made that remark.

Other passages deal with key elements in the will of God and in discipleship. Another uniquely Lucan parable, the parable of the rich fool (12:13-21), teaches that Jesus' followers should avoid being overly dependent on wealth. At least twice Jesus stressed the importance of prayer for His disciples (11:1-13; 18:1-8). He often spoke of the crucial need for faithfulness among those who await His return (12:35-48; 19:11-27). Above all, Jesus made it clear that discipleship is a total commitment of one's life and self to God. In terms of God's expectation and will, there is no minimal discipleship; what He desires is everything (9:23-26, 57-62; 14:25-33). In short, one is to love God with everything he or she has. Such a focus means His followers will also love their neighbor (10:27-28).

The Cross. Alongside Jesus' teaching, there stands His work on the Cross. Often this is the only thing people consider when they speak of Jesus' work. It also has an important role for Luke, though he did not give it the detailed attention Paul did.

Luke stressed that Jesus is the "righteous Sufferer *par excellence*." This is indicated by allusions to the Psalter in Luke 23, where psalms of lament about suffering Old Testament saints are applied to Jesus. He fit this pattern of suffering and fulfilled it (Luke 23:34-36, 46 allude to Pss. 22:18; 31:5). All through this chapter Luke stressed that Jesus is innocent (Luke 23:4, 14-15, 20, 22, 47). Luke 23:47 is the climactic declaration that Jesus suffered innocently in that He suffered as a "righteous [*dikaios*] Man."

Jesus' righteous suffering is also a major theme in the apostles' speeches in Acts. The sufferer is vindicated, according to Acts 2:23-24, since God raised Him from the dead and death could not hold Him (Pss. 18:4-5; 116:3-4). Other Lucan passages repeat this theme (Acts 4:10; 5:30). Acts 3:14-15 makes the point that He is "the Holy and Righteous One." Jesus was rejected and that is clearly shown by the fact that His death

occurred "on a tree" ([5:30](#); [10:39](#); [13:29](#)), a picture of rejection. In [13:29](#) the reference to the tree alludes to the cursed death described in [Deuteronomy 21:23](#) (cf. [Gal. 3:13](#)).

Two passages—[Luke 22:20](#) and [Acts 20:28](#)—speak of Jesus' death in terms similar to Paul's. At the Last Supper Jesus shared a cup that commemorated "the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you" ([Luke 22:20](#), accepting the longer reading of this verse). Here several ideas come together. Jesus' death inaugurated the benefits of the new covenant. Jesus died for the benefit of His disciples. His death cleared the way for people to be rightly related to God, a relationship in which God also pours His Spirit on them. Luke later alluded to this provision of the Holy Spirit as the "promise of the Father" ([24:49](#); [Acts 1:5](#)). Jesus' death opens the door to many benefits to the one who comes to Him.

The second key text is [Acts 20:28](#). [Luke 22:20](#) looked forward to the Cross, whereas [Acts 20:28](#) looks back. The church has been purchased with Jesus' blood. Jesus is again portrayed as a sacrifice whose death made possible the new community, "the church of God." The Lucan treatment of the Cross does not emphasize how the Cross provides forgiveness. Luke simply pointed repeatedly that the Cross has made it possible for humans to be related to God, since death did not end the story. After death, came vindication in His resurrection. Some have said that Paul saw "the Christ of the Cross," whereas Luke saw "the Christ of glory." Once again, the authors of Scripture complemented each another.

Resurrection-Ascension. Jesus' resurrection receives strong emphasis in Luke -Acts. In addition, many of the speeches of Acts center on the significance of the Ascension. Luke is the only New Testament author to describe the Ascension. When he discussed it, he was also pointing up the significance of His resurrection, which is why we have hyphenated the two events. For Luke they are distinct, but linked. Jesus' reception into heaven to the right hand of God had a great impact on Luke's view of His work. Numerous passages in Acts indicate that the Resurrection indicates vindication ([2:23-24](#); [3:14-15](#); [4:10-12](#); [5:30](#); [17:31](#)). Also, His resurrection resulted in His being positioned at God's right hand, so He could pour out the Holy Spirit and exercise authority ([2:30-34](#)). As already noted, Jesus' resurrection is the basis on which His disciples can minister in His name. Jesus remains in heaven until His return ([3:21](#)). But when He returns, He will rule on earth and judge all humanity ([3:20-21](#); [17:30-31](#)).

A dead Savior is no savior at all. If Jesus were still in a grave, He could do no one any good. But raised and ascended to the side of the Father, Jesus is able to empower His children and enable His church. He reigns, seeing all that everyone does and thinks. For Luke the death and resurrection of Jesus are important, but more important is His reign, both presently and in the age to come. For Luke, Jesus is not passively sitting in heaven awaiting His return; He lives and rules in anticipation of a more visible rule to come. All are and will be subject to Him.

The two-stage kingdom reign of Jesus. It is impossible to consider the work of Jesus without considering His rule. The basic outline of Jesus' rule has been discussed in relation to Luke's concept of the kingdom. Under the current heading, more specifics can be noted. The rule of Jesus is reflected in Luke's writing by what is done "in His name" or "through Jesus." To do something "in Jesus' name" is to do it in His authority,

that is, in view of the fact that He reigns. Such texts are limited to Acts, which shows how important a turning point His resurrection was.

Numerous passages speak of salvation or forgiveness of sins in His name (Acts 2:21 [this refers to Jesus as is seen in v. 38]; 4:12; 10:43). Others speak of baptism in Jesus' name (2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). These references to water baptism refer to the public confession of Jesus that expresses concretely the presence of inner faith in Christ. Water baptism pictures the spiritual washing that comes from forgiveness as well as the coming of the Spirit. This public identification with Jesus pictured God's saving act and showed that the one who was baptized acknowledged what God had done in Jesus. In the first century, the rite of baptism and what it represented are seen as a unit and are interchangeable (1 Peter 3:21-22 is similar in perspective and shows how Peter saw this connection). A third group of passages speak of healing done in Jesus' name (Acts 3:6, 16; 4:9-10), and a fourth group refers to signs and wonders through His name (4:30). Some preached in His name (8:12) or spoke boldly in His name (9:27-28).

Early in Acts, healing and other acts of ministry were the focus. But later the emphasis was on Jesus' followers suffering shame and imprisonment in or for His name (5:41; 9:14, 16; 15:26; 21:13). This suffering referred not to Jesus' activity, but to the consequences of identifying with Him in a world that rejects Him. Also 15:14 does not mention Jesus, but the benefits of identifying with Him are noted. The concept that the Gentiles are "a people for His name" (15:14 KJV), where His name describes God the Father (cf. v. 17), shows that Jesus gives anyone who believes access to the Father. Jesus is active in dispensing the benefits of salvation and is involved in the rites where identification with Him is demonstrated. The Spirit and forgiveness are the preeminent gifts Luke mentioned as a result of one's coming to the Father through Jesus.

As noted earlier in the discussion on the kingdom, Jesus' future rule is described primarily in terms of His work as judge, when He returns to gather His people (Luke 17:22-37; 21:5-36; Acts 1:11; 3:19-20; 10:42; 17:31). Luke did not give much detail about God's future program other than to make one very important note that Jesus will fulfill the rest of the Old Testament promise about the restoration of all things at that time (Acts 3:20-21).

Soteriology

Soteriology is a vast field in Luke's writings. In discussing salvation, two categories are basic. "Objective salvation" refers to what God has done, and "subjective salvation" refers to the responses of people that permit them to share in the benefits God has provided. Objective salvation involves God's work, but related to salvation is the delivery of the message about that work. This preaching reveals salvation's content. So this section of the chapter will first examine the act of proclaiming the good news, giving attention to the scope of salvation, including both Jews and Gentiles and other specially mentioned groups. Also requiring attention is the means by which God supported the message and gave it authentication. With such background in place, the treatment of objective salvation follows. Then we will examine subjective salvation, the response to the message God desires. The benefits received in salvation will be discussed next, followed by a consideration of some tangential issues in Soteriology (e.g., How does the salvation message relate to promise? What is Luke's view of the law?).

THE ACT OF PROCLAIMING GOOD NEWS

The gospel. In Acts the word gospel (*euangelion*) is used only twice. Peter noted that the "message of the gospel" went to the Gentiles through him (15:7). Acts 10:34-43 is a good example of the message Peter preached. Paul said that his life was given over for the testimony of "the gospel of God's grace" (20:24).

The use of the verb (*euangelizō*) is more plentiful in Luke-Acts than elsewhere in the New Testament. Angelic announcements of John's and Jesus' births were said to be "good news" (Luke 1:19; 2:10). John's message was the preaching of good news (3:18). This word is especially used of Jesus' message to the poor (4:18; 7:22), His preaching the message of the kingdom (4:43; 8:1; 16:16), or preaching the gospel (9:6; 20:1).

In Acts the content of the good news is more specific. The apostles proclaimed the message that "Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 5:42). Other verses also point out that Jesus was the focus of the apostles' preaching (8:35; 10:36; 11:20; 17:18). Some passages call this message the preaching of the Word (8:4; 15:35), while others refer to the promise of the fathers (13:32). Still another speaks simply of the kingdom and Jesus (8:12). However, the most common expression is simply to preach the gospel (8:25, 40; 14:7, 21; 16:10).

According to Acts 14:15 Barnabas and Paul said that the gospel meant turning from "worthless things," idols, "to the living God who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them." The gospel is an invitation to come to the living Creator God and enter into a dependent relationship with Him. At the center of the gospel stands the person and work of Jesus. He is the promised one, the Christ. The promise of the fathers finds fulfillment in Him. The kingdom is bound up with Him. Peace is through Him. Through a myriad of equally valid images, the gospel points to Jesus as people are invited to come to know God through forgiveness. This call to be related to God through Christ summarizes the gospel as presented in Luke's writings. It is the offer of forgiveness and then life.

Preaching. The noun "preaching" (*kerygma*) is rare, appearing in Luke's writings only in Luke 11:32, where the message of repentance Jonah preached is compared to Jesus' message. The verb "to preach" (*kērussō*) is more frequent. John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance (3:3). Jesus preached in the synagogue about the arrival of the "acceptable year of the Lord," a picture of forgiveness made through His appeal to the Old Testament image of Jubilee (4:18-19; Lev. 25, esp. v. 10). Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom in the synagogues of Judea (vv. 43-44; 8:1; 4:18-30 is a good example). The disciples also preached the kingdom (9:2). On occasion, the verb *kērussō* is used to describe how others told people about what Jesus had done for them (8:39). As such, the term means the same as giving testimony. Jesus also noted that a day will come when everything people said secretly will be preached from the rooftops (12:3). This does not refer to the preaching of salvation, but to judgment in the eschaton.

In Acts, Christ is the one preached (8:5; 9:20, the "Son of God"; 10:36-39, in a ministry summary). Acts 10:42-43 gives a very significant summary of the apostles' preaching. As witnesses they were commissioned to testify that Jesus is the One God ordained to judge the living and the dead. To Jesus all the prophets bear witness that "everyone

who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (10:43). Both apostolic witness and Old Testament prophetic witness testify to Jesus.

A nonsoteriological use of *kērussō* is in 15:21, which refers to the fact that Moses was being preached every Sabbath in the synagogues. And, of course, Paul presented Jesus or the kingdom (19:13; 20:25; 28:31). As Luke-Acts progresses, the message of salvation became more focused on Him than on anything else.

Teaching. Jesus is described as one whose teaching (*didachē*) brought astonishment because of its authority (Luke 4:32). Of course illustrations of His teaching are seen all through the gospel of Luke. He taught with sayings, parables, and prophetic actions, along with a few major discourses (4:16-30; 6:20-49; 11:37-52; 15:1-32; 17:20-37; 21:5-36; 22:14-38). The topics range from salvation out of sin to life with God, from Jesus' current ministry to His return. Jews who were saved on the day of Pentecost followed in the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42). The consternation of the Jewish leadership (5:28) and the astonishment of the synagogue audiences (13:12) greeted the apostolic message as well. In Athens, Paul's message of the resurrection was called a "new teaching" (17:19).

Like the cognate noun *didachē*, the verb *didaskō* is used by Luke to summarize Jesus' and the apostles' teaching. Jesus taught in the synagogues on the Sabbath; in public settings as on a boat by the shore, in towns and villages; and in the temple (Luke 4:15, 30; 5:3, 17; 6:6; 13:10, 22, 26; 19:47; 20:1; 21:37). Luke was particularly fond of Jesus' teaching at meals (5:29; 7:36; 9:16; 11:37; 12:37; 13:29; 14:1, 8-9; 22:14; 24:30). Only once was teaching requested of Jesus, when His disciples asked Him to teach them about prayer (11:1). Jesus' opponents acknowledged that He is a teacher, while accusing Him of stirring up Judea and Galilee (20:21; 23:5). He told His disciples that the Spirit would teach them what to say when they faced persecution (12:12).

In Acts the emphasis on teaching sometimes looked back at Jesus the teacher (Acts 1:1). The apostles taught the people about the Resurrection and the name of Jesus, which annoyed the authorities (4:2, 18; 5:21, 25, 28, 42). Barnabas and Saul taught the disciples in Antioch, where disciples were first called Christians (11:26; 15:35). Some Judaizers were wrongly teaching that Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised (15:1). Paul taught in various locales, including Corinth (18:11) and Ephesus (v. 25). In Ephesus he taught "the way of the Lord" (v. 25) and to the Ephesian elders he summarized his teaching of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus (20:20). Paul's opponents charged him with teaching against the people and Moses (21:21, 28). Acts closes with Paul teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ (28:31).

Teaching in Luke-Acts is seen as a broad term encompassing much more than the offer of the gospel, whereas preaching in Luke-Acts tends to be limited to the salvation message. As Luke-Acts progressed, Luke's presentation of the gospel message became more focused on Jesus. That message is still one message and one hope, because of its link to God's promise, but the center of the promise residing in Jesus emerged most clearly after His resurrection.

THE SCOPE OF SALVATION

The promise for Jews and Gentiles. Luke emphasized that what Jesus provided is available to all people. This point gradually emerges in the infancy narrative's overview of salvation. Zechariah spoke of Jesus, the "horn" in David's house ([Luke 1:69](#)), as a rising light ([Num. 24:17](#); [Isa. 9:2-7](#)) that would shine on those who sit in darkness and death ([Luke 1:78-79](#)). Such activity is a fulfillment of God's promises. Angels told the shepherds that Jesus came to bring peace on earth for all those who are the object of God's good pleasure ([2:14](#)). Not every person automatically receives these benefits, but God in Jesus makes them available to those who respond and are a part of His special people. The scope of this provision became clearer still in [2:30-32](#), where Jesus is said to be a light for revelation to the Gentiles, as well as glory for Israel. This language is rooted in Isaiah ([Isa. 42:6](#); [46:13](#); [49:9](#)). Thus the universality of God's work is noted early in Luke's introductory section in language that recalls Old Testament promises about Messiah and His rule.

The body of Luke's gospel made the same point. In an extended citation unique to Luke, the gospel writer included [Isaiah 40:3-5](#), when he described John the Baptist's ministry. The citation ends with the words "all mankind will see God's salvation" ([Luke 3:6](#)). Here the scope of salvation is made clear. The word *ing* actually is not a direct citation as much as a summary of [Isaiah 40](#), drawing on the imagery that comes from [Isaiah 40:10-11](#), since the reference to "God's salvation" summarizes the picture of [Isaiah 40:10-11](#) in the Masoretic text, while [Isaiah 40:5b](#) in the Septuagint has already made the summarizing translation. This universal note occurs also in [Luke 24:47](#), where the message of the new community is the preaching of repentance to all the nations. This message is said to be predicted by the Old Testament ([vv. 44-47](#)). In extending salvation to the Gentiles, God's promises about the Messiah are being initially realized.

Acts continued this Gentile emphasis by citing Jesus' words that the message is to go to the ends of the earth ([Acts 1:8](#)). The dramatic vision given to Peter ([Acts 10:9-16](#)) showed God's direction and intervention to guarantee and endorse this expansion, while Peter in his speech in Cornelius' house said that "God accepts men from every nation" ([v. 35](#)) and that salvation through Christ is available to "everyone" ([v. 43](#)). [Acts 28:28](#) also makes explicit the fact that the message is for Gentiles. This Gentile inclusion is a key theme in Luke. Its tie to the Old Testament hope struck a note of continuity in God's plan. To Jews in the community, this inclusion would be a difficult point, since Israel is God's special people. Therefore Luke spent much time on this theme.

Numerous texts picture this expansion of the gospel to Gentiles. [Luke 7:1-10](#) described a Gentile centurion whose faith exceeded anything found in Israel. A demon was exorcised from a man in the Gentile region of Gerasene by Jesus ([8:26-39](#)). Jesus led a mission to Samaria, a region of a mixed race ([9:51-56](#)). In the parable of the Good Samaritan a man responded to God's will properly in the treatment of others ([10:25-37](#)). Jesus spoke of people coming from east, west, north, and south to dine at the banquet table in the kingdom to come ([13:22-30](#)). In another parable, people from the highways and hedgeways were invited to share in the banquet that Jesus brings ([14:15-24](#)). In the episode of the ten lepers, only the Samaritan leper responded with gratitude for the healing he received ([17:11-19](#)). In the parable of the tenants ([20:9-19](#)), the vineyard

was to be given to others after the son was slain (v. 16). Jesus went so far as to call the current age the "times of the Gentiles" (21:24).

Acts continues this emphasis. Acts 9:15 describes the call to Saul to bear Jesus' name before the Gentiles. Acts 10-11 shows how God directed Peter to Cornelius. God is the one who brought in the Gentiles. Of course, much of the rest of Acts showed how Gentiles were receptive to the gospel. If anyone had been disturbed by the racial breadth in the new community, according to Luke there was only one figure to blame and that was God Himself. Luke's emphasis on the universality of the gospel was an effective apologetic claim against any who thought the gospel message in the church had become too broad, too generous, or too gracious.

To the poor, sinners, and outcasts. Special attention is given to the poor in Luke's gospel. Mary's hymn in Luke 1:46-55 sets the tone for this theme. Her reference to God's lifting up and blessing the poor (vv. 52-53) does not mean all the poor. It refers primarily to the *'anāwîm* of the Old Testament, those pious poor who humbly relied on God (vv. 50-55; cf. 2 Sam. 2:5; Job 5:11; 12:19; Pss. 103:11, 13, 17; 89:10; 107:9). This distinction is an important one for Luke, since the focus on the poor was not a political manifesto. What the passage does indicate is that often the poor are more dependent on God and in tune with His will than the rich. The focus on the poor was reinforced in three representative presentations of Jesus' preaching (Luke 4:18; 6:20-23; 7:22). In all these passages salvation is offered to the poor. Jesus mentioned the poor explicitly when He thanked the Father for those who were His ministering disciples (10:21-22). The poor are those who should be invited by the disciples and who are to be invited to the eschatological banquet table (14:13, 21-24). Salvation for Lazarus the beggar concludes the focus on this theme (16:19-31), while the widow with her small copper coin of contribution also reinforces this theme (21:1-4). For Luke, the "lowly people" are especially noted as candidates for God's grace. (The book of James is parallel here.)

Sinners also received special mention in Luke. Jesus' enemies frequently complained about Jesus making Himself available to such people (5:27-32; 7:28, 30, 34, 36-50; 15:1-2; 19:7). Each time Jesus vindicated His behavior by word and/or deed. Such grumbling showed that the Jewish leaders misunderstood Jesus' mission to call the spiritually sick to be healed through repentance (5:30-32).

Another group of rejected people were the tax collectors, regarded in the culture as social outcasts and traitors. The passages dealing with this group often overlap with the passages dealing with Jesus' treatment of sinners: 5:27-32 (Levi); 7:29, 34; 18:9-14 (prayer of the publican); 19:1-10 (Zacchaeus). These passages show that the gospel penetrated the hearts of those who lived on the fringe of humanity. Whether rich in sin (the tax collector) or poor in life (the *'anāwîm*), the gospel can transform the lives of those who respond to it.

THE AUTHENTICATION OF THE MESSAGE

Three levels of authentication. Along with the message came authentication. By what authority did Jesus perform His works and proclaim His message? When this question was raised by the Jewish leaders, Jesus did not reply other than to point to the same authority John the Baptist obviously had (Luke 20:1-8). Other evidence demonstrated

that Jesus is who He claimed to be. Jesus was authenticated through signs and wonders (Acts 2:22; 10:38), through His fulfilling of promises given in the Scriptures and through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The subject of scriptural fulfillment has been discussed already, but a key passage pointing to this theme is Luke 4:18-21, in which Jesus publicly proclaimed that the Scriptures attest to His ministry. Luke 24:44-47 is similar in force.

In addition, Jesus' work and message were authenticated through miracles. When John asked if Jesus is the coming One, He answered by pointing to the miracles of His ministry (7:18-23). These actions allude to passages in Isaiah that point to the end (Isa. 26:19; 29:18-19; 35:5-7; 61:1). Jesus' answer was that His work indicates the nature of the time and the nature of His person. He is the promised "One to come." Luke 11:14-23 explains what His miracles mean. God the Father exercised His power through Jesus, a power that demonstrates His superior strength, in which He portrayed Himself as the strong man pilfering Satan's house (vv. 21-22). In fact, Jesus said that if His miracles were by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God had come (v. 20).

This picture of authority is also seen in the ministry of the disciples. Jesus gave authority to the Twelve (9:1-2) and to the seventy-two (10:1). The Eleven received unique authority both now in relationship to the present kingdom and will receive it over Israel in the kingdom to come (22:29-30). Such authority, which gave them the power to exorcise demons, caused the disciples to marvel and rejoice (10:17-20). Jesus' reference to Satan falling like lightning shows the current victory this authority represents (v. 18; Eph. 1:19-23; 1 Peter 3:20-21). Similar authority existed through the apostles and others in the early church. God performed miracles through a number of individuals: apostles (Acts 2:43; 5:12); Peter and John (4:16, 22); Stephen (6:8); Philip (8:6, 13); Paul and Barnabas (14:3; 15:12). Such healings occurred in the name of Jesus (3:6, 16; 4:10) and demonstrated that there is no other name under heaven by which people can be saved (4:12). The apostles (4:33), Stephen (6:8), Philip (8:13), and Paul (19:11) are said to have miraculous power (*dyn amis*), though that power stemmed not from them but from Jesus (3:12; 14:8-18). Such exercises of authority accompanied the message and indicated the approaching arrival of God's promise, as the missions of the Twelve and the seventy-two indicated (Luke 9:1-2; 10:8-12).

A final authentication of the gospel message was the presence of "power from on high," that is, the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:15-18; 24:49; Acts 1:8; cf. Acts 2:14-22, 32-36; 10:38; 11:15-16). Pentecost authenticated not only Jesus' resurrection but also the presence of the promise of God. The Spirit's activity and testimony declared that Jesus was alive and that God was at work through those in the church.

The miracles of Jesus and His disciples. What Jesus offered in His person and message was pictured in the miracles He and His followers performed. The nature of miracles as "picture" as well as event emerges in Luke 5:1-11, where a miraculous catch of fish also prompted Jesus' remark that the disciples' will be "catchers of men." The miracle portrays a deeper reality and inspires wonder. Salvation's scope is revealed in these miracles. To appreciate the extent of salvation, it is important to look at the theology of this aspect of ministry, which authenticated, pictured, and explained what Jesus was doing.

The scope of Jesus' healing could easily be regarded as part of His work and could have been discussed earlier. However, the truths about salvation pictured by His miracles show their importance to the present theme. Jesus' healings covered a vast range of situations: the sick (Luke 4:18, 40-41; 5:31-32; 7:22); evil spirits (4:31-37; 8:26-39; 9:42; 11:14-20; 13:32); fever (4:38-39); leprosy (5:12-16; 7:22; 17:11-19); paralysis (5:17-26); a withered hand (6:6-11, on the Sabbath); epilepsy (9:37-43a); dropsy (14:1-6, on the Sabbath); blindness (4:18; 7:22; 18:35-43); a constant flow of blood (8:43-48); deafness (7:22); and resuscitation from the dead (7:11-17, 22; 8:40-42, 49-56). All these maladies picture the destructive presence of sin and chaos. The healings show Jesus' power to reverse these effects and to declare the healed one saved (5:24).

Jesus' authority, however, goes beyond dealing with human misery. He also controls creation, as seen in the nature miracles. He directed His disciples into finding a large catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11), He calmed a storm (8:22-25), and He fed the 5,000 (9:10-17).

In a revealing section in Luke's gospel, Jesus brought restoration in all kinds of ways (8:22-56). He calmed the storm, exorcised demons, healed the flow of blood, and resuscitated one from the dead. Whether over nature, spiritual forces, disease, or death, Jesus has the authority to deliver and overcome those forces that harm or destroy people.

The reactions produced by His miracles are interesting. Usually the reaction was in the form of a question or an emotional response. Seeing a man exorcised of a demon, the crowd asked, "What is this message?" and "By what authority does He do this?" (4:36). Reacting to the catch of fish with a sense of his own sinfulness, Peter asked Jesus to depart (5:8-9). After Jesus healed a man with leprosy, news about Him spread (5:15); and after He healed a paralytic, people glorified God (5:26). Some thought Jesus' power to restore the widow's son to life pointed to the presence of a prophet (7:16). When confronted with the calming of the storm and knowing that God controls the weather, the disciples asked, "Who is this?" (8:25). Another crowd was gripped with fear after the demoniac was healed (8:37). The parents of a resuscitated child were amazed (8:56). After another exorcism by Jesus, multitudes marveled (11:14). A large crowd gave praise to God when a blind man was given sight (18:43). Even demons confessed Jesus' authority (4:34, 41). Clearly the people were impressed that someone of unusual authority and power was present, though many never thought He was more than a prophet (9:18-19).

Equally impressive is the scope of the disciples' work. They also healed the sick (Luke 9:1-2; 10:9) and exorcised demons (9:1, 42, 49; 10:17). In Acts, God healed a lame man through Peter and John (Acts 3:1-10, 16; 4:8-10) and another cripple through Paul and Barnabas (14:8-18). Saul regained his sight (9:17-18). Aeneas, a paralytic, walked (9:32-35) and Dorcas was resuscitated (9:36-43), as was Eutychus (20:7-12). Exorcisms occurred (16:16-18). Publius's fever was cured (28:7-10). The power of Jesus attested the authenticity of the ministry of these men who preached Jesus; His power showed that their message came from God. Alongside these miraculous works of ministry came other authenticating signs. On three occasions, angels delivered the apostles from prison (5:17-26; 12:6-11; 16:24-34). Apostolic judgment brought death or other consequences (5:1-11; 19:13-20). People survived shipwreck and snakebites (27:23-44; 28:3-5). The scope of this exercise of power is impressive.

The important point was not so much the miracles themselves as what they portrayed (Luke 10:18-20). Jesus' power was expressed through His appointed messengers which showed that He was raised and active. The forces that oppose people meet their defeat and death through Jesus. He can deliver. In other words, physical salvation portrays spiritual salvation. The account of Acts 3:1-4:21 makes this connection clear as Peter moved from a discussion of physical healing to a declaration of spiritual salvation. What Jesus and His disciples did indicated what God was doing. The message of hope they brought in the gospel was (and is) true.

THE OBJECTIVE ASPECT OF SALVATION

Words for salvation. Several words are used in Luke and Acts to speak of salvation. The best way to examine this subject is to look at the salvation word group: *sōtēr*, *sōzō*, *sōtērion*, and *sotēria*. The term *Savior* (*sōtēr*) was discussed earlier in the section on Christ. Three times this word is used of Christ (Luke 2:11; Acts 5:31; 13:23), and once it refers to God (Luke 1:47).

The verb "to save" (*sōzō*) means to deliver from calamity. Numerous miracles picture this concept. When Jesus healed the man with the withered hand, He asked the Pharisees and teachers of the law whether it was lawful on the Sabbath "to do good or to do evil [harm], to save life or destroy it" (Luke 6:9). For Jesus the answer was to save life, which is what the miracle of physical deliverance pictured. The same was true of the demon-possessed man (8:36), the bleeding woman (v. 48), Jairus' daughter (v. 50), the Samaritan leper (17:19), and the blind beggar (18:42). These miracles were audiovisuals of God's power and authority.

The sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet was saved because of the attitude reflected in her action (7:50). In the parable of the sower (8:4-15), Jesus explained that rejecting the Word, by which He meant the message of the kingdom (v. 10), resulted in lack of salvation (v. 12). To save one's life, a person must lose it (9:24). Those who place their lives in His hands can be delivered.

Hearing Jesus' teaching, some concluded that few would be saved and so a listener asked Jesus about it (13:23). He answered that entry is through a narrow door, a reference to responding to the message on God's terms, and not human terms. Jesus added that people will come and enter in from all directions, an allusion to all races, yet some who will expect to sit at the banquet table with the patriarchs and prophets will be missing (13:24-30). Another parable speaks of a filled house (14:23), also suggesting that though many reject the gospel, many others will respond. The point of both remarks is that though many Jews will miss out on the promise they expected to share in for failing to respond to Jesus, the place of God's blessing will be full of God's people.

A similar question from one of the disciples raised the issue of who could be saved (18:26). The question was asked in response to Jesus' remark that a rich man entering the kingdom is like a camel passing through a needle's eye (v. 25). Here Jesus noted that what is impossible for man is possible with God. Peter then remarked that the disciples had left all for Jesus. In turn, Jesus responded positively, describing the rich reward that would be theirs for their response, a reward that includes eternal life (vv. 27-30). Though Peter said that the disciples had forsaken "all," they, including Peter

himself, failed at certain points to be "total" disciples. Nonetheless basic dependence on God was there, so Jesus responded positively to the claim that the disciples had left all. These disciples, and people like Zacchaeus, picture what the mission of Jesus is about, namely, to seek and save the lost (19:10).

There is irony in the final use of the verb "to save" in Luke's gospel. As Jesus was crucified, people mocked Him, calling on Him to save Himself (23:35, 37, 39). Of course Jesus' death was laying the groundwork by which He could save sinners. He was doing what they mocked Him for not doing!

In Acts, the use of the term for physical deliverance occurs in 27:20, 31 (and perhaps 16:30). Most uses are summary descriptions that occur along with acts of healing or preaching (2:47; "no other name by . . . which we must be saved," 4:12; about the house of Cornelius, 11:14; of the lame man at Lystra, 14:9; of Gentiles like Cornelius, 15:11). In his message on the day of Pentecost, Peter said those who call "on the name of the Lord will be saved" (2:21), a quotation of Joel 2:32 (cf. Rom. 10:13). The Lord to whom one calls, Peter explained, is Jesus (Acts 2:36). He saves by providing forgiveness, sparing from wrath, and giving the Holy Spirit (vv. 38-40).

Another key summary occurs in Acts 16:30-31. The Philippian jailer was overwhelmed by his circumstances and asked what he needed to do to be saved. All he may have meant was how his physical life could be spared. Paul responded by speaking of spiritual life, by calling for faith in "the Lord Jesus" (v. 31). Ultimately, life is retained through Him, so Paul answered a question even more fundamental than the one the jailer asked.

Thus the verb "to save" is used in a variety of ways. First, some occurrences refer only to physical deliverance (Acts 27:20, 31). Second, some occurrences suggest both physical and spiritual deliverance. Often miracles of physical deliverance pictured spiritual deliverance. Though Luke 5:17-26 does not use the term "save," the incident recorded there pictured this connection when Jesus healed the paralytic. Jesus asked whether it was easier to tell the man to get up and walk or to tell him his sins were forgiven (v. 23). There is irony in the question. In one sense it was "easier" for Jesus to say one's sins are forgiven, since that cannot be seen, while making a man walk can be observed. And yet, forgiving sin in reality is the "harder" thing to achieve. But how can one show that forgiveness is present? Such a claim can only be pictured. So to show His authority to forgive, the "harder and more visible" act, physical healing, was accomplished. One reality pictured the other. Miracle becomes a metaphor for salvation. All Jesus' miracles should be seen in this light. Third, other verses refer directly to spiritual salvation (Luke 19:10; Acts 2:40; 4:12). When spiritual healing is present, Jesus stands active at the center of salvation.

The meaning of the various forms of the noun *sotēriōn* and *sotēria* differ little from the verb *sōzō*. When the prophet Simeon saw Jesus, he could say he had seen God's salvation (*sotēriōn*, Luke 2:30). Luke 3:4-5 cites Isaiah 40:3-5 to describe John the Baptist's ministry, noting that the forerunner's activity of clearing the path occurs so that "all mankind will see God's salvation." Salvation had come to the Gentiles in the message about Jesus (Acts 28:28). So from the first of Luke to the last of Acts, God's saving activity is in view.

The other noun (*sotēria*) is rarely used in Luke—Acts, but its usage is significant. In a key text, [Luke 1:69, 71, 77](#), the focus is on the Davidic "horn" of salvation, who delivers from all enemies and who is associated with the hope of forgiveness and the arrival of peace with God, through rescuing people out of darkness (cf. [Col. 1:12-14](#)). In this description of salvation, physical and spiritual deliverance are discussed side by side as part of Jesus' messianic task. Jesus brings both. Also national and spiritual hope are tied together. Personal salvation ultimately results in peace on earth.

Zacchaeus, rejected by society, responded to Jesus' teaching and so he was welcomed before God ([Luke 19:1-10](#)). As already noted, [Acts 4:12](#) points out that salvation is only through Jesus. The hope of deliverance for Israel was expressed in Paul's apostolic message in Antioch of Pisidia ([13:26](#)). In fact, Paul's entire speech recorded in [Acts 13:16-41](#) is representative of a Pauline message on salvation, just as [Luke 4:16-30](#) is an example of Jesus' preaching. Paul's mission was to bring salvation to the Gentiles and to the ends of the earth ([13:47](#) alludes to [Isa. 49:6](#)). The remaining two uses of *sotēria* in Acts ([7:25](#); [27:34](#)) refer to physical deliverance.

Without doubt, salvation is a key concept in Luke. Salvation is centered in Jesus. It possesses spiritual qualities, but eventually it will impact the human structures on earth ([Luke 1:68-79](#)). It is offered to all races ([Acts 10-11](#)). It is possessed by those who respond to Jesus. It is at the center of the apostolic message, and in it is everlasting life.

The work of salvation: The Cross and Jesus' resurrection-ascension. Luke highlighted who Jesus is more than how He saves, but the basic outline of His work is still present. Many of the points to be made here were discussed earlier in connection with Jesus' work on the cross. Here focus is on the Old Testament allusions, since they vividly explain various aspects of Jesus' work.

There are two probable allusions to [Isaiah 53](#) in Luke's passion material. One is explicit. [Luke 22:37](#), portraying Jesus as the innocent sufferer, cites [Isaiah 53:12](#) (He "was numbered with the transgressors"). Jesus noted that His fate was a necessary part of God's plan. Jesus died as a social criminal between two thieves in fulfillment of this promise ([Luke 23:32, 39-43](#)). In addition, Luke noted that He died a cursed death on a tree ([Acts 5:30](#); [10:39](#); [13:29](#) using [Deut. 21:23](#)).

The second passage alluding to [Isaiah 53](#) is more debated because it is conceptual and also involves a passage that is missing in some Greek manuscripts of Luke's gospel. On the cross, Jesus interceded for forgiveness for His enemies ([Luke 23:34](#)). This also recalls [Isaiah 53:12](#), which says the Servant "made intercession for the transgressors." The connection between [Luke 23:34](#) and [Isaiah 53:12](#) is not verbal, but nonetheless it is likely. The text is probably original to Luke, since it has a parallel in [Acts 7:60](#), where Stephen interceded for His enemies. Such parallelisms are frequent between Luke and Acts. These two allusions to [Isaiah 53](#) relate Jesus to the figure of the Suffering Servant, especially in portraying His death as unjust. Jesus died like a sinner, numbered with transgressors. Yet in the midst of it all, Jesus' compassion for His enemies shone forth in His prayer for them. In praying for His enemies, Jesus applied the principle He enunciated in [Luke 6:27-36](#), namely, to love one's enemies.

Repeatedly, [Luke 23](#) affirms Jesus' innocence. Pilate mentioned it three times ([vv. 4, 14-15, 22](#)), and in one of his references Pilate reported that Herod too had found Jesus

innocent (v. 15). In addition, a centurion at the cross proclaimed Jesus' innocence (v. 47, a remark unique to Luke). The term chosen by the soldier is *dikaios*, which can be translated "innocent" or "righteous." Either term makes good sense here, but the slightly broader term "righteous" seems preferable. The soldier was probably not interested merely in the legal status of Jesus, but in His character, which made such a verdict likely. According to the lips of one of His executioners, Jesus died a righteous man. The testimony of an enemy is often worth more than the protestations of many friends.

Luke's record of the crucifixion reflects imagery from the Psalter and Isaiah. Five such allusions exist. Jesus not only requested forgiveness for His enemies (Luke 23:34 alluding to Isaiah 53:12), but Luke noted that they cast lots for His clothes, recalling Psalm 22:18 (21:19 LXX). In Luke 23:35, the onlookers' mocking cry that Jesus save Himself recalls Psalm 22:6-7 (21:8-9 LXX). The offer of wine (Luke 23:36) finds a parallel in Psalm 69:21-22 (68:21-22 LXX). Psalms 22 and 69 are psalms of lament, portraying an innocent sufferer's cry to God for vindication from his enemies. These allusions show that Jesus died in the pattern of suffering like that of the saints of old. It also shows that He trusted in God the Father for vindication.

The fourth allusion to the Psalter is in Luke 23:46, which records Jesus' final words in which He committed His spirit into God's hands. The language recalls Psalm 31:5 (30:5, LXX). This "last word" of Jesus differs from the record in the other Synoptics (Mark 15:34-37; Matt. 27:46), where Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1 (21:2, LXX), though Mark noted that Jesus made two cries. Only Luke recorded the details of the second cry. Psalm 22:1 expressed a painful cry of anguish, which Jesus offered from the cross. Psalm 22 is another psalm of lament. Psalm 31 is also a psalm of lament, but verse 5 from that psalm is an expression of trust. Thus, Jesus knew that His fate and vindication were in God's hands. With this cry He rested Himself in the care of the Almighty. The vindication, if it was to come, must come from the mighty God who cares for His own.

Of course, the vindication did come in Jesus' resurrection. The enemies had mocked Jesus by urging Him to get down from the cross (Luke 23:33-38). But God did something more; He took Him out of death. With vindication came benefits to be bestowed on those allied to Him. Numerous verses indicate that with Jesus' resurrection-ascension came the opportunity for forgiveness. Forgiveness is included in the message (24:47), is pictured in baptism (Acts 2:38), results from repentance (3:19), was offered to Israel (5:31), comes through Jesus' name as the prophets promised (10:43), comes through Him by faith (13:38), means that sins are washed away when one calls on His name (22:16), and comes as a result of turning from Satan to God (26:18). According to Luke, forgiveness is the key emphasis which Jesus' work on the cross and His resurrection can bring. When Jesus cried out, it was as if He interceded for all. To gain access to that forgiveness, all one needed do is respond to His offer.

Other benefits of Jesus' resurrection-ascension include the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:30-36), the offer of the times of refreshing along with the yet-future times of renewal (3:19-21), the realization of the Abrahamic covenant (vv. 25-26), the offer of salvation in His name (4:12), the availability of justification (13:23, 38-41), and the appointment of Jesus as Judge (17:31). God is at work through Jesus.

According to Luke 22:19-20 the new covenant was inaugurated by Jesus' death. The supper portrayed a broken body and life's blood shed on behalf of "you," a reference to disciples. The church is a community purchased by the blood of "his own" (Acts 20:28), that is, the blood of God's Son. As such, the community is precious, and those who are elders must care for it as a special gift. Rich benefits come from the hand of the innocent one who was vindicated by God and now rules at God's side as Lord.

THE SUBJECTIVE ASPECT OF SALVATION

The subjective aspect of salvation refers to the personal appropriation of salvation. Luke used a variety of concepts to express this fundamental response. The variety is important to maintain, for each term helps focus on different aspects of one's response. Salvation is not to be seen as the accumulation of these various responses. Rather the one true response to the message has these elements bound up in it, though each term highlights an ingredient in that response. Any one term can summarize a genuine response, while highlighting an element in it. Luke wished to show the multidimensional character of response to the gospel. The three key terms are repentance, turning, and faith. Luke wanted His readers to appreciate what God graciously offers, how simply it can be received, and how deep the response itself is.

Repentance. A key concept for Luke is repentance, whether expressed by the noun "repentance" (*metanoia*) or the verb "to repent" (*metanoēō*). The Greek verb means "to change one's mind," but in its Lucan usage it comes very close to the Hebrew verb for repent which literally means "to turn or turn around" (*sub*). That the Hebrew sense of the term is primary is clear from Luke 24:44-47, where the message of repentance is seen as fulfilling Old Testament promise that such a message would be preached to all the nations. So repentance is a reorientation, a total shift of perspective from where one was before repenting. This prophetic force is introduced in the section where John the Baptist preached "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3). A change of perspective, involving the total person's point of view, is called for by this term. In fact, John called for the Israelites to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance (3:8). This passage is significant for it separates repentance from what it produces, and also expresses a link between repentance and fruit. One leads to the other. That this change of perspective finds concrete expression in life is clear from the dialogue that follows in Luke 3:10-14, a passage unique to Luke. When people asked what they must do in response to John's call to repent, he told them to live with kindness and compassion toward others. John's message only prepared one for the gospel, so it is illustrative, not defining. Nevertheless, the passage reveals the basic character of repentance, though the gospel makes the ultimate basis of repentance clearer.

A central passage picturing repentance is Luke 5:30-32. Here Jesus described His mission as calling sick "sinners" to repentance. Though this passage has parallels in Matthew 9:13 and Mark 2:17, only Luke mentioned repentance here. Jesus used the term to describe His own mission, thus showing that it is an appropriate concept to use today in presenting the appropriate response to His mission and work. To repent includes an awareness that as a sinner one has an unhealthy relationship with God that needs the "medical attention" of the Physician. Repentance involves recognizing that a person is spiritually sick and impotent, unable to help oneself. Repentance is turning to Jesus for spiritual healing, for treatment of one's heart and life, knowing that only He can give "the cure." One goes to the physician, so the doctor can diagnose and treat the

disease. Repentance is similar with regard to sin and how it corrupts one's standing before God. Jesus makes it clear that humankind has a disease and that only He can treat it. Care of sin is to be placed in His hands. Part of the change of perspective in repentance is to see sin differently and to recognize it is deadly when left untreated. So the sinner who repents to receive salvation comes to Jesus, knowing that only He can heal the relationship to God and deal with sin and its consequences.

Such transformation in a sinner was a cause for joy to Jesus, for heaven rejoices to see such repentance (15:7). In fact, the term He used in His Great Commission to the disciples about their future message was repentance (24:47). This verse shows that the term is an appropriate summary for the offer of the gospel today.

Acts reinforces this point. According to apostolic preaching, repentance is available for both Jews and Gentiles. It is for Israel and is related to Christ (Acts 5:31); it is for Gentiles, leading to life (11:18); and it was prepared for by John's baptism of repentance (13:24; 19:4). So repentance is offered to Jews and Greeks through Jesus (20:21). In fact, in 26:20 Paul told Agrippa that those who repent should "prove their repentance by their deeds," a comment similar in tone to Luke 3:3-14. This parallelism shows a continuity between John the Baptist and Paul. Deeds are the natural, expected product of genuine repentance.

The verb "to repent" (*metanoēō*) is similar in force. A call to repent is the natural response to the miracles Jesus performed (Luke 10:13). Jesus' message is compared to Jonah's call to the Ninevites, showing that repentance in the New Testament has Old Testament roots (11:32). Jesus warned that people will perish if they do not repent (13:3, 5). But joy in heaven results when anyone does repent (15:7, 10). The rich man in Hades held out the hope that a messenger from the dead would convince his brothers to repent of the way they treated others, that is, to respond with a different way of life (16:30). Abraham, however, replied that a resurrection would not be convincing. Nonetheless, the discussion shows the centrality of repentance as an appropriate summary term for response. Luke 17:3-4 uses "repent" in a nonsoteriological sense (repentance of personal acts done to another).

In Acts the verb *metanoēō* is used in summary calls that invite one to enter into forgiveness (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 26:20). Peter urged Simon, the sorcerer, to repent and seek forgiveness (8:22). Excluding Simon from sharing in the benefits of the Spirit may well indicate that Simon was lost and that the belief he exercised earlier (v. 13) was less than genuine.

Three portraits of repentance exist in Luke's gospel. Already noted was that of the physician calling the sick to repent (5:30-32). A second portrait is the prodigal son returning to his father (Luke 15:11-32). The attitude of the son is the key. Here he came pleading no rights; he simply sought his father's mercy. He asked to be received not as a son, but only as a servant. Recognizing that what he had done was wrong, he entrusted himself to his father's care. That humble reliance is a change of perspective, the essence of repentance.

The third portrait, that of the tax collector in contrast to the Pharisee (18:9-14), is similar to the prodigal. Standing before the throne of heaven, realizing he could bring nothing to commend himself to God, the tax collector rested on His mercy. The beating

of his breast graphically portrays his sense of regret for his sin and his sense of need for God's mercy. Not an emotion, repentance in Luke is a change of perspective. What the emotive picture evidenced was that this man knew he was in need of God's mercy, but the attitude, not the emotion, is the point.

In summary, Luke saw repentance as a change of perspective that transforms a person's thinking and approach to life. It applies to Jews and Gentiles. The term summarizes the appropriate response to the message of Jesus and the apostles. Bringing forth fruit is a natural outgrowth of repentance. Just as a good tree brings forth good fruit, so genuine repentance produces change in one's life (6:43-45).

Turning. Another key term in Luke pertaining to the response to salvation is "turning." The noun "turning" (*epistrophē*) is used only once. In Acts 15:3 it refers to the act of conversion by Gentiles. The report alludes back to the results of the first missionary journey. The verb "to turn" (*epistrephō*) is more frequent. John the Baptist's ministry was to turn Israel to God (Luke 1:17). Luke 17:4 speaks of a brother who turns ("seven times comes back [turns] to you") to seek forgiveness for sin. This example does not refer to initial salvation. Predicting that Peter would turn from his failure of denial, Jesus then called on the apostle to "strengthen" the brethren (22:32). Here again, "turning" refers to how a believer rebounds from sin. "Turning" is the reversing of estrangement as one recognizes and accepts that he has done wrong. In this sense it is similar to repentance, but it is a more vivid term, since it portrays a reversal of direction.

The word "turn" is used similarly in Acts. In 3:19, turning is associated with repentance: "Repent, then, and turn to God." Forgiveness is the result. This verse points up a slight difference between repentance and turning. Repentance is the change of perspective and turning follows, as one's direction changes as well. Other summaries in Acts also use the term. Gentiles, seeing Aeneas healed by Peter, "turned to the Lord" (9:35). Gentiles in Antioch "believed and turned" to God (11:21). In this passage "belief" functioned in a manner similar to repent in 3:19.

These terms are used interchangeably to refer to the same saving act, though they highlight different elements of that response. Whether repentance or faith, the product is a turning to God. That entire single act saves and produces a reorientation toward God.

So Barnabas and Paul urged the Gentiles in Lystra to turn from idols to God (14:15). Again this passage shows the reversal of direction necessary for salvation of unbelievers estranged from God. The focus of turning always comes back to God. Gentiles are said to be "turning to God" in Acts 15:19, where the term alone is sufficient to describe the response that saves.

The most important passage on turning to God is 26:18, 20. Paul related the Lord's call for him to turn the Gentiles from Satan to God, to receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance that comes by faith in God (v. 18). This passage is important, because all the terms appear together here. In fact, people are to repent and turn, performing good deeds. So the urging of a response and of a result are proclaimed as the essence of Paul's call and thus of his message. Paul called on Jews and Gentiles to "repent and turn

to God" (v. 20), so they could receive benefits from God that come by faith. He also told them to perform deeds worthy of repentance.

Repentance for Luke is to express itself concretely and visibly in the life of the responder. Fruit shows the presence of a life-giving root. That root can be biblically described as planted by faith, repentance, or turning. Each of these three terms points to approaching God and resting in His provision and mercy. "Repenting" emphasizes what is left behind as one looks at life, sin, and God in a new way, "turning" alludes to a person's taking up a new direction, and "believing in God" focuses where one's attention ends up as one has a new orientation.

A negative use occurs in Acts, when Luke described the Jews' failure to "turn" because of the hardness of their hearts (28:27). Here a failure to turn was caused by a refusal to respond.

Faith. Two other terms used frequently in Luke-Acts are faith (*pistis*) and "to believe" (*pisteuō*). Luke's usage of these words varies between the act of trust and the trust that saves. All occurrences of the words suggest a reliance on another to provide something one cannot provide for himself. The paralytic's friends had faith in Jesus that He could heal their friend (Luke 5:20). Because of the centurion's "great faith" (7:9), he understood Jesus' authority to heal (vv. 7-8). Jesus spoke of the faith of the sinful woman who washed His feet (v. 50). Each act of faith expressed itself in concrete action. On the other hand, the disciples' lack of faith showed that they questioned God's ability to watch over them. As a result, they were nervous and panicked (8:25). The woman with the continual flow of blood understood that Jesus could heal her and in faith she touched His garment (v. 48). Jairus was challenged by Jesus to believe (v. 50).

Faith can be increased, as indicated by the apostles' request, "Increase our faith!" (17:5-6). This request means that faith can always have more depth, though Jesus' reply emphasized the importance of faith's presence, no matter how small, rather than its quality. The Samaritan leper (v. 19) and the blind beggar (18:42) also acted out of faith in approaching Jesus.

Peter's faith failed, as Jesus predicted (22:32). The possibility of lapsed faith in the face of persecution was so real that Jesus asked if faith would be found on earth when He returns (18:8). The faith described in these last two examples refers not to initial faith but to the continuation of faith. Lapses of faith can and do occur, but ideally faith should be constant. Such constant faith involves a fundamental orientation and trust that a person possesses, a basic recognition that if provision for deliverance in any situation is to come, Jesus must provide it. So faith is to continue; if it does not, spiritual catastrophe is the result.

The usage of the noun "faith" (*pistis*) in Acts is similar. Faith comes through Jesus and was the basis of the lame beggar's healing by Peter (Acts 3:16) and of Paul's healing of the man in Lystra with crippled feet (14:9). Stephen was a man "full of faith," a spiritually mature man, whose faith was exemplary and constant (6:5). At times the Christian movement was called "the faith" (6:7; 13:8; 14:22; 16:5). Gentiles had faith (14:27) and were cleansed by faith (15:9). Faith's object is Christ (20:21; 24:24), and faith is the subjective means that sanctifies (26:18).

In Luke's gospel the verb "to believe" (*pisteuō*) is similar in force. Positive and negative examples abound. Zechariah did not believe the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:20), but Mary did believe the same angel (v. 45). Zechariah was incredulous that God could do what was announced; Mary believed, and, as a result, she became a vessel for God's use. In the parable of the sower the devil is said to prevent belief (8:12), while faith on the part of others is portrayed tragically as short-lived (v. 13). Jairus was told that Jesus could raise his daughter (v. 50). Luke noted that many people believed John's message (20:5). Jesus declared that whatever He might say in His defense, the Jewish leaders would not believe (22:67). Jesus asked the Emmaus travelers if they believed all that the prophets spoke (24:25). Faith responds to content and results in concrete reaction. It includes perception, but this perception produces a product.

Most uses of the verb *pisteuō* in Acts are summaries of people's responses of belief. In a few passages the church is described as a community that believed (2:44; 4:32). The participle describes the respondents as "believers" (5:14; 15:5).

Usually the word refers to someone or something who is trusted: belief was in the message (4:4); in the good news (8:12-13); in the Lord, with faith in Him produced by a miracle (9:42); in the Lord, with forgiveness as a result (10:43); in Christ (11:17); in the Lord (11:21; 14:23; 16:31); in God (16:34; 27:25); in Jesus (19:4); in the Old Testament promise (24:14); and in the prophets (24:14). Those who believed included the Bereans (17:12), Athenians (17:34), Corinthians (18:8), Ephesians (19:18), Jews (21:20), and Gentiles (21:25). In Acts 13:12 no object of faith is mentioned, but the proconsul of Cyprus believed as a result of the sorcerer Bar-Jesus being blinded. Belief justifies (v. 39), but those who do not believe will perish (v. 41). All those whom God has ordained to eternal life believe (v. 48). And belief is by God's grace (15:11; 18:27).

Faith, that is, simple belief, expresses itself concretely. Numerous pictures provided in Jesus' ministry are illustrative. They show that faith acted. Faith was the recognition and persuasion that God had something to offer that one must receive and embrace. So in Jesus' miracles, individuals moved to receive what He offered. Faith is active, not passive. It understands, receives, and embraces. The one who welcomes God's message receives what God offers and responds to the gospel. He or she acknowledges that God through Jesus has dealt with the effects of sin and that only He can provide what is needed to reverse sin's presence and eradicate its penalty.

THE BENEFITS OF SALVATION

Forgiveness. Besides the presence of the indwelling Spirit, Luke enumerated numerous benefits that come from salvation. The first is forgiveness (*aphesis*). In Luke the knowledge of forgiveness is available through the preaching of the "prophet of the Most High," namely, John the Baptist (Luke 1:76-77), who in turn pointed the way to the Davidic "horn" (v. 69) who will bring salvation to the nation of Israel (v. 68) and light to all those who sit in darkness (v. 79). This knowledge and experience of salvation comes through the forgiveness of sins.

John the Baptist's baptism for the forgiveness of sins (3:3) was not the same as Christian baptism, since it could not yet picture the cleansing provided by the Cross. Rather, John's baptism represented a turning to God as a preparation for the arrival of the promised Messiah. The humility reflected in the partaking of this baptism paved the

way for divine forgiveness. To the synagogue crowd, Jesus proclaimed a release (*aphesin*) for the captives and liberty for those who are oppressed (4:18). Here His words harked back to the imagery in Isaiah 61:1 and 58:6. This "second exodus" imagery, as Jesus announced in the synagogue, pictured God's people released from enemies, which included Satan and sin, as Jesus' later mission made clear (Luke 10:9; 18; 11:20-23; 22:20). Luke 24:47 summarizes the disciples' message, a message about repentance and the forgiveness of sins. The Acts passages are all familiar summary passages. In Acts 2:38 forgiveness is related to repentance and pictured in baptism; in 5:31 forgiveness is available to Israel; in 10:43 forgiveness is based on faith; in 13:38-39 forgiveness is available through Jesus based on the faith that frees one from bondage, a freedom that the law could not provide; and in 26:18 those who turn from Satan to God receive His forgiveness.

Life. Another key benefit of salvation is life (*zoē*). A scribe asked Jesus about inheriting eternal life (Luke 10:25), actually concerned about being assured of participating in the final resurrection (Dan. 12:3). Jesus replied that he should love God and his neighbor, a reply that well summarizes the message of the law. To do this would bring life (Luke 10:28). This reply, though soteriological in nature, reflects the pre-Cross setting it depicted. The scribe's failure to respond to Jesus' message showed that he erroneously thought he could earn salvation through his own achievements.

A negative statement about life is given in Luke 12:15. Life does not consist in one's possessions. The parable of the rich fool (vv. 16, 21) illustrates this truth and calls on one to be rich toward God.

Luke 18:18 repeats the question of 10:25, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Now the answer is supplied in 18:29-30. Anyone who leaves all for the sake of the kingdom will receive many benefits in this life and eternal life in the age to come. Jesus' reply indicated that the disciples had already done this and so they had received the benefits named here. This response, together with Jesus' remarks in 10:25-28, show the point that one does not earn salvation, but must come to God for it. Luke 18 teaches that total sacrifice for Jesus does pay off. The premise behind this passage is basic to understanding the absolute character of Jesus' remarks.

In the first century any confession of Jesus would probably have resulted in rejection by some in one's family, since most Jews were rejecting Jesus. Coming to Jesus in faith would automatically mean a person would be rejected by relatives who did not believe in Him. If one feared family more than God, then the response to the gospel would be a refusal to come to Jesus. To give over all meant being willing to leave all earthly ties behind for a new set of relationships, namely, the one God calls for through Jesus. So Jesus noted that although a disciple lost a family, what was gained was a new family, along with eternal life.

In Acts, life described resurrection (Acts 2:27-28). Because of what Jesus provides He is called "the author of life" (3:15). The apostolic message is called the "words of life" (5:20), and repentance leads to life (11:18). Paul stated that since the Jews refused to respond to his message they did not consider themselves worthy of eternal life (13:46). So he turned to Gentiles, who were appointed to it (v. 48). In 17:25 life is probably not soteriological but refers instead to the physical life God gives all men, since the verse also speaks of God's giving "life and breath and everything" to all.

Gift. A number of times Luke referred to "the gift" (*dōrea*), by which he meant the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17). Particularly significant here is the parallel between Acts 2 and Acts 10-11, since what was given to the Gentiles was also what the disciples received at Pentecost.

Peace. Another benefit of salvation is peace (*eirēnē*). Like a rising star, Jesus, as the promised One from the house of David (Luke 1:69), shines as light and reveals the way of peace (v. 79). What is meant here is that Jesus makes possible a reconciled relationship between God and humanity. Jesus, as Savior, Christ, and Lord, brings peace to men of God's good pleasure (2:14). The offer of peace is part of the kingdom message (10:5-6). In a counter note, Jesus said that He came not to bring peace but division (12:51). This remark is simply a recognition that some would accept what He offered and others would not. With that reality is the recognition that division within families would come, as verses 51-52 indicate. Of course, this is precisely what did happen in many Jewish families. Peter said his message was "the good news of peace through Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36).

Grace. Grace (*charis*) is another salvation benefit mentioned by Luke, though he used the word with some variation of force. Grace refers to unmerited favor, a gift one receives from God at the moment he genuinely believes. Mary was the object of God's favor as God prepared to use her as a vessel through whom Jesus would enter the world (Luke 1:30). In two verses that describe Jesus' growth (2:40, 52), grace, that is, God's favor, is said to rest on Him. In 6:32-33, in a non-theological use, the term "grace" is translated as "credit." Here Jesus asked what is the merit of a person loving only those who love him or her.

In Acts grace rests on people and communities. Acts 4:33 speaks of grace resting on all the believers. Stephen was full of grace (6:8), and Stephen spoke of God's favor on David (7:46). Paul and Barnabas had been committed to God's grace by the church at Antioch for their first missionary journey (14:26). Later they were sent to Antioch (15:40). The most common use of the word "grace" is as a description of salvation or its message (11:23; 13:43; 14:3; 15:11; 20:24, 32). Acts 18:27 spoke of belief through grace, that is, they were enabled by God to believe. Salvation is a gift of God in which He bestows rich blessings and favor on those who seek His aid. Those who come to Him humbly in faith for deliverance they cannot supply for themselves receive His unmerited favor, and heaven rejoices at the provision of the gift (Luke 15:7, 10).

OTHER POINTS OF SOTERIOLOGY

The message of salvation and promise. Much of this subject has already been discussed in connection with other themes about salvation. The purpose of this section is to highlight that in Luke-Acts God's promise is portrayed as having already come and also as still yet to come with a judgment tied to what remains. Acts 2 emphasizes what is already fulfilled and Acts 3 discusses what is yet to come.

Jesus' message focused on the offer and approach of the kingdom. He coupled that offer with exhortations about the ethic that was appropriate for those who are associated with the kingdom. The discussion on the kingdom considered these points, which also relate to the topic here.

The apostles' message emphasized the realization of God's array of promises, particularly as they relate to Jesus Christ, the Lord. Salvific benefits are available through Him now, and judgment and consummation are yet to come. This is all in line with the hope of the Old Testament as discussed in the sections on God's plan, the kingdom, and Old Testament fulfillment. In addition, Paul argued in his defense speeches that he was simply preaching the hope of the Old Testament and the hope of resurrection (Acts 23:6; 24:14-16; 25:8; 26:6-8, 22-23). The scope of this message includes all people. Therefore, there should be no bigotry in the church or in the offer of the gospel.

In the face of promise, one other contrasting dimension merits discussion. It is that the hope of the gospel is offered in the face of approaching judgment. Speaking of an axe lying at the root of a tree, John the Baptist warned that judgment was imminent (Luke 3:7-9). Though the actual judgment John referred to will come later, the fate of one's relationship to that judgment is decided in this life. So judgment is encountered directly in the message, along with the opportunity for deliverance from it. When Jesus' message was rejected or when He anticipated rejection, He pronounced woes on His hearers to make the consequences clear (6:24-26; 10:13-15; 11:42-44, 46-52). Without repentance, Jesus said, deliverance was impossible (13:3-5). In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, judgment is seen in the fate of the rich man (16:19-31). Vultures hovering over dead bodies graphically depict the death and judgment that comes with Jesus' return as the judging Son of Man (17:37). Similar warnings in Acts invoke the imagery of the day of the Lord (Acts 2:40), and the "covenant curses" of the Torah that promise being "cut off" (3:23, taken from Lev. 23:29). In addition, two texts refer to Jesus as the Judge (Acts 10:42; 17:30-31).

With the offer of salvation, each individual faces life or death. A person may choose to be rightly related to God or to face eternal judgment. Jesus gives opportunity to receive life, forgiveness, peace with God, and the presence of His Spirit. His death and resurrection have shown that He died for others and is ruling at God's right hand, ready to distribute salvific benefits to those who come to Him. As already discussed, Luke used three terms to describe the appropriate response: repent, turn, and believe. Anyone of these terms can summarize the response that gains life, humbly coming to God for deliverance which only He can give. When a sinner repents, heaven rejoices and God receives the sinner with open arms, for to seek and save the lost is at the center of Jesus' mission (Luke 15:7, 10, 18-24; 19:10).

The law. An examination of the law in Luke-Acts is related to Soteriology, because a dispute over the relationship of the law to grace was a central conflict in the early church (Acts 15). Luke indicated that the law has certain points of value for the church. A discussion of the law in Luke-Acts considers its use in Jesus' ministry and in the church. Law in Luke-Acts does not have simply one function, nor is it simply abrogated. What is said about the law depends on the perspective from which it is addressed. Luke-Acts can refer to law as a moral guide which still has instructive value, to law as containing promise which is fulfilled, or to law as regulation of membership and ethnic regulation within the community. In this last sense Acts 15 shows that law is abrogated. A Gentile does not need to be circumcised or change one's choice of food (in other words, become a Jew) to come to Christ.

Certain Lucan passages emphasize continuity between the old era and the new era introduced by Jesus. Luke 10:25–28 indicates that the moral essence of the law is to love God and one's neighbor. Here is life. The law, having an ethical goal, is concerned with how others are treated. All the law is summed up in this focus, and Jesus endorsed it as a message worthy of the one who wishes to have a right relationship with God. Such a description fits what other New Testament texts say when they describe a believer who has embraced God's grace (John 21 with Jesus' questions to Peter; 1 Cor. 2:9; James 2:5; 1 John 4:19). Of course, if one loves God, he or she will respond to Jesus' call to enter into a relationship with Him through responding to Jesus' message.

In another context Luke affirmed that the law has abiding value. In Luke 16:17, Jesus stated that the law will not fail. Here the focus is on law as promise, since the verse follows a remark about John the Baptist's message and the newly arrived kingdom message (v. 16). In other words, the law as promise will not fail. Yet another example is that Moses and the prophets revealed the type of moral life God desires (v. 29). If one is to respond to God and undertakes to examine the law carefully, one can see the hope (and accountability to God) it proclaims. The law indicates promise, since Moses and the prophets witnessed to Christ (Luke 24:27, 44). The continuity of the new era to the law is found in its ethical call to love and its anticipation of God's promise.

Other passages point to discontinuity between the law and the present age (though in some cases the discontinuity pertained to how the law was interpreted in the Jewish tradition or by the leaders). The Pharisees and teachers of the law thought that the authority to forgive sin was limited to God, but Jesus noted that He, as the Son of Man, possessed such authority (Luke 5:17-26). In 5:27-32 Jesus challenged how the Pharisees and teachers of the law viewed associating with sinners. Jesus showed that the person who is sensitive to the message of God's hope could and should relate to sinners the hope of God's promise, as His own example proved (also see Luke 15). An explanation for the difference in perspective about sinners comes in 5:33-39, when Jesus responded to questions about His associations with sinners by using proverbs that showed how what He taught was new. It could not be mixed with Judaism, the old cloth or old wineskin. He also noted that those who liked the old, Judaism, would not like the new, the message of Jesus. The two approaches could not be syncretized, for they are distinct. That Jesus' objection here is with the interpretation of the law as opposed to law itself is clear from Luke 16:19-31, where the law should have taught the rich man to care for those in need (cf. Deut. 14:29). When the rich man wished to warn his relatives, it was to tell them, in part, that they should not respond as he had to the one in need (Luke 16:24-29).

Another key pair of texts pertain to laboring on the Sabbath, where two aspects of the law were more directly challenged (6:1-5, 6-11). In verses 1-5, Jesus pointed out that David was allowed to do what the law specifically prohibited when he and his companions ate the consecrated bread (Lev. 24:5-9; 1 Sam. 21:6). Jesus then affirmed that He and His disciples could pick the heads of grain (Sabbath labor in Jewish tradition) because He, the Son of Man, has authority over the Sabbath. Jesus is like David and more than David. Verses 6-11 affirm His right as Lord over the Sabbath to "labor" on the Sabbath in order to heal. There is irony and vindication when God honored Jesus' "labor" of commanding the man with the withered hand to "stretch out" his hand (cf. 13:10-17; 14:1-6).

In 11:41-42 Jesus argued that the Pharisees' perception of the law was distorted. By tithing herbs and neglecting justice and love, they were ignoring the law's ethical thrust. Luke 16:16 teaches discontinuity, for here Jesus noted that the law and the prophets were until John. In contrast to the era of law stands the present era of proclaiming the kingdom. The law is viewed as a period that has passed away, even though verse 17 makes it clear that the law does not fail, in the sense that it reaches its realization in the kingdom preaching about Jesus. Thus Luke 16:16-17 place discontinuity and continuity side by side.

The picture in Acts is similar. Law is juxtaposed as both continuous and discontinuous. Apparently what the church said stirred the charge that the disciples did not uphold the law (Acts 6:11-14, against Stephen; 18:13 and 21:21, against Paul). The church's reply was that the law was upheld because the promise of the law was proclaimed, either in resurrection or in hope in general (23:6; 24:14-21). What Paul preached was what the Law and the Prophets taught (24:14; 25:8; 26:22). Paul seemed to be highlighting the law as read in light of the prophets. The law reflects the moral will of God and anticipated that deliverance and justice would some day come from Him. Paul even emphasized that he said nothing against the Jews, and so he called on his listeners to consider his message and ask themselves if they believed the prophets (26:26-28; 28:17). Seeing the law as promise is evident in Acts 3:12-26, where Peter declared the hope of Jesus by appealing only to passages from the Torah (Acts 3:13, the promise of the God of Abraham [Ex. 3:6, 15]; Acts 3:22, Deut. 18:15-20; Acts 3:23, Lev. 23:29; Acts 3:25, Gen. 22:18; 26:4). In highlighting the promise of the second Moses, Peter was declaring that in Jesus a new era had come.

Nonetheless, the church, at least in Jerusalem, kept portions of the law as a means of staying in contact with Jews, for the sake of the gospel. The apostles frequented the temple (3:1). They went to the synagogue on the Sabbath (13:14). Jewish believers were sometimes circumcised (16:3). Paul took vows and honored them (18:18; 21:23-24). In fact, they advised all believers, both Jews and Gentiles, to refrain from certain items. Such action was to "do well," for it avoided giving offense (15:23-29).

The law, however, was not binding on Gentiles, since Peter affirmed that to insist that believers keep the law would place a burden on their necks (15:10). Peter argued that even their ancestors, the fathers of Israel, were not able to bear this burden. The law was not to be followed as a way of salvation. It might instruct and guide, but it was not binding for the church. Nothing made this distinction clearer than the vision from God Himself in which He showed Peter that all foods are considered clean. This vision stood in clear contrast to what the law taught (Lev. 11; Acts 10:9-16). Peter's hesitation to believe the vision only underlined the contrast contained in this instruction and the fact that the "end of the law's reign" was something God insisted on, despite the apostle's objection.

In short, the Mosaic Law had ended because God brought its role to an end! God as Lord of the law had indicated dramatically that the law had served its purpose when it had yielded the stage to the realization of hope. With the hope now realized in Jesus, the resurrection, and the inauguration of the kingdom program, it no longer played a central role in marking out what the people of God should eat or do to establish their association to Christ. The only function remaining for the law was its call to love God and to love one's neighbor, which also meant responding to Jesus, the one who

embodied the message of God's offer of peace to the fallen world (Luke 1:68-79, esp. vv. 78-79). Coming to Him meant embracing light and entering a new era of relating to God.

Ecclesiology

A look at Lucan ecclesiology requires an examination of the relationship between Israel and the church. After this study, there will be a survey of the major ecclesiological characters in Luke-Acts. Such an inquiry is necessary because Luke often revealed his theology through the examples of the individuals he discussed. This inquiry will be followed by an overview of the activity, structure, titles, and ethic of the church—God's new community—for in these elements one can see how Luke saw the church and where she fits in God's plan.

ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

The church. A consideration of Israel's relationship to the church requires defining the church, examining the role of the apostles, and considering what is actually said to Gentiles and to Israel about God's promise.

The church in Luke's thinking relates to some things old and new. It is tied to old things because it shares in promises made and bestows that message to the world. It is tied to things new because it is an entirely new structure through which God is now working. The apostles proclaimed in the synagogues that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament law, so any Jew responding to promise should come to Jesus. The apostles' contention was that the natural end of Judaism is to be found in Jesus. The apostles, early in Acts, do not appear to see themselves as called to be separate from Israel. They went to the temple and met there (Acts 3:1-10; 4:1-2; 5:12). Their practices were sensitive to Jewish concerns (15:1-35; 21:17-26). Later in Acts, Paul preached in the synagogues to Jews everywhere he went (13:14-48; 28:17). Even when Paul turned his back on the Jews to go to the Gentiles, he still went to the synagogue or to the temple in the cities to which he traveled (13:46-14:1; 18:6 with 21:26; 28:28 followed by the note in v. 30 that he preached to all). The point of continuity was the message of promise-fulfillment whose roots reached back into the Old Testament and the nation of promise (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 3:13-26; 10:42-43; 13:23-39). The Jews who heard Paul were being told that if they followed through on their commitment to God, they would embrace the message of promise inaugurated and become members of the new community.

However, events forced the church to become distinct, because of the depth of Jewish rejection. As a result, the church emerged as an independent community outside the synagogue. In Luke's view, Christians did not leave the synagogues; they were forced out. Acts outlines this development and shows that Christians did not turn their backs on Israel, but, rather, the synagogue failed to embrace the promise given to the Jewish fathers. Such argumentation is especially central to Peter and to Paul's apologetic in their speeches (2:42-47; 4:23-37; 13:1-3; 20:17; 23:6; 24:14-16; 25:8; 26:6-8, 22-23).

Luke saw the new community as something novel. This is why in Acts 11:15 Peter could refer to the events in 2:1-4 as "the beginning." Now in Lucan terms, it is the beginning of the realization of promise, as Peter's remarks relate to the first distribution

of the Spirit (Acts 2:14-36), an act that recurred for Gentiles in Acts 10. So what emerged as the church had its origin in the coming of the Holy Spirit. Acts 11:15-18 makes the bestowal of the Spirit the starting point for this new era and this new group of faithful people. Luke explained how this group became distinct from Judaism and yet had the right to proclaim promises that used to be the unique property of the synagogues. God is present in this new community. The additional point about this new people in Acts 11 is that God has included Gentiles in this circle of blessing through direct intervention (vv. 11-18). The events of the founding of the church in Acts 2 have a parallel in the events at Cornelius' house in Acts 10:1-11:18, thus showing beyond dispute that God had acted to include the Gentiles.

Such inclusion was suggested in remarks earlier in Acts (i.e., before chap. 10), even though their full force was not realized at the time by the speakers. The promise was for Israel and also for those "far off" (2:39; cf. Eph. 2:11-17). In fact, it is for "all the families of the earth" (Acts 3:25 NASB). Even Jesus had spoken of the Old Testament teaching that the message of repentance would go to all nations (Luke 24:47). In this sense there was continuity between the new community and the Old Testament, yet there was discontinuity as well.

God had to press the point to make discontinuity clear and to show that Gentiles were to be included. He had to use a vision to show Peter that no man is unclean and that the church is to show no partiality (Acts 10:28, 34). All are welcome and have access to the Spirit, whether Jew or Gentile (10:35, 47; 11:18). But Gentiles do not have to become Jews first and then Christians (15:1-29). The new institution, having a beginning, did not require a total link to the old era other than to share in the promise to which it always looked. This promise stands inaugurated, but it is not completed. God still has work to do.

Previously, in the section on the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's provision was seen to be central in Luke's theology. The Spirit's coming is clearly central to the church. John the Baptist alluded to it (Luke 3:15-18), and Jesus told the disciples to wait for it (24:49). The event is described in Acts 2:1-4 and explained later by Peter in vv. 17-21, where he cited Joel 2:28-32. Here is a sign of the inauguration of the last days. The Spirit's bestowal is the essence of the new covenant promise. In his exposition, Peter made clear that the events of Acts 2 initially fulfilled Joel. Peter used a strong fulfillment formula to introduce the citation, saying of the present event that "this is what was spoken" (*touto estin to eirēmenon*, v. 16) by God through Joel long ago. This fulfillment formula would be familiar to Peter's Jewish audience as indicating fulfillment, as its use at Qumran to indicate fulfillment shows (1QHab). When Peter cited Joel, he also added within the citation an additional reference to prophesying, to highlight the connection to what was occurring and to describe what had just resulted from the pouring out of the Spirit. The verb for pouring out, *ekcheō*, is used again in Acts 2:33 with *execheen*, thus linking the citation's fulfillment to the event with Pentecost. Because Jesus ascended, the promised Holy Spirit was poured out. This was the promise of God that had now come for those near and those far off (vv. 30-33, 38-39). The centrality of the Spirit's bestowal is also indicated in two other outpourings: 10:45 ("the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out") and 19:6 ("the Holy Spirit came on them"). The repetition of the event shows its importance to Luke.

Thus, the essence of the church is that she is a Spirit-indwelt community. This indwelling is not limited to her leaders and is not something that came and went. Instead, it includes the entire membership and continues permanently, just as Joel said the Spirit would come on all God's children (Acts 2:17). The indwelling described here is new and unprecedented, though it was anticipated in the promise of Joel. The church is something new and something old, new because of its quality and scope, and old in that God said the Spirit would come and relate the church's gifts and blessings of forgiveness to existing covenants and promises tied to the hope of the Christ and His resurrection.

One other feature made it new. The Spirit's indwelling came because of Jesus' rule *in absentia*, which means that the Messiah is ruling now not on earth from a national throne, but from God's side in heaven. A future, earthly rule was not excluded by this new dimension, as Acts 3:19-21 shows. Peter's remark about "the times of restoration" of all the Old Testament prophets promised shows that the development of Old Testament promise in Jesus' ministry did not cancel out what had been promised earlier. The program of promise as presented, explained, and expanded by Jesus and the apostles complements earlier Old Testament revelation and anticipates the decisive rule of Christ on earth, what Revelation 20 defines as the Millennium. This future period will bring in the final phases of the promise's realization that Luke alluded to in Acts 3:21, a realization that eventually will culminate in the new heavens and new earth.

So the church age represents a sneak preview of Christ's coming earthly rule. The transforming presence of God's Spirit in His people shows that He is active in fulfilling His promise to vanquish the enemies of the people of God, as He enables them to serve Him in holiness, gives them life, and spares them from the judgment to come (Luke 1:74-75, 78-79; 3:7-18; 11:14-23; Acts 2:30-39). The Spirit-indwelt community pictures to some degree, but not fully, what the greater kingdom and rule of Christ will be like when He returns to earth to bring all righteousness. However, only in this coming return will Jesus' foes and the enemies of the people of God be totally vanquished, as the restoration of all things comes and Israel's promises are fully realized (3:21).

So Luke saw two phases of rule, of which the church is the first. The two periods, though distinct, are related. The church, though it lives in an era of fulfillment, also awaits the consummation of God's promises. For Luke, the uniqueness of the church is not so much that she is Spirit-indwelt, for that was anticipated by the new covenant. Rather, she is Spirit-indwelt in a way that includes Gentiles (cf. Eph. 3:4-6; Col. 1:24-29). In this new institution, the church, the Mediator Jesus Christ rules from heaven through the work of His Spirit to bring righteousness to people on earth. Though He is not directly manifest on earth, He dispenses blessing to His children. The next phase of God's rule will differ because the Mediator will be present on earth and His rule will be comprehensive, including the redemption of all earth's social institutions and national entities.

It is interesting to note that in Acts the term for church (*ekklēsia*), when it refers to this new community, appears only in narrative notes and summaries by Luke (Acts 8:1, 3; 9:31; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3-4, 22, 41; 16:5; 18:22; 19:32, 39, 41; 20:17). The one exception comes in Paul's remark to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:28). The new community's identity emerged slowly as her distinctness became clearer

through the movement of events. Even the name "Christians" came after the church had spread to Antioch (11:26), and another frequent term used to refer to her was as a "sect" (*airesis*) of the Nazareans or of the "way" (24:5, esp. v. 14; 28:22, where Jews in Rome had been warned about this new "sect"). The term sect was also used to refer to groupings within Israel (5:17; 15:5; 26:5), so it was not necessarily negative. It simply noted a distinct group was emerging. Even outsiders had trouble noting that the distinction was becoming a chasm (23:27-29). Acts notes the growing division with sensitivity and tries to explain what factors created it.

The apostles. The importance of the present church age was underscored by various authenticating signs, as discussed earlier in the section on Soteriology. Here may be noted the twofold role of the apostles as overseers and witnesses to the formation of this new entity. The function of overseeing is evident in the passages that refer to the presence of the apostles at new phases of expansion in the church. Acts 8:14-25 records Peter and John's approval of the work of Philip in Samaria. Paul contacted the apostles after His call (9:26-27). Peter carried the gospel to Gentiles (10:23-48). The apostles sent Barnabas to Antioch (11:22). The Jerusalem Council was mainly an apostolic gathering, though others (including James, Paul, and Barnabas) were involved (15:1-35). Paul reported to James and the elders of Jerusalem about his Gentile mission (21:17-19). From the beginning, the church had structure, authority, and accountability. In Acts this authority was mostly in the hands of the apostles.

One other passage, Luke 22:29-30, shows a distinct feature about the apostles' role. Here Jesus offered the Eleven kingdom authority, with the opportunity to sit at His banquet table and additionally to "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." This passage looks ultimately to the future coming consummation, when Messiah will reign on the earth. The seat at the banquet anticipates a kingdom celebration after Jesus' victorious return. Though the apostles had authority in the early church, they will also have authority in the kingdom to come. Their authority then will expand and extend over all Israel. This expanded exercise of authority is yet future because such a banquet or such "apostolic rule" over Israel's twelve tribes is not seen in Acts. No allusion to a current apostolic rule over Israel appears there. The apostles had oversight over the church, but one day, interestingly, they will help rule Israel.

The apostles were qualified to exercise leadership over the church because they were appointed to be witnesses (*martyres*) to Jesus. Luke 24:48 anticipated this development, and Acts 1:8 formalized this call to be witnesses. The qualifications for this special function included being personal acquaintances with Jesus and His ministry, and being a witness to His resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). References to the witnesses abound as they testified to various events in Jesus' life, including His resurrection (2:32; 3:15; 13:31); His death, resurrection, ascension (5:32); and His ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection (10:39). Not all witnesses were apostles, though most were. Though Paul was a witness (22:15; 26:16), his "apostolic" role is a much-discussed issue in Acts. Stephen also received the title of "witness," and he clearly was not an apostle (22:20). Despite these minor exceptions, the church expanded under the leadership of the apostles, who had oversight over the church. As reliable witnesses of what they had seen firsthand, they proclaimed the the message about Jesus. They took the message to a broader audience and formed a new community by God's direct intervention.

Israel and the church. In the early chapters of Acts the Jews' reception of the gospel message was strong and troubled the Jewish leaders. But later, Jewish reaction and persecution set in so that the church was scattered. In some locales the message was taken out of the synagogue and offered directly to Gentiles, who responded favorably (13:46; 18:6; 28:28). This pattern of mixed Jewish reception, persecution, and turning to the Gentiles was especially common in Paul's ministry. The apostles began in the synagogues because they believed the message of Christ was for those in Israel. Local churches developed by necessity, the necessity of survival in the face of rejection. These realities caused Luke to speak repeatedly in Acts of the church's messengers "turning to the Gentiles" and "warning Israel." These themes often appear side by side, and they dominate the last third of the book of Acts. They show how the church was not Israel and how that distinction became a reality historically.

From the start God's plan was to include Gentiles. Luke 2:32 and 3:6 appeal to Isaiah to make the point that God sent Jesus to bless Gentiles too. First, the appeal to Isaiah 42:6 meant that Jesus would be a light to the Gentiles. This servant-light image pictures the inclusion of Gentiles in the blessing of the light (cf. Luke 1:78-79). The quotation of Isaiah 40:5 in Luke 3:6 showed that God's salvation would be available to all. John the Baptist's ministry would prepare the way for God's coming in Jesus so that all people might have the opportunity to come to God.

Illustrations of this universally available salvation abound. The centurion was commended for having a faith greater than anything seen in Israel (Luke 7:9). Gentiles are pictured as parading to the banquet table (14:16-24). In a particularly significant parable overlooking God's plan, the vineyard of promise and blessing is described as taken from Israel and given to others (20:9-18). Others receive what Israel once had. The fact that the current period is called "the times of the Gentiles" (*kairoi ethnōn*, 21:24) also points to God's present focus on the Gentiles.

Two facts show that Israel has a future as well. Jesus' eschatological discourse in Luke 21:5-36 with its "day of the Lord" imagery, points to Israel's future vindication, since that was what the "day" was all about. Also Peter's speech recorded in Acts 3:12-26, which refers to the future fulfillment and completion of all the Old Testament promises (v. 21), indicates that she is only temporarily set aside. But the current focus on Gentiles also helps show that a distinction exists between Israel and the church.

The apostles were slow, however, in turning to the Gentiles, though Jesus had commanded the disciples to preach forgiveness of sins to all the nations starting from Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). What the disciples seem to have understood by this was a call to preach the message in every nation to Jews of the diaspora. However, that is not what God meant. So He seized the initiative in Acts 10. Through a vision to Peter, He showed that Gentiles were intended.

This vision is important because it is Luke's (and God's) answer to the Jewish charge that what the church offers is not really God's promise, because that promise is for Israel. God's offer of salvation and a share of His promise to Gentiles needed explaining, because some Jewish Christians were nervous about opening the gospel to Gentiles without making them respond to the law and many Jews had rejected the Christian claims outright. Acts 15 shows the concern of Jewish Christians, while the persecution of the church in Acts comes almost entirely from Jewish sources. On the

other hand, Gentiles might have been disturbed too. Having entered into God's blessings, they saw the violent response of Jews to something that was originally for Jews. Some Gentile believers might have concluded they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, or at least, in the wrong way. Or they may have thought Jesus was not for them, or that they needed to heed the law. Luke's answer to this problem was short and simple. God made disciples go to the Gentiles.

As a result, Gentiles, starting in Acts 10, became more and more the center of evangelistic success. Three times Luke highlighted Paul's turning to Gentiles (13:46-49; 14:27; 28:25-29). Sometimes Jewish unbelief preceded this turn in Paul's ministry, but the call to the Gentiles was a part of the church's mission regardless of Jewish response. Nonetheless, the juxtaposition of Jewish rejection and Gentile reception recalls an element in Pauline theology, the turning to Gentiles as a means to making Israel react (Rom. 11:11-14).

Warnings to Israel also were frequently given. John the Baptist spoke of the axe at the root of the tree, warning that having the right racial ancestry was not enough (Luke 3:7-9). In bitter pronouncements of woe against the Jewish leaders Jesus told them they were not on the path to life and were preventing others from getting there (11:37-52). In the parable of the barren fig tree Jesus threatened to cut down the tree of Israel which had not borne fruit (13:6-9). The judgment was delayed, but its potential reality still was present.

That threat was carried out later. The first hint was Jesus' declaration that Israel's house was desolate (13:35). This language recalled the judgment of the Exile stated in Jeremiah 22:5 (cf. Jer. 12:7). Rejecting God's way and living under sin, the prospect of covenant curse—God's judgment—could only follow. However, this does not mean that Israel is permanently rejected, just as the Exile was not permanent. But those in the period of judgment would have no hope unless they responded to the Lord. The nation's history of rejection of the Lord was evidenced by the fact that she had slain prophets and God's messengers even before Jesus came to them (Luke 13:31-33). This critique of the nation is common in Luke and recalls the message of the Old Testament prophets against the nation. This historical critique of the nation means that Luke shared the "Deuteronomistic perspective" of Israel's history, because the appeal for judgment was based on the covenant curse that would come on the nation for unfaithfulness, as promised in Deuteronomy 28-32.

Jesus did not relish such judgment. He wept over Jerusalem because she had not recognized that in Jesus, God was coming to her in a "visitation" (cf. Luke 19:41-44). Similarly, as Jesus journeyed to the cross, He warned the daughters of Jerusalem to weep and mourn because judgment was coming on the nation (23:27-31). This passage, unique to Luke, alludes to several Old Testament passages in painting the horror of judgment in terms that recall the day of the Lord (Jer. 19:9; 41, 43; Isa. 54:1; Hos. 10:8). The allusions refer to the approaching fall of Jerusalem that came in a.d. 70. The vineyard, given to others, fits this theme as well (Luke 20:9-18).

Luke made the same point in Acts. In Acts 3:23 Peter spoke of the curse of being "cut off," by citing Leviticus 23:29. Failure to heed the apostles and prophets results in judgment. Stephen's dying words related how the nation had always resisted God and,

as a result, brought judgment on herself (Acts 7:51-53). Stephen's remarks recall Jesus' stinging rebuke in Luke 13:31-33.

Too much, however, should not be made of this emphasis that the nation is "cut off." All through the book of Acts, the apostles always went to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16). The offer to enter into participation in the promise was always made to the nation Israel, despite her rejection of Christ. Nowhere was that offer withdrawn in the book of Acts. Opportunity to receive the message still existed. However, the pattern of response was clear. Usually the offer was rejected, though others responded (2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7). Those who responded picture a faithful remnant in the nation who clung to the nation's hope. In fact, it could be argued that this Jewish remnant was a point of connection between the promise of the old era and the realization of the new, since this group most clearly had moved from one period into the other. They represented those Jews who clearly saw what God was doing and so responded to the gospel message.

So the new community saw herself as called to obey God by continuing to preach the message of Jesus to the people of the nation, even in the face of the leadership's opposition. In fact, much of Acts 3-5 is concerned to show that God gave His endorsement to those being persecuted for preaching Jesus. Peter noted that the new community will obey God, not man (4:19). Rabbi Gamaliel noted that if this movement is of God, the Sanhedrin will not be able to stop it, while if it was not, the movement would die out on its own (5:38-39). The new community's growth and survival in the narrative is Luke's answer to these alternatives. Even while in prison, God directs the apostles through the angel to take the message to the people of Israel in the temple (5:19-20). The church considered it an honor to be able to share the message and asked for boldness to do the job (4:23-30; 5:41).

However, since most Jews did not respond, the messengers of the gospel turned to others. As recorded in Acts 13:41-45, Paul turned and offered a warning to Jews. Jewish jealousy and persecution would not stop the message, but it did mean danger for those who rejected it. Paul and Barnabas shook the dust from their feet (v. 51), a sign of judgment (cf. Luke 10:11-15). Later Paul left the synagogue in Corinth to continue his evangelistic work (Acts 18:5-11). Finally, Paul turned again to the Gentiles (28:25-28), explaining to the nation his move by using the language of Isaiah 6:9-10 to describe the dull hearts of many (or even of most) in the nation. Though not a rejection of the nation nor of Jewish mission, Paul's remark did warn of severe obduracy and thus of possible judgment that the nation faced during the period of the prophets.

Luke was saying to his readers that the gospel might not be going to Israel as much as it seemed it might, but that was not the church's fault or intention. Such a failure had not halted God's plan, nor did such failure represent a departure from God's plan. The Gentiles are also included. They are responding. God is building a new institution, the church, which now proclaims the promise and in which both believing Jews and Gentiles are blessed (Eph. 2:11-22). The new community had attempted to offer the promise to Israel. That new community had taught and preached in her synagogues, but the church mostly met persecution and expulsion. God presented His message to Israel but she, especially as represented in her leadership, rejected it. Since Israel's house was "desolate," in its place had come a new house, the church, in which God's Spirit indwells all who come to seek refuge in salvation through Christ. Jew and Gentile alike

share in God's benefits. The temple is no longer a place to go see the Shekinah. Rather, the Shekinah has come to indwell believers. God is not through with Israel; He has just set her aside. In her stead has come a new entity whose origin is traced in the momentous events recorded in Acts 2. The Holy Spirit, once promised to Israel, still had come, despite the nation's refusal. That promise resides in the church until Jesus returns to set all things straight again and bring Israel back into the fold (Acts 3:19-21).

PERSONALITIES IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Peter. Undoubtedly, the key disciple in Luke's writings is Peter. He was the representative disciple, as well as the leading apostle. A key incident early in Jesus' ministry occurred in Peter's boat (Luke 5:1-11). The miraculous catch of fish caused him to confess his sin and to ask Jesus to depart, since he considered Jesus too holy to be in their presence. But Jesus communicated reception, mentioning that the fish caught in the net were nothing compared to the people Peter and others like him would catch for God. They would become fishers of men. The recognition of sin's presence enables one to serve. Peter represents confessing disciples who enter humbly into service for God and are accepted by Him.

Another indication of Peter's leading position was his confession of Jesus as the Christ (9:18-20). In another incident Peter spoke for the disciples by raising a question about the meaning of a parable (12:41). Peter recognized the difficulty of what Jesus had asked a rich man to do, in telling him to sell all and follow Him (18:22), so Peter probably affirmed that the disciples had done that very thing (v. 28). Responding positively, Jesus spoke of the rewards such a response brings both now and in the age to come (v. 30). Jesus' remark showed that the "all" language of His call to the rich man did not mean that the absolute standard was impossible. As Jesus said, "What is impossible for man is possible with God" (v. 27). The disciples, despite their many moments of failure and lack of faith, had a fundamental association with Jesus that God recognized.

Another incident showing that failure does not mean disqualification is Peter's denial of Jesus (22:31-34, 54-62). Here is an example of a disciple in severe failure, who regretted his fall and was enabled by God to continue to serve. Peter had come to learn that assuming one will always remain faithful can lead to spiritual failure. One must recognize the strength of sin and the necessity of dependence.

Peter was a representative disciple. He learned about his sin. He confessed Christ. He had made fundamental commitments to Jesus, in the midst of a world with other values. He sometimes failed. But in it all he recognized that Jesus is the answer. There was nowhere else to turn. He learned to rely on the One he confessed as the Messiah. In this focus Peter is exemplary.

Peter also was the leading apostle. He preached to the unsaved, exercised apostolic oversight among believers, and witnessed to Jesus. He was the leader in early church events, including the choosing of a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:15-22), explaining Pentecost (2:14-40), speaking of a healing (3:12-4:12), or exercising judgment against members of the community (5:1-11). He challenged the religious authorities, who tried to prevent Peter and others from speaking about Jesus (5:29-32). He took the gospel to

the Gentiles and defended this expansion before Jewish believers (10:1-11:18). Peter modeled carrying out God's will boldly and bearing His message powerfully.

Stephen. Stephen is a key transition figure whose ministry is told briefly (Acts 6:8-7:60). He is the first Hellenistic Christian whose words are recorded in Acts. He had less patience for the veneration of the temple than perhaps did his Jewish Christian colleagues, but his understanding of Old Testament history paralleled that of Jesus (Luke 11:47-52; Acts 6:9-12). Stephen knew that God could not be confined to a single location, something the Old Testament prophets also knew (Isa. 66:1). In Acts 7 Stephen outlined Israel's history of rejection of the Lord, an act ironically repeated by the nation when the people stoned Stephen. In Acts 6 Stephen was a part of a group that raised questions about the church's treatment of widows. He then became part of the solution to the problem as he served the widows in the church. His bold preaching and selfless service are models to the church of an active member filled with God's Spirit (6:3, 5; 7:55), wisdom (6:3), faith (v. 5), and grace and power (v. 8). His martyrdom showed the length to which a disciple should be prepared to go in proclaiming Jesus. Jesus' standing to greet him at his death (7:55-56) shows heaven's welcome of such a saint, where Jesus received him as the reigning Son of Man.

Philip. Another Hellenist who was prepared to share Christ is Philip. An active witness for Christ in Samaria (8:5-13), he explained Christ from the Old Testament to the Ethiopian eunuch (vv. 26-40). The cameo descriptions of figures like Stephen and Philip indicate what God can do with people among the multitudes in the new community. Such people grew into maturity and benefited the church through active service, including evangelism.

Barnabas. Barnabas was the exemplary encourager, witness, and servant. Nothing he did was for himself. He freely gave of his resources to the church (4:36-37), thus providing an example of how one with material means can serve the church. He confirmed Paul to the disciples, when some had doubted Paul's sincerity (9:26-27). He was an encourager and teacher at Antioch (11:22-30). He engaged in a missionary journey with Paul (13:1-15:12). Even when Paul had doubts about John Mark, Barnabas continued to offer encouragement that eventually bore fruit (15:36-40; 2 Tim. 4:11). In a church under pressure, where it would have been easy for some to complain or blame, Barnabas, by example and word, continually encouraged others to serve.

James. By Acts 15 James, the half-brother of the Lord, had become the leader of the Jerusalem church and the representative of Jewish Christian interests. He played a crucial role at the Jerusalem council (15:13-21). His citation of the teaching of Amos, as one example among the prophets about Gentile inclusion in God's blessing, seals the decision that Gentiles need not be circumcised. The citation of Amos 9:11-12 was a clear stroke of genius. Besides mentioning the rebuilding of the Davidic house and Gentiles seeking the Lord in a context of fulfillment, James cited the text in its Greek form, showing his desire to reach an agreement with those concerned about the Gentiles. James had a spirit that desired a thought-through, theologically sound unity. Lest anyone at the council object about the use of Amos with this emphasis, he introduced the citation by noting that many prophets had taught the same thing. When he said, "the words of the prophets are in agreement with this" (Acts 15:15), he was affirming not only what Amos taught, but also what the prophets as a whole taught. Amos is but one rendering that could be used to teach the theme. Thus James,

representing the theologically conservative Jewish camp, supplied the final touch that resulted in a resolution to the problem.

When Paul returned to Jerusalem, James advised him to carry out purification rites ([Acts 21:17-24](#)). Taking the advice, Paul reflected sensitivity to Jewish Christian concerns. In this way Paul followed principles he taught in his own writings ([1 Cor. 9:19-23](#)). James was the representative of traditional Christian interests, but he was not a hard-nosed, stubborn leader. He examined what God was doing and studied the Scriptures to determine the best way to proceed. His commitment was not to rules or to blind tradition, but to God's message and will. He wished it to be carried out in the church with sensitivity to others. He worked for unity. Here is another example of leadership, in which cooperation was exercised in the midst of recognizing nonessential differences of emphasis.

Paul. The major personality in the second half of the book of Acts is Paul. Converted while an arch rival of the church, Paul represents the truth that God can transform even the most hostile heart. As a young Jewish leader, he took delight in Stephen's martyrdom and sought to put Christians in jail ([Acts 7:58-8:3](#)). Paul thought he was protecting God's honor from being defamed. But, ironically, God, taking the initiative yet again in Acts, transformed this archenemy of the gospel into one of its chief proponents. God was honored by Saul in a way Saul had never imagined. The account of Paul's conversion is so crucial to Luke that the story appears three times ([9:1-19](#); [22:6-16](#); [26:12-18](#)). Paul's conversion illustrates the dramatic reversal God's grace can achieve. He also represents the church's mission to Gentiles ([9:15-16](#)). Saul later became known as Paul and went from persecutor to persecuted. Carrying out his commission is the burden of [Acts 11-20](#), while the theological basis that vindicates his mission appears in [Acts 15](#).

In fact, the account of Paul's ministry has two parts: his journeys ([Acts 11-20](#)) and his trials ([Acts 21-28](#)). His journeys describe what he did, while his trials explain why he did it. Through Paul's arrest and persecution, the gospel went to Rome. The movement showed that even events that on the surface seem to be hindrances to the gospel helped accomplish its advance. Paul got to Rome, despite great risk. His long journey depicts the gospel getting to the ends of the earth through God's sovereign protection ([Acts 27](#)).

In his mission Paul preached Christ, planted churches, and performed miracles. This combination shows that he was engaged in all the ground-breaking activities of the apostles. In fact, Paul may well be the key to the otherwise enigmatic [Acts 19:1-7](#) episode, in which the Spirit came on those who knew only about John the Baptist. Paul was used by God in bestowing the Holy Spirit on them ([v. 6](#)), much as Peter was used in [Acts 10](#). Scholars have discussed whether Luke considered Paul to be an apostle. In [Acts 14:14](#) Paul shared this title with Barnabas, but this is not necessarily conclusive, since all that may be meant here is a broader use of the term, which suggests Paul was an authoritative representative of the church who planted churches. Barnabas's inclusion in the remark suggests that this is the sense in [Acts 14](#). Luke answered the question of Paul's position and role not by giving him titles, but by showing how Paul's ministry was like that of the other apostles. Paul's miracles and events like the one in [Acts 19:1-7](#) make this point.

So Paul preached the promise of the resurrection (23:6; 24:15; 26:6-8, 22). From the early days of his conversion, he shared Jesus (9:27-29). In his trial Paul declared his innocence and affirmed that he suffered innocently with a good conscience (23:1; 24:12-21; 25:8). He was guilty of no offense and none of the charges against him could be proved. As with Jesus, others too declared Paul's innocence, including scribes (23:9), Claudius Lysias (23:29), Festus (25:25), and Agrippa (26:32). Paul was an innocent sufferer. Justice may not always be carried out on earth, but the Lord noted Paul's faithfulness. Acts ends triumphantly, even though Paul was in prison, because the message still went out openly. Paul's own words in Philippians 1:12-19 describe the mood in which the book of Acts concludes. Even in chains, Paul could rejoice because the gospel was being preached. A witness and a sufferer for Christ, Paul is an example to all believers, especially those who face negative reaction to the gospel.

Paul's speeches differed, depending on his audience. His message, as summarized in Acts 13:16-41, is a typical synagogue speech, in which the emphasis is on God's promise to the nation about a future Son of David and the opportunity for Jews to share in its fulfillment. Acts 17:22-31 records a representative speech to pagans for whom the gospel was a completely new idea. In Athens, Paul began by speaking of the sovereign God, who is Creator and Judge of all men. He was interrupted, so no one can know exactly how his message would have ended, though one can be sure he was headed toward mentioning Jesus Christ, whom God has "appointed" as the coming Judge (17:30-32). Later Paul addressed the elders of the Ephesian church. The contents of this speech (20:18-35) look most like portions of his letters. Here he exhorted the leaders to be faithful in their oversight of the church, just as he had been with them. They were to guard the truth, watch for error, and offer gentle care to the flock. The church is precious, having been purchased with Christ's own blood. They were to lead it accordingly, knowing that God's grace would strengthen them for their tasks. They were to help the weak, for as Jesus taught, it is more blessed to give than to receive. Paul's three messages recorded in Acts 13, 17, and 20 picture him in three distinct roles: preacher-evangelist, apologist-evangelist, and church leader.

Paul's defense speeches differed from his earlier discourses. He gave defenses to the Jews (22:1-21), to the Sanhedrin (23:1-10), Felix (24:10-21), Festus (25:8-11), and Agrippa (26:1-32). In those speeches Paul spoke of his faithfulness to God and to his racial heritage. He upheld the Law and the Prophets. He believed, as the Old Testament teaches, in promise and resurrection. He did not ask for the role he had, for God called him in a vision. He was compelled to preach Christ as the fulfillment of promise and to carry out a mission to Gentiles. If Paul was "guilty" of anything, it was that he was an obedient vessel for God, faithfully proclaiming God's promise.

Paul's career is a capsule portrait of grace. The opponent of God's people became their servant. He was a Jew burdened for saving Gentiles. He was victorious in persecution. Though he was imprisoned, the Word of God was free. Paul pictures the triumph of God's sovereign direction.

Paul also pictures, with Barnabas, the messenger of God who is a light to the world through the message preached to it (Acts 13:47). Interestingly, in this passage the task of Isaiah's servant, normally associated with Jesus (Acts 8:32-35), extends to those who represent Him and preach the message about Him.

Summary. Events in the early church and the difficult lives of the church's major early characters do not seem on the surface to favor the spread of the gospel. But every apparent setback was a catalyst to the church's growth. Suffering is not to be shunned and neither is rejection. It is part of how the gospel spreads. The early church understood this lesson for in her praying, the community asked not to be spared of suffering, but to have boldness in speaking the Word of God (4:24–31). The lessons in the lives of the believers and leaders of the book of Acts can be summarized in the call to be strong, faithful, generous, and unified as the church seeks to fulfill her mission of proclaiming Jesus in the strength of God's Spirit.

THE NEW COMMUNITY

Her activities. The early church was an active community. Many of her activities have already been discussed. Her missionary activity and the proclamation of Jesus as the Christ are the outstanding features of the book of Acts. This preaching moved from Jerusalem (Acts 2-5), into Samaria (Acts 8), then to Gentiles (Acts 10-11), into various missionary journeys (Acts 13-20), and finally by trial to Rome (Acts 21-28). Along with the message came authentication by miracles. Numerous summary statements underline the church's proclamation role as she was characterized as a "bearer of the Word" (2:47b; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 11:21; 12:24; 13:49; 16:5; 19:20). In various ways these verses speak of the Word growing as a result of the church's activities.

Besides proclamation, the church also enjoyed communal life. The believers became a caring community, who worshiped, studied, and prayed together. Acts 2:42-47 summarizes the variety of activities in which the church engaged. The believers shared possessions, met needs, broke bread in their homes, praised God, shared in apostolic teaching, had fellowship, and prayed together. Acts 4:23-31 records the early church's exemplary prayer for boldness in speaking the Word. Acts 4:32-37 indicates how they shared possessions with each other to meet their needs. Acts 6:1-6 portrays how they creatively accepted appropriate criticism about the treatment of widows and then let those who raised the problem assist in solving it. Even physical needs were the object of the church's attention. One local community sent material aid and food to another community in need (11:29). The church prayed, supported, and commissioned a missionary endeavor (13:1-3). The church was active in outreach and in supporting the growth of its members.

The church also engaged in instruction, which led to theological reflection. Two scenes indicate the apostles had to give thought to what God was doing through them. In Acts 11:1-18 Peter submitted an oral report about what God did for the Gentiles. Later in Acts 15 further questions about this same issue needed further reflection. Here the church came together and hammered out a solution to a difficult theological problem. The discussion centered around a reflective evaluation of experience measured by a look at the Scriptures. The decision also reflected sensitivity to all concerned.

The church disciplined her members. This is seen in a grim way in the experience of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied and were struck dead (5:1-11). Peter, functioning like a prophet, described their deceit as against the Spirit of God, a reference to the fact that the community is indwelt by God and thus is special in the sight of God (vv. 3, 9). The penalty's immediacy probably has more to do with the young age of the church than anything else. But here God went to great lengths to show how important honesty and

purity are to Him. Accountability for sin is graphically portrayed here. Also revealed is that God does see everything that happens in his church. Sin and deceit are an offense to Him.

The church sought to minister to her members and reach out to the world. Ministry involved meeting both physical and spiritual needs. The whole person was cared for in the individual churches and across communities. In addition, the gospel was preached whether locally or by missionaries to faraway lands. The believers in the churches of Acts did not limit their vision to their own neighborhoods. Their call was to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth, and each community sought to do so. Alongside various activities was preaching, worship, and a desire to represent the Lord boldly. This required a clear message, an active communal life, theological reflection, and support for righteous living. The many dimensions of church activity created an effective community that accomplished much despite initially small numbers.

Functions in the new community. Luke mentioned five church functions, which are either offices or other organized roles. Some were permanent, others were temporary. The first, that of apostle, is most frequently discussed by Luke. The Twelve who were chosen for this role were named in Luke 6:12-16. They were not all successful, since Judas Iscariot was in their midst. He pictures someone who participates in the community, but is not a genuine member. Such people sometimes even reach prominence in the church. When the church replaced Judas, Peter described the qualifications of an apostle (Acts 1:12-26). This office was not to continue into succeeding generations, since a requirement was that one had to have been with Jesus and to have seen Him after His resurrection (vv. 21-22).

These authoritative representatives laid the foundation of the church and exercised oversight over the various communities, as already noted. But with the passing of the Twelve, this office passed away in its most technical sense. Paul and Barnabas were also called apostles in Acts 14:14, but this use is not the most narrow use of the term, since Barnabas is included (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1-6). Here it refers to authoritative representatives who planted churches in new areas.

The second function, the role of witness, has been discussed earlier. This is a major Lucan category and often is used along with the title of apostle in describing one of the functions of an apostle. But others also were witnesses. Stephen and Paul are singled out (22:15, 20; 26:16). The disciples were commissioned witnesses (Luke 24:48), and the Lord's commission was repeated in Acts 1:8. The witnesses attested to Jesus' miracles (2:22), His resurrection (v. 32), His crucifixion and resurrection (3:15; 5:30-32), and His postresurrection appearances (13:31).

Third, Luke briefly mentioned prophets. Agabus predicted famine in Judea and warned Paul about traveling to Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30; 21:7-14). Philip's four unmarried daughters were prophetesses to the church (21:9). Though not members of the church, Simeon and Anna were also prophets who spoke to all who passed by about the new baby Jesus (Luke 2:25-38). They represented pious Jews who awaited the time of promise and who responded to Jesus. Finally, the praise associated with the tongues-speaking of Acts 2 was called prophecy by Peter (vv. 11, 17-18). So sometimes the activity was present without the office being present.

Fourth, the seven men of Acts 6:1-6 were perhaps not precursors of deacons, since Luke did not mention that connection anywhere. These men represent those who ministered to believer's physical and other needs so that the leaders of the Jerusalem church could concentrate on ministering the Word.

Fifth, Luke mentioned the leaders of a local community in Ephesus (20:17-35). These elders were charged with oversight in a local area with responsibility to serve believers. There were several such leaders rather than one. They were to instruct and lead the local congregations. They gave the church a structure for accountability, as well as instruction and direction.

As the church grew, new functions emerged and organizational structure developed for the sake of efficient, effective service. Such development is seen in Acts 6:1-6. Leaders of spiritual quality developed. However, Luke spent little time discussing the structure of the church. Instead he stressed her activities and effectiveness.

Descriptions of community members. Luke had a few titles by which he referred to those who follow Jesus. By far the most common title is disciple (*mathētēs*), which simply means "learner." It reflects the fact that one who responds to the gospel is walking with God and is learning from Him. "Disciple" is used thirty-seven times in Luke and twenty-eight times in Acts. Some disciples were not real believers, since Judas was a disciple. There are false disciples and poor disciples. But the term itself describes a person who is dependent on and instructed by Jesus, or who at least appears to be in such a position.

Another common title used by Luke is believers (*hoi pisteuontes*). This term, occurring more in Acts than in Luke's gospel, became equivalent to "disciple." Eventually "believers" replaced "disciple" in other New Testament writings because the former focused on the fundamental characteristic of trust. The words "believe" and "believers" occur in Acts 2:44; 4:32; 10:43; 11:21; 13:39; 18:27; 19:18; 21:20, 25; 22:19.

The title "Christian" was used in a derogatory way by the enemies of the gospel. It described those who so identified with Jesus Christ that they were given His name. At least this seems to be the implication of the passive verb in Acts 11:26. The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch, and Agrippa also used the term (26:28). Believers were so clearly related to Jesus that outsiders knew the connection.

A final title for the movement was "the Way." This title expresses the notion that in this movement points the way to God (Acts 9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9; 22:4; 24:14, 22). However, the church's faith and commitment, not her titles, were the important issue for Luke. That, along with her ethics, marks the church out as a unique institution among men. Both her deliverer and her messengers are light to a needy world (Luke 1:78-79; Acts 13:47).

THE ETHICS OF THE COMMUNITY

Total commitment. The ethics of the church community found expression in her discipleship. At salvation, a believer becomes a disciple, but discipleship is a walk that lasts the rest of one's life. Since each Christian must still deal with the presence of sin,

his or her walk has successes and failures. For Jesus, the life of a disciple required total commitment (Luke 9:23; 14:25-33). This was something the disciples struggled to learn, but Jesus made it clear the requirement was absolute. Nonetheless, Jesus dealt graciously with His followers' lapses. On numerous occasions the disciples failed to understand what Jesus was doing and He rebuked them, but He called them to learn and respond more appropriately the next time (8:24-25; 9:46-50, 51-55). The disciples were also willing to learn. They were committed to Christ, for which He commended them (18:28-30).

Love for God and for one's neighbor. Jesus' basic commandment to His followers was for them to love God and others. This ethic was always a part of God's plan and revelation, since it is called the essence of the law (Luke 10:25-28). In one significant passage Jesus juxtaposed a discussion of love with the issue of faith, showing how closely these two ideas are tied together (Luke 7:37-50; cf. 1 Cor. 2:9; 9:21; an idea called the Law of Christ in James 2:5, 8; 1 John 4:18).

Another section of Luke's gospel is particularly clear in setting forth a focus on love for God and for others. In three consecutive passages Luke detailed loving one's neighbor (10:25-37), showing devotion to Christ (10:38-42), and speaking to God (11:1-13). The parable of the Good Samaritan is Jesus' response to an attempt by a scribe to limit his own ethical responsibility by asking, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus told the parable to make one point: The question is not to determine who one's neighbor is, but rather to be a neighbor to all. Loving others has no limitations, something Jesus elaborated on in Luke 6:27-36, where one is to love even one's enemy. This love, because of its unusual quality, is different from the way the world ("a sinner") loves (vv. 32, 33, 34). As Jesus said, a distinguishing mark of sonship is this unusual kind of love (v. 35).

When Martha was preparing a meal for Jesus, she was disturbed that Mary was not helping. She complained to Jesus, but He rebuked her, noting that Mary had made the better choice (10:38-42). Jesus' point was that it is better to sit and hear His teaching, for that reflects devotion to Him.

Sensing that communicating with God was key to their spiritual walk, Jesus' disciples asked Him how to pray (11:1-13). Jesus' model prayer reflects a respect for and reliance on God for every daily need. It also shows that the only way to be protected from sin is if one asks for the Father's help in avoiding temptation and follows Him. Jesus also urged them to trust God to give them what is best. Together, these three passages (10:25-37; 10:38-42; 11:1-13) emphasize treating others well, being in contact with Christ, and praying often to God the Father.

Prayer. Besides the focus on prayer recounted in Luke 11, other passages show this emphasis. In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus told a parable to stress that His disciples should pray for God's justice and not lose heart. Just as the judge determined to give the persistent widow justice, so God will execute justice when He returns. The passage is often read in a general way, but its focus is on keeping an eye out for God's vindication of the saints at His return (v. 8). But Jesus wondered whether many, in fact, will be waiting for His return (v. 8).

Luke 18:9-14 contrasts two attitudes in prayer, one of which is commended and the other of which is rejected. The Pharisee prayed proudly, almost as if his relationship

with God did Him a favor. Jesus condemned such arrogance. By contrast, the tax collector prayed humbly, approaching God on the basis of His grace and knowing that one cannot demand anything of God. God honors such humility in prayer.

Jesus urged His disciples to pray that they would "not fall into temptation" (22:40), a phrase that recalls the petition of the Lord's Prayer. They failed to learn the lesson during Jesus' passion (vv. 41-46), but in Acts 4:23-31, the believers were praying, showing that they were ready through the power of God to stand up for the Word.

Luke also underscored the importance of prayer by showing how significant events were associated with prayer. Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:21) and a miracle of Jesus (5:15-16) were accompanied by prayer. The choice of the Twelve came after Jesus spent an evening in prayer (6:12). The Transfiguration was accompanied with His praying (9:29), as was the return of the seventy-two (10:17-21). Both at Gethsemane and the cross, Jesus expressed humble dependence on God through intercession (22:39-46; 23:34, 46).

The church learned from Jesus' example of prayer. The descent of the Spirit was asked for through prayer, even though it was promised (Acts 1:7-14). Decisions were made in prayer (1:23-26). Miracles were done in conjunction with prayer (3:1). The vision about the mission to the Gentiles came to Peter as he prayed (10:9-11). Peter's deliverance from prison came during prayer (12:5). Paul and Barnabas's mission to the Gentiles was bathed in prayer (13:2-3). Prayer was clearly of supreme importance to Luke.

Perseverance in suffering. Jesus fully expected His disciples to suffer rejection for their association and identification with Him. He constantly called on them to persevere in the face of such rejection. One of the obstacles that could prevent them from bearing fruit was the pressure of the world. On the other hand, fruit could appear as they received the Word with patience (Luke 8:13-15). The exhortation for them to take up their cross daily (9:23) has already been noted. But Luke is the only Gospel writer to emphasize that this is a daily task. The question of whether the Son of Man will find faith on earth when He returns has already been noted (18:8). The call to endure to the end also was made in the Olivet Discourse (21:19). The road of His followers is difficult and so they should be prepared to experience opposition, as should any believer. More than that, they should continue to trust Him through all the adversity.

Watchfulness, patience, and boldness. Jesus told His followers that pressure against them would be intense. This was especially true in the first century, for if a person within a Jewish family decided to follow Jesus, one could be dismissed from the family and excommunicated from the synagogue. Therefore Jesus told believers to be bold and patient.

He exhorted them not to fear those who killed the body, but rather to fear the one who can cast into hell (Luke 12:1-12). In addition, Jesus promised the aid of the Holy Spirit to help believers give the right kinds of responses when they would be brought before government or synagogue leaders. Jesus told them to be prepared to stand before earthly authorities and confess Him. Peter (Acts 3-4), Stephen (Acts 6-7), and Paul (Acts 21-26) did so.

Jesus also told various parables on stewardship to warn those associated with the church to be faithful in carrying out their responsibilities. Luke 12:35-48 records a parable in which Jesus taught that people will be accountable to Him when He returns. Three levels of punishment will be meted: dismemberment (v. 46), "many blows" (v. 47), and "few blows" (v. 48). Others will be rewarded with more responsibility (vv. 43-44). Dismemberment figuratively speaks about the severe punishment given to the person who denies Christ by actions that blatantly disobey what He asks for from those who profess Him. It pictures being cast out with the unfaithful into hell. Many lashes will be given to those who do not obey but have knowledge. Few lashes will be meted to those who do not obey but who are ignorant. The obedient will receive the reward of additional responsibility.

A similar parable is that of the ten minas (19:11-27). Here too Jesus urged His hearers to watch and be faithful. Those who do something with the opportunity they have from the Lord will receive blessing. Those who do not trust God and fail to see Him as gracious, will end up with no blessing (v. 26). When the Lord returns, he will require accountability. One should be bold, patient, and obedient.

Steadfastness in praying for the Lord's return is also stressed in the parable of the persistent widow, already noted (18:1-8). Being able to read the weather, but not the signs that Jesus performed points up the need for all to be watchful spiritually (12:54-56). These words were a rebuke of people's refusal to see Jesus' authority in His works. Finally, Jesus warned the disciples to read the times that point to the approach of the end much as one "reads" the leaves of a fig tree (21:28-36). All these passages stress the importance of living in light of the end. One could place such texts in a discussion of the believer's response to eschatology hope. But for Luke the believer is called to live his life in light of the approach of the end, so placing this subject here in the context of discipleship is also important.

Faith and dependence. Individuals must approach God humbly, recognizing that because of their sin they are "sick" and in need spiritually (Luke 5:31-32). Having come to the Father for help, the believer is not to be anxious but is to rest in the care of His gracious Father (12:22-34). Here Jesus stated that God's children are much more important to the Father than the other parts of creation. In fact, since the Father knows His children have need of things, they need not be anxious. Faith helps remove anxiety.

Another picture of faith is the example of the prodigal who returned to his father, asking nothing but to rest in his mercy (15:17-21). The response of the father as he ran to meet his son is as important as the turning of the son to him. Here the humility of genuine repentance and return were met with total acceptance. One can trust the heavenly Father, who runs to the penitent to meet the one who turns to Him.

A prime example of humility is Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane (22:39-46). Jesus desired that events be different from the death He was to face, but in the end He asked for the Father's will, not His own. He trusted in God's sovereign care. Equally exemplary was Paul's willingness to die (Acts 21:13-14). Those who know they are in God's hands can face any opposition.

Joy and praise. Luke frequently mentioned praise as the appropriate response to God's work. John the Baptist's birth was a cause for praise, as was the birth of Jesus (Luke

1:14; 2:10). Joy was an initial response of some people to the Word (8:13). The seventy-two returned from their mission with joy (10:17). Heaven rejoices when sinners repent (15:7, 10). The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the resurrected Jesus (24:41) and witnessed His ascension (24:52). Philip's ministry in Samaria was a cause for joy (Acts 8:8). Peter's release from prison brought joy to the servant girl Rhoda (12:14). Paul's converts rejoiced (13:52), as did those who heard of Gentiles being converted (15:3). God's works bring joy; believers are to enjoy what God is doing in drawing people to Himself.

Testimony and witness. This theme has already been examined. It is at the center of the church's mission; all believers are called to share in witnessing of Jesus' work. A basic passage here is Luke 24:44-49.

Wealth and possessions. Luke wrote more on the topic of wealth than any other New Testament writer. The first mention of this topic is in Luke 1:50-53, where the hymn of Mary contrasted the powerful and the humble. God said He would bring blessing on the poor and judgment on the rich. This first reference was given in the context of God's covenant with His people (vv. 50, 55). God's promises come to those who fear Him; therefore, the hymn is not saying that God blesses all the poor without regard for their spiritual condition. Only certain poor, the pious poor, can claim these promises. Mary's references to the poor may allude to the '*anāwîm*, the pious poor described in the Psalter and elsewhere (1 Sam. 2:5; Job 5:11; 12:19; Pss. 89:10; 103:11, 13, 17; 107:9).

The poor are mentioned again in Luke 4:18, in which Jesus said he came "to preach good news to the poor." In addition, Jesus' beatitudes focused on the poor and the deprived (6:20-23). These passages suggest that the poor may have an inherently clearer understanding of what it means to depend on God for needs.

Luke also wrote about wealthy and poor people, whose generosity is commendable. The women who supported Jesus' ministry received a brief mention in 8:1-3, a passage unique to Luke's gospel. The wealthy Zacchaeus, standing in contrast to the wealthy young ruler of Luke 18:18-23, was commended when he declared that he had changed the way he handled his tax collecting (19:1-10). A poor widow was said to have given more than anyone else because she gave of her life when giving two copper coins worth little more than a few pennies (21:1-4)! In Acts 4:32-37 Luke applauded the sharing that occurred in the church, singling out wealthy Barnabas for special attention.

Three passages focus on money directly. Luke 16:1-13 records the parable of a shrewd manager, who, faced with dismissal, became generous and forgave some of the debts of those who owed his master money. Jesus lauded this generosity as wise (v. 8). Then Jesus added that a person cannot serve both God and money (v. 13). He called the disciples to be generous with their resources, for generosity makes friends (v. 9). He also noted how the handling of money is an indicator of responsibility and trustworthiness (vv. 10-12).

The failure of money is precisely the point of the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:13-21. Here a man experienced a rich harvest. There was no greed in him initially, only good fortune. Yet when fortune came, he planned selfishly and foolishly. When God required his soul, the man was rich toward himself but not toward God. In his death he was left with nothing. Such are the dangers of attachment to wealth.

A negative example also is seen in Luke 16:19-31. Here the rich man who showed no concern for the beggar Lazarus ended up in Hades where he suffered torment. In contrast the poor man, Lazarus, was at Abraham's side enjoying fellowship and comfort with his ancestors. Because "a great chasm" separated the two, it is impossible for them to change places. The passage warns the rich to be generous, for God knows what one does with his wealth (16:19-23). In the Old Testament, God had declared His desire that men be generous to the needy. The picture of eschatological reversal between the poor and the rich, like that found in this parable, is seen in Luke 1:53 and 6:20-26.

Yet another negative example regarding wealth is Ananias and Sapphira, who lied about their donation and incurred the swift and total judgment of God, who took their lives (Acts 5:1-11). Wealth can be a potential obstacle to discipleship, as it was for the seed that fell among the thorns (Luke 8:14).

Money, like any other God-given resource, is to be used wisely and generously. Having money is a risk, for it can give a false sense of security and lessen one's dependence on God. Money can create an excessive attachment to the world and greed, both of which Jesus condemned (Luke 9:57-62; 12:13-21). It also is a barometer of whether one wishes to serve self or others. The statements in Luke about money are not unique, for Paul's advice about money is similar (1 Tim. 6:6-10, 17-19). It is far better to trust God than money (Luke 12:22-34).

Hindrances to discipleship. Besides money and attachment to the world, Luke commented on other hurdles to discipleship. The cost of discipleship is often not counted sufficiently, so failure results (Luke 9:23-26, 57-62; 14:25-35). God is to be first. Because suffering is a potential reality (12:1-10; 21:12-17), it takes patience and endurance for believers to stand for the Lord (8:15). Much of Luke 9:51-19:44 is dedicated to explaining what the disciples' walk with Him is to be like. In fact, the section exists to explain how the disciples should live in light of the reality of Jesus' coming departure (setting up the section, 9:22, 44-45; then 9:51, 58; 13:33; 17:11, 25; 18:31-34; 19:41-42). The disciples' piety is to stand in contrast to the false piety displayed by the Pharisees and scribes. The walk that pleases God loves selflessly and serves constantly, suffering rejection and loving those who reject. The believer's distinctive walk with the Lord and love are to stand out in contrast to the often self-directed love of the world (6:27-36).

Commitment to the lost. Another key to discipleship is the believer's role in helping the church accomplish her mission. Luke 24:46-47 and Acts 1:8 record Jesus' commission to the church, while Luke 3:6 promised that in Jesus, the world would see God's salvation. God's commitment to the lost is noted in His consistent concern for outcasts and sinners, even when others object (5:27-32; 7:28-35; 15:1-32). When the church was slow to take up her task to reach all nations, God took the initiative, by giving a vision to guide her (Acts 10:9-22). He also used persecution to spread the church out to locales beyond Jerusalem where the Word of God grew (Acts 6-8). Members did not cower at the adversity; they asked for boldness to stand in the face of it (4:23-31). Individuals walking with God desired to make Him known to those who needed Him. This is the challenge of the disciple: to share Him with others.

This ministry was shared by all the people, and all types of people participated in its benefits. Peter, a self-confessed sinner, was a major leader (Luke 5:8). Lepers,

paralytics, tax collectors, the blind, lame, deaf, and poor were included (5:12-16, 17-26, 27-32; 7:22-23). A woman of suspect reputation responded to the Lord. This was a beautiful account of the sacrifice of response, faith, and love (Luke 7:36-50). In the account, this woman said not a word, yet her anointing of Jesus spoke volumes about the gratitude she felt for receiving forgiveness. Anyone can be included in God's blessings. This woman is one of four "silent witnesses" in Luke whose acts speak more than a thousand words could (the others are Mary, 10:38-42; Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31; and the widow, Luke 21:1-4).

Luke also noted the active role women had in Jesus' ministry. Elizabeth and Mary exchanged notes of praise (Luke 1:39-45). Anna the prophetess announced to all at the temple about Jesus as Israel's hope (2:36-38). Women offered monetary support to Jesus, including a woman from inside Herod's palace (8:1-3). A poor widow who gave little actually gave all (21:1-4). Women went to Jesus' tomb to anoint His body, and they were the first to hear that He was raised (24:1-12). In the book of Acts, other women had important roles in the church's mission. Mary, the mother of Mark, hosted a house church (Acts 12:12). Rhoda announced Peter's release (12:13-17). Lydia helped plant a church and hosted it (16:14-15). Priscilla, with her husband, aided a community and corrected Apollos, teaching him "the way of God more adequately" (18:26; cf. vv. 2, 18). Philip's daughters were prophetesses (21:9). Nowhere in Luke did a woman have an official role in the church's organizational structure, but they were active and very effective in many aspects of the church's work.

Summary. Discipleship is both demanding and rewarding. According to Luke, it is people-focused, showing love for God and then treating others with love that parallels the love of the Father. In Acts, one sees little of the church serving itself and much of the church reaching out to those who needed the Lord. For Luke, the people in the highly effective early church looked outward. They were not cloistered constantly; they were penetrating the world and sharing the gospel, even though it involved great risk. The church did not withdraw from those outside her; she engaged the world. Trusting God, they were not afraid of what that path meant for them. Such is the picture of the effective, exemplary community of Acts, which took the message of God's plan and promise to a dark and dying world (Luke 1:79). The picture of the church in Acts is not so concerned with structures, strategies, and offices as it is concerned about attitudes, allegiances, growth, character, and outreach.

Eschatology

THE BASIC STRUCTURE

A look at Luke's eschatology shows a fundamental two-part structure with the second half divided into three parts. The basic division is between promise and fulfillment (Luke 7:28; 16:16). In the "period of anticipation" are the Old Testament promise and the ministry of John the Baptist. The forerunner was a part of the promise period as indicated in Luke 7:19-20, 28; 16:16. With Jesus' ministry one enters the "period of realization." This fulfillment has three parts: transition, the "already" (church age), and the "not yet" (Christ's return to reign).

The transition is shown in passages like Luke 11:20 and 17:21. They indicate that God's current activity for His people had taken on a new level of intensity with Jesus' coming.

One can speak of the kingdom arriving, in that the King was exercising His power and reflecting His authority. This fact was discussed in the section on Christology and the work of Jesus. It is transition, because the covenant's salvific blessings, most notably the "promise of the Father," the Holy Spirit, was not yet available to all who believed (3:15-18; 24:49). This promise of the new covenant (Luke 22:20) could not be realized until the covenant was activated by Jesus' sacrifice. So the arrival of the central promised blessings of the period of realization did not come until the Spirit arrived. The Spirit's arrival completed the period of transition, in terms of bringing initial fulfillment of promised blessing to those who acknowledged that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

The descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, made possible by Jesus' resurrection-ascension, marks the arrival of the "already" period of promise. Jesus functions now as Lord-Messiah, distributing blessings promised in the Old Testament and holding all people accountable for responding to Him ("from now on," Luke 22:69; "exalted to the right hand of God" as Psalm 110 promised, Acts 2:32-36; the pouring out of the Holy Spirit as Joel promised, Acts 2:1-4, 16-21; and coming to judge, Acts 2:40; 10:42; 17:30-31). Acts 11:15 referred back to the event on the Day of Pentecost as "the beginning." Here the hope of the new covenant was inaugurated, made possible by Jesus' death (Luke 22:20). These current blessings are part of the eschaton because in Luke's view they represent the initial line of Old Testament promises that God fulfilled. In the Holy Spirit, God is at work in His people. Jesus rules with sovereignty over these benefits as the Mediator of divine blessing. The kingdom has come because the power of God is expressed through Jesus by means of His Spirit.

But there also is a "not yet" element in Luke's eschatology. Here is the hope of consummation, in which God's promises will be brought to full realization. All the Old Testament promises made to Israel will be fulfilled (Acts 3:19-21) and God will "restore everything" (v. 21). The promise of a period of the restoration of all things recalls the language of the disciples' question in Acts 1:6, a question Peter himself answered in this Acts 3 speech. It is the promise of salvation for Israel, expressed in Luke 1:69-75. This helps explain where the rule of Jesus over the nation (Luke 1:31-35) is headed. Jesus will return to the earth to rule directly over all. He will exercise His sovereignty, not only in salvific benefits, but also as "judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42; cf. 17:31). At that time, realization of Jesus' promise to the apostles that they will rule over the twelve tribes of Israel arrives, as they help administer righteousness and justice (Luke 22:30). The numerous pictures of the banquet table celebration relate ultimately to this yet-future age, when those who will share in the consummation of the promise will rejoice (13:22-30; 14:15-24; 22:16, 20).

Luke 22:16 is particularly significant. Jesus said He would not eat the Passover meal again with His disciples until He does so in the kingdom. This remark suggests that Jesus anticipated that promises to Israel will be fulfilled, that her major feast (the Passover) will continue to be celebrated, and that the apostles will be present at the celebration. Details about establishing this period are given in Luke 17:22-37 and 21:5-33. In these passages the coming final judgment is compared to what would happen soon, namely, the fall of Jerusalem in a.d. 70. In Luke 21, Jesus discussed what will happen first "before the end" (vv. 5-9) and what will occur "before" those events that come "before" the end (vv. 12-19, i.e., the events of vv. 12-19 come before those of vv. 5-9). He also declared what will happen to Jerusalem until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled as a pattern of what the end is like (vv. 20-24). Then Jesus summarized what

the End will look like (vv. 25-28). So the first judgment, which involves Jerusalem, is a picture of what the final judgment on the world will be like (see more on Luke 21 below).

An inauguration (of the present age) is related to Jesus' ascension, and the consummation (in Jesus' future reign) is related to His return. Jesus is at the center of these plans. His return, followed by the consummation, provides perspective on how one should live now. For in the consummation, there is accountability, judgment, and reward. Judgment will be for those who do not know Jesus or who blatantly disregard Him (Luke 12:45-46; 13:25; 17:37; 19:24-26; Acts 10:42; 17:30-31). Reward is for those who obey, while punishment is for those who fail to respond to the call of the Master (Luke 12:42-44, 47-48; 14:14; 19:17-19).

IMMINENCE AND DELAY

One of the great tensions in New Testament eschatology is the fact that Jesus' return, which is said to be soon, is accompanied with the fact that the church has a mission to the whole world. Added to this is the fact that Jesus has not yet returned. This tension is reflected in Luke. In Luke 18:8 Jesus spoke of the "speedy" vindication that will come to God's children. This highlights the theme of imminence that Luke associated with Jesus' return.

Perhaps Luke 18 sees imminence and vindication at two levels. One set of events lays the groundwork for ultimate vindication. Jesus' current rule means that He is present to give aid to His children now, as they face opposition from the world. Final vindication will come, but Jesus' presence with His own now means that the groundwork of vindication is already present. This reality is seen in two "death scenes" in Luke-Acts. One involves a thief crucified with Jesus and the Lord's promise that "today" the thief would be with Jesus in paradise (23:42-43). In the other scene Jesus welcomed the martyr Stephen (Acts 7:55-56). Strictly speaking this is not the full vindication spoken of in Luke 18:8, since the enemies are not yet dealt with, but it does represent an initial form of vindication. End time vindication is both "soon" and "not yet."

Another text often thought to teach imminence (and particularly problematic, if it has that sense) is Luke 21:32, where Jesus said that "this generation" will see God's promises being completed. The "generation" in view may be the generation of the end (looking back to events about Jerusalem's end in v. 20 or to the events of v. 25). That is, once the end-time events start, it will take only one generation's duration to establish His rule. When Jesus comes, the end will come quickly. Thus the text teaches how "instantaneous" the return is, not how imminent. Another way to take the verse is to see the reference to generation, not so much as chronological as moral. So this "evil" generation, which is what the unredeemed creation consists of, will pass away when Jesus returns. Such a use of the term "generation" occurs in Luke 9:41 and 11:29. If this is the sense, then imminence is not in view either; instead what is emphasized is that at the end, judgment comes. Either view of this verse is possible.

Luke 21 is complicated, because two events are described simultaneously in the first part of the discourse. Luke 21:5-24 covers two periods. Verses 5-19 describe mostly the situation that came with the fall of Jerusalem in a.d. 70. This fall was also discussed in Luke 19:41-44. Its grisly judgment in turn pictures what the end will be like. The

earlier judgment "patterns" what the end judgment will be like, providing an illustration of it. Luke 21:20-24 describes both events as one. Luke clearly included the earlier event when he, alone among the Synoptic writers, referred to Jerusalem's "desolation" and did not mention the abomination of desolation. The shorter term in Daniel refers to a variety of desecrations, as opposed to a specific desecration (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). All the desecrations involve the temple, but Daniel 11:31 refers to temple destruction and a cessation of sacrifices, as opposed to a desecrating sacrifice. It broadens the allusion to include the fall of Jerusalem. However, Luke 21:25-36 describes the events of the end only.

The details in Luke 21:25-28 are discussed more fully in Luke 17:22-37. The return of the Son of Man to earth will take place instantly and in a way that is obvious to all (17:24). It will come after the Son of Man suffers (17:25). Suddenly, as judgment comes, some will be taken and others will be left. Some will be preserved; others will be judged. The vultures (17:37) indicate that the major picture of this aspect of the return involves judgment. If one asks where those who are taken go, as the disciples asked (v. 37), the reply is only that vultures are there.

In Luke 21 Jesus spoke of two events, both future when He spoke, but one of which (the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70) is now past and one of which is yet future. In good prophetic style, Jesus united two events that picture the same reality. One mirrors the other. The fall of Jerusalem, occurring in the lifetime of many of the disciples, guaranteed the coming reality of the end-time judgment on the world. The events are so similar, it is easy to see how they could be confused. In fact, describing the two events together would have made it difficult to distinguish the two events until one of them had occurred. But the mixing together of these events also means that this discourse was very relevant to the disciples. They would need to stand firm in persecution, but they also could know that when the Lord returned, those who stand opposed to God's people will be judged. Vindication for the saints will come.

Other verses state that a time of delay would come. In Luke 19:11 the people expected the immediate arrival of the consummated kingdom. But in the parable of the ten minas that followed (vv. 12-27), Jesus made the point that in the interim between His departure and His return the disciples are to be faithful. More indicative are warnings in the Olivet Discourse itself. Luke 21:8-9 show that the events described in the first section are not yet part of the time of the end. Verses 20-24 suggest that Jerusalem would fall before the end would come. Only with the cosmic signs and the Son of Man's return will the end come (vv. 25, 28, 31). Then redemption draws near. In fact, verse 24 refers to the entire present age as "the times of the Gentiles."

Similarly, Peter later declared that delay is actually evidence of God's patience and desire to save (2 Peter 3:9). The return of Jesus and all the events associated with it are next on God's calendar (and so at least in this sense they will occur "soon"), but also in the interim believers are to be faithful and to watch for His return (Luke 21:34-36).

Luke's treatment of eschatology is not exhaustive. Other New Testament writers described events that Luke did not mention at all. Luke's eschatology focuses on the saints' final vindication in terms of Old Testament promises. His focus on the authority and victory of the returning Son of Man shows where the resolution of all things resides. Similarly, Paul remarked that God has summed up all things in Christ (Eph.

1:9-10). Salvation moves toward its completion, which means not only deliverance for the saints, but also vindication before their opponents as well.

PERSONAL ESCHATOLOGY

In Luke's "personal eschatology" Jesus briefly described what happens when people die. Two passages are to be noted: Luke 23:42-43 and Acts 7:55-56. They speak of people at death who were immediately aware that they were entering God's presence. The thief who confessed Jesus while hanging on the cross heard the Lord promise that "today" he would be with Him in paradise. Even as Jesus died on the cross, He drew people to Himself and promised them life in God's presence. In Acts Stephen saw heaven open up and Jesus, standing as the Son of Man, waiting to welcome him. The arms of heaven are open to receive His children. Death is consumed by eternal life (1 Cor. 15:54-55).

The Mighty God who Saves

Luke's two volumes are about the mighty God who saves and who does so through Jesus Christ. Mary sang of the "Mighty One" who had done great things (Luke 1:49). In her hymn she spoke of the hope of salvation, which Luke then described in his two books. Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the mighty God (22:69). This is the God for whom impossible things are possible (1:37; 18:27). He can save individuals and transform hearts. His plan will be accomplished. When God revealed to Peter that salvation was available to all, Peter could not resist serving God's plan (Acts 11:17).

God is also the Savior, as Mary said (Luke 1:47). His intricate plan "redeemed his people" (v. 68) through a "horn" raised up from the house of David (v. 69). God is calling people (Acts 2:21, 39; 15:14) and in Jesus Christ they see God's salvation (Luke 2:30).

These promises express God's lovingkindness and grace. It is by His "tender mercy" that "the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace" (1:78-79). He cares for His own daily (12:24-28), and He desires to reach those who are lost (chap. 15). God visits people in Jesus Christ (1:68; 7:16; Acts 15:4) whether they see it or not (Luke 19:41-42). God's Word reveals that through Jesus Christ, He is mighty, saving, and compassionate. His arms are open to any who turn to Him. Jesus is Lord of all, so the gospel can go to all. The hard times of the church are not signs of God's judgment against her because she has been too generous in offering salvation directly to Gentiles, but, rather, they are opportunities to stand up boldly for Him as God spreads His Word through the testimony of those who faithfully witness to the fulfillment of God's promises. This is the story of reassurance Theophilus needed to hear (Luke 1:4). But Luke's message and theology were not for Theophilus alone. The church has the responsibility to carry this message to a world that needs such deliverance and reassurance. People need to come to God through Christ to meet, both now and forever, the mighty God who saves.

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