

## Chapter Six

### Luke-Acts

In the Gospel of Luke and its sequel, the Acts of the Apostles, the theme of mission is of profound importance. So significant is this motif that Luke's two-volume work 'may be the clearest presentation of the church's universal mission in all of the New Testament'.<sup>1</sup> The Gospel tells the story of Jesus and his salvation; the Book of Acts traces the movement of that salvation to the Gentiles. The first volume begins with a summary of what had been promised to Israel and indicates how these promises are now to be fulfilled. It thus sets the stage for the beginning of Acts—the regathering of Israel and her mission as a light to the nations.<sup>2</sup>

[Other introductory points?]

As in the case of Mark and Matthew, we will follow a narrative flow<sup>3</sup> of Luke, giving special attention to the relevant mission passages within their salvation historical context.

*Luke's Prologue* (Luke 1:1-4)

*The Infancy Narratives* (Luke 1-2)

The infancy narratives of Luke 1-2, which have been described as an 'overture' and 'introduction' orienting the reader to God's work of salvation,<sup>4</sup> function as a prologue to both the Gospel and the Book of Acts. These narratives not only introduce many of the key themes in Luke's two-volume work; they also establish continuity with the Old Testament,

---

<sup>1</sup> Senior and Stuhlmüller 1983: 255. Green 1992: 23, comments: 'Mission is central to both Lukan volumes'; the author displays 'a strategic concern' with the relationship between Jesus' own mission in the Gospel and that of the early Christian movement in the Acts of the Apostles.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dumbrell 1994: 207.

<sup>3</sup> That is, a cumulative account of the story that unfolds as the narrative is read from the beginning.

<sup>4</sup> Bock 1994: 68. He suggests that these chapters serve 'as a theological overview of the work of God'.

survey what will happen in the course of Luke-Acts and provide a framework of interpretation for the subsequent events.<sup>5</sup>

God had previously acted in the history of his people, Israel. Now, according to the canticles of Luke 1-2, he is about to intervene once more on their behalf: Israel's hopes for a Saviour of David's line who will reign for ever (Lk. 1:30-35) are about to be realized, so fulfilling the expectations of 2 Samuel 7:12-13.

Through the birth of Jesus, according to the Song of Mary (Lk. 1:46-55), God will restore Israel (v. 54), thus fulfilling his promises to Abraham and his descendants (v. 55). The Song of Zechariah (Lk. 1:67-79), which expands on the significance of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, praises God for having visited and redeemed his people in the sending of his Son (v. 68). John's role is that of a forerunner, the prophet of the Most High (vv. 76-79), whose task is to prepare Israel to meet her Messiah and to accept him (1:17, 76, 77).<sup>6</sup> Jesus, the Son of the Most High, is the Messiah of the house of David. He is the mighty Saviour who will repeat the triumphs of the exodus in fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises (vv. 71-73). The purpose of the Messiah's deliverance of his people is that they might serve God 'in holiness and righteousness' (vv. 74, 75), in other words, that Israel might fulfil her divine calling from of old (cf. Ex. 19:5, 6). The salvation which the Davidic king brings is not a political deliverance or the physical restoration of Israel, but the forgiveness of sins that enables God's people to serve him 'without fear' (vv. 77, 74).<sup>7</sup>

Not all historical Israel, however, is truly God's people. The Israel which is the recipient of the divine promises has been redefined. God's mercy extends to those who *fear* him, he has lifted up the *humble* and filled the *hungry* with good things; but he has scattered the proud, brought down the rulers and sent the rich away empty (vv. 50-54). The Abrahamic promises are not fulfilled in national Israel, but in those who fear him.

---

<sup>5</sup> For a recent detailed examination of the infancy narratives including their function within Luke-Acts, see Bock 1994: 68-258.

<sup>6</sup> Franklin 1975: 84.

<sup>7</sup> Carroll 1988: 46.

The climax of the infancy narratives is the Song of Simeon (2:29-32),<sup>8</sup> where for the first time in the Gospel Jesus' saving work is explicitly related to the Gentiles (v. 32; cf. v. 31). Simeon is looking for 'the consolation of Israel' (v. 25; cf. Is. 40:1; 49:13), and this is described in terms of the salvation that God has prepared 'in the presence of all peoples' (NRSV), that is, before the whole world<sup>9</sup> (vv. 30, 31). This salvation comes with Jesus' birth: Simeon's taking of the child in his arms is 'intended to picture the arrival of [the] messianic hope for Israel'.<sup>10</sup> The one who brings this salvation and personifies it is revealed to Simeon as the Lord's Messiah (v. 26) who fulfils the role of Yahweh's Servant (v. 32; cf. Is. 42:6; 49:6-9). His advent is in accordance with the Abrahamic promises. This salvation is for the glory<sup>11</sup> of God's chosen people, Israel (v. 32), even though not all in Israel will accept the consolation Jesus brings. His ministry will lead to division, described as 'the falling and rising of many' (v. 34). At the same time, the divine salvation, brought by Yahweh's Servant, is 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles' (v. 32; Is. 49:6).<sup>12</sup> Having witnessed it (v. 31) Gentiles will also experience it. Thus, 'God's plan of salvation for Israel and her world will not fail'; it 'will redound to Israel's glory'.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> The basic themes of all the hymns are reiterated within the narrative of vv. 25-35. In addition, Jesus is here linked with the 'Servant' hope of Is. 40-66, and the universal scope of his work is specifically introduced for the first time. Cf. Hahn 1965: 129.

<sup>9</sup> The rendering of *pavntwn tw'n law'n* as 'all peoples' (NRSV) is preferable to 'all people' (NIV). The expression refers not simply to Israel but to both Israel and the Gentiles, suggesting the note of universalism in Luke for the first time (Farris 1985: 148). The parallelism of v. 32 with its mention of the Gentiles (*ejqwn'n*), together with the OT background to 'peoples', indicates a universal reference. For the moment, Simeon speaks of the preparation of this salvation in the sight of all (v. 31); the following verse will make it clear that all racial groups will *participate* in this salvation.

<sup>10</sup> Bock 1994: 241. In seeing Jesus Simeon sees God's salvation, since he is at the centre of that salvation. *Contra* Franklin 1975:120-121.

<sup>11</sup> Most commentators understand 'light' (*fw''*) and 'glory' (*dovxan*) as parallel, and both in apposition to 'your salvation' (*to; swthvriovn sou*), v. 30. On this view, salvation is a light to Gentiles and glory to Israel. On the other hand, it is syntactically possible to take 'revelation' (*ajpokavluyin*) and 'glory' (*dovxan*) as parallel and in apposition to 'light' (*fw''*), which refers back to salvation. On this interpretation, salvation is light for all people, in particular it is revelation for Gentiles and glory for Israel. Although there is OT support for the second view (Is. 60:1-3), and it is consistent with Lk. 1:78-79 and Acts 26:22-23, the first view is slightly preferable, given the background in Is. 49:6 (note the detailed discussion in Bock 1994:244, who prefers the second interpretation).

<sup>12</sup> On Luke's presentation of Jesus as the fulfilment of the Servant of Isaiah, see recently Moore 1997a: 47-60. Note the discussion of this at 000.

<sup>13</sup> Dumbrell 1994: 209.

The infancy narratives which function as a prologue to Luke-Acts show that the promise of Israel's restoration is fulfilled in Jesus, who is the consummation of OT hopes.<sup>14</sup> In him God has confirmed his earlier promises and brought the nation's history to a climax. The salvation which he brings has its roots in Israel's history: in Abraham, the exodus, David and the Servant of Isaiah. Through the Saviour's birth the promises by which Israel would be a blessing to the world are being brought to fruition.

*The Preparation of Jesus' Ministry* (Luke 3:1–4:15)

Although Jesus' earthly ministry was restricted to Israel,<sup>15</sup> Luke signals that the Saviour's coming will have world-wide repercussions. His apparently insignificant birth is set against the backdrop of Augustus' imperial rule and that of Quirinius, his governor (Lk. 2:1), while John the Baptist's and Jesus' ministries are deliberately located within the context of universal history (Lk. 3:1-2). This is not simply for conventional historiographical reasons, but is particularly because 'the word of God' that comes to the forerunner John (v. 2) has significance for 'all flesh' who soon 'shall see the salvation of God' (v. 6).<sup>16</sup> By specifically underscoring this universalist motif at the beginning of his Gospel and again at the conclusion of Acts (note 'the salvation of God' in 28:28), Luke shows it to be a unifying theme which ties together his two volumes. God's intention to save men and women from all nations is the purple thread that runs from beginning to end.<sup>17</sup>

Jesus' baptism (Lk. 3:21-22) marks the point of preparation for his ministry. He receives divine confirmation that he is the Davidic Messiah (Ps. 2:7) and the Servant of

---

<sup>14</sup> Jesus is set forth as God's final action for Israel in these narratives (Franklin 1975: 81).

<sup>15</sup> Significantly, the particularist statements in Matthew (15:24, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel'; note also 10:6, 23) do not appear in Luke.

<sup>16</sup> Only Luke, who does it deliberately so as to emphasize the universality of salvation, adds the last clause from Is. 40:5, 'and all flesh shall see the salvation of God'. See Turner 1996: 170; cf. Wilson 1973: 38-39; Senior and Stuhmueller 1983: 260; and Penney 1997: 23, 36-37. Franklin 1975: 139, comments: 'In the beginnings of the story [of Jesus] the final significance of the whole event is foreshadowed'.

<sup>17</sup> So Tannehill 1986: 40, who comments: 'The end of the work reminds us of the divine purpose which was disclosed at the beginning and which remains central throughout'. Cf. Hahn 1965: 129.

Isaiah (Is. 42:1), who is anointed by the Spirit and whose task is to cleanse and restore Israel (Turner 1996: 211).

Immediately following the baptism Luke records Jesus' genealogy (3:23-38). Both its content and position before the commencement of his ministry serve to highlight the scope of Jesus' concern for all humanity.<sup>18</sup> A key feature of the genealogy is that it goes beyond Abraham to Adam (contrast Mt. 1:1-17). Jesus is identified with *all people*, not simply with the nation of Israel as the chosen Son, since he is 'the son of *Adam*, the Son of God' (v. 38). This universal perspective, i.e., Jesus' relationship is to all humanity as their representative, fits hand in glove with Luke's emphasis on salvation reaching to the ends of the earth (Acts 10:34-43; 17:22-31).

In the temptation narrative (Lk. 4:1-13) Jesus as God's Son, that is, Israel's Messiah, replays the story of Israel's experience in the wilderness, in what amounts to a 'new exodus'. Tempted by hunger Jesus (unlike Israel) depends wholly on God for sustenance (cf. Dt. 8:3). He rejects the temptation to worship the devil in exchange for all the kingdoms of the world (Dt. 6:13; contrast Israel, Dt. 9:12) and, unlike Israel, God's Son refuses to put the Lord God to the test (Dt. 6:16). 'As the messianic king and Son of God (2 Sam. 7.14; Ps. 2.7; 89.27; a QFlor), Jesus represents the nation and fulfills the task of eschatological Israel in the wilderness'.<sup>19</sup> Israel's restoration has begun through the victory of God's Son over the devil.

#### *Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth* (Luke 4:16-30)

Luke's account of Jesus' ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth (4:16-30) has rightly been called 'programmatic'<sup>20</sup> and parallels the function of Peter's sermon in Acts 2. It is the first episode of his public ministry reported in any detail, which exemplifies what Jesus

---

<sup>18</sup> Bock 1994: 360. Note Marshall's comment: 'Jesus has his place in the human race created by God' (Marshall 1978a: 161). Penney 1997: 40, makes the further point: The '[i]dentification of Jesus with Adam in the genealogy reminds us that in Isaiah, the servant's mission to Israel enables the law to go forth to all the world and restore the blessings of creation in line with the Abrahamic promise. See our earlier discussion, 000.

<sup>19</sup> Strauss 1995: 215-216; Turner 1996: 205.

<sup>20</sup> Note the treatments of this paragraph by Tannehill 1986: 60-73; Nolland 1989: 188-203; Green 1992: 24-33; Bock 1994: 394-421; Menzies 1994: 145-156, who speaks of vv. 16-30 as 'the cornerstone of Luke's entire theological program' (145); Turner 1996: 213-266; and Penney 1997: 42-45.

proclaimed in synagogues throughout his mission and spells out in summary form the nature of his ministry. Vv. 16-30 are closely tied with the preceding material, beginning with 3:21 in relation to Jesus' baptism, his identification as God's Son and the Servant of Isaiah, and his anointing with the Spirit for the fulfilment of his mission (vv. 21-22). Later summaries of Jesus' ministry (cf. 7:21-22; Acts 10:38) refer back to this account of the nature of his mission (4:18-19), while the future outreach to Gentiles (vv. 25-27) and the Jews' rejection of Jesus (vv. 28-30), to name but two important motifs, are foreshadowed in this programmatic section.<sup>21</sup>

The centrepiece of the passage is the reference to Isaiah 61:1-2 (cf. 58:6) in vv. 18, 19 where Jesus speaks of his anointing by the Holy Spirit (at his baptism, 3:22-23) and the purpose of his mission.<sup>22</sup>

‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
Because he anointed me;  
To preach good news to the poor he has sent me,  
To proclaim to the captives release  
And to the blind new sight,  
To send for the broken in release,  
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord’.

Jesus is the Spirit-anointed prophet who announces the new era of salvation which he brings to pass as the anointed Messiah (Is. 61:1-2; 58:6). The nature of his mission is marked out by four infinitival expressions, three of which involve preaching: ‘to *preach good news* to the poor’, ‘to *proclaim* to the captives release and sight to the blind’, ‘to release the oppressed’ and ‘to *proclaim* the acceptable year of the Lord’. The first is fundamental to Jesus' task and is apparently amplified<sup>23</sup> by the following three.<sup>24</sup> Jesus is conscious that he

---

<sup>21</sup> ‘As Luke has told the story, the ministry of Jesus in Nazareth serves a central role in the Gospel as a whole’ (Green 1992: 26).

<sup>22</sup> For other passages in which Jesus indicates the purpose for which he came, see Lk. 5:32; 12:49-53; 19:10.

<sup>23</sup> Tannehill 1986: 62-63. Green 1992: 27, suggests that the threefold repetition of ‘me’ closely links the anointing, the mission and the speaker, while the three clauses with the verbs in the infinitive (‘to proclaim . . .’, ‘to send . . .’ and ‘to proclaim . . .’) together interpret what is meant by ‘to preach good

has been commissioned and sent by God for his mission which is essentially to ‘preach good news’ (*euangelizomai*) or to ‘proclaim’ (*ke\ryssol*) and it has ‘release’ (*aphesis*) as its goal, a ‘release’ which throughout the rest of Luke-Acts signifies ‘the forgiveness of sins’<sup>25</sup> and ‘deliverance’ from bondage to Satan (4:31-37).<sup>26</sup>

The ‘poor’ to whom the good news is announced are not to be understood narrowly of the economically destitute, as most recent scholars suggest,<sup>27</sup> but refers more generally to ‘the dispossessed, the excluded’ who were forced to depend upon God. Within the wider canonical context of the OT, the ‘poor’ in the Psalms, for example, are those in Israel who are in an inferior position or humble, while in the exilic period the term is extended metaphorically to designate the great need into which Israel had fallen because of the exile (Seccombe 1982: 26). In Isaiah the poor are the afflicted ones, those returning from captivity. According to chapter 61 the poor designates the eschatological community, the suffering exiles or faithful in Israel who have been spiritually oppressed.<sup>28</sup> It is to the poor and oppressed in Israel that Jesus comes announcing the good news of the kingdom.

As the eschatological prophet Jesus announces the ultimate Jubilee: he comes ‘to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour’ (4:19; Lv. 25:8-10). Already the language of liberation has been used in this composite Isaianic quotation: ‘to proclaim *release* to the captives’ (Is. 61:1), and ‘to *release* the oppressed’ (Is. 58:6). By ending his reading in the middle of Isaiah’s sentence and omitting any reference to ‘the day of vengeance of our God’,

---

news to the poor’ (cf. Green 1994: 73). Turner 1996: 250, while recognizing that the Spirit has anointed Jesus for five tasks (he counts the second, ‘to proclaim to the captives release and [proclaim] sight to the blind’, as two rather than one), nevertheless considers that Jesus’ mission is ‘largely a unified one’, since all but the last involve ‘a different Isaianic metaphor for Israel’s low estate, and all five concern her impending release from such a state’.

<sup>24</sup> The former term to ‘preach good news’ (*eujaggevlizomai*) is used repeatedly in summaries of Jesus’ activity, and indicate that he is continually doing what he was sent to do (4:43; 7:22; 8:1; 16:16; 20:1). The same verb is picked up and used of the proclamation of the gospel by Jesus’ apostles and other disciples (cf. Lk. 9:6; Acts 8:4, 12, 25, 35, 40; 11:20, etc.).

<sup>25</sup> Lk. 1:77; 3:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18.

<sup>26</sup> Green 1994:73.

<sup>27</sup> Note the survey of the lengthy scholarly discussion as to who are ‘the poor’, together with further bibliographical details, in Green 1994: 60-65.

<sup>28</sup> Seccombe 1982: 36-39; cf. Turner 1996: 250-251.

Jesus presents his mission in terms of hope. The ultimate time of God's vengeance has not yet arrived (even though there are implications of a future judgment; cf. 4:24-27). Jesus' coming is the dawn of the new age, but it is not a call to fulfil literally the legal requirements of the Jubilee. Rather, in his announcement the Jubilee is a picture of total forgiveness and salvation just as it had become in Isaiah 61.<sup>29</sup>

When Jesus claimed that this OT Scripture had 'today' been fulfilled in his ministry, the initial response of the people of Nazareth to 'his gracious words' (v. 22) was positive. But he did not meet their preconceived expectations, and because he was unwilling to perform signs in their midst (as he had done in Capernaum), he experienced the violent rejection which prophets can expect in their homeland (Lk. 4:22-23, 28-29). This is the first of many rejections Jesus encountered from 'his own people'. The good news which he proclaimed was from the beginning shadowed by a conflict that would persist to the end of Acts.

Jesus' response to the rejection at Nazareth was to recall the actions of Elijah (1 Ki. 17-18) and Elisha (2 Ki. 5)<sup>30</sup> who, at a time of severe famine and covenant unfaithfulness in Israel, performed miracles among Gentiles outside the promised land (vv. 25-27). Although the point is not explicit, the emphasis on Elijah's and Elisha's ministry among Gentiles foreshadows the Gentile mission in Acts.<sup>31</sup> Here is a major group towards which the mission is moving. Given the larger Lukan perspective of the redefinition of Israel and God's salvation reaching to the ends of the earth, with its early adumbrations of Gentiles being

---

<sup>29</sup> Luke does not take up the distinctive Jubilee language or ideas in his writings (e.g. 'year of Jubilee release', Lv. 25:10, 11, 13, etc.), while his use of the key term 'liberty or release' (a[ffesi]) is interpreted in terms of 'the forgiveness of sins' (see n. ); Tannehill 1986: 67-68; Turner 1996: 244; cf. Dumbrell 1994: 211-212. Turner thinks that Luke has rather presented this material as part of 'a more general New Exodus soteriology'.

<sup>30</sup> The acts of Jesus in Luke's Gospel bear close resemblances to those of Elisha (Lk. 7:1-10; cf. 2 Ki. 5) and Elijah (Lk. 7:11-16; cf. 1 Ki. 17:17-24). After Jesus restores the life of the widow's son (Lk. 7:14-15), the people claim he is a great prophet (v. 16), and this links with Lk. 4:25, 26. Cf. Johnson 1977: 98.

<sup>31</sup> So Wilson 1973: 40, 41, who notes that the 'main reason, in the immediate context, for the inclusion of vv. 25-27 is that they give Old Testament precedents for performing miracles among strangers'. But the deeper meaning of vv. 25-27 is that they are prophetic of the inclusion of the Gentiles. Note the treatment of Tannehill 1986: 70-73; cf. Senior and Stuhlmüller 1983: 260, 'In this inaugural scene, Luke manages to preview the ultimate consequences of Jesus' own ministry'; Nolland 1989: 203; Penney 1997: 14; and Larkin 1998: 16.

included within the divine saving purposes (2:30-32; 3:6), the mention of the rejection at Nazareth is not surprising. Later in Acts 10:36-38 when the mission of God begins to spread to the Gentiles, the Nazareth scene will be recalled. Ultimately, the proclamation of ‘the year of the Lord’s favour’ will be understood as a proclamation to people of every nation (Tannehill 1986: 72). And for Israel the implication is clear: those closest to Jesus may miss out on God’s blessing, while others who are far away may receive it.

*Jesus and the Centurion’s Faith* (Luke 7:1-10)

Jesus’ healing of the centurion’s servant (Luke 7:1-10), which is his first encounter with a Gentile recorded in Luke’s Gospel, foreshadows the expansion of his ministry to the nations, an expansion already anticipated in 4:25-27. Of fundamental significance to the narrative is Jesus’ climactic statement, addressed to the multitudes,<sup>32</sup> about this God-fearer: ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith’ (v. 9). This Gentile, who recognized his own unworthiness, believed in Jesus’ authority and the power of his word over physical illness at a distance. Our Lord’s willingness to heal the centurion’s servant shows that the extent of his mission was not particularist or limited to Jews, but was implicitly universal—to Jew and Gentile alike.

*The Mission of the Twelve* (Luke 9:1-6)

From a larger group of disciples Jesus chose and commissioned twelve ‘apostles’ (*apostoloi*, Lk. 6:12-15). He now shares his power and authority with them,<sup>33</sup> and sends (*apostello*) them on their mission (9:1-2);<sup>34</sup> accordingly, the reader begins to understand what being an apostle means. The mission of the twelve, which is an integral part of Jesus’ own mission, involves them also in preaching the rule of God and healing the sick (v. 2). This ministry, since it is all of a piece with Jesus’, has in view the reconstitution of Israel (6:13; 22:30),<sup>35</sup> a goal already anticipated in the birth narratives (see above). Significantly,

---

<sup>32</sup> Note the close parallels between this narrative and the Cornelius narrative in Acts 10:1–11:18.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Jesus testifies to their authority as God’s representatives’ (Bock 1994: 818).

<sup>34</sup> A mission which, in fact, marks the end of Jesus’ Galilean ministry.

<sup>35</sup> On the significance of the number ‘twelve’ in Luke’s narrative see Jervell 1972: 75-112.

Luke's description of the twelve's mission (cf. vv. 2, 6) is reminiscent of his portrayal of Jesus' mission and message which was developed in the light of the Isaiah quotation in 4:18-19, and reiterated in 4:43-44 (cf. Tannehill 1986: 215).

The twelve are to depend on God as they journey, recognizing the urgency of their message. They are to take no extra provisions, relying instead on those who respond to supply their basic needs. Since they are an integral part of Jesus' mission to God's people, Israel, the twelve can expect the sort of opposition that he faced; some of the towns they visit will not welcome them (9:5).

The mission instructions to the twelve are paralleled, even extended, in the mission charge to the seventy-two (10:1-24), while the greater mission announced in 24:46-49 will lead to an even more extensive ministry of proclamation.

*The Mission of the Seventy(-two) (Luke 10:1-24)*<sup>36</sup>

Having recorded the mission of the twelve in Galilee (9:1-6), Luke now describes the mission of the seventy-two. As part of the travel narrative (9:51–19:28), the discourse grounds their mission 'in Jesus' own mission of suffering and death'.<sup>37</sup> These unnamed disciples prepare the Lord's approach to Jerusalem: they are sent 'before his face' (10:1), an expression that specifically recalls the beginning of the travel narrative when Jesus set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem (9:51, 52). Like John the Baptist (1:17, 76; 3:4; 7:27),

---

<sup>36</sup> It is difficult to come to any final decision regarding the number of disciples sent out by Jesus—seventy or seventy-two. Both numbers are represented in the Jewish tradition of the Table of Nations (Gn. 10), which makes the textual problem of Lk. 10:1 difficult to solve. Further, although it is not certain whether the seventy or seventy-two points back to Gn. 10, the clear table of nations allusion in Acts 2 suggests the mission of the seventy(-two) is intended to anticipate the mission in Acts (note the detailed treatment of Luke's geographical perspective by Scott 1994: 483-544). Dumbrell 1998: 19, however, has recently argued, against his earlier interpretation, that because the mission in Lk. 10 is to Israel, a reference to the seventy Jewish elders of Nu. 11 is more plausible. Penney 1997: 51-52, favours both! On the textual question see Metzger 1975: 150-151, and Bock 1996: 1014-1016.

<sup>37</sup> Matson 1996: 33. The regular mention of journeying in 9:51–19:28 and the repeated references to rejection, death and resurrection (Lk. 12:49-50; 13:33-34; 16:31; 17:25; 18:31; 19:14), which give a sense of narrative movement, suggest that the mission of the seventy-two stands under the shadow of the cross. Cf. Tannehill 1986: 232.

they are ‘messengers’ (*angeloi*), sent to prepare the way of the *Lord* as they travel ‘to every town and place where he was about to go’ (10:1).<sup>38</sup>

The mission of the seventy-two is to Israel.<sup>39</sup> As royal heralds whose task is to proclaim a message of national emergency<sup>40</sup> and to heal,<sup>41</sup> their journey with Jesus to Jerusalem will mark the final call to Israel to repent and submit to her King (v. 9) (Dumbrell 1998: 18-19). Their official declaration, ‘peace [i.e. salvation] be to this house’ (vv. 5-6), is an indication that the final messenger, Jesus himself, is present. To reject the message of the kingdom is to have no part in the eschatological people of God (vv. 10-11). This is the most serious of sins, as the sayings about the rejection of Jesus’ ministry by the Galilean villages show (vv. 13-15).

During the ministry of the seventy-two the kingdom powerfully advances: demons have been subject to Jesus’ name, and Satan has fallen from heaven (vv. 17, 18). The time of eschatological fulfilment has come. But a division has occurred within Israel (v. 21): the official representatives (‘the wise and learned’) have been by-passed for they have not responded to the inbreaking of the kingdom, while the disciples (‘the little children’) have been given God’s revelation. Jesus rejoices not over the success of the mission as such, but because of their incorporation into the new people of God (vv. 20, 21).

There are hints in the narrative of Luke 10 that this mission to Israel anticipates<sup>42</sup> and prepares the reader for the universal mission in the Book of Acts. These include the

---

<sup>38</sup> Tannehill 1986: 234, thinks that the connection between 9:52 and 10:1 indicates that, following John’s death (9:9), ‘the disciples take over John’s function’ which involves their going ‘before Jesus on his journey to prepare for his coming’.

<sup>39</sup> Egelkraut 1976: 147-148; and Wilson 1973: 45-47, who acknowledges that ‘in the immediate context the mission of the Seventy is clearly to Israel’. However, he does admit that ‘Luke may well have had one eye on the later mission of the Church’. Note the full discussion of Matson 1996: 31-36, who has not, however, given sufficient attention to the salvation-historical dimension of this mission in its Lukan context.

<sup>40</sup> Both the dangers (v. 3) and the urgency of their task (‘do not greet anyone on the road’, v. 4) are stressed.

<sup>41</sup> Because the seventy-two are involved in Jesus’ own mission they are commissioned and sent (*apostello*) by him (v. 3) with the same twofold task: to declare the kingdom’s coming and to heal (v. 9). Their healings are signs of the inbreaking of the kingdom (cf. 11:14-23).

<sup>42</sup> Many recent writers, with varying degrees of conviction, have drawn attention to this supposed foreshadowing of the Gentile mission in Acts: see, for example, Dumbrell 1994: 214; and Penney

reference to ‘seventy-two’ disciples, which may call to mind the seventy-two nations of the world in Gn. 10 (which are specifically in view in Acts 2), and their being sent into the harvest field for gathering God’s people against the threat of judgment (Lk. 10:1, 3) which anticipates strategic points in the narrative of Acts [Matson 1996: 35-36]. In both missions the message’s expansion is under God’s control since he is the Lord of the harvest (10:2). The acceptance or rejection of the mission, a prominent motif in Jesus’ missionary discourse (10:8, 10), is a key theme in Acts, while the instructions to the missionaries about shaking the dust off their feet as a consequence of their rejection by Israel (vv. 10-12) anticipate incidents in the ministry of Paul and Barnabas (cf. Acts 13:46-51).

*Gentiles Participate in the Messianic Banquet* (Luke 13:28-30; 14:23-24)

Two Lukan parables envisage Gentiles being invited to share in God’s salvation. On his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus was asked about the number of those who would be saved (Lk. 13:23). His response (the parable of the closed door: 13:24-30) was to urge his hearers to ‘make every effort to enter through the narrow door’ (v. 24). This was a compelling word for Israel to repent and be saved during the time of Jesus’ gracious ministry. To reject his urgent warning would lead to exclusion from the kingdom. Israel would forfeit her privileges and in her place Gentiles would share in God’s salvation. In a profound reversal, the nations (‘those who are last’) will enter into the blessing of Israel’s (‘the first’) inheritance (v. 30).

In the parable of the great feast (14:15-24) the subject of participating in the future kingdom of God is addressed (cf. v. 15). Many were invited to the banquet but refused with ridiculous and insulting excuses (vv. 18-20). The master then summoned the poor and outcasts of Israel to participate in his supper (v. 21). Even with their acceptance there was still room. An invitation was sent outside the city to Gentiles to attend the great banquet so that the master’s house would be full (vv. 22-23). Israel’s leadership refused God’s gracious invitation. They rejected the ministry of Jesus and his representatives and, as a result, are rejected by God. Gentiles, who would not have been expected to attend, gladly respond to

---

1997: 51. Note the full discussions of Tannehill 1986: 232-237 (who refers to ‘the points of contact’ between the mission depicted in Lk. 10 and the universal mission in Acts) and Matson 1996: 31-36.

the opportunity of sharing in the great messianic feast.<sup>43</sup> For them the anticipated banquet of the ‘kingdom of God’ has become a present reality (Turner 1996: 319). The parable redefines membership of the kingdom, and by offering it to outsiders Jesus challenges the privileged and powerful (Dumbrell 1994: 215). Gentiles are placed on an equal footing with Jews in the messianic age.<sup>44</sup>

*The Rejection of Jesus by Jerusalem: His Passion and Death (Luke 19-23)*

Jesus draws near to Jerusalem, enters the city and is acclaimed by his disciples as Messiah, but is opposed by the Pharisees (Lk. 19:37-40). He weeps over Jerusalem because the city will not acknowledge her Messiah, and so will be destroyed (vv. 41-44).<sup>45</sup> In his confrontation with the authorities he tells them the parable of the tenants (20:9-19), which prefigures their rejection of him and God’s giving of the vineyard to others (v. 16).

Jesus’ ministry now comes to its climax. It is a time of eschatological crisis when Satan’s activity reaches its peak (Lk. 22:3, 31, 53). There is, however, no doubt about the outcome of this conflict—the defeat of Satan (cf. 10:18). At the last supper, a Passover meal, Jesus’ body is given for his disciples, the representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel (22:14-22). The blood of the new covenant is poured out for them. There is a divine purpose in Jesus going to his death. What is written in Scripture about him finds its fulfilment (cf. Is. 53); he is numbered with the transgressors. Jesus dies in Jerusalem, rejected as Messiah and Son of Man on earth, but vindicated in heaven.

*The Lukan Great Commission (Luke 24:44-49)*

After his burial, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances which confirm the reality of his resurrection (24:1-43), Jesus commissions his disciples and proclaims that through his saving work the way is now open for the forgiveness of sins to be proclaimed

---

<sup>43</sup> Nolland 1993a: 759.

<sup>44</sup> Senior and Stuhlmüller 1983: 153. For a different interpretation see Braun 1995: passim, who argues that Luke 14 is ‘a skilfully crafted rhetorical unit in which Jesus presents an argument for Luke’s vision of a Christian society’ (Braun’s summary).

<sup>45</sup> On the rejection of Jesus by Jerusalem and the reasons for the city’s judgment, see especially Walker 1996: 69-80.

from Jerusalem to all the nations. This commission forms the climax of the risen Lord's revelation to his disciples. Along with the triumphant ascension (vv. 50-53), it concludes Jesus' history and prepares for the transition to Acts.

The paragraph is a major development within the story and reveals how God's purposes are being realized.<sup>46</sup> Bosch claims that Jesus' words quoted in vv. 46-49, 'reflect, in a nutshell, Luke's entire understanding of the Christian mission'.<sup>47</sup> The following elements are specially significant:

(1) At the centre of God's saving plan is the person of Jesus the Messiah, and in him the OT Scriptures have been fulfilled.<sup>48</sup> The content of Jesus' instruction from the OT is summarized by means of three clauses:<sup>49</sup> that 'the Christ will suffer (*pathein*)' (v. 46), that he 'will rise (*anasthēnai*) from the dead on the third day' (v. 46), and that 'repentance and the forgiveness of sins will be preached (*kekruchthēnai*) in his name'<sup>50</sup> to all the nations beginning at Jerusalem' (v. 47). Jesus' death and resurrection are the climactic events of history. The disciples as witnesses will bear testimony to the necessity of the Messiah's suffering and entering into his glory (24:26) as being at the heart of the apostolic announcement. The third essential element in the divine plan of salvation is the disciples' universal mission.<sup>51</sup> This too had been anticipated in the OT and Jesus opened the disciples'

<sup>46</sup> The story in Acts will unfold as described in Jesus' preview in vv. 47-49. See Tannehill 1986: 194-298, who shows in some detail how Luke unifies the narrative by interlacing elements of Lk. 24:47-49 at major transition points in his second volume.

<sup>47</sup> Bosch 1991: 91. Senior and Stuhlmüller 1983: 256, refer to this paragraph as 'the keynote of Luke's mission theology'; see also Fitzmyer 1985: 1578.

<sup>48</sup> On the motif of fulfilment in Luke-Acts note Peterson 1993: 83-104, esp. 85-86, 93 (together with the bibliography cited); cf. Bock 1996: 1936-1937. The OT canon as a whole is in view here, and a global understanding of it is necessary to comprehend Jesus' place within the eschatological purposes of God.

<sup>49</sup> The expression 'thus it is written' (*ou{tw" gevgraptai*) is followed by three co-ordinate infinitives which refer to the Messiah's suffering (*paqein*), his resurrection (*ajnasth'nai*) and the proclamation (*khruqh'nai*) in Jesus' name. These are fundamental steps in the realization of God's purposes in Scripture (Tannehill 1986: 294; cf. Wilson 1973: 47).

<sup>50</sup> That is, under his authority. In the OT the equivalent phrase referred to the authority of Yahweh—an authority that has now been transferred to Jesus. In Acts the 'name' of Jesus is repeatedly mentioned as the disciples 'witness' and fulfil their commission through the powerful authority of the risen and glorified Lord (Acts 2:38; 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 17-18, etc.).

<sup>51</sup> Syntactically the infinitive *khruqh'nai* ('to be preached') is coordinate and parallel with the previous infinitives (see note 000). This activity too has been anticipated in the Scriptures (Nolland 1993b: 1219).

minds to understand its salvation historical significance.<sup>52</sup> It follows that this universal mission has its immediate basis in minds that have been opened to understand the Scriptures.<sup>53</sup> Having witnessed and understood God's plan, the disciples are now commissioned to go forth and proclaim it (Osborne 1984: 130-131).

(2) This universal mission, which is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus (vv. 46-47), will be effected by his disciples as witnesses *after* he returns to the Father (v. 44). There have been strong hints and anticipations throughout the earthly ministry of Jesus that his saving work will have world-wide repercussions, benefiting the nations as well as Israel (Lk. 2:31, 32), since it is God's intention that all flesh shall see his salvation (3:6). However, Jesus did not inaugurate a full-blown universal mission during the course of his earthly ministry. His own mission, together with that of the twelve and the seventy-two, was to Israel.

(3) The disciples' task is one of proclamation (*kevussol*); no mention is made of healing, exorcism, or 'signs and wonders' ministries (Larkin 1998: 22). Their message can be summarized as a call for repentance with a view to the forgiveness of sins. Repentance, which is Luke's summary term in Acts for the response to the apostolic gospel (2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 11:18, etc.), is the turning away from sin and rebellion against God. It is a reorientation, a change in thinking that results in turning to God in faith. The 'forgiveness' (*aphesis*) of sins, which summarizes the salvation<sup>54</sup> blessings, is now mentioned for the first time in Luke after its application to the missions of John (1:17; 3:3)<sup>55</sup> and Jesus (4:18). This expression serves to 'connect the inaugural portrait of Jesus' message and mission to the

---

<sup>52</sup> As in v. 46, Luke's language is general and Jesus specifies no particular OT texts. However, Acts 13:47 (Is. 49:6) and 15:15-18 (Am. 9:11, 12) provide some clues as to the identity of these Scriptures (see below). Note especially the chapter, 'Mission in the Old Testament',

<sup>53</sup> What the disciples could not understand before Jesus' death and resurrection now becomes clear (cf. Lk. 24:25, 27, 32).

<sup>54</sup> In Luke-Acts 'salvation' is frequently described in terms of the forgiveness of sins and the consequent gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:21 with v. 38;

<sup>55</sup> It has been suggested that Lk. 3:3 and 24:47 form a kind of inclusion because of the connection of *metavnoia* ('repentance') and *a[phesi]* ('forgiveness') in both verses (Moore 1997a: 51).

message and mission He now gave the disciples'.<sup>56</sup> As the disciples proclaimed the forgiveness of sins they were continuing Jesus' Servant ministry (Is. 61:1-2). Their basic message of 24:47 was not new, but the story of salvation has developed since the earlier mention of forgiveness' (*aphesis*) in the ministries of John and Jesus: now the summons to repent for the forgiveness of sins is announced in Jesus' name, it is grounded in his death and resurrection and is to be universal.<sup>57</sup>

(4) The extent of this authoritative proclamation in Jesus' name is described by the pregnant expression 'to all nations (*eis panta ta ethne*)' (v. 47). This phrase occurs in significant OT contexts that speak of all Gentiles participating in God's eschatological salvation.<sup>58</sup> It appears in the threefold restatement of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26:4, where 'all the nations'<sup>59</sup> will participate in the covenantal blessings, and in the extensive Isaianic usage, which envisages 'all the nations' streaming into Jerusalem in the last days (Is. 2:2; 66:18-20), to participate in the eschatological banquet (25:6-7) and to worship God (56:7; 61:11).<sup>60</sup> Gentile participation in salvation, according to Isaiah, is inseparably linked with the mission of the Servant to the nations (cf. Is. 52:10-12 with 52:13-53:12; cf. 61:11 with v. 1; see above pp. 000). In the Lukan commission there is a probable connection between 'all the nations' and Isaiah's reference to the 'light for the Gentiles' (Is. 42:6; 49:6; 51:4). This is confirmed by the parallel commission in Acts 1:8, as well as 13:47, and 26:23.<sup>61</sup> Luke's description of the extent of the disciples' mission (24:47)

---

<sup>56</sup> Moore 1997a: 52.

<sup>57</sup> Note Tannehill 1986: 296, and Nolland 1993b: 1221.

<sup>58</sup> There are other contexts besides those that speak of salvation in which 'all the nations' turns up: e.g. in warnings of the destruction of Israel's enemies (Is. 29:8; 34:2), in statements about Yahweh's power over the nations (Is. 40:17) and the power of Israel's enemies (Is. 14:12; 36:20); so Moore 1997a: 52.

<sup>59</sup> 'All the nations' (*pavnta ta; e[qnh*) appears as the equivalent of 'all the families of the earth' (*pa'sai aiJ fulai; th'B gh'B*, Gn. 12:3); see 'Mission in the Old Testament',

<sup>60</sup> Note also Pss. 71:11, 17; 85:9; 116:1; Je. 3:17; Dn. 7:14; Am. 9:12; Hg. 2:7. So Moore 1997a: 52.

<sup>61</sup> In Acts 1:8, the phrase 'to the ends of the earth', which is drawn from Is. 49:6, replaces 'to all the nations'. At 13:47 Paul and Barnabas quote Is. 49:6 as the Lord's command to them (similar language from Isaiah appears in Lk. 2:30-32 and 3:6; see above). According to Acts 26:23, Paul's proclamation of 'light' is 'both to the people [of Israel] and to the Gentiles'. The scope of his ministry matches that of the Servant who is sent to both Jews and Gentiles (Is. 49:6). See Tannehill 1986: 297.

can be understood in relation to the scope of the Abrahamic promises (Gn. 12:3), and the work of the Servant who is ‘a light for the Gentiles’ (Is. 49:6) and whose salvation extends to ‘all the nations’.<sup>62</sup>

(5) The disciples’ mission begins at Jerusalem because, in the first instance, it is the mission of the Servant to Israel,<sup>63</sup> and then through a restored Israel to the ends of the earth. The holy city, with its unparalleled position in salvation-history, is not only the focus of opposition to and rejection of Jesus, and the place where he suffers, dies (Lk. 9:51; 13:33; 18:31), rises again and appears (24:1-11, 36-49). It is also the all-important starting point for the gospel mission to Israel and then to all nations. Three features of Jesus’ commission lead to this conclusion: (a) The expression, ‘beginning at Jerusalem’, alludes to the restored Zion of Isaiah, from which the word of the Lord will go forth (Is. 2:3), bringing justice and peace for all the nations.<sup>64</sup> (b) Jesus’ affirmation to ‘the twelve’, ‘You shall be my witnesses’, is to be understood in the light of Isaiah 43:8-13; 44:6-8 where the Servant of the Lord, Israel, is to testify to his saving acts on behalf of his people.<sup>65</sup> The ‘twelve’, who are Jesus’ witnesses, take up the task of the Servant and testify to God’s saving acts in Jesus’ death and resurrection (‘these things’, v. 48). They represent a restored Israel that will now minister to Israel (cf. Is. 49:3, 6). (c) The instruction to the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they have been clothed with power from on high (v. 49) evokes the language of Isaiah 32:15 with its hopes for the refreshment and restoration of Israel. The mission given to the disciples to

---

<sup>62</sup> Understanding ‘all the nations’ in this sense runs counter to Larkin, 23, who thinks that ‘[t]aken literally, it points to a target audience of all cultures, ethnic groups including the Jews, a truly comprehensive universal mission’. Similarly, Moore 1997a: 53, comments that ‘Luke gave no indication that the mission was to be for the nations/Gentiles to the exclusion of the Jews. Rather, the mission was to all the nations, including the Jewish people’.

<sup>63</sup> Bosch 1991: 94. He adds: ‘The risen Lord has entrusted the *Gentile* mission to the apostles (Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:8); they execute this mission by turning, first to the *Jews!*’ (95). And as Hengel 1983b: 59, comments: ‘Anyone who wanted to address all Israel had to do so in Jerusalem’.

<sup>64</sup> Penney 1997: 56, following J. Neuberger. As to why the movement of Gentiles to Jerusalem envisaged in the OT is now replaced by the gospel going out from Jerusalem, see below.

<sup>65</sup> Moore 1997a: 53-55. He adds that Luke 24:48 ‘verbally recalls Isaiah 43:10, 12; and 44:8, and in so doing picks up the Isaianic background in which Israel, God’s servant, is summoned to testify of God’s saving acts on behalf of His people’. Other scholars who have recognized the Isaianic background of ‘you are witnesses’ in Lk. 24:48 and Acts 1:8, include C. H. Dodd, P. H. Menoud, and more recently Johnson 1990: 347; Evans and Sanders 1993: 205; Turner 1996: 300-301; and Penney 1997: 57-58.

fulfil is that of the prophetic 'servant' of Isaiah 49:6. They will receive the Spirit as a 'prophetic empowering to extend this message and its benefits to Israel and beyond'.<sup>66</sup> This endowment is specifically to enable them to proclaim the good news (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:11).

The Gospel of Luke reaches its climax with the ascension (24:50-53). At the conclusion of the book we return to its beginning, and are back in the Temple praising God (v. 53; cf. 1:5-25). Now, however, for the first time worship is offered to Jesus (v. 52). His ascension (cf. 9:51) has been accomplished via the cross. Not until the very end of the Gospel does his journey end. Paradoxically, Israel's hopes have been achieved; the redemption of Israel has been provided (24:21), and the stage is now set for the advance of the gospel to all the nations.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Turner 1996: 343, 301; see further on Acts 1:8. Cf. Marshall 1978a: 106; Menzies 1994: 199.

<sup>67</sup> P. G. Bolt 1998: 8, 10, observes that 'Luke's Gospel ends poised for the witness theme to begin'. It 'ends on a strong note of fulfilment and expectation. The narrative is poised ready for the next stage in the divine purposes: the proclamation of forgiveness'.

*The Prologue to Acts (1:1-11)*

The Acts of the Apostles is a narrative of missionary expansion which commences with a small group of Jesus' disciples in Jerusalem and extends across significant ethnic, religious and geographical boundaries to end in Rome where Paul preaches the gospel of the risen Christ to Jew and Gentile alike (Rosner 1998: 1). Luke records the progress of the gospel in Acts, as evidenced in its acceptance by Jew and Gentile, a 'progressive expansion' which is introduced in Acts 1:8 (Barrett 1994: 49), and then confirmed in summary statements throughout the rest of the book.<sup>68</sup> If the first volume begins with a summary of what had been promised to Israel and indicates how these promises are now to be fulfilled, then it sets the stage for the beginning of Acts—the regathering of Israel and her mission as a light to the nations.

The opening verses of Acts show close literary connections<sup>69</sup> with the Gospel of Luke, as well as extensive conceptual and verbal parallels with Luke 24,<sup>70</sup> and these emphasize the continuity between Luke's two volumes (Talbert 1974: 60). Several of these parallels, including the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, the designation of the twelve as 'witnesses', and parallel expressions about the extent of their witness are central to our theme of God's salvation reaching the ends of the earth.<sup>71</sup> The scope of Luke's Gospel is summarized in vv. 1, 2, before Luke goes on to the next stage of the story. The first volume tells us what Jesus began to do and teach; Acts now recounts the continuing work of Jesus

---

<sup>68</sup> Acts 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20. 28:30-31.

<sup>69</sup> The literary unity of Luke-Acts has been strongly advocated, for example, by Brawley 1990: 86-106, on the grounds that: (1) both works are dedicated to Theophilus, (2) Acts 1:1-2 summarize the Gospel, (3) Acts repeats themes and literary patterns found in the Gospel, and (4) the narrative schema in Luke forms a bridge into Acts. See also the treatments of Talbert 1974: 58-61; and Marshall 1993: 163-182, who interacts with recent literature.

<sup>70</sup> So Moore 1997b: 394, following the works of Zehnle 1971: 98-99; Talbert 1974: 58-61; Menzies 1994: 168-172; and Soards 1994: 196-197. Note also Tannehill 1990: 10-20; and Rosner 1998: 3. Barrett 1994: 61, who regards vv. 1-14 as the prologue of Acts, considers that most of the material in these verses is mentioned in some form in Luke 24, if not earlier in the Gospel, and it is best to see this whole section as a recapitulation, with some additional elements, before Peter's first speech in 1:15-22. Note also the treatments of Dumbrell 1994: 219; Satterthwaite 1993: 353-354; and Witherington 1998: 105.

<sup>71</sup> Senior and Stuhlmüller 1983: 269, go a step further and claim that 'the scope, structure and content of Acts are dominated by the question of the universal mission'.

through his witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit (v. 1).<sup>72</sup> ‘Jesus’ ministry on earth, exercised personally and publicly, was followed by his ministry from heaven, exercised through his Holy Spirit by his apostles’.<sup>73</sup>

During the period of forty days before his ascension Jesus appeared to his disciples, showed them that he was alive—thereby confirming them as his successors—and spoke with them about ‘the reign (*basileia*) of God’ (v. 3). This expression which summarizes the content of Jesus’ post-resurrection teaching stresses the continuity with his message in the Gospel.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, during this period of instruction (Lk. 24:25-27, 44-49) Jesus showed his apostles how to *interpret the Old Testament* so they might understand that the suffering of the Christ and his resurrection were at the centre of God’s plan for Israel and the nations. God’s sovereignty, which had been decisively manifested through the death and resurrection of Jesus, would continue to be demonstrated through the proclamation of the gospel by his witnesses, and the bringing of men and women from all nations under God’s rule through the power of his Spirit (cf. 1:8).

Four of the eight references to God’s kingdom in Acts have a framing function for the book as a whole (1:3, 6; 28:23, 31), and most occurrences of the phrase turn up in summary statements of the apostolic preaching.<sup>75</sup> The missionary message which the disciples proclaim is ‘the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ’ (8:12; 28:23, 31).<sup>76</sup> The close link between Jesus’ name and the kingdom draws attention to the significance of Jesus’ reign within the divine rule. They are not two separate topics but one,

---

<sup>72</sup> In the expression, *w/n h[rxato oJ ΔIhsou" poiei'n te kai; didavskein*, the auxiliary ‘began’ (*h[rxato*) is emphatic and should be given its full weight (‘all that Jesus *began* to do and teach’, so NIV), rather than being taken as an auxiliary (= ‘all that Jesus did and taught’, so Haenchen; NRSV). Accordingly, Acts contains an account of the continuing work of Jesus. Note the syntactical discussions of Bruce 1990: 98; Marshall 1980: 56; Longenecker 1981: 253; Barrett 1994: 66, 67; and Larkin 1998: 8. For a different view, see Haenchen 1971: 137.

<sup>73</sup> Stott 1990: 32. Hengel 1986: 59, rightly observes: ‘In reality, the whole double work covers the one history of Jesus Christ’.

<sup>74</sup> Tannehill 1990: 14; Palmer 1993b: 63.

<sup>75</sup> The phrase appears in a summary of Philip’s preaching in Samaria (8:12), the missionary preaching of Paul and Barnabas (14:22), Paul’s preaching in the synagogue at Ephesus (19:8; 20:25), and as an essential element in his two year proclamation in Rome (28:23, 31).

<sup>76</sup> Bruce 1988: 32; Tannehill 1990: 14; Palmer 1993: 63; and Penney 1997: 69.

for God's rule is established in the world through the reign of his Messiah, Jesus. In his Pentecost speech Peter proclaims Jesus as Messiah seated on David's throne and as Lord seated at God's right hand (2:30-36). Having been instructed by Jesus in 'the things concerning the reign of God', Peter shows that this rule is established through the *reign of Jesus* as Messiah (see 8:12).

After teaching his apostles about 'the kingdom of God' Jesus urged them to remain in Jerusalem until they were baptized with the Holy Spirit (vv. 3, 4). Their question which followed ('Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?', v. 6) and his response (vv. 7, 8), occur at a crucial point in the narrative of Acts and are a key to understanding the book. Their concern about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel is not misguided by nationalistic expectations, as many suppose.<sup>77</sup> When told of the Spirit's coming the disciples, in line with prophetic eschatology, would naturally have in mind the last days (Joel 2:28-32) and the messianic cleansing or restoration of Zion.<sup>78</sup> Is this the time when Jerusalem will become the world city to which the Gentiles will journey?

The disciples are thinking of the future in terms of 'the kingdom of God' and the divinely-ordained destiny of Israel. They are looking to Jesus as God's anointed king, to usher in the *restoration* to which all Jews looked forward, and of which Jesus himself had spoken. They take it for granted that sovereignty is to be restored to Israel as the chief instrument of God's purposes. Jesus himself had led them to expect this (Lk. 22:29, 30). The question is, 'Will Jesus act now?' His answer did not deny their expectation of the 'restoration'. He endorsed it, but interpreted it in terms of the activity of the Holy Spirit, and stressed the Isaianic picture of Israel as God's witnesses to the nations (Isa 43:10, 12; 44:8).

---

<sup>77</sup> For a succinct discussion of a number of related issues see Penney 1997: 69-74. Following D. W. Gooding, he states: 'In the exaltation of Christ, God has begun to restore the Kingdom to Israel through the outpoured Spirit'. Bolt 1998: 10-11, regards the disciples' question as still being too narrowly nationalistic, ignoring the expansiveness of Israel's hopes erected by the prophets, but Jervell 1984: 98, thinks the disciples' question is hardly to be construed as a nationalistic misunderstanding. Turner 1996: 294-302, after a careful critique of Haenchen and Maddox, considers the question of Acts 1:6 to have been prompted by Jesus' teaching about 'the kingdom of God'. It 'is quite appropriate [that] the disciples should think (a) the kingdom will soon be restored *to* Israel, and (b) that *Jesus* will accomplish this' (299; original emphasis). Turner connects the promise of the Spirit with salvation, a salvation that is concerned with Zion/Jerusalem's restoration which will then spread to the nations (298).

<sup>78</sup> So Tiede 1986: 278; and Dumbrell 1994: 220.

Jesus denies that his followers can know the time, and he corrects any suggestion that the restoration may come immediately (see Acts 3:20-21).<sup>79</sup> Instead, this end time restoration will begin with the pouring out of the promised Spirit and the bringing of God's salvation 'to the ends of the earth' (Isa 49:6). In the witness of this little band of true Israelites, the kingdom will be restored to Israel by the Messiah, and he will send the rod of his strength out of Zion, ruling in the midst of his enemies (Ps 110:2).

This second, and positive, element in Jesus' response (v. 8) is of profound significance. Its importance in the narrative structure of Acts can hardly be overstated, while its relationship to our theme of God's universal salvation is recognized by all. In fact, v. 8 has been regarded as the 'Table of Contents' of Acts, with witness spreading from Jerusalem (chs 1-7), to Judea and Samaria (chs. 8-12), to 'the ends of the earth' (chs 13-28). Acts 1:8 is programmatic for the character and scope of the missionary theology of Acts, even if the movement 'to the ends of the earth' is only partially fulfilled with Paul's arrival in Rome at the end of the book (cf. Tannehill 1990: 18; cf. 17, 'It is more accurate to say that Jesus outlines the mission, and Acts ends with that mission still incomplete'; Moore, 398).

Verse 8 sets out the stages in the divine program of the apostolic witness. The Holy Spirit is the source of power for this witness, while Jesus' statement ends with an indication of the stages of the witness, which are to be interpreted theologically rather than geographically as it is usually taken. Although the references to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria correspond roughly to the development in Acts 2-9, if the whole expression is interpreted geographically, then some significant omissions occur. Important steps in the progress of the mission beyond Samaria are ignored. There is no reference to the spread of the gospel to Antioch, Asia Minor or Greece, although each of these is significant in Acts (Tannehill 1990:17). Nor is there any reference to Rome if there is no firm basis for identifying 'the ends of the earth' with it.

Rather, the stages of the witness are to be interpreted *theologically*. The first stage is Jerusalem, where Jesus finished his work and where Israel was to be restored in the remnant of Jews who believed in him as Messiah. The second stage is Judea-Samaria—the two places

---

<sup>79</sup> Tannehill 1990: 15, 16.

are linked with a single article in Greek—referring to the area of the ancient kingdoms of Judah and Israel. This fulfils the ancient promises of the restoration of the *whole* house of Israel under one king (eg. Ezek 37:15-19). Finally, the witness extends to ‘the ends of the earth’. This reference comes from Isaiah 49:6 (see the direct quote in Acts 13:47) where it is a key expression indicating that God intends salvation for all peoples. The point of the phrase is to eliminate any stopping point (whether Rome or elsewhere) before the whole of the inhabited world is covered. The closing words of Acts are deliberately open-ended.

### Notes on Acts 1:8

- Acts 1:8 should be read in the light of Luke 24:47 (Moore, 396). Parallels between Luke 24 and Acts 1. (Don't repeat what is written in Lk. 24).

Moore, 394. Moore's interest centers on the parallel statements of the disciples's mission in Luke 24:47-49 and Acts 1:8. Conceptual and verbal parallels include the coming of the promise/Holy Spirit upon the disciples, the designation of the disciples as witnesses, and—most notably for this study—the parallel expressions of the extent of the mission. Then discussion of 'to all the nations' and 'to the ends of the earth'. Acts 1:8 should be read in the light of Luke 24:47.

- Jesus' attitude to the mission to the Gentiles. Dumbrell, 221. The reference to it in Luke 24:47 allows no doubt regarding Jesus' intention in Acts 1, and yet in chapter 10 Peter is reluctant to go to the Gentiles. Luke's report thus indicates a historical tension between what ought to have been done and what actually came to pass. That the apostles have to be 'sold' on the concept of a Gentile mission after experiencing Pentecost is both extraordinary and indicative of the factuality of the account. By the guidance of God (10:9-16) and by the enterprise of others (8:4-8; 11:19-21; 15:12-21), restored Israel eventually goes out in mission. This missionary activity of Israel, a departure from the centripetal program of the Old Testament, was necessitated by national Israel's end as the geographical center for divine revelation [cos it is now in Jesus].

- Linking restoration of Israel and witness, therefore missionary emphasis.

Chris t. Br., 8-9, citing Turner, etc.

- Re the spread of the gospel message in Acts. Picture of progressive expansion [introduced in 1:8] Barrett, 49, followed by Rosner, 1.

- Meaning of 'until the end of the earth' Moore, esp. 396, 398, 399. Dumbrell, 220, In Acts 13:47 (cf. Is. 49:6) the phrase means the Gentile world; presumably it has a similar meaning in 1:8. From this verse emerges the missionary theme to the Jew first and then to the Gentile as a method to be followed. (221) Worldwide mission thus appears at the beginning and end of the Book of Acts (1:8; 28:28-31). Tannehill, 17: detailed references. 'to the end of the earth' is a key expression from Isaiah's testimony that God intends

salvation for all peoples. Brawley, 32-33, is an ethnic rather than a geographical phrase [Moore, 398, 399, says it is both; reasons 399] on the basis of references to Gentiles that precede and follow 13:47. Penney, 73. Following Polhill, Acts, 62: ‘The ends of the earth are never reached in Acts. The mission goal is never completed. It remains open . . .’ Parsons, 157, says most scholars think Paul’s arrival in Rome as the fulfilment of Jesus’ commission to his disciples to be witnesses “to the ends of the earth”. But he is cautious on this.

Stott, 32

For the contrasting parallel he [Luke] draws between his two volumes was not between Christ and his church, but between two stages of the ministry of the same Christ. . . . in this his second book (he implies) he will write about what Jesus continued to do and to teach after his ascension, especially through the apostles whose sermons and authenticating 'signs and wonders' Luke will faithfully record. Thus Jesus ministry on earth, exercised personally and publicly, was followed by his ministry from heaven, exercised through his Holy Spirit by his apostles. Moreover, the watershed between the two was the ascension. Not only did it conclude Luke's first book and introduce his second (Acts 1:9), but it terminated Jesus' earthly ministry and inaugurated his heavenly ministry.

Palmer, 28.

The Acts of the Apostles consists of a single volume of moderate length. It covers a limited historical period of some thirty years. Its geographical scope is not universal, but restricted by its theme. There is a consistent focus, at least from the author's point of view, on the one issue of the progress of the Christian mission. And Luke tends to portray one leading figure at a time in the service of this theme.

What then is the link with the second volume? Before his ascension Jesus gave instructions to his disciples (Acts 1:2). These are described with care (v. 8). Firstly, the disciples are told to wait in Jerusalem until they are baptised with the Holy Spirit who is also described as the gift promised by the Father (see Lk 24:49). Secondly, it is clear that the kingdom is not about to be restored to Israel in the way the disciples expected (see below). But when they have received the power of the Spirit, they are to be witnesses to Jesus. Thirdly, the scope of their witness is to be worldwide (see Lk 24:47). The central instruction is the command to be witnesses, while the exhortation to wait for the gift of the Spirit is so that they may be prepared for this task. The reference to the places where they are to go (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth) indicates that this witness commits them to telling people everywhere. The book of Acts, then, is about witness to Jesus, undertaken at his command, following the pattern provided by his own career and empowered by the Spirit. The book describes how the church continued to proclaim and confirm the message of salvation. Acts builds a solid bridge between the facts recorded in the Gospel and the people who never saw Jesus incarnate. Those separated in time and space from the saving events were to realise that salvation was for them and they are encouraged to embrace it gladly.

### **1.2 Centrality of Jerusalem**

Jerusalem was to be the point of departure for the world wide outreach. For Luke, Jerusalem is the ordained centre of God's earthly purposes (see Luke 24 and Acts 1). This is consistent with many Old Testament prophecies which view Jerusalem or Mount Zion as the centre of blessing for the whole world in the end time or messianic age (eg. Isa 2:1-4; 62:1-7; Zechariah 8).

### **1.4 Jesus' Ascension**

Following his forty day instruction of the disciples about the kingdom of God, his answer to their question about the restoration of Israel and the great commission, Jesus ascends into heaven, having been *taken up* (Acts 1:9) by God. The cloud represents the presence and glory of God (Ex 19:9; Ps 18:11-12; Lk 9:34-35).

The closing statement of Jesus (v. 8) and the explanation of the angels (v. 11) point forward to the future and are intended to stir the disciples into action. The reference to the return of Christ (the parousia) in verse 11 was probably to remind the disciples of Jesus' parables (Lk 12:35-48; 19:12-27) in which they as servants, who have been given the responsibility to witness to him, must one day give an account to their returning master. They go back to Jerusalem, the place where they must begin their mission, and prepare themselves through prayer (v. 14) and through filling the vacant office of apostle. This mission is repeatedly dependent on divine direction and prodding.

**Notes on 1:1-11**

Issues to be canvassed:

4. The ascension.

Stott, 32. Jesus' ministry on earth, exercised personally and publicly, was followed by his ministry from heaven, exercised through his Holy Spirit by his apostles. Moreover, the watershed between the two was the ascension. Not only did it conclude Luke's first book and introduce his second (Acts 1:9), but it terminated Jesus' earthly ministry and inaugurated his heavenly ministry.

Therefore of importance to our subject of mission.