

NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 27

The acts of the risen Lord Jesus

 INTERVARSITY PRESS

Copyrighted Material - www.ivpress.com/permissions

Titles in this series:

- 1 *Possessed by God*, David Peterson
- 2 *God's Unfaithful Wife*, Raymond C. Ortlund Jr.
- 3 *Jesus and the Logic of History*, Paul W. Barnett
- 4 *Hear, My Son*, Daniel J. Estes
- 5 *Original Sin*, Henri Blocher
- 6 *Now Choose Life*, J. Gary Millar
- 7 *Neither Poverty Nor Riches*, Craig L. Blomberg
- 8 *Slave of Christ*, Murray J. Harris
- 9 *Christ, Our Righteousness*, Mark A. Seifrid
- 10 *Five Festal Garments*, Barry G. Webb
- 11 *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien
- 12 *Now My Eyes Have Seen You*, Robert S. Fyall
- 13 *Thanksgiving*, David W. Pao
- 14 *From Every People and Nation*, J. Daniel Hays
- 15 *Dominion and Dynasty*, Stephen G. Dempster
- 16 *Hearing God's Words*, Peter Adam
- 17 *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, G. K. Beale
- 18 *The Cross from a Distance*, Peter G. Bolt
- 19 *Contagious Holiness*, Craig L. Blomberg
- 20 *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, Timothy S. Laniak
- 21 *A Clear and Present Word*, Mark D. Thompson
- 22 *Adopted into God's Family*, Trevor J. Burke
- 23 *Sealed with an Oath*, Paul R. Williamson
- 24 *Father, Son and Spirit*, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain
- 25 *God the Peacemaker*, Graham A. Cole
- 26 *A Gracious and Compassionate God*, Daniel C. Timmer
- 27 *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, Alan J. Thompson

An index of Scripture references for all the volumes may be found at <<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/resources/nsbt>>.

NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 27

Series editor: D. A. Carson

The acts of the risen Lord Jesus

LUKE'S ACCOUNT OF GOD'S
UNFOLDING PLAN

Alan J. Thompson



APOLLOS

INTERVARSITY PRESS
DOWNERS GROVE, ILLINOIS 60515

Copyrighted Material - www.ivpress.com/permissions

APOLLOS
An imprint of InterVarsity Press, England
Norton Street
Nottingham NG7 3HR, England
Website: www.ivpbooks.com
Email: ivp@ivpbooks.com

InterVarsity Press, USA
P.O. Box 1400
Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426, USA
Website: www.ivpress.com
Email: email@ivpress.com

©Alan J. Thompson 2011

Alan J. Thompson has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher or the Copyright Licensing Agency.

InterVarsity Press®, USA, is the book-publishing division of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA® <www.intervarsity.org> and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

InterVarsity Press, England, is closely linked with the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, a student movement connecting Christian Unions throughout Great Britain, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. Website: www.uccf.org.uk

Unless stated otherwise, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. First published in Great Britain in 1979. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton, a division of Hodder Headline Ltd. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a trademark of International Bible Society. UK trademark number 1448790.

The map on p. 111 is from The NIV Study Bible, ed. K. Barker, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985, p. 1646; used by permission.

First published 2011.

Set in Monotype Times New Roman

Typeset in Great Britain by Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by the MPG Books Group

USA ISBN 978-0-8308-2628-5

UK ISBN 978-1-84474-535-7



InterVarsity Press is committed to protecting the environment and to the responsible use of natural resources. As a member of Green Press Initiative we use recycled paper whenever possible. To learn more about the Green Press Initiative, visit <www.greenpressinitiative.org>.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Thompson, Alan J.

The Acts of the risen Lord Jesus : Luke's account of God's unfolding plan / Alan J. Thompson.

p. cm.—(New studies in biblical theology ; 27)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8308-2628-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Bible. N.T. Acts—Criticism, interpretation, etc. I. Title.

BS2625.52.T56 2011

226'.06—dc22

2011006821

P	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Y	26	25	24	23	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11		

In memory of Doug Hewlett

 INTERVARSITY PRESS

Copyrighted Material - www.ivpress.com/permissions



 INTERVARSITY PRESS

Copyrighted Material - www.ivpress.com/permissions

Contents

Series preface	11
Author's preface	13
Abbreviations	15
Introduction	17
Reassurance concerning God's purposes: the purpose(s) of the book of Acts	19
Excursus: assumptions concerning authorship, audience and interpreting Acts	23
1 Living 'between the times': the kingdom of God	29
The sovereignty of God	29
The kingdom of God	38
The continuing reign of the Lord Jesus	48
Suffering: the fullness of the kingdom has yet to come	54
Conclusion	67
Excursus: an expositional outline of Acts	67
2 The hope of Israel: the resurrection and the arrival of the last days	71
Resurrection hope	71
Resurrection in Luke's Gospel	73
Resurrection in Acts	76
Jesus' death and the resurrection in Acts	83
Preaching the gospel in Acts	88
Table 1: Major evangelistic speeches in Acts	91
Conclusion	99
Table 2: Verbs used in Acts to describe the action of apostolic preaching	99
Table 3: Summary descriptions of the message preached in Acts	100

THE ACTS OF THE RISEN LORD JESUS

3 Israel and the Gentiles: the kingdom and God's promises of restoration	103
Kingdom restoration and Israel? (Acts 1:6–8)	103
Pentecost and 'all Israel' (Acts 2)	109
Samaria and the restoration of Israel (Acts 8:1–25)	112
Outcasts and the restoration of Israel (Acts 8:26–40)	116
The Servant who restores Israel and brings salvation to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47)	118
The rebuilding and restoring of David's fallen tent (Acts 15:13–18)	120
Conclusion	124
4 The promise of the Father: the gift of the Holy Spirit	125
The prophetic hope of the Spirit	125
The kingdom of God and the promised eschatological gift of the Spirit	126
The Holy Spirit is bestowed by the risen and exalted Lord Jesus	129
God's empowering presence	131
A restored people of God	134
One people of God	137
Faith, repentance, baptism and the reception of the Spirit in Acts	141
Conclusion	143
5 The end of an era: the temple system and its leaders	145
The debate about the temple in Acts	145
The Davidic King, the last days and the temple (Acts 1 – 3)	148
The temple, temple leadership and Jesus' universal authority (Acts 3 – 5)	151
Stephen, the temple and Jesus (Acts 6 – 7)	164
Conclusion	172
6 The end of an era: the law is no longer the direct authority for God's people	175
The debate about the law in Acts	176
Jesus: the one to whom the law pointed has now come	177
Apostolic leadership and authority	178
Sensitivity to Jewish beliefs about the law	188
Conclusion	191

CONTENTS

7 Concluding summary	193
Bibliography	197
Index of authors	209
Index of Scripture references	212
Index of ancient sources	232

 INTERVARSITY PRESS



 INTERVARSITY PRESS

Copyrighted Material - www.ivpress.com/permissions

Series preface

New Studies in Biblical Theology is a series of monographs that address key issues in the discipline of biblical theology.

Contributions to the series focus on one or more of three areas: (1) the nature and status of biblical theology, including its relations with other disciplines (e.g. historical theology, exegesis, systematic theology, historical criticism, narrative theology); (2) the articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer or corpus; and (3) the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora.

Above all, these monographs are creative attempts to help thinking Christians understand their Bibles better. The series aims simultaneously to instruct and to edify, to interact with the current literature, and to point the way ahead. In God's universe, mind and heart should not be divorced: in this series we will try not to separate what God has joined together. While the notes interact with the best of scholarly literature, the text is uncluttered with untransliterated Greek and Hebrew, and tries to avoid too much technical jargon. The volumes are written within the framework of confessional evangelicalism, but there is always an attempt at thoughtful engagement with the sweep of the relevant literature.

Much contemporary theological reflection on Acts seeks primarily to answer questions arising from our own disputes: the role of the Spirit in Christian life, the continuity or otherwise of gifts like tongues, the place of prophecy in the life of the church, and so on. One must ask, of course, if those are the dominant concerns of Acts. True, Acts does in some ways address such questions, but the strength of Dr Thompson's book is that it uncovers the main theological emphases of the book of Acts on the book's own terms. Moreover, although this volume focuses on Acts, Dr Thompson wisely keeps an eye peeled for theological connections with Luke's

THE ACTS OF THE RISEN LORD JESUS

Gospel. This volume will be a treasure trove for all who seek to understand Acts better, not least those who teach and preach the book.

D. A. Carson
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

 INTERVARSITY PRESS

Author's preface

The richness of God's Word is amazing. The book of Acts, in particular, is full of challenge, encouragement and comfort. In studying Acts I have been amazed again at God's faithfulness, the kindness and power of the risen Lord Jesus, the enablement and transforming work of the Spirit sent by Jesus, and the privilege of receiving the good news of God's saving grace in Christ. Although I hope this book may make some contribution to the academic study of Acts, my main goal is to help believers who read, teach or preach through the book of Acts to see Luke's 'framework' of God's kingdom and the reign of Christ more clearly and to rejoice in, be encouraged and reassured by, and proclaim the good news of God's saving purposes in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

This book could not have been accomplished without the generosity and help of many. I wish to thank Geoff Harper, Michael Thate and especially my wife, Alayne, for reading through and offering helpful advice on earlier stages of this book, the Principal, David Cook, and Board of Sydney Missionary and Bible College for granting a sabbatical that enabled the book to be completed, the staff and research facilities at Tyndale House, Cambridge, for helping make the sabbatical both productive and enjoyable, and our girls, Deborah and Rebekah, for their joyful participation in our travels. I also wish to thank Don Carson for his advice and encouragement, and for accepting this book into the New Studies in Biblical Theology series, and Philip Duce and the staff at IVP for their help in the editorial process. This book is dedicated *in memoriam* to Doug Hewlett in gratitude for his faithful teaching and godly example in bringing honour to the name of the Lord Jesus.

Alan J. Thompson



 INTERVARSITY PRESS

Copyrighted Material - www.ivpress.com/permissions

Abbreviations

<i>1 En.</i>	<i>1 Enoch</i>
1 Macc.	1 Maccabees
2 Macc.	2 Maccabees
AB	Anchor Bible
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i> (Josephus)
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, University of Manchester</i>
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IBS</i>	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JPTSup	Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>J. W.</i>	<i>Jewish War</i> (Josephus)

THE ACTS OF THE RISEN LORD JESUS

lit.	literally
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
mg.	margin
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NT	New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OT	Old Testament
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>Pss Sol.</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra pagina
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
TNIV	Today's New International Version
tr.	translation
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Introduction

What major themes, issues or debates come to mind when someone mentions ‘the book of Acts’ to you? The answer to this question in everyday conversations about Acts inevitably includes a cluster of issues related to anything from the charismatic movement (speaking in tongues as a sign of receiving the Spirit, baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second blessing), church government and practice (congregational versus presbyterian church government, the responsibilities of deacons, infant/household baptism versus baptism of believers, baptism as a condition of salvation) to missionary methods (whether or not we should follow the same strategies).¹ It seems that, at the popular level at least, Acts is still used more for answers to debates that were not necessarily prominent in Luke’s aims than listened to for Luke’s own emphases.

My aim in this work is not to address all of these debates but rather to offer a framework for interpreting the book of Acts so that the major themes highlighted by Luke may be identified and related to the book of Acts as a whole. One of the areas of focus for the New Studies in Biblical Theology series is ‘the articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer or corpus’. It is within this area that I seek to make a contribution. This book will especially highlight Acts as an account of the ‘continuing story’ of God’s saving purposes. Luke intends his work to be read in the light of OT promises and the continuing reign of Christ. Acts is best understood, therefore, in this ‘biblical-theological’ framework that highlights the move from the OT to what the kingdom of God looks like now that Christ has come, died, risen and ascended to the right hand of the Father.² It is in this light – the continuing reign of Christ in the inaugurated kingdom of God – that Luke’s own emphases on themes such

¹ Cf. Fee and Stuart 2003: 108 for references to some of these.

² On biblical theology see Rosner 2000: 3–11, esp. p. 10.

as the saving purposes of God, suffering and opposition as the gospel spreads and local churches are established, the resurrection of Christ, Israel and the Gentiles, the Holy Spirit, the temple, law and apostolic authority are better understood and integrated.³ Although various studies have drawn attention to these themes, my aim is to highlight the 'inaugurated kingdom of God' as the organizing framework for integrating Luke's overall emphases in Acts.⁴

This framework, however, is not merely of theoretical or antiquarian interest. Luke emphasizes the continued outworking of God's purposes for a reason. The rest of this chapter will show briefly that understanding Luke's stated purpose helps us to see how we should approach Acts. A brief excursus at the end of the chapter will summarize my assumptions in this book concerning matters of authorship, audience and interpreting Acts. Those familiar with these matters of standard NT introduction may skip the excursus at the end of this introduction and continue with the biblical-theological material in chapter 1.

³ This book therefore obviously does not provide a commentary on all the passages in Acts nor does it summarize all the themes in Acts.

⁴ In addition to the now flourishing amount of technical monographs on various aspects of Lukan theology (cf. Bovon 2006), the most comprehensive discussion of the theology of Acts as a whole is found in the book edited by Marshall and Peterson (1998). As a multi-author volume, however, that book did not seek to integrate substantially the findings of the individual chapters. Jacob Jervell's book on the theology of Acts (1996) is really the only book written in recent times on the theology of Acts by one author who integrates the theological themes treated. It is helpful in drawing attention to Jewish aspects of Acts, but his views are generally recognized to be rather idiosyncratic (e.g. that 'the church is Israel', 'Torah is the distinguishing mark' and the Gentiles are an 'associate people', 43, 61). The book by Dennis Johnson (1997) is the only book in recent times to look at the theological message of Acts at a level that is also accessible to the wider Christian public (he also manages to look at theological themes without neglecting the historical reliability of Acts). My own approach is closest to Johnson's understanding of the message of Acts. I would, however, like to highlight and integrate some other themes and develop further the reference to 'The History of Redemption' in his title. Chris Green's book (2005) is a readable, popular-level introduction to the layout of the book of Acts with helps for preachers (cf. Cook 2007). However, it is more of an introduction to the structure and flow of Acts. The best succinct study of the theology of Acts is now that of Peterson 2009: 53–97. Thus, while there continues to be a never-ending stream of books on Pauline theology, and a growing number of technical studies on Acts (which are often doctoral dissertations), there are still very few books at a more 'accessible' level on the theology of Acts. It seems as though there is still room for further discussion of the theology of a writer who wrote more than Paul in the NT!

Reassurance concerning God's purposes: the purpose(s) of the book of Acts

Why did Luke write Acts? Luke's stated purpose in the preface to his Gospel, the language and style of his writing as 'biblical narrative' and his explicit links between the OT, Luke's Gospel and Acts all indicate that Luke is writing for a Christian audience familiar with the promises and language of the OT in order to provide assurance concerning the continued outworking of God's saving purposes.

First, regarding Luke's purpose, in the opening verse of his Gospel, Luke tells us he is joining others in compiling a narrative concerning 'the things that have been fulfilled among us' (Luke 1:1).⁵ The passive voice of the verb 'fulfilled/accomplished' indicates that the events have been fulfilled/accomplished *by God*, and this is in keeping with Luke's emphasis throughout his Gospel and Acts on the fulfilment of God's plan.⁶ In 1:4 of his Gospel Luke gives us the purpose of his writing project: he is writing in order that 'you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught'.⁷ The indication here is that readers such as Theophilus had been taught or instructed about the faith.⁸ What Luke's audience needed, however, was 'certainty' or 'assurance' about what they had been taught.⁹ When Luke's Gospel and the book of Acts are read in the light of this preface, it appears that Luke is writing to provide reassurance to believers about the nature of the events surrounding Jesus' life, death, resurrection, the spread of the message about Jesus, and the nature of God's people following Jesus' ascension. He is providing

⁵ *Peri tōn peplērophorēmenōn en ēmin pragmatōn*. Cf. Marshall (1993: 163–182) for a discussion concerning the importance of the prologue of Luke's Gospel for understanding both Luke's Gospel and Acts.

⁶ Cf. Peterson 1993: 83–104. In Luke's Gospel see e.g. 1:20, 57; 2:6, 21–22; 4:21; 9:31; 21:22, 24; 24:44–47. In Acts see 1:4, 16; 2:1, 16, 23, 30–31; 3:18, 24; 4:25–28; 7:52; 8:35; 10:43; 13:23, 32–33; 15:15; 17:2–3; 24:14–15; 26:6–7, 22–23; 28:23. Cf. also Bock 1998: 41–62.

⁷ *Hina epignōs . . . tēn asphaleian*.

⁸ Bock (1994: 65–66) notes that *katēcheō* can refer to a report (Acts 21:24) or to receiving instruction (Acts 18:25); *logōn* can refer to events (Luke 7:17; Acts 8:21; 15:6) or instruction (Luke 4:32; 10:39) or to a 'message received' (Luke 1:20; 6:47). Together with the term 'assurance', the reference to 'instruction' here indicates that a believer is being addressed.

⁹ The term *asphaleia* is used in Acts 5:23 to mean 'safe' (and elsewhere only in 1 Thess. 5:3). Bock (1994: 65) observes that the use of this term here 'with a verb of knowing points to a psychological goal. It refers to knowing the truth but doing so securely.' Related terms to *asphaleia* are used in Acts 2:36, 21:34, 22:30 and 25:26 to refer to assurance or 'determining the facts with certainty' (ibid).

assurance that these events really are the work of God, that God really has been accomplishing his purposes, that Jesus really is who he said he was, and that believers in Jesus really are the true people of God. All of this is especially important in the light of the rejection and persecution faced by these believers, not the least of which came from those who also claimed to belong to the heritage of God's people and who read the same Bible.

Secondly, this leads us to a further observation helpful for determining Luke's purposes – the genre of Acts. Vanhoozer describes a genre as a kind of literature that indicates 'literary practices' which bear 'family resemblances' to other kinds of literature.¹⁰ Although a full discussion concerning the genre of Acts cannot be entered into here, the 'family resemblances' between the narrative of Acts and OT historical narrative indicate that Luke is not only writing history; he is writing 'biblical history'.¹¹ Rosner's evidence in support of this includes:

1. The imitation of LXX language and style in Acts, giving it a 'biblical atmosphere' (esp. in Acts 1 – 15).
2. The language of fulfilment in Acts that is prominent in a wide range of topics covered (Christology, mission to Gentiles, Holy Spirit) and the prominence of significant themes in Acts that are central OT themes (i.e. Jerusalem, temple and law).¹²
3. Similarities to the OT in the depiction of episodes.
4. Literary techniques in Acts that may also be found in OT narratives (e.g. set formulae or summary statements in Kings to move from one king to another; speeches and prayers that introduce, sum up and transition; periods of history marked out; the writing of narrative 'through a series of main characters' or 'biographical' sections such as with Abraham, Jacob and Joseph in Genesis).

¹⁰ Vanhoozer 1998: 338, 340, citing Fowler 1982: 41.

¹¹ Rosner 1993: 65–82. Other similar phrases have also been used, such as 'theological history' (Maddox 1982: 16), 'sacred narrative' (Sterling 1992: 363) and 'biblical narrative' (Gasque 1989: 348). Rosner cites Sterling and Gasque on pp. 81–82 of his article. Cf. also the summary of Rosner's article in Peterson 2009: 13–14. The 'biographical' nature of OT historiography (mentioned in point 4) is also evident in the summaries of OT history in Acts 7 and 13 and reflects the way Luke himself is recounting the history of the church in Acts.

¹² In referring to Luke's use of the OT in Acts I will use the general distinction (following R. B. Hays 1989: 23, 29) between 'quotation' and 'allusion' where 'quotation' refers to an explicit citation and 'allusion' refers to an intended reference to the OT, which, although not an explicit citation, is more obvious than an 'echo' (which is more 'subtle'; I am not examining 'echoes' in this book).

INTRODUCTION

5. A theological understanding of history in which God is in control and is fulfilling his covenant promises. In Acts this is highlighted by the prominence of key terms that indicate divine sovereignty (the most well known being *dei*, 'it is necessary') and the emphasis on God's actions, which lead the narrative events along).¹³

Thus 'the author is continuing the story of Israel where it left off. That is to say, he is intending to write *biblical narrative*.'¹⁴ In addition to these observations concerning the language, style and themes of OT narrative, we may note Paul House's observations regarding narrative summaries of OT history in 'the narratives of Old Testament narrative', such as Deuteronomy 1 – 4; Joshua 23 – 24; Judges 1 – 2; 1 Samuel 12; 2 Kings 17; and Psalms 78, 89, 104 – 106.¹⁵ One of the functions of these historical summaries, according to House, is that 'the writers place themselves and their audiences . . . into that story'.¹⁶ In the context of the narrative of Acts the major speeches of Acts 7 and 13 are largely narrative accounts of OT history from different perspectives in order to highlight continuing participation in that history. In Acts 7 the pattern of rejecting and persecuting God's messengers is noted, and in Acts 13 the pattern of God's saving provision for his people, which finds fulfilment in the death and resurrection of Jesus and which now includes Gentiles, is emphasized.

Thirdly, three strategically placed texts (at the beginning and end of Luke's Gospel and then at the beginning of Acts) also indicate that Luke wants his readers to read along a historical line from the OT to the Gospel of Luke and on to the book of Acts to see the outworking of God's saving plan:

- (1) Luke 1:1 'the things that have been *fulfilled* among us'
- (2) Luke 24:44–47
 - (a) 'everything must be *fulfilled* . . . written . . . in the Law . . . Prophets . . . Psalms'
 - (b) 'the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day'

¹³ Other terms Rosner refers to include *hē boulē tou theou* (the will of God), *thelēma* (will), *horizō* (foreordain), *proorizō* (predestine) and *prooraō* (foresee). For more on God's sovereignty in Acts see ch. 1.

¹⁴ Gasque 1989: 348 (emphasis original), cited by Rosner (1993: 82). Note also the interesting suggestion of Barrett (1996: 94–104) that together Luke and Acts may be described as 'the first New Testament'.

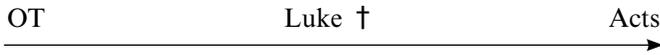
¹⁵ House 2005: 229–245.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 232.

THE ACTS OF THE RISEN LORD JESUS

- (c) and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached . . .'
 (3) Acts 1:1 'in my former book . . .'

At the beginning of Luke's Gospel (1) the links between the OT and Luke's writing are indicated ('the things that have been fulfilled among us'). At the end of Luke's Gospel (2) the links between (a) the OT ('everything must be fulfilled . . . Law . . . Prophets . . . Psalms') and (b) the account of Jesus' life, death and resurrection in Luke's Gospel ('about me . . . the Christ will suffer and rise') are confirmed, *and* the links between (a) the OT and (c) the spread of the Gospel in Acts are also identified ('everything must be fulfilled . . . *and* repentance and forgiveness . . . will be preached'). At the beginning of Acts (3) the link between Luke's Gospel and Acts is highlighted ('in my former book . . .'). These three texts indicate that Luke intends Acts to be read as a continuation of this line as he recounts the continued outworking of God's saving purposes (see the figure below).



The above observations concerning the purpose and genre of Acts help us to see how we should approach Acts. Since Acts is written for a Christian audience for the purpose of providing reassurance concerning God's actions, and since the narrative of Acts is patterned after the style and features of OT narrative, which highlight the accomplishment of God's purposes in history, then, as in OT narrative, the main character in the narrative of Acts is God. That is, Acts is not merely 'objective history' to satisfy our curiosity about various events. Nor is it necessarily prescriptive of everything it describes (though it is not merely descriptive either). The main concern of the author for his readers is that we look to see what *God* is doing in the narrative, how God is accomplishing his purposes and how we may embrace and identify with these purposes and so glorify the God of the biblical narrative.¹⁷

Of course, the main salvation-historical development that has taken place following the OT is the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus. In the following chapters we will see that the focus of Acts is on the continued accomplishment of God's saving purposes through the risen Lord Jesus. The kingdom has

¹⁷ Cf. Hamilton 2008: 34–47; 2010: 419–440.

indeed been inaugurated in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus is continuing to reign and all who come to him in repentance and faith are truly God's people and will receive the promised blessings of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. God's people may be assured therefore that, because the Lord Jesus continues to reign, they will be enabled by the Holy Spirit to serve him and reflect his character, the word will continue to spread even in the midst of opposition, and local churches will be established and strengthened with the apostolic message about the Lord Jesus. Luke's emphasis on the nature of the kingdom of God, therefore, is as relevant for Christian readers today as it was for the first century. All who follow the Lord Jesus this side of the cross and resurrection need to know that God is continuing to accomplish his purposes even now through the reign of the Lord Jesus. It is to the theme of the inaugurated kingdom of God, therefore, that we turn in chapter 1.

Excursus: assumptions concerning authorship, audience and interpreting Acts

Authorship and audience

I am assuming throughout this study that the same author wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, that this author is Luke, the 'sometime companion of Paul', and that he probably wrote Acts sometime before AD 70.¹⁸ Who was Luke writing for?¹⁹ The attempt to locate a particular 'Lukan community' is fraught with difficulty and has now been largely abandoned.²⁰ The lack of any reference to a particular community, coupled with the general nature of the prologue of Luke's Gospel, makes any such historical reconstruction for a particular locality tentative at best.²¹ Thus clues

¹⁸ My own argumentation for this may be found in A. J. Thompson 2004. An accessible and recent defence of this view may be found in Peterson 2009: 1–5. The phrase 'sometime companion of Paul' is used by Witherington (1998: 59), among others, to indicate that Luke was not an 'inseparable' companion of Paul. Michael Thompson's forthcoming article 'Paul in the Book of Acts: Differences and Distance' (which will be published in *Expository Times*) is a recent re-examination of the 'we-passages' in Acts which argues that these are the work of Luke as an eyewitness to the events described in these passages.

¹⁹ The following section borrows from my discussion in A. J. Thompson 2008a: 10–12.

²⁰ Cf. Allison 1988: 62–70; Moxnes 1994: 379–389; Barton 1998: 173–194.

²¹ Allison 1988: 66, cited in Barton 1998: 187.

must be examined in the narrative itself for descriptions of who the readers implied by the narrative may be.²²

The name of the addressee, Theophilus, mentioned in both prefaces, does not provide any further decisive evidence. A common Greek name, it was used by both Jews and Greeks.²³ The suggestion that Acts is intended solely for a readership outside the church (i.e. as a defence of Christianity to Roman readers), however, is the most unlikely option. In addition to the problem Roman officials would have had in understanding the relevance of much of the book²⁴ and the difficulty many would have had in noticing the many allusions to the LXX,²⁵ Luke's repeated use of the plural pronoun 'us' in his preface to the Gospel indicates an identification with the readership of his work. As Marguerat notes,

the narrative which follows (the Gospel and Acts) takes place within a readership composed of a common faith in the saving events (the 'events . . . fulfilled among us') and a common adherence to a tradition ('handed on [to us] by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses').²⁶

Thus a Christian readership is most likely implied by the preface to Luke's Gospel.

Other clues in the narrative, however, have been the basis for conflicting claims for the readership of Acts. Many have focused on whether or not this Christian readership was primarily Gentile or Jewish. Those in favour of a Gentile-Christian readership point to (1) the emphasis on the Gentile mission, (2) the absence of primarily Jewish preoccupations (such as Matt. 5:21–48), (3) the use of the LXX and the absence of Hebrew and Aramaic terms, and (4) Luke's

²² Kurz 1993: 13.

²³ Witherington 1998: 63. The term 'most excellent' is used only four times in the NT, all by Luke (Luke 1:1; Acts 23:26 [Felix]; 24:3 [Felix]; 26:25 [Festus]). Although it may indicate that Theophilus was an official or person of some rank, it was also a common term for polite address.

²⁴ Cassidy (1987: 148–155) argues contra the 'political apologetic' view of Haenchen 1971: 105; Conzelmann 1987: xlvii–xlviii; 1960: 138–144; Cadbury 1927: 308–313; Walaskay 1983: esp. 37, 50, 65–67. Note also the mixed portrayals of Roman officials (cf. Gallio, Acts 18:17; Felix, Acts 24:26–27). Cf. also Rowe: 2009: 3–4, 10–11.

²⁵ Ravens (1995:13) draws attention to 'Luke's allusive use of the LXX'. Cf. also Steyn 1995.

²⁶ Marguerat 2002: 23–24. Cf. also Kurz 1993: 14.

INTRODUCTION

Greco-Roman preface.²⁷ Those in favour of a Jewish-Christian readership, however, respond by pointing out (1) that the emphasis on Gentile mission needs to be understood in the context of Israel's restoration and does not necessarily entail a complete rejection of the Jews, (2) Luke's many references to primarily Jewish concerns (e.g. the clean/unclean issue in Acts 10), (3) the fact that a Greek-speaking Jewish readership could explain Luke's use of the LXX and the absence of Hebrew and Aramaic terms, and (4) that many of the Gentile converts in Acts were God-fearers who had already attached themselves to Judaism (without undergoing circumcision).²⁸ It seems, therefore, that in the light of such seemingly conflicting claims for the audience of Luke-Acts, it would be wise to follow the course proposed by Marguerat, that 'the Lucan work implies a diversified readership'.²⁹ That is, the intended audience may include both Jewish and Gentile Christian readers. A Jewish or Gentile Christian audience familiar with the language and promises of the OT, however, appears to be the primary target.

Interpreting Acts

My focus in this book will be on the text of Acts itself.³⁰ Although I am not arguing for Luke's reliability as a historian in this book, I do not assume there is a necessary disjunction between Luke's role as historian and theologian.³¹ Since Luke's Gospel and the book of Acts cannot be dealt with entirely separately, there will be some reference at times to Luke's Gospel.³² There are sufficient

²⁷ Cf. Fitzmyer 1981: 57–59; Kurz 1993: 13–14. These arguments are summarized in Ravens 1995: 14.

²⁸ Esler 1987: 24–26, 30–45; Jervell 1972: 175–177; Ravens 1995: 14–16.

²⁹ Marguerat 2002: 83.

³⁰ As noted above, in providing a biblical-theological 'framework' this book obviously does not cover all that should be said about Acts. For instance, although important for a full understanding of Acts, this book does not examine the ways in which these themes might be heard in a Greco-Roman world with imperial claims for authority (though I have examined aspects of this in A. J. Thompson 2008a; cf. Rowe 2009).

³¹ The classic book which argued that Luke was both a historian and a theologian is that of Marshall 1970. See also the M. B. Thompson article 'Paul in the Book of Acts' (forthcoming), where he argues for a positive assessment of Luke's reliability in his portrait of Paul. On the question of idealization and the portrait of the church in Acts see A. J. Thompson 2008b: 523–542.

³² Whether one thinks that Luke and Acts were written separately, with Luke's Gospel written before and independently of Acts, or if one thinks that Luke produced the two books as two parts of one work, readers of Acts cannot treat Acts as entirely independent from Luke's Gospel. This is especially so since in Acts 1:1 Luke himself

distinctives in style and focus, however, to warrant treating Acts independently.³³

Although much has been written about interpreting biblical narrative in general and the narrative of Acts in particular, I have found it particularly helpful to look out for various forms of repetition in seeking to observe Luke's emphases.³⁴ This is sometimes the best way to determine the difference between what some call 'descriptive' and 'prescriptive' elements in the narrative of Acts. For example, the appointment of a leader (Matthias) by lot is unlikely to be 'prescriptive' for the appointment of all church leaders just because it has been 'described' once (Acts 1:23–26). The frequent references to the way material possessions are used, however, indicate that Luke is trying to make a point (i.e. that he is arguing for or 'prescribing' something). In the case of material possessions it appears that by both positive and negative portraits he shows that the reality of one's allegiance to the Lord Jesus is evidenced in the way one uses material possessions (Luke 16:13).³⁵ It seems that if Luke wants to make a point, he highlights something by repetition. This repetition may be seen in

- patterns (such as the parallels between Peter and Paul)³⁶
- summary statements³⁷
- narration of major events³⁸

directs us to his Gospel. See the lengthy discussion of this in Verheyden 1999 and the recent summary in Bird 2007.

³³ Carson and Moo 2005: 203.

³⁴ For more information on interpreting Acts see the succinct summaries in C. Green 2005: 13–35 and Peterson 2009: 39–49. For an analysis of literary approaches to Acts see Spencer 1993: 381–414.

³⁵ Note the positive portraits in 2:44–45; 4:32, 34–35; 4:36–37; 6:1–7; 9:36, 39; 11:27–30; 16:15, 34; 20:35; and the contrasting negative portraits in 1:18; 5:1–11; 8:18–23; 16:16, 19; 19:23–27; 24:26. Cf. most recently C. Hays 2010.

³⁶ Cf. Moessner 1986. Note the helpful table in C. Green 2005: 25. I.e. both Peter and Paul heal a lame man (3:2–8; 14:8–10), do miracles at a distance (5:15; 19:12), exorcise demonic spirits (5:16; 16:16–18), confront sorcerers (8:18–24; 13:6–11), raise the dead (9:36–41; 20:9–12), have heavenly visions (10:9–16; 16:9; 18:9–10; 23:11), are miraculously released from prison (5:19; 12:7–11; 16:25–28) and preach to Jews using Ps. 16:10 (2:27; 13:35). Some parallels extend back to Jesus' activity in the Gospel of Luke as well (note the pattern at the outset of each person's ministry where a reference to the Holy Spirit's activity is followed by a major sermon and the healing of a paralytic in Luke 3–5, Acts 2–3, 13–14).

³⁷ 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30–31.

³⁸ E.g. Cornelius' conversion (Acts 10–11; 15:7–9); Saul's conversion (Acts 9, 22, 26); sharing resources (Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–37).



INTRODUCTION

- terms within individual accounts³⁹
- ‘frames’ or ‘inclusios’⁴⁰
- themes in contrasting accounts⁴¹

It is not always easy to determine with certainty what Luke may be ‘prescribing’ in the narrative of Acts. In addition to the observations above concerning Luke’s purposes and audience (assurance for believers concerning the outworking of God’s purposes in Christ), however, keeping an eye out for these kinds of repetitions will at least help to alert us to the fact that something is being emphasized! Although much more could be said about Luke’s narrative techniques, my aim here is merely to summarize briefly the approach taken in this book as I focus primarily on the text of Acts in order to highlight the biblical-theological framework of the inaugurated kingdom of God in Acts.

 INTERVARSITY PRESS

³⁹ E.g. ‘temple’ (Acts 3:1–3, 8, 10), ‘name’ (Acts 4:7, 10, 12, 17–18), ‘teaching’ (Acts 5:21, 25, 28, 34, 42), ‘our fathers’ (Acts 7:11–15) and ‘eunuch’ (Acts 8:27, 32, 34, 36, 38–39).

⁴⁰ E.g. Acts 6:1 and 7 (the increase of the disciples); 9:2 and 20 (Saul’s actions in Damascus); 9:1 and 31 (from murderous threats to peace); 11:1 and 18 (a contrast concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles); 12:1–4 and 20–23 (the ‘authority’ of Herod, who is called a ‘king’ in 12:1 and 20–21).

⁴¹ E.g. the use of money and material possessions mentioned above.





 INTERVARSITY PRESS

Copyrighted Material - www.ivpress.com/permissions

Chapter One

Living ‘between the times’: the kingdom of God

We have seen that Luke primarily wrote Acts to provide assurance to his readers concerning the purposes and plan of God. This, in addition to the likelihood that he is aiming to highlight the ‘continuing story’ of the fulfilment of God’s promises for his people, indicates that we should look primarily for what Luke is saying about God and his purposes in Acts and how this may provide reassurance for his readers. Thus this chapter will continue the discussion of the last chapter by focusing on what Luke says about the outworking of God’s purposes with a treatment of the sovereignty of God, the kingdom of God, the reign of Christ and the spread of the word in the midst of opposition. We will see that Luke is drawing attention to the continued outworking of God’s saving purposes specifically in the inaugurated kingdom of God through the reign of the Lord Jesus. It is within this framework that Luke wants his readers to see his account of the unstoppable spread of the word and the strengthening of local churches in the midst of persecution and opposition.

The sovereignty of God

Although many often approach the book of Acts by focusing primarily on the human participants in the narrative (such as Peter and the apostles, Paul, Stephen, Cornelius), the focus in the book of Acts is actually on God.¹ That Luke is highlighting the sovereignty of God in history is indicated by his use of key terms as well as the way in which he describes God’s involvement in the history of Israel, the events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the subsequent developments in the history of the church that he is recounting. We will examine this broad theme of the

¹ Cf. Squires 1993, Jervell 1996, Gaventa 2003 and esp. the summary in Walton 2008: 291–306.

accomplishment of God's purposes first before focusing attention on the kingdom of God and the continuing reign of the Lord Jesus.

Key terms

As noted in the previous chapter, one of the ways the book of Acts evidences a theological understanding of history in which God is in control and fulfilling his covenant promises is in the prominence of terms that indicate divine sovereignty.² The most prominent term in Acts that draws attention to 'divine necessity' is *dei*, 'it is necessary'.³ The term occurs 40 times in Luke-Acts (18 in Luke; 22 in Acts), which is almost twice as many times as in all 13 of Paul's letters (24 times in total), and significantly more than anywhere else in the NT (6 in Mark, 8 in Matthew, 10 in John).⁴ Although the term does not always refer to divine necessity (i.e. Acts 15:5; 16:30; 19:36; 25:24), Luke particularly highlights divine necessity in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus (Luke 2:49; 4:43; 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44; Acts 1:16; 3:21; 17:3), the calling, suffering and journeys of Paul (Acts 9:16; 19:21; 23:11; 27:24, 26) and suffering in the life of believers (14:22). As Walton correctly observes, 'This Lukan favourite term exposes his belief that God has a purpose which is being carried out through the stories which Luke tells in Acts.'⁵

Israel's history

The narrative summaries of Israel's history given in the speeches of Stephen (Acts 7) and Paul (Acts 13) also draw attention to the view (which Luke adopts in his summary of these speeches) that God has directed Israel's history and that current events in Acts are a continuation of these histories.

God's sovereignty in Israel's history in Acts 7

In Stephen's speech (Acts 7:2–46) the term *theos*, 'God', is mentioned sixteen times (the term *kyrios*, 'Lord', is also used twice with reference to God) and God is the subject of the action in the narrative. God appeared to, spoke to, gave promises to and sent Abraham (vv.

² Walton 2008: 295–296.

³ Cf. Cosgrove 1984: 168–190.

⁴ In addition to *dei*, Rosner (1993: 79) refers to *hē boulē tou theou* (the will of God), *thelēma* (will), *horizō* (foreordain), *proorizō* (predestine) and *prooraō* (foresee). Cf. also Conzelmann 1960: 151–154; Fitzmyer 1981: 170–181; Squires 1993: 1–3; 1998: 19–39; Marguerat 2002: 96–103; Walton 2008: 295–296.

⁵ Walton 2008: 296.

2–8); he was with, rescued and gave wisdom to Joseph (vv. 9–10); he fulfilled his promise to Abraham in rescuing the people of Israel (vv. 5, 17); he appeared to, sent and used Moses to deliver the people of Israel (vv. 25, 31–35); he directed Moses concerning the construction of the tabernacle, drove out the nations before Israel and was favourable to David (vv. 44–46). Running throughout this narrative account of Israel's history is an undercurrent of the rejection of God's messengers (Joseph, v. 9; Moses, vv. 27, 35, 39).⁶ This rejection and even resistance (v. 51) to God's messengers, however, does not leave God inactive. Despite the actions of the patriarchs, God accomplished his purposes through Joseph (vv. 9–10).⁷ Although the Israelites worshipped 'what their hands had made', God turned away from Israel, handed them over to idol worship and sent them into exile as promised (vv. 41–43).⁸ In fact, as Stephen nears the end of his speech he quotes Isaiah 66:1–2, which declares that heaven is God's throne, the earth his footstool and God has 'made all these things' (Acts 7:49–50).

This pattern comes to the fore in Stephen's conclusion, where he declares that his audience is following the pattern of those (their fathers) who persecuted the prophets. Even though their fathers killed those who predicted the coming of Jesus, and Stephen's audience followed suit in betraying and murdering this Righteous One, still the one predicted came just as God's messengers, the prophets, had predicted.⁹ The appearance again of the glory of God (cf. vv.

⁶ The primary significance of this speech in its narrative context will be examined further in the discussion of the temple on pp. 164–172.

⁷ The contrast in 7:9–10 between the actions of the patriarchs and God ('they sold him . . . but God was with him . . . and rescued him . . . gave Joseph . . . and enabled him') is reminiscent of (though not identical in wording) to Joseph's assessment in Genesis 50:20 ('You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives').

⁸ Spencer (2004: 87) notes that the relationship between Amos 5:25–27 in Acts 7:42–43 (idolatry that led to the exile) and the immediate context in Acts 7:40–41 (idolatry in worshipping the golden calf) seems to be that Amos identified Israel's wandering as God's judgment banishing them 'beyond Damascus' (i.e. to Assyria), and thus moves directly from the wilderness period to his own idolatrous age on the brink of deportation (i.e. he moves directly from exodus to exile). Stephen agrees with this assessment of Israel's history but extends it to his own day with the alteration to exile 'beyond *Babylon*' (instead of 'beyond *Damascus*'). Stephen therefore alerts these second-temple officials to the fact that they are in no more a privileged position than those being sent to exile before the temple was built.

⁹ Note the similar summary of Israel's history given by Jesus in Luke 20:9–19 (and Matt. 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–12). Cf. also 2 Chron. 24:19; 36:15–16; Neh. 9:26; Jer. 44:4–6; and esp. Jer. 7:25–29.

2, 55), and now the person of Jesus at the right hand of God, clearly shows that God's purposes were not thwarted but accomplished through this rejected Righteous One. This reappearance together with the clear allusions to Jesus' own actions at his death (cf. vv. 59–60 with Luke 23:34, 46) as Stephen is murdered indicate that this pattern is continuing. Stephen is God's messenger, now not as a messenger anticipating the coming of the Lord Jesus, but as one who points to (vv. 55–56), even prays to (vv. 59–60), and reflects the character of the Lord Jesus (vv. 59–60).

God's sovereignty in Israel's history in Acts 13

In Paul's speech in Acts 13:16–37 God is again the main character in the history of Israel and is again the subject of the main verbs. This time the emphasis is not so much on the rejection of God's messengers but the gracious provision of God for his people. The God of Israel chose their fathers, made the people prosper in Egypt, led them out, bore with them in the wilderness, overthrew the nations and gave them the land (vv. 17–20). Then God gave the people judges, installed and removed Saul as king, and made David king (vv. 20–22). In fact, it was only when David had served God's purposes in his own generation that he fell asleep (v. 36). Finally, it is from the descendants of David that God brings to Israel, as he promised (implying also a preservation of that promise through those descendants), the Saviour, Jesus (vv. 23–37). God's purposes were fulfilled in the condemnation and execution of Jesus (vv. 27–29) and God raised Jesus from the dead (vv. 30–37). The anticipation that God would do something incredible in their days (v. 41), the promise of light for the Gentiles and salvation for the ends of the earth (v. 47) and the granting of eternal life to 'all who were appointed' (v. 48) indicate that the culmination of God's sovereign and gracious provision for his people comes in the offer of salvation (v. 26), forgiveness of sins (v. 38), justification (v. 39) and eternal life (vv. 46, 48), by God's grace (v. 43), through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus to all who would believe, even Gentiles (v. 48).

Jesus' life, death and resurrection

Jesus' life

The surveys of God's actions in Israel's history given above have already indicated that part of Luke's purpose is to highlight the continued accomplishment of God's purposes in Jesus' ministry despite the rejection he faced from his own people. This is seen in

his description of God's involvement in all aspects of Jesus' ministry: his life, death and resurrection. Regarding Jesus' life, Peter's summary in Acts 2:22 is that God accredited Jesus to the people of Israel by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among them through Jesus. Similarly, in Acts 10:36–38 Peter states that God is the one who sent the word (*logos*) to Israel, 'telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ'.¹⁰ Furthermore, God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power and Jesus 'went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him' (10:38). Again, in Acts 13:23 Paul states that God is the one who has 'brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised'.

Jesus' death

Regarding Jesus' death, Luke's Gospel emphasizes the accomplishment of God's purpose even if the wickedness and culpability of those involved in Jesus' death are also maintained.¹¹ Predicted by Jesus himself (Luke 9:22; 13:33) in keeping with the predictions of the Scriptures (Luke 18:31; 24:26–27, 44–46), it is clear that the Christ 'had to (*dei*) suffer' (24:26) because everything written about him 'must (*dei*) be fulfilled' (24:44). Even the betrayal by Judas, though deserving of judgment, is described in terms of the Son of Man going 'as it has been decreed' (22:22).

When we come to Acts, the same emphasis on the accomplishment of God's purposes remains, as does the accompanying responsibility of those involved. Between the ascension of Jesus 'into heaven' in Acts 1:11 and the descent of the sound like a violent wind 'from heaven' in Acts 2:1–4 there seems to be an unusual digression that focuses on Judas' death and his replacement (Acts 1:12–26). Part of the reason for this lengthy excursus is to highlight the restoration of the number of apostles to twelve in keeping with the promises of Jesus concerning the role the twelve would play over the people of Israel (cf. Luke 22:30).¹² The dominant feature of the passage, however, is that the sovereign plan of God has not been derailed by this most wicked of actions – a betrayal from among the ranks

¹⁰ Gathercole (2006: 221–227) suggests that Luke 1:2, Acts 10:36, 13:26 and 20:32 indicate the possibility of 'an incipient logos Christology in Luke-Acts'.

¹¹ Cf. esp. Conzelmann 1960: 153, 200. Conzelmann mistakenly argued, however, that Luke sees no atoning value in the death of Jesus. Cf. Larkin 1977: 325–335.

¹² Pao 2000: 123–127.

of Jesus' own inner circle.¹³ Far from discrediting the ministry of Jesus, this betrayal was anticipated. In verse 16 the language of 'had to' (*dei*), 'be fulfilled', 'which the Holy Spirit spoke . . . concerning Judas' and 'long ago' indicates that this betrayal ought to be no surprise and has long been anticipated.¹⁴ Furthermore, the sovereign plan of God is continuing to be worked out in the provision of a replacement for Judas. This too Scripture anticipated (Acts 1:20, citing Ps. 109:8).¹⁵ Following prayer to the Lord requesting that he show them whom he has chosen, the decision is made by casting lots.¹⁶ Although there is no direct allusion to Proverbs 16:33 here, as Marshall correctly observes, 'it clearly was the basis of the method chosen here'.¹⁷ That proverb, of course, attributes God's sovereignty even to the apparent randomness of casting lots as 'its every decision is from the Lord'. The point seems to be that God's plan and the role of Jesus' followers continue to be on track despite apparently disastrous circumstances.

A similar juxtaposition of the sovereign plan of God and the responsibility of those involved in Jesus' death is found in Acts 2:23 and 4:27–28. In 2:23, despite the fact that Peter's listeners, with the help of wicked men, were responsible for putting Jesus to death, Jesus is said to have been 'handed over' (*ekdoton*) by the 'predetermined' (*horizō*) 'plan' (*boulē*) and 'foreknowledge' (*prognōsis*) of God ('God's set purpose and foreknowledge' NIV). Similarly, in 4:27–28 Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel conspire together in opposition to Jesus, the holy servant anointed by God. Nevertheless, they do what God's 'hand' (*cheir*)¹⁸ and 'plan' (*boulē*) had 'predetermined' (*proōrisen*) to happen.¹⁹ Likewise in 13:27–29 Paul states that although the people of Jerusalem and their rulers condemned Jesus and asked Pilate to have him executed, they nevertheless 'fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath' and 'carried out all that was written about him'. Thus

¹³ Cf. Peterson 2009: 124 for the relationship between Matt. 27:5–8 and Acts 1:18.

¹⁴ Cf. Marshall 2007: 530 regarding the use of Ps. 69 here. In the context of a 'Davidic typology' Jesus fulfils supremely the pattern of the betrayal of the Davidic King.

¹⁵ Ps. 109, like Ps. 69, has to do with betrayal and opposition to David.

¹⁶ See more on this later in this chapter in the section on the reign of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁷ Marshall 2007: 531. Cf. also Luke 1:9.

¹⁸ I.e. God's power. Cf. Bock 2007: 208.

¹⁹ Cf. Carson 2000: 53–54 for a discussion of the implications of this text for 'compatibilism' between God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

repeatedly throughout Luke and Acts, although the wickedness and culpability of those involved in Jesus' death are not diminished, the purpose and plan of God are said to have been carried out.²⁰

Jesus' resurrection

A consistent feature of references to Jesus' resurrection in Acts is the statement that 'God raised him from the dead.'²¹ Returning to passages mentioned above, just as God is the subject accomplishing his purposes in the summaries of Israel's history, so he is the subject accomplishing his purposes in the summaries of Jesus' 'history'. In Acts 2, following references to God's accreditation of Jesus, his accomplishment of miracles through Jesus and the outworking of his predetermined plan in the death of Jesus, Peter states that God is also the one who raised him from the dead (2:24 and again in 2:32).²² Likewise in Acts 10, following an account of how God sent the 'word' to Israel, anointed Jesus and was with Jesus for him to do good and heal, Peter states that God raised him from the dead, caused him to be seen, chose those who would see him and appointed Jesus as judge (10:40–42). In Acts 13 Paul's speech combines these 'histories' of Israel and Jesus. He highlights God's actions in choosing the fathers, guiding Israel's history (13:17–22) and finally bringing to Israel Jesus as promised, whose death fulfils the words of the prophets and all that was written about him (13:23–29). Paul follows this summary of God's actions in the history of Israel and the life and death of Jesus with an emphasis on God's action in raising Jesus from the dead. That God is the one who raised Jesus from the dead is stated four times in the following eight verses (13:30, 33, 34, 37). Though more on the significance of Jesus' resurrection will be given in the following chapter, at this point we merely note that Luke is highlighting the continued accomplishment of God's sovereign purposes in the death of Jesus (even through the wicked actions of those who put Jesus to death) and in the resurrection of Jesus.²³

²⁰ Texts such as Acts 2:23 and 4:27–28 also indicate that Luke does not limit those responsible for Jesus' death to the Jewish leaders, or the Jewish people in Jerusalem: he includes Herod, Gentiles and Pilate. Cf. Bock 1996: 1498; contra e.g. J. T. Sanders 1987.

²¹ Hence the title of Anderson's 2006 book *'But God Raised Him from the Dead': The Theology of Jesus' Resurrection in Luke-Acts*.

²² Cf. also 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 17:31.

²³ Contra Cadbury (1927: 280), who argued that in Acts the death of Jesus is merely a prelude to the resurrection.

Subsequent developments in the church

In Acts, Luke is, of course, writing an account that is subsequent to the events in the history of Israel and the events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Here too, however, Luke aims to show that God is continuing to accomplish his purposes. In addition to the language of fulfilment that is pervasive throughout Acts²⁴ and the specific interventions of angels or the Holy Spirit to direct the spread of the Gospel,²⁵ there are emphases on God's action in moving the events of the narrative along. Perhaps the most prominent aspect of God's action in Acts involves the inclusion of the Gentiles. This is seen especially in the conversion of Cornelius but also in later summaries of ministry among the Gentiles in Acts.

The conversion of Cornelius and his household

In the account of Cornelius' conversion the action of God is highlighted in Cornelius' vision in which an angel instructs him concerning where and how to find Peter (10:3–6) and Peter's vision concerning God's declaration of what has been made clean followed by instruction from the Spirit about the men who were looking for Peter (10:9–20).²⁶ In addition to these obvious indications of specific divine guidance, what is striking about the account of these events is the stress on the 'coincidences' of timing throughout the narrative. It is as the three men were 'approaching the city' that 'Peter went up on the roof to pray' (v. 9). It is 'while Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision' that 'the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate' (v. 17). It is then 'while Peter was still thinking about the vision' that the Spirit tells him about the three men looking for him and tells him to go downstairs and to go with them (vv. 19–20). The emphasis on God's timing reaches a climax when it was 'while Peter was still speaking' that 'the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message' (v. 44).

²⁴ In addition to 1:16, 3:18, 13:27, 33, 17:2–3, 26:22–23, etc., with reference to Jesus' death, cf. 2:1, 16, 30–31, 3:24, 13:47, 15:15, 28:25 regarding events in the life of the church. Cf. Peterson 1993: 83–104.

²⁵ Cf. 8:26, 39; 10:3–6; 12:7–10, 23; 13:2–4; 16:6–10; 18:9–11; 20:22–23; 21:4, 10–11; 23:11; 27:23–26.

²⁶ As Spencer (2004: 121) correctly observes, the voice that declares 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean' does 'not insist that Peter goes ahead and consumes unclean meat on this occasion, but it does demand that Peter acknowledges God's sovereignty in determining purity boundaries and, by implication, adjusting those boundaries if he so chooses'.

Peter's retelling of the account also highlights the amazing timing of the events when, after recounting the vision, he states that '*right then (kai idou exautēs)* three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying' (11:11). Then Peter states that it was as he began to speak that the Holy Spirit came upon them (11:15), indicating again that he had more to say and that the Spirit came 'without any initiative on his part'.²⁷ That this is all meant to highlight the sovereign action of God in including Cornelius is emphasized at the conclusion to the account in 11:17–18. Peter concludes his summary of the events by stating that it was God who gave them the Holy Spirit and adding, 'who was I to think that I could oppose God?' The Jewish believers respond by praising God and marvelling that 'God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life'.

This same stress on God's action in including the Gentiles in Acts 10 – 11 is found in Peter's summary of these events before the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Peter states that *God* made the choice that Gentiles would hear the message of the gospel from his mouth and that they would believe (15:7).²⁸ Furthermore, God is the one who gave them the Holy Spirit, showing that he accepted them, that he made no distinction between the two groups and that he had purified their hearts by faith (vv. 8–9). James's summary at the conclusion of the Council looks back to Peter's account as a description of how God had 'showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself', which is in agreement with the words of prophets (vv. 14–15).²⁹

Paul's ministry among Gentiles

In addition to this specific inclusion of the Gentile Cornelius and his household through faith, summaries of Gentile inclusion that frame the beginning and end of Paul's ministry to Gentiles in Acts also highlight God's sovereignty. These summaries attribute the whole of Paul's ministry among Gentiles and the response of Gentiles to the work of God. In the context leading up to the Jerusalem Council Paul and Barnabas have returned to Antioch, having completed 'the

²⁷ Bock 2007: 408.

²⁸ In Greek the verb for 'choose' is completed with the two infinitives 'to hear' and 'to believe' (*exelaxato ho theos . . . akousai . . . kai pisteusai*).

²⁹ The phrase in Greek is *ho theos epeskepsato labein ex ethnōn laon tō onomati autou* (God visited to take out from the Gentiles a people for his name).

work' under the grace of God (14:26).³⁰ This was 'the work' to which they had been called, set apart and sent by the Holy Spirit (13:2–4). In Antioch they report to the church 'all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles' (14:27). On their way to the Jerusalem Council Paul and Barnabas travel through Phoenicia and Samaria telling how the Gentiles have been converted, and upon arrival in Jerusalem report to the welcoming church, apostles and elders 'everything God had done through them' (15:3–4). At the Jerusalem Council itself Paul and Barnabas tell about 'the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them' (v. 12). At the end of Paul's ministry as a free man in Acts, when he arrives in Jerusalem in Acts 21, he reports again to the welcoming brothers in Jerusalem, including James and the elders. Luke states that Paul recounted in detail (lit. 'each one of the things') 'what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry', which elicits a response of praise to God from these church leaders in Jerusalem (21:19–20). Although more could be said,³¹ it seems clear that one of Luke's aims is to reassure readers such as Theophilus that God is continuing to accomplish his purposes (as promised in the OT) in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and in the developments subsequent to Jesus' earthly ministry by the inclusion of Gentiles among the followers of Jesus. Luke's focus on the accomplishment of God's purposes, however, must also be understood in the context of his references to the kingdom of God. It is to this that we now turn.

The kingdom of God

In the discussion that follows we will see that Luke's focus on the accomplishment of God's saving purposes is placed within the specific framework of the inauguration of God's kingdom in the ministry of Jesus. Although there are not a large number of references to the kingdom of God in Acts, their strategic placement and contexts indicate an importance that outweighs the number of occurrences of the phrase. Before looking at Acts, however, I will briefly clarify the relationship between the sovereignty of God and the phrase 'the

³⁰ This section is often described as Paul's 'first missionary journey'. The use of this designation may, however, neglect Paul's earlier ministry in Damascus (9:20–22), Jerusalem (9:28–29) and Antioch (11:25–26).

³¹ Cf. also Acts 16:10, 14; 18:10–11.

kingdom of God' and summarize the use of the phrase in the Gospel of Luke.

The kingdom of God and the sovereignty of God

There is a sense in which the phrase 'kingdom of God' refers to God's universal sovereignty.³² God always rules over his creation, he is the sovereign King over all he has made and 'his kingdom rules over all'.³³ In this sense, given that all are under God's sovereign rule, all are in God's kingdom.³⁴ The OT, however, also anticipates a time when God's rule will be established in keeping with his saving promises. This will be a time when the enemies of God and the enemies of his people will be defeated and God's people will be blessed.³⁵ The arrival of the kingdom of God in this sense is something like 'the fulfilment of God's saving promises' or 'the saving rule of God' and one must 'receive' the kingdom or 'enter into' the kingdom (Luke 18:17) to participate in these saving promises.³⁶ It is the accomplishment of this saving rule already, in advance of the final consummation, even in the midst of continued opposition, that Luke particularly highlights.

The kingdom of God in Luke's Gospel

The arrival of the kingdom

The kingdom of God is of course a major aspect of Jesus' ministry in Luke's Gospel, as it is in each of the Synoptic Gospels.³⁷ The statements which summarize Jesus' ministry in Luke 4:43, 8:1, 9:2, 11, 16:16 and 18:29 indicate that 'preaching the kingdom

³² Cf. the summary of the following texts in Schreiner 2008: 49–50, 53–54.

³³ Ps. 103:19; cf. also Pss 47:8; 93:1; 97:1; 99:1; Dan. 4:34–35; Matt. 13:41.

³⁴ Cf. Carson 2008: 104–107.

³⁵ Cf. Dan. 2:44; Isa. 9:7; 24:23; 25:6–9; Zech. 14:9; Obad. 21; Amos 9:11–15.

³⁶ The phrases 'saving promises' and 'saving rule' are taken from Schreiner 2008: 49, 54. Beasley-Murray (1986: 339) uses the phrase 'saving sovereignty'. Similarly, France (1990: 15) uses the phrase 'God in saving action'.

³⁷ Regarding the fact that some of the OT passages above speak of a new exodus, return from exile and new creation, Schreiner (2008: 48, n. 20) helpfully notes, 'We see from this that the Gospel writers did not typically refer to the fulfillment of God's promises in terms of return from exile or as a new exodus. Instead, they spoke of the coming of God's kingdom. It is important to see, however, that the coming of the kingdom means the fulfillment of God's promises regarding a new exodus and return from exile. Hence there is no need to drive a wedge between the notion of God's kingdom and new exodus and return from exile, though it is important for the sake of precision to note that the terminology typically used in the Gospels is not that of a new exodus or a return from exile but of the coming of the kingdom of God (but see Matt. 2:15, 18).'

of God' epitomizes Jesus' ministry.³⁸ Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God is best understood along the lines of 'inaugurated eschatology', or, in the words of George Ladd, 'fulfilment without consummation'.³⁹ That is, there is both an 'already' and a 'not yet' aspect to the kingdom. Thus, in keeping with OT expectations, Jesus expected a future consummation of the kingdom.⁴⁰ The more striking element of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels, however, is that he did not just announce a future kingdom; he announced the present arrival of that kingdom in his own ministry. In Luke's Gospel the presence of the kingdom is especially emphasized in Luke 10:9, 11; 11:20; and 17:21.⁴¹ In Luke 10:9, 11 Jesus tells his disciples to go into the towns ahead of him and announce that 'the kingdom of God is near' (with the sense of arrival), and Luke 10:9 adds that the kingdom has come 'upon you' (*eph hymas*).⁴² In 11:20 exorcisms by Jesus are tied to the presence of the kingdom, which is said to have 'come to you'.⁴³ In 17:21, a passage unique to Luke's Gospel, Jesus answers a question about the kingdom's presence by stating that the kingdom of God is 'among you' (NIV mg.). Given that this is a response to the Pharisees, it is unlikely to be a statement about a spiritual internalization of the kingdom in their hearts but is rather a declaration that the kingdom of God is 'in their presence'. That is, in the context of the previous verses, the point is that the kingdom has come with the coming of the King, and the Pharisees should not miss the presence of the kingdom right before their eyes.⁴⁴

³⁸ Regarding these references to the kingdom in the Synoptic parallel passages, it should be noted that Luke 4:43 is not found in Mark 1:38; Luke 8:1 is not found in Matt. 13 and Mark 4; the phrase 'kingdom of God' in Luke 9:11 is not found in the equivalent sections of Matt. 14:14 and Mark 6:34.

³⁹ Ladd 1993: 63. Cf. Seccombe (2002: 166–199) for a summary of recent interpretations of the kingdom of God.

⁴⁰ In addition to references to a future second coming in passages such as Luke 12:40–46, 17:22–37, 18:8 and 21:27–28, see also references to a future kingdom of God in 13:23–30; 14:14, 15–24; 19:11–27 (12, 14–15, 27); 21:5–38 (esp. v. 31); 22:18. In these passages it appears that Jesus anticipated a period of time between his first and second coming but emphasizes the certainty and suddenness of the future kingdom's arrival.

⁴¹ See also Luke 7:28; 8:10; 9:27; and 16:16. On this last verse see Marshall 1978: 629 and Schreiner 2008: 58–59.

⁴² Cf. the use of *engizō* (come near) in Luke 12:33; 15:1; 18:40; 22:47; 24:15, 28; Acts 21:33 ('the commander came up and arrested' Paul).

⁴³ In this verse the verb *phthanō* is used with the prepositional phrase 'upon you' (*eph hymas*). Cf. also the sense of 'attain' in Rom. 9:31; Phil. 3:16; even 'overtaken' in 1 Thess. 4:15. Bock 1996: 1080.

⁴⁴ Bock (1996: 1416–1417) notes that the prepositional phrase used here, *entos hymōn*, is often synonymous with *en mesō*, which a number of versions of the Greek

Entrance to the kingdom, therefore, is possible already and requires a response to Jesus.

Entrance into the kingdom

Although space prevents a full discussion of the importance of the kingdom of God throughout Luke's Gospel, we will focus on one particular narrative unit, Luke 18:9 – 19:10, which is the concluding part of the long journey section (Luke 9 – 19) in Luke's Gospel before Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. We will focus on this unit primarily because of its important narrative location (at the culmination of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem) and its emphasis on the kingdom.⁴⁵ Broadly speaking, Luke 18:9 – 19:10 includes the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, children being brought to Jesus, the rich ruler, a prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection, a blind beggar receiving sight, and culminates in the account of Zacchaeus the tax collector. Rather than being an arbitrary collection of events from Jesus' life, however, this section particularly stresses the response of those who will enter the kingdom of God.⁴⁶ A variety of expressions are used to describe the result of this response: justification (18:14), receiving or entering the kingdom of God (18:16–17, 24–25), eternal life (18:18, 29), receiving mercy (18:13, 38–39) and salvation (18:26, 42; 19:9–10).⁴⁷ As with the descriptions of the result, there are also a variety of ways of expressing the required response of those who will enter the kingdom. This response is to be characterized by a humble acknowledgment of one's sinfulness (18:14), dependent trust in Jesus alone (18:16–17, 37–42), and an abandonment of any other source of confidence (18:11–12, 18–30; 19:1–10).⁴⁸ In each case Jesus is the one who determines what this response should be and is the one to whom the response must be made. Thus those who respond are described as those who come

OT indicate when they translate Exod. 34:9 in either way (see also Exod. 17:7). Note also the present tense 'is'.

⁴⁵ Cf. Bock (1996: 957–964) and J. B. Green (1997: 394–399) for summaries of the structure and importance of the 'journey section' of Luke's Gospel.

⁴⁶ Cf. J. B. Green 1997: 643; Nolland 1993: 872.

⁴⁷ Note that Jesus' discussion with the ruler and the follow-up discussion with his disciples in 18:18–30 incorporate many of these expressions. The parallels between the humility described in 18:14 and in 18:15–17 seem to warrant the inclusion of the language of justification here too.

⁴⁸ The parallels between 19:1–10 and 18:18–30 ('wealth' in 18:23–25 and 19:2, 8; 'salvation', 18:26; 19:9–10) indicate that Zacchaeus is a 'rich man who enters the kingdom of God' (18:25). Allusions to Luke 3:8–14 indicate also that Zacchaeus is a 'child of Abraham' who 'produces fruit in keeping with repentance'.

to him (18:16), follow him (18:22, 28, 43), have faith in him (18:42) or welcome him gladly (19:6). Tucked away in the middle of this section is Jesus' final and most detailed prediction of his impending suffering, death and resurrection in Jerusalem (18:31–33).⁴⁹ The conclusion to this long journey anticipated since 9:51 and referred to regularly along the way is now imminent. Thus this detailed description of what Jesus is about to face indicates again that the Jesus to whom response must be made in order to enter the kingdom of God is the soon-to-be rejected, suffering, dying and resurrected Jesus.

The departure and return of the king

Luke 19:11–27 is a concluding parable to the journey section that continues this focus on the kingdom of God (19:11) before the transitional section in 19:28–44 describing the approach of 'the king' to Jerusalem (note 19:38).⁵⁰ This parable is another clue that Luke connects the kingship of Jesus with the kingdom of God.⁵¹ Luke tells us that Jesus told this parable 'because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once' (19:11).⁵² The concluding parable in 19:11–27 therefore comes in the context of Jesus' imminent arrival in Jerusalem and deals with false expectations concerning Jerusalem and the kingdom of God.⁵³ The parable focuses on a man who is appointed king and the responses to his kingdom (19:12, 14–15, 27).⁵⁴ In particular, even though the reign of this king is rejected (19:14, 27) he nevertheless departs and receives a kingdom (19:12, 15) and returns to call his servants to account for their service (19:15–27). In view of the impending arrival in Jerusalem, the response of the

⁴⁹ Earlier predictions in Luke 9:22, 44, 12:49–50, 13:32–33, 17:25 did not contain the specific details found in these verses regarding handing over to Gentiles, mocking, insulting, spitting and flogging.

⁵⁰ Cf. Bock 1996: 957–959 concerning this aspect of the structure of the 'journey section'. It seems that the journey section does not officially end till 19:44, as Jesus is still approaching Jerusalem in 19:41; but in 19:54 he is clearly in the city (in the temple area).

⁵¹ Ziccardi 2008: 460–473.

⁵² Note this association between Jerusalem and the rule of God in Pss 2:6; 110:2; and Isa. 52:7–8.

⁵³ Cf. Bock 1996: 1526–1529 on the differences between this parable and the similar one in Matt. 25:14–30.

⁵⁴ Note that the rationale given for the parable in Luke 19:11 is not in the introduction to the parable in Matt. 25:14; the references to receiving a kingdom in Luke 19:12 and 15 are not found in Matt. 25 (Matt. 25 just has a man going on a journey with no reference to kingdom); and references to rejecting the reign of the king in Luke 19:14 and 27 are also not found in Matt. 25.

rulers and crowds, and the betrayal by Judas, the parable seems to indicate again (i.e. as with 18:31–33) that Jesus' death and rejection in Jerusalem are integral to the kingdom and must come first. Furthermore, Jesus' disciples must be prepared for a period of faithful service before the king returns; judgment of the king's enemies is still to come.⁵⁵ Following the unfolding of the events in Jerusalem in Luke 20 – 23, Jesus provides clarification in Luke 24 regarding the promises of the Scriptures for Israel (24:21), the death and resurrection of the Messiah (24:25–27, 44–46), and the role of Jerusalem (24:47, 52) and the nations (24:47) in the light of his resurrection (24:31, 36–43) and in ways that recall hopes for Israel and the nations in the opening chapters of Luke's Gospel.⁵⁶ The stage is set for further clarification concerning the next stage in the kingdom between the king's departure and return.

The kingdom of God in Acts

Having surveyed briefly some of the emphases concerning the kingdom of God in Luke's Gospel, we are now better prepared to understand the significance of Luke's strategic placement of references to the kingdom of God in Acts. Announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God was a major aspect of Jesus' ministry. Now that Jesus has suffered, died, risen and ascended as he said he would, what happens next? As Jesus' teaching indicated, the kingdom has come 'already'; nevertheless, the kingdom has 'not yet' been consummated in fullness and there will be a period in-between. So what does the kingdom of God look like now in this period of the 'now and not yet'? Jesus himself stressed that people enter the kingdom as they humbly trust in him. How do people enter the kingdom now that he has departed? What is the 'king' of the kingdom doing now? How will God's saving purposes be carried out now? What about the promises of the OT regarding the blessings of the kingdom age?

⁵⁵ Cf. Secombe 2002: 493–499 for a discussion of the second coming of Jesus in this parable (contra Wright 1996: 632–639).

⁵⁶ The hope that Jesus would 'redeem Israel' in 24:21 recalls Zechariah's praise that the God of Israel has come 'and has redeemed his people' (1:68), Simeon's hope for 'the consolation of Israel' (2:25) and Anna's address to 'all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem' (2:38). Forgiveness of sins for the nations in 24:47 recalls expectations raised in Simeon's praise for God's salvation in Jesus, 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel' (2:32), expectations that have largely gone unfulfilled in Luke's narrative so far. The significance of the opening and closing chapters of Luke's Gospel will be discussed further on pp. 75–76 with reference to the resurrection.

What about the institutions of Israel and the leadership of Israel? Who are God's people now and who leads them? If followers of Jesus are 'in the kingdom of God', why do they face suffering and why are they opposed? Questions such as these are what the book of Acts addresses within the 'framework' of 'the kingdom of God' between the 'now' and the 'not yet'.

Luke's 'framing' references to the kingdom in Acts 1 and 28

Although there are eight references to the specific phrases 'the kingdom of God' or 'the kingdom' in Acts,⁵⁷ the particular location and contexts of two references to the kingdom of God at the beginning and another two at the end of Acts (1:3, 6; 28:23, 31) indicate that Luke is 'framing' his work with these references and that readers are meant to read the material between chapters 1 and 28 within this 'frame'.⁵⁸ In addition to the observation that two references to the kingdom of God introduce and another two conclude the book of Acts, the contexts of these references indicate that Luke is referring to the concept of the kingdom in the narrative of Acts more often than just where the specific phrase occurs.⁵⁹ In these contexts there is an emphasis on comprehensive teaching about the kingdom of God and an association of the kingdom of God with major themes found elsewhere in Acts.

At the beginning of Acts the kingdom of God is presented in 1:3 as the one topic of conversation during Jesus' forty-day instruction of his disciples before his ascension. Then in 1:6 the question about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel is raised in the context of this forty-day instruction concerning the kingdom of God in 1:2–5.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Cf. 'The kingdom of God': Acts 1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:23, 31. 'The kingdom': 1:6; 20:25.

⁵⁸ Cf. Tannehill 1990: 352; Marguerat 2002: 207; C. Green 2005: 17–19.

⁵⁹ Study of the kingdom of God and eschatology in Acts is often done in the shadow of Conzelmann's arguments (1960: 95–97, 123). Conzelmann assumed that the early Christians expected the end of the world immediately or at least within their lifetimes, the earlier tradition of the teaching of Jesus was that the kingdom was exclusively future and immediate, and that this fervent expectation prevented them from writing a history recording Jesus' place within what would be world history. Therefore, according to Conzelmann, Luke's writing is out of place and must be written to correct a crisis; in particular the crisis that the end and Jesus' return had not happened. Thus he argued that Luke downplays all reference to the future (placing the kingdom in the very distant future) and emphasizes history (he also argued that Luke distinguished between the message of the kingdom and the kingdom itself). Marshall (1970) responded to these arguments and noted that although Luke is interested in salvation history, the evidence for a supposed 'crisis' and downplaying of the future is lacking.

⁶⁰ Note the *oun* ('so' NIV) at the beginning of v. 6.

Acts 1:8 is clearly 'programmatic' for the geographical spread of the gospel in Acts. It should also be noted, however, that Jesus' answer to the disciples' question about the kingdom relates to Israel, promises of restoration, Jesus' own role in that restoration, the role of the Holy Spirit, the role of the apostles as witnesses of Jesus, and the place of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and 'the ends of the earth' in this restoration. The significance of this question concerning the kingdom in the context of Acts 1:1–8 is such that we will examine it in more detail in chapter 3 (on Israel and the kingdom) and chapter 4 (on the Holy Spirit and the kingdom). At this stage we are merely noting that Jesus' teaching to the disciples and Jesus' answer to the disciples' question are obviously foundational for what the rest of the book is about: the kingdom!

At the end of Acts, in 28:23, the context is a climactic meeting between Paul and 'large numbers' of the Jewish leaders in Rome, and again the emphasis is on extensive instruction. This time, although the time mentioned is just one day, Luke states that Paul explained and declared to them the kingdom of God 'from morning till evening'.⁶¹ In this context Paul has just stated that he is in chains because of 'the hope of Israel' (28:20) and, along with explaining the kingdom of God, he 'tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets' (28:23). Thus comprehensiveness is emphasized in both the extended amount of time and in the extensive amount of content referred to. The last reference to the kingdom of God in Acts is also the final verse of the book of Acts. Once again the kingdom is mentioned in the context of comprehensive explanation. In Acts 28:31 we are told that Paul 'preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ'. There appears to be a certain extensiveness of teaching implied in the association of 'the things about the Lord Jesus Christ' and the full title given to Jesus here.⁶² The context of this final summary statement of Paul's teaching, however, is given in Acts 28:30 where we are told that Paul stayed for 'two whole years' in his rented house preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the final note sounded in Acts is the bold proclamation of 'the kingdom of God'.⁶³

⁶¹ Contra Fitzmyer 1998: 794–795, Luke's point is not that Paul was long-winded!

⁶² Note that in Greek the phrase 'the things about' (*ta peri*) Jesus implies broad instruction about Jesus and is similar to what is found at the conclusion of Luke's Gospel in 24:27, 44.

⁶³ It should be noted that a number of narrative indicators in Acts show that the conclusion to Acts was deliberate and is not 'abrupt' or due simply to the fact that

It has sometimes been noted that references to the kingdom of God in Acts are shorthand summaries for apostolic preaching.⁶⁴ The fact that 8:12, 28:23 and 31 also identify Jesus as the subject of this preaching indicates, as Dodd notes, that

the kingdom of God is conceived as coming in the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and to proclaim these facts, in their proper setting [i.e. in the light of the promises of the OT], is to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God.⁶⁵

Peterson also correctly observes that, in the light of Luke 24:44–47 and Acts 1:3, Jesus was showing the apostles ‘how to proclaim the kingdom appropriately, in light of “the things which have been accomplished among us”’.⁶⁶ Although there is an emphasis on how the kingdom is proclaimed, it appears that Luke has more in mind than that. As noted above, the opening references to the kingdom of God in Acts 1:3 and 6 are set in contexts where Jesus is explaining the *nature* of the kingdom of God, not just how to proclaim the kingdom of God. Although more detailed attention will be given to 1:6–8 in chapters 3 and 4, we have already noted here that Jesus’ answer addresses not only the content of the proclamation (they will be witnesses of *Jesus*) but also the unfolding of events significant for understanding the nature of the kingdom after his ascension (i.e. the place of Israel, the eschatological promise of the Spirit, the fulfilment of God’s saving promises). As noted above, this teaching on the kingdom in the opening verses of Acts is obviously foundational for what the rest of the book is about.⁶⁷

Luke had run out of room on his scroll or that Paul had died and Luke had now run out of material! For further discussion see Troftgruben 2010. Cf. A. J. Thompson 2008a: 165–169 and Rowe 2009: 99–102 for the significance of these verses in the context of imperial claims for authority.

⁶⁴ Cf. 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31; cf. also 14:22.

⁶⁵ Dodd 1944: 24, cited by Peterson 1993: 94, n. 27.

⁶⁶ Peterson 1993: 94–95, n. 27. See also the discussion on preaching the gospel on pp. 88–101.

⁶⁷ Note also that in Acts 20:25 Paul refers to ‘preaching the kingdom’ in the same context as referring to proclaiming ‘the whole will (or ‘plan’, *boulē*) of God’. The kingdom, therefore, may be viewed broadly as the ‘plan of God’ through Jesus, something Luke is drawing attention to in the wider narrative of Acts (cf. 2:23; 4:28; 5:38–39; 13:36). C. Green (2005: 17–18) helpfully observes also that inside these four ‘framing’ references at the beginning and end of Acts two references are located in the context of evangelism (8:12; 19:8) and two are located in the context of strengthening churches and leadership in the context of suffering (14:22; 20:25).

An indication that Luke is drawing our attention to the setting of this period of the kingdom before the 'not yet' consummation of the kingdom is found in 1:10–11, immediately after Jesus' answer to the disciples' question about the kingdom.⁶⁸ This is now Luke's third reference to Jesus' ascension.⁶⁹ Although attention has rightly been paid to the importance of the ascension in Acts 1 (see below on the reign of the Lord Jesus), one feature of this particular reference to the ascension appears to be the fact that 'this same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, *will come back* in the same way you have seen him go into heaven'.⁷⁰ That is, just as Jesus taught in the Gospel of Luke (see above), there is going to be an interim period, there is a 'not yet' aspect to the kingdom even if the times and dates of God's schedule are not for the disciples to know (1:7).

To summarize: in the light of the double references to the kingdom in the introduction and conclusion of Acts, the emphasis on comprehensive teaching on the kingdom associated with these references, the explanation given by Jesus about the kingdom in the opening verses of Acts, and the fact that Luke chooses to end his work on the subject of the kingdom of God in the last verse, it seems that these are important 'framing' verses for understanding Luke's focus in the book of Acts. The book of Acts, therefore, is not just a sequel to the Gospel of Luke in the sense that it describes the spread of the gospel, or in the sense that it describes the growth of the church, or in the way it describes the inclusion of Gentiles. Though the book of Acts includes all of these elements, this 'frame' for the book indicates that the book of Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke in the sense that all of these elements are placed within the 'framework' of Luke's explanation of what the kingdom of God looks like now that Jesus has come, announced the arrival of the kingdom, died, risen and ascended to the right hand of the Father. Readers such as Theophilus may be reassured that God's saving plan, his kingdom, is continuing to be worked out through the crucified and risen Lord Jesus in keeping with Jesus' own teaching. The continuing role of

⁶⁸ See also Acts 14:22, which is discussed further below (pp. 63–65) in the context of suffering and opposition.

⁶⁹ Luke 24:50–51; Acts 1:2; and now here Acts 1:10–11.

⁷⁰ Cf. also the references to a future return of Jesus (3:20) or a future role for Jesus as Judge (10:42; 17:31) indicating that, contra Conzelmann 1960: 95–97, Luke has not eliminated the expectation of an imminent parousia due to some supposed 'crisis' brought about by its delay.

the Lord Jesus in the kingdom, therefore, must also be examined in this context.

The continuing reign of the Lord Jesus

As noted above, a major emphasis of Jesus' teaching was that the kingdom of God had already arrived. The kingdom of God had arrived, said Jesus, because the kingdom of God was present in *his* ministry. Because he, the King of the kingdom was here, entrance to the kingdom was through response to *him*. The actions of Jesus presented further evidence for his claims concerning the arrival of God's kingdom. The natural question after Jesus' departure then would be, 'What about the kingdom now?' Luke tells Theophilus in the first verse in Acts that his first book was all about what Jesus began to do and teach. The implication of these opening words in Acts is that he is now going to write about all that Jesus *continues* to do and teach. Thus we may now get even more specific about what the book of Acts is about. Luke's Gospel was written to provide assurance to Theophilus about the person and work of Jesus, that God's purposes were accomplished through him, that Jesus' suffering and death were anticipated in Scripture, and that Jesus brought about the inauguration of God's kingdom, the fulfilment of God's saving promises. The book of Acts, therefore, is about the continuation of those saving promises, the kingdom of God, through the Lord Jesus. Jesus is still the mediator of that kingdom, the one who administers those saving promises and the one who carries out God's saving plan.

Luke's statement in the first verse of Acts that his first book was about all that Jesus began to do and teach and therefore that his second book will be about what Jesus is continuing to do and teach is already a corrective to some popular approaches to Acts. Strictly speaking then the book is not primarily about the 'Acts of the Apostles'. After Acts 1, of the twelve apostles named in 1:13 and 26, only the names of Peter and John appear again.⁷¹ Some have correctly noted the importance of the Holy Spirit in Acts and

⁷¹ Incidentally, this is therefore not a reason to think that Matthias was the 'wrong choice' or that they should have waited for Paul, who was supposedly 'God's choice'. This view is not advocated today by many but was held e.g. by G. Campbell Morgan (1924: 19–20). It should be noted, of course, that generic references to 'the apostles' occur throughout Acts (e.g. 2:42–43; 4:33, 35–37; 5:12; etc.) and James's death is mentioned in 12:2.

have suggested that the book should be called the 'Acts of the Holy Spirit'.⁷² As important as the Holy Spirit is in Acts, it should be noted that even this designation does not quite capture the emphasis of Luke in Acts. Acts 1:1 indicates that the book is going to be about what Jesus is continuing to do and teach; therefore, the 'Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus' would be a better title. It must be said, though, that this could also be understood as a shorthand expression for something like 'the Acts of the Lord Jesus, through his people, by the Holy Spirit, for the accomplishment of God's purposes'! Some have thought that Acts exhibits an 'absentee Christology' in which Christ has departed and is now 'absent'.⁷³ Zwiep even claims that Luke's Christology 'is dominated by the (physical) absence *and present inactivity* of the exalted Lord'.⁷⁴ This is the exact opposite of what Luke is advocating in Acts. In what follows we will see that, according to Luke, Jesus is very much active: he is continuing to reign.

The ascended Lord Jesus reigns from heaven

Acts 1 sets the stage for the rest of Acts with a focus on 'the day' of the ascension of the Lord Jesus. In fact Luke 'frames' this chapter with references to Jesus' ascension in the almost identical phrase 'until the day he was taken up' in 1:2 and again in 1:22.⁷⁵ In between these verses we have, as noted above, another reference to Jesus' ascension in 1:10–11, where Luke refers four times in the space of these two verses to the fact that Jesus is in 'heaven'. The focus here is not on his 'absence' and consequent 'inactivity', but rather on the 'place' from which Jesus rules for the rest of Acts. The reason for the emphasis on this location here will be clarified in Acts 2:33–36, where this place is associated with Jesus' supreme authority over all. Initial evidence for this rule is seen already towards the end of Acts 1 as well as in the following account of Pentecost.

In Acts 1:24–26 the believers choose two men who meet the

⁷² Bruce 1988: 31 (following J. A. Bengel and A. T. Pierson). Bruce does, however, argue that Acts 1:1 suggests that Acts is about all that Jesus *continued* to do and teach (30).

⁷³ The phrase 'absentee Christology' was coined by Moule 1966: 165, 179–180. Cf. also Conzelmann 1960: 186, 206. Sleeman (2009: 13), however, has shown that Moule's position was more nuanced than that of Conzelmann's. Cf. also Buckwalter 1996: 174.

⁷⁴ Zwiep 1997: 182 (emphasis original), cited by Sleeman 2009: 15.

⁷⁵ *Achri hēs hēmeras . . . anelēmphthē*, 1:2; *heōs tēs hēmeras hēs anelēmphthē*, 1:22. Cf. Spencer 2004: 33.

qualifications for being a replacement apostle for Judas. Then, before they cast lots, they pray to the Lord who knows ‘everyone’s heart’ (1:24). Some have suggested that because the language of knowing hearts is used in Acts 15:8 to refer to the Father, this must be prayer to the Father too.⁷⁶ However, the prayer here to ‘the Lord’ to show them which apostle he ‘has chosen’ is also identical to language used at the beginning of the chapter, where Luke tells us about the instruction Jesus gave to his apostles whom ‘he had chosen’.⁷⁷ This opening and closing ‘frame’ in Acts 1 regarding the apostles ‘chosen’ by Jesus, and the ‘frame’ regarding ‘the day he was taken up’, together with the immediately preceding reference to ‘the Lord’ Jesus in this context (1:21), all indicate that ‘the Lord’ who is being prayed to in 1:24 is the Lord Jesus. Luke shows then that Jesus not only has such authority that he may be prayed to,⁷⁸ but Jesus is also continuing to direct affairs from ‘heaven’. The Lord Jesus is still ruling over his people, choosing which disciple will join the ranks of the other eleven apostles he has chosen, and controlling the outcome of the lot to bring about this appointment.

The reigning Lord Jesus pours out the Spirit

Following the focus on ‘*the day he was taken up*’ in Acts 1, Acts 2 begins with a reference to the arrival of ‘*the day of Pentecost*’ (2:1).⁷⁹ Furthermore, following the emphasis on the ascension of the Lord Jesus ‘into heaven’ (1:10–11), the mention in 2:2 of a sound coming ‘from heaven’ alerts us to the possibility that the Lord Jesus is continuing to act and that he is behind the events of Pentecost too. This is in fact what Peter argues in response to questions concerning the declaration of the wonders of God in a variety of languages. What this means, argues Peter, is that God’s promise to pour out the Holy Spirit in the last days has been fulfilled (2:16–17). The reason for this is that the promised Davidic King has come and has been raised for ever to sit on David’s throne (2:30–31).⁸⁰ The use of ‘therefore’ (*oun*) in verse 33 (omitted in the NIV) shows that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is evidence of the reign of

⁷⁶ Conzelmann 1987: 12, 25; Fitzmyer 1998: 227; Pervo 2009: 55.

⁷⁷ *Hous exelexato*, 1:2; *hon exelexō*, 1:24.

⁷⁸ For other references to prayer to Jesus in Acts see 7:59–60; 9:10–16 (note also Luke 6:13).

⁷⁹ Spencer 2004: 33.

⁸⁰ Cf. Hahn 2005: 294–321 for a discussion of the relationship between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of David.

the Lord Jesus from the throne of David. Here we need to note the parallelism in the words Peter uses in 2:17 (quoting Joel 2:28) and in 2:33:

2:17 'God says, *I will pour out my Spirit*'

2:33 'Exalted . . . he has received . . . and *has poured out* what you now see and hear'

Jesus is the Lord who sits 'at the right hand' of the Father, a position of power and authority and the place from which blessing and deliverance come for God's people.⁸¹ Now he is the bestower of God's blessing for God's people, sending the Holy Spirit, God's enabling presence for his people. Thus in Acts 16:7 the Holy Spirit (who is mentioned in 16:6) is referred to as 'the Spirit of Jesus'. It is most likely that this phrase is used in the light of the declaration in 2:33 that the Lord Jesus received and poured out the Holy Spirit. In the light of Acts 2, therefore, this phrase, 'the Spirit of Jesus', highlights Jesus' 'lordship of the Spirit' as he is the one who sent the Holy Spirit.⁸² As important as Pentecost is for the narrative of Acts, and as important as the Holy Spirit is for the transformation and enabling of God's people in Acts, Luke shows in Acts 1 and 2 that it is the ascension of the Lord Jesus that is determinative for the events of the rest of the narrative of Acts. Luke's opening of the narrative of Acts with reference to two 'days', the 'day he was taken up into heaven' and the 'day of Pentecost' when the Holy Spirit was poured out 'from heaven', are designed to show that it is the Lord Jesus who rules and directs affairs in this period of the kingdom of God.⁸³

The reigning Lord Jesus adds to the church

When we continue reading through the narrative of Acts, we find ongoing references to Jesus' activity. In Acts 2:47 'the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved'. In view of the overwhelming emphasis throughout Acts 2 that Jesus is 'the Lord' upon whom we must call (cf. 2:21 and 34–36), the 'Lord' at the end

⁸¹ Cf. Exod. 15:6; Pss 18:35; 44:3; 60:5; 98:1.

⁸² Buckwalter 1996: 180–182; Turner 1996: 304–305.

⁸³ Furthermore, according to Acts 2:34–35 (citing Ps. 110:1), he will reign from God's right hand until the Father makes his enemies a footstool for his feet. Again this indicates a period of time between the ascension and return, and that during this period of time there will be opposition to his rule, but he nevertheless rules from a position of power and authority.

of Acts 2 who is adding believers to the church is Jesus who has been made 'Lord and Christ'.⁸⁴ Thus not only is the Lord Jesus the one who is responsible for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and the events of Pentecost; he is the one who is adding believers to the number of those who are saved. Similarly, in 5:32 Peter and the apostles declare that he has been exalted to the right hand of God in order to give 'repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel'. Thus he is the one who not only grants forgiveness in response to repentance, but is even said to grant the required response of repentance itself.

We will break the narrative sequence here and come back to Acts 9 and Saul's conversion below, where it will be placed in the context of the rest of Paul's ministry in Acts. In Acts 11 – 12 the Lord Jesus is again highlighted as the one responsible for the growth of the church. Those scattered because of the persecution in Jerusalem began to tell 'the good news about the Lord Jesus' to Greeks as well as Jews (11:20). Then we read that 'a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord'. The reason given for this large response is that 'the Lord's hand was with them' (11:21). The references to the message about the 'Lord Jesus' and the number turning to 'the Lord', in this context indicate that 'the Lord' whose hand is with them is the Lord Jesus again. This is a crucial narrative setting, as we read not only of the introduction of Gentiles to the church following the major narrative focus on the conversion of Cornelius (and in keeping with what the Lord Jesus had said in 1:6–8), but also of the establishment of the church at Antioch, which will go on to become the next major sending church in the book of Acts (13:1 – 14:28).⁸⁵ The Lord Jesus is here again continuing to rule according to his promise, enabling the disciples in their ministry and adding to the growth of the church.

When we come to Saul's conversion in Acts 9 (and the references to this event again in Acts 22 and 26), we find that the greatest threat

⁸⁴ This statement is not a contradiction of Luke 2:11, nor does it advocate 'adoptionist Christology'. Acts 2:31 speaks of the resurrection of the Christ (i.e. he already was the Christ) and 2:34 speaks of the exaltation of the Lord (i.e. he already was Lord). Acts 2:36 indicates that Jesus' resurrection and exaltation declare the inauguration of his reign in full authority and power. Cf. Strauss 1995: 144–145.

⁸⁵ Note also the discussion of Acts 26:23 on pp. 80–81. In the narrative of Acts this verse comes at a climactic moment in Paul's climactic defence. The statement here that Jesus 'as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles' must refer to the preaching of Jesus' people (including Paul) to the Gentiles in Acts. This verse indicates, however, that Jesus himself does this preaching (through his people).

to the life of the church up to this point is not only stopped but turned around by none other than the Lord Jesus himself.⁸⁶ The description of Saul in Acts 8:3 as one who is destroying the church and going from house to house and dragging off men and women to prison, and in 9:1 as still 'breathing out murderous threats', highlights the severity of this threat. The contrast, however, between his approach to the synagogues of Damascus in 9:2 in order to drag men and women off to prison and his activity in the synagogues of Damascus in 9:19–20 proclaiming that Jesus is the Son of God shows the power of the Lord Jesus not only to overcome this threat but to enlist Saul as his own most devoted follower. In the narrative of Acts 9 the persecutor of 9:1–2 becomes the bold proclaimer in 9:19–20, even under threat of persecution himself, and this is all due to the work of the Lord Jesus.

In 9:15–16 the rest of Paul's ministry is outlined under the authority of the Lord Jesus. Paul's ministry before the Gentiles and their kings and the people of Israel will be developed from Acts 13 through to the end of the book. This ministry is said to take place, however, because Paul is Jesus' 'chosen instrument'. It is as Jesus' representative, bearing his name and suffering for his name, that Paul will minister, and it is Jesus himself who outlines the course of his ministry.⁸⁷

At a major turning point in the narrative of Acts (16:6–10) we find the directing activity of 'the Spirit of Jesus' as Paul crosses from 'Asia to Europe'. After much is made of the prevention of Paul and his companions from preaching in the province of Asia and Bithynia at the border of Mysia, and the vision of a man from Macedonia urging them to come over to Macedonia, they conclude that 'God had called us to preach the gospel' to the Macedonians (16:10). It is significant, therefore, that in the very next incident in Philippi of Macedonia Lydia responds to Paul's message, because 'the Lord opened her heart' (16:14). The immediately following statement that she is now a 'believer in the Lord' (16:15) indicates that 'the Lord' here is the Lord Jesus. Thus we see that following the directing activity of 'the Spirit of Jesus', the goal of 'God's call' was the conversion of Lydia, whose heart the Lord Jesus himself opened.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ The transformation of Saul described here indicates that this is a 'conversion' and not a 'call' only. Cf. Kern 2003: 63–80.

⁸⁷ Sleeman 2009: 205–208.

⁸⁸ Cf. the discussion of the significance of bridging this divide in discussions of ancient rulers in A. J. Thompson 2008a: 74–79.

It is in the light of the authority of the Lord Jesus over Paul's ministry then that we read of reassurances given to Paul along the way that the Lord Jesus is continuing to guide his mission and Paul's ministry. In 18:9–11, in the context of opposition, 'the Lord' speaks to Paul in a vision encouraging him not to be afraid and to keep on speaking, 'for I am with you'. In view of Paul's conversion and call to ministry in Acts 9 'the Lord' here is the Lord Jesus. Paul's ministry will not come to an end here (in Corinth) because, the Lord says, 'I have many people in this city'. Here again the Lord Jesus is responsible for the outcome of and response to Paul's ministry.

The final phase of Paul's ministry in Acts is also carried out under the direction of the Lord Jesus. In 23:11, in the midst of opposition, Paul receives further reassurance from the Lord to 'take courage'. The reason for this courage is the promise that 'as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome'. The previous chapter, where Paul refers to his 'testimony' about Jesus in Jerusalem (22:18–19), indicates that 'the Lord' here is again the Lord Jesus. Thus the subsequent events where Paul is rescued from a plot to take his life (23:12–35), sent to Caesar in the midst of false charges and corrupt rulers (24:1 – 26:32), marvellously protected through storm, shipwreck and snakebite (27:1 – 28:10) and arrives safely in Rome (28:11–16) are all meant to be read in the light of this promise from the Lord Jesus in 23:11.⁸⁹ It is under Jesus' care and as his representative that Paul travels to Rome. Paul's conversion and ministry may be made much of in the narrative of Acts. For Luke, however, this is all the more occasion for marvelling at the transforming power of the Lord Jesus.

Suffering: the fullness of the kingdom has yet to come

As Paul House has correctly observed, 'Acts has no purpose, no plot, no structure, and no history without suffering. Therefore, proper interpretation of Acts depends in part on the commentator's grasp of suffering's importance in Acts.'⁹⁰ This is all the more important

⁸⁹ It is interesting that the only use of the term *tharsos*, 'courage', in Acts is found in 28:15, and the only use of the cognate verb *tharseō*, 'take courage', in Acts is found in 23:11. In the light of the Lord's command to take courage, for he will testify about him in Rome (23:11), Paul indeed 'takes courage' when he reaches Rome (28:15).

⁹⁰ House 1990: 321.

in view of the words of Paul and Barnabas to the believers in Acts 14:22, 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.'⁹¹ In the light of the emphasis in Acts on the continued accomplishment of God's saving purposes through the risen and reigning Lord Jesus within the framework of the inaugurated kingdom of God, this verse is a significant statement about this interim period. The reference to the 'kingdom of God' here clearly has a future orientation; it has yet to be entered and there must (*dei*, 'it is necessary') be suffering beforehand. The Lord reigns and is accomplishing his saving purposes, yet his reign remains contested, the fullness of the kingdom is still 'not yet'. The accomplishment of God's saving purposes in this 'not yet' period of the kingdom therefore helps to explain why suffering is intimately related to two of the dominant themes of Acts: the spread of the word and the establishment and strengthening of local churches.

Suffering and the spread of the word

Luke punctuates his narrative at regular intervals with statements about the continued progress of the word, indicating that the spread of the word is a major theme in Acts.⁹² As Luke's Gospel highlighted the journey of the Lord Jesus to Jerusalem, so Acts highlights the journey of the word about Jesus away from Jerusalem.⁹³ The association of active verbs with the growth and spread of the word in the summary statements of Acts (cf. also Acts 20:32) together with the recurring descriptions of suffering and persecution experienced by the Christian community in the narrative of Acts indicate that this theme should not be understood as evidence for an 'over-realized' eschatology in a triumphalistic church. It is the *word* that grows 'with power' (Acts 19:20), often in the midst of the persecution of

⁹¹ Cf. Cunningham 1997. This verse will be treated in more detail below.

⁹² Acts 4:4, 29, 31; 6:7; 12:24; 13:5–12, 46–48; 14:3; 17:13; 18:5; 19:20. On the importance of the spread of the word in Acts see Kodell 1974: 505–519; O'Reilly 1987: esp. 91–121; Rosner 1998: 215–233; Bovon 2006: 272, 457; and esp. Pao 2000: 147–180. Pao relates the theme of the word to the creation of the community of the word in the midst of opposition within the framework of the Isaianic New Exodus (i.e. Isa. 2:3, 'the word of the Lord [will go out] from Jerusalem', and Isa. 40–55). Cf. A. J. Thompson 2008a: 135–170 for reference to ancient literary discussions concerning the destructive effects of division and strife and a comparison with the contexts of Luke's statements concerning the spread of the word in the midst of opposition and cities in states of division, conflict and confusion.

⁹³ Pao (2000: 150–156) notes the locations of references to 'the word' in the narrative of Acts and observes that 'the word' never visits a geographical location twice.

believers.⁹⁴ The spread of the word, however, is not hindered by the persecution and suffering of believers. In fact, sometimes the persecution of believers is even the means for the continued spread of the word.

Suffering and the spread of the word in Jerusalem and beyond Jerusalem

Luke draws particular attention to the inability of those opposed to believers to stop the progress of the word. In Acts 4:4 Peter and John are placed in jail. In the very next verse, however, Luke states, ‘But many who heard the message [‘word’] believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand’ (4:5). Similarly, in Acts 5:18 all the apostles are placed in jail. Once again Luke begins the very next verse with ‘but’. In this instance, he states, ‘But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out’ (5:19). The reason for this miraculous escape was so that the apostles could ‘tell the people the full message of this new life’ (5:20). Likewise, in 5:40–41 the apostles are flogged and ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus. The very next verse, however, highlights the continued (‘day after day’) proclamation of the good news that the Christ is Jesus (5:42). Thus the summary statement in 6:7 concerning the spread of the word is a summary of this spread in Acts 3–7 in the midst of both internal threats and rising external opposition to the Christian community, which culminates in the death of Stephen.⁹⁵

The death of Stephen brings about the greatest persecution the church has faced to that point. So great is the persecution that ‘all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria’ (Acts 8:1).⁹⁶ The description of Saul destroying the church and going from house to house dragging off men and women and putting them in prison (8:3) accentuates even further the severity of this opposition. Once again, however, in the very next verse Luke states that ‘those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went’ (8:4). In this instance Luke is not only placing side-by-side

⁹⁴ Pao (2000: 160, 162–163, 167–169) discusses the summary statements in Acts 6:7, 12:24, 19:20 (and the verbs used) in the context of Exod. 1:7, 20.

⁹⁵ See ch. 5.

⁹⁶ In this context the decision of the apostles to remain in Jerusalem is not a sign of their reluctance to take the gospel to the nations or that they somehow escaped the persecution, but of their bravery in remaining in Jerusalem in the midst of severe persecution. Cf. Schnabel 2004, 1: 670–673.

statements about opposition and the inability of that opposition to stop the spread of the word (as he has done in 4:3–4; 5:18–20, 40–42); he is stating this time that the opposition was the very means for the continued spread of the word. This is picked up again in Acts 11:19–21, where Luke describes the spread of the word to Jews (11:19) and to Greeks (11:20), with the result that 'a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord' (11:21). This great number, as observed above, was due to the fact that 'the Lord's hand' was with those who preached the word as they were scattered.

Suffering and Peter's rescue

The accounts in Acts 12 of Peter's escape from prison and Herod's death dramatically highlight this theme of the inability of those opposed to God's people to halt the spread of the word. The purpose of Acts 12 has been much debated and the ending of Acts 12 (vv. 20–23) has been a particular cause of difficulty due to its apparent disconnection from the account of Peter's release.⁹⁷ At least part of the reason for the inclusion of this chapter, however, lies in the contrast between Herod as a powerful 'king' in violent opposition to the Christian community, and 'the Lord' who is able to overcome this threat and enable the word to continue to spread.⁹⁸ The whole account is framed with references to the kingship of Herod.⁹⁹ The account opens with a description of Herod as 'King Herod' (*hērōdēs ho basileus*, 12:1). At the conclusion of the chapter Herod's kingship is again emphasized (12:20–21) with references to the 'servant of the king' (*tou basileōs*), 'the king's country' (*apo tēs basilikēs*), Herod's 'royal robes' (*esthēta basilikēn*), and Herod's 'throne' (*kathisas epi tou bēmatos*).¹⁰⁰ His powerful opposition against the church is particularly stressed in verses 1–6: he acts violently against some in the church (v. 1), kills James the brother of John with the sword (v. 2), sees that this pleases the Jews and so proceeds to arrest Peter also

⁹⁷ The following summarizes A. J. Thompson 2008a: 141–143. Cf. the discussions in Witherington 1998: 382–383; Barrett 1994: 569–573; Allen 1997: 5–24, 93–98. Witherington states that 12:20–23 should be seen as a 'separate tradition from Luke's Herodian source, referring to an event that transpired somewhat later' (389).

⁹⁸ Tannehill 1990: 152. Contra Barrett 1994: 570, who states that Herod 'is peripheral to the story'.

⁹⁹ Haenchen 1971: 388.

¹⁰⁰ His title 'king' was bestowed on him by the emperor Gaius and his realm included Galilee, Perea and, later, under the reign of Claudius, Judea (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 19.292, 351–352; *J. W.* 2.215–217). Thus at this time Agrippa had received 'the whole of his grandfather's kingdom' (*tē patrōa basileia pasē*, Josephus, *J. W.* 2.215).

(v. 3, with the implication that Peter's life is also in danger)¹⁰¹ and has Peter placed in prison guarded by four squads of soldiers and bound with chains (vv. 4, 6). The reference to the earnest prayer of the church in verse 5 indicates, however, that one more powerful than Herod is able to be called upon.

Subsequent events do not encourage us to place confidence in the human participants in this account. Peter is portrayed as helpless, asleep when the rescue began, oblivious to the events of his rescue, and comes to his senses only when he is outside (vv. 6, 9, 11–12). Rhoda, although she is at least excited that Peter is out and recognizes Peter, nevertheless is not portrayed in the most flattering light as she leaves Peter (whose life is surely in danger) outside still knocking at the door (vv. 13–14). The believers (who, we are reminded in v. 12, were still praying for Peter) then hear that Peter is at the door and respond that Rhoda must be crazy! After further insistence from Rhoda, they conclude that it must be his angel instead.¹⁰² Finally, when they open the door and see Peter, they are astonished (v. 16). In this context this does not appear to be a release that has been brought about by the great faith of a praying church.¹⁰³ What then is the emphasis of this account?

In spite of the great lengths 'King' Herod goes to in securing Peter in prison (12:4), 'an angel of the Lord' struck Peter on the side, woke him up, and led him out of the prison effortlessly (vv. 7–10). The agent of this deliverance, however, is further clarified throughout the narrative. In 12:11 Peter states that 'the Lord' (*ho kyrios*) had sent his angel to rescue him. Then in the concluding summary before Peter leaves, Luke declares simply that 'the Lord' (*ho kyrios*) had brought Peter out of prison (12:17). Thus the focus of the account of Peter's rescue is on the power of 'the Lord' to overcome the violent opposition of 'King Herod'.¹⁰⁴ At the conclusion of the account in

¹⁰¹ Cf. Cunningham 1997: 236.

¹⁰² Peterson (2009: 365–366) suggests that since the term *angelos* can mean 'messenger' it could be that the church thinks he has just sent them a message. The other alternative is that they thought this was his 'guardian angel'. Either way, the point is that they think it cannot be Peter himself!

¹⁰³ Although Cunningham (1997: 241) correctly identifies the references to prayer in Acts 12, it appears that the emphasis in 12:12–17 is more on the irony of the situation than on the community's prayer as such.

¹⁰⁴ In the context of an emphasis on the 'lordship of Jesus' in Acts 10–11, it is possible that this account contrasts the 'kingship' of Herod with the true King, the Lord Jesus. The word (*logos*) that God sent to Israel is the good news of peace (*eirēnē*) through Jesus Christ, 'who is Lord of all' (10:36). It is this 'Lord of all' who brings peace in contrast to the absence of peace in the realm of this 'king' (12:20; cf. also

the midst of the emphasis on the 'kingship' of Herod noted above, Herod's refusal to give praise to God leads to his downfall as 'an angel of the Lord' strikes again. This time it is Herod who is 'struck' down, and he dies (12:22).¹⁰⁵ It is in this context of defeated opposition that another summary statement records the continued progress of the word (12:24). Despite the efforts of Herod the tyrant who opposed and persecuted the believers, 'the word of God continued to increase and spread' (12:24).¹⁰⁶ Thus, although it is correct to see the description in 12:24 of the continued growth and increase of the word as one of the summary statements that contribute towards the portrait of the spread of the word in the face of opposition in Acts, it is the power of the Lord that enables the deliverance of his people, the defeat of opposition and the continued spread of the word.

Suffering and Paul's ministry

As noted above, at the heart of Saul's conversion and call is the statement from the Lord Jesus summarizing two aspects of his future ministry: he will both 'bear' the Lord's name before Gentiles, kings and the people of Israel and 'suffer' for the Lord's name (9:15–16). These twin features of Paul's ministry are then immediately demonstrated in his preaching in Damascus (9:20–22) and Jerusalem (9:28) and also in the persecution he faces in Damascus (9:23–25) and Jerusalem (9:29–30). On numerous occasions throughout his ministry, persecution against Paul (like the persecution he himself inflicted on believers before his conversion, 8:3–4) was often the reason for his movement and continued ministry in other places (cf. 9:25, 30; 13:50; 14:6; cf. also 17:10, 14). On other occasions, however, Paul remained to proclaim the gospel in the face of persecution and opposition (cf. 14:2–3, 19–20; 20:22–24; 21:13). Either way, persecution and opposition continued to accompany, but not thwart, the spread of the word in Paul's ministry as he faced opposition from Jew and Gentile alike.¹⁰⁷

The whole final section of Acts, which describes Paul's arrest

9:31). In contrast to the tyrannical rule of 'King' Herod (12:20), belief in 'the Lord' Jesus results in the gifts of forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit (10:43; 11:17) and the presence of his 'hand' with them as they proclaim the good news about him in the midst of persecution (11:21).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Pao 2000: 199–201 for the placement of this passage within the 'anti-idol' theme in Acts. Cf. also Allen 1997: 89–90, 104–107.

¹⁰⁶ Pao 2000: 152. Cf. also Cunningham 1997: 241–242.

¹⁰⁷ Note the Gentile opposition also in 14:5; 16:20–21; 17:32; 19:25–41. Cf. Rapske 1998: 235–256; Cunningham 1997: 186–294.

in Jerusalem and defences before various audiences on his way to Rome, is also placed within the context of ongoing suffering and persecution. A preview of what is ahead is given in Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders, where he declares that he is compelled to go to Jerusalem and that the Holy Spirit has warned him of continued persecution and hardships, but that he is determined to persevere in the task of 'testifying to the gospel of God's grace' (20:22–24).¹⁰⁸ This is confirmed by Agabus in 21:11 where Paul again affirms his commitment to persevere and even die for 'the name of the Lord Jesus' (21:13).¹⁰⁹

A suffering Saviour

The suffering of believers in Acts is, of course, consistent with the fact that they follow a suffering Saviour. A major feature of Luke and Acts is that the suffering of the Lord Jesus was integral to the accomplishment of God's saving purposes. Thus, as observed above, it is regularly stated that 'the Christ had to suffer' (Luke 24:26, 46; Acts 3:18; 17:3; 26:23). Similarly, the Lord Jesus is regularly identified as the (suffering) 'Servant' of Isaiah (Acts 3:13, 18, 26; 4:27; 8:32–33). This pattern of suffering, where believers follow their Lord in experiencing rejection and suffering, is indicated by Luke in parallels between Jesus, Stephen and Paul.¹¹⁰ Thus, like Jesus, Stephen commits his spirit to the Lord and prays for the forgiveness of his attackers after his speech (7:59–60), and, like Jesus, Saul is told that he too 'must suffer' (*dei*, 9:16).¹¹¹ When Paul arrives in Jerusalem, it

¹⁰⁸ Some have thought that there is a contradiction between 20:22, where the Spirit compels Paul to go to Jerusalem, and 21:4, where it appears that the Spirit (the disciples 'through the Spirit') urges Paul *not* to go to Jerusalem. In the light of the statement in 20:22 concerning the Spirit's role in urging Paul to go to Jerusalem and 21:12, where it is clear that it is the believers who are urging Paul not to go to Jerusalem, it is better to see in 21:4 a combination of these two emphases. The Spirit has warned again (as in 20:23) of impending suffering and it is the believers, acting out of human concern, who are urging Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Cf. Bovon 1995: 34 (who cites Chrysostom); cf. also Barrett 1998: 990–991; Fitzmyer 1998: 688; Hur 2001: 264–266.

¹⁰⁹ Agabus' prophecy ('the Holy Spirit says') in 21:10–11 (that the Jews will bind and hand Paul over to Gentiles) is confirmed by Paul's statement in 28:17 that he was 'handed over to the Romans' (and appears therefore to have been fulfilled in 21:30 when the Jews seized Paul and dragged him from the temple, which then led to the commander of the Roman troops coming in 21:31 and ordering in 21:33 that Paul be bound in chains).

¹¹⁰ Cf. Moessner 1986: 220–256.

¹¹¹ For Acts 7:59 see Luke 23:46, and for Acts 7:60 see Luke 23:34. Cf. the discussion on pp. 167–172 (which also indicates the differences between Stephen and Jesus at this point).

looks very much like he will follow in Jesus' footsteps as the repeated cries of the crowd 'Away with him!' (21:36) and 'Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!' (22:22), which 'frame' Paul's defence in Jerusalem, are much like the cries from the crowd against Jesus before his death in Jerusalem (Luke 23:18).¹¹²

Suffering for some and deliverance for others

The sometimes contrasting outcomes for God's people found side by side caution against simplistic answers concerning the reasons why in the book of Acts some suffer and others are delivered. In the same context as Peter's miraculous escape from the power of King Herod we have an account of the death of James, the brother of John, who was 'put to death with the sword'.¹¹³ Similarly, the Hellenistic Jews so opposed to Stephen that they stoned him to death in a fit of rage (6:9; 7:57–60) opposed Paul and tried to kill him in Jerusalem (9:29). Paul, however, managed to escape, as the believers found a way to send him off to Tarsus safely (9:30). It should also be noted that Luke writes of the spread of the gospel in the midst of a world where there is famine (11:27–30), injustice (24:27), storm (27:7–38) and shipwreck (27:39–44). Nevertheless, Luke's emphasis on the spread of the word in the midst of opposition indicates that one of the ways in which he seeks to 'reassure' readers such as Theophilus concerning the things they have been taught (Luke 1:1–4) is to highlight the sobering truth concerning the inevitability of suffering in this 'not yet' phase of the kingdom. Although the kingdom has been inaugurated and the risen and ascended Lord Jesus is reigning at the right hand of the Father, nevertheless, in this interim period, before the Lord Jesus returns (Acts 1:11), 'we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God' in its fullness (14:22). Believers may also be reassured, however, that despite opposition, the risen Lord Jesus is reigning and continuing to accomplish God's saving purposes through the spread of the gospel to the nations.

¹¹² The cry 'Away with this man!' in Luke 23:18 is unique to Luke's Gospel. It should be noted that the repeated statements of Jesus' innocence in Luke 23 are also similar to the repeated claims to innocence for Paul in Acts 21–28. The close identification of the Lord Jesus with his people in Acts indicates that there is also a sense in which as they are persecuted he continues to experience rejection (Acts 9:4–5; 22:7–8; 26:14–15).

¹¹³ This is the James who was one of Jesus' own 'inner circle' with John and Peter, who witnessed Jesus' transfiguration, and was with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

Suffering and the strengthening of local churches

The statement in Acts 14:22 concerning suffering during this 'interim' period of the kingdom is also a significant pointer to another major theme in Acts. Just as the spread of the word in the midst of opposition is a major theme, so the strengthening and establishment of local churches to remain faithful in the midst of opposition is a major theme. This was the reason why Paul set out on the so-called second missionary journey in Acts 15:36: Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go *back* and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.' Thus, after Paul and Barnabas' disagreement, Paul and Silas went through Syria and Cilicia 'strengthening the churches' (15:41). Likewise, the summary statement in 16:5 states that 'the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers'.¹¹⁴ We will look at just three passages here due to their significance for this theme of strengthening churches in their narrative contexts: Acts 11:19–30; 14:21–23; and 20:17–38.

Strengthening the church in Antioch

Acts 11:19–30 focuses on both the growth *and* the establishment of the church in Antioch. This account is placed in the centre of a section that runs from the summary statement in 9:31 through to the summary statement in 12:24–25 and is therefore set between two sections that focus on Peter (i.e. God's sovereign inclusion of the Gentiles through Peter in 9:32 – 11:18, and the Lord's powerful rescue of Peter in 12:1–25). This new church arises through the spread of the word in the context of persecution (11:19); it is the first church in Acts where Jew and Gentile fellowship together (11:19–20); it is where the disciples were first called Christians (11:26); and it will become the next major sending church in Acts (cf. Acts 13 – 14). In this significant section then, the growth of the church in Antioch is described three times in terms of its 'great numbers'. In 11:21 'the Lord's hand' was with those who spread the word such that 'a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord'. In 11:22–24 after Barnabas arrived from Jerusalem, he saw 'evidence of the grace of God' and 'a great number of people were brought to the Lord'. In 11:25–26 Barnabas and Saul 'taught great numbers of

¹¹⁴ The summary statement in Acts 9:31 also highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in strengthening the church.

people'. Thus one of the themes of this account is that, although persecution brought the believers there, as a result of 'the hand' of the Lord Jesus, the word continued to grow and the church increased in numbers.

In addition to this emphasis on the growth of the church in numbers, however, this section particularly stresses the 'establishment' or 'strengthening' of the church in Antioch. Thus, in the light of Acts 4:36, Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem because he was 'Mr Encouragement'. So, true to his name, when he saw evidence of God's grace he was glad and 'encouraged them' (11:23). More specifically, in the context of persecution (11:19), 'Mr Encouragement' encouraged them in wholehearted perseverance 'to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts'. Furthermore, Barnabas travels over a hundred miles to Tarsus so that Saul can help him in this task of nurturing this church. Thus the reference to Paul and Barnabas remaining in Antioch for 'a whole year' meeting with the church and teaching 'great numbers of people' is meant, in this context, to highlight a period of sustained strengthening (in contrast to the constant movement in 9:32 – 11:18 between Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea and Jerusalem). The establishment of the church in Antioch is complete in 11:29–30 when, after an emphasis on movement 'to Antioch' (11:19–20, 22b, 26–27), this narrative section concludes with movement from Antioch to Jerusalem.¹¹⁵ The church in Antioch is established such that it is now able to provide assistance to the believers in Jerusalem.

Strengthening the churches in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch

Before we look at Acts 14:21–23 and 20:17–38, it will help us to see the significance of these passages in the narrative of Acts better if we grasp the broad outline of this section as a whole. The next major section in Acts after Acts 12 is the 'first missionary journey' in Acts 13 – 14, followed by the Jerusalem Council in 15:1 – 16:5.¹¹⁶ Spencer helpfully lays out the general outline of this section:¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ C. Green 2005: 82.

¹¹⁶ As mentioned above (in the discussion on pp. 37–38 concerning God's accomplishment of his purposes in 'subsequent developments in the church'), note the 'framing' reference to 'the work' in 13:2 and 14:26. See ch. 6 for an explanation for the continuation of the themes in Acts 15 through to 16:5.

¹¹⁷ The following two outlines are simplified adaptations from Spencer 2004: 141.

THE ACTS OF THE RISEN LORD JESUS

- 13:1–3 Commission in Antioch
- 13:4 – 14:20 Ministry in Cyprus, Pisidia, Lycaonia
- 14:21–28 Nurturing the churches
- 15:1 – 16:5 Evaluation in Jerusalem

Given that Acts 15:1 – 16:5 is an examination of issues raised in Acts 13 – 14, it is best to group Acts 13:1 – 16:5 as one complete literary unit. At this point it is also helpful to note that Acts 16 – 21 follows a similar outline:

- 16:6–10 Commission in Troas
- 16:11 – 19:41 Ministry in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus
- 20:1 – 21:14 Nurturing the churches
- 21:15–36 Evaluation in Jerusalem

This appears to be the best way to outline this major section of Acts because (1) it fits better than the commonly adopted ‘missionary journey’ outline of Acts,¹¹⁸ and (2) it fits better than the other commonly adopted outline for this section, which places a break at the summary statement in 19:20.¹¹⁹

What is noticeable from these broad outlines for the second half of Acts is the repeated pattern towards the end of each section that emphasizes extensive nurturing of the churches. Thus in Acts 14:21, following ministry in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe characterized by persecution and opposition, Paul and Barnabas ‘returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch’. Luke states that the aim of this ‘return’ in spite of the opposition they had faced in

¹¹⁸ As ch. 6 will indicate, 16:1–5 (marked off by the ‘summary statement’ in 16:5) is best kept with Acts 15 rather than as part of another major literary unit that supposedly begins in 15:36. Also, within the narrative of Acts there does not appear to be another major literary break in the narrative between 18:22 and 18:23 (supposedly the end of the ‘second missionary journey’ and the beginning of the ‘third missionary journey’). The focus on Ephesus in 18:19 and 21 continues in 18:24 and into Acts 19.

¹¹⁹ I agree that the summary statements are significant narrative markers throughout Acts (hence my divisions already at 9:32 and 12:24–25). These summary statements that plot the growth of the word are, however, occasionally placed at the heart of narrative units rather than necessarily marking the end of narrative units. We will see in ch. 5 that this is the case with Acts 6:7 in the flow of Acts 3 – 7. Here it is perhaps enough to observe that Acts 19 focuses on Ephesus, and the statement of the growth of the word in 19:20 is placed in the middle of that section. The section is concluded, however, with Paul’s sermon to the ‘Ephesian’ elders in Acts 20 (see A. J. Thompson 2008a: 151–159 for a discussion of the significance of Ephesus in Acts 19 – 20).

these cities is 'strengthening the disciples' and, similar to Barnabas in 11:23, 'encouraging them to remain true to the faith'.¹²⁰ It is in this context then, of strengthening the churches in the midst of opposition, that we find the one-sentence summary of what Paul and Barnabas said to encourage them to remain true to the faith: 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God' (14:22). The implication is that the persecutions recounted in Acts 14 are not to be thought of as unique to Paul and Barnabas. Rather, this is part and parcel of the Christian life this side of the consummated kingdom. In addition to this sober assessment of the Christian life, Paul and Barnabas 'appointed elders' in each church. In this context of Paul and Barnabas' travels from city to city, they provide these churches with stability for the future by appointing leaders who will stay and further contribute to the strengthening of these churches.

Strengthening the church in Ephesus

These themes of perseverance, faithful ministry in the face of persecution, strengthening the church, and the provision of elders to assist in this strengthening of the church become a major focus in Acts 20.¹²¹ In this climactic speech – the only lengthy record in Acts of a speech of Paul's to Christians – Paul addresses Christian leaders.¹²² In looking back over his ministry, Paul summarizes it under the twin themes that characterized his commission in 9:15–16: (1) suffering for Christ's name, and (2) bearing (or proclaiming) Christ's name before Jews and Gentiles. Thus (1) he emphasizes his commitment to the comprehensive proclamation of God's word with a range of terms for the activity of proclamation,¹²³ a range of comprehensive descriptions of the content of that preaching,¹²⁴ a reference to a

¹²⁰ Cf. also 13:43 ('continue in the grace of God').

¹²¹ Cf. Kilgallen 1994: 112–121; Cunningham 1997: 267–270.

¹²² The term 'elders' (*presbyteros*, 20:17; cf. Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 22; 1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5–6; 1 Pet. 5:1; Jas 5:14) is used interchangeably with the term 'overseers' (*episkopos*, 20:28; cf. Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1–2; Titus 1:7) and the task of being 'shepherds/pastors' (*poimainō*, 20:28; cf. 1 Pet. 5:2) in the sense that the same group of people are being addressed in these three ways. Each term, however, has different nuances to the task of leadership.

¹²³ *Anangelō* ('proclaim', vv. 20, 27), *didaskō* ('teach', v. 20), *diamartyromai* ('declare', vv. 21, 24), *kēryssō* ('preach', v. 25).

¹²⁴ 'Anything that would be helpful' (v. 20), 'Jews and Greeks . . . must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus' (v. 21), 'testifying to the gospel of God's grace' (v. 24), 'preaching the kingdom' (v. 25), 'proclaim . . . the whole will of God' (v. 27).

variety of times and places for that proclamation,¹²⁵ and a reference to the widespread audience to whom Paul proclaimed the gospel.¹²⁶ (2) This commitment to the proclamation of God's word, however, is expressed in the context of suffering and opposition as Paul looks back on his ministry (vv. 18–21) and also as he looks ahead to future ministry (vv. 22–24). Paul reminds the Ephesian elders of *his* pattern of ministry in the face of opposition as something they have already seen and 'know' (vv. 18, 20) because it is a model for *their* ministry of caring for the flock (cf. vv. 34–35). Thus when Paul moves to direct exhortation in verse 28, he urges the elders to 'keep watch' over themselves and the flock, to 'be shepherds' over the flock and to 'be on your guard' (v. 31) because of the severe dangers to the flock (vv. 29–30). Ultimately, however, Paul's confidence is in God and 'the word of his grace'. This is the same 'word' that 'spread widely' and 'grew in power', which gave rise to the church in Ephesus (Acts 19:20). It is this 'word of his grace' that Paul commits these elders to in order for them to be built up. This 'word of grace' is able to bring them safe through to their inheritance (v. 32) and therefore Paul appropriately concludes his time with these elders on his knees in prayer (v. 36).

The last section of this chapter has drawn attention to the integral nature of the theme of suffering and opposition to the themes of the spread of the word and the establishment and strengthening of local churches. In the light of the 'framework' Luke provides for this book concerning the continuing reign of the Lord Jesus in the inaugurated kingdom of God, and the significant statement concerning the strengthening of churches in the midst of suffering in anticipation of the final kingdom in Acts 14:22, it seems Luke intends readers to see the theme of suffering in Acts within this broad framework of the inaugurated kingdom of God. Luke wants readers such as Theophilus to be reassured concerning God's saving purposes. Yes, God's kingdom has been inaugurated. The Lord Jesus is continuing to reign at the right hand of the Father and is building his church through the spread of the word. Nevertheless, because the kingdom is still 'not yet' consummated, the spread of the word and the establishing of churches will take place in the midst

¹²⁵ 'The whole time I was with you' (v. 18), 'from the first day I came into the province of Asia' (v. 18), 'publically', 'house to house' (v. 20).

¹²⁶ 'To both Jews and Greeks' (v. 21), 'innocent of the blood of all men' (v. 26; cf. Ezek. 3:18–19; 33:1–9).

of suffering. God's people will be strengthened, therefore, with the awareness that suffering remains a part of the Christian life this side of the consummated kingdom, and through elders in the context of local churches who will faithfully proclaim and teach God's word in the midst of suffering. It is this word, after all, that God in his grace uses to strengthen his people.

Conclusion

Luke is showing that the kingdom of God, inaugurated in the person of the Lord Jesus, is continuing to be administered through him. In this sense his book is about 'the acts of the Lord Jesus'. The departure of the Lord Jesus does not mean the departure of the kingdom. In this period between the 'now' and the 'not yet' of the kingdom he is continuing to reign from the right hand of the Father, as seen in the pouring out of the Spirit and the spread of the good news about him. The suffering and opposition that believers continue to face is because the kingdom has 'not yet' come in fullness. Nevertheless, the word will continue to spread and in this 'inaugurated kingdom' God's people are strengthened in the context of local churches. This 'inaugurated kingdom' then is still to be understood as the fulfilment of God's saving promises and plan. God's eschatological (kingdom) promises for his people are continuing to be fulfilled through the Lord Jesus. According to the OT, however, the end-time promises of blessing were closely associated with the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus, therefore, is the subject of the next chapter.

Excursus: an expositional outline of Acts

As indicated above, my own analysis of the structure of Acts, particularly the second half of Acts, slightly differs from two other major approaches. On the one hand, many opt for a 'Pauline Missionary Journey' structure of Acts 13 – 21. This is commonly outlined in something like the following:¹²⁷

- 13:1 – 14:28 First missionary journey
- 15:1–35 Jerusalem Council
- 15:36 – 18:22 Second missionary journey

¹²⁷ Cf. e.g. modified versions of this in Witherington (1998: vii–viii) and Bock (2007: viii, 47–48).

THE ACTS OF THE RISEN LORD JESUS

- 18:23 – 21:16 Third missionary journey
21:17 – 28:31 Trials of Paul and journey to Rome

The main difficulties with this approach are that (1) it tends to focus more on Paul than on the reign of the Lord Jesus and the purposes of God, which better capture Luke's emphasis, (2) it tends to have more of a focus on a circular motion of Paul's leaving from particular places and returning to particular places than on the continuing spread of the word moving further and further out, which the 'summary statement' outline (below) captures better, (3) more specifically, this structure does not do justice to the narrative flow at 15:36 and 18:22.¹²⁸

A second approach to outlining Acts focuses on the major summary statements that, as noted in the discussion above, are found throughout the narrative of Acts:

- 6:7 'So the *word* of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.'
- 9:31 'Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.'
- 12:24 'But the *word* of God continued to increase and spread.'
- 16:5 'So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.'
- 19:20 'In this way the *word* of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.'

Thus an outline that reflects these summary statements looks similar to the following:¹²⁹

- 1:1 – 2:41 Prologue: Foundations for the church and its mission
2:42 – 6:7 The church in Jerusalem
6:8 – 9:31 Wider horizons for the church: Stephen, Samaria and Saul

¹²⁸ Cf. n. 118 above.

¹²⁹ Cf. e.g. modified versions of this in Carson and Moo 2005: 286–290 and Köstenberger, Kellum and Quarles 2009: 350–351.

LIVING 'BETWEEN THE TIMES'

- 9:32 – 12:24 Peter and the first Gentile convert
12:25 – 16:5 Paul turns to the Gentiles
16:6 – 19:20 Further expansion into the Gentile world
19:21 – 28:31 To Jerusalem and then to Rome

This outline better reflects a literary approach which recognizes where Luke appears to pause and comment on the previous section (or the section he is in the middle of), it places the emphasis on the purposes of God and the spread of his word as marking off these sections, and this reflects Luke's overall emphases in Acts better. A slight modification of the 'summary statement' outline of Acts, however, is needed. The main reasons for this 'modified summary statement' approach are primarily that (1) Acts 6:7 does not bring about a major shift from Jerusalem as is often reflected in these outlines; this shift comes after Acts 7. For reasons which chapter 5 of this book will develop, 6:1–7 is better seen as a transition to Acts 6 – 7, which brings a climax to themes that have been developing throughout Acts 3 – 5. Similarly (2), it is unlikely that Acts 19:20 should be taken as a major literary break in Acts 19. It is better to see this as a statement concerning the power of the word in the midst of the wider narrative focus on Ephesus in Acts 19 – 20.¹³⁰ Thus, in keeping with Luke's introduction in Acts 1 – 2 that the major theme of Acts is the reign of the Lord Jesus who enables the spread of the word, my own, very general, 'expositional outline' of Acts is as follows:

- Acts 1:1 – 2:47 *The reign of Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit*
Acts 3:1 – 8:3 *The reign of Christ the Lord over rising opposition*
Internal and external
Acts 8:4 – 9:31 *The reign of Christ the Lord over outcasts and enemies*

¹³⁰ Cf. n. 119 above. As Spencer (2004: 141) suggests, the discussion in Jerusalem in 21:17–26 is best seen as a concluding 'wrap-up' to the previous section in Acts. The closing of the temple in 21:27–36 is therefore a fitting conclusion and a transition to the final chapters of Acts. There is also a slight variation among some outlines at 12:25. This verse is better translated as 'Barnabas and Saul returned [i.e. to Antioch], after they had completed their mission *in Jerusalem*' (i.e. 'returned from Jerusalem' NIV, rather than 'returned to Jerusalem' HCSB). This mission refers to the famine relief visit mentioned in 11:27–30 and provides a conclusion to this section rather than an introduction to the following section. Cf. Witherington 1998: 374–375.

THE ACTS OF THE RISEN LORD JESUS

- Samaria
Ethiopian eunuch
Saul
- Acts 9:32 – 12:25 *The reign of Christ the Lord over all nations*
Peter preaches Christ in Lydda, Joppa, to
Cornelius and his household
The Jewish-Gentile church in Antioch is
established
Peter is rescued from 'King' Herod
Agrippa I and his prison
- Acts 13:1 – 16:5 *The reign of Christ the Lord proclaimed to the
nations: part 1*
Commission in Antioch (13:1–3)
Ministry in Cyprus, Pisidia, Lycaonia (13:4
– 14:20)
Nurturing the churches (14:21–28)
Evaluation in Jerusalem (15:1 – 16:5)
- Acts 16:6 – 21:36 *The reign of Christ the Lord proclaimed to the
nations: part 2*
Commission in Troas (16:6–10)
Ministry in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea,
Athens, Corinth, Ephesus (16:11 –
19:41)
Nurturing the churches (20:1 – 21:14)
Evaluation in Jerusalem (21:15–36)
- Acts 21:37 – 28:31 *The reign of Christ the Lord vindicated
before the rulers*
Trial before the crowd in Jerusalem (Acts
21 – 22)
Trial before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem
(Acts 23)
Trial before Felix in Caesarea (Acts 24)
Trial before Festus in Caesarea (Acts 25)
Trial before Festus and Herod Agrippa II
in Caesarea (Acts 26)
Final meeting with Jewish leaders in Rome
(Acts 28)