

NEW
TESTAMENT
THEOLOGY

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Magnifying God in Christ



Thomas R. Schreiner



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To Bruce Ware
Beloved friend, colleague,
and inspiration

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Preface

Writing this book has been both a joyful and frustrating experience. The joy has come in learning, for as I wrote, new vistas opened before me, and I saw truths that previously were hidden from me. The frustration came from the time it took to put this book in final form, along with the recognition that it could never quite match up with my hopes and desires. I wrote the first three drafts without consulting any secondary sources. Before I wrote, I carefully took notes on the entire NT, noting what NT authors discussed, so that my NT theology would be anchored by the text. I proceeded this way so that I would be compelled to work inductively from the biblical text instead of deriving my outline or general train of thought from others. Even in these three drafts, however, I am indebted to those who have taught me and whose work I have read over the years. After writing the initial drafts, I read secondary sources. Naturally, such reading led to further revisions, and I am immensely grateful to the outstanding work of many scholars who have sharpened my understanding of NT theology. My hope is that this book will function as a useful text for pastors and students. Perhaps scholars will benefit from it as well.

Thematic versus Book-by-Book Approaches

How should a NT theology be written? For readers who are interested in a more in-depth discussion of this matter historically and in terms of method, I recommend the appendix. Here I ask whether the individual contributions of each NT writer can be analyzed separately.¹ One ad-

1. So Marshall 2004; Thielman 2005.

vantage of such an approach is that a sharper profile of the theology of each writer or book is featured. If NT theology is presented thematically, the unique contribution of particular writers may be swallowed up by the prominence of, say, Paul. Letters such as 2 Peter and Jude may be submerged or only surface occasionally. The contribution of the entire NT canon may be slighted, and hence the claim to be a NT theology called into question.

Investigating each book separately, then, opens some fresh windows in doing NT theology, and a thematic approach inevitably omits some of the distinctives uncovered in the book-by-book structure. Nevertheless, I have chosen a thematic approach in this work because a thematic structure also has some advantages. The coherence and the unity of NT theology are explained more clearly if a NT theology is presented thematically. Is a study of each individual writer truly a NT theology, or is it a theology of Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, and so forth? Further, if one studies Matthew first, then Mark, then Luke, and so on, the reader may grow weary of three separate studies on the Son of Man, the Son of God, and Jesus the Messiah. I am not saying, however, that a study of each book separately is illegitimate. Such an approach opens vistas onto the text that are obscured, at least in part, by a thematic approach. I reject the claim that there is one correct way to write a NT theology. The subject matter of NT theology is too vast and comprehensive to be exhausted by any single approach. Barr rightly says that “there can be no such thing as the one appropriate method for biblical theology.”² No NT theology will ever do justice to the complexity and beauty of the NT. Each of the various approaches and perspectives can cast a different light upon the NT, and in that sense having a number of different approaches is helpful.³ Fruitful NT theologies could be written from the standpoint of NT eschatology, the people of God, Christology, ethics, and so on.

In Defense of a Thematic Approach

I believe, however, that a thematic approach is particularly needed today, with the proviso that it is truly rooted in biblical theology. Guthrie studied the NT in terms of its major themes, but his work borders on a systematic theology.⁴ Schlatter, on the other hand, explored NT theology

2. Barr 1999: 61. See also his remarks on p. 342.

3. For instance, redaction criticism is useful in detecting distinctive themes in the Gospels, though recent work on the Gospels rightly emphasizes that they were written not merely for specific communities but for all Christians. See the programmatic work of Bauckham 1998; see also Hengel 2000: 98, 106–7.

4. Guthrie 1981.

from a thematic standpoint in a creative and insightful manner.⁵ Many NT scholars shy away from such an approach today, fearing that it too closely resembles systematic theology. They worry about domesticating the text by our own categories. Some scholars, perhaps even many, think that there is no such thing as a unified NT theology. For those who believe that the NT represents conflicting theologies, the whole enterprise is hopeless from the outset. I will say something in the appendix about why writing a NT theology is justified, and why we can assume that NT theology is coherent and consistent, not contradictory. Of course, those who think that there are contradictions are probably not much happier about a NT theology that focuses on individual writers and writings. After all, if the whole of the NT contains contradictions, there is no reason to think that individual writers are spared from such.

Let me return to what was noted above. A thematic approach runs the danger of domesticating the text and squeezing out the diversity of the NT. Still, it is a risk worth taking. Our Western world is worried about metanarratives, and hence much of the work in NT studies examines a small part of the NT, or even a single verse in the NT. It is safer to present one's conclusions on a single verse than it is to say what the entire NT is about. Perhaps it is saner as well! And no NT theology is helpful if the writer has not gotten dirty by studying the text inductively, piece by piece. And yet there is another side to the story. We understand each of the pieces in the NT by our understanding of the whole, by our worldview, by our own metanarrative. We can fall into the illusion that if we study a "part," then we are dealing with just the "evidence," "the hard phenomena" of the text. But our understanding of any piece of evidence is also affected by our standpoint, our worldview. We do not assess any piece of evidence from a neutral and objective standpoint. Hence, there is a dialogue between the inductive and deductive that constantly occurs. If we do not venture to consider NT theology as a whole, we are in danger of skewing the particular piece of evidence that we study. Examining the NT thematically, then, may assist us in understanding the pieces that make up the NT.

I have already noted the benefit of considering each writer individually. But there is another liability in studying each writer individually. We need to recall that none of the NT documents claims to be the "theology" of the writer in question. This is particularly obvious in the case of the epistles. The Epistles are occasional writings directed to specific situations and circumstances in the life of churches. It is somewhat distorting, then, to write a theology of, say, Jude or James. We can hardly claim that they have packaged the whole of their theology into such short

5. Schlatter 1997; 1999.

letters. Of course, Paul is different in that he wrote thirteen letters (in my view), and so we have a larger corpus from which to construct his thought.⁶ But even in Paul's case we do not have a complete map of his convictions. Some holes still exist.

In the same way, more can be said about Matthew and Mark, Luke-Acts, and the Johannine writings than can be said about Jude. Useful studies of the particular emphases of these writings have been produced. We need to remember, however, the constraints under which the Gospel writers composed their works. I am assuming at this juncture that they were historians *and* theologians.⁷ They were not free, in other words, to construct a theology sundered from the actual words and works of Jesus. When we compare John to the Synoptic Gospels, it is obvious that different perspectives add tremendous richness to our understanding of Jesus Christ. The differences between John and the Synoptics are obvious to the most elementary reader. Furthermore, redaction criticism has demonstrated that the Synoptics differ from one another as well. Still, I believe that the Gospels are grounded in history.⁸ The diversity of perspectives indicates neither a lack of interest in history nor the presence of a freeness to compose in accord with one's desires. We have four Gospels because the depth and breadth of Jesus Christ could not be captured by a single one. Here the recent emphasis that the Gospels were intended for wider audiences is a salutary correction to the view that the Gospels were limited to specific communities.⁹

A grasp of the nature of the Gospels, grounded as they are in history, is imperative for doing NT theology. The Gospel writers focus on the work and words of Jesus before his death and resurrection and the gift of the Spirit. Therefore, the Gospels should not be misconstrued as full-orbed theologies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These authors are faithful to the history, to the events that occurred before the resurrection and the gift of the Spirit. They are not attempting to compose theological treatises that summarize their theology. I am not denying that the Gospel writers are theologians, nor am I suggesting that the Gospels are bare history.

6. In my judgment, all the letters attributed to Paul are authentic. The Pastoral Epistles are the first to be contested, but solid reasons exist to support authenticity. See Fee 1988: 23–26; W. Mounce 2000: lxvi–cxxix; Knight 1992: 21–52; Ellis 1992. For a full discussion that opts against Pauline authorship, see Marshall 1999: 57–92.

7. See Bauckham 2006, where the role of the earliest eyewitnesses is emphasized. I do not agree with all of Bauckham's conclusions. For instance, I believe that the apostle John wrote the Fourth Gospel. Still, Bauckham rightly argues that the Gospel traditions stem from eyewitness testimony.

8. See Barnett 1999. Meier (1991; 1994; 2001) takes a more skeptical approach than I do regarding the historical Jesus, yet in his outstanding and careful work he establishes a clear historical core relative to Jesus.

9. Bauckham 1998.

The Gospels are theological history, containing an interpretation of the works and words of Jesus of Nazareth. Nevertheless, they are *gospels* that bear witness to Jesus Christ and his historical work. They are located at a certain juncture in the history of salvation. When considering the theology of the Gospels, we must attend to the location of the writer on the redemptive-historical timeline. Some matters in the Gospels remain undeveloped because the promises are not realized until the death and resurrection of Christ. Hence, the Gospels conclude with the expectation and promise that the Spirit will be poured out on God's people. The blessing of the Spirit is not given, however, in the Gospels themselves. In this sense, the rest of the NT should be located in a different place in salvation history than the Gospels.

In summary, none of the NT writings contains the whole of what is taught in the NT. They are accurate but partial and fragmentary witnesses. They witness truly but not exhaustively to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence, a thematic approach to NT theology is invaluable because it attempts to capture the whole of what is taught by considering all twenty-seven books.

The Question of a Center

Is there a single center for NT theology? The question of a center has long been debated, and many different centers have been proposed. I think it is safe to say that no alleged center will ever become the consensus. In one sense, having several different centers is useful, as NT theology can be studied helpfully from a number of different perspectives. Since the various perspectives are interlocking and not mutually exclusive, there are a diversity of ways by which the NT can be explored. Furthermore, examining the NT from different angles allows new light to be shed upon the text. Since the subject matter of NT theology is God himself, we are not surprised to learn that none of our scholarly endeavors ever exhausts the subject matter.

It is illuminating to consider NT theology from a twofold perspective. First, God's purpose in all that he does is to bring honor to himself and to Jesus Christ. The NT is radically God-centered. We could say that the NT is about God magnifying himself in Christ through the Spirit. We could easily fail to see the supremacy of God and the centrality of Christ in the NT precisely because these themes are part of the warp and woof of the NT. Sometimes we fail to see what is most obvious, what is right before our eyes. The focus on God and Christ may be taken for granted, and we become interested in themes that are "new" to us, themes that we have not seen before. Any NT theology that does not focus on what

God has done in Christ, however, fails to see what is fundamental to and pervasive in the text of Scripture.

Second, the centrality of God in Christ leads to abstraction if it is not closely related to the history of salvation, to the fulfillment of God's promises.¹⁰ We have in the Scriptures the story of God's saving plan (which includes judgment, of course).¹¹ The NT unfolds the fulfillment of the promises made in the OT. One of the striking themes in the NT is that of the "already-not yet." God has inaugurated his kingdom, but he has not consummated it. He has begun to fulfill his saving promises, but he has not yet completed all that he has started. No one can grasp the message of the NT if redemptive history is slighted. The NT does not negate the OT but fulfills it. One of the major tasks of any NT theology is to explain how this is so. Redemptive history is fundamental, then, to grasping the message of the NT. Still, God's ultimate purpose is not the fulfillment of his plan. He must have a purpose, an aim, a goal in such a plan. Here the purpose of all of salvation history emerges. God works out his saving plan so that he would be magnified in Christ, so that his name would be honored.

In most instances when citing a text from the Synoptic Gospels for which there are parallels, I cite only Matthew and then indicate that there are parallels from Mark or Luke or both. No significance should be ascribed to my citation of Matthew. I have selected it simply because it is the first Gospel listed in the canon of the NT as it has come down to us. I am not suggesting in any case that Matthew is the first Gospel. I chose to cite Matthew rather than Mark because those who did not read my preface might think that I was endorsing the two-source view of the Synoptic Problem. I am not intending any solution to the source-critical issue in citing Matthew. In any case, this book does not depend upon or promote any particular view of the Synoptic Problem. The focus is on the final form of the Gospels, not the order in which they were written.

Instead of citing numerous secondary sources, I have cited authors representatively. The body of literature in NT studies far exceeds the ability of anyone to even come close to reading all that is written. Hence, any citation of secondary sources must be selective. I hope that what I have cited is inclusive of various points of view. On controversial matters I have tried to point readers to commentaries, articles, and monographs in which the verse or issue is discussed in more detail. Given the wealth of commentaries, many different choices could have been made. I cite the commentaries that have been most helpful and insightful for me.

10. Hooker (2006: 75–76) maintains that what is fundamental in NT theology is what God has done in Christ.

11. Hamilton (2006a) argues that the center for all of Scripture is the glory of God in salvation through judgment.

Throughout the book I cite items from the bibliography by author and date, except for dictionary articles, which I cite according to author, dictionary, and page numbers. For bibliographic information on dictionaries, see the abbreviation list. Unless indicated otherwise, Scripture citations come from the English Standard Version.

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Introduction

The thesis advanced in this book is that NT theology is God-focused, Christ-centered, and Spirit-saturated, but the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit must be understood along a salvation-historical timeline; that is, God's promises are already fulfilled but not yet consummated in Christ Jesus. We will see that the ministry of Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit are fundamental for the fulfilling of God's promises. The coming of Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit are the prime indications that God is beginning to fulfill the saving promises made to Abraham.

In the succeeding chapters we will examine in more detail the theme that God's saving promises in Christ and through the Spirit have already been fulfilled but have not yet reached their consummation.¹ In this chapter the aim is to give a kind of guided tour or small taste of the main thesis of the book, so that readers will see that the primacy of God is communicated in a story that unfolds God's saving work in history. We could say that God is central to the NT witness, but such a claim without elaboration could be viewed as abstract and removed from reality. I will argue for the centrality of God in Christ in the concrete and specific witness of the NT as it unfolds God's saving work in history. Another way to put this is that God will receive all the glory for his work in Christ by the Spirit as he works out his purpose in redemptive history. Further, redemptive history is characterized by inaugurated but not consummated eschatology, so that the glory that belongs to God has not yet reached its zenith but it will.

1. The language of "already-not yet" has rightly become a commonplace in NT theology.

The Old Testament Backdrop

Before surveying the NT witness, we need to take a cursory look at the OT. We could summarize the OT under the rubrics of creation, fall, and redemption. The centrality of God is featured in the fact that he is the creator of all. God's sovereign creation of the universe is a pervasive theme in the OT, indicating that he is Lord of the cosmos and the central actor of the OT story. He made human beings in his image so that they would display his glory, reflect his character, and rule the world for God (Gen. 1:26–27; 2:15–17). Adam and Eve rejected God's lordship and struck out on their own. God's judgment of Adam and Eve also communicates his lordship and is a preview to the pervasive theme of judgment in the OT. Every act of God's judgment demonstrates that he is sovereign and Lord. Still, the story line of the OT concludes not with judgment but with the promise of redemption. This promise of redemption informs the OT story and the NT witness as well.

We can fairly say that the OT is animated with an eschatological hope. Gen. 3:15 forecasts a day when the seed of the woman will triumph over the seed of the serpent. Subsequent history appeared to mock the promise, for the seed of the serpent ruled over human beings during the days of Noah and at the Tower of Babel. God's promise of blessing for the whole world focused upon one man, Abraham. The Lord promised Abraham and his descendants land, seed, and a blessing that would encompass the entire world (e.g., Gen. 12:1–3; 18:18; 22:17–18; 26:3–4; 28:14–15; 35:12–13). The future character of the promise is evident, for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not have a multitude of children, nor did they possess the land of the promise, and worldwide blessing was far from being realized.

The promise begins to be fulfilled in the Pentateuch, for the people of Israel multiplied in accord with God's promise. Then the promise of the land of Canaan became theirs during the days of Joshua. It seemed that the nation was poised to become the vehicle for worldwide blessing, but a cycle of sin and judgment ensued in the days of the judges. David's accession as king and the everlasting covenant made with him (2 Sam. 7) demonstrated that worldwide blessing would come to pass through a Davidic descendant. But the story of the kings of Judah, not to mention the kings of Israel, sadly disappointed. The nation spiraled downward until it was carried into exile by Babylon in 586 BC. Yahweh promised through the prophets, however, the dawning of a new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34), a coming kingdom (Obad. 21), a rebuilding of David's fallen booth (Amos 9:11–15), a new day for Jerusalem and Zion (Joel 3:15–21; Zeph. 3:15–20), a pouring out of God's Spirit (Joel 2:28), a day when the Lord would give his people a new heart and Spirit so that they

would obey him (Ezek. 36:26–27), a new exodus when God would liberate his people once again (e.g., Isa. 43:5–9), and even a new creation (Isa. 65:17–25; 66:22). None of these promises were fulfilled during the OT era, and so this brings us to the NT witness.

The Synoptic Gospels

When the ministry of Jesus commenced, these great promises, which would fulfill the original blessings pledged to Abraham and confirmed to David, had not yet come to pass. What we see in the NT witness, however, is that God's end-time promises reach their fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. The God-centeredness of the message may easily be missed, for it is the creator God who is fulfilling his promises in Jesus Christ. And Jesus the Messiah carried out his ministry in the power of the Spirit. The fulfillment takes place, though, in an unexpected way, for God's saving promises are inaugurated but not consummated. The NT expresses this truth in a variety of ways, but it is fundamental to the entire message of the NT documents, whether it be the Synoptic Gospels, John, Paul, Peter, Hebrews, or Revelation. Here I want to sketch it in God's work relative to salvation history, so that it is apparent to the reader that an inaugurated but unconsummated eschatology is pervasive in the NT.

In the next chapter I will enlarge on the Synoptic understanding of the kingdom. Here I simply observe briefly the "already-not yet" character of the kingdom in the message of Jesus. Jesus declared that God's kingdom had already arrived in his ministry, and its arrival was demonstrated in the exorcism of demons by the Spirit (Matt. 12:28).² Even though Jesus claimed that the kingdom had dawned in his ministry, he instructed his disciples to pray for the kingdom to come (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2). The saving power of the kingdom manifested itself in Jesus' ministry, but the kingdom did not come in all of its apocalyptic power. The same theme, as we will see in the next chapter, manifests itself in Jesus' parables where both the present and the future dimensions of the kingdom are featured. Moreover, Jesus declared in his ministry that the eschatological promises were realized, for he gave sight to the blind, enabled the lame to walk, cleansed lepers, opened the ears of the deaf, raised the dead, and proclaimed the good news of God's kingdom (Matt. 11:5). These promises hail from Isaiah, which proclaims the coming of a new creation where the desert blossoms, streams flow in the desert, and ravenous beasts no longer destroy (Isa. 29:17; 35). It is the day of God's salvation, when he comes to vindicate his people and rescue them

2. Luke (Luke 11:20) refers to the finger of God rather than the Spirit of God.

from exile. It is clear in the Gospels that Jesus' miracles and exorcisms are manifestations of the kingdom, signs that the new age has broken in. His miracles and exorcisms indicate the dawning of a new creation, and yet Jesus also taught that there is an age to come when God will judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous (e.g., Matt. 12:32; 13:39–40, 49; 24:3; 28:20; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; 20:35). Jewish thought regularly distinguished between "this age" and "the coming age." It seems that Jesus taught the overlap of the ages, for in his ministry the age to come penetrated this present evil age, and yet the coming age had not yet been consummated.

The promised baptism of the Holy Spirit indicated the arrival of the new age (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16), fulfilling the promise of the Spirit predicted in the prophets. During his ministry Jesus was the bearer of the Spirit, but after his exaltation he would become the dispenser of the Spirit. The work of the Spirit in Jesus' ministry and beyond must be interpreted against the backdrop of the OT, where the gift of the Spirit heralds God's eschatological work. We see here the trinitarian character of God's saving work, for God sent Jesus into the world so that Jesus would baptize his followers with the Holy Spirit, thereby inaugurating the fulfillment of the promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3).

There are also a number of indications in the Synoptics that the new exodus has been fulfilled in Jesus' ministry.³ The return from Babylon predicted by Isaiah did not come to pass in all its fullness when Israel returned from exile during the days of Cyrus. The ministry of John the Baptist, some five hundred years later, commenced with the promise that God would fulfill the great promise of the new exodus (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:2–3; Luke 3:4–6). The baptism in the Jordan River by John signaled that the people were, so to speak, entering into the land of the promise again, as they did after the first exodus when they crossed the Jordan and entered the promised land (Mark 1:5 par.). The Baptist was the new Elijah, who arrived on the scene before the coming of God's promised salvation (Matt. 11:14; 17:12; Mark 1:2, 6; Luke 1:17). The most significant and obvious indication of the fulfillment of God's promises was the coming of Jesus himself. The Gospels make it clear that he is the promised Messiah, the prophet predicted in Deut. 18:15, the Son of Man of Dan. 7, and the Son of God. And yet when Jesus came as the promised Messiah, not all of God's promises were fulfilled immediately. There is an already–not yet dimension here that is quite striking.⁴

3. For a fruitful exploration of the "new exodus" theme in Mark's Gospel, see Watts 2000.

4. A significant part of this book will unpack the theme of Christology, for certainly Christ himself is central to NT theology!

The transfiguration signals the already–not yet character of Jesus’ life (Matt. 17:1–8 par.), for the glory and splendor of Jesus were veiled during his ministry. The transfiguration anticipated, however, the future coming of Jesus in glory, power, and majesty (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16–18). Luke emphasizes that God’s covenantal promises were fulfilled in the birth of the Baptist and supremely in Jesus (Luke 1:46–55, 67–79; 2:29–32). Still, the full realization of those promises was not obtained in Jesus’ ministry, for the destruction of Israel’s enemies remained unfulfilled. Nevertheless, Luke clearly identifies Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Israel. This seems confirmed by the programmatic text where Jesus drew from Isa. 61 and Isa. 58 to commence his ministry (Luke 4:18–19). The eschatological promises for Israel dawned in Jesus, but, significantly, he did not cite the part from Isaiah that speaks of God’s eschatological judgment, suggesting that the judgment is reserved for another and future day.

The Johannine Literature

Certainly the person who takes center stage in the Gospel of John is Jesus Christ, in whom God’s promises reach a striking fulfillment. Indeed, the clarity and forthrightness of John’s Christology sets it apart from the Synoptic Gospels, even though Jesus is the central character in the Synoptics as well. The Christology of John’s Gospel blazes forth throughout the narrative: Jesus is the Christ, the Prophet, the Son of Man, the Son of God, and can also rightly be called God. In Jesus Christ, supremely, the promises of God are fulfilled. But John repeatedly instructs his readers that Jesus was sent by the Father and always did the Father’s will. Hence, it is not as if the Father is a cipher in Johannine theology. Furthermore, Jesus promised that both he and the Father would send the Spirit to instruct and empower his disciples. The trinitarian character of this Gospel is conspicuous. Nevertheless, the Father, Son, and Spirit are not presented as loci in a systematic theology. The saving work is part of the story line of salvation.

John’s Gospel is distinct from the Synoptics, for the eschatological character of the Gospel of John is expressed not by the kingdom of God but by the term “eternal life.”⁵ We simply note here that eternal life denotes the life of the age to come. John emphasizes that the life of the age to come already belongs to those who believe in Jesus (John 5:24), so that he stresses the present realization of end-time promises. Even though John concentrates upon realized eschatology, the “not yet” di-

5. For fuller discussion of the theme of eternal life, see chapter 2.

mension is maintained. The resurrection of the body and final judgment are reserved for the future (John 5:28–29; 6:39–40, 44). Elsewhere John teaches that the judgment of the end time has already taken place (John 3:18–19; 9:39–41) through Jesus’ death on the cross (John 12:31), so that those who keep his word will never die (John 8:52; 11:25–26). On the other hand, the whole world does not yet know about God’s judgment. Hence, Jesus will declare it openly to the entire world on the last day (John 5:27–29; 12:48). In the future Jesus will return, after his death and exaltation, so that the disciples will be where he is (John 14:1–3). An eschatological tension is maintained in John. For instance, Jesus prayed that the disciples, who already believed in him, would be preserved until the last day, when they would see God’s glory (John 17:11, 15, 24).

One of the most striking indications of the intrusion of the age to come in John’s Gospel is his emphasis on the Holy Spirit. In the OT the Spirit was promised as an eschatological gift. In John’s Gospel the gift of the Spirit is given by virtue of the exaltation of Jesus Christ. The Spirit is granted to Jesus’ disciples after his glorification (John 7:39; 14:26; 15:26; 16:13), and even during Jesus’ ministry the disciples know “the Spirit of truth” because he dwells with them (John 14:17).

A similar eschatological tension is found in 1 John. The light is now shining in Christ, and the darkness is passing away (1 John 2:8), just as the world is passing away (1 John 2:17). The last hour has arrived, since many antichrists are on the scene, and yet a final and definitive antichrist is still to come (1 John 2:18). On the other hand, the light now shines because Jesus has been revealed as the Christ in the flesh (1 John 2:22–23; cf. 2 John 7). He is the Son of God and the fulfillment of God’s promises (1 John 5:10–12). Believers are now God’s children and have passed from death to life, so that the life of the age to come, eternal life, is theirs now (1 John 3:1–2, 14; 5:12–13). And yet the day of Christ’s coming and the consummation of salvation is in the future (1 John 2:28; 3:2). The gift of the Spirit testifies that the last days have come (1 John 3:24; 4:13; cf. 5:6, 8), and yet the final judgment has not yet arrived.

The Acts of the Apostles

In the book of Acts, which is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, the most striking indication of the fulfillment of God’s promises is the gift of the Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 1:5, 8; 2:1–4). The Spirit given at Pentecost becomes the signature of God’s salvation and the fulfillment of his end-time promises in Acts. Here we should simply note that we have the fulfillment of God’s end-time promise. The Spirit, of course, is given only after Jesus is raised and exalted to God’s right hand (Acts

1:9–11; 2:33). The ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus and now the gift of the Spirit indicate that the promise of worldwide blessing made to Abraham is now being fulfilled (Acts 3:24–26; 10:43; 13:23, 26–27, 32; 15:15–17; 17:2–3; 24:14–15; 26:22–23; 28:23). The disciples, not surprisingly, think that the gift of the Spirit is correlated with the denouement of God's kingdom (Acts 1:6), for in the OT prophecies the giving of the Spirit betokens the consummation of God's purposes. Jesus informs them that the prophecies will not be fulfilled in quite the way they expected (Acts 1:7–8). The Spirit will come, but the conclusion of salvation history will not be immediate, and God has not disclosed to human beings when history will terminate.

One of the prominent themes in Acts is the resurrection of Jesus (e.g., Acts 2:24–32; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40–41; 13:30–37; 23:6–10; 24:15; 26:8), an event that also concludes each of the Gospels. The resurrection of Jesus should not be construed simply as an inexplicable event in history. It signified the commencement of the general resurrection—the intrusion of the new age and the new creation. Jesus now reigns as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). The promised Messiah and Lord has come and rules over all the world by virtue of his resurrection and exaltation. And yet in Acts God has not yet wrapped up all of history. Jesus will come again to fulfill all God's promises and to judge the living and the dead (Acts 3:19–21; 10:42; 17:31; cf. 24:25). Hence, the resurrection constitutes a clear example of the already–not yet theme.

The Pauline Literature

Looking at the introduction to the letter of the Romans, we gain a glimpse of the heart of Paul's theology (Rom. 1:1–5). God has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to fulfill the promises made in the OT Scriptures. He is the promised Messiah, and also he now reigns as the Son of God in power since he has been exalted to God's right hand. His resurrection by the Holy Spirit signals that the age to come has dawned, and Paul as an apostle longs to bring this good news to both Jews and Gentiles. What animates Paul's mission is the glory and honor of the name of Jesus Christ. The Pauline mission, then, has a doxological purpose. I will try to demonstrate in more detail later that Paul's theology is God- and Christ-centered, and that the work of the Spirit is inseparable from the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The trinitarian character of Pauline theology cannot be detached from the biblical story line. God's greatness is featured in the story of redemption unfolded in the NT.

Indeed, the already–not yet theme is so woven into Paul's theology that discussing it could easily launch a full-fledged treatment of Paul's

theology. We will focus on some aspects of his view of the fulfillment of God's promises in more detail in due course. Here I want to note the pervasiveness of this theme in Paul's thought. Looking at inaugurated but not yet consummated eschatology in Paul is akin to looking into a kaleidoscope. As we shake the kaleidoscope, we get a different picture, but the same thought is expressed from a different point of view. To shift the analogy, if we consider Paul's theology from the perspective of an archaeological dig, wherever we dig a shaft, we find the already-not yet, even though the precise terms in which this theology is expressed may differ. It seems, then, that inaugurated but not yet consummated eschatology belongs to the fundamental structure of Paul's thought. Thus our purpose here is not to exposit these themes but to strike the keys so that we see how this theme pervades Paul's theology.

As we have already noted, Paul proclaims that the fulfillment of God's saving promises has occurred in Jesus Christ, for through his ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation he has fulfilled God's word to Abraham and David (cf. Rom. 1:1–4). The saving righteousness of God revealed in Jesus Christ fulfills what the law and the prophets anticipated (Rom. 3:21–22). God's righteousness has become a reality not through the Mosaic law but through the promise made with Abraham (Rom. 4:1–25; Gal. 3:1–4:7). Paul maintains that he is righteous now by faith instead of by observing the law (Phil. 3:2–9), and yet there is an eschatological tension, for he is not yet perfect and still awaits the resurrection (Phil. 3:10–16).

Interestingly, Paul often uses the verb *katargeō* (a verb very difficult to translate—perhaps “make ineffective” or “set aside”) to designate the change between the old era and the new. In Christ the body of sin has been set aside (Rom. 6:6); believers are released from the Mosaic law (Rom. 7:2, 6; 2 Cor. 3:11, 13–14; Eph. 2:15); the rulers of this age are passing away (1 Cor. 2:6); God will set aside our corruptible bodies (1 Cor. 6:13); spiritual gifts will pass away at the eschaton when Christ returns (1 Cor. 13:8, 10); when the kingdom comes in its fullness, evil angelic powers will be removed and death itself will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:24, 26); God will destroy the lawless one (2 Thess. 2:8); God has abolished death and inaugurated life through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10). We see, then, with this single verb *katargeō*, the inauguration of God's promises, and yet at the same time believers have not yet received the fullness that God has promised.

Another way to understand what is being said here is that all of the saving works of God in Christ are eschatological gifts. The declaration that people are righteous during the present time indicates that God's end-time verdict has now been pronounced ahead of the last day, and it will be declared to the whole world on the day of judgment (cf. Rom.

5:1; 8:33–34; Gal. 5:5). Salvation is fundamentally eschatological because it represents deliverance from God’s wrath on the final day (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9). And yet that salvation belongs now to those who believe in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8–9), so that the gift of the end time belongs to believers during the present evil age. Now is the time of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2), so that God’s eschatological promises have penetrated a world that has not been transformed. So too redemption will be the portion of believers when their bodies are redeemed and made whole (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14). And yet believers are now redeemed and forgiven through the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ indicates that the end-time resurrection has begun, as we noted earlier. Paul clearly shares this belief (Rom. 1:4). Further, he argues emphatically that Jesus has indeed been raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:1–11). Still, there is an unexpected interval between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of believers (1 Cor. 15:20–28). The last days have commenced with the resurrection of Christ as the firstfruits, but believers still await the bodily resurrection. Death as the last enemy has not yet been abolished and destroyed. Even though Christ reigns now as the second Adam, so that God’s promises are being fulfilled, there is an eschatological proviso, for all things are not yet subjected under his feet, and God is not yet seen to be all in all. Those who contend that the resurrection has already taken place have fallen prey to an overrealized eschatology (2 Tim. 2:18). On the other hand, the power of Christ’s resurrection reaches into the present age. Even now believers walk in the newness of life (Rom. 6:4) and are alive to God (Rom. 6:11). They have died with Christ and been raised with him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6; Col. 2:12; 3:1), and yet they still await the future resurrection.⁶

Paul also argues that the new creation has dawned in Jesus Christ. Those who are in Christ Jesus are now a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Now that the new creation has arrived, the Mosaic covenant, which demanded circumcision, is no longer binding (Gal. 6:15). The new creation is tied to the promise of “the new self” (Eph. 4:24), and this new person represents what believers are in Christ instead of what they are in Adam (Rom. 5:12–19; 1 Cor. 15:21–22). Believers are a new creation in Christ Jesus and created by God to do good works (Eph. 2:10). The “new creation” language fits with the theme that believers have been regenerated, which is the work of the eschatological Spirit (Titus 3:5). The dawning of the new creation does not signify, however, that the present evil age is terminated (Gal. 1:4). The old age and the new creation overlap at the same time! Believers still await their full revelation as children of God.

6. See Gaffin 2006: 60–63.

The present world is still corrupted and awaits its full transformation (Rom. 8:18–25). Believers, then, are a new creation in an old world. But the reality is even more complex, for even though believers are new persons in Christ, in that the old person—the old Adam—was crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9–10), they must still put off the old person and put on the new (Eph. 4:22–24). As Rom. 13:14 says, they must “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Believers await not only a transformed world but also their own final transformation.

Just as Paul uses the language of the new creation, so also he adopts typical Jewish language of this age and the age to come (Eph. 1:21). This age is designated as “the present evil age” (Gal. 1:4; cf. 1 Tim. 6:17), and believers are not to be conformed to this age (Rom. 12:2), as Demas was (2 Tim. 4:10), for the world dominates the lives of unbelievers (Eph. 2:2). The era between the cross and resurrection is characterized as “the evil day” (Eph. 6:13), and hence “the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16). Indeed, believers have been granted grace to live the life of the age to come in the midst of the present evil age (Titus 2:12). The rulers of this age crucified Jesus Christ because they were unaware that he was the glorious Lord (1 Cor. 2:6, 8). The intellectual worldview that controls the mind-set of unbelievers is limited to this age (1 Cor. 1:20; 3:18), and Satan rules as the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). The present evil age is not the only reality, for the “ends of the ages” have now dawned in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:11 NRSV), and believers by virtue of the cross of Christ are delivered from this age (Gal. 1:4), so that the cross of Christ represents the intrusion of the new age, or as Paul says in Gal. 6:14–15, the new creation. The world in its present form is passing away (1 Cor. 7:31). Jesus, therefore, reigns in the present evil age, and his rule will reach its climax in the age to come (Eph. 1:21; cf. 1 Cor. 15:24–28), so that in the coming ages all will marvel over the grace of God displayed in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:7). The complexity of the present age is illustrated by two truths just noted. On one hand, Satan is the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). On the other hand, Jesus rules now as exalted Lord. Satan’s dominion indicates that Jesus’ reign has not reached its denouement, that the day when all things will be subjected to him has not yet arrived (1 Cor. 15:25–28).

The indicative and imperative in Pauline theology is a prime example of the already–not yet character of his theology. Believers are, so to speak, unleavened in Christ because Christ the Passover lamb has been sacrificed and has purged the evil from their lives through the forgiveness of their sins (1 Cor. 5:6–8). So believers can be described as unleavened. And yet they must also remove the leaven from their lives to be a new lump in the Lord.

Believers are God’s children (Gal. 3:26), adopted into his family (Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:4–7). But Paul also reserves adoption for the last day,

when our bodies are redeemed (Rom. 8:23). Here we do not have an either-or but an already-not yet. Similarly, believers are heirs now in Christ (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Titus 3:7), but they have not yet obtained all that has been promised. Believers are God's holy ones now (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2) and are sanctified in Christ (1 Cor. 6:11), yet Paul can say that believers must grow in holiness (cf. Rom. 6:19–22; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:3–8). At the same time, perfect sanctification is reserved for the day when Jesus returns (Eph. 5:26; Col. 1:22–23; 1 Thess. 3:13; 5:23–24). There is apparently an already-not yet in Paul's understanding of holiness. Believers enjoy eternal life now, and yet they must run to win the prize (Phil. 3:12–14). All must exercise discipline to obtain the final reward (1 Cor. 9:24–27). On the one hand, eternal life is promised to those who belong to God, and yet on the other hand, God has fulfilled his promise in bringing Jesus Christ into the world (Titus 1:2–3), so that his grace is now realized (Titus 2:11; cf. 3:4).

As we have seen previously, the gift of the Spirit is the signature of the new age. The coming of the Spirit represents the emblem of God's saving promises, and hence the Spirit is featured in Pauline theology (cf. Rom. 8:1–17; Gal. 3:1–5, 14). The gift of the Spirit represents the eschatological tension in Paul, for the Spirit is the guarantee that God will finish what he has begun, so that believers experience the end-time resurrection (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13–14). The Spirit is the firstfruits, indicating that God will redeem the bodies of believers (Rom. 8:23). So too the coming of the Spirit indicates that God has fulfilled his new-covenant promises (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 11:18–19; 36:26–27), promises that never came to fruition under the Mosaic law—the old covenant (2 Cor. 3:14). But now that the Spirit has come, believers are enabled to do what could never be done by the letter (*gramma*—i.e., the law without the Spirit [Rom. 2:28–29; 7:5–6; 2 Cor. 3:6]). In fulfillment of God's new-covenant promise they are enabled to observe God's law (Rom. 8:4; 2 Cor. 3:17; cf. Gal. 5:14).

The contrast between justification by faith versus justification by works of law (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16–21; 3:1–5, 10) must also be understood against the backdrop of Pauline eschatology and the contrast between the old covenant and the new. Hence, those under the law, like Hagar, represent the Sinai covenant, while those freed from the law are part of the eschatological Jerusalem (Gal. 4:21–31). Paul's theology resonates with eschatological polarities, or what Martyn calls apocalyptic antimonies,⁷ so that the contrast between faith and works of law is eschatological, as is the opposition between the flesh and the Spirit, the old person and the new person, and the old creation and the new creation.

7. Martyn 1985.

Believers are presently citizens of heaven, and yet there is an eschatological proviso, for they await the promise of the resurrection (Phil. 3:20–21). Believers are now hidden with Christ in God, and yet they await Christ’s coming and future glory (Col. 3:3–4). God’s promises are fulfilled in Christ in the fullness of time, so that those who have the Spirit are God’s children (Gal. 4:4–6). The focus of NT theology is the supremacy of God in Christ through the Spirit, and hence we find that God’s promises are fulfilled in Christ by the Spirit.

Hebrews and James

It has been said that Hebrews is almost Platonic because it contrasts the heavenly and the earthly realms, but the vertical perspective of Hebrews must be plotted along horizontal or salvation-historical lines. The book opens with a majestic statement about Jesus Christ, declaring that he has fulfilled the prophecies of old (Heb. 1:1–4). His sitting down at the right hand of God demonstrates that he is both the Messiah and the Son of God (Ps. 110). Hence, the promises that God would reign over all the earth are beginning to be fulfilled in the reign of his Son. The trinitarian character of eschatological salvation is also evident, for the giving of the Spirit and his gifts is the signature of the commencement of the new age (Heb. 2:4). And those who belong to the new people of God have become partakers of the Spirit promised in the OT Scriptures (Heb. 6:4). Apostasy is particularly abhorrent, for it means that believers trample underfoot God’s Son and despise God’s gracious Spirit (Heb. 10:29).

A “not yet” intervenes, however, for believers still await the day when all the Son’s enemies will be placed under his feet (Heb. 1:14; 2:5–8; 10:12–13). God’s eschatological salvation has dawned, for death has been defeated through the death of Jesus Christ (Heb. 2:14–16). In the same way, God’s promised rest is available for those who trust and obey God (Heb. 4:2–3), though the consummation of that rest is still to come (Heb. 4:1–11).⁸ The rest is available “today” (Heb. 4:7). God’s kingdom belongs to believers even now, but the day when the created things will be removed is coming, and then the consummation of God’s purposes will be realized (Heb. 12:26–28). Believers have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Heb. 12:22), but at the same time they seek the coming city (Heb. 13:14), just as Abraham and Sarah and the patriarchs did (Heb. 11:10, 13–16).

The prominence of eschatology in Hebrews is confirmed by the extensive citation of the new covenant of Jer. 31 (cf. Heb. 8:8–12; 10:16–18). The

8. So Rhee 2001: 51–52.

author argues that the new covenant has arrived through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The old covenant, which is tied up with the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic law, anticipates Jesus' Melchizedekian priesthood and a new order. The typology of Hebrews, in other words, services the eschatology of Hebrews. The temporary nature of the Levitical priesthood and the OT law are evident because they did not bring perfection or full forgiveness of sins, whereas the sacrifice of Christ brought final and definitive forgiveness of sins because he was a sinless and perfect sacrifice and a willing human victim, unlike animal sacrifices, which were brute beasts offered apart from their will (Heb. 7:11–28; 10:1–18). Even though Christ offered the perfect and definitive sacrifice “at the end of the ages” (Heb. 9:26), the end of salvation history has not yet arrived, for believers still await the final judgment, the return of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:27–28; 10:37), and the drawing near of the final day (Heb. 10:25). Indeed, the warning passages that permeate Hebrews are set against the backdrop of its already–not yet eschatology, for in order to receive the eschatological reward, those who believe must continue to believe and obey until Jesus returns. The examples of faith in Heb. 11, therefore, focus on the eschatological character of faith, demonstrating that those who have trusted in God throughout history did not receive the promised reward during their time on earth. Heb. 11:39–40 emphasizes progress in salvation history. We have something better, so that OT saints are not perfected without us, and yet all believers look forward to the same end-time reward.

The letter of James does not emphasize the fulfillment of God's promises in the same way as does most of the rest of the NT. What James emphasizes is the final fulfillment of God's promises on the last day (James 2:12–13; 5:1–5)—the day of Christ's return (James 5:7–9). Then believers will be perfect and complete (James 1:4), exalted (James 1:9), and will receive the crown of life (James 1:12). God's salvation is fundamentally eschatological, and hence believers must do good works to be justified (James 2:14–26; 5:20). Still, there is acknowledgment that God has already given believers new life (James 1:18) and chosen them to be his children (James 2:5). It is evident that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit do not play a prominent role in James. Still, I will argue in due course that the lack of emphasis could be overstated, and hence the fulfillment of God's promises through the Father, Son, and Spirit is likely an assumed backdrop in James's letter.

1–2 Peter and Jude

The fulfillment of God's saving promises through the Father, Son, and Spirit is featured in 1 Pet. 1:2. The age to come has been inaugurated

through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3, 11; 2:21, 24; 3:18), just as it was prophesied by the Spirit (1 Pet. 1:10–12). Hence, his death and resurrection herald the inauguration of “the last times” (1 Pet. 1:20; cf. 1:18–21). Jesus now reigns in heaven over all angelic powers (1 Pet. 3:22). The inauguration of God’s end-time promises is clear, for believers are born again (1 Pet. 1:3, 23), and the promises made to Israel are fulfilled in the church as the new people of God, the new Israel (1 Pet. 2:9–10). What the temple and priesthood anticipated is fulfilled in Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:4–9). Still, the “not yet” looms large over the letter, for believers are suffering at the hands of the ungodly and are exiles on earth (1 Pet. 1:1, 17; 2:11; 4:1–6). The salvation promised to them is fundamentally eschatological (1 Pet. 1:5, 9), so that they will not receive an inheritance until the final day (1 Pet. 1:4). The final revelation of Jesus Christ is still in the future (1 Pet. 1:7, 13; 4:13; 5:4; cf. 4:7), and they must continue to believe in and obey him until he returns (1 Pet. 3:9–12; cf. 5:4). When the end-time judgment takes place (1 Pet. 4:5, 17), believers will be exalted and rewarded (1 Pet. 5:4, 6, 10).

The letters of 2 Peter and Jude are brief, and much of Jude is contained in 2 Pet. 2. However, Peter commences his second letter with the theme of the fulfillment of God’s promises.⁹ The saving righteousness of God has now been realized through Jesus Christ as God and Savior (2 Pet. 1:2). God has given to believers, in fulfillment of his promises, everything they need through the power of Jesus Christ, so that even now believers partake of God’s divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3–4). The promises of salvation belong to believers, then, through knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (2 Pet. 2:20; 3:18; cf. 1:8). Despite the emphasis on knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior now, eschatological reservation also characterizes 2 Peter. Believers must practice godliness to receive entrance into the kingdom on the last day (2 Pet. 1:5–11; 3:14–15). The final realization of all of God’s promises has not occurred, so that believers still await the return of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:16–18; 3:3–10). Those who give themselves to evil will be judged on the last day (2 Pet. 2), and therefore believers must persevere to receive the promised reward and end-time salvation (2 Pet. 3:15). The new creation—the new heavens and earth—that God promised is still coming (2 Pet. 3:13; cf. 3:7, 10).

The letter of Jude runs along the same lines. Believers enjoy a “common salvation” (Jude 3) through Jesus Christ (Jude 4). The Father has set his love upon them, and they are kept by Jesus Christ (Jude 2; cf. 24–25). However, Jude emphasizes the “not yet.” Those who give themselves

9. Most scholars today argue that 2 Peter is pseudonymous, but I depart from the mainstream view of NT scholarship here and argue that the letter is authentic (see Schreiner 2003: 255–76). Hence, in this book I will assume the authenticity of 2 Peter.

over to evil will face judgment on the last day (Jude 5–16). In the interim believers must keep themselves in God’s love and not abandon the faith once delivered to them (Jude 3, 20–21).

Revelation

Revelation features the fulfillment of God’s saving promises in Jesus Christ. He is the “Lion from the tribe of Judah” and “the Root of David” (Rev. 5:5), fulfilling the covenant that God established with David. Believers are now released from their sins because of his death and are established even now as a kingdom and priests (Rev. 1:5–6; 5:9–10; 7:14). We see in the vision in Rev. 1:12–20 that Jesus is the Son of Man predicted in Dan. 7. He has authority over Death and Hades, so that even now believers face death with confidence. The God who is the creator of all (Rev. 4) is also the redeemer through Christ (Rev. 5), and he sends his Spirit into the world as a result of Christ’s work (Rev. 5:6; cf. 1:4). Satan has been defeated at the cross and expelled from heaven (Rev. 12:7–10), so that believers share Christ’s victory over Satan because of Christ’s blood (Rev. 12:11).

The already, then, is not omitted in Revelation, but certainly the focus is on the “not yet,” though we must see that the “not yet” has been secured by Christ’s death and resurrection, so that complete confidence in final victory is taught. Revelation looks ahead to Jesus’ second coming, when he will consummate history, reward believers, and punish the disobedient. The future coming of Christ reminds readers of the necessity to persevere and to continue believing until that day arrives (Rev. 2:1–3:22). Indeed, the exhortations to perseverance and faithfulness (e.g., Rev. 13:10; 14:12) function against the backdrop of eschatology. Those addressed must keep believing in order to receive the eschatological reward on the day when Jesus returns. Judgment, of course, permeates Revelation, and this theme reminds the readers that evil will not triumph, and that those who are persecuting the church of Jesus Christ or who have allied themselves with the beast, Babylon, and the false prophet will certainly be defeated. The new creation is coming (Rev. 21:1–22:5), wherein God will make good on all the promises uttered. But the sum and substance of the promise is that God and the Lamb will reside with believers and dwell with them forever. The capstone of all biblical theology is summed up in the words “they will see his face” (Rev. 22:4).

9



Jesus' Saving Work in Acts

The theme of this book is that the new age has dawned and God has fulfilled his covenantal promises in Jesus Christ. We have seen in the Gospels the supremacy of Jesus Christ and the centrality of Christology. We have also noted that all four Gospels are narratives that point toward Jesus' cross and resurrection—passion narratives with extended introductions. The high Christology of the Gospels reveals that Jesus saves via his work on the cross because of who he is. When we come to the book of Acts, we consider the period of time subsequent to Jesus' death and resurrection, and we observe the spread of the Christian movement. In Acts Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection are still central. Hence, it is useful to consider the Christology of Acts and God's saving work in Christ. It will become clear that Acts does not deviate from the message of the Synoptic Gospels, though it now looks back on the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christology of Acts

When we study the Christology of Acts, it is imperative to recall that Luke and Acts were written by the same author. Examining the Christology of Luke and Acts together, then, would assist us in pulling together the strands of Luke's theology. In considering Christology, however, we

examined Luke along with Matthew and Mark because the agreements among the three Synoptic Gospels are so remarkable.¹ Recalling that Luke-Acts were written by the same author, on the other hand, may forestall some interpretive missteps. In some ways the Christology of Acts seems rather undeveloped, but it is quite unlikely that the Christology of Acts should be interpreted as a step down from the Christology of Luke.² We saw in our study of the Synoptics that Jesus is the exalted Son of Man and the unique Son of God, and he assumes divine prerogatives. The Christology of Acts presumably will fit with what we have found in Luke, even if some of the same themes do not sound forth. In Acts, for instance, Jesus is identified as the Son of Man and the Son of God in only one text each, but the scarcity of these appellations does not yield the conclusion that Luke questions whether Jesus is the Son of Man or the Son of God.

The purpose of Acts must be recalled in any study of its Christology. Luke did not write a theological treatise, nor did he attempt to sketch out his theology. Scholars in recent years have rightly seen that Luke is a theologian, though some have unconvincingly concluded that since he is a theologian, he is not a historian.³ It is better to say that Luke is a historian who writes history from a theological point of view.⁴ All history, including that composed by Luke, is interpretive and selective. Luke did not write a neutral composition about the ministry of Jesus Christ and life in the early church. His theological slant shines through his writing. Nevertheless, contrary to the view of some, Luke did not put speeches in the mouths of Peter and Paul, nor did he construct a law-abiding Paul of his own making. What he wrote was constrained by historical events—what people truly said and did.⁵ If Luke's purpose is historical as much as it is theological, it follows that we do not have anything like a complete map of Luke's theology. His theological perspective manifests itself in what he includes and how he presents the

1. A decision has to be made at precisely this point as to how to arrange NT theology. It is not as if one way is correct and others are false paths. Rather, no book can capture or exhaust the richness of NT theology, and so we profit from NT theologies that are written from a number of mutually complementary perspectives.

2. The Christology of Luke has been the subject of considerable discussion and debate in recent scholarship. For a survey of different proposals, see Buckwalter 1998: 108–12.

3. The notion that Acts does not consistently intend to relate historical events is a commonplace in critical scholarship. See, for example, Haenchen 1971: 3–132; Barrett 1998: xxxiii–liv; Pervo 1987.

4. In defense of the idea that Luke is both a historian and a theologian, see Marshall 1970.

5. In defense of this notion, see the detailed works of Gasque 1989; Hemer 1989. For the view that Acts deserves to be taken seriously as a historical document, and is substantially reliable, see Sherwin-White 1963; Hengel 1980; Palmer 1993; Gempf 1993; Fitzmyer 1998: 124–28.

material, but he does not have a free hand to twist the events to fit with his preconceptions. It is much more likely that Luke believed that history itself was guided by God's providential plan, and hence the events as they unfolded had theological significance because God stands behind and works in all of history.

Virtually all would agree that Luke's composition was informed by a theological worldview, simply on the basis of what he chose to include in his story. Where we could go astray, however, is in thinking that what Luke chose to include were necessarily the main themes in *his* theology. It is altogether possible that some topics are omitted because of the subject of his narrative. The particular angle of his work influenced what was retained and what was excluded. The danger of writing a theology on each writer of the NT is that it can communicate subtly, despite protestations, that we have something like a complete theology from that person. The advantage of writing a theology of the NT thematically is that the theology of the whole is gleaned from the perspective of twenty-seven different compositions. We have a better chance of grasping the whole of the theology of the NT era when we include a greater sampling of writings from various authors included in the canon.

Jesus as Resurrected Lord

Reading the book of Acts, we are struck with the emphasis on Jesus as the exalted and resurrected Lord.⁶ Luke often includes accounts that scripturally and historically emphasize Jesus' resurrection.⁷ Jesus could not be the Messiah and Lord and the one through whom people receive forgiveness of sins if he remained in the grave. Luke speaks of "many proofs" (*tekmēria*) relative to Christ's resurrection (Acts 1:3). Both Peter and Paul argued that Ps. 16 was not fulfilled in David's life, and hence the words recorded fit only with Christ's resurrection (Acts 2:24–31; 13:35–37). David decomposed in the grave, and therefore the words of Ps. 16 must point to another, one who conquered death and whose tomb was empty. The Scriptures themselves point to Christ's death and his resurrection (Acts 13:31–33; 26:22–23). Whereas the Pharisees are the primary opponents in Luke, the Sadducees come to the forefront in Acts, particularly because the apostles preached the resurrection (Acts 4:1–2; cf. 5:17). The Sadducees, of course, rejected the notion of the resurrection (Matt. 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8).⁸

6. See especially Hurtado 2003: 179–88. Moule (1966a: 160–66) emphasizes the decisive role that the resurrection plays in the Christology of Luke-Acts.

7. Acts 1:3, 22; 2:24–32; 3:15, 26; 4:2, 10, 33; 5:30; 10:40–41; 13:30–37; 17:3, 18, 31, 32; 23:6; 24:14–15, 21; 25:19; 26:8, 23.

8. See Josephus, *J.W.* 2.165; *m. Sanh.* 10:1.

Although a crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms for the Jews, in Athens it was Paul's preaching of the resurrection that brought derision (Acts 17:31–32).⁹ Paul claimed again and again, while he was under arrest and examination for criminal actions in Jerusalem and Caesarea, that the only cause for his arrest and criminal indictment was his belief in the resurrection (Acts 23:6; 24:15, 21; 25:19; 26:6, 8, 22–23). When Paul was examined by the Sanhedrin, his affirmation of the resurrection threw the council into a dither, and the Pharisees and Sadducees began to debate the legitimacy of the resurrection (Acts 23:6–10). Paul protested before Festus and Agrippa that he stood trial simply for the fulfillment of the Pharisaic hope that there would be a resurrection (Acts 26:4–8). Resurrection is a promise of the age to come, and Jesus Christ's resurrection represents the hinge of history. The age to come in Jewish thought, as we have seen often in this book, commences with the resurrection. Hence, Jesus' resurrection signaled that the new age has come. God's saving promises are being realized.

One of the central themes in Acts, then, is that Jesus is now the exalted Lord. The crucified one has been vindicated by God. Jesus' resurrection indicates that he is "the cornerstone" of the people of God (Acts 4:11).¹⁰ As the resurrected one, he is now "exalted" as "leader" (*archēgos*) and "savior" (Acts 5:31). Since Jesus was raised from the dead and exalted, he has been "glorified" by God himself (Acts 3:13). Paul in his speech draws on Ps. 2:7 to say that God has "begotten" Jesus by raising him from the dead (Acts 13:33). In its historical context the psalm refers to the installation of the Davidic king (Ps. 2:6–7). The installation of the Davidic king is traced to Jesus' resurrection in Acts, for as the risen one, he also ascended to heaven and sits at God's right hand (Acts 1:9–11; 2:34–35), and hence he is installed as the messianic king. In sitting at God's right hand he fulfilled the prophecy of Ps. 110:1, and therefore we note that Luke in Acts draws on the same psalm that Jesus used in his conflict with the religious leaders (Luke 20:41–44). At Jesus' resurrection God "made him both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).¹¹ We know from the Gospel of Luke that Jesus was the Christ during his earthly ministry, and therefore this verse does not teach that Jesus "became" Lord and Christ only when raised from the dead.¹²

9. See Barrett 1998: 854, with references to primary sources on the matter.

10. Others see it as the capstone (so Conzelmann 1987: 33; Barrett 1994: 230).

11. The use of the terms "Savior" and "Lord" in reference to Jesus may have been a direct response to the imperial cult. See Brent 1999: 73–139; Cuss 1974: 53–71; Price 1984; Witherington 1998: 157–58.

12. Contra Barrett 1994: 151–52. Rightly Jones 1974: 91–93; Strauss 1995: 66–67, 144–45. Fitzmyer (1998: 260–61) argues that the term "Lord" here means that the title used of Yahweh is now applied to Jesus. Further, Jesus is now installed as the *risen* Messiah. But Strauss (1995: 143–44) cautions against reading too much into the title "Lord" here. Con-

The point of the verse is that Jesus became the exalted Lord and Christ only at his exaltation. He did not reign as Lord and Christ until he was raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand.¹³

Buckwalter in particular shows that Jesus as the resurrected Lord is the one who pours out the Spirit on his people (Acts 2:33).¹⁴ The use of the phrase "Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7) hearkens back to the OT, where the Spirit belongs to God or the Lord. Now the Spirit is also related to Jesus, and it is this very Spirit of Jesus who guides the church of Jesus Christ in mission. Furthermore, if we consider Luke's Gospel for a moment, it is instructive that Jesus promised to give his disciples the wisdom and words to respond suitably to persecution (Luke 21:15). Such a promise fits only with one who is divine, for only one who has heavenly authority can grant such ability to disciples. The relationship between Jesus and the Spirit is quite interesting in Acts, for both Acts 2:33 and Acts 16:7 "imply that the Spirit represents, if not mediates, the exalted Jesus' presence and continued activity among his people."¹⁵

The lordship of Jesus is a common refrain in Acts, and we will not pause here to note all the texts (see, e.g., Acts 1:6, 21; 4:33; 15:11, 26; 19:13; 20:21). In a number of instances it is difficult to determine whether "Lord" refers to the Father or the Son, since the title is used of both. Even the ambiguity as to whether the title "Lord" refers to the Son or the Father is instructive, for it points to the truth that they share the same status. As Lord, Jesus speaks words that are authoritative (Acts 20:35; 22:18). As Jervell says, "Luke in some sense regarded Jesus as on a level with God."¹⁶ Further, in Acts 22:18 the words come to Paul in a vision from the exalted Jesus. The exalted Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, and such an appearance and the resulting commission suggest his divinity (Acts 9:5, 17, 27; 22:8, 10; 26:15).¹⁷ One might object that angels appear to people and give instructions, but in Acts Jesus is designated as "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36), and such a description does not fit any angelic figure. The expression is comparable with what is said of God in Jewish tradition (Tob. 10:13; Wis. 6:7; 8:3; Sir. 36:1; 50:15, 22; 3 Macc. 5:28; *Apoc. Mos.* 35:2;

zelmann (1987: 21) says that the verse "has an adoptionistic ring" but cannot be construed in this way since Jesus clearly was the Messiah during his ministry.

13. In the same way, Acts 3:19–21 should not be interpreted in terms of adoptionist Christology (see Moule 1966a: 167–68).

14. Buckwalter 1998: 115–16. What follows depends on the work of Buckwalter. See also Buckwalter 1996: 180–82, 188, 195–96.

15. Buckwalter 1998: 116.

16. Jervell 1996: 29. However, Jervell (1996: 30) is mistaken in saying that Jesus was not considered to be divine in Acts.

17. Barrett (1994: 450) says about Acts 9:5, "Jesus, once dead, is now alive and more than a man."

37:4; *Jub.* 22:10, 27; 30:19; 31:13, 19).¹⁸ In Acts 18:9–10, as Buckwalter remarks, “Jesus appears to Paul in a vision and encourages him in language reminiscent of OT theophany and prophetic calling.”¹⁹ Moreover, in Acts human beings turn to the Lord or believe in the Lord (Acts 9:35, 42; 11:21; 16:31; 18:8), and human beings are never commended for placing their trust in an angel. Paul even says that he is willing to sacrifice his life for the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 21:13).

Further, Jesus as the exalted Lord will return on the day of the Lord (Acts 2:20, quoting Joel 2:31). This is a remarkable text, for the day of the Lord in the OT is the day of Yahweh, but the prerogative of Yahweh is now assigned to Jesus Christ at his coming.²⁰ Even more extraordinary, as Hurtado notes, is the announcement that “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21, quoting Joel 2:32).²¹ In the OT the Lord who is called upon for salvation is clearly Yahweh, but in Acts the Lord who is invoked for salvation is none other than Jesus Christ.²² Bock rightly says, “Jesus is more than a regal Messiah, as his task and position show. He is Lord, a title which shows Jesus in his task and person to be equal with God.”²³ In using the title “Lord,” Luke “implies that Jesus in his risen status has been made equal with Yahweh of the OT, for ‘Lord’ was used by Palestinian Jews in the last pre-Christian centuries as a title for Yahweh.”²⁴ A high Christology is also apparent in that sins are forgiven in Jesus’ name.

Jesus as the Christ

As the resurrected and exalted one, but also the one who suffered for the forgiveness of sins (see below), Jesus is the Christ.²⁵ The word “Christ” retains its titular significance in Acts. It does not merely become a last name, as is evident in the following examples: “that he may send the

18. See Cadbury 1933: 362.

19. Buckwalter 1998: 117. Buckwalter goes on to observe that the promise of Jesus’ presence suggests deity, for in the OT God promises his presence with his people (Exod. 4:12). See also Acts 23:11, where the Lord Jesus appears to Paul and predicts that his future witness in Rome will indeed take place.

20. So Hurtado 2003: 181; see also Haenchen 1971: 179; Conzelmann 1987: 20; Fitzmyer 1998: 254. Bock (1987: 163–66, 183–85) rightly argues that the use of Ps. 110 to refer to Jesus in the speech indicates that “Lord” here refers to Jesus.

21. Hurtado 2003: 181–82.

22. Hurtado (2003: 182) goes on to say, “In fact, ‘Lord’ clearly functions in these cases as a divine title.” Hurtado (2003: 182–85) further argues that the practice of invoking Jesus as Lord was remarkably early and cannot be assigned to a later date.

23. Bock 1987: 184.

24. Fitzmyer 1998: 260. See also Fitzmyer, *EDNT* 2:328–31.

25. For a short description of the Christology in Acts, see Barrett 1998: lxxxv–lxxxvii. Jervell (1996: 27) thinks that “Christ” is the “most significant title.”

Christ appointed for you, Jesus" (Acts 3:20); "they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42); Paul in his preaching was "proving that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 9:22); "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ" (Acts 17:3); "Paul was testifying . . . to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus" (Acts 18:5); Apollo was "showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus" (Acts 18:28). Jesus is anointed by God as the Christ (Acts 4:27; 10:38). The messiahship of Jesus is closely intertwined with his lordship. The truth that he has been made Lord and Christ at his resurrection surfaces again here (Acts 2:36). The notion that Jesus is the Christ was, of course, already established in Luke, and Acts simply maintains what the Gospel taught. What is new in Acts is that Jesus is now the exalted Messiah by virtue of the resurrection (Acts 2:36).²⁶ Another way of putting it is that he is now the vindicated Messiah, for during Jesus' earthly ministry his messianic glory was veiled by his humanity, suffering, and death. Even after the resurrection, of course, not all perceive Jesus to be exalted as Messiah, but now he reigns as Messiah in glory, and his reign will be apparent to all when he returns to judge (Acts 3:20–21; 17:31).²⁷

Jesus as the Servant of the Lord

The life and ministry of Jesus attest to his messiahship and lordship (Acts 2:22; 10:37–38). His miracles and good works confirm that he was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit. His death cannot be ascribed to a mistake; rather, it was God's determined plan from the beginning (Acts 2:23; 4:26–28). The Scriptures predicted all along that the Christ would suffer (Acts 3:18; 17:2–3; 26:22–23; cf. 28:23).²⁸ And yet those who put Jesus to death bear full responsibility for their evil deed, for Luke does not think that divine sovereignty rules out the significance of human freedom, though the solution is not worked out philosophically. In putting Jesus to death the religious leaders have crucified God's "holy" and "righteous" one (Acts 3:14; 7:52).²⁹ In Acts Luke clearly teaches that Jesus is the suffering servant of Isa. 53, confirming what was argued relative

26. Hence, there is no adoptionistic Christology here. See Bock 1987: 185–86.

27. Some have understood Acts 3:20 to teach that Jesus will become the Messiah when he returns in the future. For a refutation of this view, see Barrett 1994: 204–5; see also Fitzmyer 1998: 288.

28. Everything that has happened in Jesus' ministry has occurred in accordance with the divine plan. See Cosgrove 1984.

29. Some argue that *dikaios* ("righteous") is a messianic title (Zimmerli and Jeremias 1957: 91; Bruce 1951: 109; Conzelmann 1987: 28), but the evidence is disputed (see Barrett 1994: 196–97). Doble (1996: 70–183, 226–35) argues for a wisdom background, but this is an implausible reading of the uses in Acts. Even if it is not messianic in pre-Christian literature, it clearly has a titular force in Acts (Hurtado 2003: 189–90). Polhill (1992: 131)

to the Gospel of Luke earlier. The Ethiopian eunuch just “happened” to be reading Isa. 53 when Philip was instructed to approach his chariot (Acts 8:28–34). When the eunuch inquired about the subject of the text, Philip identified the servant as Jesus Christ. A detailed exposition of the text is not given, but the verses cited from Isaiah (Isa. 53:7–8) refer to Jesus’ innocent suffering and death.³⁰

The use of the word “servant” (*pais*) in Acts is disputed, but it probably hearkens back to the suffering servant of Isaiah.³¹ The glorification of the servant refers to his exaltation in accord with Isa. 52:13 (Acts 3:13).³² The reference to the servant is confirmed by the context of Acts 3, where Jesus is handed over as a criminal by his people and suffered as was prophesied (Acts 3:13–18).³³ In both Acts and Isaiah the context suggests that the glorification follows his suffering.³⁴ This fits with the theology of Acts, where Jesus’ exaltation is subsequent to his suffering. The term “servant” is also used in Acts (4:27, 30) in a context in which the death of Jesus is implied, suggesting again an echo of Isa. 53. Nor does Luke restrict himself to the servant’s suffering. The glorification of the servant implies his resurrection (Acts 3:13), and Acts 3:26 says that “God . . . raised up his servant.”³⁵ We have an echo here of Isa. 53:11–12 (cf. Isa. 52:13) which implies the vindication of the servant after his suffering.

Acts trumpets that Jesus fulfills the OT, and such a theme makes sense because the advancement of the gospel among both Jews and Gentiles is a central theme. All the prophets looked forward to the day of fulfillment that has now come in Jesus Christ (Acts 3:24). The universal blessing promised to Abraham (Gen. 12:3) has now become a reality in Jesus Christ (Acts 3:25–26). The promise to Abraham has been fulfilled in Jesus as the “servant,” suggesting that Jesus as the servant is the true offspring of Abraham. The promised blessing for Israel and all nations is funneled through him. Nor does Luke vaguely explicate Abraham’s

suggests a link to Isa. 53:11 and the death of the righteous one. This latter view is likely correct (see Strauss 1995: 330–32; Stuhlmacher 2006: 156).

30. For a careful study of the text, see Bock 1987: 225–30.

31. Against this, see Bühner, *EDNT* 3:6; Conzelmann 1987: 28; rightly Meyer 1979: 66–67; Barrett 1994: 194; Haenchen 1971: 205–6. Zimmerli and Jeremias (1957: 80, 86, 91) argue that the use of the term *pais* in Acts 3–4 suggests that the tradition of Jesus being the servant reaches back to the earliest history of the church (cf. Stuhlmacher 2006: 156).

32. Rightly Fitzmyer 1998: 284–85. Hurtado (2003: 191) says that it communicates “a specifically Israel-oriented and royal-messianic orientation.” Bühner (*EDNT* 3:6) says, “Jesus as the *pais theou* is therefore the messianic successor of the house of David and the fulfillment of Israel’s messianic expectations.”

33. So Bock 1987: 188.

34. See Barrett 1994: 195; Bock 1987: 189–90; Strauss 1995: 331–33.

35. Some understand this verse to refer to God bringing Jesus “on the stage of history” (so Barrett 1994: 213). Fitzmyer (1998: 291) thinks the resurrection is likely in view.

universal blessing. The blessing comes through Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins available through him. Thereby evil is removed from the lives of God's people.

In Acts Luke identifies Jesus as the Servant of the Lord from Isa. 53, but he does not provide a detailed or thorough explanation of how Isa. 53 relates to the death of Jesus.³⁶ The substitutionary character of the servant's death for the sake of his people's sins, so clear in Isa. 53, is not unpacked by Luke in Acts.³⁷ It is sufficient for Luke's purposes to identify Jesus as the Servant of the Lord and to emphasize that forgiveness of sins comes through his death.

Jesus' Name

Since Jesus as the Christ is the exalted Lord, Acts emphasizes the name of Jesus, signifying his authority and his divinity. Name theology is often ignored, but its significance must be grasped in order to comprehend Luke's Christology. Hurtado says that name theology "is derived directly from the Old Testament usage, where it functions as a technical expression designating prayer and sacrifice offered specifically to *Yahweh*."³⁸ It is quite striking, then, to see that believers are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 10:48). Their initiation into the people of God is based not on God's name but on the name of Jesus. Baptism is clearly associated with forgiveness of sins based on Christ's death (Acts 2:38).³⁹ Peter healed a lame man "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (Acts 3:6), stressing that faith in the name of Christ is the basis of this man's healing (Acts 3:16; 4:10). When Peter heals Aenas, he says, "Jesus Christ heals you" (Acts 9:34). Healing is a divine prerogative, and such an action is ascribed to the name of Jesus Christ. The gospel proclaimed heralds "the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12). Paul and Barnabas "risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:26). Paul in Christ's name commanded a demon to leave a girl (Acts 16:18).⁴⁰ Most significantly, those who are saved call upon Jesus' name to experience salvation (Acts 2:21; 9:14, 21; 22:16). Indeed, his is the only name that brings salvation (Acts 4:12), and hence a divine function is clearly attributed to

36. Buckwalter (1996: 247–57) argues that in explicating the servant theme Luke emphasized how disciples of Jesus should serve others the way Jesus did.

37. See Bock 1987: 188–89.

38. Hurtado 2003: 197.

39. On the early Christian practice of baptizing in Jesus' name, see Hartman 1997; *ABD* 1:583–94; Hurtado 2003: 200–203.

40. Hurtado (2003: 204) observes that other figures were alleged to be responsible for exorcisms and healings in the Greco-Roman world, but Jesus should be distinguished from such persons, for his "name was invoked as uniquely efficacious." See the full discussion in Hurtado 2003: 203–6.

Jesus. As we noted earlier, the emphasis on Jesus' name is particularly striking in Acts 2:21, for in the OT context the name that is invoked for salvation is Yahweh's (Joel 2:32).⁴¹ Hurtado concludes that such a use of name theology in Acts demonstrates that "the name of 'Jesus' itself was revered and functioned in the devotional life of these believers."⁴² It seems that Luke's name theology points to Jesus' deity.⁴³

Jesus as the Prophet and Son of God

We have already seen in Luke that Jesus is considered to be a prophet, and indeed *the* prophet.⁴⁴ Moses predicted that a new prophet would arise (Deut. 18:15–22), and Luke maintains that Jesus fulfills that prophecy (Acts 3:22–23; 7:37). The final revelation of God has been given in Jesus himself, so that he is superior to Moses. The rejection that both Joseph and Moses experienced from their contemporaries (Acts 7:9–16, 29–43) anticipated the rejection of Jesus by Stephen's contemporaries (Acts 7:52). Jesus is the Son of Man standing at God's right hand defending Stephen (Acts 7:59). He is the one who brings life into the world (*archēgos tēs zōēs*) (Acts 3:15)⁴⁵ and is God's Son (Acts 9:20).

In Acts the title "Son of God" is used only once (Acts 9:20), and so it could be equivalent to "Messiah." But the usage in Luke's Gospel suggests that "Son of God" does not only mean that Jesus is the Christ. The title "Son of God" indicates that Jesus has a unique and special relationship with God.⁴⁶ Jesus' divine stature manifests itself in Acts, for both Stephen (Acts 7:59–60) and Paul (Acts 22:19–20) prayed to Jesus, and pious Jews, of course, would voice prayers only to God.⁴⁷ Paul almost certainly prayed

41. And so it seems to follow that Jesus is "equal to Yahweh" (Buckwalter 1998: 119). Such a view rules out an adoptionistic Christology (see Buckwalter 1996: 184–91).

42. Hurtado 2003: 198–99. Hurtado (2003: 199) goes on to say that the practice is early and stems from "Jewish Christian circles."

43. See Buckwalter 1996: 182–84; 1998: 119.

44. For contemporary Jewish discussion on Deut. 18 and a prophet like Moses, see Barrett 1994: 208. See also Fitzmyer 1998: 289–90.

45. Barrett (1994: 198, 290) thinks that the point in Acts 3:15 is that Jesus brings "life into the world . . . thereby establishing a new age or reign," while in Acts 5:31 *archēgos* bears the meaning "leader" or "prince." P. Müller (*EDNT* 1:163) understands Acts 3:15 as indicating "one who leads the way into life" and not "originator," while in Acts 5:31 *archēgos* means "Leader and Savior." Fitzmyer (1998: 286) suggests "author" or "originator."

46. Contra Barrett 1994: 465. Fitzmyer (1998: 435) rightly argues that the title is not equivalent to "Messiah" (contra Haenchen 1971: 331), and even though he does not think that it bears the meaning of the term in the later creeds, the "title expressed a unique relationship of Jesus to Yahweh."

47. So Barrett 1994: 387; 1998: 1044. The prayer in Acts 1:24 is likely offered to Jesus as well. Rightly Bruce 1951: 80 (perhaps); Barrett 1994: 103; see also Peterson 1998: 386. Contra Haenchen 1971: 162; Conzelmann 1987: 12; Fitzmyer 1998: 227.

to Jesus in this text, for the divine voice said to Paul, "They will not accept your testimony about me" (Acts 22:18). The rejected witness must refer to his proclamation of Jesus as Christ and Lord. In some texts, as we noted earlier, it is difficult to discern whether the focus is on God or Jesus. The Lord who appeared to Paul in a vision in Corinth was almost surely Jesus himself (Acts 18:9–10).⁴⁸ The divine status of Jesus suggests itself when he appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and spoke to him (Acts 9:4–5, 17; 22:7–10; 26:13–18).⁴⁹ The same divine authority surfaces in Jesus' encounter with Ananias. Jesus appeared to him in a vision, summoning him to visit Paul (Acts 9:10–16). Ananias's response to the vision accords with Isaiah's response when he saw the Lord in a vision. Isaiah cried out, "Here am I! Send me" (Isa. 6:8). Ananias responded to the vision by saying, "Here I am, Lord" (Acts 9:10).⁵⁰ The expression "Here I am" (*hinnēni*) is often used to signify humble compliance to God's will (e.g., Gen. 22:1, 11; 31:11; 46:2; Exod. 3:4; 1 Sam. 3:4).

Luke's Christology in Acts is not as detailed as what we find in his Gospel, but this can be ascribed to the purpose of the former work. In Acts he emphasizes that Jesus is the resurrected Lord, and hence he is now the exalted Lord and Christ. What Luke says about Jesus' lordship clearly implies his divinity: he appears to Paul as the exalted Lord; human beings put their faith in him; believers are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus; and Jesus is exalted as the Lord of all. Certainly only God himself can be designated as the Lord of all. The theology of the name is also prominent, so that Jesus takes on divine status in baptism, healing, and salvation. Jesus' divinity is evident because he is the Son of God, and prayers are offered to him by believers. He is clearly the Servant of the Lord predicted in Isa. 53, the one in whom and through whom God fulfills his promise to secure the forgiveness of sins.

The Saving Work of Christ

Since Jesus is the Christ, the exalted Lord over all, the Son of God, the Prophet, and the Servant of the Lord, he is to be preached and proclaimed to all (Acts 5:42; 8:5, 12; 9:22; 18:5, 28; 28:31). The lordship of Christ is not a private matter but rather is to be proclaimed throughout the world, to both Jews and Greeks. The missionary thrust of Acts is well known, and when linked with the lordship of Christ, it teaches that Jesus is the universal Lord. Since Christ is Lord of all, he must be proclaimed

48. So Barrett 1998: 869; Fitzmyer 1998: 628.

49. A genuine appearance is in view here. So Wright 2003: 396.

50. The Greek in the two texts is slightly different, *idou eimi* in Isaiah and *idou egō* in Acts, but the difference in meaning is immaterial.

to all everywhere, and all must be called upon to submit to his lordship and to confess him as Savior. The Christology of Acts, then, is tied to the mission of the church, to the mandate to witness for Christ from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Because Jesus Christ is the universal Lord, salvation is available only through him.⁵¹ The remarkable statement in Acts 4:12 could scarcely be clearer: “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”⁵² The universal lordship of Christ entails that salvation comes exclusively and solely through him. He will judge the living and the dead on the last day (Acts 10:42; 17:31). Hence, people receive forgiveness of sins only by believing in and trusting in Jesus Christ the Lord (Acts 11:17; 16:31; 19:4; 20:21; 24:24). Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin (cf. Acts 2:38; 3:19; 20:21), so that the one cannot be separated from the other. Luke nicely captures salvation and repentance when he says that God sent Christ “to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness” (Acts 3:26; cf. 5:31).

Salvation cannot be obtained through the law of Moses, but only through believing in Jesus Christ, as Paul clarifies in his speech in Antioch: “Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38–39). Since salvation is based on believing instead of doing, grace is the foundation of new life: “We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (Acts 15:11; cf. 11:17). If salvation were based on the law, it could be procured by human works or activity. Such a pathway to God is ruled out in Acts, for human sin rules out salvation by human works. Hence, one must proclaim the good news about Christ so that human beings can have peace with God (Acts 10:36). This good news is to be met with a response of faith.

Luke does not explain in any detail how Jesus’ death and resurrection are the basis for the forgiveness of sins.⁵³ The connections drawn are primarily suggestive instead of didactic,⁵⁴ though scholarship gener-

51. Franklin (1975: 65–67) and Zehnle (1969: 431) rightly see the importance of Jesus’ exaltation for salvation but underestimate the Lukan theology of atonement.

52. “Jesus Christ is the only source and ground of salvation available for mankind” (Barrett 1994: 233).

53. In an important essay Stenschke (1998) demonstrates that Luke’s anthropology was such that human beings were corrupt and thus needed forgiveness of sins. Stenschke also shows that salvation is fundamentally linked in Acts to the forgiveness of sins, even though there are other aspects to salvation. For this last point, see also Witherington 1998: 156, 160.

54. See Strauss 1995: 352.

ally has underestimated Luke's theology of the cross.⁵⁵ Peter proclaims that Jesus the crucified one is crowned as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36) and then proceeds to say that forgiveness of sins is offered in Jesus' name (Acts 2:38). It appears, then, that forgiveness is based on Jesus' work as the crucified and risen Lord.⁵⁶ A similar connection emerges in Acts 3. Peter summons the people to repent for the removal of their sins (Acts 3:19) immediately after he mentions Christ's suffering (Acts 3:18). Presumably, Christ's suffering is the basis of the forgiveness offered (so also in Acts 26:18). Nor is the resurrection omitted, for the speech concludes by stressing that God raised Jesus as the Servant of the Lord from the dead, granting blessing by turning people from their wickedness (Acts 3:26). When Peter defended himself before the Sanhedrin, he reminded them that Jesus is the crucified and risen one (Acts 4:10) and then proclaimed that salvation comes only in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). Peter did not specifically claim here that salvation comes in Jesus' name because of his death and resurrection, but the close proximity of the themes suggests that salvation is available because Jesus had died and been raised. As the living and exalted one, who is crowned as Lord and present with his people, Jesus grants salvation.

In Acts 5:30 Peter again indicted the religious leaders for putting Jesus to death (cf. Acts 3:14–15; 4:10; 7:52; 10:39; 13:28), emphasizing that he was hung on a tree. The reference to the tree probably alludes to Deut. 21:23, so in the background we have the echo of his being cursed by God. The crucified Jesus was exalted by God himself (Acts 5:31), and hence repentance and forgiveness of sins are now available in Israel.⁵⁷ Peter intimates that Jesus took God's curse upon himself, and that forgiveness

55. It is common in scholarship to say that Luke-Acts lacks a soteriological view of the atonement. See, for example, Conzelmann 1960: 153; Creed 1930: lxxi–lxxii; Vielhauer 1966: 44–45; Franklin 1975: 66; Tyson 1986: 170 (Jesus' death is part of God's plan, but forgiveness is linked with Jesus' resurrection rather than his death); Barrett 1970: 59–60; Karris 1985: 115. Doble (1996: 237) says that in Luke the cross provides "no ransom and effects no forgiveness." Talbert (1976: 389) thinks that Jesus' death fulfills God's covenant but does not provide atonement for sin. Du Plessis (1994: 534–35) maintains that Jesus suffered as a martyr, but his death was not a sacrifice for sins. According to Green (1990: 8–10), salvation is gained through Jesus' exaltation, not his death. Jervell (1996: 98) says that Luke knows the theology of Jesus' sacrificial death (Luke 22:19–20; Acts 20:28) but pushes it to the sidelines. For a helpful survey on the Lukan view of the atonement, see Herrick 1997. Strauss (1995: 353) rightly emphasizes that Luke sees salvation in "the whole Jesus event, including the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation-enthronement."

56. Acts 26:18 suggests that forgiveness is equivalent with sanctification, being set apart in a holy sphere.

57. Bock (1987: 208–9) thinks that Luke does not argue explicitly for Jesus dying as a substitute here, but that Israel thought he was cursed by God, even though he was innocent.

is given on the basis of Jesus' work on the cross and his resurrection/exaltation.

Peter, in summarizing the ministry of Jesus to Cornelius and his friends, calls attention to his death and particularly his resurrection, stressing that he appeared to chosen witnesses who ate with him (Acts 10:39–41). The latter theme fits with Acts, where the resurrection of Jesus functions as a central theme. Luke obviously has compressed Peter's words into a remarkably brief and compact summary (Acts 10:37–43), assuming that readers would fill in what was said from the remainder of Luke and Acts. He does note that Jesus died on a tree, echoing again Deut. 21:23. Peter concludes by teaching that forgiveness of sins is available to those who believe in Jesus' name (Acts 10:43), implying that such forgiveness is granted on the basis of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Paul in his speech in Pisidian Antioch declared that the Scriptures were fulfilled in Jesus' death on a tree (Acts 13:27–29), alluding perhaps to Deut. 21:23.⁵⁸ He proceeded to relate Jesus' resurrection, verifying it by the appearances made to many (Acts 13:30–31). Paul excluded himself from the earliest witnesses, whereas in Acts 10:39–41 Peter included himself among the earliest witnesses. The resurrection of Jesus was in accord with the Scriptures, particularly Ps. 16, to which Peter also appealed in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 13:35–37; cf. 2:25–32).

Immediately after explicating the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul proclaimed that forgiveness of sins is available through Jesus (Acts 13:38). Indeed, he says that "therefore" (*oun*) forgiveness is now granted through Jesus, indicating that cleansing from sin is granted on the basis of Jesus' death and resurrection. We have a remarkably authentic Pauline touch here, for Paul says, "Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38 NIV). Luke does not expand upon the significance of the word "justify" (*dikaioō*) here, and yet we have a hint of what is forthcoming in the Pauline letters. The verse should not be interpreted to say that there were some matters for which the Mosaic law could atone and now Christ's work fills in what could not be forgiven by the Mosaic law.⁵⁹ Rather, Paul argues here that final forgiveness of sins and standing in the right before God could not be accomplished by the Mosaic law.⁶⁰ People become right with God only through believing in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Human beings are declared right before God on the basis of Jesus' work as the crucified and risen Lord. There may be an implica-

58. See Fitzmyer 1998: 337; Barrett 1994: 642.

59. So Vielhauer 1966: 41–42. Barrett (1994: 650–51) offers some criticisms of Vielhauer while maintaining that the latter's view is substantially correct.

60. Rightly Haenchen 1971: 412n4; Fitzmyer 1998: 518–19.

tion here, then, that Jesus' work on the cross replaces OT sacrifices. The latter pointed to him and were fulfilled in him.

There is likely an allusion to Jesus' work on the cross also in Acts 15:11, where salvation is said to be given on the basis of Christ's grace. Salvation here is equivalent to forgiveness of sins, to the cleansing of one's heart (Acts 15:9). Peter did not expatiate on the basis of the forgiveness of sins and the grace received, since he spoke to fellow believers who knew that salvation and cleansing come from Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord. He did emphasize God's grace in opposition to human works, so that the gracious and free character of salvation is underlined.

A particularly striking verse for both Christology and soteriology is Acts 20:28.⁶¹ God obtained the church "with his own blood."⁶² Harris argues that *idiou* here is a substantive and so the verse does not clearly identify Christ as God; rather, the expression refers to the blood of God's own one (i.e., Jesus).⁶³ Harris possibly is correct, but there is no other example of *idios* functioning as a christological title, and the expression could easily be an attributive adjective (cf. Acts 1:25), and so I incline to the interpretation that Paul slides from God to Christ because they are so intertwined in the work of salvation.⁶⁴ The reference to "God's blood" is rather startling, but it fits with what we have seen elsewhere in NT Christology, in that Jesus is both divine and human. The text also establishes that the church is saved or rescued from judgment by Christ's death. The verb *peripoieomai* signifies the saving or acquiring of God's people (cf. Isa. 43:21; Luke 17:33; cf. *peperipoiēsis* in Eph. 1:14; 1 Pet. 2:9), and this context likely refers to obtaining or acquiring because the church is said to be God's. Christ's suffering, then, secures deliverance for the people of God. This verse, then, captures one of the major themes that I trace in this book: Christology is inextricably wedded to soteriology. Christ's death secures forgiveness because his death represents the death of God himself.

61. Barrett (1998: 976–77) may be correct in arguing that Calvin reads his theology into the verse, but it also seems to be the case that Barrett underinterprets what Luke writes here.

62. Some scholars reduce the significance of the verse by claiming that we have an accommodation to Pauline theology (Franklin 1975: 66; Zehnle 1969: 440; Green 1990: 7). Ehrman (1991: 583) says that although the blood of Jesus reminds people of their guilt and thus should lead to repentance, it does not signify a theology of atonement. However, this is scarcely convincing because it fails to take seriously Luke's decision to include it in the story.

63. Harris 1992: 139–41. See also Walton 2000: 96–98.

64. The textual evidence is rather evenly divided between *ekklēsian tou kyriou* and *ekklēsian tou theou*, but the latter is more likely original (so Metzger 1994: 425–26; Harris 1992: 133–37; Walton 2000: 94–95).

Conclusion

The Christology of Acts certainly is not as developed as what we find in the Gospel of John. We must beware, however, of inferring from this that Luke had a simple Christology or that he would have rejected what we find in John's Gospel. If we take seriously Luke's task as a historian, we note that he often relays the speeches given in evangelistic settings. It is not surprising, then, that the theme that Jesus is the Christ and has been exalted as Lord and Christ at his resurrection receives prominence. The evangelistic context would also explain the emphasis on the fulfillment of prophecy and the forgiveness of sins available through Jesus. And yet there are also many indications that Jesus has divine stature, for Jesus is the Lord of all, human beings pray to Jesus, believers are baptized in his name, salvation comes through believing in and turning to the Lord Jesus, and believers call on Jesus for salvation, whereas in the OT text cited Yahweh is the one called upon (Joel 2:31). Luke does not reflect deeply on the ontological dimensions of Christology, but the material contained here fits with early Palestinian Christianity and cannot be dismissed as a low Christology.

It has often been remarked that Luke lacks an in-depth theology of the atonement, and such a judgment can be conceded if he is measured against the fuller statements found in Paul. All of Acts emphasizes that salvation comes through the Lord Jesus Christ and him alone, showing that Luke ties forgiveness of sins to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Luke clearly teaches that human beings are saved not by observing the law but rather by believing in Jesus Christ. The gracious character of salvation is communicated, for forgiveness of sins is obtained through faith and repentance, not by living a noble life. Luke also affirms that justification comes through Jesus, not the law of Moses.⁶⁵ Justification here has a forensic flavor; believers are declared to stand in the right before God by believing instead of by keeping the law of Moses. The death of Jesus secures forgiveness of sins, and forgiveness comes only in Jesus' name. Luke does not explain in detail the basis for forgiveness of sins, but this is not surprising, since the speeches in Acts are evangelistic in nature, and they also represent compressed summaries of what was said. The fundamental point is that forgiveness is secured through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and it is left to other NT writers to provide a more detailed explanation of how this is so.

65. It is instructive that this statement comes from the apostle Paul, and this touch suggests that Luke was a careful historian, for we would expect that a statement on justification would hail from Paul.