

ISRAEL AND THE PLAN OF GOD

Luke's Understanding of the Future of Israel

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I. PRELIMINARIES

Luke 1 and 2 in Current Research. Hans Conzelmann, in developing his analysis of Lukan theology, does not consider Luke 1 and 2, assuming these chapters to be a later addition to the Gospel. However, beginning in modern times with Dibelius, a great deal has been done on this section of Luke.¹ Much of this research has involved investigations into the sources and traditions behind the birth narratives. Intricacy and speculation have been characteristic of this research.² Recently Oliver and Tatum, while accepting the basic conclusions of Conzelmann's work on Luke, have sought to show that Luke 1, 2 fits well into Lukan theology, and thus for internal reasons should be taken as an original part of Luke-Acts.³ Basic to this present study is the assumption that the birth narratives are indeed original, and further, that they form an important part of the composition as a whole.⁴

¹Harold H. Oliver, "The Lukan Birth Stories and the Purpose of Luke-Acts," *NTS* 10 (1963-64), 202-226, gives a very fine and comprehensive summary and discussion of the major work done on the birth narratives since 1932. He mentions especially: Dibelius (1932); Sahlin (1945); Vielhauer (1952); Goulder and Sanderson (1957); Paul Winter, numerous articles (1954-58) and Laurentin (1957).

²Especially the work of Dibelius, Sahlin, Vielhauer and Winter.

³Oliver, *op. cit.*; W. B. Tatum, "The Epoch of Israel: Luke 1, 2 and the Theological Plan of Luke-Acts," *NTS* 13 (1966-67), 184-195.

⁴This assumption is not based on any detailed source or form critical work nor work on backgrounds and traditions. It is hoped that the force of the internal evidence in the work itself will serve to point in the direction of accepting Luke 1, 2.

Description of the Present Investigation. The overall interest of this study is Luke's understanding of the place of Israel in God's plan. The investigation will center around exegetical work on the Magnificat (1:46-56), the Benedictus (1:67-79), and the Simeonian Blessing (2:28-35). An attempt will then be made to trace the themes of these sections regarding Israel as they are advanced and fulfilled in Luke-Acts. Conclusions will then be drawn as to Luke's theological view of Israel. Although the subject must be considered as a whole, stress will be placed on Israel and Luke's view of the Divine in the future (eschatology?).

The study is divided into two major sections. The first considers the text *per se* with attention primarily given to linguistic matters. The second is a broader look at the themes and motifs of these texts as they appear throughout Luke-Acts.

II. THE TEXTS

The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-56)

Variants. The only significant variant in the Magnificat occurs in verse 46. While most of the manuscripts (all extant Greek) read "Mary" as the speaker of this section, half a dozen Latin read "Elizabeth." Since the context and certain internal features favor the reading of "Elizabeth" the variants have been much discussed.⁵ Fortunately, the question is not crucial for our present purposes.

*1:46, 47. My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*⁶ First Samuel 2:1 reads, "My heart exults in the Lord." This is the beginning of the Song of Hannah at the birth of Samuel and has important parallels with the Magnificat as a whole both as to language and context. The language here is almost exactly from Habakkuk 3:18 and/or Isaiah 61:10. Also compare Psalm 35:9. These Old Testament contexts stress a time of God's intervention and visitation in behalf of His people.

⁵See R. Laurentin, *Biblica* 38 (1957), 15-23; B. M. Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, UBS, 1971, 130, 131; A. Harnack, "Das Magnificat der Elizabeth . . ." *Studien zur Geschichte des Neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche*, Berlin, 1931, 62-85.

Harnack felt that originally the Greek simply read "and she said" with no name. Then some added Mary and others Elizabeth; but the context clearly points to Elizabeth.

⁶The English Biblical references are generally the RSV.

1:48. *For he has regarded the low estate (ταπεινώσιν) of his hand-maiden.* This is directly from First Samuel 1:11 and the words of Hannah again. Thus it might be speaking of “barrenness” (i.e., of Elizabeth). This is a common Old Testament theme (see Psalm 113:5-9!). God has shown His favor and saving action to those who are victims of oppression and scoffing. Compare Elizabeth’s statement in 1:25. *All generations will call me blessed.* If barrenness is meant in these verses then the statement of Leah at the birth of Asher in Genesis 30:13 is interesting here.

1:49. *For he who is mighty has done great things for me. And holy is his name.* The theme again is God’s mighty acts on behalf of the weak. Psalm 111:9 reads “He sent redemption to his people, he has commanded his covenant for ever. Holy and terrible is his name!”

1:50. *And his mercy is on those who fear him, from generation to generation.* God’s mercy corresponds to the “great things” of verse 49. See Psalm 103:11, 13, 17 for the phrase “on those who fear him.” This is a common theme in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms. Pride and arrogance are typical of those who don’t know God. This is taken up in verses 51-53.

1:51. *He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.* These verses (51ff.) are written in the aorist tense and can well be translated as past tense in English, stressing the certainty of God’s acts. Psalm 89:10b reads: “Thou didst scatter thy enemies with thy mighty arm.” (See also Psalm 118:15 regarding the “right hand” of the Lord.) Second Samuel 22:28 should also be considered here.

1:52. *He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree.* Sirach 10:14 says “The Lord has cast down the thrones of rulers, and has seated the lowly in their place.” The context is that of faith in God’s rule through magistrates and how the arrogant are ultimately dealt with. Once again First Samuel 2 (verse 7) is very close to the language used here. (See also Psalm 147:6.)

1:53. *He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.* Psalm 107:9 reads “For he satisfies the empty soul, and the hungry he fills with good things” and First Samuel 2:5 says “Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger” and verse 7 — “The Lord makes poor and makes rich.” The language here is very directly connected. See also Psalm 146:7 for the same theme.

1:54. *He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.* This language is from the world of Isaiah. See for example 41:8, 9. Psalm 98:1-3 is especially important here and also with reference to the Benedictus. God has not forsaken His people Israel, but has *acted* in their behalf.

1:55. *As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever.* Micah 7:20 contains a similar thought: “Thou wilt show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as thou hast sworn to our fathers from the days of old.” The thought here goes back to Genesis 17:7, 8 where God gives Abraham the promise of an everlasting covenant and it includes the land as a possession forever. See also Genesis 18:18; 22:17. A similar note occurs in the Benedictus (1:72, 73) and Luke often brings in this idea of fulfillment of the promises to the fathers. This will be taken up in the subsequent discussion of themes.

The Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79)

Variants. The major variants occur in verses 68, 70, 73 and 78. Only the one of verse 78 appears to effect the meaning of the text one way or the other. Witnesses are divided as to whether the verb ἐπισκέπτομαι should be in the future or the aorist tense. Evidence seems slightly to favor the former.⁷

1:68. *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited (ἐπεσκέψατο) and redeemed (ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν) his people.* The first phrase is found exactly in Psalms 41:14 and 72:18. The context is that of praise to God for His mighty acts of intervention on behalf of His people Israel. The verb ἐπισκέπτομαι (or forms thereof) is important in Luke. It is found in Luke 7:16 as a reaction of the people to the raising of the widow’s son at Nain. Jesus says that Israel or Jerusalem is to be destroyed because she did not know the day of her visitation. It is used in Acts 15:14 of God’s action in bringing Cornelius into the church. The key idea is that of intervention by God. The word λύτρωσιν is also significant in Luke. In Luke 2:38 the prophetess Anna, at the birth of Jesus, speaks to all those “who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.” In Luke 24:21 the disciples of Emmaus relate their hope that Jesus was the one “to redeem Israel.” Related passages are: Luke 23:50, 51; 21:28 and Acts 1:6, which will be discussed later. The language of this verse is common in the Old Testament. Psalm 111:9 (LXX): “He sent redemption to his people, he

⁷See comments of Metzger, *op. cit.*

commanded his covenant for ever.” Isaiah 44:21, 22: “Remember these things O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; O Israel you will not be forgotten by me. I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.” The context here is of great praise to God for His mercy. First Maccabees 4:11: “Then all the Gentiles will know that there is one who redeems and saves Israel.” The context here is of battle and a hope that God would act as in days of old—remembering His covenant with the fathers. Psalm 77 is very important in giving the overall atmosphere and context of this kind of language (verse 15, etc.). (See also Psa. Solomon 8:30.) It should be pointed out that the verbs of this verse appear in the aorist tense.

1:69. *And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.* This of course is related to the “visitation” and “redemption” of the previous verse. Psalm 132:17 is the most probable source for this verse. It reads: “There will I cause to spring up a horn to David.” The context is that of a plea to remember David and the promises made to him with regard to the throne over Israel. Of course Luke 1:32, 33 is important here. Psalm 89 provides general background to the Davidic hope.

1:70. *As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.* This theme of fulfillment is one of the dominant ones in Luke-Acts and will be dealt with further.

1:71. *That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us.* This is language of the Exodus and comes from Psalm 106:10: “And he saved them out of the hand of them that hated them, and redeemed (ἐλυτρώσατο) them out of the hand of the enemy.” Zephaniah 3:15 also contains similar language.

1:72, 73. *To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham.* This of course appears in 1:55 as has been noted. The thought is strong throughout Luke—the theme of fulfillment and continuity with the work of God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Psalm 105:8, 9 and 106:45 appear to be the source for this language. See also Leviticus 26:42. Acts 3:25, 26 will be discussed later.

1:74. *To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 1:75—in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.* The aim of such deliverance is for Israel to carry out its function: service (λατρεῖν) in holiness and righteousness. Jeremiah 30:8, 9 gives the sense of these verses: God is to

break off the yoke upon His people so that they may serve God and David their King. If Luke had the Jeremiah passage in mind then we have also a strong Messianic context. Wisdom 9:3 singles out “holiness” and “righteousness” as the two features of God rule.

1:76. *And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways.* Both John and Jesus are said to be “great” (1:15, 32). However, John is here called the “prophet of the Most High” while Jesus is called the “Son of the Most High” (1:32). Malachi 3:1 seems to be alluded to in this verse: “Behold I send my messenger to prepare the way before me . . .” See also the references to John in 1:14-17; 7:24, 25; Acts 13:24, 25; 18:24-19:7. Elsewhere John’s work is referred to in terms of fulfilling both Malachi 4:6 and Isaiah 40:3. He is thus to “turn the hearts” of the people; “to prepare the way” and to “make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

1:77. *To give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.* The terms “salvation” and “forgiveness of sins” are very important in Luke. See for example: Luke 1:69; 2:11; 2:30; 3:6; 19:9; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 4:12; 5:32; 10:43; 13:38; 13:47; 15:11. Isaiah 44:21 has already been noted in connection with verse 1:68 above.

1:78. *Through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us (or: since the dayspring has visited) from on high.* The word ἀνατολή occurs in Jeremiah 23:5 (LXX) in a Messianic context of the raising up of a branch to David who shall execute judgment and justice on the earth. See also Numbers 24:17.

1:79. *To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.* This goes directly to Isaiah 9:1, 2 and 42:7. See also Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47; 26:23. This theme will be discussed more fully below.

Simeon’s Blessing (2:29-35)

2:29. *Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word.* This is introductory and goes back to 2:25, 26. Simeon was expecting the consolation (παράκλησιν) of Israel. It had been revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Christ (τὸν χριστὸν κυρίου).

2:30. *For mine eyes have seen your salvation.* See on 1:77 above. The reference is of course directly to Jesus.

2:31. *Which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples.* This goes back to Isaiah 52:10: “And the Lord shall reveal his holy arm in the

sight of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation that comes from our God.” This is further explained in verse 32.

2:32. *A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.* Isaiah 42:6: “I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the peoples, a light to the nations.” See also Isaiah 49:6, 9. This theme is carried out in Acts as the “word of the Lord” goes to the Gentiles. See Acts 1:8; 11:18; 11:19, 20; 13:44-49; 14:27; 15:16-18; 17:30; 18:5, 6; 26:23.

2:33, 34a. Narrative. And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother:

2:34b. *Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against.* This is a frequent theme in Luke. Note for example: 4:24-29; 7:23— “Blessed is he who takes no offense at me”; 13:6-9; 13:22-30; Acts 4:11; 7:51-53; 18:5, 6; 28:25-28. Jesus is the point of decision for Israel. See 1:52, 53 above—the mighty are to be brought low, the weak exalted. See also Isaiah 8:14, 15 for the background to the type of language used here.

2:35. (And a sword will pierce through your own soul also) *that the thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.* 2:35b completes the thought of 34b above. The theme is of judgment and discernment. This will be taken up in detail below.

III. ISRAEL AND THE PLAN OF GOD

Luke’s understanding of Israel in the plan of God will now be considered under five headings. It is an assumption of this paper that in Luke 1 and 2 the author introduces, as a kind of literary overture, his most important themes which he subsequently develops throughout Luke-Acts. Further, an examination of these chapters clearly shows the author’s great interest in Israel and the Old Testament. The first four sections will be necessary preliminaries for the fifth, which will attempt to say cautiously something about Luke’s view of Israel and the future (eschatologically).

1. He Has Done Great Things

As Luke opens the work one thing is clear: God’s time has come. It is a time of visions, prophecies, fulfillment of prophecy, signs and wonders,

epiphanies and miracles. God is once again acting in behalf of His people as in days of old. References to the Holy Spirit abound in Luke 1 and 2:

1:5—John to be filled with the Spirit from the womb

1:17—He is to work in the spirit and power of Elijah

1:35—The Spirit and power of the Most High upon Mary

1:41—Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit

1:67—Zecharias is filled with the Holy Spirit

2:25—The Spirit comes upon Simeon

2:26—It is revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit . . .

2:27—Inspired by the Spirit, Simeon comes into the temple

The select angel Gabriel appears to Zecharias and strikes him dumb (1:19-23), giving him a message from the very presence of God.⁸ His barren wife Elizabeth is to bear a son. Gabriel also appears to Mary (1:26-38) and she is to be the mother of the Christ. The babe John leaps in the womb in the presence of Mary (1:41). Numerous prophecies are given. Angels appear to shepherds singing and glorifying God (2:8-20). All are expectant, filled with wonder and awe, hope and joy at the mighty acts of God.

This theme is especially clear in the special texts examined in this study. The Magnificat literally breathes this spirit: He who is mighty has done great things; He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud; He has exalted those of low degree; He has filled the hungry; He has helped His servant Israel *as he spoke* to the fathers. Zechariah says much the same: Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; He has visited and redeemed His people *et al.*

The contexts as a whole seem to point to this same motif in almost a haggadic manner. Elizabeth, like Hannah of old, bears a child in her old age. Hannah lived in a time when visions from God were rare (1 Samuel 3:1) but with the birth of Samuel God once more made His will known and acted in behalf of His people. Samuel, the prophet of the Lord, was the one to anoint Saul and David. The striking similarities between the Magnificat and Hannah’s Song (1 Samuel 2:1-10) have been noted previously. Other parallels with Old Testament stories can be pointed out.⁹

⁸In Jewish lore Gabriel was one of four select angels who were in the presence of God. Enoch 40:9 gives their roles. Gabriel is over all “the powers.” In Daniel (8:16; 9:21) he is the one who brings visions and revelations according to the will of God. See Tobit 12:15. He is of course also sent to Mary-Luke 1:28.

⁹See M. D. Goulder and M. L. Sanderson, “St. Luke’s Genesis,” *JTS* n.s. 8 (1957), 12-30. They see Luke 1 and 2 as a kind of Haggadah on the book of Genesis. See also

Of course it seems clear that Luke's *general* view of God intervening in the world is a very real and objective one. He is at home in the world of the Old Testament or even 2 Maccabees with regard to revelations, visions, signs, and wonders. But this is not to say that he intends the births of John and Jesus as "normative" unfoldings of God's plan. He clearly recognizes that there are periods and epochs in God's authority when men wait and expect fulfillment of promises. But in Luke 1 and 2 we are not in such a time. Rather it is a time for the mighty acts of God to be literally poured out in the affairs of men. The time he tells us of is unique (Acts 2:22; 10:38) and God is "doing great things" in fulfillment of his plan.

This motif of course continues throughout the ministry of Jesus and into the book of Acts. Rather than decreasing, the miraculous activity of God increases.¹⁰ The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost empowers the Church ever more to carry out God's work as God bears witness with signs and wonders (Acts 4:30). There is no letting down of this element as the history of the Church progresses. Luke views the period from John as an epoch in which "all systems are go" and men wait with expectation as God's plan unfolds.

2. As Spoken by the Prophets

This intervening activity of God is seen by Luke in strict continuity with the Old Testament. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is acting according to His plan (βουλή) in fulfillment of what has been spoken by the prophets from of old. The whole setting of the birth narratives stresses this. Zechariah and Elizabeth are "both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (1:7). Zechariah is a priest and Elizabeth a daughter of Aaron.¹¹ As Malachi 4:4 instructs to those waiting for "Elijah" they are remembering the Law of Moses. Simeon is "righteous and devout" and Anna "did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day" (2:25, 37). When God acts He does not go to the Gentiles but to Jerusalem, to the temple, and reveals His plan to the priest of God.

the Old Testament stories of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 17, 18) and Manoah and his wife (Judges 13).

¹⁰A typical example is Peter's shadow healing those he passed (Acts 5:15, 16) and cloths that Paul had touched used for healing (19:11, 12). Right up to the end of Acts the account is full of visions, exorcisms, earthquakes, rescues, healings, etc.

¹¹See Moore, *Judaism II*, 359. The family is "pedigreed" and qualified genealogically. See also Exodus 6:23 for Elizabeth's name.

Throughout Luke 1 and 2 there is stress on the following of the Torah. The child John is to be separated to the Lord as a Nazarite (1:15); he is circumcised on the 8th day as the law commanded (1:59); Jesus too is circumcised on the 8th day (2:21); his parents fulfill all the Torah rituals regarding childbirth (2:22-24) and Luke stresses that only after this did they leave Jerusalem (2:39). Jesus belongs to a family which goes up year by year to the festivals (2:41). It is as if one might turn from Malachi 4 (the last of the prophets) right to Luke's Gospel without a break. Everything is "on track."¹²

God is seen to be acting in fulfillment of His promises and covenant with Israel. Jesus is to reign on "David's throne" over the "house of Jacob" forever (1:32, 33). This thought of course goes back to a whole series of prophecies. God has helped His servant Israel "as he spoke to our fathers" (1:55). He has acted to remember "his holy covenant which he swore to our father Abraham" (1:73). The expectations of those in Jerusalem are in terms of Israel. Simeon is waiting for the "Lord's Christ" and the "consolation of Israel" (2:25). Anna speaks to those expecting the "redemption of Jerusalem" (2:38). The men of Emmaus are hoping for the "redemption of Israel" (24:21). The disciples after the resurrection are concerned about the "restoration of the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6). Jesus is raised to sit on David's throne and "all the house of Israel" is to know this (Acts 2:30, 36). In Peter's sermon of Acts 3 he addresses the "men of Israel" about the God "of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" and stresses that all has been fulfilled according to the mouth of the holy prophets (3:12-26). Paul is bound for the "hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20; cf. 26:6).

This element of fulfillment is especially dominant in dealing with the Passion of the Messiah. See for example Luke 18:31-34; 24:45, 46 and Acts 2:23; 3:17, 18. All has been accomplished according to the will and plan of God as He has spoken to the prophets.¹³

The texts examined in section 2 of this paper are literally full of Old Testament language (LXX). A careful reading of the sources behind these texts will show in a very striking manner how greatly Luke is depending on ideas from the Psalms and the Prophets. This is especially true with regard to sections such as Psalms 89-118 which have a strong emphasis

¹²This will be developed below.

¹³See Conzelmann, *Theology of St. Luke*, 151-155; 162, 167.

on God's divine acts in behalf of His people and the great future hopes of redemption, salvation, deliverance, and peace on earth. One must absorb the atmosphere and flavor of such passages in order to catch the spirit of what Luke is saying in chapters 1 and 2. The language fairly bursts with poetry and rhythm.

Even Luke's interest in "the nations" or the Gentile mission is not to be viewed in disassociation with his understanding of God's unfolding plan regarding Israel. Acts 13:47 and 15:16-18 make this clear. It is to the promises of prophets such as Isaiah that he turns for understanding.

To summarize: Luke sees the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob acting according to His predetermined plan in the life of Jesus and the mission of the Church. He expresses his understanding in Old Testament language and with Old Testament themes. He sees all that has happened and is happening as a fulfillment of the ongoing history of Israel, as spoken by all the prophets.

3. The Rise and Fall of Many in Israel

Luke views the ministry of Jesus (and the work of John) as a time of judgment and decision for national Israel. John is sent to "prepare a people for the Lord." The "ax is laid at the root of the tree" (3:9) and for one to say "We have Abraham as our father" is not enough (3:8). God rather demands repentance and offers His mercy and forgiveness to those who turn (3:3 cf. 1:76, 77). A selection process is thus begun. Those who reject John have rejected the "purpose (βουλήν) of God for themselves" (7:29) and those who heed "justify God." They are in line with His purposes and plan as it is being fulfilled. The law and the prophets are until John—but since then God's visitation has come upon His people (7:16) and men must react. Their choice shows where they stand. Men either "justify God" or reject His ongoing βουλή.

Following the prophecy of Simeon previously noted (2:34), Luke develops this vital theme all through his work. Jesus is rejected at Nazareth (4:24-30) and makes the point that not *all* in Israel's past history have been blessed by God's salvation, using the example of Elijah and the widow and Naaman. In Luke 7:23 Jesus blesses those who "take no offense at me." He is set (intended, purposed) as a sign to be spoken against. The things of God are "hidden" from the wise and understanding and revealed to those "to whom the Son chooses to reveal" (10:22). This theme can be followed through the book of Acts. "The last will be first and the first will be last" (13:30). Jesus says to some of his own countrymen:

"You will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out" (13:28). The way is narrow (13:24) and few will be saved. Those first invited to the banquet will not enter (14:15-24). As seen previously in the Magnificat: "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich has he sent away empty" and "he has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree."

In the book of Acts this theme is further developed with slight alteration. Time-wise the Messiah is now proclaimed as exalted, having already suffered, died, and been raised to fulfill the Scriptures. This message is proclaimed and remission of sins is offered to those who repent and believe. The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner (4:11). A decision is once more demanded of Israel. Jesus is the Messiah appointed for *them* (Acts 3:20, 26) and the message goes to Israel first (3:26; 5:31; 13:23, 46). They are warned by Paul: "Beware . . . you scoffers, and wonder and perish; for I do a deed in your days, a deed you will never believe, if one declares it to you" (13:41). Many reject the word of God but those "ordained to eternal life" believe (13:48). God opens hearts (16:14) and calls men to Him (2:39; 18:10).

With regard to Israel as a nation, Jesus foretells of her destruction. All who will not repent are to perish (Luke 13:1-3). Jesus weeps over the city of Jerusalem and sees the time when armies will destroy her people with great cruelty, not one stone being left upon another. The reason given: "Because you did not know the time of your visitation" (19:41-44). Jerusalem is the one who "kills the prophets and stones those sent by God to her" even though God offers her mercy (13:34, 35). Her house is become desolate. She has rejected God's message. The parable of Luke 20:9-18 is very important in this regard. The tenants of the vineyard *always* reject the owner's servants, finally killing even his beloved son. What does the owner do? He destroys those tenants and gives the vineyard to others. Luke concludes with the quotation about the rejected stone. It is in Luke 21 that we have a well laid out scheme of things regarding the nation of Israel and especially Jerusalem and the temple. Verses 20-24: Jerusalem is to be destroyed, the people led captive into all nations (to fulfill all that is written), and Jerusalem will be trodden down by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (i.e., until God's time).

In the book of Acts, relating events before 70 A.D., this rejection of God's message by Israel is underscored. God's dealings (in the line of Old

Testament history) take new turns as He reveals His will. Acts 6:8-7:60 is very important in this regard. The temple of Solomon (and Herod) is to be destroyed (for the Most High does not dwell in houses) and national Israel is “stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears” always resisting God’s unfolding plan, killing all the prophets and even the “Righteous One” himself! Those who received the law did not keep it. As God begins to open the way for the Gentile mission (a *major* theme of Acts) these ideas become clearer and clearer. National Israel has rejected the “word of God” and in fulfillment of God’s plan and as was prophesied God calls out a “new” people which includes Gentiles. There is a sense in which the Church is seen as the “true Judaism” and certainly the *heir* of Old Testament history.¹⁴ The “train” of God’s “Way” pulls out of the station and those who will not board are simply left behind. Acts 13 and the events at Antioch are crucial in this regard, followed by the decisions of Acts 15 and the new understanding of the mission.

It seems that at least one major purpose of Luke-Acts is to deal with the crisis of the holocaust of A.D. 70. Luke sees all in the plan and will of God. There is no break in the long line of Old Testament history with Jerusalem’s destruction and the rejection of the Messiah by many Jews. All of this was foretold by Jesus and the prophets of old. There is strict continuity and all that has happened can even be spoken of as “remembering the covenant” promised to Abraham and the “redemption” of Israel. Stress is placed on the fact that God *has* raised up a “horn to David” and that he was rejected as the prophets foretold. The question of the hour is this: In view of all that has taken place—what has happened to the whole Old Testament heritage, the mighty acts of Yahweh, the great promises of the Psalms and Prophets? Luke gives an answer. All is moving “right on schedule.” Even Israel’s desolation is only for a time and God is still working out his great purposes which will not fail.

Conzelmann says of this whole subject:

On the other hand there is at the same time a reference to the cutting of the Jews from redemptive history. We can say that the Jews are now called to make good their claim to be ‘Israel.’ If they fail to do this, then they become ‘the Jews.’¹⁵

¹⁴Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, 145-148.

¹⁵Conzelmann, *ibid.*, 145.

4. Repentance and Remission of Sins

One might well raise the question: in view of Luke’s understanding of the desolation of national Israel, what then is the meaning and purpose of the Church? What is its mission? How is this stage of God’s redemptive history to move forward?

Jesus declared in Luke 24:47 that “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem.” The apostles later declare that God has exalted Jesus as Leader and Savior “to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins.” In Acts 2:38 and 3:19 the people are told to repent so they might be forgiven their sins. In Acts 10:43 Peter tells the house of Cornelius that whoever believes on Jesus “receives remission of sins through his name.” Paul concludes his message in the synagogue at Antioch by declaring, “that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.” The stress here is not the Pauline notion of “atonement” or “payment of guilt” but rather authorization. By the authority of Jesus forgiveness is proclaimed. He is the one chosen and exalted by God, and the one to judge the world.

Even in the Gospel there is great emphasis on forgiveness of sins and sinners being received: 7:36-56; 15:1-32; 18:9-14; 19:1-10 *et al.* There is a stress on repentance, salvation is spoken of, and the need of laborers in the “harvest.”

The Church then, filled and empowered with the Holy Spirit, witnessing with word, sign, and wonder to what God has done in exalting Jesus as Savior and Judge, goes forth to preach repentance and remission of sins to all nations. The task is open-ended. The Parousia is expected, though of course there is a recognition of passing time, such things as the destruction of Jerusalem coming and going, and so forth. But God’s manifestations of power are all around as He acts, leads, rescues, His true people.

5. Restoring the Kingdom to Israel

The final question now remains: What is Luke’s expectation as to the future of Israel—either in history or beyond the time of Parousia (i.e., ‘the age to come’)? Is the Church simply to go on; somewhat settled in the world; preaching to the nations? Or does Luke foresee a fulfillment of the “hope of Israel” beyond the mission of the Church? The interest here is not in physical Israel *per se* (i.e., a literal descendant of Jacob) but rather in the many great promises made nationally to God’s people in the Psalms and the Prophets. God’s Church is made up of Jew and Gentile and

together they make up the “people of God” or “Israel” in the sense of fulfilling the Old Testament heritage.

It is the conclusion of this study that Luke sees the exaltation of Jesus as the Messiah and the preaching of repentance and remission of sins to the nations before the Parousia as “only the beginning” of what God has begun to do.

Luke of course recognizes the hope of the Parousia and of a resurrection of the just and the wicked.¹⁶ He is expecting an “age to come” in which men will receive “eternal life” (Luke 18:30) and existence will be somehow qualitatively different (Luke 20:34-38) with a resurrected body. Even though men at death are in some way rewarded or punished (if we are to give weight to Luke 16:19-31) he believes in “resurrection, angel and spirit.”

In the Magnificat and the Benedictus it has been noted that Luke enters into a whole atmosphere of Old Testament (LXX) hope of fulfillment. The very texts he quotes shows that his view of the future, and what God has begun to do in Jesus, is cosmic in scope. A few selected quotations from this “world” will here suffice:

It will come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established . . . and all the nations shall flow to it . . . He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide between many peoples . . . nation shall not lift up sword against nation (Isaiah 2:1-4).

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse. . . the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid . . . they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea . . . in that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek (Isaiah 11).

Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! . . . The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies . . . I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it . . . I will make you renowned and praised among all the people of the earth, when I restore your fortunes (Zech. 3:14-20).

I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land which I have given them. This follows Amos 9:11, 12 which is quoted in Acts 15:16, 17.

O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done a marvelous thing! His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory. . . . He has

¹⁶Luke 9:25-27; 12:35-40; 14:14; 17:22-37; 21:25-28, 34-36; Acts 1:11; 3:20, 21; 10:42; 17:31 and 24:15.

remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth (Psalm 98:1-4).

It is important that one not impose a modern view of such passages upon Luke. He was very at home in this kind of thinking. There is no evidence that he “spiritualized” these themes. He had great expectations as to God’s marvelous dealings in the future. The Magnificat and the Benedictus give one a small taste of this hope.

Acts 3:19-21 is an important passage in this regard. The heavens are to receive the Christ “until the time for establishing (χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως) all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.” This same period is also called “times of refreshing” (καιρὸ ἀναψύξεως).¹⁷ The structure of this passage is interesting. Men are to repent of sins (i.e., mission of Church) *so that* these times will come. The Christ must (δεῖ) stay in the heavens until the right time. This is related to Acts 1:6, 7. The disciples are concerned about the “restoration (ἀποκαθιστάνεις) of the Kingdom of God to Israel.” They are not rebuked for this hope, but rather told that the “times and seasons” (χρόνους ἢ καιρούς) are in God’s hands and for the present they (i.e., the Church) are to be witnesses in all the earth. Luke is then concerned with the question of the restoration of Israel and the full establishment of God’s plan for Israel as foretold in the Old Testament. But he also has his answer. One is not to speculate on the “when” for that is in the will and plan of God. What is clear is that the Christ is at the right hand of God, *ready* to act at the right time, and that the Church has its mission of witness to perform—preaching repentance and remission of sins to all nations. In general Luke sees the time of the Church as a time of suffering and persecution, to be relieved in the “age to come.”¹⁸

As to the exact nature of Luke’s expectations little can be said. To many moderns eschatology is seen as non-historical and non-empirical. Yet for Luke it can be empirical and “in this world.” The Divine is present as prophecies are fulfilled and God’s plan is carried out. This can be very objective in nature. There are indications that Luke expected the nature of the “age to come” still to be related to history. Is it possible that in

¹⁷See TDNT article by Oepke on ἀποκαθίστημι.

¹⁸Luke 6:24-26 (note temporal terms); 8:13-15; 9:23, 24; 12:8-12, 13-21; 14:25-33; 18:1-8; Acts 14:22.

Luke's mind the time to come (after even the Parousia) was very much "in this world" yet with redemptive changes in man and nature. For example, he can speak of many coming from east and west and sitting down at table with Abraham and all the prophets (Luke 13:28, 29). He is also able to think of the twelve apostles in some way "sitting on twelve thrones ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel." Is it possible that he would be more at home in the thinking of say Zechariah 14 than modern thinking on eschatology? Also, does Luke 21:24 with its prediction regarding Jerusalem's desolation "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" look beyond such a time? It is interesting to note how the terms redemption; Israel; Kingdom of God; Jerusalem; and the Parousia are all connected together in various passages: Luke 2:38; 21:28; 23:50, 51; 24:21; Acts 1:6, 7.

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The following is a list of major works used. The nature of the study demanded that most of my work be limited to the texts themselves. Secondary works were very limited.

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