

THE APOCALYPTIC *LOGOS* OF LUKE IN ACTS OF APOSTLES

Apocalyptic language is a common feature in many of the world's religions.¹ This is true especially for belief systems like Judaism and Christianity that have a strong teleological orientation.² Judeo-Christian thought, with its creation beginning, its toward-an-end-time linear or chronological progression, and its cataclysmic ending, operates in an ideological milieu that is comfortable with and even demands apocalyptic language.³ In some measure, most books of the Hebrew Bible and all books of the Christian New Testament include language and themes that hint at, parallel, and/or derive from what could be called thoroughgoing apocalyptic rhetoric or

¹See Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (2nd ed.; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults and Millennial Beliefs Throughout the Ages* (London, UK: Hutchinson, 1999). The eclectic *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, edited by Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), surveys a wide range of apocalyptic manifestations and meanings, religious and secular, in their modern contexts. See too Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²See Frank Kermode's "Millennium and Apocalypse" and Norman Cohn's "Biblical Origins of the Apocalyptic Tradition" in *The Apocalypse and the Shape of Things to Come*, edited by Frances Carey (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1999); also Frederic J. Baumgartner, *Longing for the End: A History of Millennialism in Western Civilization* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Paolo Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and its History*, translated by William J. Short, *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 20*, edited by James H. Charlesworth and Lester L. Grabbe (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

³For a good overview of apocalyptic's various historical developments, primarily in this Judeo-Christian context, consult *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, edited by Bernard J. McGinn, John J. Collins, and Stephen J. Stein (New York, NY: Continuum, 2003).

end-of-the-world descriptions of catastrophic, cosmic upheaval.⁴ That Luke, a companion of Paul of Tarsus and an early Christian physician and writer, uses apocalyptic language in his Acts of Apostles should be no surprise.

Luke writes his second *logos*⁵ to Theophilus about Acts of Apostles and relates to his benefactor⁶ how Christianity spread throughout the Roman empire by the power of the Holy

⁴I have limited the scope of apocalyptic for this brief paper, and I suppose it is arbitrary to label teleological, end-of-the-world ideas and language as "thoroughgoing apocalyptic rhetoric." It would be a useful study for someone to examine apocalyptic literature, biblical and otherwise, for any sense of hierarchy or priority in its themes. For a helpful summary of apocalyptic literature, see Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972) and especially his chapter entitled, "Characteristics of Apocalyptic," 34-67; also D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, 200 BC-AD 100* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1964) and his chapter on "Characteristics of the Apocalyptic Writings," 104-139. For a brief overview of some parameters for apocalyptic language, see David W Fletcher, "Introduction," *Apocalyptic Rhetoric in the Old Southwest* (Doctor of Arts Dissertation; Murfreesboro, TN: Middle Tennessee State University, 2007), 1-20. See too Sacchi's critique of the idea of apocalyptic as a modern construct, *Jewish Apocalyptic and its History*, 23-26. For distinctions between "eschatology" and "apocalyptic," note Oscar Cullman, *Salvation In History*, translated by Sidney G. Sowers (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1967), 78-83.

⁵The Greek *logos* conveys various meanings that depend on syntax and context. Danker gives the nuance of *logos* in this introductory setting as "extended literary unit designed for vocalization, **story**, **book**." Frederick William Danker, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 217. English translations vary on how they translate, for example, "treatise" (*Tyndale's New Testament; King James Version, 1611 Edition; American Standard Version*), "account" (*New King James Bible, New Testament; New American Standard Bible*), "narrative" (Alexander Campbell, *The Living Oracles*), "book" (Richmond Lattimore, *The New Testament; New International Version; English Standard Version; New Living Translation; God's Word Translation*), "scroll" (*Common English Bible*). Luke presumably meant to highlight "Acts of Apostles" as his sequel to Theophilus, since he refers to his Gospel as "the first book" (*ton men proton logon*, Acts 1.1).

⁶See John M. Court, *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2007), 356.

Spirit.⁷ Luke keynotes this account with the words from Jesus to his apostles before his ascension from Jerusalem, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (1.8; compare Luke 24.46f.).⁸ Luke proceeds to tell Theophilus about the early history of the Christian movement and the spread of “the kingdom of God” in Jerusalem (1.1–8.3), in Samaria and the coastal regions (8.4–11.18), in Antioch and Asia Minor (11.19–15.35), in lands around the Aegean Sea (15.36–19.20), and from Jerusalem to Rome (19.21–28.31).⁹ He relates

⁷For emphasis on “the divine *dynamis* [‘power’]” as an important theme in Acts, see Luke Timothy Johnson’s “New Testament Christianity as Participation in Divine Benefits” in *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity*, The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library, general editor, John J. Collins (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 150-152.

⁸Greek transliterations and English translations, unless noted otherwise, are from *The Greek-English New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012) and based on *Nestle-Aland, Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Revised Edition, edited by Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012) and *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

⁹Compare the outline in Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 193ff.; Acts 1–7, The Earliest Days of the Church; Acts 8–12, Salvation for Both Jew and Gentile; Acts 13–28, The Light of Christ to the Ends of the Earth.

The word “history” (Greek *historia*) never is used by Luke in Acts and, in its modern sense, may not have been intended by Luke for his narrative. The use of *historeo* (“get to know, **meet**” according to Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 179), in the sense of empirical, personal inquiry, is used only one time in the New Testament at Galatians 1.18 (“to become acquainted with,” Campbell, *The Living Oracles*; “to learn to know,” Lattimore, *The New Testament*). In his 1955 Gifford Lecture at the University of Edinburgh on “The Understanding of History from the Standpoint of Eschatology,” Rudolf Bultmann concludes, “In early Christianity history is swallowed up in eschatology. The early Christian community understands itself not as a historical but as an eschatological phenomenon.” See his *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 37. Compare emphasis on Acts as “religious . . . salvation history” in Court, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 3-4. For the modern, historical critical perspective, see “Luke the Historian Defended,” in W. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 136-163.

this story of early Christianity by emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit, the work of Peter and Paul,¹⁰ and the geographical outreach of “the kingdom of God.”¹¹

As Jewish believers, the “chosen” (1.2) of Jesus had reason to quiz their Lord about the “time” to “restore the kingdom to Israel” (1.6). As those who had “accompanied” the Lord Jesus “beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up” (1.22), they had good reason to replace the fallen Judas who had been “numbered” and had been “allotted his share” in “this ministry” (1.17). They knew “the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David” (1.16). They believed the Psalm pointed to their situation, their time, when David wrote, “Let another take his office” (1.20; compare Psalm 109.8). Peter, as spokesman, guided the gathering of about 120 brothers to choose between Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias. They did so, as Peter states, because “one of these men must become with us a

¹⁰On the view that Acts in its final canonical redaction displays a “harmonizing tendency” by minimizing the conflict between “the Jerusalem authorities and Paul,” see David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 80-85. See as well Daniel R. Schwartz, “Paul in the Canonical Book of Acts,” *The Writings of St. Paul: A Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Wayne A. Meeks and John T. Fitzgerald (2nd ed.; New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2007), 187-198.

¹¹The word “kingdom” (Greek *basileia*) occurs over forty times in Luke’s Gospel but only eight times in his Acts of Apostles (1.3, 6; 8.12; 14.22; 19.8; 20.25; 28.23, 31). For this and other lexical data, see W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, eds., *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*, 5th edition revised by H. K. Moulton (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1978).

witness to his [the Lord Jesus’] resurrection” (1.21, 23).¹² In this manner, from what was understood to be divine necessity, Matthias was “numbered with the eleven apostles” in “this ministry and apostleship” in place of the fallen Judas (1.25, 26).

From the outset, Luke thereby makes a significant connection between the work of the Holy Spirit among God’s chosen in days past and the work of the Holy Spirit among God’s chosen in the present time. This “unveiling” or “revealing” of the work of God’s Spirit from the time of David to the time of the apostles, an apocalyptic word of Luke in Acts, conforms to the consistent tradition of early believers—the Evangelists, Peter the Apostle, Paul the Apostle, the prophets—about their faith and their hope. In characteristic apocalyptic ideas, they believed they stood “in the last days” when God’s Spirit would be poured out “on all flesh.” They believed “those days” would be a time of prophesy, of dreams and visions by young men, old men, sons and daughters, male servants and female servants (2.17-18). They trusted, according to “what was uttered through the prophet Joel” (2.16; see Joel 3.1-5), that God would “show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke.” And they confessed, “The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (2.19-21). Luke fittingly opens his *logos*, and

¹²On Luke’s use of *dei* (“it is necessary”), see R. J. Knowling, “The Acts of the Apostles,” *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll, Volume Two (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 63. Knowling states that the verb “expresses a divine necessity and is used by St. Peter here . . . of the events connected with and following upon the Passion.” Danker notes, “The basic idea is that circumstances or conditions, expressed or implied, determine or set expectations for an outcome, event, or performance” (*Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 85). Peter’s juxtaposition of *edei* . . . *dei* (1.16, 21) in his speech highlights testimony of Scripture, its fulfillment, and Matthias’ appointment as requisite and essential.

emphasizes his keynote theme about the worldwide witness of the apostles through the power of the Holy Spirit (see 1.8), with this quotation of Joel's cataclysmic, end-of-the-world prophecy.

As Brian Daley indicates, "The first Christians believed the end was near, almost certainly, and they hoped for a radically better life for themselves, because they believed Jesus had risen from the dead, and because they were convinced that the community's new experience of the charisms [gifts] of the Spirit was a first taste of the Kingdom of God."¹³

Luke draws inspiration for this apocalyptic emphasis from the prophet Joel, a relatively obscure and otherwise unknown figure among the Hebrew prophets. While the namesake for this "son of Pethuel" (Joel 1.1) is not rare in the Old Testament, this Joel, meaning "Yahweh ('the Lord') is God," cannot be identified with any certainty.¹⁴ Nothing is known of the circumstances connected with Joel's life, though a few things about Joel may be derived from his prophecy

¹³Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (1991; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 3. For a brief treatment of the contrast between supernatural versus human intervention in the realization of the divine, eschatological will, see Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: The Search for Meaning* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 91-94.

¹⁴Twelve other men with the name Joel are mentioned in Scripture: (1) the oldest son of Samuel and father of Heman the singer (1 Samuel 8.2; 1 Chronicles 6.33); (2) an ancestor of Samuel (1 Chronicles 6.36); (3) a descendant of Simeon (1 Chronicles 4.35); (4) the father of Shemaiah and a descendant of Reuben (1 Chronicles 5.4, 8); (5) a chief and descendant of Gad (1 Chronicles 5.12); (6) a son of Izrahiah and a descendant of Issachar (1 Chronicles 7.3); (7) the brother of Nathan and one of David's "mighty men" (1 Chronicles 11.38); (8) a Levite and a prince of the sons of Gershom (1 Chronicles 15.7; 23.8; 26.22); (9) a son of Pedaiiah and a chief of the half-tribe of Manasseh (1 Chronicles 27.20); (10) a Levite of the sons of Kohath (2 Chronicles 29.12); (11) a son of Nebo who married a foreign woman (Ezra 10.43); and (12) the son of Zichri and an overseer from the tribe of Benjamin (Nehemiah 11.9). None can be linked to the prophet, and traditional legends from non-biblical sources (i.e., that Joel was from Reuben, according to pseudo-Epiphanius) remain unsubstantiated. See "Joel" in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906), online at: www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8702-joel, accessed January 30, 2015.

itself. He was a Judean with a heart for "the temple, Jerusalem and Judah . . . the three concentric circles of his prophetic concern."¹⁵ He perhaps lived in Jerusalem or nearby, since he speaks repeatedly of Zion (2.1, 15, 32; 3.16, 17, 21) and Judah and Jerusalem (2.32; 3.1, 16, 17, 18, 20).¹⁶ And Joel, a "temple prophet,"¹⁷ was familiar with the temple, its rituals, and the priesthood and its duties (1.9, 13, 14, 16; 2.14, 17; 3.18). But as is fitting for a prophet of God with an apocalyptic message,¹⁸ Joel's life remains a mystery, an obscure but persuasive voice proclaiming judgment and salvation associated with "the day of the Lord" (1.15; 2.1-2, 11, 31; 3.14), a day accompanied by an unusual locust plague (1.4ff.; 2.3ff.; 2.25), the disruption of

¹⁵Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, general editor, Roland K. Harrison (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 31.

¹⁶See Alexander Francis Kirkpatrick, *The Doctrine of the Prophets* (3rd ed.; London, UK: MacMillan, 1912), 46-47.

¹⁷Arvid S. Kapelrud, according to John A. Thompson, "Introduction to Joel," *The Interpreter's Bible*, edited by George Arthur Buttrick, Volume VI (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962), 729.

¹⁸See the comments in Victor H. Matthews and James C. Moyer, *The Old Testament: Text and Context* (2nd ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 232.

heavenly bodies (2.2, 10, 30-31; 3.15-16), and the lack of any definitive context. Joel's elusive person and his message typify the ambiguity of apocalyptic language and its lack of specificity.¹⁹

But one thing from Joel's pronouncement is crystal clear—the work of Yahweh ("the Lord") to judge an unrepentant Judah (1.5, 11, 13) and the nations that have oppressed the Lord's people, the Lord's heritage (3.2-3). For Judah, he sends "the cutting locust . . . the swarming locust . . . the hopping locust . . . the destroying locust" (1.4), "a nation . . . fire . . . and flame . . . a great and powerful people . . . a powerful army . . . his army" (1.6, 19; 2.2, 3, 5, 11, 25).²⁰ For the nations, he will gather them to the Valley of Jehoshaphat for judgment, and he will "sit to

¹⁹Scholars have no consensus about the date of Joel but generally suggest very early (before 800 B.C.), just prior to Jerusalem's fall in 586 B.C., or very late (after 500 B.C.). See "Joel: Introduction," *New International Version, Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible*, general editor Richard L. Pratt, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 1425; Andrew Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 596-597; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, translated by Peter R. Ackroyd (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1965), 394-395; Marco Treves, "The Date of Joel," *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 7, Fasc. 2 (April 1957): 149-156; F. R. Stephenson, "The Date of the Book of Joel," *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 19, Fasc. 2 (April 1969): 224-229.

Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London, UK: Adam and Charles Black, 1952), 575-576, assigns a date around 350 B.C. but argues mostly from absence of evidence. Compare the arguments for a postexilic date from Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 368ff.; and Matthews and Moyer, *The Old Testament: Text and Context*, 231.

The historical allusions in chapter 3 (i.e., the Valley of Jehoshaphat, vv. 2, 12; Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, v. 4; the Greeks, v. 6; the Sabeans, v. 8; Egypt and Edom, v. 19) are not precise enough to determine a definite date. See comments by John J. Collins, "From Prophecy to Apocalypticism: The Expectation of the End," *Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, edited by McGinn, et al., 65-66.

²⁰On the locusts in Joel, see Ovid R. Sellers, "Stages of Locust in Joel," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (January 1936): 81-85; John A. Thompson, "Joel's Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (January 1955): 52-55; Pablo R. Andinach, "The Locusts in the Message of Joel," *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 42, Fasc. 4 (October 1992): 433-441; and Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "Joel's Locust Plague in Light of Sargon II's Hymn to Nanaya," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 112, No. 4 (Winter 1993): 597-603.

judge all the surrounding nations" (3.2, 12).²¹ And, according to Joel, the work of Yahweh ("the Lord") to be "gracious and merciful" to those who "return to the Lord" is both certain and sure (2.12ff.). The Lord who is "jealous for his land" and has "pity on his people" (2.18), the Lord who is "in the midst of Israel" will never again let his people "be put to shame" (2.27). The Lord will "restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem" so that "Jerusalem will be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it" (3.1, 17). "In that day," according to Joel,

the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the streambeds of Judah
shall flow with water;
and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord
and water the Valley of Shittim.

Egypt shall become a desolation
and Edom a desolate wilderness,
for the violence done to the people of Judah,
because they have shed innocent blood in their land.

But Judah shall be inhabited forever,
and Jerusalem to all generations.

²¹ Avraham Negev, ed., *The Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land* (rev. ed.; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 193, notes the uncertainty of the exact location of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, i.e., Kidron Valley, Hinnom Valley, or Ziz and Berachah Valley. Compare Nick Inman and Ferdie McDonald, eds., "Valley of Jehoshaphat," *Eyewitness Travel: Jerusalem and the Holy Land* (rev. ed.; London, UK: Dorling Kindersley, 2007), 115; and Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Tombs in the Valleys [of Jerusalem]," *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700* (5th rev. ed.; Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 133ff.

See too Lewis Bayles Paton, "Jerusalem in Bible Times: II. The Valleys of Ancient Jerusalem," *The Biblical World*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (February 1907): 82, 86-96; and George A. Barton, "The Jerusalem of David and Solomon," *The Biblical World*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (July 1903): 2, 8-21. On the association of the Valley of Jehoshaphat with judgment, see John M. P. Smith, "The Day of Yahweh," *The American Journal of Theology*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (July 1901): 505-533; James A. Montgomery, "The Holy City and Gehenna," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (1908): 24-47; Charles C. Torrey, "Armageddon," *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (July 1938): 237-248.

I will avenge their blood,
blood I have not avenged,
for the Lord dwells in Zion."²²

This promise the Lord himself "roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake" (3.16).²³

This work of Yahweh ("the Lord") for judgment and restoration, an apocalyptic work to be sure,²⁴ is accompanied with signs, wonders, and events of cosmic upheaval. The day of the Lord is "a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (2.2). Before the Lord's judging army, his swarms of locust, "the earth quakes . . . the heavens tremble . . . the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining" (2.10; cf. 2.30-31). When the Lord roars his judgment from Zion and announces his vengeance from Jerusalem, "the heavens and the earth quake" (3.16). Indeed, as Joel pronounces, in light of Yahweh's ("the Lord's") judgment but his slowness to anger and his boundless, steadfast love (2.13), multitudes upon multitudes are "in the valley of decision . . . for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of

²²Joel 3.18-21, the ending of the book. Chisholm, "Payback Time (3.1-21)," *Handbook on the Prophets*, 375-377, argues for gradual fulfillment of Joel's prophecy over the course of many years (i.e., not "a literal day of judgment . . . these nations and peoples passed from the scene . . . the restored Israel . . . will be dominant on the world scene and safe from the threats of potentially hostile nations"). On the uses of *naqam* ("take vengeance, revenge, avenge oneself, be avenged, be punished"), see R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Volume 2 (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1980), 598-599. See also Robert M. Good, "The Just War in Ancient Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 104, No. 3 (September 1985): 385-400.

²³On Zion, compare Joel 2.1, 15, 23, 32; 3.17.

²⁴Matthews and Moyer believe "Joel provides only a few [apocalyptic] images, not fully developed sets of teachings like the ones that appear in Isaiah or Jeremiah. He draws on both his own experience of his world and on the views of the growing apocalyptic movement, which are more completely expressed in Daniel, the Qumran texts, and the writings of the New Testament." *The Old Testament: Text and Context*, 232.

decision . . . [and] the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining”

(3.14-15). But the day, the time, the season of this marvelous work of Yahweh (“the Lord”) is TBD, to be determined.²⁵

Joel seemingly structures his book in straightforward chronological fashion—past, present, and future. But many scholars are not so sure. The problem lies in perspective. From the viewpoint of Joel and his contemporaries, not at all possible to pinpoint with certainty, the events of chapter 1—the invasion of locusts and the call to repentance—have occurred or are in progress. The events of the remainder of the book—the decision of Judah and the judgment and restoration of the Lord—are in the future. But wait! Portions of chapter 2 highlight what has happened already, the past! “The Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. The Lord answered and said . . .” (2.18-19). The “children of Zion” are admonished to rejoice, because the Lord “has done great things . . . he has given . . . he has poured . . . [he] has dealt wondrously . . .” (2.21, 23, 26). But portions of chapters 2 and 3 also highlight the activity of Yahweh (“the Lord”) to come, or in the future. “I will no more make you a reproach among the nations . . .” (2.19); “I will remove the northerner far from you . . .” (2.20); “I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten . . .” (2.25); “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh . . . I will pour out my Spirit” (2.28, 29); “I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth . . .” (2.30; cf. 3.2, 4, 7, 8, 12, 21). This back and forth of Joel’s “time” notes, or verb tenses, nicely illustrates

²⁵Rolf Rendtorff comments that chapter 2 “extends talk of the day of YHWH far beyond the specific occasion of the plague of locusts, which already has taken place, to an eschatological attack by a hostile army which is still to come.” *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, translated by John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986), 219.

the uncertainty and the unknowable nature of the times or seasons of fulfillment of apocalyptic language in the prophets.²⁶

From Joel’s perspective, events surrounding “the day of the Lord . . . as destruction from the Almighty” (1.15) and the Lord’s “pity on his people” (2.18) appear to be concurrent or contemporaneous, as the prophet in his oracle moves seamlessly from locust plague to green pastures, from wasted grape vines and splintered fig trees to “the fig tree and the vine give their full yield,” and from destroyed grain fields to full threshing floors (1.4, 7, 10; 2.22, 24). Also, from Joel’s perspective, as an indication of “the day of the Lord . . . [that is] great and very awesome” (2.11; cf. 2.31; 3.14), “the earth quakes . . . [and] the heavens tremble” and the lights of the sun, the moon, and the stars diminish (2.10; cf. 2.31; 3.15-16). But the people’s return to the Lord “with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning” averts the Lord’s judgment and brings the Lord’s mercy, his relenting or turning from inflicting disaster, and his restoration of “the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem” (2.12-14, 18-20; 3.1).²⁷

The promise or the blessing that Joel anticipates (i.e., hopes for, longs for) involves the outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord on everyone (2.28-29), the showing of wonders and signs cosmologically or universally (2.30-31), and the establishing of Mount Zion and Jerusalem as a

²⁶Chisholm takes the future Hebrew verb forms as “narrative and as reporting how the Lord took pity on his people in Joel’s day, apparently as a result of a positive response to the prophet’s exhortation,” *Handbook on the Prophets*, 368-369 (footnote 63; cf. page 373, footnote 79). For extended study of the challenges of verb tense and time in biblical Hebrew, consult John A. Cook, *Time and the Biblical Hebrew Verb: The Expression of Tense, Aspect, and Modality in Biblical Hebrew*, Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic, Volume 7 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012); and Tal Goldfajn, *Word Order and Time in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²⁷For comments on these “immediate blessings” (2.18-20), see Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 86-90.

refuge for escapees or survivors (i.e., those who are saved; 2.32).²⁸ Joel notes these expectations with the following expressions: "and it shall come to pass afterward . . ."; "and I will show . . ."; "and it shall come to pass . . ." (2.28, 30, 32). These blessings for Judah and Jerusalem belong to the future, and the promise of such restoration, again from Joel's perspective, bring for the prophet and his listeners a heightened sense of awareness, perhaps a tension accompanied with anxious waiting, about the work of Yahweh ("the Lord") to reap a full and complete harvest. Concerning this, the prophet is instructed to "proclaim this among the nations" (3.8, 9),

Put in the sickle,
for the harvest is ripe.
Go in, tread,
for the winepress is full.
The vats overflow,
for their evil is great.

Multitudes, multitudes,
in the valley of decision!
For the day of the Lord is near
in the valley of decision.
The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining.

The Lord roars from Zion,
and utters his voice from Jerusalem,
and the heavens and the earth quake.
But the Lord is a refuge to his people,
a stronghold to the people of Israel.²⁹

What Joel reflects in his use of apocalyptic language, a rhetoric that fully cannot come to grips with the seasons or times of the Lord's wrathful but merciful activities, is the "now but not

²⁸On these "supernatural blessings," see Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 96-105.

²⁹Joel 3.13-16, the conclusion of "The Lord Judges the Nations," according to the *English Standard Version*.

yet" of God's chronology, God's timetable. The Lord indeed will act in history, when the time is right, to judge the nations in "the Valley of Jehoshaphat" (3.1, 12), to right all wrongs and avenge the blood of the innocent (3.2-8, 19, 21), and to set up Zion and Jerusalem as an eternal domicile for sustenance and refreshment.³⁰ Joel and his contemporaries can know and expect with assurance the certainty of the Lord's promise, this "day of the Lord" for judgment and salvation. But Joel and his contemporaries cannot know the time (i.e., the knowing *what* but not knowing *when*) for this "day of the Lord." The ambiguity of the time notes, or the verb tenses, in Joel's oracle, the ambiguity of apocalyptic rhetoric, is due to the nature of God's work in history, an unfolding of his ways that occur and become known only in the course of time. This is what might be called "realized eschatology."³¹

This ambiguity of apocalyptic language concerning the seasons or the times of God's choosing, and the brutal, stark nature of events describing God's dissolution and reordering of his cosmos, can be understood in various ways. First, the ambiguity can be explained away and dismissed, but this removes the tension of the uncertainty of apocalyptic language and the need for humility regarding such matters. Second, the particulars of cosmic upheaval can be seen as

³⁰"Strangers shall never again pass through it"; "Judah shall be inhabited forever"; "Jerusalem [shall be inhabited] to all generations" (3.17, 20).

³¹A phrase attributed to C. H. Dodd's *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London, UK: Nisbet, 1935); see also Anthony A. Hoekema, "The Eschatological Outlook of the Old Testament" and "Recent Trends in Eschatology," *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 3-12, 288-316; George Eldon Ladd, "The Debate over Eschatology" and "The Old Testament Promise," *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 3-42, 45-75; Cullman, "Present and Future: The Salvation-Historical Tension between 'Already' and 'Not Yet' as the Key to the Understanding of New Testament Salvation History," *Salvation In History*, 166ff.; and Andrew T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet*, Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series No. 43, general editor, R. M. Wilson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

poetic (i.e., allegorical, metaphorical, rhetorical) and not as literal. For example, Joel's locust plague, and the heightened apocalyptic language used to describe it, only appears to be but really is not a cosmos-reordering event. It is merely a local and limited but devastating phenomenon. This also softens the tension of the uncertainty of apocalyptic language. Third, the fulfillment of these events of cosmic upheaval can be viewed as limited and partial. Some have occurred already in a limited way (e.g., the darkening of the sky during a severe locust plague). And some will occur in the future in a complete way (e.g., the darkening of the celestial bodies during the final, end-time dissolution of the present heavens and earth).³² Fourth, the certainty of what we know can be accepted and explained, but the uncertainty of what we cannot know also can be accepted and left unexplained.³³ Fifth, the tension produced by the uncertainty or ambiguity of apocalyptic language and its meaning(s) can be left intact, unexplained (i.e., not explained away), and mysterious.³⁴ In this way, from the human perspective or the viewpoint of this world, the need to be penitent, alert, ready, and waiting for "the day of the Lord" remains paramount.³⁵ Sixth, by honoring the intent of apocalyptic language, the marvelous and unattainable (i.e., unknowable) work of God throughout history can be emphasized and praised (e.g., Romans 3.4).

³²See 2 Peter 3.10.

³³See Matthew 24.36; Mark 13.32; Acts 1.7; 1 Corinthians 13.9-10.

³⁴See Ladd, "The Mystery of the Kingdom," *The Presence of the Future*, 218ff.

³⁵See Matthew 24.42, 44; 25.13; Mark 13.33, 35; Luke 18.1; 21.34-36; Acts 1.4; 1 Thessalonians 5.6; 2 Peter 3.11-13.

What does Apostle Peter, as preserved by Luke in Acts of Apostles, have to say about Joel's apocalyptic oracle? In this speech of Peter in Acts (2.14-36, 38-39, 40)³⁶ is the only reference to Joel by name in the New Testament. And Peter focuses on certain predictive aspects of Joel's utterance, for example, the time of God's activity (i.e., "in the last days . . . in those days . . . before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day . . ."), the unlimited pouring out of God's Spirit (i.e., "on all flesh . . . your sons and your daughters . . . your young men . . . your old men . . . even on my male servants and female servants . . . everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved . . ."), the revelatory nature of God's outpoured Spirit (i.e., ". . . shall prophesy . . . shall see visions . . . shall dream dreams . . . shall prophesy . . ."), and the showing of wonders and signs by God (i.e., ". . . in the heavens above . . . on the earth below . . . blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke . . . the sun shall be turned to darkness . . . the moon [shall be turned] to blood . . .").³⁷ In his quote from the prophet's oracle, Peter does not directly refer to the locust plague, the call for Judah and Jerusalem to return to the Lord, the judgment of the nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, or God's merciful restoration of Judah in Zion. But in his message to descendants of Abraham and Jewish proselytes who had gathered together in

³⁶See comments by French L. Arrington, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 25-32; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, general editor, F. F. Bruce (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 59-72; Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas, Volume 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 274-287; and William Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles*, New Century Bible, general editors, Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black (London, UK: Oliphants, 1973), 74-80.

For other speeches of Peter in Acts, compare Acts 1.16-22; 3.12-26; 4.8-12; 4.24-30 (a group prayer); 5.29-32; 10.34-43, 47; 11.4-17, 18; 15.7-11.

³⁷The work of God to "show wonders . . . and signs . . ." seems here to be direct, that is, without the use of intermediaries such as his angels or his servants.

Jerusalem "from every nation under heaven" (2.5, 11) for their yearly celebration of the Feast of Pentecost, Peter seems to have all these things from Joel's oracle in mind.³⁸

Peter utters a message of prophetic fulfillment to "men of Judea . . . who dwell in Jerusalem" (2.14). He calls on these "men of Israel" (2.22; cf. "the house of Israel," 2.36) to recognize their collective role in crucifying and killing Jesus of Nazareth "by the hands of lawless men" (2.23, 36). He reminds his listeners of the "mighty works and wonders and signs" that God performed among them through Jesus (2.22). And he urges them to acknowledge "the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" in the crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus as "both Lord and Christ" (2.23, 36). Like the prophet Joel, Peter admonishes his Pentecostal audience to return to the Lord (i.e., "repent and be baptized"), so that they may receive the merciful restoration of the Lord (i.e., "the forgiveness of . . . sins, and . . . the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2.38).³⁹ Peter seemingly does this, again like the prophet Joel, to let his hearers know that accepting the Lord's promise, or the Lord's call, will secure their deliverance when God judges the nations.⁴⁰ This is because "the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (2.39). So Peter continues to testify and "to exhort them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation'" (2.40).

What Joel could not see clearly in his moment of history, Peter identifies as God's work in his particular moment of history. What Joel anticipated and hinted at, with apocalyptic

³⁸Except perhaps Joel's plague of locusts.

³⁹Compare Peter's language in Acts 3.17-21; 15.16-17 (quoted from Amos 9.11-12).

⁴⁰On Luke's flexible use of "promise," see Luke 24.49; Acts 1.4; 2.33; 7.17; 13.23, 32; 23.21; 26.6.

language, Peter claims as realized in the exaltation of Jesus and the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit "on all flesh" (2.17). When Peter quotes Joel's oracle to those who had witnessed the unusual phenomenon of "a sound like a mighty rushing wind . . . divided tongues as of fire . . . [and the disciples speaking] in other tongues" (2.1-4), this is why he can say, "This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel" (2.16).⁴¹ But Peter himself, just like the prophet Joel, does not fully understand, nor does he claim any finale to God's work in his own day or time. God is not bound by the strictures of history, its unfolding bit by bit, piece by piece, part by part. Human observers of God's handiwork are bound or limited by circumstances. God who is timeless is not so bound; he is unlimited by the strictures of history. From the human perspective, this "progressive revelation" or unfolding of God's handiwork across the span of time, or history, produces a certain tension or strain. If accepted because of faith, this "strain" or "tension" of God's work brings about hope or expectation for what can happen (cf. Romans 5.1-5). If rejected because of doubt, this "strain" or "tension" of God's work brings about anxiety or uneasiness about what may happen (cf. Matthew 6.25-34; Luke 12.22-34).

But how does Luke through his cast of characters—apostles like Peter, John, Stephen the first Christian martyr, Philip, James, Saul who becomes Paul, Barnabas, and Silas—use or exploit apocalyptic themes for the whole of his *logos*? Luke, unlike John in the book of Revelation, seems to be reserved in his use of apocalyptic images. Many of the phrases in the prophecy

⁴¹It is not clear, as Knowling seems to suggest, that Peter identifies his own time as "the time immediately preceding the Parousia of the Messiah," "Acts of the Apostles," *Expositor's Greek Testament*, Volume Two, 78. See the comments by Longenecker which highlight the debate concerning the "time fulfillment" of these words, something unknown and unknowable by Joel, Peter, Luke, and, without doubt, modern interpreters, "Acts of the Apostles," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 9, 276.

quoted from Joel appear only in Peter's Pentecostal message in Acts, chapter 2. And while Luke may use semantic equivalents elsewhere, key phrases or words in this apocalyptic message are used infrequently in Luke's *logon*. The following show Luke's explicit apocalyptic emphasis to be in Acts, chapter 2.

"... **in the last days**" (*eschatais hemerais*, 2.17). Compare Luke's other uses of *eschatos* in Acts, "to the end of the earth" (1.8), "to the ends of the earth" (13.47).⁴²

"... **pour out my Spirit**" (*ekcheo apo tou pneumatou mou*, 2.17, 18). See also 2.33, "the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this . . ." (*execheen touto*).

"... **on all flesh**" (*epi pasan sarka*, 2.17). See Luke's other uses of *sarx*, "my flesh" (2.26, quoting Psalm 16.9); "his flesh" (2.31); and in his Gospel, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3.9, quoting Isaiah 40.5); "a spirit does not have flesh and bones" (Luke 24.39).

"... **shall dream dreams**" (*enupniōis enupniasthesontai*, only here in the New Testament). For one other use of the verb form in the New Testament, see Jude 8, "in their dreaming."⁴³ Compare Matthew 1.20; 20.12, 13, 19, 22; 27.19, but the word in Matthew's narrative about the birth of Jesus is *onar*.

"... **in the heavens above**" (*in to ourano ano*, 2.19). While Luke uses "above" (*ano*) only once in Acts, he definitely links "heaven" (*ouranos*) with eschatological and apocalyptic

⁴²Note the helpful comments by Arrington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 27. See too the argument that Acts 2.16ff. "is normative both because of its explicitness and because it is *the* pivotal passage in Luke's development of his distinctive interest in the witness of the church," Fred O. Francis, "Eschatology and History in Luke-Acts," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (March 1969): 52.

⁴³Lattimore, *The New Testament*, 527.

events.⁴⁴ Comparatively, John makes use of “heaven” (*ouranos*) over fifty times in his Revelation.

“. . . **on the earth below**” (*epi tes ges kato*, 2.19). Luke uses “below” (*kato*) twice in Acts—here at 2.19 and at 20.9 in reference to Eutychus who fell from a third story window, died from his injuries, and was restored to life by Paul. Luke, however, makes use of “earth” (*ge*) in a few contexts that may have apocalyptic meaning (i.e., 1.8; 2.19; 8.33; 10.11; 13.47). John, by contrast, uses “earth” in his Revelation almost seventy times.

“. . . **blood and fire and vapor of smoke**” (*haima kai pur kai atmida kapnou*, 2.19). Luke uses “blood” (*haima*) many other times (1.19; 5.28; 15.20, 20; 18.6; 20.26, 28; 21.25; 22.20) but only in chapter 2 with reference to a celestial body, i.e., “the moon [shall be turned] to blood” (2.20).⁴⁵ In reference to “fire,” Luke cites the work of the Holy Spirit on the apostles as “divided tongues as of fire” (*diamerizomenai glossai hosei puros*, 2.3), the angelic appearance to Moses “in a flame of fire in a bush” (*en phlogi puros batou*, 7.30), and the source of the viper on Malta that bit Paul who “shook off the creature into the fire [*eis to pur*] and suffered no harm” (28.3, 5). These are the only other references to “fire” (*pur*) by Luke in Acts.⁴⁶ “Vapor” (*atmis*) is found in the New Testament only here in Acts 2.19 and James 4.14, “you are a mist [*atmis gar*”

⁴⁴Distinctions between eschatological versus apocalyptic meanings can be subtle (see Cullman, *Salvation In History*, 80-83), but Luke’s use of *ouranos* with reference to end-time occurrences can be regarded safely as both eschatological and apocalyptic (see, for example, 1.10, 11; 2.2, 19; 3.21; 7.55, 56; and perhaps the revelatory trance and vision of Peter in 10.11, 16; 11.5, 9, 10).

⁴⁵Compare Revelation 6.12; 8.7, 8; 11.6; 14.20; 16.3, 4, 6; 17.6; 18.24; 19.2.

⁴⁶See in his Gospel, Luke 3.16, 17; 9.54; 12.49; 17.29. For “fire” in John’s Apocalypse, compare Revelation 1.14; 2.18; 4.5; 8.5, 7, 8; 9.17, 18; 10.1; 11.5; 13.13; 14.10, 18; 15.2; 16.8; 17.16; 18.8; 19.12, 20; 20.9, 10, 14, 15; 21.8.

este] that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” “Smoke” (*kapnos*) in the New Testament is only here in Acts 2.19 and about ten occurrences in the book of Revelation (8.4; 9.2, 3, 17, 18; 14.11; 15.8; 18.9, 18; 19.3).

“ . . . **the sun shall be turned to darkness**” (*ho helios metastraphesetai eis skotos*, 2.20).

Luke uses “sun” (*helios*) here, of the blinding of Elymas the magician who was “unable to see the sun for a time” (*me blepon ton helion achri kairou*, 13.11), of Paul’s conversion who while traveling to Damascus saw at midday “a light from heaven, brighter than the sun” (*ouranothen huper ten lamproteta tou heliou perilampsan me phos*, 26.13), and of the storm at sea experienced by Paul on his way to Rome when “neither sun nor stars appeared for many days” (*mete de heliou mete astron epiphainonton epi pleionas hemeras*, 27.20).⁴⁷ Besides here at 2.20, Luke’s use of “darkness” (*skotos*) in Acts is two other times—at 13.11 in reference to the blinding of Elymas and at 26.18 (cf. Isaiah 42.7, 16) as a metaphor used by Paul to describe his commission by the Lord to preach deliverance to the Gentiles. Interestingly, “darkness” (*skotos*), the noun form, does not appear in the book of Revelation, but verbal forms appear at 8.12; 9.2; and 16.10.

“ . . . **the moon [shall be turned] to blood**” (*he selene eis haima*, 2.20). Luke uses “moon” (*selene*) only here in Acts (cf. the other New Testament uses at Matthew 24.29; Mark 13.24; Luke 21.25; 1 Corinthians 15.41; and Revelation 6.12; 8.12; 12.1; 21.23). Two uses of the verb form *seleniazomai*, that means to “experience epileptic seizure associated with powers

⁴⁷Compare John’s use of “sun” in Revelation 1.16; 6.12; 7.2, 16; 8.12; 9.2; 10.1; 12.1; 16.8, 12; 19.17; 21.23; 22.5.

of the moon, **be an epileptic**, viewed from the perspective of victimization by demonic influence” occur in Matthew 4.24 and 17.15.⁴⁸

“. . . **before the day of the Lord comes**” (*prin elthein hemeran kuriou*, 2.20). The exact expression “the day of the Lord” (*hemeran kuriou*) is used only here in Acts (cf. 1 Corinthians 1.8; Isaiah 2.12; Ezekiel 30.2, 3; Amos 5.18). The words for “day” (*hemera*) and “Lord” (*kurios*), though, are very common and used more than ninety times and one hundred times, respectively, by Luke in his *logon*. Luke uses the common Greek word for “come” (*erchomai*) to highlight the return of Jesus from heaven (1.11; 2.20; cf. 3.20), the appearance of Jesus after John the baptizer (13.24, 25; 19.4), and the falling of the Holy Spirit on the disciples who were baptized by Paul at Ephesus (19.6).

“. . . **the great and magnificent day**” (*ten megalen kai epiphane*, 2.20). Luke uses “great” (*megas*) several times in Acts,⁴⁹ but he does not seem to give the word apocalyptic meaning unless indirectly by its use in reference to the apostles’ “power” (*dunamis*), the people’s “fear” (*phobos*), or the many “wonders and signs” (*terata kai semeia*) performed by leading believers. Luke’s use of the noun *epiphanes*, translated “magnificent” by the *English Standard Version*, is unique to the New Testament. Compare its use in the Septuagint for the Hebrew *nora*’ (“awesome,” Joel 2.11, 31; Judges 13.6).⁵⁰ On use of the verb form *epiphaino*, see Luke

⁴⁸Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 319.

⁴⁹See 2.20, 43; 4.33; 5.5, 11; 6.8; 7.11, 57, 60; 8.1, 2, 7, 9, 10, 13; 10.11; 11.5, 28; 14.10; 15.3; 16.26, 28; 19.27, 28, 34, 35; 23.9; 26.22, 24, 29.

⁵⁰G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (3rd ed.; Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1937), 176.

1.79; Acts 27.20; Titus 2.11; 3.4. Compare too the use of *epiphaneia* (“appearing”) in 2 Thessalonians 2.8; 1 Timothy 6.14; 2 Timothy 1.10; 4.1, 8; and Titus 2.13.

“. . . **everyone who calls upon . . . shall be saved**” (*pas hos an epikalesetai . . . sothesetai*, 2.21). Luke surprisingly uses “call” (*kaleo*) or “call upon” (*epikaleo*) frequently of persons and their names (i.e., Simon called Niger, Joseph called Barnabas, John called Mark, Simon called Peter), but he uses “call upon” sparingly when referring to humans invoking the “name” (*onoma*) of deity. For instance, Ananias told the Lord, who spoke to him in a vision, what he feared about Saul of Tarsus—that he had come to Damascus with authority from the chief priests “to bind all who call on your name” (*desai pantas tous epikaloumenous to onoma sou*, 9.14; cf. verse 21). To a hostile audience in Jerusalem, Paul explains to them his conversion at Damascus and what Ananias told him to do—“rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name” (*anastas baptisai kai apolousai tas hamartias sou epikalesamenos to onoma autou*, 22.16). Luke elsewhere connects “call upon” with the Lord’s “name” in James’ message to the Jerusalem assembly and his quotation of Amos 9.12 (“and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,” 15.17).⁵¹

The use of *sodzo* (“rescue from a hazardous condition or circumstance,” **save, rescue**)⁵²) in Acts is relatively sparse and includes rescue from “sins” and “this crooked generation” (2.21, 40, 47), healing or rescue from disease and infirmity (4.9, 12; 14.9), rescue from Gentile

⁵¹Compare the use of *kaleo* in 14.12 where Barnabas is called Zeus and Paul is called Hermes by the people of Lystra in Galatia.

⁵²Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 345.

uncleanliness (11.14), rescue from "not being circumcised" (15.1, 11), and rescue from bodily harm (16.30, 31; 27.20, 31).

"... upon the name of the Lord" (*epi . . . to onoma kuriou*, 2.21). Luke uses *onoma* over fifty times in Acts to indicate personal names⁵³ as well as the name of "Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (4.10; cf. 26.9), "Jesus Christ" (2.38; 3.6; 8.12; 10.48; 16.18), "Jesus" (see 3.16; 4.18; cf. "your holy servant Jesus" at 4.30; 5.40; 9.27), and "the name," "this name," or "his name" (4.7, 12, 17; 5.28, 41; 10.43; 22.16). Luke also uses *onoma* to highlight "the Lord Jesus" (8.16; 19.5, 13, 17; 21.13), "the Lord [Jesus]" (9.28), and "our Lord Jesus Christ" (15.26). And Luke connects *onoma* with *kurios* in the vision of Ananias at Damascus about Saul of Tarsus (see 9.14, 15, 16, 21) and in James' message to the council at Jerusalem in which he quotes from the prophet Amos and confirms what Peter said about God visiting the Gentiles (see 15.13, 14, 17).

A work dedicated to apocalyptic ideology, such as John's Revelation, understandably makes considerable use of language about cosmic disturbance and upheaval found in many of the expressions above. Luke uses such heightened or extravagant language less frequently, but this does not diminish the importance of what could be called Luke's apocalyptic model or template. He purposefully constructs his introduction (i.e., chapters 1 and 2) to state the important

⁵³For example, Ananias the husband of Sapphira (5.1), Gamaliel a Pharisee in the Jewish Sanhedrin (5.34), Simon the great magician (8.9), Ananias a disciple at Damascus (9.10, 12), Saul of Tarsus (9.11), Aeneas an invalid at Lydda (9.33), Tabitha or Dorcas a disciple from Joppa (9.36), Cornelius the centurion at Caesarea (10.1), Agabus the prophet (11.28), Rhoda the servant girl at Mary's house in Jerusalem (12.13), Bar-Jesus or Elymas the Jewish false prophet and magician at Paphos (13.6, 8), Timothy a disciple at Lystra (16.1), Lydia from Thyatira (16.14), Damaris a woman of Athens (17.34), Aquila the husband of Priscilla (18.2), Titius Justus a worshipper of God in Corinth (18.7), Apollos the native of Alexandria in Ephesus (18.24), Demetrius the silversmith in Ephesus (19.24), Eutychus a young man in Troas (20.9), Agabus the prophet from Judea (21.10), Julius a centurion of the Augustan Cohort (27.1), and Publius the chief man on Malta (28.7).

eschatological themes he gleans from Joel’s apocalyptic oracle.⁵⁴ Then Luke consistently develops these themes—the time of God’s activity, the unlimited pouring out of God’s Spirit, the revelatory nature of God’s outpoured Spirit, and the showing of wonders and signs by God—for the remainder of his *logon*.

The showing of wonders and signs by God. By the power of the Holy Spirit (see 1.8),⁵⁵ the apostles and prophets worked “wonders and signs” (*terata* and *semeia*, see 2.19, 22, 43; 4.16, 22, 43; 5.12; 6.8; cf. 7.36; 8.6, 13; 14.3; 15.12) in order to proclaim good news to the people about “the kingdom of God” (*tes basileias tou theou*, 1.3; 8.12; 14.22; 19.8; 28.23, 31). Peter and John heal a man who had been lame since his birth (chapter 3). Peter and John are released from prison and join other believers to pray for boldness to speak God’s word and “the place in which they were gathered together was shaken” (chapter 4). Peter rebukes the deceivers Ananias and Sapphira who both collapse and die (chapter 5). Stephen speaks boldly to the Sanhedrin, gives them a history lesson, sees the opening of the heavens and “the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God,” and is put to death by stoning (chapter 7). The hated people of Samaria receive the Holy Spirit by baptism and the intermediary work of Peter and John (chapter 8). Saul of Tarsus is struck down and blinded on his way to Damascus where he is healed by the disciple Ananias and receives the Holy Spirit (chapter 9). Peter heals Aeneas, a man of Lydda, who had

⁵⁴Compare Luke’s introductory comments to his Gospel, 1.1-4ff. On chapter 1 and 2 “as bridge” between Luke’s Gospel and his Acts, see David Wenham and Steve Walton, *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Gospel and Acts*, Volume One (2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 283-284.

⁵⁵Luke uses the word for “spirit” (*pneuma*) over seventy times in Acts with about sixty references to God’s Spirit. More than forty of these references use the descriptive “holy” (*hagios*) or “Holy Spirit.” In other words, the Holy Spirit is everywhere and is the main actor (e.g., in every scene) in Luke’s *logon*.

been bedridden for eight years, and he raises from the dead Tabitha, a disciple of Joppa, who had become ill and died (chapter 9). And in Caesarea Cornelius and other Gentiles hear the word of God from Peter, receive the Holy Spirit, and are baptized (chapter 10).

After the murder of James, Peter is rescued from the evil intentions of Herod Agrippa I and escapes from a Jerusalem prison with the help of an angel of the Lord (chapter 12). Paul at Paphos rebukes the Jewish false prophet Bar-Jesus, also called Elymas, for his interference with the proclamation of the word of God, and he becomes blind (chapter 13). Paul at Lystra heals a man who had been crippled from birth and had never walked (chapter 14). Paul is stoned at Lystra by unbelievers from Antioch of Pisidia and Iconium and is left for dead but rose up "when the disciples gathered about him" (chapter 14). Paul and Silas are deterred by the Spirit of Jesus from going into Bithynia and directed by a vision to Paul to head for Macedonia instead (chapter 16). Paul commands "a spirit of divination" to "come out of" a slave girl in Philippi, and he and Silas are thrown into jail but escape after an earthquake rattles the prison (and the prison keeper) and all the doors are opened and the shackles unfastened (chapter 16). At Ephesus some disciples of Apollos, who knew only John's baptism, learn about Jesus, are baptized, and by Paul's intervention receive the Holy Spirit who enables them to speak in tongues and prophesy (chapter 19). And also at Ephesus Paul performs "extraordinary miracles" and his power in "the name of the Lord Jesus" is recognized, by evil spirits, as superior to "itinerant Jewish exorcists" and practitioners of "magic arts" which causes an uproar in the city (chapter 19).

After he departs Ephesus, Paul in Troas brings young Eutychus, who had fallen out of a third story window, back to life (chapter 20). From Greece to Macedonia and then to Asia Minor, Paul avoids hostile Jews who had plotted to kill him (chapter 20). Agabus the prophet

comes down from Judea to Caesarea and foretells the imprisonment of Paul by Jews and Gentiles in Jerusalem (chapter 21). Paul is rescued from a vengeful mob at the temple by a Roman tribune who protects Paul, since he is a Roman citizen (chapter 22). On his way back to Caesarea as a prisoner, Paul is spared from deadly ambush by Jewish conspirators due to the quick intervention of his sister's son and the military escort given him by Lysias the tribune (chapter 23). Paul remains at Caesarea in protective custody of the Roman authorities for more than two years because of Felix's greed and his desire to appease the Jewish authorities and because of Paul's appeal to Festus to stand trial in Rome (chapters 25 and 26). Paul predicts trouble at sea, is ignored by the ship's crew, but is vindicated when they follow his instructions and save their lives during a terrible storm (chapter 27). On Malta Paul is bitten by a deadly viper but suffers no harm (chapter 28). Also on Malta Paul heals the father of Publius, the island's chief man, who had become ill with dysentery and fever (chapter 28). And while imprisoned at Rome for two whole years, Paul is permitted to receive visitors and tell them about the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ "without hindrance" (chapter 28).

The revelatory nature of God's outpoured Spirit. These wonders and signs consistently highlight the revelatory nature of God's outpoured Spirit who guides God's apostles to perform marvelous deeds among the people. At Jerusalem on Pentecost, God's Spirit empowers his apostles "to speak in other tongues" so that "from every nation under heaven . . . the multitude . . . were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language." But the crowd confessed, "We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God" (*ta megaleia tou theou*; 2.4-6, 11). And at Rome while in prison awaiting trial, God's Spirit empowers Paul, who had survived threats to his life, a shipwreck at sea, and a

venomous viper bite, to receive a large number of visitors freely and to proclaim the kingdom of God and teach about the Lord Jesus Christ “with all boldness and without hindrance” (28.23, 30-31). From the beginning to the end of his Acts, from Jerusalem to Rome,⁵⁶ Luke indicates that the nature of this apocalyptic work of God’s Holy Spirit is to reveal or show these “mighty works of God” through prophesy, visions, dreams, and teaching and preaching good news about Jesus the Christ and his death and resurrection. From start to finish, Luke records a singular balance between deed and word, since he connects the working of “wonders” (*terata*) and “signs” (*semeia*) with the revelatory nature of God’s outpoured Spirit and the words of his apostles.⁵⁷

⁵⁶See the brief study by Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1972).

⁵⁷Luke uses the verb “to prophesy” (*propheteuo*) in Acts sparingly (2.17, 18; 19.6; 21.9; cf. Luke 1.67; 22.64). He employs the noun “prophet” (*prophetes*) more often with reference to Old Testament prophets about twenty-six times (2.16, 30; 3.18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25; 7.37, 42, 48, 52; 8.28, 30, 34; 10.43; 13.15, 20, 27, 40; 15.15; 24.14; 26.22, 27; 28.23, 25) and with reference to New Testament prophets only about five times—“all the prophets” (10.43), prophets who “came down from Jerusalem to Antioch” (11.27), “prophets and teachers” in the church at Antioch (13.1), Judas and Silas “who were themselves prophets” (15.32), and “a prophet named Agabus” (21.10). Luke includes among the prophets the unmarried daughters of Philip the evangelist “who prophesied” (21.9) and twelve disciples at Ephesus who “began speaking in tongues and prophesying” after the Holy Spirit came on them (19.6).

Luke uses “vision” (*horama*) at 7.31; 9.10, 12; 10.3, 17, 19; 11.5; 12.9; 16.9, 10; 18.9 (cf. Matthew 17.9) and “appearance” (*horasis*) at 2.17 (cf. Revelation 4.3; 9.17). He uses the verb “to see” (*horao*; “be in awe of, fear’ . . . of perceiving with the eye, see,” Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 254) with the sense of divine guidance a few times (2.3; 7.2, 30, 35, 44; 9.17; 13.13; 16.9; 22.15; 26.16). Compare his use of “trance” (*ekstasis*) at 10.10; 11.5; and 22.17. Also, see how Luke uses the appearance of angels, 5.19; cf. 6.15; 8.26; 10.3, 7, 22; 11.13; 12.7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 23; 23.8, 9; 27.23.

Luke lays the greatest emphasis, though, on “proclaiming good news” (*euangelidzomai*) about Jesus (5.42; 8.4, 12, 25, 35, 40; 10.36; 11.20; 13.32; 14.7, 15, 21; 15.35; 16.10; 17.18; cf. *euangelion*, “good news,” 15.7; 20.24), “teaching” (*didasko*) about Jesus (1.1; 4.2, 18; 5.21, 25, 28, 42; 11.26; 15.1, 35; 18.11, 25; 20.20; 21.21, 28; 28.31; cf. *didake*, “the teaching,” 2.42; 5.28; 13.12; 17.19), and “proclaiming” (*kerusso*) Jesus (8.5; 9.20; 10.42; 20.25; cf. 10.37; 15.21; 19.13; see too Luke 3.3; 4.18, 19, 44; 8.1, 39; 9.2; 12.3; 24.47).

Each time an extraordinary deed or work occurs, Luke records that the people are filled with wonder, fear, and/or astonishment, and good news is shared with those who see the deed and subsequently are hearing the message about Jesus of Nazareth. For instance, the crowds who see these mighty works of God through his apostles are “amazed and perplexed” (2.12; cf. 8.13; 10.45), filled with awe or fear (2.43; 5.5, 11; cf. 19.17), “utterly astounded” (3.11), respectful of the apostles’ place (5.13; cf. 28.10), filled with “much joy” (8.8), or astonished “at the teaching of the Lord” (13.12). As a result, they turn to the Lord, they believe in the Lord, they rejoice and glorify the word of the Lord (9.35, 42; 13.48). The opponents of the apostles, however, are “greatly annoyed” (4.2), “filled with jealousy” (5.17; cf. 13.45), “enraged” and want “to kill them” (5.33), or “enraged” and “ground their teeth” (7.54). They threaten to persecute the disciples of Jesus, or they stir up persecution against the apostles (see 9.1; 13.50). And these responses, both positive and negative, happen not so much with regard to the extraordinary deeds alone but rather to the mighty works being explained by the spoken word of the apostles and the evangelists concerning the fulfillment of scripture through God’s most extraordinary work of all—the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus, the Christ.⁵⁸

The unlimited pouring out of God’s Spirit. Further, the call to decision, whether or not to follow and join “the Way,”⁵⁹ becomes a paramount concern, because the apocalyptic work of

⁵⁸Luke’s narrative preserves an excellent balance between deed and word. For Luke’s treatment in Acts of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, see 1.22; 2.31, 36; 3.13ff.; 4.2, 10, 33; 5.30-32; 7.52, 55, 56; 8.32ff.; 9.4ff.; 10.36ff.; 13.26ff.; 17.3, 18, 30-32; 19.15; 20.28; 22.6ff.; 23.6, 8; 24.15, 21; 25.19; 26.8, 23.

⁵⁹See 9.2; 19.9, 23; 22.4; 24.14, 22; cf. 16.17; 18.25, 26. Note Luke’s use of *haireisis* (“party” or “faction”) at 24.5, 14; 28.22; cf. 5.17; 15.5. Danker (*Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 10) notes that the technical meaning of *haireisis* (“heresy”) does not occur in the New Testament.

God's outpoured Spirit, according to Luke's use of Joel, has become available to "all flesh."

This universal outreach of God's Spirit, part of the "progressive revelation" of God's handiwork, is something that Peter and the rest of the apostles must learn gradually, over time. What Peter says plainly to devout Jews "from every nation under heaven" (2.5; cf. verses 9-11) who have gathered at Jerusalem for Pentecost—"for the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (2.39)—he and other Jewish disciples must now learn to accept and embrace over the course of the events that Luke narrates in his *logos*. For example, Philip the evangelist (see 21.8), who left Jerusalem because of "great persecution against the church," took the initiative to proclaim "good news about the kingdom of God" among "the people of Samaria" and later to "an Ethiopian, a eunuch" (chapter 8). The work of Philip resulted in favorable reception to the message about Christ by the Samaritans and by the Ethiopian as well. Concerning the Samaritans, they "received the word of God" and were baptized, but oddly they did not receive the Holy Spirit (8.12-17). Only then did Jerusalem send out Peter and John to Samaria to confirm God's acceptance of these alienated descendants of Israelites (see John 4.9) and to mediate, through the "laying on of the apostles' hands" (verse 18), God's promise of the Holy Spirit. The unusual circumstances surrounding the conversion of the Samaritans seems to be Luke's way of showing the progressive nature, and its gradual acceptance by the apostles, of the Lord's apocalyptic handiwork through his Holy Spirit on "all flesh."⁶⁰

This development over the course of time, or historically, of God's apocalyptic work among "all flesh" and the need for patience to comprehend fully this marvelous work becomes

⁶⁰For an extended treatment of Acts 8, see David W Fletcher, "The Design of Baptism in the New Testament," *Baptism and the Remission of Sins: An Historical Perspective*, edited by David W Fletcher (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1990), 385ff.

clear in the conversion of the Gentile centurion Cornelius and his household. And this growth in understanding is true particularly with Peter who is at the center of the events whereby God shows to his church the universal nature of the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. At Joppa, Peter’s strange trance (*ekstasis*, 10.10) and vision (*kai eidon en ekstasei horama*, “in a trance I saw a vision,” 11.5) of “something like a great sheet descending” with “all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air” includes an accompanying voice that commands Peter to “rise . . . kill and eat.” This thrice-repeated vision comes to Peter in an apocalyptic manner, from “heavens opened” (*ton ouranon aneogmenon*) and “let down by its four corners upon the earth” (*katabainon . . . kathiemenon epi tes ges*, 10.11; cf. 11.5),⁶¹ with the threefold reply—“what God has made clean, do not call common” (10.15; cf. 11.9)—to Peter’s “kosher” objection to eating “anything . . . common or unclean.” Peter, in spite of the heavenly voice’s interpretation of his revelation, is unsure and confused about the meaning of his vision (see 10.17), but he soon becomes aware of its importance through ensuing events.

While Peter “was pondering the vision” (10.19), or “at that very moment” (i.e., during or at the end of the vision, 11.11), three men, two servants of Cornelius and one of his devout soldiers (11.7), arrive from Caesarea at the house of Simon, the tanner, in Joppa. They invite Peter to go back with them to Cornelius who had been instructed “in a vision” (*en horamati*) by “an angel of God” (*angelon tou theou*, 10.3, 7, 22; 11.13)⁶² to send for Peter. On the next day,

⁶¹For “heavens opened,” compare Genesis 7.11; Ezekiel 1.1; Matthew 3.6; Luke 3.21; Acts 7.56. For “four corners of the earth,” see Isaiah 11.12; Revelation 7.1; 20.8.

⁶²Compare how Cornelius explains the angelic appearance to Peter, “I was praying in my house . . . and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing (*kai idou aner este enopion mou en estheti lampra*, 11.30).

Peter and "some of the brothers from Joppa" go with the men back to Caesarea, since the Spirit had alerted Peter to their presence at Simon's house and had confirmed the legitimacy and urgency of their task by instructing Peter to "accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them" (10.20).⁶³ When Peter gets to the house of Cornelius and explains his presence in a Gentile's house with a bit of anti-goyimite rhetoric⁶⁴ modified by his recent revelatory and apocalyptic experience ("but God has shown me"), he then listens to Cornelius' explanation about how he was told to send for Peter. At that point, with the Gentiles gathered "in the presence of God" to hear what Peter had been "commanded by the Lord" (10.33; cf. 11.14), Peter, as a result of the convergence of these unusual events, now understands "that God shows no partiality" (*ep' aletheias katalambanomai hoti ouk estin prosopolemptes ho theos*, 10.34; cf. verse 35). And he proceeds to share with these Godfearers (see 10.2) the message about Jesus of Nazareth, his anointing by the Holy Spirit, his good deeds, his crucifixion, and his resurrection (10.34-43).

As Peter begins to speak (see 10.44; cf. 11.15), the Holy Spirit fell on (*epipto*; cf. 8.16) "all [the Gentiles] who heard the word." This amazed the believers "from among the circumcised" who had accompanied Peter, because "the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles" (10.45) who were given the ability to speak in tongues and were praising

⁶³Compare how Peter explains this in light of criticism by "the circumcision party" in Jerusalem, "the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction" (*meden diakrinanta*, 11.12).

⁶⁴"You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation . . ." (10.28). Luke's word for "anyone of another nation" (*allophulos*) occurs only here in the New Testament (also used by Codex Bezae [D] in Acts 13.19) and means "foreign[er] . . . opposite of Israelites and therefore **outsider, gentile**" (Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 17).

God just like the apostles and the 120 disciples on Pentecost.⁶⁵ But Peter now understood as a result of these extraordinary events, just as he had announced on Pentecost with his quotation from Joel’s oracle, that God’s outpoured Holy Spirit belonged to “all flesh.” And the apostle in his report to the church at Jerusalem, in spite of criticism that he had associated and had eaten with “uncircumcised men” in Caesarea, now could argue for this unlimited outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit and could reason against hindering this work of God, or “God’s way” (11.17; cf. 10.47). In such step-by-step fashion—God’s carefully crafted way of graciously helping frail humans how to coexist in peace and harmony—Peter and the church were led to conclude that “to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life” (11.18; cf. verses 19ff.). But, presumably due to mankind’s depravity and stubbornness, it took extraordinary work on the part of God’s Spirit, apocalyptic deeds—angels and visions from heaven and on earth—to prod the early church to break down this historic “dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2.14) between Jews and Gentiles.

Another illustration of how Luke’s *logon* emphasizes this apocalyptic theme about the universal outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit is to be found in his remarks about Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles. After he details the second persecution of the church in Jerusalem (12.1ff.; cf. 8.1; 11.19), Luke establishes the evangelistic model for Paul’s work with the initial visit to Perga in Pamphylia of Asia Minor (chapter 13). In accordance with Jewish custom, Paul and his

⁶⁵Notice Peter’s comparisons in 10.47; 11.15, 17, “who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have,” “the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning,” and “God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us.” See also Fletcher, *Baptism and the Remission of Sins*, 389-390, for the conversion of the Gentiles, their baptism in water, and their reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

companions (i.e., Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, Timothy, then Luke himself⁶⁶) would visit the local synagogue on the Sabbath for “the reading from the Law and the Prophets” and a message (i.e., discourse or homily, *derashah*) of encouragement or interpretation (13.14-15). As a guest to the community and himself a studied Jew, Paul often would be invited to speak on an appointed Sabbath, and he would take this opportunity to summarize briefly the history of the Jewish community (i.e., the Israelites; 13.16-22; cf. Stephen’s approach in chapter 7) and then tell the congregation about Jesus (13.23-25). In his sermons, Paul would stress several themes but especially the prophetic word (13.27), its fulfillment in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (13.28-37), the offer of salvation or forgiveness of sins (13.38-39), judgment to those who reject Jesus (13.40-41), and finally displacement of the Jews by the Gentiles (because of their rejection of Jesus and their rejection of his messengers, 13.45-52). This general pattern of Paul’s missionary efforts about “the conversion of the Gentiles” (*epistrophe ton ethnon*, 15.3)⁶⁷ can be traced in several sections of Luke’s *logos* (e.g., at Iconium, chapter 14; at Thessalonica and Berea, chapter 17; at Corinth, chapter 18; and at Ephesus, chapter 19). And for Paul, whose zeal and devotion for Judaism had been changed spectacularly by his own apocalyptic experience while traveling to Damascus (see 9.1-30; 22.3-21; 26.9-23), the matter was clear. The Lord had

⁶⁶For the “we-sections” in Acts, see 16.10-17; 20.5-15; 21.1-18; and 27.1–28.16.

⁶⁷This is the only use of *epistrophe*, “‘change in belief,’ **turning, conversion,**” in the New Testament. Compare Luke’s use of *epistrepho*, “‘change mode of thinking/belief,’ **turn about/around,**” with reference to conversion at Acts 3.19; 9.35; 11.21; 14.15; 15.19; 16.18; 26.18, 20; and 28.27 (Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 146).

appeared to him and made him “a light for the Gentiles . . . to bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (13.47; cf. 9.15; 22.21; 26.16-18; see too Isaiah 49.6).⁶⁸

The time of God’s activity. Finally, this freedom of God’s Holy Spirit, unfettered and unhindered, to work among peoples of all nations, was planned by God from days of old and had been foretold by the holy prophets.⁶⁹ In the days of his apostles and in the lifetime of Luke, God had brought about the fulfillment of these ancient prophecies in the person and the work of Jesus of Nazareth. In apocalyptic fashion, in “the fulness of time” (see Galatians 4.4, *to pleroma tou chronou*), God displayed wonders and signs in heaven and on earth, he sent forth his Holy Spirit “to convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” and to guide the disciples of Jesus “into all the truth” (see John 16.8, 13), and he poured out his Holy Spirit on “all flesh” so that “Jews or Greeks, slaves or free . . . and all . . . [could] drink of one Spirit” (see 1 Corinthians 12.13). Luke underscores this apocalyptic theme—the time of God’s activity—with his use of *pleroo*, “‘bring to fruition or completion’ . . . of something foretold or designed to take

⁶⁸Luke’s emphasis on God’s handiwork to bring salvation to “the Gentiles” runs like a steady thread from start to finish throughout the book of Acts. For his use of *ta ethne*, “frequently used of people outside Israel’s traditions, **non-Israelite persons, gentiles**” (Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 108), see 4.25, 27; 9.15; 10.45; 11.1, 18; 13.46, 47, 48; 14.2, 5, 27; 15.3, 7, 12, 14, 17, 19, 23; 18.6; 21.11, 19, 21, 25; 22.21; 26.17, 20, 23; 28.28.

⁶⁹Luke uses *prophetes*, “‘a person gifted with ability for interpretation or revelation of matters transcending normal insight or awareness,’ **prophet**” (Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 308), about twenty-five times with reference to “the prophets of old” (see Luke 1.70; 9.8, 19). He includes David (2.30; cf. 14.33-36) and Moses (3.22; 7.37; cf. 6.11, 14; 7.20, 22, 29, 31, 32, 35, 40, 44; 13.39; 15.1, 5, 21; 21.21; 26.22; 28.23) with the prophets, and he cites by name Joel (2.16), Isaiah (8.28, 30; 28.25), and Samuel (3.24; 13.20).

place . . . especially scriptural or prophetic words,”⁷⁰ and his use of the common Greek word for “day” (*hemera*).

Luke does not use the idea of fulfillment often in Acts, but he does connect it with the technical use of *graphe* or “scripture”⁷¹ in a few important places. At the outset, when the disciples choose a replacement for the fallen Judas Iscariot, Peter prefaces their work to appoint “another [to] take his office” by stressing its connection with what David had referred to in his writings (see 1.20 and Psalm 69.26; 109.8). He tells the brothers that “the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand . . .” (1.16). In the explanation by Peter and John to the people of Jerusalem who wondered with amazement about the healing of the lame beggar at the temple’s Beautiful Gate, they tell them that they had killed Jesus, “the Author of life,” the one chiefly responsible for the lame man’s now “perfect health,” but they had “acted in ignorance.” And “what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.” But they, like the lame beggar, could receive “times of refreshing” and be blessed and turned from their wickedness, since God had “raised up his servant” Jesus from the dead (3.12-26).

When Paul and Barnabas speak to the synagogue at Perga in Pamphylia in Asia Minor, they rehearse the history of Israel—how God “chose our fathers,” made them great “during their stay in the land of Egypt,” led them out of Egypt, dispossessed the Canaanites and “gave them

⁷⁰Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 287.

⁷¹Danker indicates that *graphe* is used in the New Testament “only in reference to the scriptures of Israel, namely the Old Testament, **scripture** . . . as an individual citation . . . [or] as a body of writings,” *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 82. See Acts 1.16; 8.32, 35; 17.2, 11; 18.24, 28; cf. Luke 4.21; 24.27, 32, 45.

their land as an inheritance." They remind how God "gave them judges until Samuel the prophet," "gave them Saul" until "he raised up David," a man after God's own heart and obedient to God's will, and brought from David's offspring "to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised." Then these messengers "of this salvation" inform the congregation that "those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers," because "they did not recognize [Jesus] nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, [they] fulfilled them by condemning [Jesus]." But God "raised him from the dead," and the "good news" is "what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus." And "forgiveness of sins" as well as freedom "from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses" is proclaimed to "everyone who believes" (13.16-41). This clear, even though infrequent, connection by Luke between the work of the apostles he is writing about and the writings of the prophets that he concludes have been fulfilled in his own time punctuates Luke's belief that the apocalyptic work of the Lord, as foretold by Joel, had become a reality (i.e., "this is what was uttered," 2.16).⁷²

⁷²See also Luke's direct quotations of Old Testament passages, 1.20 (Psalm 69.26; 109.8); 2.17-21 (Joel 3.1-5); 2.25-28 (Psalm 15.8-11); 2.34-35 (Psalm 109.1); 3.13 (Exodus 3.6); 3.22 (Deuteronomy 18.15f., 18f.); 3.23 (Leviticus 23.29); 3.25 (Genesis 22.18; 26.4); 4.24 (2 Kings 19.15; Isaiah 37.16; Nehemiah 9.6; Exodus 20.11; Psalm 146.6); 4.25-26 (Psalm 2.1f.); 7.3 (Genesis 12.1); 7.5 (Genesis 17.8; 48.4); 7.6 (Genesis 15.13f.); 7.18 (Exodus 1.8); 7.27-28 (Exodus 2.14); 7.32 (Exodus 3.6); 7.33 (Exodus 3.5); 7.34 (Exodus 3.7, 10); 7.35 (Exodus 2.14); 7.37 (Deuteronomy 18.15); 7.40 (Exodus 32.1, 23); 7.42-43 (Amos 5.25-27); 7.49-50 (Isaiah 66.1f.); 8.32-33 (Isaiah 53.7f.); 13.33 (Psalm 2.7); 13.34 (Isaiah 55.3); 13.35 (Psalm 15.10); 13.41 (Habakkuk 1.5); 13.47 (Isaiah 49.6); 14.15 (Exodus 20.11; Psalm 146.6); 15.16-18 (Amos 9.11f.); 23.5 (Exodus 22.27); 28.26-27 (Isaiah 6.9f.). And there are considerably more allusions than direct quotations of Old Testament texts by Luke in Acts. See marginalia for "The Acts of the Apostles" in *Greek-English New Testament, 757-961*.

Luke, in the spirit of but not the exact words of Joel's apocalyptic oracle, emphasizes the Pentecostal outpouring of God's Holy Spirit as occurring "in the last days" (*en tais eschatais hemerai*, 2.17).⁷³ Luke does not use this expression "in the last days" again in his Acts of Apostles (see 2 Timothy 2.1; Hebrews 1.2; James 5.3; 2 Peter 3.3), but he does seem to indicate a dichotomy between the old (i.e., former times) and the new (i.e., present times) with his fluid use of phrases such as "these days" and "those days." Context certainly plays an important role in the meaning of each of these phrases, and it is not always certain if Luke wants to indicate anything more than just a simple expression of time. "Those days" in 1.15 is on Pentecost (cf. 2.18), in Luke's lifetime, when Peter spoke to 120 brothers about replacing Judas Iscariot which was a time antecedent to the time of Luke's writing his Acts. But "those days" in 7.41 (cf. "the days of David," verse 45) definitely refers to former times and the time of Israel's troubles when Moses "disappeared" on Mount Sinai and the people made a golden calf to bow down to. And "those days" in 9.37, also during Luke's lifetime, is about the time of the illness and death of Dorcas, the garment maker and disciple, from Joppa.

"These days" in 3.24, refers to the time after Pentecost, the ministry of Peter and John in Jerusalem, and their message to the people that "all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days." This statement highlights the time connection between former days and current days that Luke makes earlier by quoting Joel's prophecy. "Before these days" in 5.36 is Gamaliel's way of referring to the rebellions of Theudas and Judas the Galilean that occurred before their time, and "in these days" in 6.1

⁷³Compare the prophetic theme "the latter days" in the Hebrew scriptures (Numbers 24.14; Deuteronomy 4.30; Isaiah 2.2; Jeremiah 23.20; 30.24; 48.47; 49.39; Ezekiel 38.8, 16; Daniel 2.28; 10.14; Hosea 3.5; Micah 4.1).

indicates the time of substantial growth of the Jerusalem church, the problem of adequately serving the needs of Hellenist widows, and the division of labor by the apostles in their choice of seven men "to serve tables" (6.2ff.). In "these days" of 11.27, prophets, such as Agabus who "foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world" (11.28), came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and "after these days" of 21.15 simply notes the period of time in Caesarea prior to the departure of Paul and his companions, including Luke himself, to Jerusalem. None of these phrases or time notes should be taken as indicators of apocalyptic per se, but they do show the keen awareness of the author of Acts to the unfolding events of God's handiwork over the various periods of time that he surveys in his *logon*.

One thing is clear, however, and that is Luke's putting the return of Jesus to earth in the future. Unambiguous and overt references to this "second coming"⁷⁴ of Jesus, and the attendant themes of judgment and resurrection of the dead, are to be found in the following passages in Acts.

Acts 1.11, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Acts 2.20, ". . . before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day."

Acts 3.20-21, ". . . that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago."

⁷⁴This exact phrase is not used in Acts or in the Bible.

Acts 17.31, “. . . because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”⁷⁵

These passages are not numerous, so Luke does not dwell on or develop to any extent this “second coming” of Jesus in his *logos*. The references are part of the proclamation by angels (“two men . . . in white robes,” 1.10) and by the apostles, and they seem to be an appropriate part (i.e., not forced or strained) of Luke’s overall presentation of the message about Jesus. The fact that this part of God’s apocalyptic work is presented as future but not elaborated on by Luke seems to indicate his acceptance, as well as the acceptance of his fellow believers, of reliance on the wisdom of God, not their own, to reveal fully what shall come to pass and when it shall come to pass. Luke stresses as much at the very beginning of his *logos* when he records the word of advice from the risen Lord to his disciples, “It is not for you to know times or seasons (*chronous e kairous*) that the Father has fixed by his own authority” (1.7). It is enough that the Lord’s apostles receive power from the Holy Spirit to witness “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (1.8).

As a result, to summarize, Luke’s *logos* is not an extended apocalyptic book like John’s Revelation (see Revelation 1.1, *apokalupsis iesou christou*) or like the prophetic writings of

⁷⁵For these themes that imply the return of Jesus, see 2.35; 6.14; 10.42; and 24.25 for judgment; 14.22 for the kingdom of God; and 23.6; 24.15, 21 for the resurrection of the dead.

Ezekiel, Daniel, or Zechariah.⁷⁶ Acts has no apocalyptic Christ, no grandiose good-versus-evil theme, no overwhelming preponderance of apocalyptic beings (i.e., angels, demons),⁷⁷ and no extended or involved depiction of end-time realities (i.e., judgment, heaven, hell). Luke's *logos* is reserved in its use of apocalyptic images and themes, but Luke does couch his treatise in an apocalyptic framework or template with his use of themes that he gleans from the apocalyptic oracle of Joel. And he artfully and meticulously weaves these themes—the showing of wonders and signs by God, the revelatory nature of God's outpoured Spirit, the unlimited pouring out of God's Spirit, and the time of God's activity—throughout the whole of his treatise. Acts of Apostles is a carefully crafted piece of literature and combined with the author's Gospel accounts for about one-third of the canonical New Testament.⁷⁸ It is worthy of study to gain insight about

⁷⁶On Revelation, see Gilbert Desrosiers, *An Introduction to Revelation: A Pathway to Interpretation*, The Continuum Biblical Studies Series, edited by Steve Moyise (London, UK: Continuum, 2000); Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1963); Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010); and Harry O. Maier, *Apocalypse Recalled: The Book of Revelation after Christendom* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002).

⁷⁷But the Holy Spirit is ever present.

⁷⁸For different opinions about the literary nature of Acts, see Wenham and Walton, *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Gospels and Acts*, 284ff.; compare Paul Feine and Johannes Behm, *Introduction to the New Testament*, reedited by Werner Georg Kuemmel, translated by A. J. Mattill, Jr. (14th rev. ed.; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1965), 112ff.; and Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, Introduction to the New Testament, Volume Two (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1982), 49-52, 315-323. See too the apt summary, but arguing a late date around A.D. 150, by Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text and Canon* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 147-151. On the surviving patristic commentaries on Acts and their approach to its interpretation, see the helpful Francis Martin, ed., *New Testament V: Acts*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, general editor, Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), xx.-xxvi.

the religious movement evolving from the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth and revolving around the deeds and teachings of those first-century followers of the one whom they believed and revered to be the Christ. It beckons people from all nations to heed and give ear to its message about salvation, and it hearkens the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring to fruition "the kingdom of God" (1.3; 28.31). It eschews the setting of "times or seasons" that God has determined by his own authority, but it does not neglect to recognize and joyfully announce what has been perceived as the magnificent handiwork of God in the present time. It acknowledges the promises of the past, it celebrates the fulfillments in the present, and it hopes for the consummations of the future.

The conclusion of Luke's *logos* is open or unresolved and has sparked much debate about Luke's intent or purpose in writing his Acts.⁷⁹ But the unresolved ending, just like the ambiguity and uncertainty of much of the language in apocalyptic literature, serves an appropriate function. God, like Paul, is not finished with his work. He will continue to the very end. And to the very end, he will, like Paul, welcome all who come to him. "So let it be known . . . that this salvation of God has been sent out to the nations, and they will listen" (28.28, personal translation). This is a message about the rule of God (in heaven and on earth) and about our Lord Jesus Christ that can be shared "with all boldness and without hindrance" (28.31).

⁷⁹See F. F. Bruce's treatment in *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1972), 361-367; and the comments about "the purpose and the conclusion of Acts" in C. S. C. Williams, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries, general editor, Henry Chadwick (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 15-19. See too "Luke's purposes in writing Acts" in Longenecker, "Acts of the Apostles," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 9, 216-221.

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