

“What’s Resurrection Got to Do with Anything? Resurrection, Inclusion, and the People of God in Acts”

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Introduction

I begin with a simple observation that many others have also shared: the book that has been entitled “The Acts of the Apostles” may be better understood with a different title, since *divine* activity rather than that of apostles takes center stage throughout the narrative.¹ Whereas the apostles disappear from the book after chapter 15, the narrator consistently depicts God in various ways as the mover behind the Christian movement. In a manner not dissimilar to what one finds consistently in the Septuagint, the language of which Acts repeatedly mirrors, God’s activity occurs on behalf of and in the midst of those who are depicted as “the people of God.” But what is it that we see God do in Acts? Some past interpreters have contended that a title such as “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” is a better title for this work, because they contend that the Holy Spirit is the major character at work in the narrative. To be sure, the narrator “draws God and Spirit into close correlation, so that the Spirit becomes the onstage representative of the God who directs everything from the wings.”² But contemporary obsession with “signs and wonders” as indicative of the Spirit’s work may suggest a confusion over and simplification of the nature and purpose of divine activity in Acts, which may also be extended to include the nature and purpose of the people of God, as well as her calling and mission.

In Acts, a good place to turn when considering the Lukan ecclesiological perspective is Paul’s Miletus speech (Acts 20:17-35). Although this speech has received much more attention from scholars for its depiction of Paul and his ministry or for the composition of the speech as a farewell address, a better case may be made for the speech function, within the narrative context of Acts 20:1—21:17, as an address to “the church of God” (20:28) and thereby focusing on ecclesiological issues.³ From a narrative perspective, it is significant to note that these materials are located within Acts *after* all Lukan descriptions of ministry activities have ceased.⁴ In this broader

¹ This title probably originated with the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Luke’s Gospel. It was also cited by Irenaeus, who would have accepted Paul as an apostle. However, in Acts Paul’s apostolic status may be in doubt, as he did not meet the stated criteria for an apostle that Peter delineated (Acts 1:21-22). Thus, nowhere in Acts is Paul “officially” recognized as an apostle, with the only references to him as an apostle (along with Barnabas; 14:4, 14) more suggestive of missionaries or messengers. David Moessner contends for the implicit apostolicity of the Lukan Paul as the successor of the Twelve due to his faithful witness to the apostolic tradition. See David P. Moessner, “Luke’s ‘Witness of Witnesses’: Paul as Definer and Defender of the Tradition of the Apostles – ‘from the beginning,’” in *Paul and the Heritage of Israel: Paul’s Claim upon Israel’s Legacy in Luke and Acts in the Light of the Pauline Letters*, ed. D. P. Moessner, D. Marguerat, M. C. Parsons, and M. Wolter (New York: T.&T. Clark, 2012), 117-47.

² William. H. Shepherd, Jr. *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts*, SBLDS 147 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 41.

³ See Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “Theology and Ecclesiology in the Miletus Speech: Reflections on Content and Context,” *NTS* 50 (2004): 36-52.

⁴ The Acts narrative depicts the spreading of the gospel and ministry of the Jesus movement or the church. Initially, the narrator describes the ministry in Jerusalem as large numbers of people who responded in repentance or being numbered with the believers (e.g., 2:41, 47; 4:4). With references to increasing numbers of believers (e.g., 6:7), the

context, readers will also discover that this is Paul’s only speech in Acts that addresses an audience of disciples, not to mention the broader narrative context providing a brief sketch of the final steps of Paul’s ministry travels. Thus, this is a pivotal moment in the narrative. On the one hand, it encourages readers to look retrospectively into the Acts narrative from an ecclesiological perspective. From the broader context of the four travel reports surrounding the speech, the narrator offers scenes of different local churches that remind readers of “the good ol’ days” in Jerusalem, including fellowship and teaching (20:7-12, 18-35) as well as prophecy (21:7-14).⁵ In addition, Paul’s speech underscores (albeit with considerable ambiguity in detail) the divine origins of the church, a point that has been repeatedly underscored throughout the entire preceding narrative. On the other hand, this broader context with its positive perspectives regarding the fledgling Christian movement appears immediately before Paul’s final visit to Jerusalem and the church there, an episode that does not fare well as it quickly deteriorates from allegations about Paul’s problematic teaching and ultimately ends with Paul’s near execution outside the temple by an angry mob (21:18-36). This troublesome episode prompts serious questions about the relationship between the Jerusalem church and Paul and even about the church’s responses to him (i.e., initially regarding the allegations themselves and later regarding the troubles at the temple). However, the literary placement of this episode also prompts important ecclesiological questions, given this episode’s narrative appearance after the Miletus speech, where the last mention of *ἐκκλησία* (20:28) occurs in Acts, a term that the Lukan narrator has used frequently to depict the Jerusalem believers (5:11; 8:1, 3; 11:22; 12:1, 5; 15:4, 22) and others. That is, the contention here is that the Miletus speech, *together* with the additional events in Jerusalem, constitute a pivotal moment in Acts, because the issues are not about Paul but about the nature and mission of the church as the people of God.

These are issues to which we will return, but we must first pursue more fully the retrospective aspect of this Miletus speech. That is, if the Miletus speech echoes, draws, and/or builds upon earlier ecclesiological concepts and images that appear in the ministry portion of Acts and closes out such positive depictions of the church, then a good place to begin (given the Lukan tendency to use speeches as implicit commentary to provide explanation to readers) is the first speech of that extended narrative portion that begins the ministry portion of the church and the spread of the Jesus movement: Peter’s explanatory speech at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36). In addition, one must consider how the concepts from this speech may be reflected in other narrative portions of Acts, especially in descriptions of the church and her mission through the ministry portion of Acts (i.e., chapters 2 through 19).

The thesis of this paper is that the central themes of Peter’s Pentecost speech—which focus on God’s resurrection of Jesus and validation of Jesus as God’s Messiah—are responsible for the identity and mission of the believers in Acts, whom the Lukan narrator depicts as the reconstituted people of God or the *ἐκκλησία*. This paper will have several parts: (1) an assessment of some major topics or themes of Peter’s Pentecost speech, including how those themes intersect with Paul’s Miletus speech; (2) an exploration of the place of these major themes, notably resurrection and

narrative also occasionally describes the gospel (οὐ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ) as spreading (6:7; 12:24; 19:20). Interspersed are other descriptions of persons who responded favorably (and otherwise) to the gospel. However, after 19:20, no other positive description appears, signaling the end of Paul’s ministry in Acts. His activities in chapters 20 and 21 do not expand the ministry of the church beyond what is described in Acts 2—19.

⁵ Gaventa, “Theology and Ecclesiology in the Miletus Speech,” 37-40.

inclusion, in the practices and mission of the church in Acts; (3) a consideration of the ecclesiological and missional questions raised by Acts 21 and Paul’s troubles in Jerusalem with the church and temple rituals; and (4) some initial thoughts for those who are theological/ecclesial descendants of the Wesleys.

1. Peter’s explanatory speech at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41)

Not surprisingly to any reader of Acts, the extraordinary events on Pentecost were the dramatic turning point for the Jesus movement. But one should note that the Lukan narrator gives very little space or attention to the dramatic scene itself. Although the narrator provides some materials from Jesus (namely, 1:5, 8) to assist readers in the interpretation of descriptions regarding the Spirit’s activity among the believers (2:4), the subsequent Petrine explanatory speech receives the primary attention in Acts 2. Given the role of speeches in the developing Acts narrative (not to mention its introduction to the ministry portion of that narrative), it is not much of a stretch to claim that the major topics or themes of *this* speech provide the theological foundation for Acts, including its ecclesiology. A number of emphases emerge.

a. The fulfillment of God’s promises and purposes for Israel as the people of God

The citation of the Joel passage (Acts 2:17-21, quoting Joel 2:28-32 [3:1-5 LXX]), which was a promise to Israel, explains from the Hebrew Scriptures that the phenomenon regarding the coming of the Spirit upon Jesus’ followers was indicative that God had fulfilled that promise, which was to be part of God’s eschatological acts of salvation on their behalf. The speech draws attention *away* from the extraordinary nature of the Pentecost event and *toward* this simple fact: God acted as God promised long ago.

Although persons often declare that the Pentecost event signifies the birth of the church, the Lukan perspective through Peter’s speech points instead to what God had done on behalf of *all Israel* as the people of God. That is, the Lukan ecclesiology, if you will, has a broader perspective from the outset, based on the Septuagint’s use of the term ἐκκλησία. What we find here was entirely a *Jewish* event: during a Jewish festival, at the Jewish temple,⁶ with all Jewish participants and bystanders, with Israel’s God initiating what happened and implementing what *this* God had vowed centuries before. Its significance is in what God had done to fulfill God’s promises and purposes among the people whom God had called. Other appearances of the Spirit in the narrative—notably the instances at the house of Cornelius (10:44-46) and with the twelve men in Ephesus (19:1-6)—allude back to this same Pentecost scene, due to the similarity of imagery. However, other images of persons filled by the Spirit or receiving messages from the Spirit convey such individuals as God’s prophets and reveal God at work.⁷

⁶ I interpret this event to occur in the temple courts. The ambiguous reference to the believers as “all together in one place” (ἡσαν πάντες ὁμοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό; 2:1) is more likely a reference to the temple in Jerusalem than the “upper room” where the eleven apostles and others first gathered after Jesus’ ascension (1:12-14), prior to 120 believers meeting later to select Judas’ replacement among the apostles (1:15-26). See Richard P. Thompson, *Keeping the Church in Its Place: The Church as Narrative Character in Acts* (New York: T.&T. Clark, 2006), 35, 38.

⁷ See Shepherd, *Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts*, esp. 245-50.

b. The role of God in the resurrection of Jesus

Closely related to the topic of the divine fulfillment of God’s promises and purposes for Israel is the role of God with regard to the crucifixion and death of Jesus. That divine role is parsed out in two distinct ways within Peter’s speech. First, Peter mentions the significance of the life and ministry of Jesus, through which Peter insists God offered proof or validation. Peter contends that God was the source of Jesus’ miracles, as δυνάμις is the term regularly used in the Third Gospel for Jesus’ miracles. The “wonders and signs” (τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα) are reminiscent of the same LXX expression that often depicts God’s powerful acts on Israel’s behalf (e.g., Exod 7:3; Deut 4:34; 28:46; Ps 135:9; Isa 8:18). But Peter emphasizes that *God* did (ἐποίησεν δι’ αὐτοῦ ὁ θεὸς; 2:22) these things *through* Jesus.⁸ Thus, Jesus’ life and ministry embodied God’s activity and therefore God’s kingdom (in contrast to the kingdoms, empires, and power structures of that era). According to Luke’s Gospel, Jesus’ embodiment of God’s kingdom included care for the oppressed and sharing a table with the outcast (e.g., Luke 5:12-39; 7:36-50).

Second, not only did God act through Jesus’ life and ministry, but God also responded to counter or undo the Jewish rejection of Jesus (and God’s purposes). One aspect to God’s counter-response to the rejection of Jesus is God’s “reversal” of their murder of Jesus by raising Jesus, a point Peter repeats, no doubt for emphasis (2:23-24, 32). The main part of the sentence in verse 23 balances seemingly contradictory emphases. On the one hand, Peter’s strong declaration places responsibility for Jesus’ crucifixion squarely on his Jewish audience. Although they did not personally kill Jesus, as crucifixion (see the unusual verb προσπήγνυμι, which literally refers to nailing something to an object; see 1 Pet 1:2) was reserved exclusively for Roman use, Peter depicts their leaders were guilty accomplices because they ironically worked “through the hands of the lawless” (διὰ χειρὸς ἀνόμων; 2:23). On the other hand, Peter also declares this “handing over” (ἔκδοτος) or betrayal of Jesus as part of God’s divine plan that was within God’s foreknowledge (προγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ; 2:23). The two segments of Peter’s declaration introduce a paradox: the life-giving purposes of God and the life-taking intentions of humans came together to bring about Jesus’ death. Yet God’s purposes have the final word in the resurrection of Jesus, thereby vindicating him in the face of human rejection—a rejection not only of Jesus himself but all that Jesus embodied.

The other aspect of God’s counter-response to the rejection of Jesus is God’s honoring or exaltation of Jesus by placing him in the position of divine honor and authority (2:33, 36). Although God’s exaltation of Jesus was inclusive of the resurrection, Peter’s argument moves beyond the resurrection to Jesus’ ascension. It is here that the narrator offers an explanation for Jesus’ ascension. The emphatic dative construction, τῇ δεξιᾷ ... τοῦ θεοῦ (2:33), may identify either (a) God as the one who exalted Jesus (dative of instrument)⁹ or (b) the place of divine authority and favor to which he was exalted (dative of location).¹⁰ The quotation of Psalm 110:1 in the next verse makes

⁸ See my treatment of the passage in Richard P. Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2015), 82-84.

⁹ C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994-98), 1:149; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 66.

¹⁰ Friedrich Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), §199; Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, trans. J. Limburg, A. T. Kraabel, and D. H. Juel, *Hermeneia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 21.

the latter understanding more plausible, thus extending divine vindication again to Jesus as well as authority to him, despite the human rejection of Jesus. In other words, God reiterates that God has the final say, not human rejection. The speech does not offer specific explanation regarding the salvific importance of Jesus' death and resurrection (e.g., in terms of atonement), although the later reference to repentance, baptism, and the forgiveness of sins (2:38) may be linked to these.¹¹ Nonetheless, the Lukan focus on God's role in the reversal of what God's chosen people had done through their rejection of Jesus affirms the constancy and reliability of God's plans and purposes. That God acted to vindicate and give authority to *this* Jesus by his resurrection and ascension is noteworthy, as Peter underscores the apostolic witness to Jesus' resurrection as central to their role as apostles: (2:32).¹²

c. The Christological “twist” to this divine fulfillment

A third theological emphasis that may be the core affirmation of this explanatory speech (along with the resurrection of Jesus) is the role of Jesus in God's fulfillment of the divine promises and purposes for Israel. The Lukan narrator depicts the Pentecost event in Jewish terms and the citation of the Joel passage at the beginning of Peter's speech maintains a similar orientation. However, the repeated accent placed upon the resurrected and exalted Jesus coaxes readers to see this divine fulfillment in terms of *Christology* rather than *pneumatology*, despite the fact that the narrative itself often uses Spirit language to describe the believers.¹³

In other words, the speech demands a radical change in perspective. Not only had God accomplished what God promised, but the *agent* who accomplished what happened during this noteworthy Pentecost event among the Jewish people was none other than Jesus, the same one for whose death Peter declared them to be responsible. The crucial role of Jesus in this divine fulfillment is the distinctive aspect of Peter’s message and the gospel as it was later proclaimed. The gospel message declared to God’s people how God had kept and accomplished those promises to them ... through Jesus as Lord and Messiah/Christ (2:36).¹⁴ That is, God raised and exalted Jesus as *Lord and Messiah/Christ*, thereby giving the promised Spirit to *him* (2:33). Thus, Jesus was actually the recipient of God’s promise, the Holy Spirit ($\tau\acute{\eta}\nu\tau\acute{e}\pi\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\acute{\iota}\alpha\tau\acute{o}\nu\pi\kappa\epsilon\mu\acute{m}\alpha\tau\acute{o}\nu\acute{\alpha}\gamma\acute{y}\iota\acute{o}\nu\lambda\acute{a}\beta\acute{\o}\nu\pi\kappa\acute{a}\tau\acute{o}\nu\pi\kappa\acute{a}\tau\acute{r}\acute{o}\acute{s}$; 2:33), and was therefore the agent who “poured out the Spirit” as experienced during Pentecost. Without this distinctively *Christological* emphasis regarding Pentecost, there would be little if anything about this event that would be related to the Christian gospel.¹⁵

¹¹ Cf. H. Douglas Buckwalter, "The Divine Saviour," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 107-20. See also Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986, 1990), 2:35.

¹² I interpret the first person plural pronoun (ἡμεῖς; 2:32) as a reference to Peter and the other apostles (see also 2:14), as one stated criterion for candidates for the vacant place among the apostles was that “one of these become a witness to his [Jesus’] resurrection with us” (μάρτυρα τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ σὺν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι ἔνα τούτων; 1:22).

¹³ See Max Turner, "The 'Spirit of Prophecy' as the Power of Israel's Restoration and Witness," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 332-33.

¹⁴ See C. Kavin Rowe, "Acts 2.36 and the Continuity of Lukan Christology," *NTS* 53 (2007): 37–56.

¹⁵ Although the adjective “Christian” is used here, it is recognized the term has not yet appeared in Acts to refer to believers (not until Acts 11:26). Although the Jesus movement is still a part of Judaism in Acts 2, this adjective helps to distinguish believers and their message from others within Judaism, despite it being slightly anachronistic.

Nonetheless, the Pentecost experience of the Jesus movement did not signify divine actions *apart* from the Jewish people. Rather, these divine actions occurred *within* her.¹⁶ The outpouring of the Spirit through Jesus as Lord and Messiah/Christ signifies how God fulfilled God's purposes and promises within the people of God.

But this is where the common Lukian description of members of this movement as "believers" and the importance of "believing" or "faith" come into the picture. In most instances in Acts, believing is left undefined. However, in a few cases believing is qualified: believe "in the Lord" (9:42), "in him" (i.e., Jesus; 10:43), or "on the Lord Jesus" (16:31). Or, faith is sometimes defined as "in our Lord Jesus" (20:21) or "in Jesus" (26:18). Interestingly, every qualification comes later *after* the initial period of the Jesus movement in Jerusalem (which suggests that, in Acts 1—7, the speeches of Peter in particular assume this understanding of faith in Jesus, as the resurrected Lord and as Messiah/Christ). However, there is little mention of such faith after chapter 21 (except for 22:19; 24:24; 26:18).

d. The inclusive dimension of that salvific promise

Both the first and last portions of the Joel passage are widely recognized as programmatic for Acts as a whole. Given the emphasis on the Spirit being poured out on "all people" or "all flesh" (ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα; 2:17) and the affirmation that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (ἔσται πᾶς ὅς ἂν ἐπικαλέσηται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται; 2:21), in this Pentecost context there is little doubt of a double meaning to this quoted prophecy, as Peter says more than he knows. On the one hand, his later consternation over the vision with the unclean animals in Caesarea (10:9-19) indicates that he only could have understood this statement from Joel as a reference to the people of Israel. Similarly, this idea was not embraced by the church in Jerusalem, as the spread of the Christian movement outside of Jerusalem did not occur as an intentional response to Jesus' call (1:8) but as a result of the opposition after Stephen's death (8:1-3). On the other hand, the broader context of Acts indicates the salvific implications of this promise that extended beyond the Jewish people to others as well. This inclusive aspect of the Christian message continually echoes throughout Acts in its use of the terms *σώζω* and *σωτηρία*, especially in Peter's two explanations about what happened with Cornelius (11:14; 15:14). However, evidence of the concept is apparent wherever there are both Jewish and Gentile responses to the Christian message, whether the text explicitly mentions this or not.

e. Relation of themes to broader context of Acts

As the first major speech in Acts, Peter's explanatory speech at Pentecost provides the theological trajectories for the narrative holistically as well as specifically for the ecclesiology of Acts. The pivotal points of chapters 10–11 and 15, which narrate and then twice interpret the Cornelius event in light of Pentecost and its explanatory speech, indicate the importance of the theological and Christological connections that the Lukian narrator appropriates throughout this broader section.

¹⁶ See David Seccombe, "The New People of God," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 353-54, who refers to Luke's depiction of the church as a messianic people.

Some of these theological connections are readily seen in the Miletus speech as well, which provides the opposite bookend of the portion of Acts that offers the predominant portion of the Lukian image or depiction of the church. Note the similarities below:

| <i>Peter's Pentecost Speech</i> | <i>Paul's Miletus Speech</i> |
|---|--|
| God has fulfilled God's promise to Israel as the people of God that was first articulated by the prophet Joel (2:17-21). | God is the one who brought the church into being (20:28). ¹⁷ |
| The emphasis is on Jesus as both the resurrected Lord and Messiah/Christ (2:36) who serves as God's agent in restoring Israel and calls on the people to repent (2:38). | Paul refers to repentance and "faith in our Lord Jesus" (20:21). |
| The reminder in mission is that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (2:21). | Paul reminded the Ephesians that he declared the gospel to both Jews and Greeks (20:21). |
| Between these two speeches are repeated references to the Christian message, ¹⁸ including instances where that message has to do with Jesus as Messiah/Christ, ¹⁹ which allude back to the emphases of the Pentecost speech (as well as the supplemental Christological materials in the speeches of chs. 3-4). | |

f. Initial conclusions regarding Peter's Pentecost speech

Although the extraordinary events of Pentecost often captivate the attention of contemporary readers of Acts, like those who witnessed them and heard the believers witness to Jesus, the narrator uses the occasion to offer Peter's Pentecost speech as implicit commentary, which provides both explanation for what happened on that day as well as understanding for what occurs afterward in the narrative. Central to that explanation are two key themes or emphases. One emphasis is the resurrection of Jesus by God, which ensures that readers recognize that, at the heart of the gospel message, is God's vindication of Jesus' life and ministry as God's chosen and anointed one, the Messiah/Christ, who embodied the purposes of God and what Jesus proclaimed as the kingdom of God, which was characterized by Jesus extending God's grace and hospitality to all, even those rejected by society and the religious. The other emphasis is the exaltation of Jesus in his ascension and beyond, so that Jesus became both the recipient of the promised Holy Spirit and the one who poured out that Spirit, initially on the believers at Pentecost and *potentially on all people* (2:17, 21), despite Peter's and others' lack of awareness of these implications. *Both* emphases are encapsulated by subsequent references to the gospel message in Acts.

¹⁷ Cf. Gaventa, "Theology and Ecclesiology in the Miletus Speech," 48-49.

¹⁸ See, e.g., variations of λόγος (2:40; 4:40; 6:4; 8:4; 10:36; 10:44; 11:19; 13:26; 14:25; 15:7; 16:6; 17:11; 18:5; 20:32) for the gospel message, including ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ (4:31; 6:2, 7; 8:14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5, 7, 46; 17:13; 18:11) and ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου (8:25; 13:44, 49; 15:35-36; 16:32; 19:10, 20).

¹⁹ See esp. 8:5, 12; 9:22; 10:36, 48; 11:17; 17:3; 18:5, 28; 28:31. Note the significance of the theological themes, especially the inclusive aspect of salvation, that are associated with this Christological message as the Jesus movement spread geographically.

2. Resurrection, inclusion, and church — a few references

As has been mentioned already, the resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of the gospel message in Acts. Often, it is explicitly articulated. For instance, when Peter offers an explanation to inquiring minds who wonder how he healed the crippled man who had been begging at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, he responded:

You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. (Acts 3:12-16, NRSV)

In Athens, some philosophers thought Paul was an advocate or proclaimer of “foreign deities” (ξένων δαιμονίων ... καταγγελεύς) because they misunderstood his gospel message about Jesus and the resurrection (τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν εὐηγγελίζετο; 17:18).²⁰ Before the Areopagus, Paul stated, “While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (17:31), resulting in a mixed response: some scoffing, others brushing him off, and others becoming believers.

However, most references to the gospel message in Acts are more implicit with regard to resurrection. Yet resurrection is not only at the heart of that message, but the inclusive nature of the gospel that is linked to the resurrection is also tied to the identity, practices, and mission of the believers or the church as depicted in the Acts narrative. Four selected passages will be briefly examined here, noting how the resurrection of Jesus, as the heart of the gospel, leads to an inclusive (and hospitable) understanding of salvation, mission, and the people of God.

a. *Acts 2:42-47 – The believers in Jerusalem after Pentecost*

The summary statement about the believers in Jerusalem after Pentecost describes their typical behavior, which is indicated by a shift in Greek verb tense (from aorist to imperfect) that extends throughout the paragraph. More specifically, the first sentence (Acts 2:42) is an imperfect periphrastic construction, which depicts the believers as “constantly devoted” or dedicated (ἵσταν ... προσκαρτεροῦντες) to practices listed there. A common understanding is that this list outlines four basic elements of early Christian practices or liturgy.²¹ However, these four elements are listed

²⁰ The irony behind the misunderstanding of the Athenian philosophers is that, in their lack of familiarity with the concept of resurrection, they may have thought Paul’s teaching about Jesus and ἀναστάσις (“resurrection”) was about a male-female pair of deities (see John Chrysostom, *Hom. Act. 38.1*).

²¹ See, e.g., M. É. Boismard and A. Lamouille, *Les Actes des Deux Apôtres*, 3 vols., ÉBib (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1990), 2:152; I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, TNTC (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1980), 83; Gottfried Schille, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*, THKNT 5 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 115; and David John Williams, *Acts*, NIBC 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 59.

grammatically as two distinct pairs, with each pair linked together with the conjunction *καὶ* but with no conjunction joining the two pairs:²²

Ἦσαν δὲ προσκαρτεροῦντες [“Now they were constantly devoted”] ...

1. τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, [“to the teaching of the apostles and to the fellowship”]

2. τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς. [“to the breaking of bread and to the prayers”]

Considered in this way, these two pairs of practices refer to two general kinds of corporate activities: those related to *worship* practices toward God, and those related to *social* practices among believers.²³ Categorized and paired in this manner, such practices parallel the two general categories of the Shema, which deal with loving God and loving others.²⁴ More specifically, the “teaching of the apostles” refers to the testimony or witness of the Twelve about Jesus’ ministry and resurrection. Thus, the believers’ devotion to such teaching would have included both the witness and teaching from the apostles as well as the ongoing reflection on that witness. But what is significant here is the connection between this teaching and the practices of the believers, as they put into action the implication of that teaching, the description of which is consistent with what was linked to Jesus’ resurrection. Thus, the rest of the summary depicts practices of fellowship, care, and hospitality consistent with Jesus’ life and ministry. And the summary concludes by describing how the believers extended God’s grace to all (2:47), a sign that the believers lived out the inclusive mission made possible through Jesus’ resurrection.²⁵

b. Acts 4:32-37 – The Jerusalem believers after opposition

This summary occurs after the first opposition to the apostles, which was in response to Peter’s healing of the crippled man in the temple. It is noteworthy that Peter and John were arrested by the temple authorities because they were “teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead” (4:2). When brought before the Jewish council, Peter declared that the healed man “is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead” (4:10). The council tried to squelch the witness of the two apostles, only for Peter to declare that they could not keep from being witnesses to what they had seen and heard (4:20).

The summary about the believers after opposition and intimidation from the Jewish religious authorities in Jerusalem focuses on their unity and the sharing of possessions. On the one hand, the description “one heart and soul” (*καρδία καὶ ψυχὴ μία*; 4:32) combines familiar expressions to indicate the divinely created bond that held the believers together. The expression “one soul” often described true friendship in Hellenistic circles, echoing a familiar proverb that said, “Friends have

²² Cf. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 1:162, 164-66; Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2 vols., EKKNT (Zurich: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986), 1:30; and Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 59.

²³ Cf. Gerhard Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2 vols., HThKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1980-82), 1:286.

²⁴ The language of love does not appear in Acts. These general categories may be a *redescription* of practices fulfilling the Shema, with the Shema remaining a subtext, with no direct mention or allusion to it in the narrative.

²⁵ Note the CEB translation of Acts 2:47a: “They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone.” Other translations focus on believers enjoying the people’s favor. See T. David Andersen, “The Meaning of EXONΤΕΣ ΧΑΠΙΝ ΠΡΟΣ in Acts 2.47,” *NTS* 34 (1988): 604-10; Thompson, *Keeping the Church in Its Place*, 58-59.

one soul between them.”²⁶ The LXX frequently links the terms “heart” and “soul” to describe a total person’s response to God.²⁷ So these two images/ideas expressed the highest ideals of Israel in relation to God. On the other hand, the sharing of possessions was a consequence of unanimity among the believers. At the end of verse 32, and then again in verses 34 and 35, the passage describes in general ways how the believers held “all things in common” (ἢν αὐτοῖς ἀπαντα κοινά; cf. εἶχον ἀπαντα κοινά in 2:44) so that “there was no needy person among them” (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδεής τις ἢν ἐν αὐτοῖς; 4:34), which is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 15:4, which speaks of the elimination of need among God’s people with God’s blessing during a sabbath year. Such blessings occurred as wealthy persons among the believers like Barnabas on occasion sold property and, despite the departure from customary social practices, laid the proceeds at the apostles’ feet (4:35). In a culture where the wealthy and powerful received honor from those with lower social status, here wealthy believers took a position of humility by kneeling before the apostles, who served as the believers’ leaders due to their role as Jesus’ witnesses. By giving the funds to the apostles for distribution (rather than doing it themselves), the wealthy relinquished all social expectations of receiving honor or anything else in return.²⁸

Interestingly, within the summary one sentence or verse “interrupts” the descriptions of this united and caring community. On the surface, one might conclude that verse 33 does not “fit” these descriptions. However, by noting the apostles’ ongoing “testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (NRSV), there seems to be a direct correlation between this gospel proclamation and the believers’ united, caring fellowship. The narrator underscores two things about the community’s activities. First, the apostolic witness happened “with great power” (δυνάμει μεγάλη), which alludes to the resurrected Jesus’ promise of power to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). The appearance of power after the mention of heart and soul in the previous verse reflects the sequential emphases of heart, soul, and power/might in the Shema (Deut 6:5). In the LXX, these same three nouns appear in the same order to describe how God’s people should love God.²⁹ The narrator depicts the apostles as speaking specifically about Jesus’ resurrection—doing exactly what the Jewish council warned them not to do. Second, the corresponding description of “great grace” (χάρις … μεγάλη) with the believers suggests that God’s provision and favor extended to the community and in connection to the ongoing gospel proclamation. The suggestion is that the two go hand-in-hand: the gospel message about the resurrected Jesus—whose life and ministry embodied the kingdom of God that defined power in terms of embracing and empowering the outcast and the marginalized rather than overpowering others—also became so embodied in that community of faith that the practices of these believers were shaped more by values of God’s kingdom than the social norms of their day.

c. Paul at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13-52)

In the first extended scene of Paul’s ministry, Paul was invited to speak at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. Unlike previous speeches in Acts, Paul’s sermon twice addresses both the Jewish

²⁶ Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 9.8.2; see Plutarch, *Frat. amor.* 478c; and Iamblichus, *Pythag.* 168.

²⁷ See, e.g., Deut 4:29; 6:5, 6; 10:12; 11:13, 18; 13:3; 226:16; 28:65; 30:2, 6, 10.

²⁸ See Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 46-47.

²⁹ Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 1:181-82.

worshipers and “those who fear God” (*οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν*; 13:16, 26), likely a reference to Gentile worshipers in the synagogue (often called “Godfearing Gentiles”). The sermon moves quickly from an overview of Israel’s story to proclaim Jesus, first as the promised Savior (13:23) but then as the one whom Israel failed to recognize, resulting in his death. Noteworthy is that Paul reiterates God’s resurrection of Jesus *four times* (13:30, 32, 34, 37), so that result that salvation—described as “the forgiveness of sins” (*ἀφεσις ἀμαρτιῶν*; 13:38) and “being justified” (*δικαιωθῆναι*; 13:38)—is offered to “all who believe” (*πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων*; 13:39).

The initial response to Paul’s message was positive, as Barnabas and he were invited to return the next sabbath, with the use of a form of the verb *λαλέω* suggesting that the invitation was for them to continue proclaiming the gospel about Jesus as the Christ (13:42).³⁰ However, the inclusive aspect of that message was not fully realized until “almost the whole city” gathered at the synagogue a week later “to hear the word of the Lord” (*ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου*; 13:44), which essentially caused the synagogue and its Jewish constituency to be overrun by Gentiles seeking to hear the gospel message. According to the narrator, it was the Jews seeing the crowds (*ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τοὺς ὄχλους*; 13:44) that led to them being “filled with jealousy” (*ἐπλήσθησαν ζῆλον*; 13:45) or, more likely, religious zeal, which may have been concerned for their unique status and identity as God’s chosen people, which the Gentile crowds now threatened.³¹ In other words, the Jewish worshipers at this synagogue did not share Paul’s passion for the Christian gospel, its inclusive mission, or what that meant in constituting/defining the people of God. As a result, they opposed him by slandering him. However, the term that the narrator uses (*βλασφημέω*) makes it clear that Paul’s (inclusive) message was not the problem, for the opponents were not merely speaking against *Paul* but also against *God* (see 5:39). In their concern to protect their identity as God’s chosen people, they ironically distanced themselves from the one upon whom that identity was based.

d. Paul’s brief ministry in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-8)

This final scene is mentioned in passing, not because of its elaborate reference to the proclaimed gospel message or its description of the church in action. Rather, the narrator depicts Paul’s ministry with brevity, in two mere verses. Two points were at the heart of Paul’s message: (a) the proof that “it was necessary for the Messiah/Christ to suffer and rise up from the dead” (*τὸν χριστὸν ἔδει παθεῖν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν*), and (b) that Jesus, whom Paul proclaimed, is this Messiah/Christ (17:3). As already noted, such a message about Jesus as the Christ would imply an offer of salvation that extended inclusively to Jews and Gentiles alike who were listening, despite the fact that the narrator mentions nothing about this. The positive response to that message, which included some Jews from the synagogue as well as a “larger number of Greek God-worshipers and quite a few prominent women” (17:4, CEB; *τῶν τε σεβομένων Ἑλλήνων πλῆθος πολύ, γυναικῶν τε τῶν πρώτων οὐκ ὀλίγαι*), further substantiates the extent of Paul’s message about Jesus as the Messiah/Christ, as does the hostile reaction by Jews who were filled with jealousy or zeal (a form of *ζῆλος*, from the

³⁰ Of the 59 occurrences of the verb *λαλέω* in Acts, all but 3 refer to the speech of a divine speaker, Moses, David, the prophets, or believers (the exceptions being 20:30; 23:18; 26:31).

³¹ See Albrecht Stumpff, “*ζῆλος ktl.*,” in *TDNT* 2:877-82.

same root as the noun *ζῆλος*, which describes the Jews' zealous reaction in 13:45). Although some interpreters contend that the resistance is over the message of a suffering and risen Messiah (like the persecutor Saul),³² the more likely problem is the “diversity” of Paul’s converts, particularly those Gentiles who had frequented the Thessalonian synagogue. In other words, their “elevated” status and presence, at least according to Paul, created conflict over the nature and identity of the people of God in this setting.

e. Brief conclusions — resurrection, inclusion, and church

Despite the complexities of the narrative developments in Acts, the ministry portion of the book offers an array of images of the believers—the church or *ἐκκλησία*—that is both distinct and also inseparable from the Jewish people. At no point do readers find a point in Acts where the church separates from temple or synagogue, never to return. The narrator repeatedly depicts the believers as “the *ἐκκλησία* of God” (20:28) and more generally, because of such language, the people of God, as their stories are intertwined with the stories of the Jewish people. Yet the gospel message—about God’s resurrection of Jesus and about salvation that is inclusive of all people—redefined their identity as the people of God and empowered their accompanying mission. However, the gospel message became increasingly problematic for the Jewish people, not merely because of teachings about a suffering and risen Christ, but because the inclusive nature of the gospel message redefined the identity and mission of the people of God.

3. Acts 21 and Paul’s troubles in Jerusalem with the church and temple rituals

Given earlier portrayals of the Jerusalem church in Acts, the depiction of that church here in Acts 21 stands out not only because of what the narrator mentions but also because of what is not. Let’s begin with what the narrator includes. In particular, it appears that one specific issue is the focus of that meeting. Note in verse 20 that the gathered leaders brought up the issue about rumors regarding Paul’s alleged teaching. The sentence structure links what has generally been understood as two unrelated actions together: their praise to God over Paul’s report (21:19) and the raising of what amounts to serious questions.³³ The juxtaposition of these two matters seems to turn the meeting quickly into a confrontational affair, given the harsh accusations that followed. Interpreters are divided over whether the unnamed respondent was looking out for Paul, was unsympathetic and did not give him a chance to respond to the charges, was actually responding to a growing grassroots uneasiness with the whole idea of Gentile mission, or was even setting him up for the ensuing ordeal at the temple.³⁴

³² See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. AB (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 594; Robert W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. L. E. Keck, 12 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:238.

³³ In the previous meeting with the Jerusalem church (15:4-5), the report from Paul and Barnabas was followed immediately by others who insisted that the Gentile Christians must be circumcised. A major difference between that meeting and the one in Acts 21 is that here Luke mentions a positive response to the report. Cf. Gerd Lüdemann, *Early Christianity according to the Traditions in Acts*, trans. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 232, who sees Luke maintaining that Paul has a good relationship with Jerusalem to the end.

³⁴ See, e.g., Richard Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Church,” in *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting*, ed. R. Bauckham, BAFCS (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 478-79; Stanley E. Porter, *Paul in Acts*, Library of Pauline

However, noteworthy here is that this was a response to Paul's report, which the narrator describes not only as "what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry" but also "detailed" (*καθ' ἐν ἐκαστον*). This first description correlates with the typical Lukan portrayal of various churches throughout Acts. Whether early on in Jerusalem or later on as Paul's ministry that included both Jews and Godfearing Gentiles, the narrator appropriates various images and descriptions to convey God as guiding and enabling the Jesus movement, including those initial overtures of taking the gospel message to the Gentiles, as in the case of Cornelius. With regard to ministry among Gentiles, the narrator typically does not depict Paul as ministering exclusively to that group, as his ministry in the local setting typically started in a Jewish synagogue and included both Jewish and Gentile respondents to his gospel message. However, the emphasis here is likely on Paul's ministry to Gentiles since, given his Jewish audience, his ministry among Jews would have likely been assumed. The second description suggests that Paul's report included some of what we find in Luke's account of Paul's ministry after the Jerusalem Council of chapter 15, particularly the two episodes in Corinth and Ephesus depicting extended periods of ministry in those cities outside the respective local synagogue.

A brief look at each of these accounts reveals similarities between the Lukan version and the stated allegations about Paul by the Jerusalem church spokesperson.³⁵ Recall, for instance, that the charge the Jewish opponents levied against Paul in Corinth was over him supposedly attempting to "persuade people to worship God in ways contrary to the law" (Acts 18:13), which stands in contrast to the Lukan depiction of Paul "teaching the word of God" for a year and a half (18:11). Although this charge may initially seem preposterous to readers of Acts, those same readers will remember that Paul left the synagogue after opposition³⁶ arose there to his proclamation that Jesus was the Messiah/Christ (18:5-7). That message, which readers must infer in the broader context and from implicit responses of at least some Jews and Gentiles (see 18:7-8), would contain the inclusive scope of salvation first noted in Peter's Pentecost speech (2:21; see also 13:38-39; 15:8-9, 14). The relocated setting for Paul's ministry activities—"next door to the synagogue" (*ἡν συνομοροῦσα τῇ συναγωγῇ*) or even so close that it shared a common wall³⁷—has connotations of being *alongside* or *beside* the place where the Jewish people studied the Torah, *παρὰ τὸν νόμον*, precisely (and literally) the charge against him in Corinth (18:13). This compares to the allegations against him in Jerusalem: he regularly taught³⁸ against "Moses," a synonymous expression for the law/Torah.

In the account of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, most of the nineteenth chapter focuses on two extraordinary scenes: (a) the run-in between the sons of Sceva and the local evil spirit, and (b) the

Studies (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 172-86; Brian Rapske, "Opposition to the Plan of God and Persecution," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 255; and Richard P. Thompson, "Say It Ain't So, Paul! The Accusations against Paul (Acts 21) in Light of his Ministry in Acts 16-20," *BR* (2000): 34-50.

³⁵ Unlike common assumptions, there is nothing in Acts to suggest James to be the spokesperson.

³⁶ The two participles that describe the Jewish response have negative connotations. The verb *ἀντιτάσσω* is used in Greek historiography to describe a battle between two opponents (cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 4.134; 5.110; 7.103; and Thucydides, *Hist.* 2.87; 3.83; 4.55). The verb *βλασφημέω* has been used to describe Jewish opposition (cf. 13:45). Cf. Jack T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 275; and Lawrence M. Wills, "The Depiction of the Jews in Acts," *JBL* 110 (December 1991): 637.

³⁷ See Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940), 1722.

³⁸ Note the present tense of the indicative *διδάσκεις* (21:21).

silversmiths who were worked up over the perceived threats to their local economy by the Christian movement's encroachment on their market base. But the narrator summarizes Paul's ministry in three verses (19:8-10): (a) Paul entered the synagogue; (b) he proclaimed the gospel message for three months; (c) some persons were convinced, although others were not; and (d) some presumably Jewish opposition arose. In other words, this brief description echoes earlier scenes in Pisidian Antioch, as well as Lystra, Derbe, Thessalonica, Beroea, and others. However, one significant difference exists in this scene. As in Corinth, Paul did not leave town but instead left the synagogue for the lecture hall of Tyrannus to continue his ministry (19:9). The word choice to describe Paul's departure from the synagogue is noteworthy. The participle *ἀποστάς*, a term that often has negative connotations and may characterize his actions as apostasy, probably describes more than a mere departure from a building but implies Paul's rejection of his Jewish heritage and identity.³⁹ Granted, readers of Acts would recognize this move from the synagogue as forced on him by Jewish opposition (cf. 20:19), undoubtedly to a message that was more inclusive in scope than the synagogue context condoned (cf. 20:21). Nonetheless, for Paul to leave the synagogue for another location where he would continue his ministry could be interpreted as a radical departure and separation from anything and everything Jewish.

It is significant that the allegations regarding Paul's teachings from the spokesperson for the Jerusalem elders (*ἀποστασίαν*; 21:21) reflect the same general wording that the narrator uses to describe Paul's departure from the Ephesian synagogue.⁴⁰ Yet interpreters offer various explanations for this: (a) the allegations are false and therefore unbelievable, thereby making the Jerusalem Christians appear devious;⁴¹ (b) the allegations are inconsistent with the Lukan portrayal of Paul as a faithful Jew, although the Lukan narrator recognizes divergent perspectives within the narrative;⁴² and (c) the allegations reflect Paul's position as seen clearly in his letters, especially Galatians.⁴³ However, to this list may be offered a fourth explanation: Paul was guilty as charged, no matter whether he was forced out of the synagogue or not.⁴⁴ And this posed a problem for the Jerusalem believers, whom their own spokesperson described as "zealous for the law" (*ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου*), appropriating a noun from the same family of terms that earlier depicted Jewish opponents unfavorably as "jealous" or "zealous" (*ζῆλος*) against the apostles (5:17) or Paul and Barnabas (13:45). Thus, when the narrator recounts Paul's near lynching as he was about to complete his purification rite at the temple, the double reference to "all Jerusalem" (*ἡ πόλις δλη, 21:30; δλη ... Ἱερουσαλήμ, 21:31*) frames the hostile reaction against the helpless Paul and implies that the Jerusalem believers were equally troubled by what they heard about Paul, perhaps even part of the mob action against him. At very least, such a blurring of distinction between the Jewish believers in Jerusalem and the Jewish people in general makes it difficult to tell the difference between them in

³⁹ In addition, the verb *ἀφορίζω* that also appears in verse 9 describes not merely Paul taking the disciples with him but separating them from the synagogue. Although not as strong of a term as *ἀφίστημι*, it reinforces the negative connotations of the latter term.

⁴⁰ Interestingly, nowhere else in Acts does the narrator depict Paul in the context of the Jewish synagogue. His ritual observance at the temple is the only occasion where Paul is found in the context of a Jewish sacred institution.

⁴¹ E.g., Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts*, 284.

⁴² See, e.g., Thompson, "See It Ain't So, Paul!" 48-50.

⁴³ See, e.g., Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 405.

⁴⁴ Cf. Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 544.

their response to Paul.⁴⁵ Thus, the absence of the community of believers in Jerusalem, both at this vulnerable moment and for the remainder of Paul’s time in Jerusalem, leaves the reader with a peculiar image by omission on two levels. On the one hand, this contrasts with early images of the believers in Jerusalem caring for any needy person among them (4:34; also 2:44-45). On the other hand, this also contrasts with images of the Ephesian elders (20:36-38) and believers in the churches of Tyre (21:4) and Caesarea (21:12-14) who modeled care and compassion for Paul. In other words, when one considers the cumulative aspects of the Acts narrative, this depiction of the Jerusalem church seems to correspond more with the Lukan characterization of the Jewish *opponents*—a characterization reflecting an implicit “ecclesiology” of sorts, to be sure, but an ecclesiology, nonetheless, from which the Lukan narrator has distanced himself.⁴⁶ And the basis for such opposition and what distinguished this “ecclesiology” from the believers was their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah/Christ (see, e.g., 4:1-22; 5:17-42) including, what would later be understood as the accompanying message of universal salvation (i.e., inclusive of both Jews and Gentiles).

If this correlation between Luke’s depiction of Paul’s ministry in Corinth and Ephesus and the allegations by the Jerusalem believers indicates something regarding the Lukan perspective of Paul’s break from Judaism, then that also has implications as to the ecclesiology that we find in Acts. Although the beginning of Acts depicts the church in terms of a community of faith embodying the kingdom of God in a distinctly Jewish setting, the image here is of the pragmatic realities after the proverbial Gentile cat has been let *into* the Jewish bag of believers. With this, many important issues arise with regard to the ecclesiology of Acts: (a) the place of the Jewish law in the life/ethics of the church, (b) the ongoing relationship between church and synagogue, (c) the place of Israel or the Jewish people in relation to the church as “the people of God,” and (d) the actual place of Gentiles in the church as the Lukan narrator depicts it as “the people of God. The problem, of course, is that the narrator does not come right out and tell us what he thinks about these matters. Thus, these issues remain as questions on the table to be considered in light of this complex narrative. For instance, the Lukan perspective in chapters 19–21 seems to downplay the ongoing role of the Jewish law in the life of the church,⁴⁷ not to mention that it raises questions about the compatibility of zealousness/faithfulness toward the law (21:20) and about the inclusivity that led to Paul’s separation from the synagogue. Yet even *these* important issues do not really take center stage in the narrative and must be assessed in light of their narrative function. Rather, a reading of the response of the Jerusalem believers toward Paul in Acts 21 in comparison to the Lukan themes and images that have been repeated and accumulated beginning with chapter 2 may speak volumes about their true identity as the “people of God,” as their questions about Paul’s teaching and faithfulness to the law may imply. Thus, recurring ecclesiological images remain before the reader of Acts—images that build on and intersect with the theological and Christological themes of Peter’s Pentecost speech. And since Luke leaves these images on the table for readers of Acts to figure out, different conclusions have been … and continue to be so offered.

⁴⁵ Cf. Joseph B. Tyson, *Images of Judaism in Luke-Acts* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1992), 162-63.

⁴⁶ Cf. Simon David Buttigaz, *L’identité de l’Église dans les Actes des Apôtres: De la restauration d’Israël à la conquête universelle*, BZNW (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 459-70, who concludes that Luke offers two distinct images of the church that work dialectically throughout Acts. However, Acts 21 is not a focus passage for this work.

⁴⁷ Cf. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 544.

4. Some initial thoughts for theological/ecclesial descendants of the Wesleys

As those influenced by the Wesleys, we read and interpret the scriptures from a common ground, with a common perspective, and a common expectation. Thoughts about the inclusive nature of the gospel resonate with our tradition. Even in the first verse of the hymn from which the theme of our meeting is taken, Charles Wesley penned that the call of the preacher of the gospel,

Seiz'd the poor trembling slaves of sin,
And forc'd the outcasts to come in.⁴⁸

As those who are optimistic about the grace of God, which reaches in preventient ways to all, those of the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition affirm an understanding of the church that does not put limits on where that grace may work or go. This means that both the identity and mission of the church is not limited by gender, ethnicity, or any other human category that tends to divide humans and peoples because God, through the resurrection of Jesus, has created a people that is to embody God's kingdom ... a kingdom shaped by a different set of values than what shapes the "kingdoms of this world." In a time when churches wrestle with and are often divided over issues related to gender, political differences, immigration, and the like, the narrative of Acts offers readers opportunity to struggle alongside early believers, not with the hope of finding ready-made answers that one may "cut-and-paste" as solutions for contemporary problems but as a reminder that the God who raised and vindicated Jesus is also the one who graces God's people as conduits of that grace, even to the most unlikely of places and persons. As Charles Wesley reminds us in the seventh verse of our hymn,

Inlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
With boundless scharity divine,
So shall I all my strength exert,
And love them with a zeal like thine,
And lead them to thine open side,
The sheep, for whom their shepherd died.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Charles Wesley, Hymn 189 (Hymn 12 of "Hymns for a Preacher of the Gospel," in S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., *The Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley*, expanded ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 251; also Charles Wesley's Published Verse, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749), V. 1, The Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition, Duke Divinity School (http://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/cswt/45_Hymns_and_Sacred_Poems_%281749%29_Vol_1.pdf). Accessed 07/20/2018.

⁴⁹ Ibid.