



CHAPTER THREE

The Theological and Historical Integration of the Narrative Discourses of ACTS 1 - 2: The Pre-Ascension Theology and Promises of Jesus Realized

3.1 The John-Acts Connection: Acts Chapters One and Two

3:1.1 An Overview

That the twelve apostles are commissioned in conjunction with the Spirit and jointly become the indispensable link between Christ and His Church appears to find historical actualization and verification in the narrative discourses of Luke in Acts chapters 1 and 2, as indicated both by structure and content. After the ascension of Jesus, recorded in Acts 1:1-11, the next two narrated episodes have to do first, with the apostles, and second, with the Holy Spirit. I divide the first three discourses of Acts into 1:1-11, 12-26; 2:1-4.¹ These three events are consistent with what Jesus predetermined in the Fourth Gospel for the continuation of his ministry and the expansion of the kingdom of God. After the ascension/enhronement, the first two “acts” of the ascended King were to put in place his two authorized witnesses or missionaries by reestablishing the *twelve* apostles (1:12-26) and by sending the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4).² These first two “acts”

¹Verse divisions of the discourses will be discussed below under 3.1.2 “Structure.”

²Jervel recognizes the dual witness in the opening of Acts: “The testimony of the Twelve is that God has fulfilled his promise to his people. The Spirit also testifies that Israel’s



of the ascended Lord are not incidental or accidental events when read in the light of the second half of the Fourth Gospel. There is a clear divine intentionality to the history recorded in the opening events of Acts. Once Jesus had completed the seven signs³ in his mission to reveal the Father in the first half of the Fourth Gospel in the “Book of Glory” (chapters 1-12), his attention turns to the cross and his departure from this world. Consequently, Jesus is preoccupied with the continuation of his mission upon his return to the Father.⁴ Jesus’ role changes from being a ‘missionary’ of the Father to the role of missionary sender, beginning at the theological midpoint of the Gospel of John in 13:1; “It was just before the Passover Feast. *Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.* Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.” As Jesus increasingly speaks of his *ascension* in the second half of the Fourth Gospel his conversation turns to *sending the Holy Spirit* to empower the Apostles to testify of him.⁵ From chapter thirteen forward these three elements are theologically and historically bound together by Jesus (prophetically, as promises: 15:26- “he [the Spirit] *will* testify [μαρτυρήσει -future] about me”; and 20:21 “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”).

Being observed from a canonical reader’s perspective and now referring to the diagram developed previously from John 13:20, the opening narrative discourses of Acts may now be placed side by side in order to view how

Messiah has come” (*The Theology of Acts of the Apostles* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 81.)

³I am in agreement with A.J. Köstenberger in his number and list of seven signs, and with his dividing the overall structure of the Fourth Gospel into four parts: Prologue (1:1-8); The Book of Signs (1:19-12:50); The Book of Glory (13-20); and Epilogue (21) (*The Missions of Jesus & the Disciples* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans] 70f).

⁴‘Descension’ terminology dominates the first half of the Fourth Gospel (3:13,31; 6:32, 33, 38, 41, 50, 51, 58), while ‘ascension’ terminology is pervasive in the second half (13:1, 33, 36; 14:2-5, 12, 28; 16:5, 7, 10, 17, 28).

⁵See fn 61, page 138.



the theo-logic preset by Jesus’ pre-cross, resurrection and ascension in John’s Gospel, concerning the continuation of his ministry, is historically actualized in the first four “acts” of the Book of Acts. As discussed in chapter one, the legitimacy of such analysis rests upon the presuppositions of the divine-human authorship of Scripture and the subsequent logical correlate of the unity of Scripture.

Figure 3.1

John 13:20	Pronoun Antecedent	Acts Fulfillment
1. “ <u>accepts the one who</u>the FATHER <u>sent me</u> ”.....the Ordaining One		
2. “ <u>accepts me</u> ; and whoever”.....the SON Acts 1:1-11 <u>accepts me</u>the Primary Sent One		
3. “ anyone I send ”the APOSTLES Acts 1:12-26 and the SPIRIT Acts 2:1-4 The unique foundational <i>joint</i> delegated authority/ missionaries of the Son		
4. “ Whoever accepts ”	the CHURCH- all those Acts 2:37-28:30 who believe the witness and beyond of the Apostles <i>and</i> the Spirit about the Son.	

Throughout church history, (reading the chart in reverse order from bottom to top, following the word order of the verse) beginning with Acts 2:37 to the present time, incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church, only occurs through accepting and believing the joint testimony of the ‘external’ witness of the Apostolic message and the ‘internal’ testimony of the Holy Spirit, who “will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:7-11). As instituted by Christ in the Fourth Gospel, that joint testimony is the only access to Jesus provided by the Father and available to humanity. The Apostles and the Holy Spirit are the primary, joint, exclusive missionaries (sent ones) of the Son. But the content of their witness is not complete with their testimony to the incarnation, life, ministry, death, and resurrection only, but with their



eyewitness to the capstone event of the ascension and exaltation of Jesus as Lord and King. It is the *ascension* of Christ recorded in Acts 1:1-11 that completes the content of witness to which they must testify (**'Act I'** – Acts 1:1-11). Once this opening event of Acts occurs, in accordance with his teaching in the Fourth Gospel, the exalted King establishes his two witnesses by completing the twelve⁶ (**'Act II'** – Acts 1:12-26) and by sending the Holy Spirit⁷ (**'Act III'** – Acts 2:1-4). These joint witnesses⁸ now have a 'complete' testimony to proclaim to the world, and that is precisely what occurs in **'Act IV'** (2:5-41). Specifically and significantly, Luke records in Acts 2:14 that *Peter stands with the eleven* to testify to Jesus, which results in three thousand souls accepting and believing the apostolic testimony and consequently experience incorporation into the church—the fourth level in the chart above (2:41 “Those who *accepted* (points three and four in the above chart) his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”). Examination of the content of Peter’s Pentecost message shows that he testifies to the life, ministry, death, resurrection, *and the ascension* of Jesus. As evidenced by what occurs at the conclusion of Peter’s message, one’s turning from unbelief (repentance) to belief in the ‘full gospel’ apostolic witness to Jesus makes one a Christian. The crowd hears the ‘external’ witness by the apostles, while the Holy Spirit is present as

⁶Either the Spirit of Christ is directing Peter’s mind, according to the preset *theology* taught in the Fourth Gospel, in reminding him of the Psalms and inspiring application, or Peter randomly or coincidentally recalls the passages and concludes on his own to instigate the replacement of Judas. I believe there is a hint in the text by Peter himself as to which option is more likely. His words in 1:16 are, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David....” The same Spirit directing David long ago is most likely directing Peter at that moment.

⁷John 15:26- “When the Counselor comes, *whom I will send to you from the Father*, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.”

⁸“Luke-Acts is a work of art, organized from its smallest components to the whole in terms of the ‘law of duality.’ The meaning-function of this duality in the Lucan writings has its roots in the Israelite-Jewish principle that true testimony must be established by the mouths of at least two witnesses (Deut 19:15).” Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1974), 2.



the ‘internal’ witness, as promised in John 16:7-11. An explicit acknowledgment of their joint witness activity is stated in Acts 5:32, “We [the apostles] are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” In summary, following the chart in the right hand column, beginning from bottom to top, three thousand people are incorporated into the **Church (Act IV)** through their trust in the joint testimony of the **Apostles (Act III)** and the **Holy Spirit (Act II)**, with the result that they place their faith in **Jesus** as “both Lord and Christ” (2:36), because of his life, ministry, death, resurrection, crowned with his ascension (**Act I**). And finally, to have knowledge of Jesus, who came to make known the **Father** (ἐξηγήγηρομαι John 1:18; 6:45; 14:9) is to have knowledge of the Father, resulting in eternal life (John 5:24). But how would people hear the words of Jesus and obtain eternal life except through the joint witnesses commissioned by him? It would appear, from Jesus’ teaching and from the narrative of Acts, it is impossible to become a Christian without both witnesses. If one only had the testimony of the Apostles, but not the active presence and authorized ministry of the Spirit, one could not biblically become a Christian, for it entails the convicting work of the Spirit (John 16:7-11) and the regeneration work of the Spirit by which one must be born again (John 3:5-8). Alternately, if one only had the active presence and authorized ministry of the Spirit, but no witness of the Apostles (New Testament), one could not become a Christian, for “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).⁹

⁹It is interesting to me to possibly view Christian denominations through this lens. My father was Dutch Reformed in his up-bringing and my mother was Pentecostal in her roots. The former was more reticent about the gifts and manifestations of the Spirit, while the latter was weaker in the Word. Could there be a tendency for Christians and Christian groups to lean to one side or the other, while perhaps balance should be the goal—full of the Word and the Spirit? Yet I will argue later that there is a redemptive/historical priority to the Word, while acknowledging that both Word and Spirit are equally necessary to the birth, growth and nurture of a Christian.



3.1.2 Implications for the Structure of the Opening Discourses of Acts

There has been a significant amount of variation among scholars as to the determination of the verse boundaries of the opening discourses of Acts. The theology and consequent literary structures of the beginning discourses of Acts for which I have argued, have significant implications for this discussion (1:1-11; 1:12-26; 2:1-4; 2:5-41).

Steve Walton determines that “at least six different delimitations of Luke’s introduction have been proposed in twentieth-century scholarship namely, 1,1-5; 1,1-8; 1,1-11; 1,1-14; 1,1-26; 1,1-2-41; and 1,1-2,47.”¹⁰ Walton then proceeds to examine and evaluate the arguments of typical proponents of each view. Concerning the first division as being 1:1-5, Walton evaluates I. Howard Marshall’s argument as representative and concludes “Marshall’s argument is not conclusive.”¹¹ I concur. He then evaluates Haenchen’s arguments as representative of those who see 1:1-8 as the first discourse and rightly argues that “the separation of vv. 6-8 from vv. 9-11 seems artificial.”¹² He next examines L.T. Johnson’s argument as representative for 1:1-11 as the beginning of the end of the introduction to Acts and does not give objections.¹³ I will argue that 1:1-11 marks the limits of the first discourse in Acts, but not the end of the introduction. Walton proceeds to add that some scholars, as represented by Barrett, want to

¹⁰Steve Walton, “Where Does the Beginning of Acts End?” in *The Unity of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. Verheyden (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven Univ. Press, 1999), 447.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 448.

¹²*Ibid.*, 448.

¹³David W. Pao argues that 1:1-11 constitutes the prologue to Acts, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 91. Contra C. K. Barrett who argues that the whole of 1:1-14 is paralleled in Luke and the new section only starts in verse 15. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Acts of the Apostles* (ICC vol. 1; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 61. Pao responds correctly that Acts 1:11 closes the earthly work of Christ and 1:12 signifies the beginning of the apostolic history with the main character of Jesus’ ministry transferring from Jesus to the Apostles and the Holy Spirit as I have argued earlier.



include verses 12-14 and so see the introduction as 1:1-14. He then comments that James Dunn holds that 1:1-26 is the introduction. Pesch's assessment is a variant of Dunn's conclusion in that the two sub-parts of 1:1-11 and 1:12-26 together constitute a prologue to the book. I agree with Pesch on the subdivision of these two discourse segments, but disagree that they alone constitute the introduction to Acts. Lastly, Walton notes that "Longenecker sees 1:1-2:41 as setting the scene for the ministry of the church, a ministry which is outlined in the thematic paragraph 2:42-47 and then illustrated by a series of snapshots from 3:1 onward. After reviewing and evaluating these proposals for the "end of the beginning of Acts," Walton offers his own assessment:

A further step can be made for accepting Longenecker's view that 2:42-47 is a thematic statement. 1:1-2:47 can be seen as the introduction to the book. Looking back from the end of Acts 2: the departure of Jesus has happened after he has left instructions to his community (1,3-14); the symbolic number of twelve apostles has been restored, so that the church can be the true and renewed Israel (1,15-26; cf. Luke 22,30); the power of the Spirit has come upon the core of the renewed Israel (2,1-13) and the community of believers has become established (2,14-47). Now we are to see the initial mission of the church in Jerusalem (3,1-7,60) before movement into Judaea and Samaria (8,1).¹⁴

I have essentially (with only slight variation in verse divisions) come to the same conclusions as Longenecker and Walton, but from a different perspective. I suggest that reading the opening of Acts through the lens of the Fourth Gospel, from a canonical reader's perspective, gives broader canonical, theological support and insight as to why the structural verse division of Longenecker and Walton may be accurate. It is noteworthy that the Walton and Longenecker structure includes a number of proposed structures by those Walton reviewed. Several of the scholars correctly perceived individual parts, but

¹⁴Walton, *Where Does the Beginning*, 450.



not their integration within the whole. Other scholars discern the larger segments, but did not detect the theological integration of the parts. For example, Longenecker's large division of 1:1-2:41 as the introduction and 2:42-47 as a thematic or summary paragraph is well justified, but he fails to appreciate that there are parts to that whole that are highly theologically integrated and explicitly preset by Jesus in the Gospel of John. Reading – as a canonical reader – the Fourth Gospel as a 'preface' to the opening of Acts deepens the reader's understanding of the theological and historical significance of what is occurring in the opening narratives in Acts.¹⁵ Viewing the introductory discourses of Acts from this perspective may contribute to clarifying the scholarly discussions grappling with the question: "Where Does the Beginning of Acts End?"¹⁶

Walton concludes his essay by stating that Acts chapters one and two may be seen:

...as a bridge between the story of Jesus and the story of the church. Again and again we have seen Luke highlighting themes in Acts 1-2 which have appeared in the Gospel and which will be developed in Acts, almost always using vocabulary which is focused in Acts 1-2, but which can be mapped throughout the rest of Luke-Acts....It is as though a wide road from the Gospel narrows down to a small bridge (Acts 1-2) and then widens out on the other side into Acts....We may see these chapters in relation to the rest of Acts as like the overture to a longer piece of music.¹⁷

I argue that that narrow bridge Walton refers to is constructed from the theology introduced by Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, especially the pneumatology. The John-Acts viewpoint emphasizes themes and perspectives that are complimentary to those observed in studying Luke-Acts, but which offer an

¹⁵"Luke's view of Scripture spills over into the wider theme of God's superintendence of history, both in the past and in the time of Jesus and the early church." *Ibid.*, 454.

¹⁶Walton, *Where Does the Beginning*, 447.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 466.



important, distinctive canonical frame of reference in filling out meaning and understanding of what is occurring in the first two chapters of Acts. The John-Acts perspective highlights the explicit delegation of Jesus' mission and authority to the two foundational witnesses: the apostles and the Holy Spirit. From the John-Acts perspective, the King ascends to the throne (Acts 1:1-11), and the first two acts he accomplishes upon his exaltation are to put his two vice-regents in place—the Apostles reconstituted (Acts 1:12-26) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). From the John-Acts viewpoint of a canonical reader's perspective, the governance of the new Kingdom of restored Israel was explicitly preset by Jesus in the second half of the Fourth Gospel and comes into place in Acts 1-2. I also concur with Walton's second analogy that Acts 1-2 functions in relation to the remainder of Acts like an overture to a longer piece of music. But again, when seen canonically through the eyeglasses of the Gospel of John, the events narrated in Acts 1-2 are seen as the laying of the foundations by the exalted Christ, on which the 'new temple' will be built throughout the book of Acts. The remainder of Acts narrates the stories of the proclamation of the apostolic message as witnessed to by the Holy Spirit, beginning in Jerusalem, spreading to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. According to what was established in the Fourth Gospel and actuated in Acts 1-2, the Church is only truly apostolic if it is preaching a gospel and demonstrating a lifestyle that is judged to be authentically of Christ as witnessed to by the Apostles and the Holy Spirit. These two are the permanent 'judges' instituted by Christ by which all proclamation and lifestyle are assessed to be of Christ or not of Christ.

Luke 22:28 ὑμεῖς δέ ἐστε οἱ διαμεμενηκότες μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τοῖς πειρασμοῖς μου· 29 **κἀγὼ διατίθεμαι ὑμῖν** καθὼς διέθετό μοι ὁ πατήρ μου **βασιλείαν**, 30 ἵνα ἔσθητε καὶ πίνητε ἐπὶ τῆς τραπέζης μου ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ μου, καὶ καθήσεσθε ἐπὶ θρόνων τὰς δώδεκα **φυλάς κρίνοντες τοῦ Ἰσραήλ**.

John 16:7 ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τὴν ἀλήθειαν λέγω ὑμῖν, συμφέρει ὑμῖν ἵνα ἐγὼ ἀπέλθω. ἐὰν γὰρ μὴ ἀπέλθω, ὁ **παράκλητος** οὐκ ἐλεύσεται



πρὸς ὑμᾶς· ἐὰν δὲ πορευθῶ, πέμψω αὐτὸν πρὸς ὑμᾶς. 8 καὶ ἐλθὼν ἐκεῖνος **ἐλέγξει** τὸν κόσμον περὶ ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ περὶ **κρίσεως**: 9 περὶ ἁμαρτίας μὲν, ὅτι οὐ πιστεύουσιν εἰς ἐμέ· 10 περὶ δικαιοσύνης δέ, ὅτι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ὑπάγω καὶ οὐκέτι θεωρεῖτέ με· 11 περὶ δὲ **κρίσεως**, ὅτι ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου κέκριται.

Luke 22:28 You are those who have stood by me in my trials. 29 **And I confer on you** [apostles] **a kingdom**, just as my Father conferred one on me, 30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, **judging the twelve tribes of Israel**.

John 16:7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, **the Counselor** will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, **he will convict the world** of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and **judgment**: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and in regard to **judgment**, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Figure 3.2

SUMMARY, SEAM AND TRANSITION PARAGRAPH- Acts 2:42-47	
THE FORMAL INCORPORATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH—IN RESPONSE TO THE FOUNDATIONAL WITNESSES TO CHRIST - Acts 2:5-41	
THE APOSTLES- Acts 1:12-26	THE HOLY SPIRIT- Acts 2:1-4
CHRIST- THE ASCENDED / EXALTED KING- Acts 1:1-11	

Seen, canonically, in the light of the John-Acts connection, awareness may be heightened concerning the interconnection and foundational nature of the events and structure of the discourses of Acts 1-2. The faith in Christ of a believer is grounded in the ‘external,’ inscripturated testimony of the Apostles in union with the ‘internal’ witness and work of the Holy Spirit. Any community that adds to or



subtracts from the foundations laid in Acts and yet claims to be Christian, is a cult.

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work (1 Cor 3:11-13).

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:19-20 NIV).

3.1.3 Summary

The title of this dissertation proposed to address the interrelationship between theology, history and literary artistry of Luke in Acts. Thus far I have attempted to demonstrate the interrelationships from the perspective of the canonical context of Acts—specifically the immediate preceding context of the Fourth Gospel. When viewed from this vantage point, I proposed that there is a theological basis for and unity to the historical narratives recorded in Acts 1-2, which also controls the literary artistry of Luke. I shall now turn to examine the text of Acts to demonstrate in detail that theology is driving both the history and literary aspects of the text.



3.2 ACT I: Acts 1:1-11 The Ascension, the Inaugurating Event of Jesus' Continued Ministry On Earth in His New Body, the Church

3.2.1 Preliminary Comments on the Literary Art of Luke and its Relationship to His Historiography and Theology

Basic to my understanding and use of the term 'art'¹⁸ and to defining the relationship of literary artistry to theology and history is an understanding of artistry "as connoting not simply craft or artistry, but also slant and perspective."¹⁹ Access to the theology and historical perspective of Luke's narrative discourses is through his literary artistry and these three elements are inseparably intertwined. Robert Alter agrees:

Rather than viewing the literary character of the Bible as one of several "purposes" or 'tendencies,' I would prefer to insist on a complete interfusion of literary art with theological, moral, or historiosophical vision, the fullest perception of the latter dependent on the fullest grasp of the former.²⁰

Charles Talbert is right when he says, "the author of Luke-Acts is not only a theologian, but that he is also 'a consummate literary artist' with a 'mind that is tuned to the aesthetic.'"²¹ Tremper Longmans says:

the point is that we do not have so-called objective, neutral, or unshaped reporting of events. (As many have pointed out, there is

¹⁸Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 135. "As I have come to understand it, 'art' in this context should not be understood only in the sense of 'skill', 'craft', 'technique', but in the sense of an art-form, like painting and music. Biblical narrative is a form of literary art."

¹⁹V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 12.

²⁰Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 19.

²¹C. Talbert, *Literary Patterns*, 1, quoting B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 548, and Wayne G. Rollins, *The Gospels: Portraits of Christ* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 97.



no such thing as brute fact; an uninterpreted historical report is inconceivable.)...The biblical narrators are concerned not only to tell us facts but also to guide our perspective and responses to those events.²²

Intention and convention are cooperative, not competitive principles in literary discourse. Textual meaning is communicated in large part through the literary conventions an author uses in presenting the narrative.²³ Thus, I will be paying close attention to literary conventions as I examine the discourses of Acts. Discourse structure is one of the important literary conventions of narrative to which I will be particularly attentive.

3.2.2 Discourse Structure of Acts 1:1-11²⁴

The opening discourse of Acts is agenda setting for the book of Acts and for Church history.²⁵ In the narrative both the foundations for the New Testament people of God and the mission of the new covenant community are

²²Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1987), 57.

²³For example, an author decides to follow one set of conventional rules rather than another, i.e., the rules for history or the rules of fiction.

²⁴Darrell L. Bock holds 1:1-11 as the opening discourse of Acts. "On the other hand, 1:12 shows the response to the command to wait in Jerusalem and sets up the 'waiting' commanded by Jesus (note *tote*, then, in v. 12), moving directly into the replacement of Judas (with a mere *kai*, and, in v. 15). So I have chosen to view this waiting as the first act of the church gathered in Jerusalem rather than a part of the introduction (with Bavena 2003:62). Brian Rosner says Acts 1:1-11 functions 'as the beginning of the narrative of Acts.'" ("The Progress of the Word," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 217); Cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Acts*, New Clarendon Bible (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 57f; F.S. Spencer, *Acts, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1987), 24-27; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), 2 (n. 9), 9f.; L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina 5 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 28; Mikeal C. Parsons, *The Departure of Jesus In Luke-Acts*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series* 21 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 151ff.

²⁵Parsons, *Departure*, 173: "Just as the end of a narrative should function to exit the reader from the story world to the real world, so the beginning of a text should provide access from the world of the reader to the world of the text."



narrated in artistic form. In the chiasmic²⁶ structure²⁷ diagram that follows, it is significant that all four elements in the John 13:20 diagram appear in a mirrored or balanced form:²⁸ (1) the ascension, (2) the Apostles, (3) the Holy Spirit, (4) the

²⁶“Chiasmus (or chiasm) is a term based on the Greek letter *chi* (χ) which refers to an inverted parallelism or sequence of words or ideas in a phrase, sentence, or any larger literary unit.” Nils W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1942), vii. In his recent work on *chiasmus* John Breck makes the following observation: “It has long been recognized that biblical writers made use of a rhetorical pattern known as ‘chiasmus,’ a literary form consisting of two or more parallel lines structured about a central theme. Only recently has it become apparent that chiasmus is one of the most frequently occurring patterns in both the Old and New Testaments, and that its detection and proper analysis open new and significant avenues toward understanding the author’s message.” *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994), 1.

Talbert has pointed out that the surface structure of Acts 1:4-8 and 1:9-11 are formally parallel. Acts 1:4-8 contains (a) the risen Jesus’ word not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father (1:4-5); (b) the disciples’ query (1:6); (c) the risen Jesus’ response in two parts: a reproof (1:7), and a promise (1:8). Likewise, 1:9-11 is comprised of similar elements: (a) the risen Jesus’ action of being taken into heaven (1:9); (b) the disciples’ behavior (1:10a); (c) and the angelic response in two parts: a reproof (1:11a) and a promise (1:11b). C.H. Talbert, *Acts*, Knox Preaching Guides (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 7. Talbert’s observations are drawn from a narrow text of the open discourse, most of which I think are tenuous. Authors such as D.W. Palmer see individual connections within the prologue of Acts, but to my knowledge no one has formulated the total number of mirrored connections suggested in the diagram. “Luke’s reference on which. . . ‘he was taken up’ [1:2]. . . points back to the Gospel of Luke; but also inevitably anticipates the description of the ascension in Acts 1.9.” (“The Literary Background of Acts 1.1-14,” *NTS* 33 [1987]: 430.) David Petersen acknowledges that “references to Jesus’ ascension in v. 2 and v. 11 form an inclusion or bracket around the intervening material, suggesting the introduction reaches its climax with the ascension narrative.” *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 100. This clearly appears to contradict his own previous decision that the first narrative segment ends with verse 14. His observation lends support to my designation of the outer limits of the opening discourse segment of Acts.

²⁷Talbert suggests that all of the possible patterns of Luke-Acts have not necessarily been brought to light. “First in addition to the confirmation of some of the insights of past research, there has been an accumulation of evidence for more formal patterns expressive of the principle of balance in the various parts of the Lucan writings.” C. Talbert. *Literary Patterns*, 2.

²⁸Talbert laments that the “study of Lucan theology today goes on, for the most part, divorced from a consideration of the formal patterns expressive of the principle of balance which control large segments of the Lucan writings.” He goes on to state that “the conquest of subjectivity in the employment of the redaction critical method demands an awareness of the *smaller patterns* and the larger architectonic designs which govern an author’s arrangement of his material.” C. Talbert, *Literary Patterns*, 3f. [Italics mine]. Kenneth R. Wolfe also perceives the tendency of Luke to incorporate mirror structures: “Another structural pattern found in Luke-Acts



Kingdom of God/Israel. The fourth element in the chart above is labeled ‘the Church.’ A fifth element is added to these four to form a concentric ABCDE...E’D’C’B’A’ structure.²⁹ The fifth surrounding element refers to the first and second advents of Christ. I suggest that the theology driving Luke’s content and ‘artistic’ structuring of verses 1-11 reflects Jesus’ teaching and promises prior to his death as recorded in the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels.³⁰

***See Figure 3.3 on the next page.**

consists of the placing of two sections with similar or contrasting contents and even sequences over against one another.” (“The Chiastic Structure of Luke-Acts and Some Implications for Worship”, *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 22 Spr [1980]: 60.)

²⁹David G. Peterson notes that “techniques such as simple juxtaposition of events, analogical patterning of events, and interplay between narration and dialogue are used to give meaning and significance to the developing narrative, following the practices of classical writers....A reader with some rhetorical appreciation would be alert to the significance of many of the techniques highlighted above.” *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 22.

³⁰Here my presuppositions concerning biblical theology and history are determinative. I take into account the divine authorship of the Bible. I then approach Scripture in terms of its parts rather than just viewing it as a whole, as I want to account for progressive revelation on the terms that the Bible itself determines. In this case the progression is from Jesus’ teaching and promises in the Gospels to fulfillment in Acts.



Figure 3.3

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach

A Summary of the First Coming of Christ

2 until the day **he was taken up to heaven,**

B The Ascension

after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days

C The Apostles and the Holy Spirit

and spoke about **the kingdom of God.**

D The Kingdom of God

4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

E The Holy Spirit

5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

E' The Holy Spirit

6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore **the kingdom to Israel?**" 7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

D' The Kingdom to Israel?

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

C' The Apostles and the Holy Spirit

9 After he said this, **he was taken up before their very eyes,** and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up **into the sky as he was going,** when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who **has been taken from you into heaven,**

B' The Ascension

will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

A' The Second Coming of Christ

In the chiasmic diagram above the term 'church' does not appear as it does in the previous diagram of John 13:20 (fig. 3.1). I suggest that this is



because it has not formally come into existence.³¹ Therefore, the two terms in reference to which it must eventually be defined are included: ‘the Kingdom of God’ and ‘the kingdom to Israel.’ At the opening of Acts it is an open question as to how the church is to be understood in terms of the past (Israel) and the future (the eschatological Kingdom of God).³² At the opening of Acts the Church is in the process of becoming the ‘this age’ manifestation of the Kingdom of God, and is in the process of becoming Israel restored or reconstituted. The first occurrence of the term *ekklēsia* occurs in 5:1, and then twenty-two more times interspersed throughout the remainder of Acts.

³¹Perhaps a useful analogy is that the ‘church’ is conceived with the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection, but comes to birth with the ascension, the ‘filling up’ of the twelve and the sending of the Spirit. Analogical terms from the New Testament are ‘cornerstone’ for Christ (Eph 2:19; 1 Pet 2:6) and ‘foundations’ for the twelve apostles (Rev 21:14), upon which the church is built. It may be argued that the formal placement of that cornerstone from which the whole building is built is finalized with the completion of Jesus’ incarnate mission at the ascension in his exaltation. If this be true, then the first four ‘acts’ in Acts, as described earlier, may be considered together as the ‘birth’ of the Church, the new covenant people of God.

³²The proclamation of the arrival of ‘the kingdom of God,’ the inauguration of the new order ushered in by the Christ event, lay at the very center of Jesus’ preaching and was frequently spoken of in his conversation (i.e., Matt 4:23; 10:7; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43; 10:9). References to the kingdom of God outside the Synoptic Gospels are significantly less frequent (only three times in the Fourth Gospel; six times in Acts; thirteen times in the Pauline Epistles). Apart from that, the kingdom is mentioned five times in Revelation, twice in Hebrews, and once each in James, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter. Inversely, the term ‘church’ is rare in the Gospels, but becomes the dominant way of referring to the people of God post-ascension. Beginning in Acts, but rooted in the Gospels, the Church becomes the manifestation in this world of the Kingdom of God ‘in this present’ age, until the second advent, when as Paul states, God makes “known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph 1:9,f). The eschatological Kingdom of God includes the Church, but encompasses “*all things in heaven and on earth.*” This perhaps explains that on occasion ‘Kingdom of God’ is still infrequently used outside the Gospels, but that the Church dominates proclamation and teaching post-Acts because it is the present manifestation of the Kingdom of God. It is with this eschatological understanding of the Kingdom of God that Christian writers such as Arthur Glasser and others should be understood, “A right understanding of mission focuses on the kingdom of God—the Good News Jesus announced displayed to his generation.” Arthur Glasser and Donald McGavran, *Contemporary Theologies of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 31. Johannes Verkuyl says, “Missiology is more and more coming to see the kingdom of God as the hub around which all mission work revolves. One can almost speak of a consensus developing on this point.” *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*, trans. Dale Cooper (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978), 203.



The three elements of Ascension,³³ Apostles and Holy Spirit from the Gospel of John also dominate the chiasmic structure of Acts 1:1-11. The literary-‘aesthetic’ question is: “Why structure this opening discourse in a chiasm?” John Breck suggests the answer in principle:

“It is axiomatic that the form or structure of a given literary work serves as an important vehicle for its content...Rediscovery of chiasmus, one of the most important rhetorical forms in biblical literature is already having a major impact on the way we read Scripture. Lund, Ellis, Welch and a host of other scholars have detected chiasmic patterns in small, isolated units as well as in whole compositions. *They have rightly sensed the intimate connection that exists between rhetorical form and thematic content, between the structure of a literary passage and its theological meaning.*³⁴

With Breck’s last statement in mind, I suggest that there is a theo-logic to the aesthetic arrangement of the chiasm. Moving from the outer elements ‘A’ and ‘A’ to the center elements ‘E’ and ‘E’ the following logic is suggested. Between the first (‘A’) and second (‘A’) coming, the ascended, enthroned King (‘B’ and ‘B’) has designated two vice regents, the Apostles and the Holy Spirit (‘C’ and ‘C’) through whom he will continue his ministry and extend the Kingdom (‘D’ and ‘D’), but the critical central element is the key—the need for the disciples to be filled with the Holy Spirit (‘E’ and ‘E’). Concerning the outer elements encompassing the whole, Ben Witherington states, “This opening section shows that Luke conceives of the story of the church within an eschatological framework—between the ascension and the parousia, with Jesus going and

³³ David Peterson notes the parallelism of ‘ascension,’ and thus recognizes at least one element of the chiasm: “References to Jesus’ ascension in v. 2 and v. 11 form an inclusion or bracket around the intervening material, suggesting that the introduction reaches its climax with the ascension narrative.” *The Acts*, 100.

³⁴Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language*, 16. [Italics mine]



coming again in similar manner.”³⁵ The plot that will begin to unfold in Acts, between the end of Jesus’ ministry in the flesh at the ascension and the parousia, is that the Kingdom of God in the present age form of reconstituted Israel will advance through Spirit-empowered witnesses. The apostolic testimony to Jesus is confirmed to hearts of men by the witness of the Spirit. The event that launches this all-encompassing plot inaugurated in Acts and continuing throughout Church history is the ascension of Christ. The newly enthroned King continues to work in history through his servants to bring about his kingdom’s universal extension in order to bring all things on earth and in heaven under his feet (Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 15:25, 27; Eph 1:22; Heb 2:7f; Rev 12:1).

While I think an argument may be made that the parallelism of elements A-A’, B-B’, D-D’, and E-E’ is conceptually straightforward, the parallelism of C-C’ appears on the surface to not be formally parallel. In the first half of the parallelism (‘C’) the relationship of the Holy Spirit is with Jesus, and not the Holy Spirit with the Apostles. But I think that a deeper connection and emphasis is being made here. At first glance it seems odd that Luke does not record any of the forty days teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of God during this interim period between the resurrection and ascension. Luke’s writing in the Gospel records all that Jesus began to do and teach about the kingdom of God pre-resurrection. In other words, Luke does not project back into his first work teachings about the kingdom of God that actually were taught by Jesus during this forty days period, but making it appear in the Gospel that that teaching was done pre-cross, pre-resurrection. One would have thought it would have been important to write down the content of the forty day’s teaching.³⁶ But all Luke

³⁵Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 114.

³⁶I suppose one could argue that Jesus may have essentially repeated and/or restated teaching he had done before, so it was unnecessary to record it. Even if this were the case, it does not affect the point being made here about the possible rhetorical intention in the parallelism.



does is give a summary statement. For the purpose of the theology that drives his literary choices and structure in this opening narrative discourse, it appears his exclusive interest was to emphasize the *mode* of Jesus' teaching. Luke deliberately highlights that *Jesus taught them through the Holy Spirit* (1:2). I believe Luke is emphasizing that even God in the flesh did not minister without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The rhetorical effect of Luke's intentional noting of this in the parallelism to 1:8 (**C—C'**) is to heighten the need for the disciples to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus was filled and empowered by the Spirit from the beginning of his public ministry beginning with his baptism (John 1:32) until he was taken up. If Jesus needed the empowerment of the Spirit to accomplish and complete his witness to the Father, how much more would his disciples need the Holy Spirit's empowerment to accomplish and complete their witness to Jesus, even in some cases, unto death.

3.2.3 The Center of the Chiasm

Concerning the importance of the central element of a chiasm Breck writes:

*For authentic chiasmus produces balanced statements, in direct, inverted or antithetical parallelism, constructed symmetrically about a central idea. The uniqueness of chiasmus, as distinct from other forms of parallelism, lies in its focus upon a pivotal theme, about which the other propositions of the literary unit are developed. It therefore presupposes a center, a "crossing point. The image of concentric circles, rather than that of parallel lines illustrates this characteristic most clearly. For in most cases of biblical chiasmus, as we shall see further on, the parallel themes focus upon and derive their meaning from the center...The essential characteristic of genuine chiasmus remains the pivot about which the whole is centered. Chiasmus then may best be described by the expression concentric parallelism."*³⁷ [Italics his]

³⁷ Breck, John, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond*. Crestwood (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994), 32.



I suggest that canonical biblical theology strongly supports what Luke has stressed as the focal point of the chiasm: the critical need for the apostles to “wait for the gift the Father promised” (**E**); to “be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (**E'**) in order to witness and advance the Kingdom of God (**D**) or to bring about the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel (**D'**). The New Testament indicates that the lack of the work of the Spirit in circumcising the heart (Rom 2:29) or being born again by the Spirit (John 3:5f); and the inaccessibility to the baptism of the Holy Spirit to the Old Covenant people of God (Joel 2:28ff) are the central reasons that the history narrated in the OT records the miserable failure of Israel. And that failure was two-fold: (1) *vertical*—unfaithfulness to Yahweh (Jer 3:7,10; Ezek 39:23; Hos 4:12)—being uncircumcised in heart (Jer 9:26); and (2) *horizontal*—failing to fulfill their mission (Gen 12:3)- “and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”; (Isa 42:6)- “I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”

Central to the OT promises of restoration of Israel in the coming new age is the two-fold promise of Yahweh:

(1) to put his Spirit in his people to change the heart.

I will give you a new heart **and put a new spirit in you** [וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם] וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם [לֵב הַדָּשׁ וְרוּחַ]...And **I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws** [וְאֶתֵּרוּחִי אֶתְּנֶה בְּכִי וְעָשִׂיתֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר־בְּחֻקֵּי תִלְכוּ וּמִשְׁפָּטַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם]³⁸. (Ezek 36:24-28 NIV).

The promise in Ezekiel links the gift of putting the Spirit in his new covenant people as the power that will enable them “to follow my decrees” and “keep my laws,” radically distinguishing them from the old covenant people who walked in

³⁸*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia : With Werkgroep Informatica, Vrije Universiteit Morphology; Bible. O.T. Hebrew. Werkgroep Informatica, Vrije Universiteit. 2006; 2006 (Eze 36:27). Logos Bible Software.*



disobedience and were unable through unaided, self-generated will power to free themselves from the bondage of their will to idolatry;³⁹

and (2) to pour out His Spirit upon all flesh.

The fortress will be abandoned,
the noisy city deserted;
...**till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high** (Isa 32:14-15
NIV)

[⁴⁰עַד־יֵעָרָה עָלֵינוּ רוּחַ מְמָרוֹם] (BHS/WIVU)

For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring,
and my blessing on your descendants. Isa 44:3 NIV

[כִּי אֶצְקֶה־נְחִים עַל־צִמְחָא וְנִזְלִים עַל־יְבֹשֶׁה אֶצְקֶה רוּחִי עַל־דְּרָעֶךָ⁴¹]
(BHS/WIVU)

³⁹The prohibition of idolatry in the First Commandment shows us the chief sin and the source of every other sin against God. It is the reason for the curse of the human race and God's displeasure over it. Idolatry is identified by Luther as the (original) sin of Eve. Luther writes: "The source of all sin truly is unbelief and doubt and abandonment of the Word. Because the world is full of these, it remains in idolatry, denies the truth of God, and invents a new god. A monk is an idolater. He imagines that if he lives according to the rule of Francis or of Dominic, this is the way to the kingdom of God. But this is equivalent to inventing a new god and becoming an idolater, because the true God declares that the way to the kingdom of heaven is by believing in Christ. Therefore when faith has been lost, there follows unbelief and idolatry, which transfer the glory of God to works. Thus the Anabaptists, the Sacramentarians, and the papists are all idolaters—not because they worship stones and pieces of wood, but because they give up the Word and worship their own thoughts. And so this passage helps us to learn that this temptation of the devil was the beginning of original sin, when he led Eve away from the Word of God to idolatry, contrary to the First, the Second, and the Third Commandments. Here properly belong these words: "Did God actually command you?" This is an instance of the awful boldness of the devil, as he invents a new god and denies the former true and eternal God with such unconcern and assurance. It is as if he were to say: "Surely you are silly if you believe that God has given such a command, for it is not God's nature to be so deeply concerned whether you eat or not. Inasmuch as it is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, how can such ill will come upon Him that He does not want you to be wise?" Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, Luther's works, vol. 1, J.J. Pelikan, H.C. Oswald & H.T. Lehmann, eds. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House: 1999, c1958), 149. Interestingly, the growth of the Kingdom of God in Acts is described in terms of the advancement of the Word of God (6:7; 12:24; 19:20).

⁴⁰Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.

⁴¹Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.



of God. From this perspective the cross is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. The incarnation, life, ministry, cross, resurrection and ascension of Christ made it possible for the Spirit of God to indwell repentant and believing humans, and to empower them to accomplish the mission of Israel to the whole world. As Paul says, it is the indwelling of the Spirit that is the key to resurrection life: “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead *is living* in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies *through his Spirit, who lives in you*” (Rom 8:11). It is the work of the Spirit in the heart that distinguishes the new, reconstituted Kingdom of Israel from the Old Kingdom of Israel: “No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is *circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit*, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God” (Rom 2:29).

But the work of Christ also makes possible the empowerment of believers for witness by Spirit baptism. This is Luke’s primary concern at the opening of Acts. Ben Witherington notes this, stating that:

the receiving power from on high has chiefly to do with witnessing. Luke does not really comment on its soteriological significance, nor is he all that interested in its ecclesiological significance, if by that one is referring to the church offices. For example, the reception of the Spirit by the Samaritans or Cornelius did not make them apostles, but it did make them witnesses, and this book is about witnesses, whether apostles or not.⁴⁵

According to verse 3, Jesus instructs his disciples for forty days about the Kingdom of God, “a phrase which elsewhere sums up the theme of his earthly ministry (Lk. 4:43).”⁴⁶ This begs the questions: How will the message of the Kingdom continue when the King departs this world? Who will instruct about the King and the Kingdom in Jesus’ absence? Witherington comments that “this

⁴⁵Witherington, *The Acts*, 112, n. 30.

⁴⁶I. Howard Marshall, *Acts* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 57.



account (vs. 1-11) is about the passing on of the power and authority to Jesus' witnesses so that they might continue the kingdom work he had begun."⁴⁷ I agree completely with Witherington and argued in chapter two that, from a canonical reader's perspective, Jesus was concerned about this very issue and made arrangements beforehand in the Fourth Gospel for this very time. Verses 4-8 indicate that Jesus' singular preoccupation, as his last words in Acts before his departure indicate, is his concern for the disciples to be empowered by the Spirit in order to fulfill the mission to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom to the ends of the earth. Luke highlights in his programmatic text⁴⁸ Acts 1:8- "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." "It is no exaggeration to say that 'each successive stage of the outreach of the gospel to the wider world receives confirmation by the Spirit' (see e.g. 1:8; 2:3, 38; 5:32; 6:1-3; 7:51; 8:16-17; 10:45; 11:12,15-16; 15:8; 11:24; 13:1-2)."⁴⁹ To trace the activity of the Spirit in Acts is to observe the progress of the word. Howard Kee's description of the Spirit as "God's instrument in the present age" is

⁴⁷Witherington, *The Acts*, 112. This is the very issue with which I began at the opening of chapter two: "The key problem in religious authority is to find the central principle of authority and the pattern through which it expresses itself concretely and practically. Most treaties on religious authority assert that God is the final authority in religion, but this bare assertion does not make its way. Unless the assertion is expressed in a more concrete fashion it becomes mere platitude. A principle of religious authority, along with its pattern designed for its practical and concrete expression and execution, should incorporate all the necessary elements associated with such a complex notion as religious authority." Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 18.

⁴⁸"We may agree with the consensus of these scholars that Luke has a worldwide mission which will include Gentiles in mind, and that Acts 1,8 should therefore be understood as setting an agenda which the remainder of the book addresses..." Steve Walton, "Where Does the Beginning of Acts End?" in *The Unity of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. Verheyden (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1999), 463.

⁴⁹Brian Rosner, "The Progress of the Word," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 224f.



on the mark.⁵⁰ All of Luke's most important human characters who advance the mission to witness to the ends of the earth in Acts are described as "men of the Spirit." Each of them is described as "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:8; 5:32; 6:3; 7:55; 11:24; 13:9). They are described as "bold" in their witness (4:13; 13:46; 28:31). The content of their witness is the proclamation of "Good News" (5:42; 8:4, 12, 25, 40; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7; 15:35), or "the Word of God" (4:29; 8:14; 13:5). They continue the prophetic role of Jesus, filled and empowered by the Spirit as he was. The immediate and broader contexts of Acts indicate that Luke's primary concern is with the horizontal aspect of the ministry of the Holy Spirit—the empowerment for witness in order for the Gospel to be spread to the ends of the earth.

3.2.4 History, Theology, and Literary Artistry in Acts 1:1-26

James D.G. Dunn makes the following observations about the Prologue of Acts:

The problem is that the theological shaping of the account is so extensive that we cannot be sure just how much is rooted in sound historical memory of any participants. On the whole, in Acts we can be confident that at least most of the basic narrative data is derived from good eyewitness recollection. But here it would appear that the theological emphases have been given top priority—precisely in order to drive home several points relating to the theological character of the new movement's beginnings. In which case, since Luke has been the less concerned with brute facts, the less able are we to say what they were.⁵¹

For Dunn the theology has clearly trumped historiography in the prologue. At the end of the same section he states, "All that being said, however,

⁵⁰Howard Clark Kee, *Good News* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 30.

⁵¹James D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 3. Dunn believes the Prologue consists of the first chapter (1:1-26).



we can be confident of the basic historical data utilized by Luke.”⁵² He then proceeds to say that our confidence in the accuracy of the history in the Prologue is limited to three things: (1) that the story of Acts did begin in Jerusalem; (2) that there was a period of time between the resurrection and ascension that Jesus did appear to groups and individuals; (3) Judas did die.⁵³ But Dunn offers no explanation of why we can even be confident in the accuracy (truth value) of Luke’s record of these events. Dunn has serious doubts about the historical reliability of the prologue, especially the narrative regarding the replacement of Judas. He opines, “The very oddity of what is narrated in Acts 1:23-26 may even indicate that these were actions of bewildered men uncertain what to do, waiting for something to happen, and taking the only action they could in the meantime.”⁵⁴ Dunn contradicts himself. Then how is it that Luke comes to record such an event? Dunn’s answer is that historiography is trumped by theology: “...it was a matter of theological principle for the first Christians to be able to speak of an unbroken group of ‘the twelve’ as a fundamental factor in Christian beginnings (1 Cor 15:5; Rev 21:14).”⁵⁵ Dunn clearly concludes that the early church needed to invent this story in order to have a nice, tidy theology--“to be able to speak of an unbroken group of ‘the twelve.’”⁵⁶ Here we arrive at the heart issue of my thesis: the interrelationship of theology, history and literary artistry. I shall return

⁵²Ibid., 4.

⁵³Ibid., 4f.

⁵⁴Ibid. 5.

⁵⁵Ibid., 4f.

⁵⁶Vanhooser describes this hermeneutic: “The neo-pragmatist is, hermeneutically speaking, pro-choice. Neither the author nor even the notion of truth has any authority for the user. Truth is demoted from its prior status as timeless and absolute to ‘what is good for us to believe here and now’ or ‘what works for me in this situation.’” *Is There Meaning*, 5.



to engage Dunn's comments shortly. Prior to that, I will address the two issues of 'truth claim' and 'truth value.'⁵⁷

3.2.4.1 'Truth Claim' and Luke's Historiography

When Luke states his intention to write his own "orderly account," after having "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" he explicitly declares his intention to communicate objective historical facts in his writings.⁵⁸ I. Howard Marshall notes that "It is probable that the average reader approaches the Acts of the Apostles as *the history book of the early church*."⁵⁹ Terrance Callan agrees that "The stated purpose of Luke-Acts seems to mark it as a history...written to provide a true account of something."⁶⁰ David Aune's assessment is that "Luke introduces the careers of *both* John and Jesus with similar devices because his intentions are historical rather than biographical."⁶¹ In the conclusion of his examination of Acts 1:1-2 Ben Witherington concurs with these assessments. He believes Luke's intent was to thoroughly investigate and

⁵⁷By 'truth claim' I mean what a literary work intends to do (illocutionary act); by 'truth value' I mean whether the truth claim succeeds. The truth claim, or genre descriptor, historiography, implies a basic claim to referentiality. On the 'macro-genre' level one may hold to the veracity of the Bible in a sweeping sense, but one's commitment to the truth value of the Bible does not automatically settle the question of the truth claim(s) of any given sub-genre. Because the Bible contains a compendium of works of diverse literary genres, the truth claim(s) of any particular text may be discovered only as each text is read on its own terms, with due recognition of its genre and due attention to its content and wider and narrower contexts.

⁵⁸On the diversity of the Bible's truth claims, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Form," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. Carson and Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 49-104.

⁵⁹Marshall, *Acts*, 17.

⁶⁰Terrance Callan, "The Preface of Luke-Acts and Historiography," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985), 580. See also Collin Hemer, *Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*. Vol. 4 *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 85; Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 3.

⁶¹David Edward Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 133.



record the events and utterances in his account that had, and would continue to, significantly impact history.⁶² One may choose to deny the truth-value of all or part of Luke's account as Dunn does, but one is not free to read Luke as if no historical truth claim has been made.

3.2.4.2 'Truth Value' and Luke's Historiography

Philips Long contends that there are two tests that should be applied to whatever "historical truth claims the biblical witness is making."⁶³ The first is to assess whether that testimony is 'internally consistent' (coherence). The second is what he refers to as 'correspondence theory'—whether the historical truth claims of Scripture correspond to external reality and sources (understanding truth to be defined as 'that which accords with reality').

I will now explore the two dominant theories of truth in relation to the historical method: the coherence and correspondence theories. An extended description of the two theories advocated by Long will form the basis of my further response to Dunn, et. al. He concludes from his survey of the literature on the theories the following general understandings and uses of the terms:

(1) Correspondence theory or 'common sense' theory refers to the way statements about the 'facts' are related to the 'way things are,' i.e., reality. If there is found to be no incongruences between the statement and reality, the statement is viewed to be true or accurate.

(2) Coherence theory refers to the relationship that the statements have to each other. Statements that are logically coherent or consistent with each other are deemed to be true.

⁶²Witherington, *The Acts*, 11,13.

⁶³V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 185. [My brackets].



He argues that the coherency theory must be coupled with the correspondence theory, as it is potentially vulnerable to error when exercised alone when considering historical truth. He says the best way to view the synthesis is to separate the *theory* of truth from the *criterion* of truth. The correspondence theory functions well as a *theory* of historical truth, but not as a *test* of truth, because the past is inaccessible and unrepeatable. On the other hand, the coherence theory is inadequate as a *theory*, but has a useful function as a *criterion* of truth if it is understood as assessing whether a proposition is true if it fits with everything else we know. Applied to any proposed historical reconstructions would mean that they would be held to be accurate or true if: (1) they were judged to not be in conflict with all that we might know about a subject [coherence or internal and external consistency] and (2) that there is no ontological dissonance [how a representational painting corresponds to its subject].⁶⁴

3.2.4.2.1 The Correspondence Theory and Luke's Historiography

Lightfoot once stated: "The Acts of the Apostles in the multiplicity and variety of its details probably affords greater means of testing its general character for truth than any other ancient narrative in existence: and in my opinion it satisfies the tests fully."⁶⁵ At the turn of the century, the extensive research of William Ramsay provided further means of checking the book's

⁶⁴Long, *The Art*, 191-93.

⁶⁵J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: A Revised Text and Introduction, Notes and Dissertations* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1982), 347. In his article on Acts for William Smith's *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1893), 1:25-43, especially 35-37, Lightfoot illustrated this point. It is, therefore, perplexing that C. K. Barrett, "Quomodo Historia Conscribenda," *NTS* 28 (1982): 313, views Lightfoot as simply assuming the credibility of Acts and so failing to indicate the "criteria by which these qualities may be assessed." In a letter dated January 19, 1985, Professor Barrett points out that the qualities to which he refers "are not credibility but 'simplicity, straightforwardness, and naturalness', on which Lightfoot's argument for credibility rests." But if thoroughly read, Lightfoot did provide evidence of other sorts to support his confidence in Acts.



veracity at numerous points.⁶⁶ It is noteworthy that Ernst Haenchen included a thirty-six-page survey of research during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and there is not one reference to Ramsay, not even in the footnotes.⁶⁷ Olmstead observed that to the “professional student of the ancient world, it seems unbelievable that [Ramsay’s books] met almost universally hostile reception from contemporary [New Testament] critics.”⁶⁸ This was due to the history of religions approach, with its anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions. More recently, Bruce notes in reference to whether Luke’s account corresponds to contemporary history that his knowledge of historical details such as the titles of dignitaries in the various levels of the Roman Empire proves accurate.⁶⁹ Bruce argues that virtually everything that the book asserts, where it *can* be verified, checks out; yet most contemporary scholars maintain that the book is not to be trusted at those points where it *cannot* be falsified (e.g., Dunn, et. al.)!⁷⁰ This would not be so egregious if a *serious* attempt were made to refute the significant body of

⁶⁶William M. Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (1915: reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), esp. 3-89. Cf. also the summary in W. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 136-38.

⁶⁷Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971). Similarly, the standard work by Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, rev. ed. (London: SCM, 1975), includes four pages (151-54) of bibliography on Acts, but Ramsay’s name is missing.

⁶⁸A.T. Olmstead, “History, Ancient World, and the Bible,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 2 (1943): 23.

⁶⁹F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 17.

⁷⁰Other scholars are even more skeptical. E.A. Clark exudes a postmodern worldview in assessing Luke’s historiography: “The critic’s task, then, is to show how ‘seemingly politically innocent objects, forms of subjectivity, actions, and events’ are the effects of power and authority, that is, the task to denaturalize and rehistoricize what ideology has produced.” *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 176. Scott Shauf defines Luke’s historiography as “imaginative narration,” and avoids the historicity issue altogether, if for no other reason, his sources would already have been socially influenced. *Theology as History, History as Theology: Paul in Ephesus in Acts 19* (Beihfte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 133; Berlin: de Gruyter), 66-75.



evidence that has addressed the issue. Colin Hemer remarks that “opinion about the book of Acts has become polarized, and often between those who differ profoundly on the matter of historicity, but this aspect of their disagreement is often implicit rather than explicit.”⁷¹ Tannehill exemplifies the implicit approach in his second volume on Luke-Acts: “The vital issue in the study of Acts is not whether it is historically accurate but whether it promotes values worthy of respect and presents models worthy of imitation.”⁷² He then immediately proceeds to argue that access to those values is through Luke’s narrative rhetoric, so that in one sentence the issue of historicity is broached, not to be engaged again.⁷³

Hemer made an extensive study of Luke’s historiography. He thoroughly explored literary works, inscriptions, other archaeological evidence, geographical details and chronology contemporaneous to Luke’s writing. He compared his research results with Luke’s writing and perceived “the existence of a distinctive and rigorous theory of historiography.”⁷⁴ Marguerat’s approach is more nuanced. He proposes that there are three strands of historiography permeating Luke’s narrative: ‘documentary’ history (factual), ‘explicative’ history (evaluative) and ‘poetic’ history (theological). Marguerat’s analysis of the three aspects has merit, but he has Luke using one or the other indiscriminately: that

⁷¹Colin Hemer, *The Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, ed. C. Gempf, *WUNT* 49 (Tübingen: Mohr; reprinted Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990): 1.

⁷²Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. Vol. 2: *The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 3.

⁷³No footnote is offered for reference to any previous discussion by himself or others concerning the issue of historicity.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 100.



one appears at one point in Acts and then another aspect at another time.⁷⁵ The narratives where Luke portrays God's activity are "poetic," and not to be confused with the other two categories. Those narratives are a type of fictive act—a construct of Luke. Marguerat says that "historiography should not be regarded as descriptive, but rather (re) constructive." Robert Altar's view is more satisfactory. He insists that "Rather than viewing the literary character of the bible as one of several 'purposes' or 'tendencies' (*megamot* in the original), I would prefer to insist on a complete interfusion of literary art with theological, moral, or historiosophical vision, the fullest perception of the latter dependent on the fullest grasp of the former."⁷⁶

3.2.4.2.2 The Coherence Theory and Luke's Historiography

A significant amount of scholarly energy has been devoted to the correspondence criterion of assessing the historiography of Luke. Outside the Luke-Acts parameters of exploration, lesser energy has been directed to the coherence criterion in assessing Luke's historiography. What I have attempted to do in chapter two, and in the first half of chapter three—from a canonical reader's perspective—is to demonstrate that the eye and ear-witness testimony of John in the Fourth Gospel tightly *coheres* with what Luke records in Luke-Acts when he says that "I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning" (Luke 1:3). Under the criterion of coherence, that reliable testimony must be consistent with itself and with other reliable witnesses or evidence.⁷⁷ Based on my study, my confidence in the truth value of the theological history, artfully

⁷⁵Daniel Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles.'* trans. K. McKinney, G.J. Laughery, and R. Bauckham, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 121 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 5-7.

⁷⁶Altar, *The Art*, 135.

⁷⁷In this case it must be consistent with the eyewitness testimony of the Apostle John.



communicated by Luke in Acts is solid, founded upon eyewitness testimony and the witness of the Spirit.⁷⁸ My hope is that I have added another dimension or level of evidence of a coherent canonical story line than has previously been recognized in reference to the opening discourse of Acts. Coherence of a narrative is not in and of itself an absolute guarantee of historicity, but it is a necessary criterion. And when joined together with strong correspondence evidence the case becomes compelling. Only where a text's 'truth claims' involve historicity does a denial of historicity become a denial of the 'truth value' of the biblical text, and thus become a problem for those holding a high view of Scripture. A Christian who holds a high view of Scripture is convinced that any faith not based on historical truth is illusory (e.g. 1 Cor 15:17; 2 Pet 3:16) and will continue to be scoffed at for failing to adopt a post-Kantian dichotomy between the religions and the scientific. But too commonplace among biblical scholars are those like James Robinson who argue that the risk of faith must not be avoided by appealing to objective historical reality.⁷⁹ That reminds me of Jesus' parable about the man who built his house upon the sand. Geerhardus Vos succinctly addresses the view typified by Robinson that biblical faith could survive even if biblical history were destroyed. Vos' keen assessment of the importance of history for faith pierces to the heart of the matter.

For the sake of argument Vos suggests that one could begin with the assumption that for the Christian faith there was no actual historical event such as the fall and its subsequent need for the atoning work of Christ on the cross. On this assumption one might attempt to still hold that the Christian faith is yet valuable for spiritual enlightenment or moral benefit, though anchored only

⁷⁸As Carl F. Henry aptly stated, "Empirical probability can indeed be combined with inner certainty when the meaning of specific happenings is transcendently vouchsafed, that is, when that meaning is objectively given by divine revelation." *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1976), 2:330.

⁷⁹James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959), 44.



partially in facts or based purely in legend, myth or fiction. He concludes that if this supposition is held, one can have no certainty in real time and space whether one has been ontologically transformed from sinner to a saint, from death to life, from sin to holiness, and not merely in the realm of consciousness. If history is merely incidental to the biblical narratives and not part of the ‘essence’ of truth, then what are the ontological implications? What would one make of Paul’s statement that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17 NIV; ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινά.) Vos argues that if the revelation in biblical narrative is not anchored in historical reality it “betrays a lamentably defective appreciation of the soteriological character of Christianity.”⁸⁰ He contends that one would be left with a natural religion that has no ontological bearing on sin and salvation. In addressing the issue of the historicity of Luke’s account in Acts, I. Howard Marshall concurs with Vos, stating,

Apart from those historical facts there can be no basis for faith. This does not mean that Christian faith is faith *in* certain events, or that faith is possible only if certain events can be *proved* to have taken place and to have been acts of God. It does mean that if the reality of the events is denied, then there is no basis for faith: ‘If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins’ (1 Cor 15:17).⁸¹

I now return to Dunn’s commentary on the prologue of Acts. Dunn holds that the decision to replace Judas was the result of confused thinking among the apostles. Yet this is self-contradictory, as he doesn’t believe the

⁸⁰“Christian Faith and the Truthfulness of Bible History” in *The Princeton Theological Review* (1906): 4:299.

⁸¹Marshall, *Acts*, 24.



episode is factually based. The only historical fact he allows is that Judas died.⁸² Yet Dunn proceeds to denigrate the ‘historical’ actions of the disciples when he says, “these were actions of bewildered men uncertain what to do”⁸³ when they chose to replace Judas. I question the criterion by which he pronounces judgment. Dunn believes the pericope is incoherent, unless one sees it as historical fiction placed by Luke in the narrative as “a matter of theological principle” because the early Christians needed to have an unbroken connection to ‘the twelve’ as a foundation to their faith and history.⁸⁴ It is externally consistent with Jesus’ teaching in the Fourth Gospel and Peter’s application of Psalms 69 and 109 is canonically consistent. Peter was well versed in the Psalms and recalled the earlier words of Jesus about returning to the Father and commissioning the twelve to carry on his mission. He would also have remembered Jesus’ promise that the disciples would sit on *twelve* thrones and judge the *twelve* tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30). The New Testament worldview would see Peter’s exegetical insights and actions as guided by the Holy Spirit. After all, Jesus had told his disciples, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13); and, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will *remind you of everything I have said to you*” (John 14:26). But then the question arises, does one’s worldview allow for the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit?⁸⁵ John 20:21-22 indicates the disciples had

⁸²Dunn, *The Acts*, 4.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁵“Reading, says Ricoeur, is ‘first and foremost, a struggle with the text.’ But what kind of struggle: an honest struggle to understand a stranger, a ‘loving struggle’ between friends



received the Holy Spirit post-resurrection, as a regeneration experience: “Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” According to Eph 3:4-5 and 2 Tim 3:16 that same Holy Spirit that indwelt the Apostles inspired the Scriptures: “In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets;” “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” If that same Spirit that inspired the writings of the Psalms now dwells in the Apostles, is not that same Spirit able to illuminate Peter’s mind to understand meaning and the significance of the Psalms he has read? ⁸⁶

who are trying to overcome their differences, or a violent struggle between two value systems and ways of viewing the world?” Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 407.

⁸⁶“The Spirit *illuminates* the letter by impressing its illocutionary force on the reader. Thanks to the illumination of the Spirit, we see and hear speech acts for what they are—warnings, promises, commands, assertion—together with their implicit claim on our minds and hearts. In so doing, the Spirit does not alter but *ministers* the meaning... The distinction between ‘letter’ and ‘spirit’ is precisely that between reading the words and grasping what one reads. Likewise, the difference between a ‘natural’ and an ‘illuminated’ understanding is that between holding an opinion and having a deep sense of its profundity... The Spirit’s illumination of our minds is therefore dependent on his prior transformation of our hearts.” *Ibid.*, 413.

Mier Sternberg perceives the implication of this: “...a reader unable or unwilling to postulate the articles of faith (from God down) will forfeit competence as a hopeless counterreader... Either we reconstruct the whole as best we can in the light of the writer’s presumed intention... or we fashion—in effect reinvent—everything as we please... Even to judge against the text’s grain, you must first judge with it: receptivity before resistance, competent reading before liberated counterreading, poetics before politics.” Mier Sternberg, “Biblical Poetics and Sexual Politics: From Reading to Counterreading,” *JBL* 111 (1992): 473.



3.3 SUMMARY

I have argued for the theological coherence of the first three opening ‘events’ of Acts (the ascension, the completion of the twelve, and the sending of the Spirit). These events are intrinsic to the history and theology prescribed by Jesus in the Fourth Gospel and artfully narrated (‘poetics’) in the opening discourse of Acts. Meir Sternberg argues that poetic competence requires that one be attuned to the “ideology” (theology) of the text.⁸⁷ That is what I have attempted to do in reference to the opening narrative discourses of Acts. I have argued that being attuned to the poetics of the text in order to access theology requires more than an awareness of the original historical and literary context of a given text. **It demands an appreciation of the immediate canonical context as well as an awareness of canonical history and theology.** Acknowledging the Bible as “canon” entails recognizing a unity of a higher order (i.e., not merely of *parole* [Saussure’s term for the way that language was used on a particular occasion] or genre, but of *Scripture*). If one reads the opening acts of the book of Acts not merely in the light of Luke’s Gospel, but in the light of the other Gospels, in the light of the New Testament, and in the light of the entire canon, one might reasonably conclude that the disciples are perplexed in these post-ascension days, dazed and confused as Dunn observes, but that there is a larger theology built into the canonical history of the events. Poetic competence requires that one be attuned to the theology of the text of the whole canon.⁸⁸

⁸⁷Sternberg, “Biblical Poetics,” 463-88.

⁸⁸Vanhoozer adroitly addresses the issue under discussion. “Hermeneutic rationality—the quest for literary knowledge—may perhaps be best viewed as a form of inference to the best explanation (abduction), rather than a species of deduction or induction. The interpreter seeks literary knowledge, and explanation as to how and why a text is the way it is and what it is about. One does this by imputing intentions to the author that account for the way the text is, in its parts and in its wholeness. Critical interpretation proceeds by making conjectures or hypotheses about what the author was doing in tending to his or her words. On this view, one does not validate interpretation by “proving” the existence of the author’s intention; one rather shows its explanatory power and fruitfulness by asking questions about the text to which certain



I have offered my explanation for the opening of the first three events or discourses of Acts. Dunn offers his explanations. My contention has been that the text itself comprises the most appropriate context for interpretation, provided that readers/interpreters attend to the text on the level of the literary and canonical level. There is a tendency in postmodern literary criticism to view skepticism like Dunn's as a virtue.⁸⁹ Interpretations may be useful for this or that purpose, for this or that interpretive community, but they can no longer be said to be "true," but are useful fictions.⁹⁰ I would contend that this is Dunn's perspective.

descriptions of the literary act represent possible answers. Most serious interpretations cannot usually be falsified or dismissed simply by appealing to the lexical evidence. Interpretive conflicts generally pit one interpretive scheme against another, each of which claims best to account for the same data. The successful interpretation is the one that provides the best account as to why a text is the way it is rather than another way." *Is There Meaning*, 333f.

⁸⁹But do not mistake that I abandon criticism. I consider myself to be a critical or moderate realist, believing that the world is there, independent and determinate, yet it is indescribable apart from interpretive schemes and only partially accessible to any one scheme. I wish to stand in a middle position between epistemological absolutism (which might be labeled a fundamentalist hermeneutic in which "there is only one correct interpretive scheme") and epistemological relativism (in which "every interpretive scheme is as good as any other").

⁹⁰Canadian critic, Northrop Frye is an example of the type of literary criticism that has infiltrated and influenced both biblical studies and theology. He has written that "questions of fact or truth are subordinated to the primary literary aim of producing a structure of words for its own sake." *The Anatomy of Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 74. He holds that Scripture's "use of objective and descriptive language is incidental throughout." (*The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982], 29). Frank Lentricchia labels this a poetics of "aesthetic humanism." *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), 20. Wherein aesthetics "releases mankind from all the shackles of circumstance and frees him from everything that may be called constraint, whether physical or moral." *Ibid.*, 18. Frye affords the Bible a special place in his literary universe because the biblical images and narratives constitute the imaginative, mythological universe within which all subsequent Western literature has lived, moved and had its being. Frye can still call the Bible "revelation," but this is not to be understood as the "conveying of information from an objective divine source to a subjective human receptor," (*Great Code*, 91) because this would make Scripture a "descriptive" text. Frye holds to the new criticism tenant that the primary aspect of verbal structure is its self-referring, "centripetal" aspect. The Bible means literally what it says, but it can only so mean by *not* referring to some extratextual matter. For example Frye says: "When Jesus says (Jn 10:9), 'I am the door,' the statement means literally just what it says, but there are no doors outside the verse in John to be pointed to" *Ibid.*, 91. In other words, the 'door' metaphor has no extra-text reference whatsoever. For Frye, what makes a descriptive text true is its correspondence to an external reference; but a work of literature has another criterion for truth: inner verbal consistency (*Ibid.*, 62). This whole discussion drives one back to the question of genre assigned to Acts.