



## CHAPTER FOUR

### ACT 1 (ACTS 1:1-11) THE ASCENSION OF JESUS: THE TRANSITION IN THE CONTINUATION OF JESUS' MINISTRY

#### 4.1 Chapter Objective

In this chapter I will further examine the historical and theological coherence of Luke's narrative, moving beyond the immediate preceding context of the Fourth Gospel to the broader context of the canon. I will attempt to demonstrate the unbroken continuity between the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels and the continued ministry of Jesus in Acts.<sup>1</sup> Directly engaging my

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<sup>1</sup>Contra. A.W. Zwiep, who states, "Since the ascension Jesus seems to have been put on the sidetrack as it were, waiting for his glorious comeback at the parousia (cf. 1 Thess 1:10)." *The Ascension of the Messiah in Lukan Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 182. I will be arguing that the "absentee Christology" of Acts espoused by C.F.D. Moule, et. al. is an inadequate explanation of the Christology of Acts, "The Christology of Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts; Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert*, ed. Leander E. Keck, J. Louis Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 159-185. At Paul's conversion when Jesus speaks to Paul he invokes a corporate concept of his presence in the world stating, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (9:5; 22:8; 26:15). In Luke 10:16a Jesus says, "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me." The Fourth Gospel points to the new mode of Jesus' presence in the world post-ascension: John 14:17-20 "...the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you;*" John 15:3-4 "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." I am not arguing for a mere vicarious authority and presence of Jesus to his followers, but for an ontological presence by the Spirit in the new covenant people of God (promised in Ezek 36:26-27). William H. Willimon agrees: "Those who accuse Luke of an 'absentee Christology' should be reminded of Luke's assertion that the church (for better or worse!) is the presence which Christ has chosen to take in the world." ("Eyewitnesses and Ministers of the Word' Preaching in Acts," *Interpretation*, 42 no 2 Ap [1988]:167.)



thesis, I will argue that Luke's choice of narrative conventions in telling the stories (*poetics*) in Acts are guided by the *theology* inherent in the *history* he records. I will propose that the three servant roles of Christ (as King, Prophet and Priest)<sup>2</sup> continue in and through his new mode of presence in the Body of Christ,<sup>3</sup> the

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<sup>2</sup>Berkouwer makes the case for Christ's offices of prophet, priest and king as a useful tool of Christological inquiry when applied with the necessary caveats. See G.C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 58–88.

<sup>3</sup>Though Luke does not use this Pauline metaphor, I use it in this chapter to emphasize the continuity between the existence of Christ in the flesh and his continued ministry in and through the Church. As Paul's favorite metaphor for the Church, the body image particularly illuminates the grand Pauline theme of Christ's *union* or *communion* with his Church. Important works with this view are Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960); Ernst Best, *One Body in Christ: A Study in the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul* (London: SPCK, 1955); Markus Barth, "A Chapter on the Church—The Body of Christ," *Int* 12 (1958): 131-156; C.F.D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 70; Geddes MacGregor, *Corpus Christi: The Nature of the Church According to the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958). Mark Saucy argues that "Protestants have taken the body image to be a metaphor not unlike the other images the NT uses to discuss the nature and function of the Church. Catholics and Orthodox, by contrast, view 1 Cor 12:27 as more than mere metaphor and particularly as a simple statement of reality proving that the relationship of the Church and Christ is to be seen more in terms of *identity*. This interpretation is illustrated by appeal in these traditions to Chalcedonian Christology whereby the Church, like the God-man, is the mysterious union of the divine and human natures in the eternal person of Christ. Taken to this extent, the incarnation as an analogy of the church is acceptable to Protestants; there is a divine and human component in the Church's gatherings. But Catholics and Orthodox raise the stakes in their use of incarnation theology to make the claim that the union of divine and human in the Church actually makes a new single acting subject: *one person* with two natures. The immanence of Christ with his people through the Holy Spirit is the mechanism for this claim as Christ's spirit is literally fashioned as the soul of the body, the Church. Through the Spirit, Christ is organically united to his body, the Church, so that he is with her *totus Christus, caput et mambra*, ('the whole Christ, head and members')." ("Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox Together: Is the Church the Extension of the Incarnation?," *JETS* 43/2 [June 2000]: 193-212.) Because "Christ, the head, cannot be separated from his body, the Church," Richard Neuhaus identifies the "Catholic difference" with Protestants in the statement: "For the Catholic, faith in Christ and faith in the Church are one act of faith." As the "single subject with Christ: in the *totus Christus*, the Church derives her equal authority with Christ to share with him in actually dispensing faith and so extend his saving mission on earth as the 'continued incarnation of the heavenly Lord.'" ("The Catholic Difference," in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together Toward a Common Mission*, ed. by Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus [Dallas: Word, 1995], 216). My view is commensurate with the Protestant understanding. The divergent views of ecclesiology have great bearing upon the respective soteriologies and is therefore a divisive issue in the twentieth and twenty-first century ecumenical movements, where it yields the root question as to whether the work of grace (justification) comes from God alone (reformation), or is it from God and from the church



Church as inaugurated at the ascension. I will demonstrate that these three intertwined, continuing roles of the ministry of the Church constitute the central interconnections between the various narrative plots and primary themes of Acts. I will argue that the tripartite ministry is the core underlying *theology* that ‘controls’ the *history* Luke *narrates* in a highly selective manner (poetics).<sup>4</sup> If Acts 1:1-11 is read in the light of the literary context of the canon (both OT and NT) the significance of what is set in motion with God’s exalting of his Son “to his own right hand as Prince and Savior” (Acts 5:31; Phil 2:9; Heb 7:26) is greatly increased.

## 4.2 The Ascension as Transition

Only Luke narrates the ascension as an observable, historical transfer from earth to heaven.<sup>5</sup> Since the ascension is described in both the conclusion of Luke (24:44-53) and in the beginning of Acts (1:1-11), the ascension forms the

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(Catholic/Orthodox)? See Robert W. Jenson *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg—Fortress Press, 1992), 4, 90-94.

<sup>4</sup>One of the major narrative literary conventions that Luke employs is the element of ‘selectivity.’ I will argue that Luke is highly selective in the stories he records and that that selectivity is theologically guided and artfully told. I use that term in the manner Leland Ryken defines it: “...storytellers embody their point of view in their very *selectivity and arrangement* of details. There is, of course, always more than one way to tell a story. The story as it finally stands has been consciously assembled by the author for a calculated effect on the audience. In other words, storytellers control what we see and don’t see, how we see it, and when we see it.” *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 85. Flannery O’Conner says, “The novelist makes his statements by selection, and if he is any good, he selects every word for a reason, every detail for a reason, every incident for a reason, and arranges them in a certain time-sequence for a reason. He demonstrates something that cannot possibly be demonstrated any other way than with a whole novel.” *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 57.

<sup>5</sup>The longer ending of Mark 16:9-20 does, of course, narrate the ascension of Jesus; but this text is generally considered to be a later addition to the Gospel, which likely drew from the Lukan account. Some NT passages assume the heavenly exaltation of Christ without direct mention of the ascension (e.g., Rom 8:34, 10:6; Eph 1:20-21; Col 3:1), while others refer to the ascension as a theological reality without reference to its temporal or corporeal aspects (e.g., John. 6:62; 20:17; Eph 4:8-10; 1Tim 3:16). See E.J. Epp, “The Ascension in the Textual Tradition of Luke-Acts,” in *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis*, ed. E.J. Epp and G.D. Fee (Oxford: University Press, 1983), 131-34.



link between his two volumes and indicates its significance for a proper understanding of his theology and purpose.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the ascension functions as a bridge event of both continuity and discontinuity between the Gospels and Acts.<sup>7</sup> What precedes is the historical record of Jesus' ministry in the flesh (mode 1) in the four Gospels, and what begins in Acts and continues in the letters records Jesus' continued ministry in the Body of Christ by the Spirit (mode 2). Thus, the ascension appears to be the historical, theological and ontological transition event<sup>8</sup> in the New Testament canon (Fig. 4).<sup>9</sup> The continuity is found in the continuation of Jesus ministry, while the discontinuity lies in the mode of his presence on earth.<sup>10</sup>

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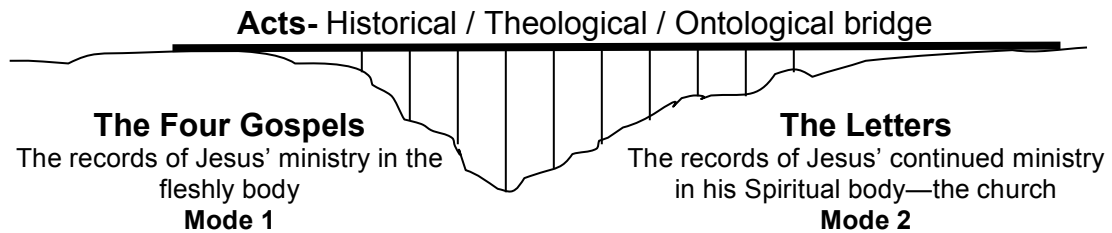
<sup>6</sup>"Theologically and empirically the Ascension of Jesus Christ is at the very heart of the New Testament." Brian K. Donne, *Christ Ascended* (Exteter: Paternoster, 1983), 67.

<sup>7</sup>Marshall, *Acts*, 56. "...the ascension is both the conclusion of the earthly ministry of Jesus and the beginning of the work of the church." Or as Maddox described it: "The ascension is the major bridge from volume one to volume two: it is the necessary climax of the one and starting-point of the other." Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* FRLANT, 126 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprect, 1982): 10.

<sup>8</sup>"The New Testament order, on the other hand, emphasizes the four Gospels' witness to the Christ event. It places Acts as a bridge between Gospels and Epistles, for which it provides a context." *Out of Egypt*, ed. C. Bartholomew, M. Healy, K. Möller and R. Parry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 46.

<sup>9</sup>Peterson says, "The paragraph as a whole implies that the risen Christ will continue to act and to teach through the promised Holy Spirit." Cf. Peterson, *The Acts*, 101. I agree with Krodel against the NRSV that the proper translation of verse 1 is "all that Jesus began to do and teach" rather than "all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning." Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts*, ACNT (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 54. The former reading helps the reader to recognize that what the apostles do and teach is a continuation of the ministry of Jesus in and through the Apostles and the Holy Spirit. This reading also signals discontinuity, for following the ascension the "doing and teaching" of Jesus is no longer accomplished directly, but through the mediation of the apostles and the Spirit. It is ministry done in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38; 3:6; 3:16; 4:9; 4:10; 4:18; 5:40; 8:12; 9:27; 10:48; 16:18; 19:13, 26).

<sup>10</sup>Continuity: this was the clear teaching of Jesus to his disciples and Jesus' self-understanding of his mission and its continuation post death and resurrection, as was traced in the second half of the Gospel of John in chapter two of this monograph. Discontinuity: this has implications for a broad view of New Testament literary genre. Karl Möler states: "The New Testament order, on the other hand, emphasizes the four Gospels' witness to the Christ event. It places Acts as a bridge between the Gospels and Epistles, for which it provides a context." ("The

**Figure 4.1**

Mikeal Parson points out that the ascension marks both an ending and a beginning event in the ministry of Jesus.<sup>11</sup> That it is a closing event is confirmed by the angelic messengers' words in Acts 1:10-11 indicating an "air of finality"<sup>12</sup> in the post-resurrection appearances.<sup>13</sup> The narrative of Acts does not record that the disciples see the bodily resurrected Jesus again.

As an opening event of Jesus' new mode of ministry on earth,<sup>14</sup> the fourfold repetition of the phrase "into heaven" in 1:10-11 is clear evidence of the reality of Christ's Lordship.<sup>15</sup> Eric Franklin quite rightly states that "the ascension

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Nature and Genre of Biblical Theology", *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Mary Healy, Karl Möller, Robin Parry [Grand Rapids: Zondervan], 46).

<sup>11</sup>Mikeal Parson, *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts: The Ascension Narratives in Context*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 21 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987): 194: "The ascension story in Luke functions in its narrative context as an ending which brings closure to the Gospel, while the ascension account in Acts serves in its context as a narrative beginning. The differences in detail between these accounts may be accounted for largely by the role of each in its respective narrative context." Cf. I.H. Marshall, *Acts*, 56.

<sup>12</sup>John F. Maile defined the ascension as a "confirmation of the exaltation of Christ and his present Lordship." "The Ascension in Luke-Acts," *TynB* 37 (1986): 57.

<sup>13</sup>See Eric Franklin, "The Ascension and the Eschatology of Luke-Acts," *SJTh* 23 (1970): 191-200.

<sup>14</sup>P.A. van Stempvoort described the ascension as "hard and realistic, leading into the future, but at the same time into the history of the Church, beginning from Jerusalem." ("The Interpretation of the Ascension in Luke and Acts," *NTS* 5 [1958/59]: 39).

<sup>15</sup> Maile defined the ascension as a confirmation of the exaltation of Christ and his present Lordship. "The Ascension," 55.



is the visible and concrete expression of Jesus' status."<sup>16</sup> In Luke 24:34 and from the beginning of Acts onwards, the disciples are represented as freely applying the term 'Lord' to Jesus.<sup>17</sup> The Ascension was God's decisive eschatological act in Jewish history, the moment of Jesus' entry into his full authority.<sup>18</sup> Luke records that he entered "his glory" (Luke 24:26) at his exaltation. God made him "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:33-36) and fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34). He is now "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36). The parousia will only reveal what is already a reality in heaven. With the exaltation of Jesus, the completion of the twelve and the outpouring of the Spirit are not random events, but the acts of the newly enthroned King restoring the kingdom to Israel.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the event of the ascension is the primary, non-verbal response to the disciples' question in Acts 1:6, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" The essential answer is given to the disciples in visible, not auditory form.

1:9 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, will come back in the same way *you have seen him go into heaven.*"

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<sup>16</sup>Eric Franklin, *Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts* (London: SPCK, 1975) 9-47. "Numerically, Luke's favorite title is *kyrios*, 'Lord', used of both God and Jesus." Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of Acts*, 29. Cf. C.F.D. Moule, *Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts* (London: SPCK, 1975), 35.

<sup>17</sup>C.F.D. Moule, "Christology of Acts."

<sup>18</sup>E.A. Laverdiere, "The Ascension of the Risen Lord," *BiTotd* 95 (1978): 1553-1559.

<sup>19</sup>Neither Matthew nor John records directly the ascension in their Gospels. Mark alludes to it, at least in the questionable ending to his Gospel, 16:19. But a fuller account is given by Luke, 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11. There are, however, references understanding it to be the inauguration of his kingship reported from the beginning of the apostolic preaching post-ascension (Acts 2:32f; 5:30f). The epistles make clear connection between the ascension and his enthronement (Phil 2:6-9; 3:20; Eph 4:8-10; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:22; Heb 2:9, 12:2; cf. also Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; 1 Pet 1:21).



What the disciples witness at the ascension is the concrete expression in time and space of the exaltation of Christ to royal position and power.<sup>20</sup> The ascension becomes the capstone event of the first advent of Christ that triggers the inauguration of the fulfillment of the OT promises regarding the enthronement of the promised Messiah—specifically the promises of the restoration of the judges (Isa 1:26) and the pouring out of the Spirit (Joel 2:28). But these are first fruits that will anticipate the completion of the harvest at the parousia.

### **4.3 The Continuation of Jesus’ Prophetic, Priestly, and Kingly Servant Roles in Acts in the new “Body of Christ,” the Church**

#### **4.3.1 Introduction**

The opening paragraph of Acts “as a whole implies that the risen Christ will continue to act and to teach through the promised Holy Spirit.”<sup>21</sup> What I will demonstrate in the following pages is that the continuity of Jesus’ ministry in Acts is best understood in terms of his person and work as described in the Gospels. Darrell Bock notes that the “key” to the continuity is Jesus’ “role and function,” but he does not proceed to develop and define that continuity.<sup>22</sup> He states: “Another major subtheme here is how what started out as the natural extension and realization of Judaism came to develop its own structure, the church. *Key to all of this is Jesus’ role and function.* Whereas Luke’s Gospel

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<sup>20</sup>C.H. Talbert attributed the ascension narratives for the most part to the artistic hand of Luke and circumscribed the ascension as a guarantee device to ascertain the corporeality of the ascension and the continuity of the dying and rising one with the ascending one, against a docetic tendency which advocated a spiritual ascension. *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts*, SBL.MS 20; (Missoula, MT: Scholar, 1974), 58-65; 112-116.

<sup>21</sup>Peterson, *The Acts*, 101.

<sup>22</sup>Similarly, Ben Witherington says that “this account is about the passing on of the power and authority to Jesus’ witnesses so that they might continue the kingdom work he had begun.” *The Acts*, 112. But Witherington also does not unpack the nature of the continuity of the ministry between Jesus and the Church.



outlines his ministry, the book of Acts shows how the risen Lord continued to be active...<sup>23</sup> I propose that the tripartite servant Christology of the Gospels is the underlying theology inherent in the poetics and historiography of Luke in Acts and provides specifics to Bock's general observation that the key to how the risen Lord continues to be active post-ascension is in "Jesus' role and function."<sup>24</sup> I will postulate that in Acts the servant roles continue in a derivative and contrapuntal relation to the heavenly ministry of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King, in such a way that the Church does not draw attention to itself.<sup>25</sup> The patterns of life and work of the Church on earth have their significance entirely and only in directing the world to the risen and ascended Lord himself. The same Kingly, Prophetic and Priestly ministry that began with Jesus at his first advent

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<sup>23</sup>Darrell Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 7. Italics mine.

<sup>24</sup>See Donald L. Jones, "The Title 'Servant' in Luke-Acts," in C.H. Talbert (ed.) *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 148-65.

<sup>25</sup>While I have stressed the continuity of Christ's ministry in the flesh with that of the Church, I also want to highlight the discontinuity. The Church of Acts never proclaims its message in the same 'self-reflective' manner as does the incarnate Jesus. In the prophetic office, while Jesus preaches God's truth, he also declares that he *is* the "way and the truth" (John 14:16). Likewise, while he preaches God's abundant life, he also preaches that he himself *is* that life. While he preaches the Kingdom of God, he *is* the *basileus* of the Kingdom. This is not the case with the Church. While the Church continues the tripartite servant-ministry of Christ, it never proclaims itself. The Church is Christocentric and theocentric, but never ecclesiocentric. The Church "proclaims" (Acts 8:5), "preaches" (Acts 5:43), "testifies" (Acts 18:5), "convinces others" (Acts 28:23), "shows" (Acts 18:28) and "teaches" (Acts 28:31), but the Church is never the object of such activity or the subject of her own proclaimed message. The only objects of *pisteuō* (with *eis*, *epi*, or *en*) and its cognates in its 60+ occurrences in the NT are "God," "Jesus," "the Lord Jesus Christ," "the Lord," "the Light," "his name," "the Son of God," "him who raised Jesus from the dead," and the apostolic "witness." The apparent object of the *pistis eis* as *pantas tous hagious* in Philemon 5 ("because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints") is not favored by the grammarians. See Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1982), 278-79. [Conversely, the Church is never the object of rejection that determines one's damnation, but rather it is rejection of the Holy Spirit that may not be pardoned (Mark 3:29 par.)].





continues in Acts in and through the Church.<sup>26</sup> Jesus identifies himself in Acts as the church when he addresses Saul on the road to Damascus (“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” [9:4]). The continuation of the tripartite ministry of Jesus and the church will be consummated at his second advent when “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Rev 11:15). That an inaugurated eschatological view of the history of Jesus is an underpinning of Luke’s historiography and theology is forthrightly set forth at the opening of his second volume and is inherent in and programmatic for the history narrated by Luke.

The following brief overviews of Christ’s three servant roles as prophet, priest and king portrayed in the Gospels, typologically rooted in the OT and further developed in the NT, will provide the backdrop for my examination of the tripartite ministry roles continuing in Acts in a paradigmatic sense. These snapshots are intended only to exemplify the continuity between the two modes of the ministry of Christ, and are not intended to be an exhaustive study.<sup>27</sup> The goal of this exercise in biblical theology is to gain a deeper understanding of the interrelationship of the theological, historical, and literary aspects of Luke’s

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<sup>26</sup>“If the Church is based in Christ, the understanding of his office will also be of increasing help in its understanding of itself and its work. This means that just as the three roles of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Christ, so they continue to be expressed in the life of the Church.” David T. Williams, *The Office of Christ and Its Expression in the Church: Prophet, Priest, King* (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1997), i.

<sup>27</sup>A much more in-depth examination of the comparisons of the three aspects of Jesus’ ministry between the OT, the NT, the Gospels and Acts would require a separate monograph. A significant part of that study would be an in-depth examination of typology. See David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010); Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Pub., 1989); Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Norman L. Geisler, *Christ: The Theme of the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968); G.K. Beale, ed., *The Right Doctrine From the Wrong Texts: Essays On the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994); Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos, the Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988).



writing in Acts. If, as I have argued, access to the divine authorial intention (theology) imbedded in Luke's writing of history is 'through' the literary text and its conventions, then one must pay attention to the literary 'contexts'<sup>28</sup> of Acts, including the broader levels of canonical context. Such an approach would yield what some critics call a "thick description" of the meaning of a text, rather than a "thin description."<sup>29</sup> Vanhoozer describes what is meant by these phrases in reference to interpretation:

...only when we consider the text as a literary act requiring a number of levels of description can we give an account of what the author is doing in the text; and *only when we give an account of what the author is doing can we give a sufficiently 'thick description' of the literal sense*. How do we know when a description of what the author is doing is sufficiently thick? I believe that the text itself usually provides sufficient evidence. Indeed, one of my aims in this chapter is to reclaim a Reformation insight: "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself." This statement of what we might call the "hermeneutical sufficiency" of Scripture implies

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<sup>28</sup>It is useful for the purpose of analogy in describing the canonical hermeneutical approach to refer to the derivation of the term 'context': from Latin *contextus*, from *con-* 'together' + *texere* 'to weave'. The syllables are intentionally separated here for emphasis purposes: there are other canonical "text" levels that should be considered with Acts in order to "weave together" what is described above as a "thick description" of meaning. Again, the literary-canonical approach is fruitful only if the premise of divine authorship of the Bible is accurate. That hermeneutical approach may be validated by showing evidence of a unified, coherent mind behind the canon, in relating the parts to the whole, which is what I am attempting to accomplish in the present chapter.

<sup>29</sup>See "Thinking and Reflecting," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures* (1968), 1:210-226. For Ryle, a thin description of, say, a wink would be one that offered a minimal account only ("rapidly contracting his right eyelid"). The description is thin because it omits the broader context of the event that alone enables it to appear as an intended action. In consequence, thin descriptions suffer from a poverty of meaning. As an example of a thick description, Ryle imagines a boy who parodies another boy's wink. The movement is the same, but the action is altogether different—neither blinking nor winking, but mocking—and the context that forms the background for this description is altogether more complex. The point is that interpretation—whether in cultural anthropology, history, or literary criticism—is a matter of offering "thick" descriptions of what people are doing. Clifford Geertz coined the phrase "thick description" in the field of cultural anthropology, but it has been borrowed by historical and literary critics. *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana, 1993), 3-13.



that the text itself contains those contexts necessary for determining the literal sense.<sup>30</sup>

The threefold servant-role Christology is developed in ever increasing concentric circles of canonical contexts to Acts: the Gospels, more broadly in the NT, and expanding to the OT where the three are typologically pervasive. I will argue that the continuation of these ministry roles in and through the Church are the central theological realities at the heart of the history narrated by Luke and which influence his poetic choices in communicating that history.

#### 4.3.2 The Canonical Context

Setting the traditional *munus triplex Christi*,<sup>31</sup> the tripartite servant roles of prophet, priest and king, in the broadest canonical context, I suggest that they were in operation from the beginning in Adam and will continue post-parousia in the glorified saints throughout eternity.<sup>32</sup> Pre-fall Adam possessed and spoke truth about God and his creation to Eve, and would have taught accurate knowledge of God to his progeny absent the fall. Thus, he functioned as

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<sup>30</sup>Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 305. Vanhoozer argues that the literary context for every text is ultimately, in the mind of the divine author, the canon. In order for the ideal implied reader to have the 'thickest' or 'fullest' possible understanding of a text, he or she must be a reader of the whole canon, providentially provided by the author.

<sup>31</sup>"The threefold Office, the *Munus triplex*, was first introduced into dogmatics by Calvin (*Institution*, II, 15), yet it was not unknown to Luther. (Cf. the chapter on *Das dreifache Amt Christi* in Th. Harnack's book, *Luther's Theologie*, Chapter 16.) Yet although Luther taught that Christ was Prophet, Priest and King, he never spoke of a 'threefold office.' It was Calvin's interest in the connexion between the Old and the New Covenant, as well as his way of thought which was permeated with the idea of saving history (*Heilsgeschichte*) which led him to present the Work of Christ under this threefold aspect." Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Dogmatics: Vol. II*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 314.

<sup>32</sup>For this understanding I am indebted to Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 629f.



a 'prophet' of God.<sup>33</sup> He functioned as 'priest' in that he offered prayer and praise to God. And though there was no necessity for sacrifice for sin, pre-fall, Adam and Eve offered their lives in service to God as a living sacrifice, "holy and pleasing to God," as a spiritual act of worship (Rom 12:1). As assigned by God, they performed the work of tending to the garden with thanksgiving, as a sacrifice of praise (Heb 13:15). Adam and Eve also functioned in a subordinate 'kingly' role. They were given to "rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" as vice-regents of God (Gen 1:26, 28).

Following the entrance and proliferation of sin into the world God began a move to restore the tripartite roles with the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), leading to the institution of the three offices of prophet, priest and king in the nation of Israel. Through Abraham and his progeny God intended to bless all the peoples on earth. A highlight of Abraham's role as servant of Yahweh is in the intercession for Sodom in Genesis 18. But the ensuing history of Israel all too often reveals false prophets, corrupt priests, and ungodly kings. Nevertheless, God sovereignly uses a select number of men in these offices to become types pointing toward a future fulfillment and restoration.

There are numerous hints in the OT that the entire nation of Israel was intended to act as prophet, priest and king for the world. This follows from the initial call of Abraham, on which the nation of Israel bases its existence. The account does not only promise that God "will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing," but also that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Israel is separated from the nations to that end. Israel is called the firstborn son of God, and because of that it has the role of priest for the other nations (Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6). Israel's king is to have rule even over other nations. The kingly rule of the future king, like

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<sup>33</sup>In the simplest of terms, the biblical prophet was the Spirit-inspired spokesman of God, who made known God's truth.



David's, will extend over other distant and alien nations. Both the psalmist and the prophet have a vision of a universal empire:<sup>34</sup>

“He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Ps 72:8).

“He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Zech 9:10).

The prophetic is also present in reference to corporate Israel. Following the Spirit's resting upon the seventy elders, Moses expresses the longing for Israel when he says “I wish that all the LORD'S people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them” (Num 11:29)! The many examples of direct prophetic oracles delivered to the nations further ratifies the distinctive prophet role of Israel among the nations (cf. Amos, Ezekiel).<sup>35</sup>

With the coming of Christ, both the purity of the tripartite servant roles of Israel are restored and the tripartite mission in the world reaches its culmination.<sup>36</sup> He, as the Messiah, was ‘anointed’<sup>37</sup> to be the fulfillment of the

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<sup>34</sup>Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, trans. G.W. Anderson (New York: Abingdon Press, 1959), 160-85.

<sup>35</sup>Byron E. Shafer, “The Root *bhr* and Pre-Exilic Concepts of Chosenness in the Hebrew Bible,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1977): 20-42. Not only the various offices that existed in Israel reached their culmination in Jesus, but Israel itself. Christ did not only come as a Jew, an Israelite, and to live perfectly as God intended that an Israelite should, but more than that, he may be seen as the fulfillment of Israel itself. While the second part of Isaiah (40f) can sum up the nation and its purposes in one individual, the servant, the identification of the servant with Christ is natural for a Christian. Christ is the true Israel. It is in this way that figures such as the servant or son of man are seen to have both a collective and individual reference. On the one hand they are Israel as a whole, or perhaps better, the ideal Israel, but on the other hand they are an individual, who therefore represents Israel as a whole. See John Gordon Davies, “Priesthood,” in Alan Richardson, *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1969), 274.

<sup>36</sup>“Jesus incomparably fulfilled and consummately enacted these three offices as: ‘prophet like Moses whom God has raised up from among his own people’ (Acts 3:22); ‘a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek’ (Heb 7:17); and ‘King of kings’ (Rev 17:14).” Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology: The Word of Life*, Volume 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 280.



tripartite roles, because “to his manhood were imparted without measure all the gifts of the Holy Ghost; and so he possessed in the highest degree the *knowledge* of a prophet, the *holiness* of a high-priest, and the *power* of a king.”<sup>38</sup> As prophet he not only speaks the words of truth, but also is the Word of God become flesh (John 1:14). As prophet, he is the supreme *revealer* of truth and the will of God, bringing light to the blind. He is the perfect high priest who is the supreme *reconciler* and sacrificial lamb, bringing forgiveness to the guilty and bringing people near to God. As king he is the supreme *Lord*, bringing peace and order to the rebellious, reigning forever with a scepter of righteousness over the new heavens and new earth. It is in Jesus that the original Abrahamic calling of Israel to serve as a blessing to the nations comes into fulfillment. Simeon’s song applies the servant songs of Isaiah to Jesus, seeing in him the fulfillment of Israel’s mission to be a “light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32, referring to Isa 42:3; 49:6, etc.).

As will be demonstrated in more detail in the sections to follow, the Church, as described in Acts, functions in each of these roles, though in a subordinate way. Believers, as Spirit empowered witnesses, fulfill the ‘prophetic’ function of proclaiming the truth of the gospel to a lost world (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). They are also “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9), exhorted to be built into a spiritual temple, “to be a holy priesthood” and “to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5). The writer of Hebrews views believers as priests who are able to “have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus” and who are exhorted to “continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Heb 10:19, 22; 13:15). Beginning in the church in Acts, believers function in the role of vice regents for they are seated with Christ “in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).

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<sup>37</sup>Anointing oil was the principle OT symbol of consecration to office (1Kgs 19:16; Lev 8:30; 1Sam 16:13).

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 283.



Thus, the church exercises his authority over evil spiritual forces that are arrayed against it (Eph. 6:10-18; James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9; 1 John 4:4).

At the return of Christ, the believers' knowledge of God will then be perfect for they will know even as they are known (1 Cor 13:12). Thus they will only speak the truth about God and about his world, fulfilling the original "prophetic" purpose intended by God for Adam. Post-resurrection believers will be restored also to the original intention of the priesthood role, for they will worship and offer prayer to God and serve in his presence eternally (Rev 22:3-4). They will continually offer themselves as living sacrifices in all that they are and do. And thirdly, believers will also "reign with him forever and ever" (Rev 22:5), sharing in ruling over the new heavens and new earth. As Paul declared, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life" (1 Cor 6:2-3)!

### **4.3.3 Does All that Jesus Began to Do and Teach As Prophet, Priest and King<sup>39</sup> Continue in Acts?**

#### **4.3.3.1 Introduction**

At the Ascension Jesus completes his *prophetic* ministry in the flesh (Matt 12:18; Luke 4:18; 8:1; John 1:1,14; 3:34; 6:33,68; 17:4,8). With the exaltation of Jesus, the completion and goal of Jesus *priestly* ministry is fulfilled--having "entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12), he was then able to take his glorified body into the presence of the Father, making it possible for other sons and daughters to follow (Heb 2:10). With the ascension his *kingly* ministry is properly

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<sup>39</sup>Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993); G.C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1959); T.F. Torrance, *Theology of Reconciliation* (London: Chapman, 1975), 215-266.



inaugurated (Eph 4:8-13; Phil 2:6-11; Heb 1:3-13).<sup>40</sup> The three missionary, servant roles of Jesus<sup>41</sup> that were inaugurated with the incarnation and fulfilled at the ascension will now transition to the Church (mode 2 of his ministry, the Body of Christ) and continue until consummation of all things at Christ's second advent.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>It is noteworthy that the vision of Jesus in Revelation chapter one is a collage picture of him with all three ministry roles portrayed in the description.

<sup>41</sup>"In the doctrine of the Three 'Offices' of Christ we are again reminded of the truth that we know Jesus through God's action in Him; this had already been suggested in the various titles given to Jesus in the Primitive Church, all of which have a 'functional' character and suggest His Work rather than his person." Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, Vol. II (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 273.

<sup>42</sup>The principle of transfer by relationship to Christ should not be a surprise, as this was already the case typologically in the Old Testament. Priests could fulfill their role simply on the basis of their genealogy; because they were in the priestly line they were able to act as priests, but nobody else was able to. Likewise, the dynastic principle applied to the Davidic monarchy. The line of David was appointed as kingly, and only those in it could rule. There is, even just a hint that in some ways the prophetic role could be transferred by blood relationship, although here the direct call of God was determinative. It can even be suggested that the role of Aaron as spokesman (the word is "prophet" in Exodus 7:1) was given to him by virtue of his being Moses' brother. Under the New Covenant it is striking that by virtue of the relationship that is enacted between Christ and the believer, they can be called "brethren" (and of course "sisters") of Christ (Heb 2:11). The union with Christ results in the adoption as children of God (Rom 8:15, Gal 4:5). Christians are baptized into Christ, and thus share in his nature and work as prophet, priest and king. This naturally gives a powerful unity to the Church, and gives a basis for the Church to share in his office because it shares in his nature. Joseph H. Crehan even sees these roles as the basic qualities or privileges of the Church. "Priesthood, Kingship and Prophecy," *Theological Studies* 42 (1981): 216-31. Incidentally, although the essence of the Church is its relationship to Christ, the Church is not the extension of the incarnation. The distinction between Christians and the Church is not blurred by the relationship; the Church is not infallible. See G.B. Cairns, "Christ, the Church His Body and Its Members," in T.H.L. Parker, ed. *Essays on Christology for Karl Barth* (London: Lutterworth, 1956), 224.





#### 4.3.3.2 Jesus' Role As a Servant-Prophet<sup>43</sup>

Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophet promised to come in the OT who would be like Moses (Deut 18:15, 18) and Elijah (Mal 4:5-6). When Jesus commenced his ministry in the Gospels, people declared, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14; 7:40). Dale Allison, Jr. insightfully unpacks Jesus' fulfillment of the Moses-like prophet in Matthew's Gospel, identifying multiple parallels (i.e., the massacre of the innocents under Pharaoh/Herod; Moses/Jesus called from Egypt; the giving of the Torah on Sinai/the new Moses delivering the Sermon on the Mount; the ten mighty works of the exodus story/ paralleling ten miracles of Matt 8-9; etc.).<sup>44</sup> Though Jesus is like the prophet Moses, the NT expresses that he radically supersedes him. In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus delivered the prophetic message on the Mount of Olives (Matt 24:3-25:46; Mark 13:3-37; Luke 21:5-36). In John he is the Word become flesh (John 1:17). In Hebrews he is the final, consummate prophetic word delivered to humanity in his faithful Son (Heb 1:1f; 3:1-6). In Revelation 1, the Apostle John, while on the island of Patmos, saw a vision of the post-ascension Jesus with a double-edged sword coming out of his mouth—a vivid Scriptural analogy for the Word of God (Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12). In the following two chapters of the Apocalypse Jesus prophetically wields that sword, speaking powerful words of commendation and judgment to the seven churches.

As argued in the previous chapters, Jesus carefully planned for the continuation of his prophetic ministry after his ascension by commissioning the apostles (Matt. 10:1f; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16) and promising to send the

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<sup>43</sup>On Jesus as prophet in the NT see, for example, Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, 66-69; Gerard F. Hawthorne, *The Presence & the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Dallas: Word, 1991), esp. 160-168; Marinus de Jonge, *Christology in Context: The Earliest Christian Response to Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 154-165.

<sup>44</sup>Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).



Holy Spirit to remind them of everything he said to them (John 14:25). If there had been no reliable account of his prophetic words and deeds, the church would have no secure foundation for its faith. Jesus commissioned the apostles to continue his prophetic ministry, giving them authority (ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν) to cast out demons, to heal the sick and to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. Their authority was derived from him and their function a continuation of his servant role. As Jesus' representative or ambassadors their function is parallel to the שליח (*šālīah*) of rabbinic Judaism.<sup>45</sup> Jesus tells them, "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16; Matt 10:40; Mark 9:37).

The question for the present study is, does the prophetic ministry of Jesus continue post-ascension in Acts? If so, is there evidence that it is a major theme in the narrative, providing a major strand of theology inherent in Luke's historiography and revealed through his literary artistry?

#### 4.3.3.3 The Prophetic Role Continued In Acts

In Acts the exalted kingly head of his newly formed body, the church, works in and through Spirit empowered prophetic witnesses to proclaim the good news of the resurrected and ascended Lord with the goal of establishing his rule, extending his kingdom to the ends of the earth.<sup>46</sup> Peterson notes that "Jesus'

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<sup>45</sup>TDNT, 1, 414-420.

<sup>46</sup>"When they [apostles] preach, he [Christ] preaches; when they are heard, he is heard." R.F. O'Toole, "Activity of the Risen Jesus in Luke-Acts," *Biblica* 62 (1981): 498. "Jesus' ascension is essentially the context in which there is a transfer of prophetic responsibility to the apostles, with the promise of enabling power to come." D. Petersen, *Acts*, 101; M. Sleeman, "The Ascension and the Heavenly Ministry of Christ," in S. Clark (ed.), *The Forgotten Christ: Exploring the Majesty and Mystery of God Incarnate* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 140-90.



ascension is essentially the context in which there is a transfer of prophetic responsibility to the apostles, with the promise of enabling power to come.”<sup>47</sup>

Immediately following the events of the day of Pentecost, the church is described as devoted to the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42). From the witness of the apostles and those devoted to the apostles’ teaching emerged the authoritative NT witness to Jesus. The authoritative teaching of the apostles is affirmed by the fact that God instructs Paul through a revelation to set before *the apostles* the gospel that he preached among the Gentiles for their evaluation (Gal 2:1-10). We know of no other Jesus than the one that emerged from this apostolic base. The witness of the apostles constitutes the lens through which the multifarious NT interpretations of Jesus were filtered. That witness becomes the bedrock for the church for all future understanding, significance and application of the good news proclaimed by Jesus. It is not surprising that Paul states that God’s household is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:19).

This dynamic is pervasively in action in Acts. In particular, the proclamation of the events of the resurrection is always substantiated by the witness of the apostles (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39-42; 13:30-31; cf. 22:14-15; 26:15-16). On one occasion Peter reports how the resurrection witnesses were specially chosen by God:

We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. (Acts 10:39-41)

The preaching and teaching of both Peter and Paul rehearse the details of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. Following the lead of

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<sup>47</sup>Peterson, *The Acts*, 101.



Jesus, each claim they made was supported by reference to Scripture. Peter launched his Pentecost message from Joel 2:28, interpreting the events of the day as fulfillment of that passage. Peter's sermon following the healing of the lame man argues that what the crowd has just witnessed is a fulfillment of what God "had foretold through all the prophets," and then proceeds to quote Moses' prophecy of a prophet like him that is to come (Acts 3:11-26). When confronted by the Sanhedrin after the miraculous healing, Peter responded by declaring that Jesus is the Christ by applying the prophecy concerning "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone" to Christ (Psalm 118:22; Acts 4:11). The church's response to the Sanhedrin's prohibition after Peter and John's release shows they viewed Psalm 2 as applying to the apostolic church. This pattern continues in Acts. Philip continues the prophetic ministry of Christ, proclaiming the good news, casting out demons and healing many paralytics and cripples (Acts 8:5-8). He leads the Eunuch to faith by preaching Jesus from the prophecy of Isaiah (Acts 8:31-38). Stephen's wily defense concludes with a powerful prophetic indictment of the Sanhedrin: "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51)!

Paul customarily reasoned from the Scriptures proving that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 17:2, 11; 18:28, 31). In Ephesus (Acts 18) Paul identifies his preaching directly as that of Jesus: "He [Christ] came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near" (Eph 2:17). Christ had never been to Ephesus. It is remarkable that Paul equates his own preaching to Christ's. Paul tells the Thessalonian church (Acts 17) that the gospel he proclaimed to them was in reality "the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1Thess 2:13). Thus, the written and oral testimony of the apostles bore Christ's full authority. The apostolic witness in Acts is seen not only to be in continuity with that of Jesus, but also with OT prophetic witness, with the former in a fulfillment relationship with the latter.



It is broadly acknowledged that the growth and increase of the word of God is a central theme in Acts in accomplishing this goal (1:8). I. Howard Marshall notes, “The main storyline of Acts is concerned with the spread of the message.”<sup>48</sup> Brian S. Rosner agrees, saying, “Virtually every commentator recognizes and gives prominence to Luke’s concern with the spread of the gospel message, ‘the word of God (the Lord)’ to use a Lukan phrase, in Acts...Not only explicitly but in a wide variety of subtle and indirect ways Acts portrays the prodigious progress of the word.”<sup>49</sup> F.F. Bruce concurs, saying that it is not one important theme among others, but “The extension of the good news in the power of the Spirit is the theme of Acts.” François Bovon states that the episodes in Acts “narrate the diffusion of the Word.”<sup>50</sup> Jerome Kodell highlights the *ecclesiological* aspects of the three summary statements on the growth of the word.<sup>51</sup>

Acts 6:7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Acts 12:24 But the word of God continued to increase and spread.

Acts 19:20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

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<sup>48</sup>Marshall, *Acts*, 26. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 30.

<sup>49</sup>“The Progress of the Word” in *Witness to the Gospel*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 229-33.

<sup>50</sup>François Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Thirty-Three Years of Research (1950-1983)*, trans. K. McKinney, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 12 (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1987), 238.

<sup>51</sup>Jerome Kodell, “‘The Word of God Grew’: The Ecclesial Tendency of *logos* in Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20,” *Bib* 55 (1974): 505-19.



That the word of God is central in Acts is indisputable. Peterson observes that “the word is the real ‘hero’ of Luke’s narrative.”<sup>52</sup> Viewed from a broader, canonical context—in particular the Gospels—it is the church (mode two—the Body of Christ) in Acts that is continuing the prophetic role of Christ, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Permeating the narratives throughout Acts, it is the Word that is the powerful force that is able to conquer the world (it *grew in power* Acts 19:20). Acts narrates the journey of the powerful Word from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.<sup>53</sup> Luke’s literary artistic choices in narrating that history reveal the intrinsic theological nature of that history as the continuation of the person and work of Jesus as Prophet.

#### 4.3.3.4 Jesus' Servant Role as Priest

Jesus was also the fulfillment of the future priest whose coming was anticipated in the OT (Zech 3:8; 4:11-14; cf. Gen 18:22-24; Exod 32:11-14). Christ’s priesthood was prefigured in the OT in Melchizedek (Heb 7:1,3,11,15) and he was called to be a priest like Aaron (Heb 5:4). Jesus’ entire life is the self-giving of his life for sinful humanity, culminating in his death on the cross. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28). All that Jesus did and taught was directed toward accomplishing the redemption and reconciliation of humanity. In the episode of the feet-washing, John showed that the life and the death of Jesus are one: condescending to serve sinful, lost humanity (John 13:5-14). Washing was a priestly activity and cleansing was the result of priestly ministry in the OT and typologically fulfilled by Christ (Exod 29:4; Lev 1:9; 13:6, 34; 2 Chr 4:6; Heb

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<sup>52</sup>David Peterson, “Luke’s Theological Enterprise,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 541.

<sup>53</sup>Joel B. Green, “Salvation to the End of the Earth (Acts 13:47): God as Savior in the Acts of the Apostles,” in I.H. Marshall and D. Peterson (eds.), *The Book of Acts and Its Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).



10:19-20). The parable of the good shepherd perhaps summarily describes with incomparable power the priestly work of Christ when it portrays the shepherd going out into the wilderness to find his lost sheep (Luke 15:3-6). The poverty of Jesus, his renunciation of the trappings of success and human fame springs from his whole life's mediatorial aim to lift people who are "down there" upwards into communion with God (Phil 2). And because of this counter-cultural worldview and lifestyle, Jesus was barraged with constant opposition from self-righteous Pharisaism.

In the Gospels Christ endured persecution and suffering as part of his unique *priestly* ministry as both priest and atoning sacrifice. As the High Priest of our faith, his experiences enabled him to sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:14,15), qualifying him in every way to be our priestly representative before the Father. Through his incarnational solidarity with sinners he bore our sins and cleansed us from guilt, enabling believers to enter uncondemned into the presence of the Father (1 Pet 2:24). He is the eternal leader of our prayer and intercession. He teaches his disciples to pray for his kingdom to come; through John's 'ear-witness' record we overhear his intercession at the Last Supper in John 17; we overhear his prayer in Gethsemane, and from the Cross—the prayer of his whole life. He is ever before the Father making intercession (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).

His *priestly* ministry is associated mostly with his passion in which, as High Priest, he offered himself in sacrifice for our sins and holy oblation to the Father (Heb 2:17; 3:1; 5:5, 6, 10; 6:20; 9:25). The ascension of Christ is his exaltation to power and glory, but *through the Cross*. His exaltation from humiliation to royal majesty is through crucifixion and sacrifice, for the power and glory of the Royal Priest are bound up with his self-offering in death and resurrection. At the ascension we not only have a King exalted to the throne but we also have "a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" (Heb 8:1; cf. 10:12). Again, the question for the present study is (from the perspective of a canonical reading): Does the priestly ministry of



Jesus continue post-ascension and pre-parousia in the apostolic ministry narrated in Acts? If so, does it appear as a major theme in the narrative, providing a second major interwoven strand of theology inherent in Luke's historiography and revealed through his literary artistry?

#### 4.3.3.5 The Priestly Role Continued in Acts

Interlinked with the plot line of the prophetic mission of witness to the Word are the ever-present realities of persecution<sup>54</sup> and consequent suffering as the Church in Acts undertakes a 'ministry of reconciliation' (2 Cor 5:18).<sup>55</sup> These two interwoven themes are ubiquitous in the narrative of Acts.<sup>56</sup> In his first volume, Luke narrated the connection between mission and persecution for both Jesus and his disciples. The implied violent rejection encountered by the Twelve and the Seventy-two foreshadow what they will experience as they continue to

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<sup>54</sup>C.H. Talbert, *Learning Through Suffering: The Educational Value of Suffering in the New Testament and in Its Milieu*, *Zacchaeus Studies: New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991); J.B. Tyson, "Conflict as a Literary Theme in the Gospel of Luke," in W.R. Farmer (ed.) *New Synoptic Studies* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), 303-27; J.J. Kilgallen, "Persecution in the Acts of the Apostles," in G. O'Collins and G. Marconi (eds.), *Luke and Acts*, trans. M.J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 143-150, 245-50.

<sup>55</sup>Paul R. House, "Suffering and the Purpose of Acts", *JETS* 33 (1990): 317-30. See also Scott Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations: The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). Again, the Church's role as priests is distinguished from that of Christ's as it never "redeems" or "propitiates" anyone. The Church's sufferings is distinctly its own and not a repetition or re-presentation of the cross of Christ. They point to Christ. It is within this uniquely Christological and not ecclesiological focus to suffering in the NT that we are to understand Christ's merciful identification with his Church (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14). As Marcus Barth states, "it is and remains *his* glory, of and in which the church lives. That the risen Christ identifies himself with the persecuted church is one thing; in his mercy he can and will proclaim his presence in the church that appears so helpless. That the church extols herself to almost divine rank by considering herself identical with Christ is another thing." ("A Chapter on the Church—The Body of Christ," *Int* 12 [1958]: 145).

<sup>56</sup>David Peterson notes this connection: "Opposition from unbelievers normally follows gospel ministry in Luke's narrative, where the focus is on God's use of such situations to further his purposes...Suffering regularly provides the opportunity for more ministry and is intimately connected with the growth of 'the word.'" ("Luke's Theological Enterprise: Integration and Intent, in Marshall – Peterson (eds.), *Witness to the Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 541).





proclaim the kingdom of God and do the works that Jesus began to do (Matt 5:11; 10:22; 24:9; Luke 9:4; 10:1-9; 21:12; John 15:20).<sup>57</sup> The persecution of Jesus in the Gospels increased in intensity until it climaxed in his death. In Acts the persecution and suffering of his witnesses begins quickly, is frequent and maintains a high level of intensity. Of the main characters in Acts (Peter, John, Stephen, Barnabas, Silas, Paul; and the apostles and disciples as groups) only Philip appears exempt from this common experience. The consistent element of persecution in the Acts narratives is manifested in the imprisonments, trials, beatings, conspiracies, riots, forced expulsions, mocking, stoning and martyrdom (as Jesus predicted—Luke 21:16). Peterson notes the connection in Acts between the prophet role and the priestly role of Jesus and of the Church:

Luke's pastoral aim was achieved by the way he structured his narrative, juxtaposing various accounts of suffering with assurances about the triumph of 'the word.' Persecution, hardships, trouble, martyrdom, and disputes between Christians and non-Christians (sometimes even between Christians and Christians) provide the theological and literary framework for Acts...Suffering regularly provides the opportunity for more ministry and is intimately connected with growth of the word.<sup>58</sup>

Just as one of the chief bases of Christianity is the suffering of Christ, so a main characteristic of the early church is its own suffering. The prominence of Jesus' suffering in the Gospel and the extension of that suffering to his representatives in Acts provide a profound link between the two volumes of Luke's work.<sup>59</sup>

George W. MacRae speaks also of the connection of Jesus' suffering with that of the Church: "It is precisely the journey motif as a structural principle of both Luke's Gospel and Acts that reveals how deep-rooted in Luke's Christology was

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<sup>57</sup>F.W. Beare, "The Mission of the Disciples and the Mission Charge: Matthew 10 and Parallels *JBL* 89 (1970): 1-13.

<sup>58</sup>Petersen, "Luke's Theological Enterprise," 541.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 544.



the concept of Christ's presence to his church in the sufferings of his witnesses."<sup>60</sup> Acts narrates the stories of what Paul expresses in principle in Col 1:24, "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which, is the church."<sup>61</sup> In other words, Paul declares that as a member of the body of Christ, the Church, that what he suffers in his ministry, as narrated in Acts, is a continuation of Christ's sufferings on behalf of the salvation of the world and the furtherance of the Gospel.<sup>62</sup> Paul informs the disciples of Lyconia (Acts 14:22) that "we must (*dei*) go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."<sup>63</sup> Barth's comment is insightful in relating the Church's sufferings to those of Christ.

The cross of Jesus is His own cross, carried and suffered *for* many, but *by* Him alone and not by many. He suffers this rejection not merely as a rejection by men but, fulfilled by men, as a rejection by God—the rejection which all others deserved and ought to have suffered, but which He bore in order that it should no more fall on them. Their cross does not mean that they have still to suffer God's rejection. They exist only—and this is quite enough—in the echo of his sentence, the shadow of his judgment, the after-pains of his rejection. In their cross they have only a small subsequent taste of what the world and they themselves deserved at the hand of God,

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<sup>60</sup>George W. MacRae, S.J., "Whom Heaven Must Receive Until the Time: Reflections on the Christology of Acts," *Interpretation* 27 no 2 Ap (1973): 165.

<sup>61</sup>D.P. Moessner, "'The Christ Must Suffer' The Church Must Suffer: Rethinking the Theology of the Cross in Luke-Acts," in D.J. Jull (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1990 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990): 165-95.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. also Paul's desire to join with the fellowship of Messiah's sufferings in Phil 3:10. The Colossians passage is of particular significance, as it is the one instance where the atonement formula *hyper humōn* is of someone other than Christ. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), IV/2, 601.

<sup>63</sup>The exact phrase *dei pathein* is used only of Jesus and Paul in prophecies of their suffering (Luke 9:22; 17:25; 24:26; Acts 9:16). But what is true of Jesus and Paul in a special way is true of all disciples generally.



and Jesus endured in all its frightfulness as their Head in their place.<sup>64</sup>

Suffering hardship and persecution is within the divine plan for God's people.<sup>65</sup> The Body of Christ, post-ascension, continues to suffer on behalf of the world in order to establish his Lordship in the hearts of men and women through the Spirit-empowered, prophetic proclamation of the Word of God (cf. Peter's response in the midst of persecution in Acts 4:8-12). Ironically, persecution serves to accelerate the prophetic mission of Christ and his Church. The consequent diffusion of his witnesses yields the further spread of the Word of God (Acts 8:1; 11:19-21). In Acts the Word of God is invincible and persecution is a catalyst for its advance.<sup>66</sup>

The disciples in Acts are intercessors, people of prayer, as was their Lord. It was their first spiritual instinct. Immediately after the ascension "they all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (1:14). In response, God pours out his Spirit. The first instance they are faced with a decision, they pray for guidance. Following the outpouring, prayer is an integral part of their corporate life: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (2:42). From that point forward for the first several chapters a cyclical pattern initiated by prayer is followed by an act of God, which results in an opportunity to proclaim the Word of God, which brings about a response

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<sup>64</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, 600, 604

<sup>65</sup>Contra. R.I. Pervo who concludes, "Persecution is for Luke a literary opportunity and a literary device." And commenting on the persecution episodes he says, "There is little theology here, but lots of excitement." *Profit With Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 28. See D.P. Moessner, "The Christ Must Suffer": New Light on the Jesus-Peter, Stephen, Paul Parallels in Luke-Acts," *NovT* 28 (1986): 220-56.

<sup>66</sup>Acts records three prison deliverances (5:19; 12:6-17; 16:25-34). The Word of God cannot be physically restrained no matter what security measures are taken as illustrated in Peter's imprisonment. When Peter reports the events to the church he "described how the Lord had brought him out of prison" (12:11, 17).



(persecution or repentance), and then the narrative again records the church praying. In the first instance of persecution the Church responds in corporate prayer for boldness in their witness (Acts 4:21-31).<sup>67</sup> Prayer is specifically mentioned thirty-eight times in Acts.<sup>68</sup> Jesus exemplifies his own plea to his disciples to “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt 5:44). Jesus prays for the forgiveness of the sin of those who crucified him: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Stephen continues the same ministry of intercession: “Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:60). The prayers of the saints in Acts are joined with those of all the saints, are described in priestly-temple terms in Rev 8:3f.- “Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hand.” The Church in Acts is in continuity with the priestly ministry of Jesus in its intercession and prayer until he returns.

#### 4.3.3.6 Jesus’ Servant Role as King

Jesus was the fulfillment of the OT prophecies of a Davidic king who would come in the line of David (Gen 17:3-6; 2 Sam 7:12-13; Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-9; Mic 5:2-4; Zech 9:9-10). Jesus’ role as king pervades his ministry from beginning to end in the Gospels. At the opening of the NT Jesus was born to be King (Matt 1; 2:1f). He was consumed with the divine imperative to proclaim the Kingdom of God: “I *must* (*dei*) preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other

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<sup>67</sup>U.C. von Wahlde, “Theological Assessment of the First Christian Persecution: The Apostles’ Prayer and Its Consequences in Acts 4:24-31,” *Bib* 76 (1995): 523-31.

<sup>68</sup>David M. Crump, *Jesus the Intercessor: Prayer and Christology in Luke-Acts* WUNT, 2.49 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992). See also S.F. Plymale, *The Prayer Texts of Luke-Acts* AUSTR, 118 (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).



towns also, because that is why I was sent” (Luke 4:43; cf. Matt 4:23; Mark 1:14-15). And as he entered his public ministry he stepped forth as the King of the kingdom he proclaimed by exercising his authority, by forming a new community, in teaching, healing, and casting out demons. And in the end, ironically, he is crowned with thorns and mocked with the title ‘King of the Jews.’<sup>69</sup> The resurrection and ascension events affirm his exaltation to the Father’s right hand with full regal authority in his domain.<sup>70</sup>

The message of Jesus is the proclamation of the coming Kingdom of God. He comes with the cry, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15). One of the chief desires Jesus teaches his disciples to pray is “thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” Thus, Jesus ratifies the foundation laid in the OT, for everywhere in the message of the OT prophets this is their main concern—the rule of God (i.e., Dan 4:3; 5:21; 6:26; 7:14, 18, 27; 1 Kgs 22:19; Isa 6:1; 24:23 66:1; Obad 1:21). The content of Jesus’ discourses is dominated by one conviction—the coming of the Kingdom of God, the new age, and its contrast to the present age. Thus, in many of his parables the subject is a king, or the master of a household. The Apocalypse confirms that this is the goal toward which all history is moving. The will of the King will be done and at the end of the age he will have an obedient people, with every knee bowing and confessing him as Lord (Rev 12:10; Rom 14:11; Phil 2:11). It is then that a loud

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<sup>69</sup>It is the path through the cross that undercuts at its very core postmodernism’s fear of the all pervasive corrupting nature of all grand narratives, whether religious or philosophical, that attempt to capture human devotion. The ascended King Jesus is one who had been the recipient of the abuse of authority at every turn in his life, ministry, and death. This crucified, resurrected and ascended King knows more than any other human being what it is like to be abused by power, and therefore will exercise his power and authority in justice and righteousness. This is what is unique about the NT *kerygma*. This is what the OT constantly called for and looked for in the kings of Israel, but never previously experienced.

<sup>70</sup>More than any other, the regal context of Ps 110 (vv 1 and 4) informed NT writers’ reflection on the state and function of the ascended Christ. There are more citations and allusions to this Psalm in the NT than to any other OT passage (five direct citations: Matt 22:44//Luke 22:69; Mark 16:19; Acts 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; 1Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 8:1, 10:12; 12:2, 1Pet 3:22).



voice in heaven will declare, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Rev 11:15).

#### 4.3.3.7 The Kingly Role Continued in Acts

While the Church cannot yet lay claim to a present ‘reign’ (1 Cor 4:8),<sup>71</sup> there still is a correspondence with Christ’s authority as the Church have been given the “keys to the Kingdom” by its Lord (Matt 16:19). Whatever it forgives on earth will be forgiven in heaven, whatever it retains on earth will be retained in heaven (Matt 18:18). In Acts, just as the incarnate divine King gathered a nucleus of twelve disciples around him at the inauguration of the kingdom in the Gospels, he ‘reconstitutes’ the twelve upon his ascension so that they may be his ‘vice-regents,’ and through whom he will extend reign over the twelve tribes of the restored Israel, his new Body, just as he promised:

Matt 19:28 Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Luke 22:30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

In Acts chapter two, Peter stands with the eleven, as authorized judges of restored Israel, to restore order the first time confusion occurs post-

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<sup>71</sup>“Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!” While there is a correspondence in role, in terms of authority, theocentricity and Christocentricity, not ecclesiocentricity, is the posture of the NT. Christ and God, not the *ekklēsia* are “king.” The kingdom is “God’s” and “Christ’s,” and never the Church’s. Christ, not the Church, is “master,” “Lord,” “head of every man,” “cornerstone” and “foundation.” The Church is subject to Christ’s supreme authority and is to obey him.



ascension.<sup>72</sup> As an authorized vice-regent Peter issues judgment that what had just taken place at the temple gate was not a manifestation of drunkenness, but the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. At the conclusion of his speech, Peter declares that God has made this Jesus, whom they crucified, both Lord and Christ, and that it is the newly enthroned King who, as a second post-ascension act, pours out the Spirit on all flesh. In Acts 2:36 Peter declares that something epochal has transpired in the history of Israel: “Therefore *let all Israel be assured of this*: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Their long awaited King has assumed his full authority granted only through the cross, resurrection and exaltation.<sup>73</sup>

This is the decisive, defining moment in Acts.<sup>74</sup> Jesus has been endowed with universal power as ruler and judge. As the exalted King, Jesus is able to extend the blessings of his Kingdom to all who call upon his name: primarily repentance and release from sins and the reception of the Spirit. Tannehill states, “The ruling power of Jesus is saving power. The presentation of

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<sup>72</sup>To further broaden the canonical context, it should be noted that in the OT when Yahweh was Israel's only King, he instituted prophets, priests, and *judges* (vice-regents) as the earthly, sanctioned manifestations of his rulership.

<sup>73</sup>The glorification of Christ as King and High Priest begins not with his actual ascension or resurrection, but with his crucifixion and indeed with his *ascent* to Jerusalem and Calvary for sacrifice. Thus he fulfills his own words, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk 14:11; Mt 23:12). Using mixed metaphors, John describes Jesus in the *Apocalypse* as a lion who is a lamb, capturing the paradox of humiliation and exaltation (Rev 5:1-14). Even in the ascension the power of Christ is exercised through his sacrifice, through his atoning expiation of sin and guilt. It is in this connection that we are to understand the ascension of the *son of man* as representative human in whom all humanity is gathered up and made participant in his self-offering by their being ‘in Christ,’ so that in his ascension Christ is installed as head of the new humanity (second Adam, 1 Cor 15:22, 45), the prince of the new creation, the King of the kingdom, about which the Apostles were inquiring in Acts 1:6f. However, it is with his exaltation to the throne of God and his sitting at the right hand of the Father that his kingly ministry properly was inaugurated.

<sup>74</sup>George W. MacRae, S.J., “Whom Heaven Must Receive Until the Time: Reflections on the Christology of Acts,” *Interpretation* 27 no 2 Ap (1973): 156. “For example, while in Acts 13:33 it is the resurrection which is decisive for Jesus’ status of divine sonship, in 2:32-36, although the resurrection is the key event in the kerygma, it is the exaltation of Jesus—in Lukan thought distinct from the resurrection—which is decisive.”



this in the Acts speeches suggests continuity with the saving work of Jesus during his previous ministry, for the beneficial power that Jesus then showed to the limited number of people who encountered him will now be offered to all.”<sup>75</sup>

The disciples continued the work of the King “in the name of Jesus” and in the power of the Spirit of Jesus (cf. 16:7). Jesus is “both Lord and Christ.” Hans Conzelmann noted, “The acts performed by virtue of the name are in conformity with what is recorded of the ministry of the historical Jesus, for it was this that set the pattern for the future.”<sup>76</sup> All the accounts that follow Acts 2 have to do with the continuation of those activities of “doing” and “teaching” and their effects, whether positive or negative. The exercise of power and authority in the name of the King either yields salvation and healing, and/or persecution and suffering. These core plot elements are interwoven throughout the narrative of Acts, with only the names and places changing.

In Acts 3, Peter and John continue to exercise their delegated authority in the healing of the lame man in the name of the King. As authorized judges of the King, the Spirit-empowered Apostles continue to establish the Kingdom of God. Other examples of the vice-regency of the Apostles in extending the Kingly rule of Jesus are the appointment of the seven deacons in chapter 6, or their exercise of judgment at the Jerusalem council in chapter 15.<sup>77</sup> But the Lordship Jesus exercises in and through the Church in Acts is not perfect, it only gradually comes into being. The members of the Church are also

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<sup>75</sup>Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts A Literary Interpretation*, Vol. 2 *The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 39.

<sup>76</sup>*The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

<sup>77</sup>I do not intend to pursue an in depth study on the continuation of these three roles of the ministry of Jesus in Acts, but introduce this topic to some extent at this point because it is the ascension in Acts that inaugurates the continued ministry of Jesus in ‘mode 2,’ the Body of Christ in Acts, and I believe that those continued roles of Christ in Acts are not peripheral, but core to the narratives. This perhaps should be the subject of a separate monograph. I have not yet become aware of such a work, specifically viewing Acts from this perspective.





human beings “in the flesh,” in whom the claim of Jesus Christ to rule over them is constantly tested by the claims of ‘self’ and of the world. Examples of this in Acts are the narratives of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11), the widow controversy (6:1-7) and Peter’s struggle to come to the realization of the inclusion of the Gentiles via the rooftop vision (10:9-43). The Church of Acts waits for and works toward the perfect Lordship of Christ, not only in the world to which it is sent, but also in the Church itself.

#### 4.4 Summary

I argued – from the perspective of a canonical reading – that the story of “all that Jesus began to do and to teach” narrated in the Gospels, describes his person and work as the hypostatic fulfillment of the three OT servant roles of Prophet, Priest and King (Heb 3:1f.). Jesus is the prophetic Word of God come down into our flesh (1:14) and as our great High Priest he is the perfect response of humankind to that Word in his obedient self-offering in life and death. He is Prophet in a unique sense, for he is in himself the Word he proclaims just as he is himself the King of the Kingdom and the Priest who is identical with the Offering he makes. It is this one who has ascended to the throne and entered into the holy of holies, as our ἀρχηγός, our πρόδρομος and our λειτουργός (Heb 2:10; 6:20; 8:2).

Just as Jesus acted as prophet, priest and king, so did his church. Indeed, this is what I have argued is characteristic of the Acts church.<sup>78</sup> The

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<sup>78</sup>David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1981), 152. Thomas.D. Hanks notes that Paul’s explanation of his ministry (Acts 26:17-18) is a remarkable parallel to Jubilee theology in Luke 4, even including the word *aphesis*. *God So Loved the Third World: The Biblical Vocabulary of Oppression* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1983), 57. I. Howard Marshall argues that the church should be involved in the bestowing of sight, both literally and metaphorically, in the release of captives and particularly action for the poor, very much a Lucan emphasis (Luke 14:13). *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 184. As with the work of Jesus, this had immediate results, not like Qumran, simply seeing everything in an eschatological light and so withdrawing to wait without acting to



Church of Acts was called to continue Christ's prophetic witness (Acts 1:8) in order to further the Kingdom of God to the ends of the earth.<sup>79</sup> It is significant that Luke brackets his second volume by employing the literary device of *inclusion* to highlight the importance of the Kingdom of God to the theology and history of Acts. As A.W. Zwiép notes, "In the book of Acts the narrative plot is developed through *circularity* (the prominent position of the Kingdom of God in the beginning and ending of Acts: Acts 1:3,6; 28:23,31; the connection between the command of world wide mission, Acts 1:8; 28:31)." <sup>80</sup>

The Church has been "made to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God" and "will reign on earth" (Rev 1:6; 5:10) and in glory (2 Tim 2:12). These ministry roles, to be consummated at the parousia, have been active in the Body of Christ, the Church, from its inception and throughout Acts. The core continuity in history between the Gospels and Acts is that they both narrate the ministry of Jesus, albeit in two different modes, with the ascension being the moment of transition. While there is ontological discontinuity in the manifestation of the presence of Christ between the Gospels (mode 1- in the flesh) and Acts (mode 2- by the Spirit in the Body of Christ, the Church), there is functional continuity. I argued that the Prophetic, Priestly and Kingly ministry of Jesus in the Gospels continues in Acts so that "all that Jesus began to do and teach" (1:1) continues until he comes "back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (1:11).

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achieve in the present, Cf. James A. Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4," in Heusner, J. *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 94. As the church of Acts was faithful to this program, it found, as Jesus experienced, that it too encountered rejection and persecution. See Robert L. Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews: Conflict, Apology and Conciliation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 24.

<sup>79</sup>There is no contradiction in the early Christian proclamation of the crucified and resurrected Christ and Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God as was supposed by earlier NT critics. In Acts, the Church did not betray her Lord's forty days of instruction on the Kingdom by immediately preaching something else. As summary statements in Acts reveal, preaching Jesus as the Christ was preaching the Kingdom (cf. Acts 8:5, 12; 28:23, 31). This is particularly evident in Acts 20:24-25 where Paul's "testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (vr. 24) is parallel to his "preaching the kingdom" (vr. 25).

<sup>80</sup>*The Ascension*, 30.



C.K. Barrett stated, “It makes good sense to give *ērxato* its full natural force. Acts contains an account of the continuing work of Jesus (through the Holy Spirit, through the church); the earlier volume contains therefore only the beginning of his work.”<sup>81</sup>

Viewed from the functional perspective it is the same Jesus one meets in Acts. There is no “absentee Christ” as some would hold.<sup>82</sup> In Acts there is only a change in the form of Jesus’ presence. Jesus’ previous words recorded in John 14:18, “I will not leave you as orphans; *I will come to you,*” must certainly have been enigmatic to disciples at the time of their utterance. But Jesus was anticipating his indwelling them by the Spirit (John 14:15f; cf. Col 1:27; 1 Pet 1:11; Matt 18:20). In this light, it appears to lend support to those who interpret the opening verse of Acts as programmatic for the book. From this perspective a comparative reading of the narratives of the history of the ministry of the Body of Christ, the Church, in Acts, with the narratives of the history of the ministry Christ recorded in the Gospels, while present in the flesh, yields greater insight into the authorial intention interconnecting the diverse narrative discourses in Acts. What

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<sup>81</sup>A *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 66f. See also I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 56f. “...the use of the word *began* in relation to the earthly ministry of Jesus...is deliberately used here, so that Luke is associating what Jesus began to do during his ministry with (implicitly) what he continued to do after his ascension; the ministry of Jesus was the beginning of Christianity.” Also, Petersen, *Acts*, 101, “The paragraph [Acts 1:1-5] as a whole implies that the risen Christ will continue to act and to teach through the promised Holy Spirit.” Contra. Ben Witherington who argues the phrase should be translated “all that Jesus did and taught,” *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 10. My assessment does not rest solely upon this single word, nor upon the support of other writers, but upon the broader argument of my monograph in earlier comments on the Fourth Gospel and from the following comments on Acts—in particular upon my assessment of the ascension in the following pages.

<sup>82</sup>“Some scholars see very little role for the ascended Christ in the outworking of Luke’s narrative. Yet the risen Lord acts and is present to the whole life of his church in Acts. He gives his followers their mission and directs them in various ways throughout the narrative.” David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 100; Cf. G. W. MacRae, “Whom Heaven Must Receive Until the Time”, *Int* 27 (1973): 160-65; J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1977), 19, is representative of those who argue for an ‘absentee Christology.’ See fn. 1.



has been at issue again, hermeneutically, is viewing the text in the light of the larger literary, canonical contexts. Read from a canonical perspective, the demonstration of continuity and coherence evidences my beginning presupposition of a single divine author whose intentionality superintends the various human authors, inspiring a unified literary whole, namely the canon. This being so, one must attend to what the divine author is attending to; and to what the Spirit is superintending over in the unified and coherent parts of the canon. The question is, “Does the text of Acts evidence this unity with the Gospel narrative of Jesus?” My answer is, yes. And the divine intentionality or theology is what is intrinsic to the history recorded by Luke and his poetics or literary artistry.