

# A *kairos* for the lowly? Reflections on Luke's story of a rejected fortune or *tyche* and lessons for South Africa

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This article argues that failure of Jerusalem to accept or recognise its fortune (Lk 19:41–44) may be ascribed to a difference in expectations between the Temple rulers and the lowly, who interacted with Jesus at their level. At the outset, the *kairos* was anticipated and welcomed by the lowly, and throughout the two-part narrative the respective attitudes of the lowly and Temple rulers towards Jesus are contrasted, whilst conflict between Jesus and the latter culminated in the crucifixion. The problem as suggested by the narrative is that a highly political messianic programme may have been expected, whereas Jesus offered an individual and community empowerment as the content of God's *kairos*. The article concludes that the content of a *kairos* is determined by the potential beneficiaries; its delivery vehicle and timing (*kairos*) are God's prerogative, whereas the ability to recognise and accept it is predicated on a consensus among beneficiaries about the content. South Africa should learn from this if its National Development Plan is to become a reality.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This article employs insights from the narrative approach and Greek mythology to question the sterile approach to the *kairos* discourse. It introduces a new hermeneutical and epistemological paradigm that opens up possibilities for a developmental approach and sheds light on the behaviours of Jerusalem and the early Church. In the process, views from Biblical Studies, Hermeneutics and Church History are engaged.

## Introduction

The *kairos* of Luke's two-part narrative originates among the lowly (Lk 1:46–55) and remains among the lowly to the end of Jesus' earthly mission. *Lowly* in this context indicates those on the fringes of society – the needy, the fragile, the destitute and those who, like Mary, are humble and obedient (Lk 1:48). There is a deliberate contrast between the respective attitudes of these people and those of the temple authorities and their allies, simply referred to as the 'ruling class' in this article, towards Jesus. This is done in order to highlight the reason for the failure of Jerusalem (the seat of power) to perceive their *kairos* in the programme of Jesus among the lowly. My two-fold aim in this article is to read Luke's story from the perspective of a narrative reading with the view to foregrounding the reason(s) for the rejection of Jesus' otherwise developmental programme,<sup>1</sup> as well as to reflect on why contemporary scholars continue to miss the link between a *kairos* and development. The focus will be on the gospel with references to the Acts of the Apostles. An additional aim is to apply the results in the South African context.

I argue that the answer to the main question lies in the understanding that Jerusalem's expected messiah was a political one, in line with the Davidic dynasty and with a highly political messianic programme (cf. Ac 18:5–6).<sup>2</sup> Their hostility towards Jesus was born of the view that he was 'usurping' powers that did not belong to him, thereby undermining their authority. This preoccupation blinded them to the visitation and its content, which was in response to the prayers of the lowly, among those who expected a messiah. Hence Jesus uttered his second lament over Jerusalem (Lk 19:41–44; cf. Lk 13:34–35). This becomes a defining factor between the views of

1. By 'developmental programme' I mean a people-centred development that entails a programme aimed at transforming social structures and improving human lives (Korten 1990).

2. The point here is that even the mere necessity for legitimization of Jesus, linking him to David and Moses, suggests that in some quarters expectations were at a different level than that at which he pitched his mission: that is, they expected a political rather than a developmental programme.

**Note:** This article is part of ongoing research on *kairos* through the eyes of Greek mythology. It is the second of three articles written to test the waters on various aspects of the term *kairos*.

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these two groups (Jerusalem leadership and the lowly) and a plausible way of closing the narrative gaps that the author of the story leaves to the reader. In fact, the logic of the narrative suggests that Jesus fitted into the role defined for him by Mary (Lk 1:46–55), thereby becoming a messiah of the lowly. The author of the narrative reinforced this by portraying Jerusalem as the abode of those who constantly failed to acknowledge Jesus, persecuted the messiah and condemned him to death (Ac 3:14, 7:52–3; cf. Lk 13:34). This constitutes a literary context against which the rejection of the *tyche* must be understood.

The article begins with a brief survey of trajectories on *kairos* publications in the last three decades, in an attempt to respond to the second part of the main question. It proceeds to motivate for a different paradigm and emphasis in a post-apartheid context so as to avoid being revisionist, whilst the new context requires innovative approaches. This is followed by a look at the narrative portrayal of the dichotomy between the views of those regarded as the lowly and the ruling class<sup>3</sup> as represented by the temple authorities and their allies. The penultimate section comprises a reflection on the relationship between *kairos* and development, which constitutes a major point of dissonance between the narrative's lowly people and ruling classes. The study concludes with a reflection on the lessons that can be learned from this relationship for the South African context.

## Trajectories in *kairos* scholarly publications

In order for us to understand why the theme of development is overlooked in contemporary *kairos* publications despite it being definitive of Jesus' programme and in spite of this author's plea a decade and a half ago (Speckman 2001), we have to look at the activities of publishing *kairos* theologians. There appears to be a pursuit of personal interests as well as a preoccupation with what may justifiably be referred to as a sentimental attachment to the spirit of the *Kairos* Document,<sup>4</sup> which had given birth to a *Kairos* theology. The following brief outline of trajectories that had proliferated since the publication of the *Kairos* Document some three decades ago (1985) supports my assessment.

I consciously distinguish between church and academic inputs in the *kairos* debate. The former is characterised by reactions from orthodox perspectives and the latter by a wrestling with issues raised by the document. For the purposes of this article, I focus on academic inputs. These commenced 2 years after the publication of the document with questions pertaining to the use of the word *kairos* and its definition as a 'moment of truth, a critical time'. Exchanges between Suggit (1987a) from Rhodes University and the duo Cochrane and Draper (1987a, 1987b) from the Department of

Contextual Theology at the University of Natal were the first publications to pursue a scholarly debate. The debate was healthy to the extent that it resulted in the recognition of the fact that the etymology of the term rather than its origin was most important for the purposes of the *Kairos* Document. Basically, the argument was that when *kairos* is used alongside *episkope* it invariably refers to a visitation (Suggit 1987b), thought to be a 'two-edged sword' (Cochrane & Draper 1987). Regrettably, the term 'visitation' was reduced to a 'moment of truth' (The *Kairos* Document 1985, 1986 – Institute for Contextual Theology 1985, 1986), or a 'time of reckoning' (The *Kairos* Document 1985), and this influenced much of the ensuing theology. I have recently realised that *kairos* can also be legitimately interpreted as a moment of fortune or *tyche* (Speckman 2014; cf. Chestnut 1973).

Ensnung questions pertaining to eschatology are adequately covered in Nolan's publications, notably his *Jesus before Christianity* (1977). This expands on the works of earlier scholars such as Von Rad (1968) and Russell (1964). However, owing to the enigmatic nature of the *kairos*, the debate on the term is far from over. The issue is not so much about what it means (for it means many things) as it is about how it is used in a given context. Sipiora and Baumlin (2002) (cf. Sipiora & Baumlin 2002) provide a valuable outline of the definition and etymology of the term in their introduction to the volume *Rhetoric and Kairos*. I engage them elsewhere (Speckman unpublished) for swiftly moving away from the spatial meaning to a philosophical debate and for not fully examining the significance of the figure *kairos* that is depicted artistically.

The acceptance of the *Kairos* Document by both church-based activists and politicians made it easy and necessary for what had become known as '*kairos* theologians' to take the lead in follow-up stages. Academics used the *Kairos* Document framework in their interpretation of the scriptures. West (1991), for example, claims to have responded to the call of the *Kairos* Document to 'return to the Bible' to find answers to the socio-economic challenges of the country. Pursuant to this, he not only rehabilitated the Brazilian model of Contextual Bible Study, he also managed, in an unprecedented manner, to put the Bible forward as the 'medicine' (West & Zengele 2006) to cure the ills of society.<sup>5</sup> In his understanding, as revealed in a later publication (West 2012), the *Kairos* Document had bequeathed a method of doing theology in a context of the struggle. However, in his 2012 survey of documents that came into existence as a result of the *Kairos* Document, he could not detect the same in all. I concur with him on this point but partially disagree with his conclusion to the effect that the expectation of another *kairos* is misplaced, as it is beyond the intention of the document (West 2012:22). This reflects our limited understanding of a *kairos*, the point my research aims to correct.

I attempted to develop a biblical foundation for the *Kairos* theology, emphasising the 'pregnancy' of the moment and

3. For lack of a better term, the term 'ruling class' is used here to distinguish a particular class in the social strata although, sociologically, this categorisation might not be appropriate for the first century context.

4. West (2012) argues in favour of the use of the definite article, spelt with a capital letter T, as the correct title of the document. He cites the document as such throughout his article.

5. West's 2012 publication is the latest academic publication on the development of a *Kairos* theology between the 1985 *Kairos* Document and the 2009 Palestinian *Kairos* Document.

questioning the notion of human ability to effect a *kairos*, whilst God was elevated as the initiator (see Speckman 1993).<sup>6</sup> That study still moved along the lines of the original debate pertaining to the interpretation of the word in its Septuagintal form and the lack of appreciation for the text of Luke 19:41–44, which is only mentioned in passing in the *Kairos* Document (Institute for Contextual Theology 1985:3). Van der Water (1998), on the other hand, focused on the historical significance of the *Kairos* Document, this being paralleled, though not chronologically, by De Gruchy and Villa-vicencio's (1994) survey of theological developments since the publication of the document. Both Van der Water's study and the volume edited by Villa-Vicencio and de Gruchy affirmed the ripple effect of the document nationally and internationally. In a recent PhD thesis, Mabuza (2010) conducted an assessment of the impact of the document on church–state relations today and concluded that because of the impact it had, it is still relevant for South Africa today. There are a few other dissertations, which I will not mention in this article.

These are some of the major academic trajectories that have emerged in South Africa since the publication of the *Kairos* Document. They not only reflect a methodological deviation but are also devoid of the idea of development, which is the content of Luke's *kairos*, whilst they operate in a mode that has no support in Luke's two-part narrative. As will become clear below, even the defiance of the church in the Acts of the Apostles is conducted along the lines of a people-centred development, that is, organising along 'bread and butter' issues, pursuing a vision and transforming social structures (see Korten 1990; Stuart 1997). To be fair, the *Kairos* Document itself only confines itself to Luke 19:44, a verse that focuses on a visitation (Institute for Contextual Theology 1985:3) and the spirit that is perceived to be accompanying the word *kairos*. However, this is no excuse for failure to look at the situation from the perspective of the present horizon.

In between, a number of activities and statements have come to light, some declaring a *kairos* wherever they perceived a crisis. This happens in a combative spirit, which, on the surface, appears authentic to the *kairos* theologians. In contrast, as I have noted elsewhere (Speckman 1998, 2014), the influence of the LXX translation of the Hebrew terms for time and the conflation of *kairos* with the notion of the Day of Yahweh as proclaimed by Amos (Am 5:18–20) have influenced the view of *kairos* in the *Kairos* Document (see Cullman 1951; Von Rad 1968). The epiphany that was identified by Mowinckel (1954) has been taken out of the word. So was the theodicy as identified by Crenshaw (1995). Owing to this discovery and my current research on *kairos* in ancient Greek mythology, I have been reconverted to the positive view of *kairos*. Hence, for me, development is the content of Israel's *kairos* during the first century in the Common Era (Speckman 2014).<sup>7</sup>

6. This point may not have been well articulated in my MTh dissertation (1993). However, the position remains the same, and subsequently more credible evidence has been provided for my point of view.

7. There is nothing preventing us from reading New Testament scriptures through the eyes of contemporary sociological models. New Testament authors were responding to contemporary needs in their times and, unlike Old Testament writers, they never laid claim to divine inspiration (McDonald 2007) or, therefore, a fixed message.

The failure of contemporary theologians to make a connection between *kairos* and development is itself a departure from the vision of a South Africa where rights to food, work, house, water, electricity, education, health, justice and many others are guaranteed by the constitution (RSA Constitution 1996). Politicians should be held to account on the basis of these rights, which are a matter of life and death for the lowly, the marginalised, the little ones of this country.<sup>8</sup> Theologians who perceive the task of a *Kairos* theology only in terms of 'looking for an emperor to challenge' run the risk of operating above the level where Jesus pitched the *tyche*, that is, at the microlevel. Equally, the notion that the *Kairos* Document was not intended to produce another document but to impart a method at best reflects a personal agenda – at worst, a defeatist position. It suggests that the spirit is no longer capable of inspiring new actions. We must guard against missing today's *kairos* by overlooking the efforts of the lowly on the fringes of society, which have so much significance for the strategy of Jesus. In my view, a programme of the lowly that will pull the carpet from beneath the feet of the mighty<sup>9</sup> is all that is needed.

## ***Kairos* in a post-apartheid context<sup>10</sup>**

How does one justify the application of a struggle paradigm in a democratic dispensation? This is the question to be faced squarely when discussing the value of the *Kairos* Document today and its continued utilisation as the basis of a theological engagement with the current political administration. I have not detected a critique of its method in Mabuza's (2010) recent study of the value of the *Kairos* Document for the church today, or in Vellem's (2013) article on black theology and prophetic witness in *Kairos* theology or in Le Bruyns' 2015 article. Whilst Mabuza (2010)<sup>11</sup> concludes that the document still has value for the church, he leaves its shaky biblical foundation and virtually popular methodology unassailed. This might have been beyond the scope of his study but it is incumbent upon theologians to correct it. Have the biblical scholars engaged the the *Kairos* Document on this front? Doing so would raise questions about the paradigm's deficiencies.

Polanyi (1958) tells us that a paradigm warrants replacement when it ceases to be useful or effective. Thirty years on, no one has questioned the effectiveness of the *Kairos* Document as the framework of our hermeneutical paradigm. It is to be assumed that this is by consensus because in 2010 South African theologians who gathered in Pietermaritzburg for the 25th anniversary of the document reaffirmed it and proceeded to establish Kairos South Africa (Kairos SA) to

8. Nolan (1977) argues that these are the terms used by Luke to depict the lowly in his gospel.

9. There was a time when the experiences of the poor were regarded as a common denominator in theological reflection.

10. The phrase is used advisedly. It highlights a situation that was formerly adversarial due to apartheid policies and concomitant actions and that has been replaced by democracy. This implies that the tactics used to fight apartheid must now be replaced by strategies to develop a democracy.

11. Mabuza sets out to look at whether the *Kairos* Document still has value for measuring church–state relations today. In his conclusion, he affirms the value of the *Kairos* Document today (see conclusion 2010:268–270).

perpetuate the spirit of the *Kairos* Document. The enemy was renamed 'empire', although it is still not clear what criteria are used to classify the empire. Leading biblical scholars such as Allan Boesak are part of this movement within prophetic theology. West, who has contributed much towards the development of *Kairos* theology, does not use the term 'empire'. However, his approach has not shifted the paradigm either, this being obvious in the lack of visible forward movement at the grassroots level where things should be happening. This situation may be ascribed to the tendency to apply struggle tactics in a democratic context.<sup>12</sup> I will expatiate on this point in a different publication. Suffice it to say that biblical scholars, whether in line with the method of the *Kairos* Document or not, have not been faithful to the spirit of Luke–Acts.<sup>13</sup>

Put differently, the question pursued in this section is: will the approach of the *Kairos* Document assist the democratic South Africa to identify the *tyche* of the present context? This appears to be the dilemma facing today's theologians of the *kairos* tradition. However, there need not be a dilemma. Firstly, it should be borne in mind that there is no static theology and that no single theology can claim to have universal answers (Mosala 1991). Theology, as Tutu once observed, is not the same as the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is conditioned and shaped by the different contexts that give birth to it. As it is about 'God-talk' (Allen 2002; Thompson 2006), the method, or how one talks about God in a given context, determines the outcome. Equally, the *Kairos* Document was shaped by the conditions of the 1980s in Apartheid South Africa and how God was perceived to be talking in that context. Today, *Kairos* theology must be shaped by a preoccupation with how God wants to make the democratic South Africa a success despite there being vestiges of the apartheid legacy.

Secondly, instead of cracking skulls about how to make the message of the *Kairos* Document speak to today's conditions, *kairos* theologians should reflect on what kind of actions the signs today are dictating. The result might be a totally new document, a popular movement based on the principles of the constitution or something else. For this to happen, due consideration should be given to the fact that, although biblical sources give a cue for the interpretation, little work has been done in respect of reflecting on the prayer to God and what signs to look out for since the dawn of democracy in South Africa. This might be a reflection of the irony that *Kairos* theology has been weakened by the end of the struggle, although some *kairos* theologians continue to raise questions about the government and to expose contradictions. In their understanding, this is in line with the prophetic approach to 'speaking truth to power'.<sup>14</sup> However, in my view, the

12. Drucker warns from a managerial perspective that 'in times of turbulence, it is not the turbulence, itself, that is the biggest danger but to act with yesterday's logic' (July 17, 2013).

13. I am aware that biblical scholars who participated in the 2010 gathering included Boesak, Mosala and West, all from the Old Testament subfield.

14. I alluded in a recent publication (Speckman 2014) to the 2012 statement of Kairos SA to the African National Congress on the eve of its centenary. It failed to get the desired effect precisely because we live in different times with different role players.

prophets set out to expose contradictions and warned of consequences in relation to a specific vision, shared by the former 'Apiru slaves'.<sup>15</sup> This view is supported by Amos, Joel and Zephaniah. One of the tragedies of a democratic South Africa is the failure of civil society to own and pursue the vision enshrined in the constitution, whilst in most cases they seek to hold the government accountable for *ad hoc* demands that emerge from nowhere. In other words, unlike the prophets, critics raise contradictions without presenting an alternative vision.

The apartheid context of *kairos* is well articulated in the two versions of the *Kairos* Document (1985, 1986). It would appear that South Africans at that stage, apart from a few conservative churches and politicians, had a common wish and goal, namely, the end of apartheid and the ushering in of a democratic and non-racial South Africa (Mbeki 1994). In other words, their cry was very clear and they worked together tirelessly towards that goal.<sup>16</sup> It is understandable, under such circumstances, why they would have found the spirit of the Amos option appealing in the face of an intransigent regime. It has to be mentioned, however, that this may not have been the original intention of the *Kairos* Document, as its persuasive (rather than invective) tone, explaining the options, indicates. The emphasis on 'doomsday' was a subsequent development as theologians expanded on the document.

The LXX has made it possible for biblical scholars to talk of *kairos* in terms of time fulfilment. This is because of the contrast it has drawn between *chronos* and *kairos* (Barr 1962; Cullmann 1951; Sipiora & Baumlin 2002). However, anyone who has attempted to trace the origin of the term in Greek mythology knows how elusive the term is. There are anecdotes about a god of luck, a god of fortune, son of Zeus whose sister is known as the goddess of luck (Speckman 2014). In trying to reconstruct a picture of the mythological figure, I used these and snippets of information gleaned from the writings of the time (Speckman 2014). The result was the *tyche* that, I concluded, was akin to development and the content of Israel's *kairos* in the first century CE (Speckman 2014 – see especially note 19 on p. 174). Post-apartheid South Africa needs content for its own *kairos* and I submit that with Luke–Acts in mind, the signs may be pointing to development.<sup>17</sup> A concomitant method therefore has to be developed.

## Narrative context of interpretation

For the purposes of this article, the narrative context of interpreting Luke–Acts is defined by the tension between the lowly and the temple rulers. This tension manifests in five ways as listed below. It is this that sheds light on why

15. The vision that is captured beautifully in Micah 4:4 lies in bits and pieces all over the Old Testament.

16. The *Kairos* Document, for example, is a product of an interdenominational, interracial, inter-ideological collaboration that later became international as well.

17. It may manifest as crime, service delivery protests, student financial aid, et cetera; these are all related to underdevelopment.

'fortune' (*kairos/tyche*), whose content was development, went by unnoticed, or better still, as a *rejected gift*. Jerusalem's attitude is blamed for this (Lk 10:21; cf. Ac 3:13–15, 4:10–11), and a closer look at that attitude suggests that the leadership of Jerusalem held a different idea of the expected messiah. Commentators suggest that they had political expectations – an offshoot of the Davidic dynasty (Jeremias 1969; Mosala 1989). A little more will be said about this in the next section, whilst in this section the focus is on the literary or interpretative framework.

The narrative's portrayal of the contrasts between the lowly and the ruling temple authorities occurs in the following ways:

- Declarations and statements of intent.
- Subtle and direct conflict.
- Rich versus ruler attitudes.
- Reception of miracles and teachings.
- Outright rejection of Jesus.

Each of these points deserves an explanation as they play an influential role in the narrative.

### Declarations and statement of intent

At the outset, the narrative opens with Mary's declaration about the yet-to-be born child (Lk 1:46–55). This declaration, on the one hand, raises the voice of the lowly, who have not previously been visible in the discourse on the expected messiah. If they were, it was on the margins of the main discourse. For example, the *anawim* are not part of any of the mainline biblical discourses, although their teachings are known to have been used in Luke's birth narratives. Isaiah talks of the return from Babylon with reference to the ruling class and their allies, who were in exile with them (Is 40–66). The suffering servant to whom he alludes is understood by these as the messiah in a political sense (Is 42). Luke appropriates this to the aspirations of the lowly by affirming Jesus as the answer to their prayers (Lk 1:46). This works well for his narrative because, whilst not claiming Jesus for the poor only, it helps him to make the point that it is especially the marginal, those with immediate needs, who were on the lookout for the signs of the times (Lk 7:18f.). It should be remembered that the voice of the lowly was never heard, even during early settlement days. Their plight therefore became an important part of the prophetic message as Israel veered further and further away from the ideal of a land of 'milk and honey' (Am 5:11–27, Jr 5:28). Amos, in particular, adopted the lack of justice for the poor as the basis of his prophetic message, and the capture and transportation of the ruling class together with their allies to Babylon may be linked to this (see warnings in Jr 5:29; 6).

In contrast, by giving Mary, who by her own admission is a lowly servant (Lk 1:38), an opportunity to declare her yet-to-come child as God's answer to the prayers of the lowly, the author signals what he intends to do. He is highlighting a moment of double empowerment – first, by raising the status of the lowly, thus taking the mind of his Jewish readers back

to the time when the 'Apiru slaves were equal as well as equally united around the ideal of a land of "milk and honey"'. If this was lost along the way, to the detriment of the lowly, it was expected to be the messiah's priority to correct it. The *anawim* statement, which is appropriated by Mary in the narrative, is portrayed as a wish list of the lowly rather than a programme of the messiah who is yet-to-be born. Secondly, the lack of reference to the macro-situation of the Roman occupation of Palestine speaks more to the concern about the immediate 'bread and butter' issues rather than ignorance about it. Clearly, bread and butter issues do not constitute the agenda of the priestly and ruling class, but the aspirations of the lowly. Their views on the expected messiah are therefore bound to be in conflict.

Further declarations are made by the religious devotees who are not necessarily temple rulers (Lk 2:29–32, 34–35), demons (Lk 4:34, 41) and, not surprisingly, civil servants as well (Lk 19:1–10; Ac 10:1–8). In the second part of the narrative, it is even the powerful in society who declare the greatness of Jesus by affirming the works of the apostles (Ac 13:7, 12; 16:14–15; 17:12). These declarations are, of course, in contrast to the attitude of the Jewish leaders, as the narrative shows.

Linked to the declarations is Jesus' statement of intent. This gives flesh to the bread and butter issues that are hinted at in Mary's declaration. It should be borne in mind that Jesus does not approach the podium as a priest in the synagogue but as one of the lowly people. Even as he declares '... this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' (Lk 4:20), he is not thinking of the upper classes who were addressed by Isaiah in exile but of the lowly before him. The rulers seek to kill him (Lk 4:28–30) precisely because he makes a veiled claim to being a messiah, whereas the expected messiah is a political one, not from a lowly background but from the line of David. Although in setting the scene, Luke does everything to make a connection between Jesus and David (Luke 2), he does not lose sight of the fact that the lowly are looking for exactly the kind of salvation he appropriates to himself. It is as if Luke's Jesus declares himself as one for the lowly, with whom he chooses to stay rather than reach out to the leaders who seek to destroy him (Lk 6:11). He affirms them at every step – for example, he tells them, 'these things are revealed to the humble but are hidden from the foolish and wise' (Lk 10:21). Commentators argue that this is with reference to the leadership (eg Draper 1991).

### Subtle and direct conflict

Conflict in a narrative theory is often a part of the plot that drives the storyline. It is usually between the protagonist and his or her opponents (cf. Resseguie 2005) and it can manifest in subtle as well as more direct forms. In Luke's narrative, the conflict is between Jesus and the authorities on the one hand and on the other between the lowly and the upper classes. The latter level of conflict is subtle throughout the first part of the narrative, only hinted at by the protagonist at certain points and suggested by the attraction of the lowly to Jesus, despite the threatening attitude of the temple officials

towards him. In the second part of the narrative, conflict between the followers of Jesus and the Jewish authorities becomes more direct, as the former declare that they will 'obey God rather than men' (Ac 4:19–21, 5:29). However, throughout the first part, Jesus confronts the temple rulers directly, even at the point of his trial and sentencing.

It appears that Luke is not highlighting conflict for its own sake but with a view to making the point that, at the outset, Jesus and his teachings are considered a threat by a certain section of the society, who consequently seek to destroy him (e.g. Lk 6:11). Unlike in the other two synoptic gospels, in Luke, the first sign of conflict comes at the beginning of his ministry, arising out of his announcement that he is the one to fulfil the scriptures pertaining to the awaited messiah (Lk 4:21). They lead him to the edge of the city to kill him, but he comes out unscathed (Lk 4:30). Conflict then intensifies as a result of his deeds, which are in line with the messianic programme whose coming is in response to the needs of the ordinary people, the lowly.<sup>18</sup> Another source of conflict seems to be the reaction of the scribes and Pharisees to the teachings of Jesus. Given his own sharp tongue at times (e.g. Lk 19:45–48), it is difficult to argue that Jesus did not himself court some of the conflict. This conflict culminates in the crucifixion episode (Lk 23), once again with the rulers of Jerusalem portrayed as the bad element that rejects, tries and convicts the messiah as a result of their refusal to acknowledge and accept him (Ac 3:14–15, 4:10–11). It has to be mentioned that, owing to the rejection or blindness to view Jesus as they should, the crucifixion becomes part of the anticlimax, which is preceded by the lament of Jesus in Luke 19:41–44.

In the second part of the narrative (Acts of the Apostles), the approach to conflict is different. At the outset, the apostles ridicule the Jews for killing Jesus (Ac 3:14–15). This is followed by them declaring that they would obey God rather than men (Ac 4:19–21, 5:29). They refuse to desist from talking about the name of Jesus and healing people in the name of Jesus (Ac 4:29–30). Of their own volition, they set up an economic support base parallel to the known Jewish community support structures (Ac 2:43–47, 4:32–37, 5:1–11) and use this as an alternative community. Operating largely, but not exclusively, in the context of gentiles, a context that is characterised by benefactors who are both spiritual and concrete (e.g. Ac 17), the apostles take up their place as the extension of the benefactor who is Jesus. However, they do this with the conviction that Jesus is different from the others and in an attempt to bring back to the fore the *tyche* that was rejected by the Jerusalem leaders.

### Attitudes of the rich versus the ruling class

The line of argument followed in this article is that there is a conscious and deliberate contrast between the rich and the lowly in the narrative. Politically, the rich are usually lumped together with the ruling classes, whether as allies or

18. The identity of those in the synagogue in this episode is not specified. It cannot therefore be inferred that those who led Jesus out to the edge of the city (Lk 4:29) were a particular group. We read on the one hand that 'all spoke well of him...' (Lk 4:22) and on the other that '... all in the synagogue were filled with wrath' (Lk 4:28).

as direct rulers. However, in Luke's narrative there is a nuanced distinction made between the rich and the rulers. The sprinkling of the rich and extensions of the ruling class who convert to the 'way' of Jesus into the narrative is meant to convey the point that individuals who see the way independently make up their minds. They are not associated with conflict but turn to Jesus with a yearning for assistance or a desire to know. In the process, they turn around in a *metanoiac* sense. Thus, their attitude towards Jesus could be described as being friendly and humble.

By contrast, the attitude of temple and synagogue leaders as well as that of some farmers (Lk 8:37) could be said to be antagonistic. It appears to be Luke's intention to demonstrate that even the ruling class was not unanimous in rejecting Jesus as the messiah. Some might construe this as an attempt to placate the rich in the context for which the narrative was intended. However, the narrative seems to be aimed at demonstrating how Jerusalem leaders missed their opportunity in the first part, thus depriving the entire nation of its opportunity for salvation, whilst in the second part, those who 'chose' to operate outside of the temple system saved themselves and many others. There is no contradiction in interpreting this as meaning that all. Even some of the rich and extension of the rulers, are part of this new movement, thus placating them. However, I prefer to keep to the interpretation that the narrative demonstrates the extent of the impact of the Jesus movement and the inroads it has made among the rich. Taking this further, it could be said that the rich were nevertheless necessary for the success of the messiah's microstrategy.<sup>19</sup> This point becomes glaring in the second part of the narrative.

### Reception of miracles and teachings

The first part of the narrative, which has some partial elements in the second part, contains a number of miracle narratives. They were performed by Jesus, the protagonist of the story. The intention is to show that Jesus possessed the powers to transform individuals and situations but also that this was neither seen nor accepted by everyone. In the second part, some of these powers were vested in his disciples. Given the fact that miracle performance was part of *euergesism* and therefore in the domain of rulers and kings (Luck 1986), this was empowering to the apostles. However, the same point evoked anger in the Jewish leaders. In the narrative, this appears as indignation over the contravention of Sabbath laws (Lk 6:11). However, when read in light of the attempts of some rich people to buy the apostles' power, it might also be construed as usurping powers that belonged to the mighty. Instead of reading the correct message out of it, they opposed him.

In contrast to the reaction of the rulers, the lowly, portrayed as the crowds that followed Jesus, accepted Jesus. That, perhaps, is the reason they followed him. It started in the

19. There is consensus among some proponents of the alternative theory of development that a microfoundation is the location of development because that is where solutions to problems are most effective (Coetzee 1989).

temple with people marvelling at his 'teaching with authority' (Lk 4:22). Again, a distinction is drawn between the lowly who received Jesus' teachings well and the mighty who became hostile towards him. This distinction shows a lack of perception that Jesus had embarked on a messianic programme of empowering the marginal. It appears that his antagonists who were aware of this were waiting for an opportunity when he entered Jerusalem.

### Outright rejection of Jesus

Something that is not always easy to notice is that the official groups that deal with Jesus used different tactics. Some tried to trick him by testing his views on controversial issues (Lk 11:53–54). Others confronted and rejected him outright. This attitude starts in Luke's narrative, with the healing of a leper (Lk 6:6–11). The same episode appears in Mark (3:1–6), with slightly different details, although the reason for plotting the death of Jesus was the same (Lk 6:11; cf. Mk 3:6). Throughout the narrative, the attitude of the rulers was guided by this resolve, and they rejected Jesus and everything he did. It is needless to elaborate on this point as the various episodes in support of it are already a commonplace.

### Messianic deeds and *kairos* in Luke–Acts

The treatment of messianic deeds as being the same as development, therefore, salvation in this article is not arbitrary. I have demonstrated the link between development and salvation in a different context (Speckman 2007:233–234). In my view, backed by sociological theories, any transformation of a situation from negative to positive, and the ensuing degrees of comparison, is development. The narrative shows Jesus doing this through his miracles, teachings, forgiveness of sins and empowerment of individuals and communities. In the Acts of the Apostles, the second part of the narrative, the apostles are portrayed as the ones who transformed situations of poverty, sickness, oppressive social structures and imprisonment. Others have defined it as a release of the human potential (John Paul VI 1979) or the use of a bargaining (collective) power to transform social structures (Korten 1990), as in Acts 4. All these definitions may be illustrated in one way or another in the narrative.

I demonstrated in the previous section that Jesus's entire programme was developmental, a reason for the authorities to oppose him. It would seem that it was because, in pursuing his programme, he invoked God's name and powers that they opposed him. The charges of blasphemy, if pursued by the ignorant, were therefore not entirely incorrect. However, that is not the issue at hand. Our concern is the link between this and *kairos*.

*Kairos*, in the eyes of ancient Greeks, was the messenger of the gods, whose task was to meet the need, thereby effecting deliverance (salvation) as well. The young god, *Kairos*, was said to be fast-moving, impossible to catch or corner, thus requiring alertness to the signs of his approach (Speckman 2014:184). He visited in response to human need and

prayer – not to punish but to provide. If the prayer was for deliverance from physical oppression by sickness, pain, captivity, and so on, that is what the gods would deliver. When the moment was missed, one's condition would remain as it was, not because of a punishment imposed from above but because the instant for turning things around had been missed. Initially, the process started with an individual's prayer, followed by waiting in a spirit of expectation. It is, however, not clear whether the individual was replaced by a collective when the statue of *Kairos* was moved to the entrance of the Olympiad, where it represented the wishes of a collective group, the team (Speckman 2014:184). The aspect of alertness to the signs of the times was emphasised – whether in an individual or communal context. Failure to do this would lead to a squandering of the special moment. Once missed, it was gone forever. Hence all waited anxiously for the moment of his arrival.

In the narrative, Jesus seems to be a substitute for *Kairos*, the vehicle that delivers the need. The narrative dispels any notion of a political deliverance from Roman occupation by immediately announcing a specific group as the beneficiaries, then a programme outlining what the target needs are. It is clear here that the author is thinking of a salvation for the lowly. Others who are said to be converted from the ruling classes are converted to the lowly people's ways of seeing reality. This raises questions about the long-held assumption that the Jews of the first century had a uniform prayer against Roman oppression. There may have been religious enthusiasts and diehards. However, the majority of the lowly, it would seem, were concerned about the immediate experience at the hands of the Temple–State rulers. They needed deliverance from that – it manifested in various ways such as psychological illnesses, physical deformities, poverty and such like. We glean some of this from the Song of Mary and most from the miracles and teachings of Jesus. If Mary represented the lowly, then the rulers represented the arrogant, the proud, those who were unable to read the signs of the times. This, however, should not be construed to mean that there was no shared prayer for deliverance at the beginning. It is clear from Luke's gospel that the major difference lay in the nature of the package they expected. Some expected a political messiah (in the line of David); others expected a match for the arrogant oppressors, whilst others still expected one who would address their bread and butter issues. This is all implied in the *Magnificat*. Jesus addressed the latter two. Hence, to the dominant, it appeared that their *Kairos* had not come, even when the lowly had seen it.

The latter sought deliverance from their daily experiences and a replacement of these with a better life. This is supported by their excitement about the ministry of Jesus, which spoke largely to their bread and butter issues. In fact, the mere fact that scholars try very hard to read into the gospels a political Jesus and impose theories about why he never challenged the empire directly or incited a *stasis* against it (see Trochme 1961; Yoder 1972) arises from the reality that Jesus was not a 'macropolitician' but a 'microstrategist'. This, at least, is how the author portrays him in the narrative. He would have

challenged the Caesar and led his followers in an uprising against him, but that was not where he located radical change. The local situation was the starting point – whether as a foundation or building block for envisaged sustainable changes or as a mobilisation strategy. It goes without saying that those implicated as perpetrators would not have shared the same views. The result is that they all missed out, because if Jerusalem did not recognise the moment, others would be stifled. Consequently, development only took place after the time of Jesus, with the church having resolved to defy Jerusalem, according to Acts 4 and 5.

I have established elsewhere (Speckman 2014:174–178) that the *tyche* or fortune alluded to above has all the elements of development. This appears to be what Israel had been awaiting for many centuries. The *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46–55), for example, hints at the role of Jesus in ensuring the improvement of lives and turning the tables against the proud and conceited. However, the lament of Jesus (Lk 19:44) at Israel's ignorance about the things that 'make for peace' raises questions about whether there was any consensus within Israel about this. The evidence he produced to John when asked whether the saviour (Lk 7:22) had come as well as those mentioned in his manifesto (Lk 4:16–18) before he started his work are among the manifestations of the developmental aspect. These should have obviated instability, at least from within Israel, and guaranteed peace from the subjects of temple rulers.<sup>20</sup>

There are at least four discernible moments for this in the narrative. The Song of Mary (Lk 1)<sup>21</sup> takes the lead; then the Isaiah passage (Lk 4:16–18), sometimes referred to as 'Jesus' liberation manifesto'; the response of Jesus to the disciples of John, which points to the improvements that have occurred in individual's lives (Lk 7:22); and the lament (Lk 19:41–44), which highlights the failure to see and embrace. These are intentionally linked to Jesus, the vehicle of the *tyche*, which Jerusalem failed to see – all because they had their own views of what their deliverer would look like and what the content of his mission would be. It is precisely for this reason that Jesus' divine origin has to be affirmed, not only through a genealogy that traces him back to Adam and Eve, then back to God (Lk 3:23–38) but also through a voice that adopts him as God's son (Lk 3:22) and the host of angels who burst into a song at the mention of the name of Jesus (Lk 2:14). Jesus as the Son of the Living God becomes the replacement of *Kairos*, who was known to the ancient Greeks, and of Augustus, who attempted to impose himself as a plenipotentiary of God.<sup>22</sup> Luke, however, does not elevate Jesus to God's status in opposition to Caesar or any other political figure but with the intention of showing that the true benefactor (*euergetes*) of the

20. The subject of socio-economic conditions and reaction thereto has been dealt with by a number of social historians (see Speckman 1993, 1999, 2007).

21. The place of these narratives in the gospel has been contested by a few scholars (see Tyson 1992:43). They contended that the narratives were a later insertion and that the gospel originally started at chapter 3. For the purposes of this paper, we shall disregard this contention.

22. Augustus Caesar had declared himself a god and wanted homage to be paid to him; hence, the importance of the adoption and the heavenly response that Caesar did not get.

people comes from above and that his coming signals the moment of God's 'breaking' into history (*kairos*), that is, the delivery and deliverance moment.

It is clear from the activities recorded in the 'birth narratives' that the atmosphere was pregnant with hope for a fulfilment of God's promises.<sup>23</sup> Mary only hints at the new dispensation that will result from this fulfilment – the tables will be turned against the mighty, the arrogant, the proud (Lk 1:51–53). Israel had lived in the spirit of expectation since the days of the prophet Isaiah – in other words, long before the annunciation was made to Mary. However, it was only in God's time that the promise was fulfilled. The urgency of the need for Israel to open her eyes is indicated by the 'sprinkling' of the term *kairos* all over the gospel and Acts. Apart from its initial mention in Luke 1:20, it appears at twelve<sup>24</sup> other places in the gospel and at nine<sup>25</sup> in the Acts of the Apostles. What is it that their eyes are being opened to? It is to the all-empowering work of Jesus, which shows that God is at work among them, delivering the promised salvation.

## Lessons for South Africa

The principles that have emerged from the above analysis suggest that the period of transition South Africa is going through with anxiety may be pregnant with its fortune. According to the criteria gleaned from Luke's narrative, the singleness of purpose among the lowly, their commitment to a vision, even to the point of civil disobedience, and the nature of issues around which they are united and mobilised suggest that a *kairos* has arrived and that its content is development. There may be a difference in perceptions between the governing class and the lowly about what is going on at grassroots level, but this might be a re-enactment of the situation portrayed in Luke's narrative. Vigilance against corruption, service delivery protests, concern about escalating crime, concern about increasing levels of poverty and poor living conditions for a number of people as well as attempts at developing an infrastructure that is consistent with the standards of a developing country, albeit for a few, are all signs of anxiety arising from a force that is at work in history (*kairos*). Is it coincidental that these manifestations all fall under the rubric of development? There are three possible ways out of it – repression, deception or correction. Those in high places have to choose one.

Another principle observed in Luke's narrative is that the burden of prioritising the nature of the request to be presented before God (or the gods) lies with human beings. God's prerogative is to provide. There is no time or date set for the moment of his arrival and there is no prescribed format for providing either. This demands alertness – which we referred to as the 'ability to read the signs of the times' – and consensus – meaning that all should read from the same page so they can see the same. The author makes it clear from the start of the

23. See the *anawim* (who came into existence before the birth of Jesus) and the devout Jews in the Temple.

24. Luke 4:13, 8:13, 12:42, 12:56, 18:1, 18:30, 19:44, 20:10, 21:8, 21:24 and 21:36.

25. Acts 1:7, 3:20, 7:20, 12:1, 13:11, 14:17, 17:26, 19:23 and 24:25.



narrative that the basic framework consists of the needs of the lowly (Lk 1, 4), in the absence of which Jerusalem is judged to be lacking 'the things that make for peace' (Lk 19:41–44). Jerusalem's failure is precisely that she goes against these needs or aspirations of the lowly. It cannot even be argued that Jerusalem's duty was to pray for a political programme. There is no basis for that in the narrative. Instead, the programme of the lowly becomes the 'Way' (e.g. Ac 18:25, 19:9) as the narrative unfolds. This is similar to what the Institute of Contextual Theology had adopted as the 'option for the poor' in the 1980s (see Kaufmann 2001).

South Africa therefore has to be evaluated in terms of its attitude towards the programme of the lowly. It has many permutations of the constitution that have not worked out well. There is currently a National Development Plan, which has the potential to unite South Africans around a common quest. However, questions have to be raised pertaining to whether this reflects the will of the lowly and whether it will benefit them in the manner a messianic programme would have benefitted them. It also has to be asked whether South Africans are one around this and whether, as they did around the removal of the apartheid regime, they have started mobilising as a collective group such as the United Democratic Front of the early 1980s.<sup>26</sup> It may be a missed moment if 2030 comes and goes without implementation.

A final principle pertains to God's vehicle in delivering the need. This, according to the narrative, is where Jerusalem's problem lay. Having a preconceived idea of who or what must deliver the content led to a rejection of the vehicle that was chosen by God. The despised, the lowly, the humble seem to be God's preference. God decides on *who* and *when*. South Africans have to think deeply about the most appropriate person who can take the lowly to a level where they must be. Just as it is easy to identify a failure, so it is also easy to identify a potential saviour. However, there is always resistance – either in removing the failure or in accepting one who is fit for purpose. It might just be that political considerations work against God's purposes for the country.

If South Africans expect that *kairos* will again work out in the form of the *Kairos* Document, they are making a mistake. The document was not meant to provide a blueprint for all contexts (see West 2012). It addressed a particular situation and its strength is that it demystified the authority that the churches claimed to have received from above. In the process, it exposed the bankruptcy of the authorities whom the churches elevated as God's servants. There were conducive conditions for this. In an adversarial situation, God clearly opted for the underdog. Do South Africans currently have an adversarial situation? Is it the acute point of this that will open the eyes to the *Kairos*?

## Conclusion

Whilst a *kairos* is not of human making and can therefore not be determined by humans (Speckman 1993, 1998), the content

<sup>26</sup>This was an umbrella body launched in 1982, in Cape Town, made up of a mixed bag of organisations whose common aim was to end the apartheid rule.

of a *kairos* is invariably determined by human need. It is only the manner and moment (*kairos*) of 'dispatching' the need (*tyche*) that remain God's prerogative and secret (cf. Jesus' teaching), hence the importance of the ability to read the signs of the times (Nolan 1990). However, this may not be noticed or discerned in situations that lack a consensus among potential beneficiaries about the nature of the intervention on the one hand and the arrogance of the rulers on the other.

The narrative demonstrates clearly that the *tyche* was delivered to Israel but that it was accepted by the lowly, whilst Jerusalem, a euphemism for 'ruler and power', remained arrogant. Jerusalem expected a messiah that would return political power instead of one who empowered people to take charge of their destinies, and the leaders refused to accept such a programme as a framework for all. Does this then imply that *kairos* was for the lowly? The reader has enough facts to decide.

Regarding the South African context, there is a leaf to take if the scriptures are given some space in the development of the nascent democracy of this country.

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