

NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 11

Series editor: D. A. Carson

Salvation to the ends of the earth

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF MISSION

Andreas J. Köstenberger
and
Peter T. O'Brien



APOLLOS

INTER VARSITY PRESS
DOWNERS GROVE, ILLINOIS 60515

APOLLOS (an imprint of Inter-Varsity Press),
38 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GP, England
World Wide Web: www.ivpbooks.com
Email: ivp@uccf.org.uk

INTERVARSITY PRESS
PO Box 1400, Downers Grove, Illinois 60515, USA
World Wide Web: www.ivpress.com
Email: mail@ivpress.com

© Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien 2001

Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Authors of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher or the Copyright Licensing Agency.

Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations in this publication are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton, a member of the Hodder Headline Group. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of International Bible Society. UK trademark number 1448790.

First published 2001

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

UK ISBN 0-85111-519-5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

This data has been requested.

US ISBN 0-8308-2611-4

Set in Times New Roman

Typeset in Great Britain

Printed in Great Britain by Creative Print and Design (Wales), Ebbw Vale

the Servant and testify to God's saving acts in Jesus' death and resurrection ('these things', v. 48). They represent a restored Israel that will now minister to Israel (cf. Is. 49:3, 6).

c. The instruction to the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they have been clothed with power from on high (v. 49) evokes the language of Isaiah 32:15 with its hopes for the refreshment and restoration of Israel. The mission given to the disciples to fulfil is that of the prophetic 'servant' of Isaiah 49:6. They will receive the Spirit as a 'prophetic empowering to extend this message and its benefits to Israel and beyond'.⁶² This endowment is specifically to enable them to proclaim the good news (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:11).

The Gospel of Luke reaches its climax with the ascension (24:50–53). At the conclusion of the book we return to its beginning, and are back in the temple praising God (v. 53; cf. 1:5–25). Now, however, for the first time worship is offered to Jesus (v. 52). Jesus' ascension (cf. 9:51) has been accomplished via the cross. Not until the very end of the Gospel does his journey end. Paradoxically, Israel's hopes have been achieved; the redemption of Israel has been provided (24:21), and the stage is now set for the advance of the gospel to all the nations.⁶³

The prologue to Acts (1:1–11)

The Acts of the Apostles is a narrative of missionary expansion which commences with a small group of Jesus' disciples in Jerusalem and extends across significant ethnic, religious and geographical boundaries to end in Rome where Paul preaches the gospel of the risen Christ to Jew and Gentile alike (Rosner 1998: 216). Luke records the progress of the gospel in Acts, as evidenced in its acceptance by Jew and Gentile, a 'progressive expansion' which is introduced in Acts 1:8 (Barrett 1994: 49), and then confirmed in summary statements throughout the rest of the book.⁶⁴ If the first volume begins with a summary of what had been promised to Israel and indicates how these promises are now to be

12; and 44:8, and in so doing picks up the Isaianic background in which Israel, God's servant, is summoned to testify of God's saving acts on behalf of His people'. Other scholars who have recognized the Isaianic background of 'you are witnesses' in Luke 24:48 and Acts 1:8 include Dodd (1952), and more recently Johnson (1990: 347); Evans and Sanders (1993: 205); Turner (1996a: 300–301); and Penney (1997: 57–58).

⁶² Turner 1996a: 343, 301; see further on Acts 1:8. Cf. Marshall 1978a: 106; Menzies 1994: 199.

⁶³ Luke's Gospel ends poised for the witness theme to begin. The narrative is ready for the next stage in the divine purposes: the proclamation of forgiveness.

⁶⁴ Acts 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30–31.

fulfilled, then it sets the stage for the beginning of Acts – the regathering of Israel and her mission as a light to the nations.

The opening verses of Acts show close literary connections⁶⁵ with the Gospel of Luke, as well as extensive conceptual and verbal parallels with Luke 24,⁶⁶ and these emphasize the continuity between Luke's two volumes (Talbert 1974: 60). Several of these parallels, including the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, the designation of the twelve as 'witnesses', and parallel expressions about the extent of their witness are central to our theme of God's salvation reaching the ends of the earth.⁶⁷ The scope of Luke's Gospel is summarized in verses 1–2, before Luke goes on to the next stage of the story. The first volume tells us what Jesus began to do and teach; Acts now recounts the continuing work of Jesus through his witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit (v. 1).⁶⁸ 'Jesus' ministry on earth, exercised personally and publicly, was followed by his ministry from heaven, exercised through his Holy Spirit by his apostles.'⁶⁹

During the period of forty days before his ascension Jesus appeared to his disciples, showed them that he was alive – thereby confirming them as his successors – and spoke with them about 'the kingdom (*basileia*) of God' (v. 3). This expression which summarizes the content of Jesus' post-resurrection teaching stresses the continuity with

⁶⁵ The literary unity of Luke-Acts has been strongly advocated, for example, by Brawley (1990: 86–106) on the grounds that 1. both works are dedicated to Theophilus; 2. Acts 1:1–2 summarizes the Gospel; 3. Acts repeats themes and literary patterns found in the Gospel; and, 4. the narrative schema in Luke forms a bridge into Acts. See also the treatments of Talbert (1974: 58–61); and Marshall (1993: 163–182); the latter interacts with recent literature.

⁶⁶ So T. S. Moore (1997b: 394), following Zehnle 1971: 98–99; Talbert 1974: 58–61; Menzies 1994: 168–172; and Soards 1994: 196–197. Note also Tannehill 1990: 10–20 and Rosner 1998: 3. Barrett (1994: 61), who regards vv. 1–14 as the prologue of Acts, considers that most of the material in these verses is mentioned in some form in Luke 24, if not earlier in the Gospel, and it is best to see this whole section as a recapitulation, with some additional elements, before Peter's first speech in Acts 1:15–22. Note also the treatments in Dumbrell 1994: 219; Satterthwaite 1993: 353–354; and Witherington 1998: 105.

⁶⁷ Senior and Stuhlmüller (1983: 269) go a step further and claim that 'the scope, structure and content of Acts are dominated by the question of the universal mission'.

⁶⁸ In the expression *hōn ērchato ho Iēsous poiēin te kai didaskein*, the auxiliary 'began' (*ērchato*) is emphatic and should be given its full weight ('all that Jesus began to do and teach', so NIV), rather than being taken as an auxiliary (= 'all that Jesus did and taught', so Haenchen 1971; NRSV). Accordingly, Acts contains an account of the continuing work of Jesus. Note the syntactical discussions in Bruce 1990b: 98; Marshall 1980: 56; Longenecker 1981: 253; and Barrett 1994: 66–67. For a different view, see Haenchen 1971: 137.

⁶⁹ Stott 1990: 32. Hengel (1986: 59) rightly observes: 'In reality, the whole double work covers the one history of Jesus Christ.'

his message in the Gospel.⁷⁰ Four of the eight references to God's kingdom in Acts have a framing function for the book as a whole (1:3, 6; 28:23, 31), and most occurrences of the phrase turn up in summary statements of the apostolic preaching. The missionary message which the disciples proclaim is 'the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ' (8:12; 28:23, 31). The close link between Jesus' name and the kingdom draws attention to the significance of Jesus' reign within the divine rule. They are not two separate topics but one, for God's rule is established in the world through the reign of his Messiah, Jesus.

After teaching his apostles about 'the kingdom of God' Jesus urged them to remain in Jerusalem until they were baptized with the Holy Spirit (vv. 3–4). Their question which followed, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' (v. 6), is apparently an enquiry about the manner of this restoration as well as its timing, and is not misguided by nationalistic expectations, as many suppose.⁷¹ When told of the Spirit's coming, the disciples, in line with prophetic eschatology, would naturally have in mind the last days (Joel 2:28–32) and the messianic cleansing or restoration of Zion.⁷² Is this the time when Jerusalem will become the world city to which the Gentiles will journey?

Jesus' response to the disciples' question comes in two parts. First (v. 7), he does not deny the expectation of the 'restoration'. However, they cannot know the times or dates, and he corrects any suggestion that it will come immediately (see Acts 3:20–21). In the second part of his answer (v. 8), Jesus assures his disciples that the Holy Spirit will come upon them, and that they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. 'In Luke 24 the disciples were invited to see Jesus' work of redemption by looking *back* to his crucifixion, now they are invited to look *forwards* to their mission "to the ends of the earth". The "redemption" of Israel is a twofold entity –

⁷⁰ Tannehill 1990: 14; Palmer 1993: 63.

⁷¹ For a succinct discussion of a number of related issues, see Penney 1997: 69–74. Bolt (1998: 197) regards the disciples' question as still being too narrowly nationalistic, ignoring the expansiveness of Israel's hopes erected by the prophets, but Jervell (1984: 98) thinks the disciples' question is hardly to be construed as a nationalistic misunderstanding. Turner (1996a: 294–302) rightly considers the question of Acts 1:6 to have been prompted by Jesus' teaching about 'the kingdom of God'. It 'is quite appropriate [that] the disciples should think (a) the kingdom will soon be restored to Israel, and (b) that *Jesus* will accomplish this' (299; original emphasis). Turner connects the promise of the Spirit with salvation, a salvation that is concerned with Zion/Jerusalem's restoration which will then spread to the nations (298).

⁷² So Tiede 1986: 278 and Dumbrell 1994: 220.

inaugurated through Jesus' death and resurrection, but implemented through the disciples' mission' (P. W. L. Walker 1996: 96). There are clear Old Testament antecedents linking the restoration of Israel with witness to the nations, notably in a restoration context of Isaiah where the ministry of the Servant is to Israel (Is. 43:1–7; 49:6) and this, in turn, benefits the nations (43:8–12).⁷³

The significance of Acts 1:8⁷⁴ in the narrative structure of Acts can hardly be overstated, while its relationship to our theme of God's universal salvation is recognized by all. Verse 8 has been regarded as the 'Table of Contents' of Acts, with the apostolic witness spreading from Jerusalem (chs. 1–7), to Judea and Samaria (chs. 8–12), to 'the ends of the earth' (chs. 13–28). This, however, has to be qualified, for although the references to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria correspond roughly to the development in Acts 2–9, some significant omissions occur if the whole expression is interpreted simply in *geographical* terms. Important steps in the progress of the mission beyond Samaria are ignored. There is no reference to the spread of the gospel to Antioch, Asia Minor or Greece, although each of these is significant in Acts (Tannehill 1990: 17). Nor is there any reference to Rome if, as we believe, it should not be identified with 'the ends of the earth'.⁷⁵

Accordingly, the stages of the witness are to be interpreted *ethnically* and *theologically*, as well as *geographically*. The first stage is Jerusalem, where Jesus finished his work and where Israel was to be restored in the remnant of Jews who believed in him as Messiah. The second stage is Judea-Samaria – the two places are linked with a single article in the Greek of verse 8 – referring to the area of the ancient kingdoms of Judah and Israel.⁷⁶ This fulfils the ancient promises of the

⁷³ Turner (1996a: 300–301) contends that Acts 1:8 reiterates the hope of Israel's restoration in its three allusions to Isaiah: 1. mention of the Spirit's coming (*cf.* Luke 24:49) rests on Is. 32:15 (LXX 'until the Spirit from high comes upon you') which is about the new-exodus restoration and the transformation of Israel's 'wilderness' estate; 2. 'you shall be my witnesses' takes up Is. 43:10–12 where restored Israel, God's Servant, is given this commission; and 3. the task of bearing witness to Jesus 'to the ends of the earth' picks up the closing line of Is. 49:6. According to Turner, all three allusions point to Israel's restoration.

⁷⁴ The verse should be read in the light of Luke 24:47–49 (T. S. Moore 1997b: 394). There are conceptual and verbal parallels between the two passages, including the coming of the promise/Holy Spirit upon the disciples, the designation of the disciples as witnesses, and the parallel expressions of the extent of the mission, namely, 'to all the nations' and 'to the ends of the earth'.

⁷⁵ The movement 'to the ends of the earth' points beyond Paul's arrival in Rome at the end of the book (T. S. Moore 1997b: 398; *cf.* Tannehill 1990: 18 and Hengel 1995: 35). See the footnote below.

⁷⁶ The Greek has *pasē tē Ioudaia kai Samareia* ('[in] all Judea-Samaria').

restoration of the *whole* house of Israel under one king (*e.g.* Ezek. 37:15–22). Finally, the apostolic witness will extend to 'the ends of the earth', a key expression which comes from Isaiah 49:6 (see the direct quote in Acts 13:47) and indicates that God intends his salvation should reach all peoples. Geographically, the phrase denotes the end of the world in a general sense. Ethnically, it refers to the Gentile world.⁷⁷ If the gospel is for the Jew first, then it is also for the Gentile (Rom. 1:16–17). Worldwide witness thus appears at the beginning and end of the Acts (1:8; 28:28–31). And the closing words of Luke's second volume are deliberately open-ended. 'The ends of the earth are never reached in Acts. The mission goal is never completed. It remains open ...'⁷⁸

Pentecost and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:1–41)

The long-awaited day of Pentecost arrives (Shepherd 1994: 159–160). For Luke this day is of profound importance, signifying a decisive moment in the outworking of God's saving plan. The outpouring of the Spirit is clinching evidence that the last days have arrived (Num. 11:29; Is. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 36:27). The language of fulfilment is used (v. 1),⁷⁹ first, because the prophecy of Joel 2:28–32 has been wonderfully fulfilled in the Spirit's coming and, secondly, because his arrival has been anticipated by prophecies of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 3:16; 24:49; Acts 1:4–5, 8).⁸⁰ Peter's sermon which interprets the significance of the Spirit's coming locates Pentecost 'in the last days' (Acts 2:17).⁸¹

⁷⁷ To 'the ends of the earth' has this significance in Is. 49:6, for it is conceptually parallel to 'a light to the nations'. The parallel in Luke 24:47 leads to the same conclusion (see above), as does Acts 13:47, where Is. 49:6 is cited by Paul as a justification for his pattern of preaching to the Jews first and then of turning to the Gentiles. For a detailed discussion, see T. S. Moore 1997b: 389–399; *cf.* S. G. Wilson 1973: 94; Best 1984: 3; Tannehill 1990: 17; Rosner 1998: 217–219; and note Brawley 1990: 43, 105.

⁷⁸ So Polhill 1992: 62, cited by Penney 1997: 73.

⁷⁹ The scene is introduced with an unusual phrase, lit. 'When the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled' (*symplērousthai*), which closely resembles Luke 9:51. Penney (1997: 78), following Tannehill (1990: 26–27), thinks the phrase 'heightens the sense of an imminent eschatological fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy'.

⁸⁰ So Tannehill 1990: 26–27. Witherington (1998: 130), who claims it is a 'critical event which sets in motion all that follows', then adds: 'Without the coming of the Spirit there would be no prophecy, no preaching, no mission, no conversions, and no world-wide Christian movement.'

⁸¹ The replacement of 'after these things' (*meta tauta*, Joel 2:28, LXX) by 'in the last days' (*en tais eschatais hēmerais*) identifies the gift as the eschatological promise of the

Pentecost was originally the festival of firstfruits (Lev. 23:19–22) that was celebrated seven weeks after Passover at the time of the wheat harvest. It came to be regarded in second-temple Judaism as the day when the law was given on Mt Sinai,⁸² and drew a large number of pilgrims from abroad. Those gathered for Pentecost in Acts 2 included not only all Jews dwelling in Jerusalem (v. 14), but also representatives from every land of the dispersion ('God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven', v. 5) – in other words, 'all Israel' (v. 36) was present.

The Holy Spirit comes upon the whole group of 120 disciples (v. 4),⁸³ although Luke highlights the gift of the Spirit to the twelve for their role as witnesses⁸⁴ (Acts 2:32; cf. 1:8; Luke 24:48–49; Is. 43:8–13; 44:6–8).⁸⁵ The election of Matthias to replace Judas (Acts 1:15–26) had meant there was now a full complement to the twelve. They are the nucleus of a restored and reconstituted Israel (cf. Luke 22:28–30) whose witness to the whole nation is about to begin in Jerusalem. With the coming of the Spirit, they are involved in taking up the task of the Isaianic Servant (as Jesus' words in Luke 24:48 had implied; cf. Acts 13:47) who ministers representatively to the whole nation, that is, to 'Jews from every nation under heaven' (Acts 2:5), and 'all the house of Israel' (v. 36, RSV).

Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14–39, which explains the significance of the Pentecost event and is central to Acts,⁸⁶ spells out the content⁸⁷ of

Spirit (Turner 1996a: 270).

⁸² Sinai and Pentecost are connected in several intertestamental texts (*Jubilees* 1:1, 5; 6:1–21; 15:1–24). For a full discussion, see Turner 1996a: 280–289.

⁸³ The recent approach of Bolt (1998: 199) is different. He understands Acts 2 to narrate the arrival of the Spirit on the witnesses (cf. 1:4, 8), who he thinks are not only the focus of attention in Acts 1 but also the probable subject of 2:1.

⁸⁴ This is not to suggest, however, that the coming of the Spirit was a prophetic empowering simply for mission or witness (cf. Stronstad 1984: 51–52; Menzies 1994: 168–175). Luke's account in Acts 2 *alone* shows that the giving of the Spirit is for salvation (vv. 38–39), and for transformed lives in the community (vv. 42–47) that are given to worship, prayer, praise, adherence to apostolic teaching and the sharing of one's possessions. Note the critique of Turner 1996a: chs. 12, 13; and 1996b: 42–43, 46–48.

⁸⁵ According to Turner (1996b: 46–47), this is because the 'expansion of the witness is a major plot in Acts, and the twelve (especially Peter) are the leaders in this'.

⁸⁶ Turner (1996a: 267) suggests that Peter's explanation of the Pentecost event in Acts 2:14–39 has perhaps greater claim than Luke 4:16–30 to be called 'the programmatic' text of Luke-Acts. He adds: 'What gives the Pentecost speech its central place is not simply what is said explicitly about the Spirit, but the way what is said here is reintegrated with other cardinal aspects of Luke's theology.' Green (1992: 33–34) thinks that Acts 2:1–41 is of central significance for four reasons: 1. the way in which the event that is 'narrated and interpreted in this passage has been anticipated throughout the Lukan story' (esp. the pronounced activity of the Holy Spirit [Luke 1:15, 35, 41, etc.;

the disciples' witness⁸⁸ 'in Jerusalem' (cf. 1:8). This coming of the Spirit is associated with the gift of prophecy (according to vv. 17–18 all will receive the prophetic Spirit), and Peter interprets the event in terms of Joel 2:28–32 where God had promised to pour out his Spirit on 'all flesh', that is, on 'all Israel'. The apostle moves from the Joel passage with its mention of people calling upon the name of the Lord to be saved (v. 21), to focus first on Jesus' crucifixion (vv. 22–23), then God's raising him from the dead and exalting him to be Lord and Messiah (vv. 33–36). After his exaltation Jesus poured out the promised Holy Spirit. The apostle also picks up the prophetic promise of salvation to all who call upon the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21) and urges his hearers to call upon the Lord *Jesus* by repenting and being baptized in his name for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Luke 24:47). They will receive the gift of the Spirit, since the promise is for them and their children (v. 39). Peter's witness then is to the whole house of Israel to hear and appropriate this message of renewal and eschatological blessing. His sermon moves from the coming of the Spirit upon the 120, and especially the twelve as witnesses (cf. v. 32), to the promise of the Spirit for the hearers who will experience salvation.

We have underscored the point that those gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost were devout Jews who represented 'all Israel' (2:5, 36; cf. v. 14). Peter's testimony was given to the people of God. Yet there are clear hints in the narrative of Acts 2 that the coming of the Spirit on a renewed and cleansed Israel will ultimately point forward to universal blessing (as the prophetic writings had foreshadowed: e.g. Is. 42:6; 49:6):

1. The presence of Jews 'from every nation under heaven' (v. 5), while referring to those of the dispersion, is nevertheless thought to

Luke 3:16; 11:13; 24:49]) which builds up to the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2:1–4. 2. While Pentecost is a non-repeatable event, 'the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost serves a paradigmatic function elsewhere in the Acts of the Apostles'; cf. 10:44, 47; 11:1–3, 17. 3. The number of parallels between Jesus' inaugural sermon at Nazareth in Luke 4:16–30 and the Pentecost narrative point to the latter's significance in the context of Acts. 4. Acts 2 'sets the agenda for the mission of Jesus' followers in the book as a whole' (cf. vv. 35–41). Cf. Peterson 1993: 97.

⁸⁷ Trites (1977: 142) aptly remarks: 'The content of the apostolic testimony is most fully revealed in the speeches of Acts, particularly those in chapters 2, 3, 5, 10 and 13.'

⁸⁸ They testify to Jesus' death, resurrection and the forgiveness of sins (each of which is explained according to the Scriptures; note Luke 24:46–47). This threefold focus is reiterated throughout the sermons in Acts, especially those to Jews (3:14, 15, 19; 10:39, 40, 43; 11:18; cf. 17:30; 26:18, 20).

'anticipate' what will occur worldwide.⁸⁹ The devout visitors to Jerusalem are considered by Luke to be representatives of the various lands from which they had come, and of the local dialects of those lands.⁹⁰

2. The list of nations in verses 9–12, which amplifies verse 5, shows a marked similarity to the Jewish table of nations tradition based on Genesis 10, and which is present in partial form in Isaiah 66:18–19, where Yahweh promises to 'gather all nations and tongues'.⁹¹

3. The expression 'all flesh', which in Joel has Israel as its immediate focus, is given a universal twist when Peter speaks of the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit being 'for all who are far off' (v. 39).⁹² This is not inconsistent, however, with a broader focus in the Joel passage, namely, that 'all flesh' hints at something wider than Israel (see below).

4. The enthronement of Jesus as Lord and Christ implies a role towards the nations. Psalm 110:1–2 (Acts 2:34–35) indicates that the 'Lord' has taken his seat to await the overthrow of his enemies, while Psalm 2, which also indicates that the nations will be defeated by Christ, declares that an amnesty is available for those who submit to the Son (cf. Bolt 1998: 200). Because Jesus the Davidic Messiah is the Lord upon whose name men and women should now call to be saved (Acts 2:21, 34–36; Joel 2:32, 36–39), forgiveness is available to all through him.

5. Luke's accounts of subsequent bestowals of the Spirit throughout Acts deliberately pick up the 'programmatic' language of chapter 2, and show that Pentecost is only a partial realization of the Joel promise to 'all flesh'.⁹³ In the subsequent narratives of Acts, the response of

⁸⁹ Tannehill (1990: 28) thinks that the presence of Jews 'from every nation under heaven' introduces a 'symbolic dimension' into the narrative that suggests 'first that it is the goal of the gospel to address all Israel, scattered throughout the world, and second that it must also address the gentile inhabitants of the lands from which these Jews come'. Cf. Menzies 1994: 176–177.

⁹⁰ Bruce 1988: 55. Dumbrell (1994: 223) speaks of 'the world being universally affected by the Pentecost event' because Jews from every nation are 'represented and what has happened now to Israel is a paradigm for the Spirit of prophecy to descend in these last days "on all people" (v. 17)'.

⁹¹ Scott 1994: 527–530 and Penney 1997: 82.

⁹² The words 'for you and your children and for all who are far off', have rightly been understood as an allusion to the Abrahamic covenant, recalling especially Gen. 17:7–10 ('you and your descendants after you'), with the last phrase, 'all who are far off', pointing to the nations who will find blessing through Abraham's descendants (Gen. 22:18; cf. 12:3); so Penney 1997: 91.

⁹³ Note the following expressions which echo Acts 2: 'the gift of God' (8:20) given to the Samaritans; the comparisons to Pentecost in 10:46–47; 11:15, 17 and the Spirit as

new groups to the word of God brings similar outpourings of the Spirit and shows a progressive movement of the realization of Joel's promise to *all*: the Samaritans (Acts 8:14–17), the Gentiles (10:44–48; 11:15–18) and the disciples of the Baptist (19:1–7). These so-called 'mini-Pentecosts' occur at crucial stages of the missionary expansion. Pentecost is a non-repeatable event, but 'the outpouring of the Spirit ... [on this occasion] serves a paradigmatic function elsewhere in the Acts of the Apostles' (Green 1992: 33–34).

Finally, although the account of Pentecost ends at verse 41, it must be read in conjunction with the first of Luke's summaries in Acts, namely, 2:42–47.⁹⁴ Here the picture is drawn of the Jerusalem community – the remnant of Israel, restored and given new life by the exalted Christ through the Holy Spirit. This congregation, whose members demonstrate wholehearted care for one another (vv. 44–45), is characterized by devotion to the apostolic teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer (v. 42). As 'the little flock' to whom the Father was pleased to give the kingdom (Luke 12:32), this community models what Israel of old should have been (Exod. 19:5–6). Not only do they meet together with glad, sincere hearts and praise God; they also enjoy the favour of 'all the people (*laos*)', and daily the Lord adds to their number other Israelites who were being saved. This restored community is presented by Luke as a model for God's purposes *for the world*.

The pilgrimage of the Gentiles to Jerusalem?

It is clear from the narratives of Acts 1 – 2 that for Luke Jerusalem is 'the all-important starting-point for the gospel'. However, it is not 'its final goal'.⁹⁵ The risen Lord's commission to the apostles is as follows: 'You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem ... and to the ends of the earth' (1:8). Jerusalem's position within salvation history is unparalleled (an emphasis we have already observed throughout the Old Testament), for the city is the source of the gospel message for the whole world. But the word of the Lord is no longer tied to the holy city; it must go out from Jerusalem. Moreover, although the narrative of Acts frequently

God's gift for the Gentiles (10:45; 11:17); and the contrast between the baptism of John and baptism in the Holy Spirit in 19:1–7, found in 1:5; and 11:16. Cf. Tannehill 1990: 30–31; and Dumbrell 1994: 223.

⁹⁴ On the significance of these Lukan summaries in relation to the 'Progress of the Word', see Rosner 1998: 215–233.

⁹⁵ P. W. L. Walker 1996: 81 (note esp. 81–94, to which we are indebted).

returns to Jerusalem, the ultimate goal is the progress of the gospel 'to the ends of the earth'.

This *centrifugal* focus on the word of the Lord going forth from Jerusalem is rather unexpected given that the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to Zion, the ingathering of the Gentiles, was a *centripetal* movement which kept Jerusalem at the centre of the divine purposes (see ch. 2). Now with the risen Lord's commission to the disciples that movement is reversed. There is, however, biblical justification for this centrifugal focus. Isaiah's prophecy states that 'the Law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem' (2:3). Although Luke does not cite this verse explicitly, the ongoing powerful advance of the word of God is a central theme of Acts which may have its antecedents in this Old Testament prophecy (cf. Is. 55:11). As we have seen, Isaiah clearly had an important influence on Luke-Acts, 'not least because of its charter for universal mission in Isaiah 49:6 (Acts 13:47; cf. 1:8)' (P. W. L. Walker 1996: 83).

Two related factors may explain this change of orientation: first, the Old Testament pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem, in which Gentiles journeyed with Jews to the Holy City, especially the temple, was in order to meet with God who dwelt there (cf. Zech. 8:23, 'In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the edge of his robe and say, "Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you"'). Now, however, as the early witnesses bear testimony to the death and resurrection of Jesus and proclaim the forgiveness of sins in his name to all the nations, so God *sends* Jesus his servant to them, to bring blessing to 'all the families of the earth', not only to Israel but also to the Gentiles (Acts 3:13, 25–26). By believing the word of the gospel, men and women from the nations receive the risen Lord Jesus whom God has sent to them. The expectations of meeting with God himself, the key purpose for the pilgrimage of the Gentiles, are fulfilled in this way.⁹⁶ A similar point is made in relation to temple language. The Old Testament looked forward to the time of eschatological peace when Israel and the nations would be united in one cult at Zion (Is. 2:4; Mic. 4:3). The early church understood itself in terms of the renewed temple of eschatological fulfilment.⁹⁷ Although the imagery is somewhat flexible,

⁹⁶ Dumbrell (1994: 221) claims that the missionary activity of a restored Israel which goes out in mission is 'a departure from the centripetal program of the Old Testament, [that] was necessitated by national Israel's end as the geographical center for divine revelation'. On the rejection by and judgment of Jerusalem, see P. W. L. Walker 1996: 89–94.

⁹⁷ Note the discussion and bibliography details of Bauckham 1995: 442–448.

believers are the stones of which the temple is constructed (1 Pet. 2:5). Jesus Christ is the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11) or the cornerstone/keystone (Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4, 6–7, alluding to Is. 28:16; Ps. 118:22). According to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus himself is the temple (John 2:19–22). Gentile believers have become integral parts of this new building, not by journeying to Jerusalem, but through their union with Christ. They too, along with Jewish Christians, are being built as living stones (1 Pet. 2:5) into this heavenly temple, the place where God dwells by his Spirit (Eph. 2:22).

Witness in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1 – 8:1)

God's promises to Abraham and the fathers are an important theme which runs through Luke-Acts (cf. Luke 1:55, 73; Acts 3:25). Consistent with these promises, which are foundational to God's redemptive plan (cf. Gen. 12:1–3),⁹⁸ salvation is offered to 'the Jew first, then to the Greek'. Accordingly, throughout Acts 3:1 – 8:1 the disciples' witness to Jesus is given in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 1:8). Peter's sermon, after the miracle at the temple gate (3:1–10), emphasizes the Abrahamic origins of the gospel.⁹⁹ In fulfilment of the covenant promises made to Abraham, God has sent (*apostellō*) the risen Jesus, his Servant (v. 13; cf. Is. 53:12), to bring blessing to 'all the families of the earth', in the *first* instance to Israel (the 'heirs of the prophets and the covenant'), *then* to the Gentiles (vv. 25–26).

Moreover, God's sending of Jesus, which is 'the most basic mission' in Luke-Acts, is carried out 'by his chosen witnesses who are equipped with ... and endorsed by his Spirit'.¹⁰⁰ Through listening to the testimony of the apostles (in this instance, the sermon of Peter), Israel can hear Jesus, the prophet like Moses, addressing them (vv. 20, 22). Even those responsible for his death (vv. 13–15) may share in these covenantal blessings, if they turn from their wicked ways (vv. 19, 26).

Israel's opportunity for true repentance, however, is not unlimited. God will *send* the Christ again, when he will restore all things (v.

Following others, Bauckham claims that the image of the Christian community as the temple is so common in early Christian literature that it 'very plausibly goes back to early Palestinian Christianity' (444).

⁹⁸ Note ch. 2, 'Mission in the Old Testament'.

⁹⁹ On the significance of the Abrahamic promises in Acts 3, see Tannehill 1990: 55–57; Dumbrell 1994: 225–227; and Penney 1997: 91–94; cf. Brawley 1994: 252–268.

¹⁰⁰ Bolt 1998: 195. See Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5, 8; 2:17–21, 33; 5:32.

21),¹⁰¹ and only those who repent before his second coming will experience forgiveness and refreshing (vv. 13–15, 17, 19). Anyone who does not listen to Jesus, the Servant and end-time prophet like Moses, ‘will be completely cut off’ (vv. 21, 23).

The witness of Peter and John ‘in Jerusalem’ to the powerful *name* of Jesus, by which a crippled beggar had been healed (3:6, 16; 4:7, 10; cf. v. 30), encountered significant and determined opposition from the Jewish leadership (4:1–22; 5:17–42). This came to a head in the persecution and death of Stephen (6:1 – 8:3). It marked the turning point in the ministry to national Israel, and led to a break with Judaism.¹⁰² Surprisingly, the narrative begins by underscoring the ongoing growth of the number of the disciples: in Jerusalem they ‘increased rapidly’, and even ‘a large number of priests became obedient to the faith’ (an *inclusio*, 6:1, 7). The Sanhedrin’s determined resistance did not stop the gospel’s remarkable progress. Luke presents the picture of the powerful appeal of the word of God and the rapid growth of the church in Jerusalem since Pentecost (Rosner 1998: 226).

The gospel spreads to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:4–40)

The immediate aftermath of the stoning of Stephen was a campaign of repression by the Jerusalem authorities, apparently directed against the whole church (cf. Gal. 1:22–23), although the Hellenists seem to have been the principal targets. They were scattered from Jerusalem and carried the gospel to the neighbouring regions of *Judea and Samaria*, the second division of Acts 1:8. God used the persecution that was the immediate cause of the Hellenists’ departure to Samaria (8:4), and even beyond (11:19–24), to effect his purposes of salvation.¹⁰³ The tragic irony was that the attempts of the Sanhedrin to stop the spread of the word of God, which were carried to such extreme lengths in the stoning of Stephen, resulted in the word spreading in Judea, Samaria and

¹⁰¹ The times of refreshing for Israel and her world which began with the death and resurrection of Jesus, together with the apostolic mission, will continue until the full restoration takes place with the return of Jesus (Dumbrell 1994: 226–227). There is a ‘now’ and ‘not yet’ tension between the restoration in Acts 1:6 and that of 3:21. Peter invites his hearers to experience in Jesus ‘the times of refreshing’ while they await a more universal restoration. Israel’s response, like the later Gentile mission, is a precursor to the final restoration anticipated in Acts 3:21. See the discussion of P. W. L. Walker 1996: 94–102; cf. Stenschke 1998: 141.

¹⁰² Tannehill (1990: 80) refers to it as the ‘climax of the conflict in Jerusalem’. Cf. Neudorfer 1998: 280; and Rosner 1998: 226, following Dollar 1993: 123.

¹⁰³ Note esp. Rapske 1998: 235–256.

Antioch (Tannehill 1990: 101).

This advance of the gospel in Judea and Samaria¹⁰⁴ was carried out, not by the apostles who remained in Jerusalem, but by Philip (8:5), who was one of those scattered by the Jewish authorities (v. 4). Unlike the twelve and Paul, who were witnesses, Philip was an evangelist who proclaimed ‘the good news of the kingdom of God’ (8:12). His ministry of preaching and healing is described in ways that underscore its continuity with the mission of Jesus and his apostles.¹⁰⁵ Thus, Jesus’ commission in Judea and Samaria, the second stage of Acts 1:8, was accomplished through a new instrument of God, Philip the evangelist.¹⁰⁶

Although we might have expected to be given an account of the missionary travels of the twelve apostles, generally this does not appear in Acts (though note 8:14–25). Instead, Luke sees them as closely linked with the city of Jerusalem, a connection that persists throughout the narrative. As the nucleus of the restored Israel, they are pre-eminently witnesses to Israel ‘in Jerusalem’, from which centre the word of the Lord will sound forth, as the Old Testament prophecies had anticipated (e.g. Is. 2:1–4; Mic. 4:1–5).¹⁰⁷ Fundamentally theirs was a stationary rather than a missionary role (Clark 1998: 180). To be a witness was not necessarily the same as being a missionary.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard about Philip’s effective ministry, they sent Peter and John (8:14) down to Samaria. The Spirit came upon the Samaritans after prayer and the laying on of the apostles’ hands; hence, the incident has been called ‘the Samaritan Pentecost’. This delayed imparting of the Holy Spirit (which Luke

¹⁰⁴ Philip’s Samaritan mission is linked geographically with his work along the coastal plain of Judea (8:26–40).

¹⁰⁵ A summary of Philip’s ministry is mentioned directly in 8:4–8, 12–13 (cf. the treatment of Spencer 1992: 32–53). Those scattered from Jerusalem, including Philip, appear as the proclaimers of ‘the word’ (8:4). More specifically, Philip is presented as an evangelist (21:8) who ‘proclaimed Christ’ (8:5; cf. Luke 4:8, 19, 44; 8:1; 9:2), ‘preached the good news of the kingdom of God’ (8:12; see Luke 4:18, 43; 9:6; Acts 5:42) and the ‘name’ of Jesus (8:12; cf. Acts 4:17–18; 5:28, 40). His preaching was also accompanied by signs: he exorcized ‘evil spirits’ (Acts 8:7) and healed the paralysed and lame (v. 7). As a result there was great joy (vv. 7–8).

¹⁰⁶ Philip also features in a second incident which is concerned with the missionary expansion of the church. In addition to ‘preaching the Christ’ to the Samaritans, Philip is led by the Spirit to ‘preach Jesus’ to a God-fearing pilgrim who not only represented a foreign nation but who, being a eunuch, was debarred from membership of the congregation of Israel (Deut. 23:1). He was, however, ‘a worshipper of God’ and should be regarded as an ‘exile of Israel’ (Is. 56:8) rather than as a Gentile. The admission of Gentiles to faith comes in Acts 10.

¹⁰⁷ Clark 1998: 176, following Fitzmyer.

indicates was unusual: 'the Spirit had *not yet come* upon any of them', v. 16) is connected with the fact that here was a significant advance in the programme outlined by Jesus in Acts 1:8. The point was not that the Spirit could be received only through the laying on of the apostles' hands (cf. 10:44 and 19:6). Rather, God had given a clear and impressive endorsement to both the apostles and the Samaritans themselves that he had included them in salvation through Jesus, thereby fulfilling his ancient promises to restore the whole house of Israel under one king (e.g. Ezek. 37:15–19). Through the coming of the Spirit the old division between north and south had been healed. The Samaritans were incorporated into the new people of God, the messianic community (8:14–25),¹⁰⁸ and this was recognized by the apostles.¹⁰⁹

Paul's conversion and commission (Acts 9:1–31)

The conversion and calling of Saul of Tarsus marked a significant advance in the preaching of the gospel and the mission of Jesus to the Gentile world. Luke clearly attached great importance to this event and wished to impress it unforgettably on his readers.¹¹⁰ So he used the simple but effective method of repetition, recounting the story three times in Acts (chs. 9, 22, 26) – once in the third person and twice on Paul's lips.¹¹¹

The account in Acts 9 opens with the picture of Saul 'still breathing

¹⁰⁸ Similarly, in 10:44–48 the coming of the Spirit was a visible sign that God wished to include the Gentiles in the salvation that Jesus brings (see also 11:15–18). Those who have clearly received the Spirit, whether Samaritans or Gentiles, cannot be rejected even if they belong to alienated groups.

¹⁰⁹ Clark (1998: 176) notes that the apostles legitimize the new development in the expanding mission (8:14; cf. 9:26–28; 11:1, 18; 15:5–6, 22–23). 'The crucial new developments in the growth of the early church are validated by the men who form the nucleus of the restored people of God.'

¹¹⁰ Most scholars note this point. Towner (1998: 418) observes that since the progress of the Christian mission is central to Luke's concerns, 'the role of Paul in opening up the whole world to the gospel is crucial to the Lukan narrative'. Cf. Witherington 1998: 303; and Hansen 1998: 322, who suggests that Luke repeats the conversion story twice in the defence speeches (22:4–16; 26:12–18) 'to emphasise that Paul's witness to the resurrection was commissioned and empowered by the risen Lord Jesus'. Each of the three narratives is shaped to suit a different purpose. On the cumulative effects of the three accounts note Hansen 1998: 322–324 and his interaction with Hedrick 1981: 415–432.

¹¹¹ Jervell (1998: 278–279, 288) observes that while Luke reports the calling of other apostles, including Peter and the twelve, he mentions Paul's conversion and calling three times. The particular significance of this lies in Paul's mission. On p. 279, however, Jervell presses the point too far when he claims that only Paul, according to Luke, fulfils the commission of Jesus in Acts 1:8 (see above).

out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples' (v. 1). Even after the death of Stephen (cf. 8:3) and the expulsion of the Hellenistic Christians from Jerusalem, Saul intended to continue the persecution in places outside the Sanhedrin's immediate jurisdiction. He approached Damascus with the High Priest's commission to arrest 'any who belonged to the way' with the intention of bringing them back as prisoners to Jerusalem (vv. 1–2). But Saul was stopped in his tracks. Confronted by the risen and exalted Lord Jesus, and questioned why he was persecuting him, he was converted and commissioned to bear witness to the Gentiles (vv. 4–19).¹¹² Luke stresses the unprecedented nature of Paul's turnaround and the genuineness of his conversion.¹¹³

Of particular significance for our theme of mission in Luke-Acts are the following:¹¹⁴ first, Paul is a chosen vessel to bear Christ's name to the Gentiles as well as to the people of Israel (9:15; 22:15). Both the comprehensive scope of his commission (it is to *all*) and its special focus (to *Gentiles*)¹¹⁵ are in view. His calling as an apostle to the Gentiles is part and parcel of the divine plan of salvation (22:14), and this is why his ministry is said, on occasion, to stand under divine constraint (*dei*, 19:21; 23:11).

Secondly, Paul's role is parallel to that of the other apostles.¹¹⁶ Like the twelve he was 'appointed [*procheirotoneō* is used of the twelve at 10:41] to know God's will' (or 'plan', 22:14, Squires 1993: 2), while his bearing 'witness to all' and being sent to the Gentiles (22:21) parallel the description of the twelve apostles as Jesus' 'witnesses to the people of Israel' (13:31). Paul fulfils the commission given to the apostles (1:8), for he preaches in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and to the Gentiles (26:20). Like the twelve, he bears witness to the same three scriptural elements of Jesus' commission in Luke 24:46–48, namely, the Messiah's suffering, his resurrection and the announcement of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations (26:22–23).

¹¹² Tannehill (1990: 121) comments: 'Thus the one who is called to be a light of the nations and to open the eyes of Jews and Gentiles has encountered the Messiah in light and is himself a healed blind man, forced by the Messiah's light to recognize his own blindness and to receive sight through him' (cf. Gaventa 1986: 62, 85).

¹¹³ Barrett (1994: 422) aptly remarks: 'This was a radical change of religious direction, and it was accompanied by as radical a change of action: the active persecutor became an even more active preacher and evangelist. If such radical changes do not amount to conversion it is hard to know what would do so.'

¹¹⁴ We shall draw on material from each of the three conversion narratives, recognizing that each is shaped to suit a particular purpose.

¹¹⁵ The position of 'Gentiles' first in the narrative (v. 15) is emphatic and indicates 'a new development' (Tannehill 1990: 121).

¹¹⁶ Note esp. Clark 1998: 188–189.

Accordingly, Paul's message, like that of the twelve, is described as 'the word of God' or 'the word of the Lord' (13:44-49; 14:3; 15:35-36; 18:11), even 'the whole counsel of God' (20:27, RSV), and as such it makes its dynamic progress throughout the world (cf. Rosner 1998: 215-233). Paul too will suffer for the sake of the Lord Jesus' name (9:15-16; cf. 5:40-41), since he, like the twelve, follows in the steps of the suffering Servant.

Thirdly, Paul continues the mission of Jesus by fulfilling the ministry of the Servant. We have already seen that the mission on which Jesus has been sent by the Father (cf. Acts 3:20, 26) is effected by his witnesses bearing testimony to Israel (2:21; 13:31; cf. 10:36-39) and to the Gentiles, and this includes Paul's apostolic witness (9:15; 22:14-15; 26:16). He 'shares in carrying out the task assigned by Christ to the apostles',¹¹⁷ a work which is explicitly identified with the role of Yahweh's Servant (Acts 13:47, citing Is. 49:6). As he continues Jesus' mission, the resurrected one proclaims light *in and through him* to the nations (26:23).

At the end of the first account of Paul's conversion the section of Acts closes with a summary statement of the spread of the gospel beyond Jerusalem into Judea, Galilee and Samaria (9:31): peace results because the persecution following Stephen's death has ceased, and growth occurs through the surprising power of the word to find new opportunities in spite of resistance.

Cornelius and the Gentiles (Acts 10:1 - 11:18)

With the word of the Lord steadily bearing fruit and increasing, the time had come for the gospel to cross the barrier that separated Jews from Gentiles and to be presented directly to the latter. Events moved to a new stage as God prepared for their entry into his people. The length of this account of Cornelius and the Gentiles (sixty-six verses in all) and the way it is told twice indicate its very great importance to Luke in the context of Acts.¹¹⁸ The passage stands in a strategic position within the book: it constitutes the climax to its first half as well as to Peter's apostolic ministry, and signals a fundamental turning point in Luke's narrative of the spread of the gospel to 'the ends of the earth' (1:8).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ O'Toole 1978: 82, cited by Clark 1998: 189.

¹¹⁸ So most writers. Reference to the incident twice more in the narrative of Acts (15:7-11, 13-21) underscores its profound significance. Note particularly Matson 1996: 91; and Witherington (1998: 365), who speaks of it as 'the most crucial drama yet recorded in the book of Acts'.

¹¹⁹ Green 1997b: 243. Cf. Witherup 1993: 45-66 and Matson 1996: 92.

Four issues receive special emphasis in Luke's presentation of the material: first, the early church resisted the idea of Gentiles being evangelized directly or accepted into the Christian fellowship without first becoming Jewish proselytes (cf. 10:14, 28; 11:2-3, 8). With the apostolic testimony at Pentecost to Jesus as Lord and Christ, and the mighty outpouring of the Spirit, the universal movement had begun (Acts 2). What started with the twelve in Jerusalem continued throughout Judea and Samaria and was moving towards the ends of the earth (1:8). Yet the apostles have to be 'sold' on the Gentile mission, which is extraordinary given Jesus' commission to them to bear witness to 'the ends of the earth' (1:8; cf. Luke. 24:47) and their experience of Pentecost.¹²⁰ Peter was reluctant to go to the Gentiles, visiting Cornelius and his Gentile friends only after he had been constrained by divine revelation (10:9-16). His preaching of the gospel in the home of those who were 'uncircumcised' aroused great alarm among believers in Jerusalem who later took him to task for his conduct (11:1-3).¹²¹

Secondly, it was God himself who introduced Gentiles into the church and miraculously showed his approval (cf. 10:3, 11-16, 19-20, 22, 30-33, 44-46; 11:5-10, 13, 15-18).¹²² The divine initiative and action are patently clear throughout the narrative: by means of divine visions and revelations to Cornelius and Peter, through God's preparing the hearts of the Gentiles to hear the gospel, and by his pouring out the Holy Spirit upon them, cleansing their hearts by faith and granting them repentance unto life. God's Holy Spirit, who confirmed the word of the gospel, declared by his manifest presence that these Gentiles were truly God's children.¹²³ 'The Holy Spirit's coming upon Cornelius and the others in a manner strictly comparable to Pentecost is the final and most compelling indication of the new divine initiative (Acts 10:44-46; 11:15)' (Rapske 1998: 241).

¹²⁰ Peter's sermon at Pentecost refers to God pouring out his Spirit on 'all flesh' (2:17, NRSV), and this directly recalls the universal promise of Luke 3:6. Yet the apostle had not grasped the radical implications of these words.

¹²¹ On this opposition to the Gentile mission, see Rapske 1998: 239-242. The two-fold nature of the criticism was that Peter entered into the house of the uncircumcised and ate with them (11:3), actions that were anathema to any self-respecting Jew. (On the subject of table fellowship, see Blue 1998: 473-497, esp. 490-494.) Rapske comments that Peter's preaching of the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius and his household was 'at once momentous and deeply troublesome to the early church' (239). His proclamation was 'not a "freelance" operation but fully apostolic, and he was 'not simply led, but "driven", to acknowledge and embrace the unfolding plan of God' (240).

¹²² Marshall 1980: 181; so most writers, including Green 1998: 92.

¹²³ The circumcised believers from Joppa were seized with amazement when they saw that 'the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out *even* on the Gentiles' (vv. 45-46, emphasis added).

Thirdly, it was Peter, the leader of the Jerusalem apostles, rather than Paul, whom God used as the human instrument to open the door to the Gentiles (cf. 10:23, 34–43, 47–48; 11:15–17). Peter's speech to Cornelius is described as 'the message God *sent* to the people of Israel telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ' (10:36), in other words, what was promised in Isaiah 52:7. According to the prophet, Jerusalem's coming redemption would be displayed 'in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God' (52:10). With Cornelius' conversion, 'what was promised by the prophet and picked up by the programmatic Acts 1:8, begins to unfold further'.¹²⁴ Since Jesus is truly 'Lord of all' (v. 36), then the conversion of the Gentiles is a necessary consequence. Luke is concerned to make clear the connection between the salvation of Israel and the Gentile mission, and what better way to do this than by showing that God used Peter, the leader of the Jerusalem apostles, to initiate Jesus' mission to the Gentiles through his apostolic testimony. Peter has already borne witness to Israel in Jerusalem, he was involved in the coming of the Spirit upon the Samaritans, and is now God's chosen witness to open the door of faith to the Gentiles (cf. 1:8). The twelve, then, continue the ministry of the Lord's Servant which had to do with Israel's redemption, on the one hand, and divine salvation reaching the ends of the earth, on the other (Is. 49:6).

Fourthly, the Jerusalem church subsequently accepted the Gentiles' conversion to Jesus the Messiah without insisting that they come via the Jewish route. Although called to account for his actions in the house of Cornelius (11:2–3), Peter explained to the Jewish believers¹²⁵ in Jerusalem how God had prepared him with the vision of clean and unclean animals, then led him to Cornelius' house where he and his Gentile friends gladly heard the message of salvation. For Peter and the others, however, the dramatic coming of the Holy Spirit on all who heard the apostolic message was decisive confirmation that God had graciously cleansed the hearts of the Gentiles and accepted them. The apostle realized that the words of the risen Christ to him and his fellow-disciples (1:5) which had been fulfilled at Pentecost were fulfilled anew here. When the Jerusalem believers heard Peter's account, they had no further objections but praised God, acknowledging that he had 'even

¹²⁴ Bolt 1998: 204; cf. Bayer 1998: 268.

¹²⁵ They shared the same perspective towards Gentiles and entry into their houses as Peter did (10:14, 28); so Matson 1996: 119. Tannehill (1990: 144) observes: 'The audience is led through the same sequence of events so that they can appreciate and share Peter's new insight.'

granted the Gentiles repentance unto life' (11:18).¹²⁶

The Cornelius episode was not simply an exceptional situation, but had paradigmatic and normative significance: it was to 'the Gentiles', that is, 'as a class of people, not to Cornelius and his friends alone', that God has given this repentance.¹²⁷ Significantly, when Peter later rehearsed this story before the Jerusalem Council (15:7–11), he did not just recount a personal experience, but drew emphatic theological conclusions from the incident in order to justify Paul's work among the Gentiles generally. The incident is 'for Luke the test-case par excellence for the admission of Gentiles into the Church' (S. G. Wilson 1973: 177).

The spread of the gospel to Antioch (Acts 11:19–30)

A significant breakthrough of the gospel occurred at Antioch, the third largest city of the Roman empire, which culminated in the initiation of the Gentile mission led by Paul and Barnabas. The Greek-speaking Jewish Christians who had been forced to leave Jerusalem at the time of Stephen's death (8:1, 4) were scattered northwards as far as Antioch. They spread the gospel as they went and in Antioch continued their mission to Jews (11:19). Some from Cyprus and Cyrene, however, went to Antioch and began to share the good news with Greek-speaking Gentiles (v. 20). The activity of these unnamed evangelists¹²⁸ had the approval of God so that many believed and were converted (v. 21). This incident began a new chapter, in one sense the most important, in the history of the Christian mission.¹²⁹ The door which was opened to the Gentiles at Caesarea by Peter was even more widely opened at

¹²⁶ Marshall (1980: 197) points out that 'Luke compares the experience of the Gentiles, not to those of the first Jews' converts in the temple courts on Pentecost, but to the very experience of the original inner circle of Jesus' followers. Thus, their full equality is made evident.' Cf. Witherington 1998: 364.

¹²⁷ Witherington 1998: 364, n. 149, following Barrett 1994: 543. Throughout Peter's account (esp. vv. 10–11) 'there is a constant shifting between Cornelius in particular and the Gentiles in general, such that the former is clearly representative of the latter (10:34, 45; 11:17–18)' (S. G. Wilson 1983: 72; cf. Tannehill 1990: 184–185; Matson 1996: 125; and Blue 1998: 493).

¹²⁸ Bruce (1988: 225) describes them as 'daring spirits ... [who] took a momentous step forward'. The arrival of the gospel in Antioch was 'not the result of a mission organized by the Jerusalem church. Nor ... [was] it caused by the conversion of Cornelius' (Tannehill 1990: 146; cf. Schnabel 1997: 757).

¹²⁹ Fernando (1998: 347) aptly remarks that 'the scattering by the persecution in connection with Stephen was indeed the scattering of the seed of the gospel in God's plan'.

Antioch by unnamed Hellenistic Jewish Christians.

The church at Antioch grew rapidly. It then went through a period of rapid growth (v. 24) similar to the initial growth of the Jerusalem church. The same language is used to describe it, since references to people being added, or to the Lord adding to the church, form a repeated theme in the narrative of the early Jerusalem church (cf. 2:41,47; 5:14). The believers at Antioch demonstrated the same concern for their fellows as did the church in Jerusalem, though they freely shared with their fellow-disciples in Judea (vv. 29–30).

Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:1 – 14:28)

From Acts 13 on, Paul, rather than Peter, moves to 'centre stage and mission is the central theme' of the narrative (Squires 1998a: 610). The commissioning of verses 1–3 introduces an important new episode¹³⁰ that will lead to Paul's programmatic speech in Pisidian Antioch (13:16–41) and the momentous announcement that he and Barnabas are turning to the Gentiles (13:44–48). Luke follows Paul's journeys and shows how he fulfils his divine commission (9:15). The Holy Spirit makes it known that Paul has been marked out¹³¹ for a particular 'work', the content of which is clarified throughout chapters 13 and 14. The description of the mission, which is highlighted as a fresh beginning, parallels several key features of the beginnings of Jesus' mission and that of the apostles.¹³² In this way the account underscores

¹³⁰ From 13:1 to 21:17, the third section of Acts. This details Paul's activities and those of his co-workers in Asia Minor and the Aegean sea, with special interest in the 'turning to the Gentiles' which Paul had boldly announced in 13:46 (cf. 18:6); so Squires 1998b: 611.

¹³¹ The Holy Spirit's initiative is emphatically stressed first by the fact of the command, 'the Holy Spirit said' (v. 2), secondly by its content, 'Set apart for me' (v. 2 emphasis added), and finally through the narrative which states that Barnabas and Paul were 'sent on their way (*ekpempō*) by the Holy Spirit' (v. 4). Luke is probably suggesting that the communication of the Holy Spirit came by prophetic utterance.

¹³² Tannehill (1990: 160–161) draws attention to the following parallels between the three missions: 1. a major statement at the beginning of Jesus' mission (Luke 4:18–21) and the apostles' (Acts 2:14–40), as well as Paul's (13:13–52); 2. the three speeches contain or lead to a Scripture quotation which interprets the mission that is beginning (Luke 4:18–19; Acts 2:17–21; 13:47); 3. the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's salvation plan is mentioned (Luke 4:25–28; Acts 2:39; 3:25–26; 13:45–48); 4. the beginnings of the missions present the key characters as workers of wonders and signs (Luke 4:32; Acts 2:43; 13:12), presumably as evidence of the Lord's confirmation of his message of grace (cf. Acts 14:3); 5. a scene follows in which a lame man is healed shortly after the announcement of the mission (Luke 5:17–26; Acts 3:1–10; 14:8–10).

the fundamental points that there are *not three distinct missions, but the one mission of God* who has sent his Son Jesus as the missionary *par excellence* and in whose mission the twelve apostles and Paul participate as 'witnesses'. In fact, Paul plays 'a key role in the fulfillment of a mission that begins with John the Baptist and Jesus and stretches on beyond the apostles and Paul into the future' (Tannehill 1990: 159). In other words, his vital mission work with its remarkable scope is part of the larger plan of God.

Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch, which is recorded by Luke in some detail, is presented as the pattern of how the gospel was planted in the cities of Asia and beyond.¹³³ This message¹³⁴ shows the type of preaching appropriate to essentially *Jewish audiences*, especially in its use of the Old Testament as the basis on which to expound the gospel.¹³⁵ Paul begins by rehearsing God's dealings with his people Israel from the exodus to the reign of David. To the recital of the acts of God in the past, Paul adds a recital of God's more recent mighty acts. He moves from the ministry and witness of John the Baptist to the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Jesus, God's faithful love promised to David was embodied (Is. 55:3). Once again the apostolic testimony contains the threefold scriptural content: the death (vv. 27–29) and resurrection (vv. 32–37) of Jesus, as well as the forgiveness of sins, that is, a justification which comes simply through believing in Jesus (vv. 38–39), is now announced to them as the fulfilment of God's promise to the fathers (v. 32). A warning based on Habakkuk 1:5 is uttered, urging the synagogue audience not to be contemptuous of the message sent to them (vv. 26, 41). A week later, however, this becomes a reality: the Jews reject 'this word of salvation'.¹³⁶ So Paul boldly declares that since they judge themselves unworthy of eternal life,¹³⁷ he

¹³³ The speech provides a model of what was said on many occasions. Later summaries hark back to elements of this sermon.

¹³⁴ It is summarized as 'the grace of God' (13:43; cf. 14:3), and is called the 'word of God' (13:46; cf. 13:5, 7), 'the word of the Lord' (13:44, 48, 49), the 'message of salvation' (v. 26) or 'consolation' (v. 15). Six times in the narrative context and twice on Paul's lips our attention is focused on the powerful word of the Lord – a major theme of Luke-Acts – as preached by Jesus and his witnesses.

¹³⁵ As with Jesus' announcement in Nazareth and Peter's Pentecost speech, Paul declares that the word of salvation has been sent first to the synagogue audience, that is, the children of Abraham and God-fearing Gentiles (13:26). Note once again that the language of mission is conjoined with the notion of witness: here it is the 'word' that has been sent (*exapostellō*) via Paul's apostolic witness.

¹³⁶ Because the Jews reject the 'word of God' (v. 46), their response is tantamount to blasphemy (cf. Barrett 1994: 655).

¹³⁷ This is Paul's theological evaluation of the Jews' rejection of the message (cf. vv. 40–41).

is going to the Gentiles (v. 46), and he cites Isaiah 49:6 as a command of the Lord in support.

Elsewhere in Luke-Acts this text from the second Servant song (Is. 49:1–6) refers to Jesus as Yahweh's Servant: he is 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles' (Luke 2:32).¹³⁸ Now, however, the Old Testament passage is applied to Paul (and Barnabas). But in what sense? Usually this has been taken to mean that the Servant is a corporate figure,¹³⁹ of which Paul and Barnabas are members, and that they are continuing the Servant's ministry. Without necessarily denying this corporate dimension, however, verse 47 could be understood as signifying that Paul is a light for the Gentiles because of the Christ whom he preaches. The double use of the light imagery is important because of the apostle's role of making known to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch this 'light for the Gentiles' and the 'means of salvation to the ends of the earth'. 'Paul is a light of the Gentiles only in virtue of the Christ whom he preaches; Christ is a light to the Gentiles as he is preached to them by his servants'.¹⁴⁰ Paul recalls the Lord's command (*i.e.* Is. 49:6) which was addressed to him by the risen Jesus on the Damascus road (cf. 9:15; 22:15; 26:16–18). Through the apostolic 'word of salvation' Christ has been sent to the people of Israel (13:26). But, according to Isaiah 49:6, Christ, the Servant, has a mission to the Gentiles as well. Since that mission is effected by those who bear witness to God's word, when the Jews oppose it 'the proclaimers simply move to the alternative mission field' (Bolt 1998: 207).

Paul's momentous assertion about turning to the nations does not indicate that he would never preach to the Jews again, much less that he would leave them to their fate, in order to devote his complete attention to the Gentiles. Luke makes it clear¹⁴¹ that after leaving Antioch the apostle continues to follow the pattern of 'to the Jew first' and preaches repeatedly to them in the synagogues (18:4–6, 19; 19:8). Moreover, the

¹³⁸ In the narrative of Acts Jesus' identity as the Servant of Yahweh is made clear (Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30). He is explicitly identified as the one to whom the Isaianic Servant Songs point (Acts 8:32–35); cf. Pao 1998: 107.

¹³⁹ Recently Pao (1998: 102–109) has suggested that the use of Is. 49:6 here in Acts 13:47 signifies a shift in the development of the early Christian movement. It points to the 'establishment of the identity of the people of God' (107) in contrast to the ethnic nation of Israel. This new people, which fulfils what is envisaged by 'the Isaianic New Exodus', includes Gentiles within it.

¹⁴⁰ So Barrett 1994: 658, who is followed by Fitzmyer 1998: 521; cf. Bolt 1998: 206–207. Fitzmyer claims that this makes sense of the singular 'you' (*se*), of whom the Isaiah passage speaks, as well as the application to Paul and Barnabas who speak as 'we' or 'us' (v. 47).

¹⁴¹ So correctly Barrett 1994: 656–657 and Fitzmyer 1998: 521.

same 'decisive' turning point occurs on two further occasions (18:6; 28:28).

Nor does the apostle's announcement indicate a new principle that Gentiles are offered the word of God only because of Jewish rejection, as though they were a kind of afterthought or second choice. From the birth narratives Luke understands that God intends to bring salvation to all peoples (2:30–32; 3:6). An inclusive mission was entrusted by the risen Messiah to his apostles (Luke. 24:47; Acts 1:8), while Paul is specifically commissioned to go to the Gentiles (9:15; 22:15; 26:16–18), and he has evangelized them before this point in the narrative (11:25–26). Salvation for the Gentiles is firmly rooted in Scripture (13:47).

The Jews were not abandoned. Their rejection of the gospel 'provided the occasion but not the cause'¹⁴² for the mission to the Gentiles. It was already commanded in the Old Testament (v. 47). So Paul made his direct appeal to Gentiles, over the heads of the synagogue Jews, so to speak. God had his chosen among them, and the task of bringing that salvation 'to the ends of the earth' through the preaching of the gospel about Jesus was given to *the apostle to the Gentiles and his associates*.

The conclusion of this first missionary journey was that God had done mighty things through his witnesses (15:4, 12). He had opened 'the door of faith to the Gentiles' (14:27), and a great step had been taken towards the completion of the programme of Acts 1:8.

The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1–35)

The dramatic advance of the gospel in central Asia Minor, which resulted in a large influx of Gentiles into the church, was put at serious risk by Jewish believers from Judea who demanded that Gentile Christians must be circumcised in order to be saved (15:1). This caused a major dispute which led the church at Antioch to send Paul and Barnabas as official representatives to Jerusalem¹⁴³ to thrash out the issue.

The dispute was resolved at the Jerusalem Council by 'three speeches that together present a single persuasive interpretation of God's

¹⁴² Barrett 1994: 656; cf. Pao (1998: 104), who speaks, however, of the rejection of the Jews as not 'the cause', but 'the force behind the move to the Gentiles' and 'signifies the beginning of a period when the Gentiles will become the majority'.

¹⁴³ Up to this point the Jerusalem church, no doubt because of its place within the saving purposes of God, exercised oversight of the developing Christian mission, particularly to Gentiles (cf. Bauckham 1995: 450–451).

purpose' (Tannehill 1990: 184). First, Peter speaks out unambiguously in the interests of gospel liberty (vv. 7–9), recounting how ten years earlier God had accepted Cornelius and the Gentiles and cleansed their hearts by his Holy Spirit when they believed 'the word of the gospel' (v. 7). Gentiles are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus just as Jews are (v. 11). Peter's reference to the Holy Spirit's legitimization of the Gentiles silences the opposition (vv. 8, 12). Secondly, Paul and Barnabas support his argument by referring to the miraculous signs which attended their own Gentile mission (v. 12; cf. 14:3). Finally, in what is the high point of the chapter (vv. 13–21), James asserts that God has taken to himself a people (*laos*), from the Gentiles who now belong to him as Israel does. By using the term *laos*, which was normally applied to Israel, James links the new people, the Gentiles, to Israel. Believing Gentiles now have a share in Israel's hope. James's argument has prophetic warrant (v. 15):¹⁴⁴ combining Amos 9:11–12 with allusions to three other prophetic passages (Hos. 3:5; Is. 45:21; Jer. 12:15–16), he associates 'the eschatological conversion of the Gentile nations with the restoration of the Temple in the messianic age' (Bauckham 1995: 455). From Amos 9 it is established that Gentiles are included in the eschatological people of God as Gentiles without having to become Jews.¹⁴⁵ The messianic temple (that is, David's fallen tent) is to be understood as the Christian community. The expression 'all the nations over whom my name has been invoked' (which literally renders the Hebrew of Amos 9:12) is equivalent to the covenant term in which the nation Israel is called 'my treasured possession' (*s'gullā*).¹⁴⁶ Both the Hebrew and the LXX of Amos 9:12 predict 'the extension of Israel's covenant status and privileges to the Gentile nations' (Bauckham 1995: 457).

Thus in Acts 15:16–18 the Gentile mission is viewed as the fulfilment

¹⁴⁴ For an important examination of the Jerusalem Council and particularly the significance of James's speech, see Bauckham 1995: 415–480, esp. 450–462, and 1996: 154–184.

¹⁴⁵ Bauckham (1995: 457–458) points out that other Old Testament texts indicate that the temple of the messianic age is the place where the Gentiles would come into God's presence (Ps. 96:7–8; Is. 2:2–3; 25:6; 56:6–7; 66:23; Jer. 3:17; Mic. 4:1–2; Zech. 14:16). Moreover, other prophecies anticipate that the Gentile nations will become, like Israel, God's own people (Zech. 2:11; cf. Is. 19:25). Many of these could be taken to mean that Gentiles would be proselytes. But Amos 9:11–12 states that the nations as *Gentile nations* belong to Yahweh (his name has been invoked over them). This text makes the point more clearly than any other that 'in the new Temple of the messianic age, the Christian community, they could do so as Gentiles' (Bauckham 1995: 458).

¹⁴⁶ An expression that was used in the Old Testament of private property held by royalty (Eccles. 2:8) or David's own personal treasure over which he alone had control (1 Chr. 29:3).

of this promise: the fallen fortunes of the house of David are restored by the raising up of Jesus as the Messiah of David's line, who extends his sovereignty over the nations through the Gentile mission, so that people everywhere are now seeking the true God and are being called by his name through faith. The apostolic council recognized the Gentiles, apart from the law, as full heirs of salvation and as members of the people of God.¹⁴⁷

Regarding the practical question of fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians, the latter were urged, without compromising their Christian liberty, to respect their Jewish brothers' scruples by abstaining 'from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood' (v. 20). Without necessarily solving all future problems of relationships between Jewish and Gentile Christians, this way of living by the Gentile believers would make fellowship with more conservative Jewish believers possible.

Luke's account of this momentous incident in Acts 15 has been described as 'the most crucial chapter in the whole book', since it is positioned both 'structurally and theologically at the very heart' of Acts.¹⁴⁸ The chapter describes the turning point of Luke's story. The threat to the expansion of the gospel to Gentiles is not only dealt with, but is turned around so that the Christian mission now extends to western Asia and Europe (15:36 – 19:41). After the council the Jerusalem church is hardly mentioned in Acts. Once the decision has been made, there is no further mention of the Jerusalem apostles (apart from 16:4), and the focus of the book is on the irresistible progress of the gospel to 'the ends of the earth' through Paul.

Paul's universal mission and testimony (Acts 15:36 – 20:38)

After his account of this critical episode in the history of the early church (15:1–35) Luke begins the second half of his story in Acts by highlighting Paul's universal witness, particularly his testimony to the Gentiles in the eastern Mediterranean world and the beginning of his mission beyond Asia. During this period Paul, consistent with the divine salvation-historical plan, continues his pattern of bearing witness to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles (18:4–6, 19; cf. 19:8). The

¹⁴⁷ S. G. Wilson 1973: 231; Dumbrell 1994: 231.

¹⁴⁸ So Witherington 1998: 439, who follows Marshall 1980: 242. Note recently, Barrett 1998: 709–710; Fernando 1998: 414; and Fitzmyer 1998: 538.

progress of the word 'concerns primarily geographical boundaries rather than ethnic or relational ones' (Rosner 1998: 228).

In his second missionary journey, which begins and ends in Antioch (15:36 – 18:22), Paul is involved in a campaign in Macedonia and Achaia which includes the advance of the gospel in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth. Paul's missionary preaching to Gentile audiences¹⁴⁹ concentrates on the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness which flows from the resurrection (cf. 14:15; 17:18). To the Athenians he explains that the resurrection was proof to all of Jesus' appointment as judge on the final day, and that as a consequence all people everywhere are to repent (17:30–31).

Paul's third missionary journey (18:23 – 20:38) is based in the important commercial and political centre of Asia, the city of Ephesus. Paul's extended stay from the late summer of AD 52 until the spring or early summer of AD 55 in Ephesus turned out to be one of the most important phases in his apostolic career. The planting of the gospel in the province of Asia during those years was carried out so effectively that for centuries these churches were the most influential in the world.¹⁵⁰

Paul's arrest and imprisonment (Acts 21 – 28)

At the conclusion of his third missionary journey Paul visits Jerusalem, where he is arrested (21:1–40) and accused of teaching apostasy to Jews of the dispersion as well as being a revolutionary.¹⁵¹ Against the former charge he claims to be a Pharisee who is faithful to the law and customs of the Jewish people. In fact, the accusation against his orthodoxy is easily rebutted. Luke portrays Paul as an exemplary Jew who takes a vow (Acts 18:18), is purified (21:26), and apologizes for speaking against the high priest (23:5). Against the latter charge Paul is a Roman citizen who is completely innocent under Roman law of all the accusations brought against him. This trial section of Acts 21 – 28 is intimately connected with the mission section of chapters 13 – 20. 'If Paul were rejected on the basis of his apostasy from Jewish law and his guilt under Roman law, then his Gentile mission and the Gentile church planted by that mission would be seriously undermined.'¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ See the detailed treatment of Hansen 1998: 307–317.

¹⁵⁰ For the claim, not wholly convincing, that Paul's extended stays in Corinth and Ephesus reflect a development in his mission practice, see Towner 1998: 417–436.

¹⁵¹ See the insightful examination of Paul's defence speeches (Acts 21 – 28) by Hansen 1998: 317–324, to which we are indebted.

¹⁵² So Hansen 1998: 320, following Jervell (1972: 174), who adds: 'if the greatest

Luke makes the point repeatedly that Paul was accused for his belief in the resurrection: 'I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead' (23:6; 24:21; 26:6; 28:20). The real nature of the Jews' objection, however, was his proclamation of the resurrection of Christ (Hansen 1998: 321–323). In his defence speeches Paul witnesses to the fact that the resurrection of Jesus fulfils the promises to Israel, that it was prophesied in the Old Testament (cf. 24:14–15), and was part of the Davidic messianic promise (13:33) (Dumbrell 1994: 231). Twice Paul's conversion story is repeated in these speeches (22:4–16; 26:12–18; cf. 9:1–31) to underscore the fact that his witness to the resurrection was commissioned and empowered by the risen Lord Jesus. In recounting the words of Christ in Acts 26:16–18, Paul claims to have had a similar experience to the prophets of Israel when they were commissioned by Yahweh (cf. Is. 6:9; Jer. 1:10; Dan. 10:11). Paul is sent to be the Lord's servant and witness to the Gentiles (Acts 26:16–17). His task is to open the eyes of the blind – the purpose of Jesus' mission (Luke 4:18; 7:22) – the goal of which is deliverance from darkness to light and from Satan to God, the forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance with all those sanctified by faith in Christ (v. 18). All of this is intimately connected with the purpose of Jesus' coming. Jesus' mission is effected in and through the witness and ministry of Paul, a point we have observed earlier in relation to the twelve apostles continuing the mission of Jesus. Christ was raised from the dead 'to proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles' (26:23). 'Not only was Paul's mission a continuation of the mission of Jesus because Paul did the work of Christ, but also because Christ did his work through Paul'.¹⁵³

The conclusion: an open-ended mission to Jews and Gentiles (Acts 28:17–31)

The narrative structure of Acts gives special emphasis to this concluding paragraph of Luke's second volume (Acts 28:17–31), with its final episode (vv. 17–28) and closing section (vv. 29–31), both of which are highly significant for our theme of mission. The Jewish focus of verses

segment of the Christian church stems from a Jewish apostate, then the church is not the restored Israel and likewise has no right to appeal to Israel's salvation'.

¹⁵³ Hansen 1998: 323–324, following O'Toole (1978: 119), who adds: 'Paul preaches to the Gentiles; the resurrected Christ has from the Father a mission which Paul performs. What Paul does can be predicated of Christ. So, the resurrected Christ cannot only be said to be in heaven; he is with and in Paul proclaiming light.'

17–28 is both remarkable and important, while the closing section highlights the unending progress of the word of God. Accordingly, the main emphasis of this climactic paragraph is an open-ended mission to Jews and Gentiles. The manifesto of Acts 1:8 is not completed with the arrival of Paul in Rome, while the witness ‘to the ends of the earth’ represents a target not reached in Acts.¹⁵⁴

Several major issues of this crucial paragraph need to be examined:

First, its pointed *Jewish focus*. Since chapter 19:21 the reader of Acts has been looking forward to Paul’s arrival in Rome (cf. 23:11; 25:11–12, 21; 26:32; 27:24).¹⁵⁵ Once he reaches the capital, he meets with the Jews¹⁵⁶ (rather than with Christians¹⁵⁷ or Gentiles for whom he has apostolic responsibility), and explains to them the message of the kingdom of God (v. 23). This climactic ministry to the Jews of Rome is remarkable and suggests that the issues related to the encounter are vital¹⁵⁸ for the mission to Israel. Paul’s loyalty to Israel, the fact that his mission is not anti-Jewish and that he is on trial for ‘the hope of Israel’, that is, the hope of the resurrection (vv. 17–20), capture the goodwill of his audience so that he is able to address them about the kingdom of God and Jesus’ place within it (v. 23). There is, however, a mixed response to his exposition of the gospel. Some Jews are ‘persuaded’ while others are not (vv. 24–25). A division results, and in response Paul cites (vv. 26–27) the well-known text of Isaiah 6:9–10, telling his audience that ‘God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!’ (v. 28).

The presumed shift from Israel to the Gentiles has been interpreted by some as evidence of God’s final judgment on his people, and an indication that the Jews were never intended recipients of his salvation.¹⁵⁹ But against this negative evaluation the following need to be noted: 1. In neither Acts 13:46 nor 18:6, where the issue of Jewish

¹⁵⁴ Rosner 1998: 230–231; against Fitzmyer (1998: 788), who thinks Luke has depicted Paul journeying ‘to the ends of the earth’ (1:8) in Rome.

¹⁵⁵ Dumbrell (1994: 232) thinks that ‘Paul’s arrival in Rome caps his role as God’s chosen instrument to testify before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel’.

¹⁵⁶ ‘This journey brings Paul not simply to Rome, but to the Jews of Rome’ (H. J. Hauser, cited by Palmer 1993: 62). The terminology employed includes ‘the Jews’ (of Rome), ‘the [Jewish] people’, ‘the ancestral customs’, ‘Jerusalem’ (v. 17), ‘my nation’ (v. 19), ‘Israel’ (v. 20), ‘the law of Moses and the prophets’ (v. 23), and the quotation of Is. 6:9–10 in vv. 26–27.

¹⁵⁷ Paul was not the first to bring the gospel to Rome; there were already Christians in the capital prior to his arrival (28:15–16).

¹⁵⁸ So Tannehill 1990: 344 and Barrett 1998: 1236–1237. Palmer (1993: 62) points out that the three separate occasions in Acts 28:17–28 are ‘closely linked to form a single episode’.

¹⁵⁹ So Parsons 1987: 169; Tyson 1992: 176–178; and Sanders 1987: 80.

rejection of the gospel is in view, are the Jews abandoned (see above). From chapters 13 – 28 a minority of Jews – albeit a significant one – has been converted through the gospel, while the majority has rejected it. The citation in Acts 28 reflects this same two-fold response: a *righteous remnant* has gladly welcomed the announcement of Jesus and the kingdom, but the rest, who refused to believe, received this prophetic word of judgment. Isaiah 6 did not signal a total rejection of Israel by God in Isaiah’s day, nor does its citation by Paul point to a divine rejection of all Jews during his ministry. 2. Paul’s response in verse 28 is ‘not a program for all future missionary efforts’ (Witherington 1998: 804). It does not signify that he is *now* turning to the Gentiles, simply that ‘this salvation of God has already been sent’¹⁶⁰ to them. In fact, this third statement (cf. 13:46; 18:6) is the only one of the three in which Paul does *not* say explicitly that he is *turning* from the Jews to the Gentiles. Perhaps it is mentioned in this final speech as a spur to the Roman Jews (cf. Rom. 11:11–12, where ‘salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious’). 3. The movement of the apostolic witness in Acts (from Jerusalem through all Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth; 1:8) does not signify that one form of particularism (Jews alone) has been replaced by another (Gentiles alone) (Rosner 1998: 228). According to verse 30, Paul ‘welcomed *all* who came to him’ in the capital, that is, both Jews and Gentiles, and he continued to proclaim the same message about Jesus and the kingdom to both after this encounter with the Jewish leaders (cf. v. 23 with v. 31). His challenge to the Jewish audience remains open. Although the great tragedy was that the majority of Jews continued to respond negatively to the message of Jesus and the kingdom, ‘Luke does not compound this tragedy by suggesting at the end of his work that God had rejected them as well, or that the gospel should no longer be offered to all’ (Witherington 1998: 806).

Secondly, the *mission to the Gentiles*. The final episode of Acts is not a justification of the mission to the Gentiles. This has already occurred in Acts 10 – 11, and was recognized at the Council of Jerusalem in chapter 15. Acts 28:17–31, then, is not a defence of the Gentile mission addressed to Jews in Rome. Luke has already made it plain that God’s sending of his Son is for both Jews and Gentiles. This was indicated in the programmatic statement of Simeon (Luke 2:30–32), announced in Luke 3:6 as God’s plan (that ‘all mankind will see [his] salvation’) and, as we have shown, reiterated throughout Luke’s two-volume work.

¹⁶⁰ He does not say that this salvation ‘will now – from this time – be sent’ to the Gentiles (Barrett 1998: 1236; cf. Palmer 1993: 68).

Thirdly, the *significance of the ending of Acts*. Luke's ending to Acts has been a puzzle to many, if not a disappointment, and there is no agreement as to what the passage signifies.¹⁶¹ Although this may not be all that can be said on the subject, Witherington's contention is valid: 'that the book's ending makes much better sense if Acts is some sort of historical work, meant to chronicle not the life and death of Paul but the rise and spread of the gospel and of the social and religious movement to which that gospel gave birth' (1998: 807).

The last verse of Acts (v. 31) is something of a summary statement about Paul's activities during his house arrest in Rome, as well as throughout his missionary work. That ministry of proclamation and teaching, with its focus on the kingdom of God and the place of the Lord Jesus, was effected by Paul without internal constraint or external hindrance. Witherington's comment is worth quoting in full:

Luke's main concern is to leave the reader a reminder about the unstoppable word of God, which no obstacle – not shipwreck, not poisonous snakes, not Roman authorities – could hinder from reaching the heart of the Empire, and the hearts of those who dwelled there. It was a universal message that was proclaimed, and yet it was from the start of Acts to its conclusion the same story over and over again about the coming of the kingdom and of Jesus (cf. Acts 1:6–8 and 28:31). It was a message that asserted that God in the end was sovereign, and that God was faithful to both his word and his people.¹⁶²

According to Rosner, several lines of evidence point 'to a deliberately open-ended ending of Acts that functions to portray the ongoing progress of the word'.¹⁶³ This motif of the advance of the word

¹⁶¹ Questions such as 'Why does not Luke tell us what happened to Paul?' and 'What is the literary function of the ending of Acts?' are just two questions that have been raised. For recent discussions, see Brosend 1996: 348–362; Witherington 1998: 807–812; and Rosner 1998: 229–233.

¹⁶² Witherington 1998: 815–816; cf. Barrett 1998: 1235, 1246.

¹⁶³ Rosner 1998: 232 (cf. 229–233). These lines of evidence are: 1. The plan of Acts 1:8 is not completed with the arrival of the gospel in Rome. 2. Acts 28:30–31 belongs to a series of texts that 'may be described as progress reports in which certain deeds and consequent growth are recounted. The function of these verses ... was to act as transitions from one period of witness to the next' (231). 3. Luke's silence about the result of Paul's trial is similar to endings in Graeco-Roman poetry and historiography (e.g. Homer and Herodotus). Cf. Marguerat 1993: 89. 4. Good endings like that of Acts include circularity (the reign of God in 1:3, 6, and Jesus' commission, 1:8, are recalled), parallels (the hope of Israel and turning to the Gentiles: 23:6; 24:15; 13:46; 18:5–6; etc.) and incompleteness (about Paul's future and the witness to the end of the earth).

is both widespread and central to the purpose of the book. It is anticipated in Luke's Gospel, presented in Acts 1:1–11, confirmed throughout by means of progress reports, and closely linked with other main theological themes of Acts (e.g. the plan of God, salvation, witness, the Holy Spirit). However, the progress of the gospel is not to be understood in a triumphalistic sense. Acts does not simply chronicle a continuous advance; Luke shows that rejection and persecution pervade the book throughout. And if there is any advance it is due to God's mighty working – he has planned, initiated, guided and supported it.

Finally, the open-ended conclusion of the book seeks to draw the readers in to identify with the powerful advance of the gospel of salvation, and to include them in the continuing task of spreading this word.¹⁶⁴ The apostolic testimony did not reach the ends of the earth with Paul's arrival in Rome. This open-endedness is a reminder of an unfinished task and encouragement to all of us as readers to be committed to the ongoing *missio Dei*.

Concluding remarks

We have seen in the Gospel of Luke and its sequel, the book of Acts, that the theme of mission is of great importance, so much so that it may be the clearest presentation of this motif in the whole of the New Testament. Luke's Gospel tells the story of Jesus and his salvation, while the book of Acts traces the movement of that salvation to the Gentiles.

The infancy narratives (Luke 1–2), which function as a prologue to Luke-Acts, indicate that Israel's hope for a Saviour of David's line are about to be realized (1:30–35; cf. 2 Sam. 7:12–13). Through the birth of Jesus God will restore Israel and fulfil his promises to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:1–3). These promises, however, are fulfilled not in national Israel, but in those who fear God (1:50–55). The Lord's Messiah fills the role of the Servant of the Lord (2:32; 4:18–19; cf. Is. 42:6; 49:6–9; 61:1–2).

During Jesus' earthly ministry the foundational mission, according to the Gospel of Luke, is his own sending by God to Israel (Luke 4:18–19). He is the Spirit-anointed prophet and Messiah who announces the new era of salvation that he is currently bringing to pass (cf. Is. 58:6; 61:1–2). Essentially, his mission is to 'preach good news' with 'release' as its goal, a release which throughout the rest of Luke-Acts is

¹⁶⁴ Darr (1992: 53) contends that the 'text is designed to persuade the readers to become believing witnesses'. Cf. Rosner 1998: 232.

first and foremost 'the forgiveness of sins', that is, a picture of total forgiveness and salvation, which it had become in Isaiah 61. The 'poor' to whom the good news is announced are 'the dispossessed, the excluded', who were forced to depend on God. According to Isaiah 61, the 'poor' designates the eschatological community, the suffering exiles or faithful in Israel who have been spiritually oppressed. It is to these poor and oppressed that Jesus comes announcing the gospel of the kingdom.

First the twelve, then the seventy-two, are intimately involved with Jesus in his mission and play a key role. They are sent by the one who has himself been sent from God. Jesus did not embark on a universal mission during the course of his earthly ministry, although there are hints and anticipations throughout Luke's Gospel¹⁶⁵ that his saving work will have worldwide repercussions.

Just as God's mission in sending Jesus (to Israel) was central and foundational during his earthly ministry, so too after his death and resurrection, with the way now open for repentance and the forgiveness of sins to be proclaimed in his name to all the nations (Luke 24:47), this sending of Jesus is still the essential mission. There is now, however, a major development within the story as to how God's saving purposes for Israel and the nations are to be realized. Jesus' universal mission, which is grounded in his death and resurrection (v. 46), is to be effected through his disciples as witnesses after he returns to the Father (v. 49; cf. Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; *etc.*). They have been chosen by him and are to be equipped and endorsed by the Holy Spirit for this task. Their testimony, which focuses on three scriptural necessities, namely, the suffering and death of the Messiah (Luke 24:46), his rising from the dead (v. 46), and the call to repentance with a view to the forgiveness of sins (v. 47), is to be given 'in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). Acts, then, recounts the continuing work of Jesus, that is, what he continued 'to do and to teach' (cf. 1:1) by his Spirit through his apostles.

With this testimony to Jesus as Lord and Christ, and the mighty outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, a Jewish festival, the universal movement has begun (Acts 2). Although it will encounter opposition, even rejection, it is unstoppable. What started with the twelve in Jerusalem continues throughout Judea and Samaria and moves towards the ends of the earth (in accordance with Acts 1:8). Luke's account

¹⁶⁵ Apart from the birth narratives and Luke 4:25-27, as we have seen, there are hints in the narrative of Luke 10 that the mission of the seventy-two to Israel anticipates and prepares the reader for the universal mission in the book of Acts.

traces the progress of the gospel from Jerusalem, the centre from which the word of the Lord sounds forth. As the story progresses, Paul too is commissioned as a 'witness' and *sent* to carry Jesus' name to the Gentiles, their kings and the people of Israel, a task that would involve him in suffering (9:6, 15-16; 22:17-21; 26:15-23).

Events with major significance for the mission recorded in the book of Acts include Pentecost and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2), Stephen's martyrdom (ch. 7), the spread of the gospel to Judea and Samaria (8:4-40), Paul's conversion and commission (9:1-31), Cornelius and the Gentiles (10:1 - 11:18), Paul's first missionary journey (13:1 - 14:28) and the Council of Jerusalem (15:1-35). The last has been depicted as 'the most crucial chapter in the whole book', since it describes the turning point in Luke's story. The threat to the expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles is turned around so that the Christian mission now extends to Western Asia and Europe. Paul's universal mission and testimony begin the second half of Luke's story in Acts: his universal witness (15:36 - 20:38) is highlighted and this finally leads to his arrest and imprisonment (chs. 21 - 28). The conclusion of Luke's second volume describes an open-ended mission to Jews and Gentiles (28:17-31). This reminds readers of an unfinished task and the urgency of being identified with the ongoing advance of the gospel of salvation.