

William S. Kurz, S.J.  
Reading Luke-Acts  
Dynamics of Biblical  
Narrative  
(Louisville: Westminster,  
1993).

## 2 Implied Authors and Readers

Notice: This material may be protected  
by the copyright law (Title 17 USC).

### IMPLIED AUTHOR VS. LUKE

An important contribution of narrative criticism to understanding biblical texts is the concept of implied authors (and the corresponding implied readers).<sup>1</sup> Historical criticism seems to have exhausted the plausible alternatives in its attempts to identify the actual authors and readers of New Testament documents, with an unsatisfying maze of incompatible hypotheses and counter-hypotheses as a result. This is especially true of Luke-Acts. Scholars have come to a satisfactory consensus that the same hand wrote both the Third Gospel and Acts, but there persists some dissent against reading both books as a single, two-volume work.<sup>2</sup> Attempts to establish the identity of that single author of Luke and Acts exhibit far less unanimity, with hypotheses ranging from a second-century writer who had never met Paul to a companion of Paul on some of his later travels.<sup>3</sup>

The search for the community to which Luke-Acts is addressed seems to have uncovered even less hard data for a definitive solution.<sup>4</sup> Since Luke-Acts is a narrative (with its own concerns and laws that are unaffected by its intended readership) and not a letter (directed to specific addressees and to their situation), the evidence for its designated recipients is at best indirect. The solutions suggested seem to have no stronger evidential weight than educated guesses.

The concepts of implied authors and readers skirt these impasses. Since they have firm footing in the text itself, the evidence for them is more reliable and less controversial. Instead of trying to determine the actual author and readers of these narratives, these concepts ask what kind of author with what point of view is implied by the intentionality of the text itself (and what aspects of himself or herself the actual author chooses to reveal) and what the text's assorted perspectives can indicate about the kinds of readers for whom the narrative was envisaged.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the textual signals about both the author and original readers that the narrative implies, the fact that Luke and Acts belong to the Christian canon suggests a wider expected range of readers than the original implied readers and relativizes the importance of the original circumstances for which form criticism searches. As canonical, Luke and Acts are now meant to address a far wider range of audiences and situations than their original writer could have imagined. Although contemporary concerns about which readers consult Luke and Acts may sometimes be analogous to those of the originally envisaged addressees, they go far beyond them. Reading Luke and Acts as part of the Christian Bible brings to the reading process the long history of their interpretation in the Christian churches, as well as contemporary Christian readings of Luke and Acts.<sup>6</sup>

PERSONAE PROJECTED BY THE REAL AUTHOR IN THE TEXT (I A)

In any writing, actual authors reveal only select aspects of their personalities. This is most clearly exemplified in letters, in which the same writer will reveal one persona to a possible employer, another to her parents, a third to her pastor, and another to her closest friend. Such selectivity concerning the author's persona that is revealed by a document also applies to narratives. The persona a given author chooses to reveal will vary from one narrative to the next, especially if he or she elects to write different genres of narratives.<sup>7</sup> Thus, C. S. Lewis reveals in his Narnia chronicles for children an implied author different from that in his space trilogy for adults.

*Histor sifting evidence and arranging a narrative*

The first aspect of his persona the author reveals, in the Lukan prologue, is that of a *histor*, a careful historical investigator who collects and sifts evidence and orders it into a unified narrative.<sup>8</sup> By beginning his narrative with an elegant, subordinated complex sentence in good literary Greek, he portrays himself as educated. He discloses his historiographical claims by using such technical expressions of historiographical prologues as "compile a narrative," "eyewitnesses," "handed down," "I too have decided," "investigating," "accurately," "orderly sequence," and "certainty" (Luke 1:1-4, RNAB). He implies his artistic or professional status by addressing his narrative to a patron, "most excellent Theophilus," as does his contemporary, the Jewish historian and apologist Josephus, at the beginning of both volumes of his *Against Apion*.<sup>9</sup>

*Christian apologist continuing the biblical history*

The writer also reveals that the implied author of Luke-Acts is an insider or Christian. His repeated use of the first-person plural—"events

fulfilled among us," "handed them down to us"—establishes himself as a member of the Christian community whom these events concern.<sup>10</sup>

The unusual expression, "events that have been fulfilled [πεπληροφορημένων] among us" (Luke 1:1, RNAB), admits possible connotations of fulfillment of biblical promises and prophecies, thus suggesting that the narrative belongs to the tradition of the scriptures of the Jews as well as to the tradition of Greek professional writing.<sup>11</sup> That Luke-Acts belongs to this biblical narrative tradition is confirmed after the prologue, when the narrator shifts to a type of biblicist Greek from Luke 1:5 throughout the rest of the infancy narrative. His imitation of the style of biblical narratives like Samuel-Kings and 1-2 Maccabees suggests that this narrative continues that biblical tradition.

The apologetic thrust of Luke-Acts receives its first strong indication at the end of the prologue: "so that you may realize the certainty [ἀσφάλειαν] of the teachings you have received" (1:4, RNAB). What Theophilus has heard orally (perhaps through his catechesis), this written narrative intends to confirm. The prologue does not specify whether this is primarily the confirmation of free-floating oral traditions and episodes by ordered written narrative, or confirmation that what "happened among us" is adequately grounded in the fulfillment of biblical promises and prophecies.<sup>12</sup> It could refer to both.

The writer reveals himself as an apologist vis-à-vis Judaism by the strong emphasis in Luke 1-2 (the introduction) on the Jewish piety of the parents of John and Jesus and of the seers Symeon and Anna who prophesy about Jesus, as well as by the major emphasis throughout Acts on Paul's Jewish piety and obedience to biblical law.<sup>13</sup> The stress on Paul's Roman citizenship and on Jesus' and Paul's innocence of any violation of Roman law conveys a balancing apologetic concern vis-à-vis the Roman empire.<sup>14</sup>

*Master of Hellenistic and biblical styles*

A corollary to these first two aspects of the Lukan persona revealed in Luke-Acts is his self-presentation as a master of both Hellenistic and biblical styles of Greek. The abrupt transition from an extended complex sentence in elegant literary Greek (Luke 1:1-4) to the biblical paratactic style (Luke 1:5-2:52), of which the lack of subordination ("and . . . and . . . and") and many foreign names would sound barbarous to Hellenistic readers, seems too deliberately conspicuous to be overlooked. The contrast calls attention to the author's style. The elegant Greek of the prologue provides his warrant as an educated, professional writer. The barbarous but biblical Greek of the rest of his introduction suggests a purpose that combines Hellenistic historiographical concerns with a

narrative in the biblical tradition and style. It also acts as a defense against the dismissal of the Gospel by educated Hellenists because of what they would consider its barbaric style (see the patristic comments about the uncultivated style of the Gospels).<sup>15</sup>

#### *Travel companion on Paul's later journeys*

As the chapter on "we" narrators will show, the use of a first-person character narrator in sections from Acts 16:10 to 28:16 makes narrative claims that the implied author was a companion on some of Paul's later journeys. This implies that he was an eyewitness to the events he narrates in the first person, which naturally would make his account more vivid and authoritative. His claims for authority, however, are more moderate than those of most of his contemporaries who use first-person narrators, such as Josephus. Whereas Josephus and others normally use the first-person singular, the writer of Acts only uses the first-person plural. Whereas most first-person narrators are involved in the events they recount, the "we" narrator in Acts stays with a group in the background, seldom contributing to events (only as part of a gathering of Christians briefly trying to dissuade Paul in Acts 21).<sup>16</sup> In the events narrated with "we," the implied author of Acts claims only limited participation and occasional companionship on Paul's journeys. As will be shown, the emphasis seems more on providing a vivid account than on stressing the historical authority of an eyewitness.<sup>17</sup>

#### IMPLIED READERS VS. "LUKE'S COMMUNITY"

The same kinds of problems that are encountered in determining an actual author bedevil historical-critical attempts to pinpoint the original readers of Luke-Acts. Once a writing is made public, the writer can no longer control or even predict who will read it. One can search Luke-Acts for clues about the intended audience, but the result is only the implied readers of the text. It is a further step, for which the text itself can provide no evidence, to argue that a particular community is its actual original recipients and readers.

Even regarding the readers implied by Luke-Acts, the narrative provides few unambiguous clues beyond the named addressee Theophilus. It is not then surprising that historical-critical speculations about the actual community to which Luke-Acts is addressed have found no consensus. Most critics have argued for a Gentile Christian community, fewer for a Jewish Christian community.<sup>18</sup> Some regard Luke-Acts as an apologetic addressed to non-Christian Romans, others as a defense of Paul against

Jewish or Jewish-Christian charges of apostasy.<sup>19</sup> Concerning the geographical location of the Lukan community, the narrative likewise contains little hard evidence on which to base a definite answer.<sup>20</sup> Acts includes depictions of Christianity in Jerusalem, Syrian Antioch, Philippi, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, and so on. But that is because the narrated events are located in those cities, not because the original readers are located there. Might not Luke-Acts have even been intended for more than one community, as an "ecumenical" narrative for the whole church, supplanting earlier Gospels belonging originally to one or another local church?<sup>21</sup>

#### CLUES IN LUKE-ACTS TO THE IMPLIED READERS

Since implied readers are in some sense properties of the narrative, we can expect to find clues in Luke-Acts for describing them. In fact, the evidence for implied readers is the same evidence that has been thoroughly discussed by historical critics in search of the Lukan community and readers and by redaction critics regarding special Lukan emphases that point to the setting of his readers.

We can start with the indicators about the identity of Lukan readers that Fitzmyer has gathered. The Gospel of Luke exhibits fewer purely Jewish preoccupations than its apparent source material (e.g., compared to what it has in common with Mark and Matthew). Both Luke and Acts have a Greco-Roman preface. Several times the Gospel uses Judea as generic for the whole of Palestine rather than for a district distinct from Galilee and Samaria. Both volumes accentuate outreach to Gentiles. Luke-Acts exhibits a marked concern to relate Gentile Christianity to Israel as the restored people of God (rather than new Israel, as in Matthew).<sup>22</sup> The Gospel also features imperial dating in Luke 3:1-2, but in a manner that imitates the dating of the prophecy to Jeremiah in Jer. 1:1, Septuagint (henceforth LXX). This cumulative evidence suggests implied readers who are not primarily from Palestine but from elsewhere in the Roman Empire, and who are either Gentile Christians or Jewish Christians concerned about the continuity between Judaism (with its scriptures) and contemporary Gentile Christianity.

The heavy use of biblical Greek and the frequent, sometimes subtle, allusions to the Greek Bible suggest that the implied readers have a more than superficial familiarity with the Greek scripture that enables them to recognize biblical allusions without direct quotations or explicit references, as are common in Matthew 1-2: "Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet . . ." (Matt. 1:17, RNAB). This subtle Lukan biblicism is strong evidence against Luke-Acts being ad-

1st book  
for actual context  
real person

plausibility of  
I.R.s.?

How are RR + IR to  
be distinguished?

dressed to non-Christian Romans, for such familiarity with the Greek Bible presupposes a Christian or Jewish readership.

That the audience was expected to be Christian and not primarily non-Christian Jews seems evident from the comparatively lesser concern than in Mark and Matthew about peculiarly Jewish issues; from the predominant focus on Jesus in the Gospel and on the apostles and spread of Christianity beyond Jews to Gentiles in Acts; and from the statement in the Gospel prologue that this book concerns "events accomplished among us" (Luke 1:1) and is to give assurance to Theophilus concerning the things "about which you have been instructed" (1:4). Especially the prologue evidence, when combined with the other indications, makes a Christian implied readership most likely.

Other important evidence that the implied readers of Luke-Acts are Christian are the prophecies that pertain especially to Christianity after the time of Paul. The clearest such prophecies occur in Paul's farewell to the Christian elders of Ephesus in Acts 20:29-30, where he foretells that after his death false teachers will beset the Christian church both from within and without. These prophecies from Paul's farewell confirm the interpretation that Jesus' parting provision of the Eucharist, his conferring the thrones of the twelve tribes of Israel on the twelve apostles and their primary leadership on Peter, and his prophecies of harsh times for them (Luke 22:19-20, 29-32, 35-37) also focus especially on Christian concerns and imply Christian readers.<sup>23</sup>

In context with these prophecies and provisions for apostolic and post-apostolic Christians, Jesus' prophecies in the eschatological speech in Luke 21 provide added confirmation of a Christian implied readership. In the midst of the kinds of apocalyptic predictions common to Jewish and Christian apocalypses (e.g., Luke 21:9-11), some prophecies seem especially significant for Christian implied readers: persecution of Christians (21:12-19); a time of punishment for Jerusalem when its inhabitants will be captured by Gentiles during protracted "times of the Gentiles" (21:22-24, which could be addressed to Jews but would function as special vindication for Christians); Jesus' return in glory as Son of Man to redeem his followers (21:27-28); and his warning to his followers to be ready to stand before him at his return (21:34-36). Added to this evidence, the prophecies at the end of Acts—where Paul cites Isa. 6:9-10 against the Jewish leaders and announces to them, "this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen"—confirm the Christianity of the implied readers.

All this cumulative evidence argues persuasively that Luke-Acts handles predominantly Christian concerns, viewpoints, and interests, many

of which would probably be of little interest to non-Christian pagans and aggravating for non-Christian Jews. Luke-Acts is intended primarily for Christian readers. (This is how Kurz defines practically I (2))

"CANONICAL" CONTEXT: IMPLIED READER AS MEMBER OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

The fact that Luke and Acts are addressed to Christian readers puts even more restrictions on contemporary free play of interpretation than their traditional character alone would require.<sup>24</sup> All narratives have gaps in what is explicitly recounted, the filling of which is a major aspect of their interpretation. The gaps in Luke and Acts that are meant to be filled are gaps that would occur to Christian readers, and they are meant to be filled from a Christian perspective. The points of view of the text, both in its original setting and in its later context as part of the Christian Bible, are grounded in and express Christian faith. The most empathetic reading of the text would therefore ordinarily proceed from Christian faith and experience. Readers from many backgrounds and faiths can execute historical-critical methods to glean historical answers from the text or engage in literary analysis of the text, but reading Luke-Acts as biblical requires a biblical perspective and strong imaginative empathy for the Christian faith. Some obvious examples where faith facilitates filling biblical gaps in Luke concern Jesus' identity and accounts of providence or the miraculous, including Jesus' resurrection and relationship to God as his Father.

*Christian catechesis and experience presumed for filling gaps* — a "right way" to fill gaps? *caller's "informed reader"*

Many gaps in Lukan narration also presume that intended readers have Christian catechesis and experience. They therefore would be much easier to fill for those having such background. Readers with experience of prayer and of manifestations of the Holy Spirit or even of healings through prayer might spontaneously fill gaps that prove problematic for interpreters without such experiences. In this respect, lay Christian believers sometimes manifest clearer insight into the main issue behind a biblical narrative (*Sachkritik*) than academic biblical scholars. For example, many scholarly confusions about tongues in 1 Corinthians and Acts have found a consensus solution only after the charismatic experiences of the 1970s.<sup>25</sup>

Knowledge of Christian doctrine and catechesis also makes many Lukan gaps easier to fill. Before reading the elliptical narrative of Jesus' baptism in the Lukan Gospel, catechized readers already know that John baptized Jesus, that Jesus is Son of God anointed by the Spirit (therefore "Anointed" or "Christ," Luke 4:18, 41), who baptizes Christians in the

Holy Spirit, usually in conjunction with their baptism in water (Luke 3:15–16, Acts 2:33, 36, 41, 9:17–18). Christian catechesis and practice of baptizing Gentiles from all nations alerted Christian readers of Luke 4:24–29 to the irony of the resistance at Nazareth to this message and to how it foreshadowed Jesus' death and its effects for Gentiles.

- *Knowledge of the Greek Old Testament presumed for filling gaps*

Many other Lukan gaps presuppose readers with a knowledge of the Greek Old Testament. Luke-Acts is permeated with indirect allusions to persons, events, and teachings of the Greek Old Testament. Unlike the many announced Old Testament quotations of the Greek in Matthew in the form, "This was done to fulfill . . ." (e.g., Matt. 1:22–23; 2:5–6, 15, 17–18; 4:14–16), Luke generally alludes to the Old Testament without announcing that he is doing so. This indirect approach presumes an ability on the part of intended readers to understand the allusions and to make the connections. For example, Lukan readers were expected to note the similarities between the angelic announcement to Zechariah in Luke 1:13 and those in the Old Testament (as in Dan. 10:12 and Gen. 17:19), and how John's abstention from wine (1:15) recalls the Nazirite vow in Num. 6:3 as practiced by Samson (Judg. 13:4–5) and Samuel (1 Sam. 1:1 LXX). They were expected to catch the echoes in Mary's canticle (1:46–55) of Hannah's song (1 Sam. 2:1–10). Jesus' identity is often described through implicit comparisons to Moses, Elijah, the Davidic anointed one, the prophets, the persecuted, just one in the psalms and wisdom writings, and so on. The pattern of the majority of the chosen people rejecting both the spirit-filled prophet and his successor (Jesus in the Gospel and the spirit-filled disciples in Acts) parallels the rejection of Elijah and Elisha as described in Sirach 48:1–16 LXX. Familiarity with the Greek Old Testament makes many Lukan gaps easy to fill.

Concepts of narrative criticism like implied authors and readers, as well as the sense of reading Luke and Acts as part of the Christian Bible for contemporary concerns, advance the treatment of Luke and Acts far beyond questions about the original author and community and life setting, and the scholarly impasses over many of those issues. These approaches help to reclaim for ordinary Christian believers some of the scriptural uses they most often make of Luke and Acts from a kind of historical-critical elitism, where academic "scribes" lock the scriptures into the distant past and intimidate even trained systematic theologians from using the scriptures without the key they alone can provide.

## 3 Plotting and Gaps

The characteristic that distinguishes a narrative from a recorded series of undifferentiated incidents is its plot. A twenty-four-hour security video recording of a bank is not a narrative; an adventure movie or TV mystery is. From the continuum of experience a plot artificially isolates a series of actions having a beginning, middle, and end.<sup>1</sup>

Authors enjoy considerable freedom over where to begin their narratives. For example, conversion narratives could begin anywhere from immediately prior to the conversion to as far back as the person's birth, childhood, or youth. The choice of an end is similarly without constraint. Conversion narratives could end immediately after the conversion, or days, weeks, or years later. Authors also have comparable freedom regarding the middle of their narratives. They can select events to include or to leave out, or choose among alternate series of episodes that arrive at the same end, as when they follow one set of characters rather than another till the two sets meet later in the account. The temporal ordering of the middle of their narratives is also discretionary: they can flash back, flash forward, or use chronological order.<sup>2</sup>

The freedom of selection regarding beginning, middle, and end of a plot line is evident in a comparison of the parallel Gospel narratives of Mark and Luke. Of all the events known about the life and times of Jesus, the Markan narrator begins with the adult Baptist to preface Jesus' baptism and ends with the women fleeing from the empty tomb. The Lukan narrator begins much earlier in Jesus' life, with angelic proclamations of the conceptions of both the Baptist and Jesus, and ends later, after resurrection appearances. The Lukan narrator also adds many intermediate episodes to those in Mark but drops a series of Markan incidents. Although Luke usually follows the same order of events in the middle as

Mark, his order sometimes differs, as in Jesus' visit to Nazareth at his incipient rather than later ministry.

The process of selection necessary for creating a plot, while it may emphasize some events, deemphasizes and even omits numerous others, which are left to be filled in by the readers' imaginations. Writers' omissions, meant to require attention from readers, are often called gaps. (Omissions that are not consequential for the narrative, like hair color, are called blanks.)<sup>3</sup> The gaps that all narratives contain perform essential functions. No narrative can provide all conceivable descriptive details of characters or settings, nor can narratives mention all the steps in narrated actions. Excessive detail, moreover, is boring to read; imaginatively filling narrative gaps provides much interest for readers.<sup>4</sup>

Comparison of Luke with Mark alerts us to some of the more significant gaps Luke left in his account of Jesus' baptism by John. These include the failure to specify who baptized Jesus or where Jesus came from, to repeat mention of the Jordan River, or to indicate where Jesus was praying when the Holy Spirit descended on him (cf. Mark 1:9 and Luke 3:21). Especially since most readers would have known about John's baptism of Jesus before reading the Lukan Gospel, they would fill in these gaps by presuming that John baptized Jesus in the Jordan (despite the proleptic mention of John's [later] imprisonment in Luke 3:20 before narrating Jesus' baptism in 3:21). Readers would also tend to imagine Jesus' experience of the Holy Spirit and of the Father's voice as either in the Jordan or somewhere nearby. Where Jesus came from would be a blank. Only after recounting Jesus' baptism does the narrator mention Jesus' approximate age, his being reputed son of Joseph, and his genealogy through Joseph (Luke 3:23–38).<sup>5</sup>

This chapter will investigate how Luke plotted his narrative, beginning with what he says about this in his prologue, and testing what he says by observing the beginning and samples from the middle of the Gospel and the end of both Luke and Acts. It will also treat how gaps left in the plot are meant to be filled by readers as they respond to the text. There is how the ER is constructed.

## PLOTTING THE NARRATIVE

### THE PROLOGUE, LUKE 1:1–4

In his prologue, Luke explicitly mentions plot ordering when he compares to his own attempts what previous writers have done: "Many have tried to compile [order, ἀνατάξασθαι] a narrative about the things that have been accomplished among us" (Luke 1:1). Then he expresses his own deci-

sion to compose a similar narrative: "It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus . . ." (1:3 rsv). The words ἀνατάξασθαι in v. 1 and καθεξῆς in v. 3 imply putting in order, which phenomenologically describes what the earliest Gospel writers had to do with the many independent stories and sayings of Jesus that they had collected.<sup>6</sup> In the absence of clear geographical and temporal clues, they were often unable to ascertain the original chronological order in which the episodes had occurred and had to find some other rationale for the order in which they narrated them in their respective Gospels. This partially accounts for some of the differences between the Lukan Gospel and one of his probable sources, Mark. But the most radical Lukan innovation is adding Acts as a sequel, with some plot overlapping between his Gospel and Acts.

### PLOTTING TWO VOLUMES: LUKE AND ACTS

Luke's sequel raises the question whether it is envisaged as early as the preface to the Gospel, and therefore whether that preface (Luke 1:1–4) refers beyond the Gospel to both Luke and Acts. I will argue that it introduces both books, despite the presence of a second preface in Acts.<sup>7</sup> The preface is part of a larger prologue that includes at least the infancy narratives in Luke 1–2. One of the main plot functions of these two chapters, along with much of Luke 3–4, is to foreshadow later events in the Gospel. But Symeon's prophecies in Luke 2:29–35 go beyond the Gospel to foretell the main plot turn of Acts, when Jews become divided over the risen Jesus and the gospel goes out to the Gentiles. They find their clearest fulfillment in the Jews' excommunication from or continued membership in God's people in Acts, according to whether they reject or accept the risen Jesus proclaimed by the disciples (see Acts 3:23).

Luke 3–4, the events of which correspond to many in Mark's prologue (Mark 1:1–13 or 15),<sup>8</sup> also foreshadow later plot developments. The theme of the Baptist's preaching, a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins, points forward to the risen Jesus' promises in Luke 24 that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name to all the nations. John's prophecy that a stronger one would come and "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (3:16) is echoed by the risen Jesus' promise in Acts 1:5 of baptism through the Holy Spirit. In Luke, the narrator's application to the Baptist of Isa. 40:5 according to the Greek Old Testament, "and all flesh shall see the salvation of God," goes beyond the shorter citations in both Mark and Matthew and is most clearly fulfilled when the Gentiles accept the risen Jesus and the Holy

Spirit in Acts.<sup>9</sup> The reference to children of Abraham in the Baptist's preaching (which occurs also in Matthew) becomes a major salvation motif only in Luke-Acts (the Magnificat in 1:55 and Benedictus in 1:73; the bent woman in 13:16; the saying about Jews excluded from God's kingdom in 13:28; the Lazarus parable in 16:22-30; Zacchaeus in 19:9; receiving the promises to Abraham in speeches of Peter and Paul in Acts 3:13, 25 and 13:26).

Further events in Luke 3-4 also foreshadow important plot elements of both the Gospel and Acts. After a description of the Holy Spirit's descent on Jesus and a record of Jesus' genealogy, there follows a description of Jesus' test by the devil in the wilderness. This temptation scene obviously foreshadows Jesus' later testing, especially when Satan enters into Judas (22:3), when Jesus gives an example of prayer against temptation (22:40-46), and when the Jewish officials arrest him on the Mount of Olives (22:53). Luke 4:13 underscores this foreboding: "When the devil had finished every temptation he departed from him until [another] time (ἄχρι καιροῦ)."<sup>10</sup>

Jesus' "inaugural address" at Nazareth has such a strong foreshadowing element that it is often described as programmatic for the Gospel as a whole.<sup>11</sup> In it Jesus announces that "today" Isa. 61:1-2 (with 58:6) has been fulfilled. The Spirit of the Lord is upon him (3:22); therefore he has "anointed" (ἐχρισέν) him. His mission is to preach good news to the poor (the beatitudes and passim in Jesus' ministry in Luke), to announce release (or forgiveness) to captives, to restore sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

The mixed but ultimately negative reaction in which his own town rejects him strongly forebodes Jesus' rejection as a prophet by his own country. The Nazarenes cast him out of the city and take him up on a hill to kill him, which portends the Place of the Skull (23:33) and Stephen's expulsion from Jerusalem and martyrdom (Acts 7:58).

Finally, the Lukan version of the miraculous catch of fish has a strong foreshadowing component. Simon is the clear leader and almost sole focus. His efforts without Jesus have been fruitless, but in obedience to Jesus his catch is overwhelming. Simon stresses his sinfulness and fear, but Jesus commissions him to catch humans, and Simon, James, and John leave all to follow Jesus (Andrew is not mentioned). These three play major roles later in the Gospel and early in Acts, but except here and in lists of the Twelve, Andrew plays no other role in Matthew or Luke.<sup>12</sup> Luke's omission of Andrew makes this call scene a clearer foreshadowing of the episodes with Peter, James, and John at the raising of the girl (8:51) and at the transfiguration (9:28).<sup>13</sup>

#### TRANSITION BETWEEN LUKE AND ACTS, WITH OVERLAP

An important aspect of Lukan plotting is his overlapping transition between his first and second volumes. One of his main plot devices to achieve this transition is foreshadowing future events through prophecies.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Luke 24:46-49: Prophecies Leading into Acts*

The last words of the resurrected Jesus to his followers refer both backward into the plot of Luke and forward into Acts.<sup>15</sup> Jesus first refers to the words he spoke in his earthly ministry, that the things written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and Psalms about himself had to be fulfilled (24:44). Then in vv. 45-47 he enables them to understand the words of scripture, that the Christ was to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day (Luke 23-24) and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins is to be preached in his name to all the Gentiles (Acts 10-20), beginning from Jerusalem (Acts 2-7). His emphasis in 24:48 that "you are witnesses of these things" provides one of the main themes in Acts. Finally, his promise in v. 49, "I will send the promise of the Father upon you: but you wait in the city until you are clothed with power from on high," obviously foreshadows and prepares for Acts 1-2.

#### *The End of Luke's Gospel*

With this preparation for Acts by words of the risen Lord, the Gospel ends in ways that overlap the beginning of Acts, with some incompatibilities of detail between the two. The impression in Luke 24:50-51, where Jesus gives his farewell blessing and is lifted up into heaven, is that the ascension occurred on Easter Sunday in Bethany. But Acts 1:1-11 says that the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples for forty days before his final ascension from the Mount of Olives. Luke 24:52-53 portrays the disciples returning to Jerusalem and spending their time praising God in the Temple, whereas Acts 1:12-14 prepares for the Pentecost account by showing them in the upper room awaiting the Spirit in prayer.<sup>16</sup>

It is clear that Luke had different purposes in these overlapping accounts. The first is to find a fitting end to his first book, the Gospel. It ends as it began, with worship of God in the Temple. Luke goes out of his way to emphasize the setting of the Jesus story within the promises to God's holy people. The Gospel begins in the Temple with this people's expectations for a messianic deliverer. It ends in the Temple praising God for the messianic deliverance that has taken place in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>17</sup>

Though I believe Luke planned his two books together, with the result

that they have cross-referencing and modifications both from the Gospel to Acts and from Acts to the Gospel, it seems quite plausible that the actual writing and appearance of the two volumes may have been separated by some time, as is often the case with multi-volume works.<sup>18</sup> If this is so, then Luke ended his Gospel in a way appropriate to it, without having a beginning of Acts with which to compare it. Later, when he actually wrote the second volume that he had planned and implicitly promised in the preface of the first, his purposes of preparing for the Pentecost account and the story of Acts led to some retelling of details already written at the ending of his first volume, which was now public and not subject to further adjustments in light of the second.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Prologue of Acts*

The plot of the second Lukan volume begins with a preface that both refers back to the first and imperceptibly merges into the narrative of the second. Luke reintroduces the first-person *histor* narrator from the preface of his Gospel ("it seemed good to me also"): "The first book [word, λόγος] I made about all which Jesus *began* (ἤρξατο) to do and teach until the day . . . he was taken up" (Acts 1:1–2). The use of *began* to describe Jesus' deeds and teaching in the first volume explicitly treats the Gospel as preliminary to the plot of Acts. But the *histor* disappears in favor of the usual third-person omniscient narrator as the introduction unfolds through vv. 3–8.<sup>20</sup>

Acts 1:3–8 doubles back over some events at the end of the Gospel but with an entirely new focus on the forthcoming events of Acts, especially Pentecost. The omniscient narrator recounts how Jesus presented himself to the apostles for forty days and ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to await the promise of the Father: "You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit after not many days" (v. 5). In response to the disciples' question, which betrays their misunderstanding about restoring the kingdom to Israel (v. 6), he corrected them (v. 7) and promised (v. 8): "You shall receive power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you [in Acts 2] and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem [in Acts 2–7], in Judea and Samaria [in Acts 8–9], and to the end of the earth [Acts 10–28 and beyond]." Thus, this prologue to Acts introduces the rest of the book by functioning as a summary of some key aspects of the upcoming plot line.<sup>21</sup>

The narration of Jesus' ascension sets the stage for both Pentecost and Jesus' return in judgment ("Jesus will return the same way you saw him going into heaven" [on a cloud]). Emphasis that the disciples watched as he was lifted up and taken by a cloud grounds the event in literary allusions to Elisha watching Elijah being taken up before receiving Elijah's

spirit and continuing his mission (2 Kings 2:9–15). Thus, in Acts the disciples too were to receive Jesus' spirit and carry on his mission, beginning at Pentecost.<sup>22</sup> Returning to Jerusalem, they prepared for this by remaining in the upper room with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers and devoting themselves to prayer (Acts 1:12–14).

(sources)

### COMPOSITE ARTISTRY IN PLOTTING LUKE-ACTS

One way in which the Bible and other traditional writings differ from works for which a single author is completely responsible is in the use of sources to create narratives. Sternberg points out that there has been a false dichotomy in some literary studies of the Old Testament between focus on sources and on the final product.<sup>23</sup> He remarks that it is foolish for literary critics to ignore completely the fact that some works are a montage of sources. Focus on the final product does not preclude also observing the composite artistry that has produced it.<sup>24</sup>

The abiding consensus is that Luke has used written sources, especially in his Gospel. I continue to subscribe to the most widespread hypothesis that Luke used both Mark and the hypothetical Q document of material common to Luke and Matthew alone, and that he added content from sources that only he had (= L), as well as history that resembles historical narratives in his Greek Bible.<sup>25</sup> For example, Luke 3:1–2 provides a historical introduction to his source material about John the Baptist that parallels Jer. 1:1–3 but is written in Greek sophisticated enough to be based on the genitive absolute.<sup>26</sup>

### *Luke 3 as an Example of Composite Artistry*

Luke 3 provides a good sample of how the plot line combines several sources. Luke introduces his source materials about John the Baptist by inserting a historical setting styled after the beginning of the Greek book of Jeremiah.<sup>27</sup> To the LXX citation he found in his source, about the voice crying in the wilderness, he adds several lines climaxing in "and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (v. 6), which foreshadows Acts. He drops all the traditional references to John's camel hair clothing and wild food and interweaves from Q and possibly another source John's preaching of repentance, which foreshadows both Jesus' preaching of repentance in the Gospel and Peter's in Acts 2 and 3. In 3:15 he adds to his source that the crowd was wondering if John the Baptist was the Christ, to provide a context for John's statement in the source about the stronger one coming who would baptize them with the Spirit and fire.

After this introductory Baptist material, Luke follows the Baptist plot line to his imprisonment (3:20) before focusing exclusively on Jesus at his



baptism in 3:21–22. To report that Herod put John in prison, where he is at the next occurrences of his name (5:33–35; 7:18–23), Luke has to jump ahead chronologically. The question in 5:33, why Jesus' disciples do not fast as John's do, and its answer that they shall fast when Jesus is taken away from them, further foreshadow the similar fates of Jesus and John. In 7:18–23, Jesus' answer to the imprisoned John's disciples ends with the foreboding statement: "And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me" (7:23, RNAB).<sup>28</sup>

Following the proleptic mention in Luke 3:20 of John's imprisonment, with its auguring of John's and Jesus' deaths, Luke 3:21–22 now focuses exclusively on Jesus, and John is not mentioned by name. Except as the occasion for Jesus' baptism, John is passed over in the scene between Jesus and his Father, despite his probable presence there in Luke's source and his actual presence there in Mark and Matthew. The Lukan scene is greatly simplified, ignoring everything except Jesus' prayer and his Father's response, "You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased."

At 3:23, Luke inserts a genealogy for Jesus in the same inverse LXX form as the genealogies of Tobit and Ezra: "being son, as was supposed, of Joseph of Eli of Matthat . . . of Adam of God" (3:23–38).<sup>29</sup> Luke's choice of where to insert Jesus' genealogy differs from Matthew, who began his Gospel with it (perhaps in imitation of 1 Chronicles, which begins with genealogies). Instead, Luke may have been imitating the placing of Moses' genealogy in Exodus 6 after the account of his call in Exodus 3.<sup>30</sup> Immediately after Jesus is called by God, with the statement, "You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased," the narrator mentions Jesus' age and that he was "the son, as was supposed, of Joseph of Eli of Matthat . . . of Adam of God." This merging of two different sources, probably Mark and L, supplies a biblical genealogy for Jesus before resuming the narrative with his temptation (from Mark and Q) in Luke 4:1–13, as well as providing a kind of commentary on God's addressing Jesus as his son in 3:22.

#### PLOTTING "IN ORDER"

We have seen that Luke's narrative was composite and involved an interweaving of multiple sources into one continuous plot. Most scholars think that as a guide to order these independently transmitted traditions he used not only previous Gospels like Mark, but also plot skeletons like kerygmatic summaries and the prophecy of worldwide witness in Acts 1:8.<sup>31</sup> He probably used Mark's Gospel as the basis for the structuring of his Gospel, with adjustments like the following: he moved the Nazareth pericope forward to function as an "inaugural address"; he omitted the repetitive Markan second feeding and the material between

those two feedings; he supplemented his Markan source with Q and L materials that he organized somewhat artificially as a longer journey-to-Jerusalem section than that in Mark. This provided a stronger parallel between Jesus journeying on mission, first to preach the kingdom and then to suffer at Jerusalem, and Paul doing similarly in Acts.

Another important Lukan method of plotting traditions is his interweaving of separate plot lines that pertain to John the Baptist and Jesus, somewhat like a two-plot novel.<sup>32</sup> The infancy prologue in Luke 1–2 intertwines plot lines about John and Jesus similarly to the way Luke 3 does in imitation of the Markan source, which began with the Baptist preaching repentance and baptizing, turned to Jesus coming down from Nazareth to be baptized by John, then followed Jesus' call and temptation (Mark 1:1–13).

In his alternation between John and Jesus, Luke finishes one plot line up to the point where that character is next needed, then alternates to the other.<sup>33</sup> Thus, he follows John the Baptist's story to Elizabeth's song of thanksgiving, then Jesus' plot line until Mary visits Elizabeth, then John's birth and his father Zechariah's prophecy until the end of the chapter (1:80), where he mentions that John grew and was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel (to be treated in Luke 3). He turns then to Jesus' birth and visits to the Temple to the end of chapter 2, resuming with John again in chapter 3, in the desert where he had left him in 1:80.

A similar alternation of plot lines is more briefly indicated when Satan left Jesus, after his temptation, "until [another] time" (*ἄχρι καιροῦ*)—namely, when he returns with special force at the onset of Jesus' passion (Luke 22:3, 40–46, 53). Another occurs in Acts 8 when, after his incident with the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip is transported to Caesarea, where he will next be mentioned in Acts 21 when Paul visits that city. The "we" account at Philippi in Acts 16 breaks off in a similar way, until it is resumed again in Acts 20:5, when the "we" are again mentioned, still at Philippi. Another example of following plot lines up to the place of the character's next appearance or to his death is Acts 12, in which, after Peter's escape from Herod, the plot follows Herod to Caesarea and his eventual death in v. 23, then returns to the spread of the word after Peter's escape in v. 24.

The following examples illustrate a related kind of intertwined ABA' plot lines. In Luke 1:64 Zechariah opens his mouth and speaks, praising God (= A). Before reporting what he said the narrator recounts in 1:65–66 the crowd's fear and question, "What will this child be?" (= B). Finally, in 1:67–79, he reports what Zechariah says (= A'). A similar ABA' plot line occurs in Luke 3:19–20: the narrator describes the

Baptist's preaching (= A), then his imprisonment (= B), then Jesus' baptism (= A'). A striking third example of this ABA' pattern appears in Luke 8:34–38, where the narrator first recounts how the Gentiles from the area saw the healed demoniac sitting clothed at Jesus' feet (= A), then how they asked Jesus to leave them so that Jesus departed in the boat (= B), and finally how the healed demoniac asked to be with Jesus (= A'). Here the violence to chronological order is particularly conspicuous, since the demoniac must have asked to go with Jesus (= A') before Jesus left (= B).

Similar patterns of intertwined plot reappear in Acts. For example, a first subplot describes Paul's conversion (Acts 9), a second concerns Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10–12), the narrative returns to Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13–14); and finally both subplots converge in the apostolic council at Jerusalem in Acts 15.

#### TECHNIQUES OF REPETITION AND REDUNDANCY IN PLOTTING

Luke-Acts is well known for its important use of repetition of key incidents and themes, which resembles the redundancy for which many Old Testament narratives are distinguished.<sup>34</sup> All that needs to be added here is how this relates to plotting. Repetition involves analepses (flashbacks) or prolepses (foreshadowings) in the plot line, as in AB–C–DE–C–FG–C–HIJ, rather than a straightforward plot progression, ABCDEFGHIJ. From the frequently treated examples of the threefold repetitions of Paul's call in Acts 9, 22, and 26, of the Peter-Cornelius incident in Acts 10–11 and 15, and of the "apostolic decree" in Acts 15:20, 29, and 21:25, the re-use of Paul's call in Acts 9, 22, and 26 can provide a sufficient illustration of how Luke uses repetition in plotting Luke-Acts.

As Meir Sternberg and many others have pointed out, repetition in biblical narratives tends to be partly verbatim, partly with variations, and partly telescoped.<sup>35</sup> Thus the narrator's version of an incident tends to be repeated by a messenger with many of the same words, but some variations and abbreviation. The Lukan examples of Saul's call tend to confirm this judgment. On the one hand, they have a good deal of verbatim repetition, especially in the core of the call account in the dialogue between the risen Jesus and Saul. On the other, each repetition has minor variations, some within this core, but most in the surrounding narrative. As obvious examples, the latter two versions occur in the first person, Acts 9 in the third. The quoted discourse, "Saul, Saul, who do you persecute me?" and what follows tends to be verbatim, but Acts 26:14 adds a Greek proverb about kicking against the goads. Jesus tells Saul to go into the city (Acts 9) or Damascus (Acts 22) for instructions, whereas Acts 26 drops all mention

of that and retrospectively telescopes with this initial encounter what Acts 22 treats as his later commission to the Gentiles.

Within the developing plot of Acts, the three versions of Saul's call provide three perspectives on what happened. The first occurs in its chronological setting, where the narrator recounts the event from an omniscient point of view, with access to the inner experience of both Saul and Ananias. The first narration of Saul's commission through one who initially objected to it (Ananias) provides an objective aura. Acts 22 offers Paul's retrospective personal point of view on what happened, stressing what his Jewish listeners would find important. Since Paul did not have access to Ananias' inner experience, he only mentions what he could observe, namely Ananias' good reputation among Jews and his behavior with Saul. Here Paul's narration of his receiving his commission through Ananias, combined with his own later vision sending him to the Gentiles, is provided with a personal and objective perspective. The point of view in Acts 26 looks back on Paul's call with more inclusion of its later consequences, dropping all mention of Ananias and telescoping this with Paul's later commissionings into one retrospective summary of the risen Jesus' mandate to him. The point of view is now entirely personal, but the setting in a formal trial defense before rulers increases the credibility of Paul's personal witness. This third account of his initial encounter with Christ now already adumbrates Paul's later career.

Thus the Acts 9 account plays its expected chronological and causal function within the plot line for what follows. Acts 22 and 26 are increasingly retrospective personal flashbacks by Paul to emphasize this centrally important event and to show its further implications in the account of Paul's work and the spread of the word in Acts. In view of the statement by Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:47, "for thus has the Lord commanded us, 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,'" Paul's commission in Acts 26:16–18, "to serve and bear witness . . . to whom [the Gentiles] I send you to open their eyes that they turn from darkness to light . . .," demonstrates his intimate association with the Christ's own role of announcing light to the people and to the Gentiles (26:23).<sup>36</sup>

#### JOURNEY MOTIFS AS PLOT DEVICE FOR GATHERING INDEPENDENT TRADITIONS

As is well known, a major Lukan principle for organizing and ordering independent traditions and sources into a unified plot line is the journey motif.<sup>37</sup> After applying other principles of plot order, such as plot lines of previous Gospels and kerygmatic summaries, the Lukan compiler would have found many leftover episodes and sayings that gave no obvious

indication of their original chronological or geographical setting. Apparently the exigencies of the plot of Acts influenced how Luke would order these extra materials in his Gospel. Whereas Matthew ordered similar materials into collections of miracles and of sayings organized as speeches, Lukan emphasis on the three journeys of Paul in Acts probably led him to expand in his Gospel a theme found in Mark—Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Thus, most of Luke's material that was not found in Mark and that had no temporal identification appears within Jesus' journey to Jerusalem.

This plot device of the journey supports the dynamic view of the spread of God's word, first through Jesus in the Gospel and then through the disciples in Acts. It also underscores the journey toward and willing acceptance of suffering by Jesus and Paul. Thus the Lukan Gospel shows Jesus on mission journeys around Galilee to preach and to heal, then later on the journey to Jerusalem to suffer. Similarly, Acts shows Paul making two types of journeys: first, to call the Gentiles from darkness to light (Acts 13–14, 15:36–20:38); second, toward his own suffering witness at Jerusalem and on to Caesarea and Rome (Acts 21–28).

#### CLOSURE IN PLOTTING LUKE-ACTS

Applying the terms and approach of Marianna Torgovnick to the Gospel of Luke, Mikeal Parsons describes two ways of achieving narrative closure by having the end recall earlier portions of the text. In circularity, the end recalls the beginning. In parallelism, the end recalls from the narrative's middle the important plot devices of conflict, prophecy and fulfillment, and the journey motif.<sup>38</sup>

We can extend these useful insights to Acts as well. Many scholars have noted how the end of the Gospel of Luke recalls its beginning, especially the settings in the Temple and the expectations of salvation. Parsons tests how Luke 24:50–53 recalls 1:5–23, then compares the broader contexts 24:36–53 and Luke 1–2, and finally examines similarities in language, situation, and character groupings between resurrection and infancy narratives.<sup>39</sup> He finds that the Gospel's end recalls the beginning in the themes of priestly blessings (Zechariah is unable to bless; Jesus blesses at the end); returning to Jerusalem; pious people of God; the Temple and Jerusalem; and angels as actors only in the resurrection and infancy accounts (though they are frequent throughout Acts).<sup>40</sup>

The beginning and end of Acts are not as closely related as those in the Gospel, primarily because the beginning of Acts is so closely intertwined with the end of the Gospel, linking the two volumes together. But there

are at least three important allusions at the end of Acts to its beginning — that provide some closure along with an ongoing openness to the future. Acts 28:23 and 31 stress preaching the kingdom of God, as in Acts 1:3. Acts 28:23 features the term *witnessing* for Paul, which recalls "You shall be my witnesses" in Acts 1:8. Acts ends with Paul in Rome, promising that God's salvation has been sent out to the Gentiles (28:28), which recalls Acts 1:8's promise that the disciples will be Jesus' witnesses "to the end of the earth." These themes are not peripheral to Acts.

The end of Acts also has some important resonances to the beginning of the Gospel, thus providing some closure for Luke-Acts as a whole. Perhaps the most significant are the common ground covered by Paul's use of Isa. 6:9–10 in Acts 28:24–28 and Symeon's prophecy in Luke 2:29–35. Paul divides the Jewish people into those who believe and those who disbelieve (Acts 28:24–28), which recalls Symeon's prophecy that Jesus' presence would result in the falling and rising of many in Israel. Paul's statement in Acts 28 that God's salvation is now sent to the Gentiles has important resonances with Symeon's prophecy that Jesus would be a light to the Gentiles.

The closure of conflict, prophecy and fulfillment, and the journey motif from the middle of the narrative is correspondingly important, according to Parsons.<sup>41</sup> The prophecy theme, in particular, involves prolepsis and analepsis in plotting, sometimes within Luke, sometimes beyond Luke into Acts, and sometimes beyond both. The analepses from Luke 24 back into the Gospel resolve its prophecies. The prolepses generate suspense by anticipating coming events so that the question is not what will happen but how.<sup>42</sup>

The end of Acts likewise resolves many of its important plot devices, such as the conflict and mixed reactions of other Jews to Peter, Stephen, and Paul; the threefold repetition of the theme of Jewish rejection and consequent turn to the Gentiles; the theme of culpable blindness and deafness (Isa. 6:9–10 in Acts 28:26–27 recalling the warning in Acts 13:40–41 and Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem in Luke 19:42); the fulfillment of prophecies like that in Acts 1:8 and the scriptural prophecies about Jesus; and the resolution of the journey motif with Paul's arrival in Rome.

#### REMAINING OPENNESS IN PLOTTING LUKE-ACTS

Two types of openness that remain at the end of Luke, linkage and incompleteness, prevent complete closure of the plot. Linkage ties the narrative to the next volume.<sup>43</sup> The most obvious linkage is the departure of Jesus (with disagreements) in Luke 24:50–53 and Acts 1:9–11. Other

linkage between Luke 24 and Acts is provided by themes of repentance and forgiveness of sins, Jerusalem, witnessing, and the command to await empowerment.<sup>44</sup> Since there is no third volume, linkage does not apply to the end of Acts.

Incompletion, however, applies to the ends of Acts and Luke. Closure is not complete, and the end of a text is not the end of the work when the narrator leaves material for readers to complete from their imaginations, rather than from the text.<sup>45</sup> Such incompletion at the end of the Lukan Gospel includes confrontations, which continue in Acts and beyond, and which make of Luke-Acts a tragic story in which the expectations of the pious for Israel in Luke 1-2 remain at least partially unfulfilled,<sup>46</sup> promises unfulfilled until Acts (like the coming of the Spirit and Jesus as light to the Gentiles) or after Acts (like the destruction of Jerusalem and the eschatological cosmic signs); and the journey motif, which continues into Acts (and "to the ends of the world" probably extends beyond Acts). Incompletion is also found at the end of Acts, which fails to include Paul's history after his two years' Roman house imprisonment.

Thus, Luke-Acts has sufficient narrative closure to be satisfying as a story, but some remaining openness beyond the story time, which engages the readers in the spread of the word and the victory of God's promises that Luke-Acts relates.

#### PLOTTING THE END OF ACTS

Perhaps the most important decision in plotting a narrative is how and where to end it. The end sheds light on all that has gone before. According to whether the end is happy or sad, the entire plot is characterized as comic or tragic. If the end is incomplete—that is, open to continuing the narrative—it relativizes what has gone before and leads readers to expect another volume. In retrospect, therefore, the end appears as the goal to which the rest of the plot has been tending.<sup>47</sup>

The end of Acts has been highly problematic in the history of interpretation and scholarship. The last section seems a bit artificial. It shows Paul witnessing to the Jews of Rome, even though Christianity was already established there. When some of the Jews accept and some reject Paul's witness, Paul's response seems to exceed the provocation, as he cites the Isa. 6:9-10 topos about Israel's blindness and promises a turn to the more receptive Gentiles. Finally, and most disturbing to commentators since, Acts seems to stop "before the end" in a most peculiar place, before not only Paul's death but even before the end of the stated time of Paul's (two-year) house imprisonment in Rome.<sup>48</sup>

According to St. John Chrysostom, deliberate ending before foreshad-

owed outcomes was a common Greco-Roman narrative practice.<sup>49</sup> It also was the practice of Luke's apparent source, the Gospel of Mark, which ends unexpectedly and even more enigmatically than Acts. Apparently many later Christian readers and scribes were not as aware as Chrysostom of how common a practice this was, for several attempts were made to provide a more satisfactory end to Mark, one of which became the Gospel's canonical conclusion. I would argue that Luke was not one of these revisors, but Luke did notice the deliberate Markan gap. Although he chose to fill that gap at the end of his own Gospel, to lead into his second volume, he imitated Mark's gap at the end of Acts.

To have ended Acts with Paul's death would perhaps bring more closure to the story than desired, for it would stop the dynamic thrust of the spread of the word that had permeated the narrative. Rather, to end with Paul preaching the gospel boldly and unhindered propels the narrative toward the future and the time of the intended readers. The proclamation carried on by Paul continues at the time of writing and the intended times of reading, and the open ending of Acts draws attention to that.<sup>50</sup>

#### READERS AND GAPS

##### INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEXT AND READER

We have seen that some gaps in the text have to be filled in by the readers for the narrative to make sense. To imagine the scenes narrated, readers also have to fill in some of the blanks by forming an imaginative image of Jesus and visualizing the actions (filling in unmentioned details). Thus, the Lukan narrator invites readers and listeners to imagine a scene in which a large crowd of people are being baptized (Luke 3:21a), then the baptism of Jesus (3:21b, all of this presumably by John), then Jesus praying (3:21b, in the Jordan or after he leaves it). After readers visualize what the narrator merely mentions, they can then follow the narrator's account to imagine Jesus' experience of heaven opening and of the Holy Spirit descending upon him (3:21b-22).<sup>51</sup>

##### *Text "Dead" Until "Raised Up" by Reader*

The reader's role is even more basic than filling gaps through imagination. In a real sense, the texts of Luke and Acts are "dead" until they are "raised up" by a reader. The narrative, although inscribed in an encoded text, needs readers' minds to be decoded and thus experienced or "heard." In this sense, the reader creates the narrative in the process of reading it, quite apart from the author, who might be long dead.<sup>52</sup>

*Reader Guided by Text in Reading*

But the reader does not create the narrative entirely from nothing (*ex nihilo*), as God created the world, according to traditional Christian belief. Reading is not unguided fantasizing: readers' imaginative pictures are guided by the codes already inscribed in the text by the writer. Although, admittedly, codes can have more than one possible interpretation, there are limits to which interpretations are possible for any configuration of words, especially in their contexts.<sup>53</sup>

Yet there are unavoidable cultural and other biases affecting not only the writer's choice of words, but also the meaning of those words in other cultural milieus. Readers in turn understand the text according to the meanings they have personally learned for words and signs and with their own emotional associations. Readers thus bring varying presuppositions and ways of decoding to the reading of a text. They can also refuse to read parts or all of the text, can let their minds wander away from attention to the text, or can hurry over or merely skim sections of the narrative. But to whatever extent the readers choose to read the text, their reading creates in their minds some version of the basic narrative that the writer inscribed in the text. When several readers compare what they understand from a single narrative, they recognize that it is the same narrative they are discussing. They fill in the gaps separately, but the writer supplies the coded signposts showing the way to do so.<sup>54</sup>

## READER RESPONSE AS RELATED TO GAPS IN THE TEXT

Reader's imaginations are quite active in visualizing actions in a narrative, even when only a few skeletal steps of those actions are stated: "After all the people had been baptized [scene 1] and Jesus also had been baptized [scene 2] and was praying [scene 3], heaven was opened and the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove [scene 4]" (Luke 3:21–22a, RNAB; my bracketed insertions). Reader-response criticism generally presumes spontaneous and habitual imaginative reading activities and focuses on the conscious steps readers must take to fill in gaps in the information provided them in the narrative. Besides visualizing the four scenes mentioned in Luke 3:21–22a, alert readers notice that Jesus' baptizer is not named and that John's imprisonment has just been mentioned in the previous verse (3:20). Most spontaneously fill the information gap by presuming that John is nevertheless the one who baptizes Jesus. They recognize that verse 3:20 is a proleptic mention of a future event. Since v. 21 is connected to v. 20 by the purely transitional particle *δέ*<sup>55</sup> ("And it happened that . . .," *'Εγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ βαπτισθῆναι ἅπαντα*

*τὸν λαὸν*), mention of John's imprisonment in 3:20 puts the focus in 3:21 totally on Jesus, not on John.

The endings of Luke and Acts and beginning of Acts provide good illustrations of readers' filling gaps in the plots of narratives.

## GAPS IN THE END OF LUKE

At first reading, the Gospel of Luke seems to close with no significant gaps remaining to be filled. By ending where it begins, in the Temple, the text provides unambiguous closure through circularity, as Parsons has argued.<sup>56</sup> But comparing the beginning and end of Mark (and of all the Gospels) also reveals the uniqueness of the Lukan Gospel's beginning and ending in the Temple. When readers ask why it should begin and end there, they perceive more clearly the thematic Lukan concern with symbolically linking "the events fulfilled among us" (Luke 1:1) to their Jewish roots. This theme of Jewish roots is further developed in the speeches of Acts.

A second plotting gap involves ending the Gospel with the disciples waiting for power from on high. Parsons fills this gap by interpreting it as openness of the Gospel to its sequel—a way of implying, "to be continued."<sup>57</sup>

Another sign of incompleteness, despite the partial closure from ending in the Temple where the Gospel began, is the very grammar used in the final sentence. Instead of using a tense like the aorist or perfect, which would finish the narrative with a completed action, the writer concludes with an awkward periphrastic construction using a verb in the imperfect tense with a present participle: "and they were continually in the Temple praising God" (24:53, RNAB: *καὶ ἦσαν διὰ παντός ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ εὐλογοῦντες τὸν θεόν*). The grammatical forms emphasize by their very awkwardness the continuous state of the disciples' praising God in the Temple. The narration thus closes in the midst of an action that continues beyond the end of the story.

## GAP IN THE CONFLICTING OVERLAP

## BETWEEN THE BEGINNING OF ACTS AND END OF LUKE

The most conspicuous plotting gap at the end of Luke is its conflicting overlap with the beginning of Acts. Scholarly struggles to reconcile these conflicts justify their description by Parsons—historically intolerable.<sup>58</sup> The literary gaps are easier to deal with. For instance, Parsons points out that the close-up scenic conclusion of the Gospel (the day of resurrection)

keeps its end temporally close to the body of the narrative, rather than providing an overview epilogue relating what later happened to characters in the story, or *Nachgeschichte* (Acts functions as the Lukan *Nachgeschichte*). But the beginning of Acts uses a basic biblical symbol, the forty days, as part of its legitimizing the disciples as they begin their mission.<sup>59</sup>

### GAP OF THE END OF ACTS

Through the centuries, the most problematic gaps for interpreters of Acts have occurred at the end, Acts 28:23–31. One gap concerns the point of view toward the Jews. Why does Acts three different times portray Paul turning from the Jews toward the Gentiles (Acts 28:25–28, as well as 13:46; 18:6)? After the first two rejections of Jews, why is Paul again shown speaking to Jews in the next town (14:1) or converting a synagogue official (18:8)? Does this pattern imply that even after Acts 28:28 Paul continued to appeal to Jews, or does its climactic and final position in the narrative imply that the appeal to the Jews was in the past?<sup>60</sup>

A related gap concerns the mixed response of the Jews to Paul in Acts 28:24–25. Since some were persuaded by him, many interpreters wonder about the apparent harshness of Paul's final statement (*ῥῆμα*) to them all, Isa. 6:9–10 in Acts 28:26–27. One plausible attempt to fill this gap is Robert C. Tannehill's explanation that the lack of agreement among the Jewish leaders dashed Paul's hopes for their endorsement of his message and hence its acceptance by the entire Roman Jewish community. Although individual Jews may continue to accept the message, this failure of the leadership to agree and thus lead the Jewish community to acceptance occasioned Paul's turn to the Gentiles.<sup>61</sup>

The gap at the end of Acts that has aroused the most attention is the flat statement in Acts 28:30 (RNAB): "He remained for two full years in his lodgings" (*Ἐνέμεινεν δὲ διετίαν ὄλην*). The verb *remained* is in the aorist, implying a simple (past) act that is over. The duration of Paul's house imprisonment is stated—"two full years." The narrator could not describe a past situation that lasted a specific amount of time without knowing that that situation changed at the end of the two years. This grammatical fact undermines the arguments of those who claim that Acts ends during Paul's imprisonment because it was written during Paul's imprisonment. If that were so, the narrator would not have referred to the imprisonment as past by using the aorist, nor could he have known how long the imprisonment would last.

If the two years of captivity are over by the time of writing, the major

gap remains: What happened after that second year passed? Was Paul tried or just released? If tried, was he convicted and executed or acquitted and released (for further travel, such as his desired trip to Spain)? There are foreshadowings in the narrative that can be interpreted as intimating Paul's execution, such as his prediction to the Ephesian elders that they would never see him again (Acts 20:25, cf. v. 38). But although the majority of Lukan specialists hold that Acts implies that Paul was executed after the two years, evidence for complete agreement is no longer available.<sup>62</sup>

Although the narrator's remark that Paul's house imprisonment lasted "two whole years" implies knowledge about what happened at the end of those two years, by choosing to withhold this knowledge from the audience he leaves an obvious deliberate gap in the plot at the climactic position of its conclusion. Already, Chrysostom noted and explained this in his *Homilies on Acts* 55: "At this point the historian stops his account and leaves the reader thirsting so that thereafter he guesses for himself. This also non-Christian writers . . . do. For to know everything makes one sluggish and dull."<sup>63</sup> The gaps at the ends of Mark and Acts invite readers to fill them using their knowledge from outside the narrative. The intended readers of Mark knew about the resurrection appearances and could supply these. Similarly the original intended readers of Luke were probably expected to know what happened after Paul's two-year imprisonment, even if this gap is difficult to fill for later readers like ourselves.

But the failure to supply such information in the narratives of Mark and Acts raises other issues to their readers' attention. The point of Mark ending so enigmatically, "And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8), seems less concerned with the story time of the women at the tomb than with stimulating the intended readers to reflect on their own faith and witness or deficiency therein.<sup>64</sup> The end of Acts also has another purpose more important than simply rounding out the story line. By not closing out Paul's life but ending Acts on a note of bold, unhindered preaching, the story ends with an open thrust toward future evangelization up to and beyond the time of the intended audience.

We have seen how the narratives of Luke and Acts were plotted by composite artistry that arranged (put in order, *ἀνατάξασθαι*, Luke 1:1) disparate source materials around previous plots (like Mark's), by kerygmatic summaries, and by motifs like the journey to Jerusalem. We have seen how the writer linked independent episodes in patterns of foreshadowing and fulfillment, in mnemonic ABA' patterns, and with deliberate redundancy for emphasis. The resultant plots of Luke and Acts have both closure of the main plot action and openness to the future.

Plotting necessarily leaves gaps in the recounting of incidents for readers to fill in. Gaps are necessary to maintain interest and audience participation in the experience of the narrative. The problematic beginning of Acts and end of Luke and Acts prove to be gaps that in some cases would have been much easier for the original intended audience to fill than for readers today. Even these gaps, problematic though they may be today, are important for linking Luke and Acts and, by avoiding excessive closure at Paul's death, for maintaining openness to a future of evangelization beyond Paul's work. Further, the kinds of gaps that are left and the information that is provided to the implied readers are indications of the kind of readers implied by the narrative, as the previous chapter showed.

Since the order of events in a plot is not fully predetermined, the (narrator) has a number of free choices in the narrative sequence, such as chronology, flashback, and foreshadowing. Thus the narrator is the key link among authors, plot, and readers. Part 2 shall present applications of these methodological considerations, with special focus on the central figure of the narrator—in the prologues (chapter 4), in the Gospel (chapter 5), in Acts as a whole (chapter 6), in the special "we" passages (chapter 7), and when a character (e.g., Paul) is the narrator (chapter 8). Part 2 will end with a study of the narrator's implicit commentary on the story (chapter 9).

how? why?  
How?

the IA?

## Applications: Narration