

Concordia Theological Monthly



D E C E M B E R ♦ 1 9 5 8

Concordia Theological Monthly

VOL. XXIX

DECEMBER 1958

No. 12

History and Eschatology in Luke—Acts

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FIFTY and seventy-five years ago the burning question in studies of Acts concerned the factual accuracy of Luke's record, which seemed to differ from, even to contradict, Paul's account in his epistles. The integrity of Luke was assailed by all but the most conservative. Source criticism was in full flood, and Acts was dissected and divided into tiny segments which were labeled "Jerusalem A" or "Jerusalem B" or "Antioch" or "Peter" or some such tag, depending on the exegete and his predilections. Some said that Luke could not have known what really happened. Others imagined that he knew but chose to suppress the facts in favor of a preconceived plan or scheme. Luke was seldom credited with relating a round, unvarnished tale.

But Acts had its champions. Largely through the efforts of the previously skeptical English historian William Ramsay, who had set out to discredit Luke only to be forced to the conviction that Acts was amazingly accurate, the negative onslaught was halted, and studies took a turn down another and more fruitful road.

Style criticism arose after the First World War and is still going strong, especially in Germany. It has tended to take Acts as it stands and has allowed it to speak for itself, instead of forcing foreign, nineteenth-century criteria of "scientific" history upon it. Instead of chopping up Acts into minute sources, it has analyzed sermons and narratives, seeking their theological meaning, their purpose, and their place in the total plan of Acts.

Today, as it becomes increasingly apparent that Paul and John are not the only divines in the New Testament, the question of the theology of Luke is beginning to command attention as never

before. Luke's theology of history and his eschatology are controverted subjects of particularly great interest at the present time.

Part One of this study concentrates on the significance of the historical drama and on the meaning and nature of the Christian era according to Luke-Acts. The second main section focuses attention on eschatology and deals much less with the Third Gospel than with Acts, although frequent reference is made to Luke's Gospel, usually more for corroboration and illustration than for extension of the argument. History and eschatology are properly, indeed necessarily, treated in the compass of a single essay; for Luke interprets the history of which he writes eschatologically, and he sees eschatology unfolding historically.

I

St. Luke, like the Biblical writers in general, describes Christianity as an event or train of events in history. The God to whom Luke bears witness is not the God of the philosophers but "the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers" (Acts 3:13; 5:30; 7:32, 46; 22:14; 24:14). Luke's two-volume work is not undeserving of the title "the first church history," for Luke seems far more concerned than the other authors of the New Testament to explore the meanings and explain the motives of the events which he investigates and to shape them into a luminous and continuous narrative. Besides reporting the facts, an author, if he is to be an historian, must work out the interpretation of events. And Luke has done just that. He did not stop after he had collected traditions. He was not content with a naked chronicle or bare concatenation of episodes. He did not operate, as it were, with scissors and paste. He made every effort to combine his materials into a significant, continuous whole whose meaning, purpose, and concern would be clear to his readers.¹

The traditions, stories, letters, and diaries circulating in the primitive church dealing with the thirty years from the ascension of Christ to the Roman imprisonment of Paul must have consti-

¹ Erich Dinkler, "Earliest Christianity," *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Robert C. Dentan (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1955), pp. 195 ff., and Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Heinrich Greeven and trans. Mary Ling (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1956), pp. 125 ff., elaborate on this aspect of Luke's work.

tuted an impressive and bewildering array (cf. Luke 1:1-4). Luke has undoubtedly made a highly selective use of available resources. He chose to record a particular line of action, a single chain of events, for a quite definite purpose.

But this is only one side of the coin. Luke is not content merely to write history, however interesting. He writes a special kind of history—call it “kerygmatic history.” He wishes to be an evangelist in both parts of his double work. His production in its entirety is a proclamation of the Gospel, that is, of Jesus Christ in His dual career, earthly and exalted. Luke writes history, but in the final analysis he is really a preacher and never merely an historian. The principle of witness governs Luke-Acts.² In his writing Luke has wedded historical fact to kerygmatic witness. He aims to edify his reader by proclaiming the story of the successful invasion of the world by the Gospel. He wants his reader to hear and believe that evangel.

Recognizing and reporting the action of the hand of God in the events of history, Luke preaches Jesus Christ as the God-appointed Savior from every need for every person in every situation. Thus Luke’s primary interest is the triumphant march of the Gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, from Jew to every man of the seventy nations. Both parts of his authorship report the history of the progress of the Gospel, in and through which Jesus Christ becomes Savior and Lord of all the world.

Luke is no objective observer of the passing scene. He knows in his heart whereof he speaks. Evidently he had been one of those who were “separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). Now, however, he is Luke, “the beloved physician” (Col. 4:14), brother in the faith and companion of Paul (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5—21:18; 27:1 to 28:16; 2 Tim. 4:11). He writes with a bias and a prejudice. In Jesus Christ he has met a transforming power and grace, which has made a new man of him and is on the way to renewing all the earth and all mankind.

² This is the thesis, ably defended, of Robert Morgenthaler’s book, *Die lukanische Geschichtsschreibung als Zeugnis: Gestalt und Gehalt der Kunst des Lukas* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1949).

Luke, the Gentile from Antioch (if tradition is to be trusted), writes the story of how the Gospel came to him who once sat in darkness and in the shadow of death (Luke 1:79).

According to Luke-Acts, Jesus in the totality of His person and teaching and action is the Midpoint, the significant Center, of history. Jesus was Salvation come in the flesh. With Him a new epoch dawned in history, a time of salvation, the Messianic era. In Jesus Christ God climaxed the long series of events comprising the history of the world and the history of Israel. G. Ernest Wright neatly sums it up thus: "He has reversed the work of Adam, fulfilled the promises to Abraham, repeated the deliverance from bondage, not indeed from Pharaoh but from sin and Satan, and inaugurated the new age and the new covenant."³

Luke, the Gentile, is keenly aware of the thoroughly Jewish roots of the Gospel. The Lucan prehistory (Luke 1—2) impresses indelibly on the reader's mind the fact of Jesus' continuity and unity with the people of Israel. The time is the reign of Herod the Great; the place, the Jewish temple; the first man on the scene, a righteous Jewish priest, Zacharias, serving his turn at the altar of incense (Luke 1:5-11). The scene shifts to thoroughly Jewish Nazareth six months later, when the angel Gabriel announces to a pious Jewish maid that she will mother the scion of the house of David (Luke 1:27, 32). Mary was espoused to Joseph of the line of David and accompanied him to Bethlehem, David's city, where she brought forth her first-born (2:1-7). According to Jewish Law, young Jesus was presented at the end of eight days for circumcision in the temple (2:21 ff.). His parents "performed everything according to the Law of the Lord" (2:39). Mary and Joseph took seriously the precepts of their people. Every spring they went up to Jerusalem for the Passover (2:41). When Jesus was twelve years old, they took Him along. His instruction in the Jewish Law had been thorough enough to surprise the Jewish doctors in the temple. (2:47)

Great psalms in the style and best tradition of Old Testament piety enrich the story Luke recounts. He has preserved for the

³ *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (London: SCM Press, 1952), p. 57.

church the Magnificat of Mary (1:46-55), the Benedictus of Zechariah (1:68-79), and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis* (2:29-35). These songs and all that occurs in these opening chapters sing of Him who will rule on the throne of David forever (1:33), the Messiah (2:11), the consolation of Israel (2:25), the redemption of Jerusalem (2:38). Jewish places, Jewish persons, and Jewish piety form the backdrop for the beginning of the earthly career of the promised Christ. From the first Luke portrays Jesus as the Fulfillment of the people, religion, and history of the Jews.

But chapter three might well set a Jewish heart to trembling, not with the wonder and joy of those two opening chapters but with more than a modicum of fear. The prophetic voice of John, son of Zacharias the priest, calls for Jews to repent and be baptized like converts to Judaism (3:1-20). And John, making ready for the Lord a people prepared (1:17), points the Jews to Jesus, the Mightier One (3:16). The genealogy of Jesus is carried back beyond the house of David, past Abraham, back to Adam and ultimately to God (3:23-38). The Gospel, even in its beginnings, is wider and longer than any Procrustean Jewish bed.

Nevertheless, Jesus carefully identified Himself with the Jewish past and Jewish hopes. It was His custom to teach in the synagogues on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). Early in His ministry He read publicly the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (4:18, 19). Then He solemnly declared, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). From that time on His work was patterned on the Isaianic prophecy as He went from village to village, from synagogue to synagogue (4:44). His preaching challenged Jewish ears, as His healings challenged Jewish priests, to see in Him the promised Deliverer (5:14). So He says to John's disciples: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them." (7:22)

Jesus' choice of exactly twelve disciples, no more and no less, was an outward and visible sign of His inward and spiritual claim

to the twelve tribes of Israel (8:1; 9:1). These Twelve He sent to proclaim in all Jewry the kingdom of God and to heal (9:2) and to gather the new Israel.

Chapter nine of Luke's Gospel records a cluster of events which mark a turning point in Jesus' ministry. He elicited from His disciples a confession of His Messiahship and spelled out His mission as the suffering Servant of God (9:18-27). About eight days later He took with Him the inner circle and was transfigured before them. They saw Moses and Elijah, representative figures of the Old Covenant, standing in conversation with Him. They spoke together of the departure (ἔξοδος) which He was to accomplish in Jerusalem (9:28-36). From that time on He set His face to go up to Jerusalem.

The section from 9:51—19:28, often called the *Reisebericht*, presents much material not found in the other synoptists. Galilee, and more specifically Capernaum, is no longer the focal point of Jesus' ministry. Rather He teaches in many places as He sets a meandering course to Jerusalem, toward which the action now proceeds.

The last great section of Luke's Gospel centers in the Jewish Holy City at the time of one of the holiest of Jewish festivals, the Passover. Here Jesus addresses His people and calls them to repentance for the last time. He cleanses the temple (19:45), teaches there daily (19:47), challenges the chief priests and scribes and elders, whom He accuses of infidelity to God (20:1-19), predicts the destruction of the temple (21:6) and the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Gentiles (21:24). The kingdom of God is indeed near. (21:25-36)

On the day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover was sacrificed, Jesus ate the meal with His disciples (22:1-38). Later Jesus was taken prisoner in the garden and brought to the house of the high priest (22:39-54). At dawn He was led before the highest Jewish court (22:66). Rejected by priest and Council, He was taken before Pilate and Herod, who also repudiated Him and His claim (23:1-13). The people, too, shouted, "Crucify, crucify Him!" (23:21). When He was crucified as a common criminal, the placard on His cross read, "This is the King of the Jews." (23:38)

Jesus had come as the Fulfillment of Jewish hope, Jewish Scrip-

ture, Jewish piety, Jewish religion and history. But He was emphatically rejected by His people. They denied Jesus' claim upon them. Jerusalem, the Holy City, rejected the Holy One of God (Acts 2:23; 3:13, 14; 4:27; 10:39; 13:27). On Golgotha Jesus stood alone as the true and new Israel of God, the suffering Servant, the Son of the Most High. Israel after the flesh had sold her birthright for a mess of pottage. With the arrival of the new covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20), Jerusalem and her priests and her people and her covenant were pronounced "old." And old Israel is no longer the normal and natural instrument of God's saving activity in history. The Passion of Christ at the hands of His own people put a great rift between Jesus and the Israelites. Luke is quite clear that the time of the new is sharply sundered from the old. From Calvary onward the Jews are summoned to repudiate the national verdict and accept Jesus as the Christ. Thus the midpoint of history is also a turning point. It is false to imagine an uninterrupted continuation of everything that has been since the beginning of the world. Both continuity and discontinuity characterize the relationship between the Jewish background and the Gospel.

The Third Gospel does not conclude with the record of Good Friday, for Jesus' cross was not Jesus' end. As T. W. Manson writes: "When Pilate had the notice 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews' tacked up on the Cross, he no doubt thought that there was another false coin nailed to the counter. And in their several spheres the Jewish authorities felt that they had disposed of something false and dangerous."⁴ Manson continues on the same page: "There are many uncertainties to be reckoned with in tracing the history of Jesus and the early Church, but here is one certainty: the Ministry of Jesus was not stopped." Luke bears eloquent witness to the Resurrected One, who showed His apostles by many proofs that He was alive after His passion. (Acts 1:3-8; Luke 24)

In the preface to Acts, Luke says that his earlier work deals with all that Jesus began to do and teach until He was lifted up (Acts 1:1 f.). The motto of the work which Jesus had begun might well be the statement, "I was sent only to the lost sheep

⁴ *The Servant-Messiah: A Study of the Public Ministry of Jesus* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1953), p. 89.

of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). But the earthly career of Jesus was prelude and preparation and presupposition for His more extensive activity as the Resurrected One. Floyd Filson reflects Luke's point of view when he writes, "Jesus' resurrection is the open door through which He entered upon the further work which in God's plan He was still to accomplish."⁵

The history of salvation continues after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. For Luke the time following the ascension has a special significance all its own. The Christ event at the midpoint of history and the parousia at the end constitute the framework within which the course of history continues. This time between the times is the period of the missionary church. The disciples were impatient to have done with the present and seize the future. But Jesus sets as a motto over this post-Paschal present the saying: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:7,8). Attention is deliberately diverted from the future to the present time, in which the church must preach the Gospel of salvation to the farthest corner of the earth. At the same time the Jewish origins of the Gospel are to be no straitjackets. The activity of the risen Lord and the new Israel far transcends the geographical bounds of tiny Palestine and the racial confines of Jewish blood. The Jews are by no means repudiated out of hand in this new period. As Jesus had done, the missionaries of the church go first to the Jews. The preachers found their first hearers in the synagogues (Acts 9:20; 13:14; 14:1; 17:1,10; 18:4,19,26; 19:8, etc.). Even at Rome, at the end of Acts, Paul called together the local leaders of the Jews and appealed to them to accept the Gospel. (28:17 ff.)

The Messianic age is here; the Messiah has come. Inseparable from the Messiah is the Messianic community (Luke 1:17). The church was constituted as the Messiah's people by the appearances of the resurrected Jesus. He gathered His scattered sheep and confirmed the faith of the faint and fearful. United with the

⁵ *Jesus Christ the Risen Lord* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 165.

Messiah by faith, created by His hand, the church is no independent theological entity and has no theological significance apart from Him who is her Savior and Shepherd.

Of all those who belong to the church the apostles stand in a peculiar, unique position. Luke records that an apostle must have been numbered among those who followed Jesus during His ministry, "beginning from the Baptism of John until the day when He was taken up," and must have seen the risen Lord (Acts 1:21, 22; cf. 10:40 f.; 13:31). The event of Easter is thus constitutive of the apostolate. Furthermore, the resurrection of Jesus reveals to the apostles the full scope of their mission. Karl Heinrich Rengstorf penned these lines: "However, as Jesus is exalted over all and as His goal is the church which embraces all people, so their office is likewise universal. In the universality of mission and the universal claim of those commissioned we see the supersession of the pre-Easter apostolate by the renewed, ultimate empowering of the disciples by the Resurrected One. He stands behind all they say and do."⁶

The Twelve had been Jesus' "co-workers in His struggle for His people."⁷ The call of the Twelve, as mentioned above, has roots deep in salvation history (Acts 7:8; 26:7; Luke 22:30). The failure of old Israel cried out for a new beginning (cf. Matt. 8:10; Luke 7:9). God's goal yet unattained went begging for fulfillment.

Luke relates in some detail the filling of the gap in the ranks of the Twelve caused by Judas' defection. The martyrdom of James, the son of Zebedee (Acts 12:2), did not result in similar proceedings. When Judas repudiated his place as one of the Twelve and apostasized, there were only eleven (Luke 24:9, 33; Acts 1:26; 2:14; Mark 16:14; Matt. 28:19). When James was killed as one of the Twelve, there was no real gap. Twelve remained. (Rev. 21:14)

These Twelve are the nucleus or foundation of the New Israel. The name "Israel" is never directly ascribed to the church, although

⁶ "ἀπόστολος," *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, hrsg. von Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933—), I, 434 ff.

⁷ Rengstorf, "δώδεκα," Kittel's *Wörterbuch*, II, 327.

the first stirrings of such a transition are discernible in the use of "Israel" in several Lucan passages. (Acts 1:6, cf. Luke 24:21; Acts 28:20, cf. 26:4-7)

In a variety of ways Luke shows that he does not regard the young church as a splinter group, a sect, but as the true and the new Israel. The resurrection appearances recorded in Luke-Acts without exception occur in or near Jerusalem, the Holy City. Jesus ascended from Olivet, "which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away" (Acts 1:12), where He had commanded the disciples not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the Spirit to equip them for their mission, which must begin in Jerusalem (1:4, 8). The Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit occurred in Jerusalem, possibly in the temple precincts (Acts 2). As was the custom of Jesus, the disciples frequented the temple in Jerusalem, to pray there and to find audiences for the evangel there (2:46; 3:1; 5:12, 20 ff., 28, 42; 21:26; 22:17). Even after the persecution which followed Stephen's martyrdom the apostles remained at Jerusalem (8:1, 14, 25; 9:26; 11:2). Jerusalem was the hub from which activity issued and to which much of it returned, especially in the early chapters, although Jerusalem figures large in all of Acts (15:2; 16:4). Even Paul had to go to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit. (19:21; 20:22; 21:13-15)

The nascent church claims as her own the Scriptures and the prophets and the fathers who speak in the Scriptures. Jesus had opened the Scriptures to His disciples, declaring that Moses and the prophets bore witness to Him (Luke 24:26, 27, 32, 44-47). Even Judas' defection and death were foretold by the mouth of David (Acts 1:16 ff.). The outpouring of the Spirit was prophesied by Joel (Acts 2:16). But first and foremost the death and resurrection of Jesus fulfilled ancient Scripture (Acts 2:23, 25, 30, 31; 3:18, 24; 4:28; 10:43; 13:27-29, 32-41; 26:22, 23; 28:23). Stephen's entire address lays claim to the Scriptures as the church's book, in which the disobedience of the Jews was portrayed and prophesied (7:2-53). Philip begins with Isaiah 53 in expounding the Gospel to the Ethiopian (8:30-35). Paul's preaching could be tested by the standard of the Scriptures (17:11; 18:28). The whole progress of the Gospel from Jew to Gentile is grounded

not only in Jesus' commission (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8) but also in the Holy Writings. (Acts 13:47; 15:15-18; 28:25-28)

By accepting and by claiming as her own the Scriptures, the fathers, and the history of Israel, the church was claiming as her God "the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers" (Acts 3:13; 5:30; 7:32, 46; 22:14; 24:14), "the God of this people Israel" (13:17), "the Creator of heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them" (4:24; 17:24), "the Knower of hearts" (1:24; 15:8), "the God of glory" (7:2), "the Most High" (7:48; 16:17). But this same God is doing a new thing. The God of this people Israel has once again bared His mighty arm and raised up Jesus, and He has created a new people who believe in Jesus.

The church, the new Israel, is not independent but wholly and utterly dependent on Christ, her Lord. She lives to bear witness to Him in these last days. Jesus, who is Lord of all (Acts 10:36), will have His lordship preached to all peoples. The Lord of the universe commissions men for a universal task. He sends them forth to proclaim the evangel "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8), "to all nations" (Luke 24:47). The early church found the universal mission grounded in the will of God already in the Old Testament. (Acts 2:39; 3:25; 13:47)

The universality of the church's mission finds expression also in other ways. Philip baptized a eunuch, to whom full participation in the Jewish community was denied by the Law (Deut. 23:1). The Gentile Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit and were baptized (Acts 10:44 ff.). When the Jerusalem leaders heard the report, they glorified God and said, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). Paul was chosen especially to carry the good news to the Gentiles (26:17). The whole plan of the Book of Acts, recounting the progress of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, witnesses to the universality of the mission, for progress from Jerusalem to Rome is a symbol of the tearing down of the barrier between Jew and Gentile.

The universal mission of the church is no substitute for eschatology, any more than the Holy Spirit is a substitute for the presence of Jesus. It is a piece of eschatology. It is one sign of

the end. These post-resurrection days are now the last days, foretold by the prophets (Acts 3:24; 2:17,18), which stand immediately before the Day of the Lord (2:20; 17:31). As John the Baptist came preaching and baptizing "to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:17), the church preaches and baptizes to prepare a people to meet the returning Christ. (Acts 3:19-21)

The universal mission of the church goes forward in obedience to the specific command of the risen Christ, "You shall be My witnesses to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This is His answer to the impatient question, "Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (1:6). The conversation is practically a repeat performance of that recorded in the eschatological discourse of Jesus in the days preceding His crucifixion. The disciples had asked, "When will this be?" (Mark 13:4; Luke 21:7). Jesus answered in part, "The Gospel must first be preached to all nations" (Mark 13:10). Luke may have intended the words, "This will be a time for you to bear testimony" (Luke 21:13), to include the thought of Mark's verse. The mission of the church in all the world is an eschatological sign.

On Pentecost the ascended Lord poured out His Spirit upon His church. Peter's first word to the curious crowd that soon gathered was of the fulfillment of the prophecy of old (Acts 2:16); for God's Spirit is an eschatological gift and power. In the old Israel the Spirit inspired only a relatively small number, the leaders and especially the prophets. And inspiration was no permanent possession or condition. The prophets themselves spoke of the good time coming when God would pour His Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 3:1-5). Ezekiel records the word of the Lord: "I will take you from the nations and gather you from all countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you. . . . A new spirit I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you" (Ezek. 36:24-26; cf. 27:14; 29:29). Ezekiel is particularly relevant, since he associates a gathering from the nations, cleansing water, and the outpouring of the Spirit, all of which appear to find fulfillment at Pentecost.

The Pentecostal gift was promised also in the words of John the Baptist (Luke 3:16,17) and in the sayings of Jesus Himself

(Acts 1:4, 5; Luke 24:49). In Luke-Acts the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit is particularly close. At Jesus' Baptism the Spirit descended upon Him (Luke 3:22), so that He was full of the Spirit (Luke 4:1). Therefore Jesus referred to Himself the prophecy of Isaiah "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me." (Luke 4:18)

The gift of the Holy Spirit to Christians comes from the exalted Jesus. "He has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33). The coming of the Spirit to the church therefore presupposes the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. (Acts 2:33; John 7:39; 14:25 f.; 15:26 f.; 16:7)

The close association of the Spirit with the Messiah is a part of Jewish hope. Isaiah had envisioned the ideal ruler as possessing the fullest endowment of the Spirit (Is. 11:1-5). The hope of a Spirit-filled Messiah comes to clearest expression in Jewish post-canonical writings (En. 62:2; 49:3; Ps. Sol. 17:42; 18:8). In some quarters the Messiah was expected to be God's agent in the general bestowal of His Spirit in the age of fulfillment (Test. Lev. 18; Gen. Rabbah 2; John 1:25; 7:38 ff.). Judaism prior to, and contemporary with, the New Testament had the notion that the Holy Spirit had long since ceased to work among men; the day of prophecy had passed.⁸ The Spirit would come again at the dawn of the end time. Peter explicitly affirms that these are indeed the last days (Acts 2:17). The words "in these last days" form no part of the original prophecy, but are an interpretative addition by Peter carefully recorded by Luke. Joachim Jeremias writes of the Spirit: "So it goes through the entire New Testament: bestowal of the Spirit means a new creation; for the Spirit belongs . . . to the heavenly gifts and powers of the coming aeon; the Spirit of God creates the transfigured world and the new, redeemed mankind."⁹

Thus while the Third Gospel records the struggle of Jesus, the Rabbi of Nazareth, for the Jewish people, and recounts His teaching in the synagogues and His encounters with Jewish leaders and Jewish

⁸ On Jewish hope and thought concerning the Spirit see the excellent account by G. W. H. Lampe, "The Holy Spirit in the Writings of St. Luke," *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), pp. 162 ff.

⁹ *Jesus als Weltvollender* (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1930), p. 17.

people on solidly Jewish soil, culminating in the final effort in those closing days in Jerusalem during the Passover season, Acts tells the story of the progress of the Gospel beyond Jerusalem and beyond the Jews. The crucifixion and resurrection constitute a decisive turning point. Now the Spirit is unleashed and is at work transforming the whole world and the whole of mankind.

Acts finds the missionaries of the church marching in many directions, scattered by persecution (8:1) and sent out by God, to the south (8:26) and to the north (Acts 10), to Caesarea, Damascus, the cities of Phoenicia and Cyprus, Antioch, the villages and the metropolitan centers of Asia Minor and Greece. Luke lavishes particular attention on the progress from Jerusalem to Rome. He could very likely have recorded the growth of the church in concentric circles from Jerusalem to its farthest expansion in all directions. Deliberately he chose to report the sweep of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, from the historic seat of the old religion to the heart of the ancient empire of the Romans. Rome is always the goal of the progress of Acts. The Lord said to Paul: "As you have witnessed about Me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11). From the instant when the Gospel first reached Caesarea and Syrian Antioch (Acts 10, 11), both Roman administrative centers, the goal is never far from sight.

In this context there is a sense in which the present ending of the Book of Acts is no puzzle but a perfect capstone. Acts begins with the commissioning of the disciples, "You shall be My witnesses . . . to the end of the earth" (1:8). This "end" or "farthest part" designates not the pillars of Hercules but Rome. In precisely this way the Septuagint uses the term. "From the end of the earth" in the Psalms of Solomon (8:16) means simply "from Rome." Thus when the Gospel is proclaimed in Rome, it has reached its divinely appointed goal. In Jesus and in His Gospel the prophecy of old had come true: "I have set You to be a Light for the Gentiles, that You may bring salvation to the end of the earth." (Is. 49:6; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47)

II

It is sometimes alleged that Luke had been disillusioned by the long delay in the expected parousia and consequently made some

great and grave adjustments in his thought. Belonging to the second generation of Christians which has seen the passing of most of the first Christians, who hoped so fervently in an early return of the Lord, Luke has sought and found an explanation. The church and the Holy Spirit take the place of the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ. What eschatology is left in Luke-Acts is only a vestigial remnant of a former outlook now effete. But this notion is really destitute of evidence in the text.

Acts affirms and promises of Jesus Christ that He will come (*ἔλεύσεται*, Acts 1:11). The term "parousia," used previously in this paper, does not occur in Luke-Acts. Nevertheless, as Albrecht Oepke indicates, "although the vocable is lacking in Acts and the primitive church possibly had no real equivalent for it, yet the central significance of faith in the parousia for the early church cannot be doubted."¹⁰ And Oepke could find ample documentation in Luke-Acts. Peter quotes Joel and says, "The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and manifest Day of the Lord comes" (Acts 2:20). In Acts 3:20 Peter proclaims: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus." And both Gospel and Acts declare the coming of judgment in the future (Luke 21:26, 35; Acts 8:24; 13:40). Although Luke-Acts declares that these are the last days, that the beginning of the end has come, it likewise knows that the end of the end is yet to come.

With an eye on Acts 3:19-21 Henry J. Cadbury says that God is waiting for the repentance of men, before sending Christ and the seasons of refreshing. The same God who in days past overlooked the times of ignorance is now commanding all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). For Luke the delay is not to be charged to the carelessness or slackness of God, but springs rather from God's patience and long-suffering. Cadbury has this interesting notice: "Finally the Christians themselves, for whom in the earliest days 'Thy kingdom come' and 'Maranatha' had been the watchwords, came in the time of Tertullian actually to pray in

¹⁰ "παρουσία," Kittel's *Wörterbuch*, V, 865.

sheer altruism for the postponement of the end—*pro mora finis*.”¹¹

Luke-Acts offers hints which, although not compelling when taken singly, do add up at least to the reminder that Luke shared not only the firm hope in the coming Christ but also the attitude that He could come at any time, and that right soon.

Unique in the New Testament is the Lucan reference to Jesus standing at God's right hand (Acts 7:55, 56). Stephen completed his sketch of the decline and fall of the Jewish people and then, “full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” The commentators do not speak with one voice on this remarkable feature. Several solutions have been proposed:

1. Jesus is here conceived not as God's Co-regent but as one who, like the angels, stands before God's throne.¹²
2. Jesus stands to intercede before God.¹³
3. Jesus has risen from His seat to receive the martyr.¹⁴
4. The standing has no special significance.¹⁵
5. Jesus has risen from His throne and is poised to return.¹⁶

Certain other features of the verses make a choice possible. The attitude of Stephen, gazing into heaven, is reminiscent in the strongest way of the disciples' pose, gazing into heaven (Acts 1:10), looking into heaven (Acts 1:11), which, as Ernst Haenchen comments, is an expression of the *Naherwartung*.¹⁷

¹¹ *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927), p. 296.

¹² Ernst Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, in *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1956), leans to this interpretation; Otto Bauernfeind, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, in *Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament* (Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1939), V, 210, mentions this, but it is not his own view.

¹³ Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Marsh (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 289.

¹⁴ Martin Albertz, *Die Botschaft des Neuen Testaments* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag A. G. Zollikon, 1947—1952), II, 1, 203, cf. 213.

¹⁵ Bo Reicke, *Glaube und Leben der Urgemeinde* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1957), p. 163.

¹⁶ Carl Friedrich Noesgen, *Commentar über die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas* (Leipzig: Doerffling und Franke, 1882), p. 175, and Albrecht Oepke, *Kittel's Wörterbuch*, V, 865 f.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 120 f.

Stephen says he sees "the heavens opened" (7:56). Opened heavens, according to Ernst Lohmeyer, are a token of peculiar grace which occurs when the sign concerns not an individual only but the whole people or the whole world.¹⁸ The corporate and all-comprehending significance of the vision is also expressed in the eschatological title "Son of Man." Thus Jesus' standing at God's right hand lends eschatological coloring to the account of Stephen's martyrdom and in all likelihood was included by Luke to support or even heighten hope in an early return of Jesus in His glory and power.

Luke has left other traces of his eschatological attitude. At Lystra Paul was stoned and left for dead, but he revived and continued his journey, exhorting the young churches of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to stand firm in the faith, "saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). This verse testifies that early Christian proclamation agrees with Jewish apocalyptic that the final affliction stands before the entrance to the kingdom of God. But whereas the eschatological distress (*θλίψις*) lay in the future from the Judaistic and Old Testament point of view, according to primitive Christianity it was already in progress. The great distress is even now upon the world, having begun with the suffering of the Messiah, even though it will achieve its final height and climax only at the last Judgment.

It is interesting to note that the church suffered tribulation following the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 8:1, Western Text; 11:19) and that the chief result, in Luke's mind, of the scattering of the believers was the spreading abroad of the Word of God (8:4; 11:19; 13:51), the preaching of which is itself an eschatological sign. Thus the vision of Stephen at his death, the tribulation of the church that followed hard on his martyrdom, and the resultant missionary preaching are all cut from eschatological fabric and together serve to keep alive hope in an early fulfillment.

The close of Acts, considered above in another connection, may well have eschatological overtones. The fulfillment of the Isaianic prophecy (Is. 49:6) and of the *verba Christi* (Acts 1:8) which are the theme of Acts means that now, with the Gospel freely

¹⁸ *Das Evangelium des Markus, in Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1937), p. 21.

proclaimed in Rome, the condition of the coming of the Kingdom set by Christ (Acts 1:8) has been met. The Western text of Acts 28:31, the oldest surviving commentary on the ending of Acts, supports this interpretation. It adds, "Since this is Christ Jesus, the Son of God, through whom the whole world will be judged." Far from relinquishing hope in a near end, Luke's second volume seeks to nurture that hope.

Luke shares the common New Testament expectation of the resurrection of the dead, the Judgment, and the life of the coming aeon. The fact of the resurrection of Jesus is the keystone of Luke's theology of history and of his eschatology. At the same time it is the stone of stumbling on which many trip and fall and are crushed. Luke believes that in Jesus' resurrection God has lifted His arm to act and has in that act given promise of carrying His stroke through to victorious consummation. Jesus' resurrection is the beginning or prelude and guarantee of the general resurrection. Paul preaches Jesus as "the First to rise from the dead" (Acts 26:23; cf. 1 Cor. 15:20, 21; Col. 1:18; Rom. 1:3). Peter, in speaking to the crowd assembled in Solomon's portico, names Jesus "the Author of life" (Acts 3:15). As the First to rise from the dead, Jesus assures His own of resurrection and life. According to Luke (Acts 4:2), the Sadducees were annoyed that the Christians proclaimed "in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." The pointed antithesis to the Sadducean denial of the resurrection here and elsewhere in Acts (23:6, 7, 8; cf. Luke 20:27 ff., par.) suggests that it was not only the raising of Jesus but the resurrection of the just and the unjust (Acts 24:15) which was proclaimed by the leaders of the church. Paul claimed to stand with the Pharisees against the Sadducees with regard to the "hope of Israel" (28:20). The phrase "hope and resurrection of the dead" is ordinarily taken as hendiadys for "the hope of the resurrection of the dead" (23:6). That hope in the promise made by God to the fathers has not found exhaustive fulfillment in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is a hope to which the twelve tribes still aspire, one in which they hope yet to participate (26:6, 7). In affirming the validity of that hope, the Pharisees were nearer than the Sadducees to acceptance of the proleptic fulfillment realized in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Whereas the Sadducees are in-

transiently hostile to the Christian movement (Acts 5:17), the Pharisees are more friendly and receptive. The Pharisee Gamaliel counseled caution and patience when the Sadducees were ready to execute Peter and his fellows (5:33-40). Some Pharisees were even converted to faith in Christ. (15:5)

Judgment is intimated already in the phrase "the resurrection of both the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15). In summarizing the apology of Paul in which these words occur, Luke writes, "He argued about justice and self-control and future Judgment" (24:25). In similar tones and phrases Paul had addressed the Athenians: "God . . . has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed, and of this He has given assurance to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31; cf. Luke 21:34-36). The third explicit reference in Acts to future Judgment is in Peter's sermon to the household of Cornelius. God has raised up Jesus from the dead, and "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead" (10:42). God has set His Day, and He has appointed Jesus as Judge. Before that Day comes, God in His goodness and patience calls all men to repent and believe. (Acts 2:21, 38; 10:43; 17:30)

The proclamation of God's eschatological act in raising Jesus from the dead and the announcement of the Judgment to come is the context in which the appeal to repent, believe, and be saved is set. In his sermon on Pentecost Peter proclaims that now the prophecy of Joel concerning the Day of the Lord is finding its fulfillment: "And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). Peter picks up the same theme at the end of his sermon: "Save yourselves from this crooked generation" (2:40). The church consisted of those who were being saved (οἱ σωζόμενοι, Acts 2:47), "the Remnant of Israel which is destined to survive the End. They were gradually being selected during the 'Interim' before the End."¹⁹ Anyone who refuses to believe in Jesus will be destroyed from the people (Acts 3:23); for in Jesus alone is there salvation (4:12; 15:11). To the jailer's

¹⁹ Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, *The Beginnings of Christianity* (London: The Macmillan Co., 1920—1933), IV, 30.

question, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul replies, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (16:30, 31). With fine perception the girl with the pythonic spirit called the apostles "servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation" (16:17). On the whole, the Jews refused to believe in Jesus, and Paul explained the consequences thus: "Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen" (28:28). The end of the ways of God with men is salvation upon all who repent and believe and call on His name.

Salvation is variously described in Acts. One term for it is "life eternal" (13:46, 48). This passage is perfectly parallel to Acts 28:28, which has "this salvation." Jesus, as eschatological Savior, has the name "the Author of Life" (3:15). The message which the church preaches is called "all the words of this life" (5:20). "Life eternal" could better be translated "life of the world to come" or "life of the age [aeon] to come."

"Kingdom of God" is another eschatological phrase describing the selfsame reality from a different point of view. Before the ascension, Jesus spoke concerning the Kingdom (Acts 1:3), prompting His disciples to inquire after the time of its restoration (1:6). But it is a gift of God, and God alone decides the time of its appearing (1:7). The evangelists of the church proclaim and preach about the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2; 16:16). And Paul says plainly that "we must enter the kingdom of God in the midst of many tribulations" (Acts 14:22). In Acts "kingdom of God" is no less eschatological or apocalyptic than the same phrase in the synoptic gospels. God's open assumption of power begins with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the exaltation of Jesus as Lord of all. The Kingdom is thus already dawning, and yet His resurrection is but a step, albeit the decisive step, on God's way to the full revelation of His power and glory in His kingdom.

Salvation, the life of the world to come, and the kingdom of God are further explicated by another set of terms employed by Luke in Acts: "seasons of refreshing from the Lord" and "times of the restoration of all things" (Acts 3:20, 21). As the context shows, these times and seasons (cf. 1:7) will begin with the coming of the

Anointed One from heaven. The full passage offers the translator and expositor some difficulty. Albrecht Oepke suggests this very probable solution for Acts 3:20, 21: "That times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord that He may send Jesus, the Messiah appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the time of the } restoration of all things, concerning which
 } establishing of everything which

God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old."²⁰ The promises of God will be fulfilled or established and God's creation will be restored to its original integrity. It is not necessary to choose between the possibilities, since both appear to be contained in this single clause of pregnant brevity. As Oepke notes, behind the phrase "restoration of all things" there lies the common Jewish notion of the Messianic re-creation. The ἀποκατάστασις means the restoration of all things to the unblemished original condition in which they first came from their Creator's hand.

CONCLUSION

In the two-volume work of St. Luke history and eschatology are related intimately. In fact, they are inseparable Siamese twins. The relationship is symbiotic. To sunder them is to kill both of them. Eschatology has invaded history. The Messiah has come into time. The Messianic era has already dawned. The Messiah's people are being gathered even now. But the old age did not grind to a sudden halt with the appearance of the Messiah. And the kingdom of God did not burst forth in open power and evident glory when Christ rose from the dead. The clock has not stopped. Time marches on. The new aeon is present but hidden. Only in the future will all eyes behold the full consequences of God's decisive eschatological act: Jesus Christ and His resurrection.

Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, can come at any time, for every precondition has been met. Even now the final tribulation is upon the world. Luke-Acts is history in expectation of God's last and universal act.

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²⁰ "ἀποκατάστασις," in Kittel's *Wörterbuch*, I, 390.