

## ***The Problem of a Beginning: Israel's Scriptures in Luke 1-2***

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*A narratological study of Luke 1-2, focusing above all on an examination of the plethora of echoes of the Abrahamic story of Genesis, leads to the conclusion that the "beginning" of Luke-Acts can be located only in God's purpose as articulated in the Scriptures of Israel; at this point at least, the framework with which Luke is working is not "promise-fulfillment," but rather a self-conscious continuation of the redemptive story.*

*Key words: Luke, Birth Narrative, Luke 1-2, Old Testament in Luke, Beginnings, God's Purpose, Abraham*

### INTRODUCTION: LUKE 1:5-2:52 AS THE "BEGINNING" OF LUKE-ACTS<sup>1</sup>

Luke 1:1-4 may be the first point of entry into Luke-Acts, but, in terms of the Lukan *narrative* as such, the beginning of Luke-Acts is the account of Jesus' birth and childhood. On the one hand, this means it is here that we gain entry into the social world of Luke-Acts—its understanding of reality, its primary institutions, its social dynamics, and the like.<sup>2</sup> Here our focus initially will fall elsewhere, on the function of Luke 1:5-2:52 as a harbinger of the story to come. In doing so,

1. Hans Conzelmann's decision to exclude Luke 1-2 from a consideration of Luke's theological enterprise (*The Theology of St. Luke* [London: Faber & Faber, 1960; reprint ed., London: SCM, 1960] 172) has met with stiff resistance and need not be engaged here—cf., e.g., the early essays by Paul S. Minear, "Luke's Use of the Birth Stories," in *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 111-30; and H. H. Oliver, "The Lucan Birth Stories and the Purpose of Luke-Acts," *NTS* 10 (1963-64) 202-26.

2. See Jerome H. Neyrey, ed., *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991); Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

however, we will find reason to question whether Luke really wants to posit the birth of Jesus as the "beginning" of this story after all.

To a degree, beginnings set parameters around the nature of the narrative and its concerns. In this sense, beginnings are restrictive, incorporating decisions about what this story might and might not be about. More consequential, though, is the way a narrative beginning opens up possibilities, generates probabilities, and otherwise invites its audience to a full hearing in order to discover its outcome.<sup>3</sup> Luke accomplishes this not so much by holding back what will happen; angelic and prophetic voices in Luke 1-2 repeatedly address this question. Rather, the reader is left to wonder how these far-reaching visions of redemption will come to fruition.<sup>4</sup> So, at the same time Luke 1:5-2:52 serves to focus the narrative on Judea and Galilee within the Roman world, it also points forward, anticipating in dramatic ways what is to come. Robert Tannehill aptly refers to this segment of the Gospel as "Previews of Salvation,"<sup>5</sup> though one also finds in the beginning more than a hint of coming conflict at both cosmic and human levels.

Viewing Luke-Acts on the large canvas of narrative analysis, it is possible to see in its entirety a simple narrative cycle,<sup>6</sup> painted in broad strokes. In it we see the working out of God's purpose to bring salvation to all people. This aim is anticipated by the angelic and prophetic voices in Luke 1:5-2:52—voices which speak on God's behalf. And this aim is made possible by the birth and growth of John and Jesus in households that honor God. But, according to the Lukan birth narrative, it is not an aim that will be reached easily or without opposition. It requires the positive response of people like Zechariah (whose response is hesitant), Mary, and others, for God's aim necessarily involves the collusion of human actors. Not all will respond favorably to God's agent of salvation, Jesus, resulting in antagonism, division, and conflict.<sup>7</sup> The realization of God's aim is made probable through the preparatory mission of John and the life, death, and ex-

3. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 7; Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic, 1975); Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Function of Narrative* (JLSM 108; Berlin: Mouton, 1982) 155-58.

4. On this means of building narrative suspense, see Michael J. Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (ILLS; London: Routledge, 1988) 49-55; Robert L. Brawley, *Centering on God: Method and Message in Luke-Acts* (LCBI; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990) *passim*.

5. He has in mind Luke 1:5-2:40, for he does not regard 1:41-52 as a part of the John-Jesus pattern; cf. Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1: *The Gospel according to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 15-44.

6. Cf. Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) 19-23.

7. On conflict in Luke-Acts, see Joseph B. Tyson, *The Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1986); *idem*, "Conflict as a Literary Theme in the Gospel of Luke," in *New Synoptic Studies: The Cambridge Gospel*

altation of Jesus, with its concomitant commissioning and promised empowering of Jesus' followers to extend the message to all people (Luke 3-Acts 1).<sup>8</sup> Jesus himself prepares the way for this universal mission, even if he does not engage much with non-Jews, by systematically dissolving the barriers that predetermine, and have as their consequence, division between ethnic groups, men and women, adults and children, rich and poor, righteous and sinner, and so on. In his ministry, even conflict is understood within the bounds of God's salvific purpose, Jesus' death as a divine necessity, his exaltation a vindication of his ministry and powerful act of God making possible the extension of salvation to Jew and Gentile alike. The subsequent story in Acts consists of a narration of the realization of God's purpose, particularly in Acts 2-15, as the Christian mission is directed by God to take the necessary steps to achieve an egalitarian community composed of Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. The results of this narrative aim (Acts 16-28) highlight more and more Jewish antagonism to the Christian movement, and the church appears more and more to be Gentile in makeup. This, too, is God's purpose, according to the narrator, speaking above all through his spokesperson Paul (and through Paul, the Scriptures), even if efforts among the Jewish people at interpreting Moses and the prophets as showing the Messiah is Jesus should continue.<sup>9</sup>

Luke 1:5-2:52, then, initiates a narrative centered above all on God whose aim it is to bring salvation in all its fulness to all. However, the story of Jesus' birth and childhood does not really introduce this God or this aim, nor does it pretend to do so. As Jonathan Culler has remarked, the force of a narrative depends essentially on its capacity to show how an event is a product of discursive forces rather than a given reported by discourse.<sup>10</sup> Historiography in particular is marked by its teleological agenda, ordering events so as to postulate their end

*pel Conference and Beyond* (ed. William R. Farmer; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983) 303-27; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Luke: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991). These studies pay insufficient attention to the cosmic realities of this theme in Luke-Acts; for a redress of the balance cf. Susan Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).

8. In fulfilling this narrative purpose, the Gospel of Luke is self-contained and does not depend on Acts 1 for its capacity to do so. The opening chapter of Acts recapitulates aspects of the Gospel, especially its closing scenes, so as to underscore the continuity between the mission of Jesus and of the disciples and to highlight how Jesus' exaltation blazes the way for the expansion of the church.

9. This is to suggest neither that either of the two volumes of Luke's work is without aims particular to it, nor that the final verse of Acts marks the absolute closure (or resolution) of all possibilities. After all, Paul has not yet gone to trial (as anticipated) and, more pointedly, Jesus has not yet returned (as promised).

10. Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) 175.

and/or beginning.<sup>11</sup> What events or forces lie behind a historical sequence? What are its causes? For Luke, those discursive forces are God's promises and acts on behalf of Israel—promises and acts (1) which are themselves narrated in Israel's Scriptures, (2) to which Luke refers in his account by way of establishing narrative needs for development and resolution in Luke-Acts,<sup>12</sup> and (3) which therefore constitute the presupposition, the literal pretext of Luke's narrative.<sup>13</sup>

11. On the historiographical character of Luke-Acts, cf., e.g., David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (LEC 8; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) chaps. 3-4; James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) 91-98; Joel B. Green, "§1 The Genre of Luke-Acts," *The Gospel of Luke*. The primary dissenting voice has been raised by those who find the closest generic parallels for Luke-Acts in Greco-Roman biography—e.g., C. H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (SBLMS 20; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974); idem, *What Is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). What is clear is that Luke, perhaps more than the other Evangelists, has been influenced by Greco-Roman literary forms—especially those related to the biographical genre, even if other formal features and the fundamentally theocentric focus of his narrative preclude identification of Luke-Acts as "biography" or "biographical succession narrative." For critiques of the biographical identification of the Gospels in general, see David Aune, "The Problem of the Genre of the Gospels: A Critique of C. H. Talbert's *What Is a Gospel?*," in *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 2: *Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* (ed. R. T. France and David Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981) 9-60; Robert Guelich, "The Gospel Genre," in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien: Vorträge vom Tübinger Symposium 1982* (ed. Peter Stuhlmacher; WUNT 28; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1983) 183-219; Albrecht Dihle, "Die Evangelien und die griechische Biographies" in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, 383-411; Larry W. Hurtado, "Gospel (Genre)," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992) 276-82.

The case for the biographical character of the *Third Gospel* has not been significantly advanced by the recent work of Richard A. Burridge (*What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* [SNTSMS 70; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992]). Thus, e.g., his analysis of verb subjects in the Third Gospel, indicating Jesus as by far the primary actor in the Gospel of Luke, proves to be too blunt an instrument, since actants (like Jesus, but also, e.g., Simeon) who expressly operate as empowered or commissioned by God are in fact acting on his behalf and serving his aim. Moreover, such an analysis does not account for the pronounced treatment given in Luke-Acts to such concepts as "divine necessity," "the Scriptures," and "God's purpose." That is, the aim driving the narrative of the Third Gospel (and also Acts) is not first Jesus', but God's. Burridge's analysis also assumes without argued basis that the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles can and probably should be divorced for purposes of genre specification. (On the theocentrism of Luke, cf., e.g., Walter Radl, *Das Lukas-Evangelium* [EF 261; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche, 1988] 59-77; Francois Bovon, "Gott bei Lukas," in *Lukas in neuer Sicht: Gesammelte Aufsätze* [BTS 8; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985] 98-119.)

12. Cf. Brawley, *Centering on God*, 104.

13. On logical presuppositions of this sort, cf. Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (CTL; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (CTL; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Indeed, as Luke has already informed us in his prologue, the events he will narrate are linked to the past history of God's salvific acts.

According to 1:1, Luke's purpose is narratological; here in his prologue he addresses the question, What is the *content* of this narratological proclamation? First, Luke's emphasis on "events" directs our attention to historiographical rather than biographical interests. Luke-Acts is concerned with particular people—especially Jesus, Peter, Stephen, and Paul—but their stories are related within larger narrative sequences whose interest transcends their individual deeds. Luke is concerned with how these events, those narrated in the Gospel and in Acts, are understood as divine affairs. This is evident from the phrase with which Luke modifies "events": "that have been fulfilled among us."<sup>14</sup> This clarification of the "events" with which Luke and his forerunners are concerned indicates two matters clearly.

First, these events are incomplete in themselves, and must be understood in relation to a wider interpretive framework. As we have already intimated, every writer whose focus is a narrative sequence must struggle with locating an appropriate beginning, a starting point sufficient to show how what follows grows out of narrated exigencies. Luke's struggle, it would appear, led him to something of an artificial solution: In 1:5-2:52 he will "begin" his narrative with the events surrounding the births of John and Jesus, but for him this is not really the beginning. They relate to something else, something prior. As 1:5-2:52 make clear, they relate to God's purpose, evident in the Old Testament and the history of God's people, as its culmination. This same affirmation is continued throughout the Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles, where Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and the shape and progress of the Christian mission are understood as manifestations of God's will.<sup>15</sup> One need not bring to bear on Luke's prologue the full weight of "prophetic fulfillment"<sup>16</sup> to see that Luke is nonetheless concerned to

14. πληροφορέω appears only here in Luke and is a synonym for πληρόω, which he uses repeatedly with a variety of meanings—e.g., for scriptural fulfillment (4:21; 24:44; Acts 1:6; 3:18; 13:27), for the passing of time (Acts 9:23; 19:21; 24:21), for the process or result of filling (2:40; 3:5; Acts 2:2, 28), for the completion of a mission or work (Acts 12:25; 13:25; 14:26), and, as here, to describe an event that fulfills the divine purpose (1:20; 9:31; 21:24; 22:16). The alternative translation, "have been accomplished" (e.g., RSV) is too weak. Cf. the use of πίμπλημι in 1:23, 57; 2:6, 21, 22.

15. Cf., e.g., Acts 1:16; 3:18; 10:1-11:18; 13:27, 46-47; 15:6-9, 12-18, 28; *passim*.

16. That Luke is concerned in 1:1 with scriptural fulfillment is explicitly denied by, e.g., Henry J. Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, part 1: *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake; vol. 2: *Prolegomena—II: Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.) 489-510 (495-96); C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (TPINTC; London: SCM/Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990) 124.

affirm that in these events God's purpose is realized.<sup>17</sup> But this is already to mention, secondly, that this modifier "have been fulfilled" suggests God as its unspoken subject.<sup>18</sup> These are events by which God accomplishes his aim.

Similarly, as Luke's employment of Israel's Scriptures in Luke 1:5-2:52 demonstrates, the proper "beginning" for his narrative is there, in the past, in God's redemptive purpose as set forth in the Scriptures. Luke is not introducing a *new* story, but continuing an old one, as if the real "beginning" were the Septuagint. He roots the coming of Jesus and the universal Christian movement in God's purpose, continuous as one divine story. Hence, Luke does not at this juncture think of segmenting salvation history into "stages" nor even of a hermeneutical pattern of prophecy-fulfillment.<sup>19</sup> This is not to deny the important ways in which Luke 1:5-2:52 (or other portions of Luke-Acts) portray an eschatologically charged environment<sup>20</sup> or to

17. Cf. François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas (Lk 1,1-9, 50)* (EKKNT 3/1; Zürich: Benziger/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989) 35: "Die Ereignisse, von denen hier die Rede ist, sind nicht nur 'geschehen, sondern 'erfüllt' geschehen, d.h. wie Gott sie wollte." A different approach is taken by Richard J. Dillon, who distinguished between the events (in the past) and their "coming to fruition"—i.e., properly interpreted and received as "signs of messianic recognition" (*From Eyewitnesses to Ministers of the Word: Tradition and Composition in Luke 24* [AnBib 82; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978] 270-72; idem, "Previewing Luke's Project from His Prologue (Luke 1:1-4)," *CBQ* 43 [1981] 205-27 [211-17]). One need not take this approach in order to see that this "fulfillment" or "fruition" has ongoing implications (suggested by the perfect tense of this participle)—cf. Günter Klein, "Lukas 1,1-4 als theologisches Programm," in *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann zum 80. Geburtstag*. (ed. Erich Dinkler; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1964) 193-216 (196-99); I. I. Du Plessis, "Once More: The Purpose of Luke's Prologue (Lk. 1.1-4)," *NovT* 16 (1974) 259-71 (263-64)—and in any case, the texts on which Dillon rests his case themselves indicate how the story of Jesus becomes clear only when understood in relation to "Moses and all the prophets" (24:27) or "the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms" (24:44; cf. 16:31).

18. That is, we read this perfect, passive participle as a divine passive.

19. Pace Darrell L. Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology* (JSNTSS 12; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987) esp. 55-90. Cf. also I. Howard Marshall, "Luke and His 'Gospel,'" in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, 289-308 (299-300); C. K. Barrett, "Luke/Acts," in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars* (ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 231-44; B. J. Koet, *Five Studies on Interpretation of Scripture in Luke-Acts* (SNTA 14; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989); E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (WUNT 54; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991) 77-121; and the earlier essay by Paul Schubert, "The Structure and Significance of Luke 24," in *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann zu seinem siebenzigsten Geburtstag am 20. August 1954* (BZNW 21; ed. Walther Eltester; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1954) 165-86. The distinction between the view espoused by e.g., Bock, and ours is not great and may only be a matter of emphasis.

20. See, e.g., Rene Laurentin, *Struktur und Theologie der lukanischen Kindheitsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967) 50-105; idem, *The Truth of Christmas*:

suggest that Luke does not regard the Old Testament as essentially forward-looking.<sup>21</sup> Rather, it is to affirm that Luke self-consciously begins his narrative in the middle of the story, so to speak. Much later in the narrative, Luke shows this by Paul's address in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-41), wherein Paul outlines a litany of divine acts. Again and again, we are told what God did, how God acted, who God chose, what God made, and so on, until we reach the last divine act in this series, narrated without fanfare as though it were just one more manifestation of God's redemptive purpose: "God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus" (Acts 13:23). If this act is then interpreted as the way God has kept his promise, it is only after its fundamental continuity with the history of the God-Israel relationship has been affirmed. The emphasis falls on salvation-historical unity: The God who has been working redemptively still is, now, and especially, in Jesus. This reality is clarified magnificently in the narrative of Jesus' birth and childhood.

#### THE OLD TESTAMENT IN LUKE 1:5-2:52: SOME PROGRAMMATIC OBSERVATIONS

That anyone would claim to find in Luke 1:5-2:52 a foundation in Israel's Scriptures for the continuing story of God's redemptive purpose may seem odd. After all, especially in contrast to Matt 1:18-2:23, with its famous fulfillment citations, the Old Testament seems conspicuous by its absence from this section of the Third Gospel. No more than three Old Testament citations are identified in Luke 1:5-2:52 by the standard reference works: Luke 1:15b—Num 6:3; Lev 10:9; Luke 2:23—Exod 13:2, 12, 15; and Luke 2:24b—Lev 5:11; 12:8.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, students of Luke are fond of referring to what Holtz calls "the numerous and evident Old Testament expressions and echoes" in Luke 1-2.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, any attempt to come to terms

*Beyond the Myths. The Gospels of the Infancy of Christ* (SS; Petersham, Massachusetts: St. Bede's, 1986) 43-68; J. Bradley Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age in Luke-Acts* (Macon, Georgia; Mercer University Press, 1988) 48-56.

21. See, e.g., Jacob Jervell, "The Center of Scripture in Luke," in *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984) 122-37.

22. The NA<sup>26</sup> lists these three. Traugott Holtz (*Untersuchungen über die alttestamentlichen Zitate bei Lukas* [TU 104; Berlin: Akademie, 1968]) treats only the citation of the law in Luke 2:23-24 (82-83); similarly, Martin Rese, *Alttestamentliche Motive in der Christologie des Lukas* (SNT 1; Gutersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1969), who, however, also treats a selection of allusions.

23. Holtz, *Untersuchungen*, 4; cf. Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (2d ed.; London: Pan, 1990) 11: "a veritable labyrinth of Old Testament reminiscence."

with the use of Israel's Scriptures in the narrative of Jesus' birth and childhood, and thus with the narrative itself, must account for the range of ways in which those Scriptures are employed—including citations, but also forms and themes, and above all, echoes.

Without attempting to analyze the use of Israel's Scriptures in the whole of Luke 1:5-2:52, Luke's design can be illustrated with reference to his use of the Abrahamic material of Genesis 11-21 in the narration of the stories of John and Jesus. Luke's interest in Abraham is transparent at two points in the story, specifically in 1:55, 73. There, in the Songs of Mary and Zechariah, God's merciful activity on behalf of Israel is related directly to his faithfulness to Abraham. A close reading of these two narratives side-by-side suggests a much more pervasive interest, as the following parallels indicate:<sup>24</sup>

<i>Genesis</i>	<i>Luke</i>
"Now Sarai was barren; she had no child" (11:30).	"But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren" (1:7).
The Lord to Abram: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will . . . make your name great" (12:2).	An angel of the Lord to Zechariah, concerning John: "he will be great in the sight of the Lord" (1:15); Gabriel to Mary, concerning Jesus: "He will be great" (1:32).
The Lord to Abram: "I will bless you" (12:2); Melchizedek to Abram: "He blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram'" (14:19).	Elizabeth, full of the Holy Spirit, to Mary: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. . . . And blessed is she who believed" (1:41, 45). Simeon, on whom the Spirit rested, with respect to Jesus' parents: "Then Simeon blessed them" (2:25, 34).
Promises to Abraham: 12:3; 15:5, 13-14, 18-21; 17:2, 4-8.	Promises to Abraham remembered by God (1:55, 73).
The Lord to Abram: "To your offspring I will give this land"	Mary, concerning God, who has helped Israel "according

24. Translations are from the NRSV. Material appearing in italics departs from the NRSV in order to provide a more literal translation of the Greek text indicating further how these parallels extend even to words and phrases.

(12:7); "all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever" (13:14-17; cf. 17:7; 18:18; 22:17).

Chronological and geopolitical markers (14:1).

Melchizedek to Abram: "blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand" (14:20; cf. 15:13-14; 22:17).

The Lord to Abram: "Do not be afraid, Abram," followed by words of God's gracious act on his behalf (15:1).

"And [Abram] believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness" (15:6; cf. 18:19; 26:5).

"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children" (16:1).

The angel of the Lord to Hagar: "Now you have conceived *in your womb* and shall

to the promise he made . . . to Abraham and to his *offspring* forever" (1:55); Zechariah, concerning God, who has remembered "the oath that he swore to our ancestor, Abraham, to *give us*" (1:73).

Chronological and geopolitical markers (1:5).

Gabriel to Mary: "[Jesus] will be called the Son of the Most High . . . and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (1:32, 35); Zechariah to John: "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High" (1:76); Zechariah: God has granted "that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve . . ." (1:74).

The angel of the Lord to Zechariah: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah," followed by words of God's gracious act on his behalf (1:13); Gabriel to Mary: "Do not be afraid, Mary," followed by words of God's gracious act on her behalf (1:30).

"Both of them [Zechariah and Elizabeth] were righteous before God" (1:6).

"But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren" (1:7).

The angel to Mary: "And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will

bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael. . . . He shall be a wild ass of a man" (16:11-12).

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram" (17:1).

God to Abram: "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless" (17:1).

God promises to Abraham: "an everlasting covenant," "ancestor of a multitude of nations," "kings shall come from you" (17:4-8; cf. 17:16).

"Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old" (17:12); "And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old" (21:4).

God to Abraham: "I will give you a son by [Sarah]" (17:16); "your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac," + future role of child (17:19).

name him Jesus. He will be great" (1:31-32).

"[Elizabeth and Zechariah] were getting on in years. . . . Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord" (1:7, 11).

"Both of them [Zechariah and Elizabeth] were righteous before God, *walking* blamelessly" (1:6).

Zechariah, of God: "He has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham" (1:72-73); cf. "throne," "kingdom" (1:32-33); "our ancestor," "Abraham," "forever" (1:55).

Of John: "On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child" (1:59); of Jesus: "After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child" (2:21).

The angel of the Lord to Zechariah: "Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John," + future role of child (1:13); Gabriel to Mary: "And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus" (1:31).

"And when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham" (17:22).

Abraham presents himself as a servant (Gen 18:3-5).

Abraham to God: "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (17:17); "Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age. . . . So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?'" (18:11-12).

The Lord to Abraham: "Is anything *impossible with God?*" (18:14).

Abraham a "prophet" (20:7). "Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son" (21:2).

"Now Sarah said, 'God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me'" (21:6).

Of Isaac: "The child grew, and was weaned" (21:8); of the son of Hagar: "God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness" (21:20).

"Then the angel departed from [Mary]" (1:38).

Mary presents herself as a servant (1:38, 48).

Zechariah and Elizabeth "were *advanced in age*" (1:7); Zechariah to God: "For I am an old man, and my wife is *advanced in age*" (1:18).

Gabriel to Mary: "For nothing will be impossible with God" (1:37).

Zechariah "prophesied" (1:67). "Elizabeth conceived . . . and she bore a son" (1:24, 57).

Elizabeth observes that God has taken away her disgrace (1:25); "Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her" (1:58).

Of John: "The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness" (1:80); of Jesus: "The child grew and became strong . . . and the favor of God was upon him" (2:40; cf. 2:52).

With respect to these many points of contact between Genesis 11-21 and Luke 1:5-2:52, a number of observations may be made.

(1) First, at several key points, these narratives share a common repertoire of elements where they intersect with conventional forms found elsewhere in the biblical tradition.<sup>25</sup> Some, capitalizing on parallels between Gen 16:7-13; 17:1-21; 18:1-15; Judg 13:3-20; Matt 1:20-21; Luke 1:11-20, 26-37; 2:9-12, have spoken of Luke's use of an "annunciation" form.<sup>26</sup> Others, exploiting points of contact between these Lukan scenes and Exod 3:1-4:16; Judg 6:11-24; 1 Kings 19:1-19a; Isa 6; Jer 1:4-12; and a number of other texts, have preferred to think of Luke's use of a conventional commissioning form.<sup>27</sup> As they have been articulated in recent studies, these forms are similar:

*The Annunciation of Birth*

Appearance of an Angel  
Luke 1:11, 26-28; 2:9a

Reaction of Fear or Awe  
Luke 1:12, 29; 2:9b

Announcement of Birth  
Luke 1:13b-17, 30-33; 2:10-11

*The Commission*

Introduction  
Luke 1:5-10, 26-27; 2:8

Confrontation  
Luke 1:11, 28; 2:9a

Reaction  
Luke 1:12, 29; 2:9b

Commission  
Luke 1:13-17, 30-33; 2:10-11

25. On the foundation of this form of repetition in the constraints of literary convention see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981) 47-62, 95-96.

26. Cf., e.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977) 156; idem, "Luke's Method in the Annunciation Narrative of Chapter One," in *Perspectives on Luke-Acts* (ed. Charles H. Talbert; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978) 126-38 (131); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (2 vols.; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1981/85) 1:318, 336, 396; idem, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 1989) 46-47; Raymond E. Brown, et al., eds., *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 112-13.

27. Cf. Laurentin, *Truth of Christmas*, 92-94; Herman Hendrickx, *The Infancy Narratives* (SSG; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984) 57-59; Terence Y. Mullins, "New Testament Commission Forms, Especially in Luke-Acts," *JBL* 95/4, 1976) 603-14; Benjamin J. Hubbard, "Commissioning Stories in Luke-Acts: A Study of Their Antecedents, Form and Content," *Semeia* 8 (1977) 103-26; Fearghus O'Fearghail, "The Literary Forms of Luke 1, 5-25 and 1, 26-38," *Mar* 43 (1981) 321-44. These analyses largely depend on Benjamin J. Hubbard, *The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commissioning: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20* (SBLDS 19; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974) 32-67; though see already Xavier Léon-Dufour, "L'annonce à Joseph," in *Etudes d'Évangile* (Paris: Seuil, 1965) 65-81.

Name of Addressee

Luke 1:13b, 30

Conception

Luke 1:13d, 31a

Name of Child

Luke 1:13e, 31b

Future of Child

Luke 1:15-17, 32-33; 2:11

Objection

Luke 1:18, 34bc

Protestation

Luke 1:18, 34

Reassurance/Sign

Luke 1:20, 35b-37; 2:12

Reassurance

Luke 1:19-20, 35-37; 2:12-14

Conclusion

Luke 1:21-25, 38; 2:15-18

Recent attempts to simplify the annunciation form have been made,<sup>28</sup> the most interesting being that of Edgar Conrad. He delineates only three elements—Announcement of Birth, Name of Child, and Future of Child. His discussion strengthens earlier arguments that the scenes in Luke's birth narrative are evocative of the patriarchal narratives. Pointing to parallels in 1 Kgs 13:2; Isa 7:14-17; and 1 Chr 22:9-10, he also notes the specifically royal connotations presented by the use of this form. Of course, as we have observed, Gen 17:4-8, 16 already manifest a royal motif.

Among the objections to the identification of Luke's scenes of angelic encounter as stories of annunciation, that of Jane Schaberg is of particular importance.<sup>29</sup> She is especially concerned with the encounter between Gabriel and Mary, arguing that it departs from other examples of this literary convention in two significant ways.

28. Cf. Edgar W. Conrad, "The Annunciation of Birth and the Birth of the Messiah," *CBQ* 47 (1985) 656-68; Robert Alter, "How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible's Annunciation Type-Scene," *Prooftexts* 3 (1983) 115-30. Conrad notes his indebtedness to Robert Neff, "The Birth and Election of Isaac in the Priestly Tradition," *BR* 15 (1970) 5-18; idem, "The Annunciation in the Birth Narrative of Ishmael," *BR* 17 (1972) 51-60.

29. Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) 101-44; followed by Richard A. Horsley, *The Liberation of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives in Social Context* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 88-91.

First, an annunciation is typically a divine intervention in response to the plight of a woman (especially her barrenness), but Mary has no need of this or any other specified nature. Second, Mary's consent is unprecedented and therefore unexpected. Schaberg concludes that Luke has in this instance blended the commission story form into the annunciation form.

Whatever else is made of Schaberg's case, the points of contact between the commissioning form elsewhere in the Scriptures and all three Lukan scenes are significant. According to this model, the interpretive focus would fall above all on the recipients of the message—Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds—and so on their respective roles in the realization of God's purpose. Particularly in Mary's case, and thus with Israel whom she comes to represent, God's design calls for human response and willing participation through which his will is embraced. But do we really have to do with a commission form in this Lukan passage?

Key to an identification of the conventional form followed by Luke is the central section of these encounters—Luke 1:13-17, 30-33; 2:10-11: Are they constitutive of a commissioning story or an annunciation story? *Content* is crucial, since in broad outline these two forms are very much alike. Clearly, the Lukan material lacks such commission oriented language as is found in commission scenes—for example, "Go . . . I hereby commission you" (Judge 6:14) or "you shall go to whom I send you. . . . See today I appoint you" (Jer 1:7-10). Surely the formal element of commission is essential to the form. But in the first example in Luke, Zechariah is not told to do anything apart from giving his son the name John; otherwise, Gabriel speaks of what John and Elizabeth will do. Likewise, Mary is told to give her son the name Jesus, but thereafter the spotlight is on his future. At the same time, one may discern in the narration of the responses of Zechariah and Mary an implicit interest in their accepting a divine vocation, but this is not at center stage in a way reminiscent of the commissioning story. Nor are the shepherds commissioned in 2:10-11; they receive "good news," then, without divine prompting, on their own volition, decide to ". . . go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place" (2:15). As becomes apparent throughout Luke-Acts, so Luke's point here seems to be that the miraculous, redemptive activity of God calls forth response.

Nor need we be concerned that Mary's annunciation does not deal with her own need. As Schaberg recognizes, annunciation scenes only *normally* begin with the plight of a woman, not always. Moreover, even when barrenness is noted, it is simply not the case that the annunciation is necessarily a response to that plight. In the case of Abraham and Sarah, divine intervention within the narrative is not motivated by Sarah's need. The pressing question is, *How will God*

*fulfill his covenant promise* to Abraham and Sarah? That is, the pressing need is *God's*. One may point similarly to the annunciation of Isa 7:10-17, where the need is that of God's people.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, the needs addressed by the birth of Jesus are those of Israel and the purpose of God.

Luke's accounts of these divine-human encounters are birth announcements like those in Genesis, which he has shaped to his own ends; they are not encounters of commissioning. Simplifications of the long form of the annunciation scene show the similarity of Luke's scenes with others in the biblical tradition, and so underscore the relation of Luke 1:5-2:52 to God's mighty acts of redemption in the past. But they also mask how many elements are shared by the announcements in Genesis and Luke. The fact that this longer form has been detected elsewhere only in Judg 13:3-21 and Matt 1:20-21 raises the question to what degree it is even possible to speak of such an expanded form as a well-known literary convention. This emphasizes all the more the relation of the Abrahamic story and Luke's birth narrative.

(2) Reflecting on the aforementioned parallels between Luke's birth narrative and Genesis 11-21 we may note further that not all suggested points of correspondence are equally convincing. For some, however, there is a surprising linguistic overlap between the Septuagint and the Greek text of Luke, including material unrelated to the literary convention of the relating of a birth announcement or such stock themes as barrenness.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Luke's clear interest in directing attention to the Abrahamic material is marked by his reference to "our ancestor" "Abraham" and concern with the "covenant" in Luke 1:55, 73.<sup>32</sup> Hence, even those parallels that are less certain

30. Cf. Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 106.

31. For example:

Luke 1:6: ἦσαν δὲ δίκαιοι ἀμφοτέροι ἐναντίον τοῦ θεοῦ, πορευόμενοι ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐντολαῖς καὶ δικαιομασίαις τοῦ κυρίου ἀμεμπτοί

Gen 17:1: καὶ ὤφθη κύριος . . . καὶ εἶπεν . . . ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ θεὸς σου· εὐαρέσκει [i.e., "walk pleasingly"—cf. Werner Foester, "εὐαρέστος, εὐαρεστέω," *TDNT* 1:456-57; as elsewhere in the LXX, the hithpael of  $\text{ךָ לָךְ}$  has been transformed from an action into a quality] ἐναντίον ἐμοῦ καὶ γίνου ἀμεμπτος . . .

Luke 1:7: . . . καὶ ἀμφοτέροι προβεβηκότες ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αὐτῶν ἦσαν.

Luke 1:18: . . . ἐγὼ γὰρ εἰμι πρεσβύτης καὶ ἡ γυνή μου προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αὐτῆς.

Gen 18:11-12: Ἀβραὰμ δὲ καὶ Σαρρα πρεσβύτεροι προβεβηκότες ἡμερῶν . . . ὁ δὲ κύριος μου πρεσβύτερος.

[Note that both narrators provide a report of their characters' advanced age, followed by a character who advances this theme in response to the divine promise of a son.]

Luke 1:37: ὅτι οὐκ ἀδυνατήσει παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πᾶν ῥῆμα.

Gen 18:44: μὴ ἀδυνατεῖ [MT:  $\text{סָלַף}$ ] παρὰ τῷ θεῷ ῥῆμα.

32. See further Nils A. Dahl, "The Story of Abraham in Luke-Acts," in *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976) 66-86. Dahl both demonstrates the profundity of Luke's interest in Abraham throughout Luke-Acts, emphasizing

begin to appear more promising precisely because of the otherwise amply attested concern of Luke with material from this portion of Genesis. That is, since it is transparently obvious that Genesis 11-21 has served so fully as a subtext for Luke, even snippets of material in Luke 1:5-2:52 comparable to that of the Abrahamic story, some of which might even be explicable on other grounds, can be seen to have been motivated at least in part by Luke's interest in Abraham.

(3) This is not to say that Luke has created the framework or content of his birth narrative out of the Abrahamic material. Neither has he demonstrated a clearly delineated hermeneutical procedure for his use of Genesis 11-21. He can move easily from character to character in his employment of the Genesis story—thus, e.g., Zechariah is like Abraham, but so is Mary; Elizabeth is like Sarah, but so is Zechariah; John is like Isaac and Ishmael; and so on. This demonstrates that Luke is making no straightforward typological argument here. Nor does he make use of "fulfillment language" to describe his use of Israel's Scriptures in Luke 1:5-2:52—either with regard to the Abrahamic narrative or with the Old Testament more generally. Even where the law is quoted (Luke 2:22-24), it is not to show its "fulfillment" in a promise/prophecy-completion cycle, but simply to report that Jesus' parents did what the law required.

Instead, what we have with the appearance of the Abrahamic material is evident of Luke's own reading of and reflection on the narrative of Abraham, and reflection on the accounts of the births of John and Jesus in light of that narrative.<sup>33</sup> To the Abrahamic narrative Luke would have been drawn not only because of the similarities in human situation, but also by the central import of the covenant (reflected in the Lukan account by the use of the term "covenant" and the motif marked by the repeated covenantal language of mercy, remembrance, favor, promise, oath, et al.). He might also have been motivated by his interest in the universalistic embrace of God's purpose (present in Abraham's role as "ancestor of a multitude of nations" [Gen 17:4; cf. 22:17-18]). In his writing, then, Luke has created a text which is itself an interplay of other texts, "a system of references," "a node within a network"<sup>34</sup>—in this case to

especially Abraham's importance as "the primary recipient of God's promise to the fathers" (142), and observes that the incorporation of Abrahamic allusions in the Song of Mary and Song of Zechariah ". . . have been modeled upon the patterns of references to Abraham in hymnic and historical texts of the Old Testament" (150).

33. Cf. James A. Sanders, "Isaiah in Luke," *Int* 36 (1982) 144-55 (146): "What is remarkable about Luke's knowledge of his scripture was that apparently it came from his assiduous reading of it, or portions of it."

34. Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (WM; London: Routledge, 1972) 23.

the story of Abraham, some doubtlessly intentional, others perhaps less so. In this way, Luke's account participates in a discourse situation in which the Abrahamic material exists as a prominent feature, in which the story of God's covenantal relationship with Abraham plays a noticeable role in encouraging interpretive possibilities. This does not require of Luke a slavish retelling of the story of Genesis 11-21 with new characters; clearly, his use of the Abrahamic material has proceeded without such restrictions as he meditated on that material and shaped it to his own ends, all the while building on its central portrayal of the covenanting God who intervenes on behalf of humanity to accomplish his gracious aim. Luke has thus inscribed himself in tradition, showing his debt to this *previous* story and inviting his auditors to hear in *this* story the reverberations and continuation of *that* story as he attempts to give significance to the *present one*.<sup>35</sup>

If the similarities between the Abrahamic material and the accounts of birth in Luke 1-2 manifest immediately Luke's desire to fix his narrative within the history of the interaction of God and Abraham, these resonances also point in another direction. They parody that history—parody, that is, in the sense of "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity."<sup>36</sup> Luke not only inscribes himself in the past but also breaks loose from its constraints, taking the story in directions that both (1) show his freedom to employ the familiar narrative sequence in ways that transform it, and thus (2) shed fresh interpretive light on the past. For example, Luke has emphasized much more God's unannounced graciousness, his unanticipated intervention to bring deliverance, together with its necessary complement, human response to God's initiative. The note of reaction is accentuated in ways that go beyond the birth announcement convention in general and the relevant parallels in Genesis in particular. Moreover, the need for eschatological consummation of God's covenant with Abraham is unanticipated in Genesis, but history—at least as Luke understands it—had shown that Abraham had not been made the progenitor of many nations. The actualization of the divine promise would require divine activity that both recalled that covenant making and also

35. See Judith Still and Michael Worton, "Introduction," in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (ed. Michael Worton and Judith Sill; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990) 1-44; William Vorster, "Intertextuality and Redaktionsgeschichte," in *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honor of Bas van Iersel* (ed. Sipke Draisma; Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. K. Kok, 1989) 15-26; Culler, *Signs*, chap. 5; Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 80, 120-40.

36. Hutcheon, *Poetics*, 26.

gathered up its possibilities in divine consummation. Mary's Song is an important witness, though not the only one, to the eschatological reality that in the extraordinary conception and birth of Jesus, God had kept his promises and was bringing about a deliverance that would embrace all nations.

Importantly, what we have observed with reference to the points of contact between the Abrahamic story of Genesis 11-21 and Luke 1-2 has been developed along similar lines with reference to additional Old Testament passages,<sup>37</sup> even if the significance of these observations has not always been explored adequately. Special attention has been devoted by others to the appearances of Daniel 7-10 and Genesis 27-43 throughout Luke 1:5-2:52; Zeph 3:14-17 in Luke 1:26-33; 2 Sam 7:12-16 in Luke 1:32-33; and Micah 4:7-5:5 in Luke 2:1-14, among others.<sup>38</sup> In some instances, such as with the use of "great" to describe John and Jesus, evidence from this other Old Testament material may overlap with what we have described as echoes from the Abrahamic story (cf. Gen 12:2; 2 Sam 7:9; Luke 1:15, 32), but this is not surprising. After all, we are not suggesting Luke's use of a closely governed hermeneutical technique whereby a particular scene is viewed in the light of a selected scriptural text. Instead, in the story of Jesus'

37. Cf., e.g., Laurentin, *Struktur und Theologie*, 74-105; *Truth of Christmas*, 43-60; R. E. Brown, *Birth*, 268-75, 319-28, 420-24, 447-51; Hendrickx, *Infancy Narratives*, 54-56; C. T. Ruddick Jr., "Birth Narratives in Genesis and Luke," *NovT* 12 (1970) 343-48.

38. One of the outstanding questions is to what degree it is accurate to credit Luke with these echoes of various segments of Israel's Scriptures. Thus, for example, Barrett ("Luke/Acts," 237) has it that, "in the gospel, Luke's contribution to the christian use of the OT is very small," and Anthony Tyrrell Hanson (*The Living Utterances of God: The New Testament Exegesis of the Old* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983] 78-89) believes that Luke is more a purveyor of the citations of others than one who has, himself, "searched the Scriptures."

In large part, the question of the origin of the Old Testament references in the Lukan birth narrative is one segment within the larger conundrum of the source(s) of the Infancy Gospel as a whole (see especially, R. E. Brown, *Birth*; and the bibliography in Anton Dauer, *Beobachtungen zur literarischen Arbeitstechnik des Lukas* [AMT: BBB 79; Frankfurt-am-Main: Anton Hain, 1990] 17-18 n. 7; more recently: Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., "Birth Narratives in Pseudo-Philo's Biblical Antiquities and the Gospels," in *To Touch the Text: Biblical and Related Studies in Honor of Joseph A. Fitzmyer*, S.J. [ed. Maurya P. Horgan and Paul J. Kobelski; New York: Crossroad, 1989] 316-24; Stephen C. Farris, "On Discerning Semitic Sources in Luke 1-2," in *Gospel Perspectives, vol. 2: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* [ed. R. T. France and David Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981] 201-37; and the brief but helpful surveys of the discussion in John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* [WBC 35A; Dallas: Word, 1989] 21-23; Evans, *Saint Luke*, 140-42). More crucial for our purposes, however, is the query, how has the narrator shaped his story? Or, in this case, given these points of contact with Israel's Scriptures, what significance do they carry in this new co-text?

birth and childhood large portions of the Septuagint have served as a kind of second language for Luke, the birth narrative has become a kind of echo chamber for the interplay of "the old stories" with Luke's own story.<sup>39</sup> Hence, we have much less a need to certify to the exclusion of other probable candidates the precise source of an allusion in the birth narrative (which in any case is not always possible) than to appreciate the many voices from the past given a fresh hearing, and thus to reflect on the significance of their interplay in this new context.<sup>40</sup>

(4) An instructive parallel to Luke's use of the Abrahamic story are the linguistic and formal parallels between the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Especially apparent among these are the Jesus-Peter, Jesus-Stephen, and Jesus-Paul parallels that span the two halves of Luke-Acts, though others, such as the parallel between Jesus' baptism and Nazareth address (3:21-22; 4:16-30) and Pentecost (Acts 2) are also noticeable. Robert F. O'Toole has drawn attention to parallel actions (e.g., baptism, travel, kneeling + prayer, and signs and wonders), geographical places (e.g., Jerusalem, Samaria, and the temple), language descriptive of preaching and its content (e.g., "I teach," "I proclaim the good news," "repentance," and "the kingdom of God"), and parallel descriptions of Jesus and his followers (e.g., full of the Spirit and wisdom, possessed of power and grace, under divine compulsion, and prophetic).<sup>41</sup> To these, numerous other echoes of the Gospel in Acts—such as the parallel dying words of Jesus and Stephen (23:34, 46; Acts 7:59-60)—could be added.<sup>42</sup>

As significant as these parallels are, perhaps more interesting in the present context are points of contact between Luke 1:5-2:52 and the Acts of the Apostles. Noting first the material in Acts 1—prior to the account of the outpouring of the Spirit and public address by Peter, which resembles Luke 3:20-4:30—we may observe points of the chart on the following page.

39. Cf. John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

40. The importance of this interplay is evident in the Song of Mary and Song of Zechariah, where the promises to Abraham and David are combined.

41. R. F. O'Toole, "Parallels between Jesus and His Disciples in Luke-Acts: A Further Study," *BZ* 27 (1983) 195-212.

42. See the monograph-length study of the Jesus-Paul parallels by Walter Radl, *Paulus und Jesus im lukanischen Doppelwerk: Untersuchungen zu Parallelmotiven im Lukasevangelium und in der Apostelgeschichte* (EH23: Theology 49; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1975); and the survey in Susan Marie Praeder, "Jesus-Paul, Peter-Paul, and Jesus-Peter Parallelisms in Luke-Acts: A History of Reader Response" (SBLSP; Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1984) 23-39.

*Luke*

"Mary" appears in the Third Gospel only in 1:27, 30, 34, 38, 39, 41, 46, 56; 2:5, 16, 19, 34.

Simeon is "looking forward to the consolation of Israel" (2:25); Anna speaks " . . . about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (2:38).

Anna serves as a witness (2:38).

The Holy Spirit figures prominently in this story (1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25, 26, 27); Gabriel to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High . . ." (1:35).

Primary characters receive news from angels (1:11-20, 26-38; 2:9-14).

Anna prays "day and night" (2:37; cf. 1:10, 14).

*Acts*

"Mary" appears in Acts only in 1:14.

The apostles to Jesus: "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?" (1:6).

The apostles will be "witnesses" (1:8).

The Holy Spirit figures prominently in this story (1:2, 4, 5, 8); Jesus to the apostles: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (1:8).

Primary characters receive news from angels (1:11).

The disciples and certain women "were constantly devoting themselves to prayer" (1:14).

To this data we may add the suggestive parallels between the complementary visions of Zechariah/Mary, Saul/Ananias (Acts 9:1-19), and Cornelius/Peter (Acts 10).<sup>43</sup> These are "complementary" inasmuch as in each case visionary experiences are related in tandem, and the successful completion of the one act of God through a human agent is related to the response of the other. The points of contact between the stories of Zechariah and Cornelius are most striking:

43. Michael D. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm* (2 vols.; JSNTSS 20; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989) 1:205-6. Goulder finds in these parallels signs for source-critical examination, but does not explore their narratological significance.

*Luke 1:5-13, 29, 39, 41*

"There was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah."

"Both [he and his wife] were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord."

"Once when he was serving as a priest . . . there appeared to him an angel of the Lord. . . . When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him."

"But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard.'"

*Acts 10:1-4, 17, 23*

"There was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian cohort."

"He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God."

"One afternoon . . . he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel coming in. . . ."

"He stared at him in terror."

"The angel answered, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.'"

Taken as a whole, these myriad parallels point to Luke's literary agenda at the level of the narrative as a whole. These points of contact are reminiscent of those noted above with reference to the Abrahamic story and Luke's birth narrative, but no one would suggest that Acts "fulfills" the Third Gospel according to a prophecy-fulfillment scheme,<sup>44</sup> even if certain possibilities raised in the Gospel are actualized in its sequel. Rather, by means of these data, Luke has built a bridge from one story to the other. He has linked the two together as one story, so that, first, we understand that between Luke and Acts we are concerned with the same, overarching narrative purpose. Second, and more importantly, we understand that behind this one story stands one divine purpose, one God who is graciously working out his salvific will.

In other words, the echoes of the Gospel in Acts serve much the same function as the echoes of Israel's Scriptures in Luke 1:5-2:52. In fact, what we have here is a form of internal repetition—internal,

44. This is not to take issue here with W. C. van Unnik's suggestion that Acts "proves" the Gospel ("The 'Book of Acts': The Confirmation of the Gospel," *NovT* 4 [1960] 26-59).

that is, to Luke-Acts--closely modelled on the external repetition we have hitherto observed between Luke's birth narrative and the Abrahamic material.<sup>45</sup> Redundancy of this sort is of particular importance in an oral environment and with a narrative of the length of Luke-Acts, serving concerns of emphasis and needs of memory as the story develops. More significantly given our present interests, repetition of this sort accentuates the unity of narratological and theological aims behind the story; in this case, repetition ties Luke and Acts together as one story, but also binds it to the Scriptures of Israel as a continuation of *that* story. We are engaged, then, with one continuous story, the story of the covenant-making and covenant-keeping of Yahweh.

(5) That Luke is concerned especially to tie his narrative of the advent and growth of the good news into the singular story of God's redemptive purpose is highlighted also by his interest in the proper interpretation of history:<sup>46</sup> It is here that the more explicit use of the Scriptures in Acts is instructive with regard to their more implicit appearance in Luke 1-2. That is, above all in the speeches in Acts, inspired speakers are repeatedly brought forward with the purpose of providing a historical review—beginning with Abraham (Acts 7:2-53) or the Exodus (Acts 13:16-41), or even with more contemporary events such as the death of Judas (Acts 1:15-22) or the healing of a crippled man (Acts 4:8-12). In each case, either scriptural events are related or the Scriptures are themselves brought to bear on current events or both, with the result that we understand that what God is doing cannot be understood apart from what God has been doing, of which the present is only the latest but not yet the ultimate chapter.

#### ECHOES OF SCRIPTURE IN LUKE 1:5-2:52: CONCLUDING REMARKS

What, then, can be concluded about Luke's use of Israel's Scriptures in this story of Jesus' birth and childhood on the basis of these observations centered on one specimen example? First, we have found nothing to suggest that our narrator is working yet with a developed notion of "fulfillment" in these events, even if this perspective surfaces later (cf., e.g., 4:18-21; 22:37). Luke does not appear to be reading the Scriptures with the purpose of finding prophecies, latent or otherwise, awaiting their fulfillment in the coming of the Messiah.

45. Cf. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1980) chap. 3.

46. Cf. Robert G. Hall, *Revealed Histories: Techniques for Ancient Jewish and Christian Historiography* (JSPSS 6; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991).

Nor does he see in Abraham or Isaac a type corresponding to a figure in his birth narrative who might serve as antitype as in a typological hermeneutic.<sup>47</sup> Rather, he regards his opening chapters as though they were the continuation of the story rooted in the Abrahamic covenant. The echoes we have heard give subtle but sure indicators that the story of God's purpose has not drawn to a close but, quite the contrary, is manifestly still being written. This is evident for the narrator in the divine machinations behind the extraordinary births of John and Jesus, workings which themselves constitute evidence that God has remembered his promise and that God is even now working graciously to bring to fruition his purpose. These echoes reverberate in the structure, themes, even language of Luke's narrative, drawing his account into the interpretive context of Abraham's story, affirming that the God who has mercifully initiated relationship and acted in surprising and mighty ways is acting in the same way, guided by the same purpose.

From this perspective, combined with the explicit language of covenant in Luke's story, the related vocabulary of remembrance and mercy<sup>48</sup> serves both to affirm the direct continuity of Luke 1:5-2:52 with the purpose of God expressed in the Scriptures and to indicate that God's purposes are being realized in these events. Hence, there is a note of fulfillment among these echoes we have heard, but this "fulfillment" is related more fundamentally to God's purpose, God's aim, than to a text-based exegetical maneuver whereby a given passage or set of passages is understood in a prediction-fulfillment scheme with Luke's story. Luke's theological agenda is theocentric, centered on God and his purposes, and his story (like Israel's Scriptures) is the narration of how that purpose is made known and realized.

For Luke, then, the "beginning" can be located only in God's purpose, and his narrative beginning presupposes not only this divine aim, but also (1) the articulation of that aim in the Scriptures and (2) a concern for that aim on the part of his audience.

47. Some exegetes refer to the use of Israel's Scriptures in Luke 1:5-2:52 as "midrashic" or "haggadic," or even as "midrashic-haggadic," but the effectiveness of such labels depends on our using these terms quite loosely. As a consequence, these labels say too little—pointing only to the interpretive use of the Scriptures in the narrative—while threatening to say too much—that the infancy material is a more or less imaginative commentary on a biblical text(s). See Ben Witherington, III, "Birth of Jesus," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 60-74; esp. 60, 64-65; Harrington, "Birth Narrative," 324; R. E. Brown, *Birth*, 557-62.

48. See Francis I. Andersen, "Yahweh, the Kind and Sensitive God," in *God Who Is Rich in Mercy: Essays Presented to Dr. D. B. Knox* (ed. Peter T. O'Brien and David G. Peterson; Homebush West, New South Wales: Lancer/Anzea, 1986) 41-88.

Before concluding this exploration of the use of the Scriptures in Luke 1:5-2:52 a further issue begs for attention. Placing to one side as unanswerable the question whether Luke's first readers were so proficient in locating Genesis-Luke parallels as our comments might suggest, we may still ask, did Luke hope that they would be so clever? To put the query differently, we may inquire, to what degree is a fruitful reading of Luke 1:5-2:52 dependent on a hearing of those echoes and their identification as having come to the Lukan narrative via Genesis 11-21? On this matter two points deserve brief mention. First, to the degree that this concern is motivated by contemporary apprehensions over our (in)ability to hear and identify these echoes, this line of questioning is itself problematic. Our own Marcionite tendencies to neglect the Old Testament too often rob us of hearing the rich interplay of "old" and "new" as occupants of a common discursive space and we ought not read our losses back into the early Christian communities. We know tantalizingly little about how much intimacy with the Septuagint we might expect of a largely Gentile church in the second half of the first century CE. But we do know that what we now call the Old Testament, especially in its Greek translation, was *the* Bible for those communities. And we know that the authors of books that eventually made up our New Testament, not the least of which were Luke and Paul, wrote *as if* their audiences could hear such echoes and follow sometimes intricate exegetical treatments of those Scriptures.

Second, the Italian professor of semiotics Umberto Eco has distinguished two sorts of readers in a way that has bearing on our problem. He observes that

. . . every text is always, more or less consciously, conceived for two kinds of Model Reader. The first is supposed to cooperate in actualizing the content of the text; the second is supposed to be able to describe (and enjoy) the way in which the first Model Reader has been textually produced.<sup>49</sup>

The first reader is encouraged by a text to respond in certain ways, specifically, in Eco's view, to deal interpretively with texts in the same way as the author deals generatively with them. The second reader delights in grasping *how* the text so encourages that response. That is, the second reader stands, as it were, over the shoulder of the author, observing his or her narrative technique, noting how an account is shaped, appreciating how it is able to effect responses in a

49. Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (AS; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 136; see 123-36; cf. idem, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1979); idem, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (ed. Stefan Collini; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

reader. In our discussion of the Genesis-Luke parallels, we hoped to function like this second reader, indicating how central aspects of Genesis 11-21 have been woven into the fabric of Luke 1:5-2:52. But a first reader (or hermeneutical community)—in this case, a first-century, largely Gentile-Christian community with familiarity with the Septuagint—might have heard these connections without having to delineate them one-by-one or charting them. Even had they missed one or two here, another there, they would still have been drawn by the Lukan account to the conclusion to which it points: As with Abraham, so now, God is working graciously and mightily to bring his purpose to fruition. Luke has peppered the account with so many and different levels of allusions that those with even largely untrained ears will still hear. And hearing, they will have been drawn into the discursive space created by the text, thus to aid in the production of its meaning, and thereby they will be shaped by it.

If we and our contemporaries are not so shaped, it is not fundamentally because we must all engage in Eco's "second reading," but because we have through neglect so far distanced ourselves from the narrative of God's purpose in Israel's Scriptures and can thus hardly perform as "first readers."