

Mission, Witness, and the Coming of the Spirit

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The Christian missionary movement is currently suffering something of a malaise, while the scriptural teaching on "mission," which might serve as a corrective to this weakness, has not been at the forefront of biblical studies. This essay examines the significance of Jesus' mission in Luke's Gospel and Acts 1-3 to determine if and how it may impact on our own mission and witness. During Jesus' earthly ministry the foundational mission in Luke was his own sending by God to Israel. The twelve and the seventy-two were intimately involved with him in his mission and played a key role. After his death and resurrection the way was opened for repentance and forgiveness of sins to be proclaimed in Jesus' name to all the nations. His mission was now effected by his "witnesses" bearing testimony to Israel (the twelve are the nucleus of the restored Israel), then to Judea and Samaria, and on to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). Those gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost represent "all Israel"; Peter's testimony was given to the people of God. Yet there are clear indications in the narrative of Acts 2 that the coming of the Spirit on a renewed and cleansed Israel would ultimately point forward to universal blessing. Those who have accepted the testimony of the apostolic eyewitnesses are themselves able to bear testimony to Jesus' death, resurrection, and the forgiveness of sins. The open-endedness of Acts reminds us of an unfinished task and encourages us to be committed to the ongoing missio Dei.

Key Words: Luke, Acts, mission, mission of Jesus, witness, Holy Spirit, Israel, Gentiles

From the beginning the Christian movement was a missionary movement that took the first-century world by storm when its advocates "turned the world upside down" with their evangelistic message (Acts 17:6).¹ As we approach the third millennium, however, we

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1. So writes P. G. Bolt, "Following Jesus and Fishing for People: Evangelistic Mission in the Third Millennium," *Explorations* 12 (1998) 1-37, esp. p. 2.

may ask whether that aggressive missionary movement is suffering something of a malaise. Some are no doubt glad that the early fervor has waned. There are many who are convinced that we should not speak of mission at all, given its overtones of cultural imperialism, and that evangelistic mission, in particular, is inappropriate in a pluralistic and postmodern world.

Others are calling for greater efforts in evangelistic endeavor. But given the current malaise of our missionary movement, how do we motivate people for this kind of undertaking? In the past, within some circles, the edifice of Christian missions has rested largely on the cornerstone of one text, Matthew's Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). But this has proven to be counterproductive: "[I]n the number-crunching climate of the modern world, exegesis is done by democracy as well."² The more the work of mission rests on one text, the shakier the whole task becomes. After all, the significance of Matthew 28 has previously been discounted, in a variety of ways: its commands were meant solely for a select group, such as the apostles, or Jewish Christians, or others of the first generation, but certainly not for Christians in the twentieth century.

But if we consider that reaching the end of the earth with the message of salvation is the major thrust of the Bible, and on any definition "mission" is bound up with this, then it must be established from both Old and New Testaments, not just from one or two isolated texts. Although the scriptural teaching on "mission" has often been central to the work of missiologists, it has not always been at the forefront of biblical studies, whether conducted by evangelicals or others. Thankfully, there has been something of a resurgence of interest in the last few years.³

In this paper I shall attempt to do four things: first, to make some preliminary comments about the mission of Jesus to Israel in the Gospel of Luke; second, to examine the relationship between mission and witness in Luke 24 and the opening chapters of Acts; third, to determine the significance of Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit in relation to our subject; and finally, to ascertain whether and, if so, how this may impact on our own mission and witness.

I. THE MISSION OF JESUS TO ISRAEL IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

It has been claimed that in the Gospel of Luke and its sequel, the book of Acts, the theme of *mission* is of profound importance. According to Senior and Stuhlmueller, in Luke's two-volume work there "may be

2. Ibid., 4.

3. One may think of the recent volume produced by the faculty of Columbia Biblical Seminary and Graduate School of Missions, entitled *Mission in the New Testament: An Evangelical Approach* (ed. W. J. Larkin and J. F. Williams; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1998).

the clearest presentation of the church's universal mission in all of the New Testament.⁴ Let us begin by turning to:

a. *The Mission of God in Sending Jesus*

According to the Third Evangelist, the basic and foundational mission is that of Jesus, who has been sent by God.⁵ This emerges clearly in the programmatic statement of Luke 4:16-30, where Jesus speaks of his anointing by the Holy Spirit (at his baptism, 3:22-23) and declares the purpose of his being sent:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
Because he has anointed me;
To preach good news to the poor he has sent me,
To proclaim to the captives release
And to the blind new sight,
To send for the broken in release,
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (vv. 18, 19)

Jesus is the Spirit-anointed prophet and Messiah who announces the new era of salvation that he is currently bringing to pass (cf. Isa 61:1-2; 58:6). The nature of his mission is marked out by four infinitival expressions, three of which involve preaching: "to *preach good news to the poor*," "to *proclaim to the captives release and sight to the blind*," "to *release the oppressed*" and "to *proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord*." The first is fundamental to Jesus' task and is apparently amplified⁶ by the following three clauses.⁷ Jesus is conscious that he has been commissioned and sent by God for his mission which is

4. D. Senior and C. Stuhlmüller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983) 255.

5. The language of mission is used of God's sending messengers to Israel (Luke 20:9-12), which culminates in the sending of Jesus (v. 13).

6. R. C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. Volume 1: The Gospel according to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 62-63. J. B. Green ("Proclaiming Repentance and Forgiveness of Sins to all Nations": A Biblical Perspective on the Church's Mission," in *The Mission of the Church in Methodist Perspective: The World Is My Parish* [ed. A. G. Padgett; Studies in the History of Missions 10; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992] 13-43, esp. p. 27) suggests that the threefold repetition of "me" closely links the anointing, the mission, and the speaker, while the three clauses with the verbs in the infinitive ("to proclaim . . .," "to send . . .," and "to proclaim . . .") together interpret what is meant by "to preach good news to the poor." M. Turner (*Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* [JPTSS 9; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1996] 250) considers that Jesus' mission is "largely a unified one," since all but the last clause involve "a different Isaianic metaphor for Israel's low estate, and all five concern her impending release from such a state."

7. The former term to "preach good news" (εὐαγγελίζομαι) is used repeatedly in summaries of Jesus' activity and indicate that he is continually doing what he was sent to carry out (Luke 4:43; 7:22; 8:1; 16:16; 20:1). The same verb is picked up and used of the proclamation of the gospel by Jesus' witnesses and other disciples (cf. Luke 9:6; Acts 8:4, 12, 25, 35, 40; 11:20, etc.).

essentially to "preach good news" (εὐαγγελίζομαι) or to "proclaim" (κηρύσσω), and it has "release" (ἄφεσις) as its goal, a "release" which throughout the rest of Luke–Acts is first and foremost "the forgiveness of sins"—a picture of total forgiveness and salvation just as it had become in Isaiah 61.⁸

The "poor" to whom the good news is announced are not to be understood narrowly of the economically destitute, as some have suggested;⁹ rather the term refers more generally to "the dispossessed, the excluded" who were forced to depend upon God. Within the wider canonical context of the OT, for example in the Psalms, the "poor" refers to the socially deprived, those in great need, arising from suffering, persecution, as well as literal poverty.¹⁰ The "poor" can also describe Israel over against the nations that oppress her (Ps. 9; cf. 68:10). In Isaiah the term is extended metaphorically to designate the great need into which Israel had fallen because of the exile: the "poor" are the afflicted ones, those returning from captivity (49:13). According to chap. 61 the poor designates the eschatological community, the suffering exiles or faithful in Israel who have been spiritually oppressed.¹¹ It is to these poor and oppressed in Israel that Jesus comes announcing the gospel of the kingdom.

b. *Jesus' Sending of the Twelve*

If the foundational mission, according to Luke, is Jesus' being sent by God, then the sending of the twelve is an integral part of Jesus' own mission. From a larger group of disciples our Lord chose and commissioned twelve "apostles" (ἀπόστολοι, Luke 6:12-15). He shared his power and authority with them¹² and sent (ἀποστέλλω) them on their mission (9:1-2).¹³ They too are involved in preaching the rule of God

8. Luke 1:77; 3:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18. Luke does not take up the distinctive Jubilee language or ideas in his writings (e.g., "year of Jubilee release," Lev 25:10, 11, 13, etc.), while his use of the key term "liberty or release" (ἄφεσις) is interpreted in terms of "the forgiveness of sins"; Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*, 67-68; and Turner (*Power from on High*, 244), who thinks that Luke has presented this material as part of "a more general New Exodus soteriology"; cf. W. J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994) 211-12.

9. Note the survey of the lengthy scholarly discussion as to who are "the poor," together with further bibliographical details, in J. B. Green, "Good News to Whom? Jesus and the 'Poor' in the Gospel of Luke," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ—Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (ed. J. B. Green and M. Turner; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994) 59-74, esp. pp. 60-65.

10. Pss 22:24; 34:6; 35:10; 86:1; 88:15. D. P. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts* (Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt 6; Linz: Fuchs, 1982) 26-28.

11. *Ibid.*, 36-39; cf. Turner, *Power from on High*, 250-51.

12. "Jesus testifies to their authority as God's representatives"; D. L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994) 818.

13. It is a mission which marks the end of Jesus' Galilean ministry.

and healing the sick (v. 2), activities which have in view the reconstitution of Israel (6:13; 22:30), a goal already anticipated in the birth narratives (Luke 1, 2). Significantly, Luke's description of the sending of the twelve (cf. 9:2, 6) is reminiscent of his portrayal of Jesus' mission and message, which were developed in the light of the Isaiah quotation in chap. 4:18-19.

c. *Jesus' Sending of the Seventy-Two*

Likewise, the sending of the seventy-two is intimately connected with Jesus' mission. These unnamed disciples prepare the Lord's approach to Jerusalem: they are "sent (ἀποστέλλω) before his face" (10:1), an expression that specifically recalls the beginning of the travel narrative when Jesus set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem (9:51, 52). Their mission, because it is his, stands under the shadow of the cross.¹⁴ Like John the Baptist (1:17, 76; 3:4; 7:27), they are "messengers" who prepare the way of the *Lord* as they travel "to every town and place where he was about to go" (10:1).

The mission of the seventy-two, like that of the twelve, is to Israel. As royal heralds who are sent on Jesus' mission (v. 3), they have the same twofold task: to proclaim a message of national emergency and to heal (v. 9). Their journey with Jesus to Jerusalem will mark the final call to Israel to repent and submit to her King.¹⁵ Their official declaration, "peace [i.e., salvation] be to this house" (vv. 5-6), is an indication that the final messenger, Jesus himself, is present. To reject the message of the kingdom is to have no part in the eschatological people of God (vv. 10-11).

To sum up. During Jesus' earthly ministry the foundational mission in the Gospel of Luke was his own sending by God to Israel. The twelve and the seventy-two are intimately involved with Jesus in his mission and play a key role. They are sent by the one who has himself been sent from God. Jesus did not embark on a universal mission during the course of his earthly ministry, although there are hints and anticipations throughout Luke's Gospel¹⁶ that his saving work will have worldwide repercussions.

14. The discourse grounds their sending "in Jesus' own mission of suffering and death"; so D. L. Matson, *Household Narratives in Acts: Pattern and Interpretation* (JSNTSup 123; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 33.

15. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 18-19.

16. Apart from the birth narratives and Luke 4:25-27, there are hints in the narrative of Luke 10 that the mission of the seventy-two to Israel anticipates and prepares the reader for the universal mission in the book of Acts. Note, recently, Matson, *Household Narratives in Acts*, 31-36; and J. B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997) 411-12. Cf. also A. J. Köstenberger and P. T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Leicester: InterVarsity/Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, forthcoming), chap. 6, "Luke—Acts."

II. MISSION AND WITNESS IN LUKE 24 AND THE OPENING CHAPTERS OF ACTS

Just as God's mission in sending Jesus (to Israel) was central and foundational during his earthly ministry, so too after his death and resurrection, with the way now open for repentance and the forgiveness of sins to be proclaimed in his name to all the nations (Luke 24:47), this sending of Jesus is still the essential mission. I do not deny that the language of sending is used of others. In fact, key theological terms are employed of a series of people who are sent by God, the risen Lord, the Holy Spirit, and heavenly messengers, sometimes for limited and particular purposes.¹⁷ But behind these other sendings stands the fundamental mission of Jesus.

Three pieces of evidence may be drawn in to support this claim. (1) It is clear from the opening two verses of Luke's second volume that Acts recounts the continuing work of Jesus' salvation through his witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit (v. 1).¹⁸ "Jesus' ministry on earth, exercised personally and publicly, was followed by his ministry from heaven, exercised through his Holy Spirit by his apostles."¹⁹ (2) The terminology of mission continues to be used in relation to Jesus' being sent by the Father (Acts 3:20, 26), and, as was the case prior to his death and resurrection, our Lord is engaged in sending others (e.g., Paul, Acts 9:17; 26:17-18). (3) The total purpose for Jesus' being sent by the Father has not yet been completed. The central salvation historical events, namely, Jesus' death and resurrection, which stand written in scripture (Luke 24), have occurred. The third divine necessity, however, the proclamation of repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name to all the nations, still remains to be accomplished.

In Luke 24, after Jesus' death and resurrection, there is a major development within the story as to how God's saving purposes for Israel and the nations are to be realized. Jesus' universal mission, which is grounded in his death and resurrection (v. 46), is to be effected by his disciples as witnesses²⁰ after he returns to the Father (v. 49; cf. Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32, etc.). They have been chosen by him and

17. By God: Acts 7:34, 35; the risen Lord: 9:17; 22:21; 26:17-18; the Holy Spirit: 10:20; 13:4; and through heavenly messengers: 11:13; cf. 10:5, 22, 31-33.

18. In the expression ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν, the auxiliary 'began' (ἤρξατο) is emphatic and should be given its full weight ("all that Jesus *began* to do and teach," so NIV), rather than being taken as an auxiliary (= "all that Jesus did and taught," so Haenchen; NRSV). Accordingly, Acts contains an account of the continuing work of Jesus. Note the syntactical discussion of C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994) 1.66, 67.

19. J. R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1990) 32. M. Hengel (*Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* [London: SCM, 1986] 59) rightly observes: "In reality, the whole double work covers the one history of Jesus Christ."

20. On the theme of witness, see particularly A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (SNTSMS 31; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); I. H. Marshall,

are to be equipped and endorsed by the Holy Spirit for this task (Luke 24:49; cf. Acts 1:4-5, 8).²¹ The twelve²² are to be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8). In particular, they will bear testimony to Israel (2:22; 13:31; cf. 10:36-39), while later Paul, who is included among the number of witnesses, takes the testimony to the end of the earth—that is, to the Gentiles (9:15; 22:14-15; 26:16).

The content of their witness, according to the summary in Luke 24, involves three scriptural necessities: (1) the suffering and death of the Messiah (v. 46); (2) his rising from the dead (v. 46); and (3) the call for repentance with a view to the forgiveness of sins (v. 47). It is significant that the "forgiveness" (ἄφεσις) of sins, which summarizes the salvation blessings,²³ is now mentioned for the first time in Luke after its application to the missions of John (1:77; 3:3) and Jesus (4:18). This expression connects the message and mission of Jesus to those he gave the disciples. As they proclaimed the forgiveness of sins they were continuing Jesus' Servant ministry (cf. Isa 61:1-2). Their basic message was not new, but the story of salvation has developed since the earlier mention of forgiveness (ἄφεσις) in the ministries of John and Jesus: *now* the summons to repent for the forgiveness of sins is announced in Jesus' name, it is grounded in his death and resurrection, and is to be universal (v. 47).

Accordingly, the mission of Jesus and the witness of those chosen by him are intimately connected: the Father's sending of Jesus on his mission is effected through the apostolic witness. This connection comes out clearly in Acts 3. Peter declares that, in fulfillment of the covenant promises made to Abraham, God has sent (ἀποστέλλω, v. 26) the risen Jesus, his Servant (v. 13; cf. Isa 53:12), to bring blessing to "all the families of the earth," in the first instance to Israel (the "heirs of the prophets and the covenant," v. 25), then to the Gentiles (cf. v. 26). Peter informs the Jerusalem crowd that by listening to the witness of the apostles, and here he is particularly referring to his own witness, they can now hear and respond to Jesus, the prophet like Moses (v. 22). So the mission of Jesus, in which he is sent first to Israel and then to the Gentiles, is heard through the testimony of the twelve and later through Paul's witness.

Let us probe this issue further in relation to the apostolic witness in Acts 2.

The Acts of the Apostles (New Testament Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); and P. G. Bolt, "Mission and Witness," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (ed. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998) 191-214.

21. *Ibid.*, 193-95, esp. p. 195.

22. Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41.

23. Cf. J. B. Green, "'Salvation to the End of the Earth' (Acts 13:47): God as Saviour in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (ed. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998) 83-106, esp. p. 84.

III. WITNESS AND THE SALVATION-HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PENTECOST

The long-awaited day of Pentecost arrives.²⁴ For Luke this is an occasion of profound importance, signifying a decisive moment in the outworking of God's saving plan. The outpouring of the Spirit is clinching evidence that the last days have arrived (Num 11:29; Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 36:27). Luke uses the language of fulfillment (v. 1), first, because the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 has been wonderfully fulfilled in the Spirit's coming and, second, because his arrival has been anticipated by prophecies of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 3:16; 24:49; Acts 1:4-5, 8).

The Holy Spirit comes upon the whole group of 120 disciples (v. 4), although Luke highlights the gift of the Spirit to the twelve for their role as witnesses (2:32; cf. 1:8; Luke 24:48-49; note also Isa 43:8-13; 44:6-8). (This is not to suggest, however, that the coming of the Spirit was a prophetic empowering simply for mission or witness: Luke's account in Acts 2 *alone* shows that the giving of the Spirit is for salvation [vv. 38-39], for transformed lives in the community [vv. 42-47] that are given to worship, prayer, praise, adherence to apostolic teaching, and the sharing of one's possessions).²⁵ The election of Matthias to replace Judas (Acts 1:15-26) had meant there was now a full complement to the twelve. They are the nucleus of a restored and reconstituted Israel, whose witness to the whole nation is about to begin in Jerusalem. With the coming of the Spirit, they are involved in taking up the task of the Isaianic Servant (as Jesus' words in Luke 24:48 had implied; cf. Acts 13:47), who ministers representatively to the whole nation,²⁶ that is, to "Jews from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5) and "the whole house of Israel" (v. 36).

Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-39, which explains the significance of the Pentecost event and is central to Acts, spells out the content²⁷ of the disciples' witness that begins "in Jerusalem" (cf. 1:8). The coming of the Spirit is associated with the gift of prophecy (according to

24. Note especially C. S. Keener, *The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts: Divine Purity and Power* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997) 190-213.

25. As R. Stronstad (*The Charismatic Theology of Saint Luke* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1984] 51-52) and R. P. Menzies (*Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* [Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994] 168--75) seem to overemphasize. Note the careful and balanced analysis of Turner, *Power from on High*, chaps. 12, 13; and idem, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: Then and Now* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996) 42-43, 46-48.

26. The prophets had associated the coming of the Spirit with the restoration of Israel: Isa 44:3-4; 59:20-21; Ezek 36:27-28; 37:14; Joel 2:28-32.

27. Trites (*New Testament Concept of Witness*, 142) correctly observes: "The content of the apostolic testimony is most fully revealed in the speeches of Acts, particularly those in chaps. 2, 3, 5, 10 and 13."

vv. 17, 18, all will receive the prophetic Spirit), and Peter interprets the event in terms of Joel 2:28-32, where God promises to pour out his Spirit on "all flesh"—that is, on "all Israel."

The apostle moves from the Joel passage with its mention of people calling upon the name of the Lord to be saved (v. 21) to focus first on Jesus' crucifixion (vv. 22-23) and then God's raising him from the dead and exalting him to be Lord and Messiah (vv. 33-36). After his exaltation Jesus poured out the promised Holy Spirit. The apostle also picks up the prophetic promise of salvation to all who call upon the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21) and urges his hearers to call upon the Lord *Jesus* by repenting and being baptized in his name for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Luke 24:47).²⁸ They will receive the gift of the Spirit, since the promise is for them and their children (v. 39). Peter's witness to Israel (which has focused on the three divine necessities of Luke 24:46, 47) is that they should hear and appropriate this message of renewal and eschatological blessing. His sermon thus moves from the coming of the Spirit upon the 120, and especially the twelve as witnesses (cf. v. 32), to the promise of the Spirit for the hearers who will experience salvation.

We have underscored the point that those gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost were devout Jews who represented "all Israel" (2:5, 36; cf. v. 14). Peter's testimony was given to the people of God. Yet there are clear hints in the narrative of Acts 2 that the coming of the Spirit on a renewed and cleansed Israel would ultimately point forward to universal blessing (as the prophetic writings had foreshadowed: e.g., Isa 42:6; 49:6): (1) The presence of Jews "from every nation under heaven" (v. 5), while referring to those of the dispersion, is nevertheless thought to "anticipate" what will occur worldwide.²⁹ The devout visitors to Jerusalem are considered by Luke to be representatives of the various lands from which they had come.³⁰ (2) The list of nations

28. B. Witherington (*The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998] 142) points out that a particular function of the Pentecost speech was "to disclose to the Jerusalem Jews that they have blindly rejected their own Messiah and must repent. . . . Peter begins, 'Let this be known to you', and concludes, 'Therefore let the whole house of Israel know assuredly . . .', forming an inclusion (2:14, 36)."

29. R. C. Tannehill (*The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. Volume 2: The Acts of the Apostles* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990] 28) thinks that the presence of Jews "from every nation under heaven" introduces a "symbolic dimension" into the narrative that suggests "first that it is the goal of the gospel to address all Israel, scattered throughout the world, and second that it must also address the gentile inhabitants of the lands from which these Jews come." Cf. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*, 176, 177; and Keener (*The Spirit*, 194), who states that "these Jewish hearers had gathered from all the nations of the known earth."

30. F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (NICNT; rev. ed; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988) 55. Dumbrell (*The Search for Order*, 223) speaks of "the world being universally

in vv. 9-12, which amplifies v. 5, shows a marked similarity to the Jewish table of nations tradition based on Genesis 10, and which is present in partial form in Isa 66:18, 19 where Yahweh promises to "gather all nations and tongues."³¹ (3) The expression "all flesh," which in Joel has Israel as its immediate focus, is given a universal twist when Peter speaks of the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit being "for all who are far off" (v. 39).³² This is not inconsistent, however, with a broader focus of the Joel passage—namely, that "all flesh" hints at something wider than Israel (see below). (4) The enthronement of Jesus as Lord and Christ implies a role towards the nations. Ps 110:1-2 (Acts 2:34, 35) indicates that the "Lord" has taken his seat to await the overthrow of his enemies, while Psalm 2, which also indicates that the nations will be defeated by Christ, declares that an amnesty is available for those who submit to the Son.³³ Because Jesus the Davidic Messiah is the Lord upon whose name men and women should now call to be saved (Acts 2:21, 34-36; Joel 2:32, 36-39), forgiveness is available to all through him. (5) Luke's accounts of subsequent bestowals of the Spirit throughout Acts deliberately pick up the "programmatically" language of chap. 2 and show that Pentecost is only a partial realization of the Joel promise to "all flesh." In the subsequent narratives of Acts, the response of new groups to the word of God brings similar outpourings of the Spirit and shows a progressive movement of the realization of Joel's promise to *all*: the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), the Gentiles (10:44-48; 11:15-18), and the disciples of the Baptist (19:1-7). These so-called "mini-Pentecosts" occur at crucial stages of the missionary expansion. Pentecost is a nonrepeatable event, but "the outpouring of the Spirit . . . [on this occasion] serves a paradigmatic function elsewhere in the Acts of the Apostles."³⁴

affected by the Pentecost event" because Jews from every nation are "represented and what has happened now to Israel is a paradigm for the Spirit of prophecy to descend in these last days 'on all people' (v. 17)."

31. J. M. Scott, "Luke's Geographical Horizon," in *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting, vol. 2: The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting* (ed. D. W. J. Gill and C. Gempf; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994) 483-544, esp. pp. 527-30; and J. M. Penney, *The Missionary Emphasis of Lukan Pneumatology* (JPTSS 12; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 82.

32. The words "to you and to your children and to all those afar off," have been rightly understood as an allusion to the Abrahamic covenant, recalling especially Gen 17:7-10 ("to you and your descendants after you"), with the last phrase, "those afar off," pointing to the nations who will find blessing through Abraham's descendants (Gen 22:18; cf. 12:3); so Penney, *The Missionary Emphasis*, 91. Keener (*The Spirit*, 197) rightly makes the further point that these phrases show clearly that "Luke does not envision the outpouring of the Spirit as a past, temporary gift."

33. Cf. Bolt, "Mission and Witness," 200.

34. Green, "Proclaiming Repentance," 33-34.

With this testimony to Jesus as Lord and Christ and the mighty outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, a Jewish festival, the universal movement has begun. Although it will encounter opposition, even rejection, it is unstoppable. What started with the twelve in Jerusalem continues throughout Judea and Samaria and moves towards the end of the earth (in accordance with Acts 1:8). As the story progresses, Paul too is commissioned as a μάρτυς and sent (ἀποστέλλω) to carry Jesus' name to the Gentiles, their kings, and the people of Israel, a task that would involve him in suffering (9:6, 15-16; 22:17-21; 26:15-23).³⁵ The mission of the exalted Jesus is being accomplished through this apostolic witness in the power of the Spirit.

In the beginning of Acts, worldwide witness is about to get under way (1:8); as we come to the end, it is vitally in progress (28:28-31). The closing words of Luke's second volume are deliberately open-ended. "The ends of the earth are never reached in Acts. The mission goal is never completed. It remains open. . ."³⁶

IV. OUR WITNESS AND MISSION?

We return to the point at which we began. Does this limited inquiry throw any light on our own witness and mission? Let me make some concluding observations:

(1) It is important to observe that in the Acts of the Apostles those who responded to the apostolic testimony, whether Jews or Gentiles, are not subsequently called "witnesses." Certainly those converted to Christ responded in a variety of positive ways: they praised God for what he had done (2:47), they rejoiced at his great kindness to them (8:39), they spoke about the Lord Jesus, they proclaimed the gospel about him (11:20), and they met together in a believing community (2:42-47), a congregation which evidenced all the characteristics that Israel of old should have shown.³⁷

Further, those who believed the testimony of the witnesses engaged in a number of activities that had the approval of God. For example, the unnamed disciples who arrived in Antioch and told the good news about the Lord Jesus had "the Lord's hand with them." The result was that a great number believed and turned to him (11:21). It was through their actions that the word of the Lord

35. In both passages Christ "sends" Paul on his mission to the Gentiles (22:21; 26:17); in the latter, which is the fuller account, the purpose of Paul's (and therefore Christ's) mission is that Gentiles "might receive the forgiveness (ἄφεσις) of sins" (26:18).

36. So J. B. Polhill, *Acts* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 62, cited by Penney, *The Missionary Emphasis*, 73.

37. Thereby fulfilling the role as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6).

spread,³⁸ and God's saving purposes were furthered. We could even say that, because of their wholehearted commitment to the gospel, they were instruments in the mission of God that had as its goal salvation reaching the end of the earth.

Yet these, often unnamed, believers did not become "witnesses," they were not commissioned as witnesses, nor were they called witnesses. Such an omission had nothing to do with any personal lacks—rather, it was due to their place after the apostles in the salvation plan of God. In Acts the term μάρτυς was reserved for those who were eye-witnesses of the resurrection (cf. Stephen, 22:20) and had been specially commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ for the task.

But, (2) the Acts of the Apostles, through its recorded speeches, provides us with the content of the apostolic testimony. Jesus has sent his witnesses to us, and their testimony is now enshrined in what has been written. Those who read and reread this book are kept in touch with the witnesses. We receive their word of salvation, and we share it with others. In this sense, we bear testimony to the apostolic witness and in so doing participate in Jesus' mission through their word. If we wish to call this "witnessing" in a secondary sense, then I do not mind, provided we remember that ours is a derived witness. We do not share the apostolic commission, for we are not eye-witnesses of the resurrection.

Let us who have accepted this apostolic testimony respond in the same way as our counterparts in the Acts of the Apostles, by being wholly committed to the Lord Jesus and his glorious gospel of salvation. The Acts is not a closed book, for the apostolic testimony did not reach the end of the earth with Paul's arrival in Rome. This open-endedness reminds us of an unfinished task and encourages us to be committed to the ongoing *missio Dei*.

38. Cf. B. Rosner, "The Progress of the Word," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (ed. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998) 215-33, esp. p. 227.