Eutychus in Acts and in the Church: The Narrative Significance of Acts 20:6–12

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Eutychus's unlucky evening in Acts 20:6–12 is frequently overlooked by preachers and commentators alike, deemed to be either too comical, awkward, or separable for serious study. This essay argues that, rather than being separable, the passage plays a significant role in furthering the Lukan argument for Pauline authority running throughout the second half of the book of Acts. Narrative analysis reveals that Acts 20:6–12 defends Paul's Jewishness, his connection to Jewish and Christian authorities, his legitimacy as teacher, and his establishment of Gentile Christian communities like the one in Troas. A canonical approach offers a glimpse at how this passage might be relevant to Christian communities today.

Key Words: Eutychus, Acts 20, narrative criticism, canonical approach, authority, Paul, Pauline authority, resurrection

INTRODUCTION

The story of Paul's visit to Troas and the healing of the deceased boy Eutychus, Acts 20:6–12, significantly furthers the Lukan 1 apology for Pauline authority, playing a key role in the narrative world of Acts. It has not often been asked how the text fits into the Lukan narrative or why it is important in this literary setting. An examination of these questions will be presented below. After considering the way Acts 20:6–12 has been generally received by both biblical scholars and practicing Christians, this article will observe, first, Luke's portrait of Paul's authority in Acts and, second, the way Acts 20:6–12 fits into this portrait. The Eutychus story is an important piece of Luke's defense of Paul. By highlighting Paul's Jewishness, his connection to the story of Jesus, his authority to teach, and his role among the Christians, the text emphasizes to Christians Paul's legitimacy as one of their apostolic figures.

1. See Appendix 1, p. 205, for my translation of Acts 20:6–12. Though the third gospel and the Acts of the Apostles are both anonymous, scholars generally agree that the same individual wrote both volumes. This individual is traditionally referred to as "Luke," and this article will follow the traditional attestation, for the sake of convenience. This article makes no claims about "Luke's" identity.
RECEPTION HISTORY: “ENTIRELY SEPARABLE”? 

Throughout history, this text has not received much attention among either practicing Christians or the academy. The academic community implicitly treats the text as expendable, viewing it as either merely humorous or literarily dismissible and disconnected from the broader narrative. Compared to other passages about claimed miracles and events in the life of Paul, this pericope receives relatively little attention in commentaries, in journals, or on library bookshelves. Like others, Luke Timothy Johnson primarily sees the text as “charming,” while James Dunn and Robert Wall both describe it as a tragicomedy. Viewing the passage as “comic” is fairly common. Beverly Roberts Gaventa writes that the passage emphasizes the “perils of preaching,” and spends little time expounding it.

The brevity of academic treatment of this section of Acts is often attributed to its assumed straightforwardness. “The story is clear, and does not need much comment,” writes Justo González, whose assertion is rarely challenged. C. K. Barrett understands it as “a straightforward miracle story.” Johannes Munck recognizes the lack of attention given to the passage, writing, “the miracle was told in such a quiet manner that it is not surprising that others made little of it.”

Hans Conzelmann views it as distinct from its surroundings and describes it as “a secular story with a popular comic touch,” in which vv. 7 and 11 have been inserted. Barrett, likewise, sees the story as “entirely separable from the context of the journey from Greece to Jerusalem,” and so not deserving of much comment. The story is somewhat odd, and its style is rather different from its narrative surroundings; those emphasizing textual criticism therefore prefer to spend little time with this pericope. A bias against texts suspected of being “inserted” prevails, and the academy generally does not presume this passage’s importance. In addition, if the academy dismisses Acts 20:6–12 because it does not seem to fit literarily, confessional Christians—particularly, modern ones—dismiss the passage insofar as these verses are viewed as limited theologically.

Interestingly, what may be the passage’s earliest attestation is also its most flattering. The Acts of Paul seems to have imitated this story, describing a youth named Patroclus who fell from a window, died, and was revived by Paul (Acts Paul 11:1). Though the supposed death and revival of Eutychus may be compared to any of the resurrection stories in the NT

Apocrypha, the story of Patroclus includes verbal parallels (along with the distinct cause of death) that imply a deliberate narrative borrowing.

John Chrysostom speaks fondly, albeit briefly, of Eutychus, noting that “the wonderful thing is this: though a young man, [Eutychus] was not indifferent, and though being overtaken by sleep, he did not leave, nor was he afraid of the danger of falling.” The golden-mouthed preacher appears to prefer parishioners who nod off while listening to those who stay home in bed and avoid the sermon altogether.

Augustine of Hippo discusses the passage only insofar as it relates to how it may or may not indicate regular worship practices of the early Christians. According to Augustine’s reading, the Christians in the upper room at Troas seem to put off their meal for a very long time until Paul is finished speaking, almost as though they were fasting. But, Augustine notes, this does not “therefore prove that they habitually fasted on the Lord’s day but only that it did not seem proper to the apostle to interrupt, for the sake of taking refreshment, an important discourse that was listened to with the ardor of most lively interest by persons whom he was about to leave.” It does not appear Augustine intends any irony by describing Paul’s listeners as “lively.”

Other ancient writers commenting on this text do not look favorably on the youth in the window. The Christian poet Arator questions Eutychus (and those finding themselves in similar situations): “Why do you seek the empty chaos of the window, young man, or why are you restful in that place where you will come to disaster?” The Venerable Bede speaks against Eutychus’s exhaustion more strongly. Speaking allegorically, Bede explains that Eutychus fell from “the loftiness of spiritual gifts” in the upper room and sinned by neglecting to remain in that sacred space. In order to build up “weak listeners,” Bede suggests, the good preacher will offer “plain explanation, just as the apostle did.”

More recent reflection on this passage makes it clear that modern Christians are less apt to see an all-night sermon as a paradigm of “plain

17. Ibid., 160.
explanation.” Instead, popular examinations of Eutychus among 20th- and 21st-century practicing Christians tend to view the tale of the unlucky youth as a warning to longwinded preachers. In an article about the difficulty of preaching on obscure liturgical readings, one author emphasizes that it is unnecessary to “force-feed the assembly” dull sermon elements because the listeners will “almost envy poor Eutychus.” Modern American teenagers, it seems, are particularly prone to “the dreaded Eutychus Syndrome,” the inability to understand properly what happens in a Christian worship meeting. Eutychus is “a paradigm of adolescent development.” Because he is described both as a young man and as a boy, he is given the title of teenager, along with all of that moniker’s anachronistic implications of curfew-induced angst. He is “an authentic teen representative” and, as such, his story serves as a warning to Christian youth ministers who are likely interacting with teenagers in danger of falling out of proverbial windows into lives of sex, drugs, and rock ‘n roll.

Anachronism aside, this approach is actually quite similar to that of the Venerable Bede, allegorically interpreting Eutychus’s fall as one from virtue to folly. While Bede blames Eutychus and suggests an antidote in more Pauline-style preaching, though, writings for Christian youth ministers place blame with those who preach in such a way as to marginalize young people. In an article in Theology Today, Anna Carter Florence suggests that it is “more important to find life rather than to find fault in the youth” and encourages church leaders to pay more attention to including teenagers in their preaching.

As mentioned earlier, nearly all modern readings of the story of Eutychus invariably describe the tale as humorous. The passage is included in a book of humorous rereadings of Scripture and is used as evidence that God is not “a grumpy old grandpa” (because God presumably enjoys cultivating such amusing side notes for the betterment of Scripture). “Eutychus” may be a familiar name to Christian evangelicals due to the

21. Ibid., 12.
22. Ibid., 13.
24. Ibid., 242.
25. Frederick Buechner, Peculiar Treasures (New York: HarperCollins, 1979) 38. In the midst of the humor, Buechner does remain true to the particularly strange sequence of events in Acts: “Everybody thought Eutychus was dead, but Paul said he’d see about that. Then he went back upstairs where, after a snack, he ran over his major points once more just to make sure. When he finally left on the early bus, they found Eutychus sitting up in bed asking for two over light and a toasted English.”
name’s use in the publication *Christianity Today*, popular within evangelical subculture. There “Eutychus” was the pseudonym answering letters to the editor for the magazine’s first 100 issues, offering humorous short stories and poems with a pithy moral.27 Interestingly, at the time of writing this article, an internet search using Google for “Eutychus sermon” returns a blog post titled “It’s Hard to Find a Good Eutychus Sermon” to the top of the list.28 If and when Eutychus shows up in sermons found on-line, it is usually humorous and highlights the importance of paying attention.

By surveying the reception of Paul’s visit to Troas among both biblical scholars and practicing Christians, it becomes clear that both groups marginalize the passage and avoid assigning it meaning as more than a comic aside awkwardly plugged into a corpus of better-known stories.

But the tale of Eutychus does fit into the literary structure and theological message of Acts insofar as it communicates a point of Lukan stress—a defense of Paul’s platform to teach and his right standing among Christians, and the right-standing of the Gentile churches he established and defended.

**THE PORTRAIT OF PAUL’S AUTHORITY IN ACTS**

It will be helpful to begin by examining what is meant in the introductory paragraph above by “Luke’s defense of Paul”—why and how Luke offers an apology for Paul’s religious authority throughout Acts. This examination will be literary in emphasis; although the problem of Pauline authority certainly extends into the history of early Christianity,29 the primary focus of this article is the location of Acts 20:6–12 within the narrative of Acts.

Tension surrounding Paul’s legitimacy and authority as a leader in the fledgling Christian movement is palatable in Acts from the moment of Paul’s introduction. At the same time, Luke’s agenda to defend Paul is simultaneously prominent. Even as a young Paul (called Saul) stands approvingly watching the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1), Stephen’s words prophetically allow for the readers’ acceptance of this zealous Pharisee. Stephen cries with his last breath, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (7:60). In addition to echoing the words of Jesus (Luke 23:34), Stephen’s plea indicates it may indeed be necessary for Christian readers to emulate the sort of radical forgiveness offered by their Lord, even in the specific case of a persecutor like Saul.

After encountering what he believes to be the resurrected Lord while en route to Damascus, Saul immediately faces skepticism. Ananias’s doubts

are strong enough to cause him to question the voice of the Lord (9:13). But the reply to Ananias foreshadows the rest of Saul/Paul’s life: “He is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (9:15–16). Saul moves from persecutor to persecuted—persecuted, most often, by those with whom he claims solidarity, Jews and Jewish Christians.

Luke, valuing Paul’s contribution to spreading the Christian message to the ends of the earth (and to the Gentiles who live there), must defend Paul on two fronts. First, Luke must emphasize that Paul really has turned from his persecuting ways and become a legitimate member of the Jesus movement. Second, Luke must reveal the accusations against Paul as baseless: however eager Paul may be to share his message with Gentiles, Paul never preaches that the God of Israel does not remain faithful to promises made to Moses and the prophets. In Acts, Luke argues, Paul remains just as committed to his Judaism after the supposed Damascus road experience as before.

Luke’s careful storytelling deliberately portrays Paul as facing increasing opposition as the narrative moves forward. Even early on, Paul’s times of teaching in synagogues are met with angered “jealousy” toward Jews (13:45) when large numbers of Gentiles show up to listen. He has “no small dissension” (15:2) with Jewish believers who teach the necessity of circumcision for Gentile believers. His frustration with Jewish opposition is strong enough that three times he tells fellow Jews listening to him in the synagogue he is “turning to the Gentiles” (13:46; 18:6; 28:28). After the first two of these “turnings” (what happens after the third being uncertain, because it closes the book), though, Paul’s practice does not change. He continues to preach in the synagogues in the cities he visits, proclaiming his message of Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles. Contrary to what his opponents seem to suggest, at no point does Paul advocate for Jewish Christians to abandon the tradition of Moses. Indeed, in the case of the ambiguous heritage of Timothy, born to a Roman father and Jewish Christian mother, Paul errs on the side of Mosaic law: he has Timothy circumcised “because of the Jews... for they all knew that his father was a Greek” (16:3).

It is in Paul’s journey to Jerusalem (Acts 19:21–21:17) that opposition to him becomes most ominous and the sufferings foreshadowed to Ananias become more tangible. As soon as he “resolves in the Spirit” (19:21) to head to Jerusalem and to Rome, Paul faces a riot in Ephesus (19:23–41) and a plot against his life in Syria (20:3). Then, after the episode in Troas in 20:6–12, Paul’s succession speech to the elders in Miletus makes it clear that he expects “imprisonment and persecutions” waiting for him in Jerusalem (20:23). Paul purports that “the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city” about these upcoming trials, and his statement prophetically prefigures...

30. Peter and John likewise face opposition because of “jealousy” (5:17), though this is much more pronounced with Paul. “Jealousy” here is possibly not jealousy of Paul’s success in gaining converts but jealousy for the law that certain individuals believe Paul to be breaking.
what happens in the rest of his journey. In Tyre, the disciples tell Paul (“through the Spirit”) not to go to Jerusalem (21:4). Paul advances anyway and, while stopping in Caesarea, the prophet Agabus testifies to Paul’s upcoming trials by binding his own hands and feet with Paul’s belt (21:11). Again refusing to heed the pleas of his friends, Paul makes the final leg of his journey to Jerusalem (21:15). Tension rises palpably as Paul makes his way to the holy city; Paul himself is expectant for what awaits him. Still, he moves forward—even moving there hurriedly.

Many scholars suggest that Luke furthers his apology for Paul’s religious authority by structuring Paul’s journey to Jerusalem as parallel to the significant journey taken by Jesus in Luke’s Gospel. Just as tension rises as Jesus approaches the holy city, repeatedly telling his disciples of his approaching death, so too does apprehension about what awaits Paul in Jerusalem grow as he moves ahead. Along his route, Jesus “went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem” (Luke 13:22). Likewise, Luke’s narration punctuates Paul’s journey with stops in churches along the way where the apostle teaches his message even as he faces certain tribulation (Acts 20:23). As Richard Pervo notes, “the prosaic enumeration of localities will become drumbeats accompanying Paul to his destiny.”

The narration of Jesus’ decision to go up to Jerusalem distinctly mirrors that of Paul’s resolution. Paul’s journey to Jerusalem follows the paradigm set by Jesus, and Paul declares himself ready to face the same fate as his

31. This verse is admittedly puzzling: does the Holy Spirit truly want Paul to stop his journey, when at other points in the narrative it appears that the Spirit condones Paul’s travel? Luke gives no indication that the disciples in Tyre are either misattributing their plea or are simply “warning” Paul. But perhaps the verse is meant to recall Paul’s own sense that the Spirit warns him of what awaits in Jerusalem in “every city” he travels through on his way.


34. In Luke 9:51, Jesus “set his face” to go to Jerusalem (a self-initiated decision). The events surrounding this decision are as follows: the Transfiguration in Luke 9:28–36 (unambiguously a high moment in the narrative), continued “astonishment at the greatness of God” in 9:43, an odd aside about an individual “who does not follow with us” casting out demons in the name of Jesus in 9:49–50, and, immediately after the crucial moment in 9:51, Jesus’ disciples’ being sent ahead into Samaria (9:52) where he is not received warmly. Compare these events to those surrounding Paul’s resolving to head to Jerusalem: a narrative about the gospel spreading and things going well in Ephesus in Acts 19:1–10, an odd story about the sons of Sceva casting out demons “by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims” (19:13) and ending up being “mastered” by the man with the evil spirit in 19:11–20, and, immediately after the narration of Paul’s resolution, Paul’s helpers’ being sent ahead into Macedonia (19:22) while Paul ends up in the middle of a riot in Ephesus (19:23–41). These parallels may be viewed this way:

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<td>Transfiguration; things generally going well (9:28–48)</td>
<td>Things generally going well in Ephesus (19:1–10)</td>
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(continued on p. 186)
Lord (Acts 19:24). Both head to Jerusalem to celebrate a moment in Israel’s past—Passover or Pentecost—and both see the story of Israel (a story in continuity with the past) move forward—through death and resurrection or the expansion of the gospel to the ends of the earth.\(^{35}\)

Luke Timothy Johnson suggests “the failure to provide a motivation for the journey to Jerusalem [besides being ‘resolved in the spirit’] only has the effect of heightening the resemblance to Jesus’ own journey.”\(^{36}\) In its broader context, though, Paul’s motivation to head to the holy city is made perfectly clear: he remains an observant Jew and is making a perfectly normal, pious pilgrimage. Toward the end of his traveling, Luke explains that Paul begins to hurry, “eager to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost” (Acts 20:16). A desire to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost specifically may not have been Paul’s initial motivation for his trip to Jerusalem (though traveling to Jerusalem remains perfectly normal for the orthodox Paul), given the slow start to his journey, staying “some time longer in Asia” (19:22) and three months in Greece (20:3) while he traveled. But when it was presumably apparent that celebrating Pentecost (the Festival of Weeks, Shavuot) in Jerusalem was a possibility, Paul began hurrying, an eager Jewish pilgrim. Paul goes to Jerusalem “to bring alms to my nation

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<td>Person casting out demons in Jesus’ name who “does not follow with us” (9:49–50)</td>
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<td>Jesus “sets his face to Jerusalem” (9:51)</td>
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<td>Disciples sent ahead to Samaria (9:52)</td>
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<td>Opposition from Samaritans (9:53–56)</td>
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35. Paul’s return to Jerusalem and resultant (imprisoned) journey to Rome ultimately fulfills the geographic pattern set forth prophetically in Acts 1:8. Paul’s eventual travel to Rome has been frequently understood to fulfill the movement of the gospel to the “ends of the earth,” but, admittedly, his sojourn in Jerusalem does not immediately appear necessary to the Lukan geographic agenda. However, when set in the context of other ancient travel stories, from the Odyssey to the Greco-Roman novels of Chariton and Xenophon, it appears that the detour to Jerusalem may have an intentional structural role. In ancient nostos tales, the protagonist typically begins and ends in the same location.

Loveday Alexander places the Pauline journeys within this same genre, while recognizing that Luke has certainly modified the typical pattern. She writes, “in geographical terms Acts is much more open-ended than the classic nostos. Paul’s final destination is not Jerusalem but Rome. But the narrative significance of this final move may be thrown into relief by the predominantly outward-and-return structure of the Pauline journeys up to the climactic arrest in Jerusalem. What we seem to have is a series of shorter trips out and back from the Antioch base enfolded (in a kind of multiple inclusio) in a broader journey which begins and ends in Jerusalem.” If indeed the story of Paul in Acts is seen through the lens of the nostos genre, then Paul’s return to Jerusalem must be understood as particularly climactic—and his effort to return as, perhaps, literally epic. Unlike Greco-Roman literary heroes, though, Paul’s ultimate goal is not his starting point, but the ends of the earth: Rome. Paul’s return to Jerusalem is all the more striking because he sees Jerusalem not as a place to stay but rather as a launching point from which the gospel can spread to the center of the Gentile world. See Loveday Alexander, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005) 71–74.

and to offer sacrifices” (24:17); he goes because he is a practicing Jew. In this way, the similarities with Jesus’ journey are heightened. Jesus’ purposeful trip toward his crucifixion was “necessary” according to the prophets and “all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:25–26); Paul’s motivations were likewise in line with the Jewish Scriptures.

Paul’s adherence to Judaism is a theme running throughout Acts, as emphasized by his practice to visit synagogues throughout his travels and a mention of his being under a vow (18:18). He introduces his message in a similar manner as Jesus, according to the prophets and the (Jewish) Scriptures (Luke 24:27–28). Almost immediately on arriving in Jerusalem, Paul follows the suggestion of James and other Jewish Christian elders to go through a rite of purification at the temple (Acts 21:20–25) so that Paul’s opponents would know that he is law-abiding. When Paul’s appearance at the temple causes a disturbance and he has a chance to defend himself before the crowd, he describes himself as “a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today” (22:3). Ananias, Paul’s first Christian teacher, is described as “a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews” (22:12). Notably, the crowd seems upset not by Paul’s acceptance of Jesus, but by his statement that Jesus sent him to the Gentiles (22:21–22). After his arrest, Paul staunchly declares he is “on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead” (23:6)—and so he ought to be accepted by his fellow Pharisees (24:15).

The sense of resolution behind Paul’s journey to Jerusalem, then, seems to be revealed as rooted in Paul’s abiding connection to his Jewish heritage. This is evident as Paul reaches his destination as well as during the process of his journey, even during his stop at Troas. The first time Saul meets with the disciples in Jerusalem, they fear him, “for they did not believe that he was a disciple” (9:26). On his final visit, the elders of the Jerusalem church warn Paul that the Jewish Christians in the city have been told that Paul’s teaching includes forsaking Moses (21:21). Paul’s long ministry (as a free man), framed by these Jerusalem visits, continually faces questioning.

Paul visits Troas and heals Eutychus as the tension regarding his authority nears its apex. Luke, as a careful storyteller, offers the story of Paul’s time in Troas not as a comic diversion but to bolster his defense of Paul’s legitimacy as Paul hurries toward his trial in Jerusalem. How Luke achieves this goal will be examined below.

**THE PORTRAYAL OF PAUL’S AUTHORITY IN ACTS 20:6–12**

Luke is widely acknowledged to be deliberate in his narrative choices. Considering this—and while also acknowledging modern Christians’

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insistence on examining the text as a whole—it seems strange to pass over Acts 20:6–12 as though it were simply a humorous aside. Luke’s storytelling is notably careful, as seen above, and a close reading will naturally ask how the story of Eutychus fits into this care. Along these lines, Pervo suggests that the “difficulties of [this] narrative seem to encourage readers to look beneath the surface,” not to dismiss it.

Luke may hint at the significance of the story of Eutychus by introducing it with the first-person plural. Verses 6–8 in this pericope are part of Acts’ infamous “we passages.” Though this article will not examine all the possible reasons for the occasional presence of first-person plural pronouns during Acts’ narrative of Paul’s travel, it can be noted that both the we and the notation of specific travel times offer a sense of verisimilitude. This may be, as Beverly Roberts Gaventa suggests, a “context of considerable urgency” as Paul makes his final rounds to his churches, and the appearance of details such as we serves to emphasize this urgency. A story framed in the first-person plural perspective is meant to be anything but “entirely separable” from its surroundings. “We” visit Troas, and Luke’s narration therefore becomes an eyewitness account attesting to Paul’s authority.

In Acts 20:6–12, Luke defends this authority in four significant ways. First, he highlights Paul’s Jewishness, a trait that was under attack by Paul’s adversaries. Second, Luke attempts to legitimize Paul by connecting him to other significant leaders in the Jewish-Christian story, including prophets, apostles, and, of course, Jesus himself. Third, this passage underlines the legitimacy of Paul’s role as teacher and preacher. Finally, the story of Paul in Troas accentuates Paul’s role in the Christian community and, moreover, the Troas community’s legitimate succession of Paul.

**Paul’s Jewishness**

Paul’s visit to Troas is located firmly within his larger journey to Jerusalem and, significantly, firmly within the Jewish calendar. Paul and his travel companions not only recognize the days of unleavened bread but they do so in Philippi (20:6), a city that, when Paul first arrived (16:13), had no Jewish synagogue aside from a place for prayer by the river outside the city gates. Philippi’s prominent Christian convert, Lydia, appears to be a Gentile “worshiper of God” (16:14); in fact, Acts does not describe an established Jewish community in Philippi at all. Still, the Philippians have Paul and Silas arrested because “they are Jews” (16:20), and in 20:6, it is in Philippi that Paul recognizes Passover. The Gentile Christian communities—such as in Philippi, in Lydia’s house—locate themselves within a larger Jewish narrative and worship of Israel’s God just as the Jewish Christian communities in Jerusalem do. With this framework, Paul heads to Troas.

38. As discussed in further detail on pp. 200–205.
41. See also Wall, “Acts,” 277.
The incident in question occurs on the “first day of the week,” Ἐν δὲ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων (20:7). Scholars debate the significance of the reference to the “first day of the week” in this verse. Luke’s description is ambiguous on the question whether he is referring to Saturday or Sunday night. But, as J. C. Laansma suggests, what might be most significant is not how the hours of the day were understood (reckonings of when a day began and ended may have varied throughout multicultural ancient Rome) but that the gathering in question occurs on the first day of the week, the day following the Sabbath. The Gentile church at Troas schedules its gatherings by referencing the Jewish calendar, the calendar of Jesus.

The most significant evidence of Luke’s emphasizing Paul’s Jewishness, though, may be the sense of hurry that pervades this pericope. Paul is traveling toward Jerusalem, as noted above, in order to make it to the holy city by Pentecost, to celebrate the Jewish holiday properly as an observant Jew. Although Luke does not specify this particular aspect of Paul’s intention until 20:18, his eagerness may already be evident in 20:6–12. An expedited travel itinerary would explain Paul’s unusually long address to the church at Troas. All-night sermons do not seem to be his usual practice, but Paul’s knowing that this would be his last chance to teach this group would warrant a change from the ordinary. His hurry may help clarify why Paul does not linger with Eutychus after the boy is healed. Once it is clear that Eutychus’s “soul is in him” (20:10), Paul returns to his primary task for the evening: teaching the church, in preparation for his departure at dawn (20:11). If understood in the context of hurrying to participate in a Jewish celebration in Jerusalem, Paul’s terse actions are possibly less callous.

Paul is clearly, as Johnson writes, dedicated “to the ethos of Judaism.” This remains true even as Paul gathers with Gentiles. The Gentiles in Troas are part of the church, the “faithful congregation of God’s people that may be incorporated within or alienated from the ‘synagogue’, depending on the situation.”

42. See Barrett, Acts, 950; Conzelmann, Acts, 169. The Jewish day begins at nightfall, and so the “first day of the week” would indicate Saturday evening. But a Roman reckoning of days begins at sunrise. Luke has just described the calendar in terms of Jewish holidays (“after the days of unleavened bread”), but elsewhere in Acts he has used a Roman clock (as in 2:15, “the third hour of the day” to describe morning, and 3:1, “the ninth hour” to describe afternoon). As Darrell Bock notes, “Luke appears to refer to days by Roman reckoning but uses the Jewish religious calendar—a foot in both camps” (Darrell L. Bock, Acts [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 5; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007] 620). Norman Young argues that “the first day of the week” is a Semitic phrase and so indicates Saturday night, immediately following the Sabbath (Norman H. Young, “The Use of Sunday for Meetings of Believers in the New Testament: A Response,” in NovT 2 [2003] 118). Indeed, the word translated here as “week” is σαββάτων, Sabbath. This Jewish description, along with other places in this narrative that emphasize Paul’s Jewish heritage, does seem to point toward a Saturday evening, rather than Sunday evening, gathering in Troas.


less legitimate as members of this congregation of the God of Israel. Paul’s reported healing of Eutychus, echoing similar healing stories regarding Elijah and Elisha (as noted in the next section of this paper) emphasizes Luke’s point: Paul is part of a long line of Jewish prophets. Luke hopes his readers believe the God by whose power Eutychus is raised to life is the same God as the God of Elijah and Elisha.

Paul’s Connection to Earlier Authority

Luke legitimates Paul in this section by drawing parallels between authoritative Jewish and Christian figures and Paul himself. The mention of Passover coupled with an evening gathering in an upper room to break bread and followed by a story of death and resurrection naturally recalls for Christians the story of Jesus’ last supper.

Interestingly, though, the word for “upper room” in Luke’s telling of the last supper, ἀνάγαιον, is not the word used here. Here, in 20:8, Luke uses ὑπερῴου, a word used three other times in the NT: first, in Acts 1:13, when the disciples stay in an upper room immediately after Jesus’ reported ascension; second, in Acts 9:37, when a disciple named Tabitha (also Dorcas) dies and is laid in an upper room; and third, in Acts 9:39, when Peter visits Tabitha and she rises from the dead, it is said, after he prays for her. In Acts, ὑπερῴου describes a location where the faithful group gathers and where their God is seemingly at work. The church in Troas, gathered in τῷ ὑπερῴου, is every bit as legitimate, Luke stresses, as the gathering of Jesus’ closest disciples and family members in the first chapter of Acts. Paul in Troas, teaching in τῷ ὑπερῴου, has as much religious authority and legitimacy as Peter in Joppa.

This scene in Paul’s life recalls Peter’s involvement in reportedly raising Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:39), a resuscitation story connected with an “upper room.” But Paul’s action in 20:10, as he “fell upon” the dead boy, also recalls events in the lives of Elijah and Elisha. In 1 Kgs 17, it is claimed that Elijah heals a widow’s son after bringing him to an upper room (ὑπερῴου) and after breathing on the boy,48 the child’s life (ψυχή) returns (1 Kgs 17:21). Similarly, Elisha in 2 Kgs 4 is said to


47. Although this article focuses on interbiblical narrative connections between Paul and other authority figures (Paul and those preceding him in the biblical narrative), it is worth noting that Luke may also be drawing connections between the apostle and Greco-Roman heroes, particularly given the legendary geographical location (Troas being Troy). A brief discussion of parallels between the story of Eutychus and The Odyssey is provided in Appendix 2, pp. 205–206. Paul’s actions in Acts 20:6–12 may mirror those not only of Judeo-Christian leaders but also of Greco-Roman “greatest,” including Alexander. According to Plutarch of Chaeronea, Alexander the Great stopped at Troy as he began the process of extending his kingdom to the ends of the earth; so too does Paul’s mission of Christian geographical expansion take a significant step by his stop in Troas. See Plutarch of Chaeronea, Life of Alexander 15.

48. “Breathing on” is found in the LXX; in the MT, Elijah stretches out on the boy.
be involved in raising a young boy from the dead after he lay on the child (2 Kgs 4:34). The story of Elijah contains more linguistic parallels to the story of Paul raising Eutychus, but Paul’s action of falling on and embracing the boy in the process of the resuscitation echoes both prophets. It is not surprising that Luke would place Paul in the company of other Israelite prophets; for Luke, Paul is a prophet, joining the lineage of those who piously proclaim God’s faithfulness while withstanding opposition from the advocates of the status quo.

Paul’s declaration in 20:10 not to be disturbed because Eutychus’s “soul is in him,” particularly given the statement’s ambiguity, also recalls Jesus’ action of returning a child to life. Jesus, Luke 7:13 claims, raises a widow’s son in Nain (not far from Shunem, the location where Elisha raised a child), telling those around the dead body, “Do not weep!” After raising the child from the dead, the onlookers “glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has risen among us!’ and ‘God has looked favorably on his people!’” (Luke 7:16). Jesus’ action is distinctly related to his prophetic role; so too it is with Paul.

Jesus also discourages grieving prior to reportedly raising a young girl (Matt 9:24; Mark 5:39) and Lazarus (John 11:11), indicating how the dead individual will be awakened by telling listeners that the dead person is “sleeping” rather than dead. Interestingly, Luke chooses to avoid this metaphor both in his gospel and in Acts. While the metaphor of “sleeping” for “temporarily dead” might seem particularly apt for Eutychus’s situation, given his cause of death, avoiding this figure of speech may emphasize Eutychus’s actual death and restoration to life. There is no reason to suggest that the miracle with which Paul is said to be involved would be any less miraculous than miracles said to be performed by prophets or apostles.

49. The reality of Eutychus’s death has been questioned by some, particularly given Paul’s statement in v. 10. Perhaps the boy is picked up “as” dead in v. 9. F. F. Bruce argues against this idea by suggesting that “euthus’s soul is in him,” particularly given the statement’s ambiguity, also recalls Jesus’ action of returning a child to life. Jesus, Luke 7:13 claims, raises a widow’s son in Nain (not far from Shunem, the location where Elisha raised a child), telling those around the dead body, “Do not weep!” After raising the child from the dead, the onlookers “glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has risen among us!’ and ‘God has looked favorably on his people!’” (Luke 7:16). Jesus’ action is distinctly related to his prophetic role; so too it is with Paul.

50. In v. 10, Eutychus’s unintentional falling down (ἐπεσεν κάτω) is contrasted with Paul’s more deliberate descent and fall on the boy (καταβὰς ἐπέπεσεν). Paul’s statement is somewhat curious: does Paul suggest that Eutychus’s soul or life (ψυχὴ) encompasses both is in the boy following Paul’s embrace, or has the ψυχὴ remained in Eutychus throughout the incident? Because Luke gives no reason to believe that Eutychus was not really dead in v. 9 and because Paul’s exclamation occurs after he has already interacted with the boy, the former seems to be implied. The New English Translation, however, renders Paul’s words as, “he is still alive!” (emphasis added). “Still,” not present in the Greek, implies a continuation of a past situation; compare it to the implications present in the English phrase, “He is alive again!” The Greek simply states that Eutychus’s soul/life is present: Paul declares that he is alive, with no mention of whether he was alive previous to Paul’s statement. Taken with v. 9, though, the most straightforward reading of the text is that Eutychus was dead and now, given Paul’s action, is not. While some question Luke’s lack of clarity here (see Bruce, Acts, 426; and Johnson,
Beyond connecting Paul to Elijah and Elisha, the uncommon word ἐπέπεσεν ("he fell upon")\textsuperscript{51} may recall another tale of restoration. The other time this word is used in the NT to refer to one individual "falling on" and embracing another is in Luke’s telling of the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20).\textsuperscript{52} The father against whom the wayward son rebelled does not see the young man’s return as a time for condemnation; rather, he rejoices that the son who “was dead . . . is alive again” (Luke 15:24). Eutychus may be culpable for failing to remain alert, but the emphasis of the church is in restoration, in including even the wayward or the sleepy Gentile boy in the community. This linguistic connection also offers a new way of understanding Jesus’ parable: it is not only that God as metaphorical father acts as a gracious and forgiving parent but also that Jesus’ followers themselves (here exemplified by Paul) ought to be full of grace and forgiveness.

Though the narrative of Eutychus ends in v. 12, v. 13 is significant insofar as it emphasizes the continued movement of Paul, pressing on toward Jerusalem. Paul’s request to travel by himself over land, rather than remain with his companions (and "we") in the boat, is curious. The decision does not seem to have anything to do with Paul’s haste, as he eventually meets the ship in Assos. The narrative makes no mention of a community along the road between Troas and Assos that Paul wishes to visit. Paul’s travel plans here are reminiscent of Jesus’ moments of privately withdrawing. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus twice withdraws from the public spotlight—once before appointing his disciples (Luke 6:12) and once before his arrest and crucifixion (Luke 22:41). If Paul’s desire for a private hike does mirror Jesus’ habit of private prayer prior to significant events, then the narrative tension surrounding what is about to happen in Jerusalem increases significantly.

\textit{Paul’s Authority to Teach}

Contrary to the suggestion of some modern interpretations, Luke actually uses this story to \textit{defend} rather than criticize Paul’s prophetic authority to teach. Listening to teaching until midnight (20:7) does not seem to be a normal course of action for the church at Troas; Luke is clear that the circumstances of Paul’s imminent departure are the reason for his long-windedness. Modern popular interpreters who use Paul here as an example of how not to preach or teach tend to miss the point: perhaps it is not wise to make overnight sermons a habit, but most who preach are not in a hurry to make it to Jerusalem by Pentecost. Paul has much to say and must say it all this evening, not because he is inconsiderate of those gathered to listen, but because this is the last time they will hear him.


51. Forms of ἐπιπίπτω are somewhat common in the LXX but are used only 11 times in the New Testament, including 6 times in Acts and twice in Luke.

52. See Florence, “A Prodigal Preaching Story and Bored-to-Death Youth,” 241.
If there is a comic touch to this story, it is not in Paul’s ability to talk for so long but rather in the name of the young man in the window (20:9). Eutychus, despite being named for the god of fortune, is ironically unlucky in his choice of seating. Luke presents details to emphasize the tragedy of the boy’s fall: the room is brightly lit, the boy has excellent ventilation, his name means “lucky,” and still he suffers a perilous fall. If anything, the presence of a popular religious missionary ought to have been enlivening (as it is eventually) rather than soporific.

But not all readers recognize an acceptance of Paul’s speech by the crowd at Troas. Justo González, echoing others, writes that here “one almost reads between the lines an undertone of criticizing Paul because he is too long-winded.” González sees a lack of religious mystique in “a human Paul, capable of putting his audience to sleep, as can happen to any of us any day.” Although Paul must defend his human mortality against residents of Lystra believing him to be divine (14:11–15; see also 10:25–26), he does not seem to be facing the same problem in Troas. Luke consistently portrays Paul in an idealized light; his point is never to make Paul seem “any of us” but rather to paint Paul as super-human—an exemplary prophet set apart by God’s for pious work. It makes little sense for Luke to suggest potential weakness in Paul when the larger section spends so much time defending him against criticism. The point of Paul talking on and on likely has more to do with emphasizing the late hour than with suggesting that Paul’s discussion is particularly sleep-inducing.

The lateness of the hour, though, does not entirely exonerate Eutychus from blame for failing to remain alert. Twice in Luke’s telling of the story of Jesus, the disciples battle sleep and are either rewarded for remaining alert or scolded for succumbing to their tiredness. During the Transfiguration

53. The presence of “considerable lamps” in v. 8 is often found by commentators to be curious. At least one ancient scribe, like modern commentators, also found this description strange. One manuscript substitutes the rare word ὑπολαμπάδες, “little windows,” for λαμπάδες, “lamps” or “torches” (J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, Vocabulary of the Greek Testament [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930; electronic edition: BibleWorks v. 8] 658; also “Codex Bezae: Cantabrigiensis D05,” Cambridge Digital Library, 831 [accessed 15 February 2013]. On-line: http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-NN-00002-00041/831.) Although the textual tradition ultimately supports the traditional λαμπάδες, the scribal emendation toward “little windows” shows that early readers may have also been puzzled by this verse’s relationship to the rest of the passage (Dennis R. MacDonald, “Luke’s Eutychus and Homer’s Elpenor: Acts 20:7–12 and Odyssey 10–12,” in Journal of Higher Criticism 1 [1994] 4). Windows, at least, are central to the storyline. Barrett and Bruce account for the mention of this detail by suggesting that the oily lamps were the reason for Eutychus’s drowsiness (Barrett, Acts, 953; Bruce, Acts, 426), though the boy’s position at the window makes this idea unlikely. Talbert argues that the mention of the lamps serves as an apology for Christian meetings (Charles H. Talbert, Reading Luke–Acts in Its Mediterranean Milieu [Leiden: Brill, 2003] 151–59), but Tannahill refutes this line of reasoning (Robert C. Tannahill, “Reading Luke–Acts in Its Mediterranean Milieu,” in RBL 1 [2006] 461). Appendix 2 discusses yet another option: that Luke included this detail to remind readers of Homer. Still, the simplest solution is probably the best: Luke mentions the lamps in a straightforward manner, to offer straightforward narrative detail. Their only “purpose” is to make Eutychus’s fall into slumber all the more surprising (see Gaventa, Acts, 279).

55. Ibid., 235.
story, the disciples present “were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory” (Luke 9:32). Before the crucifixion, while Jesus prays, the disciples do fall asleep, and Jesus asks, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial” (Luke 22:46). Sleep, for Luke, can be interpreted as figurative reference to spiritual sloth and vulnerability to temptation (Luke 9:32; 22:45–46).

Andrew Arterbury emphasizes that associating sleep with irresponsibility was a common theme throughout ancient texts: sleep emphasizes mortality and resisting sleep is a divine endeavor.

Commentators have speculated about Eutychus’s age: νεανίας (20:9), “young man,” suggests the age of a young warrior (as especially in Maccabees), while παῖδα, “boy,” which describes him in v. 12, is a distinctly more childlike adjective. As noted above, some have suggested that these descriptions place Eutychus in the strange world of “teenager,” but picturing him as a teenager participating in the youth ministry of a modern Christian church is certainly anachronistic. Darrell Bock suggests he is a “lad . . . between eight and fourteen years old.”

Being childlike offers a reason for Eutychus’s slow but sure drop into sleep, so it is somewhat odd to describe him as a “young man” and not just a “child.” Among NT texts, only Acts uses the term νεανίας. It is used here in 20:9, in 23:17 to describe Paul’s nephew, and, notably, in 7:58 to describe “a young man named Saul” at the stoning of Stephen. At this point in the narrative, the last time Luke introduced a “young man,” it was Paul himself, but during his persecution of Christian believers. The use of νεανίας to describe Eutychus may serve not only to specify the age of the youth in the window but also to recall the “young man” in 7:58 and to highlight the transformation he has undergone. As Paul’s period of (un-imprisoned) missionary work comes to an end, Luke reemphasizes Paul’s transformation from the cause of suffering for Christians to a suffering Christian himself.

The double use of καταφέρω, translated here in the passive as “sinking down” but often translated in the active as “bring down,” may also contrast this passage with Paul’s early life. “Down”-related words (κατα- words) are particularly prominent here, and while κατα- words are relatively common, καταφέρω is fairly uncommon. It appears four times in the NT—all in Acts, twice here. In no other place in Scripture is the word used for sleeping. Its other uses in Acts are both related to judgment: in Acts 25:7, false charges are brought down against Paul; in Acts 26:10, Paul recalls casting down his “voting pebble” in judgment against Christians in his earlier life. The use of a judgment-related word to describe sinking into sleep is curious and potentially suggestive of another contrast between Saul the persecutor and Paul the sufferer.

The breaking of bread in 20:11 is likely meant to be the Eucharistic breaking of bread for which the believers had gathered (as indicated in v. 7); as Ernst Haenchen notes, “the congregation certainly did not wait until after midnight for their supper!” After breaking bread and eating, though, Paul does not continue his preaching in quite the same way. Rather than use the word διαλέγομαι (to hold a discussion or to present an argument) as in vv. 7 and 9, here Luke writes that, between Eutychus’s fall and dawn, Paul spoke or conversed, ὁμιλήσας. The word διαλέγομαι is fairly common (often used by Luke of Paul for presenting an argument), while ὁμιλέω is relatively rare and, in the NT, solely Lukan. In the LXX, ὁμιλέω frequently refers not to a conversation but instead to a sexual encounter (Jdt 12:12; Sus 1:37, 57, 58; potentially Prov 5:19). If, as some have suggested, the mention of lights in v. 8 was really intended to dispel suspicion of immoral activities, Luke has not helped his case by using such an intimate term for conversation in v. 11! The intimacy implied here, of course, is not sexual. But a discussion surrounding Paul’s religious thought is by its nature intimate; when the disciples on the road to Emmaus at the end of Luke’s Gospel speak privately about “all these things that had happened,” they do so by talking intimately, ὁμιλέω (Luke 24:14–15). Paul’s authoritative teaching is seen both as prophetic preaching and as intimate discussion, its legitimacy recognized in the breaking of bread (as in Luke 24 with the teaching of Jesus).

Paul’s succession speech in Miletus, following this incident at Troas, may be representative of his message as he nears the strong opposition he anticipates in Jerusalem. In this passage, he emphasizes that central to his message is “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21). He offers a departing charge: “I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified” (20:32). Paul’s authority to teach is emphasized throughout this travel narrative, but the message he teaches is intended to guide the community long after his departure.

Paul and His Adherents

Paul’s travel from Philippi to Troas (20:6) is a reversal of his itinerary in Acts 16, when he and his companions (“we” included) sail from Troas to Philippi. This initial journey is undertaken on the basis of a vision Paul has in Troas of a Macedonian man imploring Paul to “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (16:9). Troas is both the beginning and end to Paul’s missionary journey into Macedonia and Greece. If Luke did have any sense of a nostos genre in mind when structuring the narrative of Paul’s travel, then the location of Paul’s departure and return might carry special significance. Departing from Troas initially, Paul enters uncharted territory, the Grecian

peninsula, which had not yet been presented the Christian message. Paul's return visit marks a point of maturity for Greek and Macedonian churches. Their founder has seen them through their infancy, in terms of both ecclesial matters and the acceptance of Pauline doctrines; he can feel confidently resolved in pursuing a new area of the Mediterranean. He leaves Greece and Macedonia, then, the same way he entered—through Troas.

Although the initial mention of Troas in chap. 16 did not describe a Christian church there, presumably one existed by the time of this visit. The “them” (αὐτοῖς) is not specified prior to this verse, but their “gathering to break bread” on the first day of the week suggests an established group of believers. Norman Young suggests that the mention of the “first day of the week” does not indicate a regular or established gathering time, noting that Luke makes “no mention of [the day’s] special significance” and citing Luke’s “benign attitude towards the Sabbath.” But the argument that Luke does not oppose Sabbath observation is not evidence against a regular day of Christian observance; Luke stresses, in fact, that both Jewish and Christian practices are valid for his audience (to various degrees, depending on whether the believer is Jewish or Gentile). Moreover, the off-handed nature of Luke’s mention of the first day of the week may indicate not that it means nothing but rather that the narrative assumes an understanding of why Christians are gathered on this particular day. Certainly, other NT voices indicate the possibility of a Christian gathering on the first day of the week, or the “Lord’s day” (1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10). By the time Acts was accepted by Christians as Scripture, it is quite likely that “the first day of the week” would imply a time for a specifically Christian gathering.

Interestingly (and offering more evidence for the Sunday gathering’s regularity), the gathering is not convened for the purpose of hearing the famous visiting missionary speak. Rather, it is a gathering “to break bread,” and Paul’s speech is a (presumably) lucky bonus. “Breaking bread” here is particularly significant. It is not a typical expression used for eating but, when combined with the act of “gathering,” it seems to refer most often to the Christian ritual of remembering the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:20; Did. 14:1; Ign., Eph. 20:2). The significance of Christians breaking bread and eating in remembrance and commemoration of their movement’s founder seems particularly pronounced for Luke. The ritual is central to Peter’s testimony to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:41). Additionally, an interesting pair of “breaking bread” triads appear in Luke and Acts. Jesus is said to break

62. Ibid., 120.
63. So argues Barrett (Barrett, Acts, 952). It may not, however, be the earliest “clear indication” of Sunday Christian gatherings as James Dunn suggests (Dunn, Acts, 268).
64. Laansma particularly emphasizes this point. Laansma, “Lord’s Day,” 681.
65. Ibid., 681.
66. A convenient list:
Luke 9:16: Jesus breaks bread to feed the 5,000
bread three times in the third gospel: first, apparently to feed a crowd of 5,000 (Luke 9:16); second, to serve the disciples at the Passover supper (22:19); and, third, when talking with distressed disciples at Emmaus (24:30). Notably, the disciples at Emmaus recognize Jesus “in the breaking of the bread” (24:35), not in Jesus’ initial appearance or speech. Luke uses the breaking of bread as a device to reveal something significant within his portrayal of Jesus. In Luke 9, the tale of miraculously feeding of 5,000 is framed by questions about Jesus’ identity (Luke 9:9, 20) and is perhaps an extension of his teaching (9:11). The breaking of bread with the disciples at the Passover supper emphasizes Jesus’ metaphorical mantra that he gives his body to his followers (22:19) and institutes a ritual pattern for later adherents to Christianity. Finally, the breaking of bread at Emmaus is a tool for opening these disciples’ minds to understand, in retrospect, what Jesus had been teaching through the prophets about his identity (24:32).

Breaking bread occurs three times in Acts as well. The young church gathers to devote themselves to breaking bread (along with “the apostles’ teaching and fellowship . . . and the prayers”) (Acts 2:42), and breaking bread seems to be as integral to the life of the church as any other liturgical gestures (2:46). Here, in Troas, breaking bread appears for the second time in Acts, with another Christian community performing this significant action (20:7). Bread is broken a third time in Acts when Paul and his shipmates are said to face shipwreck on their way to Rome, and Paul, “giving thanks to God in the presence of all” (27:35; an action also taken by Jesus each time bread is broken), breaks bread and encourages everyone to eat and trust that they will survive. As in the Gospel, bread is broken twice in the context of a group of disciples and once in a “deserted place” (Luke 9:12; Acts 27:20). The central act of breaking bread in both Luke and Acts is significant: in Luke, it precedes Jesus’ imprisonment and suffering, and in Acts it does the same for Paul. Just as breaking bread signals Jesus’ identity, so too it signals the identity of adherents to Paul’s teaching.67

Verse 12 completes the story of Eutychus after the “interruption” of v. 11. Without interpreting a significant intentionality behind the placement of v. 11, the narration does indeed read awkwardly. This odd structure, though, may be another way that Luke legitimizes the Gentile Troas church. The narrative’s movement—from Paul’s hope-filled declaration in v. 10 to a verse that does not even include Eutychus—on first reading,

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67 The moments of breaking bread described by Luke in Acts are recalled by Paul’s own discussion of breaking bread in 1 Cor 11. As in Troas, it seems that the church in Corinth gathers for the purpose of eating the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:20). Partaking in the bread and the cup, Paul says, is a proclamation of “the Lord’s death until he comes” (11:26). Gathering to proclaim the Lord’s death, though, ultimately proclaims salvation—tangibly so in the case of Eutychus. Resurrection is inextricably linked with the act of remembering Christ’s body and blood.
appears out of order. A typical story of an individual being raised from the dead usually relates the actions of the person immediately after his or her restoration.\textsuperscript{68} Johnson seems almost frustrated with the passage; he writes,

> Luke’s dramatic sense seems to have abandoned him completely. He tells us about the many lamps in the room, and the length of Paul’s preaching, and the gradually increasing sleepiness (a nice touch), but the dramatic moment of falling and dying and being restored are handled almost casually, and with very little detail.\textsuperscript{69}

Hans Conzelmann would prefer to remove v. 11, which awkwardly interrupts the focus on Eutychus. Conzelmann writes, “If verses 7 and 11 are removed, then the unity of the piece is clear: what remains is a secular story with a popular comic touch.”\textsuperscript{70} The fact that “we” drops out from vv. 9–13 makes the story appear all the more like an insertion into the broader narrative.\textsuperscript{71} Verses 7 and 11, however, are part of the Acts account that was accepted by Christians into their sacred text through preaching, canonization, and reception, and the awkwardness remains authoritative. The awkwardness, in fact, may serve a deliberate purpose: by surprising readers with an unexpected “insertion” into the story of Eutychus with a verse about breaking bread with the Troas church, Luke keeps the pericope as a whole focused on the broader community and the ways that breaking bread and resurrection go hand-in-hand.

Pervo notes that the events of v. 12 take place “off stage,”\textsuperscript{72} seemingly without any connection to Paul, only to the “they” of the Troas church. Codex Bezae attempts to correct the awkwardness by connecting this scene with Paul’s departure. It reads, “While they were bidding him farewell, he [Paul] brought the young man, alive” (ἀσπαζομένων δὲ αὐτῶν ἔγαγεν τὸν νεανίσκον ζῶντα).\textsuperscript{73} The scribe has both cleared up the discrepancy between the descriptions of Eutychus—here he is described as “young man” twice, rather than “young man” and “child”—and also places Paul in the scene where the reported healing is most evident. The emendation suggests at least some ancient readers felt it important to connect this story to Paul’s broader journey.

The conventional reading, though, holds sway, and its unusual construction remains provoking. Bede and Bruce both believe that the delay in confirming Eutychus’s seeming restoration indicates that his recovery to full consciousness took all evening.\textsuperscript{74} Bruce simply finds this curious, while Bede suggests that because Eutychus’s supposed death was due to his own negligence, the young man was more difficult to revive than, for example,

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\textsuperscript{68} The child restored by Elisha, for example, sneezes seven times (2 Kgs 4:35).

\textsuperscript{69} Johnson, \textit{Acts}, 358.

\textsuperscript{70} Conzelmann, \textit{Acts}, 169.

\textsuperscript{71} Haenchen, \textit{Acts}, 586.

\textsuperscript{72} Pervo, \textit{Acts}, 512.


\textsuperscript{74} Bede, \textit{Acts}, 161; Bruce, \textit{Acts}, 427.
the righteous Tabitha. Resurrection from the dead, Bede purports, is a miracle performed more effectively—or with greater expeditiousness, at least—on the pious.

Given the context, the absence of Paul from v. 12 serves its own particular purpose. Paul’s work in Troas, like his work in other Gentile churches, is significant; Paul himself is an important prophetic figure among these fledgling Christian communities. But Paul will not remain indefinitely with these communities, as is so clear in his speech to the Ephesian elders later in chap. 20 and in the letters to Timothy attributed to Paul. These churches and adherence to Jesus’ message will continue, Paul hopes, beyond him and other apostles.

The believers in Troas who took Eutychus away were “not a little comforted,” Luke writes. The litotes here seems somewhat inappropriate for people who just witnessed a child seemingly raised from the dead. Perhaps, though, given the placement of v. 11 and Paul’s intimate conversation with the group, Luke implies that the community needed comforting not only for the shock and surprise of what happened to Eutychus but also for the hurried departure of Paul. Presuming Paul informed the Troas community of his travel plans, they may likely have responded as the Ephesian elders did at Miletus in 20:37–38—with weeping and grieving. Leading Eutychus home was a comfort not only because the boy was alive but also because the living boy was a reminder that their worshiping community could also live on without their founding teacher.

Gaventa recognizes that the broader context of the Eutychus narrative, Acts 20:1–21:17, particularly emphasizes Christian community. As Paul’s journey comes to a close, the focus is entirely on the “‘internal’ or ‘intramural’ life of the church.” The Gentile church (narratively unified by Paul’s travels) seen in this section parallels the community of Jewish believers at the beginning of Acts. In some ways, these communities display the most stability Christianity has evidenced since the persecution of believers by the young Saul. The churches in Troas, Ephesus, and Caesarea have their own established worship, their own elders, and their own prophets. Paul’s presence, however beloved, is not required for a perceptibly legitimate continuation of the Christian faith.

The incident at Troas is set firmly in the context of Paul’s dramatic journey toward Jerusalem. Just as Paul offers a succession speech at Miletus in 20:17–38, he offers a succession action in Troas. As Wall describes, the purpose of this sort of succession speech (or, in the case of Troas, a succession action) “is not to bid [the listeners] farewell but to commission them

76. Ibid., 42. Gaventa notes a “triptych of community life” in this section, observing the following pattern: travel (20:1–6), event (20:7–12), travel (20:13–16), event (20:17–38), travel (20:1–7). Certainly, this pattern is worth noting. Seen in this way, Paul's farewell speech in Miletus takes center stage. The gathering at Troas, where Paul participates in raising a child from the dead, is linked chiastically with the gathering in Caesarea, where Paul declares his own willingness to die for the name of Jesus (21:13).
for a future mission that continues what [the speaker] has begun to do and say.” 77 “Through Eutychus’s seemingly miraculous return to life, Paul offers a “future mission” for the church in Troas focused on resurrection. 78

**EPILOG: IMPLICATIONS FOR A CANONICAL PAUL**

Acts introduces Paul by painting him as a faithful Jewish prophet whose message is consistent with the message of Jesus and the original disciples. Luke paints Paul as personifying faithful Israel, acting as “a light to for the Gentiles” who brings the salvation of Israel’s God “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47). 79 Acts 20:6–12 serves to affirm this portrait of Paul. The church canonized this portrait, inclusive of the story of Eutychus, and, in doing so, it created a particular theological context for reading the rest of the NT, particularly Paul’s (implied) letters. 80 The question that follows, then, is how Acts 20:6–12 in its canonical form and context fits into the broader theological function of the book of Acts and, therefore, the broader NT. Answering this question means taking a canonical approach to the study of this passage.

Here, a canonical approach to Scripture is understood to refer to an examination of the text that takes into account its role as Scripture in addition to its role as a historical document and literary work. Using a canonical approach, the interpreter’s interest ultimately lies in the text as it was (and is) shaped by and used for the church. The ecclesial community sees in Scripture the authorization of the Spirit and therefore reads Scripture as theologically authoritative. This means, then, that a canonical approach values the final form of the text—the form in which the text entered the church’s canon, which is now itself a new context “in which the texts of diverse witnesses are read together” 81—apparently odd stories and all.

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78. Moreover, just as Paul offers a “succession speech” and “succession action” in Acts 20, he also provides succession documents in his letters, particularly in the Pastoral epistles. The Pastoral epistles, with their emphasis on living rightly within the household of God, “clarify the church’s missionary vocation, worked out in other Pauline letters, for a post-Pauline setting.” See Wall’s article for a more thorough discussion of the Pastoral’s “emphasis on living rightly within the household of God” as well (Robert Wall, “The Function of the Pastoral Letters within the Pauline Canon of the New Testament: A Canonical Approach,” in The Pauline Canon [ed. S. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 2004] 42). This missionary vocation is centered in the death and resurrection of Christ and in the community established in the name of Jesus. Similarly, Paul prepares the church at Troas for a “post-Pauline” time by exemplifying what it means to live rightly within the household of God: teaching the gospel, enacting the resurrection, and gathering to break bread.
80. All the “Pauline” letters are referenced here; from a canonical and theological standpoint, what is significant is that the implied author of the Pauline letters is the Paul described by Luke in Acts. The question at hand is not historical but ecclesial: not “Did the Paul described in Acts write Ephesians?” but “What does it mean for the interpretation of Scripture that the implied author of Ephesians is the Paul described in Acts?”
canonical approach to Scripture therefore commits to Scripture’s simultaneity, the fact that its disparate individual texts are now part of one whole.

But, as Wall notes, “Besides a commitment to Scripture’s simultaneity, this approach places importance on its sacred nature: not only is Scripture’s referent a holy God, its purpose is to form the theological understanding and moral discipline of a holy people.” To speak of a text as Scripture is to speak of a text theologically; the canonical approach is necessarily a theological enterprise. Ultimately, the text of the Bible has been and will continue to be studied as a sacred text because of its significant authority for the church, a religious institution. This authority does not derive from the text’s authors, its supposed divine origin, or its role as an interesting historical or literary document. The authority of Scripture is instead based in its ecclesial role as the appointed medium through which the church recognizes what it understands to be God’s Word. The church recognizes the authority of Scripture because it understands God as using Scripture to shape the ecclesial community. Asking what the text means as Scripture, then, is a theological question: in what way does this text shape its ecclesial readers to become more fully a community of their God?

A canonical approach raises new questions for interpreters as they ask how a particular text functions in relation to the rest of the canon, including ways that the “original author” might not have predicted. This is not to say that the intertextuality intended by the “original form” of the text (insofar as it can be discerned) is to be ignored but simply to recognize that a new layer of meaning has been added with the church’s adoption of the text into its Scriptures. Brevard Childs sums up the canonical approach:

By the collecting and reordering of once independent writing into an authoritative corpus of scripture, a new dynamic was established which profoundly influenced the interpretation of the parts. . . . What is called for is an analysis which combines both historical and theological description. It seeks to pursue not only the motives for giving the literature its particular shape, but also the function which the literature now performs in its special form within the smaller and larger units of the collection.

Childs recognizes that the “parts” of Scripture contain all sorts of interesting information to the historian, the literary critic, and the general observer. But the church has not canonized the “parts” independently of one another; the church has created a new work with a theological agenda and Scripture ought to be studied accordingly.

The book of Acts plays a unique role within this theological agenda, within its canonical context. A careful interpreter seeking to examine the language, grammar, and syntax of Acts will recognize the book’s authorial or editorial connection with the Gospel of Luke. But reading Acts as

82. Ibid, 116.
84. Ibid., 43.
Scripture means reading it in a new context: instead of the second part of a two-volume Lukan work, Acts is now a narrative linking the fourfold Gospels with the epistolary collections. In particular, the location of Acts in relation to the Pauline epistles means that the Paul of Acts offers a paradigm for understanding the Paul of the letters. The question here is not the historical question whether Luke knew of and used Pauline letters in writing Acts. Rather, the question raised by a canonical approach is how canonical Acts and the canonical Pauline epistles interact; how these pieces of a final, whole NT canon are textually related now that they are part of the same work.

Historical criticism has at times prioritized the “historical” Paul of the letters over the Lukan portrait of Paul in Acts. But it is the book of Acts that offers the church-authorized biography of Paul, and so it is the Paul of Acts who is remembered by the church when the church reads in its Scriptures letters by Paul. Luke’s portrait of Paul ought to be neither dismissed in favor of a reconstruction of Paul from the letters nor defended as perfectly “historical” according to certain types of historiography. Rather, the Lukan portrait ought to be seen as the recollection of the church for future generations for the sake of their faith. The “historical” and the “Lukan” (canonical) Paul may or may not be linked together, but this is a different critical problem than that occasioned by a canonical approach to the text, in which the central question focuses on the function of the text in the community for which it is Scripture. It is the Lukan Paul whose background the church authorized as important for reading the Pauline epistles.

85. As Wall notes, “When the believer speaks of the biblical canon as a sanctified ‘place’ into which we come to hear God’s word, one can also speak of a sanctified ‘placement’ in which collections are arranged (and perhaps individual writings within them) to articulate God’s word to hear it best” (Wall, “Canonical Response,” 118).

86. So, for instance, it is appropriate to note interesting intertextual echoes of Acts 20:6–12 in the Pauline epistles. For example, the use of συνάγω, to gather or assemble, in both this passage and Paul’s letters might be intriguing. Though Luke uses the term fairly frequently, Paul uses it only once, in 1 Cor 5:4. In the passage in Acts, the believers at Troas gather together to break bread (20:7). In 1 Corinthians, Paul speaks of “when you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus” (5:4). Paul appears to indicate a connection between the gathering or assembly of the Christian community he founded and the presence of his own spirit with this gathering. Though the church at Troas gathered with Paul in person, the church in Corinth can gather with Paul’s spirit by faithfully following his teaching (which is now passed on through his letters). The fact that Paul has moved away from communities such as those at Troas or Corinth does not mean that his instruction is no longer valid. As Wall writes, a Pauline letter “supplies an inferior although effective substitute for Paul’s persona and the edifying charisms he conveys within the faith community. Sharply put, the letter represents the ‘spirit’ of the prophetic Paul, which communicates the word of the Lord in his personal absence” (Robert Wall, “The Function of the Pastoral Letters,” 30).

87. Moreover, the “Paul of Acts” and the “Paul of the letters” are likely not so disparate as some have previously argued. See Childs, The Church’s Guide for Reading Paul, 230; and Steve Walton, Leadership and Lifestyle: The Portrait of Paul in the Miletus Speech and 1 Thessalonians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).


89. Ibid., 256.
Early in the canonization process, this authorization happened separately from that of the Gospel of Luke. Acts did not “make it in” automatically, by virtue of a literary connection with a popular Gospel. Though the process of canonization for Acts is somewhat debated,\(^9\) a likely possibility is that it was introduced to the church by circulating with collections of Pauline and Catholic Epistles. Wall notes that, “For this reason, by the time the canonical process had concluded a few centuries later, the canonical Acts had its own peculiar function within the biblical canon, different from that of the Third Gospel. The importance of its role as Scripture thereby underwrites a particular approach to the study of Acts and its distinctive deposit to the biblical witness.”\(^9\) The story of Jesus—particularly, the story of Easter—in (all) the gospels leaves the church asking, “Now what?” The book of Acts answers with a story of a post-Easter mission to spread the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, to Jew and to Gentile. Or, from a slightly different perspective, Acts “sets out to describe the effect of God’s plan in equipping the apostles [and the rest of the church] with his Spirit.”\(^9\) Acts points toward the implied authors of the epistles as proclaimers of this mission; Acts introduces post-Easter Christian teaching.

The story of Eutychus ultimately encourages Christian readers of the NT to view Paul’s authority and read the Pauline corpus in a particular way. First, Paul is a pious Jew, defending himself against unbiased accusations to the contrary. Any anti-Semitic interpretations of Paul’s letters, then, are theologically incorrect.\(^9\) Additionally, Paul is deeply connected to the story of Jesus and the early church; his message is to be understood in light of the life of Jesus told in the fourfold Gospels and with an eye toward the instruction offered by other church leaders, as in the Catholic Epistles. This is not to say that any scriptural discrepancies between the Pauline epistles and the rest of the NT are to be harmonized away or ignored altogether. Instead, Paul’s connection to other early Christians simply emphasizes that all the scriptural voices are to be understood as teaching the same message: “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21). Finally, Acts 20:6–12 suggests an appropriate way to understand Paul’s continuing role in the Christian community: Paul is an authoritative, beloved figure, and his message is to be remembered (while awake!), but ultimately the church must be comforted not by the fleeting presence of Paul (or even his letters) but by the ecclesiastically perceived power of the resurrection.

A few additional points can be made about what this portrait of Paul means for the ecclesial interpretation of Scripture. First, Paul’s Jewishness

\(^9\) Ibid., 225.
\(^9\) The recent “New Perspective on Paul” movement within Pauline scholarship has made a strong case for this point from a historical perspective and is well worth investigating. Nothing said here is meant to call into question the New Perspective’s contributions. The emphasis here, though, is on the way that readings of Acts highlight Paul’s Jewishness, even apart from the important work of examining other ancient extrabiblical Jewish texts.
is to be respected; the church ought to read the letter to the Galatians with the image of a thoroughly Jewish Paul in mind. The author who wrote the letter to the Romans ought to be known as the same Paul who represents a continuation of the story of Israel’s God’s restoring actions. E. P. Sanders, James Dunn, N. T. Wright, and others of the “New Perspective” movement have made clear that ignoring Paul’s Jewish background can lead to misinterpretation of Paul’s writings and even anti-Semitism. Paul is not always flattering toward his own people, but recognizing that the Jews are Paul’s own people can profoundly change the church’s perspective on Paul’s writings about Jews and Gentiles.

The church that has canonized Acts also ought to recognize, as Wall describes, Acts’ role in ensuring the “witness of the full canon of letters,” or, in Childs’s words, “the unified witness of the apostles and Paul.” Acts reminds the church to read the Pauline and non-Pauline epistles together, as equally necessary. Paul’s actions in Acts, including the story of Eutychus, echo the actions of Peter and of Jesus. For Luke, Paul’s legitimacy is strengthened by his connection to the earlier apostles—not the other way around. It is not only the Pauline collection that is significant to the church (contrary to the preferences of Marcion and certain Protestant reformers); the Catholic Epistles ought to be read as authoritative Scripture as well.

Luke’s Paul guards against myopic readings of a select canon of texts within Paul’s letters. For instance, Pervo posits that “for Luke Paul’s breathtaking interpretation of the crucifixion was unduly conducive to dualism” and that reading Paul’s biography through a Lukan interpretation of the cross as an event emphasizing continuity with God’s ancient plan for restoration will guard against incorrect dualistic readings of the epistles. Certainly, themes of continuity—with Israel and with the Jewish church—are present even in the Eutychus story. The Paul whose implied writings are authoritative teaching for the church is the Paul introduced by Luke. Paul the teacher of the church through the ages is, in other words, Paul the teacher of the church at Troas.

The young church that accepted Acts into its canon of Scripture (likely first as an introduction to epistolary literature and later as a bridge between the Gospels and epistles) needed to establish its own postapostolic legitimacy. As Pervo suggests, “If the departure of Jesus was a great boon, the absence of Paul is not a bane, for his influence endures.” Paul’s influence does endure, in light of his portrait in Acts, the portrait of a consecrated missionary establishing churches deeply rooted in a Jewish legacy even

while reaching out to Gentiles.\textsuperscript{100} When read in the context of Acts, Paul’s occasioned writings are reoccasioned for the life of the ecclesial community in the present.

\textbf{Appendix 1: Translation of Acts 20:6–12}

\textit{Greek Text}\textsuperscript{101}

\begin{itemize}
\item [20:6] ἡμεῖς δὲ ἐξεπλεύσαμεν μετὰ τὰς ἡμέρας τὸν ἄζυμων ἀπὸ Φιλίππων καὶ ἠλθομεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν Τρῳάδα ἄχρι ἡμερῶν πέντε, ὅπου διετρίψαμεν ἡμέρας ἑπτά. 
\item [7] Ἐν δὲ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων συνηγμένοι ἡμῶν κλάσας ἄρτον, ὁ Παύλος διελέγετο αὐτοῖς μέλλον ἡμᾶς τῇ ἐπαύριον, παρέτεινεν τε τὸν λόγον μέχρι μεσονυκτίου. 
\item [8] ἦσαν δὲ λαμπάδες ἱκαναὶ ἐν τῷ ὑπερῴῳ οὗ ἦμεν συνηγμένοι. 
\item [9] καθεξόμενος δὲ τις νεανίας ὀνόματι Εὔτυχος ἐπὶ τῆς θυρίδος, καταφερόμενος ὑπὲρ βαθεῖ διαλεγομένοι τοῦ Παύλου ἐπὶ πλεῖον, κατενεχθεὶς ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕπνου ἔπεσεν ἀπὸ τοῦ τριστέγου κάτω καὶ ἦραν νεκρός. 
\item [10] καταβὰς δὲ ὁ Παῦλος ἐπέπεσεν αὐτῷ καὶ συμπεριλαβὼν εἶπεν· μὴ θορυβεῖσθε, ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστιν. 
\item [11] ἀναβὰς δὲ καὶ κλάσας τὸν ἄρτον καὶ γευσάμενος ἐφ᾽ ἱκανόν τε ὁμιλήσαμεν ἀχρί αὐγῆς, οὕτως ἐξῆλθεν. 
\end{itemize}

\textit{Author’s Translation}

[20:6] And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread and we came to them in Troas within five days, where we spent seven days. 
[7] On the first day of the week, when we were gathered to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; because he intended to depart the next day, he was extending the word until midnight. 
[8] And there were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. 
[9] And sitting down on the window, a certain young man, by name Eutychus, was sinking down to deep sleep while Paul continued the discussion much longer. 
[10] But going down, Paul fell upon him and, embracing him, he said, “Do not be disturbed, for his soul is in him.”

\textbf{Appendix 2: Eutychus and Elpenor}

Conzelmann’s suggestion that the story of Eutychus is “secular” is noted above. The “secular” nature of the pericope becomes all the more evident when its close linguistic ties to a Homeric episode are noted. In \textit{The Odyssey}, Homer tells a story of a young man (νεώτατος) named Elpenor who sleepily

\textsuperscript{100} See Wall, “Acts,” 215.  
\textsuperscript{101} Greek New Testament and LXX Database (BGT) (BibleWorks, v. 8; Norfolk, VA: BibleWorks, 1999).
and drunkenly fell to his death from a rooftop (his soul, ψυχὴ, “flew to death,” *Odyssey* 10.550–560). The story of Elpenor was popular enough to be widely referenced in ancient (and even Christian) literature, and it is reasonable to even describe Luke’s Eutychus as a sort of “imitation” of Homer’s Elpenor.

Dennis R. MacDonald thoroughly examines every potential connection between the two narratives in an article in the *Journal of Higher Criticism*. MacDonald argues that difficulties in the Eutychus narrative are resolved by studying the Homeric episode. The presence of lamps in Acts 20, for example, is mentioned, according to MacDonald, to contrast Circe’s (presumably darkened) “magic halls” which Elpenor encounters. MacDonald sees the unusual choice of τριστέγου ("third story") in Acts 20:9 as derived from Homer’s word for “roof,” τέγεος. Even the delay between Paul’s healing declaration in v. 10 and appearance of the fully restored Eutychus in v. 12 can, according to MacDonald, be explained by a parallel with the Elpenor story. Like Eutychus’s, the resolution of Elpenor’s story is delayed because he does not receive a proper immediate burial.

It is somewhat difficult to swallow MacDonald’s insistence that all the questions surrounding the story of Eutychus can be resolved because of a connection to the story of Elpenor. For instance, Luke’s use of other sources throughout Luke–Acts does not always cause awkward readings such as the strange arrangement of vv. 10–12. Still, the hypertextuality is evident; it may even be advertised, as MacDonald notes, by the fact that this event occurs in Troas (ancient Troy).

Luke’s use of the Elpenor story may not clarify all issues in Acts 20:6–12, but it does emphasize the miraculous nature of Eutychus’s restoration all the more. Homer’s young man becomes a model warning against drunkenness, while Eutychus is the paradigm for restoration in the Christian community. It was “well-known” that boys falling from great heights would meet their demise (Lucian, *Wisdom of Nigrinus* 17), but life in the church could transform even such widely expected outcomes. Ultimately, though, the way that Luke frames this narrative means that the story is not primarily about Eutychus. It is, rather, about Eutychus as part of the Christian community at Troas, and the Christian community at Troas as a model of a Pauline, Gentile church.

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106. Ibid., 15.
107. Ibid., 16.