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Something Wild: The Wilderness Aesthetic in Luke-Acts

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An Abstract of
a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

Something Wild: The Wilderness Aesthetic in Luke-Acts
By Elizabeth Hope Arnold

My dissertation, "Something Wild: The Wilderness Aesthetic in Luke-Acts," is a literary study using both reader-response and narrative criticism, and it spans the entire narrative of Luke-Acts. In this study, I examine how Luke's way of reading scripture (particularly LXX Isaiah) enables him to understand the wilderness symbolically, and this method of reading informs and shapes how he writes the wilderness in his own composition. I argue that Luke's wilderness displays an aesthetic of unhindered possibility—a result from reading the wilderness of scripture as the symbol of both Israel's past and eschatological future. The result of such an aesthetic is that the reader is conditioned to associate the wilderness with certain types of actions and attitudes, such as egalitarian community, release from bondage, and the ability to see God's salvation. I argue that Luke's story sustains this wilderness aesthetic throughout the two volumes of the Gospel and Acts.

The aesthetic of the wilderness—that of openness, possibility, and freedom—functions in contrast to the repressive aesthetic of the οἰκουμένη: understood here as not only the Roman Empire, but the entire framework of human political, economic, and religious systems. This argument works on a broadly thematic level, not unlike Susan Garrett's does in *The Demise of the Devil* (although Garrett works specifically on the notion of divine versus demonic kingdom and does not take up the human systems emphasis). Not only is this wilderness as theme sustained, but as it gains momentum throughout the story, the wilderness aesthetic increasingly confounds the boundary between wilderness and οἰκουμένη. The wilderness therefore continually undermines and progressively dismantles the οἰκουμένη and its aesthetic façade of power and control.

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CHAPTER ONE: APPROACHING LUKE-ACTS THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

1.1 THE AESTHETIC READING OF THE WILDERNESS

In this dissertation, I argue that the wilderness functions as an important theme, giving Luke-Acts its narrative aesthetic. Based on his own aesthetic reading of scripture, Luke[1] brings the timeless atmosphere of the wilderness—which both evokes Israel's past story and its eschatological future—into his own narrative. The aesthetic of the wilderness then presents a conflict with the repressive and violent aesthetic of the world of human power systems: the οἰκουμένη.

While Luke-Acts has been combed for its literary importance, wilderness as a literary function is an underappreciated aspect of the story. Many scholars, particularly of the early twentieth century, dismiss Luke's wilderness scenes as mere leftover remnants of Mark (the true "wilderness gospel"). They conclude that Luke does not capitalize on wilderness as any kind of organizing concept.[2] To the contrary, I assert that Luke's wilderness is actually a centering *experience* for the reader. In the next section, I demonstrate how reading for such a centering experience is an approach well-suited for Luke-Acts.

1.1.1 Aesthetic Reading

1.1.1.1 Luke's Stated Purpose: An Aesthetic Reading?

When Luke opens his composition, he divulges his express purpose for writing: ἵνα ἐπιγνῷς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν, "so that you may know assurance about the

[1] I use the name Luke to refer to the writer of both the Gospel of Luke and Acts. I take no position on whether Luke was a historical person with this exact name, nor that he was a companion of Paul.

[2] See Ulrich Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness: The Wilderness Theme in the Second Gospel and Its Basis in the Biblical Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 1963) and Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*: *Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969).

things you have been taught" (Luke 1:4, translation mine). Luke therefore describes his project as *synthetic* in nature since he attempts to gather separate parts (as denoted by the plural λόγων—"words, events, concepts") into a coherent whole (as expressed by the singular ἀσφάλειαν). Luke's later prologue to Acts bears witness to this fact as Luke refers to the gospel previously written as Τὸν…πρῶτον λόγον (Acts 1:1). Here, λόγος is singular, referring to the *entire story* previously written. Luke takes the words and events handed to his generation (the collection of which he assumes has already been passed on to his reader) and transforms them into one singular event—the experience of reading the whole story as told by him.

Luke's clearly stated synthetic goal suggests that his real interest lies in the future. Luke acknowledges that Theophilus[3] already has all the facts: κατηχήθης λόγων (the words or facts about which you have been taught). The verb κατηχέω (teach) in the aorist indicative identifies the action as having already occurred. In contrast, the verb ἐπιγιγνώσκω (know) is rendered in the aorist subjunctive, communicating the possibility of being realized in the future. If Luke's purpose in writing was primarily historical record, he might have stated an intention to clarify, correct, or supplement the teachings which Theophilus had received.

Instead, Luke offers his reader the chance to experience ἀσφάλεια: certainty, security, stability, or truth *about* those teachings.[4] All these potential meanings point to a condition which Luke desires to be produced within the reader. While Luke's reader may already have the "facts" of the gospel material, Luke's narrative promises to weave them in such a way that Theophilus might perceive their composite effect.[5] Thus, the response Luke seeks from his reader is not

[3] My comment applies whether Theophilus refers to an historical singular individual or the persona of the ideal reader for Luke.

[4] BDAG, s.v. "ἀσφάλεια."

[5] In his SNTS presidential address, Carl Holladay argues that not only is proclaiming the word and teaching the fullness of its meaning Luke's reason for writing, but—specifically for Acts—*kerygma* (preaching) itself could

necessarily specific actions; he does not exhort the reader to enter the mission field or to give away his wealth. Rather, Luke's goal is that the reader will comprehend the gospel narrative as a secure framework by which to understand the world and God's actions in it. Thus, Luke intends for the composite effect of his story to have a lasting effect on his reader.

1.1.1.2 The Principles of Aesthetic Reading

Following the directions of Luke, this particular method of reading—in which the effect of the story stays with the reader after the event of reading—falls into the category of what has been named aesthetic reading, in which the reader does not seek information *per se*, but an experience of the narrative. Louise Rosenblatt, a researcher on the study and pedagogy of reading methods, differentiates between aesthetic and efferent reading.

Efferent reading seeks hard data in order to put the text's information to work. Rosenblatt explains her vocabulary choice of the word "efferent" as based on the Latin word *efferre* which means "to carry away.[6] When doing efferent reading, the reader's goal is primarily to glean information that is useful outside the text's world. Furthermore, in efferent reading, the reader's relationship with the text ends when the text ends and when all the information needed for the future has been collected.

Aesthetic reading, however, occurs when "the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text."[7] Aesthetic reading

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be considered the genre of the work as a whole. Holladay notes that Luke consistently combines the act of proclamation with teaching, thus carrying out the plan he lays out in the dedication to Theophilus. Carl Holladay, "Acts as Kerygma: λαλεῖν τὸν λόγον," *New Testament Studies*, 63 no 2 (Apr 2017):153-182.

[6] Louise M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), 24. Rosenblatt gives the example of efferent reading as operating manuals, instructions, directions, warning labels, and other forms of practical reading that serve only as a means to accomplishing a certain function.

[7] Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, 25.

closely resembles Luke's direction to read for ἀσφάλεια in that the goal of reading is for the text to have a sustained effect on the reader even after the final narrative scene closes. Rosenblatt writes: "The concept of the transaction with the environment provides the model for the process in which reader and text are involved. Each becomes in a sense *environment* for the other" (italics mine).[8] The reader enters and inhabits the world of the text, but in turn and over time, the text enters the landscape of the reader's own mind and worldview. In this case, the text abides with the reader indefinitely, the boundaries between the reader's thoughts and the text's word-made world are always somewhat porous.[9]

Not only does aesthetic reading allow the reader to inhabit the world of the text, but Roger Savage—basing his argument on Ricoeur's theory of narrative *mimesis*—argues that "by inventing or discovering new modalities of thought, feeling, and action, individual works *disquiet habituated orientations and understandings*" (italics mine).[10] A powerful story that "disciples" its reader thus not only introduces new possibilities but also sharpens the reader's critical eye in regard to her own world. As such, Luke's story defines the worldview it is *not*, just as clearly as it reveals the worldview it holds. The truth of this point will become more apparent as I look at Luke's aesthetic and how it is further defined by what it aesthetically opposes.

1.1.1.3 Aesthetic Reading as Journey; Luke-Acts as Journey

[8] Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, 43. Rosenblatt is clear to distinguish her perspective from those reader-response criticisms that claim an unformed text without the reader.

[9] Roger Savage, "Aesthetic Experience, *Mimesis*, and Testimony," *Études Ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*, Vol 3 no 1 (2012): 172-193. Savage notes that the reader functions as a disciple of the text in that he or she "follows after" it.

[10] Savage, "Aesthetic Experience, *Mimesis*, and Testimony," 172-193. Ricoeur's *mimesis* argues that art (be it visual, textual, dramatic or otherwise) reinvents life as it attempts to imitate it. By doing so, it does not "copy" life but recreates it anew and offers the viewer/reader a new "world" to experience and inhabit.

Thus, says Rosenblatt, the reader "journeys" in and with the text.[11] Wolfgang Iser describes the aesthetic reading process itself as "wandering," the reader managing "a moving viewpoint which travels along *inside* that which it has to apprehend."[12] The text and reader move through the narrative in a "dialectical fashion" wherein the text continuously reorients the perception of the reader, and the reader in turn looks to receive from the text.[13] Rosenblatt demands that the text be understood as "event in time" which means the story is created in the reading (experience) of it.[14] The story does not end when the physical act of reading concludes, so long as the story continues to be inhabited in the reader's mind.[15] Aesthetic reading, therefore, creates an all-consuming "present" for the reader.[16]

Reading as journey perfectly corresponds to Luke's two-part narrative, which is dominated by journey stories. He writes Jesus's famous "travel narrative" which takes up over a third of his gospel (Luke 9:51-19:47), and Acts opens with Jesus forecasting the apostles' journeys "to the utter ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Thus, the apostles travel constantly, and Paul likewise is always on the road. After a lengthy and perilous sea voyage, Paul (and the story) come to Rome (Acts 28:14).

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[11] Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text*, 28.

[12] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 109.

[13] Werner G. Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 108.

[14] Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, 12. Rosenblatt's notion of aesthetic reading as experiencing the text in the present is particularly pertinent to the reading of Luke-Acts as many scholars note how Luke persistently (at crucial moments in the narrative) and uniquely draws the reader's attention to σήμερον ("today") and νῦν ("now") both in stories of his own creation (Luke 2:29; 4:21; 16:25; 19:42; 23:43; 24:39; Acts 3:17; 4:9; 4:29; 7:52; 10:33; 12:11; 13:31; 15:10; 17:30; 18:6; 20:32; 22:3; 22:6; 24:21; 26:9) and as additions to inherited material (5:10; 5:26; 6:21; 9:23; 14:17; 22:18; 22:36; 22:61; 23:44). Thus, aesthetic reading provides a method of following Luke's narrative that is natural to its contours.

[15] One only need to attend Comic-Con to attest to this truth!

[16] Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 156.

Luke refers to his own work in investigating the gospel events as παρακολουθέω, meaning to "follow closely" or even "be guided by" (Luke 1:3). The word implies a journey, following along a sequence of events. This journey must be a reading journey like the one aesthetic critics describe because Luke refers to the written works of others and declares that "I too thought it good *to write*."

Luke's storytelling in terms of a journey is not unusual in light of the literature that Luke would have been exposed to, says Loveday Alexander: "The use of a voyage, real or imaginary, to provide the essential structure for a narrative must be one of the oldest plot devices in literature."[17] Alexander therefore concludes: "It is not difficult…to view the whole narrative…as a voyage, that is, as a description of the geographical expansion of the Gospel message outwards from Jerusalem 'to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8).[18] It seems appropriate that the only gospel writer to call initial and formal attention to the process of reading (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1) should also be the gospel writer to most highlight the significance of the journey and name the Christian community "the Way" (Acts 9:2).

And yet despite the diverse places these various journeys touch, Luke offers the reader a single perception, an ἀσφάλεια that unites the events, characters, speech, journeys and their destinations throughout the narrative. In other words, aesthetic reading describes the way readers construct the aesthetic, namely, the composite effect produced by the synthesis of the various features.[19] Terry Eagleton observes that by pondering the aesthetic of any given artwork one

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[17] Alexander, "In Journeyings Often Voyaging in the Acts of the Apostles and in Greek Romance" in *Luke's Literary Achievement: Collected Essays* (ed. C.M. Tuckett; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 19.

[18] Alexander, "In Journeyings Often," 22. While Alexander's essay focuses on Acts, she repeatedly anchors the journey activities of Acts in the early chapters of Luke.

[19] An analogy may clarify: An open floor plan in a house or office is said to communicate a communal or collaborative aesthetic. By noting how the features in an open-concept design appear (large rooms, high ceilings, few barriers), we discern the atmosphere they create (collaborative, communal, creative), which in turn is

ponders all the pieces of it as well as its relation to all other concerns.[20]

Borrowing Luke's own words, "it seemed good to me as well" to enter Luke's narrative by seeking his aesthetic. How can we begin discerning the aesthetic of Luke's narrative? I argue that we start by looking at where the journey—the Way—begins: Luke's account of John the Baptist in the wilderness.

1.1.2 The Wilderness Theme

Beginning my analysis in Luke 3 is not arbitrary. At first blush, it might seem that the beginning of Luke's gospel is his introduction in the formal preface dedicated to Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4), wherein he announces his motivation for writing and his goals for what the composition will accomplish in its reader.[21] While this dedication starts the composition, it lies outside the narrative proper, and so does not constitute the gospel's beginning. Were we to view Luke's gospel as a theatrical performance, we would identify this dedication as an introduction to the play, in which a tuxedoed producer addresses the audience directly with no dramatic "fourth wall," all the while standing at a podium in front of the closed curtains.[22]

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exemplified in the dynamics of interaction within that space (groups working together on projects, people gathering for meals or coffee, ideas from disparate parts of the organization being shared). Along the same line, I argue that Luke's narrative displays certain features—not unlike an "open-concept" floor plan—that create an atmosphere in which a certain dynamic is in play.

[20] Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 3.

[21] He assumes the reader is already familiar with the gospel story, but he encourages a deeper conviction in the gospel. In this prologue, we learn several important points. First, this is a narrative written in a particular order which itself helps to communicate the ἀσφάλεια that Luke hopes to produce (1:4). Second, the designation about the gospel being fulfilled ἐν ἡμῖν (1:1) suggests that this composition functions as a foundational story intended to continue discipling those already in the faith. Third, the language of παραδίδωμι (transmission, handing off) coupled with Luke's insistence of writing his own gospel leads us to understand that Luke is not necessarily refuting the other accounts, but that he is simply taking his turn in "handing down" what he has received and this may include material from other gospels, such as Mark (1:2).

[22] Such was the prologue Cecil B. DeMille gave to his opening of his epic film The Ten Commandments (1956). As does the writer of Luke-Acts, DeMille offers interpretive keys to the film's viewers—specifically how to interpret current world events in light of the biblical story (and certainly vice versa). To watch, visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8iNvzzak5U

It might likewise seem that Luke's gospel begins in Luke 1:5, but as Loveday Alexander has shown, this verse marks his narrative *prologue* (Luke 1:5-2:52) as Luke shifts from addressing the reader to narrating the "back story" of the gospel.[23] Returning to our illustration of a theatrical performance, this overture would feature characters in costume acting out the birth scenes of John and Jesus, but they would still be in front of the closed stage curtains in order to signal that these scenes take place well before the main story begins. In fact, Luke uses synchronic markers in his text as a sort of "countdown" to the true beginning of the gospel.[24] The first marker begins the narrative prologue: "in the days of King Herod of Judea" (Luke 1:5), introducing the birth narrative of John the Baptist. The second and longer synchronic marker announces the birth of Jesus: "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria" (Luke 2:1-2).

These opening two chapters comprise the nutshell version of all the main themes of Luke's gospel story, and thus act as a primer for the main body of the story.[25] Taking place decades before the account of the gospel proper, the prologue lays its thematic foundation. This is an important point to remember as Luke begins subtly crafting his aesthetic in these two early chapters. We will revisit this concept later and its specifics below as well as in later chapters.

The curtains finally open as the gospel story begins in Luke 3. Here is the third and longest of Luke's synchronic markers, announcing the gospel's official beginning with great

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[23] Loveday Alexander, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 218.

[24] David Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 86, 133. Aune argues that this "chronographic list"—this tying of events to lists of those in power—was often used during the New Testament times.

[25] This case has been argued by Richard Dillon, *From Eyewitnesses to Ministers of the Word: Tradition and Composition in Luke 24* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978).

fanfare:[26]

> In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness (Luke 3:1-2, NRSV).

David Tiede remarks that this synchronism launches the story proper according to Hellenistic conventions. The synchronism's echo of prophetic books such as Jeremiah also connects the ensuing scene of the Baptist with the Septuagint-esque narrative prologue (Luke 1-2).[27]

The beginning also picks up where Mark's gospel narrative begins—John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness which Mark explicitly labels, Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Mark 1:1).[28] This connection is further demonstrated by the linguistic connection to Luke's prologue to his second volume: "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for *John baptized with water, but you* will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:4-5, italics mine).[29] Jesus describes the apostles' mission as the continuation of what began in the wilderness with the Baptist and does not refer to any of the birth narrative materials.[30] Throughout the rest of Acts, in fact, the "beginning" of the gospel actions is

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[26] David P. Moessner, "'Listening Posts' Along the Way: Synchronisms as Metaleptic Prompts to the 'Continuity of the Narrative' in Polybius' *Histories* and in Luke's Gospel-Acts," in *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune* (ed. John Fotopoulos; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 144-145.

[27] David Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 11.

[28] Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke,* Translated by David Green (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973), 68. Schweizer designates this "beginning" as the "growth of the community," meaning that the work of the Baptist inaugurates the prophetic community that will trace its roots back to the proclamation of John in the wilderness.

[29] Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX,* The Anchor Bible. (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1979), 450. Fitzmyer also notes that Luke refers to the Baptist as the beginning of the gospel in Acts 10:37: "This is the beginning of the Lucan Gospel proper, not only because the account now begins to correspond to Mark 1… but also because Luke explicitly so regards it in Acts 10:37."

[30] A further indication of the importance of 3:1-6 is that one of the most important features of Luke's first two chapters is his comparison of Jesus and John the Baptist. Many scholars have noted that not only does Luke

consistently located in the activity of the Baptizer (Acts 1:22; 10:37; 11:16; 13:24-25; 19:4).

It is important to observe the beginning carefully, since "the beginning has a defining and modeling function…to explain a phenomenon is to indicate its origin."[31] In other words, to best analyze the "way" which winds through Luke's narrative and provides him with much of his narrative structure, we must analyze where that way begins. I will show how the "way" Luke moves through his narrative very much draws its aesthetic from the wilderness.

1.1.1 Luke's Wilderness Aesthetic

In order to create his narrative's wilderness aesthetic in 3:1-20, Luke draws from motifs in Israel's scriptures (LXX), his own scripturally influenced opening chapters (1-2), and the previously circulated version (versions?) of the Gospel of Mark which was (most likely) referenced in Luke's dedication to the reader. We will briefly look at how each of these literary contexts informs the reader's perception of Luke's wilderness aesthetic in Luke 3:1-20.

1.1.2.1 Septuagint

Luke most obviously relies on the prophet Isaiah to draft his wilderness aesthetic. This we see directly in Luke 3:1-20 by Luke's singularly lengthened quotation of Isaiah 40:3-5. This quotation conjures with it all of Isaiah's symbolic use of the wilderness: forecasting the

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demonstrate the similarities of the two prophetic figures, but also the intensification that occurs when moving from the Baptist to Jesus. For example, John is conceived by an elderly woman who was barren all her life; Jesus is conceived by a virgin. These commonalities and Luke's intention of linking Jesus and John the Baptist have long been acknowledged by scholars, but many abandon this paradigm when reading Luke 3, which is unfortunate because the parallels do not cease at the close of chapter 2. On the contrary, John the Baptist's imprisonment and execution also foreshadow Jesus's arrest and crucifixion. The logical question that arises from these linguistic and narrative clues is, "If Luke takes such pains to parallel the lives of John and Jesus, and if the move from the Baptist to Jesus marks a difference in degree rather than kind, then is it not reasonable to consider that the link between John and the wilderness might not only be maintained but also intensified by Jesus's own encounters in the wilderness? If so, then Luke 3:1-6 may prove to be more paradigmatic for the rest of gospel which focuses on the character, actions, and manner of Jesus, than Luke's interpreters have thus far allowed.

[31] Iuri Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, 212.

transformation of wilderness into a garden for an exiled people.[32] But even Isaiah's use of the wilderness draws on the reader's recollection of previous wilderness stories and desert poetry in Israel's scriptures. Moses delivers the people into the wilderness (Exod 13:18) and disseminates the law (Exod 19:2-6); Elijah finds comfort and nourishment in the wilderness while a political refugee (1 Kgs 19:4).

Luke's wilderness aligns with such a political reading since he marks his story by frequently pointing to the rulers in the structures of human power, both specific rulers and general offices. On one hand, Herod the Great corresponds to the birth narrative of John the Baptist, and clearly, the differences between the two men are many. Herod's son, Herod Antipas, is the one who imprisons and executes John. John is most definitely cast in opposition to such rulers. On the other hand, Tiberius is mentioned in Luke 3, and the audience hears nothing damning about this particular emperor. In Acts, however, the Emperor Claudius expels Jews from Rome. The reader is surely meant to judge this imperial act negatively as it persecutes Aquila and Pricilla—"good characters" in Luke's story. The office of emperor is therefore suspect, even if there is no specific evil mentioned in this instance.

With regard to all these stories of Israel and its prophets just mentioned, it is noteworthy that their presence in the desert space was in opposition to the rule of a political figure in the inhabited world: Pharaoh (Exod 5:1; Ps 136:10-16), King Saul (1 Sam 23:25), and Queen Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:1-4). Part of the wilderness aesthetic, therefore, is its sharp contrast to the inhabited world and its paradigms of power and violence.

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[32] See David Pao, *Acts and Isaianic New Exodus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020), and Bryan Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018). Scholarship in the last several decades emphasizes Luke's "New Exodus"—how he draws on themes from Israel's redemption from slavery and being delivered by the prophet Moses.

1.1.2.2 Luke 1-2

As promised earlier, we return to Luke's hinting at his "wilderness aesthetic" prior to Luke 3. While the wilderness is tightly connected to the beginning of the gospel, many of the wilderness features have been introduced already by Luke in his two opening chapters. While the Baptist's birth is announced in the Jerusalem temple and specifically in the sanctuary (ναός), Jesus's birth is announced in Nazareth, a small village in Galilee which is a backwater region of Israel (Luke 1:26).

While the story of Jesus's birth begins with the image of an emperor issuing a decree from Rome and a reference to a governor ruling in nearby Syria (Luke 2:1-2), the angels appear to shepherds out in unmarked fields (Luke 2:8). The humble sheepherders then make their way to another "no place"—the stable where Jesus is born because οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος,"there was *not a place* for them" (Luke 2:7). Clearly, Luke favors the unnamed and seemingly unimportant "no places" like stables, fields, and small villages to locate his most important actions rather than palaces, temples, and large cities. For example, Jesus is only recognized in the Jerusalem temple at his dedication (Luke 2:25-38) *after* he is recognized by the shepherds in the Bethlehem stable (Luke 2:15-20). It should not surprise the reader, then, when "the Word of God" appears in the wilderness and "the Way of the Lord" is first proclaimed there (Luke 3:2-3). Indeed, throughout the first two chapters, it seems that Luke has been pointing forward to this moment occurring in just such a "no place" and specifically *not* high-profile locales.

In addition, Luke uses specific character-types to further communicate his wilderness theme. It is not the emperor or wealthy elites but the shepherds "on whom God's favor rests" that receive the angelic news of the savior's birth (Luke 2:14). While the priest Zachariah is rendered mute for his disbelief (Luke 1:20), the young Mary is lauded by Gabriel (Luke 1:28). The barren

woman Elizabeth conceives John in a long-empty womb, which draws again on the Septuagintal stories of other wildernesses dressed as empty wombs: Sarah, Rebekah, Hannah. Upon concluding the *Benedictus*, Luke tells the reader that John was then in the wilderness until he began his ministry (Luke 1:80), which further links the prophetic activity of John with the wilderness.

With all these characters, Luke weaves a theme of emptiness into his narrative: barrenness, poverty, homelessness. Empty people and empty places wait to be filled. The mystified virgin asks how her own untouched womb will conceive God's son, and Gabriel answers, ὅτι οὐκ ἀδυνατήσει παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πᾶν ῥῆμα, "such a thing will not be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). The same word, ῥῆμα, is used to describe the event that happens to John the Baptist precisely in the wilderness (Luke 3:2). The impossible work of God seems particularly suited for these empty spaces and empty people precisely because emptiness—be it in spatial or human form—has no obstacles or barriers. Again, such an aesthetic is in stark contrast to the high-profile people in the narrative; it is definitely *not* the emperor, nor the governor, the priest, the wealthy. Luke's wild and empty aesthetic is identified as much by its contrast as by its own features.

1.1.2.3 Gospel of Mark

From the gospel's preface (Luke 1:1-4), we learn how Luke has communicated his careful and particular attention to order and detail—not to undo the facts acquired from the other gospel writer. Rather, Luke attempts to solidify them. An often overlooked feature of redaction criticism is that the choice to keep and include material is just as important in understanding the writer's purposes as the choices he makes to discard or alter material. I would argue that Mark's ethos as "the wilderness gospel" is something Luke chooses to retain and not jettison from his

predecessor, even if Luke uses it differently than did Mark. It is certainly true that Luke's story contains a great deal of cosmopolitanism. When examining the entirety of Luke's two-volume work, however, we find *more* references to wilderness and important vignettes set in the wilderness than occur in Mark, not fewer.

For example, Luke inherits from Mark the wilderness as the Baptist's location, the place of Jesus's baptism and temptation, and the setting of the miraculous feeding. Luke not only retains these scenes but adds wilderness to Mark's story of the Gerasene demoniac. In Acts, Luke crafts a story of baptism that his uniquely his. Mark's emphasis on the wilderness finds not only acceptance but expansion in Luke's story.

1.2 HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

1.2.1 Wilderness in Hebrew Bible and Jewish Literature

"What is so interesting about the Hebrew Bible desert wilderness is exactly that it oscillates between a real and a fantasmatic presentation, in between cosmology, literary motif, spatial practice and geography."[33]

Luke inherits a long tradition concerning the wilderness. Evidence for the literary theme of revisiting, reimagining, and even repurposing the wilderness is found even within the Hebrew Bible itself.[34] Even when interpreting the wilderness symbolically, various writers interpret that symbol in a variety of ways.[35] Because a substantial portion of my thesis is based on how Luke

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[33] Laura Feldt, "Wilderness and Hebrew Bible Religion—Fertility, Apostasy, and Religious Transformation in the Pentateuch" in *Wilderness in Mythology and Religion: Approaching Religious Spatialities, Cosmologies, and Ideas of Wild Nature* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 58.

[34] Won W. Lee notes that even within the Pentateuch itself there is noticeable restyling of the wilderness, particularly from Exodus to Deuteronomy. See "The Concept of the Wilderness in the Pentateuch" in *Israel in the Wilderness: Interpretations of the Biblical Narratives in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Boston: Brill Publishing, 2008).

[35] Robert Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible: Toward a Theology of Wilderness* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004). In more recent study of wilderness interpretation throughout the Bible, Robert Leal notes that the Pentateuch,

reads his own biblical tradition, in this section, I will sample the range of wilderness interpretations Luke—and Luke's readers—had at his disposal in the Septuagint, the Jewish Apocrypha, and other early Jewish writers such as Philo.

The prophet Hosea uses the wilderness as a symbol for God's intimate relationship with Israel: "Therefore, I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her" (Hos 2:14). The prophet Ezekiel describes the wilderness as the place where God levies judgment: "And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face" (Ezek 20:35). Ezekiel goes on to explicitly locate this pronouncement as a reference to the wilderness Israel wandered in after the exodus, only in contrast to Hosea, Ezekiel remembers it as a place of judgment rather than intimacy.[36] Jeremiah voices these words from God to the people: "Have I been a wilderness to Israel?" (Jer 2:31). This tortured question suggests that even a person can be understood as such a "place" as the inhospitable desert that provides no food, water, or safety for those who dwell within it.

In the poetry of the Writings, the wilderness is often celebrated as the place of God's miraculous deeds in the Exodus (Ps 68:7; 78:15-52; 95:8; 106:14-26; 136:16), a more general symbol of safety during trouble (Ps 102:6; 107), and a habitat for God as Creator (Ps 29:8; 65:12; Job 38:25-27). The wilderness is also described as *source* of long-awaited presence (Song 3:6; 8:5)—which the prophet Isaiah imagines as well (Isa 40:3).

We can see from the many ways in which the Hebrew Bible portrays wilderness that its

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Prophets, and Writings of the Hebrew Bible feature both positive and negative views on the wilderness of the Hebrew wanderings—positive in that wilderness is a place of God's grace and revelation; negative that the desert is a dangerous place where hunger and horror are ever possibilities. By observing the variety of meanings for the wilderness throughout the Bible and even within a single book, the wilderness can therefore be seen as a symbol of the complexity of God and the community's relationship with God.

[36] See Anna Pfisterer Darr, "Breaking Through the Wilderness: References to the Desert in Exilic Prophecy" (PhD dissertation: Vanderbilt University, 1984).

readers could understand the places (both real and imagined) as highly symbolic and polyvalent. It is therefore completely within the tradition of the scriptures to use the wilderness as a type of literary mirror, one that reflects the themes the writer or prophet feels compelled to convey. The initial wilderness experience is "so significant…that it is adapted and reinterpreted to meet other moments of transition in the journey of Israel."[37]

In the Jewish apocryphal writings, the story of the Maccabees depicts the corruption of the inhabited world extending into the heart of Israel. The writer of 1 Maccabees states clearly that "those who were seeking justice and righteousness went down to the wilderness to live there," specifically equating the desert with godly society and depicting it as the antithesis of the world of religious, political, and social power (1 Macc 2:29). Indeed, the writer of 2 Maccabees insinuates that however "wild" the wilderness may be, the inhabited world is far more uncivilized:

> "But Judas Maccabees, with about nine others, got away into the wilderness, and kept himself and his companions alive in the mountains as wild animals do; they continued to live on what grew wild, so that they might not share in the defilement" (2 Macc 5:27, NRSV).

A similar view appears in Sirach: "Wild asses in the wilderness are the prey of lions; likewise the poor are feeding grounds for the rich" (Sir 13:19). Such a statement compares the wilderness to the economic playing field of the inhabited world.

The same interpretive trajectory continues in the writings of Jewish interpreters such as Philo, who writes that God's rationale for the wilderness wanderings centered around the shaping of Israel's character. He characterizes the wilderness by its contrast with the inhabited world. Philo describes the πόλις (city) as a place antithetical to the crafting of a holy people:

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[37] Lynne Wall, "Finding Identity in the Wilderness," in *Wilderness: Essays in Honour of Frances Young* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 76.

> To the question why he promulgated his laws in the depths of the desert instead of in cities we may answer in the first place that most cities are full of countless evils, both acts of impiety towards God and wrongdoing between man and man. For everything is debased, the genuine overpowered by the spurious, the true by the specious, which is intrinsically false but *creates impressions* whose plausibility serves but to delude (*On the Decalogue*, 2-3, italics mine).

What Philo describes here is the aesthetic of the inhabited world: the city gives the *appearance* of civility. Philo goes on to describe this aesthetic of the false as inspiring gross inequality between people and violence on individual and mass levels (4-5). By contrast, the wilderness, Philo writes, because of its empty nature, its aesthetic—the image it creates in the reader's mind—is that of God's generous abundance (16-17).

The documents at Qumran also demonstrate the ongoing interpretation of the wilderness in Jewish thought. Although the desert sect was not far removed from the time the New Testament was written, the Essene interpretations of the wilderness imbued the prophetic wilderness with a more literal meaning.[38] With regard to Isaiah, Essene commentary on Isaiah underscores the corrupt hierarchies within the social, religious, and political world—corrupt hierarchies that can be escaped by living in the purity and emptiness of the desert.[39]

1.2.2 Previous New Testament Scholarship

Within the history of scholarship, the pioneer for reading Luke's geography as symbolic of Luke's theology was Hans Conzelmann in his watershed monograph *Die Mitte der Zeit* (*The Theology of St. Luke* in its English printing). Conzelmann asserted that Luke associates different geographical areas with different characters, a correspondence that Conzelmann believed demonstrates Luke's structure of salvation history. According to this view, the wilderness corresponds to the time of Israel (symbolized in the narrative by John the Baptist), Galilee to the

[38] 1QHabakkuk Pesher (1QpHab)

[39] 4QIsaiah Pesher^{e} (4Q165)

time of Jesus (the "middle of time" as the German title communicates), and Jerusalem to the time of the church.[40]

Conzelmann's study proves helpful to the current dissertation because of its attention to the literary symbolism that Luke himself read and in turn used with regard to the wilderness. To be sure, the wilderness *indeed* intimates important moments in Israel's past. Also, Conzelmann pays close attention to the movement of characters between and within certain places as signaling events in the overall story (not just Luke's story, but the story of Israel as a whole). Conzelmann's work therefore invites us to consider the literary function of "wilderness" more closely—a suggestion I gladly accept.

However, due to his lens of *Heilsgeschichte* (a reading of distinct eras of "salvation history" on a linear, historical timeline), Conzelmann and the redaction critics who followed him only allow the wilderness an importance in Luke's *past*, and assigned Israel itself to the past of salvation-history, with no real future in the gospel story. My study challenges this notion of "salvation-history eras" and therefore draws different conclusions about what the wilderness symbolizes in Luke's narrative.

From a tradition-critical perspective, Werner Schmauch writes that the wilderness imbues a theological significance on the people whose identities are crafted in it and vice versa. He argues that in some way the wilderness in turn absorbs meaning from the events that take place in the narrative currently situated there: "hat die Wüste hier gewissermassen sich selbst aufgegeben, sie ist dort, wo dieses Geschehen um Jesus ist" (my idiomatic translation: "to some extent, the wilderness stops being "the desert" and becomes simply "wherever the event of Jesus

[40] Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, Translated by Geoffrey Buswell (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 20. Conzelmann is joined in this opinion by other redaction critics in this view such as Willi Marxsen and Ulrich Mauser.

is").[41] Schmauch then goes through the entire New Testament, arguing that the term "in Christ" equals "in the wilderness." While there may be a subtle relationship between the person of Jesus and the wilderness in the gospels—since Schmauch's theory arises from his reading of Jesus in the wilderness stories—it seems unlikely that this is the specific meaning of ἐν Χριστῷ in Paul's letters. A one-to-one transfer of meaning is not quite as helpful when dealing with a complex narrative as a more nuanced approach is.

Schmauch offers a significant contribution to reading the symbolism of wilderness because he understands that wilderness can operate not just as a setting, but it can function to shape the ways readers apprehend characters and events. His study however does not differentiate between any of the Synoptics and so, while helpful in cataloguing the instances of "wilderness" in the gospels, it does not direct the reader to any particular or specific means by which the author crafted this symbolic place in Luke's own narrative.[42]

1.3 THESIS AND METHOD

1.3.1 Thesis Statement

I argue for an aesthetic reading of Luke-Acts based on Luke's own reading of the scripture, from which Luke draws a picture of the wilderness as symbolic of Israel's past and its eschatological future. I assert that the wilderness—presented as a place without hindrance or obstacle—functions as an aesthetic principle for Luke's presentation of the gospel and the early Christian community in Acts. I will demonstrate that the unhindered aesthetic of the desert can

[41] Werner Schmauch, "In Der Wüste: Beobachtungen zur Raumbeziehung des Glaubens in Neuen Testament." *In Memoriam: Ernst Lohmeyer*, (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk GMBH, 1951), 214.

[42] Schmauch's program is perhaps best described as a "word-centered" theology, whereby he combs the New Testament and matches up any usage of the word ἐρῆμος with his definition of the Old Testament concept of the wilderness as "the model of limited salvation. Schmauch, "In Der Wüste," 203.

provide a fruitful framework for understanding Luke's narrative from start to finish. Luke's wilderness aesthetic, in turn, stands in direct conflict with the aesthetic of the οἰκουμένη: the human power systems of the inhabited world. I will demonstrate that not only does the wilderness aesthetic clash with that of the οἰκουμένη, but the wilderness progressively undermines and dismantles features of the οἰκουμένη aesthetic.

1.3.2 My Approach

First, I use a conservative version of reader-response criticism that takes seriously the impression the text creates in the reader's imagination.[43] While more radical reader-response approaches attribute all meaning making to the reader's agency, I ground my study in the text's *leadership* but acknowledge the indispensable role of the reader in constructing and perceiving the impression the text offers when read with attention and trust.[44]

Second, because I look to the text's leadership, my study also incorporates many aspects of traditional literary and specifically narrative criticism, that is, the shape of Luke's text and the techniques that stylistically act as interpretive signals for the reader.[45] Not only will this study therefore engage in literary observation (what the text *does*), but it will also examine the effect or impact those literary devices have on the reader who follows the text's guidance (what the reader

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[43] Conservative reader-response theorists which I reference in this project include Wolfgang Iser, Paul Ricoeur, and Louise Rosenblatt. For more radical reader-response theorists, see Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *The Rustle of Language* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986) and Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980)..

[44] For a survey on the spectrum of reader-response theory, see Jane Tomkins, ed, *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Balitmore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980). On reader response as it specifically relates to biblical studies, see Werner Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) and Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

[45] On literary/narrative criticism and its role in biblical interpretation also see: Mark Allan Powell, *The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport: Greenwood, 1992); Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism* (London: SCM, 1999); James Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

does with the text).

This approach also takes seriously Luke's own role and identity as a reader. I follow the path Luke left his reader from his own reading journey. He does this by referring explicitly to his literary sources (and as "books:" Luke 3:4; 20:42; Acts 1:20) and by the way in which he portrays his characters in the act of reading. Additionally, Luke shows himself as a reader by means of the literary techniques he uses, which certainly have been gleaned from the milieu of ancient Mediterranean literature: prosopopoeia (speech-in-character),[46] the motif of sea voyages,[47] and even the formal preface to the composition—one of the most distinguishing features of Luke's writing.[48] While this list is not exhaustive, it does point toward Luke's exposure to a wide range of literature and literary influences.[49] His use of accepted story-writing devices also suggests that he means for his reader to employ the same reading strategies as used in reading other literary works (for example, novels, historiography, drama, etc.).

1.3.3 Premises of the Current Project

My project depends on three basic premises regarding the composition and text of Luke-Acts:

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[46] See Brandon Wason, "All Things to All People: Luke's Paul as an Orator in Diverse Social Contexts," (PhD. diss Emory, 2017).

[47] See Robert Foulke, *The Sea Voyage Narrative* (New York: Routledge, 2011) and Vernon Robbins, *Sea Voyages and Beyond: Emerging Strategies in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2010).

[48] See Loveday Alexander, "Luke's Preface in the Context of Greek Preface-Writing," in *The Composition of Luke's Gospel: Selected Studies from* Novum Testamentum (ed. David Orton; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 108. Also see *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary and Social Convention in Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[49] On this point, many NT scholars take even just one literary device and trace it through Luke's narrative. For example: Frank Dicken, *Characters and Characterization in Luke-Acts* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016); John Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992); Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Luke: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1991); Steven Sheeley, *Narrative Asides in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992).

First, Luke has literary control over his two-volume work and writes intentionally and carefully.[50] By this, I mean both that the writer of the Gospel According to Luke is also the author of the Acts of the Apostles and that this writer (whom I will refer to as Luke) fashions both volumes so as to compose one story. I therefore will often refer to Luke's narrative trajectory—that is, how he presupposes later story events, themes, and characters even in the early chapters of the gospel.

Second, Luke knows and carefully reads Isaiah and other texts of the LXX. Upon comparison of Old Testament texts, it is clear that Luke's literary reference is the Septuagint and not the Masoretic text. It is especially important to be aware of this as Luke does not only read and quote scripture, but, according to Nils Dahl, Luke's "conscious intention…is to write the continuation of the biblical history."[51] In order to fully appreciate Luke's trajectory regarding the biblical story, it is important to accurately determine his biblical sources.

Third, Luke deliberately employs and edits the gospel of Mark (the Two-Source Hypothesis). Specifically, I posit that Luke's alterations of Mark demonstrate his reliance on Mark. Luke's edits do not constitute a fundamental disagreement with Mark, but rather a strategic use of Mark's narrative framework as well as many of Mark's important themes, especially "the way of the Lord" motif and its connection to the wilderness.[52]

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[50] In this way I align myself with such scholars as Loveday Alexander and Robert Tannehill, in contrast to Mikael Parsons, Richard Pervo, and Kavin Rowe who question or downplay the unifying elements that demonstrate Luke's connected story. This is also contra scholars such as Stephen Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) who argues that although Luke writes both the gospel and Acts, his story is incoherent.

[51] Nils Dahl, The Story of Abraham in Luke-Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. L.E. Keck and J.L. Martyn; London: SPCK, 1976), 152-153.

[52] See Mark Goodacre, "Re-Walking the "Way of the Lord:" Luke's Use of Mark and His Reaction to Matthew" in *Luke's Literary Creativity* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 26-43.

1.4 OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION

My project traces the shape of the aesthetic which I am suggesting and proceeds in the following order:

1.4.1—Chapter 2: Identifying the Aesthetic in Luke 3:1-20

Here I take stock of the artistic structure and components of Luke 3:1-20 and their effects on the reader in order to determine the aesthetic nature and function of Luke's wilderness: namely, that its nature is unhindered, and it functions as a place where God's salvation is equally viewed by all and in opposition to the rigid and closed structures of the inhabited world—the οἰκουμένη. I then use this definition as a "working aesthetic" to hold in view as I evaluate Luke's subsequent wilderness scenes. In other words, once I fully trace the intimate contours of the wilderness' "face," the wilderness aesthetic will be easier to recognize when it surfaces in other places where it is not so obviously displayed.

1.4.2—Chapter 3: The Wilderness Wanders throughout Luke's Gospel

Next, I survey the other wilderness scenes in Luke's gospel—those pericopes set explicitly in wilderness or wilderness spots: the baptism, genealogy, and temptation of Jesus (Luke 3:21-4:13); the first announcement of "the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:42-44); the salvation of the Gerasene demoniac (Luke 8:26-39); and the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17).

In reading each scene, I also ask how this manifestation of wilderness relates to and builds on other wilderness images. What qualities does it demonstrate and what types of events does it situate? On the other hand, I also ask how it contrasts with the settings around it. Upon surveying this wilderness aesthetic, we look at the narrative surrounding each passage to see how this aesthetic is carried out even in those passages that do not feature or mention the wilderness at all. I also examine the aesthetic contrast of the οἰκουμένη that opposes the events and

dynamics demonstrated in the wilderness passages.

1.4.3—Chapter 4: The Wilderness Aesthetic in Acts

Here I observe Luke's wilderness motif in the Acts' narrative, showing how it connects to Luke's foundational wilderness scene in Luke 3 by probing Acts' only explicit wilderness scene—Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39). Chapter four also features an excursus on Stephen's speech in Acts 7, wherein he rhetorically promotes the wilderness as the authentic place of God's activity rather than the inhabited world (embodied in this scene by the temple and the Jerusalem hierarchy). Additionally, he describes the Mosaic tradition as a "wilderness" existence and therefore casts himself as one of the Moses tradition.

1.4.4—Chapter 5: The Wilderness and Baptism

In this chapter, I show how the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch establishes a narrative precedent for a series of high-profile (and highly unlikely) baptisms: Saul, the persecutor of the church (Acts 9), Cornelius the Centurion (Acts 10), Lydia (Acts 16), the Philippian jailor (Acts 16), and the Corinthian synagogue ruler Crispus (Acts 18). For all their differences, these baptisms exhibit many of the features of the wilderness scene with the eunuch, thus demonstrating how the aesthetic of the wilderness crops up even in the most cosmopolitan cities of the Roman Empire. Additionally, I examine the scenes that demonstrate the aesthetic of the οἰκουμένη and note how the wilderness aesthetic undermines the boundaries which the οἰκουμένη aesthetic boasts.

1.4.5—Chapter 6: As in the Beginning, So in the End…The Wilderness Continues

I conclude my study at the end of Luke's narrative in Acts 28:16-31—the second half of the story's frame. In this chapter, I argue that the conclusion of Acts—Paul preaching in Rome—can not only be read as a wilderness scene but can be read as the mirror of the first wilderness

scene in the Luke-Acts story (Luke 3:1-20). This is done by comparing the preaching figures of John the Baptist and Paul the Apostle, examining the themes of sight and salvation that are present, and exploring the relationship between the Isaiah quotations in both passages. Thus I show that Luke's story sustains this wilderness aesthetic and the dynamic it produces wherever it appears.

1.4.6—Summary and Conclusions

Finally, I end the dissertation with a brief epilogue wherein I explain some of the conclusions that can be drawn from this study as they relate to other questions and conversations, in particular: Luke's treatment of the Jewish community, Luke's view of the Roman Empire, and the prophetic nature of the early Christian community.

CHAPTER TWO: DEFINING THE AESTHETIC—LUKE 3:1-20

This chapter is divided into two major sections: how Luke reads his own sources (namely, Mark and Isaiah) and how he uses those sources to create his own narrative aesthetic. In the first section, I look at the clues Luke leaves in his own composition about his understanding of the reading process, which includes how he refers to his sources, his method of arranging source material, and his editorial choices.

In the second half of the chapter, I look at Luke 3:1-20 and examine how Luke uses the picture of the wilderness that he distills from his sources. I begin by looking at the overall structure of the passage, noting how Luke's arrangement of the material suggests an aesthetic of unhindered possibility for the reader. Then, I move in closer to examine Luke's word choices, imagery, and use of sources in order to fully attend to the wilderness aesthetic. I argue that based on his reading of Mark and Isaiah, Luke discerns the wilderness as a symbolic place, indicative of 1) Israel's past as told through scripture 2) Israel's future which includes universal salvation, and 3) a space radically different from that of the inhabited world (the οἰκουμένη).

2.1 HOW LUKE READS

Francis Watson observes that Luke's decision to narrate the gospel afresh is "motivated by the desire to recover the original revelatory moment."[53] While many interpreters consider Luke's preface to describe Luke's quest to recover the "facts of the gospel," we need not restrict recovery only to them. I will show that Luke also intended to create a narrative that recreated the experiences of the 'revelatory moment' for his reading audience.

I argue that the key text in which Luke anchors his narrative's aesthetic—Luke 3:1-20—

[53] Francis Watson, "Luke Rewriting and Rewritten," in *Luke's Literary Creativity* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 95.

is based on his reading of Mark's accounts of the Baptist (Mark 1:1-14; 6:14-29) and on his reading of the quotation from Isaiah 40:3. How Luke reads Mark and Isaiah, therefore, factors greatly into how Luke crafts the shape and mood of his own story. In Luke's attempt to capture the world-altering nature of the gospel that he read in Mark, I argue that the "shape and mood" of his own story assumes an aesthetic of possibility.

2.1.1 Luke's Reading Characters

Not only does Luke leave clues specifically about how he reads these two sources, Luke is also unique in telling stories that depict the general act of *reading*: Luke 4:16-27 and Acts 8:26-39. Before I move to Luke's specific reading of Mark and Isaiah, it is instructive to observe how Luke distinctly portrays characters as they read. These descriptions of the reading process provide some hints as to how Luke himself reads.

2.1.1.1—Jesus and the Congregation at Nazareth

Of all the gospels' telling of Jesus's rejection from the Nazarene synagogue, only Luke preludes Jesus's sermon with the act of reading: "He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written" (4:16b-17).[54] It is noteworthy that Jesus reads Isaiah as a book. Jesus does not quote the "words" from the prophet Isaiah, but he is handed the βιβλίον τοῦ προφήτου Ἠσαΐου (Luke 4:17). Jesus skims through the scroll until he finds the place in the text of Isaiah that he will read from that day. We see Jesus perusing a book, looking through multiple passages in order to reach one particular portion that he knows is there and desires to read.[55] Luke implies that Jesus is familiar

[54] Mark and Matthew periodically feature Jesus asking an interlocutor rhetorically, "have you not read…?" but neither of the other synoptic writers describe Jesus actually reading.

[55] Larrimore Crocket, "Luke iv. 16-30 and the Jewish Lectionary Cycle: A Word of Caution," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 17 no 1-2 (1966): 13-45. Crocket cautions against reading a firm "lectionary" into Luke's account of Jesus reading Isaiah 61:1-2. He notes that while it may have been customary to read from Torah and the prophetic writings, the specific passages were most likely not assigned.

with the text and where different passages are in relation to each other. In this sense, to read a part is to have an understanding of the whole. Roger Bagnall suggests that whether Luke attempts to describe Jesus reading a scroll or a codex (which is yet unsettled), Luke is ultimately disclosing his own reading practice, not that of Jesus.[56]

Jesus reads scripture in a trajectory. Upon finishing the reading from Isaiah, Jesus states, "*Today* this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).[57] Jesus performs what I am calling an aesthetic reading of the Isaiah passage—he does not read it for facts and information; there is no debate on Isaiah's historicity. Rather, the words of Isaiah are still in play—still with and in the reader, Jesus—even after the quotation ends. In other words, Jesus reads Isaiah for its import on himself and his hearers.

2.1.1.2 Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

After the Christian community in Jerusalem is dispersed in the wake of Stephen's execution, the Spirit directs Philip to a desert road leading away from Jerusalem (Acts 8:26). On that road, traveling back to the Ethiopian royal court, is a chariot. In that chariot is a eunuch who is reading the prophet Isaiah aloud. Philip runs up and asks the official, "do you know what you are reading?" The eunuch responds that he needs someone to ὁδηγειν him, to guide him on a journey (the cognate ὁδηγειν comes from ὁδός, "way," thus: "to guide on a journey"). Once again, we see the act of reading compared to a journey. This time, the narrative journey requires

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[56] Roger Bagnall, "Jesus Reads a Book," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 51 No 2 (Oct 2000): 577-588.

[57] The importance of reading the text through the present is further developed in Jesus's exchange with a lawyer, which prompts the telling of the Good Samaritan parable. The lawyer asks Jesus the way to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25). Jesus responds, "What has been written in the law? How do you read?" (10:26). Note the first part of his response is in the perfect tense—the law *has been* written (γέγραπται). The second part of the response is in the present tense, "how *do* you read? (ἀναγινώσκεις)."[57] Luke's Jesus distinguishes between what had been written and how reading is practiced, acknowledging the necessity of both the text and the reader's approach to the text. While the lawyer responds to Jesus's question of "how do you read?" by offering only a direct quotation of the law, Jesus performs his own reading of the text by telling a story: the Good Samaritan. In doing so, he demonstrates that part of reading is *creating a* story about *the story* being read.

a tour guide. [58]

Just like Jesus's interpretation in the synagogue in Nazareth—and in regard to the same prophetic book—the reading of scripture is the beginning of the reading process: "Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus" (Acts 8:35). Luke's portrayal of reading is that the words find both the same and new meaning in the reading of them. Reading, and particularly reading scripture, is therefore an act of attention to the past and the future. This aspect of how Luke understands the reading process will be helpful as I look at how Luke reads his own sources, Mark and Isaiah.

2.1.2 Luke Reads Mark

2.1.2.1 Luke reads Mark's "narrative truth."

In Luke's preface to Theophilus, he refers to the gospels that others have written using the term διήγησις—narrative account. Luke does not use the word "history" although he definitely treats Mark's gospel as having a certain authority on the facts regarding "what has been fulfilled among us" (Luke 1:1). Yet, for Luke, "facts" are not entirely the point. The sheer abundance of parables in his narrative shows how flexibly he understands the meaning potential of story. While the flexibility of a story does not preclude the story presenting certain facts or images of truth, those facts function not as ends in and of themselves, but in the sense that they amount to the truth of the narrative as a whole:

> For the literary text there can be no such "facts;" instead we have a sequence of schemata, built up by the repertoire and strategies, which have the function of stimulating the reader himself into establishing the "facts"…The schemata give rise to aspects of a

[58] Bart Koet, "Isaiah in Luke-Acts" in *Isaiah in the New Testament* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 87-88. Philip performs a similar type of reading as Jesus does in Luke 4. The passage being read is Isaiah 53:7-8. This is known as Isaiah's description of God's "suffering servant," which in the Old Testament context is often understood to be both an anonymous singular person and/or the collective (faithful) people of Israel. The Acts text states that Philip "beginning with this scripture, proclaimed to him the good news of Jesus" (Acts 8:35). The words written in scripture, then, are the *beginning* of the reading, but they are not *all* of the reading. Much like Jesus's parable response to the lawyer in Luke 10, the act of reading continues after the scripture when Philip creates a story (Jesus's death and resurrection) about the story being read (Isaiah's suffering servant).

> hidden, nonverbalized 'truth,' and these aspects must be synthesized by the reader, who through a continual readjustment of focus is made to ideate a totality."[59]

In other words, the truth of the narrative depends, at least in part, on the view or impression of truth discerned by the reader.[60]

Based on Luke's rearrangement of Mark's Baptist story, we can see that Luke has the entire story of the Baptist in view: while Mark stretches out the Baptist story over his first six chapters, Luke condenses much of that material into the initial wilderness story of Luke 3. As Luke reads Mark's introductory description of John the Baptizer in the wilderness (Mark 1:4-9), we can see that he has continued reading past the initial "wilderness baptism" passage. He observes the account in Mark 1:14 of John's arrest, noting that Mark explains neither who arrests John nor why. He reads on until Mark 6, where Mark describes the reasons for the Baptist's imprisonment and the circumstances of his execution—John and his prophetic identity clash with Herod and his world-sanctioned systems of power.

Thus, Luke telescopes the narrative truth that the arc of Mark's story presents: prophets originating in the wilderness operate in complete contrast to rulers in the inhabited world.[61] Drawing from Q, Luke later describes Jesus teaching on the very contrast between prophets in

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[59] Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 141. This is especially helpful in regards to Luke-Acts, considering that Luke's knowledge of geography in Palestine has been questioned and henceforth described as "theologically oriented." See Conzelmann's *Die Mitte der Zeit*.

[60] A good Lukan example of this is that Luke uniquely narrates the conception and birth of John the Baptist. In Luke's story this constitutes a "fact" that is built on by others: Jesus's miraculous conception and birth follow and intensify the image of an unlikely mother giving birth to a divinely forecasted son. This need not be historically verifiable or corroborated by the other gospels because as a narrative truth it is only for the purpose of revealing the narrative's greater truth. And so in Luke's story, it is true that God works supernatural pregnancies just like the ones long ago in Israel's past: Sarah, Rebekah, Hannah, etc. And the sum of these narrative facts, when read and synthesized by the reader, produces a "nonverbalized truth"—the truth the narrative does not *explicitly* state. For example, the greatest general truth of Luke's entire narrative may be that *God is still at work in the time of the reading even though the time of Jesus on earth is passed*, and the "facts" of the miraculous births of Jesus and John are part of the building of that image of truth.

[61] Raj Nadella, "The Two Banquets: Mark's Vision of Anti-Imperial Economics," *Interpretation* vol 7 no 2 (2016): 172-183.

the wilderness and rulers in palaces:

> When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? *Look, those who put on fine clothing and live in luxury are in royal palaces.* What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet" (Luke 7:24-26, italics mine).[62]

This quotation in conjunction with the wilderness scene of Luke 3:1-20 demonstrates what Luke perceives in Mark's narrative about the Baptist in the wilderness: a challenge to and rebuttal of the rule of worldly power. Luke therefore moves the bulk of the John the Baptist material that Mark has dispersed throughout his narrative into one passage: Luke 3:1-20. He makes his point more emphatically by adding a mention of Herod before introducing the Baptist (3:1) and then follows the activity of the Baptist with his imprisonment by Herod. This move sharpens the contrast between those in the wilderness (John and Jesus) and those in the world of human power systems. Luke's thematic takeaway from reading Mark's account of the Baptist therefore is that the prophet in the desert appears and operates in direct contrast with the violent authority in the inhabited world (which in the latter half of this chapter I will discuss as the *οἰκουμένη*).

2.1.2.2 Luke reads scripture as the gospel's framework of truth.

Mark begins his gospel immediately with two citations from the LXX that justify his story. He combines a quotation of Malachi 3:1 (v. 2) and Isaiah 40:3 (v.3):

> As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
> "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
> who will prepare your way;
> the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
> 'Prepare the way of the Lord,
> make his paths straight'" (Mark 1:2-3, NRSV).

Mark therefore locates the truth—the "so what?"—of his gospel in Israel's scripture. Not only does Luke perceive this, but he expands on Mark's decision to begin with a quotation from

[62] Matthew 11:7-10 includes the same passage, material from his and Luke's common source (Q).

Isaiah—Luke distinctively introduces several of his narrative's critical scenes by a quotation from the prophet Isaiah: Jesus's "inaugural" sermon at Nazareth (Isa 61:1-2 in Luke 4:16-19), Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin which causes the dispersion of the church (Isa 66:1-2 in Acts 7:48-50), and the closing scene of Acts wherein Paul quotes Isaiah's commission (Isa 6:9-10 in Acts 28:26-27).[63]

Not only does Luke use scripture to locate the truth of his story, but he also discerns two scriptural themes from his reading of Mark's Baptist account that he incorporates into his own narrative, albeit in different ways.

First, Luke carries on Mark's view of the wilderness as a prophetic location. By moving the clash between Herod and John to the report of the wilderness pericope, Luke highlights the wilderness as a place of prophetic activity—and prophetic criticism. Narratively, it is from the desert that the censure against Herod's perversion comes. By that same token, since Luke extends the preaching of John in the wilderness and adds "the good news" to John's repertoire (Luke 3:18), the wilderness presents itself even more as the place of provision and abundance.

Second, Luke not only receives and transmits Mark's location of the Baptist in the wilderness, but he also takes on Mark's theme of the "the way (ὁδός) of the Lord" prepared in that wilderness (which of course Mark also adapts from Isaiah).[64] Luke extends the quotation of Isaiah beyond where Mark's quotation concludes so to include the imagery of the mountains being lowered, valleys being raised, and all people seeing salvation. By extending the quotation, Luke allows the Way to be "characterized as the road to salvation for all flesh" as he shapes his

[63] Koet, "Isaiah in Luke-Acts," 80.

[64] See Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992).

narrative so that the Lord's path extends to Acts and beyond.[65]

By such extension, Luke exploits this theme of ὁδός to a greater extent than does Mark. Mark's gospel characterizes the "way of the Lord" as Jesus's journey to the cross;[66] Luke's gospel certainly goes to the cross but it does not stop there. Jesus teaches on the sacrificial nature of discipleship—the cost— πορευομένων αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, "while they were going on the road" (Luke 9:57). After the resurrection, Jesus teaches scripture to two of unaware disciples on a journey to Emmaus. They reflect on the encounter, saying that their hearts were burning in response to his words to them while ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ (Luke 24:32). While these stories are unrelated in other ways, the road provides an aesthetic link that the reader can use to construct ideas about the kinds of encounters which "the way of the Lord" facilitates. As such, the Way extends beyond the passion account and into Acts, with the "way" featuring significant encounters and becoming the name for the Christian community and indicative of its character and actions.[67]

In summary, Luke reads Mark's story broadly, meaning that he reads the larger story—the "narrative truth"—in the smaller details. In Mark's story of John proclaiming and baptizing in the wilderness, Luke reads the entire confrontation with Herod and the power-hungry system of human rule. In Mark's reference to "the Way of the Lord," via Isaiah, Luke reads scripture as the validation for the manner in which the people of God live in and move through the world. In the next section, then, I take a closer look at how Luke goes to Mark's source himself and reads Isaiah.

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[65] Goodacre, "Re-Walking the Way of the Lord," 33.

[66] Thus Martin Kähler famously concluded that Mark is "a passion narrative with an extended introduction."

[67] See Octavian Baban, *On the Road Encounters in Luke-Acts: Hellenistic Mimesis and Luke's Theology of the Way* (Waynesboro: Paternoster, 2006).

2.1.3 Luke Reads Isaiah

2.1.3.1 Luke reads Isaiah as a book.[68]

Just as Mark quotes Isa 40:3, so Luke follows suit. But while Mark quotes the scripture, Καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ Ἡσαΐᾳ τῷ προφήτῃ, "even as it is written in the prophet Isaiah" (Mark 1:2), and Matthew refers to ὁ ῥηθεὶς διὰ Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος, "the words of the prophet Isaiah" (Matt 3:3), Luke has ὡς γέγραπται ἐν βίβλῳ λόγων Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου, "as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah" (Luke 3:4).[69] By drawing specific attention to "the book of Isaiah," Luke allows us to see something similar to Jesus running his finger down the length of the scroll searching for the place he requires: this denotes Luke's familiarity with the whole of the work. While a book and a narrative are certainly not the same, Luke reading Isaiah as a book is in some ways analogous to his reading of Mark as a narrative. He is not simply quoting "words" he has heard recited nor is he copying the citation he has read in Mark, but he understands the words he quotes in the layout of the whole scroll or manuscript.[70]

Much like his reading of Mark's narrative and because Luke reads Isaiah as a book, we can understand Luke's appreciation for the context of the passages he quotes.[71] Isaiah 40 represents a critical turning in Isaiah's composite text. The chapter marks a shift from the

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[68] Luke quotes the LXX version of Isaiah nearly verbatim which bears several noticeable differences to the Masoretic text. Wagner writes compellingly that the translator of the LXX Isaiah is not merely attempting to translate the words of Hebrew Isaiah but also the meaning thereof and to make it accessible to the Hellenistic reader of Jewish scripture. Ross Wagner, *Reading the Sealed Book*, 33.

[69] Luke does likewise in both Luke 20:42 and the beginning chapter of Acts in which he locates texts as ἐν βίβλῳ ψαλμῶν (1:20).

[70] Lukas Bormann, "Rewritten Prophecy in Luke-Acts," in *Luke's Literary Creativity* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 125.

[71] Bart Koet, "Isaiah in Luke-Acts" in *Isaiah in the New Testament* (eds. Steve Moyise and Maarten J.J. Menken; London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 79.

prophetic theme of judgment toward future hopes of renewal and the redemption of Israel from exile.[72] It begins with the imperative: someone needs to speak to the people on God's behalf. The language of the entire poetic unit (Isaiah 40:1-11) thereby traces the "prophetic vocation," albeit an ambiguous one since no particular person is named or suggested.[73]

In Isaiah 40:1-2, God commands the speaker to announce to those in exile that Israel's period of punishment has been accomplished,[74] and signals a turn for the prophetic agent to announce an approaching time of renewal. But Isaiah 40 signals both a temporal change and a spatial change. When Isaiah first receives the prophetic word of Israel's looming exile, God's responds to Isaiah's question of time—how long will this punishment last?—in terms of space: "until the land will be left a wilderness" (LXX Isaiah 6:11).[75] The prophet foresees the emptiness or wilderness not as the punishment but as the signal of the punishment being over. I will argue that Luke sees the wilderness in a similar way.

2.1.3.2 Luke reads Isaiah's wilderness symbolically.

On one hand, Luke reads Isaiah's references to the wilderness evocatively, understanding the poetic and prophetic wilderness as a symbol of Israel's first encounter with God in the past. As was discussed in the first chapter, the Hebrew scriptures definitely describe the wilderness as a mixed bag of experience: both hardship and deliverance, the people's disobedience and God's

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[72] For this reason, it was also used by the Essenes as a hallmark text to justify their movement and relocations from the Jerusalem cult (1QS7:4-10). The Essenes too viewed the wilderness as a holy place.

[73] John McKenzie, *Second Isaiah* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1968), 17. The Masoretic text suggests that the directive is toward a divine or heavenly council.

[74] The injunction to "speak tenderly" in v. 2 intensifies as the prophetic voice then is described as "bellowing" in the wilderness, which brings us to an important difference between the Masoretic text of Isaiah and the Septuagint translation. The MT separates the wilderness from the voice call out the prophetic words while the LXX locates the voice within the wilderness.

[75] It is clear that Luke is familiar with this as he quotes Isa 6 twice, once in Luke 8 and once at the end of Acts.

faithfulness. But in the context of Isaiah 40, I argue that the wilderness Isaiah describes is the first wilderness experience, one that also features "the way." In Exodus, the people's first experience—before the murmuring, the grumbling, and the longing for Egypt—was deliverance:

> So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea.. They set out from Succoth, and camped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. The LORD went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people (Exod 13:18, 20-22).

This view is further strengthened by the reflection Moses provides when describing the journey through the initial wilderness to his father in law, "And Moses told to his father-in-law all the things that the Lord did to Pharaoh and all the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and all the struggle that had come upon them while on the way, and that the Lord had rescued them out of the hand of Pharaoh, and out of the hand of the Egyptians" (Exod 18:8). The first word from the wilderness is one of salvation and provision.

On the other hand, Luke also sees Isaiah's wilderness not as a specific place (such as the wilderness of Sinai from the past), but as a type of future space characterized by a dynamic of interaction between God and people. I will elaborate on both these types of symbolic reading.

First, as stated earlier, it seems that Luke understands Isaiah's wilderness as an image that evokes Israel's past back to the first visitation of God with the people as they journeyed through the wilderness after fleeing Egypt. We have already witnessed Luke's other Old Testament recapitulations in Luke 1-2: miraculous pregnancies and the people of Israel under oppression by foreign (and foreign-controlled) tyrants (Luke 1:74; 2:1). Clearly, Luke appreciates the power of evoking scenes from Israel's past in order to situate his own story firmly in that tradition.[76] We have also seen that in contrast to Mark, Luke places Herod in sharper contrast with both the

[76] Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus*, 240. Estelle refers to this as "framing discourse."

Baptist and Jesus in the wilderness, thereby strengthening the Exodus imagery by employing a "Pharaoh" character.[77]

Second, while Mark includes "prepare the way of the Lord," Luke's extension of Isaiah more fully explores the nuances of that "way."[78] The conclusion of this passage in Isaiah 40:5—"and all flesh will see the salvation of God"—centers on the ability to see, which is made possible by the "way of the Lord" in the wilderness.[79] The word ὁδός can signify both a space of movement (a path) and a manner of being (a *modus operandi*).[80] In Isaiah 40:3-5, the way of the Lord is both the space of his movement (a path through the wilderness) but also the dynamic of the events which will occur there in the future: a vision of God's salvific presence will be equally distributed.[81] The reader can connect the ὁδός of the Lord as how Jesus does things, rather than simply where he goes. For example, he does not have the Sermon on the Mount as does Matthew, but rather the Sermon on the Plain: "He came down with them and stood on a level place" (Luke 6:17).

Luke's reading of wilderness as a religious and moral dynamic is in keeping with Isaiah's own usage of the wilderness. Isaiah 35 parallels Isaiah 40 in many ways: a ὁδὸς is made in the

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[77] This view of Herod as a "Pharaoh" character is also witnessed in Matthew's gospel with Herod's slaughter of male children (Matt 2:16).

[78] What is particularly interesting in Isaiah is that the objective of τὴν ὁδὸν Κυρίου is not the destination—the Lord actually entering Jerusalem—but the view of God's imminent coming. That God visibly moves toward the people in the wilderness is the height of the revelation in this passage. Other texts in the vicinity point to the wilderness itself as the destination rather than simply a place through which to pass (Isa 35:1-9; 41:18-19; 51:3).

[79] Throughout Isaiah, the ability to see is closely followed by the ability to fully comprehend truth (Isa 41:20; 42:20; 44:9,18; 52:11; 61:9).

[80] BDAG, 691, s.v. "ὁδός."

[81] Lim, *The 'Way of the Lord' in the Book of Isaiah*, 61. Lim argues that "the Way of the Lord" in Isaiah 40 is eschatological and *therefore* is ethical. It is not the people who make the topography level, but the appearance of the Lord. Because the Lord is present and the truth of both God and people is revealed, human actions must then be in accord with that divine presence.

wilderness (35:8), sight is promised to those who cannot see (35:5), and God's salvation—σώσει ἡμᾶς—is imminent (35:4). In chapter 35, Isaiah uses visual metaphors to indicate social transformation in a way similar to how Luke reads chapter 40. Just as Isaiah demonstrates equality among people by means of the valleys and hills, rocky and smooth ground finding equality (40:4-5), so the wilderness being a place of abundant water (35:6) and blossoming flowers (35:1) demonstrates that wilderness is a more the ideal residence for God's people than a palace or mighty city. In fact, a few chapters prior, Isaiah declares that the wilderness will be the place of justice and righteousness (32:16).[82]

Luke further describes this dynamic by narrating it as religious and social transformation: mountains and valleys, or all things and people high and low, do not trade places but level out so that all can see the salvation of God.[83] Upon concluding the quotation, Luke adds unique material to the Baptizer's story. He narrates the Baptist's interaction with the people by incorporating a section found neither in Mark nor in Matthew which explicates the Isaiah quotation.[84] The Baptist responds to the people's questions by demanding equalizing behaviors that demonstrate repentance (3:10-14). The one with two coats gives one to another so that the one without and the one with extra become equal.

2.1.3.3 Luke reads the trajectory of Isaiah 40:3-5.

In its initial trajectory, Isaiah 40:3-5 restarts the story of God's salvation experienced in

[82] Isaiah may in fact be one of the muses for Luke's emphasis on the relationship between wealthy and poor. In Is 58:7-8, the prophet equates true faith and pure religion with caring for the needy. The result of these faithful actions is that the "light shall break forth like the dawn." The same image of the light coming on the people—and in Isaiah's phrasing—is used extensively by Luke as well (Luke 1:78-79; 2:32; Acts 13:47; 26:18).

[83] Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 42. Lincoln demonstrates that the metaphor of topographical leveling as a way of describing an apocalyptic undoing of corrupt hierarchies between people groups is a pervasive theme in ancient religious literature.

[84] Koet, "Isaiah in Luke-Acts," 81.

the wilderness of Exodus. In the chapters after Isaiah 40, the author revisits God's actions in the exodus: revelation of the divine name (Isaiah 41:4), deliverance from chariot riders and safe passage through the waters (43:16-17), and miraculous provisions of drinkable water (43:20)—all of which occur in the wilderness.[85] Isaiah's vision in 40:3-5, therefore, in some way *resets* Israel's story to its beginning: the deliverance of the people into the wilderness and out of bondage.[86]

Having observed that Luke keeps reading, though, we can clearly see how the themes that characterize the latter part of Isaiah influence how Luke interprets Isaiah 40:3-5.[87] While the earlier themes mostly involved God's faithfulness in redeeming Israel from exile and repairing Israel's standing in the world, the prophet shifts to include "the nations" and to see the *telos* of Israel as encompassing *all* the world. The "foreigner" and the "nations" take on a more positive possibility in the last portion of Isaiah (55:5; 56:3; 60:3; 66:23). Given the trajectory of Luke's own narrative, in addition to the fact that he quotes the last several chapters of Isaiah extensively throughout both parts of his story, Luke reads Isaiah similarly to the way he reads Mark: the whole of its truth expressed in its parts.

Luke therefore reads Isaiah 40:3-5 and its visual change in topography to mean an

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[85] Hebrew Bible scholars categorize portions of Isaiah historically in regards to their relationship with the exile. Isaiah 1-39 marks the pre-exilic status of Israel, Isaiah 40-55 as the period of the exile (also referred to as Deutero-Isaiah), and Isaiah 55-66 as the post-exilic period (also known as Trito-Isaiah). Luke, however, had no knowledge of such distinctions and so I do not use these designations in the body of the project.

[86] Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, 50. Pao considers this trajectory "the *restoration* of God's people" as opposed to the "*redefinition* of God's people" which comes later.

[87] Jordan Daniel May, "Is Luke a Reader-Response Critic?: Luke's Aesthetic Trajectory of Isaiah 49:6 in Acts 13:47" in *Trajectories in the Book of Acts: Essays in Honor of John Wesley Wyckoff*, Edited by Paul Alexander, Jordan Daniel May, and Robert G. Reid (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 62. May argues that Luke himself is reading Isaiah—as well as the rest of Hebrew scripture—aesthetically. That is, he does not merely mine portions of the Bible to gather information on the Messiah or the prophetic community, but rather by reading and gaining an overall impression of the significance of the prophetic words of Isaiah, "Luke, acting as a reader-response critic, produces and defines a new aesthetic trajectory for Isaiah…with the hermeneutic he adopts."

equally unobstructed access to salvation for "all flesh" meaning "all people."[88] Luke's move toward universal salvation is suggested as well by his alteration of the LXX text:[89]

> **LXX:** εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ("make straight the paths of *our God*")
> **Luke:** εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ ("make straight *his* paths")

He switches from the particular and exclusive possessive designation of "our God" to the more universal genitive "his paths." This alteration makes a subtle but theologically noteworthy move from what may be an exclusively Jewish stance to one that includes a broader audience. The possessive used in the LXX suggests that relationship to God is only within Israel; "his paths" suggest that everyone—the entire world—can see God. Luke's gesture toward universalism suggests that he reads Isaiah 40 all the way through the trajectory of Isaiah's conclusion. And Luke's inclusion of "all flesh" reaches back to the beginning of Isaiah, even while Isaiah stands under looming judgment:

> For in the last days the mountain of the Lord shall be glorious, and the house of God *shall be* on the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall come to it. And many nations shall go and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will tell us his way, and we will walk in it (LXX Isaiah 2:2-3).

In this quotation we read a vision of Gentiles seeking "his way" (τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ), the same words used in 40:3 on which all flesh see God's salvation. And although the quotation from Isaiah 2 most likely refers specifically to Jerusalem, Stephen's speech in Acts 7 makes it clear that Luke interprets the place of all people worshipping God as symbolized by Jerusalem, but not restricted to the geographical location of Jerusalem specifically: "Yet the Most High does not dwell in a place made by human hands" (Acts 7:48).

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[88] Craig Evan, "A Light to the Nations" in *Christian Mission*, 98. Evans notes that Isaiah 40:5 in its own context may be interpreted as "all fleshing seeing God save Israel," meaning that Israel receives salvation and gentiles receive judgment. Luke, however, reads Isaiah 40 as good news for the Gentiles.

[89] Bryan Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018), 243.

Such an interpretation of Isaiah 2 is justified as Luke subsequently quotes Isaiah 66:1-2 to demonstrate his point! For good measure, Luke has Paul repeat this sentiment: "The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands" (Acts 17:24). Paul states this while he is in Athens, looking at the many shrines to many gods the Athenians worship. Luke therefore has the same warning—that God is not restricted to certain designated places of worship—given to both Jews and Gentiles. In other words, Luke reads Isaiah's declaration of God's dwelling as the entire earth as an equalizer for all people.

Thus, it seems that Luke reads Isaiah's theme of the renewal of God's people not only as restoration but also as reconstitution. Jesus's followers ask him if the point of the Christian movement is to "restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6). Jesus's response suggests not a restoration, but a reconstitution—that the kingdom will indeed include Jerusalem and Judea but also Samaria and all other places imaginable, because Luke interprets the people of God being reconstituted there as those who respond to the call for μετάνοια (repentance), no matter their ethnic or religious group.

In fact, the Baptist warns the crowd not to interpret the people of God as constituted by ethnic or religious heritage (Luke 3:8). Consequently, the people who respond to John's message and repent include soldiers, who may or may not be understood as Gentiles (3:14). Not only does Luke open his gospel with John preaching repentance, but the gospel ends with Jesus declaring that the entire gospel story's trajectory was so that "repentance and forgiveness of sin" would be possible through the suffering death and resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:47). Coming to Acts, the theme of repentance as call to Israel continues (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 13:24; 19:4), but is

expanded even further by being constantly in connection with the mission to the Gentiles (Acts 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20).

The understanding of God's salvation to "all flesh," continues the motif of universal salvation that Luke has established in his first two chapters. Angels describe Jesus's birth as joy for "all people" (Luke 2:10). Simeon declares that the presence of Jesus is in fact the embodied salvation of God "which is prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32). Luke uses the same word σωτήριος (salvation) only three times throughout the entire two-part narrative: the just mentioned quotation from Luke 2:30, the quotation of Isaiah in Luke 3:5, and the ending of Acts.[90] In that final use, Paul states definitively that the σωτήριος of God has been sent to the Gentiles (Acts 28:28). If the first and last manifestations of σωτήριος are in direct connection with good news to Gentiles, it is reasonable to think that Luke's quotation of Isaiah 40:3-5 also includes the Gentiles in God's people.

Thus, Luke reads Isaiah's wilderness as an eschatological place in which God's people includes all who repent and "bear fruits worthy of repentance." And like all the other times God's people has been defined by the wilderness, this aesthetic differentiates them from the dominant social structures (economic, political, religious) of the inhabited world of human power.

2.1.4 Summary: The Aesthetic Luke Discerns

[90] While Luke uses this particular form only three times, he does however use other forms of both σωτηρία (Luke 1:71, 77; 19:9; Acts 4:12; 13:47; 16:17) and σῴζω (Luke 6:9; 7:50; 8:12, 36, 50; 9:24; 13:23; 14:9: 18:26, 42; 19:10; 23:35; Acts 2:21; 4:9, 12; 11:14; 15:11; 16:31).

In this section, I have merely observed Luke's clues about how he reads. After observing Luke's reading method, I now distill the following features specifically in Luke's reading of Mark's gospel and the quotation from Isaiah 40:

a. The wilderness is a symbolic place, its features both reminiscent of Israel's past encounters with God (such as the Exodus story) and indicative of a future universal salvation for all (such as the vision Isaiah holds of the redemption of Israel).

b. The wilderness is where God's salvation can be seen.

c. The wilderness—and the prophetic activity located there—draws ire from the rulers of the inhabited world.

After reviewing the clues Luke leaves us as to how he reads his own sources, the reader is now better situated to see how Luke writes his gospel that begins in that same wilderness that Isaiah imagines and Mark describes. Now truly, we can only know Luke as a reader through Luke's identity as a writer. While that may seem circular (and it somewhat is), Luke's composition is simultaneously a product of both Luke's reading and writing. As we have focused on the reading aspects of his composition, we now turn to how he crafts his own narrative.

2.2 THE STORY LUKE WRITES (Luke 3:1-20)

As we read what I am designating the beginning scene of Luke's gospel, we see how he establishes his own aesthetic. Just as the structure of a building both constitutes and mediates its aesthetic, so the way Luke structures this foundational scene conveys his narrative's aesthetic. I divide the text into four main parts in order to examine the structure of the whole. I will then move in closer to look at the subtler details of word choice and imagery within the substructures of each section.

1. **The synchronic marker and announcement of the event** (3:1-2). I will show how Luke creates a portrait of the οἰκουμένη which includes Herod, only then to contrast it with a snapshot of a moment in the wilderness.

2. **The activity of the Baptist and the Isaianic quotation** (3:3-6). I will show how Luke's use of Isaiah describes wilderness in terms of its unencumbered nature which produces equal vantage points; this is also in contrast to the οἰκουμένη and its hierarchies.

3. **The interaction of John and the people** (3:7-18). I will show how Luke continues to shape the image of the wilderness by further describing the actions associated with the wilderness as equalizing actions. The content of John's preaching offers an embodied example of the image of the mountains and valleys becoming level.

4. **The response of Herod** (3:19-20) Lastly, I will demonstrate how Luke reintroduces the contrast of the wilderness as unhindered and equal with the hierarchy of power and violence of the οἰκουμένη by means of Herod and the imprisonment of John the Baptizer.

2.2.1 The Synchronic Marker (3:1-2)

By means of a list of rulers in the Greco-Roman hierarchy (3:1-2b),[91] Luke provides a more elaborate sense of the οἰκουμένη than he did in the birth narrative when he referred to the whole world taxable by Caesar as the οἰκουμένη (2:1). Luke 3:1-2b includes imperial (emperor and governor), local (subject kings), and religious (high priests) rulers. Luke sets the rulers over diminishing areas of that inhabited space: empire, provinces, districts, and cultic campuses. In one sentence, Luke summarizes the world-wide structure of political, economic, and religious power, all linked to each other in a mutual system of hierarchies.

Clearly, Luke understands the οἰκουμένη as the geographically, economically, and politically controlled world of the Roman Empire (Luke 2:1; Acts 11:28; 19:27) together with the expected and accepted behavior within the social, economic, and even religious systems (Luke 4:5; Acts 17:6; 24:5). The listing of the Herodian tetrarchs and high priests "suggests that these 'Jewish' authorities, political and religious alike, belong to the larger imperial system of

[91] The list acts as a synchronic marker, meaning that it offers a temporal reference for the reader to gauge the time of the story. Luke continues to use such references to rulers and their actions in order to pace his story (Luke 13:1; 23:7, 12; Acts 8:27; 11:28; 12:20; 18:2, 12; 23:24; 24:27; 25:13).

authority under the emperor."[92] Consequently, the οἰκουμένη is the "world" (not to be confused with κόσμος—used in Acts 17:24 to refer to the natural world)[93] which will suffer God's judgment (Luke 21:26; Acts 17:31), and it is comprised of human power systems: Jew and Gentile, local and imperial.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the reader's viewpoint in aesthetic reading "wanders" with the narrative, and in doing so is able to experience each place in the narrative. The synchronic marker, followed by the clear announcement of the gospel beginning, radically recenters the reader's focus. Luke dramatically switches in 3:2 from a view of the entire Roman Empire to the prophet in the wilderness. The reader is forced to recenter aesthetically—to turn from looking at a narrow staircase of rigid hierarchy and gaze at a panorama of wide open expanse. Luke sets up the carefully ordered world of political power, only to dramatically reorient his reader to the opposite space as the place of true importance—the wilderness. In other words, Luke tells the reader, "I know you see a big and supposedly important world there, but look over here at the empty desert instead!" By placing the overviews of these two different worlds side-by-side, Luke's picture invites the reader to compare their aesthetics.

And this space of wilderness has features that produce a completely different aesthetic from the world of taxes and temples. First, the portrait of the οἰκουμένη is a top-down hierarchy, each ruler more powerful, and controlling a larger territory, than the following subordinate one. In contrast, the prophet in the wilderness not only does not belong to a hierarchy of any sort, but

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[92] Kazuhiko Yamazaki-Ransom, *The Roman Empire in Luke's Narrative* (London: T&T Clark International), 76.

[93] Luke uses κόσμος three time in the gospel (9:25; 11:50; 12:30) and once in Acts 17:24. While the clearest use of κόσμος as "natural world" is in Acts 17, the other uses in the gospel refer to worldly cares that are connected with the natural world, such as food.

Luke asserts of him a direct link with God (ἐγένετο ῥῆμα θεοῦ [2:2]).[94] Here the word of God is the subject and therefore the active agent—the event that literally "happens" to the Baptist.[95] In 3:1-20, Luke uses no language of dominion or control to describe the "word's" activity.[96] Matthew's gospel adds that John proclaims "the kingdom of heaven is nearby" (Matt 3:2). And while Luke certainly uses "kingdom of God" throughout his narrative, he defers kingdom language when he contrasts the Baptist with the rulers of the οἰκουμένη.[97] The activity in the wilderness and the relationships between people there is not a reversal of the hierarchical order of the inhabited world—it is something else entirely.

Aesthetically speaking, the wilderness then provides the "negative space" by which the reader understands the significance of what is *not* present. When looking at Luke's diagram of the οἰκουμένη, each ruler governs a discreet territory. It is significant that "the word of God" arrives first as its own agent in an open space under no human authority. And so we begin to see the wilderness aesthetic in the features of open expanse and unrestricted movement in contrast to the delineated principalities present in the synchronic marker of 3:1-2.

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[94] I disagree with Joel Green's notion as expressed in *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 36 that Luke sets up a dichotomy merely between the rulers and the Baptist. In order for John to be parallel to the rulers in the οἰκουμένη, John would need to be seen as the "ruler" of the wilderness. First, the text makes the word of God the active agent, not John. Second, John is quite clear that he is not the expected one, but that will come after him. Third, John is plucked out of the wilderness and thrown into jail.

[95] Alexander, "Back to Front," 218. "It is worth noting that the event dignified with this ceremonial date—to which there is no parallel in Acts—is not (or not directly) the coming of Jesus but the coming of the prophetic Word."

[96] Though certainly language of force in regard to the Spirit was available to Luke. Mark's gospel uses the term ἐκβάλλω (I throw out) for the Spirit "driving" Jesus out into the wilderness (Mark 1:12); Luke changes that to ἄγω (I lead) in his account of the temptation in Luke 4:1.

[97] Even at that, Caputo argues that the "kingdom of God" is a "kingdom-less kingdom," a "holy anarchy" that mocks earthly kingdoms..."a mad hatter's tea party of a kingdom." John Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 259.

The wilderness disrupts more than just the spatial organization of the οἰκουμένη but also the way it keeps time. In the synchronic marker, the only two verbs appear in participle form, both suggesting "ongoing rule:" ἡγεμονεύοντος (controlling, ruling, reigning) and τετραραρχοῦντος (ruling as tetrarch, governing as one of four). Also implicit in the statement "in the fifteenth year of Tiberius's reign" is the fact that these events transpired in the fifteenth year of the entire twenty-three years that Tiberius ruled. This conjures images of linear lines and expected patterns for the reader. Such an aesthetic communicates that the οἰκουμένη conducts its ongoing "business as usual," while Luke's portrayal of world-making and world-breaking events occurs in the space outside the inhabited world. But when Luke switches to the occurrences in the wilderness, the verb turns from the previous present participles to the aorist (ἐγένετο), drawing attention to the specific act. The story shifts from the chronic to the acute, from an atmosphere of the usual to the unexpected.

The Baptist's activity bends the steady flow of time in another unexpected way. While Luke recites the list of rulers, their reigns and territories in contemporary koine Greek, as soon as he describes the word of God happening to the Baptist, Luke reverts back to the Septuagintal Greek he used in his previous two chapters. In fact, Luke's announcement of the scene appears in similar words as LXX Jeremiah uses for the introduction to his career as a prophet:

> ἐγένετο ῥῆμα θεοῦ ἐπὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν Ζαχαρίου υἱὸν (Luke 3:2b)
> το ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ ὃ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ Ἱερεμίαν τὸν τοῦ Χελκίου (LXX Jeremiah 1:1)

The contrast of Koine Greek with language from the LXX is not merely linguistic, nor does Luke make a detailed comparison between Jeremiah and John the Baptist. James Sanders argues that Luke's purposeful casting the prophetic event of the Word of God in biblical terms is because

Luke "insists that to understand what God was doing in Christ one had to know Scripture."[98] It is noteworthy that Luke links the wilderness with Israel's scripture, and we will see Luke do this frequently throughout his story. One feature of the wilderness aesthetic, then, is its recall of God's faithfulness to Israel as recorded in Israel's scripture.

Thus, Luke describes the wilderness as both currently interrupting business as usual and extending scripture's reach from the past into the present. On one hand, in such terms, Luke sketches the wilderness as the place of radical possibility and new event, and so its aesthetic—oriented toward the future—is discerned in the feature of expected unexpectedness. On the other hand, it is as well a place of return to God's previous revelation in Israel's prophets. By contrast, the οἰκουμένη is the place of predictable worldly power; its aesthetic is as closed and narrow as its systems.

2.2.2 John the Baptist and the Isaiah Quotation (3:3-6)

The contrast between the οἰκουμένη with the wilderness that Luke establishes continues as he narrates the Baptist's preaching activity by means of quoting Isaiah 40:3-5. I now demonstrate how the structure of the Isaianic quotation and its place in the text functions in a more visual aesthetic contrast to the structure and function of the οἰκουμένη. In addition, the specific wording within the quotation allows many of the other motifs that Luke uses throughout his two-part narrative to coalesce and gain traction.

2.2.2.1 Wilderness and Οἰκουμένη Opposed

In the first half of the chapter, I noted how Luke reads Isaiah, distilling Isaiah's symbolic description of the wilderness as place of transformation. Now I examine how Isaiah 40:3-5 functions aesthetically in Luke's narrative. In the synchronic marker, Luke lists four "levels" of

[98] James Sanders, "Isaiah in Luke" in *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 18.

the Roman hierarchy: emperor, governor, subject king/tetrarch, and high priest. Each one corresponds to an increasingly diminished geographical and political circle of power: Roman Empire, Judea, Galilee, temple. The image of inequality is built into this arrangement, and many scholars have noted the system of benefaction as the structure of such rankings.[99]

Luke offers a perfect counter to this systemic celebration of inequality by quoting Isaiah's four topographical images of equality. In the wilderness, seemingly immovable natural entities meet at a level place and hierarchy is eliminated. This is demonstrated by the following chart:

Οἰκουμένη	**Wilderness**
Caesar	Valleys Exalted
Governor	Hills and Mountains Reduced
Tetrarchs	Crooked Made Straight
High Priests	Rough Made Smooth

The list of rulers in the οἰκουμένη looks like a series of stairs—or we might say, divisions—between strata; Caesar sees all, the governor less, and so forth. This aesthetic feature is obstruction and inequality.

But the way of the Lord in the wilderness makes all four corresponding aspects equal: the valleys and mountains level to a plain, the crooked roads become straight, and the bumps in the path are made smooth so that all can have unobstructed sight of God's movement toward the people. Here, the wilderness aesthetic is seen in the removal of obstructions, like an architect might knock down walls between small rooms in order to produce a more open floor plan. At the

[99] Jerome Neyrey, *The Social World of the New Testament: Insights and Models* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 47-62.

same time, the wilderness's openness and pregnant possibility is highlighted by the contrast with the οἰκουμένη.

2.2.2.2 The Salvation of God

Having looked at the structure of the Isaianic quotation, the aesthetic of unhindered equality only intensifies when we look more closely at the content of Isaiah's words. After the imperative, "prepare the way of the Lord," Isaiah's further words suggest how that "way" is enacted: all people are brought to an equality. At the same time, the "way" points to Luke's own aesthetic. Luke's descriptions of the way made in the wilderness evoke a place of radical possibility—a future that may be.

The spatial image of high places (and people) being made low and low places (and people) being raised up has already been introduced by Luke in his first two chapters. In the Magificat, Mary proclaims that her holy pregnancy demonstrates that God "has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1:52). At Jesus's presentation in the temple, Simeon declares to Mary, "this child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel" (2:34). Many scholars observe this phenomenon and often designate it as "Luke's system of reversal."[100]

But Luke is here suggesting something even more radical than a simple reversal. Consider the refrain in Isaiah's words: πᾶς (every, all): every mountain and every hill, every valley, and all flesh. The very thrust of Isaiah's vision is its totality, that it includes everything and everyone. If every mountain is made low, and every valley exalted, then that means that all places—everywhere—will be made equal. By describing the Lord's prepared "way" thus, Luke prepares the reader to look for the wilderness aesthetic in the social "restructuring" that goes on

[100] John York, *The Last Shall be First: the Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

in his world-encompassing story. Hierarchies are not reconstituted in a reverse order—they are eliminated.

The end result of the total equalizing of places is that all people are graced with sight. The motif of sight has also already been prominently featured in the first two chapters. The Benedictus describes John the Baptist's function "to give light to those who sit in darkness" (1:78). Throughout Jesus's birth story, there is a repeated emphasis on sight (2:8-20). The very sight of the infant Jesus prompts Simeon: "my eyes have seen…a light" (2:30-32). Luke maintains the motif of sight through the gospel with a specific inclusion of the blind in God's favor (Luke 4:18; 14:13; 14:21), of tax collectors seeking a view (19:1-10), and the inability of his own disciples to recognize him until he broke bread (Luke 24:31). In Acts, the sight motif plays a central part in the commission of Paul (Acts 9:18), the preaching activity of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:11), and the final scene with Paul preaching to the Roman Jews (28:27).

The rendering of sight also connects the beginning of the gospel with the mission to the Gentiles in Acts.[101] Simeon declares Jesus "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32). Paul repeats this several times (Acts 13:47; 26:18, 23). The phrase "all flesh" that Luke quotes from Isaiah is mirrored in the quotation from Joel 2:28 during the preaching of Pentecost, and the result is also sight: "young men will see visions and old men will dream dreams" (Acts 2:17). Later in the narrative, it is a Gentile—Cornelius—who sees a vision (Acts 10:3).

The motif of sight is closely linked to salvation. The shepherds go to see the σωτήρ whom the angels declared was born for all people (Luke 2:11), and Simeon's eyes see God's σωτήριος made manifest in the baby he holds in his arms (2:30). Upon Zacchaeus's seeing the Lord, Jesus states that "salvation has come to his house" (Luke 19:9). Likewise, the sight given

[101] Bo Lim, *The Way of the Lord in the Book of Isaiah* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 167.

to Gentiles also is for their salvation: "I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47).[102]

Thus, the aesthetic of the wilderness features universal salvation—an equal access to God. This linking of sight and salvation lays a framework for Luke's "ethical" gospel—one that demands actions that work justice among people. God's salvation must be visible. In the next section, John relays the imperatives that come with the good news of God's salvation for "all flesh."

2.2.3 John and the Repentant People (3:7-18)

Luke has arranged 3:1-20 so that each step in the narrative explicates the one before it. Just as Luke extends the Isaiah quotation—including "salvation for all flesh"—to explain fully "the Way of the Lord," so John's preaching repentance includes specific acts of repentance that explain the Isaiah quotation's metaphor of mountains and valleys coming to a level place:

> And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages." (Luke 3:10-14)

Mark and Matthew add descriptions of the Baptist's appearance (his wild dress and diet help create the remote and desolate atmosphere). But Luke never describes the Baptist's appearance. This reinforces the wilderness aesthetic as being communicated by the type of actions that occur there rather than a mere matter of appearance. Embodying the aesthetic of the desert is a matter

[102] Also see Acts 11:14; 16:17, 31; 28:28.

of performing deeds which bring God's justice equally to all. Luke's ongoing emphasis on faith being visible in material justice is one of his hallmark themes and avenues of discipleship.[103]

The refrain of "every" and "all" noted in the quotation from Isaiah is repeated in the section that details John's preaching: "*every* tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (3:9) and "*all* were questioning in their hearts concerning John…and he answered them *all*" (3:15-16). Luke's frequent use of every and all throughout his narrative (and particularly in wilderness scenes) therefore can be understood as one of the specific features of a wilderness aesthetic: it communicates the universal.

The language about mountains and valleys becoming level applies as well to people and their actions. John's instructions to the diverse groups (religious people, tax-collectors, soldiers) all involve economic justice promoting equality: sharing possessions, refraining from extortion, and contentment with a modest salary.[104] Just as the mountains and valleys do not change places but become level, those having two coats do not give both away. Rather, the person must give one to someone who does not have one, and so they share equally.

This vision of economic equity as a direct result of repentance reflects in Luke's picture of the apostolic community in Acts 2-4. The same question the Baptist fields from the crowds, "what should we do?" is asked of Peter by the crowds at Pentecost (Acts 2:37). The actions that follow are quite similar to those prescribed by the Baptist: "they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:45). It might be said that while

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[103] See Luke Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: What Faith Demands*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011).

[104] John's baptism of and preaching to the soldiers may also be a subtle signal of non-Jewish penitents (3:14). Tax-collectors as well—who were often thought to be traitors against their own people—are included with Jews and soldiers in John's instructions of economic righteousness (3:12-13), foreshadowing Luke's distinct and famous story of Zacchaeus's repentance and view of God's salvation (Luke 19:1-10). Note Luke's alteration of the story of Jesus healing the centurion's slave from the way Matthew 8:5-13 tells it: Luke adds the Jewish elders advocating on behalf of the soldier as he acts as a true benefactor and "loves the Jewish people" (Luke 7:3-5).

the community in Acts is located geographically in the urban center of Jerusalem, textually it displays a wilderness aesthetic.

Luke concludes the scene with an additional event, unparalleled in the other gospels. The Baptist proclaims the "good news" (3:17). The other synoptics describe John's preaching only with the verb κηρύσσω and in relation to repentance (Mark 1:4, 7; Matt 3:1). Luke not only uses the verb εὐαγγελίζομαι with respect to the Baptist in the wilderness, but also later has Jesus attribute the beginning of the gospel proclamation to John (Luke 16:16). Luke's narrative, therefore, uniquely makes the wilderness the initial place of the good news preaching.

Thus, the reader associates positive feelings with the wilderness. As discussed in the last chapter, aesthetics are meant to produce certain emotional responses in the reader or observer. Luke's inside look at the minds of the desert crowds supports this: Προσδοκῶντος δὲ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ διαλογιζομένων πάντων ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν περὶ τοῦ Ἰωάννου, "all the while, the people are expecting something as they wonder about John in their hearts" (3:15).

2.2.4 The Arrest and Imprisonment of the Baptizer (3:19-20)

On one hand, John's preaching the good news connects the gospel and baptism of repentance intimately with the wilderness. On the other hand, it also demonstrates a contrast between the wilderness and the οἰκουμένη. In 3:19-20, Luke again contrasts the aesthetic of the οἰκουμένη and the wilderness by opposing the unhindered nature of the wilderness with imprisonment and repentant actions with increasing evil.

First, in opposition to the unhindered aesthetic of the wilderness, the οἰκουμένη becomes the place of imprisonment. Luke's passage foreshadows Herod's role in Jesus's trial and crucifixion later in the gospel (23:7). And throughout Luke-Acts, the proclamation of good news of "liberty to the captives" (Luke 4:18) leads to imprisonment. Luke adds "prison" to the list of

foreseen penalties for testimony to Jesus's message (Luke 21:12). Only Luke's Peter declares a willingness to "go to prison" for Jesus before his denial (Luke 22:33). In Acts, Jewish and Roman authorities alike arrest and jail the apostles for their activity in the Christian community, which we have already seen was based in unhindered equality (Acts 4:7; 5:18; 8:3; 12:4; 16:23; 21:33; 24:27). A consistent feature of the οἰκουμένη aesthetic is restriction (and often goes hand in with violence, as the story of the Baptist will reveal).

Second, the wilderness is the place for the preaching and practicing of repentance. Luke explicitly tells us that Herod particularly has been rebuked by John concerning all πονηρῶν, "his evil deeds" (3:19), and Herod then *increases* his evil by arresting and imprisoning John (3:20). If doing good is the action derived from wilderness repentance, then doing evil is the mark of the οἰκουμένη. When surveying the entire story, we also see the aesthetic feature of violence in addition to obstruction, as Herod is both instrumental in not only imprisoning John the Baptist, but aids in the execution of both John and Jesus.

Third, just as the activities in the wilderness produced positive feelings—indicated by John's proclaiming of good news and the hopeful expectation of those listening to him—so Luke demonstrates the bleak feelings produced by the οἰκουμένη's aesthetic. Not only does Herod perform "evil deeds" (a remark on his morality concerning adultery and incest for which John had publicly admonished him), but Herod adds to his "evil deeds" by obstructing the good actions that are occurring in the desert: repentance, baptism, and hearing the good news. John's preaching the good news (εὐαγγελίζομαι) and its positive feelings of expectation are starkly different from Herod's bad actions (πονηρός). By their comparison, the reader may feel frustration or hopelessness in reaction to Herod's treatment of John.

2.2 Summary

I have shown that Luke makes the wilderness the center stage of his narrative, a place where critical actions and events take place. Based on the reading of Luke 3:1-20, I can summarize the aesthetic of Luke's wilderness with the following points:

1. Positively, the wilderness aesthetic has the following features: a connection to Israel's past, a focus on universal salvation, and a stark contrast with the aesthetic of the οἰκουμένη.

2. Negatively, the aesthetic of the οἰκουμένη has the following features: restriction, hierarchy, and violence.

3. The wilderness aesthetic is characterized by lack of hindrance or obstruction.

4. The οἰκουμένη aesthetic is characterized by obstruction or repression.

As we move forward to investigate the rest of Luke's wilderness scenes, we can carry with us these points which we have distilled from Luke 3:1-20. We now have these points as a "working aesthetic." The reader will be more attuned to notice other places in the rest of his story that may at first seem unremarkable, but actually turn out to be the world inhabited by God's type of people. In the next chapter, we will investigate the other wilderness scenes in Luke's gospel to see how he continues to build the image of the wilderness for his reader: Luke 3:21-4:13, Luke 4:42-44, Luke 8: 26-39, and Luke 9:10-17.

CHAPTER THREE: THE WILDERNESS THROUGHOUT LUKE'S GOSPEL

Having differentiated Luke's wilderness aesthetic from the οἰκουμένη aesthetic observed in Luke 3:1-20, I will now look at the rest of the scenes that Luke explicitly locates in the wilderness or in "wilderness spots." Specifically, I am interested in how Luke continues to develop the wilderness aesthetic as it contrasts that of the οἰκουμένη. In each of the following texts (3:21-4:13; 4:42-44; 8:26-39; 9:10-17), I begin by tracing the shape of Luke's wilderness aesthetic and then examine that aesthetic in light of the contrast provided by the inhabited world. In some of the passages, Luke depicts the οἰκουμένη both before and after his wilderness scene, and so I will examine this portrayal of the οἰκουμένη both before and after the wilderness passage.

3.1 LUKE 3:21-4:13—BAPTISM, GENEALOGY, AND TEMPTATION OF JESUS

This section contains three parts: the baptism of Jesus (3:21-22), Luke's version of Jesus's genealogy (3:23-38), and the temptation of Jesus by the devil (4:1-13). While Luke maintains Mark's account of both Jesus's baptism and temptation, Luke inserts Jesus's genealogy between the two events (Matthew places a different version of the genealogy in Jesus's birth narrative). I have chosen to examine all three parts as one textual unit since they comprise one complete wilderness story centering on Jesus before beginning his ministry and all three describe Jesus as the "Son of God."

3.1.1 Wilderness

Just as wilderness in Luke 3:1-20 evokes Israel's past and announces the place of future universal salvation, the same themes recur throughout Luke-Acts. And as in the wilderness of Luke 3:1-20, here the wilderness features and their combined aesthetic provide a stark contrast

with the impression left by the οἰκουμένη.

3.1.1.1 Evoking Israel's Past

"Led in the wilderness." Luke first evokes Israel's past by crafting Jesus's movement into and through the wilderness in the same language the LXX does for Israel: "remember the way the Lord your God has led (ἄγειν) you in (ἐν) the wilderness" (Deut 8:2). Luke alters Mark's wording concerning Jesus's wilderness travels in such a way that it calls to mind the exodus experience of people of Israel. Mark has, "the Spirit immediately cast him out (ἐκβάλλειν) into (εἰς) the wilderness" (Mark 1:12). The verb ἐκβάλλειν combined with the preposition εἰς suggests a possible scene where Jesus is thrown into the wilderness on his own, without the Spirit accompanying him.

Luke changes this to, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, was led by (ἄγειν) the Spirit in (ἐν) the wilderness" (Luke 4:1). Here, the combination of the verb ἄγειν with the preposition ἐν suggests that the Spirit personally guides Jesus while he is in the wilderness; and to emphasize this, Luke adds that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit." The possibility of Luke's use of Deut 8:2 is enhanced by direct citation of Deut 8:3 that follows in Luke 4:4. Having already observed how Luke "reads around" quotations he receives from sources rather than simply duplicates them, it is probable that this alteration of Mark's wording is indeed influenced by Deut 8:2.

The echo of Deuteronomy continues as the scriptures that Jesus quotes in response to the devil's temptations are specifically connected to Israel's wilderness experience. In response to the devil's first temptation to turn stones into bread, Jesus quotes a portion of Deut 8:3, "One does not live by bread alone."[105] When the devil offers all the kingdoms of the world in

[105] In response to the devil's imperative "turn these stones into bread," he simply replies, "one does not live by bread alone." Jesus's words in 4:4 γέγραπται ὅτι *οὐκ ἐπ' ἄρτῳ μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος* form the first clause in the verse and which are followed by ἀλλ' ἐπὶ παντὶ ῥήματι τῷ ἐκπορευομένῳ διὰ στόματος Θεοῦ. In Luke 4:4, several textual variants attempt to make the rest of Deut 8:3 explicit (A D K 0102 33. 565. 579. 700. 892. 1424.

exchange for worshipping him, Jesus quotes a modified version of LXX Deut 6:13 which reads, "You shall fear the Lord thy God, and him only shall you serve; and you shall cleave to him, and by his name you shall swear." Jesus only uses the middle portion "him only shall you serve" and he prefaces this with "Worship the Lord your God" (Luke 4:8). In response to the third temptation, Jesus responds with Deut 6:16, "Do not test the Lord your God." These Deuteronomy passages evoke the image of Israel gathered in the wilderness before it enters the promised land, and all three passages point toward the lessons learned while in the wilderness.

Forty days…of hunger. The forty days of Jesus's temptation in the wilderness are certainly meant to allude to the forty years Israel was in the wilderness before entering the promised land. As was just discussed, Luke relies heavily on Deuteronomy for this portion of his narrative, and Luke's Jesus specifically quotes a phrase from Deut 8:3, "One does not live by bread alone" (Luke 4:4). Of particular importance for the symbolism of Jesus's forty days in the desert is the verse which immediately precedes it: "Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments" (Deut 8:2). Clearly, Luke understands Jesus's testing for forty days to be analogous to Israel's test of faithfulness for forty years.

Unlike Matthew 4:2, which claims Jesus was purposely fasting (νηστεύω), Luke's text does not tell us that Jesus was observing any particular fast, but simply ate no food and was therefore hungry (4:2).[106] This point too seems to recall the wilderness years of Israel, as food

2542.). This "word" that Jesus implies in his partial quotation of Deut 8:3 is the same "word" that come to John the Baptist in Luke 3:2—ῥῆμα, meaning both the spoken word but also deed or action—the enacted word.

[106] *Pace* Craig Evans, *Luke* (NTBC; Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 66. Evans argues that Jesus's hunger is meant to evoke Moses's fasting for forty days (Ex 34:28; Deut 9:9-18). Given that Jesus's quotes Deut 8:3 and that quotation is directed to the people of Israel and that Luke does not use the word νηστεύω, Luke's narrative

was always on the list of requests to God and a point of contention between the people and Moses according to many renditions of the Exodus story (Exod 16:3; Num 11:4-13; 21:5; Ps 78:18). Deuteronomy argues that hunger in the wilderness serves a specific purpose for religious devotion:

> He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut 8:3).

Luke's Jesus clearly understands what human beings truly need, and indeed he passes the test of faithfulness. By doing so, he offers a fresh chapter in an old story.[107] The forty days in the wilderness not only evoke Israel's forty years, but many other significant biblical events: Noah and the flood (Gen 7:4), Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:18), and Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kgs 19:8). Thus, forty days also alludes to other times God's faithfulness has been demonstrated.[108]

Genealogy. Luke's genealogy comes while the reader's attention is still in the wilderness and so functions as the narrator's commentary on the wilderness events. It calls to mind the Book of Numbers that outlines extensive family lines as Israel gathers itself in preparation for entering the Promised Land (Numbers 1 and 26). Luke's placement of the genealogy here as Jesus is in the wilderness is in a similar sense signaling this time of temptation as a preparation or exercise of faithfulness that will bear on his subsequent ministry once in "the promised land."

The genealogy's rehearsal of the generations of Israel also imbues the wilderness of Jesus

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suggests a comparison between Jesus and the people of Israel. Matthew's gospel, however, most certainly draws this comparison between Jesus and Moses.

[107] R. Michael Fox, "The Meaning and Significance of the Exodus Event" in *Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 13. Fox argues that Deuteronomy's portrayal of the exodus narrative and covenant not only reflected back on it, but set it up as a future paradigm.

[108] Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus*, 245.

with a sense of Israel's past, highlighting some of Israel's famous champions: namely, David, Jacob, and Abraham. David has already been referenced in Jesus's birth announcement to Mary: "The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David (Luke 1:32). Zechariah echoes this by describing Jesus as a "savior for us in the house of his servant David" (1:69). In the birth story itself, David is mentioned three times (2:4, 11). So too, Jacob has already been a part of Jesus's identity: "He will reign over the house of Jacob" (1:33); and has Abraham (1:73).

3.1.1.2 Foreshadowing Universal Salvation

"All the people." Jesus is baptized when "all the people" are being baptized (Luke 3:21). "All the people" seems to have a double meaning. In the prologue, Luke describes πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος ἦν τοῦ λαοῦ, "all of the assembly of the people" were prayerfully waiting while Zechariah went into the sanctuary (Luke 1:10)—clearly a reference specifically to the people of Israel. Jesus being counted among "all the people" in the Jordan wilderness therefore casts him in the shape of a devout Jew—baptized and praying.

Additionally, "all the people" also evokes the prior references that suggest a broader group than just Israel. The angels proclaim Jesus's birth as good news for "all the people" (2:10). The wording of this proclamation makes it resemble an imperial announcement, thus meant to have "world-wide" importance and reception.[109] Simeon speaks of Jesus as God's salvation for "all the peoples." The plural of λαός (peoples) is spelled out as including both Israel and Gentiles (2:31). Jesus being counted among "all the people" then describes him indeed as a righteous Jew humbling himself before God in baptism, but also a righteous human being in the proper posture toward the maker of all the earth.[110]

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[109] Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 32.

[110] Charles Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (New York: Crossword, 1982), 38.

The New Adam. The evidence for concluding that Jesus is the new Adam not only includes the references to "all the people" with which Luke begins the pericope, but also Luke's insertion of the genealogy of Jesus immediately after the baptism scene. Although Luke *includes* Abraham in Jesus's ancestry, he does not stop at Abraham, but instead traces Jesus's lineage back to Adam—God's υἱός, son (3:38). This connection is further strengthened by the words from heaven spoken to Jesus at his baptism prayer, "You are my υἱός" (3:22). Hence, Jesus being baptized with "all the people" and being a descendent both of Israel's father and humanity's father deftly blends Luke's combined use of the fullness of Israel and the whole of humanity.

The connection of Jesus with Adam in the baptism and genealogy allows us to see how Luke reads the temptation of Jesus in both Mark's account and the source that Luke shares with Matthew. We have already seen how Luke reads for themes and tropes in the LXX. Luke reads "temptation" as a reference to and reversal of Adam and Eve's temptation scene in Gen 3. Luke reads "wilderness for forty days" as rehearsal and perfection of Israel's forty-year wilderness wandering after the exodus.[111] On one hand, Jesus rejects the devil's attempted seductions, and thus succeeds where Adam failed. On the other hand, Jesus is tempted in the wilderness rather than a garden and quotes scriptures that hearken from Israel's wilderness tradition. The temptation scene then—like the baptism and the genealogy—establishes Jesus's character as both obedient Jew and righteous human being.

Although being tempted, Jesus—Luke's specifically Jewish and broadly human representative of "all flesh"—is able to see the world clearly from the perspective of the wilderness:

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[111] *Pace* Evans, *Luke*, 67. Evans argues that Jesus is meant to reflect Israel in the wilderness and not Adam being tempted in the Genesis temptation narrative. Given that Luke both traces Jesus's lineage to Adam and locates the genealogy immediately before the temptation account (as opposed to Matthew's fronting it before Jesus's birth) suggests that Luke does want to draw a comparison between Jesus and Adam.

> In an instant, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the inhabited world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please." (4:5-6).

It is not from within the οἰκουμένη that Jesus apprehends the diabolical nature of humanity's unjust systems, but from the perspective of the wilderness. Luke employs this wilderness vision to show the reader that the entire οἰκουμένη—from Caesar himself to the religious leaders in Jerusalem—continuously lends itself to the devil's purposes and answers ultimately to him. Or so the devil posits. From a literary standpoint, the reader does not have reason to doubt that the οἰκουμένη has been compromised. Jesus does not argue with the devil, claiming that God is indeed ruler of the human world.[112] Luke's point may be that the devil does indeed rule the world of human power, *but that world is not as significant or as total as it believes itself to be*. The world of economic, political, and religious control can be—and has been in the past—undermined by events in the wilderness.

As Jesus is explicitly shown this view of the οἰκουμένη, here the reader can discern a literal aesthetic: a certain visual display that captures the character and nature of the thing. While the reader has perceived Luke's literary aesthetic of the wilderness and its contrast (for example, the ranks of rulers and authorities in lists such as Luke 3:1-2), the devil shows Jesus the spectacle of geopolitical kingdoms and their glory. Thus, the unencumbered nature of the wilderness does not only afford a view of God's salvation. It also allows one to see more clearly what *opposes* God and his salvation.

3.1.2 Οἰκουμένη

Despite the entire pericope being set in the location of the wilderness, the οἰκουμένη still

[112] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, 38-39. Garrett notes literary parallels with Rev 13:7-8 wherein the Beast is granted authority over the world and also with the story of Job (1:11-12; 2:5-6). I think Luke's view is close to that of Revelation's writer: the demonic has power over the world of human systems, but that power is not the sovereign power of God.

appears in the narrative in opposition to that desert vision. While the wilderness shows itself to be a place of God's provision and renewal for the whole of humanity through the reversal of the Adam story, I will show how each of the three temptations demonstrates the abuse and inequality of power in the οἰκουμένη. While Matthew also records three temptation scenes, Luke's situating them immediately after the genealogy and adding various unique features allows the temptation story to be understood within Luke's special wilderness aesthetic.

3.1.2.1 Temptation #1

The first temptation—"turn these stones into bread"—is a temptation to wield economic power, the ability to procure one's own needs by one's own means. While the wilderness is the place of God's provision for all the people, the devil tempts Jesus to become the provider himself—a hallmark of one who holds a position in the οἰκουμένη. Jesus's response from Deut 8:3, "one does not live by bread alone," does not mean that people do not need physical provisions; rather, this quotation from Deuteronomy asks the reader to look *beyond* the provision to see the provider, as the entirety of Deut 8:3 states:

> He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God's mouth.

Any economic provision that does not acknowledge God as its ultimate source therefore becomes a sinful acquisition. Jesus was neither unable nor reluctant to produce bread—he does that miraculously for the crowds in Luke 9:10-17. But he refuses the temptation to rely on himself as the ultimate source of his human needs—in short, to be his own benefactor. In regard to this particular point, it is noteworthy that one addition Luke makes to the story that Matthew

does not is that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (4:1).[113] By doing so, Luke connects the story of Jesus's emptiness in the wilderness with his baptism story in Luke 3:22, when the Holy Spirit comes down on Jesus as a dove. The Holy Spirit descends from heaven as a gift bestowed on Jesus, and it is with this Holy Spirit that Jesus is filled. Thus, Jesus does not accept the challenge to procure his own bread because Luke's story suggests that the Holy Spirit is what sustains Jesus.

The particular temptation to exploit economic power or access for one's own gain becomes a key feature in the rest of Luke's narrative in such texts as the Parable of the Foolish Rich Man (Luke 12:13-21), the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot for money (Luke 22:3-5), and the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). Luke is also sure to offer examples—besides Jesus—of people who do not succumb to such temptation but instead use their economic resources for the benefit of others: the women who support Jesus's ministry travels (Luke 8:1-3), Zacchaeus the tax-collector (Luke 19:1-10) and Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37).

3.1.2.2 Temptation #2

In the second temptation, the devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the οἰκουμένη as reward for worshipping him. The parallel passage in Matt 4:8 describes "all the kingdoms of the κόσμος." Luke uses οἰκουμένη, which not only more specifically describes the inhabited human world (as opposed to the natural world), it is also a shorthand expression for the Roman Empire. As observed in the synchronic marker in Luke 3:1-2, Luke understands the imperial world to be comprised of not only Roman officials, but to have infiltrated through its ethos of power the very

[113] Susan Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 37. Garrett takes this so far to say that the conflict in the temptation boils down to the devil and the Holy Spirit (who leads Jesus).

heart of the religious establishment in Jerusalem. In line with my language about specific aesthetics, Gonzalez makes the point that it is not the material of the inhabited world, but what we might call its architecture: "Luke sees all the kingdoms of the world as somehow belonging to the devil. This does not mean that all that is in them is bad. But it does mean that as a consequence of sin the present world is ordered in satanic fashion."[114]

While Matthew notes that Satan offers Jesus the κόσμος, Luke makes it much more explicit by establishing that it is indeed the devil's prerogative to do so because the world has legitimately been given to him by the human beings managing it: "it (the οἰκουμένη) has been given over to me; and I give it to whomsoever I please" (4:6).[115] Luke's description of the devil in Luke 4:6 therefore offers an important amplification of Luke 3:1-2, 2:1-2, and 1:5.[116] He is positioned above all the other ranks of rulers listed in the synchronic markers (emperor, governor, king, etc.). The devil holds the ultimate dominion over the world of human systems because he has the power to distribute power, and all human systems—desiring power themselves—serve his agenda. The devil is the supreme patron.[117]

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[114] González, *Luke*, 59.

[115] Scholars debate who exactly has "handed over" the human world to the devil. Fitzmyer notes that many scholars of the early twentieth century read this as a "theological passive" meaning that God has relinquished the human world to the devil (something like that in Job 1:2). Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 516 and Francois Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on Luke 1-9:50,* 144. The problems surrounding the debate are many. On one hand, interpreters such as John Carroll argue from a purely dogmatic standpoint, "the source of genuine authority in the world inhabited and ordered by human beings is not the devil, but God." (Carroll, *Luke*, 102). On the other hand, interpreters such as Susan Garrett argue that within Luke's narrative—or beyond that, in the biblical narrative—the diabolical has been handed over the world of human affairs given the characterization of that world (Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, 39).

[116] Not only does the language speak of the *modus operandi* of the system, the language of παραδίδωμι (handing over) also foreshadows the role this system plays in the crucifixion of Jesus who predicts his own death: "he will be handed over (παραδίδωμι) to the Gentiles" (Luke 18:32). The temple authorities send spies to entrap Jesus "so that they might hand him over (παραδίδωμι) to the jurisdiction and authority (ἐξουσίᾳ) of the governor" (Luke 20:20). That same governor—Pilate—in turn handed Jesus over (παραδίδωμι) to be crucified.

[117] Richard Horsley, *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 92.

Another difference from Matthew is that Luke's devil does not merely offer "the kingdoms of the world" but the ἐξουσία (authority) over them. Later in the gospel, just before his arrest, Jesus explains the devil's type of authority to his disciples: "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in ἐξουσία over them are called benefactors" (Luke 22:25). Jesus acknowledges the hierarchical system of that world and the oppressive form of power that drives it. He then exhorts his own disciples to an altogether different system. He does not advocate for an inverted hierarchy, but an equality: "instead, the greatest among you must be ὡς (as) the youngest, and the one leading ὡς (as) the one serving" (22:26).

Jesus himself is narrated by Luke to have ἐξουσία, but rather than the oppressive power demonstrated by rulers in the οἰκουμένη, Jesus wields a power that only benefits others. Luke repeats a story inherited from Mark about Jesus casting out a demon, but Luke adds "he came out of him without having done him any harm" (Luke 4:35). Luke takes care to demonstrate how Jesus's ἐξουσία is over the demon, not the man, and that Jesus's power serves the person healed and is not a tool manipulated to benefit Jesus personally. The reconfiguration of ἐξουσία is then further expanded in 4:36, when the crowd is baffled by Jesus's authoritative speech, "They were all amazed and kept saying to one another, "What kind of utterance is this? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come!" Obviously, such an altruistic use of ἐξουσία is far more infrequent than the devil's use of authority.

Luke reiterates another one of Mark's stories regarding Jesus's authority (specifically the authority to forgive sin) wherein Jesus heals a paralyzed man (5:17-26), and again Luke adds a small but important detail: "Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God" (5:25). Both Mark and Matthew only state that the man got up and walked out and then everyone else glorified God. Luke adds that the man who

had been healed glorified God—this healing had personal significance to the individual. Additionally, the ἐξουσία Jesus exercises does not demand glory in return, as is understood in the system of patronage. Instead, the glory is given to God. In stories such as these, Luke seems to demonstrate that Jesus's authority is not at all like that brandished by the rulers of the οἰκουμένη.

The sum of these three differences between Luke and Matthew's versions amounts to this: the entire empire—indeed the entire realm of social institutions—has been given to the demonic, and one must render worship and obedience to that world (and thereby the diabolical) instead of to God in order to assert authority and power (the currency of that world). The wording of "it has been handed over to me, and I give to whom I please" (Luke 4:6) recalls the same chain of command witnessed in Luke 3:1-2 and also as described by the God-fearing centurion who implores Jesus to heal a favorite slave:

> For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it" (Luke 7:8).

By offering power and authority to Jesus, then, the devil's offer has a catch which the centurion reveals: whomever is granted power serves the one granting the power.[118]

Luke's narrative distinctly informs the reader that Jesus sees "Satan fell from heaven like a flash of lightening" (Luke 10:18). Setting oneself up against God—particularly as the rival for worship—is a losing game (see, for example, King Herod in Acts 12:23).[119] The trajectory of the οἰκουμένη is the same as that of its tyrannical leader. While the devil claims the οἰκουμένη is his, Jesus states that the οἰκουμένη will suffer judgment from the Son of Man (Luke 21:26). Paul elaborates on this in Acts: "God has fixed a day on which he will have the οἰκουμένη judged in

[118] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, 39.

[119] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, 40.

righteousness" (17:31).

3.1.2.3 Temptation #3

The third temptation—"throw yourself down from the temple"—points the reader to religious power. We have already seen that Luke includes the powerful leaders of the temple in Jerusalem within the hierarchy of the empire. Luke also places several previous scenes in the temple, demonstrating the very public and highly trafficked nature of the temple grounds. The devil urges Jesus to use his special status as God's son to attempt a feat that would make him appear divine to the witnesses at the temple.

The devil quotes scripture (Ps 91:11-12) in his temptation of Jesus—a perversion of religious reading. Satan perverts scripture by interpreting it for self-serving purposes, for acquiring or demonstrating power. Jesus exemplifies the appropriate use of scripture, that it should be interpreted with God as the focal point and not for one's personal gain. The devil prefaces the quotation from Psalm 91 with the conditional "if you are the son of God" (Luke 4:9). The devil therefore distorts the meaning of the entire psalm which is about trust in God; "if you are the son of God" asks Jesus to trust in his own identity, not in God.

Jesus demonstrates the proper use of scripture not only here in the wilderness temptation scene, but in the following passage when he preaches at the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). After reading a quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2 and announcing its fulfillment, Luke writes that "everyone spoke well of him and were amazed at the giftedness with which he spoke" (Luke 4:22). Had Jesus stopped there with his exegesis, he would have garnered favor and acquired power over his audience. Jesus however proceeds to interpret the scripture by applying God's promises to others whom the congregation in Nazareth are not particularly enthusiastic to include. As a result, the enraged crowd attempts to hurl Jesus off a cliff (4:29). Thus, Luke

juxtaposes the methods of scripture reading: self-serving versus others-serving.

The temptation to exercise religious power is very closely linked with Luke's special conclusion to the temptation scene: "and the devil departed ἄχρι καιροῦ (until a more opportune time)" (4:13). When the devil does come back (and is then specifically named Satan) it is within the religious system of the οἰκουμένη and specifically in Jerusalem—the place of the final temptation. Luke locates the plot to kill Jesus "two days before the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread" (22:1). Luke then expands the Jerusalem hierarchy. While Mark and Matthew only have priests and scribes, Luke adds "temple police."

Notice that Satan co-opts the disciple Judas Iscariot specifically during the feast of the Passover. Mark and Matthew separate the mention of the Passover from Judas's betrayal for hire, and neither evangelist refers to Satan's part in that conspiracy. By contrast, Luke most closely links the activities of Satan (the religious leaders paying "blood money") to the religious festival, drawing together economic transaction and corrupt religious authority. Clearly, the "better time" for the devil to trap Jesus also points the reader toward a more conducive *place* in Luke 22:1-6: the inhabited world with its religious, economic, and political power structures. Whereas the wilderness is neither a good time nor place to ensnare the prophet from Nazareth, the temple in Jerusalem during a religious festival proves an ideal time and place. As Johnson describes the contest between the devil and Jesus as "a conflict between rival kingdoms," Jesus apparently boasts a home-field advantage when in the wilderness space.[120]

The phrase ἄχρι καιροῦ in v.13 not only concludes the third temptation but the entire temptation scene. When the devil does return to finish his contest with the Son of God, he employs not only the religious leaders but the combination of all kinds of power that comprise

[120] Johnson, *Luke*, 75.

the οἰκουμένη. González claims that the reader finds the ultimate "opportune moment" to defeat Jesus is on the cross (Luke 23:35).[121] This understanding offers a particular insight: the cross was "an instrument of imperial terror" and therefore a powerful symbol of the empire's dominance (as such, οἰκουμένη equals the Roman Empire).[122] By combining the forces of Pilate, Herod, and the Jewish authorities, Luke's crucifixion account interprets the cross as a symbol of corrupt human power systems in the broadest sense (οἰκουμένη equals human systems, Roman or otherwise).

3.2 LUKE 4:42-44—THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS ANNOUNCED

In this section, Luke does not use the phrase ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ (in *the* wilderness) as in the temptation scene, but rather narrates that Jesus withdraws εἰς ἔρημον τόπον, into *a* wilderness place (4:42). Oddly, this passage is not a prayer scene like the one later recorded in Luke 5:16. Jesus does not retire in order to pray as he does in Mark's parallel passage (Mark 1:35). This move is especially odd given that Luke tends to take Mark's pericopes and fashion them *into* prayer scenes (Luke 3:21/Mark 1:9; Luke 9:18/Mark 8:27; Luke 9:29/Mark 9:2). Yet in 4:42-44, Luke takes Mark's prayer scene in the deserted place and uncharacteristically strips it of prayer.[123]

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[121] González, *Luke*, 62.

[122] Neil Elliot, "The Anti-Imperial Message of the Cross" in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997)167.

[123] This does not stop interpreters from superimposing prayer however. Carroll remarks in his commentary that Jesus goes to the desert for "prayer-bestowed strength" in v.42 although there is no mention of prayer even in Carroll's own translation of the text. Carroll also discusses the Capernaum crowd and Jesus's announcement of the kingdom completely separate from the wilderness. Carroll, *Luke*, 121-122. My observation of this is not a jab, however, but I say this only to strengthen my point that the overlooking of Luke's wilderness theme is not due to Luke's omission or underplaying of the wilderness. Rather, it is due to the fact that scholars often overlook what they are trained to overlook. When generations of scholars are told that Mark underscores wilderness and Luke does not, even learned readers such as Carroll can read what is not there and not read what is there in the text.

The omission of prayer leaves only the dialogue between Jesus and the people from Capernaum occurring in a "wilderness spot." The people of Capernaum want to hold Jesus and prevent him from leaving. Jesus states that he absolutely must depart. I will demonstrate how this text and its oddity further develops the wilderness aesthetic observed in the prior two texts (Luke 3:1-20 and 3:21-4:13).

3.2.1 Wilderness—The Kingdom of God Must Go Everywhere

Just as the revelatory event of the word of God happened to John the Baptist in the wilderness, so Luke again saves an important announcement for a wilderness place. It is εἰς ἔρημον τόπον that the reader encounters "the kingdom of God" for the first time in Luke's gospel. It has been hinted at by Luke earlier: Gabriel tells Mary that Jesus's "kingdom will have no end" (1:33), but the first articulation of the weighty phrase ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ occurs in an empty space between all other places. It happens in no place special. While the kingdom of God is subsequently proclaimed in other places, it originates in—and draws significance from—this "no place."

We can note that in Luke 9:58 Jesus declares to would-be disciples that the Son of Man has "no place" that he calls his own.[124] While Matthew 8:18-22 also has this verse and a brief explanation of it, it is significant that only Luke includes references to the kingdom of God in the explanation of the Son of Man's lack of permanent location:

> And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim *the kingdom of God*." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the *kingdom of God*" (9:58-62).

Both mentions of the kingdom of God function in contrast to the particular and permanently

[124] In Greek: οὐκ ἔχει ποῦ (literally: has no "where").

established places: the burial place of a father and parting with the family at the ancestral home. The kingdom of God's aesthetic is unfixed and has no obstacles to full participation.

By placing the kingdom of God first and foremost in a wilderness spot in Luke 4:42-44, Luke deviates considerably from Mark's narrative which has Jesus proclaim the arrival of the kingdom while he is in Galilee (Mark 1:14-15).[125] Here again, the reader can perceive an aesthetic: the kingdom of God mirrors its own nature—which is void of obstructions and hindrances—in the emptiness of the wilderness. Not only does this desolate spot launch the proclamation of the kingdom of God, but it equalizes all the places within the inhabited world: "I must (δεῖ) proclaim the kingdom of God to the other cities also" (4:43). The verb δεῖ (it is necessary) carries the weight of divine direction, meaning that when Jesus uses this verb, the insistence on Jesus's ensuing action comes directly from God (also Luke 2:49; 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 19:5; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44).[126]

The only prior time Jesus has used this verb in Luke's narrative occurs when he is a boy confronted by his worried parents in the temple: "Did you not know that I must (δεῖ) be in my father's house?" (Luke 2:49). By having Jesus use this language for both his being in the temple in Jerusalem and his proclaiming the kingdom in all the cities, Luke offers a glimpse into his view of the temple's ideal aesthetic—that it is intended *by God* to be a place of equality (a theme that Luke explores more fully in Acts and particularly in Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7). The temple should be a place like the wilderness: a place where all people can access God's salvation and nothing functions as an obstruction to this reality.

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[125] Earlier I noted that while Matthew has John the Baptist proclaiming "the kingdom of Heaven drawing near" in the wilderness, Luke refrains from kingdom language in his two first wilderness texts, quite possibly to avoid a parallel between the earthly kingdoms described in chapters 3 and 4.

[126] Charles Cosgrove, "The Divine *Dei* in Luke-Acts: Investigations into the Lukan Understanding of God's Providence," *Novum Testamentum* 26 no 2 (April 1984): 168-190.

In this passage, then, God's vision for the kingdom is that it must spread equally to all places rather than remain a local possession. The reader is reminded of Jesus's refusal of the devil's second offer, that he would give Jesus the kingdoms of the οἰκουμένη as his possession. The aesthetic of the wilderness as unobstructed, however, does not facilitate ownership and possession. Thus, the theme is repeated, that the term "wilderness" points to Luke's motif of universal salvation and the equality among people before God. In other words, it is the wilderness and what transpires there that makes all other places equal recipients of God's message.

3.2.2. Contrast with Οἰκουμένη Aesthetic: Obstruction

In opposition to the spread of the kingdom, the characteristic of the οἰκουμένη is to prevent or hinder it.[127] The Capernaum crowd wants to retain Jesus and make him a fixture of their particular place. Luke's use of the verb κατέχω suggests that the crowd desires to commandeer Jesus and his healing presence. The verb κατέχω (hold back) also can suggest the notion of occupation, seizure, or arrest—all words that imply restriction under force.[128] The prior wilderness texts have already revealed that enforced authority over humans and hindering the good news correspond to the οἰκουμένη aesthetic of power, as the reference to John the Baptist in 3:18-21 has shown.

The townspeople attempt to prevent Jesus from leaving their own specific location. But Jesus has no intention of settling anywhere at all. Luke established the pattern of the οἰκουμένη

[127] Joel Green argues that the Capernaum crowd functions as an extension of Jesus's temptation by Satan, further connecting the different wilderness spaces at the beginning and end of Luke 4. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 227.

[128] BDAG reference (pg. 532-533): 1) to prevent the doing of something or cause to be ineffective, prevent, hinder, restrain, a) to hold someone back from going away hold back, hinder, prevent from going away, c) to prevent someone from exercising power, restrain, check…4) to keep within limits in a confining manner, confine, a) in prison, b) by law.

in 3:1-2 as a hierarchy of rulers dominating specific geographical territories as their possession. And although Matthew's gospel says that Jesus "made his home in Capernaum" (Matt 4:13-17), Luke's Jesus neither makes a home nor establishes a seat of power nor a headquarters from which he can direct his mission.

In fact, Nazareth—the home Luke originally assigns to Jesus—expels Jesus in reaction to his announcement that he cannot be the prophet *from* Nazareth while *in* Nazareth (Luke 4:23-24). Jesus enrages the synagogue's audience in Nazareth when he mentions that he will not perform miracles for Nazareth; moreover, he goes on to state that God's provision is often given to people who are not even Israelites (4:25-27). The reaction of the people of Capernaum is therefore different in character from the Nazarenes (after all, they want to keep Jesus rather than throw him off a cliff), but the underlying reason for both responses is the same: the people in each place desire Jesus's presence (and therefore God's favor) to remain their exclusive property.

3.3 LUKE 8:26-39—THE SALVATION OF THE GERASENE DEMONIAC

The opposition between the οἰκουμένη and the wilderness clearly emerges in Luke's version of the Gerasene demoniac (cf. Mark 5:1-20; Matt 8:28-9:1). Luke certainly follows Mark more closely than does Matthew, which makes Luke's alterations appear even more deliberate and purposeful.[129] In this story, Luke first introduces the οἰκουμένη as a place of power and violence, then switches to the wilderness and the salvific events there, only to return the reader's attention back to the οἰκουμένη and its systems of repression. I move through the pericope in that order.

3.3.1 "A Man from the City"—Οἰκουμένη

[129] Matthew's story (Matt 8:28-9:1) features two demoniacs rather than one, has no mention of Legion or the demons' identity/identities whatsoever, and portrays no "after story" of the possessed men.

Only Luke tells us that the demoniac is actually "a man of the city," that he "had not worn clothes for a long time," and that he "could not live in a house anymore" (8:27). These descriptions locate the man firmly within the inhabited world and suggest that his derangement was not a function of living in the tombs, but the opposite: the man's possession took place while he was living in the city, and his current living in the tombs is a result of the spiritual trauma which occurred within the οἰκουμένη. Three points in the text suggest the city as the place of devastation rather than the wilderness.

First, upon establishing the man's possession by demons in the context of the city, Luke distinctively describes the man's fits of violent demonic possession as συναρπάζω, being seized or carried off completely (8:29). The same word is used later in Acts when the Sanhedrin (the religious system of power) arrests Stephen and ultimately executes him (Acts 6:12). Luke's choice of verbs is suggestive of the οἰκουμένη and its aesthetic of power which works its way through bondage and violence.

Second, the name Legion reveals that there are many demons within the man but that they operate under a singular command. Most scholars view this name as a clear reference to the military power and presence of Rome, since λεγιών is a Greek transliteration of the Latin word *legio*. In the Roman military, a legion was the largest unit of soldiers. The demons commandeer the man in a similar way to the Roman military's *modus operandi* of seizing and controlling each territory they conquer. [130]

Third, just as in the case of John the Baptist, the οἰκουμένη is the place of imprisonment and hindrance. Luke makes it clear that the man is not only shackled and chained by those in the city but adds that he had been kept under guard, φυλασσόμενος (8:29). Luke's word choice here

[130] For a full description of the structure of Roman military and the weight of its imperial presence, see Alexander Kyrychenko, *The Roman Army and the Expansion of the Gospel* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2014).

may well strengthen the allusion to the power wielded by the οἰκουμένη, since the demonic presence goes by the name Legion (λεγιών) and throughout Luke-Acts the act of guarding prisoners is a Roman military assignment (Acts 12:4-6; 23:35; 28:16). The military presence, with its hierarchy of ranks, is a staple feature of the οἰκουμένη. Even when the man escapes the guard of the city by breaking his physical chains, therefore, he still remains imprisoned by the brigade of demons from whom there is no escape. The οἰκουμένη is not distinguished as a place on a map, but as a colonization of this man's very mind and body.

3.3.2 In the Empty Place—Wilderness

Of the synoptics, only Luke refers to the wilderness as the place where the man encounters Jesus (8:29). The wilderness is once again a place free of obstacles. In the city, the man had been shackled and chained and held under guard; in the wilds there is not a thing that prevents him from encountering Jesus. In fact, Luke writes that the moment Jesus's feet touched the ground on the shore (ἐξελθόντι δὲ αὐτῷ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, "as he stepped out onto the ground") the man met him (8:27). In this empty place, there are no crowds to push through nor buildings to obstruct the man's view of Jesus.

After his exorcism, the man is "clothed and in his right mind"—characteristics he lacked when he last dwelt in the inhabited world. He is civilized only when removed from civilization. In the wilds with Jesus, the man fits the description of a model disciple, sitting at Jesus's feet and willing to follow him anywhere (see Luke 10:39). The healed man goes on to proclaim all that Jesus had done for him to everyone in the city at the end of the pericope.

Similar to the previous passage examined (Luke 4:42-44), this story does not evoke Israel's time in the exodus wilderness, but it does speak to Luke's theme of universal salvation and its connection to wilderness by means of two points. First, the man freed from demonic

control is also a Gentile. This story describes Jesus's only venture into gentile territory in Luke's gospel, and space for this Gentile's healing takes place in a wild spot. Second, Luke alone of the synoptics uses the word σῴζω (I save/heal) in the telling of this story: "those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons ἐσώθη, had been healed/saved (8:36). Here the salvation that all flesh—Jew and Gentile alike—shall see in the wilderness (see Luke 3:6) is indeed experienced in the emptiness of the wilds. Luke's addition of "the wilds" links this story to Jesus's temptation—another wilderness story where the devil is defeated (4:13).[131] And as expected, the salvation in the wilds will be vehemently opposed by the οἰκουμένη.

3.3.3 "And they were afraid"—Οἰκουμένη

Many scholars argue that the swine herders and townspeople balk at Jesus's exorcism because their livestock are demolished. They perceive Jesus as an economic threat.[132] This is certainly a legitimate point, and certainly the economic structures are part and parcel of the οἰκουμένη. Indeed, Mark conjoins the economic fear resulting from the drowned pigs with the demoniac's changed appearance:

> They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac *and to the swine* reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood (Mark 5:15-17, italics mine).

But in Luke's gospel, the people are not afraid when they are told that the pigs have perished. In fact, after the pigs drown in the lake, there is no further mention of them at all. Instead, Luke tells us that the people ask Jesus to leave when they see that the demon-possessed man "had been

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[131] Tannehill, *Luke*, 147.

[132] Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 343. Several scholars make this case based on the similarities between Luke 8:28 ("Son of the Most High God") and Acts 16:17 where Paul casts out a demon from a slave girl used to tell fortunes for a profit ("these are slaves of the Most High God"). While Luke explicitly states that her masters protested their economic loss, however, Luke's story of the Gerasene demoniac does not make this explicit.

healed." For good measure, Luke alone adds "for they were seized with great fear" (8:37) to underscore the people's reaction specifically to the healing of the possessed man:[133]

> Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told them *how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed*. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear (Luke 8:35-37, italics mine).

In fact, Luke alters the beginning of the story in such a way that places all the villagers' fear on the man *after* his healing. Mark tells us that "no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain" (Mark 5:3) and "no one had the strength to subdue him" (5:4). Matthew tells us that the two demoniacs "were so fierce that no one could pass that way" (Matt 8:28). Mark and Matthew both portray the people acting out of fear of the demoniac(s) at the beginning of the story. Luke, by contrast, uses language at the beginning that highlights the possessed man's experience rather than the villagers:

> For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds (Luke 8:29).

Luke keeps the fearful response at the end when the people see the man who had formerly been uncontrollable in the city, even with its chains and prisons. The fact that in the wilds Jesus had removed all the obstacles to the man living in equality with all the rest of them proved unacceptable.

3.4 LUKE 9:7-22—HEROD PERPLEXED, 5000 EAT, AND THE DISCIPLES RESPOND

The Lukan contrast between the wilderness and the οἰκουμένη is found next in the sequence of incidents in Luke 9:7-22, which include: Herod's perplexity regarding the identity of

[133] Evans, *Luke*, 138.

Jesus (9:7-9), Jesus's miraculous feeding of more than 5000 (9:10-17), and the disciples' response to Jesus's question of identity (9:18-22). The sequence of these events provides an aesthetic structure which focuses the reader's attention first on a ruler in the οἰκουμένη who operates according to violent principals, then on a prophet in the wilderness who feeds a hungry crowd equally, and then finally on violent events that will transpire in and according to the rule of the οἰκουμένη.

Before looking closely at these events, it is necessary to discuss why the story of the miraculous feeding (Luke 9:10-17) should be considered a wilderness passage, because Luke's location of the miracle does present some initial confusion. Luke uses the same construction for the setting of the miraculous feeding as he does in Luke 4:42; it is ἐν ἐρήμῳ τόπῳ (9:12), a wilderness/deserted place. Yet the miraculous feeding's location has troubled Lukan scholars because immediately preceding the disciples' characterization of this "wilderness place," Luke narrates that this event takes place εἰς πόλιν καλουμένην Βηθσαϊδά, in a city called Bethsaida (9:10). Is this carelessness on Luke's part by inserting his own setting (the city of Bethsaida) while accidentally leaving Mark's location (a deserted place) in the story? While that is certainly a possibility, I here offer another feasible explanation.

Several textual variants attempt to alleviate the tension between the two (seemingly) antithetical places. Some change Luke's narration in 9:10 to "a wilderness spot" so that it agrees with the disciples' description later in the pericope.[134] Others alter Luke's πόλις (city) to κώμη (village); again, this corresponds to the disciples' idea to "send the crowds away to buy food in one of the "nearby" villages."[135] And while many witness attempt to alter information about the

[134] Sinaiticus, 1241, A.

[135] D Θ r^{1}

town or city, it is striking that there are no witnesses where the phrase ἐν ἐρήμῳ τόπῳ is completely omitted from v. 12. The best witnesses place the circumstances of Luke's miraculous feeding in both Bethsaida *and* in a wilderness place.[136] Why does Luke designate this place as both a desert place and a named city?

I suggest that the answer to this question is that Luke reads Mark's phrase ἐν ἐρήμῳ τόπῳ not as a specific location but as a *type* of space where such events as divine provision of bread occur. In fact, this is precisely how others have also read Mark:

> The thought of the New Testament writer (Mark) is not directed to the geographical disposition of the country, but to the memory of the basic action of God which took place in the wilderness in the course of Israel's history… ἐρῆμος is, therefore…not a certain locality…but the place of God's mighty acts, significant for all believers of all times and places.[137]

By placing his miracle in the city of Bethsaida but also in "a wilderness spot," Luke guides the reader to conclude that wilderness is not so much a geographical location as it is the type of space where the workings of the οἰκουμένη are upended and where God provides. That the wilderness is this kind of space is highlighted by the activities of the οἰκουμένη which Luke places before and after the multiplication of the bread and fish for the multitude: Herod's attempts to see Jesus and the crowds' hypothesis about Jesus's identity.

3.4.1 Οἰκουμένη—Brutal and Blind (Luke 9:7-9)

Mark juxtaposes two types of *feeding*: Herod hosts a banquet, and John's head ends up on a platter. Jesus, by contrast, feeds the people with bread. Luke, however, makes the kingship

[136] *Pace* Evans, *Luke*, 145. Evans claims that Luke "erases" the wilderness from Mark's story. However, as demonstrated above, none of the witnesses of Luke remove ἐν ἐρήμῳ τόπῳ from the story. The "erasure" then is only the interpreter's discomfort with Luke locating the story simultaneously in Bethsaida and a wilderness spot.

[137] Ulrich Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 14. While Mauser does not read Luke the same way as Mark, we may nonetheless inquire if Luke reads these wilderness themes faithfully from Mark.

explicit: Jesus teaches the kingdom of God in Luke 9:11 (which Mark does not mention), while Herod is noted as a ruler in 9:7 (although there is no mention of a banquet).

Luke demonstrates two contrasts between wilderness and οἰκουμένη. First, Luke contrasts Herod and Jesus as ruling according to two different principles. While Luke does not narrate the grisly details of the Baptist's last hours as does Mark, he does have Herod brutally and casually refer to John: "I beheaded him." Tannehill aptly comments: "His statement 'John I beheaded' shows the audience how he treats meddlesome prophets, and those familiar with the traditional theme of conflict between prophets and rulers."[138] In a literary sense, this conflict is embodied in the settings of prophets and rulers: palaces and prisons opposite the wilderness. It is not surprising then that Herod's wondering who Jesus is, Herod's becoming suspicious of this prophet, is followed by a snapshot of Jesus in the wilderness. Apparently, there is nothing quite so threatening to a king in a palace as a prophet in the desert.[139]

Second, the motif of sight comes into play. Luke tells us that, in an attempt to salve his curiosity, "Herod tried to see Jesus" (9:9). The sight motif observed in Luke 3:6—that in the wilderness all flesh will see God's salvation—is here inverted, as one of the rulers of and in the οἰκουμένη lacks the ability literally to see Jesus. Later (and only in Luke's gospel), Jesus is sent to Herod during his trial before his crucifixion, and Luke continues to play on the motif of sight:

> When *Herod saw Jesus*, he was very glad, for he had been wanting *to see him* for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping *to see him* perform some sign. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies (Luke 23:8-12, italics mine).

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[138] Tannehill, *Luke*, 153-154.

[139] González, *Luke,* 114.

Herod may indeed see Jesus literally, but he does not recognize or acknowledge who the reader understands Jesus to be. In reference to the aesthetic difference of οἰκουμένη versus the wilderness, the οἰκουμένη has many obstructions to seeing God's workings, whereas in the wilderness more than 5000 people see Jesus offer bread from heaven.

As Luke listed Herod and Pilate as ruling members of the οἰκουμένη in 3:1-2, here they show the character of their rule: it is blind to God's rule. It also demonstrates the truth of what the devil tells Jesus in Luke 4:6, that the οἰκουμένη has been given over to the demonic and all systems in the human world serve the devil. Herod wants to see Jesus for his own reasons, but ultimately despises him. Pilate finds no guilt with Jesus but ultimately hands him over. The religious leaders have no proof against Jesus but ultimately condemn him. Representatives from each stratum of the οἰκουμένη perhaps unknowingly but nevertheless wholeheartedly obey the devil's mandate to destroy the Son of God and his wilderness kingdom.

3.4.2 Wilderness—Kingdom Bread for "All the People" (Luke 9:10-17)

3.4.2.1 Evoking Israel's Past

The bread Jesus would not provide for himself during his own sojourn in the wilderness is now offered to all who hear him proclaim the kingdom of God. In this instance, the events in a wilderness spot clearly echo Israel's past experiences with God. The giving of manna occurs in the wilderness, where the people of Israel cannot procure food for themselves nor can anyone else (such as their former Egyptian overlords). Jesus's miraculous banquet mimics the divine provision of manna in the Exodus story (Exod 16:4), but it also complicates it. Jesus at the same time is cast as "a prophet like Moses" and as the divine presence itself.[140] David Tiede suggests that the feeding story thus told answers the question asked by the psalmist who specifically

[140] Johnson, *Luke*, 149.

reflects on the exodus story: "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?" (LXX Ps 77:19).[141]

In addition to the miraculous supply of food in a desolate place, the twelve baskets and twelve disciples also evoke Israel's twelve tribes, the whole congregation. Although all four gospels recount the story of the 5000, Luke alone divides the congregation into groups of fifty, which also suggests the organization of the people in the wilderness with Moses (18:21).

This story may in fact *intensify* the Exodus manna story (Exod 16). In the wilderness of Exodus, God instructed the people to take what they needed, but not to have any leftovers or purposely save any for later (Exod 16:19). When the people do attempt to preserve the manna, it rots and breeds worms (Exod 16:20). The fact that Jesus provides bread and that the leftovers are gathered and celebrated makes this wilderness event even more abundant that its predecessor and without any undertones of scarcity.

3.4.2.2 Universal Salvation

In addition to Israel's past experience in the wilderness, this passage also highlights the egalitarian dimensions found in the wilderness but not found in the οἰκουμένη. Like the parallel synoptic texts (Mark 6:30-44; Matt 14:13-21), Luke concludes that "all ate and were filled" (9:17). But unlike the parallels, only Luke situates this miracle in the context of Jesus "speaking about the kingdom of God" (9:11). We might then consider the miracle of the bread and fish as the object lesson, the continuation of his teaching about the kingdom of God. Jesus not only speaks to them about the kingdom, but also provides a tangible example of how it functions: everyone sits down together in equal groups and "all ate and were filled."

Additionally, Luke changes the reply of the disciples to read, "We have no more than five

[141] David Tiede, *Luke*, 180.

loaves and two fishes, unless we are to go buy food for *all these people*" (9:13).[142] While this is likely a rhetorical edit to communicate the vastness of the crowd and the overwhelm of the disciples, it also demonstrates Luke's penchant for "every" and "all" that displays his theological focus on universal salvation as was particularly noticeable in the first two chapters of Luke (1:10; 2:10; 2:31). Joel Green summarizes the equalizing effect of this meal scene:

> Here are thousands of people, an undifferentiated mass of people, some undoubtedly unclean, others clean, some more faithful regarding the law, others less so…Such concerns are so lacking from this scene that we might miss the extraordinary character of this meal…No attempt has been made by Jesus and the twelve, this representation of the renewal of Israel, to preserve the social boundaries that characterize first-century Jewish life.[143]

Green's words make explicit the removal of obstruction or hindrance to accessing God's salvation, the removal of which is implicit in this story. And although this feeding story is told by all four gospel writers, Luke's unique touches (including the material that sandwiches this story) allow this story to factor into his aesthetic differentiation of the wilderness and the οἰκουμένη. Between these two subtle changes—adding "the kingdom of God" once again to a wilderness scene (see 4:42-44) and referencing "all these people"—on Luke's part, wilderness again facilitates the ideal civilization, a kingdom of God, where all the people are given equal access to that which nourishes, heals, and saves.

3.4.3 Οἰκουμένη—"Crowds and Kings" (Luke 9:18-20)

3.4.3.1 Who Do the Crowds Say I Am? (9:18-19)

Luke alone has the disciples connect Jesus with John the Baptist directly after the feeding of the five thousand. What is particularly noteworthy is that Jesus asks the disciples whom the

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[142] Mark's disciples reply: They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" (Mark 6:37) and Matthew's disciples: They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." (Matt 14:17).

[143] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 365.

crowds (οἱ ὄχλοι) think Jesus is. the disciples answer in similar verbiage and in the same order as Herod does right before the multiplication in 9:10-17.

> Herod says: Ἰωάννης ἠγέρθη ἐκ νεκρῶν, ὑπό τινων δὲ ὅτι Ἠλίας ἐφάνη, ἄλλων δὲ ὅτι προφήτης τις τῶν ἀρχαίων ἀνέστη. (9:7-8)
>
> Crowds say: Ἰωάννην τὸν βαπτιστήν, ἄλλοι δὲ Ἠλίαν, ἄλλοι δὲ ὅτι προφήτης τις τῶν ἀρχαίων ἀνέστη. (9:19)

By altering the story about Herod and repeating Herod's theories about Jesus on the lips of the speculating crowds, Luke makes a fundamental statement about how the οἰκουμένη dominates the minds and beliefs of those who live in it.[144] The crowds have received Jesus and continue to be receptive to his healing presence, and yet their thinking mimics Herod's. And indeed in Luke 23:4, both the chief priests *and the crowds* demand Jesus's death.[145]

This point brings the reader back to Luke's unusual location of the feeding in the wilderness but also simultaneously in Bethsaida. In the very chapter after the feeding, Jesus declares: "Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes" (Luke 10:13).[146] In Luke's narrative, the only deed of power that Jesus does in Bethsaida is the miraculous feeding just reported by Luke.[147] The wilderness as setting for the feeding miracle therefore

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[144] Mark and Matthew both use ἄνθρωποι (humans, people) in reference to "who do the people say I am" but both use crowd in the passion narrative when the people demand Jesus's death. Luke makes a theological statement by using crowd for both scenes.

[145] Robyn Whitaker, "A Failed Spectacle: The Role of the Crowd in Luke 23" in *Biblical Interpretation* 25 (2017): 399-416. Mark records how the religious leaders "stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas instead" (Mark 15:11), but Luke joins the crowds and the high priests as a single entity with no introduction of the crowds beforehand.

[146] Matthew also uses this decree (Matt 11:20-24), however, this curse is Matthew's only reference to Bethsaida.

[147] This is a deviation from Mark who does not include the curse on Bethsaida, but does locate Jesus's healing of a blind man there (Mark 8:22).

indicates the unobstructed and equal sharing of divine provision; the city Bethsaida indicates why that miracle's effect on the crowd could not last indefinitely. Flanked between the two negative images of death for God's prophets by the οἰκουμένη (Luke 9:7-9 and Luke 9:18-22), the wilderness embodies life and bread. As such, Luke's arrangement makes clear the contrasting aesthetics of the wilderness and the οἰκουμένη.

3.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, several noteworthy observations emerge regarding the reader's understanding of the wilderness. First, I have pointed out two passages where the wilderness is directly connected with the kingdom of God (Luke 4:42-44 and Luke 9:10-17). While on one hand scholars have been reluctant to see the wilderness as an important theme in Luke-Acts, on the other hand the kingdom of God is indeed a well-established and recognized Lukan theme.[148] The link between the two therefore strengthens my hypothesis that the wilderness functions as an hermeneutical lens with which to read Luke's story. It also makes it more plausible that the kingdom of God and the wilderness share an aesthetic—one that communicates the unhindered equality of all people accessing God's salvation.

Second, I have also pointed out that in many of these wilderness passages, the link between Jesus and John the Baptist continues to be strengthened. This also strengthens the connection between the wilderness (where the Baptist ministered) and wherever Jesus ministers. The space around John and the space around Jesus seem to share an aesthetic of unhindered and equal salvation for all who draw near to it. By contrast, the οἰκουμένη consistently proves to be a place so engineered as to obstruct the view of God's salvation, imprison human beings, and work

[148] Karl Allen Kuhn, *The Kingdom According to Luke and Acts: A Social, Literary, and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).

acts of violence in the pursuit and preservation of power. I use the word "engineered" intentionally, as Luke frequently points to the systems and hierarchies which effect these actions of bondage.

Third, Luke solidly connects the wilderness with Israel's past experiences of God in two of the stories explored—Luke 3:23-4:13 and Luke 9:10-17. Clearly, Luke's aesthetic portrait of the wilderness relies on scriptural tradition; however, Luke *unfailingly* connects the wilderness to his theme of universal salvation. Luke traces Jesus back to Adam. The gospel is equally preached to all places. The gentile demoniac is saved. The entire multitude is fed as a depiction of the kingdom of God with the twelve serving. We may conclude that Luke uses the evocation of Israel's past experience in the wilderness *in service to* his theme of universal salvation.

Luke's theme of universal salvation comes into sharper focus in his sequel to the gospel, the Acts of the Apostles. In this second volume, the early Christian community expands both in terms of geography—from Jerusalem to the utter ends of the known world—and in terms of populations to include both Jews and Gentiles. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how the wilderness plays a thematic role in Acts, particularly in Luke's portrayal of Israel's past and in his portrayal of possibilities for the future salvation of "all peoples."

CHAPTER FOUR: ACTS' WILDERNESS SCENE AND ITS NARRATIVE IMPACT

4.1 INTRODUCTION

While the wilderness aesthetic—I argue—is certainly present in Acts, it does present itself in some different ways from the Gospel. One major reason for this change is that while Luke relies on Mark's story for the majority of the gospel wilderness episodes. When Luke writes Acts he is on his own, writing a story no one else has attempted and with no discernable sources regarding the "Acts of the Apostles" such as he used Mark when composing his own gospel.

In the last chapter, I demonstrated how Luke consistently showcases the wilderness as a symbol of universal salvation—a place which boasts an open and unhindered aesthetic, where all people can see God's salvation. For example, Luke placed his gentile demoniac in "the wilds" to be saved by Jesus (Luke 8:26-39), and in several of his wilderness passages, Luke uses language of πᾶς to gesture toward the inclusivity of the gospel preached in the wilderness (Luke 3:1-6; 4:42-44; 9:10-17). Jesus's genealogy is traced back to Adam—both as the son of God and the representative of all humanity—while the reader narratively follows Jesus from his baptism in the Jordan to the wilderness temptation (Luke 3:38).

Luke often uses scripture to show how Israel's past was proleptic of salvation for all people within—and not foreign to or outside the scope of—God's relationship with Israel. I demonstrated how Luke combined wilderness scenes with extensive scripture quotations (Luke 3:1-6; 4:1-13) and how he alluded to the Exodus narrative by intentionally situating the manna-like feeding of the five thousand in a wilderness place (Luke 9:10-17).

Moreover, I substantiated how this wilderness aesthetic (intimately linked to the kingdom of God in Luke) functions in direct contrast to the οἰκουμένη. The aesthetic of the οἰκουμένη is

consistently evidenced in demonstrations of power, violence, and imprisonment. Thus, the action of Herod in response to the wilderness presence of the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 3:19-20; 9:7-9) and the responses of both Capernaum that wanted to commandeer Jesus (4:42-44) and the city in the region of the Gerasenes which feared Jesus and demanded he leave (8:34-37). This contrast between the wilderness and the οἰκουμένη continues even as Luke continues his story into Acts.

At first, it may not seem as if the wilderness with its aesthetic plays an important role in Acts since it has only one wilderness scene in its whole storyline: the baptism of an Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-39). Even if this solitary wilderness vignette proves important, one might still be inclined to view the wilderness itself as less thematically important in Acts than it was in Luke's gospel. I will show, however, that the wilderness aesthetic extends itself beyond the geographical desert and individual lexical entries. In addition, the fact that Luke crafts a unique wilderness story of his own demonstrates the importance with which he regards the wilderness stories he inherited.

First, I consider the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-39 to show how it resonates with the themes of universal salvation, which is supported by allusions to and quotations from Israel's scripture. Then, I look at the passages preceding and following the baptism of the eunuch, wherein Saul persecutes the church, again in order to show that the wilderness and its aesthetic of unhindered salvation once again clashes with the οἰκουμένη aesthetic of hindrance and violence.

Second, in an excursus, I demonstrate how Stephen's speech functions as a rhetorical examination of the contrast between the wilderness and the οἰκουμένη.

4.2 PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH (ACTS 8:26-39)

At first, the only wilderness scene in Acts appears be oddly unconnected to the rest of the Acts narrative. Luke lists a string of nominatives describing a person with an unusual (and unrepeated identity): he was an ἀνὴρ (a man), Αἰθίοψ (an Ethiopian), εὐνοῦχος (a eunuch), δυνάστης Κανδάκης (a court official of Candace) all in unbroken succession (8:27). These nominative descriptors are followed by equally unlikely verbs: ἐληλύθει προσκυνήσων εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ (he had come to worship in Jerusalem) and ἀνεγίνωσκεν τὸν προφήτην Ἡσαΐαν (he was reading the prophet Isaiah).

Unlike the conversion of Cornelius, the Ethiopian eunuch and his baptism is never referred to in the rest of the narrative, no other character repeats this story, and there is no audience in the narrative to witness the actions of this story because its setting is remote and seemingly random. It is therefore essential to remember that for the reader to perceive Luke's aesthetic, it is only necessary for the *reader* to know about this story. The fact that no one else in the Acts narrative is aware of the assignation on the desert road does not alter the reader's ability to see the aesthetic effect the eunuch's baptism has on the reading of the Acts story as a whole. In fact, the oddness of its setting, characters, and events is precisely what makes it so foundational for the rest of the baptism stories Acts—the very ambiguity of Acts 8:26-39 allows for later events to find precedence in it. As the wilderness scenes in the gospel invariably displayed a stark contrast with the aesthetic of the οἰκουμένη, so I show that both before and after it, the wilderness of Acts 8 displays the antithesis of the οἰκουμένη and its aesthetic of power, suppression, and violence. Indeed, this contrast is sustained throughout the Acts narrative even until its final sentence.

4.2.1 Wilderness

Luke uses the same themes and motifs as shown in his other wilderness scenes: an

evoking of Israel's past wilderness experiences with God as recalled through scripture and an emphasis on universal salvation through the aesthetic of openness and unhindered proclamation.

4.2.1.1 Evoking Israel's Past

As I concluded in the last chapter, Luke has a penchant for allusions to the Septuagint and Israel's history that serve his larger program of universal salvation. Luke has the story of the eunuch evoke Israel's past by means of three scriptural motifs: 1) explicit recitation of or allusions to the prophets (particularly Isaiah), 2) prophetic narratives from Israel's Elijah/Elisha tradition, and 3) motifs of the exodus story.

Isaiah 56:3-8. Luke's story of a God-worshipping eunuch recalls the eschatological vision of LXX Isaiah 56:3-8 in several ways. Four aspects of the story about the eunuch and his baptism appear as a narrative realization of Isaiah 53 and its unlikely but nonetheless accepted worshipper.

First, Isaiah declares that the eunuch must not describe himself as "a dry tree" (56:3). Indeed, Isaiah frequently demonstrates the transformation of Israel from punishment to blessing by employing imagery of dry places being supernaturally blessed with water (Isa 35:7; 43:19; 44:3), and vice versa (42:15). Luke renders such a transformation in narrative form by recording the eunuch's baptism. In fact, Luke repeats the word water (ὕδωρ) three times in three consecutive verses (Acts 8:36-38), highlighting the "surprise of water in the wilderness" motif of Isaiah (Isa 35:1; 43:19; 50:2).

The eunuch's baptism therefore also fulfills the prophet's words from Isaiah 56 that speak to the aspect of inheritance:

> To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give—in my house and within my walls—a place of honor, better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name, and it will not be incomplete (56:4-5).

Luke further demonstrates this "coming in" by writing that the two men go down εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, "into the water" of baptism (Acts 8:38), a symbol of coming into the believing community. In fact, later Paul and Barnabas refer to Gentile baptism as a θύραν πίστεως, "a door of faith" (Acts 14:27). In Acts therefore the metaphor of Gentiles "coming in" refers more to their inclusion in God's people than to them geographically entering Israel.

Second, Isaiah's description also casts the unlikely worshipper as a foreigner, but one who devotedly pursues godliness: keeping sabbath, loving God, maintaining covenant loyalty, and making sacrifices (56:6-7). In response to such fidelity, God promises the a foreign worshipper covenant blessings: "an everlasting name," an acceptance of their offerings, and a place in the Lord's service (56:6-7). Luke certainly casts the Ethiopian as such a "stranger," as he not only travels an extravagant distance to worship in Jerusalem, but is also reading Israel's scripture on the way home.

Third, Isaiah explicitly describes eunuchs coming to Jerusalem to worship (as this one has already done) also in terms of gathering in the diaspora: εἶπεν Κύριος ὁ συνάγων τοὺς διεσπαρμένους Ἰσραήλ, "says the Lord who gathers the scattered Israel" (56:8).[149] His description specifically as an Ethiopian—especially one who travels to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel—also recalls Zephaniah 3:10: "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, my scattered ones (διεσπαρμένοις), shall bring my offering."[150] The notion of gathering in the

[149] The theme of gathering the dispersed is introduced at the beginning of the Acts narrative by the final words of Jesus that his disciples are to be witnesses to "the ends of the earth" (1:8). They are then echoed by Peter in his proclamation at Pentecost: "for the promise is for you, and your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:39).

[150] See also the temple's dedication prayer offered by Solomon: "Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name—for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm—when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked

diaspora fits with Philip's preaching journey since the beginning of Acts 8 describes the "scattering" (διασπείρω) of the Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).

Fourth, Isaiah writes that God says, καὶ εὐφρανῶ αὐτοὺς, "I will make them glad" (56:7), αὐτοὺς referring to eunuchs and aliens who seek to worship God. Clearly, Luke has made the leading role of his scene both a eunuch and an alien. And at the end of the pericope, the foreign eunuch ἐπορεύετο γὰρ τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ χαίρων, "he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). Isaiah's motif of dry places becoming abundant with water also connects to the unexpected association of the desert with rejoicing (35:2; 42:11). Not only is the wilderness miraculously provided with water, but this provision transforms the desert into a place of celebration. Luke's eunuch not only refers back to Isaiah, but also ahead to other stories of salvation, as the act of rejoicing, celebrating, and praising God with gladness is a consistent feature—particularly regarding the salvation of the Gentiles throughout Acts (11:18, 23; 13:47-48; 15:3, 31; 16:33-34; 19:17; 21:19-20).[151]

Isaiah 53:7-8. As to the explicit quotation of the prophets, the very heart of the story is the shared reading of Isaiah 53:7-8 and the subsequent exchange between Philip and the Ethiopian. The "good news of Jesus" is preached precisely on the basis of this text of scripture. Isaiah 53 and his suffering servant trope is one of the most ambiguous passages in Isaiah, leaving the reader with questions as to the identity of the servant, the identity of the oppressors, and the reason God would opt for his servant to be so afflicted. The open-endedness of Isaiah's prophecy is appropriate to this deeply ambiguous encounter: "The Servant is depicted as somebody who is dishonored, pierced (or wounded), humiliated and cut off from the land of the living and

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on this house that I have built." (1 Kings 8:41-43)

[151] For more on joy/rejoicing as a Lukan motif, see J. Lyle Story, *Joyous Encounters: Discovering the Happy Affections in Luke-Acts* (New York: A Herder and Herder Book, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2018).

vindicated."[152] As such, the Suffering Servant not only sounds like Jesus, but the eunuch as well. He is a figure also suffering an assumed physical lack, rejection from the formal assembly of Israel, and a lack of personal honor commonly attributed to men in the ancient world.

I have established that Luke "reads around" his quotations from the Old Testament, meaning that he knows and understands the context of the citations he uses.[153] It is reasonable therefore to assume that Luke is familiar with the entire Suffering Servant passage which begins with the questions, "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (LXX Isaiah 53:1). This entire story of the Ethiopian eunuch answers those very questions and sets a narrative precedent for the possibility of faith.

In the next few verses, the servant is compared to "a root in a dry land" (53:2) in order to indicate the servant's humble appearance and manner. He is not like a large flowering shrub or a verdant garden, but instead is gnarled and tough. The image of "a root in a dry land" sounds quite similar to Isaiah's reference to how eunuchs might usually be described, as "a dry tree" (56:3). Like the eunuch, the servant figure is assumed to be cut off from posterity: "whom shall declare his generation?" (53:8).

And yet, for both the eunuch and the servant, the unlikeliest event—the continuation of a family line—is nonetheless promised because of their faithfulness.[154] Just as the eunuch is promised a place in a family "better than sons and daughters" and "an everlasting name" (56:5), so the servant of God can expect many descendants in righteousness and an inheritance (53:12) because of his willing sacrifice on behalf of others. This is further underscored by the fact that

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[152] Bart Koet, "Isaiah in Luke-Acts," in *Isaiah in the New Testament*, 88.

[153] Further demonstrating Luke's knowledge of the context of the verses which he does quote, Luke includes another quotation from Isaiah 53:12 in his gospel: "He was counted among the lawless" (Luke 22:37).

[154] David Blathernick, "The Ethiopian Eunuch," in *The Servant of God in Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 88.

the servant in Isaiah 53 is most widely understood not as one figure, but as the community which serves God faithfully in the midst of difficulty and persecution.[155] In some sense, the story of the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion and baptism narrates another descendent added to the suffering servant, a growing of the faithful community. Philip's preaching Jesus to the eunuch on the basis of Isaiah 53, therefore, need not mean that Philip merely interprets Jesus as the lone suffering servant of Isaiah. Rather, the eunuch's request for baptism—inclusion in a community of believers—makes far more sense if the servant is interpreted as not only Jesus, but Jesus and the entire Christian community.

Finally, the question that opens Isa 53 is ultimately one about sight—"to whom has it been *revealed* (ἀποκαλύπτω)?" This question is once again ironically also answered by Isaiah 56 and its inclusion of the righteous eunuchs: "for my salvation is near to come and my mercy to be revealed (ἀποκαλύπτω)" (56:1). The wilderness in Acts is still a place of unobstructed sight of God's salvation just as prophesied in Luke's initial wilderness scene: "and all flesh will see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6).

In conclusion to this section on the prominence of the prophetic writings—particularly Isaiah—in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, the function of the Isaiah presence must be addressed. Curt Niccum observes the scholarly tendency to interpret the Ethiopian as a means of the gospel spreading "to the ends of the earth" (Jesus's statement in Acts 1:8) as he is on his way home when this story begins. Rather, Niccum sees this story as the eschatological fulfillment of Isaiah's vision of formerly excluded people and peoples welcomed into God's family. In other words, the baptism of the eunuch signals what has happened in Jesus the Messiah (thus the events of the Messianic era suggested by Isaiah) more than it signals what will happen in the

[155] Andrew Parker, "The Servant in Deutero-Isaiah," in *The Servant of God in Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 48.

Acts narrative geographically.[156]

The desert between Africa and the "Promised Land." The location of the man on his journey evokes the Exodus story. The Ethiopian has already traveled from Ethiopia to Jerusalem, and is now on his way from Jerusalem toward home. His moving through the wilderness between Jerusalem and Africa certainly seems to recall the Exodus narrative, but at the time of the story, he is moving in the opposite direction as did the Hebrews after leaving Egypt. The space of the wilderness recalls the exodus but not the trajectory of the traveler; or so it seems. I argue that while the eunuch may be "going out" of Israel geographically, he is symbolically "coming in." The Exodus story, while beginning in the "going out" of Egypt, is ultimately about being included in the inheritance of the promised land and the reception of God's law.[157]

There appears to be a miraculous (or at least surprising) supply of water at just the time it was needed. This evokes the miraculous supply of water through the intervention of Moses (Exodus 15:25; 17:6)[158] and recalls the transformation of the wilderness as unexpectedly abundant with water in the prophetic words of Isaiah (35:6; 41:18; 43:19-20). The possibility that Luke intends the water to be a miraculous appearance is strengthened by his parenthetical statement, "this is a desert road" (8:26). The surprising appearance of water is further underscored by the fact that there is no conversational lead-up to the water. Luke does not narrate Philip prescribing—or even mentioning—baptism at all. In this story, we might read the Ethiopian's water for baptism as being miraculously provided—especially considering that the Holy Spirit is the one who explicitly directs Philip to this lonesome location and this particular

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[156] Curt Niccum, "One Ethiopian is Not the End of the World: The Narrative Function of Acts 8:26-40," in *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam*, Vol 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 894-899.

[157] Joshua Mann, "The (New) Exodus in Luke and Acts: An Appeal for Moderation," in *Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture*, 95-96.

[158] Pervo, *Acts*, 226.

person.

The Elijah/Elisha Tradition. Many interpreters note the similarities between Luke's story of Philip baptizing the eunuch and the story of Naaman and the prophet Elisha in 2 Kings 5.[159] The literary connection between these stories is strengthened since Luke has already alluded to Naaman and Elisha previously, and has it play a major role in Jesus's inaugural—and ill-received—sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:25-27). Between the stories of Naaman/Elisha and Ethiopian/Philip, three major commonalities are observed.

First, both the eunuch and Naaman are foreign dignitaries with a physical defect that would otherwise disallow them from community with Israel (leprosy and castration). In other words, both men are seen as Gentiles (already "unclean" in relation to Jews by means of being uncircumcised), and both are physically deformed even for Gentiles.[160] Yet, both venture to Israel seeking an experience that can be had nowhere else.

Second, both dignitaries are riding in chariots when they encounter the prophet figure. While in both stories the image of the chariot surely distinguishes between the social and economic status of the wealthy officials and the prophets, the function of chariot is different. In 2 Kings, Naaman arrives in front of Elisha's house "with horse and chariot" (2 Kings 5:9). This narrative point is understood when Naaman becomes irate that Elisha merely instructs him to go bathe in the inferior water of the Jordan. Naaman declares,

> Ἰδοὺ (Behold!) I said, he will by all means come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of his god, and lay his hands upon the place, and recover the leper" (LXX 4 Kingdoms 5:11).

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[159] See Etienne Trocmé, *Le Livre des Acts et l'Histoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires du France, 1957); F. Scott Spencer, *The Portrait of Philip in Acts* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Thomas Brodie, "Towards Unraveling the Rhetorical Imitation of Sources in Acts: 2 Kings 5 as One Component of Acts 8:9-40," *Biblica* 67 (1986): 41-67 and *The Crucial Bridge: The Elijah-Elisha Narrative as an Interpretive Synthesis of Genesis-Kings and a Literary Model of the Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000); John Kloppenborg (ed), *The Elijah-Elisha Narrative in the Composition of Luke* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

[160] Spencer, *The Portrait of Philip in Acts*, 138.

Naaman feels entitled to a more dramatic and "hands-on" treatment given his status and his journey to the prophet. A man who rolls up with horse and chariot, an official letter to the king, and money to spend on elaborate gifts does not go wash in the muddy Jordan without so much as a prophetic ritual. Nevertheless, he does. The Ethiopian, by contrast, not only invites Philip into the chariot to sit down (as opposed to Naaman's demanding the prophet "stand"), but when they come upon water, he too says, Ἰδοὺ, and asks to be baptized.

Third, both men go through a form of baptism (LXX uses βαπτίζω for Naaman's submersion), albeit under different circumstances and for different reasons. Naaman seeks cleansing from leprosy. The eunuch seeks inclusion in the believing community. Elisha instructs Naaman to go wash himself in the Jordan, which Naaman's (reluctant) obedience to God's prophet suffices to purify him. But because the eunuch of Acts 8 seeks inclusion, Luke narrates the baptism differently than just submersion for the eunuch. Philip descends with the eunuch into the water (καὶ κατέβησαν ἀμφότεροι εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ) and comes out of the water with him as well (ἀνέβησαν ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος). While the eunuch is baptized by Philip, the description of the actions of both men going down into and coming up out of the water intimates that they share the experience.[161] That Luke finds this meaningful is expressed by his insertion between the two actions: ὅ τε Φίλιππος καὶ ὁ εὐνοῦχος. Thus, Luke's story not only demonstrates the eunuch's conversion, it also demonstrates an expansion of the believing community through the actions of Philip.

[161] Burke, *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch*, 137. Burke argues that the ambiguity of the words ἐβάπτισεν αὐτόν ("he baptized him") leaves the baptizer and baptized undefined and so both—in a sense—baptize each other. This seems very unlikely and besides, it is an unnecessary interpretation. The text already narrates a meaningful experience by how it not only describes the actions of both men as going down into and coming out of the water together, but Luke emphasizes this by inserting ὅ τε Φίλιππος καὶ ὁ εὐνοῦχος between them going down into and coming up out of the water.

4.2.1.2 Universal Salvation

Ambiguous Identity. The ambiguity of the encounter between Philip and the official invites considerations of Luke's theme of universal salvation. The man's identity as "a man, an Ethiopian, and a eunuch" poses questions without answers. His description as both a man and as a eunuch complicates the story. Burke notes how the ancient status of eunuchs made them a "third kind"—neither fully male or female—in order for them to both move in between the genders and not destabilize either gender.[162] The fact that Luke describes him as both a man and a eunuch therefore confounds the usual categories. No other biblical mention of eunuchs describes them as men.

While Luke tells us that he went to Jerusalem to worship (which has prompted suggestions of his proselyte standing), the possibility that he has been circumcised is not likely (which would rule out having been made a full Jewish convert). On one hand, he is in possession of Jewish scrolls which also suggests devotion, but on the other hand he lacks interpretive knowledge about them. As such, he is clearly a Gentile, but certainly an odd Gentile who makes arduous pilgrimages to worship in Jerusalem and carries Jewish scrolls in his chariot.

As previously discussed, many scholars have wondered if this man could be a Jewish proselyte,[163] but when Peter preaches his Pentecost sermon and Luke catalogs the nations present via Jewish and proselytes, Ethiopia is not listed as one of the countries which finds Jewish (born

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[162] Sean Burke, *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch: Strategies of Ambiguity in Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 109.

[163] Conzelmann writes that Luke has left the eunuch's religious identity a mystery because Luke could not reconcile the eunuch as a proselyte (given Deut 23:1) nor as a gentile (given the primacy of Cornelius's conversion in Acts 10). Conzelmann's conclusion, however, is determined by his belief that Luke relies on another source for his eunuch narrative. *Acts of the Apostles*, 68. See also Henchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 314. Other scholars read the eunuch as a Gentile and not a Jewish convert. See Gaventa, *Acts*, 143. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 175.

or converted) representation (Acts 2:5-11).[164] In the Acts 2 list, Luke specifies Ἰουδαῖοί τε καὶ προσήλυτοι, "Jews and proselytes" (2:11) as the audience to whom Peter preaches. Later, in the institution of deacons, Luke again makes the status of convert explicit by describing Nichalaus as προσήλυτον Ἀντιοχέα, "proselyte of Antioch" (6:5). So if Luke means the eunuch to be understood as a proselyte, he had narrative precedence for using that term. He does not, however, and so the closest narrative description to a eunuch reading scripture and going to worship in Jerusalem is Cornelius, who is clearly a Gentile: "He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God" (10:2).

As both a eunuch and a court official, is he a slave or a free person? If he is a slave, is he Ethiopian by birth or by ownership? It is as if Luke the author took all the possibilities of converts to Christianity—Jews and gentiles, males and females, free people and slaves, citizens and foreigners—and wrapped them into one character. In this one character all flesh finds representation…and baptism.[165]

When the Ethiopian official asks, "what hinders me from being baptized?," Burke notes that there were *many* things which the audience of Luke-Acts could have identified as hindrances to the Ethiopian's baptism.[166] The eunuch may have left the temple in Jerusalem without being fully allowed to enter its precincts and without fully being accepted as a Law follower—one simply cannot know. Eunuchs were not permitted in the temple proper (ναός) due to the purity restrictions given in Torah: "No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord" (Deut 23:1).

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[164] "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs." (Acts 2:9-11)

[166] Burke, *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch*, 137.

Further evidence for the "unhindered" nature of this encounter in the wilderness is the variety of textual variants concerning the lack of impediments to the eunuch's baptism. Several manuscripts attempt to add some type of stipulation, such as: "believe with your whole heart,"[167] or "believe Jesus the Messiah is the son of God"[168] and "you will be saved."[169] And yet, the majority of witnesses to the text—and also the best—insist that there is no appropriate verbal response to "what prevents me?" Such a weighty question and such a response recalls the moment Jesus announced that the kingdom of God must go to all the other cities in Luke 4:42-44. It signals a decisive moment on which the universality of the gospel depends. The fact that nothing hinders a foreign eunuch from baptism means that nothing hinders anyone.

Further drawing attention to the ambiguity, every one of the three direct statements made by the eunuch to Philip takes the form of a question, thus highlighting the open and unsettled character of the setting and the situation:

> So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, ***"How can I, unless someone guides me?"*** (v. 30-31)

> The eunuch asked Philip, ***"About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"*** Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. (v. 34-35)

> As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, ***"Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?"*** (v. 36)

Apart from these direct quotations, the text merely narrates the eunuch "inviting Philip into the chariot" (8:31) and "commanding the driver to stop" (8:38). By representing the Ethiopian

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[167] 2818, 323

[168] Codex Laudianus (E), 323. 453. 945. 1739. 1891. 2818. Scholarly consensus reads these phrases as later additions, particularly in order to harmonize the experience of the Ethiopian eunuch with the conversion and baptism of the Philippian jailor in Acts 16.

[169] Codex Laudianus

through his questions and through the nature of his questions, Luke portrays him as the ideal seeker: asking for guidance from a spirit-filled teacher, seeking instruction about Jesus of Nazareth, and requesting baptism. The church's tasks of teaching scripture, the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus, and baptism as acceptance in the community are all represented in this one exchange between evangelist and convert. We can see a similar structure in Acts 2:16-42 (Peter's scripture-laden sermon, proclamation of Jesus's death and resurrection, and the subsequent baptism of thousands).

Another way this story presents the wilderness aesthetic through universal salvation is in the neutralizing of certain identity markers. Viewed in terms of the οἰκουμένη, both Philip and the eunuch hold power unpermitted the other. In Candace's court, the eunuch possesses economic and political power and is himself a member in a hierarchy not unlike the one described by Luke 3:1-2. In that world, Philip would be regarded as merely a homeless prophet with an implausible resurrection story about yet another homeless preacher. By contrast, in Jerusalem, Philip would be admitted to the temple as a circumcised Jewish man, within the Jewish Christian movement he is a deacon of good standing (Acts 6:3-5). The Ethiopian, however, would be an unacceptable outsider on almost every count. These respective vestiges of power fall away on this wilderness road as the word is proclaimed. Neither man loses those particularities; the eunuch continues on the way he was going and Philip continues preaching the gospel in other places. On the wilderness road, though, such identity markers did not hinder fellowship in the good news of Jesus.

Not only are such markers neutralized, but the two men are joined in community. In the last section, I discussed how Luke stresses that both Philip and the eunuch descend into the water and come up out of it together. But Luke also suggests the creation of community in how he

recounts the Spirit's direction to Philip: "come and join (κολλάω) this chariot" (8:29). Elsewhere in Acts, the verb κολλάω indicates the joining together in community. Luke uses this word to describe the people watching the disciples perform signs and wonders: "none of the rest dared to join (κολλάω) them" (5:13). It is clear from the verses that follow that this "joining" means becoming part of the believing community (5:14-16). Luke uses κολλάω to describe Paul's attempt to join the Jerusalem church, even though they did not trust that he had become a true convert (9:26). When Paul preaches in Athens, some "joined (κολλάω) him and became believers" (17:34). In its most dramatic appearance, Peter uses κολλάω to refer to table fellowship with Cornelius, and then explains that God directed him to stay as Cornelius's guest:

> "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with (κολλάω) or be received as the guest of a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean" (10:28).

In all the uses of κολλάω, its meaning does not indicate a mere "meeting" but a uniting with in a common identity. In the act of joining this chariot, Philip signals a connection not just by meeting the eunuch, but of a joint identity shared by both.[170]

As I discussed in chapter two of this project, Luke associates the wilderness of Acts 8:26-39 with the wilderness of Israel's past experiences of God, both the narrative of the exodus and the exodus wilderness as reimagined by the prophet Isaiah. By doing so, Luke establishes a continuity between Israel's past (as experienced in the wilderness and recorded in scripture) and Israel's future (which includes Gentiles, eunuchs, and every possible identity).

4.2.3. Οἰκουμένη

Just as in the gospel, here in Acts Luke contrasts the unhindered aesthetic of the wilderness with the aesthetic found in the οἰκουμένη—that of hindrance and violence in order to

[170] Green, *Luke as Narrative Theologian*, 253. Green observes that community initiation is vital to the ritual of baptism both in regards to its repentance and prophetic aspect.

acquire and maintain power. Although not specifically naming the οἰκουμένη, Beverly Gaventa nevertheless captures my point precisely:

> The larger context of the Lukan journey also discloses forces arrayed in opposition to God. The Jerusalem religious authorities sometimes act out of their own sense of God's will, and sometimes out of mere jealousy. The Roman official Felix permits Paul to remain in jail in the hope of receiving a bribe. Opposition to God may sometimes appear in the church as well, as when Peter presumes to know for himself what food is clean and unclean, or when the Jerusalem believers demand circumcision for Gentile Christians.[171]

Essentially, Gaventa describes the inhabited world of human systems—be they religious, political, economic, or a combination thereof—and those systems are on display in Acts as the opposition to the Way which the reader knows was made in the wilderness.

4.2.3.1 Before the Eunuch's Baptism

Before the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, the believers in Jerusalem have been scattered, and Saul is "ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed (παραδίδωμι) them to prison" (Acts 8:3). The language of παραδίδωμι echoes the devil's claim in Luke's temptation scene (Luke 4:6) as well as Jesus's predictions of his death at the hands of the οἰκουμένη.

After this brief description of Saul's persecution of the church, Luke turns to the story of the dispersed Philip, Peter, and John in Samaria. Simon the magician offers the apostles money in exchange for tutelage in harnessing and distributing the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke's identifying him as a magician—one who harnesses the power of the supernatural—demonstrates how Simon considers the Christian movement to be an economic opportunity. For this reason, Peter curses him saying, "Because you thought you can buy God's gift with money" (8:20).

Peter then further describes Simon's condition thus: "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness" (Acts 8:23). Chains and bondage points to the aesthetic

[171] Gaventa, *Acts*, 26.

of the οἰκουμένη that imposes obstacles or hindrances to people seeing God's salvation.

In this instance, Luke restates the relationship between economic and religious power appears also in Luke's gospel. Only here, it is a temptation within the Christian community.[172] The same pattern of operating for which Jesus criticized the Pharisees (Luke 11:39-44; 16:14-15) now rears its head even in a "spirit-filled" community. The exploitation of religious power to gain economic power is therefore not specific to the Pharisees or any other Jewish sect, nor specific to any particular form of government. It is rather indicative of the οἰκουμένη itself, and it need not be formally or particularly connected to a religious or government hierarchy.

4.2.3.2 After the Eunuch's Baptism

After the eunuch's baptism story, Luke continues his (interrupted) account of Saul's violent imprisonment of Christians. He is said to be "breathing threats and murder." And he binds people, attempting to hinder the spread of the gospel. He does all this within a network of hierarchies signaled by the high priest, synagogues, and Jerusalem. Not only does Saul persecute the Christian community as an agent of the οἰκουμένη, he does so with the explicit approval of the rulers. The high priest sanctions Saul's doings with letters of recommendation. In Ananias's dialogue with the Lord regarding Saul, Ananias states that Saul "here has authority (ἐξουσία) to bind all who call on your name" (9:14). This ἐξουσία is the same that the devil offers to Jesus in Luke's temptation scene (Luke 4:6)—a recognized power in the οἰκουμένη that in turn perpetuates the hierarchies, imbalances, and obstructions that prevent people from seeing God's salvation.

Saul's opposition is specifically against "the Way"—Luke's term for the Christian community. The reader knows that this "way" was first introduced in the wilderness: "The voice

[172] For example, the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11.

of the one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord" (Luke 3:4). Later in Luke's narrative, Jesus refers back to John the Baptist and identifies him first as the one indicative of the wilderness and second as the one who prepared Jesus's way (Luke 7:24-27). This "Way" movement therefore brings a wilderness presence into the inhabited world of religious and social order. And this "Way" is not welcome.

There is an interesting shift we can see here, though. Saul himself is out of the city and on the road when he meets the risen Jesus, yet his mentality is firmly anchored in the οἰκουμένη. Saul is blinded and unable to regain his sight until he brought into the city. From this point on in Acts, evangelism in cosmopolitan cities of the Empire become small pockets of the wilderness itself, so much so that Paul is later mistaken to be a "wilderness prophet" himself (Acts 21:38). When Paul returns to Jerusalem, his presence in the temple and his testimony there to the gospel causes a mob to attempt his murder. The soldier who intervenes assumes Paul to be the crazed prophet who gathers insurrectionists into the wilderness. The soldier assumes this because, as a rule, wilderness prophets cause disruptions in the οἰκουμένη. Wild begets wild.

EXCURSUS: STEPHEN'S SPEECH, ARREST, AND EXECUTION (ACTS 6:8-7:60)

Through an epic display of *prosopopoiea*, Luke crafts a speech delivered by Stephen that has a distinctive place within Luke-Acts. Stephen's is the longest speech in Luke's entire narrative and the one in which Luke most extensively interprets scripture, thereby also elucidating his own entire two-volume work. An analysis of the speech is beneficial therefore, especially since the case I have been making about the contrast between the aesthetic of the wilderness and that of the οἰκουμένη is so clearly displayed within the speech.

Before the speech begins, Luke narrates that Stephen—after being ordained as one of the

Seven to serve the church community (6:5)—does great signs and wonders among the people (6:8), just as the Moses described in his speech. In addition, he is "full of grace and power" (6:8), and his skill as a wise and compelling debater draws ire from certain members of the synagogue (6:10). Luke therefore frames the speech as a contest between the prophetic impulse on one side (Stephen, in the image of Moses) and the power of the οἰκουμένη (represented by the religious authorities).

Luke is sure to name the hierarchies of the Jerusalem religious and political establishment as the self-made enemies of Stephen: synagogue members (6:9), the elders and scribes (6:12), the council (6:15), and the high priest (7:1). While this is not the gentile hierarchy of the Roman empire, Luke—as in the gospel—uses the same language of imprisonment associated with the Roman rulers and their military. They συναρπάζω Stephen, "seize him"—the same word used by Luke for the demonic activity of Legion (the demonic presence named for the Roman military in Luke 8). This aesthetic of power and violence is so pervasive that the crowd operates ὁμοθυμαδὸν, with one will or purpose (7:57).

As the speech concludes—even as Stephen rebukes them for resisting and persecution the prophets—they kill the prophet, Stephen. Luke therefore frames the entire speech by this narrative conflict between the one bearing the wilderness aesthetic, whose actions mirror the desert-man Moses, and the powers of the οἰκουμένη. Such conflict is not unlike what we have witnessed between John the Baptist versus Herod and Jesus versus Herod/Pilate/Sanhedrin. And indeed, this conflict has a similar outcome, the violent repression by the οἰκουμένη.

I begin by examining the accusations that the crowd levies against Stephen. The two accusations are: 1) that he refutes Moses's authority and 2) that he engages in an assault on the temple. I also show how Stephen's response to those accusations relates to Luke's larger

narrative.

Accusation #1: "Against Moses"

First, in regard to the mob's accusation, Stephen stands accused of desecrating Moses. Twice the false witnesses claim that Moses is the object of Stephen's scorn: first, "we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God" (6:11) and second, "we have heard him say Jesus of Nazareth…will change the customs that Moses handed on to us" (6:14). The first iteration of the accusation claims that Stephen gainsays Moses; the second accusation clarifies that Stephen does so by preaching the gospel of Jesus.

Not only in the speech, but in the narrative, the reader can be left with no other conclusion than that Luke has the highest regard for the law of Moses. Jesus is presented in the temple according to the law of Moses (Luke 2:22). Jesus orders a leper to show himself to the priest in order to fulfill the law of Moses (Luke 5:14). In fact, Moses himself makes an appearance at Jesus's transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36). Jesus's resurrection is attested by Moses (Luke 20:37; 24:27-44). Peter anchors his preaching Jesus in the testimony of Moses (Acts 3:22). Later in Acts, Paul refutes that he invalidates Moses (his opponents claim that he tells Jews not to live according to the law); instead, Paul sponsors men under a Jewish vow (Acts 21:21). And finally, in his defense to King Agrippa, Paul categorically states that he proclaims nothing out of alignment with Moses (Acts 26:22). Luke obviously goes to great lengths to demonstrate how this Christian movement is not against but in alignment with Moses's teaching and vision for the people of God. Stephen's speech is in keeping with Luke's entire program.

The main point of Stephen's narration of Moses is that the Moses to which the temple leadership appeal is not an accurate portrayal of Moses in Israel's own scripture. That there are two divergent interpretations of Moses is signaled by Stephen's repeated demonstrative pronoun

"this:" "it was *this* Moses whom they rejected" (7:35) and "*this* is the Moses who said…" (7:37). A parallel construction is used in one of Luke's other famous speeches—Peter at Pentecost. Peter declares:

> "Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—*this* man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. *This* Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses…Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, *this* Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:22-23, 32, 36).

Each instance of italicized *this* in the above quotation is the same demonstrative pronoun οὗτος that Stephen uses in his distinguishing "*this* Moses." Peter certainly emphasizes this Jesus because of the paradox of a crucified Messiah—yes, *this* Jesus! The insertion of the demonstrative pronoun clarifies that the actions associated with the person are indeed an inseparable part of the person's identity. Jesus cannot be the Messiah apart from his suffering and crucifixion, nor can Moses be understood apart from his prophetic existence in the wilderness.

In so doing, Stephen asserts that the Moses who led the people in the wilderness, who performed signs and wonders on their behalf, and who gave them a law that was "alive" is not what the Jerusalem leadership means when they say "Moses." When they say "Moses," they mean the power structures that they use the Mosaic law to uphold. They mean traditions that serve their own interests and biases, all these for which "Moses" becomes shorthand.

Stephen reminds the audience that the Hebrew people repeatedly rejected Moses, refused to listen to Moses, and pushed him out of their way because they desired idols—things that were solid and seemed permanent. But Stephen does not bring up the people's rejection of Moses as a mere historical point. Rather, Stephen claims that they still reject the real Moses, just as they

have habitually rejected and persecuted the rest of the prophets.

He states: "So Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds" (7:22), and then immediately tells the story of Moses murdering the Egyptian. Luke describes the genocidal actions of the Pharaoh using the word κατασοφίζομαι (to trick), which has "wisdom" at its philological core (7:19). The wisdom of the οἰκουμένη takes the form of violence and hindrance.

Accusation #2: "Against This Holy Place"

Second, the accusation of Stephen's disregard for Moses extends to include a disdain for the temple. The accusation includes not only a double iteration of Moses but also τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου τούτου, "this holy place":

> This man never stops saying things against *this holy place* and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy *this place* and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us (Acts 7:13-14).

By stating twice that his crime is against both Moses and the temple, Luke communicates that the members of the Sanhedrin and the crowd understand both those entities to be inseparable. In other words, the law and customs associated with Moses comprise a narrow structure much like their rigid perception of the temple.[173]

Stephen argues that their ancestors had a God who became a burning bush (7:30), who gave them the law (7:38), and who traveled with them in a tabernacle (7:44). All these expressions of God's care were connected to their experience in the wilderness, not in the Temple. Also indicative of the wilderness holy place is the tabernacle—the structure that was desired by God for the people to make. The place where God resides in the wilderness is referred to as "holy ground" (7:33). This makes an interesting contrast with the accusations that Stephen

[173] Matthew Skinner, *The Trial Narratives: Conflict, Power, and Identity in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 118.

is against "this holy place" (Acts 6:13). Essentially, Stephen argues that Moses's story proves that wilderness symbolized "the holy place" because it is where God dwells and meets his people. Stephen continues this point when he notes that God's explicit directions include making the "tent of witness" which went with the people wherever they were led by God (7:44).

Yet the Israelites preferred idols (7:41). Idols are fixed, permanent, and tangible. Stephen remarks that idols are ultimately "works of their own hands" (7:44). In the speech, idols are reminiscent of Egypt. Egypt represents the oppressive structures of slavery and death, and such structures are predictable and rigid. Stephen directly connects these two: "in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make gods for us who will lead the way for us" (7:39-40). Stephen contrasts the tabernacle with the temple (which he does not even mention by name but as οἶκος, house): "Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands; as the prophet says" (7:48). Being made "with human hands" connects to the golden calf the people had Aaron make (7:40-41).

While Luke has already demonstrated a high regard for the temple as a holy place, it seems those pericopes that feature the temple prominently and positively demonstrate the function of the temple. In other words, the temple situates the worship of God and fellowship of the congregation. The stories of Jesus's birth show the temple as a place of prophetic announcement. The stories of the temple in the early chapters of Acts show the temple as a place of corporate worship and preaching of the gospel. Indeed, at the very invocation of the Temple, Solomon himself acknowledges the inability of the Temple to be God's single dwelling:[174]

> But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which

[174] Mina, Monier, *Temple and Empire: The Context of the Temple Piety of Luke-Acts* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021), 106.

> you said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive (1 Kings 8:27-30, NRSV).

Stephen's speech therefore gets at what happens when the temple is regarded as an end in itself and ceases to be the means by which worshippers approach God. When the temple becomes an end in itself, it is interpreted as a symbol of power rather than a symbol of the meeting of God and people. The temple was indeed good, but it was not ultimate.

Based on this contrast, Luke—via Stephen—reads Israel's true nature and its true God as dynamic and mobile. While God finally allows Solomon to build a temple (7:47), that temple does not anchor God to Jerusalem or any one place. Again, we see Luke incorporate the words of Isaiah that suggest a far more universal idea of God's presence:

> 'Heaven is my throne,
> and the earth is my footstool.
> What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord,
> or what is the place of my rest?
> Did not my hand make all these things?' (Acts 7:49-50)

Just as in the gospel, Luke chooses texts from the latter part of Isaiah which depicts Israel's restoration after exile as including the entire world (Isa 66:1-2).[175] This quotation fits with Luke's program of universal salvation as witnessed it in the gospel: "all these things" evokes "all the people" and "all flesh shall see God's salvation." While the reader has witnessed God's presence and the people of God's presence in the temple up to this point in the story (Luke 1:11; 2:27; 2:46; 24:53; Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:42), the point of the speech is that God's presence can never be confined to or made equivalent with that place.

As such, Stephen turns the accusation of denigrating "this holy place" on his accusers: "their attitudes and practice have ended up treating the temple as if were God's dwelling—which

[175] Cf. Luke 3:1-20; 4:18-19; 19:46; 53:12

it is not, as they know…they were not using the temple as God intended."[176] This was already demonstrated by Jesus when he drives out merchants from the temple, also quoting Isaiah (Luke 19:45-46). Only after driving out what defiles the temple did Jesus begin to teach in the temple (19:47-48), demonstrating the proper use of God's house. The teaching of Jesus and the proclamation, worship, and healing the apostles do in the temple is the example of how the Temple is to be understood. Stephen essentially tells his audience, "you blaspheme this holy place."[177]

Stephen's speech, then, makes as clear as possible the opposition between the wilderness aesthetic (which features the dynamic and mobile) and the οἰκουμένη aesthetic (which features the violent and the repressive). The bulk of the speech centers on Moses and irrefutably assigns God's "signs and wonders" done through Moses, the giving of the law, and the liberation from slavery to the wilderness—not in the sphere of human construction, building or otherwise.

As the narrative moves beyond the martyrdom of Stephen himself, the trajectory of Stephen's speech continues. His execution sparks a widespread persecution that leads to the church's and gospel's dispersal. Skinner aptly summarizes:

> The gospel that Stephen preaches cannot be detached from all that Jerusalem represents in the history of God's dealings with Israel, and Judaism's history of encountering God in various places provides proof that God cannot be confined to a particular locale.[178]

The gospel, forced into the wilderness, is subsequently found by an Ethiopian eunuch who had left Jerusalem without it.

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[176] Steve Smith, *The Fate of the Jerusalem Temple in Luke-Acts: An Intertextual Approach to Jesus' Laments over Jerusalem and Stephen's Speech* (Bloomsbury: T&T Clark, 2017), 168.

[177] Monier, *Temple and Empire*, 110.

[178] Skinner, *The Trial Narrative*, 119.

CHAPTER FIVE: EXTENDING THE WILDERNESS THROUGH BAPTISM

"Luke's 'theology of baptism' belongs to a constellation of motifs related to his larger concern with plotting the fulfillment of the divine purpose to restore Israel—and, in doing so, to transform Israel so that its borders are broadened in expansive ways to include 'the nations.' Baptismal practices in Acts, then, must cohere with this purpose fundamentally."[179]

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter, I explored the story of the eunuch's baptism and how accounts of opposition from the οἰκουμένη form its narrative bracket. What became clear is that Luke purposefully locates his first celebrated individual baptism in the wilderness, thus recalling the initial desert stories of John the Baptist and Jesus. Even without Mark's direct guidance, Luke aesthetically fashions baptism as a wilderness event. Indeed throughout Acts, the connection of baptism with John the Baptist in the wilderness remains consistent and strong (1:5, 22; 10:37; 11:16; 13:24; 18:25; 19:4). This persistent attention to John suggests that beginning my analysis of Luke's wilderness aesthetic with his account of the Baptist fits with Luke's own narrative interest.

While many scholars observe the odd and unexpected nature of the Ethiopian story—and marvel over its nature as a "one-off" with no other story being connected to it—they sometimes overlook how it functions as a paradigm for the rest of Acts. True, the Ethiopian's baptism is not mentioned again in the Acts story and no other characters are aware of it happening, but the other characters in the narrative need not know about it for the reader to have it in mind. The impression of the baptism occurring on a desert road with a divinely sourced body of water remains the most powerful impression of baptism in Acts thus far.

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[179] Joel Green, "From 'John's Baptism' to 'Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus:' The Significance of Baptism in Luke-Acts, in *Baptism, the New Testament, and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honor of R.E.O. White* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 172.

Indeed, the Ethiopian eunuch's baptism initiates a series of high-profile individual baptisms. Distinct from the stories of baptism *en masse* reported elsewhere in Acts (2:41; 8:12; 19:5), throughout Acts 8-18 Luke focuses on these individuals (often including their households as well) and the particular events preceding and following their statements of belief and subsequent baptisms. In this chapter, then, I will illustrate how the single story of the Ethiopian eunuch's baptism—embodying its wilderness aesthetic—sets a thematic precedent for the other individual baptism passages in Acts. Those passages are: the baptism of Saul (Acts 9:1-19), of Cornelius (10:1-48), of Lydia (16:9-15), the Philippian jailor (16:23-34), and of Crispus (18:5-11).

The wilderness aesthetic has a distinct character in these baptism stories. Luke does not incorporate Israel's scripture as he does in the gospel stories, and he includes persons who are unlikely candidates for baptism. But such is the nature of "something wild," especially when combined with the continuous presence of the oft-unpredictable Holy Spirit in Acts. And so while these baptism stories do not share everything in common with Luke's gospel wilderness vignettes, they do take their shape and many of their features from the Acts' wilderness scene (8:26-39).

Like the story of the eunuch's baptism in the wilderness, each of the stories in the second half of this chapter include the following features: 1) a degree of surprise or unlikeliness of the baptism candidate, 2) divine or supernatural interjections, 3) a removal of barriers/obstacles, and of course 4) a disjunction with the aesthetic of the οἰκουμένη. Thus the narrative of Acts 8:26-39 extends the wilderness aesthetic far beyond the boundaries of the desert itself.

5.2 What Prevents Saul, the Persecutor of the Way? (9:1-26)

The first individual baptism after the Ethiopian eunuch is Saul of Tarsus. While on the

way to persecute the church in Damascus—with the authority of Jerusalem to back him up—Saul is apprehended by a blinding vision (9:3). He hears the voice of the risen Jesus of Nazareth and is sent in blindness to wait in the city (9:6). After three days, the disciple Ananias is sent to release Saul from blindness and to fill him with the Holy Spirit (9:17). What had obstructed his sight—something like reptilian scales[180]—falls off his eyes, and Saul is baptized (9:18). Instead of attacking the Jesus followers in the Damascus synagogue, Saul confounds all the people there by professing Jesus publicly (9:19-22). Not only is Saul's baptism close in proximity to the Ethiopian eunuch's, but Saul's activities of persecuting the church bookend the narrative of the eunuch's encounter with Philip. The ways in which Saul's conversion mimics the Ethiopian official's, then, is even more striking since Saul plays the villain in the stories around the Ethiopian's baptism.

5.2.1 A Very Unlikely Candidate

If an African eunuch court official in the desert is an unlikely candidate for belief in Jesus and baptism in his name, Saul is even more so! Saul makes appearances in the narrative well before his encounter with the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus. In a cameo appearance that foreshadows his violent antagonism of the church, Saul watches the stoning of Stephen with approval (7:58; 8:1). After Stephen's death and the scattering of the apostles, Luke relates that Saul chases them down, acting as a kind of bounty hunter (8:3). But Saul is no mere vigilante. As he rides toward Damascus, he carries with him paperwork from the high priest to the Damascus synagogues. These letters from Jerusalem deputize Saul to stalk and arrest men and women belonging to "the Way" (9:1-2).

He is such an unlikely candidate that Ananias, sent by the Lord to release Saul from

[180] Chad Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts: The Use of Physical Features in Characterization* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 192.

blindness, admits his own doubts to God about going to him (9:13-14). Jesus responds that he chooses Saul to make known his name "before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel" (9:15). Saul's unlikelihood for baptism and the importance of his baptism go hand in hand.[181]

Ananias is not the only one shocked by this surprising penitent. The text makes this explicit as the people in the Damascus synagogue listen to Paul proclaim Jesus as the Son of God, and they ask:

> "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" (Acts 9:21).

Upon escaping from Damascus and arriving in Jerusalem, the church there refuses to meet with him until he is vouched for by Barnabas (9:26). Each time Paul subsequently gives his personal testimony of the Damascus Road experience, Luke has Paul himself mention his unlikelihood for membership in the Christian community (Acts 22:4; 26:9-11).[182]

5.2.2 Divinely Orchestrated Intervention

The story of Philip and the eunuch featured three divine interventions: the angel sending Philip to the desert road (8:26), the Spirit's direction for Philip to join with the chariot (8:30), and the Spirit snatching Philip away instantly (8:39). The story of Saul's experience also records three divine interjections into the narrative: Paul's vision of Jesus of Nazareth, Ananias's vision of the Lord, and Paul's vision of Ananias. Such supernatural occurrences bring the wilderness aesthetic into the story by creating the atmosphere of unpredictability.

First, a vision of the resurrected Christ appears to Paul, and a divine voice questions him. Like the eunuch, Saul is traveling on the road when a divinely orchestrated interruption occurs.

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[181] Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts*, 185.

[182] Paul himself attests to this in his letters (Gal 1:13, 23; 1 Cor 15:9; Phil 3:6).

The fact that Saul is on the road (ὁδός) to persecute "the Way" (ὁδός) is ironic (Acts 9:2). The reader remembers this Way's preparation and first appearance as initiated by "the Word of God" coming to John the Baptist, leading to repentance and baptism (Luke 3:1-6). We remember as well that the eunuch's baptism occurred while he was on the ὁδός in the wilderness (Acts 8:26).

Second, just as Philip was a miraculously appointed guide for the eunuch (8:26, 30), the disciple Ananias receives a divine direction to approach and lay hands on Paul. Ananias is a member of the Christian community in Damascus sent to guide Paul out of his literal and figurative blindness (Acts 9:10-17).[183] Luke casts him in the image of a prophet, since his response is "here I am, Lord" (9:10), evoking prophets from Israel's history such as Samuel (1 Sam 3:4) and Isaiah (Isa 6:8). As in John's desert experience, in Jesus's desert experience, and most recently in the eunuch's desert experience, the wilderness aesthetic involves giving Saul sight of God's salvation.

Third, while Ananias receives *his* own vision of the Lord, he learns that Saul has also had yet *another* vision (other than the one on the road to Damascus). Specifically, Saul's vision is of a man named Ananias coming to him so that he may regain his sight (9:12). Saul's second vision is also connected to the fact that Saul is praying at that very moment. Throughout Luke-Acts, prayer functions as a literary precursor to a supernatural response by the Holy Spirit, making prayer in itself a gesture toward divine interjection (Luke 2:37; 3:21; 9:29; Acts 3:1; 4:31; 8:15; 9:40; 10:9; 12:5; 16:25

5.2.3 Removal of Hindrance

The story depicts several removals of obstacles. One obstacle is Saul himself! When he is accosted by the risen Jesus, Saul is on his way to Damascus with the specific intention "to bind

[183] Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts*, 185.

men and women who belong to the Way" (9:2). Not only is Saul removed as the obstacle for these men and women, but—after his baptism—Saul himself proclaims Jesus in the Damascus synagogue (9:19-22).

As the eunuch's encounter with the gospel was neither in Jerusalem, nor Candace's court in Ethiopia, but in the wilderness, Saul's encounter with Jesus occurs when Saul is on the ὁδός, not when he is in Jerusalem, nor when he arrives in Damascus. Saul sees Jesus where there are no obstacles to Saul's "seeing" Jesus. After being blind for several days, Luke narrates that when Ananias laid his hands on Saul "something like scales fell from his eyes" (9:17-18). Spencer points out that both Saul's literal and figurative blindness are healed once the scales are removed from his eyes (9:18).[184]

Thus, Luke vividly depicts a removal of hindrance, that which blocks both the ability to see and specifically to see God's salvation for all flesh. Saul's sight is directly connected to salvation for all flesh, since Saul's conversion features a restoration of sight with the particular intended trajectory of universal salvation: "he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). The removal of the scales from his own eyes allows Saul to move forward in the narrative as the one who gives sight to others (Acts 13:47; 26:18; 28:27),[185] with the goal of their viewing salvation (Acts 13:26, 47; 16:17, 31; 28:28).

5.2.4 Clash with the Οἰκουμένη

After Paul joins the Christian community, the ensuing episodes feature a backlash from what can be described as the οἰκουμένη. Saul may have changed his identity from persecutor to

[184] F. Scott Spencer, *Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 99.

[185] Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts*, 189.

believer, but with or without Saul, the οἰκουμένη does not change its aesthetic of persecution and hindrance. Luke writes that Saul's very presence as an announcer of the gospel unsettles or stirs up (συγχέω) those who were previously comfortable in their local synagogue (9:22). Therefore, the Jews in Damascus—who are distinct from the Christ-believing Jews like Ananias whom Saul sought to arrest—attempt to kill him (9:23-25).

After being dramatically smuggled out of Damascus by disciples he himself had recruited for the gospel, Saul goes to Jerusalem. The same situation is repeated there, but this time Luke identifies the Greek-speaking Jews, Ἑλληνιστοι, as the group attempting to kill Paul (9:29). Once again, the believing community helps Paul escape, and they send him out of Jerusalem to Tarsus (9:30). Throughout the Acts narrative, Paul continuously meets with resistance and violence from the οἰκουμένη, and from both Jews and Gentiles (13:50; 14:5, 19; 16:22, 39; 17:5; 18:12; 19:23; 21:30).

5.3 What Prevents Cornelius, a Gentile Centurion? (10-11)

Having removed Saul from the picture for a time by sending him back to Tarsus, Luke turns to Peter. Peter goes all over, healing people and performing miracles—particularly in Joppa (9:32-43). While there, Peter receives a vision of a sheet with unclean foods on it; a celestial voice instructs Peter to "kill and eat" the unclean food (10:13). This vision receives prompt interpretation when men from the Cornelius, a centurion in Caesarea, come and request Peter to go with them to Cornelius's house (10:22). Cornelius too has had a vision, in which an angel told him to send for Peter (10:3-5). Peter understands the vision as a direction for him to go to Cornelius's. Upon arrival, Peter preaches the gospel (10:34-43). The Gentile audience becomes filled with the Holy Spirit and receives the gift of God, even before baptism in water (10:44-45). After staying several days as Cornelius's guest, Peter faces the questions and criticism from the

Jewish believers (11:1-3), to whom he answers that he "could not hinder God" (11:17). The story ends with the Jewish believers praising God that "the Gentiles have also been given the repentance that leads to life" (11:18).

After considering the remote location of the Ethiopian's baptism and the ambiguity of his identity (in terms of gender, religion/ethnicity, and status), it at first seems unlikely that the inclusion of Cornelius (whose identity is extremely clear) would closely follow the pattern of the eunuch's. Cornelius is an officer in the Italian Cohort.[186] He lives in Caesarea, and his story takes place completely within that urban setting. Luke crafts a picture of him as a benevolent gentleman who is wealthy. He is generous in almsgiving and has many slaves. In contrast to the eunuch, who is in the middle of nowhere and more or less alone (apart from a chariot driver), Cornelius is situated his household and invites friends and family to hear Peter's preaching of the gospel.

5.3.1 An Unlikely Candidate?

Like the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius seems to be a good prospect for inclusion in the Jesus-believing community. Luke depicts him as already a friend of the Jewish community and a godly man (10:2, 22, 31). While the reader may at first think that Luke presents Cornelius as a likely candidate for baptism, the responses of the onlookers suggest otherwise. When the Holy Spirit comes on Cornelius and other Gentiles, the reaction from the Jewish believers is ἐξίστημι (10:45), the same word Luke used to describe both the crowd's reaction to the apostles' glossolalia in the Pentecost scene (Acts 2:7) and the reaction of the temple teachers to the precocious young Jesus, who asked questions and gave answers astounding for a child (Luke

[186] The Ethiopian eunuch is also an official (δυνάστης Κανδάκης), however, that position is in a faraway queendom that is somewhat mysterious. The post of Cornelius, however, was a familiar one to all people around the Mediterranean.

2:47).

When Peter recounts the story of Cornelius and company to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, Luke narrates that "they were silenced" and were elated as they realized *then,* "so God has given even the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life" (11:18).[187] Luke does not have Peter's questioners comment on the fact that the Holy Spirit preceded the water baptism. The focus is on ἄρα καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, "so even the *Gentiles*." Moreover, Cornelius may be a decent and generous Gentile, but his behavior makes it clear that he is still nonetheless a Gentile. When Peter arrives, Cornelius makes a gentile mistake (common in Greco-Roman religion) and falls down to worship Peter (10:25). If the Ethiopian eunuch could have been hindered based on his identity as a eunuch, surely Cornelius could have been prevented from baptism based on worshipping that which is not God. The trope of Gentiles attempting to worship the apostles occurs again in Acts 14:11-15 and 28:5-6, and idol worship is a recurring concern throughout the mission to the Gentile world (Acts 15:20; 17:16; 19:26; 21:25). Even an almsgiving, prayerful Gentile is still a surprising contender for receiving full inclusion in the community of believers.

5.3.2 Divinely Orchestrated Intervention

The story of Cornelius's baptism includes multiple divine directions and visions. Cornelius sees a vision of an angel who instructs him to send for Peter (10:3-6). Peter, in Joppa, also sees a vision (three times, in fact), but it is of a sheet filled with unclean food. God tells

[187] *Pace* David Warren, "'Can Anyone Withhold the Water' (Acts 10:47): Toward an Understanding of Luke's Argument in the Story of Cornelius" in *Early Christian Voices: In Texts, Traditions, and Symbols* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishing, 2004), 131-142. Warren argues that the astonishment on the part of the Jewish believers is due to the fact that they received "the gift of the Holy Spirit" before water baptism. His argument is based on the fact that the gospel is declared to be for all people even in the beginning of Acts. This overlooks the narrative precedent that characters often do not recognize the presence or truth of something even when it is obvious (for example, Jesus predicts his suffering, death, and resurrection three times, and yet the disciples do not understand it when it happens). Warren does not take into account Acts 11:18 when the Jewish Christians praise God and exclaim, "so God has given *even* the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life?!" Clearly, this concluding sentence to the entire story of Acts 10-11 points toward the inclusion of the Gentiles as surprising.

Peter to kill the unclean animals and eat, admonishing Peter: "Do not make unclean what God has made clean" (10:11-16). When Peter interviews Cornelius's messengers, he is given yet another divine direction. The Spirit tells Peter to go with the envoy from Cornelius (10:19). In this respect, Peter fills the same role as Philip in Acts 8 and Ananias in Acts 9. The eunuch, Saul, and Cornelius all have a guide from within the community who hears these supernatural directions directly.

Gaventa notes that the divinely given visions and gifts of the Holy Spirit that appear in the narrative merely signify "the primary actor in the story—namely, God."[188] And Peter's justification of the baptism and subsequent table fellowship with the Gentiles is based on his understanding that the entire story is driven by God's express will: "If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder (κωλύω) God?" (Acts 11:17).

5.3.3 Removal of Hindrances

Upon seeing the belief of Cornelius and his household, Peter states, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34). Luke had already demonstrated this by specifying the eunuch as an Ethiopian. Then, upon seeing the Holy Spirit demonstrably validate gentile believers, Peter asks, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing them?" (10:46). This strikingly resembles the question asked by the eunuch:

> Eunuch: Look—water! (ὕδωρ) What (τί) hinders (κωλύει) me from being baptized (βαπτισθῆναι)? (Acts 8:36)
>
> Peter: Not anyone (τις) could withhold (κωλῦσαί) water (ὕδωρ) for baptizing (βαπτισθῆναι)…? (Acts 10:24)

[188] Gaventa, *Acts*, 173.

The answer to the Ethiopian eunuch's earnest question provides the same answer to Peter's rhetorical one. The answer that nothing prevents or hinders anyone from receiving salvation evokes the wilderness aesthetic.

In addition, Peter acknowledges the equality that is a product of the unhindered nature of the wilderness: God distributed the equal (ἴσος) gift. The word ἴσος not only means equal in weight or distribution, but also can refer to level ground.[189] Thus, Luke's quotation of Isaiah 40 whereby the high ground is made low and the low ground is raised, so that "all flesh may see God's salvation" here finds realization. We see the same image as in the first wilderness scene of the gospel, where the topography was leveled so that all could have an equal view.

The purpose of the open and unencumbered aesthetic is in fact to produce such an equality, and topography plays a subtle role of the Cornelius story as well. At the beginning of the story, Peter is on a rooftop, and God tells him to "get up and come down." He obeys this command and comes down to be with the Gentiles. When Peter gets to Cornelius's house, Cornelius in his Gentile ignorance attempts to worship Peter. The actions of both men bring them to an equality—a Jew and a Gentile, a backwater Galilean and a Roman centurion, a wealthy man and a homeless preacher stand on equal ground beside each other in the proclamation and reception of the gospel. The wilderness aesthetic depicted by "the mountains being made low and the valleys being exalted" extends itself to include the equality of Gentiles and Jews. The wilderness aesthetic affects both persons and the spaces they inhabit. What otherwise would be a symbol of the οἰκουμένη (the home of a wealthy Roman centurion and the company of his social peers) functions the same way that the desert did in the story of the Ethiopian—enabling equality

[189] ἴσος. Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie. *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 839. The definition of ἴσος as a level or flat place is third in the list of possible definitions, after 1) equality and 2) fair or even distribution.

of access to God's salvation.

The baptism of Cornelius is the first of individual-plus-household baptisms in Acts—Lydia, the Philippian jailor, and Crispus all follow suit. The experience of Cornelius with the angel and then with Peter serves as a conduit for the rest of his household and beyond: "Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends" (10:24).[190] In addition to his own household, then, Cornelius invites others that do not live with him, and the text states: "While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word" (10:44). In regard to the removal of barriers to salvation, Cornelius himself proves to be an "open door" to faith for others.

5.3.4 Clash with the Οἰκουμένη

Finally, Peter explains his decision to baptize Cornelius and his gentile household to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, who at first disapprove of this because of the food choices that complicate fellowship between Jews and Gentiles: "So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" (11:2-3). Their perspective, in this particular story, reflects that of the obstructive οἰκουμένη. Peter responds, "The Spirit told me to go with them and not make a distinction between them and us" (11:12). The οἰκουμένη aesthetic is demonstrated by hierarchies and divisions which act as obstacles to salvation. Peter explains that making such a distinction in regard to table fellowship would place hurdles between Gentiles and salvation. God is clearly in favor of removing such barriers, since it was by the Spirit's direction that Peter went, and since it was the Spirit's choice to anoint Cornelius and his household.

Identifying the Jerusalem church as the οἰκουμένη is important because it demonstrates

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[190] David Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives in Acts: Pattern and Interpretation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 112.

that terms such as οἰκουμένη and wilderness express not only location, but also function.[191] When the church demonstrates the dynamic of hindrance and repression, its role becomes akin to that of the very religious/political/economic establishment that persecutes the church. That being said, when the wilderness dynamic of freedom and unhindered possibility is in play, then that place—be it palace or prison—can be understood as "a wilderness place."

5.4 What Prevents Lydia, a Woman in Philippi from Thyatira? (16:9-15)

Among the individual conversion stories in Acts, Lydia's is remarkable for having a woman as its subject (who governs her own household at that). After Paul sees a vision of a man in Macedonia asking for help, he and his company sail for Europe (16:9). After arriving in Philippi, they meet a group of God-fearing women, one of whom is Lydia (16:13). God opens her heart to Paul's message, and she receives baptism (16:14). Her entire household is also baptized. Her house then becomes a hub for the missionaries' activities in Philippi (16:15, 40).

5.4.1 An Unlikely Candidate…for a Church Leader?

Just as the eunuch is in a category completely by himself, so Lydia is the only story we receive of its kind—the baptism of a woman and *her* household. Like the eunuch and Cornelius, she too is already a God-fearer. Luke intimates this by casting this scene both at a "place of prayer," and on the Sabbath, when she meets Paul and receives his gospel.

Just as the Ethiopian eunuch signifies the gospel moving from Palestine to the African continent, so scholars note that Lydia is the first gospel convert on European soil.[192] While she is the first recorded convert in Europe, she herself is not European! Not only is she a Gentile and

[191] Gaventa, *Acts*, 172. Gaventa uses the term "circumcision party" for the criticizing Jewish believers, which captures the idea of the οἰκουμένη.

[192] Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 126. Conzelmann notes that Luke's plotting of the journey's many stopping points "conveys the distinct impression of movement toward the new goal, Europe."

therefore a "foreigner" to Paul, but she is not even a native of Philippi. She is from Thyatira, and therefore a foreigner to the place where Paul meets her—just as the eunuch was to Philip.[193]

Her nationality makes her unlikely for another reason. In Paul's vision, a Macedonian man pleads for Paul to come help (16:9). Narratively speaking, the reader is therefore on the lookout for a Macedonian male to be Paul's proto-convert. A group of women are the ones brought to salvation. [194] In addition, the Spirit had forbidden Paul from going to minister in Asia (16:6-7), so Lydia is not only unlikely because she is a woman, but because she is from the very place Paul was not supposed to go. Of all the possible people for Paul to meet, she indeed is unlikely.

The most unlikely facet of Lydia's story is that not only is she a convert, but Luke then describes her as the founder and head of a church. At the end of the Philippi narrative, Paul and Silas return to Lydia's house. Luke writes that they leave after they "encourage the ἀδελφοὶ (brothers and sisters) there" (16:40). Throughout Acts, Luke uses this term almost exclusively for Jews when speaking with one another (2:37; 7:2; 9:17; 11:12; 13:15, 26, 38; 15:7-23; 21:17; 22:1, 5; 23:1-6; 28:17).[195] In the case of Lydia's household, the ἀδελφοὶ are Gentiles, but they nonetheless are accepted and referred to as a church on par with the believing Jews. Lydia is not only a female Gentile convert, she leads a church that is Gentile.

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[193] Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary*, 321. Holladay cautions that Lydia's occupation as a purple cloth merchant does not necessarily designate her as wealthy and well-connected; however, her ability to relocate and to run a household that could cater to the needs of Paul's missionary team do suggest a certain amount of wealth and status (See Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 203 n. 93 and Gaventa, *Acts*, 237). While Lydia can be understood as wealthy, connected, and an economic force in her community, both Wayne Meeks and Beverly Gaventa argue that due to the necessity of having a vocation, Lydia's status as either free or freed (i.e. a former slave) is under question as well, just as was the eunuch's position.

[194] Alexandra Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia as a Rhetorical Construct in Acts* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 84. Macaulay further argues for Lydia's unlikely inclusion in the community by stressing her status as a clothing merchant and the suggestion of her name as "a Lydian."

[195] The only exception is Acts 14:1-2, where the "brothers and sisters" are clearly Jew and Gentile.

5.4.2 Divine Interventions

Paul has a vision in which a man implores him to come over to Europe to "help them" (16:9).[196] That the vision is divine direction is supported by the comment that God's spirit had not allowed Paul and his companions to go preach in Asia (16:6-7). Furthermore, the entire company of missionaries agree that they should indeed go to Macedonia.[197]

Just as in the case of Cornelius, Lydia too receives divine guidance and a personal guide. Luke tells us that "the Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14).[198] Paul was sent as the one to guide Lydia into the faith, just as the eunuch received Philip and Paul himself received Ananias.

5.4.3 Removal of Obstacles

Her conversion also takes place in a remote location "outside the city and by the river," a setting similar to the wilderness road and the spring in the desert that facilitated the conversion and baptism of the Ethiopian. In fact, Luke seems intentionally to draw the reader's attention to this aspect, because he has Paul's companion narrate the apostle's journey to Philippi thus:

> We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. (Acts 16:11-12)

After receiving a vision of the beckoning Macedonian, Paul's missionary team sets out on a

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[196] *Pace* John Miller, *Convinced that God Had Called Us: Dreams, Visions and Perceptions of God's Will in Luke-Acts* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 106. Miller argues two points that I reject. First, he writes that Paul's vision of the man in Macedonia is not intended to be a divinely-given direction, but a solely human initiative on Paul's part. This however does not reconcile with Luke's supplemental knowledge that Jesus's Spirit did not allow the missionaries to go to Asia. Second, Miller argues that it is this lack of divine counsel that makes the missionary efforts in Europe go poorly. Such is obviously an interpretation on Miller's part (he interprets Paul and Silas in prison as "disastrous" but it can just as easily be interpreted as a success given the salvation of the jailor and their subsequent release) but there is no evidence in Acts—let alone the entire NT—for the assumption that any mission is meant to go well! On the contrary, Luke reveals in the gospel that those speaking on behalf of Jesus and his community will face hardship and persecution.

[197] Gaventa, *Acts*, 234.

[198] Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia as a Rhetorical Construct in Acts*, 84.

trans-Aegean Sea journey. They move directly and without incident from city to city, finally stopping in Philippi—a Roman colony "fortunately situated at the juncture of East and West, land and sea."[199] In other words, the very nature and situation of Philippi enhances the possibility of something occurring there. Luke builds suspense by observing that the group stays there "inside the city" for a lengthy period (comparatively). Nothing happens. It is not until they go outside the gate of the city, stop by the river, and speak to a group of praying women that anything of note occurs in the story.

The going out of the gate demonstrates the first instance of obstacles being removed as no event happens in the story until Paul and company leave the city and symbolically go out through the gate. The second instance of obstacles being removed comes in the form of the divine intervention: "The Lord opened (διανοίγω) her heart to listen eagerly to what Paul said" (16:14). The verb διανοίγω recalls a few chapters before when the Jerusalem believers exclaim that God "opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (14:27), and it foreshadows the doors and chains being opened by the fortuitous earthquake in the very next story (16:26). Doors and hearts being opened suggests the wilderness aesthetic, where freedom of movement is possible.

5.4.4 Clash with the Οἰκουμένη

After moving into Lydia's household as her guests, Paul and company go back to the place of prayer where they had first met Lydia. This time they meet another supernaturally "gifted" woman: a slave-girl with the lucrative power to tell fortunes (16:16). In comparison to Paul's encounter with Lydia, this odd story demonstrates the opposition from the οἰκουμένη. She hounds Paul and Silas about their own divine giftedness—they are tour guides on God's "salvation path"!—until Paul has enough and casts the spirit out that was enabling her psychic

[199] Pervo, *Acts*, 401-402.

power (16:18). The slave's owners become furious, Luke tells us, "when they saw their hope of making money was gone" (16:19). Economic exploitation is a hallmark of the οἰκουμένη, as was first evidenced in the temptation of Jesus (Luke 4:3-4), the coopting of Judas in the conspiracy against Jesus (Luke 22:5), like Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-2), and most recently, like Simon of Samaria who hopes to purchase the ability to endow others with the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:20).

As a result, Paul and Silas are dragged before the authorities on the basis that they are "disrupting our city…advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe" (16:21). While it seems that the men are lying (they are actually angry because they cannot make more money from this girl), they are also speaking a partial truth. Paul and Silas certainly are advocating for a different way of living than the οἰκουμένη sees fit. Paul exorcizes this woman with no consideration given to how much money could be made by her. Paul's "way of salvation" values freedom over finance.

5.5 What Prevents a Philippian Jailor? (16:16-40)

After Paul and Silas are brought to the magistrates by the slave-girl's owners and the frenzied crowd, they are stripped and beaten (16:22). Then they are put in chains, fastened in stocks and locked in the innermost part of the prison (16:24). How improbable it was—in human terms—that the jailor tasked with preventing their escape would be the next candidate for baptism. But that night, as Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns to God, an earthquake undermined the prison, so that all the doors were open and all the chains unlocked (16:26). Upon finding Paul and Silas still present, the jailor begs them: "what must I do to be saved?" (16:30). He and his entire household are baptized and rejoice (16:33). The following morning, Paul and Silas are free to go, suggesting that one important point of the story was for the jailor to receive the gospel and be baptized.

5.5.1 An Unlikely Candidate

While all the other characters in this series of baptism stories have been Jews or God-fearers of various kinds, the Philippian jailor is neither. Unlike all the other characters, we are not told his name. And unlike the other characters, his baptism story is directly related to another —that of Lydia and her household. Upon Lydia's conversion and baptism, Paul and Silas remain at her house in Philippi, and so in time are arrested and thrown into the Philippian jail.

The jailor is also an unlikely convert because he has just supervised the beating and imprisonment of Paul and Silas (16:23). His charge is to make sure they do not escape (16:24). As we have observed throughout Luke-Acts, prisons, chains, and other forms of restriction and violence are part of the οἰκουμένη aesthetic. Thus the character of the jailor is unlikely because he represents the very entity that opposes the Christian community.

Another surprising aspect of this convert and his story is the role of rejoicing. Rejoicing is the response to the jailor's conversion (16:34), and the act of joyful praise mirrors the equally surprising singing and praising of Paul and Silas at the beginning of their night in jail (16:25).[200] In Acts' miraculous jail breaks, the behavior of the apostles grows ever more defiant of the οἰκουμένη: the apostles arrested in the temple are merely "released" by an angel (5:18-20), and when Peter goes to jail he sleeps soundly (12:6).[201] By the time the gospel reaches Europe, Christian apostles are singing and rejoicing in prison. Rejoicing also connects the jailor's conversion with the Ethiopian's encounter with Philip: "and he went on his way rejoicing" (8:39).

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[200] François LeStang, *Annonce et Accueil de L'Évangile: Les Figures Individuelles de Croyants dans le Deuxième Voyage Missionnaire de Paul* [Ac 16, 6-18,18] (Pendé: J. Gabalda, 2012), 92.

[201] See John Weaver, *Plots of Epiphany: Prison-Escape in Acts of the Apostles* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyer, 2004) for more.

5.5.2 Divine Intervention

While it is not explicitly stated, this conversion should be read as a divinely directed encounter because the earthquake and subsequent release of bonds (16:25) function as a supernatural response to the prayers and worship of Paul and Silas (16:24). The possibility of this is emphasized by the lengths the officials go to in order to secure their imprisonment:

> "The magistrates…threw them into prison and ordered the jailor to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in stocks" (16:23-24).

When Luke writes that "the very foundations of the prison are shaken," then, the reader understands this to be symbolic of the worldly power that attempts to restrict those preaching the gospel. This position is further strengthened by the other earthquake episode in Acts: "When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness" (4:31). Clearly the earthquake here is to be understood as a divine response to the believers' prayer, particularly since it results in the group's further proclamation of the word of God. In the same way, Paul and Silas are emboldened to preach to the jailor after the earthquake.

5.5.3 Removal of Obstacles and Hindrance

The unobstructed aesthetic of the wilderness suddenly manifests itself in the jail: "all (πᾶς) the doors were opened and everyone's (πᾶς) chains were unfastened" (16:26). Luke's depiction of the jail and the jailor evoke the images of everything that has earlier clashed with the wilderness: Herod's prison for John the Baptist, the chains and guard of the demoniac, the chains binding the Christians that Paul arrested. And yet, the jail itself embodies a wilderness aesthetic as the hindrances are removed and the doors open. LeStang claims that "prayer makes its own place" in Luke's writings, and it could not be more true than the story of Paul and

Silas—and the one who holds them captive.[202]

By use of "every" and "all," we see Luke's inclusive language often used for the wilderness represented. The liberation for "all" extends even to the jailor himself, who had initially represented the οἰκουμένη. Upon being spared a death by suicide, he resembles the eunuch by asking the question of a disciple, "what must I do to be saved?" Luke specifies that the jailor takes Paul and Silas *outside* to ask them what he must do to be saved.

On one hand, the movement to outside the jail appears symbolic and conjures the wilderness aesthetic—they must be where there are no impediments or restrictions. On the other hand, however, the place where the impediments are removed is inside the jail itself. Although Paul and Silas do not escape, there is nothing that hinders them. We recognize the trend established in Luke's account of baptism of Cornelius and his house: the wilderness aesthetic changes the place where it is manifested.

5.5.4 Clash with the Οἰκουμένη

The οἰκουμένη and its aesthetic are front and center in this passage. Magistrates and authorities order violence done to the apostles, all in reaction to the economic upset they created by exorcising a demon from a slave. The apostles are thrown in jail—in the innermost cell—and so the οἰκουμένη attempts to impede and obstruct the gospel. Paul and Silas are not only imprisoned but put in the stocks.

But as Luke portrays it, the wilderness aesthetic begins to erode the façade of the οἰκουμένη. While Paul and Silas are in prison—complete with chains and jailors—they nonetheless engage in what appears to be an unhindered praise of God. In fact, LeStang notices how Paul and Silas say nothing in front of those persecuting them, but save all their words of

[202] LeStang, *Annonce et Accueil*, 93.

proclamation for when they are in prison—and with their fellow prisoners as the apt audience: "Or les voici qui ont retrouvé la parole qui leur avait manqué devant les stratèges: ils prient et louent à haute voix, écoutés par les autres prisonniers."[203] The people of God, so shaped by the wilderness aesthetic, do not themselves require a physical desert in order to manifest its spirit of freedom and equality. In response to Paul and Silas's "wilderness prayer," the earthquake makes the space of the prison as unobstructed as the open desert.

The οἰκουμένη does not stop resisting even after the earthquake and the release of the prisoners. The next morning, the magistrates allow Paul and Silas to go (apologizing for the mix-up about their Roman status). But, the local authorities ask Paul and Silas to leave Philippi. Apparently, while their behavior was not illegal, their very presence was disruptive—a bit too wild and unpredictable.

5.6 <u>What Prevents Crispus, the Synagogue Official? (18:1-17)</u>

After a tour of Thessalonica (where the apostles are specifically accused of "turning the οἰκουμένη upside down" in 17:4), Athens, and Berea, Paul comes to Corinth and meets Aquila and Priscilla (18:1). As in Thessalonica and Berea, Paul argues constantly in the synagogue, attempting to persuade the Jews (18:4). Like the other times, some believe and some push back violently (18:6). After many attempts, Paul finally quits the synagogue and goes next door to a more hospitable place (16:7). Oddly, it is only *after* Paul dramatically storms out of the synagogue—vowing never to return—that Luke reports the belief and baptism of the ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, together with his entire household (18:8). Later, God tells Paul in a vision that Corinth is the right place for him to be, that there are many people open to God's message there, and that Paul will be kept safe (18:9-10).

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[203] LeStang, *Annonce et Accueill*, 92.

5.6.1 An Unlikely Candidate

The last reported baptism of an individual in Acts is also an unlikely one, given both its broad and immediate context. Luke has just narrated Paul's frustrating season of seemingly fruitless proclamation to the Jews in the Corinthian synagogue:

> When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus. When they opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." Then he left the synagogue and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue. (Acts 18:5-7, NRSV)

In its broader context, this scene follows a pattern of Paul's other attempts to preach the gospel in synagogues to Jews who either refuse to believe or attempt to block others from belief (Acts 13:46; 14:1-7; 17:1-8; 19:8-10). The reader expects Paul to indeed go to the Gentiles, so his arrival at the home of Titus Justus—a God-fearing Gentile—is not surprising. But Luke makes the subtle statement: "his house was next door to the synagogue." The reader wonders what the consequence of such close proximity will be.

The next verse after Paul storms out of the synagogue and arrives at Titus Justus's home—Acts 18:8—therefore presents quite a plot twist: "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized."[204] The very thing that would not seem to happen while Paul was within the synagogue suddenly happens when Paul leaves the synagogue! In fact, Paul himself has closed this off as a possibility, but somehow the obstacles have been removed and "all flesh"—both Jews and "Corinthians" (Greeks)—become believers and are

[204] See 1 Cor 1:14. Paul writes of his time in Corinth: "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius."

baptized.[205]

This final Lukan baptism makes an interesting conclusion to the series of baptisms patterned after the Ethiopian eunuch. Before his own baptism, Paul had worked with rulers of synagogues to persecute Christians. The final individual baptism character *is himself* the ruler of a synagogue. And despite Paul's claim of giving up on the synagogue for good, the very person in charge of it becomes a member of the Way. Subsequently (even if it is not consequentially as Holladay suggests), many Gentiles then also become believers. By so stating, Luke reinforces the fact that the mission to the Jews, rather than being a dismal failure, is actually working and thereby making the way for the mission to the Gentiles. This final baptism passage will form a direct link with the conclusion of Acts and bears on its interpretation.

5.6.2 Divine Intervention

The divine direction which was present in the majority of the other baptisms (the eunuch, Saul, Cornelius, Lydia, and the jailor) occurs *after* this baptism instead of before it. In a vision, the Lord promises divine protection for Paul and instructs him to "speak and do not be silent" (18:9). This vision may seem misplaced, since Paul has already done a lot of speaking, while conversions and baptisms have already been reported. In fact, Luke does not mention any subsequent conversions in Corinth at all after Paul has this vision.

In addition, the vision emphasizes the theme of universal salvation: "many in this city are my people" (18:10). The reader already knows that of the converts, both Jews and Gentiles are represented; and so the designation of "my people" applies to both populations. The result of this divine direction is that Paul proclaims the gospel uninterrupted and unhindered in Corinth for a

[205] Carl Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (The New Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 352. Holladay notes that Crispus's conversion might be intended to function as the "cause" which "effects" the baptism of the rest of the reported Corinthians.

year and a half, although the reader is not told what specific events ensue during that time.

5.6.3 Removal of Barriers

This story also features the removal of barriers. First, it seems that Paul himself was functioning as a type of obstruction. While he was in the synagogue and arguing constantly, Luke does not report any progress on Paul's part. By contrast, in all the other cases (the eunuch, Paul himself, Cornelius, Lydia, and the jailor) divine intervention is made to send a guide. In this instance the guide must be removed in order for belief and baptism to take place! One piece of evidence for such an understanding is that Luke turns from Paul's removal to Crispus's belief by means of the transition δὲ:

> καὶ μεταβὰς ἐκεῖθεν εἰσῆλθεν εἰς οἰκίαν τινὸς ὀνόματι Τιτίου Ἰούστου σεβομένου τὸν θεόν, οὗ ἡ οἰκία ἦν συνομοροῦσα τῇ συναγωγῇ. Κρίσπος **δὲ** ὁ ἀρχισυνάγωγος ἐπίστευσεν τῷ κυρίῳ σὺν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ, (18:7-8).

As there is no μέν antecedent (which would render δὲ as "but/yet"), δὲ functions as a sequential transition: Paul leaves the synagogue, goes next door, *then* Crispus and his household are baptized. [206] In other words, the reader can understand a connection between Paul's leaving the synagogue—moving next door to it rather than remaining in it—and the subsequent baptisms of Crispus and his household. So while there is indeed a removal of obstacles, this passage is unique because the obstacle is the same person who will be the "miraculously appointed guide" for the convert.

Likewise, the supernatural instruction does not come before the convert is made, but after. The Lord describes a freedom from hindrance for Paul in the immediate future: "no one will lay a hand on you" (18:10). True to the word, Luke writes: "and so he stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God in their midst" (18:11).

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[206] Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 674.

Indeed, the final removal of obstruction comes in the form of the public hearing. Accusations against Paul are dismissed by Gallio because it appears to be a mere debate among Jews and nothing of consequence to the proconsul (Acts 18:15). This fact is another way the passage works "backward." When receiving the vision from the Lord, Paul is told, "speak and do not be silent" (18:9). Later, when in front of the tribunal, Luke writes that Gallio dismisses the charges against Paul "just as Paul was opening his mouth to speak" (18:14). While told to speak, Paul is yet delivered before he can in this situation.

5.6.4 Clash with Οἰκουμένη

The Corinthian sequence begins with Paul and Aquila and Pricilla. Luke specifies that Aquila and Pricilla were in Corinth because the Jews had been evicted from Rome by the Emperor Claudius (18:2).[207] The mention of this grand-scale expulsion points to the obstructive aesthetic of the οἰκουμένη. Just as we observed in the passage on the jailer, however, Luke takes what at first seems to be an οἰκουμένη setting and restyles it with his own "wilderness aesthetic." True, Aquila and Pricilla were forced out of Italy, but their meeting Paul in Corinth turns into a ministry partnership that will endure. They accompany Paul to Ephesus and are instrumental in the instruction of another up and coming minister, Apollo (18:2). Paul's letters testify to their partnership as well (Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19). It is the case that the Christian community, by its very nature, can transform οἰκουμένη circumstances such as obstruction and violence into a landscape of limitless possibility.

After the conversion of Crispus, Paul is attacked by the local Jews. Oddly enough, when the case is dismissed by Gallio, the crowd beats up the current ruler of the synagogue. It is noteworthy that the reader is given no information about Sosthenes and no reason why the crowd

[207] LeStrang, *Annonce et Accueil de l'Evangile*, 174.

would abuse him so. The lack of information does, however, leave no other impression than that violence is the tendency in the οἰκουμένη.

While some interpreters read a Lukan "pro-Roman Empire" stance in Gallio's dismissal, when considering the entire pericope, the reader may be cautious. Luke prefaces the passage by describing an imperial pogrom against Jews (18:2). He also begins and ends the passage with synchronic markers: the reign of Claudius (18:2) and the governorship of Gallio (18:12). As I observed in the synchronic markers at the beginning of Luke (1:5; 2:1-2; 3:1-2), Luke uses this device to show a contrast between the supposed ongoing rule of the powerful and the surprisingly important events taking place in unlikely places. In the Corinth passage, Luke does something similar.

First, it cannot be that Gallio is sympathetic to the Christian message because he sees no difference between the Christians and the Jews. Second, Luke depicts Gallio as a corrupt and negligent ruler since he refuses justice to Sosthenes and declines to keep social order. The only reason narratively, then, that Paul is spared is the intervention of God which was promised in a vision; it is not because the Roman Empire is kindly disposed to the gospel.[208] The working of God therefore *undermines* the οἰκουμένη by using it against its own purposes. This follows the pattern that has been traced throughout these baptism stories: the wilderness aesthetic undermines and even dismantles the οἰκουμένη.

5.7 CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have traced the way Luke narrates individual baptisms and noted how those baptisms resemble aspects of the first narratively elaborated baptism of an individual: the

[208] Yamazaki-Ransom, *The Roman Empire in Luke's Narrative*, 130-131.

Ethiopian eunuch. We have also seen another shift in how the wilderness aesthetic presents itself. Being free and unhindered, it creates a kind of wilderness space even in the midst of places like prisons and military households.

An excellent summarizing example is Acts 19. Paul arrives in Ephesus and immediately the topic of discussion is baptism (19:1-7). Not only does baptism occur, but it leads to the burning of sorcery manuals and the forsaking of the money that could have been made by selling them instead (19:18-20). As a result, Ephesian artisans attack the Christian missionaries because their trade is in the same jeopardy as those who sell witchcraft books and materials. The activity of Paul and company, beginning specifically with baptism, introduces a wilderness aesthetic to the city of Ephesus. In the story of the baptism of Saul, Luke used the word συγχέω (to confuse) to describe the reaction the Jews had to Saul's proclamation of the gospel. Here in Acts 19, Luke uses both the noun cognate σύγχυσις (confusion) and the verb συγχέω to describe the city of Ephesus in reaction to the Christian missionary activity (19:29, 32). In addition to "confuse," the verb συγχέω means "to blur" or "confuse the boundaries." It seems the city was not sure whether it belonged to the οἰκουμένη or the wilderness!

Spatially, room in the city is "cleared" by removing books of witchcraft, by putting away idols, and by foregoing money that could be made off such things. Indeed, the artisans complain that the offense of the missionaries will be felt by ὅλη ἡ οἰκουμένη, "all the οἰκουμένη" which had previously come to worship at the Artemis temple (19:27). The complaint of the silversmiths underscores the way that this wilderness aesthetic undermines the οἰκουμένη and gradually dismantles it.[209]

[209] The fact that some local gentile authorities warn Paul away from the ruckus also has provided evidence for those who argue that Luke paints an overly positive portrait of the Roman Empire. A similar incident takes place in the gospel, when Pharisees warn Jesus to stay away because Herod wants to assassinate him (Luke 13:31). This one episode of benevolence hardly skews the picture of Luke's gospel as "pro-Pharisee."

I have demonstrated in this chapter how the wilderness can be "recreated" in other places by importing the wilderness aesthetic specifically through the "wilderness experience" of baptism. In the next and final chapter, I will look at another place—Paul's captivity in Rome—and explain how it imports the wilderness aesthetic and what impact the aesthetic has on the way the ending of Acts is read.

CHAPTER SIX: AS IN THE BEGINNING, SO IN THE END— THE WILDERNESS CONTINUES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The ending of Acts is not a "wilderness story" in any obvious sense. Unlike the pericopes examined in the previous chapter, it does not even feature a baptism of any kind. The final scene takes place in Rome, the real and symbolic center of the οἰκουμένη; no more urban or politically powerful setting could be imagined. But does Luke's "wilderness aesthetic" such as I have defined it provide a fresh way of engaging the close of Luke's two-volume work? In particular, does Luke's way of reading and deploying Isaiah to shape his wilderness aesthetic shed any light on the question of the Jews within God's plan? Does Luke lead the reader to see the Jews as definitively cut off from God's people, or does his subtle reading and use of Isaiah point toward a hope for their inclusion?

In the previous chapter, I showed how this wilderness aesthetic is present throughout Acts in even in urban settings; I examined the individual conversion and baptism accounts concerning Cornelius, Lydia, and Crispus in cities such as Caesarea, Philippi, and Corinth. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the wilderness aesthetic is detectable even at the ending of Acts, where Paul progresses to the seemingly least desolate place imaginable—Rome.[210] The text in focus is Acts 28:16-31: Paul arrives in Rome, is placed under house arrest, and meets with a

[210] One of the key debates throughout the last century was on the relationship between Luke-Acts and the Roman Empire. Conzelmann argues that Luke's narrative functions as an apologetic to the Roman Empire. He argues this based on the positively identified characters in Luke's story who happen to be agents of the Roman Empire (for example Cornelius); however, he overlooks both the Jews who are depicted positively and the agents of Rome who Luke clearly sees as antithetical to the gospel and the Christian community. See Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 138-144. In answer to this, many scholars in the last several decades have observed Luke's resistance to empire as a "friend" of the church. See Wes Howard-Brook, *"Come Out, My People!": God's Call out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books: 2010); Amanda Miller, *Rumor of Resistance: Status Reversals and Hidden Transcripts in the Gospel of Luke* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014); and Kazuhiko Yamazaki-Ransom, *The Roman Empire in Luke's Narrative* (London: T&T Clark International, 2010).

circle of local Jewish leaders. Paul passionately attempts to convince his listeners of the gospel's truth; some believe, and some do not. Luke then concludes a narrative that has spanned decades and continents by briefly commenting on the apostle's two-year preaching stint in Rome while still under house arrest.

By showing the wilderness aesthetic as both present and effective in the Acts finale in Rome, I also demonstrate how the ending of Acts forms a perfect frame for the entire Luke-Acts narrative. Luke designs his narrative to have his beginning and end well-matched, so as to compose a narrative frame. Literary critics note that while the beginning and ending scenes of a given artistic work are indeed embedded in the narrative, they also provide commentary on the narrative as a whole.[211] Literarily, the ending frame of a narrative answers the beginning frame; it gives an account of how the story developed its initial proclamation. Has the voice calling in the wilderness been drowned out by the din of the οἰκουμένη? Have the people of God exchanged the wilderness as their place of self-definition for the urban-focused empire?

I argue that Luke's composition ends very much like it begins and that by reading the parts of the frame as reflecting each other, we can appreciate how the wilderness aesthetic creates an interpretive key for the whole of the Luke-Acts narrative. I will show how the final account concerning Paul mirrors the account concerning John the Baptist, with which we began our analysis of the wilderness aesthetic (Luke 3:1-20). And so, with regard to the commentary made by the narrative frame, I will demonstrate that that the frame shaped by the wilderness aesthetic casts Luke's story from start to finish in the image of the desert.

[211] Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, 209-212.

6.2 THE END OF ACTS AS (THE FIRST) WILDERNESS SCENE

In this first section, I argue that the final scene of the Luke-Acts narrative can be read as a wilderness story, and should be read especially in connection with Luke's first wilderness scene (Luke 3:1-20). In addition to having the same features as that first wilderness story (evoking Israel's scriptural tradition, equality in regard to salvation and sight, and a sharp contrast with the οἰκουμένη), Acts 28:16-31 also draws a parallels between the apostle Paul and John the Baptist, thus underscoring the link between the two passages. The similarities between the beginning frame (Luke 3:1-20) and the ending frame (Acts 28:16-31) structure the overall arch of the story—how "the way in the wilderness" extends even to the heart of the empire.

6.1.1 Connection with Israel's Scriptural Past

6.1.1.1 "For the sake of the hope of Israel."

Paul begins his relationship with the Roman Jews by asserting that his current imprisonment is "for the sake of the hope of Israel" (28:20).[212] Paul has already made a similar statement while standing trial: "I stand here now on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors" (26:6). In his words to Festus, Paul explains that the accusation made by the Jews is based on his interpretation of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of God's promise to redeem Israel. Paul claims that such an interpretation is totally in keeping with Jewish tradition. The reader recalls the disciples on the road to Emmaus, describing the expectations of the people regarding Jesus of Nazareth: "we had hoped he would be the one to restore hope to Israel" (Luke 24:21).

This phrase, "the hope of Israel," also draws the reader back to the beginning of Acts, when the disciples ask Jesus, "Is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

[212] Jeremiah also refers to God as "the hope of Israel" (LXX Jer 14:8; 17:13). The LXX translator uses ὑπομονὴ instead of ἐλπίς.

(Acts 1:6). Jesus then seems to deflect the question by instead mapping out the geographical trajectory of their evangelism: "to the utter ends of the earth" (1:8). But one can argue that Jesus does not actually deflect the disciples' question, but rather that "Israel" (and therefore also the kingdom) will not be delineated by the geographical boundaries of land, nor by the trappings of political rule, nor between the physical boundaries between Jew and Gentile, but is actually broader and more inclusive than the apostles comprehend. In light of this, Paul's transport of the gospel to Rome can be understood in part as the significance of "Israel" extending far beyond what the οἰκουμένη might believe possible, when viewed from a small dot on the Empire's map.

However, the phrase "for the sake of the hope of Israel" reaches even farther back in Luke's narrative than the beginning of Acts. It echoes the chapters of Luke's prologue that chronicle the birth narratives of Jesus and John the Baptist in archaic Septuagintal fashion. Mary sings that God "has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy according to the promises he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants forever" (Luke 1:54-55). Zechariah sings about "the God of Israel" and his divine actions that reach back into Israel's history: "as he spoke through the mouths of the prophets of old" (1:70); "has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors and has remembered his holy covenant" (1:72); and "the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham" (1:73). Simeon declares in the temple that Jesus symbolizes "glory for God's people Israel" (2:32). Luke has therefore consistently demonstrated a commitment to the belief that God remains faithful to Israel.

Paul's statement about "the hope of Israel" also corresponds to the words the risen Jesus speaks about Paul to Ananias: "He is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel" (9:15). It is noteworthy that while Paul discloses his mission at the end as being "for the sake of the hope of Israel," the risen Jesus

includes both Gentiles and Jews in the beginning of Paul's missionary story (9:15; 26:17-20).

The incorporation of the Gentiles is an essential element in Israel's future as Gaventa has noted: "The reference to the 'hope of Israel' recalls, of course, Paul's identification of that hope with Israel's past, as well as with…the declaration of saving light to all people."[213] Nor is this view only demonstrated by Paul, but in a pivotal moment in Acts, James—the leader of the Jerusalem community—describes the gospel as both restoring Israel and extending it to the Gentiles (see Acts 15:16-17). Clearly, this is a point Luke continuously makes throughout Acts as part of his demonstration of God's faithfulness to Israel. So Luke appropriately places it in his conclusion as well—yet another clue that Luke has not abandoned the program which he set out to accomplish.

6.2.1.2 Moses and the Prophets.

Luke makes another connection with Israel's history when Paul debates his fellow Jews. When Paul engages in debate about the truth of the gospel, he includes among his persuasive tools references to Μωϋσῆς καὶ οἱ προφῆται (28:23). Nor is Paul the first to do so in Luke-Acts. In Luke's gospel, Jesus references Μωϋσῆς καὶ οἱ προφῆται as authoritative teaching on which his own instruction is founded (Luke 16:29) and as evidence for his messianic identity, particularly as a suffering messiah (Luke 24:27). In Acts, Peter (Acts 3:21-23) and Stephen (Acts 7:37) both justify the gospel message to other Jews by references to Moses and the entire prophetic tradition.

Only a few chapters prior to the Acts finale, Paul uses the phrase "Moses and the prophets" (although inverted) in order to demonstrate not only the truth of the gospel, but the gospel's goal of universal salvation:

To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and

[213] Gaventa, *Acts*, 365.

> great, saying nothing but what *the prophets and Moses* said would take place: that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22-23).

Again, this demonstrates how Luke understands the inclusion of the Gentiles as part of Israel's past (as it is part of the prophetic tradition) and an anticipated part of Israel's future—particularly because he ends his gospel with Jesus twice claiming "Moses and the prophets" as the precedent that testifies to his suffering, death, and resurrection (Luke 24:27, 44). Once more, it is not only Paul who holds this view. In the apostolic council meeting, James states that regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's people: "the words of the prophets agree with this" (15:15). This means that even though Moses did not make the inclusion of the Gentiles an explicit facet of his proclamation as some of the prophets did, Μωϋσῆς καὶ οἱ προφῆται nonetheless function together, building a case for the future that God envisions.[214] Everson writes:

> The words of the Isaiah scroll were not heard in isolation. They were heard within the broader perspective of Israel's Torah and wisdom traditions, together with other prophetic writings and the psalms, all anchored in the memories of Moses.[215]

Luke therefore interprets God's vision for Israel (as told by Isaiah) as retroactively embedded even in the foundational Mosaic law.[216]

6.2.1.3 Isaiah 6:9-10.

After claiming "the prophets" as theological precedent for the gospel that he preaches, Paul specifically quotes the prophet Isaiah; more precisely, Paul quotes the words that God

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[214] Luke has already demonstrated this type of interpretation in the passage concerning Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39). Philip begins with the passage from Isaiah on the suffering servant, then traces its trajectory to Jesus and the gospel.

[215] A Joseph Everson, "A Bitter Memory: Isaiah's Commission in Isaiah 6;1-13" in *Desert Will Bloom: Poetic Visions in Isaiah* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 64.

[216] Roger Cotton, "The Gospel in the Old Testament According to Paul in Acts 13," 286-287. Cotton argues that such interpretation was and is done not by concluding with the text in question, but by beginning with its principals and then tracing its understood trajectories.

speaks to commission the prophet Isaiah for his prophetic task. At the very end of Acts, just when the reader looks for closure, Luke has Paul quote the *beginning* of Isaiah's prophetic undertaking. And Isaiah's appointed task is not an enjoyable one. God announces that the message Isaiah must carry will not explicitly urge the people to repentance (although it has been suggested that God's hope is for it to inspire repentance)[217] but rather an observation of their refusal to repent.[218] One wonders why it even requires delivery? God does not direct Isaiah to instruct the people or even attempt to convince them, but merely to state the obvious and yet overlooked fact: "you have closed your eyes so that you will not see" (Isaiah 6:10).[219] Thus, Luke has Paul acknowledge that the development of the prophetic identity includes preaching a message that is certain to fail in its ability to produce repentance.[220]

Many have been tempted therefore to read pessimism into Luke's idea concerning the Jews within the future of Israel.[221] But we need to bear in mind here Luke's other use of this same citation from Isaiah. While the fullest form of the Isaiah 6:9-10 quotation appears at the end of Acts, this is not its first appearance in Luke's story. Jesus cites a shortened version after

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[217] John Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity: 2014), 23.

[218] Luke uses the Septuagint (LXX) version of this quotation rather than the Masoretic Text (MT). As shown in the table below, the MT version of Isaiah outlines the necessity of the people's rejection of God and the prophet's role in "heart-hardening" so that the people will be punished: "make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes" (6:10). This recalls the role of God in hardening the heart of Pharaoh in the Exodus story (Ex 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1; 11:10; 14:4). The LXX translation of this text narrates the people's turning away from God rather than prescribing it.

[219] The LXX alters the MT's imperatives in v. 10 ("make their heart dull, shut their eyes, stop their ears") to passive indicatives ("their hearing has been made dull"), shifting the responsibility of rebellion (somewhat) from a problematic theodicy to that of the people.

[220] Ben Witherington III, *Isaiah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 61. Witherington notes that the divine oberservation of the people's willful "closing their eyes" is meant to show the need for repentance rather than to hinder it.

[221] e. g., Henry Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, 255. Cadbury mentions that a unique facet of Luke's narrative is "God's rejection of the Jews while accepting the Gentiles."

he concludes his "Parable of the Sower." He explains to his disciples that he speaks in parables so that others "looking may not perceive, and listening they may not understand" (Luke 8:10).[222]

The two quotations of Isaiah 6 shed light on each other.[223] Both Isaiah 6 and the Parable of the Sower demonstrate why some hearers do not receive God's word ("having ears they do not hear"), yet Jesus concludes his parable not by disparaging the seed (God's word) that did not take root, but by emphasizing the abundance produced from the seed that fell on good soil—it yields a hundredfold (Luke 8:12). The success of the word's proclamation, therefore, does not depend on all the seeds taking root, but on the seeds that do take root in good soil growing to maturity. In addition, Jesus's ministry and that of his disciples does not end after he quotes Isaiah's frustrating message. Jesus continues to teach, preach, and heal. In fact, Luke's Jesus tells more parables than any of the other gospels, clearly with the intent of making himself understood (see Luke 10:30; 12:16; 13:18; 14:16; 15:3; 15:11; 16:1).

By the same token, Paul's quotation of Isaiah does not any more indicate the end of his preaching to Jews than it spelled the end of Jesus's ministry. The proclamation of the gospel to the Jews is not a failure because some reject it or will reject it in the future. Nor does Luke narrate a wholesale refusal of the good news on the part of the Jews; in each instance of its preaching, some always believe and some do not (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1; 9:42; 12:24; 13:43; 14:1; 17:10), enabling the pattern of Paul's frustration and subsequent Jewish acceptance

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[222] Luke has inherited the reference to Isaiah 6 from Mark in the context of the Parable of the Sower (Matthew quotes it as well). Luke uniquely removes the suggestion of future punishment for "not seeing and hearing." While Mark shapes the reference to preclude forgiveness (Mark 4:12), Matthew follows the LXX's choice of "heal," just as Luke does in Acts 28:27. Luke also changes the LXX future tense of the verbs βλέπω and ἀκούω to present subjunctive.

[223] Alexander, "Reading Luke-Acts Back to Front," 21. Alexander notes this curtailing of Isaiah 6:10 and the delaying of it until the end of Acts strongly suggests a purposeful linking of the early narrative of the gospel (before Luke's travel narrative in chapter 9) with the ending of Acts. This move on Luke's part demonstrates "prospective unity" of the two volumes.

of the gospel.[224]

In the previous chapter, I noted how Paul frequently makes statements of exasperation and disappointment with Jews and announces a turn to the Gentiles. Paul makes a similar declaration to the one in Acts 28 when he dramatically quits the Corinthian synagogue…immediately before Crispus—the very ruler of the synagogue—becomes a believer and is baptized (Acts 18:6), launching a city-wide conversion. Earlier still, in another synagogue confrontation, Paul makes a statement that strikingly resembles his final one in Acts 28, since it also includes a quotation from Isaiah on salvation for the Gentiles and passes judgment on Jews who do not accept the gospel:

> Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. For so God has commanded us saying, "I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:46-47).

After this seemingly conclusive statement from Paul, a few sentences later in his narrative, Luke writes that in Iconium "a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers" (Acts 14:1). Paul thus habitually despairs over the mission to the Jews, only to be repeatedly and surprisingly successful in persuading many of them! Luke's achievement in this portrayal of Paul is that the reader is trained to remain open to the possibility of belief, even—or perhaps, *especially*—when it seems unlikely. Luke demonstrated this in the individual cases of unlikely belief (which includes Paul himself), and here in cases of large groups of Jews who previously seemed opposed to Paul's teaching.[225]

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[224] Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1972), 41-7.

[225] In addition, Luke reveals that, after the conversion *en masse* in Iconium, another skirmish breaks out. Luke reports: "an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and stone them" (14:5). As I have consistently demonstrated, violent behavior—especially performed to restrict the preaching of the gospel—is indicative of the οἰκουμένη. Luke emphasizes that the oppressors of the church are also Jews and Gentiles.

Rather than such a pronouncement representing Paul's (and ultimately God's) definitive turning away from Israel (*pace* Cadbury et. al), Daniel Marguerat suggests that this particular quotation of Isaiah places Paul even more squarely within Israel and even more dedicated to the mission directed to Israel:

> The apostle takes on and duplicates in the face of Israel the prophet's failure; he borrows the prophet's voice. Paul does not speak in vv. 26-27, but he makes *the prophet* speak in order to attest the continuity in the history of salvation. This drama welds the past to the present and places the Christian preacher and the prophet side by side (italics his).[226]

In short, Paul reciting Isaiah's words forecasting rebellion and subsequent judgment at the end of Acts no more intimates God's abandonment of Israel than did Isaiah's initial prophetic proclamation. Rather, the prophet's (both Isaiah's and Paul's) struggle with unrepentant people at God's behest and in view of God's judgment is a repeated—and therefore, an expected—feature of prophetic work.[227] Although indeed emphasizing judgment, such prophetic action does not place Paul at odds with Israel, but even more at its service.[228]

6.1.2 Unhindered and Universal Aesthetic

6.2.2.1 *Every and all.*

Once again, Luke points to a universal perspective indicative of the wilderness aesthetic in his use of πᾶς, "all." Luke writes that Paul's apostolic career continues by his "welcoming all (πᾶς) who came to him" (28:30). The text as it reads in NA28 does not specify the belief or

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[226] Daniel Marguerat, "The Enigma of the Silent Closing of Acts (28:16-31)" in *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke's Narrative Claim Upon Israel's Legacy*, edited by David Moessner (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International: 1999), 301.

[227] Sheldon Blank, "Traces of Prophetic Agony in Isaiah," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, no 27 (1956): 81-92.

[228] Jervell, *Luke and the People of God*, 170-171. Jervell argues that Luke's portrayal of Paul versus the unbelieving Jews does not serve to denigrate the mission to the Jews but to defend Paul: "Paul, not his accusers, has the right to speak on behalf of the people and to represent Israel. With his knowledge of the law and his belief in the Messiah, Paul is the real Pharisee and the true Jew who has the right to serve as the teacher of Israel…"

ethnic status of those included in the term πᾶς, but one textual variant clarifies that Ιουδαιους τε και Ελληνας came to listen to Paul.[229] The likelihood that both Jews and Gentiles are included in πᾶς is increased by Luke's two-fold mention of Paul's proclaiming the kingdom of God (28:23, 31) and by the fact that "some were persuaded" (28:24).[230]

6.2.2.2 Unhindered.

Just as nothing prevented the Ethiopian eunuch from baptism in the wilderness of Acts 8, nothing prevents Paul's proclamation of the gospel even while he is a prisoner in Rome. Luke ends the entire narrative with Paul " proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness (μετὰ πάσης παρρησίας) and without hindrance (ἀκωλύτως)" (Acts 28:31). The alpha privative adverb ἀκωλύτως is formed on the same root as the verb used by the eunuch when he inquires "what prevents (κωλύω) me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:37). Peter also used it when he asked, "Can anyone withhold (κωλύω) the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (10:47), and "who was I that I could hinder (κωλύω) God?" (11:17). Just as we have observed the wilderness as the place where obstacles and hindrances are removed so that all people may access God's salvation, so here there are no obstacles to Paul's proclamation of the kingdom of God and Jesus.

In addition to an absence of hindrance, Luke adds that Paul preached μετὰ πάσης

[229] Miniscule 614, Codex Gigas, and various Vulgate manuscripts are all witnesses in the Western tradition, which often tends toward suspicion or denigration of the Jews. The fact that such textual witnesses speak to the mutual ongoing inclusion of both Jews and gentiles at the conclusion of Acts is certainly worth attention. See E.J. Epp, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts* (New Testament Studies Monography Series 3; Cambridge: University Press, 1966).

[230] Luke has previously combined language of the kingdom of God with language of universal inclusivity, often through the use of πᾶς (Luke 4:42-44; 9:10-17; Acts 8:12), but also had Paul say: "It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). This is spoken in Iconium and Antioch, which Luke has previously stated that "a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers" (14:1).

παρρησίας, "with all boldness/confidence" (28:31).[231] This construction is used elsewhere in Acts, describing the bold manner of proclamation on the part of the apostolic community (Acts 2:29; 4:13, 29, 31).[232] In an essay on the use of παρρησία, James Shelton argues that while the phrase μετὰ παρρησία often described a free person's (as opposed to a slave or non-citizen) privilege to speak in the assembly of the πόλις (that is, in the Greco-Roman world), Luke's use of παρρησία draws more from the Septuagint—particularly on how the Hebrews were *made free* by God.[233] One critical passage of the LXX with such use reads: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, where you were slaves; and I shattered the bond of your yoke, and brought you forth μετὰ παρρησίας (in freedom)" (LXX Lev 26:13). Here, this phrase conveys openness, freedom, or liberty and it is used in direct contrast with imprisonment, slavery, and bondage. The entire phrase inarguably means that God's deliverance resulted in a changed manner or status of the Hebrews.

But in addition, the structure of Lev 26:13 invite us to read μετὰ παρρησίας as parallel to the liberation from Egypt:

> ἐξαγαγὼν ὑμᾶς ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου, "brought you out of the land of Egypt"
> ἤγαγον ὑμᾶς μετὰ παρρησίας, "brought you forth in freedom"

Just as Egypt represents an actual place of bondage, so παρρησία motions toward Israel's position or location in a place of freedom. For Israel during the Exodus story, this place of experienced liberty was indeed the actual wilderness. For Luke's Paul, Rome is equivalent to Egypt since Paul is in literal bondage. But the manner in which Paul preaches μετὰ παρρησίας

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[231] *Liddell & Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*. Παρρησία, 535.

[232] Paul himself also uses παρρησία to describe his activities (2 Cor 3:12; Phil 1:20; Philemon 8). Of these references, two of them (Philippians and Philemon) describe Paul's speaking, preaching, and writing while in prison, and therefore in a similar setting described in the end of Acts.

[233] James Shelton, "Holy Boldness in Acts with Special Reference to Pauline-Lukan Intertextuality," in *Trajectories in Acts: Essays in Honor of John Wesley Wyckoff* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 302.

creates a space of freedom even though paradoxically he remains in imperial custody.[234]

Just as Isaiah is quoted in Luke 3:4-6 to describe the ability to give sight, so Paul quotes Isaiah in Acts 28:26-27 also, regarding the ability to see. The motif of sight (often coupled with hearing) is prominent in Isaiah as a metaphor for comprehending truth (41:20; 42:40; 44:9, 18; 52:15; 53:11; 61:9). Paul insinuates that the reason that some of the Jews do not "see" the truth of the gospel is because they have purposely closed their eyes: "they have shut their eyes so that they might not look with their eyes…and understand with their hearts and turn" (28:27).[235] Here, the quotation adds the act of *hearing* to seeing, mimicking one iteration of Paul's own conversion testimony:

> "A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well-spoken of by all the Jews living there, came to me; and standing beside me, he said, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight!' In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. Then he said, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice (Acts 22:12-14).[236]

Upon concluding the judgment against those refusing to believe, Paul states that God's salvation has also gone to the Gentiles, choosing the imagery of hearing over sight: "they will listen" (28:28). In Luke 3, sight is afforded by clearing the landscape of obstacles that create an inequality: "the mountains and hills will be made low and the valleys raised up…and all flesh will see the salvation of God." The mention of "all flesh" gestures towards whole people groups being made equal in their access to God. At the end of Acts, sight is an issue of choice—whether

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[234] Rick Strelan, "Luke's Use of Isaiah LXX in Acts," in *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles: Collected Essays* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 154. Strelan notes: " Of the 58 words found only in Luke-Acts in NT, 51 appear in the LXX…Of 69 characteristically Lukan words and phrases, 68 occur in the LXX." Thus, he makes the case that using Septuagintal nuances makes sense in regards to understanding Luke's vocabulary choices.

[235] Craig Evans, *To See and Not Perceive: Isaiah 6:9-10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989), 126.

[236] For hearing (ἀκούω) as a response to God's word, see Luke 5:1, 15; 6:27, 47; 8:8-15, 21; 9:35; 10:16; 11:28; 14:35; 16:29-31; Acts 2:22; 4:4, 19; 7:2; 13:7, 16; 15:7; 16:14; 18:8; 21:20.

one opens or closes one's eyes.

K.T. Aitken argues that the sensory perception/understanding motif plays out in Isaiah by juxtaposing positive and negative renderings of sight/hearing and understanding. In Isaiah 6:1-13, seeing and hearing are rendered in the positive ("you will indeed see/hear") while understanding is described in the negative ("you will not understand"). In Isaiah's context, argues Aitken, this positive/negative pairing of hearing God but not attending to God's message leads to God in turn "speaking" to them through the machinations of Gentiles (in Isaiah's case, the invading Assyrians). [237] A similar interpretation can be seen in Luke's inclusion of Isaiah's sight/hearing motif. While the Jews to whom Paul preaches have the opportunity—the seeing and hearing—they still lack understanding. Paul's conclusion is that the future then includes God's incorporation of believing Gentiles (rather than invading armies) as a new conduit of the message, and so he concludes: "This salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; *they will listen*" (Acts 28:28).

John the Baptist preached the coming salvation and thereby also judgment (Luke 3:16-17). At the end of Acts, the salvific justice of God once again demands a choice between repentance and refusal. Of Paul's initial preaching to the Jews in Rome, Luke writes: "From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and from the prophets" (28:23). After the crowd is divided and arguing over the matter, Paul quotes Isaiah and then states: "this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles" (28:28).[238] Luke certainly equates the story of

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[237] K.T. Aitken, "Hearing and Seeing: Metamorphoses of a Motif in Isaiah" in *Among the Prophets: Language, Image, and Structure in the Prophetic Writings* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 28.

[238] Jacques Dupont, *The Salvation of the Gentiles: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 14-15. Dupont notes that this is one of the few uses of the neuter form σωτήριον in the NT and corresponds to Luke 2:30 and 3:4-6.

Jesus in Luke's gospel with God's salvation (and therefore also judgment). Combining Isaiah's words pronouncing judgement and declaring that God's salvation has indeed been extended to the nations rings true to John's preaching in Luke 3:1-20.

6.1.3 Contrast with Οἰκουμένη

As with the wilderness scenes in Luke and Acts, the unhindered aesthetic of Paul's welcoming of all and unhindered evangelism on behalf of the kingdom of God presents a severe contrast to the aesthetic of the οἰκουμένη. In the scene at Rome, the narrator tells us that Paul—while permitted to live in his own lodgings—is kept under the guard of a soldier: σὺν τῷ φυλάσσοντι αὐτὸν στρατιώτῃ (28:16). When speaking with the local Jewish contingency, Paul gestures dramatically toward τὴν ἅλυσιν ταύτην (*this* chain) that he wears (28:20), possibly meaning that he is tethered either to his house or to the soldier assigned to detain him.[239] Prison guards, chains, and bonds convey the aesthetic of obstruction and have been a feature of the οἰκουμένη aesthetic in other clashes between the wilderness and οἰκουμένη (Luke 3:21; 8:29; Acts 8:3; 9:1-3; 16:23-27).

Another similarity between the ending scene of Acts and the other depictions of the οἰκουμένη is Paul's description of his experience of being "arrested and handed over" (28:17), just as was prophesied concerning him (21:11). The language of handing over was first introduced in the wilderness scene of Jesus's temptation when the devil speaks explicitly about the nature of the οἰκουμένη in terms of παραδίδωμι, "handing over" (Luke 4:6). The same verb was used by Jesus to describe his own arrest and crucifixion by a hierarchy of human powers (Luke 18:32). Like the physical chains and prisons, the verb παραδίδωμι conveys the aesthetic of control, hinderance, and violence.

[239] Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary*, 509.

Luke's language is undoubtedly meant to link the characters and fates of Paul and Jesus.[240] Since Luke portrays Jesus's mission in terms of the wilderness aesthetic and as therefore antithetical to the οἰκουμένη, it is reasonable to conclude that if Luke intends Paul to be associated with Jesus, then he intends that Paul also show this wilderness aesthetic in his own ministry. Indeed, Paul has only recently been confused with being a revolutionary wilderness prophet (Acts 21:38), so there must indeed be "something wild about him." Even before this scene, Luke explicitly paints Paul as the opponent of the οἰκουμένη. Paul is described as one who "is turning the οἰκουμένη upside down" (17:6) and as "a pestilent fellow, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the οἰκουμένη" (24:5).

6.1.4 The Apostle and the Baptizer

Read according to the wilderness aesthetic, Paul's experience and the Baptist's have many parallels. First, large numbers (πλείονες) come to see Paul (Acts 28:23), which is parallel to the crowds (ὄχλος) who came to be baptized by John (Luke 3:7). Second, both John and Paul proclaim or preach (κηρύσσω): John the baptism of repentance (Luke 3:3) and Paul the kingdom of God (Acts 28:31). Third, in both stories, Luke stresses the extension of salvation. In regard to John's program, salvation is for "all flesh" (Luke 3:6). For Paul, it extends to the Gentiles (Acts 28:28). Fourth, John is imprisoned by Herod (a fixture of the οἰκουμένη) for his preaching, and Paul proclaims while in chains.

Throughout the wider narrative, Luke's language creates a connection between Paul and the Baptist. In two separate instances, Paul reiterates (both directly and indirectly) the language of Luke 3:3-17 in ways that imply a continuity between himself and the Baptist. Following the

[240] Pervo, *Acts*, 682. Also see the definitive work on the literary parallels between Paul and Jesus in Walter Radl, *Paulus und Jesus im lukanschen Doppelwerk Untersuchungen zu Parallelmotiven im Lukasevangelium und in der Apostelgeschichte* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1975).

apostolic commissioning of Paul and Silas, the first miracle performed by Paul occurs when he curses the magician Elymas whom the text specifies as "a Jewish false prophet" (Acts 13:6). Paul—portraying the true prophet in this scene—repeats and reverses the very words of Isaiah quoted about John the Baptist in Luke 3:5, οὐ παύσῃ διαστρέφων τὰς ὁδοὺς τοῦ κυρίου τὰς εὐθείας; (Acts 13:10). The Baptist is not mentioned explicitly, but there is no doubt that Paul accuses Elymas of working against the mission that Luke describes as the Baptist's. We can infer that Luke understands Paul as holding to the same mission, and thus in some way being a successor to John.

Immediately after the scene with Elymas, Paul preaches his first sermon in the synagogue in Antioch. He accepts John the Baptist as a legitimate prophet, using John's words to support Jesus's messianic identity: "He (John) said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but one is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of the sandals on his feet" (Acts 13:25-26). Paul is then the only apostle in Acts to quote the Baptist's actual words from Luke's gospel.[241]

Paul later encounters disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus (Acts 19:2-6). Despite the distance from the Judean desert and the decades that have passed, the influence of the Baptizer clearly has not diminished but extends itself into the wider Mediterranean world and throughout the entire Luke-Acts narrative.[242] Paul proves that the Baptist's work and teachings point beyond themselves to the impending messianic reality, that John's ultimate instruction was for "the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus" (Acts 19:4). Thus, Paul

[241] J. Ramsey Michaels, "An Odd Couple?," 245-260. It is important to note that Michael's study is a historical one, in which he argues that the actual person of Paul—not the literary character of Luke's creation—was influenced by the legacy of John the Baptist. Michaels makes the point though that the words Paul refers to are not necessarily the words that Luke attributes to the Baptist. This may point to actual knowledge Luke has of Paul's preaching.

[242] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 67.

uses the Baptist's prophetic ministry to undergird his own.

Luke fashions the apostle in the image of the Baptist by using for each of the two the verbs κηρύσσω (I preach, proclaim) and εὐαγγελίζομαι (I announce good news) to describe their activities (Luke 3:3, 18; Acts 9:20; 14:7; 16:10). Paul also agrees with the content of John's preaching. John consistently calls the people to repentance (Luke 3:3, 8; 7:30; Acts 13:24; 19:40). With such repentance, signified by baptism, people must also "bear fruits worthy (ἄξιος) of repentance (μετάνοια)" (Luke 3:8). Paul echoes this in his sermon to Agrippa: "they should do deeds ἄξιος with μετάνοια" (Acts 26:20). Paul also proclaims repentance to pagan Gentiles, stressing the universal call for "all people" to repent (Acts 17:30; 20:21).

Similarly, Luke artistically links the Baptist and the Apostle by a creative double (or maybe triple!) use of the "way." Whereas John was born "to prepare the way of the Lord" (Luke 1:76), Paul's story starts with his persecution of this very Way (Acts 8:1; 9:1-2). The use of ὁδός in reference to the Christian community is a constant refrain throughout Acts (18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14). Paul's fateful encounter with the risen Jesus of Nazareth in fact occurs on the ὁδός and that this setting was the stage for his own repentance gets repeated throughout Acts (9:17, 27; 26:13). Eventually, Paul's own gospel message is declared "a ὁδός of salvation" (Acts 16:7).

Finally, Paul is mistaken by a Roman soldier as a "wilderness prophet" (Acts 21:38). While it seems that Luke is referring to an incident reported by Josephus regarding an Egyptian who incited a revolt by amassing followers in the wilderness,[243] the mistaken identification describes Paul's actions in the present, which Gaventa describes as "a threat to public order."[244]

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[243] Josephus, *Jewish War*. Book II. 261. (5)

[244] Gaventa, *Acts*, 305.

In this episode, Paul is in Jerusalem—at the temple—and endures the same fate Luke's reader has come to expect of a wilderness prophet at the hands of the οἰκουμένη: the Jewish crowds attempt to kill him (21:31), and the Roman tribune arrests Paul and has him "bound with two chains" (21:33).

All these allusions and references lead the reader to connect the preaching and prophetic symbolism of John the Baptist to the continuation of that prophetic momentum by Paul. Michaels writes:

> No one will argue that John the Baptist was the major influence on Paul's life and thought…Yet John seems to have been for Paul a precedent, his only role model other than Jesus himself for the preaching of 'eschatological repentance' to Israel and the Gentiles. He was a more appropriate role model than Jesus precisely because he was not Jesus, but (like Paul) someone who called people to believe in Jesus (Acts 19:4).[245]

While Michaels takes a historical look at the connection between John the Baptist and Paul, his point is still salient in a literary reading. Whether or not John had any effect on the historical Paul, the reader of Luke-Acts nonetheless has the Baptist in mind when observing the similarities between the two characters and their contexts.

6.1.5 Summary

What is the benefit of reading the final narrative of Acts as a wilderness scene? First, the overarching character of wilderness is its openness to possibility. Unlike the οἰκουμένη, wilderness interrupts that which is expected or predictable. As Luke consistently demonstrates throughout his narrative, "the Way of the Lord" travels through many unexpected places. Like the baptism stories I explored in Acts 8-18, wilderness—and its mysterious aesthetic—has the power to transform even the most unlikely people into believers. Since we can understand this story as wilderness in nature, then, we are free to interpret it without the expected limitations of

[245] J. Ramsey Michaels, "Odd Couple," 245-260.

human probability.

6.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISA 6:9-10 AND ISA 40:3-5

Having established that Paul's final scene in Rome can be read as a parallel to the wilderness scene with John the Baptizer, and having demonstrated the benefits of reading the final scene this way, I now ask: how does Luke incorporation of the two quotations of Isaiah (in Luke 3 and Acts 28) shed light on how we understand this closing narrative specifically as a wilderness story? And how does this understanding, in turn, shape our sense of Luke's view concerning the people of God? I will argue that Luke uses the two related portions of Isaiah to frame his narrative, both of which either locate God's salvation in the wilderness explicitly (as in the case of Isa 40:3 quoted in Luke 3:4-6) or implied by its context (as demonstrated by Isa 6:9-10 quoted in Acts 28:26-27). Both these quotations feature the desert as a symbol of salvation—either future or current, but nonetheless both salvific.

6.3.1—Isaiah 6:9-10 (Acts 28:26-27)

As I previously mentioned, the quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10 is part of the prophet Isaiah's "call narrative." Isaiah sees a vision of God in the temple (6:1),[246] and when the Lord asks for a volunteer to be sent with a message to the people, Isaiah answers that he will go (6:8). The message is that even though the people have the ability to see, they have closed their eyes; while they have the opportunity to hear, they do not grasp (συνίημι). The word συνίημι, while meaning to perceive or understand, also means "to take notice of," thus expressing the same attitude toward the gospel as the unconcerned Gallio in Acts 18. Essentially, the message is that no matter what the prophet says, the people refuse to pay attention to the evidence of coming

[246] LXX uses οἶκος (house) rather than MT הכל (temple).

destruction and to hear the call to repentance.

In the first part of this study, and in several specific passages, I have shown how Luke characteristically "reads around" the texts he cites. We then must consider the wider context surrounding Isaiah 6:9-10. In the very next verse, Isaiah asks: "how long O Lord?" (6:11). Part of the prophet's task on the people's behalf is not just to forecast punishment and watch it come to fruition, but also to anticipate its limit and eventually announce its end.[247] God answers Isaiah: "until the cities are emptied from being uninhabited, and houses from having no people, and the land will be left an ἔρημος, a wilderness" (LXX Isaiah 6:11). The prophet foresees the emptying of the land, knowing that this desolation once fulfilled will signal the end of Israel's punishment. In other words, the *transformation* into a wilderness is indeed Israel's punishment, but the *actualization* of that wilderness means that the punishment is ending. The wilderness is a symbol of God's impending judgment and also future redemption.

6.3.2—Isaiah 40:3-5 (Luke 3:4-6)

The quotation from Isaiah 40:3-5 announces the coming era of salvation in Israel's history—marking a shift from the prophetic trend of impending judgment and captivity toward future hope of redemption.[248] Once again, we observe that Luke reads around his quotations, so it is noteworthy that this passage is immediately preceded by the imperative for someone to speak to the people on God's behalf. It therefore indeed parallels Isaiah 6, but on a happier note. These two verses plead for someone to "Comfort my people…speak to the heart of Jerusalem" (Isaiah 40:1-2). So although it is ambiguous—no one person is specifically named or

[247] J.J.M. Roberts, *First Isaiah: A Commentary* (Baltimore: Project Muse, 2016),100. This is a common question put to the Lord by prophets in regard to the duration of punishment. See Zech 1:12; Hab 1:2; Jer 12:4; 47:6; Ps 79:5.

[248] For the same reason, this passage was a focal point for the Essenes—another sect of first century Judaism—to describe the justification of their relocation from Jerusalem into the desert.

suggested—the prophetic announcement of a specific message is similar to Isaiah's own personal call narrative.[249] In these initial verses, God commands the speaker to announce to those in exile that Israel's period of punishment has been more than completed (πίμπλημι). As Isaiah asked God "how long?" at the onset of the punishment (Isaiah 6:11), chapter 40 answers the question of duration with a definite "this long and no longer!"

The wilderness signals the "no longer," because the imperative to tell Jerusalem that her punishment is over is immediately followed by the preparation of the way in the wilderness, where all are able to see the arrival of God. The wilderness signifies (quite literally) rock-bottom and recapitulates Israel's story of first meeting of God and the people in the wilderness, where the pattern was established. While *being made* a wilderness is a negative image because it is the result of judgment, when the wilderness has fully appeared, this signals a new era of God's faithfulness to Israel. The wilderness then becomes a place with no obstacles to Israel's view of the coming redemption as God draws near. More than merely recalling the words and themes of Isaiah's commissioning, Isaiah 40:3-5 portrays the prophetic actualization of Isaiah 6:1-12 just as Isaiah 6 anticipates the redemption described in chapter 40.

6.3.3—Isaiah in Reverse?

Isaiah 6 prophesies the time of exile, and so evokes a disheartening mood of judgment and destruction. Isaiah 40 indicates the beginning of homecoming, and therefore celebrates redemption from exile and bondage. The primary issue as it relates to the ending of Acts is how to reconcile the primarily hopeful quotation from Isaiah 40 at the beginning of Luke with the more pessimistic citation of judgment from Isaiah 6 at the end of Acts. Does Luke indeed reverse Isaiah's theme of "judgment and then redemption" and instead begin his narrative with God's

[249] John McKenzie, *Second Isaiah* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968), 17. The Masoretic text suggests that the directive is towards a divine or heavenly council.

salvation and end with judgment?

In his study *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, David Pao describes the relationship between Luke 3:4-6 and Acts 28:26-27 as indeed a "reversal."[250] Pao writes that salvation is announced for God's people—meaning Jewish Israel—at the beginning of Luke,[251] but that salvation is ultimately spurned by them at the end of Acts. He argues that the quotations of Isaiah announce the coming salvation in Luke 3 and mourn the lost salvation of the Jews in Acts 28.

The major problem with this position is that it ignores the context of the Isaiah quotations as they appear in both Isaiah and in Luke-Acts. In Isaiah's context, Isaiah 6:9-10 is not only followed by an end time to the suffering of Israel as punishment (Isa 6:11), but also God's mention of a remnant. LXX Isaiah describes the remnant as a seed, the idea that within large-scale calamity and destruction, God would preserve a portion of the people with which to rebuild (Isa 6:13).[252]

In the Lukan context, Paul's quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10 does not end the story of Luke-Acts, but Pao overlooks the *narrative* setting when interpreting the quotation. First, Paul has made comments such as this quotation throughout the Acts narrative, and yet the mission to both Jews and Gentiles continued. Even Jesus quoted this passage from Isaiah 6, and it did not mean that salvation was impossible for the crowds that flocked to hear him. Second, Paul's continuous

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[250] David Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, 105. Pao works with the idea of the Isaianic New Exodus, meaning that he reads Isaiah as interpreting Israel's exile as another type of Exodus story, where God delivers a people out of a forced bondage and reconstitutes them into a new people that serve him. He mines Isaiah 40-55 for themes, images, and pronouncements that capture the birth of a people. Pao argues that Acts is mainly concerned with fashioning the early Christian community's identity as the new people of God. He notes that the author of Luke-Acts follows Isaiah's example: just as Isaiah reimagines the Exodus from Egypt for the people returning from exile, so Luke imagines a new*er* Exodus with the Christian community also forming and validating its identity as the people of God.

[251] This is also doubtful since Luke's Jesus nearly is killed in his first sermon because of his biblical interpretation of Israel's stories including the Gentiles (Luke 4:16-30).

[252] The theory of the church being comprised of a portion of Jews (the remnant of Israel) and a portion of Gentiles is the position of Jacob Jervell, and one strongly criticized by Pao.

unhindered proclamation and welcoming of both Jews and Gentiles should influence how the reader interprets Paul's use of Isaiah 6.

In Pao's supplemental articles, he cites the disagreement among the Jews as further support for the removal of salvation as a future option for the Jews. Pao claims that because Luke presents the Jews in disagreement with each other at the conclusion of Acts, Luke means for the divided Jews to be in contrast with the united church.[253] The problem with this is that Luke literarily contrasts the Jews with *Gentiles*. In other words, Luke's story of the formation of the church does not seek to include "Jews and Christians" but rather "Jews and Gentiles," which Luke substantiates throughout the narrative (Acts 2:41; 9:2; 11:18; 14:1; 17:11; 19:17). On that note, Luke reports persecution of the church by both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 4:27; 14:5; 21:11; 26:17). If the Jews are to be excluded from the hope of future salvation on the basis of being divided, then the Gentiles would fare no better either.

In contrast to Pau, Peter Mallen takes a different approach to Luke's narrative trajectory. While Mallen does not use the term reversal, he explains that Luke changes Isaiah's course or direction. He notes that Luke does not merely work with the words of Isaiah, but also with the *patterns* of Isaiah. Mallen insists that Luke's theological reading of Isaiah is ever forward-focused; Luke does not highlight the pattern of Isaiah to explain the past but to alert the audience of how to understand the future.[254] He claims that Luke reads Isaiah for its recurring images and themes which have literary and theological valence. He specifically notes that interpreting Luke's use of Isaiah 6:9-10 at the end of Acts requires the reader to decipher what comes next

[253] Pao, "Disagreement among the Jews in Acts 28," in *Early Christian Voices: In Texts, Traditions, and Symbols—Essays in Honor of François Bovon* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 110.

[254] Peter Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation of Isaiah in Luke-Acts*, 200-209.

within the Isaianic pattern of "suffering and exaltation."[255] Mallen's emphasis on this pattern points to an interpretation that evaluates God's (and Luke's) plan more positively: "Luke is able to draw on the writings of Isaiah to show that the events recounted are not a deviation from God's ancient plan but rather form part of its realization."[256]

One would expect therefore, that Mallen would challenge Pau's position on the eschatological state of Israel. It is surprising that he asserts that Luke significantly alters Isaiah's theological goal. He claims that Luke adheres to Isaiah's thematic elements but specifically rejects Isaiah's vision of a restored Jerusalem as the eschatological reality,[257] which is another way of stating Pao's position that Isaiah's words signal a relocation of God's salvation from the Jews to the Gentiles (albeit Mallen's is a more subtle version). I object to this point as I have demonstrated that "Jerusalem" has more than one definition and function in Luke-Acts.

On one hand, I noted how "Jerusalem" functions (in a negative sense) as shorthand for the religious establishment, much the same way that "Washington" functions in an American political context. It is the place where prophets are killed (Luke 13:33-34; 18:31). Jerusalem symbolizes power and human authority, particularly political and religious (Luke 4:9; 22:4; Acts 4:5; 8:1; 9:2).

On the other hand, Jerusalem also has a positive function. It accommodates acts of prophecy (Luke 2:36), Jesus's dedication (Luke 2:22), and learning in the temple (2:41). In Acts, Jerusalem is where the apostles are directed to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4), and where

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[255] Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation*, 200.

[256] Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation*, 200.

[257] Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation*, 208. This is where the difference between Jerusalem as space and Jerusalem as place matters, both literarily and theologically in regard to Luke-Acts. If one interprets Jerusalem as a specific geographical location—its place—then certainly one may say that Luke alters Isaiah's vision. If, however, one understands Jerusalem as a type of space, then it may be that Luke proves quite faithful to Isaiah's vision after all.

subsequent proclamation of gospel goes out to all the world through the miracles of Pentecost (Acts 2:5). Not only Jerusalem, but specifically the temple situates where the apostles worship (2:46), pray (3:1), heal (3:8; 5:16), and proclaim the gospel (5:21).

And this dual view of "Jerusalem" is read in Isaiah as well. In his essay "Zion as Reality and Symbol in Psalms and Isaiah," Joseph Blenkinsopp argues:

> In the book of Isaiah there is…duality about Zion: on the one hand, the actual city Jerusalem with its many problems, its often incompetent and corrupt leaders both secular and religious, and its precarious position in relation to the current imperial power; on the other hand, an eschatological symbol of light in the surrounding darkness…*a place of* security and salvation[258] (italics mine).

To argue that God has not restored "Jerusalem" then begs the question of which definition of Jerusalem is in view. Jerusalem as *a place of* light is determined more by aesthetic vision than by geography, just as the wilderness is *a place of* unobstructed view of God's salvation.

As I have traced the aesthetic shape of Luke's text by way of the wilderness, the criteria by which the ending must be interpreted is what Savage referred to as the aesthetic "fit." Luke's skillfully crafted work fashions an aesthetic experience for the reader, who—by journeying through the narrative—is trained to make aesthetic judgments about what appropriately fits with that story.[259] In other words, does the ending cohere with the patterns and structure that Luke has given the narrative thus far? The reader has witnessed that throughout the narrative unlikely candidates for belief, believe; all people are given equal access to salvation; hierarchies and divisions become neutralized in the kingdom of God. Given that I have demonstrated Luke's opening and closing scenes as wilderness narratives, and that many places throughout Luke-Acts feature this same wilderness aesthetic, what does it mean for the entire narrative to begin and

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[258] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Essays on the Book of Isaiah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 131.

[259] Savage, "Aesthetic Experience," 178.

conclude in a place of open and unhindered access to God's salvation?

6.3.4—An (Unhindered) Possibility

The problem with deeming the Isaiah quotations a "reversal" is that it assumes that Luke (and before him, Isaiah) follows a linear timeline, so that covenant dynamics—judgment and redemption—can only move in one direction. Thus, some scholars have tended to compare the order of these passages in Isaiah with Luke's use of them at the beginning and the end of the narrative, arriving at the conclusion that Luke reverses Isaiah's order of redemption and judgment:

> Isaiah 6:9-10 (Judgment)→ →→→→→→→→Isaiah 40:3-5 (Redemption)
> Luke 3:4-6 (Redemption) →→→→→→→→Acts 28:26-27 (Judgment)

We would be remiss, therefore, if we were to overlook certain facts about these two quotations and their themes of God's impending judgment and subsequent redemption of Israel.

First, eras of judgment and salvation are not the inventions of Isaiah and the literary tools of Luke, but have been a pattern throughout the biblical accounts of Israel's history. The history of the exodus follows patterns of rebellion on the part of the people and redemption by God out of the calamity they bring on themselves. The pattern continues even when the Israelites move into the promised land—the Book of Judges narrates the Israelites recurring patterns of disobedience and subsequent redemption.[260]

By noticing this as an alternating pattern rather than a linear series of events, the ending of Luke-Acts makes more sense if it indeed depicts judgment, but also anticipates redemption. Instead of a reversal, the narrative might be conceptualized using the following image:

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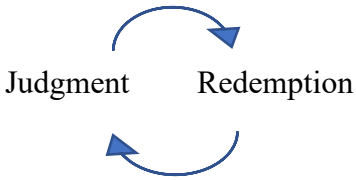
[260] Kenneth Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture in Luke-Acts: Telling the History of God's People Intertextually* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 185.



It is also important to note that Israel's so-called pattern of rebellion and salvation did not begin with judgment! God hears the cries of the Hebrews in Egypt and remembers the covenant made with their ancestors (Ex 2:24-25). The descendants of Jacob are not enslaved in Egypt as a punishment for violating God's law as their bondage occurred long before the law was given. God redeems them from slavery, leads them *into the wilderness*, enters into covenant with them, gives them the law, and *then* they rebel (Deut 1:26). Therefore, the linear view of judgment and redemption is not one Luke inherited. Instead it is the alternating pattern Luke himself deciphers. Wilderness begins as a place of salvation before it ever became a place of punishment.

Second, the alternating themes of judgment and redemption as expressed in these passages are not mutually exclusive: salvation is present even in judgment, and judgment remains a factor even when salvation is announced. This may be why the desert makes such a fitting metaphor since it too symbolizes both judgment and redemption. Melugin offers a helpful perspective on the relationship between the two texts and their dominant themes:

> It is clear that while Isa 6 seems to emphasize a commissioning regarding a time of judgment and 40:1-8 appears to focus on a time of forgiveness and deliverance, *both texts point forward and backward*. Thus it is productive to ask how sharply the two texts represent a dividing line between a symbolic world dominated by judgment and a symbolic world characterized by deliverance (italics mine).[261]

Both Israel's judgment and redemption, symbolized by Isaiah's wilderness passages, are always part of God's salvific relationship with Israel. The answer to Melugin's clearly rhetorical

[261] Roy Melugin, "Poetic Imagination, Intertextuality, and Life in a Symbolic World," in *Desert Will Bloom: Poetic Visions in Isaiah,* Edited by A. Joseph Everson and Hyun Chul Paul Kim (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 12.

question—how productive is it to ask whether Isaiah's symbolic world focuses on judgment or deliverance—is that it is not productive, but in fact harmful. The tendency to see Isaiah's texts in Luke-Acts as either judgment or redemption paints an unrealistic picture of both aspects and has resulted in narrow (and often anti-Jewish) readings of Luke-Acts.

For example, Paul's comment upon concluding Isaiah 6:9-10 is: τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἀπεστάλη τοῦτο τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ, "this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles." Much has been made about the aorist passive tense of ἀποστέλλω in Acts 28:28,[262] particularly because the next clause refers to the Gentiles' response in the future: "they will listen." As a result, some scholars read the turn from the passive past to the active future as a "final word" of Luke-Acts on the Jewish people. But it must be remembered that Acts 28 does not end at verse 28! Paul's mission continues after his quotation of Isaiah. He welcomes "all" and proclaims the kingdom of God. The "final word" of Acts is the very unfinal word ἀκωλύτως—unrestricted and open to possibility.

Furthermore, as noted earlier, Acts 28:28 is one of few instances in the New Testament where the neuter adjective σωτήριος is used rather than the feminine noun σωτηρία. Its use makes a direct link to the beginning wilderness scene and echoes Isaiah 40:5.[263] Thus, God's salvation and judgment play vital roles in both texts although one may be emphasized more than the other.[264]

As opposed to a linear timeline, the statement issued by Paul through the use of Isaiah

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[262] Marianne Bonz, "Luke's Revision of Paul's Reflection in Romans 9-11" in *Early Christian Voices: In Texts, Traditions, and Symbols—Essays in Honor of François Bovon* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 151.

[263] Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture in Luke-Acts*, 191.

[264] Wagner, *Reading the Sealed Book*, 216. This may be due to in part to the Greek translation of Isaiah which "balances the prophet's emphasis on God's judgment with a reminder of the Lord's 'mercy'…and does not so much inject 'foreign' ideas into Isaiah's vision as amplify, elaborate and interweave characteristically 'Isaian' themes into bold new patterns."

does not end the prophetic mission to the Jewish people; rather, it recapitulates it.[265] We may therefore conclude that this pairing of future redemption with current rebellion is the hope to which Paul clings: "He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:30-31). As I suggested previously, "all who came to him" seems intended to include both Jews and Gentiles. [266]

Luke's description of Paul "welcoming" all ends the composition on a joyful note, as ἀποδέχομαι suggests "accepting favorably or agreeably."[267] Marguerat says: "Paul's preaching mentioned in the end overcomes the opposition of the λαός/ἔθνη, which dominated verses 25-28, to recapitulate the universality of the addressees of the Christian mission."[268] The openness Marguerat notes is what we have observed as an aesthetic Luke created by means of the wilderness.

Finally, Luke's choice to have Paul quote Isaiah's call narrative here at the end does more than recapitulate Paul's prophetic task. It also hands it on to the reader. In his essay "A Prophet as Witness to His Call," Wojciech Pikor argues that the function of a prophet's call narrative as it is included in a prophetic book is to transfer the prophetic identity onto the reader:

> Reading today the narrative of the prophet's call that belongs to the past, its reader (the real reader) assumes the role of the prophet's listener (the implied reader). Becoming the

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[265] Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture in Luke-Acts*, 187.

[266] Karl Armstrong, "The End of Acts and the Jewish Response: Condemnation, Tragedy, or Hope?" *Currents in Biblical Research* Vol. 17.no 2 (2019): 209-230. In his essay "The Ending of Acts and the Jewish Response," Karl Armstrong notes that New Testament scholars fall—generally—into one of three categories in regards to the future of the Jews in Luke-Acts: condemnation, tragedy, or hope. Armstrong concludes that the more seriously a scholar reads Paul as a faithful Jew throughout Acts, the more that scholar will read Luke's portrayal of Paul's mission to the Jews beyond the end of the Acts narrative as hopeful.

[267] This act of welcome is the same verb Luke uses to describe Jesus's reception of the crowds—the feeding of the five thousand in a wilderness place (Luke 9:11).

[268] Marguerat, "The Enigma of the Silent Closing of Acts," 299. Marguerat also notes that the topic of judgment goes hand in hand with the openness theme.

> implied reader in this case signifies the realization in one's own life the attitudes present in the world of the narration. The reader is faced with a choice of identifying with either the prophet and his attitude to God's word or with the prophet's listeners and their decision not to listen.[269]

By this token, the goal for Luke's unhindered aesthetic is for the reader to see this pronouncement of judgment via Isaiah's call narrative 1) as an invitation to examine her own relationship to the prophetic word and 2) not to rule out the possibility of belief for even the least likely of people. Thus, the aesthetic reading experience—wherein the reader "journeys" through the narrative and takes up residence inside the story—comes full circle. Indeed, the story as it ends this way takes up residence inside the reader's own worldview and self-identity.

In sum, Luke has merely begun and finished his story at different stages than did Isaiah—but they are nonetheless part of the same cycle. Just as a prophetic mission began for John in a wilderness, so Paul enters a prophetic wilderness himself. As we have seen in my analysis of Isaiah's texts, the prophet persistently redirects Israel's attention back to its own foundational stories of the exodus, the wandering in the wilderness, and the settling in the promised land. Thus the placement of Isaiah 6:9-10 at the end of Acts communicates that the prophetic mission is now turning to the other side of the judgement/salvation coin, which anticipates future redemption—however and for whomever it may be.

Marguerat describes the openness of the ending of Acts as "narrative suspension," meaning that the author intentionally does not—in the strict sense—close his story. The reader must be the one to close the story. This is done by taking into account the entirety of the Luke-Acts story, feeling its shape, and noticing its patterns—just as I have done through this study. Throughout the story, God has faithfully directed the plan for bringing about his kingdom, and

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[269] Wojciech Pikor, "A Prophet as Witness to His Call: A Narrative Key to the Reading of Prophetic Call Narratives," *Scripta Theologica*, Vol. 52 (2020): 73-95.

Luke has consistently written the story so that the reader can trace this pattern: every time the gospel meets resistance, it clears obstacles out of its way; every time human beings (Jews and Gentiles alike) reject or restrict the gospel, both God and the apostles continue to proclaim the good news and it continues to find purchase. As such, the final scene of an unhindered proclamation of the gospel then functions as a "metaphor or a synecdoche" for the story itself.[270]

I agree with Marguerat, but I would add to his statement. This final Acts scene with both judgment and openness toward future salvation functions indeed as a snapshot of the entire story, but just as and in tandem with that opening scene of Luke's gospel: the account of the proclaimer in the wilderness. The beginning scene of the Baptist proclaiming repentance, judgment, and a view of God's salvation for all people, together with the final scene of the apostle proclaiming the kingdom and teaching about Jesus unhindered function to convey the entire Luke-Acts narrative in a nutshell.

In this way, the ending of Acts with its Isaiah quotation mirrors that opening (wilderness) scene. Luke has not abandoned his wilderness with its prophet calling out for repentance and equality in regard to God's salvation—for both Jews and Gentiles alike. All the possibility, the freedom from obstructions, and equal access to see the coming redemption that was embodied by the wilderness still presents itself in the wilderness aesthetic that is recreated even in the capital of the Roman Empire. Just as the desert hosts the proclamation of an unobstructed view of God's salvation, so Paul proclaims the kingdom of God, the final word of the Greek text of Luke-Acts appropriately being ἀκωλύτως.

[270] Marguerat, "The Enigma of the Ending," 292-293.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As I have argued in the last chapter, the conclusion of Luke's story in Acts sends the reader back to the wilderness of the beginning. It is therefore appropriate that I return to my beginning, to reflect on this journey of aesthetic reading through Luke-Acts. In Chapter 1, I proposed that the wilderness is an important unifying feature of Luke's story and that an ideal way to view it is by reading Luke aesthetically. Noting that Luke offers his reader ἀσφάλεια (a unified understanding of truth), I argued that by reading Luke-Acts for its wilderness aesthetic the reader could perceive Luke's story as an entire experience. This experience then shapes the reader's understanding of what lies beyond the story.

Following Luke's path, the reader began in the wilderness with John the Baptist. In Chapter 2, I demonstrated how the wilderness provides the reader with an orientation toward the *un*expected and the unlimited inclusion of all people in salvation in contrast to the predictable and limiting οἰκουμένη. Luke's quotation of Isaiah 40:3-5 demonstrated this aesthetic of unlimited possibility through the imagery of mountains being lowered and valleys being raised—all places being transformed into optimal views of God's saving presence. This is the very dynamic I have traced throughout Luke-Acts*: the aesthetic of the wilderness—that which is wild and open—transforms all places in the narrative so to be equally accessible to salvation.*

In Chapter 3, I continued to follow this wilderness path as it traveled from the Baptist to Jesus. Like John the Baptist, the way prepared in the desert involved baptism and the miraculous appearance of the divine. Subsequently, the wilderness for Jesus included his first proclamation of the kingdom of God and its intended equality for all. The reader stood by Jesus as the devil coolly discussed the οἰκουμένη as his own demonic possession. Throughout the wilderness scenes in Luke and Acts, the reader picked up the pattern of the scripture-evoking wilderness in

fierce contrast to the οἰκουμένη—the place that bears the aesthetic of repression and violence. The miraculous feeding in a "wild place" appeared in contrast—almost in defiance—to Herod who had brutally killed John the Baptist. Throughout these stories, God's salvation is seen in the wilderness by the widest range of people, from hungry crowds to a gentile demoniac.

In Chapter 4, I traced the reading journey into Acts, where the reader was the only other witness—besides the prompting Holy Spirit—to the Ethiopian eunuch's baptism by Philip. I pointed out that Luke crafts this story without Mark or any other known source. The reader then saw that Luke understands baptism as a wilderness event, going back to John and Jesus in Luke's early chapters. I demonstrated how the unlikely identity of such a convert reflects the wilderness aesthetic of unhindered possibility.

In Chapter 5, taking cues from the eunuch, I traced the surprising pivot and spread of the wilderness throughout Acts' cosmopolitan story: the wilderness came to Damascus, Caesarea, Philippi, Corinth, and beyond through the baptism that began in John's desert. The same equality—the mountains and valleys brought to a level place—that the wilderness aesthetic creates was manifested in places and persons that would otherwise be perfect representations of the οἰκουμένη: prisons and their jailors, cities and their merchants, and opulent houses of the elite. I noted how the wilderness displays a tendency to not only contend with the οἰκουμένη, but to undermine and dismantle it.

In Chapter 6, I followed this wilderness and its habit of unexpected transformation all the way into the very heart of the empire. While concluding a story spanning decades and continents, Luke still looks toward the future expecting surprise. And so Paul expresses frustration at an unbelieving group of people while continuing to proclaim the gospel and the kingdom of God to *all people*. The same aesthetic that made the wilderness a place of radical possibility and

stunning transformation makes the end of Luke's story hopeful. The narrative of Luke-Acts has truly been an adventure for the reader, but it has also prepared the reader for the adventure to continue beyond Luke's story. If all that has been seen throughout Luke's telling has indeed granted the reader the promised ἀσφάλεια, then the reader cannot help but expect the unexpected in the future. The gospel, in the reader's mind, has invaded the world and is in the process of transforming it into a place like the desert—where God appears and does miraculous things.

The benefits of reading this way, using the wilderness aesthetic as the guide through Luke-Acts, are many. First, the reader can better appreciate the cohesion of Luke's story. Not only have I demonstrated the wilderness aesthetic as a unifying principle, but this aesthetic incorporates many of Luke's other themes. Scholars of Luke-Acts highlight Luke's emphasis on social reversal and justice, the activity of the Holy Spirit (and its activation through prayer), and the divinely ordered plan of God (βουλή τοῦ θεοῦ) as some of Luke's most notable features. All of these can be viewed through the aesthetic lent by the wilderness as all the above mentioned features rely on Luke creating literary suspense and surprise which is attributed to God. Reading the wilderness aesthetic draws all these other themes more closely together under one category.

In particular, this aesthetic reading centering on the wilderness offers greater cohesion between Luke-Acts' beginning and ending. The same expectancy that the reader has when reading the opening chapters of Luke can be maintained even as Acts closes. While I am not arguing that Luke expected a full-scale Jewish acceptance of the gospel in regard to Jesus, I do argue that Luke constructs his narrative and its ending so not hinder the possibility of it. In our current social reality (namely, post-Holocaust and the persistent anti-Jewish rhetoric in society and often even within the Christian church), a reading of Luke that offers the hope of community rather than alienation between Jews and Christians can only be a benefit.

Another scholarly question my project answers is regarding the Lukan relationship to the Roman Empire. My survey of the entirety of Luke-Acts has shown that wherever the wilderness aesthetic manifests—be it in the wilderness proper or in the center of a Mediterranean metropolis—it finds itself in opposition to the οἰκουμένη (which is also a term for the Roman Empire itself). An aesthetic that creates equality and unexpected inclusion violates those unspoken and unwritten boundaries on which the οἰκουμένη depends: binary categories such as Jew/Gentile, male/female, free/slave, native/foreigner, rich/poor.

Additionally, by its equalizing effect, the wilderness aesthetic disturbs the hierarchies implicit in those binary categories and their various degrees. For example, caring for the poor by sharing possessions among the early church does not in itself constitute a violation of the law or even of religious virtue; the aesthetic of egalitarianism, though, does challenge the οἰκουμένη's aesthetic of restriction and power. Even the οἰκουμένη itself is fair game for the wilderness aesthetic, as I have shown that even the most restrictive and violent of places can be and are dismantled by the wilderness aesthetic.

A final and important benefit of my aesthetic reading is that the wilderness helps uncover Luke's fidelity to the "prophetic impulse." Many scholars (particularly of the late nineteenth/early twentieth-century) built studies of Luke-Acts on the supposition that Luke's was a narrative of prophetic "decline," wherein the church became gradually less concerned with the radical experience of the Jesus event and more concerned with self-preservation into the future. Bovon summarizes this perspective built by Bultmann, Vielhauer, and Conzelmann:

> For many, the objectification of faith into creed or history was a temptation that early Christianity could not resist. From the beginning, eschatology, or rather eschatological conscience, had to seek temporary and contingent forms of expression…By choosing historical narrative instead of apocalyptic urgency, he betrayed the cause and revealed a

loss of eschatological sap.[271]

My study, taking seriously Luke's use of the wilderness as creating space where this "urgency" is expressed by surprising and divinely inspired actions, demonstrates that Luke's narrative does not depict a "decline" from prophetic authenticity into mere institutionalization. Rather, the wilderness in Luke-Acts demonstrates Luke's view of the apocalyptic as infiltrating the inhabited world and transforming *it* into more prophetic space.[272]

By drawing a closer comparison of the two frames of the Lukan story, I have demonstrated that not only is the space inhabited by the prophetic church just as wild and unpredictable as the first wilderness scene, but also the openness of the ending sends the reader back to the beginning—to the desert. Luke's hope for the readers of his narrative may have sounded like the lyrics to "Half Light II" by Arcade Fire: "Pray to God I don't live to see the death of everything wild."

[271] François Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Fifty-Five Years of Research* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 11.

[272] Luke Johnson. *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church: The Challenge of Luke-Acts to Contemporary Christians* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011). Nor is my study alone in this agenda, as other scholars have tapped into this prophetic impulse in Luke, albeit through different avenues. For example, Luke Johnson, by focusing on the nature of prophecy rather than wilderness as I have done, captures this sentiment in his book *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church*.

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