

**“Luke’s Perspective on Pentecost in Acts 1–12”**  
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**Introduction**

Of the three annual pilgrim feasts, Passover and Tabernacles are well developed in the gospels.<sup>2</sup> The absence of Pentecost is a loud silence, save Luke alone. This raises the issue that if Pentecost was ignored by others, what was Luke doing with this tradition? Two basic questions formulated themselves for research into this Pentecost curiosity: (1) from what historical matrix did Luke derive his emphasis on Pentecost, and (2) what was he up to at the narrative level by profiling an ignored feast in prominent narrative position as the lead event from which all the following narrative plotline flowed?

Several assumptions are made as a part of this study. I use “Luke” in the traditional sense, the Pauline missionary associate (Col. 4:14; Philem. 1:24; 2 Tim. 4:11), although the question of authorship does not impact this narrative study. I also assume Luke and Acts to be a literary unity, although this certainly can be challenged.<sup>3</sup> Finally, I assume the material in Acts to be historically reliable, but that is not to deny the clear presence of Lukan perspectives.

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<sup>2</sup> Most notably the Gospel of John in this regard.

<sup>3</sup> The standard narrative monograph is Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986, 1990). For recent discussion, cf. David P. Moessner, ed., *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke’s Narrative Claim upon Israel’s Legacy*, Luke the Interpreter of Israel, vol.1, gen. eds. David P. Moessner and David L. Tiede (Harrisburg, PN: Trinity Press International, 1999).

## Part 1: The Historical Background of the Feast of Pentecost

### *Agricultural Origins of Pentecost*

Pentecost, a derivative of the Greek numeral πενήκοστος, “fiftieth,” was used by ancient Jews to refer to one of their three annual pilgrim festivals (Tobit 2:1; 2 Macc. 12:32; Philo, *Decal.* 160; *Spec. Leg.* 2.176; Josephus, *War* 1.11.6; 1.13.3; 2.3.1; 6.5.3; *Ant.* 3.10.6; 13.8.4; 14.13.4; 17.10.2). The sources are mixed on the nature of the original festival: (1) either a celebration of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Num. 28:26; Lev. 23:16), or (2) a celebration of the completion of the barley harvest begun three months earlier (Deut. 16:10; Jer. 5:24).<sup>4</sup> The time was set at seven weeks after the beginning of the barley harvest, yielding a week of weeks, hence the name “Feast of Weeks” (חַג שָׁבֻעוֹת, Deut.16:10, 16; Num. 28:26; Lev.23:15; 2 Chron. 8:13). The time also was noted as fifty days after Passover, hence, “Pentecost” (Lev. 23:16).

### *Celebration of Pentecost*

#### Calendar

The actual festival technically was only a one-day celebration (Lev. 23:21), but the practicality of insuring everyone had opportunity to participate expanded the festival into two days. According to Reinhardt, offerings still could be brought for several days after the actual feast.<sup>5</sup> No evidence suggests the number of visitors to Jerusalem was less at the Feast of Weeks than the other festivals.<sup>6</sup> Polhill argued that Pentecost was even

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<sup>4</sup> So Theodor H. Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year: A Modern Interpretation and Guide* (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1952, 1953), pp. 14, 59; Mark J. Olson, “Pentecost,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Nashville: Fortress Press, 1995), 5:222.

<sup>5</sup> Wolfgang Reinhardt, “The Population Size of Jerusalem and the Numerical Growth of the Jerusalem Church,” *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter, *Volume 4: Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1995), p. 263.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

more popular than Passover due to better weather travel conditions.<sup>7</sup> The actual calendrical date for the celebration is a vexed question, since this date was argued differently among Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes and others.<sup>8</sup> Lohse concluded that, though the date for celebration was argued, the Pharisaic reckoning (exactly fifty days after the first day of Passover) was followed in Judea prior to AD 70.<sup>9</sup>

### Festival Activity

The precise elements of the Feast of Weeks are never explained in any detail. Even information from the Mishnah and Talmud is sparse. While the other two pilgrim feasts, Passover and Tabernacles, have entire tractates dedicated to discussion of them, Pentecost receives only scant mention in the Mishnah and Talmud. These few references are themselves difficult to adjudicate as to tradition lineage back into the first century.

While detailed discussion of Pentecost in the ancient sources is missing, the general sense of the nature of the festival is not hard to estimate. One could say that from within the context of Jewish monotheism, Jewish harvest festivals in general were occasions both to declare God’s ownership of the land and to acknowledge his grace to cause that land to bring forth food. Further, any such focus on the land inevitably would provoke remembrance of national events of election, covenant, and exodus and inspire a sense of gratitude to God for that salvation (cf. Deut. 26:1–15).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26 of *The New American Commentary*, gen. ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> In Mishnaic discussion, note *Hagig.* 2:4; *Ed.* 2:10; *The Mishnah, Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes*, Herbert Danby, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933). Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 31 of *The Anchor Bible*, gen. eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 233.

<sup>9</sup> Eduard Lohse, “πεντηκοστή,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 6:44–53.

<sup>10</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), p. 139.

The issue of all the Jewish feasts was, in fact, related to the overarching monotheistic thrust of the entire Exodus narrative. For example, the prelude to a discussion of the Jewish feasts in Exodus 34 is a restatement of God’s exclusive covenant relationship with Israel in verses 10–17. The burden of this restatement is a pointed warning against participation in pagan feasts connected to the worship of pagan gods. Only then does the discussion of the three great pilgrim feasts ensue. Thus, the feasts and their celebration inherently included the confession of God alone as the source and sustainer of life and the rejection of the worship of all other gods.

Of the worship elements, one element would be some type of worship liturgy. Falk noted that liturgical prayers and the *Hallel* on festival occasions would have been a common feature.<sup>11</sup> Another worship element would be offerings brought by the worshipper to the Temple. For the Feast of Weeks, these offerings were either two loaves from the new corn<sup>12</sup> or a freewill offering.<sup>13</sup> A third element would be sacrifices. Both Lev. 23:16–20 and Num. 28:26–31 prescribe the sacrifices to be offered at the Feast of Weeks: burnt offerings of seven lambs, a bull, and two rams,<sup>14</sup> a grain offering, a drink offering, a sin offering of a goat, and two yearling lambs as a sacrifice of well-being (שְׁלָמִים, Lev. 23:19).

One ritual procedure was described by Sanders.<sup>15</sup> He noted that for firstfruits offerings (of any type on any occasion, but including Pentecost), the worshipper brought his basket of firstfruits offering to the priest, reciting the words of Deut. 26:2: “I declare

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel K. Falk, “Jewish Prayer Literature and the Jerusalem Church in Acts,” *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter, *Volume 4: Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1995), p. 293.

<sup>12</sup> Lev. 23:17—leavened bread as a contrast to the unleavened bread of Passover; cf. *Sukk.* 5:7.

<sup>13</sup> Deut. 16:10 indicates a “freewill offering” (נְדָבָה) in proportion to the blessings received at the Lord’s hand.

<sup>14</sup> Num. 28:27 indicates two bulls, one ram.

<sup>15</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, p. 154. Bringing firstfruits to the Temple is described in *Bikk.* 3.2–4.

this day to the Lord your God that I have come into the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give us.” Then the priest would set the basket before the altar, and the worshipper would continue his avowal by quoting the rest of Deut. 26:3–10.

In such a ritual, one can see combined the two themes of God’s gift of the land and the Exodus. Gaster pointed out that the idea of collaboration was involved: the farmer collaborates with God in making the land yield produce and the ingathering is the necessary condition of life and prosperity in the coming year.<sup>16</sup> In noting that the feast was a reminder of deliverance from Egypt as the covenanted people of God, Freeman observed, “The ground of acceptance of the offering presupposes the removal of sin and reconciliation with God.”<sup>17</sup> This appropriation of God’s forgiveness was the ground of joy in the festival. Themes of harvest, God’s blessings, life, God’s promises, salvation, and forgiveness all come together to energize a joyous time of Pentecost celebration.

One other ritual element has received attention, wine as a constituent part. Fitzmyer explained the mockery from the crowd, “they have just had too much new wine” (Acts 2:13), as possibly reflecting Qumran traditions within the Temple Scroll of a series of three Pentecostal feasts, one of which celebrated new wine (Feast of Weeks, Feast of New Wine, Feast of New Oil).<sup>18</sup> “Luke may have known of such multiple Pentecosts among contemporary Jews and alluded to the Pentecost of New Wine, when speaking more properly of the Pentecost of New Grain.”<sup>19</sup> While this can be offered as an interesting speculation, the connection to Luke’s presentation is highly dubious, since Luke generally does not show such a detailed interest in Qumran ritual nor use Qumran traditions for narrative development. The suggested allusion is weak at best.

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<sup>16</sup> Gaster, *Festivals*, p. 62.

<sup>17</sup> D. Freeman, “Pentecost, Feast of,” *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, revision ed. N. Hillyer, 3 vols. (Leicester, Eng.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 3:1188.

<sup>18</sup> Fitzmyer, *Acts*, pp. 234–35.

<sup>19</sup> Fitzmyer, *Acts*, p. 235.

From Josephus we can add another piece of information regarding the first-century celebration of Pentecost:<sup>20</sup>

Ἐβδόμησ ἐβδομάδοσ διαγεγενημένησ μετὰ ταύτην τὴν θυσίαν, αὐταὶ δ' εἰσὶν αἱ τῶν ἐβδομάδων ἡμέραι τεσσαράκοντα καὶ ἑννέα, [τῆ πεντηκοστῇ], ἣν Ἐβραῖοι ἀσαρθὰ καλοῦσι, σημαίνει δὲ τοῦτο πεντηκοστήν, καθ' ἣν προσάγουσι τῷ θεῷ ἄρτον ἀλίτων μὲν πυρίνων ἀσσαρῶνασ δύο μετὰ ζύμησ γεγονότων, θυμάτων δὲ ἄρνασ δύο

Fitzmyer argued that behind Josephus’s reference to ἣν Ἐβραῖοι ἀσαρθὰ καλοῦσι is an Aramaic expression for “solemn assembly,” implying this feast called for an assembly of Judean Jews.<sup>21</sup> This solemn assembly seems confirmed in other references to Pentecost by Josephus.<sup>22</sup>

### Social Inclusiveness

Harvest in all agrarian societies is both work and celebration: hard work for getting in the crop, joyous celebration for the life needs thereby supplied. A feast is a common token of that joyous time. The Jewish offering of two loaves of leavened bread symbolized gratitude to God for the plentiful harvest and was a token of the feast celebrated in Jewish homes. This feast was meant to be inclusive. No one in Israel should be in want of food at the celebration of harvest. The exhortation in Deuteronomy 16 repeatedly echoed in the elaboration of the feasts Israel celebrates is: “Rejoice before the LORD your God—you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves,

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<sup>20</sup> Perseus, Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 3.10.6, sec. 252. Online resource: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Texts.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Fitzmyer, *Acts*, p. 232. The phrase identifying where offerings would be brought, “place which the Lord your God will choose” in Deut. 26:2, though ambiguous, traditionally in rabbinic Judaism always was understood to be Jerusalem; cf. *Piska* 298, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy, Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Notes by Reuven Hammer*, Yale Judaica Series, ed. Leon Nemoy, Vol. XXIV: *Sifre on Deuteronomy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986).

the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you—at the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name” (Deut. 16: 11, NRSV). That is, the Pentecost celebration is intended to be inclusive, with specific attention to those normally vulnerable to life’s vicissitudes.

This inclusiveness surrounding the celebration of the Pentecost feast is prominent in the story of Tobit, a fictional presentation from the Intertestamental period of a pious Jew living in Ninevah. At one point in the story, Tobit prepares to celebrate the Pentecost feast in his home. Before he does, though, he is careful to perform those demands in the Torah calling for inclusion in the feast. He commissions his son, Tobiah, to go out and retrieve someone from the pious poor of the exiles in Ninevah to share the Pentecost feast with his family in his home.<sup>23</sup>

Were the pilgrim feasts significant as well for Diaspora Jews? Probably so. We already have noted the story of Tobit. In addition, John M. G. Barclay argued that the feasts did play an important role for Diaspora Judaism, perhaps even as much or more than for Judean Jews. Of three significant aspects noted by Barclay that bound Jews in the Diaspora together in their religious, social, and financial affairs, one was festival and fast observance. The Jewish festivals were prominent social and religious events. They attracted even non-Jews to participate. The feasts were one of the most significant factors contributing to a sense of solidarity for Jews, including the Diaspora.<sup>24</sup> These

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Ant.* 14.13.4; 17.10.2; *War* 1.13.3; 2.3.1.

<sup>23</sup> Tob. 2:1–2. In fact, the Pentecost meal plotline is only a foil for proving the extraordinary piety of Tobit in the next few verses of the story (2:3–7). When his son returns with the horrible news of murder in the market and an unburied Jewish corpse, Tobit immediately jumps up from table to perform the pious act of proper burial. He returns to the Pentecost meal, only now to be submerged in sorrow rather than the joy that had been anticipated initially. This causes Tobit to remember the words of the prophet Amos: “Your festivals shall be turned into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation” (Amos 8:10).

<sup>24</sup> John M. G. Barclay, *Jews In The Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 415–16.

observations resonate with Luke’s narrative development of the protracted list of those Jews present at Pentecost.<sup>25</sup>

### *Religious Significance of Pentecost*

#### The Proposed Pentecost/Sinai Connection

What was the religious significance given by Jews to this harvest feast? Dunn argued that a connection to covenant renewal seems implied in 2 Chron. 15:10–12, seems probable at Qumran, and is certain in *Jub.* 6:17–21 (c. 100 B.C.).<sup>26</sup> We already have noted that a sense of general covenant connection is evident in Deuteronomy 16. But even if this general concept is to be expanded into an actual “covenant renewal ceremony” due to certain Jewish texts such as those at Qumran or *Jubilees*, can this covenant renewal particularly be related specifically to the Sinai traditions that later Judaism ascribed to Pentecost? Dunn argued “almost certainly,” even though he was forced to acknowledge that no Pentecost/Sinai link actually can be documented before the second century A.D.<sup>27</sup> Fitzmyer also was convinced of this Pentecost/Law association, himself pointing to certain Qumran texts, as well as a collection of so-called indirect allusions to the Sinaitic covenant in Luke’s Pentecost account.<sup>28</sup> Wright also seemed persuaded of the Pentecost/Sinai connection.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Acts 2:9–11; most likely Diaspora Jews in Jerusalem specifically for the feast, not resident Jerusalemites, *contra* Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn, rev. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 168, n. 7. For discussion and bibliography, cf. C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 1: Preliminary Introduction and Commentary on Acts I–XIV, *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*, gen. eds. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), pp. 118, 121–24.

<sup>26</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, “Pentecost, Feast of,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, gen. ed. Colin Brown, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 2:784.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Fitzmyer, *Acts*, pp. 233–34.

<sup>29</sup> “Not mentioned in this connection in the OT, but clearly a pre-rabbinic tradition, with echoes in the NT”; he then cited *Jub.* 1:5; 6:111, 17; 15:1–24; *bPes.* 68b; Acts 2:1–11; Eph. 4:7–10. Nicholas Thomas Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God in Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 234, note 73.

No doubt, later Judaism did associate Pentecost with the giving of the Law at Sinai.<sup>30</sup> One could say that this development almost could be viewed as inevitable. A connection was suggested already just in the general time frame: both the dated arrival of the Israelites to Sinai three months after Passover and the general time of the barley harvest in the spring of the year was close enough to lend to this association. Polhill tellingly pointed out, though, that the supposed parallels of Luke’s account to the Sinai theophany are more apparent than real because this language is mostly stock theophany terminology.<sup>31</sup> Neither does Luke make any explicit connection to Torah, whether in the narrative or in Peter’s speech that follows.<sup>32</sup> Dunn would agree that, even if Luke probably was aware of an already established Pentecost/Sinai connection, we have no evidence that such a connection was driving his narrative in Acts 2.<sup>33</sup>

#### Other Proposed Connections

What other Old Testament or Jewish background has been suggested as behind Luke’s presentation in Acts 2? We briefly survey those commonly encountered.

Philo has been one suggestion. Philo has a discussion of the Sinai theophany that includes an element of God’s voice as a sound turning into fire.<sup>34</sup> This connection at least

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<sup>30</sup> Gaster, *Festivals*, pp. 60–63; cf. *bPes.* 68b. Gaster noted that the Book of Ruth came to be read in the later liturgy for two reasons: (1) the story has a barley harvest background itself, and (2) a pagan embraces Israel’s faith; these are the two main features of the feast: (1) harvest ingathering, and (2) acceptance of the Law, Gaster, *Festivals*, p. 70.

<sup>31</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, p. 105, n. 93.

<sup>32</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, p. 105.

<sup>33</sup> Dunn, “Pentecost,” *NIDNTT*, 3:785.

<sup>34</sup> Philo *Dec.* 33: ἡ τὸν ἀέρα σχηματίσασα καὶ ἐπιτείνασα καὶ πρὸς πῦρ φλογοειδὲς μεταβαλοῦσα καθάπερ πνεῦμα διὰ σάλπιγγος φωνὴν τσσαύτην ἔαρθρον ἐξήχησεν, “which by giving form and tension and transforming it to flaming fire, like breath through a trumpet, gave out such a clear voice . . .” F. H. Colson, trans., *Philo, With an English Translation by F. H. Colson*, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. T. E. Page, 9 vols. (London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937).

has an element of fire and voice. A major weakness here, however, is that Philo himself never connected his remarks about the Sinai theophany to the feast of Pentecost.

Another suggestion has been God’s descent in fire in Ex. 19:18. Again, this is in a Sinai context at the foot of the mountain in a revelatory theophany of God to the people of Israel after the Exodus. Yet, fire is one of the most common features of theophanic revelation, so provides nothing distinctive to our understanding of Acts 2.

Finally, the suggestion has been that Pentecost is a symbolic reversal of the confusion of tongues in the Tower of Babel episode in Gn. 11:1–9. While some logical connection has been attempted in this suggestion, once again, the logic is external to Luke’s actual narrative of Pentecost itself. This, in other words, is the weakest suggestion of all three at the narrative level.<sup>35</sup>

In short, none of these other background suggestions has persuasive force. The major objection to them all is that Luke never reveals any use of them for his narrative development of Acts.

### *Summary of the Historical Background*

Pentecost was an ancient spring harvest festival celebrating both God’s deliverance from oppression in the events of the Exodus and his covenant provision of life for the community of Israel through the abundant produce of the promised land. That is, Pentecost celebrated the concrete realization in the life of the nation of God’s covenant promises to be the sole sustenance and life of Israel. Observance of the feast was demonstration of covenant loyalty within an exclusively monotheistic faith. The date was inseparably fixed exactly fifty days after Passover, but whether this always should fall on a Sabbath or variously during the week was argued differently.

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<sup>35</sup> Note Barrett’s incisive critique, *Acts*, p. 119.

In Jerusalem, a day of solemn assembly was observed. Worship elements at the Temple included ritual liturgy, offerings, and sacrifices. Acceptance of the offerings presupposed the removal of sin and reconciliation with God, a spiritual basis for great joy and celebration in the feast. The Jewish feasts were one of the three fundamental factors contributing to Jewish solidarity in the Diaspora, and observance of the feasts, including Pentecost, was as important in the Diaspora as in Judea.

The offering of two loaves of bread was a token of the Pentecost meal celebrated in Jewish homes. This meal was conceived as a table fellowship to be shared by all. The inclusive emphasis of the meal served as a tangible expression of the essence of that fullness of life promised to Israel, for even widows, orphans, poor, stranger, and Levite—those typically disenfranchised in the ancient economy—were invited to participate in the feast.

While covenant relationship is integral to all Jewish feasts, association in particular of the giving of the Law with Pentecost is not a productive avenue of interpretation for the narrative of Acts. No ancient writer actually did so, and neither did Luke, even if such an association with Pentecost already was in place by the time Luke wrote, or, further still, even if he was aware of that association.

If we reject the typical Pentecost/Sinai connection, does this evacuate the Acts account of this event of meaning? Not if we probe at the narrative level. We simply clear the ground for Luke to operate from within his own narrative structure.

### **Part 2: Luke’s Narrative Development of Pentecost**

The first and foremost observation to make, acknowledged immediately by all, is that the Pentecost narrative is uniquely Lukan.<sup>36</sup> No other New Testament author has this

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<sup>36</sup> We have here no need to pursue tradition criticism of Luke’s work, such as Fitzmyer’s remarks: “may be Luke’s historicization of aspects of Christ’s resurrection/exaltation, as he did with the Ascension itself” (*Acts*, p. 232); further, Fitzmyer speculated the date of this first confrontation of Jews with Christian proclamation was in the tradition Luke used; Luke simply dramatized that received tradition with the story of the outpouring of Spirit (*Acts*, p. 232). Barrett has given a good overview of tradition analysis of Acts 2; *Acts*, pp. 109–10.

story or even alludes to the event.<sup>37</sup> Now, this type literary phenomenon usually is taken as a signal that in such material we have to do with elements special or peculiar to that author that give us an inside track into that author’s themes and purposes. While we can agree with Barrett that Pentecost is a “special ‘founding’ gift of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>38</sup> this does not take us very far in analyzing Luke’s narrative. One can note that at the end of his discussion of Acts 2, Barrett rather blandly observed, “Luke’s narratives are by no means always theologically motivated. He had a good deal of plain common sense.”<sup>39</sup> Even a recent commentary based on a sociological perspective simply does nothing with the Pentecost background to Acts 2, much less how the story is developed in Acts 1–12.<sup>40</sup> Surely Pentecost has more narrative significance than these paltry offerings suggest. Pentecost’s prominent position in the Acts narrative alone deserves more attention.

### *The Narrative Priority of Pentecost*

First, we observe at the narrative level that Luke fronts the Pentecost narrative. That is, Luke chooses to launch his narrative plotline with Pentecost. This choice alone already establishes the priority of this episode. This easily made observation is also all too easily passed over. Even Luke’s preliminary materials point ahead to Acts 2.

### Promise of the Father

Prior to the Pentecost story, Luke has given the necessary preliminary materials in Acts 1. These preliminaries set the stage for Pentecost. They include a resumptive

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<sup>37</sup> Dunn has called John’s report of the Spirit in Jn. 20:22 a “Johannine Pentecost,” but that simply is to confusate Luke’s contribution. Dunn, “Pentecost,” *NIDNTT*, 2:787. Barrett wisely was much more cautious, noting that John’s passage “differs markedly” from the account in John, *Acts*, p. 108. Paul assumes the gift of the Spirit as the groundrock of Christian experience (cf. Rom. 8:9) and discusses the Spirit-led life often, but nowhere mentions Pentecost in this connection.

<sup>38</sup> Barrett, *Acts*, p. 108.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>40</sup> Ben Witherington, III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Social-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand

prologue (1:1–2), a reprise on the ending of the Gospel, including appearances, teaching the disciples, and commission (1:3–8), a second Ascension account as a conclusion to the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus (1:9–11), and a reconstitution of the Twelve (1:12–26). The stage now properly set, Pentecost becomes the epoch event transforming the Twelve and the believing community into a mission of dynamic witness, even as Jesus had commanded (1:8).

Within these preliminaries of Acts 1, literary signals have displaced the reader’s attention forward toward a coming event yet to be narrated. Already this displacement is anticipated at the end of the Gospel. In Lk. 24:49 the reader hears Jesus tell the disciples to expect the “the promise of my Father” (τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πατρὸς μου), which will have the effect of an extraordinary divine empowerment. The disciples are charged to remain in Jerusalem to receive this promise. Clearly, the plotline has been extended by the narrator. By this reference Luke builds a narrative bridge to Pentecost.

Acts 1:4–5 is resumptive of this Pentecost bridge. Luke recapitulates the promise theme, but now adds a specific content exposition, “you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (ὁμεῖς δὲ ἐν πνεύματι βαπτισθήσεσθε ἁγίῳ). This addition facilitates the reader’s prescience of the narrative that will follow. Luke also adds an explicit time element, “not many days hence” (οὐ μετὰ πολλὰς ταύτας ἡμέρας). This brief time frame keeps the reader’s expectations primed. The narrative importance of Pentecost could not be expressed more carefully at the end of the Gospel and the beginning of Acts.

That is to say, Luke uses the Pentecost narrative not simply because the first apostolic witness to Jerusalem happened to have a coincidental connection to one of the Jewish feasts but because Luke perceived a divine fulfillment integral to that feast. The events surrounding Pentecost comprise the essence of the “promise of my Father” the reader has been directed to expect to happen to the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem.

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Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

### Fulfillment Vocabulary

The promise of the Father theme, which carries with it the idea of divine fulfillment, is why Luke particularly launched into the story of Pentecost in Acts 2:1 with the vocabulary of fulfillment: “And when the day of Pentecost was fulfilled” (Καὶ ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς πεντηκοστῆς). Moessner, for example, has pointed to the similar use of “fulfilled” in Lk. 9:51 (ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι τὰς ἡμέρας) in reference to the divinely ordained days of Jesus being taken up in Jerusalem as the interpretive rubric for Luke’s sense of “fulfilled” in Acts 2:1.<sup>41</sup> The common element that makes Moessner’s connection highly probable is the divine necessity guiding both narratives. Both narratives at these verses are at crucial turning points in the story: at 9:51, Jesus turns toward his ultimate mission and destiny in Jerusalem, and, at 2:1, the church turns toward its ultimate mission and destiny in the world.

Our key point here is that this sense of divine guidance that Luke has injected into Acts 2, both by narrative prolepsis and by fulfillment vocabulary is related to a particular Jewish feast, Pentecost. Pentecost has narrative priority for Luke because Luke finds significance in the feast itself for elements in his narrative development. In terms of narrative strategy then, Luke presents Pentecost in Acts 2 as the controlling narrative event in Acts from which all future plot development flows. The question is, what significance does Luke attach to Pentecost *in the narrative*?

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<sup>41</sup> David P. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative* (Harrisburg, PN: Trinity Press International, 1989), p. 66. That “fulfilled” would be that the total of fifty days from Passover had transpired has little support in the Greek text, for which Luke is careful to use singular, not plural, for “day” (ἡμέραν). Luke is focused on the feast itself, not the time interval from Passover.

*The Narrative Development of Pentecost in Acts 2*

Eschatological Divine Forgiveness

The historical Pentecost celebration included sacrifice as prescribed in the Law. Acceptance of sacrifices by the priests in the Temple communicated divine acceptance and forgiveness of sins. This appropriation of God’s forgiveness contributed to the sense of festal joy for the Pentecost worshipper. Abundant crops signaled God’s blessings and prevenient forgiveness, a positive covenant relationship enacted in sacrificial ritual.

Luke has a characteristic emphasis on forgiveness terminology. This emphasis surfaces, for example, in the way he chooses to epitomize Jesus’ final instruction to the disciples in Lk. 24:47: “and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (καὶ κηρυχθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ μετάνοιαν εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. ἀρξάμενοι ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ).

Luke’s emphasis on forgiveness also shows up in Peter’s Pentecost speech. That is, Jesus’ charge in Lk. 24:47 Peter immediately discharges in his first message in Jerusalem. In his mission speech interpreting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the Jerusalem crowds in 2:14–36, Peter establishes the eschatological context of the Pentecost phenomenon from Joel 2:28–32. Peter then exhorts in 2:38: “Each of you repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (μετανοήσατε, [φησίν,] καὶ βαπτισθῆτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν).<sup>42</sup> For Luke, this is the historic moment of God’s offer of eschatological forgiveness to Israel. For our purposes, we note that Luke has placed this divine offer carefully within the festal background of Pentecost. Why? Because forgiveness, while integral to the ritual of the Pentecost feast, is not the most prominent

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<sup>42</sup> Regularly in Petrine speeches; cf. 5:31; 8:22; and 10:43. The Lukan tendency especially surfaces in formulating Paul’s synagogue sermon at Antioch of Pisidia in 13:38: “that through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you” (ὅτι διὰ τούτου ὑμῖν ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν καταγγέλλεται); cf. 26:18. In the principal Pauline epistles, such forgiveness terminology using the ἄφεσις root is extremely rare: only once in the verbal form in Rom. 4:7, and this is simply a quote of Ps. 32:1. Even if we include all the Paulines, we only add the noun form twice in the doublet of Eph. 1:7/Col. 1:14.

element of that feast.<sup>43</sup> The most prominent element is a harvest meal. The appropriation of God’s eschatological forgiveness through Jesus Christ offered in this festal setting, then, inherently anticipates a communal celebration of festal joy.

### Eschatological Harvest Bounty

Behind all of Acts 2 is the assumption that the outpoured Spirit is the eschatological dawning of the last days.<sup>44</sup> Peter extends the realization of this eschatological promise of the Holy Spirit to the Jewish audience in 2:39, “for this promise is for you” (ὁμῖν γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐπαγγελία). The historical underpinnings for this eschatological perspective are the Mosaic traditions revolving around the Exodus story. Particularly pertinent in this regard is Luke’s summary of Peter’s exhortation with Peter’s closing admonition in 2:40, “With many other arguments he testified and urged them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation’” (ἐτέροις τε λόγοις πλείοσιν διεμαρτύρατο καὶ παρεκάλει αὐτοὺς λέγων· σῶθητε ἀπὸ τῆς γενεᾶς τῆς σκολιᾶς ταύτης). This exhortation is an intertextual echo of Moses’ song in Deuteronomy 32 warning the Israelites of grievous idolatries in the context of the Exodus redemption.<sup>45</sup> Those who rebel against God after his glorious redemption are castigated in Deut. 32:5 as “a crooked and perverse generation” (γενεὰ σκολιὰ καὶ διεστραμμένη).<sup>46</sup> A rehearsal of Israel’s Exodus redemption and wilderness wanderings is followed by a summary of the realization of God’s gift of the land to Israel in 32:13, “he brought them up to the heights

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<sup>43</sup> Neither is the most prominent element the miracle of tongues, which is unconnected to the festival itself. This miracle *does* have narrative significance as the manifestation of the fulfillment of the “promise of the Father,” the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, for which the reader has been primed both at the end of the Gospel and in the preliminary materials in Acts 1.

<sup>44</sup> Dunn, “Pentecost,” *NIDNTT*, 2:785.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, p. 267.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Deut. 32:20. LXX references are taken from Accordance, Ver. 4.5, OakTree Software Specialists, Altamonte Springs, FL, 2000.

of the land, he fed them with the harvest of the fields” (ἀνεβίβασεν αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ τὴν ἰσχὺν τῆς γῆς ἐψώμισεν αὐτοὺς γενήματα ἀγρῶν). The bounteous harvest points toward God’s blessings and the faithfulness of God’s people.

The reader of Acts further is appraised of this Exodus tradition echoing in Acts 2:40 in Peter’s next speech to Jerusalem crowds in Acts 3:22. Here, Peter explicitly refers to Deut. 18:18, the tradition of a Prophet like Moses to come, and applies this to Jesus. That is, even in the Mosaic traditions, God’s provision for his people through the harvest of the fields is only the penultimate climax of the whole story of the Exodus. Even Moses anticipated One to come who would bring the ultimate prophetic fulfillment to the Exodus journey. Thus, in his own eschatological Pentecost setting for Acts 2–3, Luke has presented the ultimate climax of this Mosaic tradition in Jesus Christ and his followers.

In this speech in Acts 3, Peter also refers to “the times of the restoration of all things” (χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων) in 3:21 and echoes the kingdom phrase “times of refreshing” (καιροὶ ἀνανύξεως) in 3:20. Such phrases echo a complex of Jewish expectations in which a universal reign of messiah figures prominently. By also incorporating messianic language into Peter’s speech in Acts 3, Luke has integrated Jewish messianic expectation with Mosaic prophetic traditions. The Mosaic traditions, however, are what drive Luke’s Pentecost setting.<sup>47</sup>

The positive response of the Jerusalem crowds to Peter’s exhortation is the beginning of the gospel advance outlined in the programmatic Acts 1:8. A significant response to Peter’s exhortation is registered. Regardless the actual numbers, Luke’s

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<sup>47</sup> The Mosaic traditions perhaps even may serve as the corrective to certain nationalistic strands of messianic expectation. This seems to reflect the spirit of the question of the disciples to Jesus in 1:6, “will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” and the nature of Jesus’ ambiguous response. While Jesus neither affirms nor denies this question, he certainly redirects the disciples’ focus toward the tangible realities of the promised Holy Spirit as manifestation of that kingdom (1:7–8). That Spirit was Pentecost. Peter’s quote of Joel in 2:17–21 in his Pentecost speech expresses an inaugurated eschatology that reflects concord with the spirit of Jesus’ teaching in 1:7–8 and sets the larger context for what Peter says in Acts 3.

narrative theme is clear: his emphasis is on the fullness of the response.<sup>48</sup> For Luke, this is the beginning of the eschatological harvest bounty.

### Eschatological Harvest Joy

The most prominent element that Luke develops directly out of the Pentecost festival in his narrative account in Acts 2 is the shared bounty of the harvest signified in the joy of table fellowship. The Pentecost meal fellowship of Jesus’ disciples represents the inaugurated eschatological harvest joy anticipated in the Exodus traditions. This characteristic fellowship is portrayed by Luke in the narrative immediately following Pentecost describing the life of the early church, Acts 2:41–47. The reader through Luke’s smooth transition is thereby given a clear signal that this community experience is to be understood as the direct result of the Pentecost experience. Luke’s festival connection between the two narratives of the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and the description of the early life of believers is clear in his fourfold description.

Luke characterizes this community life by four aspects: (1) the apostles’ teaching, (2) fellowship, (3) breaking of bread, and (4) prayers. The first aspect, the apostles’ teaching, would be an extension of Jesus’ kingdom teaching during the days between his resurrection and ascension (1:3). The core of this teaching understands Jesus life, death, and resurrection as scriptural fulfillment anticipating God’s kingdom (Lk. 24:44–47). Eschatological realities already are unfolding in the story of Jesus. At the narrative level this core is highlighted in Peter’s Pentecost presentation. Noteworthy in Peter’s speech is the christological hermeneutic implicitly identified by Jesus in Lk. 24:44 now explicitly applied by Peter to the law (2:23), prophets (2:17–21), and writings (2:25–28, 31, 34–35). This kingdom fulfillment theme in the teaching of Jesus, now preserved by the Twelve

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<sup>48</sup> Luke’s statistical accuracy is not essential to our narrative argument. However, for a defense of the accuracy of Luke’s numbers here, cf. Reinhardt, “Population Size of Jerusalem,” pp. 237–65.

with Peter as spokesman, has concrete implications for the life of the community of believers. Luke’s other three aspects characterizing community life spell this out.

The three aspects of fellowship, bread, and prayers comprise a recognizable group, because these are components of the celebration of the Pentecost feast. In short, Luke is extending the reality of the Pentecost feast from its temporal limitations as an annual Jewish pilgrim festival to its atemporal eschatological fulfillment, as did Peter when interpreting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That is, this promised Holy Spirit not only energizes apostolic witness, this Spirit also inspires harvest response to Jesus and harvest communion among disciples. God’s eschatological joy now is being realized among God’s people. Fellowship, bread, and prayers are a perpetual token of that festal fulfillment.

Thus, Luke’s emphasis on the fullness of the response to Jesus in Jerusalem is the bounty of the Pentecost harvest modulated into the eschatological key of Jesus. The harvest that the annual festival of Pentecost anticipated in the kingdom of God has arrived, a bountiful harvest, not of sheaves of grain, but of people, a visible harvest with visible results: joyous communion and shared meal fellowship. Positively, anytime Luke punctuates his narrative with a word about the church growing bountifully with God’s blessings, this is his Pentecost fulfillment theme sprinkled generously throughout the entire narrative to tie all sections back to the original controlling narrative event, Pentecost.<sup>49</sup> Negatively, the breakdown of Pentecostal table fellowship is what gives the issues in Acts 5 and Acts 15 their eschatological significance for the church as serious matters of kingdom fulfillment.

Recognizing this Pentecost fulfillment theme would bring more clarity for commentators into what might otherwise appear to be superfluous parts of Peter’s scriptural quotations in his Pentecost speech. For example, in commenting on Peter’s

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<sup>49</sup> Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31.

speech, Polhill was perplexed that Peter included in his quotation in Acts 2:25–28, taken from Ps. 16:8–11, the words of Ps. 16:11, “you have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence” (ἐγνώρισάς μοι ὁδοὺς ζωῆς πληρώσεις με εὐφροσύνης μετὰ τοῦ προσώπου σου). Polhill asserted, “since it adds nothing to his argument about the resurrection.”<sup>50</sup> This simply is not so. Polhill missed the implications of God’s present eschatological harvest in the Pentecost feast context. The joy in God’s presence is the eschatological joy of the feast. Narratively we can note that Peter’s quote of Ps. 16:11 in Acts 2:28 Luke explicitly plays out in his description of the early community of believers in Acts 2:46: “Day by day, while remaining associated closely and continuously in the Temple of one accord, they were breaking bread in each home, sharing their food together with gladness and singleness of heart” (καθ’ ἡμέραν τε προσκαρτεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ, κλῶντές τε κατ’ οἶκον ἄρτον, μετελάμβανον τροφῆς ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι καρδίας).

Many probably could recognize that at this point my argument would resonate well with that of Moessner.<sup>51</sup> His work in the Gospel of Luke involved an interpretive scheme for Luke’s travel narrative beginning in Lk. 9:51 using Deuteronomy’s land of promise fulfillment theme. Moessner observed that this theme is echoed in the early stages of Acts: in Luke’s narrative of Pentecost, in the unity of the community in all things common, in the joy of the harvest as the eschatological joy of the community in the time of fulfillment, and in Ananias and Sapphira as destroying that unity and joy. Further, meal scenes in Luke, especially as transparently laid out as in the climactic Emmaus story (Lk. 24:13–32), have their key in recognition of the journeying guest who is revealed at table as Lord, and as host of the banquet in the Kingdom of God.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, p.11.

<sup>51</sup> Moessner, *Banquet*, pp. 275–76.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

Moessner then inferred a connection in Acts with this journeying guest motif of the eschatological banquet in the Lukan travel narrative.<sup>53</sup> Regarding this narrative development in Acts, Moessner wrote, “The New Exodus of Deuteronomy 30 has been accomplished!”<sup>54</sup> With this I agree.

### Eschatological Harvest Inclusiveness

One feature common to the Jewish festivals preserved in the Law was their intent to be inclusive social events. Those typically disenfranchised economically or by society were to be included intentionally in the festal meal. This inclusive intent clearly comes out in the story of Tobit, for example.<sup>55</sup>

Luke makes clear that this festal inclusiveness is dominant in the character of the meal fellowship of the followers of Jesus. The shared communal life indicated by Luke in 2:44, “they were having all things common” (εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινὰ), is the concrete realization of the promise of social inclusiveness portrayed in the Pentecost feast. That this realization was not understood to be temporally limited is indicated by the selling of capital goods in order to preserve the on-going status of Pentecost fulfillment (2:45). The verses that follow in 2:46–47 are a perfect capsulation of the two foci of the Pentecost feast activities in Temple and home: “Day by day, persevering in one accord in the Temple, breaking bread at home, they were sharing their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.” (καθ’ ἡμέραν τε προσκαρτεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ, κλῶντές τε κατ’ οἶκον ἄρτον, μετελάμβανον τροφῆς ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι καρδίας αἰνοῦντες τὸν θεὸν καὶ ἔχοντες χάριν πρὸς ὅλον τὸν λαόν.) The eschatological Pentecost harvest and inclusive

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 185–86.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>55</sup> Tobit, however, did limit his sense of obligation to searching out only particularly pious

meal fellowship are now what we see and hear in Acts 2:41–47. Israel’s festal fulfillment anticipated annually in the Pentecost pilgrim festival in Judea and throughout the Diaspora has arrived: abundant harvest, great joy, inclusive communion, sustenance and life in the homes of Jesus’ followers.

### *The Narrative Development of Pentecost in Acts 3–12*

The promise of eschatological festal fulfillment in the community of believers is thematically carried along both positively and negatively in the chapters of Acts that follow. The two characters that Luke immediately uses to develop the theme are Barnabas and Ananias.

#### Barnabas

Barnabas is introduced in 4:32–37. Shared communal life is the resonant setting that connects Acts 4:32–37 with Acts 2:41–47. This connection is implicit in the close similarity of the two descriptions, selling possessions, bringing the proceeds for distribution, but especially in the verbal echo of the last phrase, “as any one might have need” (καθότι ἄν τις χρείαν εἶχεν):

2:45 and they were selling their possessions and property and distributing the proceeds to all, as any one might have need.

καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον καὶ διεμέριζον αὐτὰ πᾶσιν καθότι ἄν τις χρείαν εἶχεν.

4:34–35 For not any one among them was needy, for as many as possessed lands or houses, selling them, they were bringing the proceeds of what was sold and laying it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each, as any one might have need.

οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδεής τις ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς· ὅσοι γὰρ κτήτορες χωρίων ἢ οἰκιῶν ὑπῆρχον, πωλοῦντες ἔφερον τὰς τιμὰς τῶν πιπρασκομένων καὶ ἐτίθουν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἀποστόλων, διεδίκετο δὲ ἐκάστῳ καθότι ἄν τις χρείαν εἶχεν.

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individuals.

This description in 4:34–35 indicates that the eschatological harvest fullness of the people of God epitomized in Acts 2:41–47 has been extended in the narrative plotline. This extension specifically is in order to tie the introduction of the character of Barnabas in Acts 4 to the Pentecost festal fulfillment theme of Acts 2.

Further, Luke characterizes Barnabas as a Levite. A social connection to the feast of Pentecost echoes in the specific covenant obligation to include the Levite in the Pentecost feast (Deut. 16:11). Emphasizing how full is the eschatological realization in the community of Jesus’ disciples, this Levite himself is the channel of blessing to the community, rather than the community being a blessing to the Levite.

This character trait of a channel of blessing is codified in Barnabas’s surname in 4:36: “Son of Encouragement” (ὁ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνεύμενον υἱὸς παρακλήσεως). Commentators have balked at Luke’s interpretation of the meaning of Barnabas’s name. Clearly, this surname relates to no possible etymological analysis by Luke.<sup>56</sup> The surname has to have narrative significance. What possible connection is Luke making?

The connection is Pentecost fulfillment. This fulfillment actually ties all the way back to the prophet Simeon in the nativity narrative of the Gospel. Simeon the prophet was looking for the “consolation of Israel” (παράκλησιν τοῦ Ἰσραήλ) when he had his revelatory encounter with the baby Jesus in the Temple in Lk. 2:25. Jesus is the consolation of Israel. This consolation in the church is realized through the Holy Spirit, the eschatological promise of the Father to the followers of Jesus. This eschatological realization is key to Luke’s summary statement of the church in 9:31: “The church, therefore, throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria experienced peace, being built up and continuing in the fear of the Lord and in the consolation of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplying” (Ἡ μὲν οὖν ἐκκλησία καθ’ ὅλης τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ Γαλιλαίας καὶ Σαμαρείας εἶχεν εἰρήνην οἰκοδομουμένη καὶ πορευομένη τῷ φόβῳ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ τῇ

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<sup>56</sup> Fitzmyer, *Acts*, pp. 320–21, has provided a concise overview of the etymological problems.

παρακλήσει τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐπληθύνετο). Barnabas is a “Son of Consolation” because his actions have representative power on behalf of Jesus as an effective channel for the consolation of Israel in the community of believers. This consolation is in the realization of Pentecost fulfillment. In fact, Barnabas becomes the key character facilitating the realization of the promise of Pentecost fulfillment in each of his significant interactions in the episodes that follow.

The other characterization of Barnabas given by Luke is that Barnabas is from Cyprus. This makes him a Diaspora Jew, at least in his origins. This allows Barnabas within the scope of Luke’s narrative to represent the broad movement of the gospel beyond Judea, alluded to in Peter’s Pentecost speech in 2:39, “for this promise is to you, and to your children, and to those who are far off” (ὁμῖν γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐπαγγελία καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις ὁμῶν καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς εἰς μακράν). Further, the connection to the first destination in the itinerary of the First Missionary Journey is given its foundation.

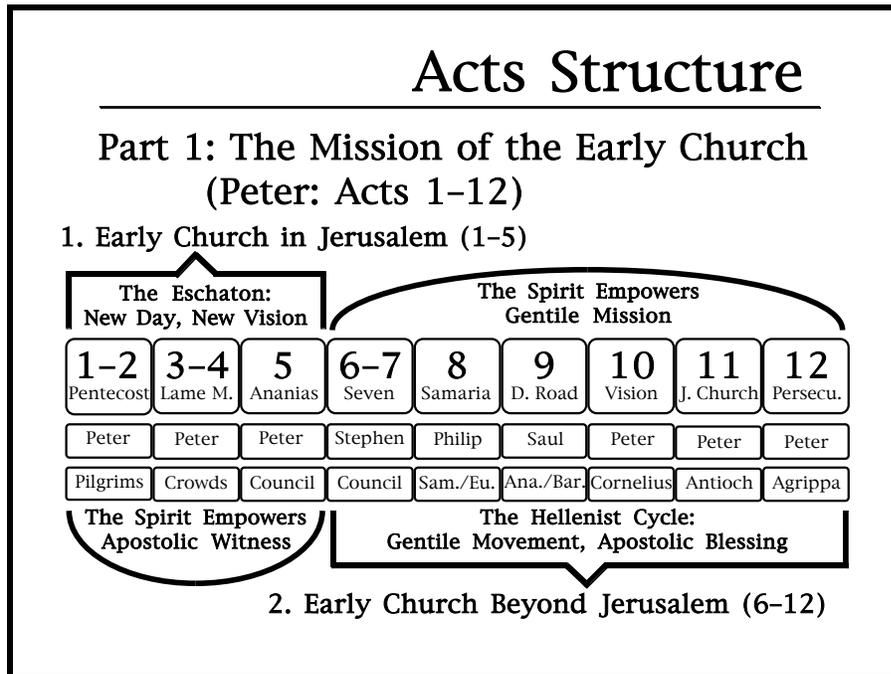
### Ananias

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is one of the unrelieved enigmas of Acts. However, in the narrative, Luke has juxtaposed the story of Ananias immediately against that of Barnabas. Luke intends the reader to compare Ananias to Barnabas. That comparison creates intentional narrative irony, because the contrasts are strong. If Barnabas is the positive image of Pentecost fulfillment, Ananias is the negative. Ananias’s actions, along with those of his wife, serve to threaten the fulfillment of Pentecost in the life of the church. To the harmony of one accord, Ananias brings discord; to the strength of shared life, Ananias brings a selfish life; to the potential of Pentecostal fullness, Ananias brings a short-changed purse. Where Barnabas is a “Son of Consolation,” an effective instrument of the Holy Spirit in the community, Ananias egregiously provokes the Spirit into judgment. The issue is serious, and Peter’s quote to the Jerusalem population of Moses’ warning about heeding the Prophet to come (Deut.

18:19)<sup>57</sup> already has set the stage for this showdown between Ananias’s duplicity, which will play havoc with the Pentecost harvest, and the Spirit’s determination to bring Pentecost to eschatological fulfillment in the church. Ananias is Pentecost fulfillment threatened, a grave lesson for the church.

The Hellenist Cycle (6–12)

Figure 1—Acts Structure



The structure of Acts takes a new direction with the Hellenist Cycle beginning in Acts 6. The narrative indicators of a change are clear: new terminology (e.g. “disciples,” μαθηταί, for Christians), new social dimension to the complexion of the early Christian community (“Hellenists,” Ἑλληνισταί), new leadership group in the Seven, new negative

<sup>57</sup> Acts 3:23: “And it shall be that every person who does not obey that Prophet will be utterly cut off from the people” (ἔσται δὲ πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἣτις ἐὰν μὴ ἀκούσῃ τοῦ προφήτου ἐκείνου ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ). The verb translated “he will be utterly cut off” (ἐξολεθρευθήσεται) in Peter’s formulation is neither a part of the MT nor the LXX of Deut. 18:19. The verb form probably was derived by Peter from the LXX of Lev. 23:29, a description of the fast of the Day of Atonement; so Fitzmyer, *Acts*, pp. 289–90; Dunn, *Acts*, p. 47, who added, “it is response to the new Moses which determines membership of the people.”

critique of the Temple as an institution (Stephen), and new directions for the mission inaugurated at Pentecost (Samaritans, Ethiopian eunuch). Luke moves to this cycle because this material formulates the story of the gospel’s first advance from its initial soundings in Jerusalem, the Gentile movement that will have apostolic blessing.

Key to this movement are the “Hellenists.” Acts 6 is the beginning of the Hellenist breakthrough to wider witness. Three new characters will carry the weight of the plot development in the early stages of this Hellenist Cycle: Stephen, Philip, and Saul. (See Figure 1.) Stephen represents the definitive critique of Jewish resistance to the gospel in Acts 7. Reaction to Stephen plays out the reality of the self-condemned status of the Sanhedrin regarding the preaching of Jesus established in Acts 5. Philip represents the first witness outside Jerusalem in Acts 8. Philip advances the word about Jesus both to those considered “half-Jews” and to a non-Semite. Saul is commissioned on the Damascus Road in Acts 9. Saul will represent the philosophy, passion, and powerhouse behind the Gentile mission.

After the text Peter quoted to the Sanhedrin in Acts 4 begins to come true in Acts 5 (Ps. 118:22 in Acts 4:11, “the stone which the builders rejected,” ὁ λίθος, ὁ ἐξουθενηθεὶς ὑφ’ ὑμῶν τῶν οἰκοδόμων), the plotline must take a new, divinely ordained direction for Pentecost fulfillment to play itself out. This Hellenist Cycle part of the story will involve social ramifications already inherent in the very nature of the profile of the celebrants in the Pentecost festival called for in Deut. 16:11 (“and the stranger,” אֲרֵיבָי; LXX = καὶ ὁ προσήλυτος). The material of the Hellenist Cycle will tell that part of the story, the realization of the full social dimensions of Pentecost’s eschatological harvest.

### Saul the Pharisee

Saul is commissioned by God in Acts 9:1–31 to carry Jesus’ Name. Sandwiched between the story of Philip’s work among the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch and

Peter’s revelation guiding him into acceptance of Gentiles such as Cornelius without circumcision as part of the people of God, Saul’s story is given its sense and interpretation as an integral part of the Hellenist Cycle. Philip’s work in Acts 8 alludes to the direction of that mission, and Peter’s insight in Acts 10 shows the apostolic blessing on that mission. (See Figure 1.)

Saul’s powerful apologetic in Damascene synagogues in 9:22, “And Saul grew . . . more powerful and confounded the Jews,” (Σαῦλος δὲ μᾶλλον ἐνεδυναμοῦτο καὶ συνέχυνεν [τοὺς] Ἰουδαίους), shows that he is taking up Stephen’s synagogue mantle characterized by Luke in 6:10, “and they were not able to withstand the wisdom and spirit in which he was speaking” (καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυον ἀντιστῆναι τῇ σοφίᾳ καὶ τῷ πνεύματι ᾧ ἐλάλει.). The Sanhedrin has not prevailed in the murder of Stephen: the voice of the Hellenist martyr speaks again. Note especially the characterization of Saul in 9:29, “He was speaking and arguing with the Hellenists, and they were attempting to kill him” (ἐλάλει τε καὶ συνεζήτει πρὸς τοὺς Ἑλληνιστάς, οἱ δὲ ἐπεχείρουν ἀνελεῖν αὐτόν). Saul becomes the character in the narrative embodying the Hellenist Cycle’s destiny—an unstoppable voice, an unbeatable apologetic—because God will preserve this witness by both human (9:23–25; 18:12–16; 19:30–31; 20:2–3; 21:30–32; 23:6–10, 12–24; 25:1–5, 9–11) and divine (14:19–20; 16:23–26; 18:9–10; 27:23–24; 28:3–6) means. The escape from Damascus begins this preservation motif that will play out numerous times in Acts.

The intervention of Barnabas, however, is required for Saul in Jerusalem. Initial suspicion greets Saul in his first effort to visit Jerusalem after the Damascus Road. Hesitation among the disciples is understandable: this is the great persecutor of the church (8:3; 9:26). This suspicion would be a serious setback for Saul, because the legitimization of Saul’s mission from the Twelve is crucial, since their symbolic role in Acts is to represent the heart and intention of Jesus. Barnabas personally mediates Saul’s introduction to the apostles in Jerusalem as an advocate for Saul (9:26–27). Here Barnabas also plays his characteristic role in Acts, established in the first episode

introducing him as a character to the Acts narrative—Pentecost fulfillment facilitator. Acceptance by the Jerusalem apostles in Acts 9 validates for the church Saul’s commission from God and places him in an esteemed category similar to that described of Stephen in 6:6, “These men they stood before the apostles, who, after praying, laid their hands on them” (οὗς ἔστησαν ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀποστόλων, καὶ προσευξάμενοι ἐπέθηκαν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας). Pentecost will find its broader fulfillment in the story of Jesus through the divinely commissioned Saul, and Barnabas will facilitate all the crucial early stages of that fulfillment.

Finally, one will observe that Luke has concluded the Damascus Road sequence of narratives with one of his Pentecost summary verses in 9:31. In this summary he specifically points out the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Within the narrative, Barnabas, “Son of Consolation,” is the channel of that comfort to a church disquieted by the presence of the former persecutor Saul now claiming a divine commission from God on behalf of Jesus.

### Cornelius the Centurion

The church’s acceptance of the implications of the Pentecost harvest among Gentiles is going to take more than an initial acknowledgement of Saul by the Twelve. Yet to be worked out, of course, is the story of the status of the Law of Moses in this Gentile mission, as well as the proper accommodations for table fellowship. Table fellowship is no mere social formality. This will be a crucial decision for the church, because this issue resides at the very heart of the demonstration of the eschatological Pentecost harvest that inaugurated the entire narrative movement in Acts 2.

In Acts 9:32–43, Luke uses the memories of Peter’s seacoast ministry to validate Peter as a reflection of Jesus’ own ministry before moving on to tell the crucial but controversial story of Cornelius’s conversion. The well-known doublet strategy with

which Luke has constructed Acts 10 and 11 serves to highlight this episode at Caesarea as an epoch event in the life of the church.

What usually receives little attention is that Peter’s vision is about the divine provision of food. In the story, Peter had become hungry, and food was in the process of being prepared for him when he fell into a trance (10:10–12). In the trance Peter saw a vision of a sheet let down from heaven with food that Peter was commanded to take and eat (10:13). Peter does not get the point, and the scene repeats two more times. The key declaration is in 10:15, “what God has cleansed, do not treat as unclean” (ὃ ὁ θεὸς ἐκαθάρισεν, σὺ μὴ κοίνου). Peter’s confusion about the meaning of this vision does not clear up until the interpretation is provided by the messengers from Cornelius and Peter’s subsequent witnessing of the Holy Spirit poured out on the Gentile Cornelius and his household (10:44–46). Now Peter understands that the vision of God’s command to eat means that God has declared Gentiles “clean.”

But “clean” specifically for what in the narrative? Just as pilgrim worshippers who presented themselves at the feasts in Jerusalem had to purify themselves in order to participate in the rituals, so God has provided access to the eschatological Pentecost feast by himself purifying those who come to the celebration through faith in Jesus. Therefore, Gentiles such as Cornelius are clean to participate in the eschatological Pentecost feast. Peter may share this feast celebration with Cornelius symbolically by eating in Cornelius’s house. Peter’s meal fellowship inferred in staying in Cornelius’s home symbolically plays out the central characteristic of the early church portrait painted by Luke in the first summary statement at the end of the Pentecost narrative in 2:46. The connection to Pentecost is clear in Peter’s explicit question in 10:47: “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?” (μήτι τὸ ὕδωρ δύναται κωλύσαι τις τοῦ μὴ βαπτισθῆναι τούτους, οἵτινες τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἔλαβον ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς;). Since that Pentecost narrative of 2:1–4 is tied to the closely associated festal meal fellowship of 2:41–47, the eschatological nuance of the festal

celebration in Acts 2 is inherent to Peter’s question about Cornelius in Acts 10 and provides the reason for the specific character of Peter’s vision in Joppa being about food.

A problem arises, though, when news from Caesarea hits Jerusalem. Some Jerusalem believers react negatively, pointing to the need for circumcision and continued social barriers supposedly expressing ritual purity (11:1–3). These demands, however, are a fundamental failure to grasp the eschatological dimensions and social implications of the Pentecost experience. Peter’s testimony to the church in Jerusalem about the Cornelius episode is crucial to the church’s acceptance of his action on behalf of Cornelius. Peter’s rhetorical question in 11:17 encapsulates the new revelation, “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 God?” (εἰ οὖν τὴν ἴσην δωρεὰν ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς ὡς καὶ ἡμῖν πιστεύασιν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, ἐγὼ τίς ἡμῖν δυνατὸς κωλύσαι τὸν θεόν;). God was creating a new fulfillment of the Pentecost festival powered by the promised Spirit. Faith in Jesus has transcended the Law of Moses in a new Exodus.<sup>58</sup>

However, even though concord on the issue of Gentile inclusion seems achieved in Acts 11:18, Luke slips in a revealing note of an undercurrent of problems in 11:19: “Therefore those dispersed by reason of the persecution on Stephen’s account went through Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to Jews only” (Οἱ μὲν οὖν διασπαρέντες ἀπὸ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς γενομένης ἐπὶ Στεφάνῳ διήλθον ἕως Φοινίκης καὶ Κύπρου καὶ Ἀντιοχείας μηδενὶ λαλοῦντες τὸν λόγον εἰ μὴ μόνον Ἰουδαίοις). The issue is only silenced in Acts 11, not settled. This alerts the reader not to be surprised when the large influx of Gentiles resulting from the success of the First Missionary Journey means that the issue of Gentile inclusion no longer can be ignored. The narrative already hints in 11:19 that the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15 is inevitable.

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<sup>58</sup> Lk. 9:31, “they were talking about his exodus which was going to be fulfilled in Jerusalem,” ἔλεγον τὴν ἕξοδον αὐτοῦ, ἣν ἡμελλεν πληροῦν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ. Cf. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet*, p. 46.

In the broader scope of Acts 1–12, given the narrative thrust of Acts 2, the problem raised in Acts 11 by Jerusalem believers with Cornelius translates into *which* Pentecost feast is to be celebrated, the historical annual pilgrim feast as defined in the Law of Moses on the basis of the Exodus redemption, complete with the burden of the law and its social exclusiveness, or the eschatological atemporal feast as defined in the gospel of Jesus on the basis of his own sacrificial redemption, complete with the gift of the Spirit and a social inclusiveness? Peter is commanded to take and eat from the new feast of God’s special provision at this opportune time of eschatological Pentecost fulfillment, and so is the church. God has provided a new redemption in Jesus. God has provided a new harvest festival in the Spirit. Gentiles are cleansed by faith and included in the new festal celebration marked by continuous fellowship in the homes of believers.

### The Church at Antioch

While some dispersed through the Jerusalem persecution speak to Jews only (11:19), Luke shifts the narrative focus to Antioch, because here the true significance of Pentecost will find fulfillment in the church. Jerusalem no longer will be the center of Pentecost fulfillment, because negative reaction to the action of God in cleansing Gentiles such as Cornelius will quench the Spirit of Pentecost in Jerusalem. This is what Luke infers by noting that believers are first called Christians at Antioch.

Luke moves from the Cornelius narrative immediately into its Antioch sequel. In Acts 11:20 the essence of the first light of full Pentecost harvest realization is given: “which ones after they came to Antioch were speaking also to the Hellenists and proclaiming the Lord Jesus” (οἵτινες ἐλθόντες εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν ἐλάλουν καὶ πρὸς τοὺς Ἑλληνιστὰς εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν). This effort to evangelize Hellenists signals a distinct turn in the mission agenda. This turn happens in Antioch, not Jerusalem. The Pentecost promise of inclusive harvest is receiving fuller realization, with echoes of

the Jerusalem Pentecost harvest in 2:41, for Luke emphasizes in 11:21 that many believed (“a great number,” *πολύς τε ἄριθμός*).

Once again, Barnabas plays the key role. Jerusalem determined to investigate the activity already taking place in Antioch and sent Barnabas as an apostolic representative (11:22–24). Barnabas rejoiced in what he witnessed at Antioch, which echoes the eschatological joy of the harvest first felt among believers in Jerusalem (2:46). But when Barnabas begins to appreciate the significant size of the response (11:24: “and a large crowd was brought to the Lord,” *καὶ προσετέθη ὄχλος ἰκανὸς τῷ κυρίῳ*), he realized the need to incorporate Saul into the work and retrieved him from Tarsus for that purpose (11:25–26). Once again, Barnabas is the Pentecost facilitator in the life of Saul. He introduced Saul to Jerusalem, and now he introduces Saul to Antioch.

The work was so notable over the course of a year’s time that Luke in the same breath draws attention to that specific appellation that would become the historical watermark used for followers of Jesus.<sup>59</sup> Why note they are called “Christians” first at Antioch? Because Antioch is where the new vision of the people of God born at Pentecost first matured into its more universal ramifications of mission strategy.<sup>60</sup> Because Antioch is where Saul, the one specially called to Gentile mission by God, was integrated into that particular fellowship that would become the missionary sending agent for the First Missionary Journey.<sup>61</sup>

Luke then moved to narrate the Famine Relief visit of Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem, beginning in 11:27–30. The narrative of this Famine Relief visit is interrupted by the story of Herod Agrippa I in Acts 12:1–23. In 12:24–25, though, Luke returns to the Famine Relief visit of Barnabas and Saul. The Famine Relief visit thus becomes a

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<sup>59</sup> Whether self ascribed by believers or used in derision by Jewish or pagan detractors is inconsequential to the narrative significance.

<sup>60</sup> Similarly. Polhill, *Acts*, p. 273.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

bracketing device used by Luke to surround the story of Herod.<sup>62</sup> At the narrative level this should mean that the story of Herod enhances or interprets the Famine Relief visit.

The famine is a threat to Pentecost harvest joy in Jerusalem. God, however, does not stand idly by. Instead, God inspires the prophet Agabus to predict the famine so that the church in Jerusalem may be supplied adequately through the believers in Antioch (11:27–28). This is a role reversal of Pentecost blessing: instead of from Jerusalem outward, we have a reverse flow inward to Jerusalem. This proactive ministry taking up the Pentecost fulfillment mantle, when coupled with the proactive Hellenist mission already noted, contributes to a sense of why Luke pointedly observes that believers first were called “Christians” at Antioch—the paradigmatic church of Pentecost mission and ministry.

As with the threat of famine to the whole church, we have the threat of Herod targeted directly at the apostolic leadership of the church. James, brother of John, is killed, and when Herod perceives the favor of the Jews about this policy, goes after Peter as well (12:2–3).<sup>63</sup> God, however, also deals with Herod as he did with the famine—by divine intervention. Peter is miraculously released from prison (12:7–10), and Herod meets his end at a feast in Caesarea (12:21–23). Luke has interpreted Herod’s dramatic and sudden death as God’s judgment (12:23: “an angel of the Lord,” ἄγγελος κυρίου).

What is more significant than usually granted is the brief mention by Luke of Herod’s relationship with the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon in 12:20. Why mention this at all? At first, this remark seems an aside contributing little to the plotline.<sup>64</sup> However, the bracketing of the Herod narrative with the Jerusalem famine visit of Barnabas and

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Polhill, *Acts*, pp. 276–77.

<sup>63</sup> Herod will find his story haunted by Peter’s recent question to his detractors in the church in 11:17: “who was I that I could hinder God?” The question did not occur to Herod apparently.

<sup>64</sup> Most commentators hardly take note, other than occasionally voicing curiosity over Luke’s source here, since Josephus does not relate any word about this arrangement between Herod and these two Phoenician cities; e.g., Barrett, *Acts*, p. 589; Dunn, *Acts*, p. 166; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, p. 490; Polhill, *Acts*, p. 284.

Saul suggests that the connection within the developing plotline of Acts 1–12 is the very nature of Herod’s relationship with Tyre and Sidon.

Herod apparently was attempting to strengthen his reign by developing patron-client relationships in neighboring regions.<sup>65</sup> Luke indicated in 12:20 that the relationship with Tyre and Sidon had been on behalf of food supply: “they were asking for peace because their country was supplied with food from that of the king” (ἤτοῦντο εἰρήνην διὰ τὸ τρέφεσθαι αὐτῶν τὴν χώραν ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλικῆς). Herod had attempted to establish himself as the provider of food for Tyre and Sidon. He had assumed the position of the guarantor of the harvest. That assumption put him in direct rebellion against God when the background material of Exodus 34 is recalled. Jewish festivals were intended to inculcate that belief that God alone was the source and sustainer of life. Herod’s unexpected demise provides the reader with the contrast of the insecurity of life supplied from within human resources, and life supplied by God. Even in famine, God can effect a harvest supply for Jerusalem believers. This power of God’s provision contrasts that of a frail human king, and, translated into an eschatological key, reinforces the sense of the surety of the eschatological Pentecost harvest. God will be able to overcome all obstacles to bring about Pentecostal fullness in the church. This will be an important reassurance when following the narrative of Saul’s mission in Acts 13–28.

Finally, the Herod material prepares the reader for subtle but observable shifts in the narrative that set the stage for the second half of Acts. Herod’s persecutions in Acts 12 seem to be the catalyst of several leadership transitions: (1) a shift in church leadership from Peter and the Twelve to James and the elders,<sup>66</sup> and (2) a shift in mission leadership from Peter in Acts 1–12 to Saul in Acts 13–28.<sup>67</sup> Finally, a geographical shift

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<sup>65</sup> So Dunn, *Acts*, p. 166.

<sup>66</sup> E.g., note Peter’s instruction after his release in 12:17, “tell these things to James and the brothers” (ἀπαγγείλατε Ἰακώβῳ καὶ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ταῦτα).

<sup>67</sup> In 12:17, Peter’s departure after so extensive a role in the narrative seems quite anticlimactic,

also can be perceived in the center of gravity for the Gentile mission from Jerusalem to Antioch. With these shifts in Acts 12, the reader is prepared for a new mission and a new leader of that mission in the ongoing saga of eschatological Pentecost fulfillment.<sup>68</sup> That Pentecost echoes reverberate with meaning far into the second half of Acts, even for someone who was not there, is seen in Luke’s explanation of Paul’s haste to pass by Ephesus at the end of the Third Missionary Journey in 20:6: “for he was hurrying, if it might be possible for him, that he be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost” (ἔσπευδεν γὰρ εἰ δυνατόν εἶη αὐτῷ τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς πεντηκοστῆς γενέσθαι εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα).

*Summary of the Narrative Development in Acts 1–12*

The Pentecost narrative of Acts 2 is uniquely Lukan. Luke fronts the narrative for plot development, making Pentecost the controlling narrative event of Acts. Divine fulfillment already is integral to Luke’s characterization of the Pentecost experience before he actually narrates the event. The fulfillment theme comes through a “promise of the Father” motif that bridges the end of the Gospel to the beginning of Acts, as well as fulfillment terminology to begin the Pentecost narrative. The promise of the Father is the Spirit. The Spirit inaugurates the eschatological fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel derived from Exodus traditions. The historical celebration of Pentecost anticipated a full consummation in a future prophetic figure. The Gospel of Luke has presented Jesus as this promised prophet leading Israel into a new Exodus redemption. The next stage in the redemptive cycle is Pentecost.

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just “going out he went to another place” (ἐξελθὼν ἐπορεύθη εἰς ἕτερον τόπον). Peter does not reappear in the Acts account except for a cameo appearance at the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15 to voice one last time the apostolic validation of Saul/Paul’s mission (15:7–11). James actually pronounces the final decision at the conference (15:13). While anticlimactic, the nature of Peter’s stage exit in Acts 12 reinforces the overall narrative impression that Saul has, after all, the premier character role in Acts.

<sup>68</sup> Even a message to pagans does not fail to echo the Pentecost theme. Note that even when explicit Christological language falls out, Paul’s message to pagans at Lystra still alludes to the Pentecost harvest motif through a focus on the Creator God who blesses mankind with seasons, crops, and harvest and fills the human heart with gladness (14:14–17).

On the negative side, Peter’s characterization of Israel as “this crooked generation” is a deliberate echo of Moses’ warning to Israel in Deuteronomy 32. The context of Deuteronomy 32 is the Exodus redemption prior to realization of God’s gift of the land with its promise of abundant harvest providing for the ongoing life of Israel. Moses warned Israel of failure to realize fulfillment of God’s promises through failure to respond to God’s Exodus covenant faithfully. As Israel of old, Israel now is confronted with the choice that determines fulfillment of the Pentecost promise, only now, the choice is endowed with eschatological consequences in failure to respond to what God has accomplished for Israel’s redemption in Jesus.

Historically, Pentecost celebrated the grain harvest. A successful harvest was epitomized in a joyous festal meal in Jewish homes. Luke has modulated this historical festal meal setting into its eschatological fulfillment in the homes of Jesus’ disciples in 2:41–47. The believers’ shared life is Pentecost’s promised fulfillment. Social inclusiveness always has been a key component of this celebration of the Pentecost feast. Social inclusiveness, therefore, is central to the fulfillment of Pentecost in the church.

The character of the Levite Barnabas conveys the positive side of Pentecost fulfillment in Israel. Barnabas’s surname, “Son of Encouragement,” obviously is not based on etymology. Rather, this surname has narrative function symbolizing Pentecost fulfillment. Barnabas is the Pentecost fulfillment facilitator.

The character of Ananias, on the other hand, is set in direct contrast to Barnabas. Ananias is the negative side of Pentecost—fulfillment frustrated. That is, Ananias’s actions threaten Pentecost fulfillment. This serves as a warning both to the Sanhedrin and to the church about the serious issues involved for God in the fulfillment of Pentecost in Israel.

Luke introduces the Hellenist Cycle in Acts 6 because the material will help develop the full social dimensions of Pentecost’s eschatological harvest. In this Hellenist Cycle, Saul is commissioned by God as the character who will embody the Hellenist

Cycle’s destiny in the Gentile mission. Barnabas is the facilitator for Saul’s realization of this role.

Pentecost fulfillment among Gentiles comes through faith and the purifying power of the Holy Spirit. Peter learns this truth in his encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10. Cornelius is pronounced “cleansed,” a purification that allows participation in the eschatological harvest festival. However, this Gentile development is met with resistance from elements within the Jerusalem church in Acts 11, the prelude to Acts 15.

Disciples are first called Christians at Antioch because the full dimensions of Pentecost fulfillment develop in this church. A distinct turn in mission strategy occurs at Antioch: deliberate preaching to Hellenists, who respond in significant numbers. Barnabas is the Pentecost facilitator in Antioch, as in Jerusalem. Barnabas facilitates Saul’s ministry too, once again, by retrieving him from Tarsus for the Hellenist work in Antioch. Jerusalem’s new vision of the people of God born in Acts 2 matures into Antioch’s mission strategy in Acts 11. The Famine Relief visit of Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem completes the picture of Antioch as the paradigmatic church of Pentecost mission and ministry. This is why believers are first called “Christians” at Antioch.

Luke constructs the story of Herod in Acts 12 to interpret the Famine Relief visit of Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem sandwiched on either side (11:27–30; 12:24–25). Famine is a threat to Pentecost harvest fulfillment. God, however, is able to supply the needs of the Jerusalem church through divine intervention from Antioch. Herod’s story provides the stark contrast for Luke’s Famine Relief account of God’s harvest provision for Jerusalem. Herod’s attempts to force Tyre and Sidon into a patron/client dependency for food supply are undermined by Herod’s untimely death. In contrast, against the threat of famine in Jerusalem, God does not fail to provide the surety of the harvest. Further, Antiochene famine relief through Barnabas and Saul in Jerusalem points to the surety of the eschatological harvest through these same characters in future Antiochene mission

efforts in the Diaspora. Thus, Acts 12 prepares the reader for a new stage of Pentecost fulfillment among both Jews and Gentiles.

In sum, Exodus traditions related to Moses, God’s future prophet, and the final Pentecostal consummation of Israel’s Exodus journey are compressed by Luke into the story of Pentecost in Acts 2 and the events that flowed from that foundational eschatological event. Pentecost defined the profile of the early church mission and the social parameters of her eschatological life in the world. In the Gospel of Luke, with the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem, a new Exodus had occurred. In Acts, with the Father’s outpouring of the Spirit on his people, a new Pentecost is celebrated.

### **Conclusions**

Pentecost is more than a circumstantial time frame surrounding the miracle of languages giving rise to Peter’s inaugural mission speech in Acts 2. The narrative development of both the end of the Gospel of Luke and of Acts 1–12 indicates that Luke’s strategy evolves out of the significance of the Pentecost feast in the ancient Jewish setting of Israel’s Exodus and subsequent possession of the promised land. Luke has translated this dimension of Israel’s story into its corresponding eschatological fulfillment in Jesus and the church. Within this narrative strategy, Luke combines Pentecost fulfillment with both the narrative development of the character of Barnabas and the motif of the church’s Gentile mission developed in the character of Saul.