

The Atonement in Lukan Theology

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CAMBRIDGE
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This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-5979-6, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5979-0

To Sarah,
my partner in life and in the gospel,
whose imprint is left on all I do

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PREFACE

According to the book of Revelation, all those who are in Christ will spend eternity worshiping the glorious Lamb who was slain. In other words, eternity will never exhaust our ability to glory in the work of Christ upon the cross. Working on this book has felt like a small foretaste of that truth. I consider it a remarkable privilege to have spent so much time dwelling on the cross as presented in Luke-Acts, and look forward to a day when I will learn to appreciate its meaning with even greater clarity and force.

Upon completion of this project, I have many people to thank for their support and encouragement. Tom Schreiner, my doctoral supervisor, first suggested to me the topic of the atonement in Lukan theology. I am grateful he encouraged me to tackle such a large and weighty issue, and then provided the steady guidance I needed all along the way. I am indebted to Tom Steller and John Piper for setting me on the road toward careful biblical study and a passion to labor directly with the text of Scripture during my time at The Bethlehem Institute. Throughout my studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, I was sustained and encouraged by the gospel-driven ministry of Clifton Baptist Church, and am humbled by the opportunity to now serve this local congregation as a pastor.

My parents, Ray and Agnes Kimbell, were unfailing in their support of me. Their generosity helped me to pursue intensive theological study without sacrificing family or church involvement. My father went to be with the Lord last year and now understands all these issues more clearly than we who remain behind. My wife's parents, Dan and Debbie Gardinier, have provided a constant stream of biblical care, counsel, and encouragement that has been a steadying force in our family from the beginning. I will always admire their wisdom and godliness.

Our children, Anna, Rachel, Trevor, Ryan, Julia and Tyler are truly a blessing from the Lord. I will always remember the mid-evening "break" for dinner and playtime and family devotions when writing this work. I pray they all will grow to cherish the cross of Christ. Thank you, Anna, for your work preparing the index!

My wife, Sarah, simply makes everything I do better. She is one of the most gifted people I know, and I am amazed that God has allowed me to

have her as a partner in life and ministry. I am so grateful that through many years of family, school, and ministry together, we can sincerely say that our love for one another has grown. By God's grace, we have also grown together in the gospel, and I could not imagine anyone else by my side while continuing to search for new vistas of the cross.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A steady debate over the meaning of the death of Jesus in Luke-Acts runs through the heart of scholarly attention to Lukan theology. With the rise of redaction criticism and the recognition of Luke as a theologian in his own right, the uniqueness of the Lukan perspective over against other biblical authors has been regularly emphasized. In this regard, it has become commonplace to affirm Luke attaches no direct soteriological value to the death of Jesus, or at the very least minimizes any such connection.¹ On a more specific point, a broad contingent of critical scholarship has concluded that nowhere in Luke-Acts is Christ's death presented as an atonement for sin.²

¹ Hermie C. van Zyl states in a recent summary article on this issue that "since the rise of critical scholarship it has become the standard view that Luke does not accord salvific meaning to the death of Jesus" ("The Soteriological Meaning of Jesus' Death in Luke-Acts: A Survey of Possibilities," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 23 [2002]: 533). Peter Doble writes, "What, precisely, is the nature of this widespread complaint against Luke? It is alleged that in Luke-Acts Jesus' death is 'played down'" (*The Paradox of Salvation: Luke's Theology of the Cross* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 3-4). François Bovon states matter-of-factly, "All agree to recognize that Luke rarely confers a soteriological function on the cross, but minds are divided in the explanation of this given" (*Luke the Theologian*, 2nd rev. ed. [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006], 183-84).

² Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), 280; John M. Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (London: Macmillan, 1930), lxxi-lxxii; M. Kiddle, "The Passion Narrative in St. Luke's Gospel," *JTS* 36 (1935): 277-80; C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1944), 25; Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (London: Faber & Faber, 1960), 201; Ernst Käsemann, "Ministry and Community in the New Testament," in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1964), 92; Gerhard Voss, *Die Christologie der lukanischen Schriften in Grundzügen* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), 130; Philipp Vielhauer, "On the 'Paulinism' of Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn, trans. Wm. C. Robinson, Jr., and Victor P. Furnish (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 44-45; Richard Zehnle, "The Salvific

Rather, Luke's soteriological emphasis lands squarely upon Jesus' resurrection and exaltation as Lord.³

Thesis

Without denying scholarship's well-grounded assessment regarding Luke's emphasis on the saving significance of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation, it seems the value Luke attributes to the death of Christ has

Character of Jesus' Death in Lucan Soteriology," *Theological Studies* 30 (1969): 438-44; Walter E. Pilgrim, "The Death of Christ in Lucan Soteriology" (Th.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1971); Augustin George, "Le Sens de la Mort de Jesus pour Luc," *RB* 80 (1973): 198, 208-09; W. Eric Franklin, *Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 65-67; idem, *Luke: Interpreter of Paul, Critic of Matthew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 77 n. 1, 120-21, 130; C. H. Talbert, "Martyrdom in Luke-Acts and the Lucan Social Ethic," in *Political Issues in Luke-Acts*, ed. Richard J. Cassidy and Philip J. Scharper (New York: Orbis, 1983), 99; Robert J. Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian. Luke's Passion Account as Literature* (New York: Paulist, 1985), 1, 80, 115; Joseph B. Tyson, *The Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1986), 170; John T. Carroll, "Luke's Crucifixion Scene," in *Reimagining the Death of the Lukan Jesus*, ed. Dennis D. Sylva (Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1990), 202 n. 64, 68; David Ravens, *Luke and the Restoration of Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1995), 157-69; Doble, *The Paradox of Salvation*, 234-37. Joel Green is slightly less emphatic, stating, "While aware of this interpretation of the cross he does not appear very interested in it" ("The Death of Jesus, God's Servant," in *Reimagining the Death of the Lukan Jesus*, ed. Dennis D. Sylva [Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1990], 7). Similarly W. G. Kümmel, "Current Theological Accusations Against Luke," *ANQ* 16 (1975): 13; Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 31, 98; Robert F. O'Toole, "How Does Luke Portray Jesus as Servant of YHWH," *Bib* 81 (2000): 336.

³ I. Howard Marshall, who according to C. K. Barrett "makes as much as anyone could of Luke's references to the Cross" ("Theologia Crucis—in Acts?" in *Theologia Crucis—Signum Crucis: Festschrift für Erich Dinkler zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. C. Andersen and G. Klein [Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1979], 74) asks, "How does Jesus save? The clear view expressed in Acts is that Jesus saves men by virtue of His exaltation" (*Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988], 169. Recently, Marshall briefly affirmed without discussion that in Luke's Gospel Jesus' death is to be seen as "sacrificial and redemptive" (*New Testament Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004], 153) yet summarized with regard to the book of Acts, "Little is said about the function of the death of Jesus in achieving salvation, and more stress is placed on his authoritative position as the exalted Lord" (181).

been underestimated. When all the data is considered, the death of Christ is given greater *direct* soteriological significance in the Lukan writings than scholarship generally acknowledges. Specifically, Luke presents the death of Jesus as an atoning death that brings about the forgiveness of sins.⁴ This is not to say Luke emphasizes the saving significance of Christ's death *above* other soteriological events such as resurrection and exaltation. Rather, it is to say that atonement plays a fundamental role in Luke's soteriology such that when this aspect is rejected or minimized, Luke's presentation of the cross and salvation is distorted.

Methodology

This work seeks to make use of the best modern methods of biblical study. Careful historical-grammatical exegesis of relevant texts in Luke-Acts is done to discern the author's intended meaning. "Luke-Acts" is understood to be a two-volume work by a single author. While there is much debate over the extent to which Luke-Acts is a unified work, it is sufficient for our purpose to note that Luke undoubtedly makes reference back to his Gospel at the beginning of Acts (1:1). This shows Luke is writing with an awareness of his completed Gospel *and* intentionally draws the attention of his audience to that previous work. The key implication is that readers of Luke's double work should take seriously the possibility of literary links and parallels between the two books.⁵

⁴ I use "atoning" to refer to God's saving work that addresses the problem of human sin and its effects so that sinners may be restored to fellowship with Him. Atonement is therefore a broad term that can include more specific elements such as expiation (cleansing from sin and its defilement), propitiation (turning away God's wrath), substitution (bearing the penalty for sin in the place of others so they do not have to bear that penalty themselves), and representation (dying and rising in union with sinners so that sinners themselves pass through death into reconciliation and life). See, e.g., Robert W. Yarbrough, "Atonement," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 388-93. If any one of these elements is shown to be in view in Luke-Acts, I understand "atonement" to be in view. For a helpful discussion of the distinctions between substitution and representation, see Daniel P. Bailey, "Concepts of *Stellvertretung* in the Interpretation of Isaiah 53," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*, ed. William H. Bellinger, Jr., and William R. Farmer (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 223-50.

⁵ I am following here the work of Steve Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle: The Portrait of Paul in the Miletus Speech and 1 Thessalonians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 40-44.

When redaction critical questions are addressed, they are considered on the basis of Markan priority and the Two-Document Hypothesis. While redaction-critical issues are not overlooked, they are not regarded as the final step in determining the biblical author's theology. The work must be read as a whole (including both tradition and redaction) in order to faithfully grasp the theological intention of the author.⁶ In this regard, the insights of literary criticism are utilized and my focus falls upon the finished narrative. While Luke has written an historical narrative, he has a theological purpose in view.⁷ Whether or not Luke's theological purpose includes presenting the death of Christ as an atonement for sin is the focus of this study.

History of Modern Research

A "Historical-Religious" Interpretation

In 1868, Carl Holsten sought to compare the gospel of Peter and Paul, using the Petrine speeches in Acts as his basic source for Peter's understanding. In his study, Holsten drew a sharp distinction between the "historical-religious" view of Peter and the "dogmatic-religious" interpretation of Paul.⁸ For Peter the cross was essentially a historical event. Although affirming the cross as part of the divine decree, Peter fails

⁶ See the helpful comments and cautions with regard to redaction critical approaches in François Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Fifty-five Years of Research (1950-2005)* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 296; Grant Osborne, "Redaction Criticism," in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 128-49, esp. 140-42; David P. Moessner, "Reading Luke's Gospel as Ancient Hellenistic Narrative: Luke's Narrative Plan of Israel's Suffering Messiah as God's Saving 'Plan' for the World," in *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation*, ed. Craig C. Bartholomew, Joel B. Green, and Anthony C. Thiselton (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 126, 150-51.

⁷ As Joseph A. Fitzmyer states, "His historical concern serves a theological end; he sees the 'events' that he is to narrate as a fulfillment (Luke 1:1) and this reveals his historical concern as subordinate to a theological one" (*The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, AB, vol. 28 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981], 16).

⁸ Carl Holsten, *Zum Evangelium des Paulus und des Petrus* (Rostock: Stiller [Hermann Schmidt], 1868), 147-48. See also Gotthard Lechler, *The Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times: Their Diversity and Unity in Life and Doctrine*, 3rd ed., trans. A. J. K. Davidson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886), 271-72.

to recognize it as an event bringing salvation. Rather, his emphasis falls on the cross as a sinful crime carried out by men against the Messiah.

For Paul, however, the cross was a saving event understood in terms of a sacrifice for sin. Paul saw the cross as the means of salvation, expressing God's love and grace. Holsten attributed the differences to Peter's primitive theology, which was eventually developed by Paul's reflection on the deeper meaning of Christ's death. Though Holsten's discussion focused mainly on the Petrine speeches of Acts, many subsequent studies have raised questions regarding the broader Lukan presentation of the cross.⁹

A Misunderstanding to Be Corrected

Along similar lines to those drawn by Holsten, some have claimed Luke sees the death of Jesus as a mistake on the part of the Jews. On this view, God raised Jesus from the dead in order to overturn their mistake. So Henry Cadbury writes,

The death of Jesus was an act of ignorant wickedness and rejection on the part of the Jews. God, however, thwarted its effect by raising Jesus from the dead.¹⁰

Similarly, Ernst Käsemann views the cross as a gross misunderstanding on the part of the Jews that God corrects with the resurrection. He states with regard to Luke,

His Jesus is the founder of the Christian religion; the Cross is a misunderstanding on the part of the Jews, who have not properly understood Old Testament prophecy, and the Resurrection is the necessary correction of this human error by the Great Disposer.¹¹

⁹ For other helpful overviews, see van Zyl, "Soteriological Meaning," 533-57; Pilgrim, "Death of Christ," 1-34; Greg Herrick, "The Atonement in Lukan Theology in Recent Discussion," Biblical Studies Press [on-line]; accessed 17 January 2007; available from www.bible.org; Internet.

¹⁰ Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, 280. Darrell Bock refers to Cadbury's work as "a seminal redaction-critical work before the rise of redaction criticism" which would "influence Lukan studies from that time onward" (*Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Lukan Old Testament Christology* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987], 27).

¹¹ Ernst Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1964), 29. Philipp Vielhauer writes in his influential essay "On the 'Paulinism' of Acts,"

According to these scholars, Luke perceives the cross primarily in a negative light and fails to attribute any positive soteriological significance to the death of Christ in and of itself. C. K. Barrett notes,

In the sermons in Acts the death of Christ tends to be treated negatively, as an unfortunate event which nevertheless, in view of the resurrection, need not be an obstacle to faith. Acts 20:28 is a light weight to balance against the bulk of Luke's references to the Cross, which suggest not an atoning sacrifice but a temporary reverse, not unforeseen, and speedily retrieved.¹²

These scholars therefore view Luke's primary perspective on the cross as a negative event.

The Divine $\delta\epsilon\iota$: For What Purpose?

There is a clear emphasis in Luke-Acts given to the divine necessity ($\delta\epsilon\iota$) of the cross as the fulfillment of Scripture.¹³ This alone has been enough to cause many scholars to question the notion that the cross is solely or even primarily a negative event for Luke. In some sense for Luke the suffering and death of Jesus flow out of the redemptive purpose and intention of God.¹⁴ The question remains: How does it function specifically within that redemptive purpose? It has become standard to

“According to Acts, specifically chap. 13, the crucifixion of Jesus is an error of justice and a sin of the Jews, who despite knowledge of holy Scripture did not recognize Jesus' messiahship; but the suffering and death of the Messiah were prophesied, and the Jews unconsciously did their part toward fulfillment of this prophecy. Nothing is said of the saving significance of the cross of Christ” (45). See also Pilgrim (“Death of Christ,” 111), who says God provides forgiveness and life “in spite of” the necessity of the cross.

¹² C. K. Barrett, *Luke the Historian in Recent Study* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 59-60.

¹³ Luke 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44; Acts 17:3; cf. Acts 3:18; 26:22-23. See Charles Cosgrove, “The Divine $\Delta\epsilon\iota$ in Luke-Acts: Investigations into the Understanding of God's Providence,” *NovT* 26 (1984): 168-90. See also Luke's use of $\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\eta$ in Acts 2:23 and 4:28 (cf. Luke 22:22), which identifies Christ's death as part of God's predetermined “plan.”

¹⁴ “The inevitability of Jesus' suffering, rejection, and death flows from a divine necessity, from God's redemptive purpose, disclosed long ago in Scripture” (John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995], 68).

deny the answer includes atonement for sins.¹⁵ In lieu of this, various suggestions are put forth.¹⁶

Failure to Answer the Question

Some scholars suggest Luke does not explain how the death of Christ functions within God's redemptive purpose. In his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, John Creed writes,

Most striking is the entire absence of a Pauline interpretation of the Cross There is indeed no *theologia crucis* beyond the affirmation that the Christ must suffer, since so the prophetic scriptures had foretold.¹⁷

In his landmark work *The Theology of St. Luke*, Hans Conzelmann echoes Creed's assessment. On the one hand, Conzelmann explains with regard to divine necessity in Luke,

The point at issue is not the general question as to whether there is a rule of providence, for Jews and Christians are in agreement on this. ... It is a question rather of proving that this particular event¹⁸ has been brought

¹⁵ The evidence cited to support the fact that Luke *intentionally downplays* atonement generally includes Luke's (1) emphasis on the ignorance and sinfulness of those who crucified Jesus, (2) omission of Mark 10:45, (3) avoidance of vicarious suffering passages in quotations from Isa 53, (4) shorter form of the Lord's Supper text (if taken to be authentic), (5) movement of the rending of the temple veil prior to Jesus' death, (6) lack of an explicit statement connecting the death of Christ to the forgiveness of sins, and (7) emphasis on the saving significance of the resurrection.

¹⁶ Many of the following approaches are complementary and therefore do not necessarily exclude one another. This point is affirmed by a number of the following works cited. A large part of the debate seems to be where Luke's emphasis falls or which view is most fundamental to his thought. I have sought to categorize authors according to what I perceived as their primary emphasis. As I will seek to show, however, many of these scholars articulate their proposal for Luke's understanding of Christ's death in such a way that specifically denies atonement even a minor, complementary role in Luke's perspective.

¹⁷ Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, lxxi-lxxii.

¹⁸ By the singular "event" Conzelmann seems to be referring to the whole ministry of Jesus, or perhaps whatever event within that ministry Luke is seeking to support with Scripture. However, Conzelmann makes it clear in the context that Christ's Passion is what receives emphasis in relation to the divine providence of salvation.

about by God as in a special sense the saving event. It is for this reason that the kerygmatic proclamation points to the evidence of Scripture.¹⁹

Nevertheless, Conzelmann does not seem to perceive anything more specific from Luke, and makes clear no reference is made to atonement theology. He states,

There is no trace of any Passion mysticism, nor is any direct soteriological significance drawn from Jesus' suffering or death. There is no suggestion of a connection with the forgiveness of sins.²⁰

More recently, in a monograph devoted to *The Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts*, Joseph Tyson concludes,

The conviction of divine necessity constitutes Luke's main contribution to the theological discussion of Jesus' death. But he seems uninterested in piercing through to an understanding of the theological reason for the death or in analyzing what it was intended to accomplish.²¹

The Means to Glorification

Others have attempted to set forth more positive answers to the question. Eric Franklin points out the weakness in understanding Christ's death in merely a "negative" light, since the suffering of Christ plays so central a role for Luke. Yet he observes that "only on one occasion, that of Paul's farewell speech to the elders of the Ephesian church, does Luke give any saving value to the death of Christ (Acts 20:28)," and this is merely "an accommodation to Paul's beliefs rather than an expression of his own theology."²²

According to Franklin, Luke's failure to present a vicarious understanding of Jesus' death should be attributed to Luke's Christology, which focuses on the present reality of Jesus as living Lord. From this perspective, "Jesus saves by virtue of his exaltation and it is from this that his saving work proceeds as it enables men to come under his sway in the present." Franklin therefore suggests that the positive value of the cross "lies in that it alone made the resurrection, and consequently the

¹⁹ Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 153.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 201.

²¹ Tyson, *Death of Jesus*, 170.

²² Franklin, *Christ the Lord*, 66. Franklin does not view Luke 22:19b-20 as authentic.

ascension, possible. ... Suffering, culminating in death, becomes the means of glorification.”²³ Richard Zehnle takes a similar stance. He writes,

For Luke, it is the glorification of Jesus as Messiah that enables Him to be *now* a cause of salvation for men. Because Jesus was completely obedient to the divine plan, even accepting the Passion and death foreordained for Him, God did not allow Him to be held captive by death, but raised Him up and seated Him in majesty at His right hand (Acts 2:24-36), making Him Lord and Christ, and enabling Him to bestow the promised Spirit upon men.²⁴

Salvation-As-Transposition

Some who view Jesus’ death as a means to his glorification have sought to be more specific as to why his death was necessary in this regard. Jerome Kodell, building upon the work of Richard Glöckner,²⁵ draws on Luke’s theme of salvation as the “raising of the lowly” in order to understand the salvific meaning of the death of Jesus. For Luke, sinfulness is understood fundamentally as a spirit of self-exaltation. The “mighty” are those who are self-sufficient, desiring to raise themselves to glory. On the other hand, the “lowly” are humble and open to God’s salvation, waiting for Him to raise them up. In view of this,

God’s answer to the sinful self-exaltation of mankind is the self-emptying life and death of Jesus. In his death, humiliation and lowliness taken to the extreme, the power of sin is undermined.²⁶

Joel Green, an influential voice in Lukan studies, articulates a similar understanding. He writes,

Luke’s soteriology and portrayal of discipleship are particularly focused on the idea of “reversal” or “transposition.” But this is only a reflection of his portrait of the means of salvation: Jesus as the Servant of Yahweh

²³ Ibid., 66-67.

²⁴ Zehnle, “Salvific Character of Jesus’ Death,” 431. Similarly, Pilgrim states, “At the heart of Luke’s conception of the cross, therefore, is not its necessity as a means of atonement, but its necessity as an act of suffering obedience to the will of God, which finds its vindication in the resurrection and exaltation to glory” (“Death of Christ,” 376).

²⁵ Richard Glöckner, *Die Verkündigung des Heils beim Evangelisten Lukas* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1975).

²⁶ Jerome Kodell, “Luke’s Theology of the Death of Jesus,” in *Sin, Salvation and the Spirit*, ed. Daniel Durken (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1979), 228.

obediently goes to the cross and is exalted, and is therefore designated as Prince and Savior.²⁷

Therefore, the death and resurrection of Jesus are the ultimate embodiment of a Lukan motif of “salvation-as-transposition.” The means of salvation is consistent with the nature of the salvation accomplished, demonstrating the true character of that salvation as well as the nature of genuine discipleship.²⁸

Martyrdom

Martin Dibelius made popular the notion that Luke portrays Jesus in his Passion as an innocent martyr. Dibelius writes,

For Luke, the suffering Saviour is the Man of God who is attacked by evil powers and who, with His patience and forgiveness is a model of innocent suffering. Luke regards these events in the place where he consequently puts them not as the completion of salvation, but as the story of a saintly man closely united with God. The literary consequence of this view is that Luke presents the Passion as a martyrdom.²⁹

Recently, Brian Beck has argued in support of Dibelius’s thesis. Beck points to parallels between the presentation of Jesus and Stephen (and to some degree Paul), the emphasis on Jesus as a prophet (an occupation that typically led to martyrdom), and parallels with other martyrdom literature such as (1) conflict, (2) innocence, (3) the attitude of bystanders, (4) the conduct of Jesus, and (5) the call to be like Jesus.³⁰ While Beck does not think martyrdom is the only theme in Luke’s Passion narrative, it is a

²⁷ Green, “Death of Jesus, God’s Servant,” 27.

²⁸ “In his suffering and resurrection, Jesus embodied the fullness of salvation interpreted as status reversal. His death was the center point of the divine-human struggle over how life is to be lived, in humility or self-glorification. In his death, and in consequence of his resurrection by God, the way of salvation is exemplified and made accessible to all those who will follow” (Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000], 77).

²⁹ Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 2nd ed., trans. Bertram Lee Woolf (London: Ivor, Nicholson and Watson, 1934), 201.

³⁰ Brian E. Beck, “‘Imitatio Christi’ and the Lukan Passion Narrative,” in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G. M. Styler* by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 28-33.

major one.³¹ He states, “As a martyr Jesus dies for the cause of his own teaching in obedience to the way of life that he has laid on his disciples. In this he is their pattern.”³² C. H. Talbert also perceives the Lukan Jesus as an innocent martyr, and discerns two theological points with regard to Jesus’ death: (1) it is a rejection of God’s spokesperson which results in the rejection of the rejectors by God, and (2) it serves to legitimate the Christian cause and to function as a catalyst for evangelistic outreach.³³

Isaianic Servant

It is generally acknowledged that in some measure Luke identifies Jesus with the suffering servant of Isaiah. However, it is highly disputed to what degree this is the case and how to understand its theological significance. Some find in Luke’s association evidence that he understood the death of Christ to have atoning significance. William Larkin argues from the placement of Luke’s quotation of Isaiah 53:12 at the end of the farewell discourse (Luke 22:37) that Luke intends his readers to see the entire Passion story as its fulfillment. Furthermore, to properly understand this fulfillment, Luke must have used the quotation as a pointer to the larger original context.³⁴ Bock adds, “The exegetical milieu of Isaiah 53, the emphatic introductory formula, and the summary use of this text may suggest that not only is the Isaiah 53 reckoning of the servant as a criminal in view in Luke 22:37, but also Isaiah’s whole portrait of the Suffering Servant.”³⁵ When this is coupled with Luke’s references to Jesus as ὁ πᾶσις (Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30), Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-35), and possible allusions to the servant through the

³¹ Beck (“Imitatio Christi”) even seems to suggest Jesus’ Messiahship may be a more fundamental category for Luke. He writes, “The obedience of Jesus to the will of God laid down in scripture is thus not just the obedience of one martyr among many to some ill-defined holy cause, a Man of God (in Dibelius’ phrase) who is of interest primarily as a typical human being; it is primarily the assent of the Messiah, the elect one (23:35), to a specific vocation laid down in scripture for him as for no other” (36). However, Beck denies this is to be understood in terms of “expiation of sins” (34) and does not explain further in what sense Jesus’ death is distinctive other than saying it is “unique and messianic” (47).

³² *Ibid.*, 47.

³³ Talbert, “Martyrdom in Luke-Acts,” 100-06. See also C. H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 212-18.

³⁴ William J. Larkin, Jr., “Luke’s Use of the Old Testament as a Key to His Soteriology,” *JETS* 20 (1977): 325-35.

³⁵ Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern*, 138.

references to Jesus as ὁ δίκαιος (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14), scholars feel justified in perceiving a strong identification of Jesus with the servant that implicitly demonstrates the substitutionary nature of Jesus' death.

Cadbury, however, drew attention to the fact that Luke fails to use any of the explicitly "vicarious" phrases from Isaiah 53. Thus he argued,

That elsewhere Luke uses part of Isaiah 53 as a proof-text for Jesus' death does not prove that he adopted from it the theological explanation which later Christians have found in the unquoted parts of the same passage.³⁶

How then does the servant concept function for Luke? Answers vary. Doble finds an emphasis on the humiliating and shameful nature of Jesus' death in support of a more primary "suffering righteous" paradigm.³⁷ Green sees the servant concept embracing the whole of Jesus' work, including death and resurrection, and functioning to hold the two central motifs of suffering and vindication together.³⁸ Martin focuses on the glorification and enthronement of Jesus as the one who establishes men in covenant with God (Isa 49:6-8).³⁹ Flanagan locates the heart of Luke's theological interest in the universalism of the servant songs (Isa 42:1-7; 49:1-6).⁴⁰

Proof of righteousness

Another proposal is that Luke understands Jesus' death through the paradigm of the suffering righteous one. The cross is therefore the testing of Christ's obedience to God's will in the face of those hostile to that same will. At the same time, God's faithfulness is put on trial, which he proves true by vindicating Jesus in the resurrection. Robert Karris writes,

Jesus is *the* righteous one, who, obedient to God's will and plan, reveals and embodies that plan. He reveals a God who is just to the poor and afflicted. He unjustly meets with opposition from the religious leaders,

³⁶ Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, 280. Similarly Morna D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant* (London: SPCK, 1959), 113-14, 149-51; Kodell, "Luke's Theology," 222.

³⁷ Doble, *Paradox of Salvation*, 129-30.

³⁸ Green, "Death of Jesus, God's Servant," 23-24.

³⁹ Ralph P. Martin, "Salvation and Discipleship in Luke's Gospel," *Int* 30 (1976): 378.

⁴⁰ Neal Flanagan, "The What and How of Salvation in Luke-Acts," in *Sin, Salvation and the Spirit*, ed. Daniel Durken (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1979), 213.

stereotypes of unrighteous conduct. Embattled, Jesus is the suffering righteous one. In him God is on trial.

God vindicates himself and his plan for creation in exalting the crucified righteous one, Jesus.⁴¹

Karris finds the basis for this model in the Psalms and Wisdom of Solomon.⁴² Picking up on the latter, Peter Doble has extensively argued that Luke looked to Wisdom of Solomon 2-5 as a means for understanding the significance of the cross. He states,

Historically, faithfulness to God had met opposition, enmity and persecution from other, less committed Israelites, and Wisdom offers in chapters 2-5 a paradigm of the δίκαιος in his conflict with cruel and cynical opponents, culminating in his open vindication by God.⁴³

Doble articulates the soteriological implications for this view:

Jesus' cross is his living out, *and thereby fulfilling*, the life of the δίκαιος and what is the case for the δίκαιος will also be the case for those δίκαιοι who persevere to the end.⁴⁴

Expanding on this, he writes,

While the Lukan cross is no ransom and effects no forgiveness—which Luke understands as God's direct gift to the penitent—this cross is the proving of *the* δίκαιος and a model of how those who follow him might expect to die God raised Jesus because his dying proved him δίκαιος. The disciple's salvation is their assured resurrection.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Robert J. Karris, "Luke 23:47 and the Lucan View of Jesus' Death," in *Reimagining the Death of the Lukan Jesus*, ed. Dennis D. Sylva (Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1990), 75. Elsewhere Karris writes, "The persecuted person becomes a double test-case: (1) for the integrity of the one being persecuted: will she/he endure such torment without moral collapse? (2) for God's fidelity: will God rescue this faithful doer of his will? Is God faithful?" (*Luke*, 16).

⁴² Karris couples his view with understanding Jesus as God's rejected prophet (*Luke: Artist and Theologian*, 18-20). In looking to Wisdom of Solomon Karris references Eduard Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship* (London: SCM, 1960), 30. See also Beck ("Imitatio Christi," 43-46), who makes use of the background in Wisdom as support for a martyr motif.

⁴³ Doble, *Paradox of Salvation*, 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 232-33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 237. I understand Doble to be speaking of their "assured resurrection" if they remain righteous (faithful to God) in the face of opposition and death.

Obedience of the Second Adam

While acknowledging Luke works with various models for Christ's death, Jerome Neyrey proposes an Adam-Jesus comparison as an important emphasis for Luke.⁴⁶ Neyrey draws together links made between Jesus and Adam at the beginning of Jesus' career (genealogy and temptation) and at the end of his life (garden and cross). From this view, the cross is seen as the culmination of Jesus' temptation by Satan, which Jesus successfully withstands. Neyrey explains,

His dying in faith dramatically portrays Jesus' radical obedience to God's will. And so, his death means that God reigns over him, not Satan. Tempted even on the cross, Jesus remained God's Christ and Chosen One. Jesus' faith in God, moreover, definitively constitutes him as God's Son.⁴⁷

By his disobedience Adam ushered in a period of history characterized by sin. It was a period under the reign of Satan in which the gates of Paradise had been closed. In contrast, by his obedience even unto death Jesus inaugurates a new period of salvation history characterized by obedience and the forgiveness of sins. This period marks the end of Satan's reign and the re-opening of Paradise to God's people (cf. Luke 23:43).⁴⁸ According to Neyrey, Jesus' obedience was not merely an example to be followed. Rather, it was a unique obedience as the head of God's people, which provided for their salvation.

Seal and Guarantee of the New Covenant

Focusing on Jesus' own words in Luke's account of the Lord's supper, I. J. du Plessis argues the death of Christ is presented as the "seal and guarantee" of the new covenant. However, this is not to be understood in terms of an atoning sacrifice for sin. Rather, Jesus' death is "the highest price a human being can pay to show that He cares for his followers, and that they may know and be reminded how much he cares."⁴⁹ His death is "that of a martyr, which could act as a sign of Jesus' faithfulness to those sharing in the new covenant."⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Jerome Neyrey, *The Passion According to Luke: A Redaction Study of Luke's Soteriology* (New York: Paulist, 1985).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁴⁹ I. J. du Plessis, "The Saving Significance of Jesus and His Death on the Cross in Luke's Gospel—Focussing on Luke 22:19b-20," *Neot* 28 (1994): 534.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 535.

Others acknowledge Luke's explicit connection between Jesus' death and the institution of the new covenant,⁵¹ while at the same time denying any reference to atonement. So C. H. Talbert writes,

If the death of Jesus is in any way to be regarded as sacrificial in Luke-Acts, it is as a sacrifice that seals a covenant (cf. Gen 15:8-21; 17): it is not an atonement for sin.⁵²

Ralph Martin also states,

It seems that [Luke's] understanding of Jesus' death was less that of concern with the significance of atonement than with the practical, pastoral mediation of forgiveness by the establishing of the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34.⁵³

Atonement

A minority of voices have sought to show, contrary to scholarly momentum, that in various ways Luke does indicate an understanding of Christ's death that includes atonement.⁵⁴ As mentioned above, some perceive an atoning significance for Christ's death communicated through Luke's identification of Jesus with the suffering servant of Isaiah.⁵⁵ In

⁵¹ A major debate surrounding this question is the authenticity of Luke 22:19b-20. The debate does not appear to be settled, although recent scholarship tends to affirm the longer version as original.

⁵² Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 209.

⁵³ Martin, "Salvation and Discipleship," 378. See also Robert C. Tannehill: "These passages [Luke 22:19-20; Acts 20:28] regard the death of Jesus as a community-founding event and do not directly address the issue of how individuals find salvation through Jesus" (*The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1, *The Gospel According to Luke* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], 285 n. 15).

⁵⁴ This is a more specific point than simply arguing Luke emphasizes the death of Jesus as salvific or that Luke does actually have a "theology of the cross." For example, C. K. Barrett's article "Theologia Crucis—In Acts?" is often referenced as showing persuasively that Luke does indeed have a theology of the cross. Yet Barrett suggests this is the case only "if theologia crucis may be taken to mean not, or not only, a doctrine of the atonement but a way of life" (75). Barrett goes on in his article to argue that Luke's "theology of the cross" in Acts is the working out of Jesus' call for his disciples to take up their cross daily. Luke's *theologia crucis* is in essence encouragement for his readers to follow Christ in their own suffering.

⁵⁵ In addition to Larkin and Bock, see Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 141-42, and David P. Moessner, "The 'Script' of the Scriptures in Acts: Suffering as God's 'Plan' (βουλή) for the World

addition, Luke 22:19-20 and Acts 20:28 are the two texts generally cited as explicit statements pointing to this perspective.⁵⁶ However, even for those who understand them in this way, these texts are often considered traditional material, a literary presentation of Paul's theology, or simply indications of Luke's "awareness" of atonement theology, which he intentionally chooses not to develop anywhere else in his work.⁵⁷

Leon Morris notes Luke's three references to Jesus' death "on a tree" (Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29) and suggests these are allusions to Deuteronomy 21:22-23 in which anyone hung on a tree is said to be under the curse of God. Morris contends these allusions interpret Christ's death as one that bears God's curse for others (cf. Gal 3:13; 1 Pet 2:24).⁵⁸ Joseph Fitzmyer has drawn attention to the crucifixion scene, suggesting that Luke dramatically portrays the saving significance of Jesus' death through his offer of salvation to the crucified criminal at his side.⁵⁹ Finally, David

for the 'Release of Sins,'" in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 228-29. Marshall is much more cautious. He acknowledges that Luke has "incorporated traditions about the atoning work of the Servant," yet "there is no evidence that he himself has positively evaluated the Servant concept in terms of redemptive suffering" (*Luke: Historian & Theologian*, 172).

⁵⁶ See especially Mark A. Seifrid, "Death of Christ," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 267-71.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., references to Green and Jervell in n. 2 above.

⁵⁸ Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, 142-43; more recently, Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 188-89.

⁵⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1989), 212-13. Fitzmyer notes that in the course of five verses Luke uses $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\omicron\omega$ four times with reference to the *crucified* Jesus (Luke 23:35 [2x], 37, 39). However, Fitzmyer stops short of explicitly saying this signifies "atonement." In his first volume on Luke's gospel he makes the general assertion that Luke does not "regard Jesus' death as a sacrifice (cf. Eph 5:2) or as an expiation for sin (cf. Rom 3:25)" (*The Gospel According to Luke I – IX*, AB, vol. 28 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981], 219-20). In his second volume, however, his statements are more ambiguous. In his comment on the crucifixion scene he says Jesus "is not depicted as having given his life 'as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45) or as 'put to death for our trespasses' (Rom 4:25; cf. 1 Cor 15:3)" (*The Gospel According to Luke X – XXIV*, AB, vol. 28a [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985], 1515). Yet Fitzmyer goes on to tie the crucifixion scene to Jesus' words at the Last Supper and suggests, "With these elements of an earlier part of the passion narrative in mind, the reader of the Lucan Gospel can understand the implication that Jesus' death has been a sacrifice. ... Luke does insinuate the vicarious and salvific aspects of the death of Jesus (1515-16).

Moessner has appealed to ancient Hellenistic narrative theory in an effort to show that Luke's overall plot indicates the rejection of Christ, culminating in his crucifixion, as that which issues in the eschatological forgiveness of sins.⁶⁰

The Present Work

The goal of this work is not a comprehensive evaluation of every perspective listed above. As stated previously, many of these positions may legitimately complement one another. The relationship of the present work to those considered above regards their widespread denial of atonement as at least one essential aspect of Luke's perspective on the cross. I intend to demonstrate that those who maintain such a position have overstated the case.

Currently, there is no book-length work defending this view.⁶¹ Recent dissertations or monographs devoted to the death of Christ in Luke-Acts have concluded that the author himself attributes no atoning significance to the cross.⁶² Various articles or brief sections within monographs have defended atonement in particular texts or facets of Luke's work,⁶³ but no published work that seeks to synthesize all the relevant material presents atonement as integral to Luke's perspective on the death of Christ.

⁶⁰ Moessner, "Ancient Hellenistic Narrative," 125-54.

⁶¹ Two recent monographs focusing on the Passion narrative in Luke do argue that Christ's death is presented as salvific in some manner. For Jerome Neyrey (*The Passion According to Luke*, 1985) it is so as the climactic aspect of Jesus' unique obedience as the second Adam. Donald Senior (*The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke* [Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989]) says Luke interprets the death of Christ as "having saving power," "having the power to liberate from sin," and as the "breaking of the power of death through the cross" (161-66) yet does not explicitly use the language of atonement.

⁶² Pilgrim, "Death of Christ" (1971); Tyson, *Death of Jesus* (1986); Doble, *Paradox of Salvation* (1996).

⁶³ See Marshall, *Luke*, 169-75; Morris, *Theology*, 187-90; Seifrid, "Death of Christ," 267-74; Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 198-200; Hermie C. van Zyl, "The Soteriology of Acts: Restoration to Life," in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology*, ed. Jan G. van der Watt (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 141-44.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEW COVENANT SACRIFICE*

A key Lukan text for interpreting the death of Jesus occurs in the account of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples. In his description of this event, Luke sets forth one of the most direct statements explaining the purpose of Jesus' death. The statement comes through the words of Jesus himself, at a climactic place in the narrative, and at a strategic location for explaining the immediately following passion of Jesus. Although the words of Jesus regarding his death have been considered textually suspect by some, the external and internal evidence taken together point strongly to the words being authentic. When attention is given to the Old Testament ideas standing behind Luke's account, it becomes evident that Jesus is interpreting his death as a sacrifice that atones for the sins of God's people so that they might enter a new eschatological covenant with God.

In subsequent episodes of Luke-Acts, Luke points back to this interpretation in ways that indicate its foundational importance for his work as a whole. First, the breaking of bread at Emmaus in the resolution of Luke's Gospel indicates that Jesus' sacrificial death was at the essence of his messianic task to redeem God's people. Second, the breaking of bread in remembrance of Jesus' saving death is one of the essential characteristics of the church in Acts, demonstrating its ongoing significance for the new community of believers. Third, Paul's charge to the future leaders of the church, located within a farewell speech parallel to that given by Jesus at the Last Supper, is grounded in the fact that God acquired the church through Jesus' atoning blood. As a result, not only does Luke present the death of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice, he also identifies this atonement as the foundational event for establishing the church as God's redeemed community.

* A version of this chapter appeared previously as "Jesus' Death in Luke-Acts: The New Covenant Sacrifice," in *SBJT* 16 no. 3 (2012): 28-48. Used here by permission.