

This is the pre-publication version of my essay which appeared in the following multi-author book: *Issues in Luke-Acts: Selected Essays*, eds. Sean A. Adams & Michael Pahl (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2012), pp. 217-37.

CHRISTOLOGY IN ACTS

L. W. Hurtado

Although Acts is typically (and justifiably) seen by scholars as the second volume of a two-part work by one author and with a unified purpose, “Luke-Acts”, it is appropriate to consider Acts in its own right as to its theological emphases.¹ Certainly, the author’s Christian outlook prompted and in various ways shaped his story of Jesus in the first volume of his work. So, for instance, with a distinctive frequency among the four Evangelists, the author of GLuke refers to Jesus as “the Lord”, reflecting the dominant title by which in Acts he also portrays early Christians referring to Jesus (e.g., Luke 7:13, 19; 10:1, 39, 41; 11:39; 12:42; 13:15; 17:5; 18:6; 19:8; 22:61), a matter to which we return later.² Nevertheless, the author seems to have made an effort to maintain a certain distinction between the setting of Jesus’ ministry and the situation of the early churches after Jesus. As examples, the message of Jesus in GLuke (focused on the Kingdom of God, e.g., 8:1; 9:2) is distinguishable from the preaching of believers in the “post-Easter” setting of Acts, which is focused on Jesus’ significance, e.g., 2:36; 4:12; people are not baptized in the name of Jesus in GLuke, whereas this is frequent in Acts; and the only time in GLuke where disciples worship (*proskynein*) Jesus is after his resurrection (Luke 24:52).³ Certainly, in Acts the author openly aims to portray early Christian beliefs and activities, especially, of course, the geographical spread of the Christian witness about Jesus in a sprawling narrative that takes readers from Jerusalem and across numerous regions, winding up in Rome. So, however much the author’s Christian faith is reflected in GLuke, it is Acts that will give us the most direct indications of the author’s efforts to show the place of Jesus in the religious beliefs and practices that he affirms.

Before we look at look at specifics, however, I offer a brief preliminary word about what data we will consider. Although in scholarly literature “christology” more typically designates beliefs about Jesus (with a focus on the terminology used to express these beliefs), I maintain that there are two bodies of relevant data to consider. To be sure, we want to take account of beliefs about Jesus, the claims made about him and the terms used to express these claims/beliefs. But, for a fuller sense of the place of Jesus in the religious life of the author and earliest readers, we also need to consider what any text such as Acts tells us about early Christian devotional practices and how Jesus figured in these. In what follows, therefore, although I devote most of the discussion to christological beliefs, we will look at both kinds of evidence.

¹ E.g., the influential study by Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (London: Macmillan Co., 1927; reprint, London: SPCK, 1961). More recent questioning of the unity of Luke-Acts is the focus of a multi-author volume: Andrew F. Gregory and C. Kavin Rowe, eds., *Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2010).

² I refer to the Evangelists by their traditional names without thereby taking a view of who the actual authors were. To distinguish between the traditional names of the authors of the Gospels and the texts that bear their names, I refer to the latter as GLuke, etc., except when I cite specific passages. GMatthew and GMark refer to Jesus as “the Lord” only in the account of Jesus’ “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem: Mark 11:3/Matt 21:3/Luke 19:31, 34. Except for only two instances (John 6:23; 11:2), in GJohn the title is reserved for the accounts of the risen Jesus: John 20:2, 13, 15, 18, 20, 25, 28. For a recent and vigorous proposal that GLuke subtly reflects the author’s elevated christological emphases, see C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

³ The omission of *proskynēsantes auton* (“they worshipped him”) in Codex D and some other witnesses is generally judged a secondary reading.

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CHRISTOLOGICAL BELIEFS/EXPRESSIONS

As noted already, early in Acts the author conveys the focus of the text on the early testimony of Jesus' followers about him. In 1:6-8, after deflecting his disciples' question about when "you will restore the kingdom to Israel," Jesus promises them empowerment from the Holy Spirit, by which they "will be my witnesses" from Jerusalem "to the ends of the earth." In the ensuing narrative in Acts, however, there are various christological terms and claims, as well as the differences of emphasis noted already between GLuke and Acts. Influenced by the notion that the author of this ambitious literary project (Luke-Acts comprises 25% of the entire NT) had his own particular theological standpoint and sought to advance it in this two-part narrative, some scholars have tried to identify a central and unifying christological emphasis. In his 1996 monograph, Buckwalter critically surveyed eighteen such efforts, judging them all to fail in providing "a unified account" of Luke's christology. Undeterred, however, Buckwalter then proceeded to lay out his own proposal that Luke's "main or controlling christological concern" was to portray "the servanthood of the Lord Jesus," contending that this "reconciles the christological tension in Luke-Acts between Jesus' sovereign Lordship and his apparent subordination to the Father."⁴ Nevertheless, it is not clear that Buckwalter succeeded any more than those whom he cites.

The particular "christological tension" addressed by Buckwalter is one of several posited by others as well. Indeed, for some scholars, the variety of christological expressions in Acts is judged not susceptible to a fully unifying effort. Moule, for example, contended that "the Christology of Acts is not uniform, whatever may be said to the contrary," and that Luke's own Christian outlook, which differed from that of GJohn and Paul, was "nearer, one may guess, to the 'average' Christian mentality than to that of these giants."⁵ As another example, granting that Luke was "the primary architect of the christological edifice of Acts," and that this implies a certain "unity to the christological perspective" of the text, George MacRae nevertheless warned against exaggerating this, for "not all the statements about Jesus in Acts are really harmonious."⁶

On the one hand, scholars are now accustomed to think of the NT authors as each having theological concerns, and for some time it has been fashionable to portray them as advancing these concerns in their writings. On the other hand, Luke professes to have drawn upon a number of early Christian sources (Luke 1:1-4), and if to any significant degree he sought to register them in his own narrative that would likely have resulted in a certain diversity of emphasis. Moreover, in this same passage the author states that he seeks through his narratives of Jesus and the early church to assure his reader ("Theophilus") about the teachings of Christian faith that he already knows, and he gives no indication of intending to revise or introduce some particular teachings of his own. In any case, numerous scholars recognize a diversity of christological statements in Luke-Acts, making it difficult to posit a convincing single emphasis that distinguishes the work.

One of the most provocative proposals alleging serious differences within Acts was offered by J. A. T. Robinson, who contended that in the speeches in the early chapters of Acts there are "points where their theology is demonstrably different from

⁴ H. Douglas Buckwalter, *The Character and Purpose of Luke's Christology* (SNTMS 89; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6-24 for his review of proposals. Quoted phrases from 283.

⁵ C. F. D. Moule, "The Christology of Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert*, ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 159-85, quotation 181.

⁶ George W. MacRae, "'Whom Heaven Must Receive Until the Time': Reflections on the Christology of Acts," *Int* 27 (1973): 151-65, citing 154.

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that of the editor of the work as a whole,” and that “these speeches contain at least two *incompatible* Christologies.”⁷ Noting the statement in Acts 2:36 that God’s resurrection of Jesus involved his present exaltation to heavenly glory as “both Lord and Christ”, Robinson argued that in Acts 3:12-26 we have a different and more primitive view in which the resurrected Jesus is “still only the Christ-elect,” and is to be fully installed as Messiah when God sends him again for the salvation of Israel, this view “embedded in the book of Acts like a fossil of a by-gone age.”⁸

Robinson argument has not proven widely persuasive, but certainly some scholars, e.g., Stephen Wilson, have perceived a christological diversity in Luke-Acts, judging that the author was “a somewhat indiscriminating collector of christological traditions who transmits a variety of traditional terms and concepts without reflecting upon them individually or in conjunction with each other.”⁹ So, let us turn to the text of Acts to see for ourselves the nature and extent of the christological beliefs it reflects.

Christological Titles

One of the common approaches to characterizing the christology of NT authors is to note the “christological titles” or honorific epithets for Jesus used. In Acts we have a rich variety of these, and for a few of them Acts is the unique NT witness to their usage.¹⁰

By far, the most frequently used christological title in Acts is “the Lord” (*ho Kyrios*, usually with the definite article), applied to Jesus some 70-75 times.¹¹ In a number of cases, we find “the Lord Jesus” (4:33; 7:59; 8:16; 11:20; 15:11, 31; 19:5, 13; 20:21, 24, 35; 21:13), in a few others “the Lord Jesus Christ” (11:17; 15:26; 28:31), and in one case (10:36), it is probably Jesus designated “the Lord of all”.¹² But in most of the remaining cases where Jesus is the referent he is designated simply as “the Lord”.¹³ The primacy of references to Jesus as “the Lord” corresponds to the usage of this term to designate Jesus in GLuke (e.g., Luke 7:13, 19:10:1, 41; 11:39; 12:42; 13:15; 17:5-6; 18:6; 19:8, 31, 34; 22:61; 24:34), which is far more frequent than in the other Gospels.

This same title is also applied to God ca. 20-25 times. In several cases, however, it is difficult to be sure whether the referent is God or Jesus; hence the approximate tallies given here. For example, in 5:19; 9:31; 12:11, 17, the referent is probably God but

⁷ John A. T. Robinson, “The Most Primitive Christology of All?,” *JTS* n.s. 7 (1956): 177-89, citing 177 (emphasis his).

⁸ Robinson, “Most Primitive Christology,” 180-81, the final quotation from 188.

⁹ Stephen G. Wilson, *Luke and the Pastoral Epistles* (London: SPCK, 1979), citing 79-80. For additional references to scholars who see a similar diversity, see Buckwalter, *Character and Purpose*, 4-5 (n. 2).

¹⁰ See, e.g., Henry J. Cadbury, “The Titles of Jesus in Acts,” in *The Beginnings of Christianity, Part I, The Acts of the Apostles, Vol. V, Additional Notes*, eds. F. J. Foakes Jackson, Kirsopp Lake (London: Macmillan, 1932; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966), 354-75.

¹¹ Cf. Gerhard Schneider, “Gott und Christus als KYPIOΣ nach der Apostelgeschichte,” in *Lukas, Theologe der Heilsgeschichte* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1985), 213-26; J. D. G. Dunn, “KYPIOΣ in Acts,” in *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift*, eds. Christof Landmesser, et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 363-78.

¹² For discussion of whether the referent is God or Jesus, see, e.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles, Volume I* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 519-20.

¹³ There are eleven vocatives, where Jesus is addressed directly as “Lord” (*Kyrie*; 7:59, 60; 9:10, 13; 10:4, 14; 11:8; 22:8, 10, 19; 26:15). Of course, by itself this could be taken as simply a polite form of address (“Sir” or “Master”). But in the context of the other uses of “Lord” for Jesus, these vocatives are probably laden with additional meaning.

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could be Jesus in one or more, and in 2:21; 8:25; 11:21; 13:2; 15:17 (the first of the two uses) and 16:14 I take the referent to be Jesus, but it is a judgment call.¹⁴

Along with this sharing of the title by God and Jesus, and the resulting ambiguity in some instances, there are cases where the referent is rather clearly Jesus but the expressions equally obviously derive from biblical/Jewish discourse about God. These include the references to “the word of the Lord” (8:25; 11:16; 13:48-49; 15:35-36; 16:32), all (or nearly all) of which concern the gospel message about Jesus.¹⁵ Likewise, in 2:21, the OT statement about calling “upon the name of the Lord” (from Joel 2:32) clearly refers here to Jesus. In some other sentences as well, Jesus features in ways that resemble references to God. Note, e.g., 7:59-60, “Lord Jesus” in Stephen’s dying prayer-appeal, and 9:10-19, where “the Lord” (Jesus) appears to Ananias and directs him to receive and heal the blinded Saul.

So, in Acts Jesus is foremost “the Lord” and is by far the most frequent referent for this title, which reflects a major “overlap” between Jesus and God in the discourse of the author, and probably in the devotional life reflected in Acts as well. The title is not applied to Jesus as the expense of God, so to speak, but instead is extended to Jesus in usage. In short, Jesus is incorporated (uniquely) within the referents-sphere of the title, sharing it with God, indicative of the dyadic re-shaping of discourse and devotional life characteristic of early Christian circles. Later in this discussion, we will notice other ways in which Jesus and God “overlap” or are directly linked in Acts.

The next most frequent title is “Christ” (Greek: *Christos* = “anointed one”, translating “Messiah”; some 24 times). In twelve cases we find “Jesus Christ”, in four of which the full expression “Lord Jesus Christ” is used, the latter favored in scenes where fellow believers are addressed.¹⁶ But the remaining instances make it clear that for the author “Christ” really is a title that expresses Jesus’ messianic significance, which is an important emphasis in Acts. So, e.g., 2:36 declares that God made Jesus “both Lord and Christ”, thereby installing him in a role that now demands assent, and in various other instances Jesus is referred to as “his [God’s] Christ” (3:18) and “the Christ” (3:20; 5:42; 8:5; 9:22; 17:3; 18:5, 28; 26:23). In all of these, the narrative portrays Jews addressed, and so clearly Jesus is presented as Israel’s Messiah. Indeed, in 10:38, Peter refers to God as having “anointed” (*echrisen*) Jesus “with the Holy Spirit and power,” enabling him to perform healings and exorcisms, the verb here further showing the author’s familiarity with the connotation of “Christ”.

“Son of God” appears only once in Acts (9:20), though there are two other texts where Jesus’ divine sonship is reflected (13:33, quoting Psa 2:7, and, probably, 20:28).¹⁷ It is noteworthy that in 9:20 and 20:28, the claim is ascribed to Paul addressing fellow Jews, and in 13:33 fellow believers. It is noteworthy that Acts never presents Jesus’ divine sonship as featuring in proclamation to gentile *unbelievers* (cf., e.g., 10:34-43; 14:8-18; 16:25-34; 17:16-31). This suggests that for the author, as for Paul, Jesus’ divine sonship was not understood along the lines of the pagan background of divine/divinized heroes, and did not function to promote Jesus as such a one to people of pagan

¹⁴ Cf. Schneider’s sometimes different judgments about various texts where the referent of “the Lord” is somewhat ambiguous, “Gott und Christus als *kyrios*,” 219-23.

¹⁵ The textual variants in a few of these (e.g., 8:25; 13:48; 16:32, in each of which some manuscripts have “word of God”) show that ancient readers found the statements ambiguous as to referent. I return to this later in this discussion.

¹⁶ “Lord Jesus Christ” in 11:17; 15:26; 20:21; 28:31; “Jesus Christ” in 2:30; 3:6; 4:10; 8:12; 9:34; 10:36, 48; 16:18.

¹⁷ Of the variants in 20:28, if “church of God” is preferred over “church of the Lord”, then the final Greek words (*ton idion*) probably refer to Jesus as “his own Son”.

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background. Instead, shaped by the OT references to divine sonship, and especially its application to the Davidic king (as in Psa 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14), referring to Jesus as God's "Son" likely functioned to ascribe to Jesus this royal/messianic significance.¹⁸

The Greek word "*Nazōraios*" ("the Nazarene") is applied to Jesus in several places in Acts (2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 22:8; 26:9). Jesus is called "the Nazarene" several times also in the Gospels, but not elsewhere in the NT (or in the Apostolic Fathers or early Apologists such as Justin Martyr).¹⁹ The term probably originated through Jesus' connection with Nazareth, but seems to have become a particular designation of him, and then (in plural form) of his followers also (as reflected in 24:5).²⁰ But the term seems not to have figured much in early Christian discourse, and hardly at all as a "christological title". Its usage in Acts probably reflects the author's desire to convey something of the linguistic "colour" of the early scenes of Jewish-setting discourse that he portrays.

There are other terms applied to Jesus in Acts that similarly reflect the author's effort to convey what are likely authentic features of early Jewish-Christian discourse. Among these terms is "the righteous/just one" (*ho dikaios*), by which Jesus is designated in 7:52 and 22:14, and also in 3:14 in the slightly fuller expression "the holy and righteous one". The use of the term with the definite article suggests that in these instances it is to be taken as a title and not simply an adjective. We probably have the term used also in *1 Enoch* 38:2 (and also "the Righteous and Elect One" in 53:6) designating the messianic figure of the "Similitudes" in this composite book. This may mean that "the Righteous One" was, to some degree, in circulation in ancient Jewish messianic expectations, and so Jewish believers applied it to Jesus.²¹

Yet another title applied to Jesus in Acts that seems to stem from early circles of Jewish believers is the Greek word "*pais*," which can mean "servant" or "child" (3:13, 26; 4:27, 30). The first two instances are in a speech to fellow Jews ascribed to Peter, and the latter two are in a prayer ascribed to Jewish believers. From other uses in the NT (Matt 12:18; Luke 1:54, 69; Acts 4:25) and OT and later Jewish texts it appears that the term was used for Moses, the prophets, the righteous, Israel and David, any of whom can be called God's "servant".²² From these very positive usages in Jewish tradition, including also key OT passages (esp. Isa 42:1), references to Jesus as God's *pais* connoted a high status. Indeed, the application of the term to David in particular (Acts 4:25) suggests that *pais* could sometimes carry a royal-messianic flavour in particular. Although the term survived as a christological title in some limited uses in later texts, especially in material exhibiting the influence of liturgical tradition (e.g., 1 Clem 59:2-4; Did 9:2-3; 10:2-3; Diog 8:9, 11; 9:1; MartPol 14:1), it seems to have been superseded by "Son of God" (*huios tou*

¹⁸ This may also be reflected in the Lukan version of the centurion's statement in the crucifixion scene (Luke 23:47), "this man was righteous/innocent" (*dikaios*). Cf. Mark 15:39, "son of God". The other Lukan instances (1:36; 4:3, 9, 41; 22:70) likewise all probably reflect this OT/Jewish background. On references to Jesus' divine sonship in the Gospels, see D. R. Bauer, "Son of God," *DJG*, 769-75; and for Pauline usage see L. W. Hurtado, "Son of God," *DPL*, 900-6.

¹⁹ *Nazōraios* is also applied to Jesus in the Gospels (Matt 2:23; 26:71; Luke 18:37; John 18:5, 7; 19:19), as is *Nazārenos*, which is probably to be taken as an alternate form of the epithet (Mark 1:24; 10:47; 14:67; 16:6; Luke 4:34; 24:19). See, e.g., H. Kuhli, "Ναζαρηνοϛ, Ναζωραιοϛ," *EDNT* 2: 454-56.

²⁰ Petri Luomanen, "Ebionites and Nazarenes," in *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts*, ed. Matt Jackson-McCabe (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 81-118.

²¹ On the term in *1 Enoch*, see Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch, or 1 Enoch: A New English Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 195; and cf. also the description of the messianic king in *PsaSol* 17:32.

²² Israel (e.g., Isa 41:8-9; 42:1; 43:10; 44:1-2), Moses (Bar. 1:20; 2:28), the OT prophets (Bar. 2:20), the righteous (Wis 2:13; 9:4-5; 19:6). Note also "my servant, the Messiah" in 2 Bar 70:10. For further discussion of the term, see Cadbury, "Titles," 364-70.

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theon). Perhaps gentile Christians, for whom “servant of God” was not such a treasured category, found *pais* insufficiently exalted as a title for Jesus. It is interesting that, as noted, in Acts the term is applied to Jesus only in the early chapters focused on Jerusalem and earliest Jewish Christians.

Other expressions reflective of Jewish eschatological hopes applied to Jesus include “the coming one” (*ho erchomenos*), in Acts 19:4 (and also Luke 7:19-20/Matt 11:3), and the related claims that Jesus is the (final?) prophet promised by Moses (Acts 3:22-26; 7:37; referring to Deut 18:15-19). We should probably also include “saviour” (*sōtēr*; Acts 5:31; 13:23; also Luke 2:11), a term also applied to God in Luke 1:47 (echoing biblical tradition).²³ Likewise, the Greek term “*archēgos*” (“leader”), applied to Jesus in Acts only in speeches ascribed to Jewish Christians in 3:15 (“the leader of life”) and 5:31 (“leader and saviour”), draws on the numerous uses of this term in the Greek OT (mainly for leaders of Israel). That the term appears elsewhere in the NT only in Hebrews (2:10; 12:2) suggests that Acts and Hebrews reflect an ancient christological expression that did not persist in Christian discourse.

In sum, two major observations about the christological titles/terms used in Acts. First, we note the variety, suggesting that the author sought to represent a certain spectrum of early Christian christological expressions and affirmations. Secondly, the author seems to have aimed to reflect specifics of the christological discourse of various circles of believers and in various settings. Thus, for example, in the narratives set in Jerusalem and in speeches directed to Jewish audiences the author uses terms that rather clearly seem to derive from very early Jewish-Christian circles and modes of christological discourse. As noted, some of these terms dropped out of Christian discourse as the Christian movement became dominantly gentile, and by the time of the writing of Acts some or all of these terms may already have been somewhat archaic. So, (contrary to the assumptions of some scholars), the author may have been more concerned to reflect his sources of information about early christological statements than to assert some distinctive christological teaching of his own.

Subordinate and Exalted

In addition to the rich variety of christological titles, another interesting feature of Luke-Acts is what some have judged as the tension between certain statements (esp. in GLuke) that reflect a view of Jesus as Messiah and Lord from his conception onward (e.g., Luke 1:32-35; 2:11), and other statements (esp. in Acts) that refer to his resurrection as the point when God exalted him to heavenly glory and “made [*epoiēsen*] him Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).²⁴ Also, as noted earlier, GLuke refers to Jesus of Nazareth as “the Lord” with a distinctive frequency, which indicates that the author regarded the earthly Jesus as worthy of this majestic title. Yet other statements both in GLuke and Acts refer to Jesus as a human figure through whom God worked powerfully (e.g., Acts 2:22-24). Indeed, in some cases within the immediate context we find almost side by side statements that seem to carry different christological emphases, such as Acts 10:34-43, where Jesus is referred to as “the Lord of all” (v. 36) and also then as God’s anointed and empowered figure who went about working miracles “for God was with him” (v. 38).²⁵ The author

²³ God is referred to as “saviour” in the Greek OT numerous times, e.g., Deut 32:15; Psa 23(24):5; 24(25):5; 26(27):1.

²⁴ See also, e.g., Acts 3:13. We have a similar statement in Luke 24:26, which refers to Jesus fulfilling OT prophecies that Messiah was to suffer “and then enter into his glory.”

²⁵ “Lord of all” likely here means all people, i.e., both Jews and Gentiles. So, e.g., Cadbury, “Titles,” 362 (who cites comparable expressions used for God in ancient Jewish texts).

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clearly affirms all these ways of referring to Jesus, and likely saw no conflict or serious tension among them. We should always assume this, for any author, unless the evidence requires us to think otherwise; and so the first interpretive task is to try to perceive how a given author probably held together ideas that may seem to us somewhat dissonant.

We are most likely to find the answer in this particular instance by beginning with the recognition that for the author of Luke-Acts Jesus' resurrection and heavenly exaltation by God is foundational, both for the subsequent proclamation of the gospel and also for all else that he holds about Jesus' significance. So, e.g., in Acts the key task of the Twelve is to be witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (1:21-22; also 4:33). In speeches to Jews and Gentiles, Jesus' resurrection (which is taken also as his glorification) is the crucial claim upon which rest the call to repentance and the offer of forgiveness of sins and full salvation (e.g., 3:13-16; 4:8-12; 5:30-32; 10:36-43; 13:26-39; 17:30-31). That is, God's resurrection of Jesus involved installing him fully as the regnant "Lord and Christ" who is now openly proclaimed as such, and in whom uniquely salvation is offered.

But it is also clear that this author believed that the messianic exaltation of Jesus simply fulfilled what had been divinely ordained for him all along, and laid out prophetically in the OT, as is affirmed in the statement ascribed to the risen Jesus in Luke 24:25-27. In this passage, Jesus as Messiah suffers and then "enter[s] into his glory," and in 24:44-47 there is a similar emphasis on the fulfilment of scriptures in Jesus' death and resurrection. This does not, however, in any way reduce the significance of these events, but instead underscores them as the new and decisive expression of divine purposes, and powerful confirmations of Jesus' status.

In Luke 1:32-35, the angel declares that God will give to Jesus "the throne of his ancestor David," and that Jesus "will be called Son of God," both statements in future tense. So, although the angelic announcement to the shepherds in Luke 2:11 refers to Jesus as "a savior, who is Messiah, the Lord", for this author Jesus is fully installed as such in God's resurrection and exaltation of him. To be sure, in the GLuke Jesus of Nazareth came with divine authority and divine recognition as God's Son (e.g., 3:21-22), and in various ways the earthly Jesus' messianic identity is a theme (e.g., recognized by Simeon, demons and Peter, 2:26-32; 4:41; 9:20; a key charge of Jesus' accusers, 22:67; 23:2; the mockery at the cross, 23:35, 39; and then affirmed by the risen Jesus, 24:26, 46). But for this author there was also a strong sense in which Jesus' full and open investiture as Lord and Messiah, with a previously unimagined larger dimension to his status, came in his resurrection.

So, on the one hand, in light of God's resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, this author treats Jesus retrospectively in the GLuke as rightfully Messiah from his birth onward. On the other hand, God's resurrection of Jesus has now more fully conferred and ratified his exalted status, even beyond previous messianic expectations and hopes, and this new divine affirmation of Jesus authorizes the bold proclamation of it in Acts, with all the redemptive consequences that it offers. What some have seen as a "tension" in the author's various christological statements is probably more accurately understood as an expression of his fundamental conviction that God's resurrection of Jesus both confers on him a new and high role in the divine plan, precisely as the one in whose name salvation is now offered, and also casts a powerful light back on the whole prior life of Jesus, showing him always to have borne uniquely divine approval and authority.²⁶

²⁶ Cf. C. Kavin Rowe, "Acts 2.36 and the Continuity of Lukan Christology," *NTS* 53 (2007): 37-56, who proposes reading 2:36 as expressing a timeless "making" of Jesus as Messiah and Lord, and argues that Acts 2:36 be interpreted in light of the references to Jesus as "Lord" in GLuke; and for a different view, Arie W. Zwiep, *Christ, the Spirit and the Community of God* (WUNT 293; Tbingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010), esp. 139-56.

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Ascended and Active

The vividness and materiality of the risen Jesus is a particular feature of the resurrection-appearance narratives in GLuke (e.g., 24: 36-43), and there are similar qualities in the Acts account of Jesus' ascension (1:6-11), where Jesus goes upward in a bodily form into a cloud and disappears from sight. Indeed, this account is unique to Acts, and the consequent emphasis on Jesus' heavenly ascent has sometimes been taken as reflecting a somewhat distinctive *absence* of Jesus in Acts.²⁷ Certainly, Jesus' ascension plays a role in Acts, and is alluded to several times, among them in 3:21, where Jesus is to remain in heaven "until the time of universal restoration" promised by God through OT prophets. Moreover, when Jesus is portrayed as acting directly in Acts, he does so from heaven, as in the appearances to Paul *en route* to Damascus (9:3-5; 22:6-8; 26:12-15) and/or in visions (Paul's in 22:17-18; 23:11; Ananias in 9:10). In other cases, an angel or the Spirit is the agency through whom directions and revelations come (e.g., 8:26, 29, 39; 11:27-28; 12:7-8; 13:2-4; 16:6-8; 20:23; 21:11; 27:23).

But it is an exaggeration to allege an *emphasis* on Jesus' *absence* in Acts.²⁸ Instead, as Zwiep has argued, the ascension of Jesus likely functioned in close connection with the author's belief in Jesus' future return in glory (Jesus' "*parousia*", to use the Greek word).²⁹ That is, probably drawing upon biblical stories of ascended OT worthies (e.g., Moses and Elijah), the author portrays Jesus as taken into heaven, from where he exercises executive authority *on earth*, and from whence he will return at the future consummation of the divine plan of redemption. As Zwiep contends, the author's aim was to encourage readers to cope with waiting for this consummation by thinking of Jesus vividly as installed in heavenly glory and returning at a future time. That is, the vividness of Jesus' ascension functioned to strengthen hope in the reality of his return, as expressed in the angelic words to the disciples in 1:11 that "this Jesus . . . will come *in the same way as you saw him go into heaven*" (emphasis mine).³⁰ The particular role of Jesus' *ascension* (as distinguished from his exaltation to heavenly glory) is distinctive to Acts, but belief in his heavenly status and expectation of his return are attested in other NT texts (e.g., 1 Thess 1:9-10; 4:16; Rev 22:12).

Moreover, Acts certainly presents the ascended Jesus as active and influential in the earthly events recounted. That is, though Jesus is to return in person in God's good time, he is also now the focus of Christian witness and proclamation and is operative in directing and empowering believers in these matters. For example, it is the exalted and ascended Jesus who dispenses God's Spirit to all who turn to him (2:33), and in 16:7 the author even refers to the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of Jesus", indicative of the Spirit's role as the agency of Jesus in directing Paul and his companions. Also, in the accounts of visions/appearances of Jesus previously cited, it is clear that these are to be taken as real and powerful actions of the heavenly Lord Jesus, as in the dramatic reorientation of Saul from opponent to advocate of Jesus on the Damascus Road.

The Name of Jesus

²⁷ E.g., MacRae, "Whom Heaven Must Receive until the Time'," esp. 157-60), who cites Moule's reference to an "absentee Christology" in Acts ("The Christology of Acts," 179-80).

²⁸ Contra MacRae, 157-58.

²⁹ Arie W. Zwiep, , *The Ascension of the Messiah in Lukan Christology*, NovTSup, 87 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), and now *id.*, *Christ, the Spirit and the Community of God*, 38-67.

³⁰ Zwiep, *Ascension*, 180.

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There are also expressions of Jesus' power in earthly affairs in the numerous references to Jesus' name in Acts. References to actions involving the name of Jesus are frequent, at least 31 in Acts. For example, repeatedly in Acts, Christian Baptism is specifically identified with reference to Jesus' name, and likely involved the invoking of Jesus by name (2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16), by which the person baptized was placed under Jesus' authority and efficacy in conveying forgiveness of sins.³¹ Likewise, healings and other miracles are worked through the power of Jesus' name (3:6, 16; 4:10, 30; 16:18). But the author was obviously concerned to distinguish all this from magical practices, involving the use of powerful names, as is reflected in the amusing story of the itinerant Jewish exorcists who tried to use Jesus' name and are set upon violently by a demoniac (19:13-20). The point of the story is that the power of Jesus' name cannot be manipulated and is available only to those who call upon him in a relationship of faith.

In a variety of other ways as well, Jesus' name features in Acts with unusual prominence in comparison to other NT writings.³² The Jewish leaders command the apostles to cease teaching/speaking in Jesus' name (4:17-18; 5:27-28, 40), and the apostles rejoice to be "considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name" (5:40). Philip's proclamation to the Samaritans concerned "the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (8:12). The risen Jesus reveals that the recently converted Paul is chosen to "bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel", and also to "suffer for the sake of my name" (9:15-16). After his conversion, Paul then speaks "boldly in the name of the Lord" (9:28), and later Paul and Barnabas risk their lives "for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:26). In 21:13, Paul declares his readiness "to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Everyone who believes in Jesus "receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (10:43), and in one of the most forthright assertions in the NT Peter is portrayed as declaring that "there is no other name under heaven . . . by which we must be saved" (4:12).

We return to devotional practices in Acts later in this discussion, but we should note here that Acts also reflects the invocation of Jesus by name as characteristic of and constitutive for Christian worship. Indeed, the author can simply designate believers as those who "call upon" Jesus' name, as in the several references to the Jewish-Christian targets of persecution by the pre-converted Paul (9:14, 21; 22:16). In the speech set before the ruler Agrippa (26:1-23), Paul describes his pre-conversion attitude as "convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (26:9), and states that he tried to force Jewish believers to "blaspheme" (26:11), which likely refers to coercing them to denounce Jesus or pronounce an imprecation on him.³³ It is noteworthy that thereafter Paul, too, refers to fellow Christians simply as "all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:2), a devotional practice he reflects also in Romans 10:9-13.

In all these references to "calling upon the name" of Jesus, the phrasing (the Greek verb *epikaleō* + *to onoma*) is a deliberate appropriation of the OT expression, to "call upon the name of the Lord" (Joel 2:32; explicitly cited in Acts 2:21), which means

³¹ For full discussion, Lars Hartman, *Into the Name of the Lord Jesus: Baptism in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997).

³² To be sure, other NT texts reflect the prominence of Jesus' name in early Christianity: e.g., Matt 7:20; 10:22, 41-42; 18: 5, 20; Mark 9:37; 13:6; John 1:12; 14:13, 28; 15:16; 16:23; 1 Cor 5:4; 6:11; Philip 2:9-11). In comparative frequency of references to Jesus' name, GJohn (12x) comes next after Acts.

³³ We may also have an allusion to this cursing of Jesus by unbelievers in 1 Cor 12:3, "*Anathema Iesous*" ("Jesus be cursed"). The Roman governor Pliny says that he sought to get those denounced to him as Christians to "curse Christ" (*Epistles* 10.96.5), and cf. Josephus' reference to the Essenes put under torture by the Romans in an unsuccessful effort to get them to "blaspheme their lawgiver" (*War* 2.152).

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to offer worship and to commit oneself to “the Lord”. In the appropriation reflected in these NT references, “the Lord” is obviously Jesus. Given ancient Jewish concerns about God’s uniqueness, especially in worship, this is quite simply an astonishing development that directly reflects the degree to which the risen Jesus was linked with God (the Father) in earliest Christian faith and devotional practice. This also powerfully illustrates how we must take account of devotional practices in assessing adequately the christology of Acts, and we return to devotional practices later in this discussion.

Jesus and God’s Will

A number of statements in Acts emphasize that Jesus is the expression of God’s will and purposes. In particular, Jesus’ death is referred to both as the wrong-headed actions of Jewish leaders and “lawless ones” (the Roman authority), and yet also as the fulfilment of God’s foreordained purpose (*hōrismenē boule*, 2:23; and similarly in 4:28), Jesus’ “suffering” foretold of the Messiah by OT scriptures and so necessary (3:18; 13:26-29; 17:3; 26:23), and Jesus’ resurrection likewise the fulfilment of divine promises (2:24-31; 13:32-37), an emphasis reflected already in the GLuke (24:25-27, 44-48). Other statements present Jesus as “ordained” (the Greek verb, *hōrizō*) by God “as judge of the living and the dead” (10:42) and the one by whom “the whole world” will be judged (17:31).

This emphasis on Jesus’ death (“suffering”) in particular as fulfilment of the divine plan (Acts 3:18) and so “necessary” (the Greek verb *dei*, Acts 17:3, connoting divine necessity) is by no means unique to Luke-Acts (e.g., Mark 8:31; 9:12; Matt 16:21).³⁴ But it stands out in Luke-Acts, perhaps because this is pretty much what the author has to say about Jesus’ death, and he does not use the “for us/for our sins” formulae or “redemption” terminology (*lytron*, *lytroomai*) so familiar from some other NT writings (e.g., Mark 10:45). But there are statements in Acts that either directly or implicitly refer to the redemptive efficacy of Jesus’ death. In the “apostolic decree” cited in 15:11, believers are “saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus,” the “grace” likely alluding to Jesus’ obedience to suffering and death and the redemptive consequences. Likewise, when read in the context of Paul’s address in which Jesus’ death and resurrection are central (13:26-41), the statements in 13:38-39 that “through this one [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,” and that “everyone who believes in him is justified [*dikaiontai*]” connect these benefits, at least implicitly, with these events. Also, in 20:28, we certainly have an explicit reference to Jesus’ death (“blood”) as the means whereby God “obtained the church” for salvation.³⁵

But, certainly, the author’s primary emphasis about Jesus’ death and resurrection is that these events fulfilled God’s plan. In this, we have one of a number of indications of the profoundly *theo*-logical and *theo-centric* nature of the author’s religious outlook and beliefs. This does not at all involve a minimizing of Jesus or a significantly “lower” christological stance in comparison to other NT authors. Instead, as we have noted, the author affirms lofty claims about Jesus, even linking Jesus with God in discourse and religious practices, and does so confidently because all this has the strongest imaginable basis in God’s will and purposes.

Word of God / Word of the Lord

³⁴ W. Popkes, “δεῖ,” *EDNT* 1: 279-80.

³⁵ The phrasing in 20:28, *dia tou haimatos tou idiou*, can be taken to mean “through his own blood” or “through the blood of his own (son).” If, as seems preferable, God is the subject of the sentence, the latter is the likely sense of the phrase in question.

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The conspicuous link of Jesus with God noted earlier, e.g., their sharing the title “the Lord”, is reflected also in the noteworthy use of several expressions in Acts referring to the message proclaimed. Most frequently, the author refers to the gospel message as “the word of God” (4:31; 6:2, 7; 8:14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5, 7; 13:46; 17:13; 18:11; cf. “your word”, 4:29). But in another eight cases it is “the word of the Lord” (8:25; 13:44, 48, 49; 15:35, 36; 16:32; 19:10). Distinctively, in another twelve cases, the author simply designates the message as “the word” (4:4; 6:4; 8:4; 10:36, 44; 11:19; 14:12, 25; 16:6; 17:11; 19:20; 20:7).

It is clear that in all these expressions the proclaimed “word” concerns Jesus, as is especially clear in 10:36, “the word concerning Jesus Christ,” and reflected in other related expressions: “the word of this salvation” (13:26), “the word of his [Jesus] grace” (14:3; cf. “the word of his [God’s] grace,” 20:32), and “the word of the gospel” (15:7). Moreover, in light of the frequency with which the author designates Jesus as “the Lord”, in at least some of the uses of “the word of the Lord” it is probable that Jesus is the referent. This is especially likely in 16:32, for in the preceding verse Paul’s exhortation is “Believe on the Lord Jesus.” At the very least, the expression “the word of the Lord” takes on a certain ambiguity, and this is likely deliberate, signifying that for the author Jesus shares with God not only the title “the Lord” but also the content, derivation and authority of the gospel message.³⁶

Savior of Israel and the Gentiles

Emphatically in Luke-Acts, Jesus is presented as the true Messiah of Israel, the fulfilment of OT prophecy and Jewish hopes of redemption. This is so not only in GLuke (e.g., 1:30-35, 46-55, 67-79; 2:29-32), where Jesus’ ministry is situated among fellow Jews of Galilee and Judea, but also in Acts. Of course, he is also the savior of the world, emphasized especially in Acts, where the gospel message goes out to the Gentiles of various lands. Already in Luke 24:46-47, the risen Jesus declares that the message of “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his [Jesus] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” In Acts 1:6-8, in response to his disciples’ question about “when you will restore the kingdom to Israel,” Jesus first demurs (v. 7) and then promises empowerment by the Holy Spirit and assigns them as his witnesses “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” So the author consistently presents the gospel message about Jesus as arising in a Jewish context and proceeding outward to all peoples. But in this universal dissemination of the gospel proclamation, the identification of Jesus as (Jewish) Messiah and fulfilment of OT prophecies remains indelible.

Some scholars, however, have claimed that Acts portrays the Jewish people as irredeemably disobedient to the gospel, and so as written off in favor of the (essentially Gentile) church. It is not possible here to argue the point adequately for anyone not already disposed to my view, but I find this a dubious reading of the text.³⁷ To be sure, Acts repeatedly portrays Jewish rejection of the gospel, reflected especially in several strident statements: e.g., Stephen’s concluding indictment in 7:51-53; the complaint of Paul and Barnabas in 13:45-47; similarly in 18:5-6; and Paul’s rebuke in 28:25-29. But up

³⁶ This ambiguity seems to have led to the variants in a number of these texts. So, e.g., in 8:4 “the word/word of God”; 14:25 “the word/word of the Lord/word of God”; 16:6 “the word/word of the Lord”; 13:49 “the word of the Lord/the word”; and in 6:7; 8:25; 13:5, 44, 48; 16:32 “the word of God/word of the Lord”. These variants probably reflect efforts by some ancient readers to remove the ambiguity in various directions.

³⁷ So also, e.g., Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2: xcvi-xcviii.

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to the end of Acts, Jews continue to be included among those to whom the gospel is preached, and at various points the author refers to Jews who accept the message (e.g., 2:41-42; 4:4; 5:14; 13:43; 14:1). To be sure, the author holds that faith in Jesus is essential to salvation (e.g., 4:12), for Jews as well as Gentiles. So, Jewish unbelief in the gospel is profound disobedience to God. But in Acts, the extension of the gospel to Gentiles (e.g., 11:18; 15:13-18) is not at the expense of the Jewish people. Although the author excoriates unbelieving Jews, especially those who actively oppose the gospel-proclamation, the Jewish people remain among those to whom the gospel is preached in the hope of their assent to it, and Jesus' role as savior of the world remains firmly based in his legitimacy as Messiah of Israel.

DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES

Earlier we noted the references in Acts to "calling upon the name" of Jesus as reflecting the highly significant devotional/liturgical practice of invoking Jesus, which seems to have been characteristic of Christian baptism and also corporate worship. This and other devotional practices reflected in Acts are important (but often under-estimated or overlooked) evidence of how remarkably central Jesus is in this text. Space permits here only a limited discussion of these important phenomena.

In addition to the invocation of Jesus, we also have prayers addressed to him. The clearest examples of these are the appeals of the dying Stephen, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," and "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (7:59-60). Even if it is a dramatized scene, the author surely expected his Christian readers to approve of Stephen's prayers here, which likely means that prayer-appeals to Jesus were a familiar feature of their devotional practice.

In 13:1-2, we have a scene of the gathered church "worshipping the Lord" and fasting. It is curious that some commentaries do not even engage the question of who "the Lord" is here.³⁸ But, again, in light of the author's use of "the Lord" as a frequent designation of Jesus, it seems entirely plausible to judge that he presents the risen Jesus here as the object of the worship and prayer. Certainly, in 9:10-16, it is the Lord Jesus who designates the newly-converted Saul as his chosen witness. So, also here in 13:1-2, "the Lord" is probably Jesus, this text another indication that for this author Jesus is uniquely and strikingly linked with God both in religious discourse and in devotional life/practice.

The strong *theo*-centric stance of the author makes this all the more remarkable. The author shows no sympathy for deification of human rulers or heroes (e.g., 12:21-23!), and certainly does not present Jesus as another/new deity alongside the one God. Yet he equally clearly holds Jesus in the highest imaginable regard, not only as Messiah and appointed savior, but also as the exalted Lord who now dispenses the Spirit, is the content of the gospel and directs its progress, and is rightfully to be linked with God uniquely in reverence. The absence of reference to Jesus' "pre-existence" or agency in the creation of the world, ideas familiar to readers of GJohn, should not blind us to the very exalted view of Jesus attested in Acts. Although the author may essentially gather up christological beliefs from the tradition known to him, they represent a fascinating and remarkable body of evidence of the centrality of Jesus in that tradition.

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³⁸ E.g., Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1: 601-6 considers various other questions but not this one.

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