

Chapter Eleven: The Primacy of Luke's Literary Engagement with the Old Testament

It is important to note that literary analysis of Luke, in order to truly *be* a literary analysis, must take up all of the major themes in the narrative and integrate them. Hence the literary unity of Luke is not based simply around table fellowship, almsgiving, and friendship with the poor, as Green and Bekaert argue, although those are indeed pieces of the overall puzzle. The content of Luke corresponds not only to the themes of *table fellowship*, *wealth*, and *reversal* but also to the theme of *Israel's Scriptures*, itself a body of literature, and the multiple major themes emerging from it: Israel and the nations, sight, Davidic kingship, Isaiah's servant, salvation, women, the prophets, etc. By including Israel's Scriptures as a major theme running through Luke – Acts, we are thus invited to integrate the literary themes in Luke with the literary themes in the Old Testament.

The Theme of Table Fellowship

However interesting the parallels may be with the Hellenistic symposium, Luke's table fellowship is fundamentally a Hebraic concept. Eating in God's presence is an Israelite ideal that refers back to the creational paradise. In the garden, God told Adam that he may eat of all the trees in the garden, save one (Gen.2:16). The sense of abundance cannot be missed. At Sinai, when 'Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, they saw the God of Israel, and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they beheld God, and they ate and drank' (Ex.24:9 – 11). Eating in God's presence thus denotes the enjoyment of God's covenant. David said that experiencing God's shepherding is like being fed in a luxuriant pasture: 'Thou dost prepare a table before me' (Ps.23:5). And Isaiah foresaw the restoration from exile and the renewed covenant in terms of abundant banqueting in God's presence: 'Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend your money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance' (Isa.55:1 – 2).

For Jesus to eat with people, then, was his way of symbolically enacting the restoration to the new creation paradise he was accomplishing by his Cross and Resurrection. We count ten such meal scenes in Luke's Gospel. (1) Jesus celebrates with Levi a great feast, inviting other tax collectors into his fellowship, teaching about the new covenant he is inaugurating (Lk.5:27 – 39). This meal scene is invitational: Jesus is 'fishing' for people, which he had recently discussed with Simon (5:1 – 11), inviting other tax-collectors, along with Levi, into his new community. This episode lays the groundwork for why the Pharisees accuse Jesus of regularly eating with 'sinners and tax-collectors' (e.g. 15:1 – 2). At this, the first such meal scene, the Pharisees and scribes ask two openly hostile questions: 'Why do you eat with sinners?' (5:30) and 'Why do your disciples not fast?' (5:33). Previously, they had kept their critical reasoning to themselves (5:21 – 22). Now, however, they voice their hostility.

(2) Soon enough, a Pharisee named Simon asks Jesus to dine with him (7:36 – 50). Simon is the host, with Jesus as the supposedly honored guest. During this meal, an unnamed sinful woman enters the scene and begins to weep and wipe Jesus' feet with her tears and hair. In fact, she plays the role of host, and truly honors Jesus as a guest. In this meal scene, we see a Pharisee think private thoughts that Jesus knows supernaturally and confronts brilliantly. Since Simon doubts that Jesus is a prophet, Jesus shows him precisely out of what kind of prophetic stuff he is made. He reads his thoughts and delivers a telling parable about two people who are forgiven to different degrees. Jesus then elevates the unnamed sinful woman over Simon the Pharisee, calling attention to the woman's attitude and posture of faith. Though he does not use these words, Jesus implies that she is the true host of the meal, and Jesus has now reoriented his attention to the party happening between him and the woman. Jesus pronounces on her his *shalom* (7:50), the (new) creational blessing.

Jesus' table fellowship with prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners had tremendous meaning – he was elevating them to his status circle and expressing his solidarity with them. Of great import is Jesus' defense of himself as a 'friend' of such people (Lk.7:34). This scandalized the Pharisees, of course, and meal scenes are always a source of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. Making this particularly ironic is the fact that the Pharisees, 'although they did not reject the priesthood or the Temple cult, in light of the priests' and the Temple's vulnerability to impurity, sought to renew Israel by shifting the locus of holiness to their homes. This resulted in a special focus on the purity of one's everyday food and of one's companions at every meal.'¹ Jacob Neusner observes that this zeal for ritual purity extended so far that the Pharisees viewed the tables on which they ate their meals as representations of God's altar in the Jerusalem Temple.² Although Luke mentions more than once that the early Christians had table

¹ S. Scott Bartchy, 'Table Fellowship,' p.796.

² Jacob Neusner, 'Two Pictures of the Pharisees: Philosophical Circle or Eating Club?' *Anglican Theological Review* 64 (1982): 525 – 38.

fellowship with each other, we should not assume that this practice was for Christians only. It can be said with some confidence that table fellowship was one of the early Christians' outreach vehicles, as it was for Jesus. When we come across statements like, 'And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved' immediately after mention of the believers taking their meals together regularly (Acts 2:26 – 27), we should probably see the early Christians as continuing the practice of Jesus, extending table fellowship to 'tax collectors and sinners.' This suggestion will be confirmed by 14:1 – 24 and 15:1 – 32.

(3) Jesus supernaturally provides an abundant meal of bread and fish in the wilderness (9:10 – 17), giving his disciples a lesson on how he himself will provide for his own community through the apostles. This seems to be an important episode for the apostles, who have just returned from their short-term missions trip to Israel. By sending them out with authority to preach backed by spiritual authority over demons and disease, Jesus seems to be indicating that he is distributing his teaching and/or something of himself through the twelve. Just as they have distributed Jesus' teaching and healing power and return filled with joy, so they distribute bread to the five thousand and return, each with his own basket filled. Far from being depleted and spent, they are nourished by Jesus in ministry.

(4) After recruiting, sending, and debriefing the seventy, Jesus has a meal with Mary and Martha (10:38-42). The placement of this story seems strategic to defining what 'loving God' means. Luke has just positioned this material after the 'good Samaritan' parable, which is about 'loving your neighbor.' The two stories seem to be a way of answering the question being debated by Jesus and the lawyer about the two greatest commandments. Conceptually, the stories follow a chiasmic form:

- a. Love God definition sought
- b. Love neighbor definition sought
- b'. Love neighbor redefined
- a'. Love God redefined

When placed in its cultural context, the episode becomes powerfully suggestive. Whereas the typical Jewish portrait of loving neighbor would have been a Jew loving a fellow Jew, Luke's portrait is that of a Samaritan loving a Jew, crossing a vast national and ethnic boundary. Similarly, whereas the typical Jewish portrait of loving God would be a Jewish man sitting in the Temple reading Moses, Luke's portrait is that of a woman sitting at Jesus' feet listening to his word.

Both lessons Jesus gives to the twelve and the seventy will recur after the resurrection. By feeding the five thousand, Jesus provides an early link to his meal with the Emmaus disciples after his resurrection (24:13 – 34). Luke makes the verbal links between the two episodes strong. Tannehill notes, 'The description of the Emmaus meal is closer to the feeding of the multitude than to the Last Supper in some details. According to 24:30 and 9:16 Jesus 'blessed' the bread...In describing both the feeding of the multitude and the Emmaus meal, the day is said to 'decline'...The same verb for 'reclining to eat' is used in these two passages... However, the most striking point of contact between 9:10 – 17 and the Emmaus meal is in the description of Jesus' initiation of the meal through a series of four actions...Jesus takes bread, blesses, breaks it, and gives it to his companions.' By doing this, Jesus anticipates the development in Acts where the Christian community shares meals together and is nourished by the exalted Jesus through the apostles' teaching. The early physical picture of that experience is painted here in the wilderness. Also, the motif of listening to Jesus' word that was prominent in the Mary and Martha episode will recur at the resurrection, both when the Emmaus Road disciples listen with hearts burning to Jesus unfold Moses and the Prophets, and also when the eleven disciples are gathered and Jesus opens their minds to understand the Scriptures. By saying that listening to Jesus' word is an important aspect of sharing table fellowship with him, Luke lays an explicit foundation for the teaching that is to occur at Jesus' table. The disciples will later exposit his teaching and his interpretation of the Old Testament over these community meals. What was implicit about the importance of Jesus' word at his table becomes explicit here in 10:38 – 42, and held up widely as a model later.

In two polemical situations at the table with the Pharisees (11:37 – 54 and 14:1 – 24), Jesus lays out his requirements for inward purity and social ethics, both of which the Pharisees do not meet. (5) The growing conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees takes a new turn when one Pharisee asks to have lunch with Jesus (11:37). The Pharisee makes a private observation about Jesus not washing ceremonially before the meal. Jesus in turn launches into a devastating verbal rebuke of the Pharisees' internal uncleanness. Lest we interpret internal uncleanness narrowly to mean a bad motive for good behavior, we note that Jesus gives a much broader definition. He says, 'You disregard justice and the love of God' (11:42). The Pharisees are amiss regarding both horizontal and vertical relations. One of the lawyers pipes up at this point and claims to be insulted. That does not stop Jesus, however, who goes on to rebuke these lawyers who interpret the Law of Moses for getting it all wrong. They, in Jesus'

opinion, have greater blame than the Pharisees, for they make the interpretations that the Pharisees then implement. The scene closes with rebuke lingering in the air.

(6) The next meal scene surprises us merely by the fact of its existence: Jesus still gets invited to these Pharisees' meals! To make matters more amusing, Luke tells us it is the Sabbath, so the stage is set for twice the usual conflict. True to form, Jesus wastes no time healing a man, pushing the limits of the Pharisees' interpretation of the Sabbath again. In addition, Jesus comments in some detail on the roles the Pharisees were playing at these meals: guests, hosts, and invitees. Speaking about being *guests*, Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for focusing these meals and parties on themselves, whereas if they had really understood how table fellowship functioned as a symbol of the kingdom banquet, they would have understood these events as occurrences of a wedding feast (14:8) where the focus is properly on the groom (proper Middle Eastern culture), not on the guests. The Pharisees fundamentally misunderstand the kingdom; it is a wedding feast honoring the groom, not a time to honor themselves. What kind of person would go to a wedding feast as a guest and call attention to himself? The same kind of person who thinks Jesus' kingdom is not about Jesus but himself.

Next, Jesus turns to his host and delivers a challenge about being a *host* for the kingdom: 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous' (14:12 – 14). Since the host has fallen far short of this, there was probably an awkward silence until one person courageously tries to break in with a bland, neutral statement he thinks everyone can agree on: 'Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!' To which Jesus effectively says, 'And you are not going to be among them because of your poor excuses' (14:15 – 24). Being an *invitee* to the kingdom feast doesn't make one a participant: You still need to show up to the feast. Jesus has just laid an ethical foundation about being guests and hosts for the kingdom that we will see the early Christians follow. Their meals would embody these teachings. Luke follows this section, significantly, with Jesus warning the multitude that a real disciple hates his own mother and father, etc. and even all his material possessions (14:33). This is a serious warning, but it makes sense in the context of Jesus' disciples needing to be hosts who display the inclusive, generous and sacrificial ethic of their master's kingdom banquet. Throwing parties for people who cannot pay you back will surely challenge your concept of community and drain your wallet. Yet this became the practice of Jesus' disciples.

Immediately following (6) is an occasion where (7) the Pharisees criticize Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners (15:1 – 2). Their critique prompts Jesus to tell the three famed parables of the lost (15:3 – 32). Jesus says in all of those parables that the best way to describe the rejoicing in the heavenly realms over the return of the lost is a celebratory community banquet. (8) Then Jesus welcomes Zaccheus into fellowship with him at his home, implicitly with a meal (19:1 – 10). Zaccheus, the man who is 'short in stature' and climbs a tree like a child, is contrasted with the rich ruler, who has appeared just before Zaccheus (18:18 – 30), who would not become a child to enter the kingdom community (18:15 – 17). Luke utilizes the theme of sight in the rich ruler – Zaccheus sequence as well, and we will discuss this episode in more depth below.

Of these episodes, the sixth and eighth interact substantially with Luke's theme of wealth, while the seventh does so to a lesser extent. In the three parables of the lost, Jesus portrays material possessions being used in celebration of the lost returning to God through Jesus' ministry. During the sixth meal scene, however, Jesus radically redefines the role of a 'host' in his service to align with his role in opening up the kingdom to all. This inclusiveness necessitates large expenditures on behalf of the poor and others who cannot pay the host back. This teaching is not aimed at the level of motivation (e.g. invite friends of your same socio-economic circle without expecting anything in return), but of actual practice (e.g. invite people who really cannot pay you back, who might be socially awkward for you to host). Doing this consistently means that entering the kingdom bears a significant cost (thus, the two warnings in 14:25 – 33) culminating in the warning that Jesus has come to claim all a person's material possessions. Jesus teaches that his disciples are to host meals that include people who are marginalized by society. Likewise, during the eighth meal scene, Jesus celebrates a meal with Zaccheus after he announces publicly that he will give away half his wealth and pay back by a multiple of four anyone whom he has wronged. Zaccheus, incidentally, probably expects not a short line of claimants outside his door eager to take him up on that offer. He probably won't be left with much after all is said and done! Thus, Zaccheus is one who is eager to reconcile his strained relationships for the sake of the kingdom; he is eager to generously help the poor; he is one who allows Jesus to claim all his possessions. In these meal scenes, we see the theme of money interacting more and more with the theme of table fellowship. In Acts, we will see a thorough convergence of the two themes.

The ninth and tenth table fellowship scenes bracket the Cross and Resurrection accounts, lending them symbolic depth. (9) In the upper room, Jesus introduces the idea that his disciples will internalize his own body and blood. By doing so, they are entering a 'new covenant.' The resurrected Jesus later clarified this union with himself as actually happening by the Holy Spirit indwelling the believers. What are the effects of this spiritual

internalization of the crucified Jesus? On the Cross, Jesus grants to the penitent revolutionary³ communion with him in 'paradise.' This statement, unique to Luke, is no haphazard pronouncement. It underscores the achievement of Jesus' death: restoring rebels to paradise with God. This is only one half of an idea that we must take with its counterpart.

Associated with the Resurrection, (10) two of Jesus' disciples on the Emmaus Road experience the reversal of the fall in the context of a meal.⁴ The gender of Cleopas' companion is strategically unspecified, allowing us to wonder if this companion was Cleopas' wife, Mary. This reminds us of Adam and Eve walking with God. Rather than losing fellowship with God, however, these two disciples gain it. Rather than failing to believe and live by God's word as Adam and Eve decided, they eventually gain insight into it and believe. In fact, their hearts burn as they internalize God's Word. In the context of eating, they have their eyes opened, in a phrase that deliberately echoes Adam and Eve's eyes being opened by eating in the fall. Only this time, rather than having their eyes opened to a fallen self-awareness, they are opened instead to perceive Jesus; they perceive him as he breaks bread, suggesting how we are to understand not only the communion sacrament and what it points to: the internalization of Jesus himself. Whereas Adam and Eve realized they were naked, the disciples are eventually clothed with power from on high. Whereas Adam and Eve were to spread from Eden over the whole earth to proclaim their rule over it, the disciples of Jesus are commanded to spread from Jerusalem over the whole earth to proclaim Jesus' rule over it. The intertextual links to the Genesis account cannot be missed.

Hence Luke uses meal scenes not only to tie his work together literarily, but also to sound out the main melody of his composition. Jesus has brought about, in some sense, an undoing of the fall. He is making restoration, the paradisaic state of fellowship with God, available, and this not just for Israel, but for all humanity. This achievement occurred at the Cross and Resurrection. By emphasizing a 'new covenant' in the upper room on the night of the Passover, Jesus placed a new interpretation of deliverance on top of the traditional meaning of the Jewish Passover. Likely Jesus was speaking in a multi-layered way. For one, he was surely speaking of deliverance out of the kingdom of darkness, Satan's domain (e.g. Col.1:13 – 14). Second, he was also speaking of the 'new covenant' on contrast to the Mosaic Law. We have sufficient ground here to link Jesus' upper room statements to Peter's later comments, 'Through him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses' which is 'a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear' (Acts 13:39; 15:10). Jesus is speaking of delivering people from the Mosaic Law and into the 'new covenant' in some parallel way to how the Israelites were delivered out of Egypt. So rather than celebrating a straightforward physical deliverance from oppressors like Rome, Jesus' disciples will henceforth celebrate a spiritual deliverance from the Mosaic Law, the powers of Satan, and evil itself. Jesus eclipsed the memory of the exodus deliverance with his own act of deliverance. Henceforth Jesus would send his people to expose and correct evil, but without resorting to evil means.

Christian communion is also tremendously symbolic because of its antecedents in the literature of ancient Israel. Those antecedents include the Joseph story and the Creation story. In the Joseph story, Joseph is imprisoned and then exalted on high, but while imprisoned is associated with a baker who then is killed (echoing bread being broken) and a cupbearer who goes free (echoing wine being available). This has echoes to the Jesus story, where Jesus is 'imprisoned' in a sense, and later exalted on high, but only after making available bread that is broken and wine that runs free for all. More importantly, we believe, in Christian communion, a new humanity is pictured eating from a new source of life with Eden as an antecedent. Communion draws out in symbol the mysterious act of identifying with the crucified Jesus, or more precisely, having the crucified and resurrected Jesus within oneself by the Spirit. The act of eating the bread and wine symbolizes internalizing Jesus (by the Spirit) to be free from the Mosaic Law's condemnation, thus reentering paradise with God, which is itself symbolized by eating, elegantly enough. A Jew 'under the Law' and a Gentile 'in Adam' must both internalize the crucified Jesus and rise with him. The fact that believers in Jesus have internalized Jesus' death and resurrection by the Spirit therefore allows them to see in communion a reminder that they are part of a new humanity, a one body, that enjoys the new covenant blessings with the God of Israel who is also the Creator-Redeemer God of the world.

It is well accepted that the early Christians believed that the exalted Jesus was somehow present with them when they gathered and especially when they observed the Last Supper. However, what is not typically explored is how the mere act of eating meals also served as a reminder of internalizing Jesus as well. Early Christian meals had theological and social implications above and beyond the liturgical communion practice, which most church traditions have not upheld. Snapshots of early church life shown in Acts revolve around meals. While it is true that the phrase 'breaking of bread' probably refers to the specific observance of the Last Supper (e.g. Acts 2:42), in order

³ not a common thief, see N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p.

⁴ I am indebted to N. T. Wright for pointing this out in *The Challenge of Jesus*.

to express the unity of their community life, they ate together regularly. They took 'their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart' (2:46).

More significantly, these meals appear in the context of sharing and redistribution of economic resources. Luke observes that 'all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need' (2:45 – 26). The earliest Christians appear to have taken seriously Jesus' call to be a new community. The historic Christian virtue of hospitality seems to be a direct result of this ethic, as do reconciliation (interpersonally and ethnically) and redistribution of wealth. The conceptual basis for redistribution is laid in fairly simple terms: If all believers eat from the same kingdom banquet table, not physically but conceptually, sharing wealth is akin to someone asking another believer across the table to 'please pass the plate.' This unity seems to have made a positive impression on the population, for the community was continually expanding. Probably, as we saw with Jesus, the early Christians used meals as their outreach vehicle as well. The outcome of this inclusive table fellowship is that 'the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.'

Luke shows us that the apostles initially managed the money and table fellowship in the earliest Jerusalem community. Three mentions of this practice are evidenced consecutively. In 4:34 – 35, 'For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.' In 4:37, Barnabas sold a tract of land, 'brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.' And in 5:1 – 11, Ananias and Sapphira attest by way of negative example to the sale of property and the distribution of its proceeds. Thus, the earliest Christians practiced the redistribution of resources within the Christian community; trusted apostolic leadership managed this broad table fellowship because handling the community's money was a serious matter. Judas, the last money-handler, had lacked integrity and been a traitor. Luke says that he had acquired a field (1:18), doing precisely the opposite of Jesus' teaching and practice of separating Israel from its ancestral land. The apostles, by contrast, did not keep any of it for themselves. Earlier, Peter and John claimed, 'I do not have silver and gold' (3:6). The apostles were handling the collection and daily distribution of resources across these few thousand people peppered throughout the city, a formidable task.

What happens when disunity threatens the church's table fellowship? We get a glimpse of this in Acts 6. The ethnic and cultural divisions present in the wider Jerusalem society begin to affect the Christian community. Following the appointment of Stephen, one of the seven, mention is made of a Hellenistic 'Synagogue of the Freedmen' made up of Cyrenians, Alexandrians, Cilicians, and Asians (6:9), an odd peculiarity giving us insight into the context of the early church. Why would a synagogue exist in Jerusalem? Synagogues were formed for Jews who were away from Jerusalem, especially during the exilic time period when the Temple did not exist. Yet according to some scholars, more than a dozen synagogues existed in first century Jerusalem while the Temple stood, which is a bit astonishing. Apparently, Hellenistic Jews were not totally embraced by the native Hebrew community and power structures. After a few generations, the influence of Hellenistic culture(s) on Diaspora Jews was probably significant. Perhaps some intermarriage (while enslaved?) had given them different physical characteristics; they surely had different accents, languages, dress, and customs. If Jerusalem dwellers looked down upon Galileans, identifying them by their accents, how much more did they feel similarly towards Hellenistic Jews from beyond the land? Those differences were apparently palpable and relevant in a context where ethnic purity was valued. Any reading of Acts which criticizes the early Jerusalem church for delaying its outreach to the Samaritans and Gentiles needs to do so cautiously and sympathetically, if at all. Judaism was not monolithic, and ministry to the Jews was not without its own ethnic and cultural challenges.

Divisions from outside the church become divisions within in Acts 6. Being native Hebrews, the apostles were probably less informed about the Hellenistic widows in the community. In a rapidly growing community, their information network must have simply been 'who they knew.' An oversight was bound to happen. When it does, it falls along the same ethnic and cultural lines that exist in the broader Jewish world. The oversight is unintentional, but it nevertheless replays realities with which people were already very familiar. The apostles acknowledge the validity of the Hellenistic complaint, as opposed to ignoring it, getting defensive, or squelching the ethnic minority's voice by impugning their motives. They then recognize that the management of the church's table fellowship has become larger than what they could handle. The translation, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables' (6:2) is unfortunate. Such wording gives the impression that the apostles took orders and served meals. In reality, it was much more than that. Such wording also gives the impression that the apostles disdained the job in favor of the more 'spiritual' tasks of preaching and praying. Nothing could be further from the truth: The job was a vital one to the whole community, in fact it was the very expression of their community life together, and the apostles were taking it very seriously in delegating it to the seven deacons. The apostles open seven vacancies for the whole community to fill, the criterion being that the seven men must be full of the Spirit, trustworthy to manage the community's money (unlike Judas Iscariot), and good representatives of the community

(6:3). These seven were presumably responsible for some teaching at community meals. This move meets with divine approval, as Luke adds, ‘The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith’ (6:7).

Table fellowship continued to have significant implications for the early church. When God gives Peter the vision to include Cornelius the Gentile in the covenant community, He uses the motif of food and eating, reversing the kosher laws for Peter (Acts 10 – 11). Nothing could have been clearer as a message to go eat with the Gentiles. Similarly, table fellowship was the hot issue in Galatians 2. It was the expression of the unity of believers, and as such, can probably be taken as the dominant image for the social vision of the New Testament.

So we are back to the basic question: Does it matter in regards to exegesis and application whether we position ‘table fellowship’ within the Hebraic theme of eating or the Hellenistic motif of the symposium? Yes, on several levels. First, however strong an awareness Jesus himself may have had of the Hellenistic symposia, he seems to have retained a stronger commitment to the Hebraic theme of eating. As evidence, it is the Hebraic awareness that seems to stir up the most controversy with the Pharisees. At the same meal setting where Luke mentions the various roles of host, guest, etc. of the symposium (Lk.14), the Hebraic awareness of the meal as a symbol of the eschatological kingdom of God still provides the basic grist for Jesus’ challenge to the Pharisees that they are not entering the kingdom.

Second, if we exegetically situate Jesus in a Greek symposium whenever we find him eating with sinners in Israel, we do lose some of the power of the theme for other purposes. If we adhere to the scholarly definition of the Greek symposium as the time of talking and drinking that *followed* a banquet, or perhaps even independent of a banquet,⁵ then we lose the *act of eating* with guests as a symbol of God’s kingdom. The meal scene symbolically demonstrates at least four actions at once: God invites people to Himself (symbolized by the initiative of the host inviting others to a meal), one enters the kingdom by internalizing Jesus’ death and resurrection (symbolized by the eating of bread and wine), one enjoys lost paradisaic communion with God (also symbolized by the food), and those at the table serve each other (the guests are honored by the host serving them). If the symposium is not actually the meal, but simply an arrangement of seating, then we weaken our own ability to critique social dynamics and evangelize at the same time. This is so because technically, the symposium is only a time of socializing after the meal. A Hellenistic guest, by merely participating in a socially adjusted Greek symposium, would not see a symbol of how to enter the kingdom since the host offering food (which symbolizes Jesus offering himself to us) is no longer emphasized. She only sees the symbolic effects of the kingdom (a change in social dynamics at the table), and that only partially (a host with no food is a diminished portrait of the God of Israel). The symposium does not symbolically express *entering* the kingdom by *internalizing Jesus*. The force of Luke’s writings is therefore weakened, as would be the evangelistic thrust of the Christian praxis of meals.

Third, the notion that table fellowship really drives Jesus’ overall teaching on money and relationships is an overstatement. To be sure, there was social elitism played out in the symposium, so it is true that Luke’s writings landing in a Hellenistic environment would have some powerful *social* implications: It would cause Hellenistic Christians to seek out the typically unwelcome and seat them at places of honor. There is no ground, however, for making Luke’s theme of table fellowship the driving factor behind the theme of wealth, as we have demonstrated above and will continue below. Jesus’ teaching on wealth and the poor also emerges out of an engagement with Israel’s historic and literary interaction with their own land traditions. Thus, Jesus is really calling for all to disinherit themselves – whether they are rich or poor – from their traditional sources of material wealth. Correspondingly, we cannot make the reversal of the social hierarchy in meal settings tantamount to Jesus’ teaching on the poor. Under this subordination, various scholars take Luke’s writings to require a reversal of an unfair distribution of wealth, where the rich give to the poor (which we endorse) and the poor *merely receive* (which we do not). One difficulty with this view is that table fellowship was not intended for Christians to practice exclusively amongst themselves. It was a significant and general form of outreach as well, and that required resources even from the less endowed in the church.

This is not to say that the Hellenistic symposium and other social practices should not be critiqued for being unjust. They absolutely should, but only as their own situations after Luke’s text is properly understood. Just as there are hierarchical social taboos around the meal scene in virtually every culture that should be challenged because of and with Luke’s writings, so the Greek symposium is such a one. But saying that behind Luke’s theme of table fellowship lays the historic institution of the Greek symposium is simply exegetically inaccurate. It exaggerates the historic impact of Hellenistic culture in Israel, especially upon the mind of Jesus. It drains away the significance

⁵ Michael Vickers, *Greek Symposia* (Joint Association of Classical Teachers: London, 1978). See also S. Scott Bartchy, ‘Table Fellowship’ in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 1992), p.796. See also D. E. Smith, ‘Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,’ *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 613.

of the Jewish Passover as the backdrop to Jesus' upper room meal. It causes us to lose clarity into the meaning of true table fellowship, when we see in the other person's eating a symbolic lesson about internalizing Jesus by the Spirit. And it detours our theological thinking: Social ethics are most firmly derived from foundational truths about the meaning of Jesus' life, teachings, death and resurrection within the context of Israel and Israel's literary heritage, not elsewhere.

The Theme of Sight

Another Hebraic theme used by Luke that is also very relevant to our discussion about Luke's treatment of wealth is that of spiritual sight (and its converse, blindness). There is one early mention of the theme of sight involving one of Isaiah's Servant Songs. It occurs when the aged Simeon in the Jerusalem temple encounters the baby Jesus. After years of waiting for God to fulfill a promise made to him, that he would 'see' Israel's Messiah, Simeon comes 'in the Spirit into the temple.' At long last, he takes the baby Messiah into his arms and says, 'Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel' (Lk.2:29 – 32, quoting Isa.49:6). The sight of Simeon, who says that his eyes have 'seen' God's salvation, is the sight of faith empowered by the Spirit. It is also the sight of the one who sees that God is restoring not Israel only, but the Gentiles. Thus there is a double meaning in Simeon's sight. He sees that others too will regain their spiritual sight, and who those others will be: both Israel and the Gentiles. Significantly, however, Simeon passes quickly from the narrative, both because Luke's narration moves along quickly and because Simeon apparently dies soon after. He is the last character to 'see' these things until after the resurrection.

In the meantime, everyone else is blind. The theme of sight appears in Jesus' famous Nazareth proclamation, also in connection with a text from one of Isaiah's Servant Songs.

Lk.4:16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom.

He stood up to read,

¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and **recovery of sight to the blind,**

to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll,

gave it back to the attendant,

and sat down.

The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

This passage is important because the theme of sight is bound up with the larger theme of reversal, where the oppressed are freed and so on. This theme of reversal is found in various Old Testament passages. For example, Jesus is drawing on Isaiah 61:1 – 2, which reads:

The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God. (Isaiah 61:1 – 2)

One intriguing aspect of Jesus' announcement is that he inserts 'recovery of sight to the blind' into the Isaianic text. Additionally, by saying in the outer line of the chiasm in v.20 that all eyes were fixed on Jesus, Luke underscores sight as the pivotal issue. Why does he do this? We will answer this question after we examine another major one.

The Jews at Nazareth thought 'the poor' and 'the oppressed' were themselves. They were living in Roman occupied territory, in the shadow of a Roman garrison, under conditions of oppression. Popular interpretation today would take Jesus in this passage as referring primarily to the socio-economically poor and oppressed categorically, without concern for why such communities are specifically afflicted by poverty and oppression. This concern, while legitimately present elsewhere, is not the likely meaning of Jesus' proclamation here, and this is where I disagree with Tannehill. The Israelites in the Nazareth synagogue were sorely disappointed by Jesus' explanation of Isaiah, because Jesus followed his announcement with the statement that while many widows in Israel suffered from the famine, Elijah went to the widow at Zarephath in Sidon; likewise many lepers in Israel went uncleansed, but Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian. Usually scholars identify how stinging Jesus' pronouncement was because he mentioned

the widow and the Syrian general. After all, in one of the most nationalistic communities in the Galilee area, Nazareth, Jesus announced God's grace to the advantage of Israel's sworn enemies. In just two brief examples, Jesus struck at the core of his contemporaries' worldview.

The Israelites, long accustomed to thinking of themselves as the poor and oppressed group who would benefit from the Isaianic Servant's action, were now compared to a pagan nation. The Northern Kingdom of Israel to which Elijah and Elisha were sent was not a valid covenant nation. The historian of Kings said that they did not even really worship YHWH (2 Ki.17:21), perhaps because they did not obey the Davidic king, worship at Jerusalem, and/or uphold the correct covenant history. They apostasized more quickly than the Southern Kingdom of Judah and were exiled by Assyria. In this regard there was a deeper insult riding on Jesus' linking himself to Elijah and Elisha, and especially Elisha since John the Baptist had already played the role of Elijah. Both of those prophets were sent to the soon-to-be-overthrown Northern Kingdom. This motif is even more poignant because of the fact that the historian of Kings had already dressed Elijah and Elisha in the literary garb of Moses and Joshua during the wilderness wandering and the conquest of the Canaanites.⁶ By identifying himself with them not only through this proclamation but also through his baptism in the Jordan, temptation in the wilderness, and symbolic re-entry into the land as its new Joshua, Jesus stepped into a story line resonating with deep echoes. He communicated again that all Israel itself had become false. He symbolically aligned his contemporaries with both the idolatrous Canaanites of old and the idolatrous Northern Kingdom. This is in line with Luke's overall narrative thrust. God's program with Israel had now shifted to the person of Jesus Christ and his worldwide restoration, and the Israelites who were trying to hold on to an empty political entity – their nationhood – rejected Jesus. So Jesus could not have picked better symbolic predecessors. His ministry was like that of Elijah and Elisha because he was now gathering to himself the remnant who would believe rightly before God scattered the nation.

It would seem, then, that Jesus' identified the 'poor and oppressed' as the Gentiles, and in the immediate context, the Romans. Despite being Israel's captors, they were trapped in sin and excluded from covenanting with Israel's God. Of course, Jesus would also extend God's grace to repentant Israelites. But the notion that Jesus is here speaking about literal, physical poverty and oppression on the socio-political level can be challenged. Although Jesus speaks in many places about giving to the poor and having compassion on them, and although these verses can be seen in that light, it would seem that that is not their primary meaning. The phrase 'recovery of sight to the blind' lends more weight to identifying 'the poor and the oppressed' in a spiritual way. By adding this phrase, Jesus also invoked Isaiah 42:1 – 7:

Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold, My chosen one in whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon him; He will bring forth justice to **the nations**. He will not cry out or raise his voice, nor make his voice heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break and a dimly burning wick he will not extinguish; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not be disheartened or crushed until he has established justice in **the earth** and **the coastlands** will wait expectantly for his law. Thus says God the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its offspring, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it, 'I am the LORD, I've called you in righteousness; I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you; and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to **the nations to open blind eyes**, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison. (Isaiah 42:1 – 7, boldface mine)

This passage connects the phrase, 'recovery of sight to the blind' to the Isaianic Servant restoring Gentiles to fellowship with God. Though even Isaiah was not clear on exactly what would happen (Eph.3:5 – 6), the nations would be blessed along with Israel because of this Servant. By conflating these two passages from Isaiah, Jesus is claiming that the passage in Isaiah 61:1 – 2 should not be applied to only Israel. It should be applied to all humanity, Jew and Gentile.

With this insight, we can better move through the passage in Luke. The reason Jesus speaks this way in the Nazareth synagogue is because he is announcing his worldwide ministry, not just his ministry to Israel retaining Israel's privileged status among the nations. This seems confirmed by the series of narrative pericopes in the local context. When Luke introduces Jesus' ministry (Lk.3:21 – 38), he highlights Jesus' descent from Adam in 11 sets of 7 generations. Jesus is the 77th son of God. By tracing Jesus' genealogy back to Adam as God's son, and structuring the genealogy around the Hebrew number of completion, Luke is suggesting something along these lines: All humanity comes to completion or rest in Jesus; Jesus is the true son of God, Jesus is the redeeming son of Adam, or something of the sort. Whatever the precise message, one thing is clear. Luke is putting Jesus in the context of all humanity starting from Adam, not just Israel starting from Abraham, which Matthew does. Luke is suggesting from the start: Jesus is not just saving Israel but opening salvation up to Jew and Gentile.

⁶ Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, *The Literary Guide to the Bible*.

Furthermore, Jesus' temptations (Lk.4:1 – 13) echo the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve. The three temptations of Jesus echo the three perceptions Eve had of the forbidden fruit.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened... (Gen.3:6 – 7)

Jesus' temptation to alleviate his own hunger corresponds with seeing that the tree was good for food, the temptation to possess the nations corresponds to the delight to the eyes, and the temptation to make a spectacle at the temple under the rubric of the Son of God identity corresponds to the desire to claim God-like status, in this case through wisdom. That Jesus does not succumb to Satan's tempting is of course significant; not only has Jesus not fallen, he will later rout Satan completely. The parallel is all the more meaningful given Jesus' state of deprivation in contrast to Adam and Eve's state of abundance. The overtures to a restoration made available to all humanity cannot be missed. If we were to make subtitles for each of these sections, we might use the following:

Lk.3:21 – 38	Jesus, the Climax of the Human Race
Lk.4:1 – 13	Jesus the New Adam Survives the Temptations
Lk.4:14 – 21	Jesus Comes to Restore...
Lk.4:22 – 30	Restore Both Jew and Gentile

Thus, the context in which the initial occurrences of Luke's theme of sight is the openness of the gospel to both Jew and Gentile, with special emphasis on 'Gentile' since Israel had long enjoyed a privileged status as the chosen people.

The ability to perceive God's intent to open salvation to all humanity is precisely what defines spiritual sight over against spiritual blindness. The Nazareth synagogue proclamation is thematically connected to, and indeed literarily dependent on, Simeon's statement in this way. Although the eyes of all in the synagogue are fixed on Jesus, they do not perceive the spiritual reality God is inaugurating. They do not understand the true meaning of the Isaianic Servant's role. Hence they are blind.

Blindness is lifted by recognizing that Jesus is the heir to David's throne over all humanity. One other Lukan incident involving sight, the healing of the blind man just outside Jericho, suggests this. Mark identifies him as Bartimaeus (Mk.10:46 – 52). In this pericope (Lk.18:35 – 43), Bartimaeus calls Jesus the 'Son of David.' This is a Messianic identification, obviously referring to Jesus' legitimate claim on David's throne, which was by that time considered to be or foreshadow God's world-embracing reign (Ps.2). We know from very early in Luke's narrative that Jesus was guaranteed David's throne (Lk.1:32). So this appellation is no accident, and in its historical context, it is of great significance; many would have disputed Jesus' claim to that title. Jesus affirms this personal gesture of faith: 'Receive your sight, your faith has made you well' (Lk.18:42). Hence, this passage suggests that faith in Jesus as the Messianic Son of David, the heir to David's throne over the whole human world, is the requirement for having one's spiritual sight healed.

In addition, literarily and (from all accounts) historically, this healing of blindness follows right on the heels of Jesus' private prophecy of his resurrection to the disciples (Lk.18:33) and the very mysterious editorial statement, 'They understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said' (Lk.18:34). This strongly suggests a link between Jesus' Davidic claim and humanity's ability to perceive it prior to his resurrection. One can only ask questions: What kind of hiddenness was this? Who hid the meaning of this saying from them? What will allow the disciples to perceive and comprehend this statement correctly? What is the relation between Jesus' resurrection and the healing of humanity's spiritual sight?

Sight once again figures prominently when Luke uses the final Servant Song, the Song of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12, as the backdrop and framework of his Cross and Resurrection account. The passage is set off by Jesus' announcement in Lk.22:37 that he is now fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, 'And he was numbered with transgressors,' which is of course from Isa.53:12. The Suffering Servant prophecy revolves around proper sight: the kings of the earth will 'see' the servant (Isa.52:13), and while the servant's appearance is ordinary and unremarkable (53:2), his achievement in service is utterly astonishing for those who can perceive it spiritually. 'He will sprinkle many nations,' but the question is still, 'To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?' (Isa.52:13)

The motif of sight recurs in Luke's Cross and Resurrection account along the same lines. At the close of the Garden of Gethsemane scene, Jesus says, 'This hour and the power of darkness are yours' (Lk.22:53). Not until the dawning of the sun on resurrection morning do references to light appear. A climate of gloom and darkness pervades the narrative. For example, while people 'see' Simon Peter and interrogate him, Simon Peter fails to 'see' the gravity of his own situation. When Jesus 'looks' at him, though, they lock eyes and Peter finally sees his weakness

and need for salvation (Lk.22:56, 58, 61). The trial progresses to the ironic point of Jesus being blindfolded although his inquisitors are spiritually blinded. This is underscored by Luke's omission of the phrase 'you shall see' from Jesus' mouth when Jesus claims that he, as the Danielic Son of Man, will be seated in power on the clouds of heaven (Lk.22:69). Matthew and Mark include the phrase (Mt.26:64, Mk.14:62). Luke suggests that Jesus will be vindicated as the Danielic Son of Man, but Israel's leaders will not 'see' it. If this omission is significant to Luke, as we believe, then Luke is again emphasizing the Jerusalem leadership's spiritual blindness: Even when Jesus is vindicated as the Messiah by the destruction of Jerusalem, they will not perceive it as such.

Furthermore, Luke seems to draw contrasts between those who see Jesus as the suffering servant and those who do not. There is a contrast between the two rulers (Herod and Pilate), who 'see' Jesus (Lk.23:8) with physical but not spiritual eyes, and the two Emmaus disciples, who eventually do see Jesus both physically and spiritually. There is a contrast between the Israelite people, who were 'looking on' at Jesus on the Cross, and the centurion who praised God because he 'saw' Jesus give up his spirit (Lk.23:47). And there is a contrast between the multitude and the disciples: While the multitude 'observed' these occurrences (Lk.23:48) and beat their breasts in lament, Jesus' acquaintances stood at a distance, emotions unrecorded, 'seeing these things' (Lk.23:49). When darkness falls on Israel as Jesus breathes his last, suggesting either that the light of the world had gone out or that Israel had been judged to be spiritually blind, Jesus' male and female disciples are prepared to see light: 'early dawn' and angels in 'dazzling apparel,' and eventually something more.

Like the theme of table fellowship, this theme of sight reaches its climax in the accounts involving the resurrection and the encounters between the disciples and the resurrected Jesus. The strange unnamed obstacle to human sight strikes again, since the Emmaus Road disciples' eyes 'were prevented from recognizing him' (Lk.24:16). Moreover, during the conversation the two disciples have with the unrecognized Jesus, the limit of their human sight is discussed. The women who saw the empty tomb reported what they saw to the men. 'They had also seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive' (Lk.24:23). But when some of the male disciples went to the tomb, they saw that the tomb was indeed empty, but 'him they did not see' (Lk.24:24). Only after Jesus breaks bread with the two disciples on the Emmaus Road does the mysterious barrier fall. 'And their eyes were opened and they recognized him' (Lk.24:31). Although Jesus vanishes immediately afterwards, the apostles are given an extended time with the resurrected Jesus, who says to them, '*See* my hands and my feet, that it is I myself, touch me and *see*, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you *see* that I have' (Lk.24:39, italics mine). Though the apostles are unique in their full sensory experience of the resurrected Jesus, Luke at least implies that faith in the resurrected Jesus causes true spiritual sight to be restored for all who believe. Disciples in general can now perceive and recognize Jesus in the exposition of Israel's Scriptures and in the breaking of the bread. The disciples see that Jesus' death had atoning value as Isaiah foresaw and that Jesus would indeed 'sprinkle many nations.'

We can also integrate Luke's theme of sight into its primary literary reference point, the Hebrew Scriptures. In Israel's Scriptures, human sight becomes a major issue from the fall, where Adam and Eve's eyes were opened to self-centered and self-focused sight. The topic of sight weaves its way through the patriarchs in intriguing ways,⁷ is used in the book of Samuel to describe humanity's inability to perceive God's dealings, and is used repeatedly by Isaiah as a metaphor for restoring both the Gentiles and Israel. Luke takes up sight in these passages we have noted, significantly, by quoting all of Isaiah's Servant Songs. Of particular importance is Luke's portrayal of Jesus' resurrection as, in some sense, reversing or overcoming the fall; self-centered sight at the fall is countered by Christ-centered sight at the resurrection. Luke even uses the same phrase: 'And their eyes were opened' (Lk.24:31, quoting Gen.3:7). Then the Damascus Road conversion of Luke's missionary hero, Paul, revolves around the motif of blindness and sight. Luke is sounding a note resonating deep within the symphony of the Hebrew worldview. Although we cannot make all the literary connections here, it should be abundantly clear that Luke is indeed engaging primarily in a literary correspondence with Israel's Scriptures.

This is why the contest for Israel's Scriptures is of paramount importance for Luke and why he ties sight into it. The newly founded Christian church must 'see' in Israel's Scriptures not only the Messiah, but also the Messiah's mission to the world. All humanity, not just Israel, is eligible to participate in God's new humanity and to eventually inherit all of God's new creation. Luke's use of the theme of sight is his way of emphasizing the new creation, including a new humanity founded on and derived from the bodily resurrection of Jesus. God has designated a new humanity, not around a disembodied Jesus, but a concretely physical resurrected body, which signals the beginning of the new creation with a new Adamic head. Because this is an act of new creation, it has its roots farther back than Abraham. It goes all the way to Adam and the creation, and thus embraces all humanity in principle. Significantly, a mission to the whole world is given to the disciples in this context, which is the correct interpretation of Israel's Scriptures. To perceive this is to 'see' truly.

⁷ See Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*

We risk being repetitious in regards to our study of wealth, but the point cannot be stressed too much. Clearly Luke as an author of literature engages with literary motifs from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. We have asserted that Luke's relation to the Old Testament holds true when we are discussing Luke's theme of wealth and Israel's land; we expect this analysis to give sufficient support to that assertion. While we do not discount Green's or Johnson's attempts to see Luke engaging a Greco-Roman audience using literary motifs familiar to a Hellenistic audience – for such studies are valuable from the point of view of strategic contextualization of the gospel – we cannot go so far as to position Luke's literary work primarily in a Greco-Roman context. Luke does not invent situations, characters or attitudes that did not actually exist in Jesus' ministry. He may take pre-existing historical events and make literary suggestions and omissions, but he still weaves that material tightly around fundamentally Hebraic concerns. Doubtless those recurring themes were inescapable, for if Jesus himself as the most brilliant of all Jewish theologians organized his life and teaching around those motifs, it was simply left to his disciples to tie those themes together.

The Theme of Reversal

The theme of reversal seems to be the main objection. The consequences of Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection are described in the language of rulers being humbled and the humble being elevated, the rich being stripped of their privilege and the poor given new status and resources, the proud being scattered and the hungry being given good things to eat, etc. This pattern begins early in Luke, from the songs of Mary and Zecharias in particular. Clearly Jesus' appearance does mean reversal of some sort, and reversal is probably the dominant literary motif in Luke's Gospel. However, does this theme mean that the poor should simply be given great levels of wealth, that the oppressed should be placed in positions of dominance, etc.? Increasing numbers of commentators on Luke like Yoder, Green, Johnson, and Moxnes now argue for this general interpretation of the theme of reversal, primarily to address some pressing social needs. Again, I affirm the attempt to address social issues. I would recommend a different rubric, however, because it is questionable whether the theme of reversal should be taken in a general form and literalistically in this manner. Four observations can be made regarding this.

First, Mary and Zecharias use the language of reversal in their songs to describe the reversal of *Israel's* unfortunate status as downtrodden among her enemies. Mary and Zecharias are not talking about just any people, or about all people in general. Both refer to 'Abraham' as the reference point of God's covenant with Israel (1:55, 1:73). Both understand God to be enacting signs relevant to all Israel, signaling Israel's long awaited return from exile, conditioned upon Israel's repentance as defined by John and Jesus, which Luke explicitly denotes by quoting from Isaiah 40 in chapter 3. We have seen above how Mary, in the Magnificat (1:53), quotes from Psalm 107, a psalm about *Israel's* return from exile. Thus, when Mary sings about thrones being toppled and the humble being exalted, she is almost certainly thinking of *Israel's* captors and *Israel's* lowly condition as a whole. Her hope is that the Messiah's appearance would mean the return of God's favor to Israel. Her song, in fact, climaxes with her expression of hope for the nation: 'He has given help to *Israel* His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever' (1:54 – 55, italics mine). Likewise Zecharias, before turning to bless his son John the Baptist, begins with precisely the hope that Israel will be delivered from her enemies and restored to God's favor: 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant – as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old – salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us, to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days' (1:68 – 75). Finally, John the Baptist's appearance revolves around and is relevant to 'Israel' (1:80). The fact that all Israel did not and has not welcomed Jesus as Messiah and Lord is itself a reversal of what should have been. Some within Israel have done so, obviously. But as Tannehill notes, this is important to the development of plot in Luke – Acts, even to the end of Acts. It contributes to the irony of the story and in fact deepens the theme of reversal.

Second, both the destruction of the temple and Pentecost are also described using the language of reversal, in cosmic terms. However, mention of the sun turning to darkness and bizarre signs appearing in the heavens (Lk.21:25, Acts 2:19 – 20) does not mean that these things would literally happen on Pentecost or when Jerusalem fell to the Romans. They happened theologically, in the sense that God overturned a long upheld theological order. This has mainly to do with (1) the reversal of Israel's theological status, going from being under the Law to being delivered from the Law and its penalty for sin, (2) the inversion of Israel's expectations of earthly privilege, and (3) the opening wide of the Spirit to the Gentiles. By using language about the cosmos, Jesus and Luke are saying that this reversal is like an overturning of the cosmic order.

Third, when we consider the fact that the theme of sight is also a major part of the larger Lukan theme of reversal, the meaning of this reversal becomes (appropriately) clearer. In addition to the language of rulers being

toppled and the humble being elevated, the meaning of Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection is also described in the language of sight: those who sit in darkness are given light (Lk.1:79), the blind are given sight (Lk.4:18, 7:22), etc. Even if we accept miracles for today as a regular occurrence, it would be very difficult to argue that all physically blind people can or should physically see as a result of Jesus' death and resurrection, even though the language of sight is woven just as deeply (if not more so) into the broad theme of reversal as the language of social positions. This observation suggests that when Jesus mentions the reversal of cosmic regularities, social positions, and physical maladies, he is fundamentally using that language (and those actions) to metaphorically describe a reversal of something else. Namely, Jesus and Luke used physical and political language to describe major theological shifts. These shifts include the challenge to Satan's rule, the negation of ethnic Israel's privileged theological status, the opening of salvation's doors to the Gentiles, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all believers, Jew or Gentile, etc. On the theological level, these are earth-shattering events. They cause the transformation and healing of people's spiritual make-up. This is why in dealing with the theme of reversal, we should move from literal to literary, and from physical to theological. The language does not go the other way round.

Finally, Jesus inaugurates an era where *values* are reversed, not only people's social positions per se, although many people's social positions certainly will be changed. That should be clear from his discourses on materialism. Nowhere does Jesus endorse a desire to be physically rich, even when expressed by the poor. Here is where we diverge most from Green, Johnson, and Moxnes. Because they take only the Lukan themes of *table fellowship* and *wealth*, take the theme of *reversal* at too general a level, and do not consider the themes of *sight*, *Israel*, and *Israel's Scriptures*, they would never draw these conclusions. Yet evidence for this position abounds. We know, for instance, from other places in the New Testament that wealth was given *by* the poor, not just *to* them.

The use of wealth now serves a christocentric purpose. Because Jesus adopted an insecure, fragile position ('the Son of Man has no place to lay his head') by divesting himself of his familial inheritance in Mosaic Israel and calling others to do the same, the giving of wealth and the acceptance of uncertainty serves an ethical and symbolic purpose derived from the model of Jesus himself. Christians must share wealth to support the movement of the gospel and the church across all humanly constructed boundaries. Whether those boundaries are based on class, race, nation, gender, or social status, wealth must be put to the use of embracing and welcoming the outsider and finding that person a place within the church body because of the theme of table fellowship. The church is certainly called to help the poor, and the failure to do this among Christians in the United States, for instance, is a gross failure indeed. Much can be said about this, but that is only a part of the whole picture.

We can press further still. How did the early Christians regard Jesus' beatitude, 'Blessed are you who are poor'? There is no question that they showed a remarkable commitment to it. They went beyond supporting the movement of the gospel across international boundaries, although they did do at least that. They went beyond just redistributing wealth within the church to bring everyone to the same level of wealth, although they certainly did redistribute wealth like Zaccheus did. As we mentioned earlier in reference to Acts, Christians gave up wealth in ways that did not facilitate the formation of a stable community. Among some people, like the apostles, wealth was given up almost completely (Acts 3:1 – 10). This goes beyond a pragmatic 'fund the mission,' 'help the poor' or 'redistribute wealth' stance towards material wealth. The giving of material wealth serves a radical purpose that is both symbolic and real: this is what Jesus himself did, and what he continues to do through those he inhabits by his Spirit. This is what makes the Christian poor especially blessed. They demonstrate that they have a much more valuable source of wealth, just as Peter said, 'Gold and silver I do not have, but what I do have, I give to you.'

Luke's development of the theme of Israel's wealth ends on a clear note: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35). If Jesus and the apostles really wanted an equal distribution of wealth across the church, they would not have permitted the poor to give anything because their basic responsibility would have been to simply receive. Instead, we have a teaching of Jesus where giving now has an importance all its own. Social reversal does happen, and the rich do give to the poor, but it takes place because of a complete reversal of values by and in Jesus Christ. Once again, if we had to sum up Luke's theme of wealth in a few words, it would not be 'equalization.' Nor would 'redistribution' be the most precise term. It would certainly not be 'capitalism is acceptable as is.' It would be 'disinheritance and universal giving.'

The Direction of Contemporary Lukan Scholarship

Why have recent attempts to study Luke's teaching on wealth gone awry? The problem can be evaluated from various standpoints. From the field of biblical studies, the problem has been the failure to locate the Gospels in the same category as Old Testament biblical narrative. One very recent compendium of biblical scholarship compiled in 1992 demonstrates a conspicuous absence: 'Discussion of the literary genre of the NT Gospels involves two basic issues: (1) the literary nature of the canonical Gospels as continuous prose narratives of Jesus' ministry and their relationship to other early Christian writings [e.g. Paul's epistles]; (2) the relationship of the Gospels to

their Greco-Roman literary setting.’⁸ What about adding, ‘and (3) the relationship of the Gospels to the Old Testament narratives’? Why is this option not present?

In 1915, a New Testament scholar named C.W. Votaw compared the Gospels to the popular biographical literature of the Greco-Roman era. In response, K.L. Schmidt argued that the Gospels are a unique type of literature and cannot be compared to any other ancient literature. This view became standard among New Testament scholars until the 1970’s.⁹ Since then, scholars of the Gospels have compared the Gospels to all kinds of Greco-Roman literature: ‘aretologies’ (narratives of purportedly divine men), biographies, histories, or novels of *Greco-Roman origin*. Stimulating as these discussions have been, one omission is glaringly obvious. The Gospels are narratives that emerge out of *Israel’s* history. They were born in a society and culture that had a very developed literary tradition of its own. Therefore, the Gospels should fundamentally be viewed as belonging to the category of *Hebrew narrative*.

In all fairness, however, scholars probably could have made such a classification only recently. It would not be inaccurate to say that understanding of the basic properties of Old Testament biblical narrative passed out of the church’s knowledge base when Gentile anti-Semitism drove the Jews out of the church and made dialogue with the synagogue impossible. Tatian, Jerome, and Origen did not focus their studies on Hebrew narrative per se. In fact, their probable frustration with the Gospels is suggested by their writing harmonizations. Eusebius of Caesaria demonstrates no real understanding of the Gospels, even to the point of subverting the political implications of Luke’s writings in order to support Constantine. Then, rabbinical scholars and Jewish sages focused on the events of 70 and 130 CE. Analysis of Old Testament narrative as literature basically lay dormant until the source criticism movement in the late 1800’s tried to uncover the ‘sources’ behind the present biblical text, largely in an effort to debunk the text. The fruit of this – the Documentary Hypothesis, the notion of four evolving schools in Israelite religion (J, E, P, and D), the Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah hypotheses, etc. – led to eventual dissatisfaction with source criticism. In the 1970’s, Robert Alter, Meir Sternberg, and others wanting to study the text in its final form began to rediscover the literary unity of the Old Testament narratives. These Old Testament scholars identified literary characteristics like repetition, thematic development, structural unity, and varying levels of disclosure by the narrator. Only then did the scholarly community take seriously the formal properties of Hebrew narrative. Since the 1970’s, the dialogue between biblical studies experts in the Old Testament and the New has slowly increased, albeit haltingly due to the division in the academy between Old Testament Theology and New Testament Theology. What we are proposing here is that the properties of Hebrew narrative be considered when studying the Gospels. We are merely taking the recent discoveries of Old Testament literature analysis and applying them to Luke – Acts.

Some theological explanations can now be offered for why Luke’s writings on money are conspicuously avoided in wealthy segments of the church, notably in White American and Asian-American evangelical communities. Four reasons come to mind. The first problem lies in the Puritan separatist tendency to separate themselves from the broader Christian community worldwide. The early Puritans viewed the rest of the church as impure and inferior, so they minimized any sense of responsibility towards the rest of the global body of Christ. This helped make Protestantism in America separatist, nationalistic, and generally apathetic towards the rest of the world. Since this conflicted with Luke’s strong critique of ethnocentrism, American Protestants avoided the real sting of Luke’s writings by focusing on the Exodus and promised land narrative.

Second, all White American churches in the U.S. began as immigrant churches, much like the Asian-American churches with which I am personally quite familiar. Immigrant insecurities and ambitions won out over Jesus’ teaching. Jesus’ teaching on disinheritance from family wealth, universal giving, and pilgrimage ran roughshod over the immigrant dream of financial betterment in the ‘New World’ and the desire to leave one’s children in a better financial situation. But while Asian-American family-based congregations (I have in mind those of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese descent) have spent two to four generations in this posture, White American churches have had centuries to perfect it. This helps explain why clichés and defensive reactions abound when Jesus’ authentic teaching on money, not to mention race and ethnicity, is mentioned. I suspect that the misappropriation of Israel’s Proverbs, with its moderate to affirming view of money and wealth, was a source of legitimation.

Third, White American individualism affected exegesis and life in significant ways. ‘Individual salvation’ was prioritized above ‘corporate salvation.’ A literary treatment of Luke’s Gospel would have corrected this. The absence of a strong theology of Christian community framing the responsibilities of the Christian individual also

⁸ See the articles on Gospel (Genre) in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, edited by Joel Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall. IVP (Downers’ Grove, IL: 1992) p. 276

⁹ *ibid*, p. 277

allowed White Americans to fundamentally disregard the multi-class and multi-ethnic vision of the church, a vision which runs strong in Matthew and even more strongly in Luke, not least in Luke's vision of 'table fellowship.'

This corresponded, fourth, with a tendency to view any ethical command as a 'guilt-producing device.' White American Protestants created a theological culture where the Epistles were normative and the Gospels had mixed importance. The earthly Jesus' ethical teaching was seen as part and parcel of the Mosaic Law with the intention of producing 'guilt' in his hearers. His teaching, in this schema, was never really meant to be lived or practiced in community. This tendency crystallized in the form of 'dispensational theology,' where Jesus' ministry was explicitly seen as heightening Israel's 'need for the atonement.' This grew to monstrous proportions, such that the 'saved individual' became the 'saved sovereign individual,' somewhat theologically removed from any ethical constraints. Though the Epistles themselves carried enough convicting material on the subjects of wealth (e.g. in James) and ethnicity (e.g. in Paul), many commands in the Bible as a whole were categorized as 'law,' which was interpreted as merely driving us to 'grace,' which was misinterpreted to mean 'forgiveness' at the expense of 'transformation and empowerment.' Since the cross of Christ was viewed as subtly discontinuous with any kind of ethical expectations, the actual following of New Testament commands of any sort was relativized. This was especially true with Matthew and Luke, both of whom write extensively about such commands. The lack of a serious literary methodology in approaching the Gospels again led to a view of the Gospels as merely 'sources of historical information about Jesus.' They were not viewed as pastoral and theological documents with a very clear message and vision for the church.

Another problem from within the tradition of liberation theology occurred in the reverse direction with regards to the fields of exegesis and hermeneutics. It is unfortunate that Lukan scholars have allowed a perfectly legitimate concern for the poor, which appears with great conviction in numerous places in Luke and elsewhere, to override responsible exegesis of particular texts and arguably Luke as a whole. Having uncovered concern for the poor in other Lukan passages, they proceed to read it into all of them. Although it is humorous how often this happens, it is particularly unfortunate that we vilify the Pharisees for whatever problems we see around us. If we are critiquing the medieval Catholic notion of individual works-righteousness, we condemn the Pharisees for such an attitude.¹⁰ Now that the world's concern has shifted to critiquing capitalistic excess, the Pharisees again catch it on the chin. If they appear the least bit materialistic and systematically oppressive, we saddle them with our own vices and condemn them for it. Unfortunately, this new portrait of the Pharisees simply will not stand. They were not the wealthy class in Israel. Nor were they the most stingy Israelite party, since they did give alms and were quite strict about tithing. And it is doubtful that we can properly accuse them of systematically oppressing people *based on economic power*. The argument can be made that non-Christian Jews did in fact wield political-economic power when they expelled Jewish Christians from the synagogues, as did occur in John 9:34 – 35, and from a literary perspective, the New Testament braces its readers for such a fate; but much recent scholarship has emerged that strongly suggests that relations between Christian Jews and non-Christian Jews were actually quite good well into the fifth or sixth centuries.¹¹

This strikes a sensitive nerve of Lukan interpretation. To suggest that the theme of reversal in Luke describes the reversal of spiritual privilege and not necessarily economic privilege is to run the sure risk of being called 'conservative,' or 'naïve,' and possibly incurring the anger of many who have admirably dedicated their lives to addressing injustice under the auspices of a particular interpretation of Luke or other passage of Scripture. Ever since the oversimplified view of history espoused by Marx – that all historical conflicts are really between a bourgeois party and a proletariat faction over economic power – has been used as a hermeneutical tool by some

¹⁰ We project onto them Luther's conscience-stricken dread of never being 'good enough' to merit salvation, ignore their political aspirations so that they seem to be only concerned with individual salvation, and sometimes go so far as to suggest that Jesus outraged them simply by calling God the overintimate 'abba.' That idea is still in currency and is difficult to overturn in Protestant circles, where everything tends to boil down to a matter of individual salvation anyway. Sanders, Wright, Dunn, and others have provided us with ample evidence that the Pharisees believed in election and grace (so why would you need to individually earn your way to God?), were actually politically revolutionary, and concerned with defining Jewish ethnic distinctions spelled out by the Torah (much like some in minority communities in the U.S. argue about who is more or less black, Asian, etc.). While the way the New Testament deals with their error indeed informs how we should deal with ours, we introduce major interpretive problems by making a simple comparison between their concerns and ours. In Matthew, receiving the disciples of Jesus is equivalent to receiving Jesus. How the church is received by the nations is the litmus test for their reception into the one new covenant body. Those who minister to the persecuted disciples, despite their social stigma, will inherit eternal life. This tight identification between Jesus and his disciples is vital to the working of the covenant community and reflects how seriously Jesus is indeed Immanuel, 'God with us.'

¹¹ Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (Harper Collins: New York, 2006), p.137; see also Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Harper Collins: New York, 1996), p.64

liberation theologians, Luke has been read increasingly in economic terms. Yet not all conflict was (or is) based on differences in economic power. A good deal of human conflict is social, religious, and ideological, even to the point where differences in economic power are inverted in relation to the primary issue. Although Luke does teach on wealth quite often and quite stringently, the ethics of using money have less to do with differences in economic power lurking behind every conflict in Luke's text and more to do with the mission and character of Jesus Christ in any given situation. It is my conclusion that theologians with Marxist presuppositions have unduly influenced exegesis. The fact that Luke has been the favorite of the four Gospels among them should be reason enough to suspect that their results were predetermined from their assumptions.