

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Scripture* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_scripture-01.php

THE WAY OF THE LORD

Luke seems to have viewed the continuity of salvation history as a course (*dromon*) or a way (*Odos*). He may have derived this concept from his reading of Mark (1,1) "Beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet . . . 'A voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.'" ¹

The Marcan account began with a citation of Isaiah 40,3: "prepare the way of the Lord". Luke continues the quotation two verses farther to include Isaiah 40,5. He thereby emphasizes (30,6) that "the way of the Lord" leads to the Gentiles: "and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Further traces of Lucan universalism appear when at Nazareth Jesus spoke of non-Israelites who were blessed of old (Lk. 4,25ff) and at Pentecost the representatives of the nations were present (Acts 2,5ff). Isaiah 40,5 closes Luke's portrayal of the way (Acts 28,28): "therefore be it known to you that this 'salvation of God' is sent 'to the Gentiles'—and they will listen." Luke begins and ends his presentation with this text which underscores the way of the Lord to the Gentiles.

Luke's terminology reveals that the stages in his history of salvation are defined in terms of times fixed by God and are presented as a way travelled by the protagonists at each stage.² Paul's sermon at Antioch (Acts 13,16ff.) clearly states Luke's theology of history. Lucan terminology portrays the history of salvation as a way: "As John was finishing his course (*dromon*), he said . . ." (13,25). John's preaching preceded Jesus' entrance (*eisodos*, 13,24).

The public ministry of Jesus is depicted as a way (13,33): "it is necessary for me to be on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it is impossible that a prophet should die outside Jerusalem;" and Lk. 22,22: "The Son of man goes as it has been determined."³ At the Transfiguration Moses and Elias spoke with Jesus in the terminology of a way (9,31): "they spoke of his *exodus*."⁴ The Christian movement is called "the way" (9,2; 19,9 and 23; 22,4; 24,14 and 22). Apostleship is defined in terms of a trip (1,21f.); Paul's farewell address at Miletus refers to the conclusion of his ministry as the completion of his course (*dromon*).

Luke expresses the history of salvation in the terminology of a way.

¹ W. C. Robinson, *The Way of the Lord. A Study of History and Eschatology in the Gospel of Luke*, a doctoral dissertation accepted at the University of Basel (Basel, 1960) questions Conzelmann's interpretation of Luke in *Die Mitte der Zeit* and suggests that Luke's main theme is his notion of "way", which envisages the activity of Jesus as a journey, "the way of the Lord." This concept is treated in a subdivision pp. 61-69, of the dissertation.

² H. J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (London, 1958), p. 231f.

³ Hauck and Schulz, art. *poreusma*, *TWNT*, VI, p. 574.

⁴ W. Michaelis, *TWNT*, V, 111 n.13; B. Reicke, *TWNT*, VI, p. 685, p. 20f.

His narrative corresponds to the concept of a way so as to suggest an orderly movement along a way or course. This concept of salvation history appears throughout his Gospel. Luke has schematized the first part of Mark's account of Jesus' ministry in Galilee to present a pragmatic and orderly course of movement. The way began in Nazareth (4,16), extended to Capharnum (4,31) and continued "throughout all Judea" (4,44).⁵ The completeness of Jesus' ministry is expressed spatially by the phrase, "throughout all Judea" (23,5; Acts 10,37); it is expressed temporally by the phrase "during the whole time," (Acts 1,21).

The way of the Lord is the way Jesus has gone as the leader of his people. The way recapitulates the familiar Old Testament pattern of disaster and restoration, and, as the Joseph stories insist, of the contrast between the machinations of evil men and the good counsel of God.

The outline of this theme is already drawn in the episode at Nazareth which Luke has serves as the introduction to the rest of his Gospel and Acts. Jesus announces himself as the prophet sent by God to preach a gospel and to heal, indicates the universal scope of his mission, is rejected and, like Stephen in Acts 7,48, is thrown out of the city to be killed. Yet he passes through the midst of his would-be destroyers and goes on his way. The word used to describe this (*Poreuomai*) is also used in Luke 22,22 and 33 of his journey to death, and in Acts 1,10f. of the ascension to heaven or to the Father.

Luke does not permit the way to return to Galilee after the death of Jesus in Jerusalem, because the next stage of the way must "begin from Jerusalem" (Lk. 24,47; Acts 1,8). Consequently, Luke changes the statement to the women at the tomb: Mk. 16,7 reads "say to his disciples and to Peter that he goes before you into Galilee; there you will see him, as he said to you." Lk. 24,6 reads "Remember how he spoke to you, while he was still in Galilee, saying the Son of man must be given over into the hands of sinners. . . ." The course of the way in Acts is familiar: "beginning from Jerusalem" (Lk. 24,47) and extending to Rome (Acts 1,8).

According to Luke's theological understanding, the way is an actualization of God's purpose. The way of Jesus is laid out for him. The Son of Man indeed goes his designated way (22,22). The writings of Luke bear witness to the mysterious 'must' (*dei*).⁶ God's providence has determined that Jesus must enter into the home of Zaccheus for salva-

⁵ W. C. Robinson, p. 6 states that Luke does not always express the orderly course of saving events with topographical emphasis. Luke avoids Mark's disjointed collection of episodes and creates a chain of events by modifying the introductions to sections in 5.17-6,11 = Mk. 2.1-3.6).

⁶ G. W. H. Lampe, "The Lucan Portrait of Christ," *New Testament Studies* 2 (1955-56), p. 167.

tion had come to that house that day (19,5 and 9). Jesus had to leave Capharnum because he had been sent to preach in all the cities of Israel (4,42f.). This "must" governs every step on the way of the Lord, which God had ordained from the beginning. The way is foretold in scripture chiefly as a way of suffering (22,37). The divine plan guarantees that along this way there is neither accident nor chance.

The word *dei* is used with special frequency in Luke, where it occurs forty-four times out of hundred and two times in the whole NT.⁷ It expresses submission to the will of God, which personally summons men and which fashions history according to its plan. Jesus is always submissive to this will (4,43; 13,33; 22,37; 24,44, and, in the context of the passion, 9,22; 17,24; 24,7 and 26). Jesus' witness also obey the same divine will (Acts 5,29; 9,7; 16:14,22, etc.)

In this context those Lucan passages should be noted which concern the futility of trying to withstand God. Gamaliel warns the Sanhedrin not to oppose God (Acts 5,39). Peter defends himself in the case of Cornelius: "Who was I that I could withstand God?" (11,17). The risen Christ tells Paul: "It hurts you to kick against the goad" (26,14); nor can Paul resist his vision (11,19).

Luke's view of the divine purpose applies to Jesus' life prior to his ministry (2,49). Within his ministry it is applied to his suffering, death and resurrection (9,22; 17,25; 24,7 and 26; Acts 3,21). Subsequent to Jesus' earthly ministry the will of God includes Jesus' Ascension into heaven until the restoration of all things according to the prophecies (24,26; Acts 3,21).⁸

The Lucan statements on the range of Christ's way are rooted in a faith that the historical course which Christ followed has its origin and termination in a world beyond this. Jesus spoke repeatedly about the eschatological future of the Son of Man, whom all peoples will see at the end coming to judge mankind.⁹ The way of the Lord stretches from the beginning to the end of time.

God's purpose appears in the term "designate" (*orizo*),¹⁰ (22,22, Acts 3,21; 4,28): "The Son of Man goes his designated way, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed." The risen Christ is designated by God as the judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10,42; 17,31). Paul's course is also "designated" by the divine purpose (*dei*—Acts 9,16; 14,22; 19,21; 23,11; *procheirizomai*—22,14; 26,16).

⁷ E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, tr. J. Marsh (London, 1963), p. 26.

⁸ H. Flender, *St. Luke Theologian of Redemptive History*, tr. R. and I. Fuller (London 1967), p. 143 n.4.

⁹ W. C. Robinson, p. 65.

¹⁰ E. Stauffer, p. 27.

The Spirit leads the way (4,1 and 14; Acts 16,6-10), expressing the divine purpose. In the sermon opening his public ministry at Nazareth (4,16ff.), Jesus read from Isaiah 61 "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" and said "today the scripture is fulfilled". The Spirit is poured out on those who are to be witnesses in the ministry of the Church, and the prophecy of Joel is fulfilled (Acts 2).

Through the Spirit's guidance the divine plan of salvation is realized in the community. The divine economy of salvation is designated by the term *boule* (7,30; Acts 20,27 and, with reference to Christ only, Acts 2,23; 4,28; 5,38). Many compounds of this word occur with the prefix *pro-*. One group of these compounds deals with divine predestination. Christ (Acts 3,20), the witnesses of the resurrection (10,41), Paul (22,14; 26,16), and even Jesus' adversaries (4,28), are said to be predestined (= designated) by God to do certain things. The other groups refer to the word of God in scripture, which is seen beforehand in visions (2,31), proclaimed beforehand (3,18; 7,52; 13,24), prophesied (1,16), and thus associated with divine predestination (= designation).¹¹

This does not mean that the course of the history of salvation denies man's freedom of choice. The Jews could have acted differently. The Church is the Spirit-guided community following the way of the Lord. At times the Spirit persuades its members to act otherwise than they would have done. Divine providence stands alongside of blindness to God's ways on the part of his witnesses. They must wait for the Spirit to show them the way (Acts 13,1f.; 1,14). The Spirit guides Peter to the Gentile mission, although he had objected three times to it (10,9ff.). Contrary to the itinerary which he had planned for himself, Paul is guided to Europe (16,6ff.).

The continuity and unity of history in the divine plan of salvation do not exclude the contingency of history and the element of surprise for those who follow the way of the Lord.¹² The Holy Spirit, guiding the apostolic community, gives continuity to the acts of God in the ongoing course of history. The Spirit creates that history of salvation through the dialectical relation between His own activity and the decisions of His community.

Luke emphasizes prophecy and fulfillment as the expression and realization of God's purpose (*dei* and fulfillment of prophecy 22,37; 24,44; Acts 1,16; 3,21). At Miletus (Acts 20,27) Paul said "I did not shrink from proclaiming to you the whole plan of God." Luke himself seeks through his gospel and Acts to declare "the whole plan of God."

The one and only God governing the history of salvation (Acts

¹¹ K. L. Schmidt, art. *orizo*, *TWNT*, V, p. 453f.

¹² H. Flender, p. 143.

17,23f.; 14,15), gives it a universal scope, from the creation of all things (Acts 17,24ff.; 14,15; Lk. 3,38; Acts 17,28) to "the restoration of all" concerning which the prophets had spoken (Acts 3,21).¹³ This universal scope extends from the creation of man and the determining of the external factors of his history (Acts 17,25ff.) to his final judgment which God has designated for all mankind (Acts 17,31; also 1,7; 10,42). Thus creation and history (Jewish and Gentile) are united in the course of salvation established by God.

Although God had apparently allowed the Gentiles to go their own ways in the past (Acts 14,16) he did not, however, leave himself without witness. Nature testified of God (14,17; 17,26f.), and the possibility of a natural knowledge of God is assumed (17,27; also 10,35). The Jews were ignorant of the prophecies of the suffering Messiah (Acts 3,17; 13,27) and yet fulfilled them by condemning him. Israel's past, like Gentile history can be conceived as a way. Luke notes (Acts 7,39) that the Israelites had been guilty of "turning back in their hearts" to Egypt (Ex. 32,8).

Luke maintains the Septuagint view of history that following God meant keeping his commandments (1,6; Acts 7,53) and going in the way which the Lord commanded (Deut. 5,32f.; Kings 3,14), not turning aside to the right or to the left (Deut. 5,32f.; 9,16; 28,13f.). False prophets led from the way which God commanded Israel to go (Deut. 5,32f.; also Acts 20,30). A Jewish false prophet's opposition to the Christian faith is described as "making crooked the straights ways of the Lord" (Acts 13,10).¹⁴

Luke viewed the *present* as a stage along the way of the Lord which had its own meaning within that redemptive-historical context.¹⁵ Luke regarded the apostolic beginnings of the Church and Jesus' ministry as past history continuing into his own age. He wrote during the epoch inaugurated at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The kingdom of God was still being preached and "everyone" was still entering it (Lk. 16,16); however, the declaration made at the appearance of the Baptist had not yet been fully realized; "And all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Lk. 3,6 from Isa. 40,5). The "times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21,24) followed upon the rejection of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem. The Church was engaged in the Gentile mission because it believed that the Spirit of God was leading it to this enterprise.

Luke thought of himself and the Church as living in the time between Jesus' two advents. The *past* assured Christians (Lk. 1,4) of the legiti-

¹³ H. Flender, p. 145.

¹⁴ W. C. Robinson, p. 67.

¹⁵ W. C. Robinson, p. 68.

macy of Christianity¹⁶ Luke's writings had shown the orderly progress of the way of the Lord, and Christians understood that the plan of God embraced them. Jesus' purification and taking possession of the Temple for his teaching and for later gatherings of Christians, had shown that the true Israel was the Church rather than the Synagogue. The converse of the Church's temporary possession of the Temple appears in Jerusalem's rejection of Jesus and her consequent destruction.

The authentic apostolic witness assured the legitimacy of the Christian mission. The apostolic community possessed the teaching of Jesus. Luke's travel account emphasized the authentication of the witnesses and the content of their testimony. The Lucan account stressed the power of the Spirit in Christian witness rather than in Jesus' exorcisms (Lk. 12,12). The parable of the sower (8,4ff.) interprets the apostolic preaching as the sowing of the word of God and the response of converts as accepting the word (Lk. 8,15 and 21; also 11,27ff.).

In the Lucan account Jerusalem is an example of a divine visitation demanding decision. The teaching of Jesus emphasizes the radicality of man's decisions (Lk. 9,57ff.; 14,25ff.) and the grace of God inspiring and supporting them (Lk. 10,29ff.; 15,11ff.). Jesus' ministry is the paradigm of God's gracious reign (Lk. 4,18-21; 7,21f.; Acts 2,22; 10,38). Joy (Lk. 2,10 . . . Acts 2,46; 8,8; 13,52; 15,3) rather than anxiety about worldly concerns (Lk. 8,14; 10,41f.; 12,11, 22ff., 24f.; 21,34) should therefore pervade Christian life.

The Christians' assurance for the *future* should free them from fear.¹⁷ Their Father has given them the kingdom (Lk. 12,32); within which they enjoy the benevolent reign of God. Assurance regarding the end is not attainable by means of apocalyptic calculation, because the final cosmic signs are not in sequence with preliminary natural and historical signs. The final signs will be clearly recognizable, but for those who are not ready it will be too late (Lk. 17,21; Acts 1,7). The way to be ready is to stay ready through regular participation in the life of the Christian community (Lk. 21,34-36; 12,35-40ff.; 17,26ff.). Luke always restricts the realization of God's redemptive plan to the apostolic community.¹⁸

Christians are assured that the future is in God's plan, and that they find their place in it as members of the way. The signs and wonders which characterize the ministry of the Church (Acts 4,30; 5,12; 6,8; 14,3; 15,12) show that God is with the Church just as He had been with Jesus during his ministry (2,22; 10,38) and with Israel (7,36). The divine

¹⁶ W. C. Robinson, p. 116.

¹⁷ S. Schulz, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 54 (1963), p. 104ff.

¹⁸ W. C. Robinson, p. 115.

¹⁹ W. C. Robinson, p. 114.

plan continues to realize itself in the history of salvation along the way of the Lord.

Luke views history as a course of events following a schedule of times set by God and moving along a "way" leading to the Gentiles. It can be described by the Septuagint expression which Luke found in the beginning of Mark and underscored in his own work: the way of the Lord. It is the way of the Father's will, of Jesus and his community. Through the transmission of his Holy Spirit the Risen Christ abides with his people and guides them along the way of the Lord for the salvation of all mankind.²⁰

JOHN NAVONE

Gregoriana, Rome

²⁰ G. W. H. Lampe, p. 167.

S. Schulz, "Gottes Vorsehung bei Lukas," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 54 (1963, pp. 104-116, states that Luke is the author of a salvation-history in which, between the creation and the consummation, there are three ages—that of Israel, of Jesus and of the Church. Underlying and directing everything is God's providence and His purpose. Though not explicitly formulated in the Gospel, this viewpoint is manifest in many ways. (1) In the abundance of *pro-compounds*. (2) The subject of these compounds is not God but God's design, His providence and will. (3) The terms *horizein*, *tithenai*, *histanei* and *tassein* confirm this view of providence. (4) So also do the words *dei* and *mellein*. (5) Certain key statements support this thesis: it is hard for Paul to kick against the goad (Acts 26,14), a typical *fatum* statement; Paul must first preach to the Jews (Acts 13,46); Peter's vision (Acts 10.8ff.). The Lucan view of history is not the concept of election which is found in the Old Testament and in later Judaism. Schulz believes that it is a providential history interpreted according to Hellenistic and Roman ideas of *fatum* and *anagke*.

However, that God wills all these events Luke makes clear by means of the following devices: (1) the history, geography and biography of the salvation events; (2) miracles and signs; (3) frequent statements about *pneuma*, the angels and visions; (4) proofs from Scripture; (5) preaching, witness, apology. Thus Luke, according to Schulz, shows that salvation is present and only present where God's providence wills it.