



SATAN IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD: EXPLORING CENTRAL MOTIFS IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

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ABSTRACT

This essay identifies and discusses some of the salient features contained in the central motifs employed in Luke's gospel. It begins by addressing the key controversies involved in Lukan biblical scholarship such as the Theophilus reference in the Prologue; the Pauline connection; Luke's stated purpose for writing his gospel; and Luke's alleged concerns with imperial Rome. Then it proceeds to examine the central organizing principle or leitmotif of Luke's gospel, the messianic identity of Christ, in relation to other dominant theological themes such as righteousness, Holy Spirit, gentiles, religious conflict, Satan, and Kingdom of God, as well as the core issues involved within each motif. The essay finds that the Satan motif is the most prevalent in Luke's gospel especially in relation to the Kingdom of God concept. In fact, references to Satan or variations thereof are so dominant that it is not only one of the great hallmarks of the public ministry of Christ but, as well, absolutely central to a comprehensive understanding of Luke's gospel. The Satan belief is such a core tenet of the Christian faith, it is safe to say that without it all other central Christian doctrines and concepts, and authentic Christian belief itself, would stand on very shaky grounds indeed.

Keywords: motif, leitmotif, Theophilus; Satan; Kingdom of God, righteous; Holy Spirit; religious conflict; gentile;

INTRODUCTION

A few highly salient issues need to be considered before we delve into the scholarly literature on Luke's Gospel to identify dominant motifs. Although Luke in his prologue presumably dedicates his book to a distinguished patron named Theophilus¹, once again we have a Gospel in which it seems like the reader knows the identity of the author when, in fact, the author does not explicitly identify himself. It's almost as if 'Luke', for some reason (not to mention perhaps other Gospel writers), deliberately adopted a protective authorship mode of anonymity². Consequently, the conspiracy theories abound in biblical scholarship.

However, this reference to Theophilus, whether an actual person or simply an honorary title or something else altogether, is more than simply a passing mention. Among other things, it serves to make clear why Luke is writing his Gospel right from the beginning, very much unlike Mark and Matthew:

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of things accomplished among us...as they were handed down...by those who...were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well...to write it out for you...so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:1-4).

The truth about what? Answer: all the things that happened in the life of Jesus. So, then, to confirm the identity of Christ is the prime motivation for Luke writing his Gospel. His Gospel is his story of "the exact truth" of Jesus Christ. Arguably, then, it could be argued



that the leitmotif of Luke's Gospel is the messianic identity of Christ or the true identity of Jesus as savior of both Israel (Jewish people) and the rest of humanity (Gentiles).

Many examples can be proffered to illustrate this point. When the angel Gabriel is talking to the Virgin Mary about how she will conceive Jesus in her womb, he names Jesus as "...the Son of the Most High" that will be given "...the throne of His father David..." (Luke 1:32-33). Luke (1:68-69) then mentions that Zacharias in his prophecy blessed the Lord God of Israel for bestowing redemption upon His people by raising up a horn of salvation from "the house of David His servant". During Jesus' birth in Bethlehem when the angel appeared before some shepherds who were staying out in the fields at night watching over their flock and said to them, "...I bring you good news of great joy...for today in the city of David there has been born for you a savior..." (Luke 2:10-11).

Proving divine identity integrally linked to Jewish Scriptural tradition is a major concern. There is divine confirmation of Jesus's identity as the Son of God when "...the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, 'You are My beloved Son...'" (Luke 3:21-22). When Jesus was led around in the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted voraciously by the devil, Jesus's identity as the Son of God is again confirmed. In the elaborate listing of the genealogy of Jesus, we see that he was the Son of Joseph from the house of David, "...the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham...the son of Adam, the son of God (Luke 3:23-38).

Another crucial point to remember about Luke's Gospel, of course, is the Pauline connection, so to speak. In Christian tradition, the anonymous author of Luke's Gospel had been intimately associated with the apostle Paul, accompanying him on missionary work³. Many passages throughout the New Testament make clear that the early church was quite aware of both Paul's distinguished relationship with Christ and the traditions of a 'Luke' who was believed to be Paul's co-worker (Nickle, 2001). In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke continually employs "we" to describe the Pauline missions with which he is directly involved, which Biblical scholars argue lends considerable credence to the claim that he was actually present at the times referred to (Bartlet, 1911). As well, in 2 Tim 4:11 Paul says, "only Luke is with me", when he is in Rome near the end of his life, a claim which is also affirmed by Luke himself in Acts 28:16. Clearly, then, Paul and Luke knew each other intimately. It is highly likely, then, that Luke preached the very same gospel as Paul with a heavy emphasis on the salvation message for the Jews. This probably explains why there's so much Jewish apologetics in Luke's writings, whereas Paul is emphasizing salvation for both Jews and gentiles (Wright, 2020; Pope Benedict XVI, 2017).

Another pivotal point to consider when trying to understand Luke's Gospel is that he wanted to write "an orderly account of the events" (Luke 1:1-3) which occurred in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ that was adequate to satisfy the needs of his own community, his central audience (Nickle, 2001). His gospel was not intended to be read in combination with the other gospels but, rather, to replace them as a more "orderly account". Given that Luke's intended purpose was to write an account of Jesus's life more accurate than all others, it is simply an irony of history that it turned out to be otherwise.

As it turned out, Luke apparently invested too much confidence in the historical accuracy of his sources including Mark's Gospel. That means that Luke was less interested in correcting any historical inaccuracies in Mark or any other sources than he was in expanding or enriching those accounts with additional sources. As well, he wanted to be more persuasive in his defense of Christianity than were the other gospels. In other words, Luke wanted to write a bestselling and persuasive apologia or defense of Christianity that was



applicable beyond his own community to the preaching and teaching of the Christian mission. As Nickle is at pains to point out, it is also highly likely that Luke wanted to address his gospel to a special community of Gentiles in first-century Greek society who found the Jewish religion quite appealing. There were many Gentiles who partook in Jewish rituals and customs and who attended synagogues and celebrated many Jewish festivals but without fully converting to Judaism. The Jews called them ‘friends of God’ or ‘God-lovers’, believers of God that were very devout and already familiar with the messianic writings in Jewish religious traditions. Perhaps Luke’s reference to “Theophilus” in the prologue of his gospel refers to this particular community of people⁴.

Lastly, Luke is also making an effort to address the concerns of imperial Rome in his apologia. His reference to the “most excellent” Theophilus was, at that time, a very common way of talking about top government authority figures. After all, it was a time when Roman government officials were likely to view Christians as subversive dissidents, a bunch of rabble rousers hellbent on tearing down the fabric of Roman society by promoting worship of the king of the Jews rather than the Emperor of Rome. Sensing their authority under threat, Hebrew priests and scribes were perhaps all too eager to promote such suspicions.

Therefore, it is likely that Luke wanted to clarify any misgivings or misunderstandings which powerful Roman officials may have been entertaining about Christian worshippers. The fact that Luke was the only author in the New Testament to explicitly mention the names of Roman emperors in his writings lends considerable credence to this major point (Luke 2:1; 3:1/Acts 11:28; 18:2). As it turns out, then, Luke’s very first words in his gospel referring to “Theophilus” is not at all as casual and perfunctory as it might seem at first reading.

Now that we have outlined a few central considerations that need to be borne in mind as we attempt to understand Luke’s Gospel, we are now in a much better position to discuss some of its major thematic components. Then we will try to understand how these core thematic components tend to be governed by central theological principles and interests. The heavily repeated thematic content of Luke’s Gospel may be much more relevant to achieving a sound understanding of Luke’s particular theology of Christianity than is the uncertain question about authorship identity.

Regardless of who actually authored Luke’s Gospel (and its sequel, the Acts of the Apostles), together the two-volume set makes up more than 25% of the New Testament. This amount of text easily surpasses the contributions of any other ‘author’ of the New Testament (Perkins, 2007; Nickle, 2001). Therefore, a thorough thematic analysis would certainly appear to be warranted.

1. EXPLORING CENTRAL MOTIFS IN LUKE’S GOSPEL

I – The Righteousness Motif

„ As mentioned earlier, the leitmotif of Luke’s Gospel from start to finish appears to be the messianic identity of Christ. It is the dominant thematic principle in relation to which all other themes and theological issues are organized. That is why Luke initiates his gospel by firmly linking that messianic identity to the prophecies contained in Hebrew writings and to Hebrew genealogy. The ‘Son of David’ in Luke 1:32-33 becomes the ‘Lord’ in Luke 1:43 becomes “God my Savior” on Mary’s lips in Luke 1:47 becomes the “Savior...Christ the Lord” in Luke 2:11 when an angel stands before shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus – a



solid message of messiahship rooted in Jewish religious tradition carried through to the end of Luke's Gospel (Perkins, 2007).

However, in addition to the 'messianic' organizing principle of Luke's Gospel, there are several other dominant themes repeated in various guises throughout the text that play a central role in Luke's theological narrative. We will now investigate some of these dominant motifs in greater depth. Several other themes and related concepts also figure prominently in Luke's Gospel, but they are mentioned less frequently and not emphasized and elaborated upon as much in Luke's writings. For example, discussions about prayer, women, the marginalized, and sympathy for the poor are all noted by Luke, but they don't appear to be of central importance to Lukan theology (Nickle, 2001). Hence our focus here will be to extract dominant motifs that do appear to play a central theological role.

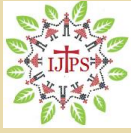
Although rarely explicitly identified as such by Biblical writers in the scholarly literature or otherwise, the righteousness motif is a dominant underlying theme in various parts of Luke's Gospel as well as in several other gospels and biblical writings in general (Kenyon, 2020; Vickers, 2006). In fact, it's mentioned over 500 times in the Old Testament and more than 200 times in the New Testament. Clearly, then, righteousness⁵ not only plays a central role in Luke's theology, but also within the Christian faith from its inception to its Jewish roots. We find it in the Sermon of the Mount, in Matthew when Jesus is talking to John the Baptist during His own baptism, in the Proverbs and Psalms, everywhere.

Not surprisingly, we find it throughout Luke. It is emphasized at the very beginning at Luke 1:6 to describe the foretelling of the birth of John the Baptist, where a priest named Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth are both described as being "righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord". Later, eight days after John the Baptist is born and he is taken to baptism and circumcision Zacharias prophesies that his child "Might serve Him (God) without fear, in holiness and righteousness" (Luke 1:74-75). How appropriate that the term 'righteousness' here is applied to a child who will later baptize Jesus.

After eight days had passed in regards to the birth of Jesus. Luke 2:21-35 mentions that Jesus was brought to the temple in Jerusalem "to present Him to the Lord". At that time, there was a man called Simeon who was "righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before the Lord's Christ" (i.e. God's 'messiah'). Simeon goes into the temple, takes little Jesus into his arms blessing God and blessing his parents while uttering solemn statements and prophecies linking the child Jesus with salvation, glory to Israel, and the light of revelation to Gentiles. These are theological issues concerning 'righteousness' that concern attribute of God, not man.

Later, on the Sabbath when Jesus goes into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees to eat some bread with a man sitting at the table in front of Him who was suffering from dropsy, the issue of righteousness arises once again. The Pharisees are watching Him closely to see if He will do anything which they define as against religious policy on the Sabbath. Wisely, Jesus asks the Pharisees and lawyers sitting at the table: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" (Luke 14:3). They refused to answer, so Jesus simply proceeds with healing the man.

Then He proceeds to recount a number of parables to communicate certain principles to the Pharisees such as the parable of the guests and the parable of the dinner (Luke 14:7-15; 16-24) because Jesus is noticing that people around the table were jockeying for seats of honor at the table. In the guest parable, Jesus says to them forthrightly: "...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 paid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14). It is crucial to note here that a core Christian concept is introduced in the same phrase parallel to the ‘righteous’ term, namely, ‘resurrection’. The pivotal significance of the link between God, righteousness, salvation, and the core Christian concept of resurrection was intimated earlier and will become clearer as we proceed.

When He is passing between Samaria and Galilee on His way to Jerusalem, there is a series of discussions that occur between Jesus and His disciples about the ‘Kingdom of God’, the signs of the ‘Second Coming’, and several key parables that underscore the significance of righteousness. Especially in reference to the parables on prayer, Jesus brings up a parable about a widow who went begging to a judge to provide her with legal protection against an opponent. The judge refused to satisfy the widow’s request for a long time, but eventually decided to provide it because the widow continually bothered him to get it despite constant refusals.

The judge decided to give the legal protection not on the basis of principle but, rather, because “by continually coming she will wear me out”. Jesus tells His disciples to really “hear what the unrighteous judge said, a “judge who did not fear God and did not respect man”. The superficial lesson to learn here is that God will not delay in rendering appropriate justice to His elect (Christians); he will surely provide swift justice to his chosen people. The real issue is faithfulness and righteousness in the eyes of God, and in the end God will settle all accounts according to the dictates of righteous justice, not selfish irritation as it was for the unrighteous judge in this parable. A righteous God will not delay in answering the cries of his persecuted elect.

The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, Luke (18: 9-17) refers to the concept of righteousness. This time, he addresses the issue of the appearance of righteousness in terms of two men walking into the temple to pray – a Pharisee and a tax collector. “God, I thank you that I am not like other people,” prays the Pharisee. “I fast twice a week; I pay tithes (taxes)...” However, the tax collector some distance away, unwilling to lift up his eyes towards heaven, is singing a different tune to God: “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” Jesus responds: “I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other”.

Here the crucial consideration is that being self-righteous is not the same as being righteous because self-righteousness is not conduct with humility and humbleness but, rather, pretentiousness. ‘Appearing’ righteous is not ‘being’ righteous, in other words. God’s mercy can provide justification to a person engaging in prayer with humility, but the self-righteousness of a person can prevent the justification of God’s mercy from reaching that person. That’s why asking from God and praying to God must be conducted with a humble, gracious attitude. Pharisees were praying about how great they were in pompous self-righteousness while looking down upon all others with contempt as menial irredeemable sinners. The last important reference to righteousness in Luke’s Gospel is telling indeed, as it occurs immediately after Jesus has died while hanging on the cross. To put it succinctly, Jesus is hanging dead on the cross and now his body is a grave danger. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that any of His disciples were brave enough to present themselves to Pontius Pilate to make a direct request for the body of Jesus. None of them had the financial means to provide a decent internment, so it was likely that His body would have been thrown into a mass grave dug for social wrongdoers and indigent criminals.



In the Jewish community, this was the common fate of condemned malefactors who tended not to receive a burial at all (Dt 21: 22-23). That's when a man named Joseph, "a member of the Council, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan of action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus" (Luke 23: 50-51).

Since this man was described as "righteous" by Luke, "prominent" by Mark (15:43), a "rich man...who himself had become a disciple of Jesus" by Matthew (27: 57), a "disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews" by John (19:38), most Biblical scholars believe that "Joseph" had actually been either a member of the Council of the high priest that had conspired to kill Jesus or a high member of the great Sanhedrin, the central assembly of elders (known as 'rabbis' later after the destruction of the Second Temple) who had been appointed to sit as 'judges' in Jewish courts in every city in ancient Israel to decide on disputed cases. Cases that could not be firmly decided at these individual local 'city' courts by what came to be known as the 'lower Sanhedrin' were normally appealed to the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem which acted very much like a Supreme Court.

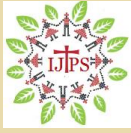
The fact that such a man could even safely approach a Roman Emperor to make such a request would seem to imply that Pilate immediately recognized the Honorable 'Joseph' as a judge sitting in the Great Sanhedrin or Supreme Court of Jerusalem through previous knowledge or dealings with him, and consequently "ordered (the body of Christ) to be given to him" (Matthew 27: 58). Clearly, he held an exalted position in the context of both Jewish and Roman society and culture.

Now, what exactly made this man Joseph so 'righteous' beyond providing for proper internment of the body of Jesus, if anything more? Well, it should be noted that in making such a request the news would surely spread widely and quickly across both the Jewish and Gentile communities. Such a man would have to be powerful enough and rich enough not to fear the possible adverse consequences of doing so. If it had not previously been clear to other religious leaders and authorities, especially other members of the Jewish high council that he had not agreed with their decisions and actions to plot for the death of Christ, then certainly the request for the body of Christ and payment for internment made it 100% clear. Joseph certainly had to review in his mind how dangerous such a request from the emperor could be for him, personally. It was a time of tremendous desperation and sorrow and pain of heart for Joseph, no doubt, who wanted to make things 'right' in the eyes of God. And that's exactly what made him 'righteous'.

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT MOTIF

The Holy Spirit is another highly dominant organizing theme in Luke's Gospel and even more central in the Acts of the Apostles, its companion writing by Luke. Once again, we find the Holy Spirit at work right from the very first chapter in reference to the birth of John the Baptist foretold. The words come directly from the angel's mouth, and it bears repeating a lengthy portion here as it ties quite nicely into our previous discussion about righteousness. The angel who appears to Zacharias the priest and father-to-be states that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son "great in the sight of the Lord...who will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb...and who will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God...turn the hearts of the fathers...and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:13-17).

Now, after Jesus responds to messengers sent to Him directly to inquire if He was "the Expected One" written about by the prophets while He is in the midst of performing a series



of healings and exorcisms. He turns to tell the crowd that John is “more than a prophet”, “no one greater among those born of women”, a “messenger” sent by God Himself to prepare His way (Luke 7: 19-28). Among other things, the fact the John the Baptist was *filled with the Holy Spirit* from conception in the womb demonstrates the powerful sovereignty of God. More importantly, the Holy Spirit empowered John the Baptist for the transcendental role he was to play in preparing the ground for Christ.

To ensure that this way would be prepared adequately, God manifested Himself in the form of the Holy Spirit within John the Baptist at conception. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit was the sovereign empowerment of God within John to ensure an *effective ministry*. In fact, the power of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of John the Baptist is so miraculous that when a pregnant Mary goes to visit the impregnated mother Elizabeth, Luke says “the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit”; Elizabeth tells Mary that “when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy” (Luke 1: 41-43). Lastly, the Holy Spirit also provides the fuel to ensure the unwavering resolute commitment of John the Baptist to God’s plan for putting into place a solid foundation for the earthly ministry of Jesus.

The role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the public ministry of Christ in Lukan theology is extensively emphasized in many other passages in Luke’s Gospel, as Nickle (2001) points out. Often times, it is referred to in tandem with the issue of righteousness, as noted above in relation to the “righteous and devout” Simeon who greets Mary and Joseph with the child Jesus in the Jerusalem temple. When John the Baptist starts to baptize people in the river Jordan, he tells those he baptizes just how fiery the Holy Spirit will soon get (Luke 3:16):

“As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who
Is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His
Sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Just a little afterwards in the same chapter, Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. While He stands there praying, Luke tells us “... heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove” (3:21-22). Shortly after that, Jesus was “filled with the Holy Spirit”, and then He was escorted “by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days” for a different kind of ‘baptism’, so to speak, namely, to be “tempted by the devil” on an empty stomach for the entire duration (Luke 4:1-2).

When the devil had finally given up, the power of the Holy Spirit led Jesus back to Galilee where He “began teaching in their synagogues” (Luke 4:14-15). As will be remembered, the event in Nazareth that ignited His public ministry was when Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath (“as was His custom”) and read from the book of Isaiah, in which it was written and which Jesus repeated: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me” (Luke 4: 16-18). Clearly, the bond between the Holy Spirit and Hebrew writings was firmly cemented by this inaugural event.

Later in Luke, we learn that the Holy Spirit is hard at work when Jesus commissions a group of 70 disciples to go ahead of Him to preach the Gospel. After Jesus had appointed these disciples and provided them with powers to heal the sick, exorcise demons, and other miraculous abilities, he sent them out in pairs to every city which He Himself had planned to go. After they had returned, Luke tells us that the seventy disciples reported back to Jesus joyfully: “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name” (Luke 10:17). Jesus tells them not to rejoice too much that He has given them authority to “tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you”. Luke tells us that Jesus immediately “rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit” (Luke 10: 19-21). So, then, now



the Holy Spirit is linked to the *commissioning of the disciples* and the *spreading of the gospel* as well as to perfect *authority over every evil*.

In Chapter 12, we get a commanding sense of just how important the Holy Spirit is in the theology of Luke. In this chapter, Jesus proclaims several warnings against the hypocrisy and hidden motives of the Pharisees who believe that evil things can be done and said in the dark without God knowing about it. Don't fear the one who can kill the body and do no more harm to you, Jesus warns. Instead, "fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!" (Luke 12: 5).

It is precisely at this point where it gets really spicy, spiritually speaking, relative to the Holy Spirit. Shockingly, Jesus goes on to tell the people and disciples around Him that it may be forgiven if anyone speaks a word against the Son of Man; "but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him". The point here is that blasphemy⁶ against the Holy Spirit is an absolutely unforgiveable eternal sin, also noted by Mark (3:29) and Matthew (12:31-32). By acting in this way, the implication is that the person is rejecting the offer of eternal life by God, rejecting the offer of salvation by Jesus Christ.

Within Christianity, the offer of salvation by God to humanity is a gift freely offered by God which graciously includes the forgiveness of sin. So, then, not to accept God's free offer of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, this eternal mistake cannot be forgiven because it effectively prevents the Holy Spirit from entering your 'being', your existence. As such, it means that you cannot be sanctified, your uncleaned soul, your unrighteousness, cannot be redeemed by God. People who engage in rejecting God's gift of salvation by blaspheming against the Holy Spirit voluntarily exclude themselves from God's forgiveness of sin.

Later in the same chapter, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit again when He senses that His disciples may be worried about what political rulers or religious authorities might do to them if they openly proclaim themselves to be followers of Christ and preach the Gospel. He tells them not to worry if they face great adversity or opposition from powerful authorities because the Holy Spirit is living within them and working through them. He says to them (Luke 12: 11-12):

"...do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

In other words, the Holy Spirit will empower God believers to know what to say and how to behave especially in times of great troubles and tribulations before the faces of authority or the principalities of power, whether synagogue authorities or otherwise. It is not unreasonable to view this particular function of the Holy Spirit in Lukan theology (as well as in Christianity proper) as part and parcel of spiritual weaponry to assist believers engaged in spiritual warfare.

Indeed, it is often spoken about using conceptual language commonly applied to warfare such as 'shield', 'breastplate', 'armor', and so forth. God believers would be the medium through which the Holy Spirit itself would speak as primary weaponry. Therefore, if these words from the Holy Spirit would be ignored, denied, or condemned, it would be the same as ignoring, denying, or condemning God Himself.

Either explicitly or implicitly, the Holy Spirit plays a highly significant role in other parts of Luke's Gospel. For example, as we learned in Luke 3, Jesus was described as being "filled with the Holy Spirit" when engaged in His ministry outside in the various communities and cities and synagogues He visited. However, the explicit and implied activity



of the Holy Spirit is not only everywhere throughout the life and teachings of Jesus, but also fervently at work is the ancient history of the Hebrews. It is a primary tool with which God fulfills salvific functions in sacred history through the prophets and other writers of Hebrew Scripture. It will be noted that it was through the Holy Spirit that Isaiah predicted Christ would become incarnate.

Later, when Christ the Messiah expected according to these ancient Hebrew writings was actually incarnated in the flesh and began His public ministry performing all kinds of healings, exorcisms, and a great variety of other miraculous deeds, Luke makes it clear that at that time and afterwards the Holy Spirit was present and actively working to guide the Christian church in its missionary function. That is why Luke literally ends his gospel with a blatant reference to the Holy Spirit coming out of the mouth of a resurrected Christ just moments before His ascension:

“And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24: 49)

What does Jesus mean by saying “promise of my Father” and “clothed with power from on high”? Evidently, it doesn’t mean that they will be converted into Worldwide Wrestling Federation champions or great military generals nor given great insurmountable overwhelming physical human strength of any kind whatsoever. It means that they will be given some of the sovereign power of almighty God. The power that comes directly from God is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus clearly stated that the Father had promised Him to send the Holy Spirit “upon” them from above in heaven.

So, then, they were to receive an all-powerful pill fortified with great spiritual vitamins and minerals, so to speak, so that they could have bountiful power of knowledge, wisdom, understanding, love, courage. Evidently, this means that it would be sent as a spiritual nutritional powerhouse to impregnate their souls with the armor of unassailable God belief. Surely, it is not by coincidence that Luke ends his gospel in this way. It is even much less of a coincidence, then, that Luke follows up the primacy of the Holy Spirit in his gospel by making it the dominant motif of his companion volume, the Acts of the Apostles.

3. THE GENTILE MOTIF

The next dominant thematic thread that runs through Luke’s Gospel is the Gentile motif. This should not be surprising or bewildering in any respect since we know that Luke himself was likely the only Gentile among Paul’s associates during his missionary work even by Paul’s own admission. Still, there doesn’t seem to be enough conclusive evidence of such within Luke’s own writings for a positive determination to be made. What we do know is that he was intimately knowledgeable about Hebrew Scripture and could link that scripture to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, recognizing the Jewish roots and linkages of Jesus wherever he felt they could be legitimately claimed like the genealogy and prophetic ties.

However, it is also true that Luke strongly extends his gospel of salvation to include Gentiles in ways that are not at all emphasized by the other Gospel writers save for Paul. In other words, for Luke salvation is not exclusive Hebrew territory. Rather, the Gospel of Christ is universal in character even though it is undeniably historically rooted in ancient Hebrew Scripture. Jews do not have a monopoly on ‘redemption’ in the Gospel of Christ according to Luke.

This fact seems to suggest that Luke was paying homage to Jewish religious traditions in order to avoid any conflicts with those religious authorities while, at the same time,



extending olive branches to Greek Gentile Christians. What is emphasized throughout Luke's Gospel, therefore, is the universal application of the Gospel to all gentiles beyond the Jewish community.

Therefore, despite incessant references to Jewish heritage wherever they could be made, Luke's Gospel still exhibits a very strong thematic tendency to emphasize or underscore Gentile application of the Gospel. To this effect, we come across direct references to Gentiles very early on. Recall that Jesus had been presented to the temple in Jerusalem eight days after His birth when Simeon the "righteous and devout" had blessed Him and His parents. During that event, Simeon holds the infant Jesus in his arms giving blessings to God, describing Jesus as "a light of revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2: 32).

During his very lengthy and detailed genealogy of Jesus, Luke (3: 23-28) begins with the son of Joseph and ends with the son of Adam, the father of the human race in Genesis (2:20). Here we can see the genealogical extension of God's saving grace through Christ to all humanity, Gentiles included. We see this same extension of God's salvation through Christ to Gentiles in when Jesus agrees to heal the beloved servant of a Roman officer (Luke 7: 1-10). What is very interesting about this event is that the centurion had asked Jewish elders that he knew to ask Jesus to save the life of his servant, describing the Roman soldier as "worthy for You to grant this to him".

What happens at this point is much more than very interesting, however, in terms of the universalistic application of the Gospel to Gentiles. Jesus starts on His way with the elders towards the centurion's house. But as He reaches sight of the house, the soldier sends out friends to stop Jesus from proceeding any further. They passed on a message from the soldier that he thought himself unworthy to welcome Jesus into his house, even unworthy to come out to see Him. So, the soldier requested Jesus to "just say the word, and my servant will be healed". Completely astonished, Jesus turns and addresses the crowd that is with Him at the time: "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith". By the time the messengers return to the soldier's house, the servant had been fully healed.

The question arises: Why would a first-century gentile military force of Roman occupiers in Judea and Galilee be portrayed in such positive ways by a Gospel writer in the New Testament especially when they were not exactly fondly viewed by most Hebrews at the time? Obviously, Luke as a Gentile is not worried about portraying the Romans in this manner when his point is to extend the saving grace of God's salvation through Christ. The Roman centurion's profound response to the presence of Jesus and the Gospel message as well as the clearly demonstrated faith in His messianic identity by also seeking Him out to heal his dying servant.

This humble representative of the great Roman oppressive state first seeks out Jesus for help through friends and then sends out Jewish elders to speak on his behalf when Jesus approaches his house. The centurion's faith in the Gospel of Jesus is clear when he makes clear he believes Jesus could heal his servant by His Word from a distance with no need to enter the house at all. Like the Roman centurion receives authority from above to command his soldiers as he sees fit, so, too, does the centurion recognize that Jesus possesses authority from above to heal his dying servant without entering his house. Additionally, the humble self-perception of the centurion as being "unworthy" speaks to the righteousness of his attitude and character in the eyes of Jesus. By the end of this event, the clear message conveyed by Luke is that Gentiles are capable of having and practicing "great faith", so salvation cannot and should not be denied to them.



However, in the very next mention of Gentiles in Luke's Gospel, the lovely picture of Gentile reception to the Gospel of Christ is completely reversed as Jesus explains to an emotionally shaken Peter and the rest of his disciples what exactly will happen to Him once they enter Jerusalem:

“Behold, we are going to Jerusalem, and all the things which written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again” (Luke 18: 31-33).

Here it is remarkable, to say the very least, that the Gentile author of Luke's Gospel as described by Paul himself in one of his epistles (“not of the circumcision”) quotes Jesus as saying in no uncertain terms that His murderers are “Gentiles”.

Yet, it is precisely to those pagan Gentiles outside of the Jewish nation that the offer of salvation and forgiveness for the remission of sins is being extended; salvation is being offered from the Hebrew covenant people to the non-Hebrew non-covenant pagan Gentile population. Yet, Jesus says in Luke that the Gentiles “will kill Him” as He informs his disciples what will happen to happen to Him just before they enter Jerusalem for the last time before His death.

So, then, why is it that Jesus inside his hometown synagogue says in Luke 4:24, “no prophet is welcome in his hometown”? Following the same passage, Jesus then immediately rebukes Israel for not helping anyone in the time of great famine during the days of Elijah and for not helping many of the lepers. Then we are told by Luke (4:28-29) that:

“All the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff”

At the very beginning of Luke's Gospel, we have Jews in Jesus's hometown “filled with rage” trying to kill Him! Already Jesus is being rejected by members of His own culture, by the Jewish people, in what appears to be a trial run for His grim persecution and execution later in Luke's Gospel.

More importantly, it's exactly that inflamed rejection by the majority of Jewish people that presages the extension of the covenantal promise of salvation from the Jewish nation to all of humanity. Remember, Jesus at this time is in a synagogue first reading from the book of Isaiah just before He talks about people suffering from the great famine and leprosy not being helped by Jewish leaders during the days of Elijah. He is not on the street or by the lakeshore or at the foot of a mountain or in some other remote place preaching to a crowd outside like Luke recounts so many times later in his Gospel. He is in the heart of religious authority in Nazareth, the synagogue, the gatekeepers of Jewish culture.

This is a highly salient factor to consider in our attempt to understand how Luke employs the Gentile motif in his Gospel since it is repeated elsewhere in Luke's writings. It is also salient because Jesus notes in the passage above that He will be “handed over” or delivered to the Gentiles, that is, to secular authority, to be “scourged” and then “killed”. Exactly who could he be referring to? Exactly who will hand Him over to be killed? Answer: Jewish religious authorities. So, then, who is really responsible for the persecution, crucifixion, and death of Christ? The religious authorities who from the beginning of Luke kicked Him out of His hometown synagogue and tried to throw Him over a cliff to His death



and eventually delivered Him to be executed OR the gentile Roman State who performed that execution?

Therefore, it's not by coincidence that we find considerable Roman apologia in Luke's Gospel since Romans are Gentiles. In many passages in Luke where he contrasts Gentiles with Jews, for example, the Gentiles seem to be tinted a bit more favorably. For example, standing with a crowd just a few meters away from the Roman centurion's house just before Jesus heals his servant who lays dying, Jesus turns to the crowd with him and describes the centurion in the following manner: "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith" (Luke 7:9).

Now, keep in mind that later it is precisely gentile Roman soldiers and Heads of State that will put Jesus to death. Remarkable, to say the least. Another poignant example of Gentile apologia in Luke's Gospel concerns the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican tax collector who go to pray in the Temple. The Jewish Pharisee is described as being self-righteous and contemptuous of others; the gentile Publican tax collector is described as a sinner humbly asking God for mercy. "I tell you," Jesus says, this man (i.e. Publican) went to his house justified rather than the other". If that's not gentile apologetics, then the meaning of the word apology is unknown.

When Luke is recounting what Jesus said about the things to come (21:10-24), Gentiles play a role: "Jerusalem will be tramp-pled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled". Then again much more apologetically presented is the exclamation of the gentile Roman centurion after Jesus "breathed His last" hanging on the cross and he witnessed many supernatural events that had occurred: "Certainly this man was innocent". Coming from a gentile Roman centurion, that's a lot more sympathy than Jesus had received from Jewish religious authorities who conspired to kill Him.

4. RELIGIOUS CONFLICT MOTIF

This is precisely why Luke heavily emphasizes the conflict between the teachings of Jesus and those of Jewish religious authorities wherever He goes and whatever He does. The religious conflict motif is pronounced in Luke's Gospel right from the moment they are first introduced in Chapter 4 when Jesus is preaching inside the synagogue in His own hometown, as mentioned earlier. From that point onwards, that antagonism is not only continual, but also intense and hateful bordering on rageful.

Religious authorities are portrayed by Luke as constantly attempting to entrap Jesus into saying and doing things that are religiously and legally condemnable and criminal such as blasphemy. They are portrayed as feeling threatened by the teachings and activities of Jesus like a revolutionary attempting to overthrow the existing religious order. By the time Luke has completed his gospel, there is no doubt readers' minds exactly who he felt were primarily responsible for the persecution, crucifixion, and death of Jesus – the religious authorities incessantly trying to eradicate Him from Jewish society.

Since there are so many examples of Jewish religious antagonism to the teachings of Jesus in Luke's Gospel, just a few poignant examples beyond the hometown synagogue attempt to throw him over a cliff will perhaps suffice to make Luke's sentiments about the responsibility of religious authorities. For example, when Jesus and His disciples were walking through a grainfield on a Sabbath while eating some of the heads of grain, some of the Pharisees who were present confront Jesus: "Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?". Jesus responds to giving an example from Jewish Scripture when King David and some of his men entered the Temple and unlawfully ate consecrated bread. And just in case



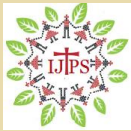
the Pharisees didn't understand His point, Jesus said to them: "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath". A relatively mild example of religious conflict in Luke compared to the earlier cliff debacle. However, just two passages later Luke mentions how on another Sabbath "the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him". In that synagogue, Jesus noticed a man sitting there whose hand was withered. He tells that man to get up and come forward, and then Jesus looks at the Pharisees and asks them: "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?" The Pharisees don't answer Him, so Jesus looks at them all and then commands the man to stretch out his hand. He complies and his hand is restored. Luke says the Pharisees were so "filled with rage that they discussed together what they might do to Jesus" (Luke 6: 1-11). Now that is a pointed example of intense conflict with Jewish religious authorities, to be sure.

In the last example, Luke is the one pointing out the intense antagonism of religious authority towards Jesus. In Chapter 9, however, after He has performed the miracle of feeding 5,000 people with very little bread and fish, the existence of deadly conflict with Jewish religious authorities is confirmed by Jesus Himself. Jesus is talking to His disciples about who the people say that He is, and Peter says "The Christ of God". At exactly that point, Jesus orders them not to say anything to anyone about that, then informs them: "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day" (Luke 9: 18-22). Conflict in spades, to be sure, between Jesus and Jewish religious authorities that ends up looking like an assassination plot.

In Chapter 12, just before Jesus starts talking to a large crowd, he turns to His disciples and says: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12: 1). This is a fairly damning description of the Pharisees coming out of Jesus's mouth. The implication is that it only takes a little bit of hypocrisy to corrupt the thinking of a great multitude of people, just like it takes just a little bit of yeast (leaven) to convert a small piece of dough into a large loaf of bread. Leaven spreads the bread like hypocrisy spreads into much greater hypocrisy. What exactly is this hypocrisy of the Pharisees that Jesus feels compelled to warn His disciples about? Perhaps it is self-righteousness appearing as righteousness and holiness and thinking of itself as such. The worst kind of hypocrite, of course, and the deadliest kind of hypocrite, is the hypocrite that does not know himself to be a hypocrite. Surely, this was the kind of hypocrisy that Jesus attributed to the Pharisees.

A much more poignant example of the hostility between Jesus and Jewish religious authorities occurs when Jesus enters the Temple and starts to kick out the sellers and traders, telling them that they had turned His house into "a robber's den". Here Jesus is purifying or cleansing the Temple, not just teaching or preaching the Gospel in it. Since Jesus didn't have the outward appearance of some who had undergone formal rabbinical training, kicking out traders from the Temple was a highly inflammatory thing to do, religiously speaking. As well, it must have been felt as condescending to them answering a question with a question that could not be safely answered and then ending up not answering their question at all.

In the very next passage, it should not be surprising when Luke tells us that the "chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him..." (Luke 19: 46-47). Later in the same temple Jesus is teaching the people and preaching the gospel when the chief priests, scribes, and elders directly confront Him: "Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, and who is the one who gave You this authority?" (Luke 20: 1-2).



It is clear here that Jewish authorities felt that their own positions of authority in the eyes of the people were being threatened. After all, these Jewish religious authorities were essentially a religious aristocracy enjoying lives of comfort, safety, privilege, status, wealth, and authority, all of which were threatened by the teachings, preaching, and activities of Christ. At the conclusion of Chapter 20, Jesus tells His disciples while many people are listening precisely what he detests about the scribes, focusing heavily on the ‘appearance’ of righteousness, honor, humility, respectfulness:

“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows’ houses, and for appearance’s sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation”

(Luke 20: 46-47).

Just in case it wasn’t clear in previous examples exactly what Jesus found so utterly repulsive about the behavior of Jewish religious authorities, here it is made crystal clear, that is, the ‘appearance’ of righteousness. Recall our previous discussion about the dominance of the righteousness motif in Luke’s Gospel. Pretending to be pious is an unconscionable and unpardonable sin. Rather than seeking honor that comes from humble worship of God alone, the scribes were defrauding poor widows, abusing prayer by using it as a pretense to engage in wicked worldly conduct, and coveting wealth, privilege, and status, loving the things of the world through pride and ambition that exalt their power rather than humbly worshipping and fearing God.

It is certainly not by coincidence that both Matthew and Luke devote entire sections where Jesus is uttering woes upon the Pharisees after they had invited Him to have lunch with them. The Pharisees happen to notice that Jesus did not wash ceremonially before starting to eat His meal. Jesus rebukes them in no uncertain terms, again referring to the ‘appearance’: “Now you Pharisees clean the inside and the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones” (Luke 11: 39).

A better example for condemning the ‘appearance’ of righteousness could hardly be imagined. Righteousness refers to what is ‘inside’ a person or spirit, not what is ‘outside’ (robes, seats in the synagogue, respectful greetings in the marketplace, and the like). The first priority of Christ is the inner cleanliness of the soul rather than the showy rituals about outer cleanliness of the body like the Pharisees criticized Him for.

5. SATAN MOTIF

The next core thematic thread running through Luke’s Gospel is the Satan motif. In fact, references to Satan (either directly or indirectly as demons, the devil, legion, Beelzebub, unclean spirits, and so forth) are so dominant in Luke’s writings and also widespread within the other gospels that it is safe to say it is one of the great hallmarks of the public ministry of Jesus Christ. As such, it is not only central to a comprehensive understanding of Lukan theology but, much more importantly, one of the core tenets of the Christian faith itself. This means that without genuine belief in the existence of Satan, authentic Christian belief stands on very shaky grounds indeed.

This is one of the core central tenets informing the Lukan gospel narrative, and that’s why Luke attaches great prominence to Satan in the public ministry of Jesus from the beginning. Cosmologically speaking, from the Lukan theological viewpoint it is not really the



Romans, the Gentiles, or even the chief priests and scribes and elders of the religious courts that are the enemies of Jesus but, rather, Satan. Luke's gospel narrative is operating as much at the timeless cosmological level as it is operating at the temporal physical level of human events.

Indeed, the chief diabolical foe of Jesus and the essential root of the alleged 'conflict' between God and the authority figures in the world is Satan. Satan is the Professor Moriarty of Jesus's public ministry, so to speak. Indeed, it doesn't take a theological genius to notice that this notion of the existence of a central cosmological enemy strongly implies the previous occurrence of some other cosmological event that functions to explain the existence of evil and provides a spiritual background framing the appearance of Christ.

We see this quite clearly at the very beginning of Luke's Gospel when it is assumed that Satan rules over the world wreaking all manner of havoc, sickness, affliction, and suffering upon human beings; Satan or evil is 'bonded' to human beings and vice versa, human beings are bonded to evil. The certain cosmological message framing Luke's Gospel is that Satan or Satanic agents are holding human beings in bondage. Not only this, but Luke notes that these Satanic agents seem to be aware that God has sent Jesus to emasculate and destroy them through putting into place on earth a 'Kingdom of God'. That is to say, these Satanic agents know who Jesus is (Luke 4:34; 8:28).

In fact, in the many synagogues in Galilee where Jesus began His public ministry, Luke tells us that the many demons that were "coming out" of the people were shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' at Him. As a response, Jesus "would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ" (Luke 4:41). Curiously enough, however, people are not aware of who He is or at the very least they are a bit slow in fully realizing it (9:7-9, 18-20). Cosmologically speaking, therefore, demons seem to be in the know, as they say, whereas human beings appear to be clueless, at least at first.

The implication here is that God came to earth as Jesus as the Messiah specifically to displace or forcibly push aside the dominant position of Satanic spiritual forces in human existence and to offer humanity entrance into His 'Kingdom'. Further, the implied claim here is that the other core concepts of the Christian faith such as salvation, sin, forgiveness, redemption, repentance, and especially creation, cannot be adequately understood apart from fully comprehending the role of Satan in Luke's narrative.

So, then, let us now proceed to provide a few poignant examples of the role of Satanic forces in Luke's Gospel. Readers need to keep in mind as we proceed, however, that there is a cosmological plot working itself out within Luke's narrative. In a manner of speaking, various human agents seem to be caught in a cosmological power struggle between Satan and God. The forces of Satan are constantly plotting not only to afflict human beings with every kind of trouble, conflict, pain, and suffering imaginable but, also, to sabotage and destroy Jesus. After all, Genesis claims that human beings were evidently created by a loving God, not Satanic forces, which seems to imply that the cosmological battle framing Luke's Gospel is not between human beings and God but, rather, Satan and God. All that having been said, let's begin with our Satanic examples in Luke's narrative.

The first explicit mention of Satanic agents occurs in Chapter 4 after Jesus returned from being baptized by John in the River Jordan. Then he was "led around" the "wilderness" by the Holy Spirit for 40 days⁷ to be "tempted by the devil", eating absolutely nothing during the entire time. So then, immediately after Jesus's baptism, the cosmological battle begins implying that Satanic forces are already aware of His Messianic identity.



In the darkness of the wilderness, the spirit of Jesus is repeatedly and mercilessly assaulted (tempted?) by Satan to turn stone into bread to feed His hungry flesh, to be rewarded with all the kingdoms of the world if He only worships Satan, and to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple to prove that He is the Son of God. Jesus responds to every temptation effectively with several “it is written” introductory phrases invoking Judaic law and Hebrew Scriptures.

Then later in the same chapter, a Satanic agent in the form of “the spirit of an unclean demon” who had taken possession of a man in a synagogue in Capernaum where Jesus was teaching cries out loudly:

“Let us alone! What business do we have with each other,
Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who
You are – the Holy One of God!”

Jesus rebukes the demon and says authoritatively: “Be quiet and come out of him!” It is precisely at that point that the demon reacts violently towards the body of the man, “throwing him down in the midst of the people,” but coming out without harming him (Luke 4:33-35). Luke says right afterwards that the people witnessing the exorcism were all amazed and wondered about the authority and power of Jesus to command “unclean spirits”.

Unclean spirits taking possession of human bodies and then either committing violence against those bodies or making the possessed people act in bizarre ways literally permeates Luke’s narrative (Luke 8:27-29; 9:39, 42). It is also the case that Satanic agents quite enjoy working together to possess a human being. For example, when Jesus sailed to Gerasenes just the opposite of Galilee and came onto shore, He was confronted by a man without clothes from the city who was possessed with demons who was “living in the tombs” or cemetery. We are told that this man had been “seized many times” by this “unclean spirit”. Consequently, he had been placed in chains and shackles and under guard, yet “the demon” would always manage to “break his bonds and drive him into the desert”! Now, strictly speaking, those acts are fairly solid examples of violent actions.

Subsequently, the man falls down in front of Jesus and, repeating a phrase uttered above by a previous demon, says loudly, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me”. This time, Jesus asks the man (demon?) his name, to which the demon in the man replies, “Legion”, since many demons had taken possession of the man, Luke tells us. The demons started begging Jesus not to destroy them, imploring Him instead to permit them to enter a herd of swine that had been grazing nearby. Jesus grants this permission, and with the herdsmen watching in shock, the demons lead the entire herd off a cliff into the lake to be drowned (Luke 8:27-39).

One of the key messages that Luke is communicating here is NOT that God nor Christ nor Christian believers collectively nor the Christian faith system itself doesn’t care about animals. Rather, Satanic forces are capable of delivering enormous pain, suffering, and death to animals as well as to human beings because Genesis stipulates clearly that everything God has created is “good”, whereas Satanic forces are opposed to God and all God’s Creation, and that opposition is “evil”.

The next poignant example of Satanic forces committing violence occurs just after the transfiguration of Christ on a mountain where he had gone up with His disciples Peter, John, and James to pray, but ends up glowing as he’s talking to Moses and the great Hebrew prophet Elijah! As Jesus is coming down from that mountain the next day, he is confronted by a large crowd. A man from that crowd starts to beg Him to take a look at his “only” son and, in that very moment, Satanic forces go to work. They “seize” him, make him scream,



throw him into a convulsion with mouth foaming, and “maul” him as they leave his body, much like a bear or wolf or dog mauls prey, a very vivid picture of what it means for demons to commit violence against a human body.

All this time, that same man is trying to walk forwards and approach Jesus for help with his ailing only son. He rebukes His disciples severely after He’s informed that the man had approached them for help unsuccessfully before approach Jesus for help, for which Jesus rebukes His disciples severely. Jesus orders the man to “bring your son here”, but as he persists in moving forwards, the same demon returns to “slam him to the ground and throw him into a convulsion”. Jesus then immediately exorcises the “unclean spirit” and heals the boy.

Surely, a more dramatic version of Satanic possession and violence against human beings could hardly be imagined. This particular example makes clear that Satanic agents are perfectly capable of returning to their human hosts, if you will, in order to wreak more havoc and mayhem and pain, a trait we see repeated at many other places through Biblical passages. In fact, Satanic agents returning with “friends” to do much more serious damage to humans with porous or unguarded spiritual walls around their souls was a major Lukan theological preoccupation and a fearful Christian concern:

“When the *unclean spirit* goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, “I will return to my house from which I came”.
(Luke 11: 24).

So, then, what happens if the unclean spirit returns and finds the house well-cleaned and guarded?

“Then it goes and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first” (Luke 11: 26)

Precisely at this point in Chapter 9, it is not at all by coincidence Luke mentioned that all the people were amazed about God’s greatness in all that Jesus was doing, but pulls His disciples aside while saying, “Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men”. Here Jesus for a second time issues prophetic words about His coming death, referring to it precisely at the moment when everyone is awing about the glory of God in dealing with the violent demon possession of an “only” little boy. What’s the theological point of doing this? The question is: Is it possible to understand this assertion by Jesus from a Lukan theological viewpoint? Answer: Yes indeed.

The theological point here is that demon exorcism and the passion of Jesus is intimately bound up with the mystery of humanity’s salvation in the meaning of the cross. Jesus is imploring His disciples not to get too carried away by the wonder and amazement of people about His miraculous deeds and to stay focused on the heavy price that Jesus had to pay for their salvation, although “they were afraid to ask Him about this statement”. In other words, let it sink deeply into your ears really means let it penetrate profoundly to the center of your heart, and remember.

Committing all forms of violence against human beings and animals by taking possession of them and compelling them to behave in bizarre ways is not the only portrait of Satanic forces scripted into Luke’s narrative. As we learned in an earlier example with reference to the “Legion” designation, Satanic agents in biblical writings are known are known by many names all of which absolutely permeate almost every part of both the Old and New Testaments as a dominant motif – NOT just Luke’s Gospel. Just a few other



Satanic designations will no doubt make clear here the extent to which the Satanic motif is so intensely present in many guises within Luke Biblical accounts of Jesus's life and teachings.

First of all, the name "Satan" itself (Luke 10:18; 11:18; 13:6; 22:3, 31) or some other designation for the leader of evil supernatural agents such as "Beelzebub" (Luke 11:15) are employed prolifically. The name "devil" is used on a number of occasions (among them Luke 4:2; 8:12). Satanic agents are also sometimes described as "evil spirits" (Luke 7:21; 8:2) and demon(s) (Luke 7:33; 9:49; 10:17; 11:14-15). As well, there is an almost viral proliferation of Satanic forces in Luke known as "unclean spirit(s)" or "unclean demon(s)" causing trouble, sufferings, illnesses, and ailments of every kind in a great variety of different contexts that Jesus deals with directly and effectively without difficulty, once again demonstrating that He is the Son of God (Luke 6:18; 8:29; 9:42; 11:24).

Jesus confronts and demobilizes Satanic agents in other ways throughout Luke's Gospel, and it's crucial to point out here that He never loses a battle against Satanic agents, one or many, leaders or foot soldiers. For example, He successfully performs a series of exorcisms as hinted above (Luke 4:33-37; 8:26-33; 9:37-43). Typically, Jesus is confronted by or meets a human being suffering from demonic possession and then has a conversation with that person and demon, after which at some point fairly soon Jesus commands the demon to be gone. The demon immediately obeys Jesus, but usually not without engaging in some kind of symbolic spiteful gesture as an insulting slap in the face both to Christ and to God. If there are any witnesses to these events, and commonly there are, they all just look on in shock.

Not only this, but Luke makes sure to tell his readers that Jesus bestowed his disciples (implying all other Christian followers?) with very similar powers during passages referring to the Commission when Jesus gave His 12 disciples "power and authority over all demons and to heal diseases" (Luke 9:1) and especially at the Ascension when He promises to send them "the promise of My Father" or Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). So, then, in Lukan theology it is abundantly clear that supernatural powers against Satanic forces can indeed be delegated.

The great number and variety of miraculous healings of serious mental and physical afflictions in Luke are absolutely remarkable, to be sure, as they demonstrate visually the great powers God possesses over life and death. In fact, in some of these cases Jesus has no problem whatsoever healing people by raising them from the dead, just as He Himself will later be raised from the dead by God. For example, soon after Jesus heals the servant of the centurion who had demonstrated more great faith than could be found in all of Israel (Luke 7:9), He approaches the city gate of Nain and notices a dead man being carried out in an open coffin who was the only son of a widowed mother weeping behind.

Jesus feels compassion, tells the weeping mother not to weep, walks up to the coffin and touches it, the procession halting. "Young man, I say to you, arise!" Jesus commands. The young man sits up and starts to speak, and Jesus returns him to his mother, while shock and fear grips onlookers and witnesses (Luke 7:11-16). Apparently, Jesus resurrecting the dead was a rather common part of Jesus's public ministry, according to Luke.

Another highly significant example of the crucial link between Jesus's healing practices and the core Christian principle of salvation occurs after Jesus returns from Gerasenes across the water opposite Galilee. A crowd of people were waiting for Jesus by the lakeshore. None other than a synagogue official named Jairus throws himself at Jesus's feet begging Him to come to his house to save his only daughter of 12 years old who was dying. Jesus continues walking with the crowd pressing up against Him. As He does so, a woman who had been hemorrhaging uncontrollably for twelve years intentionally touched the fringe



of His cloak, and immediately she was healed completely. As Jesus senses what has happened, the woman drops before Him trembling and explaining why she had touched His cloak: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace”, Jesus replies. No sexual discrimination there, and the strong logical implication by Jesus’s words is that faith itself possess healing power.

Now back to the dying 12-year-old only daughter of the synagogue official, Jairus. While Jesus was still speaking to the woman who had been healed by touching his cloak, someone from the house of the synagogue official ran up to inform him that “your daughter has died; do not trouble the Teacher anymore”. However, when Jesus heard these words, he states assuredly: “Do not be afraid any longer; only believe, and she will be made well”. Jesus then goes to the synagogue official’s house and gives strict instructions not to let anyone enter the dead girl’s room except His disciples Peter, John, and James as well as the dead girl’s parents.

They all enter, everyone starts weeping and lamenting for the dead girl, but Jesus tells them to stop weeping since the girl “has not died, but is asleep”. They start laughing at Jesus, for they saw they she had died. Jesus takes the child’s hand and commands, “Child, arise!”, and then the girl’s “spirit returned, and she got up immediately; and He gave orders for something to be given to her to eat”, just as Jesus Himself would later do after His own resurrection to prove to His disciples that He had indeed resurrected (Luke 8:49-56).

What are the theological messages that Luke wishes to impart to his readers. The first lesson is that death holds dominion over all humanity of age, gender, or any other factor, a cruel enemy that makes no distinctions in afflicting everyone sooner or later. The ugly and the beautiful, the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the lucky and the unfortunate, the well-fit and the physically disabled they must all suffer the same fate.

Nothing of human or worldly power can keep the sword of death away from our bodies. The more important theological point to be gleaned from these examples is that Jesus Christ through God the Father has power to restore life at the instant of command. Jesus resurrected the widow’s only son and the synagogue official’s only young daughter during His public ministry living on Earth, proving the almighty power of God the Father over death.

To prove this point, just in case more proof would be needed, God the Father resurrected Christ. Like it says in other parts of the Bible, in doing so Christ has delivered humanity from the fear of death by overcoming it Himself; He has “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...” (2 Tim 1:10). Through His own death and resurrection, Christ “rendered powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil”, that he might “free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Heb 2:14-15).

Through His resurrection, Christ has proven that “he who believes has eternal life” (John 6:47). As Jesus Himself said to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, whom he later resurrects from the dead: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die” (John 11:25-26). Paul confirms this in many places in the Bible: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21).

The biblical message about the meaning and central significance of the resurrection of Christ is perfectly clear, namely, Christ came to heal the death afflicting humanity. The theological message of Luke’s Gospel is that healing through the resurrection of the dead



while Christ was on Earth is a dry run for when the resurrection of Christ heals our death and provides us with access to his eternal kingdom.

When John the Baptist had sent messengers to Jesus asking Him if he was “the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?”, Luke tells us that at the very moment Jesus was asked that question He had been engaged in many miraculous healings like restoring sight to the blind, exorcising evil spirits, and curing diseases. Most significantly, however, Luke’s narrative recounts Jesus’s response to those messengers:

“Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up....” (Luke 7:18-23)

Lastly, what’s more, in the healing and exorcising practices of Jesus there is no sexual discrimination, as the passages about Jesus defending the sinful alabaster woman anointing Christ while weeping and wiping the tears from His feet with her hair during a meal at the Pharisee’s house makes clear (Luke 7:37-50). Shortly thereafter, Luke tells us that Jesus began going from city to city and village to village specifically ministering to women while the 12 disciples and “some women” were with Him:

“women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others....” (Luke 8:1-3).

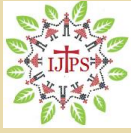
6. KINGDOM OF GOD MOTIF

The last dominant thematic thread running through the fabric of Luke’s Gospel that we will be reviewing is the Kingdom of God motif. In many ways, this motif is the most significant theological theme of Luke’s theology although it is possible to entertain different views about it. For example, some believe it is a ‘kingdom’ already present in physical worldly existence while others claim it is a state of being yet to be established in the future. Some believe it is an actual physical place in material existence, while others claim it exists in another spiritual dimension of time and place not subject to the limits of physical reality. The central issues of time and place in this motif will be addressed later.

Although the kingdom of God motif has already been intimated or suggested within several previous motifs reviewed here, especially the Satan motif, it requires unique attention here because it appears to function as a comprehensive concept around which many other concepts, tenets, and principles of the Christian faith are organized. As well, since this concept in Luke is indeed a dominant theme in the life and teachings of Jesus, not to mention the entire Gospel itself, a few general preliminary historical and etymological comments about it are required before we discuss specific Lukan references.

Luke’s first reference occurs just two short passages following the passage already noted above where “demons” are shouting at Jesus from within many Galilean synagogues just before Jesus removes them from people, “You are the Son of God!” He tells readers that when the day came for Jesus to leave Galilee, he disappeared to a remote place to be alone. But crowds eventually found Him, imploring Him not to leave them. Jesus responded to them: “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose” (Luke 4:42-43).

Here Jesus points out to the crowds that he was “sent”, implying that someone had sent Him with a message to deliver. He was a messenger with a mission or a calling to share



“the *kingdom of God*” with “other cities”, not only Galilee. The implication is that God the Father “sent” his messenger Christ with a message or calling or mission to share “the *kingdom of God*” with as many people in as many places as possible to all those who were willing to listen. That’s why Jesus could not stay in Galilee to continue teaching and healing as the people desired although the many crowds of people searching for Jesus who had been trying to find some time alone away from the crowd also tells us something important about the ‘kingdom of God’ motif in Luke.

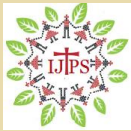
For one thing, it’s ‘the people’ searching for Him and eventually begging Him to stay, not religious authorities or political rulers, as far as we know from Luke. Evidently, the bulk of the Galileans were greatly impressed with the preaching of Jesus and their lives benefitted from it greatly in real, concrete ways that they could understand and appreciate. Much more than that, the great number of miraculous instantaneous healings of serious diseases and illnesses by Jesus (including Simon’s mother-in-law) surely convinced people about God’s power through Christ. Christ in the real, concrete life experience of people was showing them that God the Father loved human beings enough to eliminate their pain and sufferings.

But God’s power was shown to be not restricted to the physical world in many of those healings because they involved removing Satanic forces. To those people, this meant that God didn’t only have power to heal diseases, illnesses, and physical deformities. The more important cosmological message here is that God has sovereign power over Satan and all manner of Satanic opposition operating through various agencies: “demons”, “unclean demons”, “unclean spirits”, “evil spirits”, and so forth, and those Satanic agents were captained by Beelzebub.

Those people understood that through great miracles of healing, God through Christ is able to offer a new physical life. Through power over Satanic agents believed to be exploiting human flesh as hosts, however, God through Christ is able to offer new life to the soul of human beings, a new spiritual life uncontaminated or uncorrupted by Satanic forces. God through Christ heals sickness and disease, indeed; but more importantly, God through Christ heals the souls of human beings. That’s why Luke (19:10) says that Christ came to save souls, “to save that which was lost”.

The point here is to emphasize that God’s Words are the healing power for the human soul, the spiritual food for the human spirit. Therefore, the people of Galilee were being indirectly told by Jesus that the most proper behavior for them is not to prevent Him from leaving Galilee but, rather, to spread God’s Word far and wide, to worship God the Father with thanks and humility, and to live consistently according to His Words. That is precisely the underlying cosmological message here at the very beginning of Luke’s narrative.

The next time that the kingdom of God is mentioned is when Jesus proclaims the beatitudes during the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:20). The context is crucial here because it speaks to the significance of other major themes in Lukan theology such as the Satan motif, for example. Jesus had come down from a mountain where he had spent the entire night in prayer to God, calling all of His disciples close to Him and choosing twelve of them as His apostles. Then He stands at some kind of great open level place with a large crowd of His disciples close by and a massive throng of people from Judea, Jerusalem, and the coastal regions of Tyre and Sidon who had come to be healed, to be cured of unclean spirits, or just to hear what He had to say. The massive throng of people were struggling just to touch Him because “power was coming from Him and healing them all”. Jesus turns to His disciples and the very first words that come out of His mouth according to Luke: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20)



The first thing to notice is the context. “Those who were troubled with unclean spirits” and those with “diseases” had come to be “cured” by Jesus. A large throng of people from far and wide who were afflicted by diseases and unclean spirits had come to be “healed”. It’s difficult to believe that such a large throng were mostly well-placed people within their own geographical communities living a fairly comfortable life, people of wealth, power, privilege, position, authority, and the like, however modest the actual amounts of any of these status indicators might have been. It’s doubtful that the various rulers of any of their communities were present or even sent representatives.

On the other hand, Matthew’s Gospel talks about Jesus’s first statement in the same Sermon on the Mount a little differently:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for there is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3).

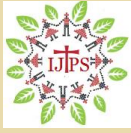
The two fundamental differences between Matthew and Luke here are clear. Matthew changes “poor” to the phrase “poor in spirit” and “kingdom of God” to “kingdom of heaven”. What concerns us here is the “poor in spirit” expression. The classical theological explanation is the assertion that it refers to people who suddenly realize that they are spiritually poor, nor materially poor. This interpretation is especially popular among evangelical Christians whose intense religious beliefs may lead them to emphasize ‘spiritual poverty’, ‘mourning’ for their sins, and other such cross-topic metaphorical applications.

To modern ‘liberal’ ears, poverty usually refers to a state of extreme material deprivation like no food, shelter, or clothing, living on the street, and the like. The metaphor of ‘mourning’ usually refers to the subject of death, not feeling guilty about immoral behavior or feeling sad about its disappearance or eradication. Of course, no one will argue that spiritual poverty is irrelevant to Christianity. The gospels are replete with stories about various people realizing the severe error of their ways when living without God front and center in their lives from kings to tax collectors to prostitutes to adulterers to thieves, and more. Therefore, the recognition that our spirit is shallow and empty without God is a valid part of the Christian faith.

However, it’s just as difficult to believe here that Jesus is NOT referring to those people who are ‘poor in spirit’. Remember, many if not most of the people who came from far and wide to see Him came with a great variety of ailments of one sort or another, many of them even “troubled by unclean spirits”, Luke tells us. Perhaps it’s safe to say that nothing is quite as effective in grinding down the life spirit or joie de vivre of a person than sustained illness, disease, or psychological “troubles” more than severe material poverty. Anyone who’s ever been that dirt poor can surely testify to that fact. Jesus realized exactly who He was talking to in the large crowd around Him, people who were broken in spirit because they were at the bottom of the social heap, so to speak.

The New Testament Greek has two different words with two different connotations meaning ‘poor’. It could very well be that it’s a translative variational emphasis with Luke using one translation and Matthew the other. One word means everyday struggling just to take care of very basic needs, while the other refers to dirt poverty, as they say, the absolute poorest dregs of society, the poorest of the poor. This interpretation also makes sense especially when placed in the context of the other “Blessed” statements Jesus makes. These statements refer to various emotional states required to heal the broken spirit of life which the hammer of grinding poverty has inflicted upon people.

What all of this really means from a reader or listener point of view is that perhaps one gospel writer is emphasizing one aspect of poverty while the other gospel writer is



highlighting another aspect of poverty. Therefore, it's likely that both interpretations are applicable in this context. Further, the various woes to the rich, the well-fed, the comfortable, and the well-spoken of just a few verses after the initial 'poor' reference in Luke seems to provide additional support for this interpretation. The next reference to kingdom of God in Luke comes in Chapter 8 when the discussion revolves around ministering to women and the parable of the Sower. It occurs just after Jesus while dining at the Pharisee's house has defended the faith of the sinful alabaster woman who had come from the city to anoint Jesus with her perfume and tears fallen on His feet wiped away by her own hair. Luke says that:

“Soon afterwards, He began going from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him” (Luke 8:1).

It is significant that this chapter is one of the only chapters in Luke where the kingdom of God is mentioned consonant with the phrase “word of God” more than once, twice by Jesus Himself. The first time Jesus is explaining to confused disciples what the Parable of the Sower means: “Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God”. The other occurs while Jesus is recounting the Parable of the Lamp to a large crowd and he's interrupted by people informing Him that His mother and brothers were waiting to see Him, to which He responds: “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:11, 21).

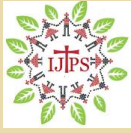
It doesn't take a theological rocket scientist to comprehend that here Jesus in Luke is referring to the kingdom of God introduced to the soil of the Earth in the form of the word of God. The other reference to the kingdom of God in Chapter 8 seems to confirm this point where Jesus explains to His questioning disciples why He's using parables to preach:

“To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand” (Luke 8:10).

Clearly, once again, interpretation here should be contextual. Both references to the 'kingdom of God' interpreted from within a 'word of God' context means that the values, principles, and doctrines of the Gospel are presented as the 'word of God'. The intention is to impart to receptive minds and hearts unique spiritual knowledge conceived as a special gift from God residing in a timeless place called heaven. The kingdom of God has come down from heaven to Earth in the form of the word of God, and Jesus was at that time proclaiming and preaching the word of God as the “kingdom of God” from city to city and village to village precisely because that's exactly where it came from.

However, it was being delivered to people whose spirits had not been fed the word of God, who were not the citizens of heaven, so to speak. So, then, Jesus as sovereign Teacher had to select a pedagogical technique that could successfully deliver the word of God to 'aliens' (those who were empty of or without the word of God) so that their spiritual soil may be properly fertilized (by that seed).

The next time Luke mentions Kingdom of God is several times in Chapter 9 when Jesus provides for the ministry of the twelve apostles and defines the exacting parameters of discipleship. Before commissioning the apostles, he bestows upon them great powers and authority including “over all the demons and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing” (Luke 9:1-2). He gives them specific instructions and sends them out. Sometime later, the apostles return and report back to Him all that they had done as the crowds followed Jesus also listening to these reports. Jesus



welcomes the eavesdropping, turns to the crowd afterwards, and then starts “speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing” (Luke 9:11).

In these verses, the cosmological concept of the kingdom of God is tied together with the worldly concepts of power and authority. The Greek word for ‘power’ means the ability to act powerfully with the right and authority, and here that right is reserved to Jesus. Since God the Father who created and sustains all in the universe is working through Jesus His messenger, the ‘messiah’, then it stands to reason that Jesus has ultimate authority over demons and disease. Presumably, that’s why it is repeated so many times throughout the Bible that all authority belongs to God.

By logical extension, that means that any and all authority human beings may have are merely delegated authority, a gift from God the Father through Jesus. So, then, it should be used in wise stewardship, without self-righteousness, pride, or arrogance. All worldly power and authority, therefore, is a gift from the kingdom of God and, as such, should be employed to honor God by doing good for others and not to seek power for its own sake and our own aggrandizement. That’s why it is linked to healing activities by Jesus and the apostles.

The next time kingdom of God is mentioned in Chapter 9 is when Jesus is talking with His disciples after feeding a large crowd of 5,000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish. He says that those who are shamed of Him and His words will themselves receive His shame when he comes into His glory. Then He adds this proviso:

“But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:27)

Here again, kingdom of God is mentioned with the word death in the same sentence, seemingly implying that some of the people present will make it to heaven after death where they will see God, and some won’t. It could also imply that Jesus is talking about His Second Coming when He establishes or transfers His kingdom of God from heaven to Earth. However, the fact that the very next verse begins a long section on the transfiguration of Christ on a mountain with Peter, John, and James present as witnesses, it is highly likely here that Jesus is referring to the fact that some of those disciples He was talking to at the time would be eye witnesses to the ‘royal splendor’ of His transfiguration, another Greek meaning of the word ‘kingdom’.

Further down the same chapter, Luke mentions that Jesus talks about the kingdom of God when He’s setting the standards for authentic discipleship. As Jesus and the apostles are walking along the road, people noticing Him and offering to follow Him unconditionally. Jesus also approaches some people along the way and asks them to Him. But some of them hesitate and make excuses. On two occasions when someone wishes to bury his dead father and the other wishes to say goodbye to his family first before following Him, Jesus responds:

“...Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60)

“...No one after putting His hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62)

Here one thing is for certain, “let the dead bury the dead” does not mean that the dead resurrect or come back to life to bury dead people. So, then, obviously the phrase cannot and should not be interpreted literally. What appears to be meant is that spiritual responsibilities to God are more important than worldly responsibilities such as burying the dead. On the other hand, in this case the dead are already dead; the father has already died; death is already done, so going back will not undo that death. However, ‘possible’ these



interpretations are to make, it is unlikely to be the meaning intended by Jesus especially since dead people don't bury dead people, literally.

It is much more like that Jesus here is referring to the other people back home to which the man was returning to bury his dead father. It seems to imply that those people were spiritually dead, irredeemably solid unbelievers engaged in ungodly worldly beliefs and practices. Perhaps one of those routine behavioral practices was burial ceremonies and rituals which Jesus found to be repulsive and ungodly. If we interpret this phrase as a central doctrine of God the Father through Christ rather than just a passing condescension of some kind, then the interpretative meaning widens to other possibilities more consistent with other Biblical passages.

For example, one possible interpretation along these lines is that Jesus was warning the man not to allow himself to be heavily burdened by participation in the ungodly practices, ceremonies, rituals, and other pagan behaviors of unbelievers. Pagan ceremonies and rituals for death at that time involved heavy drinking and drunkenness, lewd dancing and sexual escapades, eating gluttonously and sacrificing food to demonic gods of various sorts, and much more ungodly behaviors. In other words, they engaged heavily in various forms of necrolatry or attaching sentimental reverence to the dead. Merriam-Webster defines it as a superstitious worship or veneration of the dead. As such, it can be viewed as a form of idolatry.

As well, it should be noted here that cults of the dead were very popular in and around ancient Israel at the time. Engaging in these behaviors was tantamount to engaging in fellowship with evil, so it was specifically prohibited and warned against at many places in the Bible. Jesus was evidently aware of this (just to name a few - Cor 6:15-18; 7; 10-22; Psalm 106: 28-29; Mark 6: 29; Dt 34: 5-6; Is 5: 12-14; 1 Jn 2:16).

The last example of the kingdom of God given in a lengthy chapter 9 of Luke's Gospel refers to the plow metaphor used by Jesus quoted earlier, but worth re-quoting here: "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). First of all, it's not at all surprising that Jesus would employ a series of agricultural metaphors when trying to communicate effectively and efficiently the values, principles, and doctrines of the kingdom of God to a largely agricultural audience. That was an agricultural time period when every earned a living mainly from growing crops on land.

So, then, everyone would know what it meant to 'plow' something and how important it was to be done properly. Everyone working in the fields of crops everywhere had to concentrate on their specific assigned tasks at hand in a very careful and responsible manner if those crops were to be harvested in a productive and timely manner and then ending on somebody's table in good condition to promote human health. For those people assigned the task of plowing, they needed to concentrate even more intensely on the job they were doing once they started.

The best way to have done it was to move forward being careful not to leave anything behind in the plowing process. Leaving something behind would cause the plowman to always look back, and always looking back would make it much more likely than usual that he would not plow in a straight line as he should. If this occurred, it would cause serious seeding and crop growth problems which, in turn, would yield less than a desirable full harvest.

Now, when Jesus applied this metaphor to the spiritual job of preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, the messages communicated are largely self-evident. Putting one's body and mind at work undertaking this spiritual job means that the Gospel is the plow that is



going to be sent into the field of humanity to harvest as many as possible into the kingdom of God. This spiritual plowman must commit himself to God without any worldly distractions, that is, without “looking back”. That spiritual plowman must commit his life to God by repenting of his sinful nature by receiving the Holy Spirit through baptism.

CONCLUSIONS

In other words, here Jesus is demanding that each of His followers be a plowman by going out into the world and plowing it properly for harvesting believers. Jesus is saying that God is commanding humanity to come out of the world with baskets filled with the good fruits of your diligent harvesting techniques. The message to the plowman is never try to go back into that world, never “looking back” in regret or doubt, by giving in to the endless pleasures it might offer in terms of pride, power, desires of the flesh, or other worldly features. Jesus wanted discipleship, and as disciples he expected nothing less than forfeiture of the whole heart to God.

The message is clear. If Jesus gives somebody the job of spiritual plowman, that person must stand firm in the field and not let go of the plow. ‘Looking back’ would make it much more likely that they would let go of the plow, meaning they might return to their previous sinful disposition. That means they wouldn’t finish the spiritual job that God has assigned to them. In effect, this would make them unfit “for the kingdom of God”, as Jesus commented in Luke.

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