

## SALVATION, SPREADING, AND SUFFERING: GOD'S UNFOLDING PLAN IN LUKE-ACTS

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Twenty-five years ago in this *Journal* Paul House wrote, “Many writers briefly mention suffering or persecution in Acts. Very few, however, explain its significance at length.”<sup>1</sup> This article adds to those “very few” studies of suffering in Luke-Acts. First, I briefly survey scholarship on Luke’s theology of suffering. Second, I offer a working definition of “suffering” and offer examples of suffering in Luke-Acts under four headings: persecution, oppression or injustice, natural adversity, and retribution. Third, I consider how suffering relates to Luke’s purpose in writing his two volumes. Fourth, I unpack five theses concerning God’s unfolding plan for salvation and spreading through suffering.

### I. SURVEY OF RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

Hans Conzelmann’s redactional study of Luke’s theology has cast a large shadow over subsequent Lukan scholarship, including studies of suffering and persecution.<sup>2</sup> Conzelmann argues that Luke responds to the delay of the *Parousia* by writing an account of salvation history in which the period of the church is “a situation conditioned by persecution.”<sup>3</sup> Luke’s primary concern is “the Christian’s behaviour in persecution” in this time when the church is called to suffer for Jesus’ sake.<sup>4</sup> Conzelmann raises questions concerning methodology, eschatology, and ethics, with which subsequent scholars have grappled. First, how should modern readers discern Luke’s “theology” of suffering? Second, how is the church’s suffering related to God’s plan and the expectation for Jesus’ (delayed) *parousia*? Third, what is the relationship between the suffering of Jesus and that of his followers?

Georg Braumann follows Conzelmann’s redactional approach and salvation-historical paradigm. However, he contends that the community’s persecution (*not* the delayed *parousia*) motivates Luke to write.<sup>5</sup> Frieder Schütz argues that the

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<sup>1</sup> Paul R. House, “Suffering and the Purpose of Acts,” *JETS* 33 (1990) 319.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *Die Mitte der Zeit: Studien zur Theologie des Lukas* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1954). References here are to the English translation, *The Theology of St. Luke* (trans. Geoffrey Buswell; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960). The importance of Conzelmann’s contribution is evident by François Bovon’s decision to begin his massive survey of Lukan scholarship with the chapter, “The Plan of God, Salvation History, and Eschatology.” *Luke the Theologian: Fifty-five Years of Research (1950–2005)* (2d ed.; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006) 1–85.

<sup>3</sup> Conzelmann, *Theology* 209–10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 232.

<sup>5</sup> Georg Braumann, “Das Mittel der Zeit,” *ZNW* 54 (1963) 117–45, esp. 145.

church's de facto position in the world is determined through tribulation (“durch θλίψεις”), and he stresses that believers experience suffering as they follow after Jesus (“Leiden in Jesu Nachfolge”).<sup>6</sup> Dehandschutter claims that Luke transforms persecution from a sign of the end times to an opportunity for witness in the context of the church's life.<sup>7</sup>

Richard Pervo acknowledges that readers of Acts must reckon with the “sheer number of adventure stories,” by which he means incarcerations, persecutions, martyrdoms, plots, conspiracies, trials, and the like.<sup>8</sup> However, Pervo contends, “Suffering does not really exist in these tales,” which are literary opportunities for Luke to express his entertaining and edifying theology of glory.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to Pervo, Paul House asserts, “Acts has no purpose, no plot, no structure, and no history without suffering.”<sup>10</sup> He notes that suffering plays a crucial role in Luke's presentation of the gospel's expansion, his defense of Christianity, his portrayal and defense of Paul, and the strengthening of the early church's foundations.<sup>11</sup>

Brian Rapske traces the themes of persecution and opposition to Jesus' followers in Acts.<sup>12</sup> He argues that the obedience, boldness, divine assistance, and evangelistic success of persecuted witnesses demonstrate that the Christian movement is “of God,” according to Gamaliel's test in Acts 5:38–39. Rapske notes that for Paul, “persecution and particularly imprisonment have a vocational dimension” (cf. Acts 9:15–16), though Acts 14:22 makes clear that persecution is expected for all believers and not merely apostolic witnesses.<sup>13</sup>

The most significant treatment to date of suffering and persecution in Luke's writings is Scott Cunningham's “*Through Many Tribulations*”: *The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts*.<sup>14</sup> Cunningham argues that Luke “uses the literary theme of persecution as a vehicle in pursuit of his theological agenda.”<sup>15</sup> He discerns six theological functions of the persecution motif in Luke-Acts:

<sup>6</sup> Frieder Schütz, *Der leidende Christus* (BWANT 89; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969) 11, 112.

<sup>7</sup> Boudewijn Dehandschutter, “La persécution des chrétiens dans les Actes des Apôtres,” in *Les Actes des Apôtres* (ed. J. Kremer; BETL 48; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979) 545.

<sup>8</sup> Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 18, further at 14–17. Cf. idem, *Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009) xli.

<sup>9</sup> Pervo, *Profit* 27.

<sup>10</sup> House, “Suffering” 321. Contra Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Studies of the NT and Its World; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982) 82.

<sup>11</sup> House, “Suffering” 321–29. Cf. John Kilgallen, “Persecution in the Acts of the Apostles,” in *Luke and Acts: FS E. Rasco* (ed. Gerald O'Collins and Gilberto Marconi; New York: Paulist, 1991) 143–60, 245–50.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Rapske, “Opposition to the Plan of God and Persecution,” in *Witness to the Gospel* (ed. I. Howard Marshall and David G. Peterson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 235–56.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 247, 255. See further idem, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (The Book of Acts in Its First-Century Setting 3; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Scott S. Cunningham, “*Through Many Tribulations*”: *The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts* (JSNTSup 142; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997). For a more extensive review of scholarship up to the mid-1990s, see pp. 23–41.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 337.

- (1) Persecution is part of the plan and providence of God.
- (2) Persecution is understood as the rejection of God's agents by those who are supposedly the people of God.
- (3) The persecuted people of God stand in continuity with God's prophets of old.
- (4) Persecution is an integral consequence of following Jesus.
- (5) Persecution is the occasion of the Christian's perseverance.
- (6) Persecution is the occasion of divine triumph.<sup>16</sup>

Cunningham's study builds upon the contribution of David Moessner, who argues that Luke presents Jesus' followers, particularly Stephen and Paul, as following in the footsteps of Jesus, the persecuted prophet like Moses.<sup>17</sup> In Moessner's view, Jesus suffers and dies according to God's plan and achieves forgiveness of sins and eschatological atonement.<sup>18</sup> "Jesus' resurrection or enthronement forms the hinge which unites the suffering-crucified one to the suffering-exalted one who preaches through his suffering apostles-witnesses to the ends of the earth."<sup>19</sup>

Martin Mittelstadt focuses on the relationship between suffering and the Spirit's empowerment of witnesses in Luke-Acts and its implications for Pentecostal theology.<sup>20</sup> He largely affirms Cunningham's conclusions and argues that Luke's account "is not merely a narration of persistent triumph, but one of consistent conflict, opposition and persecution of God's agents."<sup>21</sup> Mittelstadt demonstrates that in Luke-Acts, the Spirit-empowered witness of Jesus and his church brings about persecution and ironically advances amid opposition.

Alan Thompson asserts that Luke intends to "reassure" his readership by drawing attention to "the sobering truth concerning the inevitability of suffering in this 'not yet' phase of the kingdom."<sup>22</sup> For Thompson, the inaugurated (but not yet

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 14. Darrell L. Bock restates and affirms Cunningham's thesis in *A Theology of Luke and Acts* (Biblical Theology of the NT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) 326 n. 27.

<sup>17</sup> David P. Moessner, "The Christ Must Suffer: New Light on the Jesus—Peter, Stephen, Paul Parallels in Luke-Acts," *NoiT* 28 (1986) 220–56. Cf. idem, *Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 297–307, 322–25.

<sup>18</sup> Moessner, *Lord* 323; idem, "The Christ Must Suffer, the Church Must Suffer: Rethinking the Theology of the Cross in Luke-Acts," *SBL Seminar Papers* 29 (1990) 165–95; idem, "Suffering, Intercession and Eschatological Atonement: An Uncommon Common View in the Testament of Moses and in Luke-Acts," in *Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation* (ed. James H. Charlesworth and Craig A. Evans; JSPSup 14; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 202–27.

<sup>19</sup> David P. Moessner, "The 'Script' of the Scripture in the Acts of the Apostles: Suffering as God's 'Plan' (βουλή) for the World for the 'Release of Sins,'" in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts* (ed. Ben Witherington III; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 249.

<sup>20</sup> Martin W. Mittelstadt, *The Spirit and Suffering in Luke-Acts: Implications for a Pentecostal Pneumatology* (Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement 26; London: T&T Clark, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 130.

<sup>22</sup> Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan* (NSBT 27; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011) 61. For further summary and analysis, see my review in *BBR* 23 (2013) 126–28.

consummated) kingdom of God helps to explain suffering's intimate relation to two leitmotifs in Acts: the advancement of God's Word and the growth of local churches.<sup>23</sup>

Recent studies of Luke's theology of suffering have moved out of Conzelmann's shadow by advocating different approaches (such as literary criticism) and theological assumptions (such as inaugurated eschatology). This article aims to contribute to this scholarly discussion in at least three ways. First, I offer a working definition for suffering and illustrate what suffering looked like in the first century AD. Second, I consider persecution alongside other sorts of suffering mentioned in Luke-Acts. Third, I explore how suffering integrally relates to Luke's presentation of God's unfolding plan for salvation through Christ and the spread of the gospel through Jesus' witnesses.

## II. DEFINING AND ILLUSTRATING SUFFERING IN ACTS

1. *A working definition of suffering.* Because suffering is rooted in painful real-life experiences of individuals and communities, some scholarly treatments avoid defining suffering and move immediately to examples of suffering.<sup>24</sup> Others define suffering as the experience of pain or misery.<sup>25</sup> For example Daniel Harrington writes, "To suffer is to feel pain or distress; to sustain injury, disadvantage or loss; or to undergo a penalty."<sup>26</sup> This is a helpful starting point, but is inadequate as a full explanation of suffering in the first or the twenty-first century, since suffering has always been complex and multifaceted, including not only physical pain but in some cases psychological distress, social pressure or dislocation, and/or economic loss.<sup>27</sup> Suffering entails experiencing or enduring that which is unfavorable.<sup>28</sup> Thus, for the purposes of this article I propose the following working definition of suffering: the individual or group experience of bearing physical, psychological, economic, and/or social pain, distress, or loss. I define persecution as suffering deliberately inflicted by another person or group because of one's beliefs, ethnicity, or practices.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 55.

<sup>24</sup> Iain Wilkinson, *Suffering: A Sociological Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005) 16. Cf. Mittelstadt, *Spirit*. For example, Daniel J. Simundson writes, "People know when they are suffering. Suffering is a personal experience." In *Faith under Fire: Biblical Interpretations of Suffering* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980) 13–14.

<sup>25</sup> "Suffering," in *Collins English Dictionary* (ed. Jeanette Kuether; 6th ed; San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2003). Accessed 4 May 2013, [www.thefreedictionary.com/suffering](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/suffering).

<sup>26</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, *Why Do We Suffer? A Scriptural Approach to the Human Condition* (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2000) 1.

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., 2 Cor 11:23–28; 2 Tim 1:8, 16; Heb 10:32–34.

<sup>28</sup> BDAG, "πάσχω" 785 §3; "suffer," in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (ed. John Simpson et al; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Accessed September 10, 2010, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com). It is noteworthy that the English term "suffer" derives from the Latin *sufferre*, to bear or endure.

<sup>29</sup> For further discussion, see Brian J. Tabb, "Suffering in Ancient Worldview: A Comparative Study of Acts, Fourth Maccabees, and Seneca" (Ph.D. diss., London School of Theology, 2013) 12–16.

Acts 16:22–24 recounts the violence against Paul and Silas at Philippi, which illustrates the holistic and multifaceted reality of suffering and persecution in the first century:

The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.<sup>30</sup>

First, the missionaries' suffering is *public*, as indicated by the reference to the crowd's attack (16:22; cf. 16:37: δέιραντες ἡμᾶς δημοσίῳ). Second, their suffering is *humiliating* and *unjust*. They are stripped and beaten repeatedly with rods (ῥαβδίῳ, 16:22; cf. 2 Cor 11:25), punishment designed to humiliate the victims and discourage their followers.<sup>31</sup> Then without a trial or even formal presentation of charges (cf. Acts 16:37), Paul and Silas are imprisoned. Verse 24 supplies two details of their imprisonment: (1) the jailer put them into the "innermost cell"; and (2) he secured their feet into stocks. These actions suggest more than mere concern for the prisoners' security, as the innermost cell would have been oppressively dark and was typically "reserved for dangerous low class felons."<sup>32</sup> Roman stocks were used "in such a way as to cause the utmost discomfort and cramping pain."<sup>33</sup> Luke's presentation suggests that "the accused were considered wrongdoers entirely lacking legal and social merit."<sup>34</sup>

Thus Paul and Silas experience not only physical pain but also psychological distress and public humiliation.<sup>35</sup> Strikingly, it is only *after* undergoing this unjust suffering that Paul reveals his Roman citizenship, which would have offered him legal protection from such treatment (16:37). Further, Paul and Silas stay in the prison following the earthquake (16:28) and evangelize the jailor who had abused them (16:31–32), details that indicate how the missionaries' suffering contributes to God's unfolding plan for salvation and spreading.

2. *A taxonomy of suffering in Luke-Acts.* I have defined suffering as the individual or group experience of bearing physical, psychological, economic, and/or social pain, distress, or loss. Here I survey various types of suffering in Luke-Acts, including instances of persecution, oppression and injustice, natural adversity, and retribution.

<sup>30</sup> Unless otherwise noted, scriptural quotations come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (rev. ed.; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 497 n. 119.

<sup>32</sup> Rapske, *Paul* 126, further 196–204.

<sup>33</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 315. For primary sources and further discussion, see Rapske, *Paul* 126–27.

<sup>34</sup> Rapske, *Paul* 127.

<sup>35</sup> Rightly *ibid.* 432. Cf. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1–2:47* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012) 446.

Acts includes many examples of persecution, including arrests and imprisonments (4:2), false accusations (6:13–14), beatings (5:40), murder plots (9:23), stoning (14:19), and killing (12:2). Persecution usually entails threatening or inflicting *physical* harm on someone else, whether threatened or actual, though it often includes psychological, economic, and social dimensions, as illustrated above in 16:22–24.

Examples of suffering from political injustice include Paul's prolonged imprisonment (Acts 24:26–27), and 16:16–18, where a possessed girl at Philippi is enslaved for her owners' economic gain (16:16). Jesus' passion is the supreme example of persecution and injustice in Luke's Gospel. The evangelist records Jesus' shameful, painful death without any graphic detail, saying simply, "there they crucified him" (Luke 23:33). However, Luke emphasizes the relational, emotional, and social dimensions of Jesus' suffering. His close friends betray and deny him, as he predicted (22:22, 31–34, 47–48, 57–62). Jesus alone fully grasps the suffering he must face, and he experiences profound anguish (ἀγωνία) in prayer (22:44), while his disciples quarrel (22:24), misunderstand him (22:38, 51), and fall asleep at his time of greatest need (22:45–46). Opponents forcefully arrest Jesus like a bandit (22:52), then mock, beat, revile, and falsely accuse him in order to humiliate him and destroy his public identity and credibility (cf. 22:63–65; 23:2, 10–11, 35–36, 39).<sup>36</sup>

Luke's writings offer examples of natural adversities,<sup>37</sup> hardships resulting from calamity, personal or corporate loss or disappointment, and not from human antagonism. The Gospel's opening scene prominently features Elizabeth's barrenness (Luke 1:7), while Acts 27–28 include a violent storm, shipwreck, snakebite, and serious illness. In between these bookends of natural adversity, people suffer from disease and unclean spirits (Luke 7:21), fever (4:38), leprosy (17:12), blindness (18:35), lameness and paralysis (Acts 8:7), poverty (Luke 16:20), and famine (Acts 11:27–30).

However, for Luke (like other biblical authors) these instances of suffering all have underlying spiritual realities. Luke presents human suffering as indicating the world's brokenness because of sin against God and Satan's oppression. At the same time, the suffering of Jesus and his followers is part of the *reversal* and *redemption* of this brokenness. For example, a woman is unable to straighten her back because of "a spirit of weakness." After healing her, Jesus describes the woman as previously bound by Satan for eighteen years (Luke 13:11, 16; cf. Acts 10:38; 26:18). Further, Luke highlights the central role of Jesus' redemptive suffering in the outworking of God's sovereign purposes (Luke 9:22; Acts 4:28). God then empowers suffering believers to proclaim the gospel (4:29–31; 9:16). God and Jesus demonstrate power and compassion to heal and restore sufferers (Acts 10:38) and will ultimately end and reverse suffering and right all injustice (3:20–21; 17:31; 24:25).

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<sup>36</sup> Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 406–7.

<sup>37</sup> Charles A. Estridge employs the term "natural adversities" in "Suffering in Contexts of the Speeches of Acts" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1991) 257–58.

Luke views some suffering as expressing divine retribution. Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Spirit and God strikes them dead (Acts 5:5, 10), worms eat king Herod (12:23), and God blinds Elymas the false prophet (13:11). However, Jesus cautions against interpreting all suffering as punishment for sins that one personally commits (Luke 13:2–5). Luke-Acts records numerous instances of healing and reversal of suffering, but God does not heal all illnesses or spare everyone from suffering and death (Luke 4:25–27; 13:1–5; 16:20–22). While Paul experiences divine deliverance time and again, at the close of Acts he waits under house arrest in Rome. In Acts 12:1–11, one apostle is beheaded while the Lord miraculously rescues another from prison and sure execution. This illustrates the complexity of Jesus' teaching in Luke 21:16–18: "some of you they will put to death ... but not a hair of your head will perish."<sup>38</sup> Thus Thompson writes, "The sometimes contrasting outcomes for God's people found side by side caution against simplistic answers concerning why in the book of Acts some suffer and others are delivered."<sup>39</sup>

### III. SUFFERING AND THE PURPOSE(S) OF ACTS

Scholars have offered various proposals concerning the purpose or purposes for the book of Acts.<sup>40</sup> Many argue that Luke writes for apologetic reasons, to defend Christianity's legitimacy in the Roman world and truthfulness in the face of Jewish persecution and political accusation.<sup>41</sup> Some maintain that Luke writes for the purpose of evangelism or to encourage the church in its mission.<sup>42</sup> Others assert that Acts aims to address historical, theological, or practical questions such as the relationship of Jewish and Gentile believers or the delay of the *parousia*.<sup>43</sup> Still others propose that Luke seeks to strengthen or legitimate the early Christian movement in the face of largely Jewish resistance.<sup>44</sup>

Luke 1:1–4 suggests that the Gospel and probably also Acts (cf. 1:1) primarily address believers who have received instruction (κατηχέω) concerning the Christian

<sup>38</sup> James A. Kelhoffer does not take into account this complexity when he claims that James' death is "a remarkable exception" to Luke 21:18, in *Persecution, Persuasion and Power: Readiness to Withstand Hardship as a Corroboration of Legitimacy in the NT* (WUNT 270; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) 285. Cf. my review in *RBL* (9/2012), online: [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/8391\\_9191.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/8391_9191.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Thompson, *Acts* 61.

<sup>40</sup> Mark L. Strauss, "The Purpose of Luke-Acts: Reaching a Consensus," in *NT Theology in Light of the Church's Mission: FS I. Howard Marshall* (ed. Jon Laansma, et al.; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011) 135–50; Maddox, *Purpose* 20–23.

<sup>41</sup> Keener, *Acts 1:1–2:47* 441–58. He argues that apologetic and mission are intertwined purposes for Luke, p. 438.

<sup>42</sup> See respectively William J. Larkin, "The Recovery of Luke-Acts as 'Grand Narrative' for the Church's Evangelistic and Edification Tasks in a Postmodern Age," *JETS* 43 (2000) 410–12; and Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) 37–38.

<sup>43</sup> Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles* (NT Theology; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 1.

<sup>44</sup> Maddox, *Purpose* 187; Philip F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (SNTSMS 57; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 16–23.

faith but may be misinformed or have lingering concerns (Luke 1:4). Among other things, Luke's narrative may address questions prompted by the gospel message concerning a crucified and risen Messiah, the inclusion of Gentiles into God's people, and the suffering of Jesus' followers.<sup>45</sup> So Luke writes his "orderly account" (1:3) to give confidence or certainty (ἀσφάλεια, 1:4) to readers about "who we are and how we got here."<sup>46</sup> God is fulfilling his ancient promises of salvation and establishing his kingdom in and through the suffering, risen savior and his eschatological people, the suffering, witnessing community of Christ followers.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, Acts may also offer readers "a missiological model" for ongoing proclamation by the Spirit in the face of opposition and persecution.<sup>48</sup>

#### IV. SALVATION AND SPREADING THROUGH SUFFERING: FIVE THESES

We have surveyed various types of suffering in Luke and Acts, including persecution, oppression and injustice, natural adversity, and retribution. Additionally, I asserted that Luke writes to instruct and strengthen readers about the kerygma of the suffering Messiah and about their identity as the suffering yet legitimate people of God who continue the mission begun by the apostles and Paul. I now offer five theses concerning God's unfolding plan for salvation and spreading through suffering. First, Jesus' redemptive suffering and vindication are the surprising means by which God accomplishes his promised plan of salvation. Second, believers' suffering serves a strategic missional purpose in light of God's inaugurated-not-yet-consummated kingdom. Third, suffering validates the legitimacy of the church and especially its leaders, who suffer like Jesus, in fulfillment of his predictions. Fourth, suffering fundamentally expresses the world's brokenness and Satanic oppression; nevertheless, God will ultimately end and reverse suffering and right all injustice and has begun doing so through Jesus and his witnesses. Fifth, believers should respond to suffering through concerted prayer, bold witness, and joyful, confident hope.

Thesis 1. *Jesus' suffering and vindication are the surprising means by which God accomplishes his promised plan of salvation.* Jesus encounters misunderstanding, opposition, and violent rejection from the very beginning of his public ministry. After Jesus reads Isaiah 61 at the Nazareth synagogue and boldly declares that this Scripture has been fulfilled "today," his hearers initially speak well of him. However, they are soon filled with wrath and drive Jesus out of town and nearly off a cliff (Luke 4:16–30). Jesus explains, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown" (4:24). Jesus is the rejected prophet par excellence, who is also the righteous one whom the rejected prophets of old announced (Acts 7:52).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Rapske, "Opposition" 236.

<sup>46</sup> Strauss, "Purpose" 141.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 143. Cf. Thompson, *Acts* 19–20, 61.

<sup>48</sup> Keener, *Acts 1:1–2:47* 440.

<sup>49</sup> See further Cunningham, *Tribulations* 59–65, 182–83.

After Peter declared that Jesus was the Messiah of God (Luke 9:20), Jesus predicts his own suffering and death: “The Son of Man *must* suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Luke 9:22; cf. Matt 16:21; Mark 8:31). Yet his disciples are consistently unable to grasp that he *must* suffer and die (cf. Luke 9:44–45; 18:31–34), until following the resurrection Jesus “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (24:45).

Why is it necessary for Jesus to suffer many things? Jesus “must” (δεῖ) suffer and die “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23; cf. 4:28), according to the “script of the Scripture.”<sup>50</sup> Jesus makes this point most forcefully in Luke 22:37, citing Isaiah 53:12: “For I tell you that this Scripture [τὸ γεγραμμένον] must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.”<sup>51</sup> Luke’s writings clarify that Jesus suffers and dies vicariously for others to bring about God’s promise of restoration and salvation for Israel and indeed “all flesh” (cf. Isa 40:1–5; Luke 2:30–32; 3:3–6). At his final Passover meal Jesus tells his disciples, “This is my body, which is given *for you*. Do this in remembrance of me . . . . This cup that is poured out *for you* is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:19–20). Central to the “new covenant” announced by Jeremiah is a restored relationship between God and his people based upon the definitive forgiveness of sins (cf. Jer 31:31, 34). Consequently the risen Lord declares, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46–47). Therefore, as Peter explains, there is “forgiveness of sins” and comprehensive “salvation in no other name” than that of Jesus, the suffering and exalted Lord and Messiah (Acts 4:12; 5:30–31; cf. 2:36).

Thesis 2. *Believers’ suffering serves a strategic missional purpose in light of God’s inaugurated-not-yet-consummated kingdom.* Acts frequently links Christians’ sufferings and trials to the progress of the Word and the strengthening of the church.<sup>52</sup> Peterson observes, “Luke does not gloss over the conflicts and difficulties of the earliest churches, but, in reporting problems, he regularly focuses on the way they were resolved.”<sup>53</sup> Acts records various external conflicts and difficulties, as well as internal challenges faced by the churches (see Table 1).<sup>54</sup> As believers endure and overcome these trials, the church grows and the gospel continues to spread (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 19:20). Thus, Luke intends to “reassure” readers such as Theophilus (Luke 1:1–4) that God is accomplishing his purposes through his suffering witnesses, who

<sup>50</sup> This phrase comes from Moessner, “Script.”

<sup>51</sup> Jesus’ emphatic citation of Isaiah 53:12 at this juncture in the narrative suggests, “Luke wants his readers to understand Isaiah’s fourth servant song as the hermeneutical key to the narrative of Jesus’ suffering and death.” David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in *Commentary on the NT Use of the OT* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 385.

<sup>52</sup> “Certainly the gospel moves, but never without pain,” according to House, “Suffering” 326.

<sup>53</sup> David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 230.

<sup>54</sup> House incorrectly sees nearly all the church’s problems as coming from external forces until 9:31, in “Suffering” 323.

proclaim Jesus as suffering and exalted Lord and Messiah and await the consummation of the kingdom upon his return (Acts 3:20–21; 14:22).<sup>55</sup>

Table 1: External and Internal Challenges to the Church's Mission in Acts 1–12

<i>External Challenges</i>	<i>Internal Challenges</i>
Jews arrest, imprison, threaten, and beat apostles (4:1–3, 21; 5:18, 40–41)	Ananias and Sapphira's greed, Satanic deceit, and judgment (5:1–10)
Synagogue Jews oppose, accuse, and stone Stephen (6:8–14; 7:54–60)	Neglect of a needy minority group in the church (6:1–7)
Great persecution against the Jerusalem church, leading to scattering (8:1–3)	Simon's false motives for associating with Christianity (8:18–24)
Saul persecutes the church (9:1–2)	The church's acceptance of Saul, the former persecutor (9:13–14, 21, 26)
The Jews persecute Saul (9:23–25, 29)	Gentiles' full inclusion in community (10:14, 23, 28; 11:3)
Severe famine in Judea affects the church (11:27–30)	Jewish believers are hesitant to speak the Word to non-Jews (11:19)
Herod persecutes the church, kills James, and arrests Peter (12:1–4)	

The risen Lord's promise in Acts 1:8 set forth the church's mission between Jesus' ascension and his return (cf. 1:11): "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." As the narrative continues, Spirit-empowered witnesses consistently encounter persecution and opposition as they proclaim the gospel of Messiah Jesus beginning in Jerusalem unto the end of the earth. The apostles take the lead in bearing witness to Jesus in Jerusalem, while Jewish adversaries question, imprison, threaten, and beat them. Through their persistent, suffering witness, "the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). Stephen's martyrdom unleashes a "great persecution" (διωγμὸς μέγας) against the Jerusalem church that scatters (διασπείρω) the church throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1). Far from thwarting the word's advance, the church's scattering remarkably serves as a catalyst for evangelizing Samaria (8:4–25), as well as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, where the first outreach to Gentiles takes place (11:19–21).<sup>56</sup> Then, when Paul and Barnabas are opposed and persecuted by the Jews, they boldly declare they are turning to the Gentiles in obedience to the Lord's command (from Isa 49:6) to "bring salvation to the end of the earth" (Acts 13:46–47), explicitly recalling again Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8.

<sup>55</sup> Thompson, *Acts* 61. Cf. Kilgallen, "Persecution" 160.

<sup>56</sup> "Now those who were scattered [Οἱ μὲν οὖν διασπαρέντες] went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). "Now those who were scattered [Οἱ μὲν οὖν διασπαρέντες] because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews" (Acts 11:19).

After Peter and John announce that salvation is available exclusively through Jesus, their hostile Jewish opponents see their boldness (παρρησία) and are astonished (Acts 4:13). Luke regularly employs the terms παρρησία and παρρησιάζομαι to denote the Spirit-enabled boldness or freedom to proclaim the truth even in the face of opposition or persecution.<sup>57</sup>

The calling and ministry of Saul/Paul further establishes the link between suffering and mission in Acts. Jesus tells Ananias, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:15–16). In context, Jesus’ announcement that Saul must suffer powerfully motivates Ananias and other followers of Jesus to “go” and accept their former persecutor as a true disciple (cf. 9:23–25, 29–30).<sup>58</sup> Verses 15–16 also establish the integral connection between Saul’s suffering and his missionary calling. Throughout Acts, Paul proclaims Jesus as God’s Son, encounters persecution (particularly from fellow Jews), and experiences divine preservation (cf. 9:20–30; 26:19–23).<sup>59</sup>

Thus far, the examples have focused on the suffering of the apostles and Paul. However, Luke 9:23 and Acts 14:22 clearly establish that suffering is normative for believers until the kingdom’s consummation. As Cunningham asserts, “persecution is an integral consequence of following Jesus.”<sup>60</sup> After predicting his own coming suffering (Luke 9:22), Jesus says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (9:23; cf. 14:27). This text summons all disciples to adopt a daily attitude of self-renunciation and willingness to accept the potential shame and suffering that may come from following the suffering Lord.<sup>61</sup>

Acts 14:22 is the clearest statement about the normative Christian experience of present suffering before future glory. Paul is stoned and left for dead in Lystra (14:19) but is miraculously preserved.<sup>62</sup> He then returns with Barnabas to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we [ἡμεῖς] must enter the kingdom of God.” First, the first person plural (ἡμεῖς) likely includes both the missionaries and their hearers. The missionaries’ teaching serves to strengthen and encourage the believers by providing a theological rationale for *Paul’s* recent persecution, which is consistent with his calling to suffer (9:16), and by motivating their hearers to endure various hardships *themselves*. David Adams writes, “The per-

<sup>57</sup> See 2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27–28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26; 28:31; Thompson, *Acts* 96–99. Acts 4:8, 31 indicate that this παρρησία is due to the Holy Spirit empowering believers. Cf. Mittelstadt, *Spirit* 93–94.

<sup>58</sup> See Thesis 3 below.

<sup>59</sup> See further Tabb, “Suffering in Ancient Worldview” 162–75.

<sup>60</sup> Cunningham, *Tribulations* 14.

<sup>61</sup> For a full study of this theme, see Sverre Boe, *Cross-Bearing in Luke* (WUNT 2/278; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). Cf. my review in *BBR* 22 (2011) 409–11.

<sup>62</sup> Schnabel, *Acts* 612. Paul’s comment in 2 Cor 11:25 likely recalls this event in Acts 14:19.

sistence he demands of others ... he embodies himself.”<sup>63</sup> Second, this verse highlights the *necessity* (δεῖ) of “many tribulations,” which implies that believers’ suffering and persecution is consistent with God’s plan. Acts 14:22 may recall Ps 34:19 (33:20 LXX), “Many are the afflictions of the righteous [πολλὰ αἱ θλίψεις τῶν δικαίων], but the LORD delivers him out of them all.”<sup>64</sup> This OT backdrop and Luke’s usage of the term θλίψις elsewhere suggest that “through many tribulations” encompasses persecutions (as in 14:19) as well as other forms of suffering in this life (cf. 7:10). Third, while tribulations are necessary (δεῖ), they are a means (διὰ) and not an end in themselves. As Jesus suffered then entered into glory (Luke 24:26), so too believers in Jesus who suffer now should confidently expect to enter the blessedness of God’s presence.<sup>65</sup>

Thesis 3. *Suffering validates the legitimacy of the church and especially its leaders, who suffer like Jesus in fulfillment of his predictions.* As noted earlier, one of Luke’s purposes for writing was to validate the suffering community of Jesus’ disciples as God’s eschatological people. Acts highlights the legitimacy of the twelve apostles, Stephen, and Paul as divinely authorized leaders who suffer like Jesus in obedience to God’s will (Acts 5:29) in fulfillment of Jesus’ predictions (Luke 12:11–12; 21:12–19; Acts 9:16), and who receive divine aid in the face of opposition (4:13; 26:22).

Table 2: Predictions of Persecution and Proclamation

<i>Prediction in Luke</i>	<i>Fulfillment in Acts</i>
They will lay hands on you (21:12)	Peter and John (4:3); apostles (5:18); church (12:1); Paul (21:27)
They will persecute you (21:12)	Church (8:1); believers’ persecution by Paul (9:4–5; cf. 22:4, 7–8; 26:11, 14–15)
They will hand you over to synagogues (21:12; cf. 12:11)	Stephen (6:9); believers by Paul (9:2; cf. 22:19; 26:11)
They will put you in prison (21:12)	Apostles (5:18–19; cf. 4:3); Peter (12:3); Paul and Silas (16:23)
You will be brought before kings and governors (21:12; cf. 12:11)	Paul (24:10; 26:2, 30; cf. 9:15)
For my name’s sake (21:12, 27)	Apostles (5:28, 40–41); Paul (9:15–16)
This will lead to testimony (21:13)	Apostles (5:32); Stephen (22:20); Paul (22:15)
Wisdom, which your adversaries cannot withstand (21:15)	Peter and John (4:12–14); Stephen (6:10)
The Holy Spirit will teach you (12:12)	Peter/apostles (4:8; 5:32); church (4:31); Stephen (6:10; 7:55); Paul (20:22)
They will kill some of you (21:16)	Stephen (7:54–60); James (12:2)
No hair of your head will perish (21:18)	Paul and fellow passengers (27:34)

<sup>63</sup> David R. Adams, “The Suffering of Paul and the Dynamics of Luke-Acts” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1979) 136.

<sup>64</sup> Noted by Cunningham, *Tribulations* 247.

<sup>65</sup> On entering into the kingdom, see Luke 18:17; 18:25; and 23:42.

The church's proclamation about Jesus instigates persecution from unbelieving Jews and Gentiles. Jewish opposition to Jesus and his witnesses continues the biblical pattern of Israel resisting God's purposes and rejecting God's prophets (Acts 7:51–52; 28:25–27; Isa 6:9–10). Conversely, Gentiles persecute believers because the church's message of Jesus' lordship poses a social, religious, and economic threat (cf. Acts 16:18–19; 19:26–30). Acts portrays those who harass and stand against Jesus' witnesses as *θεομάχοι*, those who fight against God (Acts 5:39).<sup>66</sup>

Acts 4–5 confirms the legitimacy of the apostles as God's appointed leaders in at least four ways. First, those who oppose the other apostles are the same Jewish leaders responsible for their Lord's death.<sup>67</sup> The opponents recognize the apostles' connection to Jesus precisely in their bold witness to the truth amid adversity. Second, persecution highlights the apostles' obedience to God, as they insist, "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (5:29 NIV; cf. 4:19).<sup>68</sup> In contrast, Luke portrays their persecutors as opponents of God and his Messiah (4:25–29; 5:32), in danger of being "completely cut off from their people" (3:23 NIV). Third, the suffering of the apostles and their community identifies them with Jesus, who suffered and was vindicated according to God's plan. It is noteworthy that the apostles endure beating (*δέρω*), as their master did (5:40; cf. Luke 22:63).<sup>69</sup> The Christian community interprets the threats against Peter and John (4:17, 21, 29) as an extension or continuation of the opposition Jesus faced (4:27–28).<sup>70</sup> Fourth, the apostles experience God's presence and power in the midst of human opposition. Peter and John perform a "notable sign" of healing (4:16), and the believers pray for God to continue to grant further healings (4:30). Further, the apostles' miraculous deliverance from prison and ongoing teaching ministry thwart and confuse the high priest's plans (5:19–25).

In Acts 6–7, Stephen's suffering confirms his legitimacy as a true witness while discrediting his persecutors. In Luke 21:12–15 Jesus predicted that his disciples would suffer:

But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict (cf. 12:11–12).

When members of the synagogue oppose him, Stephen demonstrates Spirit-filled wisdom that his adversaries could not withstand (Acts 6:9–10), in fulfillment of Jesus' words (Luke 21:15). The persecution of Stephen by his own people con-

<sup>66</sup> Rapske, "Opposition" 236–38.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Luke 22:66; 23:13; 24:20; Acts 4:5–6; 5:28–29.

<sup>68</sup> The apostles' response "highlights the value of their suffering for asserting their legitimacy," according to Kelhoffer, *Persecution* 296.

<sup>69</sup> For this and other parallels, see Cunningham, *Tribulations* 195–96.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 198.

tinues Israel's long-standing pattern of persecuting its divinely appointed leaders (Acts 7:9, 35, 52, 57–58). Further, Stephen's charge that his Jewish adversaries are uncircumcised in heart and ears and resistant to the Spirit like their forebears (7:51–52) is dramatically confirmed in the next scene. Stephen is "filled with the Spirit" and gazes into heaven (7:55) while his opponents "were enraged in their hearts" and "covered their ears" (7:54, 57 HCSB) and proceed to stone Stephen.

Finally, the presentation of Stephen's trial and death in Acts 6–7 deliberately parallels Jesus' passion.<sup>71</sup> Both Jesus and Stephen (1) appear before the Jewish council (Luke 22:66; Acts 6:12, 15); (2) are accused by false witnesses (Mark 14:56–58; Acts 6:13–14); (3) are charged with blasphemy (Mark 14:64; Acts 6:11; cf. 7:58); and (4) cry with a loud voice at their deaths (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:60). Additionally, each of Stephen's three statements in Acts 7:56–60 recalls similar sayings of Jesus in Luke 22–23.

Table 3: Parallels between Jesus' and Stephen's Statements

<i>Jesus</i>	<i>Stephen</i>
"But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69)	"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56)
"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (τὸ πνεῦμά μου; Luke 23:46).	"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (τὸ πνεῦμά μου; 7:59).
Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).	"Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (7:60).

Stephen's dying words not only recall Jesus' earlier statements; they are also addressed to the risen, vindicated Lord. The exalted Son of Man assumes "the standing posture ... of a witness" in the heavenly court (Acts 7:55–56).<sup>72</sup> Stephen receives divine blessing and vindication, while his opponents are liable to the Son of Man's judgment (Luke 9:26; 12:9; cf. Acts 10:42; 17:31).

Saul's calling to suffer for Jesus' name (Acts 9:16) and his initial experiences of persecution (9:23, 29) confirm the genuineness of his conversion in the eyes of the persecuted church. It is crucial to note that the risen Lord Jesus reveals Saul's

<sup>71</sup> Witherington writes, "One of the overarching impressions of the material in Acts 6:8–8:3 is that Luke is deliberately writing this story to indicate how Stephen's last days and end parallel those of his master, Jesus," in *Acts* 252. Cf. Anselm Schulz, *Nachfolgen und Nachahmen; Studien über das Verhältnis der neutestamentlichen Jüngerschaft zur urchristlichen Vorbildethik* (SANT 6; München: Kösel, 1962) 268; Moessner, "New Light" 234; Charles K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols.; ICC; London: T&T Clark, 1994, 1998) 1.320; James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem* (Christianity in the Making 2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 263–64.

<sup>72</sup> C. F. D. Moule, *The Phenomenon of the NT* (London: SCM, 1967) 90. Cf. *Ascen. Isa.* 9:35–36; Witherington, *Acts* 275. For a summary of alternative interpretations of Acts 7:55–56, see Barrett, *Acts* 1.384–85; Nicole Chibici-Revneanu, "Ein himmlischer Stehplatz: Die Haltung Jesu in der Stephanusvision (Apg 7.55–56) und ihre Bedeutung," *NTS* 53 (2007) 459–88.

calling to bear his name and suffer for his name to Ananias, one of the disciples in Damascus that Saul intended to harass (9:13–16; cf. 9:1). The Lord Jesus responds to Ananias’s fears concerning this former persecutor by commanding the disciple to “go” to Saul for two reasons. First, Saul is Jesus’ chosen instrument to bear his name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel (v. 15). Second, Ananias should overcome his fear and move toward the persecutor because (γάρ) Jesus will show Saul “how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (v. 16).<sup>73</sup> Immediately after hearing that Saul must suffer for Jesus, Ananias goes and ministers to his former enemy and calls him “brother” (9:17). The same pattern recurs in the next two scenes, as Saul’s powerful preaching *and* his experience of persecution from his fellow Jews together facilitate his full acceptance as a disciple of the suffering Lord (9:20–30). Saul’s suffering links him to Jesus (Luke 9:22) and the apostles (Acts 5:41). It also serves a powerful apologetic function for Ananias and the other disciples to embrace Saul’s new identity as Jesus’ chosen emissary.

Paul’s words to the Ephesian elders demonstrate that he fully embraces his calling to a ministry of suffering:

And now behold, having been bound in the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me in there, except that the Holy Spirit in each city keeps solemnly testifying to me, saying that bonds and afflictions await me [δεσμὰ καὶ θλίψεις με μένουσιν]. But I do not consider my life of any account as precious to myself, so that I may complete my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to solemnly testify to the gospel of God’s grace. (Acts 20:22–24)

In 15:26, the apostles and elders commend Paul and Barnabas as “men who have given over their lives [παραδεδωκόσι τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν] for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (my translation). Even though Jackson and Lake called the rendering “men who have risked their lives” “indefensible” eighty years ago, it still persists in modern English versions and lexicons.<sup>74</sup> However, the perfect participle παραδεδωκόσι likely denotes a decisive act of consecration or devotion, not repeated exposure to hazards. Their lives are surrendered for Jesus’ name, which recalls Paul’s original calling to suffer (9:16) and also anticipates his declaration that he is even ready to die in Jerusalem for Jesus’ name (21:13).<sup>75</sup>

Thesis 4. *Suffering fundamentally expresses the world’s brokenness from sin and Satanic oppression.* Nevertheless, God will ultimately end and reverse suffering and right all injustice and has begun doing so through Jesus and his witnesses. Humanity’s basic

<sup>73</sup> This reading of Acts 9:15–16 is further supported in Tabb, “Suffering in Ancient Worldview” 166–69.

<sup>74</sup> F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, *Beginnings of Christianity* (5 vols.; London: Macmillan, 1920–33) 4:180. Cf. NRSV, ESV, NASB, NIV, HCSB, NKJV; BDAG 761; L&N §21.7; NIDNTT 2.368. Schlachter is preferable: “Männern, die ihr Leben *hingegen* haben für den Namen unseres Herrn Jesus Christus,” *Die Bibel* (Schlachter; Geneva: Genfer Bibelgesellschaft, 2000).

<sup>75</sup> “The suffering which Jesus and Paul experienced are an inevitable part of Christian leadership as Luke understands it ... in the end suffering and struggle lead purposefully to glory,” according to Steve Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle: The Portrait of Paul in the Miletus Speech and 1 Thessalonians* (SNTSMS 108; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 136.

predicament is not suffering but sin, unbelief, Satanic oppression, and rejection of God's purposes.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, suffering is a result of the world's brokenness and is an enduring reality for believers and unbelievers alike until God's kingdom comes in its fullness.<sup>77</sup>

Salvation (σωτηρία) in Luke-Acts is multifaceted.<sup>78</sup> Its central feature is forgiveness of sins and deliverance from eternal death and calamity (Luke 9:24; Acts 2:38–40; 4:12), but salvation also entails freedom from demonic oppression and physical, spiritual, and social restoration. This restoration anticipates creation's renewal and the full realization of God's kingdom (Luke 11:2; 22:18; Acts 3:20–21). According to Acts 10:38, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (cf. Luke 13:11–18). His followers bear witness to his resurrection and summoning others to repentance and faith unto the forgiveness of sins (cf. Luke 24:46–48; Acts 1:8; 5:31–32). Paul is sent to open the Gentiles' eyes, "so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). The same Spirit that empowered Jesus empowers the apostles and other Christians, and thus they too perform "signs and wonders" that attest to God's power and presence (cf. Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:13; 14:3; 15:12). These signs authenticate their gospel proclamation and reveal "its character as good news of 'salvation' motivated by God's compassion."<sup>79</sup>

The suffering and pain of the present world do not continue indefinitely but will terminate at "the times of the restoration of all things," spoken of by God's prophets (Acts 3:21, my translation). Significantly, this reference to eschatological restoration comes in Peter's sermon explaining the miraculous healing of the crippled beggar (3:5–8, 16).<sup>80</sup> Luke's account of the lame man leaping recalls Isa 35:6 LXX (ἀλεῖται . . . ὁ χλωρός), where healings of the blind, deaf, and lame attend God's coming to save his people (Isa 35:4).<sup>81</sup> According to Peter, this man is given "full health" (ὀλοκληρία, Acts 3:16) and is now "saved" (σέσωται, 4:9) and "sound" (ὕγις) by the name of Jesus, whom God raised (4:10). Following this use of σώζω to denote physical healing in 4:9 (cf. Luke 8:36, 48, 50), Peter announces definitive-

<sup>76</sup> Kavin Rowe explains, "This problem gets formulated in different ways of course—ignorance, violence, bribery, idolatry, magic, superstition, avarice, and so forth—but these failings are simply different expressions of the fundamental quandary: human beings are lost, sinners, in the dark; they need new direction, forgiveness, light" (*World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009] 124).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Rom 8:18–25; Rev 21:4.

<sup>78</sup> See further Ben Witherington III, "Salvation and Health in Christian Antiquity: The Soteriology of Luke-Acts in Its First Century Setting," in *Witness to the Gospel* 145–66; Bock, *Theology* 239–77; Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Social Dimensions of *Sotēria* in Luke-Acts and Paul," in *Contested Issues in Christian Origins and the NT: Collected Essays* (NovTSup 146; Leiden: Brill, 2013) 183–204.

<sup>79</sup> Keener, *Acts 1:1–2:47* 546.

<sup>80</sup> Joel B. Green, "Was It Not Necessary for the Messiah to Suffer These Things and Enter into His Glory? The Significance of Jesus' Death for Luke's Soteriology," in *Spirit and Christ: FS Max Turner* (ed. I. Howard Marshall, et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) 76–77.

<sup>81</sup> Dennis Hamm, "Acts 3:12–26: Peter's Speech and the Healing of the Man Born Lame," *PRS* 11 (1984) 201.

ly that there is no other name “by which we must be saved [σωθῆναι]” (Acts 4:12). Thus, this healing is “a sign of the present, heavenly authority of the exalted Christ to save in the ultimate sense,” which anticipates “the universal restoration that Jesus will accomplish on his return (3:20–21),” a restoration and renewal that has begun already in Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>82</sup>

Jesus’ resurrection is foundational for NT authors, particularly Luke. Resurrection vindicates Jesus as God’s Messiah, demonstrating that the human authorities were fundamentally mistaken in rejecting Jesus and condemning him to death. Peter declares, “The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree” (5:30; cf. 2:23–34; 3:13; 13:27–30). Further, Jesus’ resurrection serves as a decisive initial *present* fulfillment of Israel’s hope of *future* resurrection (26:6–8, 23; 28:20).<sup>83</sup> Peter and John provoke the Sadducees—who deny the resurrection (23:8)—by proclaiming “in Jesus the resurrection of the dead” (4:2). Similarly Paul declares that the Messiah was “the first from the resurrection of the dead” (26:23). Jesus’ resurrection guarantees others’ future resurrection and ushers in the present experience of the new age’s blessings for believers who receive the Spirit (2:17; 2:33) and identify with their risen Lord (9:4–5).<sup>84</sup>

In the present, Jesus and his followers face opposition (Luke 2:34–35; Acts 13:45), and injustice and oppression continue, affecting believers and unbelievers alike (Luke 13:1; Acts 24:26–27). In Acts 9:4–5 the Lord declares, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? . . . I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Paul repeats this striking announcement in his defense before the Jews in 22:7–8 and before Agrippa in 22:14–15. The risen Lord Jesus radically identifies with his suffering, oppressed followers, such that to persecute them is in some profound sense to persecute him.<sup>85</sup> The Lord Jesus shows mercy to his enemies, such as Saul the persecutor (Luke 6:35–36; Acts 9:15), and will one day “judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31). Thus believers should pray for their persecutors’ forgiveness, as Jesus and Stephen do (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60), and should like Paul reason with unbelievers and authorities concerning “righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment” (Acts 24:25).<sup>86</sup>

Thesis 5. *Believers should respond to suffering through concerted prayer, bold witness, and joyful, confident hope.* Jesus summons disciples to a radical response to suffering and opposition: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who

<sup>82</sup> Peterson, *Acts* 167, 191.

<sup>83</sup> See Kevin L. Anderson, *But God Raised Him from the Dead: The Theology of Jesus’ Resurrection in Luke-Acts* (Paternoster Biblical Monographs; Bletchley, UK: Paternoster, 2006) 266–91. “Jesus’ own resurrection from the dead is the beginning of ‘the resurrection of the dead,’” according to N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 3; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 453–54 (italics his).

<sup>84</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *Christ and the Future in NT History* (NovTSup 97; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 119.

<sup>85</sup> Acts 9:4–5 highlights “the organic and indissoluble unity” between Christ and his people, according to Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *Luke-Acts* (Expositor’s Bible Commentary 10; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) 854.

<sup>86</sup> Steve Walton, “What Does ‘Mission’ in Acts Mean in Relation to the ‘Powers that Be?,” *JETS* 55 (2012) 537–56, esp. 555.

curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27–28). As he goes to the cross, Jesus fully embodies this message and models for his followers a distinctively Christian response to suffering by healing one of his opponents (Luke 22:51), praying for God to forgive his persecutors (23:34), and entrusting himself confidently to his Father’s care (23:46).<sup>87</sup>

Like Jesus, the disciples after Pentecost consistently respond to suffering and difficulty by praying.<sup>88</sup> Acts 4:24–30 offers a model prayer in the face of hostility.<sup>89</sup> The believers affirm God’s sovereign power and rehearse the outworking of God’s plan in Jewish and Gentile opposition to Jesus, interpreted in light of Ps 2:1–2 (Acts 4:24–28). Then they ask the Lord to “look upon their threats” (cf. 4:21) and grant them continued ability “to speak your word with all boldness” (4:29), as God continues to perform healings, signs, and wonders through Jesus’ name (4:30). The prayer is immediately and powerfully answered in 4:31: “they all were filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness [παρρησίας].” Thus the church prays not for deliverance from adversity or judgment on their opponents but boldness to proclaim Christ amid adversity. Acts ends on this very note as Paul remains in Rome under house arrest, “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (28:31).

In fulfillment of Luke 21:12–15, the apostles, Stephen, and Paul all boldly testify to the risen Lord in the face of opposition. Further, after enduring imprisonment and beatings, the apostles “rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (Acts 5:41). Underlying this paradoxical response of rejoicing at the honor of suffering dishonor for Jesus’ sake is Jesus’ teaching in Luke 6:22–23: “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.”

## V. CONCLUSION

This study defines suffering as the individual or group experience of bearing physical, psychological, economic, and/or social pain, distress, or loss. Persecution is particularly prominent in Luke-Acts, although the narrative includes various other forms of suffering, including oppression and injustice, natural adversity, and retribution. We have seen that the suffering of Jesus and his followers is integral to

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<sup>87</sup> I argue for the authenticity of Jesus’ prayer in Luke 23:34 in Brian J. Tabb, “Is the Lukan Jesus a Martyr? A Critical Assessment of a Scholarly Consensus,” *CBQ* (forthcoming).

<sup>88</sup> Luke 6:28; 22:40–46; 23:46; Acts 4:24–30; 7:59–60; 12:5; 16:25; cf. Graham H. Twelftree, *People of the Spirit: Exploring Luke’s View of the Church* (London: SPCK, 2009) 106–7.

<sup>89</sup> “The entreaty of the friends of Peter and John provides most of all a paradigmatic interpretation of the believers’ experience of opposition and a paradigmatic display of God’s stand on the matter,” according to Geir Otto Holmås, *Prayer and Vindication in Luke-Acts: The Theme of Prayer within the Context of the Legitimizing and Edifying Objective of the Lukan Narrative* (Library of NT Studies 433; London: T&T Clark, 2011) 180.

the unfolding plan of God for salvation and spreading. First, God accomplishes his promised plan of salvation through the suffering, risen Messiah. Second, within the framework of God's inaugurated-not-yet-consummated kingdom, suffering serves a strategic purpose for the advancement of the gospel. Third, suffering legitimates believers and especially church leaders, who suffer like Jesus in fulfillment of his predictions. Fourth, suffering is a basic feature of the world's brokenness because of sin and demonic oppression. However, God will surely end and reverse suffering and its effects and will right all injustice and has begun to do so through the risen Christ and his witnesses. Finally, Luke-Acts calls believers to respond to suffering through concerted prayer, bold witness, and joyful, confident hope.