



Jews and Christians Together in the Gospel of Luke



Probably it was somewhere in Greece during the last decade of the first century that an evangelist wrote the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostle—chiefly for Gentiles. His account of the passion and resurrection of Jesus was the center and climax of his literary work. It opened the time of Jesus to the time of the church on the way to the fullness of time in God's reign.

Luke's passion account does not reflect major problems with Judaism, as the other three gospels do. Politically and ethnically, his work is at once simpler and more complex. He knew great varieties of Jewish Christian communities, Gentile Christian communities and mainly mixed Christian communities. For example, in the passion account, "the Jews" occurs three times in a neutral sense (Luke 23:3, 38, 51; 7:3). Even references to the "chief priests" and "scribes" are neutral.

Genuinely positive, however, is Luke's evaluation of the law and the prophets of Israel. At a key transition in the gospel, Jesus affirmed, "Up until John it was the law and the prophets; from that time on the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is pressed to enter it" (Luke 16:16). The law and the prophets are not neutral but normative in Luke's view. Justification by faith in Christ, according to the Lucan Paul, is not a replacement of the law, but supplements it (see Acts 13:38-39). In fact the law and the prophets predict truths about God's reign. On the road to Emmaus, for example, the risen Lord, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.

"Israel," for Luke, is always the Israel of old, heir of the "promise made to the fathers" (Acts 13:32). The evangelist understood the people of Israel, the Jews, very positively. On one occasion, "three thousand of these Jews welcomed the word and received baptism" (Acts 2:41). Later the number was five thousand (4:4). Finally, "Brother, you see how many thousands of believers there are from among the Jews, and they are all zealous observers of the law" (21:20).

Look at Simeon, Anna, Mary and other faithful people of Israel. Simeon sang out, "My eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the people, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel (Luke 3:30ff.; Isaiah 42:6; 46:13; 49:6). John the Baptist proclaimed, "All flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6; Isaiah 40:5).

For Luke, Christians were not the Israel of God, as they were for Paul; nor were they the true Israel of the nations, as for Mark. For Luke, Gentile Christians were part of a larger re-established Israel. Some call it "reconstituted," because the law and the prophets form its "constitution."

Luke's economic vision of Jewish-Christian relations builds on two pillars: the law and the prophets of Israel as well as the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ.

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