

Eschatological Prophet of Restoration: Luke's Theological Portrait of John the Baptist in Luke 3:1–6

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Abstract

While numerous articles and commentaries on Luke 3:1–6 draw readers' attention to Luke's prophetic portrait of John, these treatments of Luke's prophetic presentation of John are often cursory in nature and do not consider the subtle prophetic allusions, motifs, and echoes that Luke employs throughout these six verses. The purpose of this article is to explore the tapestry of Luke's prophetic portrait of John as the eschatological Elijah-like prophet.

1 Introduction

It is common conjecture in Lukan scholarship that the author of the Third Gospel presents John the Baptist as an eschatological prophet.¹ This is evident not only in Luke's inclusion of an infancy narrative of John in which he notes that the Baptist will be a prophet in the spirit of Elijah (Luke 1:16–17), but also in his manipulation of his main source Mark. Beginning in Luke 3, the author of the Third Gospel clarifies Mark's

* This article would not have been possible without the instruction and feedback I received from Dr. Allen Black, Professor of NT at Harding School of Theology in Memphis, Tenn., while I was a student there. As a result, I dedicate this article to him and his many years of "making ready a people for the Lord."

¹ Sanders (1985, 92) notes, "There is in any case no reason to doubt the depiction of John as an eschatological preacher." For more information on John the Baptist in the gospels see Ernst (1989); Lupieri (1992, 430–461); Wink (1968); Tatum (1994); Webb (1991); Hollenbach (1992, 887–899); Koester (1982, 2.71–72); Evans (2006, 3.344–351). For a helpful summary of the information Luke contains on John the Baptist, see Vinson (2008, 93–100).

vague “beginning” and introduces John with a detailed synchronism (3:1–2a), connecting the Baptist’s activity with a divine call—the word of God came to John (3:2b). While these features of the Lukan narrative are certainly evidence of Luke’s prophetic accentuation of John, they are by no means the only ones. On the contrary, a detailed investigation of Luke’s introduction of John’s ministry reveals that the author of the Third Gospel carefully constructed the Baptist’s public appearance in Luke 3:1–6. Saturating the pericope with numerous prophetic allusions, motifs, and echoes, Luke presents John as the eschatological *Elijah-like* prophet and genesis of the restoration of Israel. The purpose of this article therefore is to examine Luke’s prophetic portrait of John through an exegesis of Luke 3:1–6, giving attention to Luke’s use of Mark.²

2 Luke’s Synchronistic “Beginning”

Similar to biblical and ancient Greek historiographers, Luke employs chronological markers to date his narrative.³ He reconstructs the *Sitz im Leben* of John’s ministry with seven historical figures from the first century C.E. (3:1–2a), demonstrating that John’s ministry transpired in and around Roman-occupied Palestine.⁴ In the process, Luke adds to Mark’s narrative, noting that the events of Mark’s “beginning” (1:1) occurred:

² This article presupposes Markan priority, the two-source hypothesis, and the existence of some form of Q. However, I am unsure if Q was a written or oral source. For Markan priority and a written Q see Koester (2007, 26, 40–44). For more information on the possibility of an oral Q see Dunn (2011).

³ 1 Kgs 1:1; 6:1; 2 Kgs 1:1; 3:1; 2 Chr 13:1; 16:1; Ezra 1:1; Neh 2:1; 1 Macc 1:1; 2 Macc 13:1. For more information see Sweeney (2005, 33–42). Herodotus, *Hist.* Prologue; Lucian, *How to Write History*; Polybius, *Histories* 1.13; Josephus, *Ant.* 10.1; 11.1; Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* 2.2; Bovon (2002, 118). For more information on ancient historiography see Eigler (2005, 6.415–430). For an excellent treatment of Luke’s synchronism and Hellenistic historiography see Moessner (2006, 130–150).

⁴ Luke’s synchronistic dating system also presents the socio-historical backdrop of the narrative. The events of Luke 3 occur at a time when Roman hegemony extended to all facets of Jewish life, even the sacred Jewish right of appointing a high priest (see Josephus, *Ant.* 18.2.2; 18.4.3; 19.6.4; *B.J.* 1.152–5). As a result of Roman oppression, messianic expectations of deliverance were elevated, something Luke notes in particular, Luke 3:15; Acts 5:33–39. For more information on Roman hegemony see SEG 36, translation by Judge (2002, 22); Koester (1982, 2.390–403). A coin minted in Rome picture Tiberius on the obverse side of the coin and the emblems of a globe and rudder on the reverse (BMCRE I 139 Nr. 136–137). The propaganda and symbolism of the coin suggests that Rome and Tiberius are steering the course of the world (Suarez 2010, 30).

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius,⁵ when Pontius Pilate⁶ was governor of Judea, and Herod⁷ was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip⁸ ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas.⁹ . . . (3:1–2a)¹⁰

Synchronisms such as the one above are occasionally found in the Third Gospel. As the author of Luke-Acts introduces the nativities of John

Noreña (2011, 265) notes the following about numismatics in the Roman Empire: “Though the specific effect of messages on coins is difficult to document, as we have seen, the distinctive feature of the coinage as a medium of communications ensured that coins played a crucial role in shaping public discourse—critical for the maintenance of any configuration of power. . . . No other commodity in the Roman world was produced on that scale. And coins were portable. As a result of their mass production and portability, coins were everywhere, constantly crossing back and forth between the public and private spheres. . . . In a world without modern technologies of mass communications, the only medium capable of such a deep impact was the coinage.” For more information on Roman imperial iconography in the early empire, see Zanker (1990). For more Roman propaganda, see in the early empire see *OGIS*, 458; Virgil, *Aen.* 6.750–853; *4th Eclogue*; Horace, *Odes* 4.2; *Shield of Virtues*; *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*; *IGRR* III, 137; *OGIS*, 532; *ILS*, 8781.

⁵ Tiberius Iulius Caesar Augustus (42 B.C.E.–37 C.E.) was adopted by Augustus Caesar in 4 C.E. and ascended to the throne upon Augustus’s death in 14 C.E. Suetonius, *Tib.* 15; Tacitus, *Ann.* 1. For more information see Balsdon and Levick (2012, 1478–1479). Josephus uses a similar dating method: “in the twentieth year of the reign of Tiberius . . .” *Ant.* 18.106.

⁶ Pilate was the prefect of Judea from 26–35 C.E. (see *EJ* 369; *AE* 1963, #104; Luke 13:1; Matt 27; Mark 15; John 18; Philo, *Leg.* 299–305; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.2.2; 18.3; *B.J.* 2.9.2–4). For more information see Rajak (2012, 1183–1184); Berschin (2007, 11.597–598); Rousseau and Arav (1995, 225–227).

⁷ Augustus Caesar installed Herod Antipas as the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea 4 B.C.E. However, Herod Antipas was removed in 39 C.E. from his position and exiled. Josephus, *B.J.* 2.6.3; *Ant.* 18.2.1, 3; 18.4.5; 18.5.1–3; 18.7. For more information see Rajak (2012, 673).

⁸ Augustus installed Philip as tetrarch of Bateneia, Trachonitis, Auranitis, Gaulantis, and Panias in 4 B.C.E. (Rajak 2012, 1129).

⁹ For more information on Caiaphas see Wandrey (2003, 2.925); Rousseau and Arav (1995, 225–227). There is no clear answer why Luke uses the singular form ἀρχιερέως in relation to Annas and Caiaphas. Bovon’s (2002, 120) suggestion may have some merit: “The only clear point is that Luke, like John the evangelist, connects Annas and Caiaphas with the story of Jesus, and considers both to be high priest.” See John 11:49; 18:13, 19; Acts 4:6.

¹⁰ All English scripture references are taken from the NRSV.

and Jesus, Luke marks the years of their births with notable historical figures, King Herod in 1:5, and Augustus Caesar in 2:1–2. The dating system of 3:1–2a, however, is a nonpareil for it is more exhaustive than the two previous ones. Thus Luke emphasizes the importance of the events of 3:1–2a within his narrative. One might expect that an early Christian author would place his narrative's most detailed synchronism before the introduction of his main protagonist, Jesus of Nazareth. Nevertheless, Luke does not. As a result, Luke uniquely highlights the importance of John's ministry.¹¹

Not only does the dating system of 3:1–2a accentuate John's role in the gospel story, but also the synchronism introduces the Baptist as a prophet. Throughout Jewish Scriptures, numerous prophetic books utilize synchronisms to date the ordination of a prophet's ministry.¹² The work of Isaiah is introduced with: "the vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (Isa 1:1).¹³ The prophet Jeremiah's ministry began: ". . . in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month" (Jer 1:1b–3). And the author of the book of Daniel indicates that the events of his narrative were inaugurated: "In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it" (Dan 1:1).

Notwithstanding John's prophetic introduction, Luke's dating system also introduces several antagonists into his narrative.¹⁴ Readers who are familiar with Jewish tradition would likely also be aware of the strained relationships that God's prophets typically had with earthly rulers. Since the first Israelite king, Saul, seers have been commissioned to confront unrighteous monarchs. For example, Elijah spent much of his

¹¹ This conclusion is supported by the surprising number of references to John as the beginning of the gospel story in the evangelistic exploits of the early Christians in Acts (Acts 1:5; 13:24–25), even among non-Jews (Acts 10:37).

¹² Cf. Ezek 1:1–3; Hos 1:1; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1.

¹³ There is disagreement concerning how First, Second, and Third Isaiah are related to the superscription. For more information see Childs (2001, 11–12); Blenkinsopp (2000, 175–176).

¹⁴ Green (1997, 167).

prophetic career battling the assimilationist king, Ahab (1 Kgs 17–19).¹⁵ Jeremiah's prophetic ministry was riddled with confrontations with authorities occasionally resulting in Jeremiah's imprisonment (e.g., Jer 36). Consequently, readers should not be surprised when they encounter hostility between John and Herod, which ends with the demise of John (Luke 3:18–19).¹⁶

Luke's placement of these characters in relation to his infancy narratives is rather interesting and creates a sense of literary irony. The birth stories, which likely function as an introduction for the entire two-volume work,¹⁷ acclimate readers to Luke's perspective. Therefore, as readers of the gospel encounter the Emperor Tiberius and other earthly rulers, they are *already* aware that God has begun a great divine reversal and “scattered the proud,” “brought down the powerful from their thrones,” and “lifted up the lowly” (1:51–53).¹⁸ As a result, Luke encourages readers to form a negative opinion of the rulers of 3:1–2a, and see them as antagonistic forces throughout his work.

3 Luke's Employment of Prophetic Motifs

After Luke's synchronistic explanation of Mark's “beginning” that introduces John as a prophet, Luke follows the overall order of Mark 1. Much like Mark, Luke notes that the Baptist's ministry was successful and that he baptized “all the people.”¹⁹ Nonetheless, Luke also alters the Markan narrative for his own theological purposes. First, he moves Mark 1:2, the quotation from Mal 3:1, to a later point in his gospel (7:27). Second, the author positions the Isaianic quotation of Mark 1:3 (Isa 40:3) after his introduction of John's ministry (3:4). Following these alterations to Mark's Gospel, Luke is left with Mark 1:4, part of which he shifts to a

¹⁵ For more information see Sweeney (2005, 36–37).

¹⁶ Mark 6:14–29; cf. Matt 14:1–12. Josephus notes that Herod killed John because he was suspicious of sedition, *Ant.* 18.116–119. For more information on John the Baptist in Josephus see Ernst (1989, 253–263).

¹⁷ *Contra* Paffenroth (1997) who believes the first two chapters are a later edition. For more information on the unity of Luke 1–2 to the rest of the narrative and its function in Luke-Acts, see Suler (1998, 173–189); Talbert (2003, 65–77); Coleridge (1993); Jung (2004); Strauss (1995, 85–86).

¹⁸ Interestingly, this reversal begins, not with the birth of Jesus, but with the nativity of John (Luke 1:32–33, 69–74; 2:25, 38).

¹⁹ Luke 3:21; Mark 1:5; cf. Matt 1:5.

later point in the pericope (3:3b). Finally, Luke adds these words: “the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.”

Luke’s addition to the Markan narrative continues to demonstrate his interest in the prophetic portrait of John. For example, Luke’s addendum includes the Lukan phrase ῥῆμα θεοῦ²⁰ (word of God), which underscores John’s prophetic connection. Numerous prophets of the Hebrew Bible were ordained into public service when some form of the ῥῆμα θεοῦ (word of God) came to them.²¹ After the ῥῆμα κυρίου (word of the Lord) came to Nathan, he was called to confront King David of his peccancy with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 7:4). Through the ῥῆμα κυρίου (word of the Lord), Yahweh instructed Isaiah to return to King Hezekiah and proclaim that God would spare his life (2 Kgs 20:4). John’s association with the prophets is also evident in another Lukan phrase τὸν Ζαχαρίου υἱὸν (the son of Zechariah). Luke’s use of υἱὸν (son) in this construction demonstrates Semitic influence,²² for the designation “son of” is common in the introduction of Hebrew prophets.²³

For readers of the Gospel of Luke, this prophetic portrait is a direct fulfilment of the infancy narratives.²⁴ At the birth announcement of the Baptist, the angel Gabriel informs Zechariah that John:

Will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.²⁵ (Luke 1:16–17)

²⁰ All Greek Textual quotations are from Nestle-Aland 27th edition unless otherwise noted.

²¹ Cf. Gen 15:1; 1 Sam 15:10; 1 Kgs 6:11; 2 Kgs 20:4; 1 Chr 17:3; Isa 1:1; Jer 1:2. For more information see Sweeney (2005, 35); Tatum (1994, 69).

²² BDF §162

²³ Cf. 1 Kgs 19:19; 2 Kgs 3:11; 2 Chr 18:7; Isa 1:1; Jer 1:1; Ezek 1:3; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Zech 1:1.

²⁴ The notion of fulfilment runs throughout Luke-Acts (Talbert 2002, 30). Prophecy and fulfilment played an important role in Graeco-Roman literature (Virgil, *Aen.* 6.788–807; Aune 1983, 146). Concerning Luke 1–2, Bauckham (2009, 328) astutely notes, “Luke thereby provides his readers with a framework of expectation and significance within which to read the rest of the story of the Gospel and Acts.” For more information on the infancy narratives of Luke see George (1978, 43–65).

²⁵ Brown (1993, 262); De Long (2009, 138–152).

From the outset of the Third Gospel readers are aware that John is destined to be a great prophet. However, by indicating that he will be a prophet “with the spirit and power of Elijah,” Luke juxtaposes John with one of the most renowned seers in all the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple Judaism, and nascent Christianity, Elijah.²⁶

Among the corpora of writings that were composed around the first century C.E. that praise Elijah, the Wisdom of Sirach is probably the most helpful for understanding Luke's presentation of John. As the author lauds Elijah for his wonderful deeds (Sir 48:5–10), he borrows from Mal 4:6 and notes: “At the appointed time, it is written, you are destined to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and to restore the tribes of Jacob” (48:10).²⁷ While Luke does not agree with the author of the Wisdom of Sirach concerning Elijah turning God's wrath away from the people (e.g., Luke 3:7–9), he does share the view that Elijah would restore the people of God. Thus the notion that upon the return of Elijah he would restore Israel existed within the matrix of Second Temple Judaism (and embryonic Christianity) before Luke composed his gospel. Considering Luke's attention to the restoration of Israel theme throughout his two-volume work,²⁸ the Wisdom of Sirach may be one of the sources for his Elijah typology for John the Baptizer.²⁹

²⁶ 1 Kgs 17–21; 2 Kgs 1; 2:1–3; 9:36. Mal 4:5; 1 Macc 2:58; 2 Esd 7:109; Sir 48:1–11; 4Q558; *Sib. Or.* 2:187–190; Matt 11:14; 16:14; 17:3–4, 10–12; 27:47, 49; Mark 6:15; 8:28; 9:4–5, 11–13; 15:35–36; Jas 5:17; Rev 11:1–6.

²⁷ Luke's words more closely resemble Sir 48:10 than Mal 4:6. In the following comparison, word-for-word similarities are underlined with an unbroken line, while thought-for-thought similarities are underlined with a dashed line:

- Luke 1:16–17: καὶ αὐτὸς προελεύσεται ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν πνεύματι καὶ δυνάμει Ἡλίου, ἐπιστρέψαι καρδίας πατέρων ἐπὶ τέκνα καὶ ἀπειθεῖς ἐν φρονήσει δικαίων, ἐτοιμάσαι κυρίῳ λαὸν κατεσκευασμένον.
- Sir 48:10: ὁ καταγραφεὶς ἐν ἐλεγμοῖς εἰς καιροὺς κοπᾶσαι ὄργην πρὸ θυμοῦ, ἐπιστρέψαι καρδίαν πατρὸς πρὸς υἱὸν καὶ καταστήσαι φυλὰς Ἰακωβ.
- LXX Mal 3:23 MT 4:6: ὃς ἀποκαταστήσει καρδίαν πατρὸς πρὸς υἱὸν καὶ καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου πρὸς τὸν πλησίον αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἔλθω καὶ πατάξω τὴν γῆν ἄρδην.

For more information see Brown (1993, 262).

²⁸ Luke 1:32–33; 2:25, 29–32, 38; Acts 1:7; 3:21. For more information on the restoration of Israel theme throughout Luke-Acts, see Jervell (1972); Tiede (1986, 278–286); Ravens (1995); Wasserberg, (1998); Fuller (2006).

²⁹ If this postulation is correct, there may be a connection to Luke's Elijah typology of John and Paul's synagogue sermon in Acts 13. As Paul proclaims Jesus as the Messiah, he indicates that John's role was to baptize “all the people of Israel” (13:24–25). As a result, this summary of John's activity may be comparable to Sirach's “tribes of Jacob.”

It is a mistake, however, to assume that Luke presents John in light of the Elijah redivivus myth that was popular in Second Temple Judaism³⁰ and the burgeoning Christian movement.³¹ Luke avoids identifying the Baptizer with the redivivus myth for he omits Mark's description of John's attire, which is similar to Elijah's (2 Kgs 1:8); and Luke does not include the discussion about John after the transfiguration in which John is connected (vaguely) in Mark with Elijah (9:11–13) and explicitly in Matthew (17:9–13).³² Concerning this deletion, Luke follows the entire order of Mark's transfiguration narrative (Mark 9:1–41; cf. Luke 9:23–50) except for his omission of Mark 9:11–13, John's possible connection with Elijah. This indicates that Luke's omission is deliberate. Hence, he disassociates John with the Elijah redivivus myth.

What is Luke's motivation for this? There is no forthcoming answer. The solution may be found in Luke's use of Hebrew typology, which, to say the least, is diverse.³³ For example, Luke not only compares John to Elijah, but he employs Elijah typology in relation to Jesus as well.³⁴ Therefore, caution must be exercised in identifying John as Elijah returned from the dead. Considering John's connection with the promise to restore Israel (1:16–17) and Luke's emphasis on the Baptist's prophetic role (3:2b), Luke likely presents John as the eschatological prophet "with the spirit and power of Elijah."³⁵ The purpose of which is to be the

Michaels (1991, 247) is surely correct when he notes of Acts 13 that Luke places the reference to John "just after his summary of Jewish history (vv. 16–22)."

³⁰ Mal 4:5; Sir 48:1–11; 4Q382; 4Q558. "Unfortunately, the evidence is too sparse to provide any clear picture of Elijah's place in the eschatology of the Qumran sect." Joynes (2010, 577–578). See also Barrea (2000, 246); *Sib. Or.* 2:187–190.

³¹ Mark 6:15; 8:28; 9:4–5, 11–13; 15:35–36; Matt 11:14; 16:14; 17:3–4, 10–12; 27:47, 49; *Contra* Ernst (1989, 81–86); Taylor (1997, 281); Webb (1991, 62, 65). For more information on Elijah in nascent Christianity see Barrea (2000, 246); Walsh (1992, 2.463–466).

³² Danker (1987, 70); Tatum (1994, 69); Wink (1968, 42–43); cf. Mark 1:6; Matt 3:4.

³³ See Evans (1987, 83). Wink (1968, 42) is probably correct when he notes, "Luke uses Elijah purely as a basis for comparison."

³⁴ Miller (1988, 611–612); Tatum (1994, 69); cf. Luke 4:25–27; 7:11–16; 9:8, 9, 19.

³⁵ This hypothesis is supported by evidence from the infancy narratives that indicates John will be a "prophet of the Most High" who gives "knowledge of salvation to his people," "light to those who sit in darkness," and "guides [their] feet into the way of peace" (1:76–79) (Bauckham 2009, 337). Some scholars suggest that Luke sees John as the proto-Christian evangelist "preparing the way of the Lord" (cf. Ernst 1989, 89; Talbert 2003, 30–31; Wink 1968, 113–114). Lupieri (1992, 443–444) notes that Luke has the deepest Christianization of John in the New Testament.

forerunner for God's Messiah and begin the restoration of God's people (1:17).

After Luke introduces John as the Elijah-like prophet, he rejoins Mark's narrative in placing John ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ (in the wilderness) (Mark 1:4b; Luke 3:2b). This, however, is not the first time Luke connects John with this locale. After the Baptist's miraculous conception and birth to elderly parents, the evangelist leaves John preparing for his prophetic role ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ (1:80). It is only after a small hiatus in the story world (that includes the birth of the Messiah) that Luke returns to the location he left John.

The wilderness is a popular concept in biblical tradition.³⁶ Although most often associated in the Pentateuchal narratives as place of testing in which the elements needed to sustain life are scarce (Num 14:26–35; Deut 9:7), for Luke the wilderness also has positive connotations. It is a place where prophets are called (1:80; 3:2) and a deeper relationship with God can be cultivated (1:80; 4:42; 5:16). Luke's employment of the wilderness motif also strengthens his prophetic portrait of John. Two of the Hebrew Bible's most honoured prophets, Moses and Elijah, were summoned into God's service in the wilderness, Moses while keeping his father-in-law's flocks in the wilderness (Exod 3), and Elijah, whom Luke has already connected with the Baptist, while seeking refuge from Jezebel in the same location (1 Kgs 19:4–18).

Not only does Luke's use of the wilderness motif highlight John's prophetic role, but also the inhospitable region accentuates the eschatological component of the Baptist's ministry. Occasionally, the prophets of the Hebrew Bible pictured the eschatological renewal of God's people occurring in the wilderness. These seers envisioned a new exodus, a time, much like the first one, in which Israel would depend solely upon Yahweh. In regards to this event, Hosea notes that God will renew the covenant by luring Israel into the ἐρημος (MT midbār)³⁷ and establishing a

³⁶ Cf. Acts 7:36–44. For more information see Talmon (1966, 31–63); Baker (2003, 893–897); Wright, (2005, 5.848–852). Although somewhat dated, Funk's (1959, 205–214) article on the wilderness is still one of the best treatments of the topic. Alison Schofield (2010, 1337) notes: "Literally and symbolically, the wilderness has been an important backdrop for the development of Jewish identity. From early biblical narratives, frequently set in the wilderness, to Second Temple literature, the wilderness becomes a theologically charged image, (re)used and thematized by various Jewish groups."

³⁷ *HALOT*, 2.546–547.

new relationship with his people (MT Hos 2:14–15=LXX 2:16–18). At this time Hosea pronounces that God will remove all idols from Israel and she will be the wife of Yahweh in righteousness, justice, and steadfast love (Hos 2:16–20). The prophet Ezekiel divines a time of eschatological restoration that God will accomplish by bringing Israel ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ (Ezek 20:35). During this time, Yahweh will purge all those who are unworthy of the covenant (Ezek 20:36–38) and manifest his holiness to the righteous remnant (Ezek 20:40–44).

It is worth noting that by the last centuries B.C.E., this eschatological component of the wilderness was literally played out by the inhabitants of Qumran who left Jerusalem to spend the last days in the wilderness.³⁸ One of the passages the Qumranites used to justify their migration was none other than Isa 40:3 (a passage that will be discussed below). Funk is surely correct when he remarks about the infamous location, “there can be little doubt that the wilderness was connected with messianic and apocalyptic hopes.”³⁹ Consequently, readers should not be surprised as Luke indicates the Israelite people inquired whether or not John was the Messiah (Luke 3:15–16).

While the above observations are probably part of Luke’s inspiration for placing John in the wilderness, there is a more explicit rationale for this occurrence, Luke’s use of Isa 40:3–5, which indicates that the way of the Lord, or the eschatological exodus, will occur in the wilderness.⁴⁰ Before this is discussed in more detail, we must explore more of Luke’s prophetic presentation of John’s ministry.

4 Luke’s Presentation of John’s Ministry

After accentuating the eschatological prophetic portrait of John with motifs and echoes from the Hebrew Bible, Luke brings the Baptist out of seclusion (1:80) and into his role as the eschatological Elijah-like prophet.⁴¹ In the process of bringing John out of his sequestration, Luke modifies the Markan narrative and (uniquely) indicates that John’s preaching was itinerant (Luke 3:3a; Mark 1:2–6; cf. Matt 3:1–6): “he went

³⁸ IQS 8.13; 9.19–20; 4Q171 2.11; 3.1; 4QMMT; Talmon (1966, 31–63). It is noteworthy that the participants in the Maccabean Revolt also took shelter in the wilderness (1 Macc 2:29–38). For more information see Funk (1959).

³⁹ Funk (1959, 214). Luke even notes that he is aware of two messianic pretenders: Judas the Galilean and Theudas (Acts 5:33–37).

⁴⁰ Danker (1987, 83); Green (1997, 171); Nolland (1989, 143).

⁴¹ Lieu (1997, 22).

into all the region around the Jordan” (3:3a).⁴² Luke’s distinctive précis of the Baptist’s ministry is either an interpolation to the Markan narrative or Luke’s use of Q, for, Luke 3:3a possesses close affinities with Matt 3:5.⁴³ If Luke employed Q in 3:3a, however, he interpreted Q in a different manner than Matthew. The Matthean parallel indicates all Jerusalem, Judea, and the Jordan River came to John, while Luke denotes that John came to them. Whatever Luke’s source for 3:3a, it is a mistake to assume that he intends that John left the wilderness to preach to the masses. On the contrary, the wilderness is a critical motif of Luke’s eschatological prophetic portrait of John; for it is the place he lived (1:80), ministered (7:24), and fulfilled his role as the eschatological Elijah-like prophet, preparing the way of the Lord (3:4).

After deviating from Mark’s Gospel by noting the itinerant ministry of John, Luke rejoins the Markan narrative in his synopsis of John’s kerygma: “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (3:3b). Luke’s use of Mark in Luke 3:3b is verbatim and suggests that Luke incorporated Mark’s understanding of John’s baptism and its connection with repentance⁴⁴—that is, baptism is the outward sign of repentance (Luke 3:8, 10–14).⁴⁵ As a result, those who submit to John’s

⁴² Conzelmann (1961, 19); Fitzmyer (1981, 459).

⁴³ Bovon (2002, 118, 121); Fitzmyer (1981, 452); Robinson, Hoffman and Kloppenborg (2000, 6–7); Kloppenborg (2000, 94). Below note the underlined similarities:

- Luke 3:3a: καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς πᾶσαν [τὴν] περίωρον τοῦ Ἰορδάνου
- Matt 3:5: τότε ἐξεπορεύετο πρὸς αὐτὸν Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ πᾶσα ἡ Ἰουδαία καὶ πᾶσα ἡ περίωρος τοῦ Ἰορδάνου

Fitzmyer (1981, 452) accurately reflects the difficulty in determining whether or not Luke used Q when he notes, “the issue is not easily decided.” For a lengthy discussion see Neiryneck (1996, 41–74); Fleddermann (2005, 210–213). For more information on the Baptist and Q see Ernst (1989, 39–80).

⁴⁴ Webb (1991, 170); Everett Ferguson (2009, 83–96); George (1978, 355).

⁴⁵ John and his baptism figures prominently in the Lukan narrative, Luke 16:16; 20:4; Acts 1:5, 22; 10:37; 11:16; 13:24–25. It seems that John’s baptism was unique in the late Second Temple period, Taylor (1997, 86); Dunn (2002, 357–361). The Qumran washings are likely the closest parallel to John’s baptism. However, the two must not be equated (Talmon 1994, 8). The washings at Qumran were self-administered, perpetual, and not for the forgiveness of sins (see 1QS 3:4–5; 4Q414, 4Q512; CD 10:10–11:1; Sanders 1985, 182–187). John’s baptism was not self-administered, hence he was given the title “immerser or baptizer,” and non-perpetual (Luke 7:29–30), which resulted in the forgiveness of sins (Matt 3:1; 11:11–12; 14:2; 16:14; 17:13; Mark 1:4; 6:14, 24, 25; 8:28; Luke 7:20, 33; 9:19; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.5.2). Moreover, Wenell (2007, 93) rightly concludes that John’s baptism was open to all Jews (Luke 3:14), while the washings at

baptism “signified their surrender to God’s aim, distancing themselves from past ways of life oriented away from God’s purpose, and professed their (re)new(ed) allegiance to his will.”⁴⁶ The location in which this “renewed allegiance” occurred is theologically significant.⁴⁷ In Israelite tradition, the crossing of the Jordan River marked the end of the wilderness wanderings and the possession of the land that God promised to the patriarchs, Canaan (Gen 12:7; Josh 3).⁴⁸ The crossing of the Jordan River therefore was a physical manifestation of the fulfilment of Yahweh’s covenantal promises for Israel. As Ernst correctly notes: “Das Durchschreiten des Flusses beim Einzug des Volkes in das Land der Freiheit (Jos 3) hat in der Erinnerung einen einzigartigen heilsgeschichtlichen Rang.”⁴⁹ Therefore, concerning Luke’s (and the other synoptic gospel authors’) use of the Jordan, Ernst concludes: “Der Jordan war für die synoptischen Evangelien ein heilsgeschichtlich ausgewiesener und geheiligter Strom.”⁵⁰ Thus John’s baptism was highly symbolic and probably attempted to reenact God’s promises to restore Israel (Luke 1:16, 54; 2:25, 32; Acts 1:8).⁵¹

Qumran were only for the community. As a result, “what seems to be missing is a spatial restriction of purity for John.” For a detailed discussion of the washings at Qumran and John’s baptism see Badia (1980). That John was deemed the Baptizer is probably indicative of the originality of his baptism (Dunn 2002, 355–356).

⁴⁶ Green (1997, 164).

⁴⁷ Ernst (1999, 351); Wright (1996, 154–155).

⁴⁸ Wenell (2007, 95) perceptively notes that John does not baptize in a *miqveh* but the Jordan River.

⁴⁹ Ernst (1999, 351).

⁵⁰ Ernst (1999, 351).

⁵¹ Luke indicates that John’s role was to prepare Israel for the covenantal promise of the Messiah, which occurs at baptism (Acts 13:25–26; 19:4). Interestingly, John the Baptist is not the only prophetic figure around the first century C.E. to exploit the sacred space of the Jordan River. Josephus indicates that the Jordan also played an important role with Theudas’s prophetic movement (*Ant.* 20.97–99). By employing the sacred space of the hallowed River, Theudas probably attempted to reenact the conquest of Canaan vis-à-vis the covenantal promises. It seems possible that the symbolic act of baptism even accentuates John’s prophetic appearance.

Luke's acknowledgement of John baptizing individuals for the remission of sins seems to suggest the inefficiency of the established temple cult and priesthood in Jerusalem to forgive iniquity (Luke 3:2b; Mark 1:4).⁵² John's baptism therefore:

Requires the performance of ritual (baptism) to go along with repentance, though without the priests as mediators. Even though John does not mention the temple or sacrifice, it is a significant and provocative action to suggest a new ritual for forgiveness which does not involve temple or priests.⁵³

Moreover, John's kerygma, which stressed holy living over sacrifice (3:10–14),⁵⁴ further demonstrates Luke's prophetic presentation of the Baptist. Numerous Hebrew prophets belaboured to persuade their fellow Israelites and Judeans that Yahweh desires righteous living over and above sacrifices (e.g., Isa 11:1; Jer 6:20; Hos 8:13; Amos 5:25). One of the more famous examples is Micah's plea to the people of his day:

With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic 6:6–8)

⁵² Ferguson (2009, 90); Green (1994, 495–515). Mánek (1957, 14) is surely correct when he concludes that after the infancy narratives "Jerusalem is a town which stands opposed to Christ." Cf. Luke 9:51; 13:4, 33–34.

⁵³ Wenell (2007, 95). The early church also required baptism as a prerequisite for entering their movement, Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 13, 16, 36–38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16. There were, however, two differences in John's baptism and Christian baptism: (1) John's baptism was only for Israelites (Luke 1:77; Acts 13:24), and (2) it did not impart the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:15–17; Acts 19). The early church continued to proclaim repentance identical to John's (Luke 5:32; 11:32; 13:3, 5; 15:7, 10; 17:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 26:30). See Tannehill (1986, 1.48). For more on baptism and Luke-Acts see Avemarie (2002).

⁵⁴ Wenell (2007, 94). John proclaims that repentance and holiness, not Abrahamic lineage, is the litmus test for a follower of Yahweh (3:8).

Along with baptizing individuals, rejecting the established Temple cult, and proclaiming holy living over sacrifice, Luke continues to accrue echoes of the Hebrew prophets in John's ministry by noting that he proclaimed a message of μετανοία (repentance).⁵⁵ John's call to repentance is comparable to the Hebrew term *shuv* (to turn),⁵⁶ which numerous prophets employed throughout Israel's Scriptures to encourage the people of God to set aside their sin, return to their privileged relationship with Yahweh, and live as they have been called. Luke's use of μετανοία therefore should be interpreted as a prophetic invitation for Israel to return to God and live in the ethical manner proscribed by Yahweh (Luke 3:7–14; 1:16–17).⁵⁷ Furthermore, with the use of μετανοία, the author of Luke also continues to accentuate the eschatological prophetic component to John's ministry, for μετανοία possesses an eschatological component and summarizes the “anticipated condition for [Israel's] eschatological restoration.”⁵⁸ In sum, Luke's use of the landscape (i.e., wilderness and the Jordan River), silence concerning the Temple cult, and summary of John's preaching highlights the Baptist's eschatological prophetic ministry.

5 Luke's Use of Isaiah

After Luke's collage of prophetic allusions, echoes, and summary of John's ministry, Luke appeals to Isaiah to support the Baptist's activity. In doing so, Luke uses Isa 40 in a manner distinct from Mark. For example, Luke omits most of Mark's introductory formula—“as it is written in the prophet Isaiah”—retaining only “it is written in.” He also interjects “as . . . the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah” into Mark's narrative. Luke's greatest change to Mark's story, however, is his extension of the Isaianic

⁵⁵ Nave (2002); Healey (1992, 5.671–672); Fuller (1992, 5.672–674); Gench (2006, 2.762–764); Kim-Rauchholz (2008). Josephus also notes the ethical element in John's preaching, *Ant.* 18.117. It is noteworthy that “repentance is featured most prominently in the NT throughout Luke-Acts” (Gench 2006, 2.763). The fact that Luke has John proclaim a baptism for the remission of sins is another fulfillment of the infancy narratives and that he would “turn” the hearts of the people (Tannehill 1996, 78).

⁵⁶ Cf. Jer 3.12, 14; Ezek 14.6; Hos 12.7. For more examples see *shuv*: *HALOT*, 4.1427–1434.

⁵⁷ Interestingly, Luke uniquely summarizes John's message with Christian vocabulary, 3:18, Lupieri (1992, 443–444).

⁵⁸ Bauckham (2009, 329).

quotation from Isa 40:3 in Mark 1:2 to Isa 40:3–5 in Luke 3:4–6, which “anticipates and clarifies the activities of John.”⁵⁹

Isa 40:3–5 is a passage brimming with promises of covenant restoration and exodus from captivity. In the context of the book of Isaiah, Israel is told she will be deported to Babylon (Isa 39). Nevertheless, this exile will not last forever. The author of Second Isaiah notes that Yahweh will act again and redeem Israel in the form of a new or second exodus (Isa 40:2).⁶⁰ Thus the Israelites will once again find the safety of the Promise Land.⁶¹ Interestingly, this exodus begins with a voice crying for the construction of a highway in the wilderness. This highway will not be like any others. It will level the earth, reveal Yahweh's glory, and bring salvation to the nations (Isa 40:3–5).

There is a noteworthy difference in the location of the voice of Isa 40:3 in the ancient sources of Isaiah.⁶² The Masoretic Text, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Targumim of Isaiah indicate that the voice foretells the location of the new exodus in the wilderness, namely, “a voice cries, ‘in the wilderness.’”⁶³ The LXX of Isaiah places the voice in the wilderness crying out, namely, “a voice crying in the wilderness.” It is this second understanding that Luke, borrowing from Mark, uses as a proof text for the Baptist's ministry.

Notwithstanding the confusion in the ancient texts of Isa 40:3, Israel's return from Babylonian captivity did not encapsulate the promises of the new exodus.⁶⁴ As a result, some Second Temple Jews anticipated its fulfilment.⁶⁵ According to Luke's use of Isaiah, the wait is over and John is the voice that begins the new exodus—that is, John is “the voice of one

⁵⁹ Koet (2005, 81).

⁶⁰ Anderson (1962, 177–195); Baltzer (2001, 49); Bonnard (1972, 87–88).

⁶¹ Concerning the author of Second Isaiah, Bonnard (1972, 19–20) notes: “Parmi ses frères exiles, notre prophète se tient comme un éveilleur d'espérance et un prédicateur du salut, désormais tout proche. Ce salut présente trois éléments principaux: liberation—retour—restauration.”

⁶² Snodgrass (1980, 24–45); Davis (1996, 61–102); Rietz (2010, 392–398).

⁶³ The inhabitants of Qumran interpreted Isa 40:3 in light of the MT. Thus the reason for their exodus to Qumran was to prepare the way of the Lord through the study of the Torah, 1QS 8:14–15; 4Q176 1:6–7. Moreover, the Qumranites' copies of the text of Isaiah follow the Masoretic Text (Parry and Qimron 1998, 67). English translation: “A voice cries out, ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, and in the desert make a smooth highway for our God.’” See Abegg et al. (1999, 332).

⁶⁴ See Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Malachi, and Zechariah.

⁶⁵ 1QS 8:11–16; 4Q176 1:6–7; 4Q259 3:4–8, 19.

crying out in the wilderness” (3:4b).⁶⁶ The location of the voice ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ recalls many of the prophetic allusions, motifs, and echoes discussed earlier (see above).

The next phrase of the Isaianic quotation, ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου (prepare the way of the Lord) has two functions. First, it points readers back to the infancy narratives of the gospel. In Luke 1, Gabriel prophesies that John will ἐτοιμάσαι (prepare) a people for the Lord (1:17). Likewise, a Spirit-filled Zechariah utters that John will ἐτοιμάσαι ὁδοῦς αὐτοῦ (prepare his ways), presumably God’s (1:76). John’s prophetic ministry can therefore be summarized as ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου (preparing the way of the Lord). The second function of ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου looks forwards throughout the gospel and the narrative of Acts. Consequently, it is no surprise to readers that the early Christians of Acts referred to themselves simply as “the way” (Acts 9:2; 18:25; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22),⁶⁷ which seems to be a sectarian epithet that existed within Second Temple Judaism.⁶⁸ Concerning this phenomenon Joseph Blenkinsopp notes, Isa 40:3 is “the most seminal of texts for the Qumran yahad [and] provided biblical warranty for the self-segregation of the group in the Judean wilderness by the Dead Sea.”⁶⁹ Thus when the sectarians of Qumran separated from the people of Israel, they did so by indicating they were following the way of the Lord. Similarly, there are numerous references to sectarian behaviour by Jewish Christians within Acts (Acts 3:22–23; 4:12; 23–30; 18:6). As a result, David Pao is probably correct when he suggests that the term “is used in polemical contexts where the identity of the ‘true’ people of God is at stake . . . [Thus] Isa 40:3 is used to distinguish those who belong to the people of God from those who do not.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Fitzmyer (1981, 461).

⁶⁷ For more information see McCasland (1958, 222–230).

⁶⁸ Blenkinsopp (2006, 181–184); “The use of *derek* as a group designation is admittedly not so clear in Qumran as *hodos* is in Acts, but usage in the various rules favours that conclusion: the members are ‘the elect of the way’ (1QS IX 17–18) and ‘the perfect of the way’ (1QM XIV 7), while recidivists are those who ‘deviate from the way’ (CD I 13; II 16).” (p. 181)

⁶⁹ Blenkinsopp (2006, 125). For a great discussion in the use of Isaiah at Qumran and in nascent Christianity see Blenkinsopp (2006, 89–221). For texts in Isaiah that employ the term “way” see Isa 30:11–12; 53.6; 56.11; 57.10; 58.13; 65.2; 66.3. For more information on *derek* see HALOT, 1.231–232.

⁷⁰ Pao (2002, 60, 68). Blenkinsopp (2006, 141) notes that John’s disciples may have seen themselves as the “true Israel” of the last days.

However, it must be noted that there are major differences in the two groups who both called themselves the way. First, unlike the members of the Qumran community (e.g., 4QMMT), the early Christians did not remove themselves from interactions with other Second Temple Jews. Second, unlike the Jews who lived at Qumran, the early Christians allowed non-Jews to enter into their sectarian group, an act that would have been considered an abomination by the members of the Qumran community. Third, while the way of the Lord involved rigorous and continuous study of the Torah and living by a certain set of purity codes, for John and the early Christians, it involved repentance and ministering to sinners and tax collectors.⁷¹

Be that as it may, it is noteworthy that the way John prepares does not end with his death. Beginning with the prophecy surrounding his birth (1:17; 2:76, 79) and his public ministry (3:4), John inaugurates a movement that extends to the early disciples in Acts and ultimately to the ends of the earth, namely, Gentiles.⁷² Although there is no indication that John ever baptizes a non-Jew, he fulfils his task of preparing Israel for her global mission (Luke 1:25; 2:38; 24:44; Acts 1:8; 13:25–26).⁷³

In the remaining portion of Luke 3:4, Luke's use of Isa 40:3 mimics Mark's. Since John is preparing the way of the Lord or Jesus, Mark alters the text of the LXX of Isa 40:3b, which reads "make straight the path of our God," to interpret Isa 40:3b christologically.⁷⁴ Mark removes "of our God" and replaces it with the pronoun αὐτοῦ (his), producing a new reading of Isa 40:3—"make straight his paths." Thus αὐτοῦ's (his) new antecedent is κυρίου (Lord), that is, Jesus (Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4). Luke uses Mark's altered text verbatim over the LXX of Isaiah.

Beginning in Luke 3:5, however, Luke departs from Mark and lengthens the Isaiah quotation from Isa 40:3 to 40:5. In 3:5 he follows the LXX of Isa 40:4 closely with only minimal changes. First, Luke omits πάντα (all) from his quotation. Next, he changes the number of the noun

⁷¹ Tannehill (1996, 80).

⁷² As noted above it is no coincidence that Luke refers to the early Christians as members of the way, Acts 9:2; 16:17; 18:25–26; 19:9; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14, 22. In Acts 13:10 Paul indicates that because Bar-Jesus attempted to interfere with his evangelistic activities, he was making crooked the way of God (Tannehill 1986, 1.48; Mallan 2008, 72).

⁷³ Bauckham (2009, 352–353). Johnson (1996, 295) rightly concludes that Luke's plan is to present John as "the prophet of God's great reversal" and therefore the beginning of Israel's redemption.

⁷⁴ Cf. Rowe (2006, 76–77).

τραχεῖα (rough) from singular to plural. Finally, Luke deletes πεδία (plain) and adds ὁδοὺς λείας (smooth ways). Luke’s fondness of the way may explain this alteration (see above). It is unclear what the imagery of valleys filled and mountains brought low means. Balch suggests the quote should be viewed as a fulfilment of the infancy narratives. In the Magnificat, Mary declares that God has “scattered the proud,” “brought down the powerful,” “filled the hungry,” and “sent the rich away empty handed” (Luke 1:51–53).⁷⁵ Conversely, Ernst hypothesizes that the imagery points forward to John’s work: “Wegbereitung und gerader Pfad kennzeichnen das Werk des Johannes als Bote für Christus; das Auffüllen jeder Schlucht und das Abtragen der Berge und Hügel weist schon hin auf den ethischen Impuls der Umkehrpredigt.”⁷⁶ It is this latter interpretation that best accords with Luke’s prophetic portrait of John.

As Luke concludes his use of Isa 40:3–5, he omits the phrase καὶ ὀφθήσεται ἡ δόξα κυρίου (the glory of the Lord shall appear) from Isa 40:5. The motivation behind this omission may be Luke’s belief that the Lord’s glory is no longer a distant hope. With the advent of the word of God that came to John and the birth of Israel’s long awaited Messiah, God’s activity within history is a present reality. Luke uses the remaining portion of Isa 40:5 verbatim: “and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” One of the clearest rationales for Luke’s extension of the Isaiah quotation is visible with Isaiah’s universal emphasis upon “and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”⁷⁷ Consequently, Ernst is correct when he indicates, “Das Zitat nimmt ein Motiv auf, das bereits in den Worten des greisen Simeon (2,30ff.) deutlich angeklungen ist und im nachösterlichen Sendungsbefehl (24,47) zur Mission der Kirche überleitet.”⁷⁸ As Simeon takes the baby Jesus in his arms in Luke’s infancy narratives, he proclaims Jesus is τὸ σωτήριον (the salvation) of God that has been prepared for “all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (2:30–32).⁷⁹ It is only as the narrative of Luke-Acts unfolds that this promise comes to fruition as the gospel is taken to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles.⁸⁰ This is evident in that the phrase τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ (the salvation of God) stretches forward throughout the Gospel and Acts to

⁷⁵ David Balch (2003, 1110).

⁷⁶ Ernst (1977, 140); Bonnard (1972, 87–88).

⁷⁷ Meek (2008, 20); Nolland (1989, 138).

⁷⁸ Ernst (1977, 141).

⁷⁹ Mallan (2008, 71). For more information see Stenschke (2011).

⁸⁰ Acts 1:8; Acts 2–7; Acts 8; Acts 10–11; 15.

Paul's arrival in Rome. There he proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah to a Jewish audience who partially rejects his message (Acts 28:24). As a result, Paul quotes Isaiah and proclaims that he is taking τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ (the salvation of God) to the Roman Gentiles, for they will listen (Acts 28:28). Therefore Luke's promise of a universal mission to both Jews and Gentiles forms an *inclusio* that begins, not with Jesus, but with the eschatological prophet of restoration, John, and his preparation of the way (3:6; cf. Acts 13:24–25), which results in τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ (the salvation of God) coming to πᾶσα σὰρξ (all flesh).⁸¹

6 Conclusion

While it is unquestioned in New Testament scholarship that Luke presents John as an eschatological prophet, this project has demonstrated the depth into which Luke goes to highlight the Baptist's prophetic portrait. From this investigation three conclusions are evident. First, Luke is deeply invested in the prophetic, preparatory work of John. So much so that even when Luke is not working from Mark (i.e., Luke 1–2; Acts), John is still the beginning of the gospel story (1:5; 3:1–6; 13:24–25), even among non-Jews (Acts 10:37).⁸² Luke also introduces the Baptist with the most detailed synchronism of his two-volume work, and he presents John as the beginning of the restoration of Israel and thus the Gentile mission. As a result of John's preparation of the people, by the time of Jesus' ministry, "Israël est donc déjà divisé en peuple fidèle et en incrédules."⁸³ Consequently, John is a vital portion of "the things that have been fulfilled" among Luke's audience (Luke 1:1). Therefore, the author of the Third Gospel could not imagine a gospel story without him.

⁸¹ Luke 24:46–49; Acts 1:8, 15:16–17; Mallan (2008, 70). Mallan (2008, 71) astutely notes that Luke's "emphasis appears to be at odds with other Jewish interpretations" of Isa 40:3–5 in regards to "the *scope* of salvation." He demonstrates that in Second Temple Judaism "Isa 40:1–11 is consistently interpreted as a prophetic promise describing salvation for the righteous *within Israel*. The nations, along with the wicked in Israel, face God's imminent judgement. Salvation is for insiders. Simeon's oracles modified this perspective, however, by hinting that God's salvation was prepared in the sight of *all peoples*, and includes provision for both Jew and Gentile." Cf. Bar. 5:7; *Pss. Sol.* 8:17; 11:4–5; 1 QS 9:19–20; 10:21; 4Q176.

⁸² Wink (1968, 58).

⁸³ George (1978, 94).

Second, Luke's prophetic accentuation of John with imagery from the LXX reveals his vast knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. With almost every stroke of the pen in Luke 3:1–6, Luke, more so than his main source Mark, accentuates John with a plethora of prophetic motifs, allusions, and echoes from the LXX and Second Temple Judaism. Finally, although John the Baptist is integral for Luke's story, he is clearly not the Messiah. Contrary to the manner in which the authors of Matthew's (Matt 3:14) and John's (John 3:30) Gospels employ dialogue from John's own mouth to exalt Jesus over John, Luke accomplishes this task like an ancient historian, through narrative. While John is born to an elderly couple in the infancy narratives (Luke 1:5–25), a virgin brings forth the Messiah (1:26–38). While an angel foretells John's destiny as turning the hearts of the parents to the children and making ready a people for the Lord (1:17), the same angel indicates that Jesus will be the Davidic King and reign forever (1:32–33). And while John preaches and baptizes Israelites for the forgiveness of sins (3:3), it is only Jesus (Acts 4:12) and baptism in his name through which forgiveness is possible in the restored Israel of God (Acts 2:38; 13:39).

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