

The Jerusalem "apostolic decree" in Acts 15:1-35

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THE JERUSALEM “APOSTOLIC DECREE” IN ACTS 15:1-35

By

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to

**Very Rev. Fr. Dr. Ayodele Ayeni, C.S.Sp.
Provincial Superior
Congregation of the Holy Spirit
Province of Nigeria North-West
Abuja, Nigeria**

with

Fraternal Love and Gratitude

ABSTRACT

The strict historical reading of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1-35 is a problematic in scholarship. This raises the question of the purpose of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Luke’s narrative of the Jerusalem Council. This study argues that Luke’s purpose of the Decree in Acts (15:20, 29; [also found in 21:25]) is not for a pure historical evolution of the Christian mission from Jerusalem to the Gentile world, but refers to a theological and social etiology, founded on divine choice, the Mosaic law, and the prophets, that Luke promulgates as four prohibitions, which have practical values for Luke’s community in creating the conditions necessary for enabling the table-fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

The thesis of my study states that the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (Acts 15:20, 29; [also found in 21:25]) in Acts 15:1-35 is Luke’s theological, literary, and narrative utilization of some stipulations in the Mosaic Law (Lev 17–19) and echoed in the Prophets (Amos 9:11-12), represented as founded on divine choice and the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Its purpose was to describe the practical actions taken in service of the social values of his mixed community, to endorse and/or legitimate the table-fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians, and to present a story of the early disciples of Christ as standing in continuity with the story of Israel and as fulfilling God’s promise to Israel.

My analysis combines some historical-critical methodologies, which include textual, narrative, literary, theological and compositional approaches, with Luke’s rhetorical devices, intertextuality and scriptural fulfilment. Using these methods to describe the social situation of Luke’s community, the thesis examines the origin, meaning, purpose and function of the Decree (15:20, 29) in Acts 15:1-35. This study also highlights the theological, ecclesiological and contemporary implications of the Decree.

This thesis concludes that the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35 is Luke’s narrative for endorsing the fellowship of his mixed community. The Decree originated from the Mosaic law and may have been adopted from some Pauline community’s lived experience to describe the social workings of Luke’s mixed group in their table-fellowship as a multi-ethnic community, who see themselves as a people of God in fulfilment and continuity with the divine story of Israel. The Council in Acts 15:1-35 is the narrative climax that not only solves the problem of Jewish-Gentile communal existence using many arguments, but articulates the conditions from the law and prophets that also apply to the Gentile and Jewish Christians apart from faith in the good news of Christ, thereby endorsing the fellowship of the mixed Lukan community. From the comparison of Galatians 2 and Acts 15, this study concludes that Acts 15:1-35 is Luke’s compositional way of modifying Paul’s position on the Gentiles in Galatians 2. Luke brings together the figures of Peter and Paul to be in unity with one another. For implications, Luke’s composition offers the narrative language of communion for future councils in the history of the church. Also, the Decree implies the necessity for integration, inclusion and mutual concession in managing identity and diversity in our world today.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The interpretation of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35 is a matter of scholarly controversy between two main groups. While there are those who analyze the passage in terms of its historical function, there are also those who argue from the narrative, literary, theological, and social functions of the episode without seeing Acts as a strict history of the earliest Jerusalem community headed by James.

Fitzmyer, arguing with regard to a historical function of the Jerusalem Decision about Gentile Christians, comments: “So what is now recounted is the turning point of Luke’s story, when the apostolic and presbyteral college of Jerusalem officially recognizes the evangelization of Gentiles, which has been initiated by Peter and carried out on a wide scale by Barnabas and Paul. It leads to the definitive break of the Christian church from its Jewish matrix.”¹ This comment by Fitzmyer gives the impression that Luke was aware of a historical apostolic and presbyteral college of Jerusalem that decided the definitive break of the Christian church from its Jewish matrix. But is Luke really narrating a historical account here? I argue that Luke’s narrative of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts (15:20, 29; [also found in 21:25]) is not a strict historical evolution of

¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 538. Also, Chris Forbes, “The Acts of the Apostles as a Source for Studying Early Christianity,” in *Into All the World: Emergent Christianity in its Jewish and Greco-Roman Context*, ed. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 5-36, uses the historical approach in his article as a source for studying early Christianity. There is need for caution regarding a strictly historical approach to Acts of the Apostles.

the Christian mission from Jerusalem to the Gentile world, but a theological narrative, founded on divine choice, the Mosaic law (Lev 17–19), and the prophets (Amos 9:11-12), which allows for table-fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.² Using this theological cum literary narrative as an expression of the social situation of Luke’s community, I will examine the origin, meaning, purpose, and function of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (15:20, 29) in Acts 15:1-35.

The reading of the Acts of the Apostles as a strict historical account began with Irenaeus (c. 130 – c. 202 CE) and especially with Eusebius (d. ca. 339 CE), who both ascribe the book to Luke, and this became the traditional name for the author of the two-volume work of Luke-Acts. For Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 3.14.1), “Luke tells us, not in boasting but as one bound by the truth, that he was closely associated with Paul as his fellow laborer in the Gospel.”³ Also, Eusebius takes this strict historical account of the Acts of the Apostles to prove the excellence of Christianity over pagan religions and philosophies, thereby solving some theological problems of the early part of the fourth century. Consequently, Christian readers of Acts no longer observe how Luke specifically addressed the social situation of his original audience or his use of rhetorical narrative. Nevertheless, in Acts I suggest that Luke, while wrestling with the problem of the mission to the Gentiles vis-à-vis the Jewish law, had some elements of traditional information that he

² Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 469-470. Also see Christopher R. Matthews, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha: An Ecumenical Study Bible*, Fully Revised Fifth Edition, ed. Michael D. Coogan et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1957.

³ James R. Payton, *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith: A Condensation of Against Heresies* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2012), 69, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.bc.edu/stable/j.ctt1cgf5k8>.

“re-describes” in his narrative in order to address the social and theological problems brought about by the church’s relationship to its Jewish heritage and its Greco-Roman cultural and political environment.⁴ In the first place, even though the ministry of Jesus and the calling of the Twelve took place in Galilee (Lk 4:14; 5:1-11; 6:12-16), Luke begins the Acts of the Apostles in Jerusalem and pictures the earliest community of the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4, 12-14). The theme of the apostles as witnesses (Lk 24:48), its frequent recurrence (Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31), and the description of the progression of the mission from Jerusalem in geographical terms (Jerusalem...Judea...Samaria...to the ends of the earth – cf. 8:38) show that Luke intentionally situates the earliest community in Jerusalem.

Furthermore, the earliest community of Jerusalem is different from Luke’s community. As stated by Matthews, “the gap between Luke’s generation and the earlier time is bridged by the endorsement of the Gentile mission in the deliberations of the apostolic council and the promulgation of the apostolic decree (15.20, 29; 21.25).”⁵ According to Esler,

Luke, just like the other evangelists did have a specific Christian community in mind. One of the places in Luke-Acts where one feels most immediately that Luke is using apostolic history to speak to the present of his own audience is in Paul’s prophetic address to the elders of the Ephesian ἐκκλησία (Acts 20:17-35) There is more here than a generalized message to Luke’s readers that Paul had foreseen the troubles in store for Christians in the years ahead. For the context Luke establishes for these troubles is the local Christian community, the ‘flock’, with clear boundaries between itself and the outside world, which is threatened by enemies crossing those boundaries from without, while others rise up within.⁶

⁴ Matthews, “Acts of the Apostles,” 1957.

⁵ Ibid., 1957.

⁶ Philip Francis Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology*, SNTSMS 57 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 26.

The passage of Acts 20:17-35 truly shows certain features of the church of Luke's day: later Pauline heritage, a mixture of Jews and Gentiles (Greeks), a community passing through trials, but still holding to the sayings of Jesus. Another flock image that Esler uses to support his argument for a particular portrait of Luke's community, which is fragile and possibly in distress, is the exhortation of Jesus in Lk 12:32 – "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." On the basis of this repeated use of the flock image, Esler "suggests that Luke found it appropriate to the circumstances of his own readers, in other words, that they too were members of a small Christian community beset by difficulties from within and without."⁷ Therefore, Luke's community can be considered as a highly mixed and hellenized community of Jewish and Gentile Christians, which might be connected with one of the cities of the Pauline mission around the Aegean Sea like Ephesus or Philippi.⁸

More so, the discrepancies between the undisputed Pauline letters and the narrative about Paul in Acts long identified by scholars and the temporal gap suggested by Matthews also clarify the situation.⁹ Paul in Acts is an excellent orator (Acts 17:22-31; 21:40; 22:1; 24:1, 10-21), but the real Paul, as he himself admits, was anything but a master of the improvised speech. In 2 Cor 10:10, Paul says of himself that as a speaker he was feeble and unimpressive. Therefore, we also see that Luke, who represents a later generation and is an admirer of Paul, uses the tradition of Paul as a great missionary to present him as a great orator. In addition, the reference to justification by Luke in Acts 13:38-41 lacks a Pauline note. The natural theology of the Areopagus speech (17:22-31) hardly came from the author of Romans 1. One of the greatest difficulties regarding a

⁷ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 26.

⁸ Matthews, "The Acts of the Apostles," 1955. Matthews's conclusion is in line Esler's position.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1957.

strict historical reading of Acts is to be found in Luke's narrative of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 in comparison with the undisputed Pauline letters, especially Galatians. "Would one who was on intimate terms with Paul have believed that he approved of the Decree promulgated in 15:29 and delivered it to the Gentile churches for them to observe (16:4)? In his extant epistles Paul never mentions the Decree and gives advice which seems to contradict it."¹⁰ Consequently, while there may be some elements of tradition in Luke's narrative, could the Jerusalem episode of Acts 15:1-35 not be seen as one of Luke's ways of connecting his "Hellenist" community to the (twelve) apostles of the idealized Jerusalem church, who are original witnesses of Jesus and therefore links to Jesus, thereby allowing the Lukan community within its own social context to continue the mission of Jesus to the ends of the earth?¹¹

In modern study, as White submits, "the Apostolic Decree has been generally viewed as four concessions made to the Gentile Christians as an outcome of the judgment made by James at the Jerusalem Council."¹² For Conzelmann, "the Decree is conceived rather as a concession to the Gentile Christians, which would enable Jewish Christians to live with them, and particularly to have table fellowship."¹³ This conclusion of Conzelmann has had a long-standing influence in

¹⁰ C. K. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles: A Shorter Commentary* (New York: T & T Clark, 2002), xxiv.

¹¹ Christopher R. Matthews, "Luke the Hellenist," in *Early Christian Voices in Texts, Traditions, and Symbols: Essays in Honor of François Bovon*, Bl 66, ed. David H. Warren, Ann Graham Brock, & David W. Pao (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003), 103.

¹² Aaron White, "Reading Inclusion Backwards: Considering the Apostolic Decree Again in Fresh Context," *BibTheolBull* 48 (2018): 202. DOI: 10.1177/0146107918801514.

¹³ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 118.

Lukan studies.¹⁴ In the light of this concern, White suggests that “the Apostolic Decree is rooted in Leviticus 17–19 as a blueprint from an eschatological ecclesiology that has an impact on us even today.”¹⁵ He argues through a heuristic or hermeneutic of hospitality, that the “law of the resident alien” in Leviticus 17–19, which he considers the source of the “Apostolic Decree,” is aimed at including the Gentiles as full citizens in the newly multi-national people of God.¹⁶ In this study, therefore, I argue that the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” refers to a theological and social etiology that Luke promulgates as four prohibitions (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25), which are of practical value for Luke’s community in creating the conditions necessary for endorsing the table-fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. The four prohibitions concern (1) what has been sacrificed or polluted by idols; (2) fornication; (3) that which has been strangled; and (4) blood.

Haenchen argues, on the basis of the question of the origin of the Apostolic Decree, that “there is nothing against the view that the four requirements were still in force among Gentile Christians at the time when Acts was written.”¹⁷ So, stemming from narrative, literary, and social standpoints, Haenchen argues:

the introduction of these four conditions must have occurred at a time when it was hoped that they would cement the fellowship of Jewish and Gentile Christians. For this, Jerusalem does not come into consideration, and James cannot be thought of as the author. For, as the incident at Antioch proves, he regarded table fellowship of Jewish and Gentile Christian as inadmissible.... These prohibitions must have come into force in a strongly mixed community of the diaspora, where Jewish claims were more moderate and could be

¹⁴ Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 202, 206-07.

¹⁵ White, *Reading Inclusion Backwards*, 202.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁷ Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 472.

satisfied by the four commandments which Moses himself gave to the Gentiles.¹⁸

If Haenchen's submission is plausible, that Jerusalem does not come into consideration because the Jerusalem church members were all Jews, then these four stipulations may have come from Luke's experience of his social situation. Luke may have found such stipulations among the guiding principles of the Christ groups he was familiar with, which could be some Pauline community's lived experience. Also, Luke himself may have been the author and not James; indeed, Luke may have put them in the speech of James in order to get the seal of the authoritative figure of James. Haenchen's argument shows that "even where people had become entirely estranged from the ritual commandments of the law, the Gentile Christians made certain 'ritual' observances their own, quite independently of the association with Jewish Christianity."¹⁹ He shows that Gentile Christians in the second century abhorred flesh of pagan sacrifices:

According to Justin, only gnostic Christians ate it: the others would sooner have been struck dead (*Dial. Cum Tryph.* 34.8). Somewhat later, *ca.* A.D. 161, Minucius Felix (36.6) combats the accusation that Christians ate children by pointing out that they even abstained from the blood of animals. The woman martyr Biblis says exactly the same during the persecution of A.D. 177: 'How could they eat children who are not even allowed to eat the blood of irrational animals?' (Eusebius, *H.E.* V 1.26). Finally, Tertullian, at the end of the second century, writes of the Christians: *qui ne animalium . . . sanguinem in epulis esculentis habemus, qui propterea suffocates quoque et morticinis abstinemus, ne quo modo sanguine contaminemur vel intra viscera sepulto* (*Apologia* 9.13).²⁰

In this thesis, I will explore the possibility that it was in fact Luke who, along the lines supposed by Haenchen in connection with some unspecified earlier group, utilized the idea of a set of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 470-71.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 471.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 471-72.

stipulations to provide instruction and inspiration to his contemporaries through “the idealized representation of the Jerusalem church and the association of that paradigmatic community with the church of Luke’s day through the incorporation of various details from the life of the latter into the description of the former.”²¹ Thus, I argue that the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” might have emerged in a strongly mixed and Hellenized Lukan community, possibly in Ephesus or Philippi, some major city of the Pauline mission where, though the Jewish believers may have been in the minority, the church’s connection with its Jewish heritage occupied a pride of place in their faith in Jesus Christ. In this circumstance, the decree was a myth for enabling the relationship between the Jewish and Gentile Christians of the community. The thesis of my study states that the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (Acts 15:20, 29; [also found in 21:25]) in Acts 15:1-35 is Luke’s theological, literary, and narrative utilization of some stipulations in the Mosaic law (Lev 17–19) and echoed in the prophets (Amos 9:11-12), represented as founded on divine choice and the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Its purpose was to describe the practical actions taken in service of the social values of his mixed community, to endorse and/or legitimate the table-fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians, and to present a story of the early disciples of Christ as standing in continuity with the story of Israel and as fulfilling God’s promise to Israel.

1.2 Statement of the Question

The historical reading of Acts 15:1-35 has always created problems for a coherent scholarly reading of the Acts of the Apostles. This raises the question of whether Luke is really narrating a historical account in the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35. Is there actually a clear

²¹ Matthews, *Luke the Hellenist*, 103.

historical function of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35? A comparison between Acts 15:1-35 and Galatians 2 creates an unresolved problem for those scholars who insist on a strict historical function for the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree.” Since many scholars have yet to demonstrate how to navigate the elements of history in Luke’s Acts, the issue of contradictions with reference to ostensibly overlapping accounts, differences in the portrayals of the key figures in these accounts, and the inability to give a coherent analysis and interpretation of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” persist. Part of the problem is that many scholars have assumed, on the basis of tradition going back to Irenaeus and solidified through reception history, that Luke, as a historian of early Christianity and as a fellow companion of Paul, is giving a strict historical account in the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree.”

This statement of the issue gives the justification of this study. It seems that Luke’s history is rather driven by his theological, social, literary, and narrative agenda. Will it not be more fruitful to locate Luke’s purpose with regard to the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in his historical “program” rather than in history itself? The arguments in the narrative of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35 seem to be driving home a message. Therefore, what are the narrative, literary, social, and theological functions of the Jerusalem Apostolic Decree? Where did Luke get the Decree from? Is Acts 15:1-35 Luke’s way of modifying Paul’s position on the Gentiles?

In line with the perspective of this thesis, Beverly R. Gaventa’s commentary shows that what Luke seeks to present is much more of a theological story than a historical chronicle.²² However,

²² Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003). Christopher R. Matthews, “Acts of the Apostles,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible*, vol. 1, *Acts-LXX*, ed. Michael D. Coogan et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 24, gives a synopsis of the commentary in the annotated bibliography.

this study reexamines her questions, which seem not to have been properly addressed. She observes that “the questions emerge: what relationship exists between the Cornelius story and the Jerusalem Council? And what does that relationship reveal about the place of the Jerusalem Council in the larger framework of Acts?”²³ I, therefore, attempt to answer these among other questions that lie within the persistent scholarly problem of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35.

1.3 Research Objectives

This research work examines exegetically the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25) in order to understand its origin, meaning, purpose, and the nature of its function within the entire narrative of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35). It also considers the reason why Luke reopens the debate on circumcision according to the custom of Moses as requisite for admission of Gentiles into the fellowship of the believers of Christ of the Lukan community in Acts 15:1-5, which seemed to have been settled in Acts 10:1–11:18, and Luke’s intention in bringing together the figures of Peter and Paul with James in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1-35.

1.4 Research Questions

By implication, this research is interested in the following questions: What is the nature of the function of the “Apostolic Decree” in the entire narrative of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1-35? What is the origin of Luke’s Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree? And does the Decree help Luke in his historical program and his theological agenda? If Luke is aware of Galatians 2, what is his

²³ Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 211.

intention in bringing together the figures of Peter and Paul with James in the “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35?

1.5 Methodological Framework

I intend to approach this analysis from a historical-critical methodological standpoint, using textual, narrative, literary, and compositional approaches, and paying attention to Luke’s rhetorical devices and use of Old Testament references in the passage. The methodology uses intertextuality with some elements of scriptural fulfilment. Using the words of Matthews, “I understand intertextuality to entail the prudent acknowledgment of the complex range of antecedents (many of which are as a matter of course irrecoverable) that came together in the formation of any given early Christian text. Ancient compositional techniques typically reused earlier materials and adapted them to varying degrees to serve in their new contexts.”²⁴ This intertextuality will be applied in the light of scriptural fulfilment, which shows Luke as a true heir of Paul in using scriptures in the composition his writings. Speaking of how Paul depicts Jesus as the fulfilment of scripture, Stegman writes: “In the years following his encounter with the risen Lord, Paul reinterpreted the sacred texts he had known so well. He does so now in the light of the surprising way God has acted through a crucified (and risen) Messiah. He comes to appreciate that the One whom the Scriptures revealed as Creator and covenant God has fulfilled his promises to Israel

²⁴ Christopher R. Matthews, *Philip: Apostle and Evangelist: Configurations of a Tradition*, NovTSup 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 10.

([Rom] 15:8; 2 Cor 1:20) — and by extension, to all peoples — through Jesus.”²⁵ I, therefore, apply these methods of intertextuality and scriptural fulfilment, which may have also influenced Luke in his composition of the Jerusalem Council episode and, particularly, in his use of the “Apostolic Decree.”

The study also advocates for neutrality, freedom from religious ideologies and biases, and suspension of judgments regarding the function of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” within the larger Lukan narrative of Acts on the basis of reception history. However, there are a few assumptions that can be made here on the basis of previous scholarship on Luke as the author of Acts, the dating of Acts, and the Lukan community. In agreement with François Bovon’s and Christopher R. Matthews’s suggestions that Luke is an heir of the Pauline tradition,²⁶ this project assumes that Luke wrote for his mixed (Hellenized Jewish and Gentile) community at the turn of the first century CE.²⁷ This first chapter has introduced the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” and establishes the background of the study. The second chapter reviews the works of some scholars on the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” with a focus on their methodologies and insights on the

²⁵ Thomas D. Stegman, *Written for Our Instruction: Theological and Spiritual Riches in Romans* (New York: Paulist Press, 2017), 36.

²⁶ François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50*. (trans. Christine M. Thomas; ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 7. See also Matthews, “Luke the Hellenist,” 106.

²⁷ The passage of Acts 20:17-35 shows that Luke’s community is a mixed community of Jews and Greeks (cf. also, Acts 6:1-7), likely in Ephesus. Matthews, “Acts of the Apostles,” 1955, acknowledges that scholarly consensus dates Acts to 85-95 CE; though some arguments have been advanced for an early second-century date. My earlier argument on the discrepancies between the undisputed Pauline letters and Paul in Acts support my dating of Acts to a late first or an early second-century.

Jerusalem Council. The third chapter exegetically examines the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (Acts 15:20, 29;21:25) in order to understand its meaning, purpose, and function in the entire narrative of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1-35. The fourth chapter concludes the study and draws some implications of the study for theology and biblical studies, and also for contemporary society today in the light of integration and inclusion as approaches of managing identity and diversity in our world today.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it shifts the analysis of Luke’s narrative in Acts from the strict historical reading of the Jerusalem Council episode (Acts 15:1–35) to the theological and practical imports of the narrative for the Lukan audience and for us today. The purpose of the study is to understand the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (Acts 15:20, 29) from the theological, literary, compositional, and narrative standpoint. It establishes the origin, meaning, and purpose of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree”. This study also seeks to provide a justification for the importance of the four stipulations in the Lukan community and Luke’s argument for the unity of Peter and Paul. Furthermore, it seeks to highlight the socioreligious and narrative functions of the Jerusalem Council episode in Acts and as well as its theological implications.

CHAPTER TWO

ANALYSIS OF SCHOLARS ON THE JERUSALEM “APOSTOLIC DECREE” IN ACTS 15:1-35

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present a critical analysis of the approaches and methodology of scholars on the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35. I critically review the approaches and methodology that each scholar uses, and how the scholar addresses the decree in Acts 15:1-35. In other words, how do the scholars, in the light of their methodologies, understand the place of the “Apostolic Decree” in Luke’s larger narrative in Acts? I approach the analysis from a historical-critical methodological standpoint, using textual, literary, and narrative criticisms, with attention to Luke’s rhetorical devices and the use of Old Testament references in the passage. In the process, I advocate for neutrality, freedom from religious ideologies and biases, and suspension of judgments regarding defining the meaning and function of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in the larger Lukan narrative of Acts on the basis of the traditional assumptions of reception history.

While the scholarly evidence of the “text” of the Acts of the Apostles presents great difficulties for exegesis, the textual analysis of C. K. Barrett is at the basis of my scholarly analysis. In his analysis, Barrett rightly advocates for the adoption of the “eclectic method”; that is, “each variant will be assessed on its own merits, and neither adopted nor rejected because it belongs to a particular family of readings (Old Uncial or Western).”²⁸ For the most part, this approach is important because an examination of the variants in the textual tradition offers insights into

²⁸ Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, xviii-xix.

understanding the decree and its prohibitions. I focus my analysis on major scholarly commentators and other secondary literature to include: Ernst Haenchen, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Luke Timothy Johnson, C. K. Barrett, Beverly Roberts Gaventa, Christopher R. Matthews, Aaron White, Justin Taylor, Charles H. Savelle, Todd R. Hanneken, W. Edward Glenny, and Michal Beth Dinkler.

Considering my interest in this research on the origin, meaning, and nature of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in the entire narrative of the Jerusalem Council, I consider how previous scholarship approaches the “Apostolic Decree” and the Jerusalem Council in analyses of Acts 15:1-35.

2.2 Scholarly Discussion on the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35

The interpretation of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35 is a matter of scholarly controversy between two main groups. While there are those who analyze the passage from the perspective of its historical function in relation to the entire book of Acts, there are also those who argue from the narrative, literary, theological, and social functions of the episode without seeing Acts as a strict history of the earliest Jerusalem community headed by James. I analyze the scholarly discussion on the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35.

2.2.1 Haenchen’s Analysis of Acts 15:1-35

First, Haenchen’s commentary, though it shows its age in some respects, does a great service in offering much insightful analysis and in giving the history of previous scholarship both in his survey of historical and critical research into Acts as a document, and in his treatment of Acts 15:1-35 under the heading “Gentile freedom from the law admitted in Jerusalem.” For

Haenchen, “towards the end of the eighteenth century the traditional view of Acts began to weaken.”²⁹ Haenchen gathers from the insights of scholars like Martin Dibelius, Otto Bauernfeind, Alfred Loisy, James Hardy Ropes, Rudolf Bultmann, Hans Conzelmann, and Franz Overbeck to argue that Luke’s intention is not to reproduce any historical recollection (v. 17)³⁰, but to demonstrate Gentile Christian freedom from the law (v. 10).³¹ Haenchen notes that 15:16-18 agree entirely in meaning, and for the most part in wording, with the LXX. For him, the Jewish Christian James in Jerusalem would not have used the Septuagint text, which differs from the Hebrew, as scriptural proof. Therefore, he concludes that it is not James but Luke who is speaking here.³² This observation suggests that the Jerusalem episode is part of Luke’s narrative composition. This indicates that Luke as an author has a literary procedure that could be associated with some forms of ancient traditions that depend on both written sources and oral tradition during the actual process of composition. This is similar to Matthews’s view of “an intertextual perspective and the insights that it offers with respect to the composition of oral and written texts in antiquity.”³³ Consequently, Haenchen’s observation might mean that with the text of the Jerusalem Council and its Decree as part of his compositional narrative, Luke connects the Law (Leviticus) and prophets (Amos) with the social experience of his group to communicate a message to his audience. Through the reference of Luke to the re-erection of the ruined tabernacle of David (Amos 9:11-12), he does not see it as just a restoration of the Davidic kingdom, or as an image of the true Israel, but he conceives

²⁹ Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 447.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 446.

³² *Ibid.*, 448.

³³ Matthews, *Philip*, 10.

the Jesus event (the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) as what causes the Gentiles to seek the Lord. The Jesus event, which is seen as the re-erection of the ruined tabernacle of David, becomes the marker for making the scope of the people of God to be inclusive of not just Jewish Christians, but also Gentile Christians.

At this point, I introduce Bruce M. Metzger's explanation of the "Apostolic Decree in Acts in order to further our understanding and analysis with Haenchen and other scholars. According to Metzger:

the text of the book of the Acts of the Apostles circulated in the early church in two quite distinct forms, commonly called the Alexandrian and the Western. The former, which has been traditionally regarded as the authentic text of Acts, is represented by P⁴⁵ P⁷⁴ ⋈ A B C Ψ 33 81 104 326 and 1175. The other form is represented chiefly by D and the fragmentary papyri P²⁹, P³⁸, and P⁴⁸, by the readings marked with an asterisk or standing in the margin of the Harclean Syriac version (syr^h with *, syr^h mg), by the African Old Latin ms. h (a fifth or sixth century fragmentary palimpsest that preserves about 203 of the 1007 verses of Acts), and by the citations of Acts made by Cyprian and Augustine.³⁴

Though the Alexandrian text and the Western text differ in character as well as length, the Alexandrian text, which is traditionally considered the authentic text of Acts, is the primary text of this study. In line with this, Metzger articulates the fact that

the text of the Apostolic Decree, as it is called, is given at 15:29; it is referred to proleptically in 15:20 and retrospectively in 21:25. The three verses contain many problems concerning text and exegesis: (1) Are Gentiles commanded to abstain from four things (food offered to idols, blood, strangled meat, and unchastity) or from three (omitting either strangled meat or unchastity); and (2) are the three or four prohibitions entirely ceremonial, or entirely ethical, or a combination of both kinds? (a) The Alexandrian text, as well as most other witnesses, has four items of prohibition. (b) The Western text omits "what is strangled" and adds a negative form of the

³⁴ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*, Third Edition (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 259.

Golden Rule in 15:20 and 29. (c) What may be the Caesarean text omits “unchastity” from 15:20.³⁵

It is important to note that since, as Metzger observes, it is not known that the “Caesarean” text exists, and the Western text is regarded as a revised textual form, both forms will not be at the center of our consideration here. Therefore, for Haenchen, he seems to say that from the D text there is evidence that vv. 1-5 show that the developing tendency is to have ecclesiastical controversies settled by higher authority; this procedure is seen as justified by the example of Jerusalem.

On the issue of the four requirements (the Apostolic Decree) in v. 20, Haenchen notes that these textual variations in the two Greek versions (1. mentioning “what is strangled” but without the “golden rule” [so all uncials save D], 2. without any mention of “what is strangled” but with the “golden rule” [so D d Iren Cypr]) seem to influence scholarly interpretations of the Apostolic Decree as either ethical or ritual in nature.³⁶ In his analysis of Acts 15:1-35, Haenchen admits that this chapter has been the subject of passionate debate among scholars. So, he summarily exposes the positions of representative scholars like Bernhard Weiss, Friedrich Spitta, Hans Hinrich Wendt, Bauernfeind, and Dibelius. Using source criticism, Weiss sees the passage as a Lukan composition that combines a source of Luke and Luke as a reviser. This position, for him, is substantiated by the chapter’s apparent conflict and differences in the formulation of the decree in vv. 23-29 and in James’s proposals. Also, there is the reason of its divergences from Galatians. Weiss held that the speeches of Peter and James were their authentic words. However, for Haenchen, this is a

³⁵ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 429-30.

³⁶ Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 449-450.

psychological impossibility.³⁷ And this is not just a psychological impossibility, but it is also not possible on the basis of scholarly evidence.

Spitta, for his part, assumes that 15:1-33 was an insertion into a missionary journey. There is also this inconsistency, that Judas and Silas in 15:33 return to Jerusalem and yet Silas a few days later leaves Antioch in the company of Paul. Finally, Spitta makes the point that the whole section belongs not after the first journey but before it, since 15:23 presupposes only a mission to Syria and Cilicia.³⁸ Therefore, Spitta, starting from the internal contradictions in Acts, considers Luke as a redactor in Acts, and regards as original the report which agrees with Galatians 2. Moving ahead, Haenchen reviews Wendt, who sensed the stylistic difference between Acts 15:1-33 and the mission-report on either side. Thus, Wendt concludes that the passage was an “episodic addition” to that source report, though itself based on a tradition rather than freely imagined.³⁹ What then is the tradition upon which Luke’s narrative is built? This inquiry puts in perspective this investigation on Acts 15:1-35, which will be addressed in the next chapter. However, the narrative of Acts 15:1-35 gives an indication that Luke seems to be a redactor of some earlier traditions. Stepping ahead another quarter of a century from Wendt, Haenchen examines Bauernfeind. Haenchen highlights one point from Bauernfeind’s work, which is some form of historical program in Luke’s composition.

In 1947 Dibelius tackled the problem of the Apostolic Council, sensing more strongly than all his predecessors the methodological necessity of appreciating the “real character” of Luke’s account. Hence, for Haenchen, Dibelius gives an analysis of the chapter which surpasses all

³⁷ Ibid., 456.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

previous attempts in its precision. “From it he extracts two conclusions – (a) literary: the text is comprehensible without discrimination of sources. Luke shows that in the conversion of Cornelius God has authorized the Gentile mission, then adds the decree which he had come across somewhere. (b) historical: there is only *one* record of the proceedings in Jerusalem, that of Paul in Galatians. It should not be corrected on the basis of Acts; the decree ‘does not derive from this meeting’.”⁴⁰ If Dibelius’s conclusions are correct, could it be that Luke is doing something else with the Jerusalem Decree rather than trying to set forth a history? One thing is clear as Haenchen submitted: Luke did not write for a history-obsessed twentieth-century generation.⁴¹ Consequently, this survey by Haenchen supports the view that the structure of Luke’s narrative in Acts 15:1-35 is a composition. Also, the Decree may have originated from Luke’s utilization of the Mosaic law (Leviticus 17–19), and its lived experience in some Pauline community, and then applied to the social experience of his community that is increasingly a mixture of some moderate Jewish Christian minorities and Gentile Christians who all take pride in the Jewish heritage of their emerging Christian faith. Arguing in this direction, it is likely that the members of Luke’s community see themselves as part of a Pauline Christian mission with a Jewish heritage as indeed the people of God.

Haenchen then goes on to analyze Acts 15:1-35 as Luke’s composition of a narrative. Haenchen continues with the role of the episode in the scheme of Acts. He asks the question: what *function within the grand design* is this composition meant to serve? For him, chapter 15 is the turning-point, “centerpiece” and “watershed” of the book, the episode which rounds off and

⁴⁰ Ibid., 457.

⁴¹ Ibid., 457.

justifies the past developments, and makes those to come intrinsically possible.⁴² He affirms in line with Dibelius that Luke's version of the Apostolic Council does not possess historical value.

Haenchen then proceeds to explore Paul's version in Galatians. This record of Paul in Galatians 2 forms part of Paul's demonstration that he was independent of the community at Jerusalem, and in particular of "those who were Apostles before" him (Gal. 1:17). However, Haenchen affirms that Paul's concern was to demonstrate also that the gospel he preached to the Gentiles met with approval, that is, that the mission without the law carried authority. Though it seems that Luke may have been influenced by Paul's Galatians, a comparison between Acts 15 and Galatians 2 reveals some insights that may be of interest to this study. In line with Matthews's comparison, both texts mention the Jerusalem meeting (Acts 15:1-35; Gal. 2:1-14). However, Paul in Galatians says he went by revelation (v. 2) while, in Acts 15, representatives in Antioch were appointed (v. 2). Paul talks of false believers (v. 4), while Luke speaks of some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees (v. 5). Paul says he had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised (Gentiles), just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised (Judeans) (v. 7). Luke narrates that Peter says that he was chosen to be the one through whom Gentiles would hear the gospel (v. 7), that is, hear it for the first time. The contentious debate talked about in Galatians 2 is passed over in silence in Acts (v. 12). Whatever the differences in the comparison of the two texts, I argue that the debate suggests that the status of Gentiles and the issue of eating with them were matters of conflict between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, which Luke was addressing in Acts and necessitated the "Apostolic Decree".

From historical-critical, textual, narrative, literary, compositional, and social standpoints, Haenchen argues:

⁴² Ibid., 461. Emphasis original.

the introduction of these four conditions must have occurred at a time when it was hoped that they would cement the fellowship of Jewish and Gentile Christians. For this, Jerusalem does not come into consideration, and James cannot be thought of as the author. For, as the incident at Antioch proves, he regarded table fellowship of Jewish and Gentile Christian as inadmissible.... These prohibitions must have come into force in a strongly mixed community of the diaspora, where Jewish claims were more moderate and could be satisfied by the four commandments which Moses himself gave to the Gentiles.⁴³

What is this mixed community of the diaspora which Haenchen refers to as the likely origin of the “Apostolic Decree”? Could it be from Luke’s experience of a Pauline mission in the diaspora, who adhere to the Scriptures of the Jews? In this context, one sees the point that the Decree must have originated from a community of Paul’s mission in the diaspora. It is plausible then to argue that Luke’s aim is meant to provide legitimation, or a rationale for current praxis among his contemporaries through the idealized representation of the Jerusalem church, and the association of that paradigmatic community with the church of Luke’s day through the incorporation of various details from the life of the latter into the description of the former.⁴⁴ Also, what links these four prohibitions together, and at the same time distinguishes them from all other “ritual” requirements of “Moses,” is that they – and they only – are given not only to Israel but also to strangers dwelling among the Jews. Whereas in other respects the law applies solely to the Jews, it imposes these four prohibitions on *Gentiles also!*⁴⁵ Therefore, Luke may have used it in his narrative to cement the fellowship between his highly mixed (Hellenized Jewish and Gentile Christian) community.

⁴³ Ibid., 470-71.

⁴⁴ Matthews, “Luke the Hellenist,” 103.

⁴⁵ Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 469.

2.2.2 Fitzmyer's Analysis of Acts 15:1-35

Fitzmyer, arguing for a historical function of the Jerusalem Decision about Gentile Christians, comments: "So what is now recounted is the turning point of Luke's story, when the apostolic and presbyteral college of Jerusalem officially recognizes the evangelization of Gentiles, which has been initiated by Peter and carried out on a wide scale by Barnabas and Paul. It leads to the definitive break of the Christian church from its Jewish matrix."⁴⁶ This comment by Fitzmyer gives the impression that Luke was aware of a historical apostolic and presbyteral college of Jerusalem that decided the definitive break of the Christian church from its Jewish matrix. Is the Jerusalem Council (15:1-35), and its Decree (15:20, 29), history itself or a historical program of Luke with a theological agenda?

Fitzmyer divides his analysis into five sub-sections: prehistory, convocation and Peter's appeal to precedent, James' confirmation and proposals, the Jerusalem letter to local gentile churches, and the aftermath of the Jerusalem decision and letter. Generally, Fitzmyer's analysis is a solid historical-critical treatment of the text that includes scholarly literature. Fitzmyer notes in his comment on vv. 1-2 that "up to this point in Acts Jerusalem has been a focal point, as the mother church and the doctrinal center.... The controversy that Luke now introduces into his account was a historic incident in the early church. It is also recorded by Paul in Gal 2:1-10."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 538. Also, Forbes, "Acts of the Apostles as a Source," 5-36, uses the historical framework for Acts as a source for studying early Christianity. There is need for caution regarding a strictly historical approach to Acts of the Apostles.

⁴⁷ Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 539.

For Fitzmyer, the double attestation, in Acts and in Galatians 2, reveals that we are dealing with a historical debate in the early church. He acknowledges that the question of the source(s) used in Acts 15 has been a matter of no little debate. Fitzmyer modifies Harnack's claim of an Antiochene source, and affirms that vv. 1-2 are a Lukan suture, joining the material found in vv. 3-33, which comes from Antiochene sources, with the Pauline source that he had been using in 13:1–14:28, the description of Paul's Mission I.⁴⁸ In addition, Fitzmyer concludes that the significance of this episode is that the "Council" decides that, to be a disciple of Christ, one does not have to be circumcised or obey all the prescriptions of the Mosaic law. James's speech and reference to Amos 9:11 join Peter as one of "two witnesses," and shows how the words of the prophet are fulfilled in Jesus and his relation to the nations.⁴⁹ On the Jerusalem letter to local Gentile churches, Fitzmyer opines that the letter offers a solution to the problem in the Antiochene church that rose out of the incident of Paul's public rebuke of Peter there (Gal 2:11-14).

This analysis, though it gives some wonderful insights, assumes that Luke is a contemporary of Paul and that the episode has historical value. Fitzmyer affirms that Luke concludes his account of the important Jerusalem decisions and letter by describing the reception of the representatives of the Jerusalem church in Antioch, where the problems originally began.⁵⁰ It can be observed here that ascribing historical value to the narrative of Luke in Acts 15:1-35 is to overdetermine the text and force on Luke a historical consistency with Galatians. The traditions that Luke uses in his narrative may be more complex than just a systematic portrayal like a 21st-century historian. An understanding of the literary skills, rhetorical devices, and theological

⁴⁸ Ibid., 540.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 562.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 567.

interest of Luke definitely brings out Luke's distinctiveness and a proper understanding of the Jerusalem "Apostolic Decree" (15:20; 29) and the entire Jerusalem Council narrative in Acts 15:1-35.

2.2.3 Johnson's Analysis of Acts 15:1-35

Johnson's commentary uses a literary approach to analyze the place of the Law and the Prophets in the narrative of Acts 15. According to Johnson, "no reader can miss the obvious importance Luke attaches to this Jerusalem Council. Preparation for it began already in Acts 10–11, with Peter's conversion of Cornelius and his household."⁵¹ While emphasizing Luke's capacity for composing a sustained narrative and comparing Acts 15 with Hellenistic novels, Johnson opines that "the importance of the meeting is signaled as well by the proposing (15:20) and issuing (15:29) of a formal decree, the only such official directive in the entire narrative. Luke gathers his main characters together for the first time only for the fashioning of this decision, and then disbands them. The only time two of the participants meet again, the subject of the decree will also surface: when James meets Paul on his last visit to Jerusalem, he reminds Paul of the terms of this conciliar decision (21:18-25)."⁵² On this basis, Johnson argues that the Apostolic Council is a watershed in the narrative of Acts. After making a comparison between Acts 15 and Galatians 2, Johnson argues that the structure of the story calls our attention, for example, to the dynamics of decision-making in the Church.

⁵¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 267.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 268.

Johnson raises the question of what we are to make of the “apostolic decree,” which James wants sent to the Gentiles. For him, James characterizes the prohibitions as something other than “harassment,” and locates their basis in the fact that “Moses is read” throughout the Diaspora:

According to Luke’s presentation, therefore, the prohibitions are neither new to these Gentile converts nor burden to them. This implies that they would have learned of the prohibitions through their association with the synagogue, and would have already been observing them. Looked at in this light, the prohibitions themselves clearly seem to fit within the sort of requirements for “proselytes and sojourners” already spelled out in Leviticus 17–18, and elaborated in the rabbinic discussions of the so called “Noachian precepts.” These were the commandments given to the sons of Noah for observance, and include (among others) the prohibitions listed here by Luke (see *bT Sanh.* 56b).⁵³

The connection of the Decree to Leviticus 17–18 is likely a plausible one. In addition, Johnson refers to the logic of James’s position as being either that the stipulations would be known to the nations or that those frequenting the synagogues would already know them. It is contestable, then, that Luke is reporting the position of a historical James in Jerusalem because, if it is so, he would not be quoting the Septuagint, but rather the Hebrew Scriptures (Masoretic Text). However, Luke may have picked up the stipulations from some experience of the practice of the Mosaic law as guiding principles of a Pauline Christian mission. Rightly, nevertheless, Johnson argues:

the point would seem to be to provide the basis for table-fellowship and full communion between Jew and Gentile Messianists. The commandments in Leviticus in particular give as their motivation the avoidance of “defiling the land” and “defiling the people,” and the consequences of breaking these commandments is “being cut off from the people” (Lev 17:7, 9, 10, 14; 18:21, 24-25, 28-30). But according to the protocol of table-fellowship in the ancient world, one would eat only with someone who shared the same values. Table-fellowship symbolized spiritual fellowship (see 1 Cor 10:14-22).⁵⁴

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Johnson also submits that the way Luke “shaped the rhetoric of the Jerusalem meeting is far more important than the historicity, applicability, or reception of the ‘apostolic decree’. That decree could have been, in any case, of only temporary significance.”⁵⁵ It is difficult to dismiss the Decree to be of only temporary significance as opined by Johnson. In the first place, the emphasis placed on the Decree in the narrative as a formal decision calls for great attention. Secondly, the apostolic characters and other figures brought together each time the Decree is mentioned in the narrative of Acts is also worthy of note. Thirdly, the repetition of the Decree (15:20, 29; 21:25) in Acts expresses its significance. Therefore, it is important to raise the question of its origin, meaning, and function in the Jerusalem Council narrative (Acts 15:1-35).

2.2.4 Barrett’s Analysis of Acts 15:1-35

C. K. Barrett’s critical commentary, perhaps the best one current among major critical commentaries on Acts for depth of information and balanced treatment, analyzes the debate of the Council in Jerusalem in Acts 15:1-35 as rightly the center of Acts. For Barrett, “this concerns not the terms on which Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians may have fellowship, especially at the common Christian meal (though this question undoubtedly lurks in the background and was important), but whether circumcision and observance of the Law are necessary for salvation.”⁵⁶ Barrett argues that “in Luke’s report, however, the Decree (proposed here by James) fits into the framework Luke has provided: it sets forth conditions of salvation.”⁵⁷ Barrett considers the Decree as four abstentions, and then analyzes the background and origin of these abstentions. From these

⁵⁵ Ibid., 280

⁵⁶ Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 222.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 228.

foregoing arguments, it seems that, with regard to the meaning of the Decree, Barrett favors more the accent on salvation than on table-fellowship. However, if one considers the social dynamics of religion at the time of Luke's community, table-fellowship may not be separated from salvation. Furthermore, Barrett affirms that the Decree of Acts 15 is Luke's work, though it is not without historical foundation.⁵⁸ Does historical foundation here mean the information that Luke gathers from Galatians and the other traditions at his disposal? Nevertheless, he is correct to affirm that Paul was not involved in the composition of the Decree in Acts 15.

As the narrative goes, the meeting, for Barrett, does not take the form of a trial but rather of a general discussion of Christian practice. The debate seems to be in the background. Luke "assigns speeches to Peter, who is in favour of a liberal attitude; to Barnabas and Paul, who show that God, by granting miracles, has blessed the Gentile mission; and to James, whose attitude is less clear. He agrees with Peter, but indicates that some concessions must be made to Jewish convictions. The whole company agree with their leader, and a letter is written in the name of all, disowning those who have caused trouble at Antioch and stating the Decree proposed by James."⁵⁹ As Barrett describes it, chapter 15 of Acts is the best example of a pattern that occurs several times, which can also be seen in chapters 6 and 19. A difficulty is encountered; steps are taken to address it; then the problem is not only solved, but a notable advance takes place. In particular, chapter 15 of Acts narrates that the expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles (which runs through chs. 1–14) is threatened; the Council deals with the problem; not only is the problem solved, its solution leads to further advance (15:35, and the rest of the book).⁶⁰ Therefore, chapter 15 may be said to

⁵⁸ Ibid., lxxxii.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 226.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

determine the shape of Acts as a document because it resolves a problem, which seemed to have been anticipated in the preceding chapters, and at the same time leads to the subsequent chapters of Acts.

Barrett acknowledges that many other scholars see in chapter 15 the use by Luke of a variety of traditions; some think of oral, others of written traditions.⁶¹ Luke may have combined both oral and written traditions. It is clear, as Fitzmyer and Barrett themselves assert, that Luke as a member of the Pauline tradition and having written his Gospel (the first volume of his two-volume work, Luke-Acts), must be aware of the written tradition of a meeting as mentioned by Paul in Galatians 2. However, in my view, there may be other traditions that are also available to Luke at the time of composing his narrative in Acts, like the Antiochene (of Paul, Barnabas and others) and Jerusalem (of Jesus, the Apostles and elders) traditions.

Just as with other scholars before him, Barrett observes that Luke's story invites comparison with Galatians 2. He identifies some similarities and differences between Acts 15 and Galatians 2. He observes that the same persons are involved; both seems to treat questions raised by the extension of the Christian mission to the Gentile world. Regarding the differences, Barrett notes that in Galatians, Paul and Barnabas were to continue the Gentile mission with no demand for circumcision, while the Jerusalem apostles continue their mission to Jews. The Acts story begins on these lines but ends with a Decree. In my opinion, I think Luke uses circumcision to set the stage for the debate because the story needs to establish the connection of the Decree to the Mosaic law. In Judaism, one would not eat with Gentiles whose values and practices defiled

⁶¹ Ibid. It is important to note that, contrary to Barrett, Fitzmyer considers Luke as a fellow companion of Paul. In my view, Luke rather appears to belong to a later Pauline heritage and not a fellow companion of Paul if the internal evidence of inconsistency between Luke in Luke-Acts and the undisputed Pauline letters are considered.

themselves, others, and the land. Thus, the Decree is most readily understood as regulating the conditions by which Jewish and Gentile Christians may have fellowship, especially table-fellowship, with one another.

In Galatians there is no reference to the Decree, nor does Paul mention it elsewhere. Both Acts and Galatians mentioned the visit to Antioch of a delegation from Jerusalem. In Acts this happens before the Council, in Acts 15:1-5. Judeans insist that Gentile Christians of Antioch must be circumcised and keep the Law. In Galatians it happens after the Jerusalem meeting. Those people ended the practice of shared Jewish-Gentile meals, dividing the church and even separating Barnabas and Paul. This seems to mean that at this point there was no agreed Decree on common meals. Paul maintained his position and stood by the Gentiles.⁶² It can be noted that Paul in Galatians and Luke in Acts are doing different things. Since Paul in Galatians makes no reference to the Decree of the Jerusalem meeting while Luke does, it means that Luke knows about the Decree in the Mosaic law (Lev 17-19), and from his experience of possibly another Pauline Christian community, and then utilizes it in his narrative composition of Acts 15:1-35. Also, the characteristics of the Lukan community as highlighted in Acts 20:17-35 indicate that it is a mixed community. Esler asserts that “one of the places in Luke-Acts where one feels most immediately that Luke is using apostolic history to speak to the present of his own audience is in Paul’s prophetic address to the elders of the Ephesian ἐκκλησία (Acts 20:17-35),”⁶³ and this passage shows a mixed community. Considering, then, that Luke has in mind a community, though Pauline, which is becoming increasingly mixed, it seems that Luke needed to use the Decree to prescribe the behavior endorsed by the Decree and thus enable the table-fellowship between the mixed

⁶² Ibid., 227.

⁶³ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 26.

Hellenized Jewish and Gentile Christians. However, the comparison of Luke in Acts and Paul in Galatians was so strong that Barrett seems to have argued for Luke's simplification of a complicated sequence of events, making dating virtually impossible. He said it was probably a year or two after the famine (11.28).⁶⁴

Regarding the background and origin of the four prohibitions, Barrett analyzes four suggestions: (a) practical rules bearing on the convert's life; (b) the commands given to Noah (see Gen 9.4-6; *Jubilees* 7.20) and believed to be applicable to all races; (c) the more widely accepted suggestion concerning regulations given in Leviticus 17 and 18 for Gentiles living among Jews; and (d) a suggestion provided by a group of rabbinic passages that urged that, even in persecution, a Jew is not expected to compromise on three matters: idolatry, the shedding of blood, and incest. These cover Luke's prohibitions concerning idolatry, blood, and fornication (which would include incest). They do not cover what is strangled; this could have been added to facilitate common meals. It is worth noting that there is some correspondence also with the legal observance possible for Diaspora Jews; much of the Law could be observed only in Israel.⁶⁵ Barrett favors (d) combined with (a). For him, (b) and (c) do not have a close connection with the prohibitions.

2.2.5 Christopher R. Matthews's Analysis of Acts 15:1-35

⁶⁴ Some famines are known to have occurred within the Roman Empire in the reign of Emperor Claudius Caesar (41-54 A.D.). The second famine was in the fourth year of his reign (45 A.D.), and was particularly around Judea. Luke refers to this particular famine in Acts 11:28.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 234.

Matthews comments that v. 1 refers to *certain individuals*, which v. 5 identifies as Pharisees, whom Paul in Gal 2:4 calls “false believers.”⁶⁶ These people say that unless you are circumcised and keep the law of Moses, you cannot be saved. For Matthews, chapter 15 “reopens issues seemingly settled with the approval of the ‘circumcised believers’ (11.2n., 18) in 11:1-18. If the right of Gentile admission to the church was confirmed in chapter 11, the present discussion may raise the issue of the conditions that might nevertheless apply.”⁶⁷ This assertion seems to reaffirm the position of Haenchen, Barrett, and some other scholars, who argue that Acts 15 is the turning-point, “centerpiece,” and “watershed” of the book, the episode which rounds off and justifies the past developments, which run through chapters 1–14. In fact, Barrett further affirms that its solution leads to further advance (15:35) and the rest of the book.⁶⁸ Also, it seems to refute the position of Gaventa that the story of the conversion of Cornelius by Peter (10:1–11:18) is the narrative climactic event in the first half of Acts, while 15:1-35 concludes the narrative denouement for Part I of Acts.⁶⁹ If one is in search of a narrative climax in the literary discussion of the admission of Gentiles into the fellowship of the people of God, I think it is Acts 15. Acts 15 did not only solve the problem of admission of Gentiles using many arguments and evidence in the narrative, it also articulates the conditions that apply to both Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. In this way, it also cements the fellowship between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians.

⁶⁶ Matthews, “Acts of the Apostles,” 1983.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 226; see also, Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 461.

⁶⁹ Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 211-12.

According to Matthews, Luke narrates in v. 2 that the representatives were appointed while Paul in Gal 2:2 says he went “by revelation.” Also, elders now appear with the apostles in vv. 4, 6, 22, and 23; also, in 16:4 these elders are considered as leaders of the Jerusalem church under James (vv. 13, 19). Peter is the only apostle named; the others function as a corporate symbol as they have throughout. As seen in v. 5, the Pharisees in Acts are portrayed as believers (26:5) or tolerant of Christianity (5:34), often in sharp contrast to Sadducees (4:1-2; 5:17; 23:6-9). In vv. 7-9, Peter makes his second summary (see 11:1-18) of the events narrated in 10:1-48. Peter’s statement in v. 7, “I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers,” contrasts with Gal 2:7-8. In v. 10, the yoke is that of the law, which is different from Paul’s view (Rom 7:12), but Peter’s words in v. 11 echo Paul’s language (Rom 3:24). In v. 12, the contentious debate reported in Galatians 2 is passed over in silence in Acts.⁷⁰ In this way, Matthews gives a more robust comparison between Acts 15 and Paul. From this comparison, it can be said that Acts 15:1-35 is Luke’s compositional way of modifying Paul’s position on the Gentiles. It seems that while Luke is affirming the place of faith, he is narratively applying the law as part of what makes common table fellowship possible. Also, the silence that passes over the contentious debate reported in Galatians 2 suggests consent to divine approval shown through signs and wonders that God had done through Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles.

Furthermore, Matthews comments that James began to speak in v. 13. In v. 14, he refers to Peter using the Semitic form of his given name, Simeon, which emphasizes connections with Judaism even as the church is becoming a mixed group (v. 19) of Jews and Gentiles. In vv. 15-18, James references the prophets, particularly Amos 9:11-12, which reflects Jer 12:15 and Isa 45:21.

⁷⁰ Matthews, “Acts of the Apostles,” 1984.

Also, v. 20 talks of the four prohibitions: 1) *Things polluted by idols*, that is, food sacrificed to them—prohibiting by extension idolatry itself (note Paul’s more liberal stance in 1 Cor 10:27-29). 2) *Whatever has been strangled*, that is, meat not ritually butchered. 3) *Blood*, which may mean the same as whatever has been strangled (omitted by some manuscripts), although it could mean murder. Suggested backgrounds for the items included in the “apostolic decree” include the so-called Noachian precepts (regulations to be observed by all peoples; see Gen 9:4-6) and the regulations for Gentiles living among Jews in Lev 17–18) *Fornication*, which has a more practical function. The list may have a more practical function (avoid non-kosher food and fornication) or stipulate matters beyond compromise (idolatry, murder, and incest). In v. 21, James’s speech refers to Moses. Selections from the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), traditionally thought to have been written by Moses, were read aloud in weekly Jewish services. The necessity of the decree (v. 20) is explained in terms of the pervasiveness of Jewish practices, which continued to be observed by Jewish Christians (cf. 21:20-25).⁷¹ Therefore, Matthews rightly argues that this pervasiveness of Jewish practices is confirmed when Paul visits James and the elders, who say to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are zealous for the law” (21:20). Following this, I ask: can the decree as expressed in 15:20 be seen as a way for the Gentiles to be configured like the Jews such that though they may be uncircumcised they are like the Jews? This may be plausible considering the arguments that refer to the law and the prophets (Acts 15:15-21; 21:20). In v. 28, it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us (see 5.3) to impose on you no further burden than these essentials. These essentials (Decree) are different from the one thing Paul referred to in Gal 2.10, which is to remember the poor. In v. 32, Judas and Silas were called prophets. Finally, the reference to Paul and Barnabas’s stay in Antioch

⁷¹ Ibid.

shows the importance of Antioch in this narrative (cf. 11:26; 14:28). So, the Decree with its essentials seems to be performing a function in the Lukan narrative of Acts 15:1-35 and in connection with the larger narrative of Acts.

2.2.6 Other Scholarly Articles on the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35

2.2.6.1 Aaron White reexamines the Apostolic Decree found in Acts 15:19-20 (and restated in 15:28-29; and also found in 21:25). He suggests that the Apostolic Decree is best understood as a Lukan rereading of Leviticus 17–19, appropriated as a blueprint of the life of an eschatological and multiethnic church made up of two associate peoples, and this has an impact on us even today. White asserts that in modern study, “the Apostolic Decree has been generally viewed as four concessions made to the Gentile-Christians as an outcome of the judgment made by James at the Jerusalem Council.”⁷² While highlighting the conclusion of Conzelmann and the debate in scholarship, White argues through a heuristic or hermeneutic of hospitality, that the “law of the resident alien” in Leviticus 17–19, which he considers the source of the “Apostolic Decree,” is aimed at including the Gentiles as full citizens in the newly multi-national people of God.⁷³ White’s essay includes discussion of hospitality as remembered debt forgiveness extended toward “the indebted other,” hospitality and “invisible debt,” why Leviticus is the source of the apostolic decree, the category of the *gēr* and their situation, requirements of hosting the other, requirements of the guest, and the eschatological tent and the reciprocal nature of forgiveness-hospitality. White concludes that for Luke, the Jewish Christian hosts extend forgiveness of the debt of the Gentiles

⁷² Aaron White, “Reading Inclusion Backwards: Considering the Apostolic Decree Again in Fresh Context,” *BibTheolBull* 48 (2018): 202. DOI: 10.1177/0146107918801514.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 209.

by remembering their own forgiveness, and in response the Gentile Christians (according to the Lukan construal of Leviticus 17–19) are obligated to express reciprocal hospitality by fulfilling four stipulations. Finally, White applies the apostolic decree to the crisis of migration today. For him, “if the Jewish-Christians could host the Gentile-Christian (an epochal moment not simply in Acts, church history, or theology), anyone (governments included, encouraged by the advocacy of Christians) can offer a hand of generous hospitality to whoever their ‘other’ is in any particular situation.”⁷⁴ This essay really brings out the scriptural background of the apostolic decree in the book of Leviticus and paints the picture of the Gentile Christians as the “other.” However, in the narrative of Acts, are the two associate peoples not the “other” to one another? I think that the apostolic decree in Acts is rightly a rereading of Leviticus 17–19 and it helps to make coexistence of Jewish and Gentile Christians possible.

2.2.6.2 Justin Taylor considers the Jerusalem decrees (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25) both as Noahide commandments (see Gen 9:4-6) and as analogous to the decrees for resident aliens in Leviticus 17–18. The former implicitly keeps the separation between Jews and Gentiles; the latter implicitly allows Gentiles to associate with Jews under certain conditions. For Taylor, what is at stake is the status to be assigned to Gentiles by the community of Jewish believers in Jesus.⁷⁵ Though Taylor attempts to respond to Barrett’s survey of the four suggestions on Acts 15:20, he erroneously presumes a historical function of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree.” For him, two

⁷⁴ Ibid., 213.

⁷⁵ Justin Taylor, “The Jerusalem Decrees (Acts 15.20, 29 and 21.25) and the Incident at Antioch (Gal 2.11-14),” In *NTS* 47 (2001): 372.

interpretations (Noah and Leviticus) correspond to the attitudes toward Gentile believers at Antioch manifested according to Gal 2:11-14 by James and Cephas, respectively.⁷⁶

2.2.6.3 Charles H. Savelle examines the origins, purposes, and significance of the four prohibitions in the apostolic decree of Acts 15. While acknowledging that “the textual traditions of the Book of Acts present significant challenges for any exegetical examination,”⁷⁷ Savelle considers the Greek text of 15:20, 29 and 21:25, compares the lists of the prohibitions in Acts, examines five key terms used by Luke, and discusses the source, nature, and purpose of the prohibitions. Savelle builds on the gains of textual and literary criticisms and uses the Greek text well. Savelle rightly concludes that “the purposes of the decree and its prohibitions were to promote unity among believing Jews and believing Gentiles”⁷⁸ of the Lukan community.

2.2.6.4 Todd R. Hanneken examines the prohibitions binding on Gentiles in the "apostolic decree" (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25) as an important example of how the Law of Moses was interpreted, taught, and used for legal rulings in the 1st century.⁷⁹ He presents an overview of the issue in Acts 15, reviews four scholarly approaches to explain the four prohibitions, and proposes that careful consideration of *Jubilees* explains the interpretation assumed in Acts. This proposal prefers a comparison of the prohibitions as an interpretation of the Noachide laws with *Jubilees*

⁷⁶ Ibid., 378.

⁷⁷ Charles H. Savelle, “A Reexamination of the Prohibitions in Acts 15,” *BibSac* 161, (2004): 450.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 468.

⁷⁹ Todd R. Hanneken, “Moses Has His Interpreters: Understanding the Legal Exegesis in Acts 15 from the Precedent in *Jubilees*,” *CBQ* 77 (2015): 686.

rather than with rabbinic literature as suggested by Barrett.⁸⁰ It finds that Acts follows *Jubilees* for three principles: (1) the narrative of Genesis 9 indicates that a set of laws is binding on all Gentiles by virtue of their being descended from Noah; (2) the prohibition of eating blood in Genesis 9 includes related prohibitions expressed elsewhere in the Law of Moses; and (3) eating blood is a paradigmatic Gentile offense linked to idolatry and illegitimate unions.

2.2.6.5 W. Edward Glenny focuses on the textual, hermeneutical, and theological issues related to the quotation from Amos 9:11-12 LXX in Acts 15:16-18 that James uses to support his scriptural argument for the inclusion of Gentiles in the church. Glenny discusses Amos 9:11-12 in the MT and the LXX, respectively. Glenny examines James's use of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15 in connection with the text form of Acts 15:16-18, its sources, David's Fallen Tent, the verbs used in the quotation, and the Apostolic Decree. Glenny concludes that there is evidence that the detailed exegetical work reflected in the scriptural quotation in Acts 15:16-18 reflects the use of the Hebrew Bible as well as the LXX. He opines that the Apostolic Decree is "another evidence of Jewish Christian exegesis of the Scriptures at the Jerusalem Council."⁸¹ This raises a question whether Glenny considers Luke a Jewish Christian. In my opinion, it is erroneous to consider Luke as a Jewish Christian, even though his narrative reflects a Hellenist Christian exegesis of Jewish Scriptures.

2.2.6.6 Michal Beth Dinkler first maintains that the seemingly inevitable dichotomy between "rhetoric" and "narrative" in NT studies is anachronistic and distorts ancient witnesses, and that the time has come to integrate the full range of insights from classical and

⁸⁰ Ibid., 687.

⁸¹ W. Edward Glenny, "The Septuagint and Apostolic Hermeneutics: Amos 9 in Acts 15," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 22 (2012): 22.

“New Rhetorical” approaches with the close attention to narrative elements advocated by contemporary narratology. In addition, Dinkler proposes that we explicitly reimagine the boundaries of the “NT and rhetoric” to include narrative as a mode of persuasion in and of itself, using resources from the literary subfield of rhetorical narratology. Finally, Dinkler analyzes the uses of speech and silence in Acts 15:1-35 to demonstrate how integrating narrative-critical and rhetorical approaches can help us to think in fresh ways about the rhetorical force of NT narratives.⁸²

2.3 Conclusion

On the basis of this scholarly analysis, support has been identified to understand the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” of Acts 15:1-35 as part of Luke’s narrative composition, which seems to have a potential “historical” function in terms of the way Luke wants to account for the existence of the Christian community familiar to him. Also, this chapter concludes that Luke seems to be a redactor of some earlier traditions, which have some historical religious figures. Acts 15:1-35 is Luke’s compositional way of modifying Paul’s position of the Gentiles. It seems that while Luke is affirming the place of faith, he is narratively applying the law as part of what makes common table fellowship possible. Also, this chapter concludes that the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35 is Luke’s narrative for enabling the fellowship between his mixed (Hellenized Jewish and Gentile Christian) community. It is the turning-point, “centerpiece” and “watershed” of the book. It rounds off and justifies the past developments, which run through chapters 1–14, and its solution leads to further advance (15:35) and the rest of the book. The

⁸² Michal Beth Dinkler, “New Testament Rhetorical Narratology: An Invitation toward Integration,” *Biblical Interpretation* 24 (2016): 203-28.

Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” in Acts 15:1-35 is the narrative climax that not only solves the problem of Jewish-Gentile communal existence, using many arguments and evidence, but articulates the conditions from the law and prophets that also apply to the Gentile and Jewish Christians apart from faith in the good news of Christ, thereby endorsing the fellowship of the mixed (Hellenized Jewish and Gentile Christian) community of Luke.

CHAPTER THREE

BIBLICAL EXEGESIS OF ACTS 15:1-35

3.1 Introduction

This chapter engages in an exegetical examination of Acts 15:1-35. This biblical exegesis examines the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (15:20, 29; also 21:25) in Acts 15:1-35 in order to understand its origin, meaning, purpose, and function within the entire narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. Is the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” a theological narrative that enables the working relationship and table-fellowship of the Jewish and Gentile members of the Lukan community? Assuming that Luke is aware of Galatians 2, what is Luke’s intention in bringing together the figures of Peter and Paul in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1-35? In this part of the thesis, I apply the methods of historical criticism in the exegetical interpretation of the passage (Acts 15:1-35) alongside compositional, literary, narrative, rhetorical, and theological approaches. I will also use intertextuality and the idea of scriptural fulfilment in the analysis of the passage. This exegetical examination is in line with the thesis of this study, which argues that the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” is Luke’s theological, literary, and narrative utilization of some four stipulations in the Mosaic law (Lev 17-19), and possibly adopted from some other Pauline community’s lived experience, which also agrees with the prophets and is founded on the divine plan, for describing the social workings of his mixed group in their table-fellowship as multiethnic (Jewish and Gentile) Christians, who see themselves as a people of God in continuity with the story of Israel and in fulfilment of God’s promise to Israel.

3.2 Overview of the Text:

(a) Context and Content:

Acts 15:1-35 narrates how the Jerusalem apostolic council affirms the admission of Gentiles as disciples of Christ and members of the community alongside Jewish disciples of Christ (Jewish members of the community). The context of the passage is set at the conclusion of the journey recounted in chapters of 13 and 14. In Acts 14:24-28 the narrator says:

Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had completed. When they arrived, they called the church together and related all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles. And they stayed there with the disciples for some time (NRSV).⁸³

According to Barrett,

the importance of this paragraph, probably based on the Antiochene record but rounded out by Luke with traces of his own style throughout, is that it matches 13.1-3. The whole narrative of chs. 13 and 14 is set in an Antiochene framework.... Luke emphasizes in v. 27, and indeed throughout, that the mission had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. This will have been welcomed in (Syrian) Antioch (cf. 11.20), but it met with a different attitude in Judaea (15.1). This attitude and its overcoming laid the foundations for the rest of the book.⁸⁴

Thus, the immediate context can be seen in 15:1, in which certain individuals came down from Judea to assert that “unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (NRSV). So right from the immediate context (15:1), there is a picture of Judea that

⁸³ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from the NRSV.

⁸⁴ Barrett, *Shorter Commentary*, 218.

connects the narrative to Judaism. It is indeed clear here that from the narrative context, there seems to be an interaction and/or continuity between Judaism and the emerging Christian group in the Gentile world. Thus, the portrait of Luke's community highlights the presence of Jewish and Gentile Christians. In the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-3), there are some Jews and non-Jews. In Cyprus and Salamis (Acts 13:4-5), there are synagogues of the Jews. In Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14-52), Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue, where there are Jews and Gentile God-fearers. All of these texts point to the intersection of pious Jews and Gentile God-fearers during the early stage of the emergence of the Christian faith in the narrative of Luke in Acts.

Using some information from maybe an Antiochene tradition and his style of compositional-literary-narrative, this Lukan passage on the Jerusalem Council contains the dispute in Antioch and the convening of the Council in Jerusalem, Peter's speech and the report of Barnabas and Paul, James' speech, the Jerusalem "Apostolic Decree," and the Decree's positive effects in Antioch with the strengthening of the relationship between the Antioch church and Jerusalem church. Acts 15:1-35 seems to assume Galatians 2 on the law and reviews it in order to bring together the figures of Peter and Paul. The dispute generated in Antioch by these Judeans implies that there is an issue involving a certain form of conservative view opposing some form of liberal view of Judaism. It is important to observe that at the time when Luke was writing, there is not yet a very clear separation between Judaism and Christianity. So, we must acknowledge then that when we say Judaism here, we mean "pious Jews," and when we say Christianity, we mean simply disciples of Christ. Therefore, Luke may be raising this issue in his narrative as a way to address this socioreligious issue among his audience. Circumcision is a very important marker for the conservative Jewish Christians, who seem to be insisting on their conservative position of Judaism. The "Apostolic Decree," then, seems to be the theological narrative for how Jews and

Gentiles work and have table-fellowship together in Luke's community, who saw themselves to be in continuity with the story of Israel with God (15: 7-9, 14-18, 19-21, 28-29).

The scene of the Jerusalem Council is an important episode in the entire narrative of Acts. Its central location in Acts shows that literarily it is strategic. It is, so to speak, the hinge between the so-called "Acts of Peter" (chs. 1–14) and "Acts of Paul" (chs. 16–28). This is why Haenchen submits that "chapter 15 is the turning-point, 'centerpiece' and watershed of the book, the episode which rounds off and justifies the past developments, and makes those to come intrinsically possible."⁸⁵ In conversation with Haenchen's view, Gaventa states that "students of Acts frequently employ terms such as "centerpiece," "turning-point," and "watershed" to convey their sense of its importance... and it does occupy the literary center of the volume, standing at the end of the first half of the book."⁸⁶ Similarly, Holladay opines that "located at the midpoint of Acts, the Jerusalem Council is reported as a watershed event."⁸⁷ However, this thesis disagrees with Gaventa when she questions the nonclarity that the Jerusalem Council is the dramatic turning-point of the book. In this biblical exegesis, therefore, I attempt to establish that through the Jerusalem "Apostolic Decree" (v. 20, 29), Luke in his narrative connects the Jewish roots in the law and Jerusalem represented by Peter (and James), the other apostles, and Paul and Barnabas with his own audience.

⁸⁵ Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 461.

⁸⁶ Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 211.

⁸⁷ Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 294.

(b) Structure of the Passage⁸⁸

1. The Dispute in Antioch and the Convening of the Council in Jerusalem (vv. 1-5)

- Certain individuals come down from Judea teaching, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved”
- After Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them
- Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss the question with the apostles and the elders
- Sent by the Church, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles both in Phoenicia and Samaria and brought great joy to all the believers
- At Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the Church and the apostles and the elders, and some believers of the sect of the Pharisees said: it is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses

2. Peter’s Speech and the Report of Barnabas and Paul (vv. 6-12)

- Gathering of the apostles and the elders
- After much debate, Peter stands up and addresses them
- The whole assembly kept silence
- The whole assembly listens to the report of Barnabas and Paul

3. James’s Speech (vv. 13-21)

- After they finished speaking, James replied, “My brothers, listen to me”
- Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles

⁸⁸ The structure of this passage laid out here was aided by the outlines in Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 221-40 and Holladay, *Acts*, 294-308.

- This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written
- Therefore, I have reached the decision that...

4. The Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 22-29)

- Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to send Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers (v. 22)
- With the following letter (vv.23-29)
 - Opening of the letter (v. 23b)
 - The Apostolic Decree (vv. 24-29)
 - Certain persons who have gone out from us with no instructions from us (v. 24)
 - We have decided unanimously to choose representatives along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 25-26)
 - By word of mouth (v. 27)
 - For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us (v. 28)
 - These essentials: the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (v. 29)
 - Closing of the letter (v. 29b)

5. The Positive Effects of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 30-35)

- So, they were sent off and went down to Antioch
- When its members read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation
- Judas and Silas, who were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers
- After they had been there for some time, they were sent off in peace by the believers to those who had sent them
- Paul, Barnabas and many others taught and proclaimed the word of the Lord in Antioch

3.3 Significant Topics of the Passage:

1. Circumcision and keeping the law of Moses as conditions for being saved
2. Debate on the significance or otherwise of circumcision and the law of Moses for salvation as people of God
3. The place of Jerusalem and the apostles and the elders in the Lukan narrative on the Church
4. The conversion of Gentiles brought great joy to all the believers
5. The meeting of the apostles and the elders in Luke's Acts
6. Peter's speech and God's testimony and cleansing
7. Salvation through the yoke of the Law and/or through the grace of the Lord Jesus
8. The silence of the assembly
9. God's signs and wonders among the Gentiles: the testimony of Barnabas and Paul
10. James' speech in the Council
11. God's favor on the Gentiles and its agreement with the prophets (Amos 9:11-12; Jer 12:15; Isa 45:21)
12. James' decision: the prohibitions of the "Apostolic Decree"
13. Moses and the proclamation of the Torah on every Sabbath in the synagogues
14. Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leaders among the brothers, sent to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas
15. The letter with the Jerusalem "Apostolic Decree"
16. Goodness of the Holy Spirit and the apostles and the elders
17. No imposition of further burden than the prohibitions
18. Emissaries to Antioch from Jerusalem

19. Members of the Antioch Church rejoiced at the exhortation (letter)
20. Judas and Silas, who were prophets, encourage and strengthen the believers, and are sent off in peace
21. Paul and Barnabas with many others proclaimed the word of the Lord in Antioch

3.4 Detailed Analysis of the Text:

1. The Dispute in Antioch and the Convening of the Council in Jerusalem (vv. 1-5):

This section presents the ostensible context and the issue in the dispute. The dispute reflects the influence of the social, ethnic, and religious factors on Luke's theology. In the dispute in Antioch and the consequent convening of the Jerusalem Council in Acts, Luke keeps the question of the law in the admission of the Gentiles into the fellowship of the people of God firmly in the background of his narrative.⁸⁹ According to Gaventa, "verses 1-5 introduce the problem and provide the necessary transition, so that the Antioch delegation makes its way to Jerusalem."⁹⁰

This problem shatters the joyous mood intoned by the report of Paul and Barnabas on their return to Antioch from the mission regarding the conversion of the Gentiles to becoming disciples of Christ. Actually, chapter 11, which is an abbreviated repetition of the story told in 10:1-48, first narrated the disagreement of the circumcised believers with Peter's going to and eating with Gentiles. This made the church in Jerusalem send Barnabas to Antioch, who seemed to have approved the admission of the Gentiles just as Peter obeyed the Holy Spirit.

- Certain individuals come down from Judea teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (v. 1) – These

⁸⁹ Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 223.

⁹⁰ Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 210.

individuals from Judea state that Gentile converts can only become members of God's people (those who are saved) if they are circumcised and keep the law of Moses. According to Barrett, "the visitation in Acts precedes the Acts Council, the visitation in Galatians follows the Galatian Council. If the two Councils are to be identified one writer is presumably in error."⁹¹ This comes into consideration if both Councils are historical facts. In Acts, the Council, and even the Decree (15:20, 29), perform more of a narrative, literary, and theological function than a historical function. So, arguing whether one writer is historically in error is unwarranted. However, there is a similar theological viewpoint between these visitors to Antioch in Acts and Paul's opponent in Galatia (Gal 5:2-3; 6:12-13). For Paul (Gal 1:7-8), insisting that a Gentile must be circumcised is "another gospel." However, in the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, the Judeans who come to Antioch highlight the literary conflict that Luke expresses in order to address the issue of the relationship and the table-fellowship between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians of his community. In this way, it is affirmed that inclusivity is in line with the type of Christianity that is being promoted by Luke, whereby there is a narrative for an inclusion of Gentile believers and endorsement of their fellowship with Jewish believers as God's people.

Furthermore, the individuals who visit Antioch were teaching the brothers (*ἀδελφοί*); here, Luke uses "brothers" to refer to the uncircumcised believers, which indicates that though uncircumcised they are already considered as "Christian" brothers (disciples of Jesus Christ). However, for these visitors, "a Gentile might enter the Jewish fold if he complied with the regulations; and all male Jews, by birth or by proselytization,

⁹¹ Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 222.

were circumcised.”⁹² In the narrative of Acts, Jerusalem remains the center of influence for the church and the authoritative witness of the apostles is still recognized in the churches in other areas. These certain individuals’ view (v. 1) tallies with the position of some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees (v. 5). For Barrett, “Luke makes it clear that not table-fellowship but salvation is the theme that is under discussion.”⁹³ I contest this opinion of Barrett because the narrative of Luke implies both admission as God’s people (that is, those who are saved) and admission into table-fellowship with the Jewish Christians. This analysis is substantiated by the view of Esler who opines that

as far as Luke and his readers were concerned, the crucial factor in the establishment of the sectarian status of the Christian community *vis-à-vis* Judaism was the institution of table-fellowship between Jews and Gentiles, and that this was still a live issue in his own community. Such table-fellowship was quite correctly perceived by Jews as a serious threat to the existence of their *ethnos* and of the Mosaic law.⁹⁴

The “Apostolic Decree” is then adopted for the mutual co-existence of both the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians (v. 21).

- After Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them (v. 2a) – In order to show the seriousness of the controversy, Luke uses litotes, a Greek formulation in which emphasis is achieved through negative understatement: “no little strife and controversy”

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 223.

⁹⁴ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 111.

(στάσεως καὶ ζητήσεως οὐκ ὀλίγης - Acts 15:2).⁹⁵ This indicates that the dissension is a serious one between Paul and Barnabas and the Jerusalem Jewish Christians.

- Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss the question with the apostles and the elders (v. 2b) - Paul and Barnabas are leaders in the church of Antioch (11:26) and its trusted delegates (13:1-3). If Acts 15 is read in parallel with Gal 2:1-10, some other unnamed delegates would include Titus (Gal 2:1, 3). These were appointed to go up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem plays an important role in the entire narrative of Luke-Acts. Jerusalem is the city of destiny for Jesus and the pivot of salvation for all humanity, beginning with the earliest disciples of Jesus, who are noted in this verse as “the apostles,” and then some, who may be leaders of some sort of the “Christian” community, were considered “elders.” Here, they constitute the leadership of the Jerusalem Church. The apostles refer to the Twelve in Acts mainly represented by Peter. Nevertheless, James, who is not an apostle but may be considered an elder due to his influence, plays a significant part in the account of the Jerusalem Council. Later on, the term for elders came to be used to refer to priests. According to Barrett, “James is not an apostle; he is never called an elder. It is probably true that he owed his influence to a special relation with Jesus (Gal 1:19) and to the strength of his character and convictions rather than to any definable office.”⁹⁶ Though James is never called an elder, his influence can make one consider him as the “presider” over the elders. The elders in Jerusalem received earlier on (11:30) the relief fund collected by the Antioch church.

⁹⁵ Holladay, *Acts*, 296. Other examples of litotes include 12:18; 14:17, 28; 15:2; 17:4, 12, 27; 19:11, 23, 24; 20:12; 21:39; 26:19, 26; 27:20; cf. 28:2.

⁹⁶ Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 223.

The controversy raised by the question of circumcision in Acts 15:1-2 is the reason why Paul and Barnabas go up to Jerusalem, but in Gal 2:2 Paul went up to Jerusalem “because of a revelation,” which is not further explained there.⁹⁷ Both Gal 2:1-10 and Acts 15 talk of a meeting, but Paul says nothing was imposed upon Gentle Christians in respect of Mosaic law, but the apostles asked only one thing: that they remember the poor, which was actually what Paul was eager to do (Gal 2:10); the “Apostolic Decree,” however, instructs Gentile Christians of mixed communities to abide by four prohibitions. Consequently, it can be argued that though both passages are similar, Luke is doing something different with the Jerusalem meeting and the “Apostolic Decree” (15:20, 29).

For Luke, Jerusalem is symbolic of the people of Israel and circumcision is the symbolic marker of a Jew after birth. Jerusalem is an important city in Jewish traditions. According to Johnson, “the middle twelve chapters of the two-volume book narrate events”⁹⁸ in Jerusalem. A closer look at why Luke wrote them shows that he wants to present a story of the earliest Church as “standing in continuity with the story of Israel,”⁹⁹ and as a fulfilment of God’s promise to Israel (Acts 13:26, 32-33). The Jewish believers would ask themselves: “how could Jews eat with those whose practices fundamentally defiled themselves and the land and the people?”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, Luke seems to be using the “Apostolic Decree” (15:20, 29) and the Council to respond to the challenge of harmonizing

⁹⁷ Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 542.

⁹⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, “Luke-Acts, Book of,” *ABD* 4:410.

⁹⁹ Terence L. Donaldson, *Jews and Anti-Judaism in the New Testament: Decision Points and Divergent Interpretations* (London: Baylor University Press, 2010), 77.

¹⁰⁰ Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 273.

the relations between the emerging groups of Jewish and Gentile Christian believers of his time who were becoming highly mixed and needed to address the social, religious, and theological pressures of table-fellowship. In this way, the requirements of the four stipulations of the Decree enabled Jewish believers to remain in communion with Gentile believers, since the Gentile believers would not be engaging in practices in radical disharmony with the Jewish *ethos*, and the Gentile believers would be Torah observant as was stipulated in Leviticus 17–19 for foreigners and God-fearers in the land.¹⁰¹

- Sent by the Church of Antioch, Paul and Barnabas reported the conversion of the Gentiles to those in Phoenicia and Samaria and brought great joy to all the believers (v. 3) – The church of Antioch was responsible for their journey to Jerusalem, not the Judeans. Therefore, it is really the interest of the church of Antioch to ratify the conversion and admission of the Gentiles as believers in Christ. So, Paul and Barnabas report the conversion of the Gentiles on their travels recounted in chapters 13–14 to the believers in Phoenicia and Samaria (v. 3). But how can Paul and Barnabas be reporting in Phoenicia and Samaria while they are on their way to Jerusalem? The response will be to say that it is so because the narrative says that is the way they went. However, I think that this is one of the inconsistencies in the narrative of Acts that shows that he was actually making a composition for the purpose of driving home a message to the audience and not presenting historical facts. Nevertheless, Acts 11:19 also talks of the spread of the word to Phoenicia (see also 21:2), while Acts 8 recalls the story of the early witness in Samaria. Thus, though they were on mission to resolve the controversy, they continued the spread of the good news as well as witnessing to the conversion of Gentiles. This reference can be seen in

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 273.

Acts 13 and 14. The report brought great joy to all the believers. This joy that followed seems to be characteristic of what follows the proclamation of the gospel in Acts (cf. 8:8, 39; 11:23; 13:48, 52).

- At Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the Church and the apostles and the elders, and some believers of the sect of the Pharisees said: it is necessary for them (i.e., Gentiles) to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses (vv. 4-5) – As Barrett opines, “this verse reproduces the themes of vv. 2, 3. Luke represents the journey to Jerusalem as something like a triumphal progress. The Gentile mission has begun and it is clear that nothing will stop it. This intended emphasis provides a better explanation of the repetition than a theory of parallel sources.”¹⁰² Consequently, they reported all that God had done with them (cf. 14:27 and 15:3). This work of God proved that it was right; it needed no further defense. The Church refers to the early Christians, which includes the apostles and elders, and other believers who did not hold office as apostles and elders. Therefore, the Church refers to the entire body of Christ, who are disciples of Christ in Jerusalem.

Unlike the disciples of Christ in Phoenicia and Samaria, who showed great joy at the report brought to them regarding the conversion of the Gentiles, some believers of the sect of the Pharisees respond by repeating the demand made in Antioch in a more extensive manner that clearly included both circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic law. Here, the demand is emphatic, opening as it does with the Greek word *δεῖ*, which means it is necessary, and Luke uses this word elsewhere to indicate elements of God’s choice (e.g., Luke 2:49; 4:43; 24:44; Acts 1:16; 4:12). This sect of Christian Pharisees may see themselves as speaking of a theological necessity. This demand also sets the stage for

¹⁰² Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 223.

Luke's Council narrative considering all that God has done in the conversion of the Gentiles was right. What is then the significance of the Christian Pharisees' view? The Christian Pharisees seem to highlight the necessity of obedience to the law as part of the Christian requirement, though clouded with the requirement of circumcision.

2. Peter's Speech and the Report of Barnabas and Paul (vv. 6-12): Generally, one observes that Luke highlights the importance of the gathering, the importance of its delegates, and that much debate took place, which is followed with the speech of Peter.

- Gathering of the apostles and the elders (v. 6) – Though the apostles and the elders gather to look into the matter, only Peter, who represents the apostles speak. The narrative highlights the importance of the gathering for examining the matter on the admission of the Gentile believers into the fellowship of the Jewish Christians. Barrett opines that “there is no record of any contribution from the elders; the apostles (in Luke's view) were the decision-makers.”¹⁰³
- After much debate, Peter stood up and addressed them (vv. 7-11) – “Peter stood up and said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers” (v. 7). Peter is rightly the one to speak at this point. This is because he is the leader of the apostles. Also, and above all, as Haenchen observes,

because it was through him that God long ago inaugurated the Gentile mission in the conversion of Cornelius. As in Chapters 10 and 11, this story here also is raised to the level of a fundamental principle: through Peter ‘the Gentiles’ have come to the faith. God acknowledged them by giving them the Spirit, as he did the disciples in Jerusalem at Pentecost. It would be defying God, like faithless Israel in the wilderness, to disregard his decision.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Ibid., 228.

¹⁰⁴ Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 458.

Considering the literary use of speeches in Acts, Luke narratively gives some theological points in the Jerusalem Council, which refers to the fulfilment of God's saving plan for all humanity. Peter's opening sentence has some obscurities. However,

the emphasis on God's initiative in v. 7 is more pronounced in the Greek than in the NRSV.... God's selection has here a double object in that God chooses the mouth of Peter and *also* chooses that the Gentiles hear the gospel. The verb translated "made a choice" is revealing, because it is used elsewhere for the choosing of Israel or the choosing of the disciples (1:2, 24; 13:17; Luke 6:13). Verses 8-9 continue the emphasis on God's role: God knows human hearts (cf. 1:24), God testified to them, God gave them the Holy Spirit, God did not distinguish them from Jewish believers, and God cleansed their hearts.¹⁰⁵

Therefore, it is God's will that Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians have fellowship together. God, knowing human hearts, gives them the Holy Spirit without partiality. Thus, the testimony of the Holy Spirit communicates the divine choice. In addition, the choosing of the disciples (both Jewish and Gentile) is a continuation and fulfillment of the choosing of Israel by God. In vv. 10-11, Peter, while focusing on the assembly, comments on the law and appears to employ Pauline language on grace. These statements appear ambiguous, but the introduction of them is far from ambiguous: "Now therefore why are you putting God to the test? (v.10a). The demands of vv. 1 and 5 that Gentiles must be circumcised and observe the Mosaic law are interpreted by Peter as willful resistance to God's actions. Peter's language reminds the audience of Israel's rebellion against God (LXX Exod 15:22-27; 17:2, 7; Num 14:22; Deut 6:16; Isa 7:12; Wis 1:2; Luke 4:12; Acts 5:9).¹⁰⁶ Regarding whether this perspective of Peter is historical or not, it is important to state, as expressed

¹⁰⁵ Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 215-16.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 215-16.

by Haenchen, that “this clearly does not represent the historical Peter’s way of thinking, for the strict Jew by no means regarded the law as an intolerable burden. Luke is rather portraying the image which Hellenistic Gentile Christians had of the law: a mass of commandments and prohibitions which no man can satisfy.”¹⁰⁷ In v. 11, Peter uses the language of Paul that “we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” This seems to recall 2 Cor. 8:9, even though Peter does not say what the grace of the Lord Jesus means. However, Peter clearly shows that grace does not mean works of the law. The word saved (σωθῆναι) is aorist infinitive passive in Greek, and can be translated as “we will be saved,” “we are saved,” or “we have been saved.” Nevertheless, in Greek idiom the future reference seems most likely. For Luke in Peter’s speech, it is clear: faith as a theological virtue, and not merely some set of doctrines, is necessary for salvation. The “they” refers to the Gentile Christian believers.

- The whole assembly kept silence (v. 12a) – “The whole assembly” refers to the general body of believers, which includes the apostles and elders, and all other believers, whether Jewish or Gentile. Silence is a sign of consent and submission to the position of Peter. As Fitzmyer opines “the silent acquiescence of the assembly conveys their decision.”¹⁰⁸
- The whole assembly listened to the report of Barnabas and Paul (v. 12b) – Barnabas and Paul report to the whole assembly, but their words are not quoted. They told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. The actor here is God, who performs “signs and wonders.” The signs and wonders worked in chapters 13–14 are certainly in view: the blinding of Elymas (13:9-11), the signs and wonders at Iconium

¹⁰⁷ Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 459.

¹⁰⁸ Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 544.

(14:3), and the healing of the Lystran paralytic (14:8-10). Also, the Gentile mission as a whole show that God is dramatically at work once again as in the exodus (cf. Exod 7:3; Deut 4:34; 6:22; Ps 135:9; *passim*).¹⁰⁹

3. James's Speech (vv. 13-21) – This follows Peter's speech. James refers with approval to Peter's words about the story of Cornelius. The citation of the LXX, which fundamentally departs from the Hebrew and indicates Lukan redaction, makes it incontrovertibly clear that James's speech too is not a historical report but a composition of the Hellenistic Gentile Christian Luke.¹¹⁰ This is in line with the position of Matthews, who argues that "one area where Luke's creative contribution comes to the fore is in the extensive speech material found within the narrative of Acts, comprising about one-third of the text.... These speeches add variety to the narrative presentation even as they advance its literary, ideological, and theological objectives."¹¹¹ Therefore, James's speech is Luke's way of making the point of confirmation of God's approval of the Gentile mission and the point of the apostolic unity of the early church, which is the message of unity that he gives to the Christian believers of his day.

- After they finished speaking, James replied, "My brothers, listen to me" (v. 13) - James here is presumably the James of 12:17 and 21:18, the leading figure in Jerusalem whom Luke does not feel necessary to introduce. This same James is presumably the one mentioned as one of the brothers of Jesus (Mk 6:3) and as a witness of the resurrection (1

¹⁰⁹ Holladay, *Acts*, 299.

¹¹⁰ Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 459.

¹¹¹ Matthews, "Acts of the Apostles," 15.

Cor 15:7). This is the same James we find in Galatians (1:19; 2:9, 12).¹¹² Luke in Acts 15 presents the figure of James as in unity with Peter, Barnabas, and Paul. If some of the other evidence noted above contradicts this portrait in Acts 15 (as some does—Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12), then it seems that Luke’s portrait of James is based on his literary, ideological, and theological motifs of unity of the apostolic witnesses and a united Christian community. This is substantiated by the reference to those James was addressing as “brothers,” who are both the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and the mixed Christian communities of Luke’s day.

- Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles (v. 14) – Here, James refers to how Simeon has related how God, (“first,” v. 14; “in the early days,” v. 7) took from among the Gentiles a people for his name. Simeon denotes the Semitic form of Peter’s given name and it emphasizes connections with Judaism even as the church is becoming a mixed group of Jews and Gentiles as indicated in v. 19 (cf. also 14:1; 17:4, 11-12; 18:4, 8; 19:10).¹¹³ God’s favor on the Gentiles is similar to God’s choice of Israel as the people of God (cf. Deut 14:2). In the immediate context of the passage, James is taking up Peter’s reference to the Cornelius episode, but uses the language of the LXX version of the Torah. Luke in this verse (v.14) clearly connects James with Peter, which expresses the essential harmony that exists among the first apostles and Christian preachers, and how they connect with the Jewish scriptures. So, James and Simeon echo the choice of the Gentile Christians by God as the people of God just as the Jewish Christians are the people of God.

¹¹² Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 231. Barrett also refers to the two accounts of his martyrdom: Josephus, *Ant.* 20.200 and Eusebius, *HE* 2.23.4-18. In these two accounts, the figure of James has a great reputation for Jewish piety.

¹¹³ Matthews, “Acts of the Apostles,” 1984.

- This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written (vv. 15-18) – James sees an agreement in the prophets with the early church’s experience of God’s action. As Gaventa, quoting Bauckham, opines, James finds those words in a slightly altered citation of Amos 9:11-12, although other prophetic texts may influence this citation as well (Jer 12:15; Isa 45:21).¹¹⁴ James uses the language of LXX as against the Masoretic text because the Hebrew actually undermines the argument of James (Luke) in that the Hebrew of Amos 9:11-12 anticipates the defeat of the nations rather than their inclusion. This confirms the fact that Luke used the LXX scriptures and not the Masoretic text. In addition, this signifies that James’s speech is a composition by Luke, which is based on the LXX rather than a historical summary of a speech delivered in Aramaic and based on the Hebrew text.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, vv. 16-18 express the quotation by James (Luke) introduced with “as it is written.” Though these verses show a composite citation of Amos 9:11-12,¹¹⁶ an examination of the verses indicate that it is another theological and biblical argument of Luke to justify the non-circumcising Gentile mission. What are the differences between the Lukan citation and the LXX passage? In addition, what is the significant difference between the Hebrew text and the LXX version, which Luke used? In v. 16, Luke uses the verb ἀνοικοδομήσω (I will rebuild) not the verb ἀναστήσω which was used in LXX Amos 9:11 and in Acts for the resurrection of Jesus (cf. 2:24, 32; 3:26; 13:33, 34). More so, Luke omits in his quotation of LXX Amos 9:11-12 the phrase “just as in days of old.” Therefore,

¹¹⁴ Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 218-19.

¹¹⁵ Holladay, *Acts*, 301-02. Cf. also, Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 459.

¹¹⁶ Ben Witherington, III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 459.

my analysis argues in line with Gaventa that “verse 16 concerns “the dwelling of David” and its renewal. . . . No longer is it Israel who attempts to build a house for God (7:47, 49), but God alone is the builder of a house for all people.”¹¹⁷ In other words, the Lord will rebuild the fallen dwelling of David in order that all other peoples may seek the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago (vv. 17-18). Luke’s quotation at this point is very similar to LXX Amos 9:12. Consequently:

Luke adds “the Lord” following “so that all other peoples may seek,” and omits “God” at the end of the phrase, “Thus says the Lord.” Luke also adds “known from long ago” in v. 18, so that the point is that these things are part of God’s plan. Taken together, the second half of the citation reinforces the claim that the Gentiles also belong to God’s name and that God has always intended to bring about their inclusion. . . . In its Lukan context, then, vv. 16-18 interpret all three speeches, and indeed everything back to and including the conversion of Cornelius, as consistent with God’s plan.¹¹⁸

Luke concludes from scripture the theological argument that the Gentile Christians are God’s people and that this is consistent with God’s plan and that God has been making these things known from long ago.

Before moving on with this analysis, there is need to say something about the differences between the Hebrew text and the LXX version, which Luke used. The Hebrew text speaks of Israel not only regaining all its own land but also “possessing the remnants of *Edom* and all the nations which are called by my name,” while the Greek version speaks of the remnant of humankind (*Adam*) seeking God. Furthermore, in the Hebrew text,

¹¹⁷ Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 219.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 219-20.

“remnant” is seen as the object of the verb “possess.”¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, it is worth noting that these texts were used by different communities of Jews, at different times and places, for the purpose of edifying their communities.

- Therefore, I have reached the decision that... (vv. 19-21; [particularly v. 20]) – Here, Luke’s James makes a juridical proposal, which has come to be called the “Apostolic Decree.” Scholars have argued that the statement in v. 19, “Therefore, I have reached the decision...,” may consider the subsequent statements as a formal decision in which James sees himself as the judge, authority, or chairman (cf. 13:46; 21:25; 25:25) or it may simply be James’s own personal judgement (25:25). “Therefore” refers back to the first part of James’ speech (vv. 13-18) in which he quoted Amos 9:11-12. This first statement presents James as an authority and the “I” of the second statement indicates an authority that is personal. This means that Luke paints the figure of James as an authority/leader in Jerusalem. Also, the larger context shows a summation of the three previous speeches and the scriptural proof; and the later references to the apostles and the elders and the whole church of believers (vv. 22-23) “suggest that James is here formulating a proposal he understands to be consistent with his speech as well as those of Peter and Barnabas and Paul.”¹²⁰ From the foregoing arguments, this study proposes that Luke presents James as an authority figure who is united to Peter, and Barnabas and Paul, in not only affirming the

¹¹⁹ Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 459. Though the social pressures in the communities that Luke addressed have great influence on his narrative, to argue, like Ben Witherington, III does, that Luke has a social program similar to Alexanders’ Hellenizing agenda, or the emperor’s Romanizing one, is difficult to see.

¹²⁰ Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 220.

mission of the non-circumcising Gentiles, but also presenting an etiology for enabling the table-fellowship of the Lukan mixed community of the Diaspora. The “Apostolic Decree” (v. 20) will endorse the relationship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in order to enhance their common table-fellowship and present them as the continuation of the divine story of Israel. Therefore, James, in communion with the apostles and the elders and the whole church, reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God (v. 19).

So, James decrees that “we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood” (v. 20; also, in v. 29 and 21:25 with slight difference in order of presentation). A quick observation needs to be mentioned here that there is an ambiguity in Luke’s narration when comparing Acts 15 with 21:25 because in Acts 21:25 Paul seems to be learning of the decree for the first time, when in Acts 15 he was involved. As was earlier noted, Bruce M. Metzger affirms that the text of the Apostolic Decree is given at 15.29; proleptically referenced in 15.20 and retrospectively in 21.25. These three verses raise many problems for the text and for exegesis, which include the number of things Gentiles are commanded to abstain from, and whether the prohibitions are entirely ceremonial, or entirely ethical, or a combination of both kinds. Nevertheless, as noted by Witherington, the vast majority of New Testament scholars are convinced that the four prohibitions (food offered to idols, fornication/unchastity, strangled meat, and blood) are the content of the earliest form of the decree.¹²¹

¹²¹ Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 460. He refers to the earlier list in Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 450.

Even though in the narrative, the “Apostolic Decree” (v. 20, 29) was meant to address the issue of whether Gentile believers should be required to submit to circumcision and to fulfill other Mosaic statutes, it is also a theological and social etiology for cementing the table fellowship of the mixed community of believers, who were Luke’s contemporaries. Here, Luke incorporates Leviticus 17–19 and adopts it as a concession for promoting the mutual coexistence of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in their table-fellowship. So, the “Apostolic Decree” appeals to the law of the resident alien in Leviticus, and Luke appeals to these stipulations for direction on how these two connected groups might live, work, have fellowship, and worship together as the people of God. This view argues against Gaventa’s position that “the possibility of sharing in meals does not enter the conversation here (by contrast with Gal 2:11-13).”¹²² From the perspective of the implied author’s world, I think Gaventa is wrong to hold that because “Gentile and Jewish believers have been eating together since the conversion of Cornelius in chapter 10,”¹²³ then the issue of table fellowship does not arise. On the contrary, rather, the “Apostolic Decree” (v. 20, 29) is really Luke’s effort at establishing a theological and social narrative that is rooted in scriptures and founded on the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem for the maintenance of the social relations and spiritual communion of the mixed community, including joint participation in the Lord’s Supper.¹²⁴ The Cornelius episode is, in fact, preparatory to the Jerusalem Council and the Decree, which is related to the prohibitions

¹²² Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 222.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Since Luke is part of the Pauline heritage, it is assumed that he is aware of the Pauline teaching on the Eucharist in 1 Cor 11:17-34.

of “the law of the resident aliens” in Leviticus 17–19. In the Cornelius episode, we also find Peter wrestling with the issue of eating (Acts 10:12-16; 11:6-12). In Leviticus 17–19, there is clearly a “host” and the “other.” Also, the “other” is considered to be the alien. But it is important to note that in Leviticus the law addresses both Israel and the resident alien. So, the reference could be both the Jews and the Gentiles. In Acts 15:17, “all other peoples” refer to the Gentiles, while the dwelling of David in v. 16 refers to Israel. Finally, we can say that the Gentiles are the other group because in Lev 19:33 they are referred to as the stranger who enters Israel’s land. Therefore, the “Apostolic Decree” has as source Lev 17–19 and Luke must have adopted it from the Torah (vv. 20-21).

In fact, a closer look at the four prohibitions shows that they have to do with matters of food and drink (ritual/ceremonial), and with morality (ethics). Though Jewish and Gentile Christians may have been eating together since the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10, Acts 15 is the climactic scene that articulates the etiology for fellowship and common participation in the Lord’s Supper of the mixed groups of believers who are Luke’s contemporaries. The four prohibitions will then be examined in connection with the table fellowship of the mixed community of believers, their possible roots and implications. At this juncture, it is necessary to state that these four prohibitions are in full accord with Moses himself (v. 21 explicitly mentions Moses), who demanded just those abstinences of the Gentiles as well as the Jews: Lev 17:8 condemns sacrificial offerings to the gods (heathen offerings); Lev 18:6-25 condemns marriage to near relatives and other forms of sexual immorality; Lev 17:13 prohibits whatever has been strangled and advocates for pouring out the blood of animals or birds killed or hunted; and Lev 17:10 condemns eating of blood and/or murder in cold blood. This study therefore assumes that this scriptural root

is part of the series of arguments that Luke presents in his narrative literature as an effort to endorse the communion of his mixed Christian community.

The first of the four prohibitions is to abstain from things polluted by idols (ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων). This refers to a wide range of things, but particularly to food and drink sacrificed to the gods (cf. v. 29; 21:25). For Kurz, this “recalls arguments that Paul himself had made with the Corinthians about not eating meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8:1-13, reiterated in Rom 14:13–15:2).”¹²⁵ Though Paul may have sounded liberal in 1 Cor 10:27-29, Luke prohibits these things sacrificed to idols and considers them polluted or defiled for the sake of the common fellowship/communion of the mixed Christian believers. This seems to confirm the fact that Luke is actually doing something different with these prohibitions in comparison to Paul. Luke seems to be using these prohibitions to enable the fellowship of the mixed Christian believers to work and thereby enhance unity of the community of disciples of Christ, who participate together in their table-fellowship.

The second out of the four prohibitions is *porneia* (καὶ τῆς πορνείας), which could mean sexual immorality, fornication, prostitution or uncleanness. Gaventa says that elsewhere in the New Testament it refers to any form of sexual misconduct and often reflects Jewish notions about the indiscriminate sexual behavior of Gentiles (e.g., Rom 1:18-32; cf. Wis 14:12, 24).¹²⁶ It also refers to forbidden degrees in marriage. It is used in 1 Cor 5:1 of one who has taken his father’s wife. As observed earlier on, this is forbidden

¹²⁵ William S. Kurz, S.J., “Acts” in *The Paulist Biblical Commentary*, eds. José Enrique Aquilar Chiu *et al.* (New York: Paulist Press, 2018), 1213.

¹²⁶ Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 221.

in Lev 18:6-25, the passage on forbidden degrees in marriage. What seems not to be plausible is Barrett's argument that since the word fornication (Greek, *porneia*) does not occur in this OT passage (Lev 18:8), then there is no reason to think that it was ever used of marriage within the forbidden degrees.¹²⁷ I think Kurz is correct in arguing that in Luke's narrative in Acts "to enable Jewish and Gentile Christians to live together, both cultures have to agree not to marry closer relatives, such as first or second cousins, than other culture allows."¹²⁸ So, *porneia* refers to both sexual immorality and forbidden degrees in marriage. Therefore, the second stipulation is also important for the mutual and peaceful coexistence between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

The third prohibition is from whatever has been strangled. This refers to meat that is not ritually butchered.¹²⁹ As noted by Barrett and Gaventa, the interpretation of the third prohibition, alongside the fourth, is difficult.¹³⁰ However, it has to do with advocating for pouring out the blood of animals or birds killed or hunted in preparing it for eating (cf. Lev 17:13). On this basis, the fourth prohibition, which is blood, is closely connected with the third, but the fourth could also mean murder (blood of murder) (cf. Gen 9:4; Lev 17:10, Deut 12: 16; 1 Sam 14:31-35). Therefore, the four prohibitions have connections with ritual and ethical practices that affect the relationship and communion in the mixed group(s) of the Christian believers. However, Matthews rightly argues that the list may have a more

¹²⁷ Barrett, *Shorter Commentary*, 233.

¹²⁸ Kurz, "Acts," 1213.

¹²⁹ Matthews, "Acts of the Apostles," 1984.

¹³⁰ See Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 233; cf. also Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 221.

practical function.¹³¹ Finally, in this section, verse 21 refers to Moses. This shows that the four prohibitions of the “Apostolic Decree” are consistent with the instructions (Torah) of Moses. “For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues” – (v. 21). Once we see the previous statements in James’s speech as a chain of the climactic arguments of Luke, we can then say that the reference to Moses is a way of connecting v. 20 to v. 21, and dealing with the cultural sensitivities of the Jewish Christians who live with the Mosaic/Jewish heritage, just as an earlier reference was made to the words of the prophets (vv. 15-18).

4. The Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 22-29 [particularly v. 29]) – James’s proposal, ratified by the authority of the Holy Spirit and the unity of the apostles and the elders with the consent of the whole church, becomes the “Apostolic Decree.” It presents a narrative etiology for inspiring the Lukan mixed community in the Diaspora through the four stipulations. This decree enables the relationship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in order to enhance their common table-fellowship as believers in Christ. Therefore, James in communion with the apostles and the elders and the whole church reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, and chose men (Judas and Silas) from among their members and sent them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas with a letter containing the “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 19-20, 22-23). So, James’s decree becomes the finely written Apostolic Decree in the letter that Gentile Christians should “abstain from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood” (v. 20, 29; see also v. 21:25 with slight difference in order of presentation). Consequently, even though the Jerusalem Council was meant to address the issue of

¹³¹ Matthews, “Acts of the Apostles,” 1984.

whether Gentile converts into the Christian group should be required to submit to circumcision and to fulfill other Mosaic statutes, the Decree, as an unexpected outgrowth of the Council, is for endorsing the table-fellowship of the mixed communities of believers who were Luke's contemporaries. These contemporaries are Jewish believers and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ. The "Apostolic Decree" is really Luke's effort at establishing a theological narrative rooted in scriptures and founded on the authoritative witnesses of the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem, and Paul and Barnabas for the maintenance of the social relations and communion of the mixed community, including joint participation in the Lord's Supper.

- Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to send to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas, Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers (v. 22) – From this verse, it is clear that James's proposal is approved by the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church. Luke separates the apostles and elders, and then mentions the whole church. Arguably, this means that there is an emerging sense of hierarchy in the early church of Luke. Also, the whole church, as Barrett submits, is clearly the church of Jerusalem, with a handful of delegates from Antioch.¹³² However, the authority of the church and its leadership seem to draw from the Holy Spirit (cf. v. 28). So, they decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers, with the letter from the Council in Jerusalem and to confirm their letter orally. Here, we see the importance of oral and written traditions for the early church; both mediums are ways of maintaining the living tradition of the church. Judas Barsabbas does not reappear again after this passage in Acts, but Silas will travel with Paul on a later

¹³² Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 235.

missionary journey in Acts (15:40; 18:5). Silas is probably identical with Silvanus, mentioned along with Timothy, as co-sender in both of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; cf. also 2 Cor 1:19). Luke describes them as chosen and leaders in the community.¹³³

- With the following letter (vv. 23-29) – The following letter from the apostles, elders, and the whole church in Jerusalem is addressed to Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. “The Decree was not intended to apply only to Antioch; see 16.4 for its distribution by Paul and Silas.”¹³⁴ The letter pronounces a disclaimer on those persons from Judea who have no authority from the church leaders in Jerusalem and who trouble the Gentiles with false demands of circumcision in fulfillment of the custom of Moses as requirement for being believers.

- Opening of the Letter (v. 23b) – The letter opens with a conventional salutation from the addressor to the addressee, that is, from the apostles and elders, who seem to be acting on behalf of the whole church, to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.

- The Apostolic Decree (vv. 24-29) – The “Apostolic Decree” appears here in the letter in finished style. This is Luke's composition. This view takes Barrett's analysis further beyond the argument of whether it is a composition by Luke or it was received by him from tradition.¹³⁵ Although Luke depends on a living tradition in his narrative, he does the composition of his work for the literary, rhetorical, and theological objectives of his message and audience. The “Apostolic Decree” (v. 29), the letter, and the setting of the

¹³³ Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 224. See also Kurz, “Acts,” 1213.

¹³⁴ Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 236.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 236.

council of Jerusalem are all Luke's composition. This is in line with the argument of Matthews who submits that:

Throughout Acts the roles of the characters are more often than not shaped by the requirements of Luke's own theological outlook and the practical and ideological needs of his readers. Because we possess letters of Paul, we can to some degree check on Luke's literary procedures by comparing how the image of Paul that emerges from the letters is refashioned in distinctive ways in Luke's narrative. One can only assume that the characterizations of all the other characters in the narrative as well have been completely shaped to contribute to the larger Lukan literary-theological agenda.¹³⁶

This idea is applicable to not only the characters, but also to the settings, speeches, letters, and even Luke's use of the "Apostolic Decree" (v. 20, 29). This shows that there is a historical program in the "Apostolic Decree" which Luke intends for the spread of the gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth. This historical program of Luke is different from historical fact itself. This does not mean that the figures are not identical to some historical figures; rather, Luke shapes them for his rhetorical, literary, and theological objectives.

- Certain persons with no instructions from us (v. 24) – This verse looks back to 15:1.

- We have decided unanimously to choose representatives along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 25-26) – The phrase, "We have decided unanimously," suggests a decree and not an opinion (see also vv. 22 and 28). Also, the choice of representatives from the Jerusalem church along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul shows that there was no difference of opinion between the Jerusalem apostles and the missionaries from Antioch. This is also Luke's way of connecting the Antiochene missionaries to the apostles and elders in

¹³⁶ Matthews, "Acts of the Apostles," 14.

Jerusalem. Thus, Luke brings together the images of Peter and Paul and their teachings for his theological agenda and in the interest of his audience. Barnabas and Paul are described not only as Antiochene missionaries but also as those who have devoted and risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. This really shows that Barnabas and Paul are great figures who preached in the name of Jesus Christ.

- By word of mouth (v. 27) – This verse connects with v. 25. Judas and Silas who are sent with Barnabas and Paul will report the same thing by word of mouth. These four delegates underscore the unity of the church in Jerusalem and Antioch and the importance of the “Apostolic Decree” to both the church in Jerusalem and the Gentile world.

- For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us (v. 28) – Here, Luke states the unity of the Holy Spirit with the apostles, elders, and the whole church. The Holy Spirit is seen as the source of the authority of the church and the companion of the church since the Pentecost event (Acts 2:1-41). More so, the Holy Spirit testifies to God’s decision, which was affirmed by Peter (v. 7) and James (v. 14). In Peter’s case, the work of the Holy Spirit that descended on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41) is set in 10:1-48, reiterated in 11:1-18, and sealed in 15:6-11 (also sealed in v.12, 13-21, 28-29 by the Holy Spirit and the whole community). Therefore, we should impose on you no further burden than these essentials – “very similar words occur in Rev. 2:24. The same passage (2:20; cf. 2:14) condemns fornication and the eating of things sacrificed to idols. It seems probable that there is a reference here (the earliest) to the Decree, or at least a version of it.”¹³⁷ Though it is not clear that Barrett is right in terms of the Decree, nevertheless, the parallel with Rev 2:24 reveals a broader basis for “Jewish” sensitivities among early believers in Christ. In

¹³⁷ Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 237.

addition, “no further burden than these essentials” does not mean mere courtesy, but compulsion. The “Apostolic Decree” is indeed Luke’s way of describing the necessary requirements for showing commitment to God and their fellow believers in the fellowship of the community, and it may be seen as a condition for salvation (cf. 15:1, 5).

- These essentials: The Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (v. 29) – “That you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.” Though with a slight variation, this verse states or repeats the four prohibitions given in James’ speech in v. 20. Instead of things polluted by idols, we have things sacrificed to idols, which has the effect of specifying the most likely cause of the pollution. Still, in comparison with v. 20, the direction of the Decree is consistent: Gentile believers must keep themselves from those things that Jews associate with polytheism, which includes eating of food sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, blood/murder, and whatever has been strangled. This Decree, then, is Luke’s description of how to use the stipulations to configure the Gentile members of his community to be able to be in fellowship with their Jewish members. In this way, we see Luke’s community of believers in Christ as people who see themselves as standing in continuity with the story of Israel as a people of God, and as fulfilling God’s promise to Israel. This “Apostolic Decree,” then, offers some stipulations that will help to build the relationship between the Jewish believers in Christ and the Gentile believers in Christ of the Lukan audience. Also, this Decree aids the integration between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians in the Lukan community. In this way, we see the continuity between Israel and believers in Christ. Also, the believers of the Lukan community see themselves as the fulfillment of God’s promise to Israel.

- Closing of the Letter (v. 29b) – The letter closes with an exhortation and a farewell greeting.

5. The Positive Effects of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 30-35) – This section brings the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” episode to a close and talks of the positive effects of the decree in Antioch, where the dispute started.

- So, they were sent off and went down to Antioch (v. 30) – The delegates from Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas together with Judas and Silas, were sent off and they returned to Antioch. The sending off is a kind of missioning with the “Apostolic Decree” to both the dispersed Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians in the Greco-Roman world of Luke’s contemporaries in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia. When they gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. The congregation refers to the whole church of Antioch (cf. 15:12).
- When its members read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation (v. 31) – The church members at Antioch read and rejoiced at the exhortation. This joy is compared with the joy of the gospel. The exhortation has to do with comfort or encouragement. They were released from the burden of circumcision, and the legitimacy by which the Gentile Christians eat with Jewish Christians is now established in the “Apostolic Decree.”
- Judas and Silas, who were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers (v. 32) – Judas and Silas were referred to as prophets. They preached much to encourage and strengthen the believers. This is part of the positive effects of the “Apostolic Decree.” The idea of preaching as a way to exhort and encourage believers has continued even up to our present day.

- After they had been there for some time, they were sent off in peace by the believers to those who had sent them (v. 33) – Judas and Silas spent a considerable time in Antioch, and the delegates of the Jerusalem church (Judas and Silas) were sent off in peace by the believers. This being sent off in peace is a sign of accomplishment of the mission and an appreciation from the Antioch church. Also, it indicates that there is fraternity and peaceful fellowship in the church at Antioch with the aid of the “Apostolic Decree.” It is worthy of note that v. 34 (“But it seemed good to Silas to remain there”) was probably not there in the original text. Scholars consider it to be a later addition by copyists to account for the presence of Silas at Antioch in v. 40.¹³⁸
- Paul, Barnabas and many others taught and proclaimed the Word of the Lord in Antioch (v. 35) – Chapter 15 closes with Paul and Barnabas remaining in Antioch, there with many others (see 11:19; 13:1), teaching (see 18:11) and preaching (see 8:4) the word of the Lord (see 8:25; 15:36) to Gentiles and Jews alike unhindered. Consequently, with the “Apostolic Decree” established, the mission to the Gentile world is now freely unhindered. This is one of the positive effects of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree.”

3.5 Overall Interpretation of the Text:

¹³⁸ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 439. See also Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 240; Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 470. Also, Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Revised Edition, eds. Barbara and Kurt Aland *et al* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013), omits v. 34 from the body of the text in keeping with the presumed original text of Acts 15.

This biblical exegesis establishes that although Luke's narrative of the Jerusalem Council (15:1-35) was set to address the issue of whether Gentile converts into Christianity should be required to submit to circumcision and to fulfill other Mosaic statutes, the "Apostolic Decree" (vv. 20, 29) is Luke's theological, literary and narrative utilization of some stipulations in the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 17-19), which agrees with Amos 9:11-12 and is founded on divine choice and the testimony of the Holy Spirit. The reconstructed purpose of the "Apostolic Decree" is to endorse the table fellowship of the mixed community of Jewish and Gentile Christians who were Luke's contemporaries. It connects the Jewish roots in the Law and Jerusalem represented by Peter (and James) and the other apostles with Paul and Barnabas and the Gentile mission in Antioch and other parts of the Gentile world. It describes the practical values of Luke's mixed community (likely in Ephesus or Philippi, a major city of the Pauline mission) expressed in the stipulations. Furthermore, the narrative presents the early disciples of Christ as standing in continuity with the story of Israel and as fulfilling God's promise to Israel.

In Acts 15:1-35, Luke makes series of arguments to justify the non-circumcising Gentile mission, to affirm the inclusion of Gentiles as part of the people of God, and to decree against idolatry, sexual immorality/unchastity, and to set forth food laws that will enhance the table fellowship of the highly mixed community of Jewish and Gentile believers who are Luke's contemporaries. At the background of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1-35 is the Cornelius episode in Acts 10:1-11:18. The following series of arguments justify the non-circumcising Gentile mission, the inclusion of Gentiles as disciples of Christ, and the table fellowship of the mixed (Jewish and Gentile) community of believers in Christ during Luke's time:

1) God's will is clearly shown in the conversion of Cornelius, and Peter provides the testimony (vv. 7-9);

- 2) Peter submits in his speech that not even the Jews are able to keep the law, which seems to be an unusual negative representation of the law by Luke and Peter (v. 10);
- 3) Barnabas and Paul report the signs and wonders (miracles) that God had done through them among the Gentiles (v. 12);
- 4) There is the scriptural proof from the words of the prophets with specific reference to Amos 9:11-12 (vv. 15-18);
- 5) The stipulations (Decree) are in full accord with Moses himself, who demanded just those four prohibitions from the Gentiles (vv. 20-21, 29; 21:25). These four prohibitions are identified in the Torah (cf. Lev 17 and 18), traditionally considered to have been written by Moses, as regulations for Gentiles living among Jews;
- 6) The Decree is ratified by the authority of the Holy Spirit and shown to be in the unanimous consent and unity of the apostles and the elders with the whole church.

Consequently, this chain of arguments affirms the mission of the non-circumcised Gentiles and their inclusion as Christians, but also presents a theological, literary, and narrative incorporation of some stipulations in the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 17–19), which is in line with the prophets and God’s decision, for endorsing the table-fellowship of the Lukan mixed community of Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ in the Diaspora. The “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 20, 29) not only enables the relationship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in order to enhance their common table-fellowship as believers in Christ, it also pictures the early disciples of Christ as a continuation of Israel as a people of God, and as fulfilling God’s promise to Israel. Thus, the members of the Lukan community are no longer a single ethnic group, but a multi-ethnic group of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Therefore, the “Apostolic Decree” is really Luke’s effort in using the Council to compose a narrative that is rooted in scriptures and founded on the

witnesses of the Apostles and the elders in Jerusalem for the development of the social relations and legitimating of the table-fellowship of his mixed community, who are Jewish believers and Gentile believers in Christ.

In addition, this study finds that there is a historical program in the Jerusalem Council in terms of legitimating the social practice of the Lukan community. Though the characterization of Peter and Paul, for instance, does not tally with the historical-critical information about these figures, Luke sets out to narratively present them as being faithful to the universal mission of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8). Therefore, though these figures, like Peter and Paul, are not identical to their real historical images, Luke shapes them for his rhetorical, literary, and theological objectives.

More so, the choice of representatives from the Jerusalem church along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul shows that there was no difference of opinion between the Jerusalem apostles and the missionaries from Antioch. This is also Luke's way of connecting the Antiochene missionaries to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Thus, Luke brings together the images of Peter and Paul and their teachings for his theological agenda and in the interest of his audience.

Barnabas and Paul are described not only as Antiochene missionaries, but also as those who have devoted and risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. This reveals that Barnabas and Paul are great figures of preaching in the name of Jesus Christ. Paul and Barnabas, alongside the other two delegates (Judas and Silas), underscore the unity of the church in Jerusalem and Antioch and the importance of the "Apostolic Decree" to both the church in Jerusalem and the Gentile world. This unity is then sealed by Luke in referencing the unity of the Holy Spirit and the apostles, elders, and the whole church.

The “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 20, 29) is indeed Luke’s way of reflecting the practice of communal coexistence between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in his community in order that they may show commitment to God and their fellow believers in the fellowship of the community. Here, unity is very important and the key to the fellowship of the mixed group of believers in Christ. Although Gentile believers are not circumcised, they are presented as Jews “of some sort” in their keeping the requirements of the “Apostolic Decree.” Still, in the comparison between v. 20 and v. 29, the direction of the Decree is consistent: Gentile believers must keep themselves from the things that Jews associate with polytheism, which includes eating of food sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, blood/murder, and whatever has been strangled. In so doing, they all are able to present a united front as united witnesses of Christ in the Greco-Roman Hellenized world.

Furthermore, Luke seems to be a redactor of some earlier traditions, which have some historical religious figures. Acts 15:1-35 is Luke’s compositional way of modifying Paul’s position vis-à-vis the Gentiles. The narrative (Acts 15:1-35) remains the turning-point, “centerpiece” and “watershed” of the book. It rounds off and justifies the past developments, which runs through chapters 1–14, and its solution leads to further advance (15:35) in the rest of the book. Therefore, the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15: 1-35 is the narrative climax that solves the problem of admission of Gentiles, using many arguments and key evidence. Also, the “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 20, 29 – stipulations) is articulated from the law and echoed in the prophets, founded on God’s decision and the witness of the Holy Spirit, for describing the practical actions taken in service of the social values of his mixed community, thereby enabling the fellowship of the mixed (Hellenized Jewish and Gentile Christian) community who are Luke’s contemporaries. This paradigm has positive implication for promoting peace and mutual coexistence in our diverse world today.

3.6 Conclusion:

In conclusion, the theological narrative of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 20, 29) in Acts 15:1-35 is at the background of the movement of the gospel to the Gentile world in the larger narrative of Acts. Historically, Christianity also sees a historical function of this narrative. Our exegesis, though aware of the historical emphasis by reception history, initiated by Irenaeus and clearly laid out in the commentary of Fitzmyer, uses the historical, literary, narrative, textual, and compositional criticisms to articulate the analysis and interpretation of this passage. It also considers intertextuality and scriptural promise-fulfilment framework in its analysis. This chapter concludes that Luke’s narrative, though it portrays some historical figures and events, is purposeful in achieving its literary, ideological, and theological objectives. Luke’s portrayal in Acts 15 gives us the narrative language for future councils in Christianity and the Catholic Church in particular. Finally, the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (v. 20, 29) in the Jerusalem Council narrative in Acts 15:1-35 is Luke’s theological and literary incorporation of some stipulations in the Mosaic law (Lev 17–19) and echoed in the prophets (Amos 9:11-12) to describe the practical actions taken in service of the social values of his mixed community. The Decree is revealed as founded on divine will, which is communicated through the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Also, the Decree enables and/or legitimates the table fellowship between the mixed Jewish and Gentile Christian community that Luke addresses in the passage. This Decree presents the Lukan community as disciples of Christ, who saw themselves as standing in continuity with the story of Israel and as a fulfilment of God’s promise to Israel.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

4.1 Conclusions

In view of the analysis of Acts 15:1-35, I conclude that Luke's Jerusalem "Apostolic Decree" (v. 20, 29 [also found in 21:25]), rather than being a decree that was established in a historical meeting which took place as an apostolic and presbyteral college of Jerusalem that decided the definitive break of the Christian church from its Jewish matrix, is his theological, literary and narrative utilization of some stipulations in the Mosaic Law in Lev 17-19, which agrees with the Prophets (Amos 9:11-12) and is based on God's will and the witness of the Holy Spirit. These stipulations, from the Law for resident aliens in Lev 17-19, and adopted from some Pauline community, are used by Luke for promoting Jewish and Gentile Christian table-fellowship so that the members of the community can mutually coexist in peace, love, and harmony, and see themselves as a continuation and fulfilment of Israel's story with God.

The narrative climax of Acts 15:1-35 legitimizes the non-circumcising Gentile mission through many arguments. In the "Apostolic Decree" (vv. 20, 29), Luke gives some evidence that articulates the conditions from the law and prophets that apply to both the Gentile and Jewish Christians apart from faith in the good news of Christ. This Decree also cements the fellowship of the highly mixed (Hellenized Jewish and Gentile Christian) community who are Luke's contemporaries. This gives Luke, as rightly noted by Matthews, the opportunity to provide instruction and inspiration to his contemporaries through the idealized representation of the Jerusalem church and the association of that paradigmatic community with the church of Luke's day through the incorporation of various details from the life of the latter into the description of the former, and through some arguments based on God's actions and the Scriptures, which are

approving arguments, for Luke's purpose of a message of unity and communion for the mixed community of his time.¹³⁹

This conclusion answers the question regarding the nature of the function of the Jerusalem "Apostolic Decree" (vv. 20, 29) in the narrative of the Acts 15:1-35. Luke's Jerusalem "Apostolic Decree" (v. 20, 29) has a narrative function for the literary, theological, and social purposes of the communities that are his audience. It is indeed erroneous to insist on a purely historical function of the Jerusalem "Apostolic Council" in Acts 15 as Taylor¹⁴⁰ seems to do in emphasizing the historical nature of the "Apostolic Decree." Though Luke referred to the Jerusalem "Apostolic Council" in Acts 15, just as Paul talked of a Jerusalem meeting, Luke is surely doing something different with the Jerusalem "Apostolic Decree" in Acts 15:1-35. The literary function is seen in the textual composition, use of speech, and story-telling. The theological function is clearly identified in his use of scripture, signs and wonders, speeches, and in the bringing of the figures together. The social function is shown in his composition of the Jerusalem Council, the "Apostolic Decree" (vv. 20, 29 -prohibitions) contained therein, and the re-introduction of the controversy surrounding the non-circumcising Gentile mission. In line with this social function, Esler submits

¹³⁹ Matthews, "Luke the Hellenist," 103.

¹⁴⁰ I do not agree with Justin Taylor, "The Jerusalem Decrees (Acts 15.20, 29 and 21.25) and the Incident at Antioch (Gal 2.11-14)," 379-80, for transporting the historical function of the crisis at Antioch (Gal 2:11-14) and applying it to the Jerusalem "Apostolic Decree" in Acts 15. It is likely that some information in Luke's narrative may have come from Paul's Letter to the Galatians. However, the Pauline language is adapted into the Lukan narrative in Acts. Luke also re-describes other traditions and persons, and makes his own composition. Also, there is the influence of Judaism (OT religion and scripture) and the Greco-Roman world (Hellenist culture and philosophy) in the narrative.

that “the question of table-fellowship between Jew and Gentile is not explicitly raised in Acts 15, but its presence is everywhere implied. We may confidently assume that Luke would have intended his readers to understand that what prompted the teaching by the Judeans in Acts 15:1 of the need for circumcision of Gentiles was simply the fact that they were sitting around the same table, for the eucharist especially, with Jews.”¹⁴¹ This thesis affirms Esler’s view that the “Apostolic Decree” is intimately connected with the theme of Jewish-Gentile commensality. Furthermore, the study asserts that Luke’s narrative, literary, theological, and social purposes are to give approval to non-circumcising Gentile mission, to include Gentile Christians in the people of God (Israel), and to cement the fellowship and communion of the highly mixed (Hellenized Jewish and Gentile Christian) community who are Luke’s contemporaries.

Nevertheless, this thesis also concludes that Luke’s composition in Acts 15:1-35 implies a narrative language for future councils in Christianity and in the Catholic Church in particular. The narrative language that Luke offers to Church Councils gives the link between Acts 15 and the actual historical events of later Ecumenical Councils in the Church. However, this should not make exegetes argue for a pure historical reading of the Jerusalem Council in the precise way that Luke composes it. This language of unity, communion, and fellowship of Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians is seen in the Jerusalem Council narrative. The conclusion of this study affirms that the Jerusalem meeting in Acts 15:1-35, also indicated in Galatians 2, highlights Luke’s historical program. However, the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 20, 29) did not derive from the meeting that Luke dramatically narrates. It originates from the Mosaic Law in Leviticus 17–19, and some other Pauline community’s lived experience, which he adopts in his narrative for his community in order to enable the table-fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Also,

¹⁴¹ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 98.

Luke promotes the ideals of the Jerusalem church and identifies them as paradigms for the church of his time. Consequently, the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 20, 29) is part of Luke’s reflection of a compromise for how Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians might work, fellowship, and commune together as members of God’s people. In this way, it gives approval to the inclusion of the Gentile God-fearers (Gentile Christians) among the Jews (Jewish Christians) as God’s people. From the insights of Dibelius and Haenchen as shown previously, Luke’s literary quality shows that the text is a composition, that is, “an invention,” wherein Luke draws from some traditions and composes other aspects of the narrative like the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree.” Luke shows that in the conversion of Cornelius God has authorized the Gentile mission; then he adds the decree in order to suggest how certain practical matters of living together can be accommodated for each “side” of the community.¹⁴²

A comparison between Acts 15:1-35 and Galatians 2 creates an unresolved problem for some scholars, who insist on a strict historical reading of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree.” In Galatians 2, Paul refers to a meeting, but makes no mention of the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree.” Part of the problem is that many scholars uncritically accept the scenario proposed by Irenaeus and adopted by reception history which assumes that Luke, as a historian of early Christianity and as a fellow companion of Paul, was giving a strict historical account in the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree.” So how do we construct a coherent narrative for the history of the meeting in Galatians and the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15? In other words, is Acts 15:1-35 Luke’s way of modifying Paul’s position regarding the Gentiles? Yes, from the historical point of view, there is only one record of the proceedings in Jerusalem, that of Paul in Galatians. It should not be reconstructed on the basis of Acts; the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree,” rather than deriving from this meeting, is

¹⁴² Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 457.

Luke's composition. Luke theologically and literarily uses the "Apostolic Decree" to instruct, configure, and motivate the Jewish and Gentile Christian community of his time for promoting mutual coexistence, unity, integration, inclusion, table-fellowship and identity as the people of God (Israel). From the comparison of Galatians 2 and Acts 15, this study concludes that Acts 15:1-35 is Luke's compositional way of modifying Paul's position of the Gentiles in Galatians 2. It seems that while Luke is affirming the place of faith, he is narratively applying the law for enabling the table-fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. These conditions help in the configuration of both the Jewish and Gentile Christians of this mixed group in their fellowship, communion, and integration.

Furthermore, this study affirms that the reason why Luke reopens the debate on circumcision according to the custom of Moses as requisite for admission of Gentiles into the fellowship of the believers of Christ in the narrative of Acts 15:1-5, which seems to have been settled in Acts 10:1-11:18, is because he needed to present the chain of arguments based on God's actions and the scriptures for the Gentile Christians admission. Also, he uses the prohibitions (conditions) for endorsing the relationship and table-fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. More so, Acts 10:1-11:18 is preparatory to Acts 15:1-35. In line with this, this study reexamines Gaventa's questions¹⁴³, which seem not to have been properly addressed. Therefore, it concludes that the relationship between the Cornelius story and the Jerusalem Council is that the Cornelius story affirms the rights of Gentile admission by divine approval while Acts 15 did not only solve the problem of admission of Gentiles using many arguments and much evidence in the narrative, which includes the Cornelius story, but also articulates the conditions that apply to both Gentiles

¹⁴³ Gaventa's argument that the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1-35 is not so much narrative climax as narrative denouement is tenuous. See Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 211-12.

living among Jews and Jews themselves. Consequently, this relationship shows that the Jerusalem Council truly constitutes a pivotal passage in the larger framework of Acts. It is indeed the dramatic turning-point, centerpiece, and watershed of the book as against the position of Gaventa, but in line with Haenchen, Conzelmann, Johnson, Witherington, Barrett, and Matthews.¹⁴⁴ This study, therefore, answers this question that lies within the persistent scholarly problem in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1-35: it affirms that Acts 15:1-35, rather than Acts 10:1–11:18, is the narrative climax and pivotal passage that links the first part of Acts with the second part.

Finally, while affirming that Luke is aware of Galatians 2, this thesis concludes that Luke's intention in bringing together the figures of Peter and Paul in the Jerusalem "Apostolic Decree" in Acts 15:1-35 is to present the figures as being in unity with one another. If some of the other evidence about these historical figures contradicts this portrait in Acts 15, as it does (Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12), then it seems that Luke's portrait of these figures is in line with his literary, ideological, and theological motifs of unity of the apostolic witnesses and a united Christian community. This is substantiated by the reference to those James was addressing as "brothers," who are both the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and the mixed Christian communities of Luke's day. Situating Acts within the context of the Greco-Roman world, Dinkler rightly argues that "Luke's authorial audience was familiar with cultural scripts involving proper uses of speech and silence."¹⁴⁵ Thus, Luke uses speech for projecting unity of persons, while silence is used to submit to divine action. More so, Savelle is right to conclude that the purposes of the decree and its prohibitions were to promote unity among believing Jews and believing Gentiles of the Lukan community.

¹⁴⁴ See the following: Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 461; Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 115, 121; Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 268; Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 439; Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 226.

¹⁴⁵ Dinkler, "New Testament Rhetorical Narratology," 227.

This study notes that the “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 20, 29) does not only have implications for theology and biblical studies in the interpretation and reading of the Acts of the Apostles, it also calls the attention of everyone (establishments, systems, communities, and governments included) to the need for integration and inclusion as approaches for managing identity and diversity in our world today. Contemporary society today still battles with the challenge of the clash of diversity in our global world. Luke’s theological narrative could be an example for offering some compromise and concessions on mutual terms for the promotion of peace and mutual coexistence among diverse groups and individuals.

This thesis concludes that the Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 20, 29) in Acts 15:1-35 is Luke’s theological, literary, and narrative utilization of the Mosaic law (Lev 17–19) for endorsing the table-fellowship of his mixed community, who are Hellenized Jewish and Gentile Christians and who should see themselves as a continuum of Israel as the people of God and as a fulfilment of God’s promise. This Jerusalem “Apostolic Decree” (vv. 20, 29), which originates from the Mosaic Law and may have been adopted from a Pauline community’s lived experience, agrees with the prophets, and is firmly based on God’s will and the testimony of the Holy Spirit. It also describes the social and practical values of the Lukan community, which integrates and promotes the mutual coexistence of Jewish and Gentile Christians.

4.2 Recommendations

This study recommends that a proper literary, compositional, and textual critical understanding of Luke's narrative in Acts 15:1-35 will aid scholars in making a more coherent reading of the entire Acts of the Apostles. This will help in delineating the literary, theological, and social motifs of Luke in Acts. Also, exegetes should de-emphasize the strict historical reading of the narratives in Acts, such that the message and interpretation of Luke in the work will not conflict with other parallel passages in other biblical and non-biblical texts. It should be understood that Luke has some particular social contexts, pressures, and community that influenced the writing of his narrative. As an obvious admirer of Paul, scholars should see Luke as likely a disciple of Christ in a Hellenistic society, who was present geographically in a "Pauline" region (rather than the traditional Antioch), and as a figure with a temporal distance from Paul. While reading the Acts of the Apostles, this study recommends that exegetes should think of Luke as likely having access to letters of Paul or some information in the letters, which he may have used for the purposes of his own narrative and to address his contemporaries. This view of Luke is clearly seen in the analysis of the text of Acts 15:1-35 and its comparison with Galatians 2.

4.3 Suggestion for further Study

In view of further study, this study suggests that deeper efforts should be made to investigate the role of traditions and sources in the narrative of Luke-Acts. It could also be suggested here that further study may consider Luke as a re-describer of traditions in Luke-Acts. Furthermore, a closer look at Luke's approach to some themes in Acts could be investigated using a historical-critical methodology that considers textual, narrative, literary, and compositional approaches, and Luke's rhetorical devices and use of Old Testament references in the passage.

Consequently, any further study of the Acts of the Apostles should advocate for neutrality, freedom from religious ideologies and biases, and suspension of judgments that could be based on reception history.

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