

THE SABBATH IN LUKE'S WRITINGS

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1. Introduction

This article studies references and allusions to the Sabbath in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles in order to investigate how these contribute to the significance of the Sabbath as well as to the theology of Luke.

The two studies within the last decade by Henry Sturcke¹ and Bente Bagger Larsen² both contain valuable observations regarding the texts in Luke and Acts, but employing very dissimilar methodologies, they reach quite different conclusions. According to Sturcke, the Sabbath for Luke "is neither abolished nor binding on Gentile believers" and he characterizes this fact "not so much as a resolution of the tensions involved in the creation of one community out of observant Jews and non-observant Gentiles as it is a truce."³ Larsen, on the contrary, following a position argued also by Jacob Jerwell,⁴ understands seventh-day Sabbath keeping in the Lukan community to be the natural result of Gentiles being incorporated into the worshiping community of Israel.

Most scholars agree with Sturcke and Larsen that Luke writes within a community where Christian Jews still kept the Sabbath,⁵ but the implica-

¹ Henry Sturcke, *Encountering the Rest of God: How Jesus Came to Personify the Sabbath* (Zürich: TVZ, 2005).

² Bente Bagger Larsen, *Konflikten om gudstjenesten: Sabbatten i Lukasevangeliet* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2003). Larsen was a researcher and lecturer at the University of Aarhus, and her study was published posthumously.

³ Sturcke, *Encountering*, 169.

⁴ Jacob Jerwell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles*, *New Testament Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 57.

⁵ Traditionally most Patristic scholars, whether for or against the change, have viewed the transition from Sabbath to Sunday in the early church as a re-

tions of that historical fact for the wider Gentile Christian community then and now depends on several questions, such as the theological nature of the Sabbath references in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, and the function of these references within the theology of the New Testament as a whole.

While any study of the Sabbath in the Lukan writings involves closely intertwined historical, literary, and theological perspectives, the primary aim of this article is theological. Historical questions relating to the Sabbath in the ministry of Jesus and in the early church are not the focus.⁶

placement, cf. titles like Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977); D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); and Ernst Haag, *Vom Sabbat zum Sonntag: Ein bibeltheologische Studie*, Trier Theologische Studien 52 (Trier: Paulinus, 1991). The period of transition has been determined on the basis of the supposed time of departure of the Christian Church from its Jewish roots, often set even as early as the 1st century. However, this traditionally dominating understanding of the relationship between synagogue and church has in recent years been seriously questioned, see Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (AD 135-425)*, trans. H. McKeating (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); trans. of *Verus Israel; Étude sur les relations entre chrétiens et juifs dans l'empire romain (135-425)*, 2nd ed. (Paris: de Boccard, 1964). The Christian Church may not in general have been perceived as a religion separate from Judaism until sometime after AD 200, so Alan F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

⁶ A more thorough investigation of the historical aspects goes beyond the limitations of this study. Three recent studies help toward a more fact based understanding of the Sabbath in Early Judaism and Christianity. Lutz Doering provides a comprehensive analysis of Sabbath Halakah in "Schabbat: Sabbathhalacha und-praxis im antiken Judentum und Urchristendom," *TSAJ* 78 (1999). Andrea J. Mayer-Haas makes a thorough investigation of relevant New Testament texts, especially in the Gospels, in "Geschenk aus Gottes Schatzkammer (bSchab 10b):" *Jesus under der Sabbat im Spiegel der neutestamentlichen Schriften*, NTAbh 43 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2003). Ilya Lizorkin studies a number of early Jewish documents on the Sabbath in order to investigate the various theological understandings of the Sabbath in "Aspects of the Sabbath in the Late Second Temple Period" (MPhil diss., University of Stellenbosch, 2006). Further important issues to explore beyond the limitations of this study include a detailed synoptic comparison, and in regard to Acts, a discussion of the relationship between the depiction of Paul's teaching in Acts and his theology as known from the Epistles.

As illustrated in the works of Sturcke and Larsen, the major issue has to do with the nature of the *People of God*. Is the concept of the *People of God* in Luke, as understood by Jerwell and Larsen, a continuation of the people of Israel of the Old Testament thus resolving the tension between Christian Jews and Gentiles in the Lukan community? Or is this solution even in Luke nothing but a temporary "truce,"⁷ which is theologically unviable and will later naturally disappear in the wider Christian Church along with the historical replacement of Judaism with the Church and the abrogation of the Jewish roots of Christianity? In this context, more specific questions are then to be raised. What is the theological role of the Sabbath in light of a more universal concept of the *People of God*? Is the Sabbath in the world wide community of Christ to be replaced either by an alternative day of worship or by the peace of Jesus which, because it permeates every day, abolishes the distinct nature of the Sabbath? Or, is the Sabbath also for the Gentiles to be seen as an ongoing concrete sign of that rest of faith in Jesus?

Methodologically, Sturcke and Larsen approach the issue of the Sabbath quite differently. Sturcke's study of the biblical texts is predominantly diachronic, re-examining "the NT texts on the basis of a historical critical approach, supplemented by narratological and sociological considerations."⁸ In contrast, Larsen assesses the texts in view of the Gospel and Acts as a whole. For the purpose of answering the question of the theology of Luke, such a synchronic approach is more valuable than the diachronic perspective employed by Sturcke, and it is my preferred choice for this article.⁹ Moreover, Larsen's study contains a more detailed and helpful analysis of the Sabbath references in the writings of Luke, including broader theological reflections. In particular, she views the Sabbath from the perspective of worship as understood by Jesus and the early church. Her observations contribute significantly to Lukan theology and shed new light over a number of relevant questions.

⁷ Sturcke, *Encountering*, 169.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁹ Sturcke is to be commended for explicitly acknowledging his methodological presuppositions. Nevertheless, by treating Luke almost exclusively as a commentary on Mark, the particular Lukan perspective is not receiving the attention it deserves. Sturcke chooses to deduce Luke's understanding of the Sabbath almost exclusively from the grain plucking episode in 6:1-5, see *ibid.*, 141. Using this methodology, the unique contribution of Luke would have to be seen in light also of the material which is exclusive to him, such as the Sabbath incidents in 13:10-17 and 14:1-6, which are both ignored by Sturcke.

One of the unique aspects of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts within the New Testament is that they provide a historical perspective of events before and after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ written by the same author.¹⁰ It is evident that the perspective is historical as both books are written years after the events they describe transpired.¹¹ We should not miss the significance of this temporal distance in understanding the role of the Sabbath. Luke's references to the Sabbath would most likely have been written and/or included due to their relevance for the community of believers who were addressed, and to whom, consequently, Sabbath keeping was still an issue.¹²

With specific reference to the Sabbath, it is noteworthy that Luke describes how both Jesus and Paul went into the synagogues on the Sabbath "according to custom" (κατὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς, Luke 4:16 and Acts 17:2) with identical terminology. This observation further underscores the question of continuity or change. What, if any, is the difference for Luke in regards to the Sabbath and Sabbath keeping before and after the cross? Is the importance of the Sabbath for Paul in his life and ministry as described in Acts in principle different from the significance it had to Jesus according to the Gospel of Luke? Does the change of focus from the ministry of Jesus to the Jews in the Gospel of Luke to the mission of Paul to the Gentiles in Acts alter the understanding of the role of the Sabbath? What is the signif-

¹⁰ "It is almost an axiom in New Testament scholarship that whoever wrote the Third Gospel was also the author of Acts." David J. Williams, *Acts*, NIBCNT (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 2.

¹¹ In spite of occasional suggestions that at least Acts stems from the 2nd century, most scholars date the composition of Acts within the years AD 75-85. Conservative scholars in general hold that these books most likely were written in the years immediately before and/or after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. In regard to Luke, see the brief discussion by John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, WBC 35A (Dallas: Word, 1989), xxxvii-xxxix, and Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao, "Luke," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan: 2007), 10:33-35. For Acts, see Richard N. Longenecker, "Acts," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:697-701. A more extensive discussion of the date of Acts is found in the monumental work by Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 365-410. The date of AD 62 proposed by Hemer is probably the earliest suggested date of note.

¹² Speaking about the "community in which the Third Gospel may have been formulated," Sturcke observes that "we have an advantage" compared with the communities of the other Gospels because "we can draw on the description of the post-Resurrection community in Acts," see *Encountering*, 167.

icance of the fact that Luke so many years later described the customs of Jesus and Paul in relation to the Sabbath in identical terms?

Though acknowledging that these two books are to be viewed together in regard to the theology of Luke, it is also necessary to realize their distinct, individual nature. From a literary perspective, each of these books presents itself as a closed unit,¹³ and I will look first at each of the books in its own right.¹⁴

A similar procedure will be followed for the two books. I will initially identify references and allusions to the Sabbath. Next, I will situate these references in the course of events of each of the books as they transpire, and describe and evaluate their thematic function in the immediate literary context. On this basis, the theological significance of the Sabbath will be discussed for each of the books and in the end for the theology of Luke as a whole.

2. Set Free to Worship: The Role of Sabbath in the Gospel of Luke

2.1. Identification

Table I provides a list of references and allusions to the Sabbath in the Gospel of Luke.

Text	Event	Synoptic Parallels	Nature of Reference
4:16-30	Visit to Nazareth	Matt 13:54-58 Mark 6:1-6	Preaching

¹³ Luke's introductory statement in Acts 1:1 refers to the Gospel as *πρῶτος λόγος*, first/former book/word, indicating a certain time gap between the two, implying that the Gospel was written as a completed composition. In assessing Luke and Acts as two books, I build on the analysis by Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

¹⁴ Sturcke states that "these are separate books, and thus do not necessarily present a single theological position," see *Encountering*, 167. Mikeal C. Parsons briefly summarizes "shared literary and thematic elements" of the two books in *Luke: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 3-4. For such in more detail, see further, Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts*, SBLMS 20 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974).

Text	Event	Synoptic Parallels	Nature of Reference
4:31-37	Visit to Capernaum: exorcising	Mark 1:21-28	Preaching and healing
4:38-39	Healing Peter's mother-in-law	Matt 8:14-15 Mark 1:29-31	Healing
6:1-5	Grain plucking	Matt 12:1-8 Mark 2:23-28	Debate and controversy
6:6-11	Man with withered hand	Matt 12:9-14 Mark 3:1-6	Healing and controversy
13:10-17	Double bent woman		Healing and controversy
14:1-6	Sabbath party: man with dropsy		Healing and controversy
14:7-24	Subsequent banquet parables taught on the Sabbath ¹⁵		Teaching
23:56-24:1	Sabbath in the grave before the Resurrection	Mark 16:1-2	Factual reference

Table 1: *The Sabbath in Luke: References and Allusions*¹⁶

2.2. Literary and Thematic Function of Sabbath References in Luke

This section will take a closer look at the Sabbath references in the course of the events of the Gospel of Luke.

¹⁵ Matthew reports a similar (22:2-14), but not identical parable to Luke 14:16-24. Significantly for this study, it is not set in a Sabbath context.

¹⁶ The Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (D) adds another saying about the Sabbath (Luke 6:5D), "On the same day, seeing someone working on the Sabbath, he (Jesus) said to him, Man, if you know what you are doing, you are blessed. But if you do not know, you are cursed and a transgressor of the law," displaced between 6:10 and 6:11. There is scholarly consensus that this saying is but a Western addition. It testifies to a later conviction, but this understanding of the Sabbath "is not justified" as a Lukan view. Sturcke makes this point after a lengthy discussion in *Encountering*, 164-167. See also Joel Delobel, "Luke 6,5 in Codez Bezae: The Man Who Worked on the Sabbath," in *À Cause de l'Évangile: Études sur les Synoptiques et les Actes* (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 453-477.

The visit of Jesus to the synagogue in Nazareth is the first mention of the Sabbath. This visit is explicitly stated to have been "his custom" (4:16), and the general nature of this custom is underlined by the fact that the episode in Capernaum immediately follows it (4:31).¹⁷

The Nazareth incident contains also another first in Luke. Jesus preaching is his first recorded public proclamation, indicating what would have been the general content of his teaching.¹⁸ By presenting the first message of Jesus as an announcement of the Jubilee, Luke emphasizes joy and deliverance (4:18) as main themes preached by Jesus in the synagogues he visited Sabbath after Sabbath. The actions of Jesus, casting out a demon (4:31-37) and healing Peter's mother-in-law (4:38-39), provide a narrative illustration of these themes. By presenting the first message of Jesus as a sermon in the synagogue on the Sabbath and his subsequent healings as taking place on Sabbaths as well, Luke also helps to define these words and acts as expressions of genuine Christian worship.¹⁹

The next four Sabbath episodes are all characterized by controversies over the Sabbath, primarily with the Pharisaic party.²⁰ Though not explicitly stated, we may assume that the ruler of the synagogue in 13:14 belongs to or favours this party. The grain plucking episode is unique because it does not involve any healing;²¹ the last two healing episodes belong to events recorded only by Luke.

¹⁷ Nolland emphasizes this by noting, "In 4:14-44 the pattern of synagogue ministry has been established and illustrated." Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 219. In contrast, Mark contains no links between the visits to Nazareth (Mark 6:1-6) and Capernaum (Mark 1:21-28).

¹⁸ "Luke brings what may be characterized as a program for the total ministry of Jesus." Larsen, *Konflikten om Gudstjenesten*, 59.

¹⁹ "When the Sabbath is the day on which Jesus programmatically presents his good news to the poor, and also the day on which he typically performs his acts of deliverance, these words and acts receive pregnant significance as worship." *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁰ Joel B. Green notes how the series of pericopes "yield a narrative strategy" and how Luke "uses each incident to further his characterization of Jesus' mission, each building on prior material and preparing for the next," see *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 251. Jesus, for instance, healed Peter's mother-in-law on a Sabbath (Luke 4:38-39) "without encountering opposition," but the report of Jesus' activities brought some Pharisees to Galilee to monitor Jesus.

²¹ This fact is one of the major rationales for Sturcke's choice to analyse the Sabbath in the Synoptic Gospels by focusing primarily on the grain plucking episode, see *Encountering*, 141.

These controversies do not involve the issue of the Sabbath *per se*; the focus is not on whether the Sabbath is to be kept or not. Rather the issue is how to keep it, what is its purpose, and who has the authority to interpret and apply its principles and to define what constitutes genuine Sabbath observance?

In recording the grain plucking incident²² Luke does not, contrary to Mark, include the argument about the original creation sequence (Mark 2:27, the "Sabbath was made for man"), but moves directly to the point of the authority of Jesus, the Son of Man, as Lord over the Sabbath (6:5). Thus, he rejects the authority of the Pharisees to determine the Halakah, what actions are and are not lawful to be done on the Sabbath (6:2), based on their oral tradition,²³ and by analogy with David, he establishes the right of the Son of Man, who is of course more than King David,²⁴ to interpret the law.²⁵ As stated by Larsen, the issue is not the Sabbath as such, "When then the Saviour and Lord of Israel is the Lord also of the Sabbath it is absurd to interpret this Lordship as an abrogation of the Sabbath."²⁶

²² While only few commentators understand the eating as a result of hunger on the part of the disciples, John Paul Heil in his work on the function of meals in Luke-Acts sees this as part of the issue, writing that "the audience must not allow legal, cultural, or religious practices, such as the prohibition of work on the sabbath, to deprive human beings of such basic and fundamental needs as *the satisfaction of their hunger*." He continues to state that this "actually fulfils the divine intention of the Sabbath observance as a sacred time of rest and refreshment." See *The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts: An Audience-Oriented Approach*, SBLMS 52 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 1999), 37.

²³ What is in question is not any Old Testament Sabbath law *per se*, but the elaborate and extreme set of rules for proscribed and prohibited work developed by the Pharisees, as noted by Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 256; but never really made clear by Sturcke.

²⁴ Understanding the expression "Son of Man" against the background of Dan 7:13-14 according to which He is given the eternal kingdom and is the Lord of all.

²⁵ Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 257; concludes that Jesus acts in accordance with "the law's true intention."

²⁶ Larsen, *Konflikten on Gustjenesten*, 83. Green writes that "for Jesus . . . the question remains, Who interprets Scripture (and, so, the Sabbath law) correctly? Or, to put it more starkly, Who knows and represents God's will? Not the Sabbath law *per se*, but this more fundamental question comes to the fore in Jesus' response to his rivals in vv 3 and 9," see *The Gospel of Luke*, 252. The fact that a variety of interpretations of the Sabbath commandment already existed within Judaism also needs to be considered, see Lizork, "Aspects of the Sabbath," 77-79. In such a diverse environment, the words of Jesus as a contrast to the dom-

How the law is applied by Jesus is further exemplified in the healing episodes. The first of these follows immediately and is directly linked by the phrase "on another Sabbath" (6:6) to the discussion after the grain plucking.²⁷ By healing the man with the shrivelled or withered hand, Jesus makes it clear that doing good is accepted on the Sabbath.²⁸ Jesus further raises the question, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" (6:9). In raising this question Jesus is not addressing the condition of the man with the withered hand as much as speaking to the Pharisees who in their hearts nourish "murderous intentions towards him" which certainly would not "benefit the intentions of the Sabbath."²⁹ The question highlights the different attitude of Jesus compared to his opponents. He is doing good. They are plotting evil. He is honouring the intention of the Sabbath. They are not.

That such work of doing good is particularly fitting for the Sabbath becomes evident in the next episode³⁰ where a woman who has been crippled for eighteen years is healed by Jesus in a synagogue on the Sabbath.³¹

inant Pharisaic position do not indicate an abrogation of the Sabbath, but simply present his position.

- ²⁷ More clearly so than the somewhat vague "another time" in Mark 3:1, "the two Sabbath incidents are to be read closely together." Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 259; see also Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 251.
- ²⁸ Liefeld and Pao comment on the story of the man with the shriveled hand by stating, "Jesus is not breaking the Sabbath—he is using it to do good to a human in need," see "Luke," 129.
- ²⁹ Following the perceptive suggestion by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 312.
- ³⁰ Green summarizes the basic issue of Luke 13:10-17:10 by asking "who will participate in the Kingdom?" He also points out the close association of the healing of the double bent women with the subsequent parables of the kingdom in Luke. They are linked in 13:18 by the conjunction "therefore, οὖν," see *The Gospel of Luke*, 516, 618.
- ³¹ Mikeal C. Parsons mentions that "until recently, the story of the bent woman has largely been ignored in the scholarly literature." See *Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 83. His own study centers on the physical anomalies and their significance for the message of Luke and makes no specific mention of the role of the Sabbath, yet highlights the decisive issues of universalism and acceptance into the people of God. Larsen briefly rejects a position common in earlier critical scholarship that this healing episode might have been composed around a logion (Luke 14:5) as a variation of one original story represented by Mark 3:1-5, see *Konflikten om Gudstjenesten*, 101. Her own analysis is found on pages 99-115.

In this incident the discussion centers on the very nature of the Sabbath. The ruler of the synagogue claims that there are six other days to heal (13:14), but Jesus refutes him by emphasizing that the Sabbath is an appropriate day to set someone free who has been bound by Satan (13:16) to enjoy the kingdom of God.³² Thereby, Jesus links the Sabbath to His program speech in Nazareth (Luke 4:18-22). Sabbath is a day symbolizing the freedom and joy of the Jubilee.³³ The incident also exemplifies the inclusive attitude of Jesus toward participation in the true worship of Israel. Though but a bent woman, she is nevertheless a "daughter of Abraham," and on the Sabbath day Jesus opens the door for her to worship and thereby illustrates the intention of the Sabbath.³⁴

Max Turner argues³⁵ against this understanding of the pericope by stating that the question here is not:

[O]f the Sabbath being particularly appropriate for such healing; any more than it is particularly appropriate on that day to loose oxen and donkeys from their crib and to water them. The argument, in other words, is not that the Sabbath is a special day in this respect but precisely that is

³² Larsen comments on the two different ways of understanding the nature of the Sabbath: "The behaviour of the opponents thus represents the opposite of worship. They revolt against God and the law of God when they permit to lose bound house animals, but not a bound woman on the Sabbath. Jesus, on the contrary, is in agreement with the Sabbath law when he redeems the daughter of Abraham on the Sabbath. This is worship," see *Konflikten om Gudstjenesten*, 111.

³³ This conclusion is in line with Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath*, 30, and Berndt Schaller, *Jesus und der Sabbat*, Franz-Delitzsch-Vorlesung 3 (Münster: Institut Judaicum Delitzschianum, 1994). Nolland similarly describes the release as "part of the 'liberty' 'to the captives' promised in 4:18," see *Luke 1:1-9:20*, 724. Larsen writes that to Luke, Sabbath and Sabbath law first of all is a question about worship and as such also about the deliverance characteristic of Israel's worship," see *Konflikten om Gudstjenesten*, 115.

³⁴ As well expressed by Liefeld and Pao, "This healing demonstrates the dawning of the kingdom that transcends the dividing wall that Jewish laws and customs had come to represent. Instead of excluding others from worshipping God, the Sabbath institution was meant to demonstrate the mercy of God." See "Luke," 233. This conclusion is in line with the studies by Joel B. Green, "Jesus and the Daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:10-17): A Test Case for a Lucan Perspective on Jesus' Miracles," *CBQ* 51 (1989): 643-654 and J. J. Kilgallen, "The Obligation to Heal (Luke 13:10-17)," *Bib* 82 (2001): 402-409.

³⁵ Turner is explicitly arguing against G. B. Caird, *The Gospel of Luke*, PNTC (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), 107-108.

not. The inbreaking kingdom, the loosing of Satan's captives, is no respecter of day.³⁶

Both Turner and D. A. Carson³⁷ in their comments on this episode, however, miss several important theological aspects in their discussion of the Sabbath. First, they almost completely ignore the clear link to the Jubilee proclamation in Luke 4:18-19.³⁸ Thereby, they miss the Sabbath connection to the deliverance now proclaimed and exercised by Jesus.³⁹

Second, by claiming that "under such an interpretation one might also conclude that the Sabbath is particularly appropriate for untying donkeys,"⁴⁰ Carson misses another significant point, namely, that anybody can untie a donkey but only Jesus can release someone bound like this bent daughter of Abraham. Not only is Jesus uniquely able, but he is also uniquely willing. The healing of this woman thus becomes a special act of deliverance, an event of the Jubilee initiated through the ministry and by the authority of Jesus. Bringing captives back is certainly appropriate on a day originally intended to celebrate the creative power and authority of God, such as the Sabbath.

³⁶ Max M. B. Turner, "The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 107.

³⁷ D. A. Carson, "Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 72-73.

³⁸ Carson briefly discusses, but remains unconvinced, of the scholarly consensus in regards to the Jubilee. The reason for this may be evident in his comment in the Nazareth episode in Luke 4 that "no explicit connection between eschatological, messianic authority and the Sabbath is offered in the text itself, unless Luke 4:16-31 is taken as a reference to the messianic jubilee." Carson, "Jesus and the Sabbath," 59.

³⁹ James H. Park's thorough analysis of the Nazareth pericope underlines the theological connection between the freedom theme in both Sabbath and Jubilee and shows "the universal nature of (the Lukan) community." He concludes that "the theological themes of Sabbath and Jubilee informed and directed the understanding and practice of redemptive release and forgiveness in the life and ministry of the discipleship community." James H. Park, "The Proclamation of Release in Luke 4:16-30," *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 7 (2004): 27-37.

⁴⁰ Such comment exemplifies a clear bias, not least illustrated in Carson's final comments where he without reference or factual historical justification simply assumes that the first Christians "treated the Sabbath as a shadow of the past." Carson, "Jesus and the Sabbath," 73, 85.

Is the fact that this redemptive ministry though in this case performed on the Sabbath day, nevertheless, could happen on any day of the week a contributing factor to the erosion of commitment to the Sabbath?⁴¹ Leaving the discussion of the possible historical reasons for the demise of the Sabbath over the first centuries of the Christian Church, the question raises a theological issue which is directly related to the way the Sabbath is understood in Luke. As interpreted with messianic authority by Jesus, the Halakah prohibitions are rejected,⁴² and the positive aspects of Sabbath originally intended at creation are re-inforced.⁴³ The Sabbath day is not primarily seen as a contrast to other days of the week by means of prohibitions, but rather as the climax to which all days build up and point. Thus, the negative contrast to other days of the week is only the command not to work for gain. The Sabbath experience is the culmination of the eschatological hope for the kingdom in light in which all other days should be lived.⁴⁴ This is well illustrated in the last Sabbath episode in Luke.

This episode covers most of ch. 14 (vv. 1-24) and is introduced by the final healing controversy (14:1-6), this time in the house of a prominent Pharisee.⁴⁵ Jesus heals a man with dropsy, and once again, the issue is not

⁴¹ Turner finds that the continued messianic work, "irrespective of the Sabbath, may well" have had that effect in "some quarters of the primitive church." Turner, "The Sabbath," 107.

⁴² As observed also by Carson, Jesus "implicitly rejects the framework of the Halakah," see "The Sabbath," 73.

⁴³ It is characteristic that neither Turner nor Carson in their discussion of the meaning of the Sabbath turn to the original intention and the origin at creation. Carson especially consistently sees the Sabbath commandment as a "mosaic" law and seeks to downplay the unique role of the Ten Commandments and, consequently, the place of the Sabbath among them. Ignoring this origin at creation, the Sabbath can thus be described as a "shadow of the past," a pointer rather than a symbol of "the messianic rest," see "The Sabbath" 85, 75, and Turner can speak about the Sabbath as only a "token of messianic rest," see "The Sabbath," 107.

⁴⁴ One of the significant issues which is outside the scope of this paper is the nature of New Testament eschatology in relation to the Sabbath. For a different view from the present article regarding Sabbath keeping from this perspective, see A. T. Lincoln, "Sabbath Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 197-219.

⁴⁵ Though this incident does not take place in a synagogue, but rather at the Sabbath meal at midday following the service in the synagogue, the Sabbath perspective in the view of Larsen still provides the context of worship, see *Konflikten om Gudstjenesten*, 119.

the law as such, but its interpretation.⁴⁶ Any controversy is, however, postponed as no Pharisee lifts his voice in protest. They all keep silent and give no answer to the questions of Jesus (14:4 and 6). Their next response will come through violence and death, not through arguments. Jesus completely takes over the scene, and during the banquet, he tells parables about the nature of the kingdom of God, comparing it to a feast to which God invites everyone (14:7-23), and where those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted (14:11). The Sabbath is an appropriate venue for the experience of this eschatological kingdom because it provides a foretaste of such a banquet of joy (14:15).

The final reference to the Sabbath in Luke is a reference to the inactivity of the law observant women the day after the crucifixion (23:56-24:1). It records a historical fact, and it is difficult to defend the theory that it contains a proleptic theological message of the Jewish Sabbath being replaced by the Sunday of resurrection.⁴⁷ Such conclusion lacks textual support.⁴⁸ From a redactional perspective, the reference rather seems to emphasize first that the early Christians to whom Luke addressed his Gospel were loyal and law abiding participants in the worship of Israel, next that the Sabbath was still a relevant feature for the community far later than the historical events recorded in Luke's account.

⁴⁶ Note the comment by Green, "Jesus' question, then, is not designed to subvert the law itself, but to query conventional wisdom regarding its interpretation," see *The Gospel of Luke*, 547.

⁴⁷ Sturcke hints at the thought, supported by A. T. Lincoln that the Gospel references to the Sabbath, the day before the resurrection, would indicate that the Sunday commemoration of the resurrection was to replace Sabbath observance. It is difficult to find any textual foundation for this reading which rather represents a strenuous attempt to provide theological justification for later practice, see Sturcke, *Encountering*, 157; A. T. Lincoln, "From Sabbath to the Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective," in *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, 364.

⁴⁸ According to Sturcke, Mayer-Haas understands the "Sabbath rest of the women in Luke 23:56 . . . as paradigmatic for the behaviour of the Lukan Christians," see *Encountering*, 367. I agree with Sturcke, however, that some caution needs to be exercised in using such historical references as paradigms, see *Encountering*, 31-32.

2.2. Literary and Thematic Function of Sabbath References in Luke

The previous sections first identified references and allusions to the Sabbath in the Gospel of Luke, and next described the function of these references in the flow of events in the book. It is now time to summarize by asking how, against the background of the Gospel of Luke as a whole, the references to the Sabbath contribute to the theology of Luke, and how this book contributes to our understanding of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath incidents in Luke reach a climax in the healing of the bent woman in 13:10-17, and in the healing of the man with dropsy in 14:1-6 with the subsequent Sabbath banquet in 14:7-24, pericopes which all belong to the unique Lukan material. Viewed together these two events underline the message of Jesus as an invitation to a Gospel Feast of Joy,⁴⁹ and in conjunction with the Jubilee in Christ's program speech in Nazareth (4:18ff.), the Sabbath thus serves to proclaim a gospel of deliverance and liberty, restoration, and re-creation. The themes of joy and liberty in relation to the Sabbath are emphasized by Jesus in clear opposition to the Pharisaic party's interpretation of the Sabbath commandment, and they help to develop an understanding of the original divine intention with the Sabbath, contributing to a theology of the Sabbath.⁵⁰ The theme of re-creation and restoration would also, for the Pharisees, have been naturally associated with the Sabbath which after all was instituted as a memorial of creation. However, in the Sabbath pericopes in Luke, this theme becomes particularly important because of the question of the divine authority of Jesus. As the Lord of the Sabbath, the Creator of the Holy Day, He is the one who has the right to interpret its meaning and decide on its application (6:5).⁵¹

⁴⁹ Heil, mentions Jesus' "compassionate concern to heal the dropsical man even and especially on the Sabbath, a sacred time to celebrate and experience God's refreshing liberation from the oppression of disease (14:1-6) that has now arrived with Jesus (4:18-21)." See *The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts*, 113.

⁵⁰ To Larsen, the main difference between the two interpretations of the Sabbath laws is the different understanding of the nature of worship to which true Sabbath keeping testifies.

⁵¹ Commenting on the grain plucking episode, Green highlights the theological main point: "Jesus is less concerned with abrogating Sabbath law, and more concerned with bringing the grace of God to concrete expression in his own ministry, not least on the Sabbath; what is more, according to Luke, as lord of the Sabbath he has the authority to do just that!" see *The Gospel of Luke*, 252-253.

The ability to enjoy the freedom of the Sabbath and celebrate the Jubilee is, therefore, dependant on whether people acknowledge that authority of Jesus and accept the invitation to the banquet. The first Sabbath reference with the proclamation of the Jubilee in Nazareth highlights this challenge. The preamble in Luke 4:15 states that everyone "praised" or "glorified" (from *δοξάζω*) Jesus. This general acceptance⁵² was, however, not matched by the reception of Jesus in his home town where he was rejected (4:28-29). The verb "glorify" plays a significant role in the Gospel of Luke. It is used specifically to describe the positive response by those who have experienced and witnessed the liberating message of Jesus, such as the shepherds (2:20), the paralytic (5:25-26), the witnesses to the resurrection of the son of the widow in Nain (7:16), the Samaritan leper (17:15, 18), and Bartimaeus (18:43). Likewise, the double bent woman healed by Jesus on the Sabbath praises or glorifies (*δοξάζω*) God (13:13). The Gospel of Luke invites the reader to join the praise and exultation resulting from this divine redemption and re-creation. The Sabbath in Luke, on the one hand, underlines these themes, on the other, is given its authoritative interpretation by Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, in order to serve exactly that redemptive purpose.⁵³ To Luke, the true experience of Sabbath joy is only possible in Jesus.

In summary, as a day of praise the Sabbath highlights the main theme of the Gospel of Luke.⁵⁴ Jesus makes the Sabbath a sign of the joy of redemption and re-creation through Jesus, a foretaste of the communal worship fellowship at the banquet of the kingdom of God.

⁵² Indicated by the present participle *δοξαζόμενος*.

⁵³ Larsen concludes her analysis of the story about the bent woman by stating that "the law for the Sabbath not only permits, but even demands the deliverance of the daughter of Abraham because this healing during the Sabbath worship in itself is worshipping act of deliverance and at the same time has as the result that the woman now is able to worship and serve God. In this way the worship of Israel is promoted. Jesus' healing of the daughter of Abraham at the same time fulfils the law and realizes the promise," see *Konglikten om Gustjenesten*, 115.

⁵⁴ The Gospel of Luke begins and ends on a note of joy and praise, see the Magnificat in 1:46-55, the song by Zacharias in 1:67-79, the proclamation of the angels in 2:14, and the closing description of the early Christian community in 24:52-53, returning to Jerusalem with joy and continually "praising (from *εὐλογέω*) God." As a "blessing", or an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving, this verb covers shades of meaning similar to the verb *δοξάζω*, "give glory to." Like *δοξάζω*, it plays a central role in the Gospel, used by Zacharias in 1:64, and Anna in 2:34, and in the end is a response to the blessings by God in Jesus (cf. 24:50-51). On the relation of praise in Luke to Sabbath and worship, see further Larsen, *Konglikten om Gustjenesten*, 105.

3. Praying and Preaching: The Role of the Sabbath in Acts

3.1. Identification

Table 2 provides a list of references and allusions to the Sabbath in the Acts of the Apostles.

Text	Classification	Comment
4:24; 14:15	References to theology of Sabbath	Quoting Exod 20:11
13:14, 42, 44; 17:2; 18:4	References to visits to synagogues on the Sabbath in the course of mission narratives	
16:13	References to a place of prayer visited on the Sabbath	
14:1; 18:19, 26; 19:8	Allusions to Sabbath visits to synagogues	Sabbath not explicitly mentioned, but presupposed
13:27; 15:21	References of general historical nature	

Table 2: The Sabbath in Acts: References and Allusions

These references and allusions raise several important issues. The explicit references to the Sabbath in Acts highlight the role of the Sabbath in Paul's ministry. According to his custom (Acts 17:2), he entered the synagogues every Sabbath where he preached the gospel and from the Scriptures proved that Jesus was the prophesied Christ (13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). Though not explicitly mentioned, the Sabbath is alluded to or taken for granted also in Acts 14:1 where Paul and Barnabas is said to go into the Jewish synagogue in Iconium "as usual" (using the idiomatic expression, *κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ*). Paul also twice in his sermons explicitly mentions the Sabbath, referring to the reading of the Scriptures in the synagogue every Sabbath, the reading of the prophets (in Antioch in Pisidia, Acts 13:27) as well as the law (at the Jerusalem Council, Acts 15:21), thus, including all Scripture. The question needs to be answered what the implications of this custom are for the significance of the Sabbath. Are Paul's visits an expression of a personal commitment to Sabbath keeping or only an action plan in his mission strategy?

Two centrally placed quotations from the fourth commandment (Exod 20:11) contain references to the theology of the Sabbath. The first of these

appears in the believers' prayer after Peter's and John's first capture and subsequent release (Acts 4:24). In the second, Paul in his first recorded sermon to a Gentile audience quotes from the Sabbath commandment when addressing the people of Lystra (Acts 14:15). It may be argued that the reference is only to the concept of creation without any specific Sabbath connotation. However, in light of the historical milieu, I find it impossible to maintain such a position.⁵⁵ The early church, especially the community of believers in Jerusalem, was saturated with the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, and would, when listening to such a quote, immediately associate it with the Sabbath and the fourth commandment from which the quote originated. Important questions, therefore, include, why is the Sabbath commandment quoted in prayer and preaching, what is the function of these Sabbath quotes in the course of the narrative of Acts, and what are the implications for the theological message of the book as a whole? The answer to these questions must be pursued in light of both the role of prayer and worship and the function of speeches in Acts as a whole.

Two texts with potential significance for the role of the Sabbath are not included in this table. Some scholars also understand the decree in Acts 15:28-29 as an allusion to the Sabbath as part of what no longer should burden Gentile Christians. The question needs to be asked whether this is the implication of the decision of the Jerusalem Council? Likewise, Acts 20:7-8 must be discussed to see whether it points to a celebration of Sunday as a weekly day of worship as often claimed, and whether it thus indirectly alludes to the abolishment of the Sabbath and its replacement with Sunday.

In the following, I will first assess the references and allusions against the background of the events in Acts as they transpire; next, I will in light of this literary position further examine the major theological issues these references evoke.

3.2. Literary and Thematic Function of Sabbath References in Acts

Two interrelated significant movements in the course of the overall narrative of the Book of Acts are implied in the opening dialogue between Jesus and His disciples in Acts 1:7-9. In regard to time, the book moves

⁵⁵ We should, of course, not assume that the Gentiles in Lystra with their Scriptural ignorance would recognize the Sabbath quotation in Acts 14:15. The point is, however, that the audience of Acts would do so. In the theology of Luke, the two Sabbath quotes must be seen together.

from the ascension and enthronement of Jesus towards his Second Coming as the Judge of the world (cf. Acts 7:56). It changes location from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, to the Gentile world, and to Rome from whence it continues, thus, also providing a geographical narrative framework for the book.⁵⁶ In accordance with this outline the preaching of the gospel, the *kerygma*, from the outset targets the Jews and their leaders, but in the course of events turns to the Gentiles. Understanding the nature of this transition is the major key to the message of Acts and helps to position the Sabbath in the story as well as in the theology of the book. Table 3 lists the sermons in Acts and the response of the audiences. The table illustrates how the initial reception is replaced by opposition and at the time of Stephen was finally rejected by the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin. It also shows how the message subsequently reaches Gentile audiences and there receives a mixed response, the final reaction being postponed and the book thus remaining open-ended. The preaching of the message is not yet completed.⁵⁷

Text	Preacher	Place	Audience	Result
2:14-39	Peter	Jerusalem	Jews	Positive
3:12-26	Peter	Jerusalem	Jews	Unrecorded Preaching stopped
4:8-12	Peter	Jerusalem	Sanhedrin	Postponed ⁵⁸
5:29-32	Peter and the apos- tles	Jerusalem	Sanhedrin	Negative reaction post- poned
7:2-53	Stephen	Jerusalem	Sanhedrin	Negative
13:16-41	Paul	Antioch in Pisidia	Jews and Gentile proselytes to Juda- ism	Postponed
14:14-17	Paul	Lystra	Gentiles	Negative

⁵⁶ Jerusalem (chs. 1-7), Judea and Samaria (ch. 8), into the Gentile world (from ch. 9), ending in Rome (ch. 28).

⁵⁷ This is in my view the major function of the ending of the book which leaves the reader with Paul in Rome, awaiting the results of his teaching and preaching.

⁵⁸ The reaction by the Sanhedrin to the speeches in 4:8-12 and 5:39-32 is characterized as "postponed" because the Sanhedrin decides not yet to take any action.

Text	Preacher	Place	Audience	Result
17:32-31	Paul	Athens	Gentiles	Mixed
20:18-35	Paul	Miletus	Ephesian Elders	
22:1-21	Paul	Jerusalem	Jewish Crowd	Negative
26:2-23	Paul	Caesarea	Agrippa's Court	Postponed
28:26-27	Paul	Rome	Jews	Postponed

Table 3: *Sermons in Acts*

3.2.1. *The Sabbath Reference in the Prayer in Acts 4:34*

The first allusion to the Sabbath in Acts is found in the prayer offered by the congregation in Acts 4:24.⁵⁹ This incident is significant as the first and only prayer recorded from any explicitly described worship event in the New Testament.⁶⁰ In the wider context within Acts, the prayer in 4:24-29 is set in the midst of the first example of opposition and persecution typical for the remainder of Acts. The prayer follows the negative response by Jewish leaders to the preaching of Peter and John and the capture and subsequent release of the two apostles with a futile admonition not to continue their proclamation of Jesus as Messiah. Gathered after the reunion with the two apostles, the small group of believers responds to this first experience of hostility by asking God for boldness to preach in

⁵⁹ The reference to Exod 20:11 is evident. The three part phrase *τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς* is identical. The only other OT text containing the exactly same wording is Ps 146(145):6 which most likely also quoted from the commandment. It is common also to refer to Isa 37:16 which, however, is a *merismus*, not containing the third element, the sea. C. K. Barrett, otherwise very detailed, strangely omits Exod 20:11 though referring to many other texts from OT and inter testamental Jewish literature in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary Commentary to the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 2:244. Neither does Craig A. Evans include these quotations from the fourth commandment in his list of references to the Ten Commandments in his otherwise excellent treatment of "The Decalogue in the New Testament" in *The Decalogue through the Centuries: From Hebrew Scriptures to Benedict XVI*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Timothy Larsen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 29-46. J. Bradley Chance notes the reference to Exod 20:11 in Acts 4:24 and 14:15 in *Acts*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007), 79, 239.

⁶⁰ Scholars have in general made nothing out of this Sabbath connection. Even Larsen with her emphasis on the theme of worship overlooks this text as well as the similar quote in Acts 14:15.

spite of persecutions to come (4:29).⁶¹ Table 4 provides a brief overview of the prayer elements. The reference to the Sabbath is part of an emphasis on the theme of universality. God is the Creator of the world and Lord of past and present history.⁶² Though everyone, both Jews and Gentiles, has come together to oppose God,⁶³ his Anointed Messiah and his representatives, God's cause will persevere and his decisions stand (26-28). The events in Acts confirm this confidence.⁶⁴

The fact that the reference is found in a prayer must be understood in the light of the significance of prayer and worship throughout the Book of Acts.⁶⁵ The prayer life of major characters like Paul and Cornelius is mentioned (10:2, 4, 9, 31), and believers regularly respond to or express their trust in God's intervention and deliverance by praise (as in 2:47; 3:8; 4:21;

- ⁶¹ The specific petition of the prayer is a narrative surprise. In the context readers naturally expect either a prayer of thanksgiving for deliverance or a petition for future protection. French L. Arrington comments on the function of the prayer, "Since preaching the word of God is the main theme of chapter 4, this prayer is not for deliverance from persecution but for boldness to preach God's word. The prayer was a model for Luke's readers. The presence of God's power in times of persecution enabled the church to face it and to continue to bear witness to Jesus Christ." See *The Acts of the Apostles—An Introduction and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 49.
- ⁶² John R. W. Stott comments on the God of creation ("made," v. 24), revelation ("spoke," v. 25), and history ("decided," v. 28), *The Message of Acts, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 100. The language "echoes the heart of creation theology (see Exod 20:11; Ps 146:6 *et passim* . . .)" says Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 66.
- ⁶³ In this text, Jews and Gentiles are united in enmity toward the gospel but later in Acts, Gentiles of course also join Jews in accepting the good news.
- ⁶⁴ The specific petitions of the prayer are directly answered in the subsequent narrative accounts. The Christians speak the word of God with boldness (4:31, *παρρησία*), and signs and wonders follow their ministry (5:12).
- ⁶⁵ Prayers have received surprisingly little attention in the study of the works by Luke, the recent study by Geir Otto Holmås, *Prayer and Vindication in Luke-Acts*, LNTS 433 (London: T&T Clark, 2011) being the first major study on the function of prayer since the work by Oscar Harris, "Prayer in Luke-Acts: A Study in the Theology of Luke" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1966). A shorter article by P. T. O'Brien is also helpful, "Prayer in Luke-Acts," *TynBul* 24 (1973): 111-127. François Bovon provides a helpful overview of literature up to 1975 in regard to prayer in the theology of Luke, see *Luke the Theologian: Fifty Years of Research (1950-2005)*, 2nd rev. ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 453-457. Holmås provides a more extended bibliography, see *Prayer and Vindication*, 2.

10:46; 16:25; 28:15). Harris finds that prayer in Luke-Acts is related to the "unfolding of redemptive history."⁶⁶ This observation highlights the significance of the content of the prayer in Acts 4.

Verse	Prayer Element		Theme
24a	Invocation		
24b	Appellation	Description: Identification	Universalism in Creation
25a		Description: Past Activity	
25b-26		Past Prophecy	Universalism in History
27-28		Motivation: Past prophecy fulfilled	Universalism: Gentiles + Israel <i>Specific situation</i>
29a	Transition		
29b	Invocation		
29c	Supplications	Petition for attention	
29d		Specific petition	Decisive line
30a-b		Extended petitions	Parallel lines
30c	Ending		

Table 4: *Prayer Elements in Acts 4:24-29*

3.2.2. *The Sabbath Reference in the Sermon in Lystra in 14:15*

References or allusions to the Sabbath subsequent to the prayer in 4:24 all appear in connection with the spread of the gospel to the Gentile world, most of them directly related to the preaching and teaching in the synagogues of the diaspora. The quote from the Sabbath commandment 14:15⁶⁷ is a notable in the course of events in Acts because it appears in the

⁶⁶ As referred by Bovon, *Luke the Theologian*, 456.

⁶⁷ Luke 4:24, the wording is identical to Exod 20:11 τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς. Most commentators note the connection. I. Howard Marshall writes how Paul is "revealing to them the existence of the living God, the Creator of the Universe (cf. 4:24; 17:24, citing Exod 20:11) and urging them to turn from their futile idols to this God," in *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press;

first sermon spoken to a totally Gentile audience.⁶⁸ Paul's preaching may here happen in an atypical situation, forced by unexpected circumstances, yet its theological outline reflects what we later hear on Areopagos (17:17-31), and we should "read" it "as typical of the way he would present the gospel to a Gentile audience with no knowledge of God's special revelation."⁶⁹ In contrast to sermons to Jewish audiences, there are no explicitly mentioned references to Scripture. This is of course appropriate when speaking to an audience which does not know and, consequently, does not have the Scriptures as its accepted authority.

From a literary perspective, however, by repeating verbatim from the Sabbath commandment the description of God in the appellation of the prayer in 4:24, "who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them,"⁷⁰ Luke creates a clear and direct link to the prayer and worship of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. The audience is different, the illustrations and the stated sources of authority are changed, yet God is the same, and the theological emphasis is repeated. As the God of the Sabbath, God is Creator and Lord of all people. This is also the main idea in Paul's speech on Areopagos (Acts 17:24-26),⁷¹ but here in Lystra this

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 238. Also Williams speaks about "citing (Exod 20:11)," see *Acts*, 250.

⁶⁸ "Although what Luke includes is only a very brief abstract of Paul's sermon, it is of great importance as his only recorded address to illiterate pagans." Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 231. Parson notes that "Paul's missionary preaching" in Acts only twice "aimed at an exclusively non-Jewish audience," here and on Areopagos, and he devotes much of his comments to the passage on the difference in social and intellectual level between these two situations, see *Acts*, 199-202.

⁶⁹ Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 89. Thompson makes in his work no specific reference to the Sabbath or to the fact that the fourth commandment is quoted in Acts 4:24 and 14:15. J. Bradley Chance notes that "this speech offers the first example of how Luke presents the proclamation of the gospel to non-Jews; Acts 17:22-31 will offer a more detailed example," see *Acts*, 238.

⁷⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson notes that this phrase from the prayer in Acts 4:24 "is repeated almost verbatim in 14:15 and 17:24," see *The Acts of the Apostles*, SP 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 34.

⁷¹ The mentioning in Acts 17:24 of God being the Lord of "heaven and earth" (οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς κύριος) links the speech in Areopagos further to the Sabbath commandment references in Acts 4:24 and 14:15. Though the sea is not mentioned on Areopagos, a combination of heaven and earth is in Acts only found here and in 7:49 where Stephen in his speech quotes Isa 66:1 to support the notion of the heavenly sanctuary now inaugurated by Jesus. We should not miss

universalistic theology is highlighted by the Sabbath quote. Paul is further identifying himself with the people of Lystra as a person of like passion, created by God who cares for all people and all nations (14:15-17).⁷² Stopped violently in this instance in Lystra, Paul later presents the conclusion of the argument on Areopagos. Just as in the prayer in chapter 4, the function of the reference to the Sabbath commandment is to underline the universality typical for the gospel message with its invitation to Gentiles through Christ to join the worship of Israel. The theology of the Sabbath is utilized in the inclusive presentation of the gospel by Luke.

3.2.3. *The Sabbath as Venue for Preaching and Teaching*

As events in Acts follow the Christian message into the world, preaching to the Jews is not simply replaced with preaching to the Gentiles. The synagogue is the venue in space, and the Sabbath is the venue in time (13:14, 42, 44; 14:1; 17:2; 18:4), also when the synagogue is absent and the apostles only hope to find a "place of prayer" (16:13). This role of Sabbath and synagogue may have several reasons. It is generally accepted by commentators and obviously true that the synagogues and, therefore, the Sabbath services provided an excellent starting point in Paul's missionary strategy. But the approach also shows that the rejection of the gospel by the Jewish leadership, sealed with the stoning of Stephen, in no way implies that the Jews or the people of Israel as such were rejected or no longer receptive to the *kerygma*. Moreover, the preaching by Paul in the synagogue on the Sabbath is an invitation to both Jews and Gentiles to join the true worship of Israel taught by Jesus and founded on His redemptive death and resurrection. The sufferings of Christ find their fulfilment in the words of the prophets read every Sabbath in the synagogues (13:27); therefore, the Christian preaching is the genuine continuation of that worship. Viewed from this perspective, Larsen concludes that "Paul did not seek the synagogue for just reasons of mission strategy but because it was his custom to do so."⁷³ Paul understands the Christian Church as a con-

the theological link between these texts. The function of the heavenly sanctuary is to underline that God is God for all peoples, and the Sabbath likewise is used in both prayer in ch. 4 and sermon in ch. 14 to highlight this inclusive universalism. Furthermore, both sanctuary and Sabbath are connected theologically also by the theme of worship.

⁷² Links between these two texts and the universal nature of God as expressed on Areopagos are also noted by Parsons in his discussion of the Lukan landscape and God as the Creator of both "topographical and geopolitical space," see *Luke: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, 87.

⁷³ Larsen, *Konflikten om Gudstjenesten*, 47.

tinuation of Israel and his preaching is an invitation to join the worship of Israel. The Sabbath is the natural venue in time for such continued worship.

3.2.4. The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and the Sabbath

The council in Jerusalem described in Acts 15 was a major event in the transformation of the Christian movement from a narrow Jewish community to a universal church. In the course of events in Acts, it follows the stoning of Stephen, sealing the fate of the Jewish leadership; the spread of the gospel into Judea, Samaria, and Syria (Antioch); the first baptism of Gentiles (the Ethiopian eunuch in 8:36-39 and Cornelius in 10:44-48); the conversion of Saul in ch. 9; and his and Barnabas' first missionary journey in chs. 13-14, preaching to both Jewish and totally Gentile audiences.

The major question settled at the Council was the criterion for the inclusion of Gentiles into the church and "how believing Jews and converted Gentiles are able to live together in Israel."⁷⁴ The basic argument for the decision taken was the testimony of the Holy Spirit already evident in the miraculous events connected with the baptism of Cornelius, recognized by the delegates in the formula "the Holy Spirit and we" (15:28).⁷⁵

The wording of the final statement of requirements to the Gentiles for full inclusion into the church has led several scholars to see the Sabbath abolished as part of the Mosaic laws which are to be abrogated in order not to put further burden on the newly converted Gentiles. Such a conclusion, however, overlooks several significant facts and perspectives.

First, the position presupposes that no distinction is made between the various laws of the Torah, ignoring any distinction between, for instance, the Ten Commandments and socio-political, purity, or ceremonial laws.⁷⁶ However, the expression of the decree "no further burden" (15:28, *mhden ple, on ba,roj*), implies that certain basic moral requirements were already taken for granted. Such would evidently include other great principles of the Ten Commandments—Gentile converts were not supposed to kill, commit adultery, cheat, or covet—and there is in the context of the wor-

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷⁵ The unusual sequence of the outpouring of the Spirit before the baptism (10:44-47) is recorded at the Council by Peter (15:7-9) and used by Jacob to confirm the purpose of God (15:14) as the basis for the decree of the Council.

⁷⁶ It is a major conceptual mistake by Sturcke consistently to assume that all laws in the Torah are to be perceived at the same level and are equally binding at all times and places.

ship theme in Acts no reason to exclude the first four commandments of this great code, the Sabbath commandment not excepted.

Second, it needs to be remembered that the four prohibitions of the decree all have their origin in the demands of the law to Gentiles living in Israel among its people (cf. Lev 20:2ff; 18:6ff; 17:15; 17:10, 12 ff.). "Participation in the worship of Israel thus presupposes keeping these ritual prohibitions and thereby a change in the diet and whole social and economic existence of the converted Gentile."⁷⁷

Third, the explicit rationale behind the decree is often ignored or simply not understood. During the deliberations, James specifically justifies the four prohibitions with a reference to the worship of Israel: "For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath (15:21)." With a reference to the use of the particle *gar* ("for"), Larsen explains "that Moses from days of old is read and proclaimed in the Sabbath synagogue service constitutes the reason for imposing the four prohibitions on converted Gentiles. It is, therefore, not the law, but the worship to which reference is made when the rationale behind the prohibitions is to be given."⁷⁸

The very discussion thus focuses on how Gentiles may become part of the Sabbath worship of Israel.⁷⁹ The four prohibitions were understood as the lawful conditions for Gentiles to join that worship.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Larsen, *Konflikten om Gudstjenesten*, 36.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 36-37. She continues, "The difficulties which several scholars have had with the presence of verse 21 in the context, are eliminated when the text is read against the background of the worship. . . . Because the law is a sign of the worship of Israel, it is necessary to ask Gentiles who seek God and want to participate in Israel's worship, to respect the characteristics of the worship. This characteristic cannot be abrogated without destroying what the law points to, namely the worship. The Gentiles are thus not obligated on the whole law, but on the prohibitions which in the law are imposed on the strangers among the Israelites, and which are known from the proclamation of the law in the synagogues." One major characteristic of this worship is the Sabbath.

⁷⁹ This inclusion of Gentiles into Israel's worship is further underlined by the Old Testament quote from the prophet Amos (9:11-12) which Jacob utilizes to support his case (Acts 15:15-17). Spoken originally in the context of uniting the kingdoms of Israel into one, like in the age of David, the prophetic utterance as interpreted by James further pointed to the inclusion of Gentiles who would seek the Lord in the Davidic, Messianic age. That age has according to Jacob now arrived.

⁸⁰ Contrary to Turner, who speaks about "the law-transcending admission of the Gentiles to the church," see "The Sabbath," 128; the Council in Jerusalem un-

3.2.5. Acts 20:7 and the Day of Worship

Though Acts 20:7 contains no reference to the Sabbath, it is justified briefly to evaluate the significance of this text because it is repeatedly and also recently⁸¹ used as an argument for Sunday or the first day of the week as the day of worship for early Christians. There is little indication in the text that the communal gathering on the first day of the week⁸² was a regular event. As pointed out by Young, it "was simply a happenstance" in the sequence of events during Paul's third missionary journey. Young refers to the fact that Luke in this account provides an ongoing list of such time references⁸² and quotes C. K. Barrett:

Luke's reference to the first day of the week is made in passing, as a natural explanation of the fact that the Christians were taking supper together. It does not appear that he is pressing the observance of the day as something he wishes to commend to his readers; rather he assumes that they will fully understand what is going on.⁸³

Young's own comment is illuminating, "If the first day was not just a random occurrence, but a purposeful and regular day for Christian meeting, it is astonishing that Luke makes no mention of its special significance."⁸⁴

derstands and argues for the inclusion of the Gentiles in accordance with the law as originally intended by the Lawgiver.

⁸¹ See S. R. Llewelyn, "The Use of Sunday for Meetings of Believers in the New Testament," *NovTes* 43 (2001): 205-223 and Norman H. Young, "The Use of Sunday for Meetings of Believers in the New Testament: A Response," *NovTes* 45 (2003): 111-122.

⁸² Such as "for three months" (19:8), "daily" (19:9), "for two years" (19:10), "for three months" (20:3), "in five days" (20:6), "for seven days" (20:6), "on the first day of the week" (20:7), "the next day" (20:7), "on the following day" (20:15), "the next day" (20:15), "on the day of Pentecost" (20:16), etc. Young, "The Use of Sunday," 118.

⁸³ Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical*, 2:952.

⁸⁴ Young, "The Use of Sunday," 118. This particular observation in regard to Acts 20:7, of course, illustrates also a major historical point, namely, that any change of worship to the day of Sunday in the Apostolic Church would have created a major conflict with the Jewish community, yet no sources reflect such a struggle in the New Testament era or the immediate subsequent period. Turner acknowledges the strength of the argument from silence in Acts where the Sabbath (or its abrogation) is never mentioned as a cause for tension in spite of the fact that Luke "faithfully records various grounds of Church/Judaism conflict," see "The Sabbath," 127-128.

The reference to the breaking of bread (Acts 20:7) is at times seen as indicating a regular weekly worship.⁸⁵ Also here Young's comment is to the point, "Whether this was a formal celebration of the Lord's Supper is doubtful when compared with the general usage in Acts, see 2:42, 46; 20:11; 27:35. We should also add that the Last Supper occurred on a Thursday or Friday and not on a Sunday."⁸⁶ In 27:35, the breaking of bread is no indication of the eucharist, and in Acts 2:42 we experience the early church breaking the bread daily, not on a regular weekly basis.

There is thus in my estimation little reason to see any clear and decisive reference to Sabbath or Sunday as the weekly day of worship in Acts 20:7.⁸⁷

3.3. The Sabbath in the Theology of Acts

Acts twice alludes to the theology of the Sabbath by citing the fourth commandment. The quote itself highlights the theme of universality, describing God as the Creator God of all, both Jews and Gentiles.⁸⁸ The set-

⁸⁵ F. F. Bruce speaks about "reasonable certainty," in *Acts*, NICNT, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 384; see also R. P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (London: SCM, 1964), 78-80; Willy Rordorf, *Der Sonntag: Geschichte des Ruhe-und Gottesdiensttages im ältesten Christentum*, ATANT 43 (Zürich: Zwingli, 1962), English translation, *Sunday* (London: SCM, 1968), 196-205.

⁸⁶ Young, "The Use of Sunday," 119.

⁸⁷ Turner discusses related arguments in some detail and exercises caution in comparison with scholars making "extravagant claims" in regard to this text as a support for early Sunday keeping. In his conclusions, he makes two observations: first that this "first day of the week" in Acts 20:7 is not yet called the "Lord's Day" as a reference to Sunday, a title Luke would have used if known, and second, that "in view of the fact that a planetary week was in general use at the time, the reference by a Gentile writer to observance of the Jewish weekly cycle (apart from the Sabbath itself) by a *Gentile* church must be taken as deliberate," see "The Sabbath," 131-133. Turner offers the resurrection tradition as the background for this choice. However, the reason for using the Jewish designations for the days of the week may even more easily be understood as natural exactly for a Sabbath keeping community. After all, the phrase translated "the first day of the week," *μῆ τῶν σαββάτων*, as typically Jewish reflects the very notion of the Sabbath as climax and culmination of the week as a whole. Other week days are given no specific names except in relation to the Sabbath!

⁸⁸ In his brief comments on the prayer in 4:24-31, Holmås observes that "the prayers acknowledge God as the sovereign ruler of the created world who controls history according to his plan even as human opposition seems to prevail," see *Prayer and Vindication*, 181-182. Holmås makes no references to the Sabbath in his discussion of the prayer.

tings are both significant, one incident taking place at the only recorded prayer in a worship of the New Testament Church, the other being part of the first recorded sermon addressed to a Gentile audience. In light of the context of worship and preaching, the universalistic content of the two Sabbath quotes serves to link Jewish and Gentile Christians into one community.

The choice of Sabbath and synagogue as the venue for the proclamation of the gospel is thus not simply due to Paul's missionary strategy. The Sabbath teachings in the synagogues are the basis for the inclusion of Gentiles into the true Israel (cf. 13:27 and 15:21), and the Sabbath remains the venue in time, even when the synagogue no longer functions as the venue in space (cf. 16:13).

As such venue in time, the Sabbath is significant not only for Jews, but also for Gentiles who are invited to join the church for worship. The church is not a replacement, but grows out of and into the true Israel and is now the place where worship as originally intended by God is to take place, open for everyone and based on the redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

4. Bringing Gospel and Acts Together: The Sabbath and the Theology of Luke

This article has discussed how the theology of Luke and the Sabbath contribute to each other. Though the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts from a literary perspective are two unique books, they share common theological perspectives, and they combine to form a theology of Luke's writings.

The main focus of this article has not been history. Yet, there is historically little doubt that the community to which Luke wrote kept the Sabbath.⁸⁹ This fact is implied throughout by all references to the Sabbath.

⁸⁹ As acknowledged also by Sturcke, *Encountering*, 169. The conclusion by Herold Weiss in regard to the Sabbath in the Lukan writings is notable, "The author of Luke/Acts repeatedly brings Jesus and Paul to the synagogue on the Sabbath and makes the point that attending the synagogue was their custom. For persons whose piety is beyond question this is only to be expected. The author clearly wishes to make the point, in particular about Paul, that he was an observant Jew. In his account of the Sabbath healings, he brings out that the Sabbath is a day for deliverance, thus linking the Sabbath to the words of Isaiah that serve as the text for Jesus' sermon . . . in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-20). The observance of the Sabbath represents "the acceptable year of the Lord," when the oppressed find freedom. This is a leitmotif of his gospel" in *A Day of Gladness:*

Written even a long time after the events, there is no hint of any change from Sabbath to Sunday or the accompanying tension such change would have evoked, and the "first day of the week" is mentioned only in passing by, using the Jewish weekly calendar names and without any notion of a particular significance (Acts 20:7). The many situations where the Sabbath is mentioned would have provided Luke with excellent opportunity to point out the fact that the Sabbath was abrogated if such were the case. He does not. On the contrary, the amount of references imply that Sabbath keeping was still a very relevant issue for the audience to which he wrote.

The Sabbath controversies of Luke never center on whether the Sabbath is to be kept, but on how to keep it, and on whose authority this Sabbath keeping takes place. This indicates an ongoing historical relevance of Sabbath keeping. Jesus rejects the framework of the Halakah and he interprets the Sabbath commandment with authority as the Creator and Lord of the Sabbath.

The ministry of Jesus as described in the Gospel thus does not abolish the Sabbath, but presents an interpretation of the law different from the prevailing understanding among the Pharisees. In Luke, Jesus redefines the nature of worship in accordance with God's original intention, and the Sabbath day becomes a natural expression for the deliverance and joy characteristic of genuine worship, a symbol of freedom and access to God for everyone. Having the authority to interpret the Sabbath, Jesus redefines every genuine Sabbath experience as an experience with him.

The Book of Acts does not change this understanding. As was the custom of Jesus, so Paul also visited the synagogues on the Sabbath day. The same message of inclusiveness was preached and exemplified in the ministry of both Jesus and Paul. As Jesus opened the door to the kingdom for the outcast and those bent, so Paul proclaimed the *kerygma* to everyone, Gentiles as well as Jews. The God of Israel is also the God of the Gentiles. Luke's open invitation to enter the kingdom is in Acts exemplified by the universal preaching of the gospel, appealing to Gentiles not to abolish or replace, but to join the genuine worship of Israel which after the rejection of Jesus as Messiah by the Jewish leaders now continues in the Christian church. The Sabbath references serve to emphasize this universalism, pointing to God as the Creator of both Jews and Gentiles.⁹⁰

The Sabbath among Jews and Christians in Antiquity (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 171.

⁹⁰ Universalism appears in many ways in Luke's writings. Parson's work provides one insightful example, as he illustrates how people who were regarded as outsiders in Israel due to their physiognomic characteristics, such as the bent

Two quotes from the Sabbath commandment, the first in the prayer and worship of the earliest Jewish Christian community (Acts 4:24) and the second in the first proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles (14:15), further make the conclusion unavoidable that the Sabbath was not only kept, but also expected to be kept in the community to which Acts was written. The theology of the Sabbath is thus closely linked both to the spiritual and the evangelistic life of the early Christian community in Acts. It was not just a traditional day of worship for the Jews, but a day of joy and deliverance also for the Gentiles, now invited into a universal fellowship founded on the redemption won by the crucified and risen Saviour.

woman in Luke 13:10-17 and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:36-39, in Jesus were accepted into the Kingdom. See *Body and Character*, 83-95; 123-141.