



New Testament Theology

The Mission of the Triune God

A Theology of Acts

PATRICK SCHREINER

Series edited by Thomas R. Schreiner and Brian S. Rosner

“Given the size and complexity of the book of Acts, scholars have proposed various candidates for the main theological themes and offered analysis for how they all fit together. In this engaging work, Patrick Schreiner shows that the idea of God as Trinity is foundational to the entire book of Acts and that Luke’s other emphases develop and cohere in light of this central truth. This study would be an excellent resource for anyone wishing to delve more deeply into the message and intention of Acts.”

David Peterson, Emeritus Faculty Member, Moore College; author,
The Acts of the Apostles

“Patrick Schreiner offers here a valuable and beautifully wrapped gift to every serious reader of the book of Acts. Not only does Schreiner discuss each major theological theme of Acts in depth, which is itself a significant contribution, but he is careful to show how Luke integrates these various themes into an overarching, powerful, and rich theological message that resonates with the church in every age as it desperately seeks renewal. Schreiner’s lively writing style makes this book a joy to read, his many graphs and images render the work easily understandable, and his allusions to contemporary popular culture reinforce his underlying conviction that the message of Acts is every bit as relevant today as when it first burst onto the scene.”

David R. Bauer, Ralph Waldo Beeson Professor of Inductive Biblical Studies; Dean, School of Biblical Interpretation, Asbury Theological Seminary

“Patrick Schreiner has given us a solid look at the theology of one of the most underappreciated books of the New Testament: the book of Acts. He shows clearly how Luke’s look at history and the promise that is at the heart of the early church is not about the acts of the apostles but about the unfolding acts of God that are still at work in our world. This work will develop your appreciation for what God has done and is doing, and who we are called to be as members of his church.”

Darrell L. Bock, Executive Director of Cultural Engagement,
The Hendricks Center, Dallas Theological Seminary

The Mission of the Triune God

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Edited by Thomas R. Schreiner and Brian S. Rosner

The Mission of the Triune God: A Theology of Acts, Patrick Schreiner

The Joy of Hearing: A Theology of the Book of Revelation, Thomas R. Schreiner

The Mission of the Triune God

A Theology of Acts

Patrick Schreiner

The Mission of the Triune God: A Theology of Acts

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*To Hannah—
My coworker in this mission.*

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Series Preface

THERE ARE REMARKABLY FEW treatments of the big ideas of single books of the New Testament. Readers can find brief coverage in Bible dictionaries, in some commentaries, and in New Testament theologies, but such books are filled with other information and are not devoted to unpacking the theology of each New Testament book in its own right. Technical works concentrating on various themes of New Testament theology often have a narrow focus, treating some aspect of the teaching of, say, Matthew or Hebrews in isolation from the rest of the book's theology.

The New Testament Theology series seeks to fill this gap by providing students of Scripture with readable book-length treatments of the distinctive teaching of each New Testament book or collection of books. The volumes approach the text from the perspective of biblical theology. They pay due attention to the historical and literary dimensions of the text, but their main focus is on presenting the teaching of particular New Testament books about God and his relations to the world on their own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus. Such biblical theology is of fundamental importance to biblical and expository preaching and informs exegesis, systematic theology, and Christian ethics.

The twenty volumes in the series supply comprehensive, scholarly, and accessible treatments of theological themes from an evangelical perspective. We envision them being of value to students, preachers, and interested laypeople. When preparing an expository sermon

series, for example, pastors can find a healthy supply of informative commentaries, but there are few options for coming to terms with the overall teaching of each book of the New Testament. As well as being useful in sermon and Bible study preparation, the volumes will also be of value as textbooks in college and seminary exegesis classes. Our prayer is that they contribute to a deeper understanding of and commitment to the kingdom and glory of God in Christ.

Patrick Schreiner's Acts volume, *The Mission of the Triune God*, lays out in engaging style the theology of a unique book in the New Testament. The book of Acts bridges the gap between the Gospels and the Epistles and recounts the birth of the church age. But too often its theology, presented in narrative form, goes untapped. Schreiner reads Acts as a programmatic document, calling on and equipping the church to press on with the task of witness to the end of the earth. Acts is about resurrection life, the expansion of the temple of the Lord, and the advance of the word of the Lord. It has a high view of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and also a high view of the church as central to God's purposes. Delightfully punctuated with appropriate popular culture references, *The Mission of the Triune God* is an eminently practical as well as profound presentation of the main themes of Acts.

Thomas R. Schreiner and Brian S. Rosner

Preface

EVERY BOOK I STUDY IN THE BIBLE becomes my new favorite. That is currently the case with Acts. Spending significant time in any part of Scripture allows one to see the breadth, depth, and beauty of the words from God himself. As Gregory the Great once said, Scripture is shallow enough for a child to play in but deep enough for an elephant to drown in.¹ I like to become an elephant, minus the drowning.

This book is a biblical theology of Acts. Biblical theology can be done in a variety of ways. The work in your hands does not trace the narrative of Acts so much as follow the *theological themes* through *narrative order* (cf. Luke 1:3). It is a logically and narratively ordered treatment of the major theological themes in Acts.

The outline came to me when I was working on my commentary on Acts in the Christian Standard Commentary Series (2022). Some of that material is reproduced, reorganized, and expanded here. Sections of chapter 2 also stem from my thoughts in *The Ascension of Christ* with Lexham Press (2020). I am thankful to both publishers for allowing me to reproduce some of the material here.²

- 1 Gregory the Great, "Letter to Leander," in *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job*, trans. Brian Kerns (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press; Athens, OH: Cistercian Publications, 2014), 53: "It has out in the open food for children but keeps hidden away the things that fill the minds of the eminent with awe. Scripture is like a river again, broad and deep, shallow enough here for the lamb to go wading, but deep enough there for the elephant to swim."
- 2 Patrick Schreiner, *Acts*, Christian Standard Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman, 2022); *The Ascension of Christ: Recovering a Neglected Doctrine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020).

My prayer is you will see that the many themes of Acts do not compete with one another but work in harmony. Acts has a Trinitarian shape, and God has a mission to accomplish. Or to put it another way, the Father has a plan for his people, which centers on the exalted Son and goes forth by the empowering Spirit. From this Trinitarian river all other themes flow, like water from the temple renewing God's church in every age.

The soundtrack for this book came mainly from Jon Guerra's album *Keeper of Days*. It released after I was done with two chapters and became my go-to album for the rest of the chapters. I also consistently listened to the soundtrack of the movie *A Hidden Life*, with the score by James Newton Howard. The newest Lone Bellow album, *Half Moon Light*, also snuck its way into my playlist.

Because the Scriptures have a musical quality, and because the Father's plan can also be described as his "orchestration," I have capitalized on the musical theme and begin many chapters with a musical illustration.

Thanks to the many friends who read this book before it was published and who pointed out many mistakes and unclear sentences. Chad Ashby caught numerous errors, and I can't give him enough credit. Nathan Ridlehoover read pieces of the book and gave helpful suggestions. Julia Mayo pointed out a few places where I needed to change wording.

Thank you to the series editors, Brian Rosner and Tom Schreiner, for inviting me to be a part of this series. I know Tom somewhat, and Brian is a swell scholar. All other mistakes should be attributed to Voldemort.

Abbreviations

<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Il.</i>	Homer, <i>Illiad</i>
<i>INT</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JECH</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian History</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSS</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of New Testament Supplemental Series</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
NIDNTTE	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis
<i>NPNF</i>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
PTMS	Princeton Theological Monograph Series
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>

Introduction

Acts as a Renewal Document

The Uniqueness of Acts

The book of Acts offers something unique in the Christian canon. It has no rival in terms of a book spanning so many different lands. Its references to the Spirit far outpace any other work. It functions as a hinge canonically, bridging the Gospels and Epistles. It recounts the birth of the church age. And its content has no parallel in the New Testament.

Some of Paul's letters correspond to each other, and the four Gospels overlap, but most of what is found in Acts can be found in no other document. Without Acts, there would be no account of fire and wind at Pentecost. No description of Peter's encounter with Cornelius. No narrative of the rise of the multiethnic church in Antioch. No story of Paul's visit to Philippi, Corinth, or Ephesus, or of Paul's trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea.

Acts is also unique in that it might be our only writing from a Gentile—in addition to the Gospel by Luke. Colossians 4:11–14 gives a strong, but not decisive, argument for Luke's Gentile status, since Paul lists Luke after those of the circumcision party.

The New Testament is largely written to deal with the Jew and Gentile dispute in light of Jesus's arrival. If this is what the New Testament concerns, then it is remarkable that 27 percent of the

New Testament (Luke-Acts) comes from a Gentile mind, heart, and quill.¹

Acts is also unparalleled in that it recounts a new stage in Christian history: post-Jesus life. Everything (canonically) before this has been either pre-Jesus or with-Jesus. No longer are readers or characters looking forward to a Messiah, or following him on the dusty roads of Galilee. Now readers get a glimpse of Jesus's followers as they seek to be faithful to Jesus after he has departed.

The new community must figure out how to act now that Christ is gone. What has God instructed them to do? Where is the kingdom? How will they respond to persecution and pressures? What is the future of God's people? How do they live under the rule of Rome as a marginal and contested community?

Acts, as a unique part of the canon, coming from a distinctive voice, lays out the unparalleled story of the early church to encourage the church to press on. It therefore has much to say to the church in every generation. As Erasmus wrote to Pope Clement VII in 1524, Acts presents "the foundations of the newborn church . . . through [which] we hope that the church in ruins will be reborn."²

In other words, Acts is a model, a prototype, an exemplar for the renewal of the church. Luke, as a travel companion of Paul, kept his eye on the community of faith and so should any modern reading of Acts. This story is for more than the people of God, but aimed primarily to encourage God's people.

1 A few early Christians also identify Luke as from Antioch. The Anti-Marcionite Prologue (end of second century; cf. "Anti-Marcionite [Gospel] Prologues," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, ed. David Noel Freedman [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 262) describes Luke as "an Antiochene of Syria." Some even argue "Lucius of Cyrene" in Acts 13:1 is Luke (cf. Rom. 16:21). If he is from Cyrene, the north coast of Africa, then he likely had dark skin. Though this is hard to confirm, if true, Luke-Acts is the only work authored by a black Gentile. While many modern scholars doubt this, as Paul elsewhere calls him Luke (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24), it should be taken into account that the two most "Roman" books (Romans and Acts) call some obscure figure Lucius.

2 Desiderius Erasmus, *Paraphrase on Acts*, trans. Robert D. Sider, vol. 50 of *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 4.

Acts speaks to the church in two different ways: as a *transitional* and a *programmatic* book.³ As a *transitional* book, Acts recounts nonrepeatable events that establish the community of faith. For example, Pentecost is an unrepeatable event, but also not retractable. The reestablishment of the twelve apostles is exclusive to the period of Acts. The fate of Ananias and Sapphira is not likely to be seen requiring the immediate termination of liars in the church today.

However, Acts also confronts Christians as a *programmatic book*. It provides guidance for the church in every age. Its message can't be locked in the past. Its accomplishments can't be relegated to a bygone era. Its miracles can't be separated to another age. The same Spirit is still active. The same Christ still rules. The same God still sustains his church. The same resurrection days reside.

The scope of what happens in Acts is nothing short of remarkable. Within the space of thirty years, the gospel is preached in the most splendid, formidable, and corrupt cities.⁴ It reaches the Holy City (Jerusalem), the City of Philosophers (Athens), the City of Magic (Ephesus), and the Empire (Rome). Its message and work were not done in a corner. Its victories and opposition were not minor blips in history. Acts recounts the struggle and success of the gospel message going forth, all under the plan of God, centered on King Jesus, and empowered by the Spirit.

The triumph of this movement cannot be attributed to the apostles or Paul but only to God himself. The change brought about by the twelve apostles is the most inexplicable, mysterious, and wonderful event ever witnessed in this world. Luke writes to encourage the church, telling it *this* is the plan of God. His kingdom plan is not put on hiatus once Christ leaves; rather, it kicks into higher gear as the Spirit comes and the good news goes to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth (1:8).

3 I borrow this language from Brandon D. Crowe, *The Hope of Israel: The Resurrection of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 4.

4 The next two paragraphs are a reworking and paraphrasing of Barnes's moving summary of Acts. Albert Barnes, *Notes Explanatory and Practical on the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Harper, 1851), vi.

The Purpose of Acts: Assurance

The purposes of Acts are bound up in the narrative rather than in abstractions. It is fruitless to try to boil Luke's story down to one purpose. Surely, Acts is a multilayered and multipurposed document.⁵ In addition, Spirit-inspired literature such as this outlives its immediate purposes to instruct and challenge future generations, even in ways the human author could not completely foresee.

Having said all that, it is still beneficial to ascertain some key and fundamental purposes for Acts. Luke is the only writer in the New Testament to give us a prescript for both of his volumes (Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1–5), which ends up being extremely helpful for determining his purpose. Luke's preface for his Gospel is as follows:

Since many have attempted to organize a *narrative* of the deeds that have been *fulfilled* among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an *orderly sequence* for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may *know* with *certainty* concerning the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1–4, my translation)

The purposes orbit around these italicized words: narrative—fulfilled—orderly—know—certainty. The narrative itself, the ordering, provides certainty about the fulfillment of God's promises. But what was this uncertainty and what was fulfilled?

Interestingly, Luke employs the same language (*know* and *certainty*) and concepts (*fulfill*) of Luke 1:4 again in Acts 2:36. At the end of Peter's Pentecost sermon, he tells the crowd, "Let all the house of Israel *know* with *certainty* that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (2:36, my translation).⁶

5 Mark Powell categorizes the proposals for a purpose of Acts under six headings: irenic, polemical, apologetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and theological. Mark Allan Powell, *What Are They Saying about Acts?* (New York: Paulist, 1991), 13–19.

6 The same word for certainty resurfaces once more in the judicial contexts of Acts where Paul argues Jesus is the Messiah (21:34; 22:30; 25:26).

Thus, Luke provides *certainty through an ordered narrative* that God has *fulfilled* his promises to Israel and the nations *in Jesus Christ*.⁷ He writes an arranged story to show Jesus and the Spirit are the Father's plan for his people—both now and forevermore. In this way, Acts is a work of edification; it has a *theological* and *pastoral* purpose for local communities.⁸ As Craig Keener states, “Luke’s largest agenda in Luke-Acts is to place the mission of Jesus and the church in its place in salvation history.”⁹

At the highest level, Luke writes to convince his audience that the bumpy start of the community of God *is* the plan of God. Luke’s audience needs *assurance* that they are on the right path. As the church endures rejection and persecution, God’s people might not be sure this is the fulfillment of the kingdom.

In many ways, Acts can be seen as a series of onslaughts of Satan trying to thwart the spread of the word. Ironically, the onslaughts only propel it forward. Luke, therefore, reassures Christians of the nature and plan of God. This is the primary purpose of Acts.

However, many subcategories exist below this larger purpose. If Luke wrote to provide theological and pastoral certainty, then the uncertainty he counters can be identified with even more precision. This uncertainty seems to have stemmed from ethnic, gender, supernatural, social, economic, and political realities. All of these created pressure points, persecution, or disunity.¹⁰

7 The word translated “orderly” (*kathexēs*) doesn’t so much mean chronological but refers to a logical and coherent sequence (cf. Luke 8:1; Acts 3:24; 18:23).

8 Howard Marshall also claims Acts was intended as “an account of Christian beginnings in order to strengthen faith and give assurance that its foundation is sure.” I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 21.

9 Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1, *Introduction and 1:1–2:47* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 438.

10 As Philip Esler notes, the actual condition of Luke’s community governs his theology. He has molded his work to minister to the needs of the community and therefore gives modern ministers the impetus to stay attuned to the social, economic, and political realities of our own time. Philip Francis Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 223.

Ethnically, the new community now consisted of both Jews and Gentiles, which caused problems. Jews wondered whether welcoming Gentiles to table-fellowship necessarily implied the abandonment of their ancestral faith.

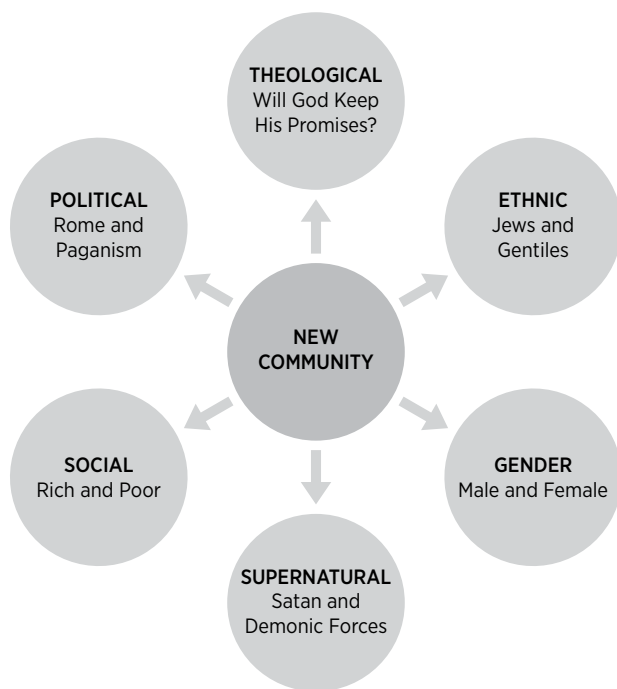
Politically, Gentiles wondered how they fit into a religious movement that had its roots in Judaism, and all Christians pondered how their newfound faith inhabited the Empire.

Socially, this community consisted of both rich and poor, and the culture of the day had a wide separation of the two groups.

In terms of *gender*, women were a large contingent of the early church, and Luke wrote to affirm the diversity.

Supernaturally, this community was under attack by demonic forces and the power of Satan.

Figure 1.1 Uncertainty in Acts



Luke, therefore, shows readers through his ordered narrative that Jews and Gentiles are to engage in table-fellowship together; Christianity fulfills ancestral Judaism; the gospel is for the rich and the poor; the rich are to provide for the poor; Christianity and Rome don't have to be at odds; the Way is innocent of sedition against Caesar; both women and men are welcome in the church; and the Satanic and political forces have no power over the message of Christ.

Furthermore, Luke tells these stories so the future church can emulate the virtuous acts and avoid the shameful ones. Literature in the ancient world presented its subjects as exemplars to instruct and inform concerning the current moment.

All of the above points combine to form a theological, pastoral, historical, evangelistic, and even political purpose.¹¹ *Luke writes to encourage, to embolden emulation, and to evangelize.* It is a renewal document for all times.

The Plan and Argument

The rest of this book will outline the ordered narrative theology of Acts. God imparts a theology in Acts for the renewal of the church. Yet the proposals for a theological center or theological heart of Acts twist in a variety of directions.

Many claim Acts focuses on the Spirit. The Spirit is thus the primary actor in Acts, making this the "Acts of the Holy Spirit." Others claim it is the word, which becomes almost a character in Acts with arms and legs. Others claim it is the church. Acts exists to teach us about the struggles of the early church. Others claim Acts is about the transition from Peter to Paul—after all, this is the *Acts of the Apostles*. More recent proposals focus on the continued work of Jesus.

11 F. F. Bruce says Luke is an apologist in Acts: he defends Christianity against pagan religion (Christianity is true, paganism is false), against Judaism (Christianity is the fulfillment of true Judaism), and against political accusations (Christianity is innocent of any offence against Roman law). F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 3rd rev. and enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 22.

Elements of truth persist in each of these proposals. But rather than claiming one outdoes the others, it is better to recognize they all relate to one another. Coherency and association rather than conflict and antagonism unite these themes together. Too many propose a different central theme, arguing past one another, not realizing they are arguing for the same thing but from a different angle.

Benefit, therefore, exists in locating these themes in a logical and conceptual order. Rather than being disparate, these themes are a mosaic—the pieces fit together. To put them out of place does damage to our understanding as a whole.

The order, to no surprise, is found in Luke's narrative (cf. Luke 1:3). To put this another way, one cannot theologize Acts correctly without *narratizing* it. As Richard Pervo puts it, "Acts is a narrative, and its theology must be recovered from the narrative."¹²

For example, one can't speak about the Spirit according to Acts without putting him in the frame of the risen Christ. One can't speak of Christ without speaking of the Father's plan. One can't speak about the witness of the apostles without relating it to the empowering of the Spirit. This book is most fundamentally about the mission of the triune God.

I have chosen seven themes to summarize Luke's main theological aims, though certainly many more could be added: (1) *God the Father* orchestrates; (2) through *Christ*, who lives and rules; and (3) through the empowering *Spirit*; (4) causing the *word* to multiply; (5) bringing *salvation* to all; (6) forming the *church*; which (7) *witnesses* to the ends of the earth.

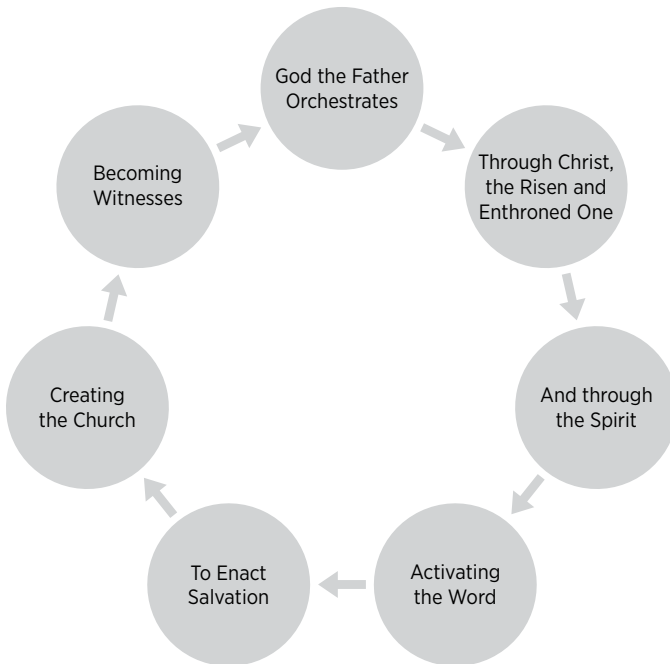
Luke emphasizes all of these themes in different ways, but my order is purposeful—a Lukan logic exists. The triune God stands at the head because the remaining themes flow from God the Father's plan, centered on the risen and enthroned Jesus, and the empowerment of the Spirit. The Spirit then empowers *the word* concerning salvation in Jesus's name. Through the word, *salvation* in Jesus's name is announced to all

12 Richard Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008), 22.

flesh. Salvation creates *the church* (the body of Christ), which *witnesses* to the actions of the triune God.

When all of these are tied together, the priority of the Trinitarian shape surfaces from the message of Acts. Acts is about God, the God who continues his mission to glorify himself by blessing the nations through his chosen people. Though this book is about God, the agency of God never negates the agency of his people; it empowers them. The time has come to look at each of these theological themes in more detail for the renewal of the church.

Figure 1.2 Theological Themes in Acts



God the Father Orchestrates

*For if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail;
but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them.*

ACTS 5:38–39

The Father and the Ensemble

One of my favorite classical songs is Gustav Holst’s “Jupiter, the Bringer of Jolity.” A long time ago, I found a YouTube video of “Jupiter” performed by the Osaka Philharmonic Orchestra with Eiji Oue as the conductor. He likely spent countless hours on this project, working through the mistakes, the mistimings, and mismanagement.

Midway through the song, the string section arises in full force. Oue’s face fills with emotion as he directs them to be one with their instruments and one another. He conducts a masterpiece. He guides the song to its natural, prewritten, and beautiful end.¹

If Acts is a song, then the Father conducts the ensemble. Similar to Oue, God the Father orchestrates all actions in Acts toward their prewritten and beautiful end. He has a plan. And it will be accomplished.

¹ My wife and I love the song so much that we used the strings portion for her walk down the aisle at our wedding.

Though most theological works on Acts don't begin with the Father (and sometimes don't even include him in one of the themes), it is clear throughout the narrative that all the action finds its source *in* and stems *from* the Father.²

All other refrains in Acts flow from the Father's orchestration. Acts *is* about Christ, the Spirit, and the church, but these—to use early church language—are begotten from, spirate from, and are born from God the Father. A theology of Acts must start with the Father, his plan and orchestration.

It is the Father who acts (2:11; 14:27; 15:4, 7–8, 14; 21:19); speaks (2:17; 3:21; 7:6–7; 8:14); attests to Jesus (2:22); raised Jesus from the dead (2:24; 3:15, 22, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 7:37; 10:40; 13:30, 37; 26:8); anointed Jesus (10:38); appointed him to be judge (10:42); swore an oath to David (2:30); is seated in the heavens (2:33; 7:56); made Jesus Lord, Messiah, Leader, and Savior (2:36; 5:31); calls people (2:39); deserves worship (2:47; 3:8–9; 4:21; 16:25; 18:7, 13; 22:3; 23:1; 24:14–16); is the God of Israel's ancestors (3:13, 25; 7:17, 32, 46; 13:17; 22:14); fulfilled what he said in the Scriptures (3:18; 13:33); deserves obedience (4:19; 5:4, 29; 10:4); listens (4:24); reveals (4:31; 6:7; 10:28; 12:24); orchestrates (5:39; 10:15); delivers (7:25, 35, 45); punishes (7:42; 12:23); has power (8:10); gave the Holy Spirit (5:32; 8:20; 11:17); is glorious (7:2, 55; 11:18), great (10:46), gracious (11:23; 13:43; 14:26; 27:24), present (7:9; 10:33), and alive (14:15); helps (26:22); doesn't show favoritism (10:34); appoints witnesses (10:41); is to be feared (13:16, 26); performs wonders (15:12; 19:11); calls (16:10); created all things (17:24); commands (17:30); demands repentance (20:21); deserves thanks (27:35; 28:15); has a plan (20:27); establishes a church (20:28); and provides salvation (28:28).

Darrell Bock rightly declares, “God is the major actor in Luke-Acts,” and Squires concludes the plan of God “functions as the foundational theological motif” for Luke-Acts.³

2 Bock and Squires are notable exceptions. Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: God's Promised Program, Realized for All Nations*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012); John T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts*, SNTSMS 76 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

3 Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, 99; John Squires, “The Plan of God in the Acts of the Apostles,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and

While many focus on the earthly sphere, everything in Acts moves according to the heavenly scepter. Luke's principal theological, philosophical, logical, geographical compass is the heavens. All earthly action has prior orchestration and plan.

This chapter will cover the Father's orchestration in three parts. First, I will look at the plan of God, then the word of God, and finally at the kingdom of God.⁴ As Rosner summarizes,

The message in Acts is described as the "word of God" (see Luke 3:2–17; 5:1; 8:11; Acts 4:29, 31; 6:2, 7; 8:14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5, 7, 44, 46, 48; 16:32; 17:13; 18:11), its content concerns "the kingdom of God" (1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:23, 31) and "the salvation of God" (28:28; cf., 7:25), and its progress depends upon the "purpose," "will" and "plan" of God.⁵

However, complementing Rosner, I will focus on the word not only as a message but also as an *agent*. God is the conductor, whose agent is the word (orchestra), and the music is the kingdom ("Jupiter").⁶ To put it in the frame of Genesis, God's creative will is performed by his word, which brings life (the kingdom). This is the song God has been directing from the beginning of time.

Table 1.1 The Father Orchestrates

Concept	Logical Relationship	Orchestra Analogy
The Plan of God	Purpose	Conductor
The Word of God	Agent	Orchestra
The Kingdom of God	Content	Performance

David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 23. For the detailed discussion, see Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts*.

4 I will spend the most time on the first point (the plan of God), as subsequent chapters will deal with the other themes.

5 Brian Rosner, "The Progress of the Word," in Howard and Peterson, *Witness to the Gospel*, 224.

6 Or, to change the metaphor to a governmental analogy, God is the administrator (Bartlett), the word is his press secretary (C. J. Craig) and the content is the briefing (Toby). Let the reader understand. Other "agents" will be discussed in later chapters.

The Plan of God

Luke arranges the story of the early church in the broadest possible theological context: the plan of God.⁷ He begins his two volumes by speaking of “events that have been fulfilled among us” (Luke 1:1 CSB) pointing to the plan of God behind it all. Enhancing this picture is Luke’s use of terms such as “plan,” “foreknown,” “foretold,” “predestined,” “promised,” “ordained,” or “worked” through God’s choice.⁸

Boulē in Acts

Every theme is somehow connected to the Father’s plan (*boulē*), and thus Luke employs this term as a theological ballast. The Father’s plan can be seen by Luke’s emphasis on the activity of the Son and Spirit, manifestations of divine agents, and even miracles. Human characters are subsidiary to the larger story of divine activity.⁹

The word *boulē* is a political and governmental term employed in cities of the Empire.¹⁰ It was a management expression, an administration of a *polis* led by some governmental official. The Father’s plan in Acts is to fulfill his promises by creating his new community that will bless the world.

The Father’s agents are the Son and Spirit. Peter specifically uses the word *boulē* to speak of God’s “appointed or ‘definite plan’” in terms of Jesus’s being delivered up to death (Acts 2:23). God’s plan is centered on Jesus’s passion and glorification. Jesus creates a new people and brings about a new era.¹¹

7 See Squires, “The Plan of God.”

8 Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, 125.

9 Beverly R. Gaventa, *Acts*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 27.

10 NIDNTTE, ed. Moises Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 1:256, says, “The noun *boulē* means ‘will’ and, more strongly, ‘determination,’ but it freq. carries the sense ‘counsel, advice’ and can be applied to a deliberative body or ‘council’ (Homer *Il.* 2.53).” A local city typically had a state council (*boulē*), a male citizen body (*dēmos*), divided into tribes (*phylē*), comprising the state assembly (*ekklēsia*).

11 The plan of God is focused on Jesus. In Isaiah 9:5 it says a child to be born will be a wonderful “counselor” (*boulēs*). Isaiah 11:2 states the Spirit of “counsel” (*boulēs*) will rest upon the anointed figure. See also Ps. 33:10–11; Mic. 4:2.

Then Jesus himself announces this new era when he appears to his disciples after his suffering to tell them the plan is on track. The next phase is about anticipation: they are to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4–5; 2:33; cf. Luke 3:16; 24:49). If Acts is about the Holy Spirit, it is first about the Father's promise.

In Acts 2, the plan unfurls as the Spirit falls on God's people. The Father's promise comes to fulfillment as the Spirit is poured out on all flesh (2:17) and the Spirit is then given to Samaritans (8:14–17) and Cornelius (10:44–45), signifying Gentiles are also welcome and thus fulfilling the Lord's words from Acts 1:4 (cf. 11:16).

However, the plan of God for his people that centers on the Son and Spirit does not advance unopposed. Neither earthly nor spiritual powers will comply with the divine decree. Ironically, every effort to thwart only furthers his plan.

A particularly clear example of this comes in Acts 4:23–31 when the apostles gather and pray for boldness after they have been castigated for performing a resurrection miracle. They reflect on this opposition, noting even that this suffering is the *boulē* of God. The people gathered against Jesus “to do whatever your hand and your [*boulē*] had predestined to take place” (4:28).¹² The apostles put the opposition to them under the banner of the *boulē* of God. Persecution is not outside God's will. It is his very design. Jesus already told them many would lay their hands on them, persecute them, and deliver them up to synagogues, prisons, kings, and governors (Luke 21:12).

God's sovereign plan also shines in Gamaliel's speech when the apostles are once more arrested for preaching and healing in Jesus's name (Acts 5:33–42). In 5:38–39, Gamaliel draws his conclusion from the two examples he has given, both of which logically lead to staying away from these men. He says, “If this *boulē* is of human origin, it will fail” (my translation and paraphrase). On the other hand, if it is of God, the temple leaders will not be able to destroy them. Gamaliel says the movement will either be destroyed on its own (because it is

12 Both the words in 4:28, “plan” and “predestined,” link back to 2:23.

of human origin) or no one will be able to destroy it (because it is the *boulē* of God).

Gamaliel adds one final note indicating the possibility that they may even be found “opposing God” (*theomachoi*), a word that more literally means “God-fighter.” Those who oppose God’s people and his plan are “God-fighters.” Those to whom Luke writes are God-lovers (*theophilus*, 1:1). In Luke’s theology, there are two paths: loving God’s plan or warring against it.

Fulfillment in Acts

Not only is the plan of God evident in the use of the term *boulē*, but every narrative in Acts, from the smallest to the largest, can be put under the banner of *fulfillment*. This means Luke wrote showing the Father was conducting and orchestrating all the events. For example, in Acts, the large narrative blocks as a whole fulfill the Scripture.¹³ Most argue 1:8 functions as the table of contents for Acts:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

The rest of Acts details how the apostles and God’s people are witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and Rome. However, many miss the Isaiah echoes packed into this commission (see table 1.2).

Acts, therefore, fulfills Isaianic prophecy. However, as one turns to more detailed narrative analysis, the fulfillment theme continues as the Old Testament Scriptures are either quoted or alluded to. In every section of Acts, evidence exists that God directs this story. God conducts the entire musical score by directing each individual instrument.

¹³ The fulfillment theme can be further seen in the way that the term *dei* (it is necessary) occurs throughout Acts. Luke says it was necessary that Judas defect and be replaced (1:16–20). It is necessary that Jesus ascend (3:21). It is necessary that the apostles be persecuted and obey God rather than man (5:29; 9:16; 14:22). It is necessary for Paul to go to Jerusalem and Rome and Caesar (19:21; 23:11; 27:24). It is even necessary that Paul’s ship must run aground on the way to Rome (27:26).

Table 1.2 Fulfillment of Isaianic Prophecy

Acts 1:8	Isaiah
“When the Holy Spirit has come on you”	“Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high” (32:15)
“You will be my witnesses”	“You are my witnesses” (43:10, 12; 44:8)
“To the end of the earth”	“I will make you as a light for the nations, / that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (49:6; cf. 45:22)

Jesus ascends in fulfillment of Psalm 2, Psalm 110:1, and Daniel 7:13–14 (Acts 1:9–11). Both Judas’s defection and replacement fulfill the Scriptures (Acts 1:15–26; cf. Pss. 69:25; 109:8). The pouring out of the Spirit fulfills Joel 2:28–32 (Acts 2:1–21). Jesus’s resurrection and exaltation completes the hopes for a Messiah (Acts 2:22–36; cf. Pss. 16:8–11; 110:1). The temple restoration scene of the lame man walking and leaping alludes to hopes for a new era (Isa. 35:6; Mic. 4:6–7).

Peter’s sermon about the raised servant fulfills the servant theme (Acts 3:11–26; cf. Isa. 52:13–53:12). Even the temple conflict completes the Scriptures as the apostles quote from Psalm 2 (Acts 4:1–31). The generous community embodies the hopes of a new Torah people (Acts 4:32–37; 6:1–7; cf. Deut. 15:4), and even Ananias and Sapphira’s death satisfies the fate of those who oppose God and his people (Acts 5:1–11; cf. Lev. 10; Josh. 7). Stephen’s temple sermon walks through Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and the entire biblical storyline with an eye on the presence of God (Acts 7:2–53; cf. Isa. 66:1–2).

Acts 8–12 also fulfills the Scriptures. Philip, led by the providence of God, unites Samaria to Jerusalem, fulfilling Ezekiel 37. The eunuch becomes a pillar in God’s temple, achieving Isaiah 56:3–8 (Acts 8). Paul is called as a prophet of old and sees Jesus when Ezekiel’s vision was obscured as to who was on the throne (Acts 9; cf. Ezek. 1:26–28). Peter realizes God does not show favoritism when he goes into Cornelius’s home (Acts 10:34–35; cf. Deut. 10:17–19). Antioch becomes the first multiethnic gathering, realizing Isaiah 55:3–5 (Acts 11:19–30). God

sends his witnesses past Jerusalem in fulfillment of a new exodus pattern (Acts 12; cf. Isa. 40:3; 41:18–19; 43:18–19; 48:20; 51:11; 52:11–12).

Acts 13–20 also fulfills the Scriptures. Paul goes to the coasts and islands (Isa. 11:11; 24:15) and proclaims Jesus as a light to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47; cf. Isa. 49:6) and the one who rebuilds David's tent (Acts 15:16–17; cf. Amos 9:11–12). Paul declares Jesus fulfills the Scriptures (Acts 13:17–39; 14:3; 17:2–3; 18:5; 19:8), God as the creator of all things (Acts 14:15; 17:24–29), and the arrival of the Spirit (19:3–5), and warns those who will not listen (Acts 13:41; cf. Hab. 1:5).

In the final section of Acts (Acts 21–28), though Paul seems to be caught up in a swirl of events beyond his control, the narrative indicates this is all according to divine plan. Prophecies and visions fill the narrative (20:23; 21:4; 21:11; 23:11) to remind readers, in the midst of the whirlwind, that the divine plan is carried forth (19:21; 20:22–23; 21:11). God's plan is for Paul to witness to kings and Gentiles. The trials fulfill Act 9:15 and Luke 21:12–15 as he testifies before kings. Even Israel's rejection of Paul's message Luke affirms as in accordance with God's plan and the Scriptures (Acts 28:25–28; Isa. 6:9–10).

Nothing—not a single narrative—falls outside the banner of fulfillment and God's plan. Luke's driving purpose in writing Acts is to show the choppy beginning of the church is still all according to divine plan, his administration.

Overall, the point of Acts is clear. The Father orchestrates all of this according to his will. This is his plan. This is his symphony. This is his masterpiece.

The Word of God

If the plan, purpose, administration of God comes logically first in Acts, then at least one agent of this plan is the *word of God*. Though this theme will be covered more fully in a later chapter, a brief preview is appropriate here.

While we might be tempted to think of the word of God only as the contents of the plan of God, the word has a more active force in Acts

and the Bible as a whole. God's agents for his plan are the Son, the Spirit, and his sanctified (his people), but also his word.

In Genesis, God creates by his word. In Isaiah, his word doesn't return to him void (Isa. 55:10–11). In the Gospels and Acts, God's word grows and spreads. In Genesis, Isaiah, and the Gospels, God's plan is to sink his word deep into the soil of the earth so that kingdom trees will multiply.

In Acts, the word appropriately becomes a powerful force through which God conquers.¹⁴ The Spirit empowers the apostles on mission to spread what Luke calls either "the word" or "the word of God/the Lord" (4:31; 8:14, 25; 11:1; 13:5, 7, 44, 46, 48; 16:32; 17:13; 18:11).¹⁵ Luke most commonly describes it as the word *of God*, likely interpreted as a possessive or subjective genitive: God's word. It is the Father's word, his agent.

The word is the Father's agent of new creation and new exodus. It grows and multiplies on the earth, thus becoming a power attributed to God himself. This is most explicitly highlighted in three parallel references in 6:7, 12:24, and 19:20. All of them refer to the word growing, multiplying, and increasing.

These words come directly from the exodus generation who also flourish under persecution (Ex. 1:7, 12, 20). The Father's plan is to establish and grow his community through his word. This is the mission of the triune God.

Table 1.3 The Growth of the Word in Acts

6:7	And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.
12:24	But the word of God increased and multiplied.
19:20	So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

¹⁴ David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 150.

¹⁵ The "word of God" occurs eleven times in Acts; the "word of the Lord" occurs ten times, and many times "Lord" refers to Jesus, but not exclusively (cf. 8:25; 11:16; 13:44, 48–49; 15:35–36; 16:32; 19:10, 20; 20:35). The "word of his grace" occurs only in 14:3 and 20:32; "word of the gospel" occurs once in 15:7; "word of salvation" in 13:26; and "word" in the absolute sense occurs in the first twenty chapters of Acts.

If the Father is the conductor of this song, then his word is his orchestra. He directs, guides, and spreads his word so that all might hear the kingdom tune.

The Kingdom of God

The plan of God is to spread the word of God. The *content* of this word is the kingdom of God. From a broader biblical perspective, the kingdom message concerns the king's power over the king's people in the king's place.¹⁶ God's plan from the beginning was to exercise his rule over the earth through humans. Humanity failed, so Jesus arrived as the true King who died as their substitute.

When Jesus arrived, he announced the gospel of the kingdom (Luke 4:43). He is the King. He rules over his people and provides a home for them. Acts argues this kingdom plan is still going forward. Two subjects must be addressed here. First, is the kingdom one of Luke's emphases? Second, what is the kingdom message according to Acts?

Admittedly, Luke does not refer to the kingdom of God much in Acts, but he does so at key points, which frames the entire narrative as a continuation of the kingdom story. Two kingdom of God references occur at the beginning of Acts (1:3, 6) and two at the end (28:23, 31), thus bookending the entire narrative. Four references occur in the body of the work at key transition points in the narrative (8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25).

Almost immediately in the narrative of Acts, we see the kingdom is on Luke's mind. The term first appears in Acts 1:3, where it speaks of Jesus teaching his disciples over a period of forty days about the *kingdom of God* before he left. A few verses later, the disciples gather around him and ask, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

These two references to the kingdom at the beginning of the book create expectations shaping the way we read the rest of the narrative. In

16 Patrick Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018). Some of the following material is based on my Luke section in that book.

his answer to the disciples, Jesus describes the spread of the kingdom to every place. The Father's plan is for his kingdom to expand.

The double reference to the kingdom reappears at the conclusion of Luke's narrative. In Acts 28:23 and 28:31, Paul is imprisoned in Rome, but Luke's point is the word of God still goes forth. The local Jewish leaders arrange to meet Paul and come to the place where he is staying, and "from morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the *kingdom of God*" (Acts 28:23). The last verse of Luke's narrative closes the kingdom framing by speaking of Paul proclaiming the *kingdom of God* "with all boldness and without hindrance" (28:31).

As Alan Thompson explains, in both of "these contexts there is an emphasis on the comprehensive teaching about the kingdom of God."¹⁷ In 1:3, it is Jesus's teaching; 1:6 contains the disciple's question; 28:23 is where Paul is meeting a large number of Jews; and in 28:31, Luke closes his narrative with a summary statement of Paul's preaching. Each of these has a comprehensive summary or conceptual framework summary to the message of both Jesus and Paul.

What many overlook is the kingdom statements in the middle of the narrative. Four key kingdom references occur, mapping onto Luke's geographical progression. After the Jerusalem narrative, readers come across a reference to the kingdom of God in Samaria when Philip preaches the good news about the kingdom of God centered on Jesus Christ and many are baptized (8:12).

Then at the end of Paul's first missionary journey, he travels back through the places he has evangelized and strengthens them, saying that through many tribulations they must enter the kingdom of God (14:22). In Paul's final locale as a free man, Ephesus, he comes into the synagogue and boldly reasons with the people about the kingdom of God (19:8). Finally, in Paul's farewell speech at Miletus, he summarizes his message as "proclaiming the kingdom" (20:25). Each block of Luke's narrative includes at least one reference to the kingdom.

17 Alan Thompson, *Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 44.

Table 1.4 Kingdom of God References in Acts

Acts 1–7 (Galilee/Jerusalem)	Acts 1:3, 6
Acts 8–12 (Judea and Samaria)	Acts 8:12
Acts 13–20 (Paul's Journeys)	Acts 14:22; 19:8; 20:25
Acts 21–28 (Paul's Trials)	Acts 28:23, 31

However, this raises the question: If the apostles proclaim the kingdom, then where is it? Luke's answer to this comes in Acts 1:6–8 when the disciples ask if Jesus is going to restore the kingdom at this time? Jesus answers with a “no, not now” in 1:7 and then “yes, now” in 1:8. To put this another way, Jesus seems to give a “Not Yet” and “Already” answer in 1:7–8.

In 1:7, Jesus says no: “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.” The consummation of the kingdom plan is set by the Father. So he rejects their attempt to calculate the timing. However, he goes on to say yes in 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Therefore, when the disciples ask if he is going to restore the kingdom to Israel, he reframes how they are to think of it in terms of receiving the Holy Spirit and welcoming more into the kingdom life.

This transitions us to the second issue: the content of the kingdom message in Acts. Luke, as a specific author of scripture, emphasizes particular aspects of the kingdom. He focuses both on *Jesus as the Savior and King, and the upside-down nature of the kingdom—more specifically, the people welcomed into the kingdom.*

If the kingdom is the message of the apostles, then at the center of this message is Jesus. Without Jesus, there is no kingdom. He is the King, the inaugurator, the ruler, and the Suffering Servant of the kingdom. His life, death, resurrection, and ascension are the key to understanding the kingdom. Without him, the kingdom plan is dead in its tracks.

All of Jesus's actions are oriented toward the goal of welcoming more into the kingdom. He dies for his people, he lives so that they too might have life, and he ascends so they too might be glorified. Luke specifically puts emphasis on the "surprising" converts to the kingdom. Jesus does this in Luke as he proclaims good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, liberty for those who are oppressed, and the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18–19). Jesus says the Spirit of the Lord anoints him to do these things.

Then in Acts, this same Spirit anoints his followers as they go out and welcome the marginal into this kingdom plan. Luke's picture of the people of the kingdom was culturally and ethically daring. They welcome the marginal, the rejected, the poor, tax collectors, sinners, women, Samaritans, and Gentiles. It is the lame, the eunuch, the Samaritans, those of backwater towns, and barbarians who respond to the good news of the kingdom.

This radical kingdom message drove the religious leaders to seek the apostles' execution. The symbolic universe Jesus created challenged the status quo and angered those around him. God's plan was to create a new kingdom community where the oppressed and poor were welcome.

The Spirit initiates hospitality toward these groups through miracles, rescues God's people, and judges God's enemies. Miracles abound in Acts. The lame are healed (3:1–10; 14:8–10), buildings are shaken (4:31), apostles are set free by the angel of the Lord (5:17–21), Philip is transported by the Spirit (8:40), light appears to Saul (9:1–9), Saul is blinded and healed (9:8–19), Aeneas is healed (9:32–35), Dorcas is restored to life (9:36–41), Herod is struck down (12:20–23), Elymas is blinded (13:6–11), demons are cast out (16:16–18), Paul is freed by an earthquake (16:25–27), Eutychus is raised from the dead (20:7–12), Paul is unaffected by a snake bite (28:3–5), and the father of Publius is healed (28:8).

If the apostles and other Christians needed certainty concerning God's plan, then the miracles give evidence that God's kingdom plan is happening in the present. The kingdom is present by the Spirit. The miracles point to the presence of Jesus's kingdom in the midst of

Satan's. Luke interprets those who are lame, imprisoned, and blinded as "oppressed by the devil" (10:38) and the role of the apostles is to turn people from darkness to light, or from the power of Satan to God (26:18). A cosmic and apocalyptic battle unfolds on the pages of Acts. To domesticate it does violence to a plain reading of the text.

Conclusion

I began this chapter with a conductor who orchestrates a symphony. The Father is the conductor of all things. Luke doesn't depart from good Jewish theology. A prewritten and beautiful end to God's story is coming, and Acts fits into this drama.

A theology of Acts thus logically begins with the one who orchestrates, with the plan of God, the word of God, the kingdom of God. All of Acts thus fulfills God's plans. Acts is a fulfillment document.

Every human being is tempted to think the story of the universe centers on them, but Acts reminds us this is primarily God's story and we are simply included in it. We can either play a part in furthering his purpose or oppose it. If we oppose it, we will be crushed and crush ourselves along the way. If we step into God's administration, there may be persecution and pain, but there will also be great contentment.

Later, we will look to more participants in the Father's symphony, but here we focused on the word of God. The word is personified in Acts; it is a divine agent. It conquers in the midst of opposition; it grows and multiplies. The Father's plan is executed through the word.

The content of this word is the kingdom of God. It is his plan for the earth. A new King has stepped onto the scene and is remaking all things, starting with this little community. God's administration is good. Through his King, he is welcoming all to his side. This includes the poor, the ethnically other, women, and the socially ostracized.

All of the other themes in Acts, and their subsidiary themes, are in some way linked to God the Father and his plan. The Father has decisively interrupted history through the sending of the Son and the Spirit, and not seeing the Father's role in all of Luke's recounting overlooks a major refrain, if not the major refrain.