The Role of the Ascended Jesus in the Acts of the Apostles

Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Theology (New Testament) at Stellenbosch University

By Hansung Park

Promoter: Prof. Marius J. Nel

Faculty of Theology
Department of New Testament

December 2019

Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (saved to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: December 2019

H. Park

Abstract

This study endeavours to rediscover the significance of the ascension narrative as a key for understanding the activity of Jesus as divine character within the whole Acts narrative by exploring ancient ascension accounts and the theme of divine involvement in Graeco-Roman historiography. This study offers a fresh approach. It illuminates the connection between ascension accounts and the use of divine involvement in ancient historiography, and demonstrates that the ascension of Jesus can be understood in the light of the connection. By extending the investigation to both Graeco-Roman and Jewish ascension accounts, Chapter 2 demonstrates that the ascension narrative reports the absence of the ascended character on earth and the presence of him as a god (Graeco-Roman) or like Elijah (Jewish) in heaven, including an expectation of activity of the ascended character from heaven. Chapter 3 then ascertains that the portrayal of divine character as the driving force of stories/history is a common feature in ancient historiographies, and that a significant number of Graeco-Roman historians insist on divine involvement in human affairs. The Acts of the Apostles shares this feature of Graeco-Roman historiography. Setting Acts in conversation with the previous chapters, focusing on the ascension narrative and the portrayal of the heavenly Jesus' appearances, shows that the ascension narrative was understood as Jesus' divine identity and his activity from heaven for people. It also highlights Luke's theological view that the divine character, like Jesus, is the driving force of the story/history. All of this is affected in fundamental ways by Luke's portrayal and testimonies of the ascended Jesus' activity in the Acts narrative. As a result, this thesis clarifies that the ascension narrative in Acts does not merely report the absence of Jesus and his exaltation (Acts 2:33); it also enables the ascended Jesus' active involvement in the Acts narrative as a whole. Jesus as the divine character thus continues to participate in God's plan for the church/the disciples as described and testified in Acts. Although Jesus is taken up into heaven, Jesus' characterisation makes him active and present rather than silent and absent in the Acts narrative.

3

Opsomming

Hierdie studie streef om die betekenis te herontdek van die hemelvaart-narratief as sleutel vir die verstaan van Jesus se bedrywighede as goddelike karakter in die geheel van Handelinge deur antieke hemelvaart-vertellinge en die tema van goddelike betrokkenheid by Grieks-Romeinse historiografie te ondersoek. Die studie bied ʻn vars benadering. Dit belig die verbintenis tussen hemelvaart-vertellinge en die gebruik van goddelike betrokkenheid in antieke historiografie, en demonstreer dat die hemelvaart van Jesus in die lig van hierdie band, verstaan kan word. Deur die ondersoek uit te brei na beide Grieks-Romeinse en Joodse hemelvaart-vertellinge, demonstreer Hoofstuk 2 dat die hemelvaart-narratief getuig van die afwesigheid van die opgevaarde karakter op aarde en sy teenwoordigheid as ʻn god (Grieks-Romeins) of soos Elia (Joods) in die hemel, insluitend ʻn verwagting van optrede van die opgevaarde karakter vanuit die hemel. Hoofstuk 3 stel vas dat die uitbeelding van goddelikheid as die dryfkrag van verhale/geskiedenis ʻn algemene eienskap van antieke historiografieë is, en dat ʻn beduidende aantal van Grieks-Romeinse geskiedkundiges aandring op goddelike betrokkenheid by menslike gebeure. Die Handelinge van die Apostels deel hierdie eienskap van Grieks-Romeinse historiografie. Wanneer Handelinge in gesprek tree met die vorige hoofstukke en fokus op die hemelvaart-narratief en die uitbeelding van die hemelse Jesus se verskynings, dui dit aan dat die hemelvaart-narratief destyds verstaan is as bevestiging van Jesus se goddelike identiteit en sy optrede vanuit die hemel vir mense. Dit beklemtoon ook Lukas se teologiese standpunt dat ʻn goddelike karakter, soos Jesus, die dryfkrag agter die storie/geskiedenis is. Dit word alles op wesenlike maniere beïnvloed deur Lukas se uitbeelding en getuienisse van die opgevaarde Jesus se optrede in die Handelinge-narratief. Die gevolg is dat hierdie tesis dit duidelik maak dat die hemelvaart-narratief in Handelinge nie net verslag doen oor die afwesigheid van Jesus en sy ophemeling (Hand. 2:33) nie; dit maak ook die opgevaarde Jesus se aktiewe deelname in die Handelinge-narratief as ʻn geheel, moontlik. Jesus as goddelike karakter neem dus nog steeds deel aan God se plan vir die kerk/die dissipels soos beskryf en van getuig in Handelinge. Hoewel Jesus opgeneem is na die hemel, maak sy karakterisering hom aktief en teenwoordig in die Handelinge-narratief, eerder as stil en afwesig.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the product of the support and care of a great number of people, to whom I owe much more than these notes of thanks can say.

To my supervisor, Prof. Marius J. Nel, I owe a great debt of thanks. From the outset he encouraged me in my work, provided me with many details and suggestions for research, and carefully and patiently read the manuscript. His eagle eye saved me from many an unfortunate slip.

To my family, I owe the greatest debt of gratitude. My parents, brother, aunt, father-in-law, and other in-laws in Korea have continually offered me warm encouragement, prayers and support. Particularly, my lovely wife, Dongji Park, has assisted me in innumerable ways. The birth of my children, Sol Park and Jiham Park, in South Africa, and their presence have been full of the joy, giving me the power to constantly and patiently study without negative emotions. Whatever I say here, cannot do full justice to the extent and the value of their contribution.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. New Testament research on the ascension of Jesus

The ascension of Jesus is well attested in the New Testament.[1] Luke relates the ascension of Jesus in his Gospel of Luke and Acts. The two versions differ in their theological function within their respective literary settings. The ascension scene in the Gospel of Luke functions as the ending of the book (Parsons 1987:110; 2015:355). The book of Acts has a longer version of the ascension of Jesus, providing chronological and geographical information which bridges the gap[2] between the Gospel of Luke and Acts (Van Stempvoort 1958/9:42) and functions as the narrative's beginning, allowing readers of the text to anticipate major plot developments in Acts. For example, it anticipates the formation of the church (Parsons 1987: 24; 185-6) as the realm in which Jesus' lordship is accepted (Sleeman 2009:74). Luke portrays the ascended Jesus' involvement in the growth of the church (Acts 2:47), the suffering of his followers for his sake (Acts 7:54-60), healings (Acts 3:6; 9:34), the conversion of Paul and his missionary journeys (Acts 9:5; 18:9-10; 23:11), as well as in the expansion of the proclamation of the gospel to the gentiles (Acts 26:23). Also, in the speeches[3] in Acts, Jesus is not silent, but active in various ways.

Despite the importance of the ascension for Luke, Biblical scholarship has shown scant interest in it since the 20th century (Gulley 1992:473). There is also no general agreement about what the ascension entails for Luke. The historicity of the ascension itself has furthermore been questioned, while a great deal of emphasis has been placed on delineating and assessing the pre-existing tradition and its subsequent redaction, which underlie the ascension narratives in Luke's writing.

Form and redaction critical studies on the ascension of Jesus in Luke, tend to downplay its

---

[1] See Mk. 16:19; Lk. 24:50-51; Jn. 3:13; 6:62; 20:17; Acts 1:9-11; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:19-20; Col. 3:1; Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Tim. 3:16; and 1 Pet. 3:21-22.
[2] It is noteworthy that he does not retell the crucifixion or the resurrection of Jesus.
[3] This study presumes that one of Luke's important historiographical techniques is speech writing (Rothschild 2015:26-7; cf. Gempf 1994:259-303). Distinctively in the speech form in Acts, early Christians such as Peter and Paul speak of the work of God or the Lord in history, indicating that it is a crucial theological perspective in Luke. In this sense, examining what Jesus' followers say in their speeches in Acts, is a valuable way in which to ascertain how Lukan theology adapts how the Israelites perceived God in history.

significance in the extant Acts narrative. Some, Lohfink (1971:150-1), Conzelmann (1961:203-4), and Parsons (1987:62, 150), understand the ascension as the departure of Jesus. They thus emphasise the absence of Jesus in the history of the church. Franklin (1970:191-200), however, claims that Jesus' ascension was the climax of redemptive history and that it reveals the lordship of Jesus by depicting him as sitting at the right hand of God. Maddox (1982:139) also highlights the present lordship of Jesus in Acts, who is revealed as having the status of being the living Lord Jesus rather than a person of the past.

Despite the investigation of the importance of Jesus' ascension by the scholars mentioned above, a number of important questions still need to be answered in terms of the role it plays in the Acts narrative and speeches. John Maile (1986:56) comes the closest to giving an answer, in that he anticipates that "the ascension is the explanation of the continuity between the ministry of Jesus and that of the church". Yet, despite this recognition of the impact of the continuity of Jesus' ministry in Acts, he does not explore this in the narrative of Acts. Jesus' continuous involvement from heaven also remains largely unnoticed and undeveloped by subsequent scholarship.

Parsons' (1987) approach to the ascension focuses on the literary function of Luke's two ascension narratives. In regard to Acts, he notes that the ascension in Acts functions as the narrative's beginning, but he does not focus on the further role of the ascended Jesus in the rest of the Acts narrative.

Building on Parsons, Matthew Sleeman (2009:6) recently attempted to make a case for the continuing activity of the heavenly Jesus "within Acts as a narrative whole". In line with this, Uytanlet (2014:33-44) argues that divine involvement like that of the ascended Jesus is a common feature in ancient historiographies (Aune 1989:132-6). As Shauf (2015:18-9) observes, a significant number of Graeco-Roman historians insist on divine involvement in human affairs. The continued involvement of the ascended Jesus in Acts is thus typical of ancient historical narratives. Therefore, this study will pay attention to the role of the ascended Jesus in the entire Acts narrative and not just its beginning, as has been the case with most scholars, in view of the role divine figures play in Graeco-Roman historical writings. It will not just understand the ascension narrative as making an announcement of

Jesus' absence in preparation for the Spirit's descent on the disciples. Instead, it will be viewed from the perspective of the essential role that the ascended Jesus actively plays in Acts in producing new faith communities, comforting the persecuted early churches, healing the sick, and the widespread proclamation of the gospel.

1.2. **Research questions**

The following specific research questions will be addressed:

(1) How would the theme of the ascension of a character to heaven have been understood by its original audience within the Graeco-Roman world and the Jewish world?

(2) How do references to divine actions in human affairs function in Graeco-Roman historiographies?

(3) What is the function of Luke's portrayal of the involvement of divine characters, and especially that of the ascended Jesus, in the narration of the mission of the early church in Acts?

1.3. **Delimitation**

The goal of this study is to ascertain the significance of the ascended Jesus in Acts as an important character within its narrative. It will focus on Luke's use of the title "Lord"[4] for Jesus in Acts as well as on his portrayal of Jesus as a character in the Acts narrative.[5] Since this research is mainly a literary one, it will primarily undertake a genre and narrative analysis of Acts. The narrative analysis will focus on the characterisation of the ascended Jesus.

1.4. **Aim of the research**

The proposed research aims to investigate the significance of the ascension narrative as a key for understanding the activity of Jesus as divine character within the Acts narrative as a

---

[4] The Book of Acts frequently uses κύριος in a complex manner. The use of the Lukan κύριος "increases to reflect the locational reality of the κύριος in heaven" (Rowe 2006:189). In Acts Jesus is lord of all, but the use of κύριος in Acts makes it difficult to discern whether or not this term simply indicates the existence of Jesus in heaven. Rowe (2006:189) provides many other examples which can be understood to indicate a heavenly Jesus as Lord: "the use of κύριος in Acts 1:24; 2:47; 8:23, 25; 11:23, 24; 15:35, 6; 16:14; 19:10, etc.".

[5] For a recent, brief analysis of God as main character in Acts, see Steve Walton, The Acts – of God? What is the "Acts of the Apostles" all about?*, EQ* 80(4), 2008, 291-306; Richard B. Vinson, The God of Luke-Acts*, Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 68(4), 2014, 376-88.

whole. Through a genre and narrative analysis, the ascension narrative in Acts will be studied in the text as it occurs in Nestle-Aland[28]. The relationship between the ascension of Jesus as divine character and other themes in Acts' historical narrative will also be studied. This is important, since the ascension narrative is closely associated with the theme of divine involvement in Acts.

The divine as the driving force of the story/history is found not only in Acts, but is also a common feature in other Graeco-Roman historical narratives (Uytanlet 2014:25, 67-9; Fowler 2010:319; Squires 1993:38). [6] Thus, a comparative study of selected similar narratives of the ascension of Jesus in Acts and other ascension stories in Greco-Roman and Jewish writings is worth examination. This comparative study will be undertaken in two phases.

Firstly, Graeco-Roman ascension accounts will be compared to Old Testament and other Jewish texts (2.2.2; 2.2.3; 2.3.1; 2,3,4) in order to (i) identify the characteristics of the ascension portrayals in the various literature sources, and (ii) examine whether or not a post-ascension character is also engaged in human affairs (2.2.3.1; 2.3.5).

Secondly, this study will explore historians' use of divine involvement and divine characters' involvement in Graeco-Roman historical narratives to identify their literary and theological function by undertaking a genre analysis (Chapter 3). The primary goal of this genre analysis is not to attempt to classify the Book of Acts, but rather to ascertain how the presentation of divine characters' acts in ancient historical narratives should be understood. This study will therefore focus on characterisation, especially that of Jesus, in the narrative of Acts, by utilising a specific theory of characterisation in texts (4.2). It will (i) examine how the ascension of Jesus relates to the theme of Jesus' involvement in Acts and trace the way in which this is developed within the Acts narrative. It will also (ii) pay attention to the role of genre (4.3) in order to determine if Jesus' involvement in Acts is comparable to Graeco-

---

[6] For instance, in his work, Herodotus recounts that the reason for the failure of Croesus' invasion of Persia, was his misinterpretation of an oracle (Herodotus, *Persian Wars* 1.71). Before invading Persia, Croesus ensured that his campaign would be successful from the oracle (Herodotus, *Persian Wars* 1.53). After his defeat in battle, he ascribed the disaster solely to the actions of the divine (Herodotus, *Persian Wars* 1.91). The ancients thought that one therefore cannot exclude the role of the divine as an explanation of human affairs in ancient historiography.

Roman historical accounts of the actions of divine characters in history (Uytanlet 2014:33; 41; 68-9).[7]

1.5. **Hypothesis**

The hypothesis this study wants to investigate, is that the ascension narrative in Acts does not merely report the absence of Jesus and his exaltation (Acts 2:33), but also enables the ascended Jesus' active involvement in the Acts narrative as a whole. Jesus as character thus continues to participate in God's plan for the church in explicit and implicit ways.

1.6. **Methodology**

In order to determine the significance of the ascension of Jesus in Acts, this study will make use of both narrative and genre criticism to understand the activity of characters like Jesus/gods in a given historical-narrative like Acts. It will thus focus on the character of Jesus in Acts and other divine figures in a selection of comparable texts (3.4; 3.5; 4.3). A theory of characterisation (4.5) is, therefore, necessary to elucidate the way in which characters relate to each other as well as the plot, events and settings in narratives.

For a thorough understanding of divine characters (Jesus/gods) and their involvement in human affairs in a historical-narrative, this study will primarily utilise Cornelis Bennema's (2016:365; 2013:41) so-called "comprehensive and non-reductionist theory" of character. This theory challenges the dominant view that New Testament characters are static in much the same way as Graeco-Roman stock/flat characters, and that there is therefore a clear distinction between ancient and modern characters (Bennema 2014:24-5). Instead, Bennema offers a different theory of literary characters, and argues that in literature there is, no dichotomy between the personal or individual traits of Hebrew and Greek characters, or between those of modern and ancient characters. According to his observation, ancient characters can be complex, change, be dynamic, have an inner life and even show personality (Bennema 2014:383-9). While these are not identical to the traits of modern characters, the differences are in emphasis rather than kind (Bennema 2016a:367). It is therefore possible to

---

[7] John T. Squires (1993:120; 154; 185) has identified the characteristics related to divine characters' involvement in Hellenistic historiography as epiphanies, oracles, and the language of necessity, which highlight divine involvement in human affairs.

classify characters along a continuum extending from "flat" to quite complex, rather than according to overly simplistic categories.

Bennema's (2016a:373) theory of character is different from other more extreme forms of characterisation theories: (i) it is *comprehensive* and *non-reductionist* in that it considers both ancient and modern theories of character; (ii) it is sufficiently *economic* and *flexible*, but not complicated; (iii) it is *evaluative*.

Bennema's (2016a:367-73; 2013:42-57) comprehensive non-reductionist theory is comprised of a three-dimensional approach: (i) The first component of his approach is to *study character in text and context*, deriving information about a character from the biblical text where the character is portrayed. (ii) Next Bennema (2016a:369; 2013:45-6) uses Yosef Ewen's reductionist classification model to *analyse and classify New Testament characters* along three continua (complexity, development, inner life)[8]; to classify the existing characters "on a continuum of degree of characterization" (from "agent" to "type" to "personality" to "individual") (Bennema 2014:72-90). (iii) The third step is to evaluate characters in relation to the narrative's ideological point of view (Bennema 2013:52-3) and their role in the plot with an eye to its significance for the whole narrative.

This study will use Bennema's theory to examine the character of Jesus in the Acts narrative to understand the different degrees of characterisation, and also examine the post-ascension Jesus in other New Testament texts to understand what each author says about the ascended Jesus.

In order to collect data about Jesus from Acts, the following aspects will be studied: (i) the

---

[8] Due to the fact that Yosef Ewen's work is only available in Hebrew, Bennema relies on the summary of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, in *Narrative fiction: Contemporary Poetic* (New York: Methuen, 1983), 41-2, in which Ewen's three continua are summarised. "Complexity is that characters range from those displaying a single trait to those displaying a complex web of traits, with varying degrees of complexity in between; Development is that characters range from those who show no development to those who are fully developed. Development is not simply the reader's becoming aware of an additional trait of a character later in the narrative or a character's progress, for example, in his or her understanding of Jesus. Instead, development is revealed in the character's ability to surprise the reader, when a newly-found trait replaces another or does not fit neatly into the existing set of traits, implying that the character has changed; Penetration into the inner life is that the characters range from those who are seen only from the outside (their minds remain opaque) to those whose consciousness is presented from within" (Bennema 2016:369).

actions of Jesus; (ii) the speeches of Jesus; (iii) what other characters say about Jesus; and (iv) the narrator's speech. The data will then be examined for the way in which characters associate with other characters, the plot, the setting, and events within a narrative. The focus will especially be on how divine characters are involved in human affairs (4.3).

The reason for studying an ascended deity's involvement in history, is that it was a key aspect of ancient Graeco-Roman historians' theological claims in historiographies. For Chapter 3, I have been approaching a kind of various ancient genres, historiography, through a way of genre studies.

While genre itself is not the focus of this study, the results of recent scholarship on genre will be taken into consideration where appropriate. It will be utilized not to classify the text itself,[9] but, instead, to determine if Acts shares some important similarities in regard to the role of the divine in history with other writings (3.3; 3.4; 4.2; 4.3).[10] The reason for this is that genre studies are essentially a kind of comparative study that enables the reader to gain a sense of a text and knowledge of its contemporary reader/audience. This study therefore utilises the comparative aspect of genre studies to understand how theological claims of authors were commonly conflated with historical claims in ancient historical works. While numerous proposals have been made to classify the genre of Acts (there is no consensus on which kind of ancient genre describes Acts),[11] this study does not focus on genre criticism per se.

---

[9] Whereas many scholars have participated in the debate to classify genres most applicable to Acts, a number of them are reluctant to agree on a definitive answer to the question of Acts' genre (e.g. Alexander 1999; Talbert and Stepp 1998; Blach 2003). Genre scholarship, however, generally agrees that Acts fits the genre of Hellenistic history of some sort or has at least some features of ancient historical writings. This study will undertake genre analysis to gain a sense of the world of a text to better understand Acts' historical narrative.

[10] Considering the genre of a text is an important preliminary step in the process of interpretation for the reader/audience. In this study it is, however, not a goal in itself. Gregory Sterling (1992:16) highlights one of the functions of genre by quoting E.D. Hirsch (1967:74), who suggests that "an interpreter's preliminary generic conception of a text is constitutive of everything that he or she subsequently understands". To put it differently, genre helps the reader/audience to conceptualise the social and cultural context relevant to the meaning of the text as a cultural media of communication (Aune 1989:13; Pervo 1989:310; Sterling 1992:17; Bonz 2000:26; Burridge 2004:15-6; Peterson 1978:18; Frow 2005:2).

[11] As I will argue in the study itself, this research presumes Acts has a mixed genre, but that its most distinctive genres are historiography and ancient biography. Richard Burridge makes the point that both ancient and modern genre theory confirm its character as a flexible mixed genre (Burridge 2004:31-59). More recently, Bale criticizes Burridge's genre theory, and argues for some essential features of ancient genres, not taken into consideration by Burridge, including that it is necessary for those who try to read an ancient text to take into account the multiple cultural backgrounds, intertextuality of the text, multiple backgrounds of the author and its cognitive relevance to genre and the reader/audience (Bale 2015:70-92). In this regard, classification of ancient genres is more complex than we assume.

Most scholars argue that Acts contains a mixture of different genres and was influenced by Hellenistic historiography. Considering the divine in historiography, Shauf argues (2015:15) that genre affects the presentation of the divine. This means "the portrayals of the divine in ancient historiography are best seen as resulting from genuine reflection on the role of the divine in history" (Shauf 2015:15). For a richer understanding of Acts as an ancient writing, it should therefore be compared to other ancient sources to deduce how ancient people perceived divine involvement in history[12] and the phenomena of ascension/rapture, which ancient people were familiar with. Recent genre studies have attempted to do just this. The focus of this proposed genre study will be on the role of divine characters in Acts and how the Book of Acts relates to other forms of (Graeco-Roman) historiography[13] in this regard (3.2; 4.2)**.**

Narrative criticism will also be used to focus on divine characters in the text of the post-ascension section of Acts as it is reconstructed in NA[28]. Jesus as active character in Acts will be investigated in order to understand his role in the Acts narrative as the Lord of all (4.2; 4.3).

1.7. **Outline of thesis**

This thesis will comprise of the following chapters: Chapter 1 is the introduction of this study. In Chapter 2 Graeco-Roman ascension accounts will be compared to the ascension accounts in the Old Testament and other Jewish texts in order to identify the characteristics of the ascension portrayals in the various literature sources, and to examine whether or not post-ascension characters in them are also engaged in human affairs. Chapter 3 will explore historians' use of divine involvement and divine characters' involvement in Graeco-Roman historical narratives to identify their literary and theological function by undertaking a genre

---

[12] In this study, the conception of "history", a judgement based on the facts as the result of investigation, does not mean genre. It rather transcends genre. It denotes understandings of the whole course of human affairs, also encompassing elements of a writer's understanding of history.

[13] In this study, I reserve the term "historiography" for a literary genre of texts that gives an account of events. The term "historiography", however, does not mean a genre in itself. It is instead a generic term used to indicate various forms of historical genres. The Book of Acts has been placed in various ancient history genres such as general history, historical monograph, Graeco-Roman political history, apologetic history, institutional history, and Jewish historiography etc. It is thus apparent that there are diverse historical genre forms of ancient historiography that cannot be easily classified and that it is therefore also difficult to classify the Book of Acts.

analysis. Chapter 4 will explore the function of the ascension narrative in the whole Acts narrative, and the portrayal of the ascended Jesus to ascertain if he plays an active role in the selected stories. Chapter 5 will contain the summary and the conclusion of this thesis.

Chapter 2: Ascension in ancient literature

2.1. Introduction

If, as Luke and ancient writers intended, a person in antiquity read or heard of ascension or a story about rapture in literature, it would not have come as a surprise to them. The ascension or rapture of a prominent person to become a god was not strange to ancient Graeco-Roman people (Talbert 1975:419-21; Zwiep 1997:39). A 1st-century writer like Luke might therefore also have inherited a variety of images of, and assumptions about, ascension/rapture. His cultural and religious context provided not only a structured model for the narrative of Jesus' ascension embedded in gospel, but also a wealth of historical biographical discourses about the divine identity and the theological implication of the Lord Jesus' activity in the course of the narrative of the Acts. In this chapter, descriptions of rapture imagery are discussed under two broad categories: Graeco-Roman literature (2.2), and traditions from within Judaism (2.3). Comparing two categorisations is the primary aim of this chapter.

Before addressing each of these areas, one important qualification should be noted. A distinction will not be made between Graeco-Roman and Jewish rapture stories in Luke's historical context when investigating the background of the Lukan ascension with regard to the tradition to which it is more similar or to the surface structure that it most resembles. Rather, by adducing them, the aim is to examine the general function of ascension/rapture stories and their significance for the ancient reader or audience. Although the Jewish ascension/rapture tradition is advocated as a plausible background for the Lukan ascension (Zwiep 1997:79), it is not possible to entirely separate these two different cultural ascension/rapture traditions.

2.2. Ascension in Graeco-Roman literature

2.2.1. A brief overview of the concept of ascension in ancient texts

Various ascension narratives occur in various literary texts, regardless of genre, from the ancient world. Graeco-Roman writers particularly liked to include ascension narratives.[14] The notion of "ascension" is, however, often used so broadly that it is not of any use in identifying various types of ascension stories. It is therefore important to first clarify what is meant by an ascension story.

Graeco-Roman ascension stories can fall into four categories identified by Tabor (1986:69-95)[15]: (1) Ascent as an invasion of heaven; (2) Ascent to receive revelation; (3) Ascent to heavenly immortality; and (4) Ascent as a foretaste of the heavenly world. While the first, second and fourth types of ascent developed in the archaic period, and depict a heavenly journey of mortal beings and their return to the earth without being transformed into immortal beings, the third type of ascent represents what Tabor calls a "one way" ascent and permanent status as a god; this type never describes degradation from immortal to mortal again following the ascension. The third type of ascent identified by Tabor refers only to the soul's ascent,[16] while a bodily ascent is overlooked, and therefore Tabor's classification cannot be applied to understanding Jesus' bodily ascension reported in Acts. Although he provides a helpful identification of the various types of Graeco-Roman ascents, there are in fact multiple explanations of ascensions in different ways that include both bodily and soul ascensions.[17]

Having examined Graeco-Roman ascension representations on the basis of the earlier work by Lohfink (cf. 1971:32-50), Zwiep classifies ascension into two distinctive types (1997:36; 2001:331): On the one hand, there is the heavenly journey of the soul (*Himmelsreise der*

---

[14] Graeco-Roman ascension references are found in Zwiep (1997:38-9); Aune (1998:626-7); Keener (2012:717-8); Talbert (1975:419-436; 1976:419-20; 2005:3); Scott (2000:447-8); Parsons (1987:136-8); Tabor (1986:77-80).

[15] Tabor's primary concern here is to trace a similar type of ascension tradition to Paul's heavenly journey amongst the Graeco-Roman ascension traditions. He particularly pays attention to the fourth type, which he assumes to show the most resemblance to Paul's heavenly journey without intervention of death. So, the third type of ascension is not relatively less articulated than the fourth.

[16] For other arguments on soul ascension, see Ioan Petru Culianu (1983).

[17] There is no consensus concerning to what extent ancient people believed in ascension. For instance, an ancient writer reports Heracles' ascension and the fact that the body had completely disappeared, thus no one could find it. There is a suspicion that Romulus was murdered, but, on the other hand, Romulus' new status in heaven is also reported. It is therefore difficult to determine which assumption was most believed by ancient people.

Seele)[18] which means the transportation of the soul into heaven either in ecstasy or at the end of a person's life, and, on the other hand, there is rapture (*Entrückung*) which, unlike the heavenly journey, is about being physically taken up into a divine realm such as heaven without the intervention of death. The clear difference between the two is whether or not only the soul is caught up, or whether the fleshly body is also taken up into heaven. The term "rapture" with reference to those who ascend into heaven is, however, used ambiguously, and cannot be reserved for one category of ascension tradition (Maile 1986:40-4).

Such a view is, however, explicitly argued by Zwiep (1997), who applies a strict singular meaning to ancient rapture (*Entrückung*), building on the work of Lohfink (1971). In his published dissertation he seeks to place the Lukan ascension stories within the large spectrum of ascension traditions. In his identification of the type of ascension, a clear distinction is made between "heavenly journey" and "rapture". According to him, in terms of the form-critical method, the Lukan ascension stories fit into the category of "rapture" within the wide range of types of ascension traditions (Zwiep 1997:36). It is intended "to report Jesus' bodily translation into beyond (heaven) as the conclusion of his earthly life without death" (Zwiep 1997:36).[19] Therefore, in clarifying the distinction between rapture and other types of ascension, it is necessary to trace the rapture tradition, for its characteristics are "definitive (unlike a heavenly journey) and bodily (unlike an ecstatic experience or an assumption of the soul after death)" (Zwiep 1997:36).

The focus text of this study, the ascension narrative in Acts 1:9-11, is about Jesus' physical ascent without death. This chapter will, therefore, be confined to a consideration of the bodily ascension accounts that do not mention death. The term "rapture" as used by Zwiep, for a definitive bodily ascent, will be used along with the more general term "ascension".[20] The concept of "rapture" is useful since it narrows down the various types of ascension stories from antiquity that need to be considered. Furthermore, in this study, the term "ascension" indicates physical ascent into heaven without the intervention of death, although this term had a broader meaning in the ancient world.

---

[18] Its proper meaning is "that descent of the individual soul from, and ascension to, the sky" (Culianu 1983:10).

[19] According to Tabor (1986:57), Luke clearly states Jesus' bodily ascent, unlike the unclear ascent of Paul.

[20] One may point out that there is a good deal of mixing and merging of texts, so this study stresses that these are working models rather than an absolute frame.

2.2.2. Apotheosis and immortality

In Hellenistic antiquity ascension was understood in relation to the concept of immortality and as a means of apotheosis (Zwiep 1997:39). Talbert (1975: 419-20) identifies the concept of Hellenistic immortality as the peculiar complex of a heavenly place in which a person was believed to have moved by suddenly disappearing at the end of their career. Although all immortal cases related to the ascension are disputable, it was not strange to ancient people that a person went to heaven and was transformed from a mortal human being into one of the immortal gods. Talbert's (1975) study confirms that there was a common belief (among ancient people) in this regard, which differs substantially from modern people's perspectives. Two distinguishing characteristics underlying the common beliefs of ancient people explain how those who ascended into heaven were regarded as immortals:

> Whenever Mediterranean people spoke about the immortals… they meant a mortal who had become a god, and this was usually expressed in terms of an extraordinary birth (one of his parents was a deity) and an ascension into heaven (witnessed to by such circumstances as there is no remains of his body to be found) (Talbert 1975:421-2)

In this way, the ascension assumption involves immortalisation in heaven (Tabor 1986:78-9). However, the ascension is not only associated with immortalisation, but also with divinity. Roloff (1970:84) appropriately explains a natural relationship between immortality and divinity as follows: "Since, in an anthropomorphic representation of God, immortality is the essential feature of the divine, the abolition of death as the adoption of what separates the hero from the divine, signifies his transition to the divine, his elevation to divinity". Indeed, a person who was immortal in any sense, was considered to be a god (divinity). Thus, the concept of immortality can be equated with divinity and vice versa.

In this sense, the relationship between ascension and the divine attribute is not difficult to determine, even where Graeco-Roman literature reports a brief account of the sudden disappearance of a hero or a prominent person. In an extreme case, Hercules was taken up into heaven with typical signs commonly found in Graeco-Roman rapture narratives (a cloud, thunder) and made immortal, as he was moved from earth to a heavenly location in which the

gods dwelled (Apollodorus, *The Library* 2.7.7; 2.8.1). In *Roman Antiquities,* Dionysius narrates a fantastic account which appears to offer a reasonable explanation for the death of Romulus, who disappeared in "sudden darkness and a violent storm burst" (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 2.56.2). This account was intended to confirm Romulus' transformation into immortality through his ascension (cf. Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 2.56.2-6). Among more ambiguous examples, Dionysius reports another ascension narrative which arose from uncertainty about the location of king Aeneas' body, including some reports of his transformation into a deity (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 1.64.6).

Indeed, as clearly observed in the above-mentioned texts, ascension was a crucial means of depicting apotheosis in Graeco-Roman culture. Romulus, the founder of Rome, represents someone deified in this recurrent manner. In *Numa*, Plutarch provides a report of Romulus' divine status by mentioning his disappearance:

> Suddenly there was a great commotion in the air, and a cloud descended upon the earth bringing with it blasts of wind and rain. The throng of common folk were terrified and fled in all directions, but Romulus *disappeared*, and was never found again either alive or dead (Plutarch, *Numa* 2.2)… the Patricians sought to remove by ascribing divine honours to Romulus, on the ground that he was not dead, but blessed with a better lot. And Proculus, a man of eminence, took oath that he had seen Romulus *taking up[21] to heaven* in full armour, and had heard his voice commanding that he be called *Quirinus.* (Plutarch, *Numa* 2.3; my italics)

In this narration of Plutarch, Romulus is said to have ascended into heaven and to have obtained the same honour as Quirinus. The later apotheosis through ascension is developed elaborately in Cassius Dio's *Roman History* (56.46):

> Now these rumours began to be current at a later date. At the time they (the Senate) declared Augustus immortal…a certain Numerius Atticus…swore that he had seen Augustus ascending to heaven after the manner of which tradition tells concerning Proculus and Romulus (Cassius Dio, 56.46).

---

[21] Ἀναφέρω is often used to describe a rapture in Hellenistic ascension stories (Parsons 1987:137; Zwiep 1997:92). The passive act of disappearance is interpreted as ascension in the Graeco-Roman literature (Zwiep 1997:92).

This description retains the Graeco-Roman ascension form, contents, and style, which were integral parts of ascension narratives. The difference in this description, compared to earlier versions, is the need for a vote by the Senate for an emperor to be declared an immortal god after the emperor's death (Kreitzer 1990:211). The distinguishing features of the apotheosis were that: (1) they were human beings; and (2) they became gods through ascension, so that emperors gained the honour of being immortal as reward for initially having been a benefactor; and would permanently bring peace into the inhabited world from the heavenly realm. For the ancient audience, the role of other characters who ascended into heaven was depicted in a manner very similar to that of their emperors. It appears that the hero taken up into heaven was expected to bring benefit to people, as in the case of the emperors. What may be deduced about ascension narratives, is that the end of the life of a prominent person as an apotheosis, was significantly shaped on the basis of ancient belief in heaven.[22]

To summarise, ancient people largely believed that ascension implied both the status of immortality and of deification. In the Graeco-Roman world, individual persons ascending into heaven at the end of their lives were regarded as obtaining immortality, but in literature, the immortality itself then implied deified status. As a result, Graeco-Roman ascension narratives provide legitimacy for the apotheosis of prominent men. The idea of a human being's ascent into heaven would thus have been conceivable among ancient Graeco-Roman

---

[22] Heavenly space seems to play a more significant role in pagan texts based on a dualistic spatial assumption in antiquity. Tabor (1986) provides an argument which deals with the ascent into heaven in terms of this dualistic spatial assumption of antiquity. This underlying idea is helpful for identifying background knowledge to heavenly assumption. He works with a set of beliefs based on particular views regarding new cosmology in antiquity. In the Hellenistic period, "new cosmology" was related to his/her perception of space. For a summary of "new cosmology", see Nilsson (1948:96-103). According to the concept of new cosmology, the heavenly realm was a space for the soul to be dwell in as an immortal god (Singer 2000:223). This cosmological principle was a means of explaining life after death. People remaining on the earth were considered mortal human beings, and a soul ascending into heaven was believed to indicate an immortal god released from the mortal body. Thus, in the Hellenistic period, space played an essential role in the extent to which someone was mortal or immortal, which was determined by a place. Emphasis was placed on the soul of an individual ascending back to heaven, the true home of soul, unlike in the Jewish rapture. This implied devaluation of all that was the earthly human being with a mortal body and material things, as the lowest level of value. In spite of specific variations and exceptions, cosmology with its dualistic spatial idea was widespread and prevalent throughout the Graeco-Roman and Jewish as well as the Mesopotamian worlds (Tabor 1986:65-6). Furthermore, an ascent into heaven in the Jewish context was often regarded as an apocalyptic feature which reflected broad religious development of the Hellenistic period, including Gnosticism. Tabor (1986:67-8) contends that both Jewish apocalypticism and Gnosticism were Hellenistic so that Paul's theology of salvation (as opposed to Gnosticism) can also be considered in the broad context of the Hellenistic religious principle. For cosmology in terms of New Testament theology, see Pennington (2008).

audiences.

2.2.3. Interpreting the descriptions of ascension in literature

Ascension traditions occur extensively in ancient literary material, especially in historical texts, biographies, and even satire, so that Graeco-Roman ascension narratives offer a number of insights for the interpretation of the Lukan ascension recorded in Acts. This study will therefore consider the ascended individual as a benefactor of mankind (2.2.3.1); the underlying political function (2.2.3.2); frequently used terminology (2.2.3.3); and, finally, common motifs (heavenly motifs, clouds, absence, a mountain, and worship of the cult) in the ascension literary form (2.2.3.4).

2.2.3.1. Benefactor

Those who ascended into heaven were treated as benefactors of mankind (Talbert, 1986:425). In the Graeco-Roman world, the title "benefactor" was commonly bestowed on kings, gods and healers, as well as strong men, thus all who had brought good things to people or society in the past. As an example, Craig A. Evans (2011:126), citing Diodorus Siculus' *Discourses* (3.56.5), suggests that the text includes a description of Uranus as a benefactor. Diodorus Siculus' short description of Uranus presents his immortality accorded by people. His immortality is seen as valid because of his *benefaction* and his knowledge of the stars. Heracles is suggested as another example who is said to be a benefactor of mortals due to his great benefit for the life of people (cf. Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 4.15.1; 4.10.7).

According to Talbert's (1975:425) analysis, the title "benefactor" existed in the Egyptian, Graeco-Roman, and Jewish worlds. It also occurs in Acts with reference to both God and Jesus (Danker 1982:489-90; Evans 2011:125-30; Neyrey 2004:64-6).[23] It differentiates between inferiors and superiors of differing status, not only between those equal in status. Talbert (1975:425) further explains the typical life of benefactors as "good kings, healers, strong men who used their might to conquer powers hostile to other men, those who introduced certain skills or goods into civilization, and great teachers. Their extraordinary lives were usually explained by their unusual parentage and *their present status as divinities*

---

[23] In the letter of James, God is portrayed as an idle benefactor (Batten 2004:256, 265)

by their ascent to heaven" (my italics). Indeed, the good use they made of their earthly life, paved their way to heaven (White 1988:353). In this respect, ancient people, especially the pagans, would have agreed in affirming the divinity of Jesus when they heard of Jesus' extraordinary heritage as the descendant of King David. His ascension was thus in line with his extraordinary life.[24] Jesus' presence in the heavenly realm would legitimate his activity as divinity and benefactor, since honouring him as benefactor would be in line with the expectation of benefits from his activities among the mortals on earth.

2.2.3.2. Ascension as political propaganda

Ascension, in implying deification, sometimes functioned politically. Beard and Henderson (1998:197) argue that the ascension of emperors was considered an essential element of apotheosis that, in turn, legitimated Roman power (cf. White 1988:354). This initial system was called "imperial theology" and was mainly structured as a heavenly motif (Carter 1999:58). For instance, the text concerning the death of Julius Caesar portrays the manifestation of his admittance to the heavenly realm.[25] As mentioned in the previous section, Augustus, the heir of Julius Caesar, was likewise deified through his ascension to heaven, and the Senate declared Augustus' new status as immortal (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 56.46).

In this way, Roman emperors were portrayed as *divus* (divine), and this was promoted widely for its political value. In other words, ascension became a means of Roman propaganda (Gilbert 2003:242-7). Propaganda can be defined as "a rhetorical strategy means to communicate a particular idea or vision of the world and, with an air of transparency, to persuade the audience of its truth" (Gilbert 2003:236). It was aimed at making people participate in society. It sought to provoke conformity and stability (Evans 1992:2) in terms of Roman authority in the Roman world. In this sense, the Roman propaganda system at this point would legitimate the divinity of emperors through the emperor's ascension, and function as political persuasion of the audience to accept the emperor's extraordinary

---

[24] A similar point is made by Aune (1990:19). Aspects of the life of Heracles seem parallel to the life of Jesus, and the image of Heracles as a savior figure was understood by some early Christians as applicable to Jesus. For more information comparing Heracles and Jesus, see David E. Aune (1990:3-19). In his article, Aune (1990) provides diverse accounts of Heracles from birth to ascension.

[25] For the references, see Gilbert (2003:243).

superiority. Moreover, signs such as an eagle or a chariot particularly functioned as symbols of the ascension of Roman emperors in that they indicated their going to heaven (Scott 2000:447). Scott (2000:447) provides the example of the Arch of Titus in Rome (81 CE) as propaganda that visually depicted the emperor ascending into the heavenly realm on an eagle.[26] This arch also used ascension as political propaganda for the emperor and reflects the contemporary belief concerning how an emperor was taken up into heaven.

The apotheosis of Roman emperors through ascension is supported by extensive archaeological material. Beard and Henderson (1998) point to surviving coins, cameos, and public commemorative sculptures, which show the visual representation of ascent of both emperors and their wives. For instance, the Column of Antoninus Pius shows the conjugality of the apotheosis of both the emperor Antoninus Pius (who died in about 161 CE) and his wife Faustina (who died around 141 CE) being caught up to heaven together (Beard and Henderson 1998:192-3). The Belvedere Altar depicts Julius Caesar's ascension in a chariot drawn by four horses (Beard and Henderson 1998:200).

As opposed to Franz Cumont's negative attitude concerning the value of images of the visual metaphors in terms of the mechanics of apotheosis, Beard and Henderson (1998:194) acknowledge its important function as "politics of representation" embedded simultaneously in the Roman people's lives and in cultural products alongside ascension in literature. According to them, due to the fact that the ascension story in literary narrative form does not clarify the specific process of ascension from earth to heaven, Roman art depicting the ascension of the royal family could give the Roman people a more detailed and vivid picture of how ascension proceeded. This visual representation of ascension was officially displayed, but it was manipulated for a political purpose, which can be called "imperial image-making" (Beard and Henderson 1998:196).

Ascension in this way played an essential role in the apotheosis of emperors. This can be seen as propaganda to persuade the audience of the truth of deification from a considerable amount of literary sources and artistic products. In announcing the emperor's divinity by ascension,

---

[26] For a picture of the Arch of Titus, see Beard and Henderson (1998:210), which presents the "eagle" associated with the imperial apotheosis (Beard and Henderson 1998:208-9)

the emperor's authority to rule over Rome was accepted as divinely confirmed. In this sense, using ascension for propaganda enforced conformity and strengthened the stability of the great Roman Empire, and authorised the emperor as worthy to rule over the great country. Although a number of means interconnected with one another were employed for Roman propaganda, the political image-making of ascension cannot be excluded.

2.2.3.3. Ascension terminology

Having traced the original root of the ascension narrative in Acts, Parsons (1987) identifies the ascension terminology commonly used in Graeco-Roman literature. Although a variety of words are employed in ascension narratives, three verb groups are most common (Parsons 1987:136-7; Maile 1986:40): (1) ἀφανίζω; (2) ἁρπάζω; and (3) μετατίθημι. Of these by far the most common technical term for ascension in Greek is ἀφανίζομαι from ἀφανίζω.[27] The use of this term, however, does not make it clear whether it indicates direct ascension in the literature.

The verb ἁρπάζω is frequently used to report an ascension event that is caused by a god (Friedrich 1973:53-4). Being caught up by a divinity is often expressed in the passive form. There is scholarly consensus that the passive form refers to the divine as an agent of ascension in Hellenistic and Jewish ascension stories. Another term, ἀναφέρω, is also frequently used (Parsons 1987:137; Zwiep 1997:92). Its basic meaning is to bring or to carry up, which indicates a somewhat similar meaning to ἁρπάζω. This term means that the ascension event is, as ἁρπάζω is, brought to a god as evidence of the ascension.[28] In this sense, it is found in the Hellenistic ascension narratives (Lohfink 1971:171). Therefore, it is probable that the two terms are closely related to divine action in terms of ascension.

2.2.3.4. Literary motifs and features

The ascension accounts in literature often follow standard motifs in terms of the narrative. A list of ascension motifs in Graeco-Roman literature has been identified by a number of

---

[27] References in G. Friedrich (1973:54).

[28] For examples of the occurrence of ἀναφέρω in Hellenistic literature, see Zweip (1997:92) and Lohfink (1971: 42). In Luke 24:51, ἀνεφέρετο, the imperfect tense, is used to describe Jesus' ascension. The grammatical tense used here seems to illustrate the process of movement, suggestive of Jesus being carried up in the air (Van Stempvoort 1958/9:36).

scholars, including a mountain, funeral pyre, thunderbolt(s), storm, chariot, cloud, eagle with accompanying phenomena (solar eclipse, earthquake, etc.), heavenly confirmation (appearances of the ascended one), and subsequent worship cults centred on institution and veneration (Lohfink 1971:42-9; Parsons 1987:138). In addition to this, light, darkness, a sudden disappearance and witnesses are likewise often presented in Graeco-Roman ascension accounts (Maile 1986:40) to illustrate the ascension in vivid detail.

The **cloud,**[29] which is closely related to the heavenly motif, is a typical motif often used as a "media for the rescue and rapture of heroes in Graeco-Roman literature" (Pervo 2009:45) and/or as "a means to conceal the actual taking up" (Zwiep 1997:104). In the early Greek period, the cloud was an important sign of the divine for Hellenistic people (Oepke, TDNT 903-4; cf. Virgil, *The Aeneid* 9.14-24), so it is unsurprising that it became an important motif of ascension narratives. The ascension cloud seems to function as a vehicle for being taken up into heaven (Zwiep 1997:104) by a god. It symbolizes heavenly concealment. In this sense, it is probable that, borrowing Van Stempvoort's (1958/9:38) language, "the cloud is not a fog cloud hiding a mystery but a royal chariot showing the reality of the disappearance of" the hero toward paradise or heaven.

Another noticeable motif in the ascension narrative, the **religious cult motif**, uses the structure of the ascension to focus on the transformed new status of the person ascended into heaven. After the disappearance of the hero, people respond by worshipping him due to the higher status that he was believed to have, which gave him enough power to be involved in human affairs. Asclepius, the son of Apollo and Coronis, for instance, was worshipped by people on earth after his death (*Asclepius* 1.121-2; 2.108). The cult around Asclepius was prevalent in the Graeco-Roman world (Litwa 2014:157). It was not only popular due to Asclepius' ascension, but also due to the fact that his activity as a benefactor through healing, bringing good to people, and predicting the future, was experienced by many (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.24).

This cult motif, however, does not appear alone in the narratives. It is introduced together with other devices (the pyre, lightning, witness, and confirmation by the divinity) in the text

---

[29] Regarding the ascension cloud in Graeco-Roman literature, see Pervo (2009:45); Parsons (1987:138).

to sanctify a person caught up and alive in heaven as a god. For example, when Heracles ascended *the pyre* and after the attendants lighted it, *lightning* fell from heaven and consumed the pyre as a whole. After this, the *witnesses* (the companions of Iolaüs) could not find the body of Heracles at the scene of the incident. It was supposed that Heracles was removed to the divine space to be with the gods (Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 4.38.4-5; cf. Apollodorus *The Library* 2.7.7; my italics).[30] In a more subtle example, Romulus *suddenly* disappeared–an event which was *witnessed* by many, including the Senate. The weather was *dark*, and a *thunderbolt* and the *blast* of a violent *storm* had come and gone. After that, the people gathered again. Then they *honoured* and *revered* Romulus for he was caught up into heaven, becoming a higher deity, instead of only being a good king on earth (Plutarch, *Romulus* 27.8).

By adding elements to the ascension narrative in this way, the ascension became a reason to exhort the people to worship the ascended person, forming a religious cult. Where a text may particularly touch on, for example, the motif of the heavenly aspect (the cloud, violent weather, and weather changes in general), the witness or other specific motifs consistently associated with the deity, such as worship,[31] and the confirmation of the ascended (by appearing to people), ascension is firmly confirmed.

Hence, the ascension narrative from the Graeco-Roman world, the literary form which emerged alongside these motifs associated with the cults, provides crucial insight into the way in which the ascension was understood in Luke's context. Influences such as deification and becoming a benefactor, require careful consideration in interpreting the Lukan ascension, especially with regard to Jesus' passing into heaven and his reappearance as recorded in Acts. However, Luke and the ancient reader/audience also inherited influences derived from the Old Testament and other Jewish images of rapture involving an apocalyptic rapture. The

---

[30] Apollodorus, in *Library*, provides complementary elements to Hercules' story. In his description, the geographcal information (Mount Oeta) and a cloud are offered; these are absent from Diodorus' writing (cf. Diodorus, *Library of History* 2.7.7)

[31] The worship cult is sometimes mentioned in the literature together with the term προσκυνέω (Zwiep 1997:93), which occasionally occurs with the sudden vanishing of the prominent person. Προσκυνέω frequently refers to worship of the ascended being in early Christian literature (Leim 2015:48). In Graeco-Roman literary sources, some texts use this term for worshipping a god or an emperor (Leim 2015:49). For an example of the use of προσκυνέω in the Graeco-Roman world, see Leim (2015:49). Leim's primary concern is to demonstrate that the use of προσκυνέω in Matthew's gospel is a key term in developing the distinctive christological narrative of Jesus.

study will now turn to these.

2.3. Ascension in Jewish literature

Explicit reports of ascension/rapture appear twice in the Old Testament text. These events deal with Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:1-18) being taken up to the heavenly realm. The imagery becomes a vehicle for describing their transformation into a new place, heaven, without passing through death, or for the process of transferring prophetic ability to a successor, or an assumption of eschatological expectation. In the later tradition, Mal. 4:4-6 (3:24-26 in the Hebrew text) refers to Elijah being taken up to announce an eschatological return of Elijah and his eschatological role prior to the coming of the Day of Yahweh.

This section presents an investigation of some of the features and themes in Jewish ascension/rapture tradition before discussing the content of Mal. 4:4-6. Having considered these references, this study then briefly examines varying types of Jewish writing after the time of Malachi, including the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 2nd temple period and the 1st century CE, which offer insight into the way in which later Jewish people reflected a belief about the eschatological return that represents a connection between ascension/rapture and return.

2.3.1. Ascension/rapture terminology

Jewish ascension/rapture stories use fewer terms than Graeco-Roman rapture stories. As with Graeco-Roman ascension terminology discussed in the previous section, Parsons (1987:139) has identified frequently used ascension/rapture terminology in Jewish literature in Greek. Here two verb groups are distinctive and frequently used: (1) ἀναλαμβάνω; and (2) μετατίθημι. The verbs that signify rapture usually appear in the passive form, emphasising the belief that someone being taking up is always due to the action of the divine and thus especially connotes Yahweh's involvement in the Jewish world (Cohn 2000:13). In much the same way as in Graeco-Roman ascension terminology, the passive form generally advocates divine involvement in the ascension, but in the Jewish case it only refers to the one God, Yahweh.

The verb ἀναλαμβάνω (to take up) does not appear in ascension descriptions in Graeco-Roman literature (cf. Parsons 1987:136-7). This term, however, does appear in the elaborate

description of Enoch's rapture (Sirach 49:14) and especially of Elijah's taking up (2 Kings 2:9-11(LXX); Sir. 48:9; 1 Macc. 2:58). In all these texts, the authors use ἀναλαμβάνω (cf. Delling, *TDNT* 4.4-9) in the passive form in order to represent Enoch's and Elijah's raptures to the glorious divine space. Although its surface meaning is strictly "to take up" or "to lift up" as used in various contexts,[32] it without doubt becomes a standard technical term for both temporary and definitive rapture in the writings of the 2nd temple period and even in the New Testament (Hobbs 1986:15).[33]

The term μετατίθημι (to transfer or to change) is the ascension term in both Graeco-Roman (Diodorus, *Library of History* 2.20.1; 4.38.5; Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 1.64.6; Apollodorus, *Library*. 2.8.1) and Jewish rapture accounts, especially in Enoch's definitive rapture (Gen. 5:24; Sir. 44:16; Wis. 4:10).[34] The LXX version of Gen. 5:24 associates μετατίθημι with the explicit report of divine action, that "God took him", so the passive here does not validate divine action on its own. The terminology also connects to the theme of Enoch's virtue, which explains why Enoch did not die but was taken up by God. Gen. 5:24, Sir. 44:16, and Wis. 4:10 all attribute Enoch's definitive rapture to the fact that he pleased (εὐαρεστέω) God.[35] In this sense, εὐαρεστέω (please), supports the view that μετατίθημι (to transfer or to change) is a technical term for rapture. If Enoch simply died, the apologetic explanation: Enoch pleased God, would not have been necessary. Importantly, although the terminology is used in many ways, at least the authors of the above texts place direct lexical emphasis on μετατίθημι in reporting the definitive rapture of Enoch.

2.3.2. The literary motif of the ascension/rapture

In addition to rapture terminology, Jewish raptures in literature often reveal standard motifs and signs in terms of narrative. For example, "the motif of an unsuccessful search" or "the

---

[32] For more references to ἀναλαμβάνω, see Delling, *TDNT* 4:7-9.
[33] E.g. Mk. 16:19; Acts 1:2; 1 Tim. 3:16.
[34] For more examples of rapture accounts concerning Enoch and others using μετατίθημι in terms of deity, see Zwiep (1997:43); Friedrich (1973:54).
[35] Zwiep (1997:43) suggests another virtue in relation to Enoch such as "sign" and Enoch's "knowledge". But as above texts mentioned, describing Enoch's virtue within the text, Zwiep's suggestion is not related to the terminology or assumption of rapture.

motif of absence", which also appear in Graeco-Roman accounts of ascension (Zwiep 1997:43), often provide a portrayal that serves as the climax of the narrative. Another motif, "blessing", on the other hand, functions as a prelude to rapture in the narrative in which a person is blessed before the rapture occurs. This motif often plays a role in Jewish accounts of ascension, but not in Graeco-Roman ascension accounts (Zwiep 1997:87). In Josephus' Hellenised description of the rapture of Moses, the motif of blessing provides the setting for farewell, in which Moses' final speech to the crowd occurs before his departure to a private place to be taken up (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.315-20).

The other motif in ancient ascension narratives, **the cloud**, focuses the narrative on the deity or things related to the deity, as in Graeco-Roman ascension literature. Keener (2012:726) explains that the aspect of the cloud as used in ancient literature was "like vapors generated by deities or the deity for special purposes". Some texts associate the presence of the cloud with the divinity. In the Old Testament, Yahweh appears in the cloud (Ex. 13:21; 19:9,16; Num. 11:25; Deut. 31:15; Ps. 97:2), and it is regarded as a visible symbol of God's presence (Num. 9:15; 1 Kings 8:10; 2 Chr. 5:14; Isa.19:1; 30:27; Lam. 2:1). Even in the New Testament, in Lk. 9:35, a voice alleged to be God's voice, comes out of the cloud, confirming Jesus' distinctive identity as the Son of God.

In some Jewish texts, the cloud functions as a symbol of ascension. The whirlwind in which Elijah was caught up into heaven, is sometimes regarded as a cloud (Keener 2012:726). The later tradition (1 Enoch 14:8 and 39:3) also confirms the perception that the cloud often relates closely to God. In these pericopes, it is said that the cloud carried Enoch to the heavenly place away from earth. Josephus, providing a Hellenised description of Moses' ascent, depicts Moses' disappearance in a cloud, which was regarded as his being taken up to God (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.326). Therefore, the occurrence of the cloud in the ascension narrative supports the assumption that a person's taking up is made possible by the divinity or someone related to the divinity, and would be the means of spatial separation between the earth and the heavenly realm in which God dwells (Sleeman 2009:77-8), but this is not a sharp separation (Haenchen 1971:132).[36]

---

[36] Keener (2012:726) provides a number of examples in which the cloud functions as the vehicle to heaven. Although most of the references he suggests seem to be to later writings than Acts, it may imply that the notion

In addition to the above-mentioned motifs, eyewitnesses often appear to witness the person's corporeal rapture in their presence. The motif of an eyewitness plays an essential role, not only in Graeco-Roman literature (Zwiep 2001:332-3) but also in the Jewish rapture tradition. The author of 2 Kings 2:1-18 provides the readers/audiences with a detailed description of the visible rapture of Elijah in the presence of Elisha, his successor, making Elisha an eye-witness of his rapture. Except for this account, only Josephus' Hellenised description of rapture includes the notion of an eye-witness of Moses' disappearance. These irreducible features of an ascension description as a form of human utterance and as a report of it are related to the issue of trust. Such events should be treated as credible only to the extent that they can be verified.

Overall, a number of motifs occur in Jewish ascension traditions, as Parsons (1987:140) observes. In Parsons' (1987:140) examination, however, the motifs in Jewish rapture descriptions play a less important role than in Graeco-Roman descriptions. Nevertheless, in both cultures, the ascension motifs mostly represent a symbol of divine involvement, thus the ascension event can be deemed as caused by the divine.

2.3.3. Themes and Jewish interpretation

Beyond these motifs and the terminology of the literary form, the description of rapture in literature develops a crucial and consistent theme drawn from eschatological elements associated with ascension.

A number of features which commonly serve to express an element of the contemporary audiences' expectation of those who have been taken up, also occur in the Jewish rapture tradition. In particular, these texts communicate something about the ascended apocalyptic figure and eschatological activity. The ascended person in the Jewish world is presented as being divine but not identical to a god. This emerges from Zwiep's (1997) critical question about how the story of ascension functioned in the minds of Jews and 1st-century Christians.

The concepts of **immortality and deification,** which are explicitly established in Graeco-

---

of the cloud as the means of transport to heaven was understood in later Judaism.

Roman ascension traditions, are not clear in Jewish accounts of ascension/rapture. This may be due to the fact that the texts that focus on rapture in the Old Testament, do not provide any information on whether Enoch and Elijah achieve a new status, like a god, after their rapture from earth to the heavenly realm. While deification and immortality are not always explained explicitly, in most similar cases the context of deifying language involved is metaphoric, mystical or visionary (Zwiep 2001:336). Except for a few exceptions, deifying language is seldom identifiable in non-visionary ascension stories (Zwiep 2001:336, 348). In later Jewish writings there is an attempt to clarify this, so there are diverse interpretations of what a rapture story means. One of the interpretations views the heavenly being as an immortal that has been deified. In fact, only a few references point to the concept of immortality and deification, in particular in the stories about Moses' bodily rapture and assumption (Himmelfarb 1993:48) and divine figures in the Qumran texts.

Although the dominant view of Deut. 34:6 in the Jewish world suggests Moses' death,[37] even in the text in which the rapture is not explicit, the notation that "no one knows the place of his burial" suggests a different view. For instance, Jeremias (*TDNT* 4:853-5) suggests that the interpretation of a Jewish tradition based on Deut. 34:6 in later Jewish traditions differed substantially from that of the dominant view. A rabbinic tradition that persisted, declared that Moses did not die but was taken up into the divine realm (*Yalkut Sim'oni III*, 958, quoted from Meeks 1967:209-10). This tradition concentrated primarily on the implication thereof. Moses' ascent on Sinai, in particular in Ex. 34:28, can be seen as providing a foretaste of his final ascension to heaven (Meeks 1967:210). In this case, the statement that Moses did not die can imply his immortality and deification (Talbert 1975:423-5), which may resemble the Hellenistic perspective on ascension (Jeremias, *TDNT* 4:854; Zwiep 1997:77).

The description of Moses' sudden disappearance in Josephus' *Antiquities* specifically illustrates the concept of immortality as in the original Greek. In the introduction to *Antiquities*, it is mentioned that Moses' climatic end seemed to resemble that of the Roman founders, Aeneas and Romulus (Thackeray, Introduction of *Jewish Antiquities* ix). In the

---

[37] Philo's speculative interpretation of Deut. 34:6 exhibits the belief that Moses was transferred to heaven and obtained immortality (*Life of Moses* 2.288). However, Moses' ascension seems to be an ascent of the soul returning to its true home by leaving the body (*On the Virtues* 76), which signifies Moses' death, not his bodily rapture (Talbert 1975:424).

description of Moses' end, Moses, accompanied by Eleazar, the high priest, and Joshua, goes to the so-called Mount Abarim for the preparation of his death in a private place. While Moses is talking with Eleazar and Joshua there, a cloud suddenly stands over him and he disappears[38] in a ravine (Josephus, *Juwish Antiquities* 4.8.48). This account holds together the Graeco-Roman ascension features such as a cloud and the archetypical term for "the legendary heroes' death of Mediterranean peoples" (Talbert, 1975:425) and, in so doing, "echoes the usual 'death/ascension' aspect of the mythology of the immortals" (Talbert, 1975:424).[39] In this sense, when the Hellenistic resemblance with the rapture narrative about Moses was presented to a pagan audience or reader, considering deification with regard to Moses, was imaginable in a cognitive sense.

The Dead Sea Scrolls provide another yet more subtle example of those who gain immortality from their origins as human beings (Zwiep 2001:336). In 11QMelchizedek (11Q13), Melchizedek, for instance, is represented as a heavenly high priest in terms of the jubilee year. The figure of Melchizedek in the manuscript seems to play a significant role in these respects. He is portrayed not as a human being, but rather as a deified being, who was usually seen as an angel (Martínez 1996:176). Zwiep (2001:336) suggests another example from the War Scroll (4Q491), called the "Self-glorification hymn", which declares that the hymnist is a human being in origin who ascended into heaven and then became a deity. The concept of deification is clear and articulated in lines 12-14:

> …a mighty throne in the congregation of the gods. None of the ancient kings shall sit on it, and their nobles [shall] not [] [There are no]ne comparable [to me in] my glory, no one shall be exalted beside me; None shall associate with me. For I have sat on a [thron]e in the heavens, and there is no one []… I am reckoned with the gods and my abode is in the holy congregation. (4Q491)

Although there is no description or terminology related to rapture, it still makes a clear claim

---

[38] As Thackeray mentioned (*Jewish Antiquities* ix), Dionysius of Halicarnassus' account portraying the disappearance of Aeneas and Romulus in *Roman Antiquities* (1.64.4; 2.56.2), as an example, is similar to that of Moses' disappearance.

[39] Josephus' account of Moses, however, retains the dominant view about Moses' death, including why the ancient Isrelites believed his death. Therefore, it is not explicit whether he is negative about Moses' bodily rapture. For varying views on Moses' death/rapture and comments on Josephus' understanding of the issue of Moses' death in both modern and ancient interpretations, see Feldman (2000:472).

about how deification is justified by being present in heaven (Smith 1990:187-8).

In the apocalyptic writings, Ezra is described as eligible to become immortal: "The root of evil is sealed up from you, illness is banished from you, and death is hidden; Hades has fled and corruption has been forgotten" (4 Ezra 8:53 NRSV).

Although some documents refer to immortality or deification in Jewish ascension/rapture traditions, it is important to note that the notion of immortality and deification in relation to rapture differs in some sense from the concept of immortality in the Graeco-Roman worldview. In the Graeco-Roman world, ascension/rapture is a literary device that promotes one to become a god permanently (Zwiep 2001:334). Jewish rapture story candidates, to the contrary, temporally remain somewhere in heaven until the end time to achieve some task. The Jewish world furthermore had a thoroughly monolithic faith so that no one could be on an equal level with God.[40] In spite of being transferred by ascent, rapture candidates had to be of a lower status than Yahweh, and thus are on an angelic level, never a god, unlike in Graeco-Roman ascension narratives. The connection between rapture of candidates for ascension and their eschatological task on return is discussed in more detail in further sections below.

Rapture as an indication of being alive in heaven rather than the concept of immortality, was widely taken into consideration in later Jewish circles. In other words, when a rapture narrative was presented to ancient readers or audiences, they believed that those taken up to heaven were alive in heaven. This belief also arose due to the fact that the Old Testament rapture tradition does not contain information about candidates' status after rapture from the earth to the heavenly realm (cf. Gen. 5:21-24; 2 Kings 2:11-12).

Rapture texts, in fact, could be naturally interpreted as a mere metaphorical portrayal of dying (Zwiep 2001:331). However, there is no strict sense that someone's end, described as a way of a person's translation into heaven, is death. In terms of the terminology used, death and

---

[40] Larry Hurtado (1999:9-12) provides his own summary of scholars' devotion to the study of Jewish monotheism, writing that all have acknowledged the uniqueness of God since the earlier ages, including the 2nd temple period. He further argues the issue in the current debates on 1st century Jewish monotheism. See his assessment (Hurtado 1999:3-26).

rapture are conceptually understood as a mutual relationship (Zwiep 2001:331-2), which could indicate being dead or alive in heaven.

Despite the ambiguous understanding of rapture, some limited traditions about the belief of persons taken up alive into heaven have been preserved. The earlier tradition regarding this belief was developed particularly in terms of eschatological hope. In interpreting Mal. 4:4-6, scholars argue that Elijah' ascension legitimates his return and him being alive in heaven. (Hill 1998:375; Wiener 1978:35; Snyman 2015:189; Brown 1996:204). This is also stated in Sir. 48:9-10. Zwiep (1997:48) notes that 1 Enoch 89:2 includes the belief that Elijah is alive in a place where Enoch also stays, and both of them are destined to be witnesses of judgment (1 Enoch 90:31). One rabbi states clearly "Elijah is alive" (Mo'ed Qatan 26a). With regard to Enoch, Heb. 11:5 supports the belief that the fact that Enoch was caught up, means he is alive. Thus, being taken up into the heavenly realm, was an indication in some Jewish circles at least, that those taken up were alive and did not experience death.[41]

Rapture as the involvement of Yahweh introduces the role of Yahweh, the only one able to take up a human being into the heavenly realm without the intervention of death. This is clearly articulated in Gen. 5:24. Here, the author of Genesis explains a profound dependence upon Yahweh, attributing to Yahweh the fact that Enoch escaped death: "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him" (Gen. 5:24 NRSV). However, even in the Old Testament, the only further information about Enoch other than the brief description in Gen. 5:21-24, is a genealogy (1 Chr. 1:3). The LXX's interpretation and Sir. 44:16 expand on the speculation about a possible reason why God took him up into the divine place. The LXX version of Gen. 5:24 mentions that Enoch's life was pleasing to God. In Sir. 44:16, an additional description of Enoch is added: "Enoch pleased the Lord and was taken up, an example of repentance to all generations" (Sir. 44:16 NRSV).[42] These brief remarks are clear

---

[41] It seems that the ancient Jewish view on rapture prefers the "aliveness" of ascended people to the concept of immortality. This is probably because the Jewish world was an utterly monolithic world, so that any attempt to portray a human being as divine, was strictly rejected (Zwiep 1997:48). In this regard, stating that those taken up to heaven are alive, safeguarded Israelites from being suspected of attempted blasphemy. However, Zwiep (2001:331) argues that if immortality and aliveness are seen as mutual concepts, this prevents a clear demarcation between them. One answer to the question concerning the reason for the belief about the aliveness of those taken up is that it is a belief, and that believing something to be a phenomenon or higher being, is not explicated in a reasonable way, although a social context would be assumed.

[42] As Zwiep (1997:44) sees it, "an example of repentance to all generations" is probably allegorical in reflecting

enough for the reader to conclude that Enoch was taken up by God because his life pleased God.

The description of Elijah's ascent into heaven, the most detailed bodily rapture narrative in the Old Testament, includes an explicit reference to God's action. In the description of Elijah's rapture, the whirlwind appears as a means of transportation to heaven (2 Kings 2:11). The author of 2 Kings affirms that Elijah's rapture, accompanied by the mystery of the whirlwind, is the way in which Yahweh becomes involved in human affairs (2 Kings 2:1). Later Jewish tradition adds a complementary remark providing the reason for Elijah's taking up. In 1 Macc. 2:58 Elijah's taking up is said to be because of his zeal for the law, which God tasked the Israelites to keep. Thus, Elijah's ascension, which is mentioned in 2 Kings 2:1-11 and 1 Macc. 2:58, also attributes the mystery event, the rapture, to God.

In summary, concerning immortality and deification, the Jewish ascension accounts differ in some sense from the Graeco-Roman ascension accounts. In Josephus, the rabbinic tradition, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the apocalyptic literature, those reported as having been taken up into heaven (Moses, Melchizedek, Ezra, etc.) only stay in the heavenly space temporally to await the time of a future task. This therefore differs from the concept of immortality and deification in Graeco-Roman ascension accounts, which often confer permanent divine status. However, there is a common understanding in the ascension accounts of both cultures that directly indicate a sojourn in heaven. Moreover, the Jewish writers firmly attribute the ascension events as the work of Yahweh. Later traditions also support this idea, which explicitly affirms Yahweh's power.

2.3.4. Ascension as succession narrative

Alexandrian exegesis.

Succession narratives are common and widely found in Graeco-Roman and Jewish texts.[43] The so-called succession narrative plays an essential role in the literary form of Mediterranean antiquity (Talbert 2003:19) and tells of a so-called successor who accomplishes his given task in some Graeco-Roman text. In many cases, the succession narratives would have functioned as an apology (cf. McCarter 1981:355-67) to legitimise the successor of an earlier prominent person. In order to accomplish this goal successfully, the divinity sometimes seems to be employed to confirm the successor's holistic status. Thus, succession narratives become not merely a report of a person's devolution or receiving the particular spiritual ability, but an apologetic means for illustrating the successor's actions over ordinary human capacities or the claim of divine intervention. In the archetypal example from the Old Testament, Moses exhorts Joshua in the presence of the people (Deut. 31:7-8) and then Joshua is charged with his new task by Yahweh (Deut. 31:14-15,23). The fact that Joshua is filled with the Spirit of wisdom is confirmed by Moses' action of laying his hands on Joshua (Deut. 34:9) and Joshua therefore fulfills his given task as recounted in the Book of Joshua.

Similarly, in the stories of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 16:29 and 2 Kings 13:25), the author includes prophetic succession narratives which exhibit various elements (words and themes) that consistently occur in both accounts related to Elijah and Elisha (Carroll 1969:404-6).[44] In this regard, there may have been an expectation that Elisha would repeat what Elijah had done, or play a similar role. Thomas L. Brodie (2000:3-4) suggests a number of examples in which some points can be seen as continuity and fulfilment of Elisha's charge as emphasized by the similarity between the prophets' names, their vocations, the calling of one by the other, the passing of the mantle as to a first-born son (1 Kings 19:18-21; 2 Kings 2:7-14), and Elisha's fulfilling of Elijah's mission (to anoint Hazael and Jehu, 1 Kings 19:15-16; 2 Kings 8:7-15; 9:1-3).[45] Samson Uytanlet (2014:110) notes the resemblance in the primary prophetic task of both Elijah and Elisha: to deliver the message of God's judgment against Omrides.

---

[43] For examples and references regarding the concept of succession in the Graeco-Roman world, the Jewish world, and even in Christian sectors, see Talbert (2003:19-21).

[44] Some scholars pay attention to the resemblance between Elijah and Elisha, and then argue against the concept of succession between the two (Uytanlet 2014:102-11; Keener 2012:712-7).

[45] Other parallel examples between Elijah and Elisha are the interactions with women found in the miraculous supplying of food and drink (1 Kings 19:1-8 [cf. chapter 17]; 2 Kings 4:38-44); and the Aramean ward (1 Kings 20; 2 Kings 6-7) (Brodie 1990:79).

Although it is by no means certain, it is reasonable to assume a conception of succession in the Elijah and Elisha accounts. Elisha's successive prophetic task, however, is embarked on after Elijah's rapture, which probably established Elisha's legitimacy as the successor of Elijah (Keener 2012:719).

In describing Elijah being taken up into heaven, 2 Kings 2:1-18 forms part of what has been traditionally called the "Elijah-Elisha narrative". Many scholars focus on whether this narrative leans more toward Elijah or Elisha,[46] given that the story is not about a single character, but the rapture narrative described in 2 Kings 2:1-18 clearly depicts succession. Having discussed the unity evident between Chapters 1 and 2, Hobbs (1984) argues that the subject of 2 Kings 2 is Elijah's rapture, structurally centred on the Elijah and Elisha story (Hobbs 1984:332; Brodie 1990:79). According to Cohn (2000:10), the rapture story is neither an Elijah nor an Elisha story, but rather the succession of one after the other. It describes how Elijah's life came to an end and provides a description of Elijah's rapture into heaven as witnessed by Elisha and fifty disciples. Elijah's taking up happened at the end of his career, preparing the scene for the Spirit descending on Elisha.

As mentioned above, Moses' passing on of his ministry to Joshua established a setting for the Spirit's impartation on Joshua (Deut. 34:9). Although Moses had already exhorted Joshua in the presence of people, the Spirit imparted to Joshua at the time of Moses' death, made this conclusive.

Likewise, the Elijah-Elisha succession narrative also needed a transitional setting for the Spirit to pass on to Elisha. The rapture happens at the end of Elijah's life (2 Kings 2:1-12) in much the same way as the Graeco-Roman ascension or rapture almost always occurs as an apotheosis of the hero or prominent person. The common understanding regarding these two parallel stories is that the Spirit is only imparted to another at the end of a person's life. There seems to be only one leader, who is infused by the Spirit, which cannot be shared with another person. In the Old Testament, the authority of a prophet is guaranteed by the inspiration of the Spirit of God. Here prophetic authority usually refers to affecting a wonder

---

[46] It has been debated whether 1 Kings 22:51 – 2 Kings 3:3 is about Elijah or Elisha. Most historical critics are uncomfortable with the view that the passage is about Elijah (cf. Rofé 1988:44; Fretheim 1999:136). However, a few scholars contend that this belongs to Elijah's story (Long 1991:20).

40

or miracle (cf. Ex. 31:1-5; 2 Kings 2:14), and the Spirit comes upon someone who functions by providing legitimacy for the king and prophets (1 Sam. 16:13; 2 Kings 15).

In this sense, the ascension at the end of Elijah's life, means that the Spirit of God is transmitted to his successor, which is also an announcement that Elisha has taken up the task of the prophet. A specific literary pattern is evident in the parallels between the Moses-Joshua and Elijah-Elisha cases in terms of passing on the Spirit to the successor at the end of the career of a predecessor. The succession of Elijah's ministry to Elisha is thus established by rapture; therefore, it is pivotal as a bridge between the stories of Elijah and Elisha.

2.3.5. Eschatological role of the ascended one

Exploration of the figures of those taken up to heaven in the Jewish world suggests that a rapture story can be understood as simply expressing absence or death in a particular text. However, it can also present the eschatological expectation of a person's return from heaven and of a special active role, which does not fit into the Graeco-Roman worldview (Zwiep 2001:334; Collins 1994:104).

Exploring Mal. 4:4-6 in the Old Testament, which may be the relevant background to the eschatological expectation traditions, suggests that these texts not only involve rapture, but also contain an eschatological element. In later Jewish documents the tradition of the connection between ascension and eschatological return is developed and displayed in a similar vein. In the range of texts below, however, the expectation that the eschatological figure will return, is not clearly identified, but sometimes hinted at. It is highly probably that the return of Elijah, or one like Elijah, or a prophet comparable to Elijah, was expected.

2.3.5.1. The eschatological return in Mal. 4:4-6 (MT 3:23-5)

New Testament references to an eschatological return such as the ascension narrative in Acts 1:9-11 and Jesus' prophecy in Matt. 24:29-31 imply an established tradition of the return of a prominent person in the Jewish world. However, especially given the fact that only a few people in the Old Testament aside from the instances outlined above, are taken up to heaven (Gen. 5:24; 2 Kings 2), the Old Testament contains little reference to such a tradition. Zwiep (1997:78) argues that the tradition developed more strongly from the 2nd temple period to the 1st century CE, as a result of the crises that arose in the period (the Jewish War and the destruction of the temple) evidenced in intertestamental material like the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament. Mal. 4:5-6 (3:24-5 MT), however, does provide one clear Old Testament reference, in which anticipation of Elijah's return is mentioned (Zwiep 1997:60-1).

Mal. 4:5-6 (3:23-4 MT) forms part of what scholars widely consider a later appendix (Mal. 4:4-6) added to the text composed earlier. Although few commentators deal with when Elijah was expected to return, given that the time is linked with the eschatological theme in the previous section of Malachi (Snyman 2015:184). Thus, the prophetic remark about Elijah's return in Mal. 4:5-6 refers to an eschatological event in the future (O'Brien 2004:314). It describes a time when Elijah will appear back on earth again[47] and indicates that he will play a preparatory role before the great and terrible day of Yahweh. In the time prior to the coming of Yahweh, Elijah will turn the parents' hearts to the children and vice versa, otherwise God will strike the land with a curse.

This early reference to the eschatological return of Elijah contains a number of motifs or themes which are relevant to the development of the expectation of the eschatological return and thus to the interpretation of the Lukan ascension in Acts. These themes include the Law of Moses; the Day of Yahweh; the return of Elijah; reconciliation (preparatory role); and warning of conditional punishment (called *ḥērem*). I will discuss each of these below.

Although mention of the coming of Elijah before the Day of the Lord appears for the first time in the Old Testament, the announcement of the return of the prophet Elijah probably reflects the theme of the coming of someone (Mal. 3:1) indicated by "grammatical and

---

[47] In terms of the grammatical aspect, "I will send" indicates the idea of immediacy, for it is constructed in the form of "the particle *hinne* followed by a participle" (Snyman 2015:190).

thematic similarities" (Hill 1998:383). The mention of Elijah clarifies the identity of the unknown messenger (Mal. 3:1) and immediately recalls the Elijah story illustrated in 1 Kings 17 to 2 Kings 2 (Snyman 2015:188-9). In the narrative Elijah is identified as a "prophet" who directly delivers the message of Yahweh to the people. Central to his message conveying God's admonition, is the call for Israel to love God exclusively (1 Kings 18). Having performed the successful prophetic task, Elijah is remembered by the Israelites as the greatest prophet, worthy of evading death (Kaiser 1984:108). Some scholars (Snyman 2015:189; Brown 1996:204) assert that there is an expectation of his return because Elijah was known to have been taken up into the heavenly realm because of the silence surrounding his death.[48] Concerning this aspect, the ancient reader/audience might have anticipated Elijah's role in heaven at the present time and his future role when he returns (Aune 1983:125).[49]

The mention of Elijah's return and the expectation of his eschatological role are reinforced by the fact that he not only ascends to heaven without experiencing death, but also by his being a representative prophet comparable with Moses. Mal. 4:4-6 highlights this characteristic, which reminds the reader of both Moses and Elijah as popular persons in Israelite history. It seems that Moses and Elijah invoked the Torah and prophecy respectively. However, this line of thinking of grouping Moses and Elijah together, is strange, because the law and prophecy are often seen to compete in the church and in the thinking of some modern biblical scholars (Schuller 2015:966).

In contrast to this tendency of the church and modern biblical scholarship to see the law and prophecy as opposing forces, the conclusion of Mal. 4:4-6 claims that the law and prophets do not compete. Observations from commentators in general view the appendix added by Malachi as comprising two superficially different literary traditions, the law and prophets, but that they cannot be separated (Hill 1998:365; O'Brien 2004:316-7), as they mutually support each other. In one of the earlier Old Testament texts, for example, the author of 2 Kings puts it clearly: "Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with

---

[48] "It can be explained by the obvious assumption that his contemporaries did not consider Elijah to have died in the conventional sense" (Wiener 1978:35).
[49] For a discussion of identifying a being as in Malachi's "Elijah to return", see Hill (1998:383); Verhoef (1987:340-1); Schuller (2015:966).

all the law that I commanded your ancestors and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets'" (2 Kings 17:13 NRSV).

The opening line of a tractate of the Mishnah supports this understanding as the traditional Jewish construal that the prophet delivers the Torah to people, and is not a recipient of anew revelation from God (Sicker 2004:56-7; Schuller 2015:966): "Moses received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua. Joshua transmitted it to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly" (*Pirkei Avot* 1.1).

Whether Elijah as a prophet delivered the Torah or a new revelation from Yahweh, the more important point is that both Moses and Elijah, as faithful servants of Yahweh, performed their roles thoroughly, particularly by successfully bringing the commandments of God to the ancient Israelites. While Moses' experience at Sinai (Ex. 3) is mentioned as "Horeb" in Mal. 4:4, the text of Mal. 4:4-6 as a whole is reminiscent of Elijah's communal meeting with God at Mount Sinai (1 Kings 19:8-18), in which he receives comfort and commandments from Yahweh. Given the similarity between Moses and Elijah, Brueggemann (2000:234-6) contends that 1 Kings 19 is intentionally offered as parallel to Moses (Ex. 33:21-3). So too, it is said that in Mal. 4:4-6, Moses and Elijah are parallel representatives of the law and prophecy.

In terms of the parallel between Moses and Elijah, in the New Testament the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36) further presents Moses and Elijah imagery on a mountain but is generally supposed to reflect the traditional ideas in Mal. 4:4-6 in which Moses and Elijah, and Elijah's eschatological return, are mentioned. This is a possible reason why people at the time believed that Moses and Elijah did not experience death, but were taken up into heaven, which is what people expected with regard to divine beings (Barton 2001:237). In Jewish literature, all people who were regarded as remaining in heaven after ascension (Enoch, Moses, Elijah, Ezra, Baruch and Phinehas) are described as waiting somewhere until the end, at which time their return is anticipated (Zwiep 1997:76-9). Aune (1998:625-6) argues that Mal.4:4-6 and the ascension traditions of both Moses and Elijah provide the proper background for making sense of Jesus' transfiguration in which the eschatological return of both Moses and Elijah are implicitly imbedded. Thus, in this case, as

written after Malachi, the authors of the synoptic gospels hold the traditional assumption that the two great prophets are physically alive in heaven, and also of Elijah's eschatological return, which contemporary audiences may have shared.

Malachi announces the main task that Elijah will attempt in his eschatological coming, described as reconciliation between the parents (singular form in the LXX) and their children and vice versa before the Day of Yahweh. This is disputable because the text does not present any idea of what exactly "turning to the hearts" means here. Snyman (2015:191-2) refers to a number of possible answers suggested by several scholars. Hill (1998:388) advocates the idea that it indicates the covenantal relationship between the faithful ancestors and the faithless descendants. Asiss (2011:208-20) argues that Elijah's mission concerns reconciliation between God and the people of Israel, rather than the restoration of family relationships. According to him, the relationship between God and his people, described here as "the Father of his people" and "children of God", is a common expression in the Old Testament (Asiss 2011:214-7). Snyman (2015:191-2) supports the hypothesis that Hellenistic culture caused family relationships to deteriorate, hence the text may refer to restoration of real family relationships. Although there are a number of opinions as to the possible true meaning of "turning to the hearts" in Mal. 4:4-6, it should be noted that reconciliation between fathers and their children is accepted by people as a beneficial promise from God.

Finally, the author of the Malachi appendix imparts Elijah's task with the eschatological mood of the day of Yahweh in terms of redemption (Brown 1996:205; Adelman 2009:192). This day is also alluded to several times in the rest of Malachi (3:2; 3:17, 19, 21). The overall image has two meanings: Yahweh will bring joy to the righteous, and on the other hand destruction to the wicked. However, given the Hebraic concept *ḥērem* (commonly translated as "curse"), the atmosphere of the day seems to reflect the coming judgment. Although generally understood in a negative sense, like "curse" here, its meaning is broader than a curse, destruction, and offering. It rather indicates something set aside from normal use or contact by God (Greenberg 1972:344). With regard to this basic definition by Greenberg, Park (2007:42) argues that the heart of the concept is "separation", so that the land will be

devoted to God on the return of Elijah.[50] Thus, the primary purpose of Elijah's preparatory mission before the great and terrible day, is to separate the righteous from the wicked.

As argued above with regard to the two Old Testament accounts of the ascensions of Enoch and Elijah, it was believed that Enoch and Elijah did not experience death and that they act as heavenly beings. Such imagery is manifested particularly in terms of Elijah's expected return in Mal. 4:4-6, which reflects the expectation of a belief that most ancient Jewish people may have shared. This text offers an image of Elijah's return in which his task is associated with keeping the law. The reconciliation to be established between parents and children at the time of Elijah's return, meant preparing to face the great and terrible day of Yahweh.

In the Jewish world, the belief that the ascended Elijah would return was further maintained and developed in some sense during the intertestamental period and later. It is not possible to consider all relevant texts from this time within the scope of this study. However, it is interesting to note the way in which this image was taken up by varying traditional Jewish sectors, to which this study now turns.

2.3.5.2. Rapture and eschatological return in the intertestamental period

Some Jewish literatures from the intertestamental period preserve a traditional belief in intense hope of Elijah. Some rabbinic streams of thought and the Qumran documents commonly hold a similar idea with regard to the return and role of heavenly beings who were believed to have been taken up into heaven (Keener 2012:715-6). The nature of this belief ensures thematic cohesion between earlier and later versions.

Sir. 48:1-14 is comprised of praise for what Elijah accomplished during his life, as well as the assumption that he remains alive in heaven (Sir. 48:9). After describing Elijah's rapture, Sir. 48:10 (NRSV) narrates his appointed return and his eschatological role, which is similar to the remark "turns the hearts of the parents[51] to the sons" as written in Mal. 4:4-5. However,

---

[50] Park (2007) conducted a comprehensive study of the concept of *ḥērem*. For its use in the Old Testament, the intertestamental literatures, and in particular in allusion to or echoing in Luke-Acts, see Park's published doctoral dissertation.

[51] It differs from the Hebrew version of Malachi in plural form. The singular seems to be more connected to the LXX version edited as a singular form.

Sir. 48:10 differs from Malachi in terms of Elijah's role "to restore the tribes of Jacob", which reflects an interpretation of Malachi's version, and may be more specific than Malachi's version, or reflect a hope that contemporaries may have harboured (cf. Aune 2008:15). There is no mention of "the day" which is included in Malachi. And "to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury" (Sir. 48:10 NRSV) probably articulates the description of God's discernment between the righteous and the wicked with *ḥērem*. Although the text concerning Elijah's return in Sirach's version is superficially different from Malachi's, it, in some sense, preserves the thematic cohesion between Malachi's and Sirach's versions.[52]

It is likely that a later rabbi would have been familiar with the eschatological expectation of a prophet as reflected in Mal. 4:5-6 and Sir. 48:10 and would have understood that Elijah was alive.[53] In the intertestamental rabbinic literature, however, understanding the mission of Elijah's return and his essential role is regarded largely in two different ways (Keener 2012:715-7).[54]

One of the tendencies in this period gives salience to the present political role of Elijah rather than his eschatological role in a remote future time before the day. Keener (2012:716) cautiously proposes a reason for this tendency that this may be, in part, because Israel was politically unstable at the time, especially after suffering under Hadrian.[55] The rabbis also held to the recognition of Elijah as a qualified proto-scribe and a master *halakist*[56].

---

[52] Interestingly, in terms of ascension and eschatological return, the book of Sirach parallels those in the Old Testament. As mentioned above, there are only two explicit ascension accounts: that of Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and that of Elijah (2 Kings 2:11-12), and nothing is mentioned in the Old Testaments texts of someone's return, except Elijah in the last section of Malachi. Ben Sira also includes two explicit ascensions, namely of Enoch in Sir. 44:16 and Elijah in 48:9, but he only presents the expectation of Elijah's second coming.

[53] Cf. Mo'edQat. 26a; Sanh. 113b. For the references, see Keener (2012:716); Priqe de-Rabbi Eliezer (PRE) 29, a later rabbinic tradition which adopts the image of Elijah's return as the eschatological forerunner, described in Mal. 4:5-6 and Sir. 48. The narrative is expanded in PRE 29, 43 and 47. In these texts, Elijah is linked with the zealot Phinehas, inferring a potential reason for Elijah's eternal life and his transformation from zealot to herald of the end time. For this observation in PRE, see Adelman (2009:185-208).

[54] I do not read the later rabbinic traditions as contemporary material. The later rabbinic material simply indicates that the tradition of the connection between Elijah's rapture and his return continued or was preserved in a later period in the Jewish community.

[55] Elijah's task in the second coming will be linked to the restoration of Israel to some extent. The theme of hope for restoration is developed following the ideological and sociological context of "the traumatic impact on Judean life and culture of the destruction of the temple of Solomon in 586 BCE, with the attendant political and economic subjugation to the Neo-Babylonian empire, and the forced exile of thousands from the upper classes to Babylonia" (Aune 2008:15).

[56] For the reference and another view on Elijah in later rabbinic literature, see Keener (2012:607; 208).

The other view, however, suggests another eschatological role of Elijah as a forerunner of the last time (cf. Sifre on Deut. 41.4.3; 342.5.2; Hammer 1986:84-5; 351). This view explicitly reveals an awareness of the phrase about Elijah's return in Mal. 4:5-6. Being aware of this, they may have hoped for Elijah's coming as an intermediary forerunner. Aune (1983:124-5) identifies passages in 1 Enoch 90:31 and 4 Ezra 6:26 about Elijah's extraordinary duties as a forerunner to the end of time. Matt. 17:10 and Mk. 9:11 also present the idea that Elijah will come first as a forerunner. Aune (1983:125), who examined the texts about Elijah's eschatological prophetic role, identifies five essential similarities in them: (1) the restoration; (2) intercession for the people of God to avoid the wrath of Yahweh; (3) preaching of repentance and reconciliation in Israel; (4) the gathering of scattered Israelites; and (5) the performance of miracles. Taking this into consideration, it would seem that contemporaries knew about Elijah's return and his eschatological role.

Other examples of an ascended hero's return are found in 1 Enoch and 4 Ezra. Zwiep (2001:339) suggests some texts in which Enoch's eschatological return is clear. The earliest version concerning his return is described in 1 Enoch 90:31 (2nd century BCE): "And thereafter those three who were clothed in white and had seized me by my hand [who had taken me up before], and the hand of that ram also seizing hold of me, they took me up and set me down in the midst of those sheep before the judgment took place" (ed. Lumpkin 2010:177). In 4 Ezra 6:26, written in the late 1st century CE, an expectation of the eschatological reappearance of Enoch and Elijah as two witnesses to play a preparatory role before the Messiah's coming, is included (Zwiep 1997:48).[57] However, Enoch's return and future activity are not clear in the text and there is little evidence of his return in Jewish traditions, so it may be assumed that this understanding of Enoch was not widespread in Jewish circles (Zwiep 1997:49).

Another figure in terms of the connection between rapture and eschatological return is found in apocalyptic literature. Despite there being no mention of Ezra's death in the Old Testament, 4 Ezra (late 1st century CE) describes Ezra as an exceptional person among the biblical priests

---

[57] There is a problem with interpreting Rev. 11:3-12, which describes two unknown witnesses. The two witnesses are held to be Moses and Elijah, or Enoch and Elijah, or two unknown persons called by the Lord.

and scribes and informs him of the task for which he is destined. Chapter 8 tells of Elijah's future role, describing Ezra's bodily rapture (4 Ezra 8:19) and his immortality (4 Ezra 8:53). Chapter 14 identifies Ezra as closely as Moses in terms of what he has to do for his people. In 4 Ezra 14:9, in particular, Ezra's being taken up is repeated (omitted only in Latin version) (Collins 2013:96). Ezra will live with the Messiah (Stone 1983:233),[58] like Enoch and Elijah (4 Ezra 14:9; 48). Then the Lord gives Ezra a guarantee that he will be taken up, and be alive in heaven. This guarantee likely reflects Elijah's and Enoch's experiences of being taken up into heaven. Being present in heaven with the Son until the time of the end implies Ezra's eschatological return (Zwiep 2001:340). Zwiep (1997:71-3) argues that the striking similarities between Ezra and the ascensions of Enoch and Elijah, the two righteous persons mentioned above, strengthens the anticipation about Ezra's return. Although there is no explicit mention of Ezra's return in 4 Ezra, his rapture and his eschatological return to the earth are firmly established in it.

The Syriac version of 2 Baruch (dating about 100 CE) provides a similar example paralleled by 4 Ezra with regard to the theme of rapture and return at the eschatological time. In 2 Bar. 76, the following is written about Baruch:

> And he answered and said to me (Baruch), "Since the revelation of this vision has been explained to you as you requested, hear the word of the Highest that you may know what will happen to you after these things. For you will surely depart from this world, yet it will not be unto death, but you will be kept unto the completion of the times. Therefore, go up to the top of that mountain, and all the regions of this land will pass before you; and the likeness of the inhabited world, and the top of the mountains, and the depth of the valleys, and the depths of the sea, and the number of rivers, so that you may see what you are leaving, and to where you are going. This, then, will happen after forty days. Go, then, now during these days and instruct the people as much as you are able, that they may learn so as not to die in the last time, but may learn so that they may live in the last times (2 Bar. 76:1-5).

A divine announcement is made that Baruch will be taken up without experiencing death until

---

[58] The description of Ezra's future centre of activity described in 4 Ezra is associated with an eschatological Messiah and his kingdom. See Stone (1983:229-243).

"the completion of the times" (2 Bar. 76:2), that is, as in other instances of rapture, Baruch's end will be a physical rapture to heaven where he will remain awaiting the end time. At the end of the day, then, he will be a witness to the judgment. Interestingly, before the rapture event, Baruch is granted a forty day period in 4 Ezra 14, as is granted to Jesus prior to his departure as recorded in Acts 1:1-11. This may allude to the final day of Moses in Deut. 9:9 and Ex. 34:28 (Tamási 2013:214). Examining the connection between rapture and return, Zwiep (2001:342) comments that "rapture initiates a period of temporary preservation in heaven, waiting for an eschatological task". Thus, a narrative or account of rapture in any text would encourage those who are familiar with those texts, to imagine a heavenly being coming again.

The Dead Sea Scrolls also preserve the intense eschatological image of Elijah's return (Neufeld 1997:127). Although this tradition is rare in the 2nd temple period, Collins (1994:102-6) notes that 4QMessianic Apocalypse (4Q521) may well be evidence that the Qumran community maintained the expectation of Elijah's return since this idea is referred to explicitly in Malachi. The text is recorded in the poetic literary genre and comes from a fragment of an ancient document that alludes to Elijah (frag. 2.3): "… and the law of your favour. And I will free them with […] it is sure the fathers towards the sons […] who blesses the Lord in his approval […] May the earth rejoice in all the places […] for all Israel in the rejoicing of […] and his scepter…[…]".

"I will free them" and "the fathers towards the sons" are particularly clear allusions to the original description of Elijah's return as depicted in Mal. 4:5-6 (Collins 1994:102). In this case, however, there is no vivid portrayal of the rapture of Elijah. Nevertheless, the expression, "I will free them and the fathers towards the sons", was presumably cited from Malachi and means that the author of the fragment is reflecting the image of Elijah's rapture in 2 Kings 2 (Collins 1994:102). The author of the appendix (Mal. 4:4-6) to Malachi reflects the same assumption regarding Elijah's taking up and being alive in the heavenly space. However, announcing the eschatological return of the prophet is not the critical issue in 4Q521, but it could be a related theme for proclaiming the work of the Lord which frequently includes good news to the people from through prophets such as Elijah (Collins 2006:90). Whether or not the text purports to exhibit the work of the Lord, it is important nonetheless to

note that 4Q521 expresses the eschatological expectation of Elijah's role and provides evidence that a sect or community before the period in which Christianity arose, also read Mal. 4:4-6 in the same way and held onto the hope for the eschatological return of Elijah or someone like Elijah, to fulfill his prophetic role for the people at the end of time.

From the time when the expectation of Elijah's eschatological return and his role appeared in Malachi for the first time, Jewish traditions developed it in the form of various literary genres, but all indicate the same point (cf. Sir. 48:10; 1 Enoch 90:31; 4 Ezra 6:26; 2 Bar. 76; 4Q521 etc.). These texts positively adopt the expectation by expressing the eschatological hope and the desire for redemption in the form of an announcement of the return of a prophetic figure like Elijah prior to the coming of the Lord. As I have shown by means of these examples, the connection between rapture and eschatological return is also ascertained here. Thus, it can be concluded that Jewish literature written after Malachi continuously preserved and developed the understanding of the connection between the rapture and the tradition of the eschatological return and implied that those who had ascended to heaven would play a significant role on their eschatological return.

2.4. **Concluding remarks**

The Lukan audience or readers of Luke were possibly familiar with a number of traditions around rapture which could provide an essential background for interpreting the Lukan ascension narrative in Acts 1:9-11 and the divine figure of Jesus, whose involvement in human affairs is reported a number of times in the ensuing narrative of the book of Acts. There is a range of ways in which Graeco-Roman ascension traditions are relevant, including an understanding of the connection between rapture and the expectation of the action of heroes in heaven, its familiarity to the people in the Graeco-Roman world and related literary traditions. In Jewish traditions, rapture is sometimes also related to a succession narrative and connected with a future eschatological event (such as Elijah's return) as well as God's coming judgment. Until that time, those abiding in heaven will be preserved until their return to carry out their designated tasks.

I now turn to considering the divine involvement of heavenly beings as articulated in Acts. Although the divine activity of heavenly beings is recorded identically in the Jewish (Shauf

2015:81-7), Hellenistic Jewish (Shauf 2015:152-3), and Graeco-Roman historiography (Shauf 2015:67), this study only deals with the description of divine involvement of heavenly beings in Graeco-Roman historiographies, before exploring the way in which the connection between the Lukan rapture narrative about Jesus and his reappearance, reflects this portrayal.

Chapter 3: Divine involvement in Graeco-Roman historiography

3.1. Introduction

Unlike the modern view on history, ancient history is presented from a theological point of view without which the historical dynamics involved in the works are not intelligible: the divine is, at one point at least, the significant measure of all human affairs. Thinking about the divine was not exceptional or unusual in the Graeco-Roman world. In particular, mention of or assumptions about the gods' activity in the course of history occur frequently in literature of the time in that the gods are described as involving themselves in human affairs, leading and guiding people in direct or indirect ways.[59]

Luke as a 1st-century writer presents a variety of images of, and assumptions about, divine[60] activity in the course of his work. His cultural, social, and religious context provided a model for the way in which divine activity is described in Acts, as well as a wealth of knowledge of what people in ancient times believed about divine involvement in human affairs

Luke-Acts originates from and addresses a world dominated by the Roman Empire. Thus, it portrays the Christian origins and the spread of Christianity throughout the Graeco-Roman world Luke's linguistic and rhetorical skills, often identified as superior among NT texts, have resulted in it being studied in the context of Graeco-Roman literary conventions. Most of the recent work on Luke-Acts focuses on assessing the genre(s) of the Lukan writings by predominantly studying it in relation to ancient Graeco-Roman texts of the same genre. This focus on the genre(s) of Luke-Acts has resulted in its separation from Jewish texts. Penner (2004), however, observes that in the last 15 years Acts studies have compared Acts to Jewish texts when addressing theological questions, while comparing it to non-Jewish texts

---

[59] According to Horsley (2014:16-7) this was considered natural by the ancient elite, and it was difficult to distinguish clearly between divine causation of an event and a natural phenomenon. The divine was not experienced as supernatural, but rather as rational and natural, and was understood to be an essential part of nature in ancient times.

[60] Luke's use of the term "divine" refers to one God, Jesus, and the Spirit, but sometimes angelic figures are included as agents. However, in the Graeco-Roman context "divine" refers to the gods and "the various individual constitutive deities" (Shauf 2015:2). This study follows Shauf's use of the term "the divine" to "refer to these parallel but differing representations in both sets of works" (Shauf 2015:2).

when addressing rhetorical matters Although some more recent studies have incorporated Jewish historiographies (cf. Uytanlet 2014), the continued dominance of genre studies generally confirms the prominence of non-Jewish Graeco-Roman historical genres in Acts studies. Understanding the role of the divine in Hellenistic histories has thus also become important.

According to Squires (1993:189), divine activities within the course of Hellenistic histories are expressed through the language of "providence", "portents", "epiphanies", "prophecy", and "fate" that are addressed in Acts. Such portrayals of and discourses about the divine in relation to human beings are delivered by means of various signs and phenomena (oracles, dream-visions, miracles, unusual phenomena, etc.),[61] which were regarded as ways by which a deity acted and intervened in human affairs.

At this point it is important to investigate divine involvement according to the various ways, themes, and concepts identified in Graeco-Roman historiography, but the investigation will focus more on the explicit portrayal of divine involvement in the historiographies. This is because the ways in which the divine act in literature, is so diverse that it is impossible to cover all the references describing the divine in utterances, deeds and reports by historians. This study is not concerned with the continuity between theology and historiography. The primary aim is to concentrate on divine activity in historical works and how the reader/audience of the time responded to divine activity recorded in historiography.

3.2. **Diverse views on the role of the divine in historiography**

Assumptions about divine activity are common in Graeco-Roman historiography. However,

---

[61] In Graeco-Roman historiography, divine activity is often described and identified by inference: "that (subject) was a god (predicate)" (Fowler 2010:322).

there are diverse perspectives on the role of the divine in human history. Shauf (2015:17-8) argues that the diverse views on the divine are complex, so that one cannot merely define or construe ancient historians' thought on the divine in the course of their works. He goes on to say that, with the exception of Polybius and Thucydides, who excluded theological claims in their histories, "other Graeco-Roman historians are far more willing to assert or at least consider divine guidance of seemingly natural events and divine intervention in human affairs" in terms of the role of divine in historiography (Shauf 2016:18-9). Despite the frequent uncertainty about the identity of the gods, most agree that Graeco-Roman historiography presents pronouncements and descriptions concerning the divine or myth with a wide range of frequency in relation to an event (Momigliano 1978:7; Gehrke 2011:50-2).[62]

Although many ancient historians agree that the gods are involved in or act on human history, it is significant that they did not record history solely to represent the activity of gods. The assumption of divine intervention is intentionally used when necessary (Fowler 2010:322). Uytanlet (2014:27-8) provides two instances. The first example is from Herodotus, who in his history, claims: "Now, for the stories which I heard about the gods, I am not desirous to hold that no man knows about the gods more than another; and I will say no more about them than what I am constrained to say by the course of my history" (Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 2.3).[63] Another example is the historian Diodorus Siculus (*Library of History* 1.6.1), who seems to have followed the example of Herodotus, who was unwillingly compelled to include the divine in his work.[64] It is not possible to generalise, but the extent to which these two

---

[62] A similar understanding is found in Grene's (1987) translation of Herodotus' *History,* referenced by Van Seters (2002:9). Herodotus (1987:24-5) says that "any special God, or the Gods, or fate, or (very commonly) the divines (*to theion* or *to daimonion*) are all one. They all signify the power that controls the world of man. And this power's relation to man is bound up with a maddening relation between man's reason and understanding and such 'signs' as the divine has allowed us to have of its future or past intervention" (Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 6.27).

[63] Herodotus' second volume, dealing with Homeric epic, especially the *Iliad* (Greenwood 2015:126-7) shows careful handling of the mythical elements for persuasive historiography. In this passage, Herodotus disagrees with Homer's manipulated truth in terms of whether Helen went to Troy (Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 2.116). Herodotus seems to deny the mythical setting. As a historian, Herodotus' inquiry was limited to whatever source he could find as evidence for earth-bound human events. Unlike the epic, Herodotus does not accept passionately divine work or intervention here, and thus, unlike in the *Iliad*, his history is narrated solely from the more rational perspective of what human beings think. However, Herodotus still includes miracle, prophecy, and divine activity behind human history, signifying that he probably took a careful stance in terms of the role of the divine in history, indicating that scholarship had divided into two movements (cf. Greenwood 2015:152-3).

[64] Diodorus Siculus' perspective on the divine is much the same as Herodotus' stance, as cited by Uytanlet (2014): "concerning the various conceptions of the gods formed by those who were the first to introduce the worship of the deity, and concerning the myths which are told about each of the immortals, although we shall

historians reflect the actions of the gods in their works (Burrow 2007:25-6; cf. Fornara 1983:78)[65] shows that they at least carefully recorded the activities of the gods who interacted with, performed and intervened in human affairs.

As argued above, there are examples of divine involvement in historiography, but two ancient historians (Thucydides and Polybius) tended to rule out the concept of the divine as a safer way to present the complete truth. In this they deviated from other ancient historians. Thucydides (5th century BCE) is known as the pioneering scientific and rational historian and is well known for avoiding any mythical elements in his work (Burrow 2007:25).[66] This is related to his concerns and aims in recording history (cf. Loraux 2011:20-6).

In *History of the Peloponnesian war*, **Thucydides** states his claim against traditional historical records before narrating the Peloponnesian War, saying that "it is difficult to be sure of every detail in the evidence since people accept quite uncritically any reports of the past they get from others, even those relating to their own country" (*History of the Peloponnesian war* 1.20.1). He continues "as to the events of the war themselves, however, I resolved not to rely in my writing on what I learned from chance sources or even on my own impressions, but both in the cases where I was present myself and in those where I depended on others I investigated every detail with the utmost concern for accuracy" (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian war* 1.22.2). This affirms that the portrayal of the divine is almost absent in his history, so that his claim for speaking the truth cannot be questioned with regard to its historicity (Loraux 2011:25-6; Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian war* 1.22.4).[67]

---

refrain from setting forth the most part in detail, since such a procedure would require a long account, yet whatever on these subjects we may feel to be pertinent to the several parts of our proposed history we shall present in a summary fashion, that nothing which is worth hearing may be found missing" (*Library of History* 1.6.1). However, divine guidance in history is not the primary concern of Diodorus, but rather an element to support the universal history he pursues, as a succession of object lessons in virtue and vice (Green 2010:6).

[65] For Herodotus, see Fornara (1988:78); for other examples and references to Herodotus, Shauf (2015:19-24); in relation to the tragic motif, see Lee (2013:34-54); for Diodorus Siculus in terms of the concept of the divine, see Squires (1993); for divine testimony through utterance and deeds, see McConnell (2015:90-113, 178).

[66] Cf. Mynott (2013:*Liv*, in the section entitled "Greek deities").

[67] When Thucydides uses "speaking the truth", it is a very complicated concept. Greenwood (2015:57) provides a guideline as to what Thucydides' usage could imply: "Firstly, 'speaking the truth' can have philosophical or, more precisely, ontological overtones (whether what one is speaking about exists or not). Secondly, 'speaking the truth' can have an ideological dimension: whose truth, or whose version of the truth (Thucydides' version, the speaker's version, or the audience's version)? Thirdly, in Thucydides' account truth has an uneasy relationship with the spoken word; hence the very idea of 'speaking the truth' is problematic. In this last case, Thucydides contrasts 'speaking the truth' with 'writing the truth'. Fourthly, since Thucydides' *History* is a

Thucydides thus as far as possible does not include divine providence, fate, and fortune, which all were used to demonstrate divine involvement by his contemporaries (Shauf 2015: 25-6). There are, however, some imaginative words in his work, but they do not clearly indicate any divine activity or intervention in human history. Thucydides merely reports past interpretations of an event in terms of the divine to his contemporary or future readers. For instance, Thucydides uses "the god responded that" in the scene of the response of the Oracle of Delphi (*History of the Peloponnesian war* 1. 25.1).[68] This is also applicable in another practice of the oracle and the interpretation of miraculous disasters seen as portents (*History of the Peloponnesian war* 2.53.4; 2.54; 1.23; 2.28; 4.52.1; 2.17.2; cf. Shauf 2015:26-7).[69]

Why did Thucydides include instances like the above although he professes a sceptical stance on the assertion of divine action behind human history:

> Perhaps the absence of the element of fable in my work may make it seem less easy on the ear; but it will have served its purpose well enough if it is judged useful by those who want to have a clear view of what happened in the past and what - the human condition being what it is - can be expected to happen again some time in the future in similar or much the same ways. It is composed to be a possession for all time and not just a performance-piece for the moment (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian war* 1.22.4).

In spite of his critical stance on the intervention of the divine and mythical elements in history, he does report the mythical view of the historical interpretation of the past to demonstrate that the belief in the divine as involved and guiding human history was popular or at least widely held at the time. Thus, in his works he does reflect on some of the actions of the gods, who interacted with and intervened in human affairs (Burrow 2007:25-6; cf. Fornara 1983:78).

Polybius was less strict than Thucydides in terms of including the role of the divine in history,

---

literary narrative, albeit a factual narrative that concerns itself with the presentation and analysis of real events as opposed to imaginary subject matter, we also need to consider the formal, rhetorical conventions that are employed in presenting the truth (the 'form' of the truth)".

[68] Shauf (2015:25) offers another example of consulting the oracle and a response in similar language. Cf. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian war* 1.119.3. For the report of the religious activity, 2.8.2-3; 2.21.3.

[69] In one particular case, the oracle is credited as true in the history of Thucydides (*History of the Peloponnesian war* 2.17.2).

but his stance on divine involvement in history is also distinct from other historians. Following Thucydides, he criticises previous reports which included mythical features in history (Burrow 2007:68). He also draws attention to the cause of an event that determined circumstances (Polybius, *The Histories* 3.32). Ancient historians offer whether the main factor of an event was divine or human (Marguerat 2002:14, 25).[70] When human actions caused an event, it was accepted that humans were the cause, and Polybius denies divine causation (Marincola 2001:143-4; Shauf 2015:32) except for an event such as a miracle or a spectacular event that was assumed as having a divine cause by other historians. However, in Polybius' work, allowance for the divine is only designed to "safeguard the piety of the people towards the divine" (Polybius, *The Histories* 16.12.9).

Although he was wary of the attitude of indiscriminately ascribing historical events to the gods, Polybius occasionally refers to divine activity behind human history by mentioning fate and providence (Shauf 2015:33). Already in 1957 Walbank (1957:17) identified a number of manifestations of the divine principle that Polybius used, including τύχη as the goddess "Fortune" or "chance", and natural phenomena such as heavy and persistent rain, drought destroying the crops, outbreaks of plague; in short what today would be termed "acts of God".

When Polybius uses the term fortune or chance (τύχη) in his historical narrative, this[71] is the manifestation of divine will and as such considered the activity of the personified goddess of fortune (Marincola 2001:143). Polybius uses τύχη (fortune) ambiguously and with a wide range of meanings (Marincola 2001:143),[72] so his intention is sometimes difficult to define (Van Seters 2002:11).[73] Walbank(1957:18) argues that the use of τύχη in relation to events which, although limited by context, could not be caused by human power, was logically considered to be the activity of fortune. Capricious and sensational events that, in most cases, comprised disasters were seen as her activities (Walbank 1957:18). Such events do not require indefinite assurances of divine action to determine who is involved in the particular case.[74]

---

[70] In contrast to this, seeking human causation is absent in Luke-Acts (Marguerat 2004:25; Shauf 2015:207).

[71] For the argument about Polybius' use of τύχη in *Histories*, see Frank W. Walbank (2007:349-55).

[72] It can mean "pure chance" or function as a metaphor (Walbank 2007:350-1, 354).

[73] This diagnosis borrows from Walbank (1957), a professional in the field of study regarding Polybius (16-27).

[74] Therefore, minimum standards or guidance on what constitutes divine action are not needed. Polybius himself discusses this issue in *Histories* in the following manner (Polybius, *Histories*36.17.1-4): "For my part,

Later **Livy** (59 BCE-17 CE) presents his own distinct views on the divine in his writings on the origin and rise of the Roman Empire. Although Livy rarely describes direct divine communication, he believes that the divine really communicated with human beings and that divine activities in the course of his histories are expressed through the language of fate, fortune, and portents, and through typical divine communication through an oracle, dream-visions, and prophecies (Shauf 2015:50-1). He does, however, have a sceptical view of the role of the divine; and equivocates whether or not the divine really were ever involved (Davies 2004:22; cf. Livy, *History* 21.62.1). These two opposite poles represented by one single historian are problematic. Davies (2004:22-6) deals with the problem of the coexistence of religious belief and skepticism signifying that Livy was a firm believer and that each case therefore had to be critically determined as to the cause of the event.[75] A more eclectic suggestion is that he probably was not completely sure of the gods' activities in human history.

Tacitus (56 BCE-117CE) likewise entertains views of gods' activities and a critical stance that indicate both positive and negative attitudes towards divine activity in history as a common denominator between Livy and Tacitus. As with the others, the question about who caused an event, is also significant. Tacitus accepts both divine and natural causation (Shauf 2015:55; cf. Tacitus, *Histories* 5.7) and then extends to the concept of chance (*Fors* in Latin), which could be assigned to a god or natural causes (*Fatum* in Latin) (Davies 2004:170-6).[76] Tacitus, however, was not sure what the divine was really doing (Shauf 2015:54).[77] Nevertheless, events caused by the divine, such as divine retribution, are seen as acts of the

---

says Polybius, in finding fault with those who ascribe public events and incidents in private life to Fate and Chance, I now wish to state my opinion on this subject as far as it is admissible to do so in a strictly historical work. Now indeed as regards things the causes of which it is impossible or difficult for a mere man to understand, we may perhaps be justified in getting out of the difficulty by setting them down to the action of a god or of chance, I mean such things as exceptionally heavy and continuous rain or snow, or on the other hand the destruction of crops by severe drought or frost, or a persistent outbreak of plague or other similar things of which it is not easy to detect the cause. So in regard to such matters we naturally bow to popular opinion, as we cannot make out why they happen, and attempting by prayer and sacrifice to appease the heavenly powers, we send to ask the gods what we must do and say, to set things right and cause the evil that afflicts us to cease. But as for matters the efficient and final cause of which it is possible to discover we should not, I think, put them down to divine action".

[75] According to Shauf (2015:52), Livy's stance on divine activity is close to Diodorus and Dionysius, but his sceptical position with regard to divine intervention in history is akin to that of Thucydides.

[76] For examples, also see Davies (2004:170-6).

[77] For example, see *Annals* 15.36; 1.28; *Histories* 4.26.

divine.

Despite the convincing use of divine involvement and extreme denial of divine involvement in historiography, events are often interpreted in relation to divine activity. For instance, Herodotus, who viewed divine activity critically in his work, provides many descriptions of dramatic events attributed to the unknown divine being. In *Hellenica,* the approach of Xenophon (4th century BCE), seems similar to that of Herodotus, but his emphasis is more on morality (Shauf 2015:27-32), so the virtue of the deity as an immortal being in the heavenly space is reinforced. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1st century BCE) in *Roman Antiquities* convincingly advocates divine guidance in human affairs to the same degree as Herodotus (Shauf 2015:37). The moral is also important in his historical writing. This is likewise apparent in Diodorus Siculus' (1st century BCE) *Library of History,* in which moral edification is regarded as his central purpose. The divine is thus considered to be a major moral example for people to emulate (Shauf 2015:44).

There may be a philosophical influence on the attitude of advocating divine activity in history. Divination and providence, for example, were part of Stoic philosophy, but opposed by the Epicureans. Stoic belief also supported the existence of the divine and divine involvement in human events (Uytanlet 2014:28-9; Squires 1993:103-5).

However, the tension between strong conviction and a sceptical attitude with regard to the role of the deities in history, continues to coexist. Other histories reluctantly report divine intervention (Uytanlet 2014:29). Especially, Herodotus, the father of history, carefully includes the divine when deemed necessary. Thus, attributing the cause of historical events to the actions of gods, was widespread in writing history. Unlike in modern historical narrative, ancient historians could not ignore the activity of gods, which makes this a unique characteristic of ancient history.[78]

Some of the terms or names used to refer to gods or goddesses and express divine guidance in ancient Greek and Roman culture are fate, fortune, and providence. Occurrences considered

---

[78] Nice (1999:52-67) demonstrates that Roman people from the late 3rd century BCE to middle 1st century BCE had no interest in divine activity regarding their lives. In contrast to mainstream Roman thought, historians use divine practice differently in their works.

to be manifestations of the divine for conveying the divine will or message, such as dream-visions and oracles, also frequently occur in historical records. Even natural phenomena such as lightning, rain, storm and drought, are explained as the activity of gods. All these representations regarded as divine guidance in history are discussed in the following sections.

3.3. **Divine providence**

Divine providence is a feature of the Graeco-Roman world, so it is unsurprising that it became an essential aspect of ancient historiography.[79] Providence is about divine intention[80] which seems to describe "god at work in human history".[81] In this regard it was generally believed that gods guided events (Squires 1993:38). Historians in ancient times thus often attributed the cause of an event to divine providence, which is usually presented as testimony.

3.3.1. **Stoicism and rhetoric training on providence**

As briefly mentioned above, the frequent attempts of historians to interpret history and events as divine providence, can be understood against the ideological background of Greek philosophy. Squires (1993:38-40) notes this feature. According to his analysis, ancient Greek historians, especially Diodorus and Dionysius, advanced the notion of divine providence in their works, in which the providence of anonymous gods is described with an emphasis on their role in guiding events according to their wishes.[82] In this regard, Stoic philosophy was rooted in a religious base, and historians, who had a positive attitude to the power of the divine in history, generally had the same ideological ideas (Squires 1993:39).

In Stoic philosophy, the universe itself was a god. In other words, Stoicism did not view the

---

[79] Diodorus Siculus comments on how important divine providence is in history: "such historians have therein shown themselves to be, as it were, ministers of divine providence. For just as providence, having brought the orderly arrangement of the visible stars and the natures of men together into one common relationship, continually directs their courses through all eternity, apportioning to each that which falls to it by the direction of fate, so likewise the historians, in recording the common affairs of the inhabited world as though they were those of a single state, have made of their treatises a single reckoning of past events and a common clearing-house of knowledge concerning them" (Diodorus, *Library of History* 1.1.3).

[80] According to Quintilian, providence is used to explain god's favour to humankind (*Institutio Oratoria*, 1.12.19, quoted in Murphy 2014). Therefore the gods' activity in history concerns providential care of people (Grant 1986:49-50).

[81] This is the title of the third chapter in Squires' (1993:37) book.

[82] Both Diodorus and Dionysius mention the contemporary objection to accepting divine activity in human affairs in their works (Diodorus, Library of History 15.48.4; Dionysius, Roman Antiquities 2.688.1-2); for this argument, see Squire (1993:38-9).

divine as supernatural, but rather as natural and existing everywhere. The world was experienced as fully filled with "spirit", and "spirit" seemed to be an objective reason (*logos*) which brought order to the world (Martin 1978:41-3). An objective reason (*logos*), which makes up the world and all beings, would have been viewed as the providence of god (Long 2001:22). Indeed, an objective reason was seen as "integrity and only authority" (Long 2001:25). Martin (1978:43-4), for example, offers three topics from Epictetus' teaching in *Discourses* (1.16), which concerns Stoic thought (50-120CE), in which he addresses the most implicit and consistent statements demonstrating religious beliefs in terms of providence.

As Epictetus asserts in the first text:

> By Zeus and the gods, one gift of nature would be enough to make a man who is reverent and grateful perceive the [divine] Providence…Take the fact that milk is produced from grass, and cheese from milk and that wool grows from skin. Who has created or contrived these things? No one. (Epictetus, *Discourses 1*.16, cf. Martin 1987:43)

Then he moves to the issue of sexuality, saying that the distinction between man and woman, and the characteristics of each gender, are determined by divine providence. The individuality and the difference between men and women must, therefore, be kept distinct as in its origin (Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.16, cf. Martin 1987:44). Even the tools needed to cultivate the land were also understood to have been given to people by divine providence (Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.16, cf. Martin 1987:44-5). Epictetus considers providence central to humankind, but recognises the limitations of human beings as unable to know all the providence of god for the universe, and the duty of people to praise God for doing all these things.

That said, in the context of the Graeco-Roman cultural world, there was a belief in divine providence which was central to both the Greek and the Roman stoics (Long 2001:23; Burrow 2007:186). For the Stoics, divine providence was like a law that determined the order of the universe (god), the nature of man, and even the behaviour of human beings (cf. Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.14, appended in Long 2001:25-6). Based on this idea, Stoicism in this regard pursued a higher standard of moral conduct designed by providence (Martin 1987:46). So, providence became an essential topic in Stoic philosophy. The issue of providence was not a metaphysical discourse that seemed far removed from ordinary lives; it could be found

62

in nature, life, and even in a person's own self, which is within reach in everyday life.

In some rhetorical training, the subject of providence was provided as part of the curriculum (Grant 1986:49; Squires 1993:39).[83] Historical writing accepted techniques and styles widely available through training in rhetoric (Burrow 2007:168). Squires (1993:15-7; 38-46) notes that representing divine providence was the aim of two historians, Dionysius and Diodorus, and that divine providence was an essential concept in writing historiography. However, providence was common knowledge, and not only restricted to the educated (learned). For whatsoever purpose providence was used, in historical writings providence plays an important role, leading us to suppose that providence at the very least was known to ancient Graeco-Roman historians.[84]

3.3.2. Portrayal of providence

In most cases, providence is depicted in the form of a report, and was understood as the cause of an event. For instance, Herodotus in *The Persian Wars* interprets Pisistratus's meeting with Amphilytus as "the providence of heaven", when Amphilytus announces a prophecy to Pisistratus (Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 1.62). Pisistratus acts on the prophesy and leads his army against the enemy. Herodotus narrates that the war was led and conducted by divine providence, so Pisistratus' army fulfilled the prophecy by winning the war (Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 1.63).

Another example of divine providence used in the pattern of divine involvement in a big event like a war, is found in Diodorus Siculus' report in *Library of History*. In this report, Megabates, the high admiral of the fleet, sails out against the Greeks, according to the order of Xerxes. While sailing from Pydna in Macedonia towards the promontory of Magnesia known as Cape Sepias, a huge storm abruptly arises. The storm causes more than 300 ships to sink, so the military power of the Persian army was much weakened in numbers and equipment for a battle (Diodorus, *Library of History* 2.12). Diodorus mentions the general belief among people that the storm was divine providence siding with the Greeks (Diodorus,

---

[83] Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 3.5.6; 5.7.35; 7.2.2; 12.2.21; for references that providence was a topic for training students in debate, see Squires 1993:39.

[84] For the crucial role of Stoicism in Roman historiography and Livy's awareness of this in relation to providence, see Walsh (1961:51-60).

Library of History 2.13). Although Diodorus noted that scientists were not willing to attribute the cause of a natural phenomenon like the storm to divine activity, he prefers to consider natural disasters as the result of the anger of a god (Squires 1993:38). In this regard, it is not strange that this storm was thought to have been caused by divine providence.

The belief in divine providence related to nature is supported by the understanding that divine providence preserves the natural order. Herodotus says that "it would seem that the wisdom of divine providence (as is but reasonable) has made all creatures prolific" (Herodotus, *The Persian wars* 3.108). This is because the universe is balanced by divine providence (Pownall 2004:6; cf. 3.109).

Keeping the world order balanced by divine providence means that it not only maintains the order of nature, but also the order of human affairs. This seemed especially true in the political rise and fall of empires that was the concern of historians.[85] In this regard, it is no surprise that the attempts by historians to explain the various wars were closely associated with the rise and fall of a country, and attributed to divine providence.

This type of usage of divine providence to maintain the balance of the universe appears to be relevant to the portrayal of divine retributive justice.[86] By bestowing divine reward or retribution on people either on the individual level or on the assembly level of the organisational unit, the balance of the universe is maintained. But ancient Greek historiographical literature more frequently portrays retribution than reward (Trompf 2000:20). One clear example is by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in *Roman Antiquities*. After telling of the collapse of Messena which happened during the war between Rome and the prominent Greek king Phyrrus' troops (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 20.1.8-3.7), Dionysius refers to a similar story of calamity that befell Rhegium, attributing it to a man named Decius, the commander of the garrison. While some of the Rhegians were still asleep or feasting, Decius and his troops went to the houses of the Rhegians and slew them all. Although most of the men were killed, Decius and his troops did not cease their cruelty; they forcibly raped the

---

[85] For a brief argument on the rise and fall of empire in Herodotus, see Pownall (2004:6).
[86] For examples of the retributive principle in the ancient Hellenistic context, see Trompf (2000:20-33). He refers to examples of retributive justice described in historiography. He does not purport to reveal divine activity behind retribution, so it does not matter if the divine works behind retributive practice. However, in his examples, the divine is mostly linked to causation of retribution in both Hellenistic and Hebrew historiography.

remaining women who witnessed the death of their fathers and husbands. Decius became the tyrant of Rhegium. But this tragedy was followed by an unknown disease that caused severe pain in Decius' eyes. Dionysius explains that "divine providence took vengeance upon Decius" (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 20.5.2). His fate worsened and eventually he was taken away blind by the Roman army that arrived in the city. This case ends with the report of the city being restored by survivors of the carnage of Decius (cf. Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 20.4.1-5.2). What this story depicts is the providence of the gods who punish those who commit evil or a crime in accordance with the general customary rule of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

In Plutarch's view, even evil can be proof of providence. According to Plutarch, the world is governed by providence exercised by the divine to benefit people (Beck 2014:91). However, this typical understanding of providence cannot explain the evil that exists in the ordinary lives of human beings. In denying dualism, Plutarch views both good and evil as the providential care of the gods, with providential evil mostly appearing in the shape of retribution (Beck 2014:91). Bernstein (1993:76) analyses how Plutarch views punishment after the death of a human being, and argues that the divine works providentially by punishing humankind as follows: (1) Those who have innate evil which they inherited from their forbears, must be purified in their lifetime. (2) While the descendants are suffering, the forbears suffer punishment after death. The double punishment in this world and another world are for the purpose of education, purification, and determent (Bernstein 1993:76), which Plutarch conceives of as the proof of providence (Bernstein 1993:74). In this case, providence works in directly opposed situations, good and bad, but ultimately works to bring benefit to people.

3.3.3. Fortune and providence

Unlike most uses of providence in historiography which do not reveal the identity or name of a certain god but simply and preferably refer to "providence", Fortune is a goddess whose

identity is expressed and whose activity is deemed as divine providence by some Graeco-Roman historians. Polybius in *The Histories* says "Fortune has guided almost all the affairs of the world in one direction and has forced them to incline towards one and the same end" (Polybius, *The Histories* 1.4).[87] As Fortune guides history towards one aim converging in a single ending, the historian should pursue the same aim (Polybius, *The Histories* 1.4).[88] Polybius' understanding of the role of Fortune in history may be called universal history (Burrow 2007:69) in that it involves a great event such as the rise of Rome and the war for territorial expansion (the Punic Wars) in the case of Polybius. However, the role of Fortune is one of the factors Polybius takes into account for his idealistic, universal, and pragmatic history,[89] rather than the full truth (Burrow 2007:74). For Polybius, the providential role of Fortune in his historical work is necessarily useful for making tentative conclusions to illustrate the cause of an event as an option rather than the only measure to explain everything.

In a similar vein, the portrayal for Fortune in Diodorus' *Library of History* plays an essential role as the measure to explain the cause of an event. In Diodorus' portrayal, Fortune's activity is presented as intervening in human affairs to make difficult situations better or worse with regard to a great historical event such as warfare or even a private personal event. For instance, when the Syracusans dealt with the matter regarding Ducetius, an old man amongst those gathered argued that they had to depend on a god to determine the fate of Ducetius, thus they had to supplicate Fortune or divine retribution, because the fate of a single person is handled by the divine (Diodorus, *Library of History* 11.92.3-4). Another instance concerns the story of King Ptolemy who commanded his men to hunt elephants and snakes. The people, fortunately, succeeded in capturing them. Diodorus attributes this outcome to the work of Fortune. He suggests that successful hunting done with her blessing can hardly be denied (Diodorus, *Library of History* 3.36.3-5). In this respect, Fortune's activity is closely related to human affairs, even to more private issues that seem to be relatively less important than

---

[87] Crabbe (2016:150-1) claims that Polybius uses "providence" "in the sense of human foresight", rather than in the sense of Walbank's understanding of it as the "driving force of history".

[88] Describing the activity of Fortune was one of Polybius' two aims for his history. The first aim was to provide a kind of lesson from the past for politicians and second to guide the reader or audience to recognise the active role of Fortune by portraying the cause of events in the past (Polybius, *The Histories* 1.12-13).

[89] Regarding "pragmatic history", Polybius sought balance to avoid accounts that could be read as taking sides, so that the readers would make their own judgments on each account. Walbank (1957:12) challenges this, indicating that, although it is difficult to judge, some bias can be detected in the course of Polybius' work, but he rejects attempts to exaggerate this (Walbank 1957:11).

reports of magnificent wars. Hence, Fortune, who provides people with something good, is spontaneously respected (Diodorus, *Library of History* 13.21.4-5).

Dionysius in his *Roman Antiquities* likewise views Fortune positively, as in Diodorus' portrayal of her. He particularly informs the reader that Fortune caused the rise of the Roman Empire, especially by giving strength to the Roman soldiers and assisting them by bringing disaster to their enemy so that the soldiers could conquer a city more easily (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 2.17.3-4). He also endorses her goodness in that the prosperity and adversity commonly shared by all Roman citizens are allotted by Fortune (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 3.29.4).

Sometimes a change in the weather is regarded as a favour from Fortune indicating her support. According to Squires (1993:45), some people in ancient times experienced the crucial nature of Fortune as "unstable, uncertain inconsistent, inscrutable and changeable". The fickle nature of Fortune led Diodorus to reveal uncertainty as to whether a situation is advantageous or not. Constant changes in a situation, and fate determined by the fickleness of Fortune (Diodorus, *Library of History* 18.59.6; 27.15.3), confuse people who want to anticipate a consistent and predictable future (Diodorus, *Library of History* 18.59.6).[90] Thucydides likewise notes that Fortune is fickle.

Although it was difficult to accept the fickleness of Fortune, which is subject to a negative evaluation, Fortune's providential activity was positively evaluated by the ancient people. The positive view concerning her involvement in human affairs was very popular and was accepted by historians such as Polybius (Burrow 2008:81), Dionysius, and Diodorus (Squires 1993:45-6), who included Fortune's providential activity in their historiographical narratives to reveal the cause of events and the meaning of phenomena. Hence, understanding Fortune's providential caring for people was essential to these historians.

Although all historians in ancient times did not argue thus, providence was clearly a means of articulating history. A number of Graeco-Roman historians reflecting contemporary common

---

[90] There can be no doubt that people prefer predictable and stable lives. In this regard, a negative response to the fickleness of Fortune is taken as a natural reaction.

belief portrayed or explicitly stated the providential work of the gods in human affairs. This hermeneutical importance may not be depreciated when reading the Graeco-Roman historiography in antiquity. It was a general belief that the world is governed by divine providence, so the history of humankind was also regarded as intentionally led by providential divine will.

With this provident background, Graeco-Roman historians reported or described divine involvement, whether direct or indirect, by articulating the events of life with reference to miracles, oracles, and more vivid portrayals of dreams and visions. Luke's second writing, the Book of Acts, reports similar divine activity through epiphanies such as dreams and visions, and miracles, but he seems to narrate miraculous events more readily than Graeco-Roman historians. We now turn to a number of references to miracles in Graeco-Roman historiographies to investigate how audiences/readers in ancient times interpreted the causes of miraculous phenomena.

3.4. **Miracles and divine work[91]**

Having examined how some Graeco-Roman historians treated the providential work of the divine in their writing, the previous section proposed that the writers and even readers or audiences believed that human history was determined and led in accordance with divine providential guidance (Nice 1999:66-7). Alongside this belief, some Graeco-Roman historiographies report miracles, wonders, and signs within the cultural milieu which may now be considered.[92] However, they rarely refer to divine performance of miracles in the course of their works (Keener 2011:16). This is probably because many Graeco-Roman

---

[91] McConnell (2014:6) explains why the term "miracle" is preferably used in his study rather than the term "supernatural", because "this carries with it a post-Enlightenment assumption that the world is governed by natural laws; this is clearly anachronism when one considers the worldview of a first-century audience". He relies on other scholars' definition of a miracle and argues that miracles should be related to or appeal to divine causation. For references to the definition of miracle in terms of divine activity, see McConnell (2014:6). Another definition of the term "miracle" comes from Licona and Van der Watt (2009:11). Although the credibility or historicity of miracles is debated, scholars like (Bartholomew (2000); Beaudoin (2006); Bultmann (1958); Ehrman (2008); Hume (2000; 1777); Lewis (1978); Meier (1994), etc.) cited in McConnell's book commonly agree to define miracles as supernatural phenomena caused by external forces or divine power.

[92] For selected concise miracle stories in a variety of genres in Graeco-Roman literature, see Wendy Cotter (1999). The selected miracle stories do not comprise an attempt to demonstrate the historicity or credibility of miracles, but rather to address how people accept such miracles and whether people ascribe it to the divine. Richard A. Horsley (2014:14-9) discusses the miracle terminology in Graeco-Roman culture that frequently appears in reports of miraculous events but differs from a modern understanding. According to him "sign" and "wonder" are stereotypical terms used by writers describing miracles.

historians took an ambivalent position between trust and skepticism with regard to miraculous events (Keener 2011:90).

Nevertheless, having considered Graeco-Roman historiography, New Testament scholars generally agree that accounts of miracles that occur, present the miracle as a sign of divine involvement in the event. According to Kee (1986:3), "miracle embodies the claim that healing can be accomplished through appeal to, and subsequent action by the gods, either directly or through a chosen intermediary agent". Although Dionysius was not inclined to include miracles in his history, Balch (2015:212) found in his limited observation, that special persons like the founder of Rome, Romulus, could only perform a miracle with divine blessing or if they were divine beings themselves. Analysing divine testimony in Graeco-Roman historiography, McConnell (2014:6) also insists that miracles should be understood as divine activity. Hence, examples from Graeco-Roman historians illustrate miracles in terms of divine involvement.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus provides an exceptional miracle report in his *Roman Antiquities* by introducing the popular Roman tradition that Numa, the king, was involved in many marvelous stories (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 2.60.4). As an example, Dionysius presents Numa's extraordinary relationship with the nymph Egeria, who visited Numa and guided his actions during his reign (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 2.60.5). Dionysius continues by providing a miracle concerning the feeding of a guest. Numa invited a number of Romans to his house without completing preparations for the dinner. When the Romans arrived at the appointed time, all were astonished when they saw that everything has been made ready for the dinner in a very short time, and neither the required furniture nor anything else that was needed, was lacking (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 2.60.6-7). People who were invited to the banquet commonly agreed that the goddesses with whom Numa had conversed, were involved in the preparation of the banquet. In the next chapter, however, Dionysius includes a critical opinion of this story, suggesting that it was fabricated by Numa himself for political purposes. Nevertheless, those who were in awe of the divine, would have complied with Numa's laws (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 2.61.1), because authority for ruling the country was granted by the divine. Thus, Numa's encounter with the divine and the feeding miracle account functioned to strengthen Numa's authority granted by the divine being and represents

69

the common belief of ancient people that a miracle occurs by the intervention of a god.

Similarly, miraculous events in historiography function to identify someone's greatness, as seen in Livy's *History of Rome* (1.39).[93] Livy narrates an account introducing the prodigy Servius Tullius, who appeared at a palace. In his early childhood a miraculous flame appeared around his head while he was sleeping. This mysterious phenomenon was witnessed by many people. Livy describes the reaction of the king and queen to this miracle as that they "were aroused by the great uproar", which implies its rareness. For the queen, it was a sign of the extraordinarily nature of the infant, and according to Livy, it was caused by the will of the divine. Warrior (2006:57) comments on the political function of the miraculous flame, proposing that it served to signify both Tullius' extraordinary status thereafter and even "his future greatness". Thus, in this account, the miracle is described as clearly indicating divine involvement, which played an important role in giving credit to Servius Tullius' greatness from his early childhood.

McConnell (2014:196-7)[94] presents an unusual occurrence of a mysterious portent from Dionysius of Halicarnassus who, in *Roman Antiquities*, narrates a traditional local account about the conception of Servius Tullius. In this legend, one day a male penis appeared while a sacrifice was offered in the palace on the hearth on which the Romans regularly performed sacrifices and religious ceremonies to consecrate their first meals (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 4.2.1). Tarquinius, who heard of this, interpreted the mysterious phenomenon as revealing the child's genius and consulted Tanaquil, a soothsayer. She told him that "it was ordained by fate that from the royal hearth should issue a scion superior to the race of mortals, to be born of the woman who should conceive by that phantom" (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 4.2.2). Another soothsayer also affirmed this. The king thought that Osciria, who first saw the miraculous phenomenon, was a woman with potential to be the mother of the prodigy. As Tanaquil foretold, Osciria conceived – some people believed by having intercourse with a god – and gave birth to the child Tullius (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 4.2.3). The miraculous account of the conception and birth of Tullius was, however, not

---

[93] Livy seemed to be more willing to include miracles in the course of his work, although some descriptions as extranormal phenomena are disputable. For abundant references of miracles in Livy's work, see Keener (2011:91).

[94] McConnell's primary concern regarding this account is that its purpose was to prove that the fire was a form of divine testimony.

believed by all (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 4.2.3), so Dionysius also includes the account of the miraculous fire around Tullius' head in early childhood narrated by Livy, as cited above. McConnell (2014:197), therefore, judges that Dionysius added another account of a miraculous phenomenon to reinforce the credibility of the account of a miracle.[95]

Dionysius reports that the impregnation of Tullius' mother by a god and the godly origin of the flame that occurred in his early childhood, verified his greatness as a person who was associated with the divine. Dionysius says, it "was wonderful and extraordinary" (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 4.2.3), and contemporary people believed that these two miracles were performed by the divine. The miraculous flame could therefore be considered as divine activity.

Another example of a miracle described in Livy's *History* concerns control over nature. This unfolded in the context of the Roman conquest of Veii.[96] Livy describes the unusual rise of the Alban Lake in spite of the lack of rain or other factors that could have caused this phenomenon (Livy, *History of Rome* 5.15). The portent was therefore regarded as a sign of a god's involvement in the Roman conquest of Veii. Keener (2011:94) notes that this is similar to Hellenistic historians' descriptions of portents as signs of a god's activity. The interpretation of this portent by a soothsayer from the Delphic Oracle was, however, needed to make the meaning of the portent clear. Meanwhile, the Roman troops waited outside Veii until they received the response from the oracle. Something miraculous, like, in this case, the unusual rise of the lake when there was no rain, thus served to show divine involvement through a miracle.

---

[95] Theology is a significant tool in Dionysius' historiography (cf. Driediger-Murphy 2014). Driediger-Murphy (2014:337), for example, juxtaposes the miracles of the vestal virgins Aemilia and Tuccia (2.68) with the miraculous conception of Tullius to prove the significant role of miracle and theology in Dionysius' historical work, which does not diminish the value of his report. In his conclusion about the role of divine activity within the course of Dionysius' work, Driediger-Murphy (2014:345) says that "it should remind us how far these ideas spread in antiquity, at least among the literate. For this reason, Dionysius' claim that Roman religion was to be understood not just through the examination of cult and ritual forms, but also from a theological perspective, is surely worthy of further consideration".

[96] In the light of the common belief that the divine controls nature, a contemporary ancient audience may not have perceived a myth presented by Diodorus Siculus in *Library of History* (3.66) as strange. Diodorus mentions common consensus among writers that, as the Tenes claimed, the continual flow of wine with an unusually sweet fragrance from the land was proof that Dionysus was born in the particular city (Diodorus, *Library of History* 3.66.3). In other cases, some lands were also sacred to Dionysus because of his personal favour and presence in that city or country.

71

While healing miracles, as frequently reported in Luke-Acts, are hardly found in Graeco-Roman historiography, well known religious and mythical accounts of divine providence were often seen as related to healing practices. Accounts describe that the divine miraculously healed sick people, preserved the health of people, and was involved in the normal medical practices of the healer.

In *Library of History*, Diodorus Siculus, unlike most of his contemporaries and later historians, provides the traditional myth of Asclepius' ability to heal. Asclepius was believed to be the son of Apollo, which meant that he was a semi-god who had extraordinary medical skill, which was recorded from the time of Homer's *Iliad* (Kee 1983:27).[97] Diodorus mentions an account of Asclepius' skilful and scientific treatment, which enabled him to save many people, even the dead who had already descended to Hades (Diodorus, *Library of History* 4.71.1-3). The intellectual elite of the time saw healing by Asclepius as enabled by the divine (Horsley 2014:17). Thus, he can be said to have been a distinguished healer with divine power compared to other healers.

Other sources in Graeco-Roman literature describe Asclepius as the god of medicine.[98] Asclepius, as the god of medicine dwelling in a divinely distinctive space, was regarded as performing healing practices from heaven by means of making contact with humankind. For instance, Cotter suggests (1999:23) that Artemidorus, in his *On the Interpretation of Dreams* (2.37) (late 2nd century CE), presents the traditional belief that a dream of Asclepius entering the house of the sick, was a portent of healing. Worshipping Asclepius was as common in religious culture as worshipping any other god and goddess (Kee 1983:89). Legendary accounts reported in the mid-2nd century CE included that Hippolytus dedicated twenty horses to Asclepius, who had restored him when he was dying after being poisoned (Cotter 1999:30). Through this kind of depiction, writers achieved a religious effect, describing Asclepius as a god of healing. Kee (1986:66), when discussing the characteristics of healing in the Graeco-Roman world, points out that the general thinking that healing was given by a god, these healings are defined as miracle. Despite the lack of vividness and detail in

---

[97] Homer (*Iliad* 2.728-33; *Odyssey* 17.383) describes Asclepius as a craftsman practicing art.
[98] See Apuleius, *De Deo Socratis* 15.153; *Inscriptiones Graecae* 4.1.121–122: Stele 1.4; Oribasius, *Collectiones Medicae* 45.30.10–14; for these texts and more fluent additional references collected in a single volume, see Cotter (1999:15-27).

accounts of healing, it is certain that healing is attributed to divine involvement.

The miraculous episode involving Vespasian provided by two Roman historians, Tacitus in *Histories* and Suetonius in *Vespasian of Twelve Caesars,* is a more relevant, plain, and subtle example of divine involvement in a healing miracle in a historical genre.[99] In both narratives, when the position of emperor is fiercely contested after the death of Nero, Vespasian is in Alexandria to take control of the gateway to Egypt. He visits the temple of Serapis with a view to his future and sees a dream-vision. After this, he becomes the new ruler of the Roman Empire, but remains in Alexandria, uncertain of his authority and dignity. He is approached by a blind man and a disabled man, asking for healing. Apparently the Hellenistic-Egyptian god Serapis had shown them in dream-visions that Vespasian would heal the blind man by putting water on his cheek and spitting in his eye, and the disabled man by touching his leg with his foot (Suetonius) or arm (Tacitus). Vespasian ridicules this and denies their requests. According to Tacitus' report, Vespasian consults physicians about treating the supplicants with human medical skill prior to undertaking what the two visitors asked (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.81). In Suetonius' report, Vespasian is persuaded by his friends to attempt what was requested (Suetonius, *Vespasian* 7). Tacitus' interpretation of this event is that Vespasian was probably chosen by the gods for this, and it had to be done in accordance with the divine will. Vespasian publicly attempts the healings, the dream-visions of the blind and disabled men are fulfilled, and they are healed. Although it seems that Vespasian's miracle was passively led by the divine and circumstances, Tacitus attributes all the glory of this success to the emperor. Hence, this account attests to Vespasian's dignity and authority as the new emperor and functioned as propaganda of divine endorsement of the emperor (Papaioannou 2018:101-2; Eve 2008:5-6)[100] and a new beginning of the Roman history of Vespasian.

These examples suggest that such healings were deemed to have occurred with divine involvement through an agent such as a healer. Although such healings were performed by a human being, the healings were actually attributed to the divine being. Amythical god like Asclepius was deemed to have healing power. It was a general cultural belief that Asclepius,

---

[99] Horsley (2014:17) and Keener (2011:1.91-2) refer to the work of Tacitus and Suetonius, who report a miracle scene involving Vespasian and Graeco-Roman culture that can perhaps to be compared to the descriptions of miracles in the New Testament. Cassius Dio (*Roman History* 65.8.1) also describes the same event.

[100] Keener (2011:1.91) also notes the general opinion of scholars assessing this account as imperial propaganda.

in particular, or other gods should be relied on for healing. In the case of Vespasian, the historians Tacitus and Suetonius, and Vespasian, as well as the ordinary people, perhaps believed that the unusual healing phenomena could be classified as a miracle, a phenomenon in which god's special power was bestowed on the chosen person. When the Graeco-Roman people talked about healing, divine involvement in healing was indispensable, which was natural for them (Horsley 2014:18).

To summarise, this brief survey is sufficient to show that miracles or unusual phenomena were deemed proof of divine involvement in history. It serves to explain how such miracles or unusual phenomena occurred and were understood. When natural phenomena and miraculous phenomena are dealt with in Graeco-Roman historiography, there is an understanding that a divinity caused the miracle or unusual phenomenon through their direct intervention or through an agent. Yet, the direct voice of the god is silent in the narrative; the narrator simply reports divine involvement in a miracle. In the course of Graeco-Roman historiography, the contexts in which miracles took place are usually with the goal of revealing a god's ongoing care and involvement. Moreover, miracles as signs functioned as divine sanction for war (in *Roman Antiquity*) and to give authority to the new emperor Vespasian (in Suetonius and Tacitus' writings on history).

Having addressed miracles as caused by divine involvement through direct divine activity or performance through an agent, I now turn to divine involvement through dreams and visions.

3.5. **Divine involvement through dreams and visions**[101]

---

[101] For terminology related to dreams and visions, see Hanson (1980:1407-9). Having briefly studied the terms as "dreams" and/or "visions", Hanson explains that a number of possible Greek terms are used for dreams or visions in Hellenistic literature in Josephus' work, and in the Gospel of Matthew. However, in terms of terminology, it is difficult to distinguish which terms explicitly mean dreams (sleep) or visions (awake), or both. Problematic issues regarding formal structure and literary function remain. Hanson employs the combined phrase "dream-vision" as an alternative, because "evidence to support the difficulty of distinguishing terms for dream or vision is found in the lack of consistent discrimination between waking and sleeping in connection

74

There are abundant examples of dream-vision descriptions in Graeco-Roman historiographies. Derived from Graeco-Roman historiography understanding, a dream-vision draws on the common understanding of the activity of the divine as a guide in the narrative context. John Hanson (1980:1396-97) argues that, from Homer to late antiquity in the Graeco-Roman cultural world, a dream-vision is universally understood as occurring in ordinary life and typical of divine involvement in human affairs. In spite of a disagreement on how to classify the complexity of dreams, visions, or dream-visions, most scholars agree that the crucial meaning focuses on divine will and communication of a message to the dreamer or visionary about a future event that will allow history to proceed in accordance with the divine wish, as is illustrated in the course of the historiographical narrative.

Significantly, the dreamer or visionary then becomes the divine agent who acquires revelatory knowledge about what to do. Gods' directions through dream-visions do not entail clear instructions for the dreamer to understand immediately. It was enough to grasp the divine intention and to act as if it were revealed in a dream-vision (Hanson 1980:1411). Given a dream-vision, the dreamer, as the divine agent, often is not the protagonist. So the dreamer will pass the revelation on to the main actor in a given episode. For instance, as mentioned in the reports of Tacitus and Suetonius regarding Vespasian's action in the previous section (cf. Tacitus, *Histories* 4.81; Suetonius, *Vespasian* 7), a disabled man and a blind man come to Vespasian and explain that they had to come to Vespasian for healing. They say that the god Serapis promised in a dream-vision to heal them, providing detailed advice of what they had to do in order to be healed. In this event, neither sound nor vivid visual description of the dream-vision are reported; it just involves a report of the dreamers in the third person. The dream here involves healing.[102] In this episode, the dream-vision is one

---

with any particular term". Hanson provides the examples in Acts 16:9-11 and Acts 10:1-8 as evidence to support his suggestion; Miller (2007:8-9) accepts Hanson's proposal for his study of dream-vision accounts in Luke-Acts. He, however, not only uses the expression "dream-vision", but also "dream" or "vision" interchangeably. I accept Miller's developed and delimiting suggestion for this study.

[102] This dream-vision report may belong to the fourth category classified by Gnuse (1996), which explains that dreaming signifies divine involvement in healing. Prior to Gnuse's work, Hanson (1980:1410-2) classified dream-visions in three basic categories: (i) In "audio-visual dream-vision" one experiences a dream-vision in which a dream figure is seen and something is heard as well; (ii) In the" auditory dream-vision" only a sound or indication is heard by those who experience it; (iii) In the "visual dream-vision" a third person observes the scene of a mysterious dream-vision; no sound or voice is heard in this type of dream-vision. Gnuse (1996:10-27) provides a slightly further developed categorisation of ancient dream-visions in the Graeco-Roman world. He proposes four categories of dream-visions. Three of the categories are identical to Hanson's categories, but only differ from Hanson's classifications in respect of titles. An additional category on the basis of Hanson's

of the spaces where the gods providentially become involved with humans. In concord with the divine wish, the supplicants are healed, and the dream-vision provides the story with probability and legitimacy for Vespasian to become the Roman emperor. Thus, the dream-vision in this narrative played a role in legitimising political power.

The gods often gave approval for undertaking a war of aggression, and a dream-vision could function similarly in politically justifying war by gaining divine approbation through a dream-vision. Many dream-vision scenes or reports regarding the Persian war are included in Herodotus' *History*. These occur while the Persian troops are moving toward Greece. Xerxes, the Persian king, and Artabanus, Xerxes' uncle, discuss whether it is right to invade Greek territory. Thereafter they receive a number of prophetic dream-visions. Xerxes testifies that he had a dream during the night, in which a divine figure told him not to continue the invasion of Greece (Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 7.12). It seems that the divine appeared in both visual and auditory manner and it is interpreted by Xerxes himself as an objection to the invasion. After this dream, Xerxes admits that his uncle's opinion is the better opinion. He immediately announces his decision not to continue the expedition to Greece to his troops, but this is not the end of this story (Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 7.13-5). Artabanus has a similar dream in much the same way as Xerxes, but a divine figure in the dream-vision speaks to him, indicating that the king will be punished if the war does not take place (Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 7.16-7). Following this dream, Xerxes and Artabanus assume that invading mainland Greece is authorised by the gods. However, another dream-vision occurs in Xerxes' sleep (Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 7.19), and this is interpreted as that all men should be under his rule. A continuous, recurring and mysterious dream-vision convinces him to go to war against Greece.[103] The recurring dream-visions influence Xerxes'

---

categorization is the fourth category of dreams that involve healing. Gnuse provides many helpful examples of dream-visions in this regard, but more instances of Josephus' work.

[103] For examples to judge divinely governed *topoi* such as miracle, dream-vision, and nature, etc. in a rational manner in Herodotus' *History,* see Lindborg (2018:33-4). When Herodotus reports this history, dream-visions do not manifest often or clearly. Because of the vagueness of dream-visions, there is no immediate acceptance thereof. It still has to be interpreted by a third person or the dreamer, who can rationally attempt the procedure of interpreting and determining the meaning of a dream-vision. Even if a mysterious dream-vision was from the gods, and whether or not the dreamer accepts the dream-vision according to the interpretation, the process of deciding to act makes the reasonable intervention of rational judgment inevitable. Further, making a decision to proceed or not introduces a kind of tragic motif of a "dilemma in choices" in the Hellenistic world. For examples of the motif to understand the narratives concerning difficult decisions of characters, see Doohee Lee (2013:40-2)

decision to continue with the war. Xerxes later invades Greece, but a tragedy results when numerous ships were destroyed in a sudden storm and he suffers a virulent disease. Xerxes' dream-visions and his decision therefore brings him to a tragic pre-destined fate. This likely influenced the characteristic philosophy of Herodotus' tragic style (Lindborg 2018:40-1). We could say that the dream-visions in this episode function as a tool for the purpose of divine retribution (Asheri 2007:74).[104] In this example, recurring dream-visions are revealed to important figures in the narrative. These are plainly of divine origin and serve as direct divine involvement, but are applied practically with great deliberation.

Dream-visions sometimes guided the founder of a new city. Dionysius' *Roman Antiquities*, for example, includes a dream-vision that appears to Aeneas. Before the dream-vision, Aeneas receives a command through an oracle to follow the four-footed animal that would guide him to a place where he would build a city. After this, while offering a sacrifice to the god, a sow appears before the people and runs away from them, which is believed to indicate the fulfillment of the oracle (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 1.56.1-2). As instructed by the oracle, Aeneas and his army follows her as she runs up the hill, and they arrive at a place that is judged by Aeneas as unsatisfactory for building a new city. Despite his dissatisfaction, he decides to obey the oracle and settle down there. After the oracle is fulfilled, he has a sudden dream-vision while awake, in which a voice speaks to him from the wood, commanding him to settle down immediately (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 1.56.3).[105] Dionysius comments that it resulted in the founding of a new city through Aeneas' obedience to the divine command in "hearing this and looking upon the voice as something divine" (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities* 1.56.4). Dionysius also provides another version of this event, in that "others say a great and wonderful vision of a dream appeared to him in the likeness of one of

---

[104] A defensive and eclectic view of retribution in Xerxes' case is illustrated in historiography. See Jonas Grethelin (2009:203-5). He says "Besides divine envy that seems to underlie the apparition that appeared to Xerxes, divine retribution and the cycle of good and bad fate are competing models that conceptualize dramatic changes in the *Histories*, but there is no systematic philosophy of history that overcomes contingency […]. In the end, as the dreams of Xerxes reveal, human beings are at the mercy of the gods. Even with history […], the future remains unpredictable". Even if Grethelin's argument is correct, in this case dream-visions are given to Xerxes guiding him towards calamity.

[105] In Diodorus' account of this same event in *Library of History*, Aeneas' dream-vision is given while he is sleeping. In this narrative, the divine command through the dream-vision is portrayed in the following way, citing Fabius, the Roman historian: "But in his sleep he saw a vision which strictly forbade him to do so and counseled him to found the city thirty years hence, corresponding to the number of the farrows of pigs, and so he gave up his design" (Diodorus, *Library of History* 7.5.5).

his country's gods and gave him the advice just before mentioned" (Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities*1.56.5). Eventually, in fulfillment of the dream-vision, Aeneas's son Ascanius founds the city of Alba Langa at the place determined by the god (cf. Diodorus, *Library of History* 7.5.3).

In this historical narrative, the divine is involved in three ways (the oracle, the sow, and the dream-vision). The dream-vision is described as a direct command of the god, in this case to Aeneas, without showing anything visually. The dream-vision thus serves as divine guidance and sanctions the founding of the new city and Aeneas's excellence as an agency of the divine.

In summary, despite the shortage of examples of dream-visions offered in this section, it was commonly observed that a dream-vision provided the space for the gods to communicate with people. It guided people in terms of how to act in relation to a future event by means of a command, warning, or through an event which also appeared divine.[106]As a dream-vision is a form of divine involvement, it functions providentially in guiding the historical narrative, and as evidence of how close the relationship of the character receiving the dream-vision, is with a god. In this manner the many dream-visions reported in Graeco-Roman historiography are embedded in imagery.

3.6. **Concluding remarks**

Except for historians Thucydides and Polybius, most Graeco-Roman historians viewed the gods as a common and significant part of their historiographies. The gods' involvement is, however, included critically. Most of these historians are not fully convinced of the activity of gods and their involvement in human affairs. There is also a tension among historians between those with a strong conviction and those with a sceptical stance concerning the role

---

[106] The illustrations of dream-visions are not formed in a single or stereotypical simple format. In this respect, McConnell (2014:214) identifies the features of dream-visions most often found in Graeco-Roman historiography as follows: (i) Dream-vision often occurs with other ways assumed as divine involvement; (ii) Some dream-visions are certainly of divine origin, but some dream-visions are recognized as of divine origin through considering a background or a narrative; (iii) A protagonist in an episode can have a dream-vision but someone else may also have a dream-vision; (iv) Multiple dream-visions can be given to people for the sake of one purpose of the god.

of the divine. Some historians reluctantly report divine intervention. This critical use in historiography of divine involvement related to causality, as a result of the gods being employed to explain the cause of an event. Despite this critical attitude to the use of the gods in the works of historians, the narratives describe divine activity in human history, illuminating Graeco-Roman historiographies.

This chapter demonstrates that the historians' understanding of divine providence related to an essential concept of divine involvement in historical events and in the affairs of characters portrayed in the course of Graeco-Roman historiographies, by focusing on the philosophical contexts and practical portrayals in the texts. Providence is about divine intention which seems to describe "god at work in human history" (Squires 1993:37), which is portrayed by using characteristic terms or related concepts. In doing so, historians' use of divine providence serves to explain the cause of an event and to verify the event according to a divine plan. Thus, whether events are disastrous or not, all results in the narratives maybe accepted as divine providence.

In respect of the divine plan, this chapter further demonstrates other important ways of divine involvement, by focusing on miracle and dream-vision scenes. Both miracle and dream-vision scenes are generally regarded as caused by the gods for the sake of divine will. Miracles, especially healings, are regarded as caused by the gods in the narratives. And dream-visions are generally believed to have a divine origin. Dream-visions are given to guide humans and described in following narratives as divine involvement.

Thus, divine involvement in human affairs described in Graeco-Roman historiographies functions providentially in guiding the historical narratives and serves to explain the cause of an event and to verify that the event occurred according to a divine plan. The manner in which the divine is portrayed in history, shapes the overall presentation of history, and vice versa.

Luke, as a 1st-century writer, presents a variety of images of, and assumptions about, divine activity in the course of his work. Shauf (2015:15) argues that genre affects the presentation of the divine. The portrayals of the divine in Graeco-Roman historiography were not strange

to ancient people. Understanding the Graeco-Roman notions of divine involvement in human affairs described in Graeco-Roman historiography is therefore useful for understanding Luke as a Hellenistic historian of Christian conviction in the Graeco-Roman world. The study will now focus on the text of Acts and how it portrays divine involvement by focusing on Jesus' involvement.

Chapter 4: Ascension in Acts as space for divine involvement

4.1. Introduction

This chapter explores whether and how the portrayals of Jesus in selected texts in Acts show his active position in the post-ascension time. The second chapter has already indicated that ascension narratives were interpreted as vehicles for deification (Greco-Roman), for a person becoming a more extraordinary being than the normal human being, but who is not on the same level as God (Jewish). This could have given the reader/audience in ancient times an expectation in line with religious beliefs about divine involvement from heaven in the Graeco-Roman world, and the eschatological role of a heavenly being in the Jewish world. The previous chapter has indicated that it was a widespread belief in the Graeco-Roman world that the divine in the heavenly space providentially involved themselves in human affairs through varying direct and indirect ways commonly included in historical writings (oracles, miracles, dream-visions, etc.). In this respect, the description of Jesus' ascension can presumably be regarded as divine and his involvement from a heavenly space be expected by the pagan reader/audience, and even Jewish reader/audience of the time. In this way, Jesus is represented in the image of gods from a Graeco-Roman perspective. Luke sought to assure his readers by illustrating Jesus' providential care through the events of history.

This chapter explores how Jesus is depicted in the narrative in Acts in general, with a closer focus on the characterisation of the divine role of Jesus. In order to accomplish this task, this study utilises Bennema's reconstructed character theory and approach.

Luke in his second book, Acts, utilises the features of indirect characterisation, so this study will use what other characters testify to,[107] and the narration about Jesus. However, there is not much direct narration concerning Jesus in Acts, so Jesus' character will be reconstructed from both indirect and direct characterisation (Jesus' words and deeds). Each selected text assuming Jesus' appearance will be examined. In the last section all the data will be evaluated

---

[107] Testimonies generally form 25% of the Acts narrative (Squires 1993:22).

to come to a conclusion about the characterisation of Jesus in the Book of Acts.

4.2. **The ascension and the Lord Jesus in Acts (1:9-11)**

While Luke's gospel ends with Jesus' ascension to heaven, thereby emphasising it, the Acts of Apostles begins with Jesus' ascension (1:9-11),[108] which is Luke's unique contribution to Jesus' characterisation; Jesus' physical presence can only be seen here within the entire Acts narrative. In other words, Jesus, without doubt, appears to be active in Acts 1:9-11.

In Acts 1:5-11, Jesus' utterance and speech leave an eschatological expectation and anticipation in relation to the coming of the Holy Spirit, the spreading of the good news, and Jesus' return. Indeed, the ascension narrative at the beginning of Acts can function as "plot development", connecting the middle and the ending of the narrative (Parsons1987:186). In this chapter the text of Acts will be analysed and Graeco-Roman and Jewish socio-historical aspects of it will be discussed to show how Jesus' ascension is linked to the Acts narrative. The focus in this discussion will be on the character of Jesus in Acts.

4.2.1. Jesus as protagonist (Acts 1:1-8)

In Acts 1:1-3, Luke, addressing Theophilus, begins by briefly describing what his previous book, the third gospel, contains: "all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven" (Acts 1:1-2 NRSV). Zwiep (1997:95) notes that the use of the hyperbolic term πάντων ("all") that Jesus began to do and to teach is stereotypically Lukan in origin (cf. Parsons 2003:16). Zwiep (1997:95) also observes that Acts 1:3 creates "a smooth transition" from the prologue (Acts 1:1-2) to the ascension event (Acts 1:4-14). On

---

[108] For the historical context and argument of textual problems, form criticism, and source analysis of this passage, in which all considerations belong to so-called "diachronic analysis", see Parsons (1987:117-50).[109] Barrett (1994:63) goes on to say that the aims of the prologue, including the ascension event, are to achieve the following: "(a) it refers the reader to the following volume and indicates the continuity between the two. (b) It draws attention to the work of the Holy Spirit as an essential and characteristic feature of the new volume, a feature which also, through the connection with John the Baptist, strengthens the connection with Luke. (c) It underlines the function of the apostles as witnesses; this is a theme that recurs frequently in the book as a whole. (d) It points out that the church and its witnessing activity are to extend throughout the world. (e) It emphasizes that details of the eschatological future, though determined by God, are not made known to men, even the apostles. (f) It nevertheless lays down the eschatological framework within which the Christian story is to unfold: Jesus has been exalted to heaven, borne up thither on a cloud; he will return in the same way. It is between these points that the church lives, and its life is determined by them. (g) The church is a fellowship at whose heart are the named eleven apostles, chosen by Jesus himself; into this new family the earthly, physical family of Jesus is integrated".

the whole, the opening section is carefully and intentionally structured by the author (Barrett 1994:63).[109]

Thus, it can be said that Luke intentionally recorded the reference to the appearance of Jesus. He provides the data about Jesus choosing the apostles in v. 2. In v. 3 we learn that Jesus appears to them in order to prove that he is alive. He also accompanies them for forty days,[110] teaching the work of the Kingdom of God. Luke strongly emphasises Jesus' resurrection from the dead in this verse and focuses the reader's attention on Jesus by describing his teachings and actions.

After undertaking a computer analysis, Burridge (2011:27-8) claims that the opening features in Acts 1:1-4 share similar generic indicators with those found in ancient biographies or monographs. Luke's assertion that "all that Jesus began to do and teach" is a typical indicator found in the ancient biography genre which clearly shows the subject's name and refers to his (Acts1:1) deeds and words (Burridge 2011:10).[111] With "began" (ἤρξατο), the assertion in particular further creates an expectation of the continuation of Jesus' ministry as recorded in Luke's gospel (Burridge 2011:10; Adams 2013:174). At this point, Jesus seems to be the subject of Acts, creating the expectation that it will illustrate Jesus' deeds and words. However, Jesus is not the most frequent name mentioned in the Acts narrative. There is no overwhelmingly dominant single character or group. In Acts, more than one character, for instance Peter and Paul, lead the narrative, and divine characters (God, Jesus, the Spirit, angel) are all main actors in the general descriptions, occurring in the nominative case (cf. Steve

---

[109] Barrett (1994:63) goes on to say that the aims of the prologue, including the ascension event, are to achieve the following: "(a) it refers the reader to the following volume and indicates the continuity between the two. (b) It draws attention to the work of the Holy Spirit as an essential and characteristic feature of the new volume, a feature which also, through the connection with John the Baptist, strengthens the connection with Luke. (c) It underlines the function of the apostles as witnesses; this is a theme that recurs frequently in the book as a whole. (d) It points out that the church and its witnessing activity are to extend throughout the world. (e) It emphasizes that details of the eschatological future, though determined by God, are not made known to men, even the apostles. (f) It nevertheless lays down the eschatological framework within which the Christian story is to unfold: Jesus has been exalted to heaven, borne up thither on a cloud; he will return in the same way. It is between these points that the church lives, and its life is determined by them. (g) The church is a fellowship at whose heart are the named eleven apostles, chosen by Jesus himself; into this new family the earthly, physical family of Jesus is integrated".

[110] It could have both a historical (real dates) and a theological meaning, as the holy number, forty days is chosen for the sake of the holy purpose (to educate the church for the work of the Spirit) (Van Stempvoort 1958/9:39-40).

[111] This phrase could be reminiscent of Hellenistic histories (Squires1993:24).

Walton 2008:191-306).

Employing and building upon Burridge's genre theoretical methodology, [112] Adams (2013:123) provides an eclectic way to classify the prologue of Acts (1:1-11) as a short biography of Jesus. Examining the opening features, subject, external features, and internal features of Acts, he concludes that Acts is similar to individual biography and history (Adams 2013:116-71) in his book *The genre of Acts and collected biography*. This proposal in terms of the genre of Acts focuses on characterisation in Acts indicating that the narrative is "around a series of individual apostles and disciples" (Adams 2013:184). In the light of this, the opening of Acts can be classified as part of the biography of Jesus in which Luke portrays Jesus' teaching and his rapture as a farewell. While Jesus dominates in the opening of Acts (1:1-11), it not only highlights the special end of Jesus' earthly life, but also implies that the heavenly Jesus will be present throughout the narrative. It thus provides information on the identity and characterisation of Jesus.

Since "all that Jesus began to do and teach" seems to affirm the continuation of Jesus' deeds and words throughout the Acts narrative, despite Jesus not being the main character, Jesus is referred to continuously throughout the Acts narrative, both explicitly and implicitly. Examples of this are Stephen seeing a dream-vision in which Jesus appears to accept him into heaven (Acts 7:56), Jesus leading Paul by speaking to him from heaven while he is on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6), and later encouraging Paul to take up the missionary task through a dream-vision (Acts 18:9; 23:11). Even the disciples' and the apostles' deeds and words are sometimes attributed to Jesus (Acts 2:47; 3:6; 9:34; 26:23) so that it can be said that Jesus' ministry extended to the disciples and the apostles (Adams 2013:175).

The Holy Spirit, however, seems to play a more significant role than Jesus in Acts.[113] Indeed, the Holy Spirit empowers the disciples/apostles (Peter, Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, and Paul,

---

[112] More current genre theory has established that history and biography genres cannot be sharply separated (Burridge 2011:9-10).

[113] The simplest reason why scholars have an interest in Luke's understanding to the Spirit may be the frequency of the reference to "the Holy Spirit" in Luke-Acts. "The Holy Spirit" as divine expression appears 74 times in total: 17 times in Luke's gospel (cf. 6 in Mark, 12 in Matthew, and 15 in John's gospel), and 57 times in Acts (Hur 2004:13). F.F. Bruce calls the Book of Acts "the Acts of the Holy Spirit". A. Ehrhardt and R.P.C. Hanson call Luke's gospel "the gospel of the Holy Spirit". J.D.G. Dunn describes Luke as "the enthusiast in/for the Spirit". For references to these scholars' words, see Ju Hur (2004:13).

etc.) and guides them so that the disciples/apostles can perform miracles and boldly testify about the Kingdom of God and Jesus.

In the beginning of Acts (1:3-8), the narrator brings up the importance of the Spirit[114] and emphasises the new role of the disciples/apostles as witnesses of Jesus through receiving the baptism of the Spirit. As Jesus worked with the Holy Spirit (Lk. 3:22; 4:18; Acts 10:38), his disciples must do the same. This text provides a description of what happened just before Jesus' ascension and what his last words to his disciples were, which all link to the end, and is enough to explain the importance of this text in the whole narrative of the Acts. As most scholars[115] rightly observe, this section, especially v.8, serves a programmatic role for the entire Acts narrative in alluding to a worldwide mission. Programmatic role refers to Jesus' commandment to deliver the gospel "to the ends of the earth", which determines the plot of the entire Acts narrative. In its essence and importance v. 8 confirms a kind of geographical missionary commandment of delivering the gospel "to the ends of the earth" which will be fulfilled sooner than the recovery of Israel (Acts 1:6).[116]

What Jesus says here, presents an expectation or anticipation of fulfillment in the narrative. Parsons (1987:156-9) suggests a number of verbal and thematic developments within the narrative that audiences probably anticipate and expect: (1) The Kingdom of God; (2) Worldwide missions; (3) Teaching; (4) Last words; (5) Other links (the Holy Spirit, restoration of Israel, the use of Isaiah, etc.). This represents the significant information that Jesus as the main character here is directly or indirectly related to the programmatic features at the beginning by Luke.

Jesus thus plays a programmatic role in the prologue for the whole of the Acts narrative with the statement that they will be witnesses of Jesus "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The narrator's aside in v. 8, which occurs prior to Jesus' ascension, creates the audience/reader's expectation of fulfillment of this mission because it is stated by Jesus, the most reliable character (Parsons 1987:155). In presenting the missionary commandment, God's

---

[114] The main subject referred to in the section is the promise of the Holy Spirit (Keener 2011:662).

[115] For examples, Ben Witherington III (1998:110-1), Conzelmann (1987:7), and Parsons (1987:155).

[116] This geographical Christian movement cannot confine "the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome" that is the Europe-centred perspective. It can be viewed in various ways, depending on an individual's perspective, for instance, Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, who interprets it as Africa or Ethiopia (Smit 2017:1-2).

involvement and guidance for salvation history are immediately expected (Conzelmann 1987:7) in accordance with the plan of God (Squires 1993:20-6). The disciples must therefore obey the instruction of waiting for the Spirit in Jerusalem to be baptised in the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus (Acts 1:4-5). We can therefore look to Luke to describe the mission of the disciples, empowered by the Holy Spirit. It must be emphasised that the beginning of all these things commences with Jesus, the most trustworthy one. There is also a suggestion that the spread of the gospel to the pagan world according to the Jesus' words at the beginning, will finally be fulfilled by Jesus.

The prologue to Acts (1:1-8), which is placed prior to the depiction of the ascension, thus emphasises Jesus' dominant activity as the main character in the section. The introduction of Acts, dominated by Jesus' words and actions, may be classified as a short single biography of the character of Jesus according to the ancient literary genres. Jesus is described as the one who presents the programmatic statements by announcing the promise of the Holy Spirit to the apostles/disciples and the missionary commandment "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). These statements prepare for the narrative which follows. In this regard, the reader/audience would tend to wonder: How will these sayings of Jesus be fulfilled in the following narrative? What is the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit? Will the Holy Spirit completely displace the role of Jesus? What does this imply for understanding the activity of post-ascension Jesus?

4.2.2. The dichotomy in understanding the active and inactive portrayal of the ascended Jesus (1:9-11)

In this ascension narrative, crucial information regarding the characterisation of Jesus is provided when it narrates that Jesus is taken up into heaven on a cloud before the eyes of the apostles/disciples (Acts 1:9). Luke uses the passive form of the verbs (ἐπήρθη in Acts 1:9 and ἀναλημφθεὶς in Acts 1:11) to suggest that Jesus' ascension is the work of the God of Israel. The description that Jesus is enveloped by a cloud as the symbol of God's presence also supports this idea (Strelan 2004:36-7). In the next verse, the narrator provides additional information about Jesus. In v. 10, two messengers[117] in white clothes appear while the

---

[117] Notably, Luke does not provide any data for the identity of who they are. Scholars' views on the identity of the two are divided: the first view suggests Moses and Elijah, an opinion originally from Wellhausen's

disciples are still looking at the sky where the cloud took Jesus out of their sight. Luke emphasizes the visuality of the ascension event in the narrative by using verbs such as: "as they were looking on", "out of their sight" (Acts 1:9); "staring" (Acts 1:10); "looking", and "saw" (Acts 1:11) (Fitzmyer1998:208). This aspect denotes the disciples/apostles being eyewitnesses of the ascension. Two unidentified messengers link the ascension to Jesus' second coming in much the same way as his taking up. The announcement of Jesus' return does introduce an expectation of fulfillment in a near time confined to "Israel" (Van Stempvoort 1958/9:37). Given the new hope about Jesus' return, the disciples will do what they must do. They must accept that the days when Jesus was physically present and with the disciples, are past. However, this ascension narrative text not only provides simple information about Jesus' absence on the stage of earth by being taken up into heaven and his future *parousia*, but also implies his continuous activity in line with his new status in heaven, an aspect that argues for the ascension narrative (Acts 1:9-11).

The ascension narrative reported in Acts left past scholarship with the debatable matter of whether Jesus is absent or present, and active or non-active within the whole of the Acts narrative. In fact, Jesus is silent in the ascension narrative (Acts 1:9-11), in contrast with the description in the previous passage (Acts 1:4-8) in which Jesus is the central character who is acting and speaking almost exclusively. This silence seems to suggest that Jesus is absent from and inactive in the ensuing story of Acts. The fact that Jesus gave his final message and then disappeared by ascending into heaven, may support this idea.

Concerning this tension, however, O'Toole (1981:497) insists that Jesus is absent but also present in the church, in his Word, through the Eucharist, in the Holy Spirit, in the preaching of his witnesses, in his name, in salvation issues, and in signs and wonders.[118] Parsons (1981:160-2), however, suggests Jesus' absence by his ascension can be explained by

---

conjecture (Haenchen 1971:150; the second view is more commonly accepted, namely that they are angels (for example, Dunn 1996:14)). The identity of the two messengers is intentionally hidden because it is not an important matter. As Haenchen rightly says, "their only function here is to help the men to a proper understanding of the situation" (Haenchen 1971:150). Hence, the narrator does not need to give their names for the reader to identify the two messengers clearly.

[118] For references to these in Acts, see the same citation (O'Toole 1981:497), though the Holy Spirit and church is not my concern. Although Zwiep (1997:182) evaluates post-ascension activity by Jesus as intermediary or indirect, I focus on direct descriptions of Jesus' appearance and attributions to Jesus' work by the narrator or characters (who could be the church).

Kreiswirth's discussion about a literary function of "empty centre". The notion of the "empty centre" in Acts indicates the character Jesus who "functions primarily as a symbol of loss and evokes a similarly broad range of responses from those who encounter him" (Kreiswirth 1984:39). His emptiness or absence is triggered by his ascension. Nevertheless, as his teachings and actions constantly revolve in the narrative of Acts (Parsons 1987:161),[119] it could highlight that he is "absent but curiously present" (Kreiswirth 1984:39).

Theologically, it is called "absentee Christology", [120] which is the corollary from rapture/ascension theology (Zwiep 1997:182). In contrast to Parsons, but similar to O'Toole's position, Zwiep (1997:182) claims that the Christology of Acts is "dominated by the (physical) absence and present inactivity of the exalted Lord". In other words, according to his additional claim in his footnote, "Jesus acts now (since the ascension event) through his name (Acts 3:16; 4:10,30; cf.19:13), through the Spirit (Acts 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6-7; 19:21; 20:22-23; 21:4,11), through visionary experiences (Acts 9:10, 12; 10:3,11,17,19; 12:5; 16:8-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-18; 23:11; 26:19) and through angelic interventions (Acts 5:19; 12:7,9,23; 27:23), but these are all intermediary experiences" (Zwiep 1997:182).[121]

The role of Jesus as "intermediary experience" (instead of viewing his role as active and present) is, however, posited without further discussion. Zwiep does not further examine it, and also fails to acknowledge the active descriptions of Jesus such as in Saul's encounter with him on the journey to Damascus in Acts 9, or the statement made by the active Jesus in Acts 18:10. These examples should be seen as an active role of the heavenly Jesus rather than an intermediary role while physically absent among the disciples.

However, many Acts scholars and commentators do not embrace the "absent but curiously present" framework of Jesus' involvement from heaven. Tannehill (1990:18) notes that the

---

[119] The literary effect of "empty centre" in the case of Acts "absent and curiously present", is summarised in the following: "These figures occupy their focal positions not only because all the circumferential characters obsessively look to them as a means of evaluating themselves and each other but also because they initiate and control their text sequence of incidents, its proairetic elements, as well as its sustaining enigmas, or hermeneutic elements" (Kreiswirth 1984:40, quoted directly in Parsons 1987:161).

[120] See Moule (1966:179-80). Absentee Christology insists on Jesus' physical absence and the presence of his words in the church.

[121] The ascension establishes Jesus' intercessory role. For Stephen, his visionary experience of seeing Jesus standing at the right hand of God was evidence of Jesus' intercession. For a brief discussion of intercession in the ancient near east and in the Old Testament, see Viljoen (2008:329-45).

two statements in vv. 8 and 11 refer to the future missionary journeys of the disciples/apostles and the Acts narrative almost exclusively proceeds in concord with the two statements. Peterson (2009:113) asserts that the ascension located in the narrative beginning of Acts addresses the continuity between the pre-ascension and the post-ascension Jesus' words and deeds through the actions of the disciples/apostles. Viljoen (2008:344-5) adds another example by focusing on Jesus' active role in Acts as intercessor, particularly through prayer. Fitzmyer (1998:209) argues, moreover, that the post-ascension Jesus is present in the Eucharist (cf. Luke 24:35).

According to Zwiep (1997:182-5), the ascension of Jesus functions to declare the physical absence of Jesus, whose role on the earth is replaced by the Spirit. For him, the ascension narrative can be the transition point at which Jesus' events (words and deeds) continue in two separate stages and two ways. The one is on earth where Jesus works in the church through the Spirit, and the other is in the heavenly space "where the risen Lord is being kept in preservation" until the time of his return (Zwiep 1997:185). Despite his denial of Jesus' activity in Acts, these two separate lines suggested by Zwiep highlight the distinctiveness of "heaven", the divine space to which Jesus ascended.

In terms of space, Sleeman (2009:72-81) advances the significance of heaven. Unlike the other gospels, the ascension narrative in Acts draws a sharp distinction between Jesus' earthly ministry and his heavenly dwelling in time and space (Zwiep 1997:171). In Acts 1:9-11, Luke uses "heaven" (οὐρανός) four times,[122] and three of them occur exclusively in the words of two messengers. Luke's recurrent use of heaven in this short passage seems to crystallise Jesus' dwelling in heaven, from where Jesus operates his new task. The repeated mention of "heaven" raises the expectation of the essentialness of heaven. Viewed in this way, Sleeman (2009:36-7) notices its importance for the rest of the Acts narrative.

Heaven semantically leaves us with ambiguity, since heaven here can refer to the visible sky in contrast with the material earth, and to the distinctive theological space in which God

---

[122] "Information concerning space is often repeated, to stress the stability of the frame, as opposed to the transitory nature of the events which occur within it" (Bal 1995:97, cited in Sleeman 2009:74). Sleeman also provides other examples in Acts in terms of fourfold repetition within the space of fifty foregrounded Greek words. For this, see Sleeman (2009:74).

dwells. However, heaven as a divine space is not a space isolated like a remote island where no one can be reached. Rather, "heaven casts an influence over other places and over social relations within Acts without the need for its locative description" (Sleeman 2009:37). In this respect, heaven becomes "the space of Christ's lordship" (Sleeman 2009:74) in which, in the light of Soja's spatial theory, the heavenly Jesus[123] provokes events within the Acts narrative and involves other spaces such as the believer's space on the earth (Sleeman 2009:75). In this, Sleeman demonstrates an active role of Christ from heaven.

The discussion of the information of Jesus from the text presented in the section above may have conveyed the impression that the ascension narrative emphasises the ministry of the risen Jesus both on earth and from his new location, heaven. The genre study furthermore sheds light on the fact that the introductory part (Acts 1:1-11) has the characteristic of a biographic genre, which focuses the reader/audience on Jesus and also raises expectations of Jesus' activity in the future. With the statement "to the ends of the earth", the prologue of Acts further confirms that Jesus does play a programmatic role in the ensuing narrative, which Luke carefully structured in order to raise expectation or anticipation in the reader/audience. However, information obtained from the text has limitations with regard to understanding and anticipating Jesus' activity. Scholars have a different attitude to this, arguing about whether Jesus is absent or present, and active or inactive. Thus, the richer meaning of the ascension cannot be obtained from the information provided by the text alone. The contextual aspect of the text will therefore have to assist in understanding how ancient audiences/readers understood Jesus' ascension.

4.2.3. The context of Jesus being taken up from background traditions

4.2.3.1. Jesus' ascension in the Jewish setting of Elijah

Some aspects of the Graeco-Roman and Jewish contexts provide important information on ascensions that the audience/readers of Acts may have shared. For instance, Jesus leaves, but his words and deeds continue through his disciples/apostles through the Spirit sent by the ascended Jesus. This is reminiscent of the story of Elijah's ascension (2 Kings 2:1-14),[124]

---

[123] The term "the heavenly Jesus" emphasises heaven as his dwelling place.
[124] For Keener (2012:713), "Elijah-Elisha succession is by far the most relevant model as background for Acts 1:9-11".

which is called a "succession narrative".[125] Yet, Jesus as a divine character is presented in ways which differ from the traditional existing background.

Elijah's ascension narrative provides a close background for the narrative of Jesus' ascension. Firstly, as protagonist, Elijah, at the end of his ministry, taught and instructed Elisha. Jesus similarly teaches his disciples before he is taken up. Secondly, a company of prophets accompanying Elijah and Elisha were described as witnesses of Elijah's ascension in much the same way that Jesus' ascension narrative includes witnesses. Thirdly, as pivotal point, Yahweh lifted Elijah up into heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1, 10) that revealed bodily rapture, not a spiritual event. In a similar vein, Jesus is taken up into the same location, heaven, without the experience of death. Finally, Elijah passed on his ministry to Elisha by imparting the Spirit to Elisha.[126] In Acts, on the day of Pentecost, all the disciples gather in one place to receive the Spirit, who's coming was promised by Jesus. Aided by the Spirit, the disciples/apostles continue Jesus' ministry. This structural parallel between Elijah's and Jesus' ascension narratives affirm the resemblance between the two.

However, not only do the two ascension narratives share common features, but other stories about both depicted in 1-2 Kings and Luke-Acts also reveal similar portrayals of their lives. In making a comparison between Jesus in Luke-Acts and Elijah (1-2 Kings), Keener (2012:714) notes that Jesus' activity closely resembles Elijah's prophetic activity. While the Gospel of Matthew and Mark confirm that John the Baptist is the new Elijah as prophesised in Mal. 4:5 (Mk. 9:13; Matt. 11:14; 17:12-13),[127] Jesus' acts as portrayed in Luke seem to be

---

[125] Given the concept of succession and how it works in Chapter 2, the succession narrative expresses that the so-called successor fulfils his given task like the predecessor did (Talbert 2003:19). Another noteworthy succession story in the Old Testament is the Moses-Joshua succession in which Moses made a farewell speech and ascended the mountain at his final end, but there is no clear indication whether he ascended into heaven without experiencing of death or not. For the Moses-Joshua succession and other Jewish successions, see Uytanlet (2014:112-130). He provides a literary pattern founded in Jewish historiography as well as in Luke-Acts. See Talbert (1974:125-36) for a Graeco-Roman succession, Diogenes Laertius's *Lives,* in parallel with Luke-Acts. This comparative analysis, taken as a whole, sanctifies Luke-Acts in unity with a sort of biographical genre.

[126] When comparing Jesus and Elijah, it should first be demonstrated that Elisha is depicted as the successor of Elijah. Transferring Elijah's spirit to Elisha is a vehicle to begin succession (Gertel 2002:77). Uytanlet (2014:118) examines this and concludes that Elisha (successor) is portrayed "as those who replicate, continues, and even complete the unfinished task of their predecessors. Four basic types of parallels were used by the Deuteronomic historian to narrate succession tales, namely, structural, episodic, circumstantial, and verbal parallels".

[127] In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist denies that he is either Elijah or the Prophet (Jn. 1:25).

closer to those of Elijah than with the prophecy (cf. Lk.1:17) of the role of John the Baptist. There is no indication that John performed miracles and wonders but, in contrast, Jesus is portrayed in Luke as doing many miracles and wonders (Lk. 4:27; 5:12-3; 7:14-5; 8:46; 8:54-5; 9:16-7), like Elijah and Elisha.[128] Uytanlet (2014:123) suggests five elements, taken as a whole, commonly found in the account of Elijah-Elisha and Luke-Acts in terms of succession: (1) Statement of task (Lk. 2:25-38; 4:18-9; 1 Kings 21:17-9); (2) Predecessors as God's agents who began to carry out the tasks (Lk. and 1-2 Kings as a whole); (3) Appointment of successors (Lk. 5:10; Acts 9:15; 1 Kings 19:15-8); (4) Transition and leaders "ascension" (Lk. 24:50-3; Acts 1:9-11; 2 Kings 2:9-14); (5) Successors as God's agents who continue/complete the tasks (Acts; 2 Kings 2-9). Hence, both Elijah and Jesus purportedly fulfilled God's mission, and then both Elijah and Jesus were commonly worthy to be taken up into heaven.[129]

The Old Testament provides another image of the post-ascension Elijah as context for post-ascension Jesus in the course of the Acts narrative. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Mal. 4:4-6 (MT 3:23-4) elaborates the promise of Elijah's return. Later Jewish traditions developed his eschatological return, as in Sir. 48:10. The texts of 2 Kings 2:1-12, Mal. 4:4-6, Sir. 48:9-10, 1 Macc. 2:58, and 1 Enoch 89:52 assume Elijah's ascension and then his being alive in heaven, where the ascended one is preserved to wait until the appointed day (Zwiep 1997:78). Aune (1983:124-5) suggests that 1 Enoch 90:31 and 4 Ezra 6:26 elaborate that the role of a returning Elijah is as an intermediary forerunner.[130] Likewise, Zwiep (1997:48-9; 2001:339) argues that the Book of Dream Visions (2nd century BCE) shares a paradigm similar to the text of Elijah's return with Enoch's rapture and return at the eschatological time.[131] Some rabbinic traditions also include Elijah's eschatological role concerning his return at the end of

---

[128] For the comparison potential and resemblances between Elijah and Jesus, and the references, see Keener (2012:714-5).

[129] As argued in Chapter 2, later Jewish tradition (1 Macc. 2:58) attempted to interpret the reason for Elijah's ascension to his zeal for the law, which God commended the Israelites to keep. This means Elijah's obedience to the Word of God. Another explicit Jewish rapture is the story of Enoch, both the LXX version of Gen. 5:24 and Sir. 44:16, which explicitly state that Enoch's life pleased God. Yet, the Elijah ascension and Jesus' ascension narratives do not clearly explain why two prominent persons were taken up.

[130] Aune (1983:125) further examines the texts about Elijah's prophetic eschatological role and finds five essential similarities in it: (1) the restoration; (2) intercession for the people of God to avoid wrath of Yahweh; (3) preaching of repentance and reconciliation in Israel; (4) the gathering of scattered Israelites; and (5) the performance of miracles. Taking this into consideration, we can assume contemporaries knew about Elijah's return and his eschatological role.

[131] For the further argument and references concerning the return of Enoch, see Zwiep (1997:48-9).

days which is prophesised by Malachi.[132] It can be inferred from early Jewish literature that the rapture-return paradigm had been continuously preserved or developed since the time of Malachi. It is clear that both Enoch and Elijah at least were known to contemporary or future Jewish people as having been taken up into heaven; they were also aware of their post-rapture activities. In this respect, the two messengers in Acts 1:11 may contextually share a similar idea of the ascended Jesus returning in much the same way as Elijah was taken up and returned as prophesised, concerning which contemporary readers/audiences might have had a common expectation or anticipation regarding Jesus' activity.[133]

4.2.3.2. The Lord Jesus' involvement in history

It can be argued that Luke, in Acts, continuously maintains the idea of Jesus' uniqueness and superiority: this identity of Jesus helps readers to understand the meaning of the ascension. Having reached a consensus, scholarship takes the Gospel of Luke as the first half of two volumes, with the Book of Acts written by the same author. The former illustrates the ministry of Jesus on earth, the latter Jesus' words and deeds in varying ways in that Jesus is described as physically absent but present in heaven. Tuckett (2001:136) argues that the ascension/exaltation[134] is a key event for Lukan Christology, which is related to Jesus' location, divided into two distinctive locations, on earth and in heaven. In Acts 1:21, Luke writes about the (resurrected) Lord Jesus on earth, who accompanies his disciples until the time when he is taken up.

Prior to the key events (Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension), Lk. 22:69 (NRSV) shows in advance what position Jesus will be in after the ascension event: "From now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God". In this context, other titles given to Jesus are also used by other characters (the Christ, the Son of God) (Lk. 22:67-70). Here he

---

[132] For examples, see Keener (2012:716).

[133] However, the difference between Elijah and Jesus can also immediately be observed. In contrast to Elijah's identity as a mortal prophet, as Keener (2012:721) rightly argues, Jesus was already superior to Elijah as the Son of God (Lk. 1:32, 35; 3:22), the Son of Man (Lk. 12:8, 40; 17:22-6; 19:10; 21:36),[133] the Messiah (Lk. 9:20); and the Lord (Lk. 1:43; 1:76; 2:11; 3:4-6; 4:14-21; 5:8, etc.).[133] Although Zwiep (1997:78) considers the passive status of one taken up into heaven who is set aside until the end of the ages in a Jewish cultural setting, and applies this paradigm to Jesus' ascension, Jesus' superiority to Elijah can be taken into account in terms of Jesus' post-rapture activity that differs substantially from Elijah's eschatological role preserved in heaven until the end of time.

[134] "Taken in its most literal sense ('to lift up, to raise on high'), the ascension story is clearly an exaltation scene" (Zwiep 2001:329).

is discreetly silent about the return of Jesus. The focus is on Jesus, who is called the Son of Man, the Christ, and the Son of God, exalted in heaven. After narrating the ascension, Luke confirms the present location and the identity of Jesus that Stephen speaks of in Acts 7:56: "He said, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man[135] standing at the right hand of God". The re-narration of Jesus in the Stephen story thus ties this account to the earlier council scene (Lk. 22:66-71) in Luke's first volume and to the stories yet to unfold in Acts. The title "the Son of Man" and the location "at the right hand of God" simultaneously function as implication or abbreviated form expressing the distinctive identity of Jesus and its continuity in Acts: Jesus (the Lord, the Son of Man, the Christ, and the Son of God), who is present in heaven after being taken up, is the same as the Lord Jesus who lived life to the full in his earthly ministry.

In Acts, Jesus is said to be a prophet like Moses (Acts 3:23; 7:37). The Christological titles relating to the identity of Jesus in the narrative allude to Deut. 18:15 (Tuckett 2001:138). And as mentioned above, the Son of Man only appears once in Acts 7:56. Other passages confirm Jesus as the Saviour (Acts 5:31; 13:23).

However, "Lord" and "the Christ" are distinctively used as titles for Jesus in Acts.[136] In his speech, the Lukan Peter makes it clear that "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36 RSV).[137] Modern scholars argue that Jesus becoming the Lord and Christ is justified by his being raised from the dead (Wrede 1971:216; Bultmann 1951:27; Fitzmyer 1998:260-1; Rowe 2007:45). In contrast to this view, however, Peter's speech in Acts 2:31-5 provides another opinion; that Jesus becomes the Lord and Christ at both events, resurrection and ascension, made by God (Acts 2:31-35).[138] Jesus being raised from the dead indicates that he is alive, which is important evidence for Jesus to be the Lord and Christ. In order to maintain him alive, being bodily taken up into heaven is the only way

---

[135] This passage is the only reference to the title in the New Testament outside of the gospels (Culy and Parsons 2003:146).

[136] C. Kavin Rowe (2006:189) provides the highly potential Christological use of κύριος in Acts 1:24; 2:36, 47; 8:23,25; 11:23,24; 15:35,36; 16:14; 19:10; etc.

[137] Luke writes of Jesus as the Lord as early as in the infancy narrative, which occurs prior to resurrection. The expression that "God made" results intension concerning when exactly God made Jesus the Lord – at the time of the prophecy in the infancy narrative, or with his resurrection. For the current discussion in terms of the tension, see C. Kavin Rowe (2007).

[138] Both the resurrection and the ascension events are related to the matter of immortality.

to evade death. Steve Walton (2008:64-5) insists that the ascension is the culmination of the process of Jesus' exaltation. As cited, Peter's speech also suggests that the tradition about Jesus' exaltation to the right hand of God already existed in the Scripture in Ps. 110:1 (Acts 2:34-35).[139] In this regard, Jesus' exaltation through both resurrection and ascension into heaven is interpreted as the fulfillment of the Psalm. Thus, the whole of Peter's speech justifies Jesus' superior identity as the Lord and Christ, by relying on the evidence that being alive and ascended into heaven results in him sitting at the right hand of God.

It is important to take note of contemporary reader/audience's expectations of Jesus' involvement in human affairs. For the rest of the Acts narrative, Luke uses the term Lord (κύριος) for Jesus with the purpose of promulgating the Christology (Barrett 1994:151; Tuckett 2001:140-1) to the reader/audience. Yet, its wide range of meaning needs an exposition within the context, as Luke uses it freely and because it is a complex term. On several occasions, the word κύριος is used to represent polite respect; it can also be a reference to a human master (Tuckett 2001:141). "Lord" also refers to the political leader with the highest authority, such as Caesar in Rome.[140] In a Jewish context, the title Lord can be a distinct reference to God. Likewise, this title is used in both Luke's works to refer to God, but usually indicating both God and Jesus in an ambiguous manner. Regarding the Acts narrative, Robert B. Vinson (2014:378) notes that except in Acts 4:23-30 and Acts 9:46, this stylistic Lukan use of the ambiguous term κύριος, does not clearly indicate to whom the term "Lord" refers, whether to Jesus or to God (e.g. Acts 1:15-26; 11:21; 14:23). What, then, does this ambiguous use of κύριος imply?

The occurrences of κύριος for denoting the divine, God or Jesus, like the other terms, appear within a context of representing divine action told by the narrators or characters concerning the role and function of the "Lord" in the narrative (Shauf 2015:187). This characteristic is common when it refers either to God or to Jesus to interpret the result of an event. For example, a text like Acts 21:14 can refer to either God or Jesus (cf. Acts 21:13). This use of the term creates the possibility of either God's or Jesus' activity, or of activities by both God

---

[139] The use of *Psalm* for Christology probably creates the possibility to liturgically read the Lukan ascension narrative for the worship. For this reading, see Strelan (2004:33-49).

[140] For the discussion of its political interpretation in Luke-Acts and Pauline letters, see Seyoon Kim (2008).

and Jesus. The term κύριος is clearly used to refer to God in Acts 4:23-31, where the Lord is described as God who responds to prayer. God is also involved in human affairs by sending an angel described as "an angel of the Lord" who opens the door of the jail for the apostles to escape (Acts 5:19). Regarding the use of κύριος for Jesus, the Lord Jesus appears in a voice and calls Paul to be his servant for the mission to the gentiles (Acts 9:1-18). O'Neill (1955:155-74) demonstrates that the Lord described as the speaker in his appearance to Paul, is Jesus (Acts 9:5-6); as also in Ananias' dream-vision (Acts 9:10-16); in the encouragement of Paul at night (Acts 18:9-10); and in assuring Paul at night (Acts 23:11).

Considering Luke's multiple uses of the word "Lord" as a term for the divine, this is not merely a rhetorical expression denoting leader or master. The divine term κύριος appears rather startlingly in contexts either describing the work of God or of Jesus in the Acts narrative as a whole. The plot proceeds in accordance with the activity of this very Lord. It can then be concluded that the frequent use of "Lord" in this manner may unite the identities of God and Jesus in the Acts narrative as a whole (Rowe 2006:45).

Using κύριος in this manner not only unifies the identities of God and Jesus, but also the role of the two divine persons. The role of the God of Israel alongside the providential divine plan in history, as shown in the Old Testament, is pivotal in the Acts narrative (Squires 1993:8-9,186-94; Marguerat 2004:36; Shauf 2015:189-91).[141] Scott Shauf's (2015:181-265) analysis of the portrayal of the divine in Acts observes that the historical Acts narrative of divine control is close to the portrayal of the divine in Jewish historiography, and in itself intensively addresses the eschatological divine involvement for the sake of God's own plan. Both Squires (1993:192-4) and Shauf (2015:265) generally agree that the extensive occurrence of divine activity in the Acts narrative serves as a validation of Christian movement and the spread of the gospel by interpreting it as the result of God's action.

In this regard, the ambiguous use of κύριος in Acts, uniting the identity God and Jesus and stating the significant portrayal of the Lord's position at the right hand of God, being raised

---

[141] Marguerat and Shauf cite Acts 2:14-36; 3:12-16; 7:2-53; 10:34-43; 13:16-41; 22:3; 24:14-15; 26:6-8; and 28:17-20.

from the dead and being taken up, not only constructs the identity of Jesus but also, like so much of the work of the God of Israel, gives particular significance to the aspect of the providential role of the heavenly Jesus in history through controlling or being involved in human events. The heavenly Jesus represented within the larger framework of God's plan, can lead to the conclusion that the ascension signifies the divine identity of Jesus. For a 1st-century Christian from a Jewish cultural background, the ascension narrative in Acts brings the expectation that the heavenly Jesus will act like the God of Israel or will intervene in history in cooperation with God in conformity with God's plan.

4.2.3.3. Jesus' ascension in the Graeco-Roman context[142]

A number of characteristic aspects of Graeco-Roman ascension accounts provide an important background, as those from a Jewish context, for the meaning of the ascension narrative in Acts. Hence, while our focus is on Acts, we must consider how Jesus' ascension would have been understood or accepted by the ancient reader/audience in this regard.

Ascension accounts signify that rapture into heaven was regarded as the way to immortality and a means of apotheosis in the Graeco-Roman world (Zwiep 1997:39). With regard to the record of bodily ascendance to heaven without the intervention of death, people held that one who was in heaven after being taken up, was immortal (Tabor 1986:78-9). A mortal becoming immortal was usually expressed in terms of ascension, which indicated that such a person had become a god (divinity) (Roloff 1970:84). Being divine was necessarily synonymous with being immortal and vice versa (discussed in 2.1.2 of this study). In this regard, the portrayal of Jesus as taken up into heaven would have been believed by the people of ancient times as him having eternal life as a divinity.

The recurrent emphasis on Jesus' location in heaven represented in Acts 1:9-11, also leads the readers/audience to consider Jesus' divinity. Talbert (1987:421-22) argues that

---

[142] The ascension narrative in Acts 1:9-11 could establish a connection with Roman ideology. Reports of the ascension of the Roman emperors were political propaganda (Gilbert 2001:242-7). So, as Gilbert asserts (2001:247), the narrative of Jesus' ascension should be placed within the political context of its day. Here, however, I will not focus on a political aspect of the meaning of the narrative of Jesus' ascension. I focus on the role of the divine described in the historical narrative.

immortality was confirmed when a mortal ascended to heaven. In the Hellenistic world, heaven was regarded as the distinctive space of the divine and spatially distinguished from earth, where mankind dwells. Luke introduces convincing evidence to show the divine identity of Jesus by placing Jesus in heaven, sitting at the right hand of God as Lord (cf. Acts 2:36; 7:55-56; 9:3-9).

The first Graeco-Roman readers/audiences may have regarded Jesus as divine at ascension. The emphasis is, however, not on his divine identity only, but also involves the cultural expectation of his role in human affairs. When ancient Hellenistic people spoke about a person's ascension into heaven, they assumed his identity as a divine benefactor of mankind (Talbert 1986:425). The title "benefactor" was bestowed on those who had bestowed benefaction on the lives of people. Some New Testament scholars argue that the divine role of God and Jesus in heaven fits the role of benefactor (Danker 1982:489-90; Evans 2011:30; cf. Neyrey 2004:64-6). Luke illustrates the activities of God and Jesus by means of his narration and the speeches of certain characters (discussed in 2.1.3 of this study).

The description of divine activity in a historical narrative like Acts was not strange in the Graeco-Roman world. As explored in Chapter 3, most Graeco-Roman historians, besides Thucydides and Polybius who were extremely loath to include divine activity in history, included divine involvement as a common and significant part of their histories. This theological point of view in historical narratives was included so that historians could explain the causes of historically significant events (discussed in 3.2 of this study). Bearing in mind this aim of history, historians reported divine interventions (Uytanlet 2014:29) by using terms or names that refer to gods or goddesses (fate, fortune, and providence) to express divine guidance in the course of the narratives (discussed in 3.3 of this study).[143] Dream-visions and oracles were described as conveying divine will or a divine message. Natural phenomena such as lightning, rain, storms and droughts, were also interpreted as the activity of the gods (discussed in 3.4, 5 of this study). So, the frequent illustration of divine actions in history was very familiar to people of the time. The post-ascension activity of Jesus from heaven is

---

[143] The terminology for the gods used by Graeco-Roman historians is absent in Acts, except for one example in Acts 24:2 (Shauf 2015:194).

similarly described in historical literature, namely Acts. When Peter explicitly affirms Jesus' divine identity as Lord and Christ at the right hand of God in heaven, the reader recalls that Jesus' identity has been connected to expectations of the role of the sovereign Lord, and then Luke narrates Jesus' involvement in human affairs. Thus, the ascension narrative contributes to the narrative development in relation to the role of the heavenly Lord Jesus.

For the 1st-century reader/audience, the ascension narrative (Acts 1:9-11) therefore is layered with the cultural context of the heavenly Jesus' role, affects the text's meaning and drives the plot. The passage preceding the ascension narrative prepares readers for the ensuing narrative, including the ascension of Jesus in terms of literary function and structure. The structure of the passage highlights how Jesus' words and deeds continue with the use of the programmatic statement "to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)" in the course of the narrative. Graeco-Roman and the Jewish allusions imply Jesus' divine identity in heaven and guide the reader/audience to expect the significance of his role in heaven involving the apostles/disciples' affairs for the sake of the providence of God.

4.3. **Portrayal of Jesus' involvement in the narrative and speeches**

The Acts narrative portrays a number of examples in terms of the activity of the heavenly Jesus. Indeed, the statements and the portrayal of his active divine role are apparent in the events around the apostles/disciples, but this discussion does not allow space to exegetically analyse the entire passage. This study argues that Jesus is not a stock character or a type, but closer to an active and dynamic individual character in the whole narrative. In order to determine if this is the case, this study presents data related to Jesus from each key text. The implication and impact on the historical narrative will also be discussed.

This section will systematically outline each scene in terms of Jesus' involvement. The key texts concerned with the role of Jesus are found in the replacement of Judas (Acts 1:15-26); in the growth of the church (Acts 2:47); in the persecution that follows Stephen's testimony (Acts 7:55-56); in healing (Acts 3:6; 9:34); in the conversion of Saul (Acts 9:3-9, 10-18); in the encouragement to his people (Acts 18:9-11; 23:11); and in guiding the mission of the

disciples to the gentiles (Acts 26:23).

4.3.1. Jesus' involvement in the replacement of Judas (Acts 1:15-26)

This narrative portrays the process of choosing Matthias to replace Judas. The text now indicates that Matthias, the new apostle, is chosen by "the Lord" (Acts 1:23-25), but it is not altogether clear whether it is God or Jesus who chooses him. Taken as a whole, the narrative, however, provides in Peter's speech[144] the clue for the reader/audience to infer "the Lord" as referring to Jesus, and this pointer continue in the rest of this narrative, another use of "Lord" in Acts 1:24 as referring to Jesus. It can be read Christologically in the same way; "the Lord has chosen" can be understood by the reader/audience as "Jesus has chosen". In addition to this, the contextual image also seems to advocate a Christological reading of Acts 1:24. The scene of choosing the new disciple/apostle is reminiscent of Jesus calling the twelve disciples himself (cf. Lk.5:1-11, 27-32; 6:12-16). If Jesus truly did choose the twelve disciples, it can be understood that choosing Matthias to replace Judas, was the work of the Lord (Jesus). Thus, this reading establishes Jesus' involvement from heaven beginning immediately after the ascension (Sleeman 2009:90).

It can be questioned why and how the prayer to Jesus (Acts1:24-25) is construed as evidence of the ascended Jesus' continued presence/involvement in human affairs when he is simply addressed in a prayer. The prayer in Acts 1 that is addressed to Jesus can, however, be seen as an indication of an expectation that Jesus would choose the replacement apostle. The attribution of an event to divine activity is a typical pattern of Graeco-Roman historians (Crabbe 2016:137-276). Luke's explicit attribution to divine guidance in his portrayal of the divine plan (Crabbe 2016:194), even when events are enacted by humans, fits this pattern. Thus, the prayer addressed to Jesus in Acts 1:24-25 with the assumption that he will respond, can be construed as divine involvement in history.

---

[144] Peter's speech is probably an example of deliberative rhetoric, which refers to "acts of persuasion meant to produce a certain course of action in the near future" (Witherington 1998:115); cf. Kennedy (1984:116).

Jesus' central position in choosing another apostle-witness with the use of the divine title "Lord", relates to the participation of Jesus in significant events according to a divine plan. This significant aspect in the narrative is conveyed especially in the double use of the deliberative rhetorical expression δεῖ (Acts1:16; 1:21). [145] C.K. Rothschild (2006:187) explains the rhetoric function of δεῖ in Luke-Acts as that: "δεῖ construes unfamiliar and/or implausible events of the narrative – any events for which the historian wishes to strengthen causation – as fulfilled predictions". The occurrence of δεῖ in Acts 1:16 demonstrates that Judas' apostasy and his demise is the prediction of the fulfilment that reflects God's will (Haenchen 1971:159; Keener 2012:756). [146] Peter's speech uses δεῖ in Acts 1:21 to persuade the reader/audience that Jesus' involvement in choosing another apostle, Matthias, was necessary. [147] Rothschild (2004:202-3, 212) argues that the Lukan use of the expression δεῖ not only insists on the divine necessity of the events, but also the credibility of the contested event in the narrative. Here the double use of the expression δεῖ highlights the truthfulness of the events and the reliability of the actual action of Jesus in choosing another apostle-witness.

Having considered divine involvement in a significant event in terms of reliability, Keener (2012:753) points out that this differs from other church assembly narratives (Acts 6:1; 11:2-3; 15:1-7; 21:21-22) in that the replacement narrative concerning new apostles is shaped without addressing a controversial issue. The different characters seem to be silent with regard to all that is suggested and occurs; they all agree about the need to choose another apostle, the way to do it, and the result of it. Peter's speech confirms Judas' betrayal was a part of God's plan (Acts 1:16), just like Jesus' death on the cross (Acts 2:23). The selection of Matthias is also explained as evidence of the Lord's involvement. In doing so, Luke probably indicates that all events, deeds and words of the disciples are being guided in

---

[145] There are 24 occurrences of the expression δεῖ in the Acts of the Apostles. In an article on this issue by Charles H. Cosgrove (1984:168-90), he correctly reinforces that interpretation of divine guidance in Luke-Acts cannot be confined to the expression δεῖ. To commence the study of this topic concerning divine activity in Luke-Acts, the best way to begin is with Cosgrove's article.

[146] Parsons (2008:31) rightly points out the irony concerning Peter in that both Judas and Peter betrayed Jesus, but Peter remained an apostle and even became the leader of the early community. Divine testimony is a useful tool to persuade the implicit reader of the situational irony of Peter.

[147] The use of the rhetorical expression δεῖ not only functions to persuade the reader/audience in this narrative. In fact, taken as a whole, Peter's speech is a kind of "deliberative rhetoric – an act of persuasion meant to produce a certain course of action in the near future" (Witherington 1998:115). Parsons (2008:32) focuses more on the quality of the character. The person delivering a certain speech, qualifies the quality of the speech. In this narrative, the speech delivered by Peter about the need for filling a vacancy among the twelve apostles, can be qualified as a persuasive one.

accordance with the plan of God.

In all these ways, the Christological reading of Acts 1:24, the reminiscence of Jesus' choosing of disciples in Luke, and the use of the rhetorical expression δεῖ, establish the influence of Jesus' activity in history. Regarding Jesus' involvement, the characters, without argument, seem to accept Matthias as the new apostle-witness to fill a vacancy among the Twelve.[148] Sleeman (2009:91) and Parsons (2008:35) agree that the narrative represents the activity of the heavenly Jesus in salvation history presented within the Acts narrative. The use of the term "Lord" may place explicit narrative-theological weight on the beginning of the Acts, in which the reader/audience is encouraged to expect the active role of the Lord Jesus in the ensuing story of the early church. In this narrative, Luke thus provides the story of the active and dynamic divine character Jesus, rather than the stock character (cf. Parsons 2008:34-5).

4.3.2. Jesus' involvement in the growth of the church (Acts 2:47)

In portraying the life of the early Jerusalem church, Acts 2:43-47 presents Jesus' involvement in the growth of the church (Sleeman 2009:103). Luke presents the life of the collective believers whose joining of the community is generated by the Lord Jesus. Prior to this passage, as we have discussed, the reliable character Peter preaches that Jesus is now the Lord and Christ who sits at the right hand of God in heaven. It implies that the heavenly Jesus now reigns alongside God as the Lord (Walton 2008:65). As briefly argued in 4.3.1, attribution of an event to the divine is a typical way of describing divine involvement in history. This passage indicates both what the life of the early community was and reports the Lord Jesus' involvement in adding to the number of the believers.[149] Thus, the narrator's attribution to what Jesus did is not a mere address, rather represents Jesus' presence.

---

[148] The number "twelve" here is not presented with adequate reason why the twelve positions must be filled. This topic may require another chapter. However, I insist that the Twelve should be seen as a symbolic number of belonging for the people of God. The image of the number of twelve disciples conjures up the image of the twelve tribes of Israel. As every Israelite belonged to one of the twelve tribes in the time of the Old Testament, the gentiles also have to belong to one of twelve apostles in the time of the New Testament.

[149] Ben Witherington III (1998:163) identifies the "Lord" used here as God without further demonstration.

It is helpful to note the placement of Acts 2:43-47 in the overall narrative of Chapter 2 in terms of the continuity of divine activity. Luke relates the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) that Jesus promised in 1:5-8. The Pentecost experience empowers the disciples and gives them confidence in themselves for their mission (Acts 2:4). Talbert (2005:82) demonstrates that Pentecost is one of the two turning points (Pentecost and Saul's conversion) for the missionary movement in Acts. Luke places Peter's speech testifying to the divine origin of the events at Pentecost immediately after this initial event. Parsons (2008:43) argues that the whole Pentecost narrative (Acts 2:1-42) comprises Graeco-Roman *topoi*,[150] which almost exclusively appeals to divine words and deeds. Here Luke does it by testifying of God through two divine testimonies, a loud noise and tongues of fire, generated from heaven (McConnell 2014:237). Luke also does it through appealing to the Old Testament; Peter claims that it is God's words (divine testimony). In Peter's speech, Luke offers a reminder that Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit and strategically ensured that the good news be heard by the crowd by sending his disciples (Acts 2:33). Thus, the overall context of Acts 2 is dominated by explicit divine activity. That divine testimony serves to give divine sanction to every event.

Here, in the immediate context of the divine activity following the event at Pentecost, the divine activity continues in that the believers are gathered together and live the radically eschatological life represented in Acts 2:42-47 (Squires 1993:58-9): teaching, fellowship and breaking of bread (the Eucharist or daily meal),[151] prayer, sharing and donating possessions to anyone in need, regularly meeting at the temple court, praising God. All their radical practices are distinctive characteristics to identify members of the early church. It is not a single event that occurred once, but a number of events that are routinely practised (Barrett 1994:176-8; Fitzmyer 1998:269). Ben Witherington III (1998:157-9) notes that the passage is the sole report summarising the life of the early church in the whole Acts narrative. If Acts 2:42-47 is really the summary of the life of the early church, it is also within the scope of

---

[150] For the varying understandings and history of the study of this topic, see McConnell (2014:23-73). The 1st-century cultural world was dominated by the divine involvement of gods intimately involved in human affairs. In this regard, we can understand that ancient writers would use the *topos* of divine testimony as an effective way of explaining the cause of an event.

[151] It should be considered as the pre-practice of the eschatological banquet already practiced by Jesus. For this view in Luke, see Paul Minear (1970:322-31) and Arthur Just (1993).

everyday life of the early church that the Lord (Jesus) is behind this persistent increase in believers being saved (Acts 2:47).

As Rowe (2006:45) rightly insists, the use of the title "Lord" in Luke-Acts unites the identities of God and Jesus. Here it means that the Lord's activity for the growth of the church can be considered as the work of God or of Jesus, or the work of both. There is also another unity in the context of Acts 2:42-47: this is the story of the Lord Jesus and the story of the church (Parsons 2008:35). In doing so, Luke adds a great deal to the characterisation of Jesus as active by subtly placing him within the life and space of his disciples.

4.3.3. Jesus' involvement in the situation of the persecution of the disciples (Acts 7:55-56)

Jesus' involvement in human affairs is found in the context of Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin which takes place immediately after Stephen is seized by the Jews (Acts 6:8-15). After Stephen's speech, the Spirit enables him to look into the heaven and see the glory of God, and Jesus, the Son of Man, standing at the right hand of God.

In this narrative, Luke emphasises the reality and visuality of the main character's visionary experience as he gazes (ἀτενίζω) into heaven,[152] and sees (ὁράω) the glory of God and the exalted Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56)[153] while it is taking place. Looking at someone or something is clear evidence of a visual vision (Miller 2007:178-81). This visual experience of Stephen seeing the glory of God and Jesus is intended by Luke to ensure the truthfulness of the experience (Keener 2013:1436). Moreover, Stephen's response

---

[152] The action of looking up to heaven was probably very familiar to both the Jewish and Graeco-Roman reader/audiences because heaven was believed to be God's dwelling space. Looking up to heaven was usually practised in prayer or worship together with the typical action of lifting up the hands (Keener 2013:1435-6). For a similar heavenly vision, see Keener (2013:1435).

[153] When it comes to the reader/audience, it seems unclear why Stephen had to see the heavenly Jesus just after his speech to the Sanhedrin. It suddenly appears after Stephen's speech (Acts 7:55), but his vision and his testimony of seeing the heavenly Jesus (Acts 7:56) provokes the hearers to greater rage, enough to kill him (Acts 7:57-60). In the Jewish context, no one could be compared to the glory of God. However, it was hard to accept Jesus as the Christ, who was sentenced to death as a sinner. In this regard, Stephen's testimony of seeing the exaltation of Jesus standing at the right hand of God and the glory of God, is enough to enrage people enough to kill him (Barrett 1994:382-3). If Stephen's visionary experience was intended to make people angry about the context, it succeeded.

to the experience when he tells the others of the vision he received, reinforces the reality and truthfulness of the visionary experience. Stephen is described as having a strong conviction that he really saw Jesus in heaven. Having a strong conviction of his visionary experience, he could immediately report the vision he encountered to the others (Acts 7:56), which would encourage the people to believe that Jesus was in heaven with God.

The information about the location of Jesus and his identity is described at least three times in the Acts narratives. First, Luke records the longer portrayal of Jesus being taken up into heaven in Acts 1:9-11. Second, in Peter's speech, Luke connects Jesus standing at the right hand of God to the identity of Lord and Christ (Acts 2:35-36). In the temple scene, Peter speaks about Jesus' location in heaven (Acts 3:21). Now Luke here, again, confirms Jesus' location and his identity by visually illustrating Stephen's encounter with the heavenly Jesus.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the gentile reader/audience would have accepted that the gods guided and controlled human history through dream-visions according to the divine will. Both McConnell (2014:204-15) and Hanson (1980:1396-7) observe that Graeco-Roman historians used dream-vision to show the gods' involvement in history. The portrayal of Stephen's visionary experience is, however, the only reference to Jesus' appearance in a vision in the Acts narrative after Jesus' ascension in Acts 1:9-11. No message is given in the visionary experience. Even Jesus is silent, so that the reader would see Jesus as a passive stock character like other silent divine characters in Graeco-Roman historiography. However, it would not have been strange to Graeco-Roman readers/audiences that the vision was given to someone without an accompanying message. According to the categorisation of dream-visions by both Hanson (1980:1407-9) and Gnuse (1996:101-27), a visual dream-vision is sometimes given to someone without any accompanying message. To know the true meaning of the dream-vision, it had to be interpreted by someone who had this skill. Then the interpretation had to be re-evaluated at a future time to ascertain whether the interpretation was correct in terms of the divine will (cf. Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 7.12-19). In this regard, Stephen's experience of a vision without an accompanying message needed to be interpreted for the reader/audience to observe what that dream-vision truly meant within the ensuing narrative.

This vision account would lead the reader/audience to recall the familiar idea that heaven is God's divine space from which he is involved in human affairs, especially in the case of Jesus, who was taken up as a divine being (Acts 1:9-11; 2:35; 3:21). It is also the distinctive space for divine revelations (Luke 2:13-15; 3:21-22) as would soon happen to Paul (Acts 9:3-6; 22:6; 26:19) and Peter (Acts 10:11-16; 11:5-10). In this regard, what ancient readers/audiences would have expected from the heavenly Jesus' intervention in Stephen's speech and in the following persecution, would be that Jesus would be active from heaven and impacted upon human affairs, especially in this scene in which the gospel is introduced and expanded. Spencer (1997:70) points out that the portrayal of Stephen's experience at least presents Jesus' wellness in a divine space that differs entirely from the land of Israel. Thus, Luke intends to depict the heavenly Jesus with God and his activity from heaven by describing the dream-vision which needs an interpretation.

4.3.4. Jesus' involvement in healing (Acts 3:6; 9:34)

As the Gospel of Luke frequently includes Jesus' healing stories, Acts also includes the miraculous healings by Jesus' disciples/apostles as successors of Jesus (Acts 3:6; 8:7; 9:34; 14:8 etc.). This study will focus on Acts 3:6 and 9:34 because they explicitly attribute healing to the work of Jesus.

4.3.4.1. Healing the disabled beggar (Acts 3:6)

The first example of Jesus' involvement in a healing event is in Acts 3:1-11. Prior to this passage, Luke summarises the life of the early community, describing the many wonders and signs the apostles performed (Acts 2:43). In this event, Peter is depicted as performing an act of healing by using the words "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (Acts 3:6), which is the key element in this narrative. "Name" appears frequently (Acts 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 17-18, 30; 5:28, 40; 9:27, 29; 10:48 etc.), and is used in various ways, sometimes introducing the identity of person (Acts 5:1, 34; 8:9; 9:10). But the use of "the name of Jesus" here involves miraculous healing. One should note that Luke establishes the healing not only with the words "the name of Jesus" but also with Peter's commandment, all of which echoes Jesus' healing account in Luke 5.

Some scholars (Malina and Pilch 2008:38; Sleeman 2009:106-7; Tannehill 1990:49-51) agree that the portrayal of Peter's healing in the narrative is similar to the portrayal of Jesus' healing of a paralytic (Luke 5:17-26). The similarity is that: 1) those who cannot walk are able to walk; 2) the imperative mood related to the authority of Jesus, "get up" and "walk"; 3) the healing event is followed immediately by an argument or the character's speech. This implies continuity with Jesus' ministry, and emphasises the earthly absence but heavenly presence of Jesus, who is involved in the healing.

Indeed, perhaps invocation of the name of Jesus gives Peter the authority of Jesus for healing, as Jesus did in his authority. Keener (2013:1065-6) provides the cultural context of the same age as related to using "a deity's name", here of Jesus, in healing. His observation can be summarised as that the utterance of a deity's name can produce healing, because acting in a deity's name was regarded as receiving the power to heal.[154] Keener (2013:1066) offers Jewish sources as examples of healing in the name of Jesus as described in Acts 3, which is similar to the way in which rabbis usually employed the name of the deity or a false deity for healing. In this context, Peter's utterance of the name of Jesus would be understood as an action of invoking power from Jesus in heaven.

Peter's miraculous healing by simple invocation of the divine name and a command, was an unfamiliar practice among ancient people, but was usually accepted as the work of a god. As argued in Chapter 3, when unusual natural phenomena or miraculous events occur for which mankind cannot explain the cause, ancient people often attributed the cause to the action of a god. Attribution of an action to the divine was a typical literary convention used by historians to portray divine involvement in human affairs. Squires (1993:79-84, 94) also explains that the occurrence of healing was considered by "the Hellenistic audience as a manifestation of divine power". Thus, the miraculous healing in Acts 3:1-11 could easily have been ascribed to the divine Jesus.

Peter's invocation of the name of Jesus, engages the heavenly Jesus in the healing. It was not

---

[154] The full text of this summary is helpful to understand how ancient people understood invocation of the divine name. See Keener (2013:1066). For the examples cited in his argument, see Keener (2013:1066).

strange for ancient people to think that Jesus in heaven could be involved in healing. Later on, Luke confirms the salvific authority of the name of Jesus by which people are saved (Acts 4:12). Therefore, this account of healing reinforces Jesus' involvement in the ministry of his disciples/apostles, especially in the healing of the disabled beggar in the name of Jesus.

4.3.4.2. Healing for Aeneas (Acts 9:32-35)

Another healing account relating Jesus' involvement appears in Peter's missionary activity (Acts 9:32-35). When Peter visits the saints in Lydda, he meets a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been suffering from his malady for eight years (Acts 9:32-33). The narrative immediately mentions Peter's healing activity. The healing of Aeneas is similar to the previously discussed instance addressing Jesus' involvement from heaven. However, the invocation of "the name of Jesus" is not used; this instance more explicitly describes Jesus' involvement in the healing by using the formula "Jesus Christ heals you" (Acts 9:34)). Thus, it is clear who works the miraculous healing. In this respect, even without the mention of Jesus, the reader/audience would recall other healing accounts in Acts ascribed to Jesus' intervention from heaven.

The context of Acts 9:32-35 supports the idea that divine activity continues throughout the narrative. Prior to Peter's healing of Aeneas, Acts 9 illustrates Saul's conversion through his visionary experience of encountering Jesus (Acts 9:4-10); Ananias' vision from the Lord (Acts 9:10); and Saul's recovery of sight as fulfillment of Ananias' vision (Acts 9:18). Another instance of divine intervention occurs after Acts 9:32-35. In this narrative (Acts 9:36-42), Peter is described as raising someone from the dead. Peter's testimony of divine healing therefore serves to sanction the continuity of Jesus' involvement in human affairs.

McConnell (2014:263) argues that divine testimony through the formula "Jesus heals you", plays a role in the legitimation of the disciples' activity. The healing established by Jesus functions as legitimation of both Jesus as the divine and Peter as a holy man (Malina and Pilch 2008:74). Malina and Pilch (2008:37, 74) argue that Peter, in Acts, fits the category of "holy man" in the Hellenistic world. A holy man was defined as one who "has direct contact or communication with the realm of God by means of an alternate state of consciousness" (Malina and Pilch 2008:211). The activity of holy men was usually "directed toward the

benefit of people in their society" (Malina and Pilch 2008:211). Such a holy man, called "the divine man", healed the sick by accessing the realm of the deity and receiving the power of healing from the divine space to bring it to the earthly space (Malina and Pilch 2008:211-3). In this regard, the story of Peter's healing would not surprise a 1st century reader/audience. Thus, the healing narrative is introduced for the people living in Lydda and Sharon to turn to the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:31).

This brief account of healing (Acts 9:32-35) also demonstrates Jesus' involvement from heaven. Both accounts of healing (Acts 3:1-11 and 9:32-35) describe Jesus as divine according to the testimony of Peter. The result of this is immediate; many believed in the Lord Jesus. The divine testimony that "Jesus heals you" therefore serves to represent the active role of Jesus' continuing involvement in human affairs.

4.3.5. Jesus' involvement in the conversion of Saul (Acts 9:3-9, 10-18)

Luke next narrates the story of Saul. Acts 9:3-9 provides the overall context of Acts in which Saul's conversion occurs. Saul is described as a fervent persecutor of Jesus' disciples (Acts 9:1), but he becomes one of the disciples of Jesus (Acts 9:19-22) and a missionary to the gentiles (Acts 13-28). This is interpreted as the providential activity of God (Squires 1993:60-2). The reader/audience learns that Saul's encounter with Jesus in the vision causes this dramatic turnaround in Paul. Therefore, Jesus' appearance through his voice is extremely important for Saul's conversion and the ensuing narrative of Acts (Talbert 2005:82).

According to the description, Saul is journeying to Damascus to find Jesus' disciples (Acts 9:2-3). While on the way to Damascus, there is a flash of light from heaven and Jesus appears to Saul in a voice (Acts 9:4-5). According to Miller (2007:189), this narrative is concerned with emphasising Jesus' words. Except for the one visual description of "a light from heaven", only Jesus' voice speaking to Saul is heard. This type of dream-vision is an "auditory dream-vision" (Hanson 1980:1410-2). Dream-visions in the ancient world were often regarded as a means of communication between a deity and a person (Miller 2007:51).[155] People in ancient

---

[155] Miller (2007:51) examines both the positive and the negative attitudes towards dream-visions in Graeco-Roman and Jewish dream-vision examples. Miller (2007:39-73) argues that ancient dream-visions do not provide explicit evidence of divine causes, and that many ancient writers reveal a sceptical stance to divine dream-visions. As I mentioned a similar attitude among ancient historians in Chapter 3, a tension exists between

times, especially in the Hellenistic era, therefore treated dream-visions seriously (Gnuse 1996:116).[156] In this regard, Jesus' voice can be understood as a divine command given to Saul in the dream-vision. The portrayal of "a light from heaven" also supports the idea that this is divine activity from "heaven", a distinctive divine space, to which Jesus has ascended. Thus, it can be said that this epiphany of Jesus through the dream-vision is a typical divine activity (cf. Fitzmyer 1998:419-20).

The implication of epiphany in the dream-vision is that the divine origin of Paul's apostleship and the instrumental role of Paul among the gentiles (McConnell 2014:249-50) begin with the event of Jesus calling him on the road to Damascus.[157] Seyoon Kim (1984:56-6) argues that the encounter with the risen Lord Jesus and his speaking to Paul on the road to Damascus concerned the delegation of apostleship and the missionary calling to the gentiles. This experience is mentioned three times in Acts (9:1-9; 22:4-16; 26:9-19), which highlights the significance of this experience to Paul. Although he uses implicit expressions, Paul also refers to his experience in Damascus in his letters (Phil. 3:4-12, Gal. 1:12-17; 1 Cor. 9:1, 16; 15:8-9). However, the reader/audience can learn that Saul's apostleship and calling to the gentiles is revealed in Ananias' vision (Acts9:15).

The activity of the heavenly Jesus continues in the Ananias story.[158] Jesus, from heaven, has the blinded Saul led to the city for the ensuing narrative (Acts 9:6). Luke describes what Jesus has purposely done in the story. Firstly, Jesus gives Saul a visual dream-vision[159] of Ananias entering the house and the recovery of Saul's sight (Acts 9:12). Secondly, Jesus

---

the strong conviction and sceptical stances regarding the role of the divine in history. Others reluctantly report divine activity behind history. However, historians frequently use the divine in their works in spite of this tension. In this regard, for ancient people it was fairly normal for a deity to play a role in human affairs. The familiarity to attributing dream-visions to divine origin should certainly be considered.

[156] A dream-vision can signify divine providence in Graeco-Roman historiography (Squires 1993:104-12); cf. Acts 10:1-8, 9-23.

[157] The event of Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus is read in relation to Paul's theological formation or the influence of this experience on his theology. For the debate on this topic, see Seyoon Kim (1984; 2001).

[158] Sleeman (2009:199), in opposition to some commentators (Conzelmann1987:71; Johnson 1992:162-3; Townsend 1998:96; and Gaventa 2003:148), claims failure in connecting Jesus in "heaven" appearing to Saul with Jesus in Acts 1:9-11. He insists that Jesus' appearance in a vision to Saul has a Christophanic emphasis, rather than being divine providence (Sleeman 2009:199). But I suggest that both aspects should be considered together, because Jesus standing at the right hand of God is providentially involved in history.

[159] This dream-vision can be categorized as "visual dream-vision" in which "the one receiving the dream-vision only sees and does not hear any type of speech" (Hanson 1980:1412-3). Luke does not provide clear evidence that any type of voice is heard when Saul is praying.

appears to Ananias in an auditory dream-vision which includes a command to Ananias to visit the house where Saul is staying, including are as to obey Jesus' visionary message (Acts 9:15 NRSV); "for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel".

In obedience to the dream-vision, Ananias goes to the house in which Saul was staying, and lays his hands on Saul, in fulfillment of the dream-vision (Acts 9:12), and Saul can see again (Acts 9:18). In the rest of the Acts narrative Saul (Paul) is portrayed as a passionate missionary almost exclusively active among the gentiles.

In the narrative of Saul's conversion, Jesus appears in three dream-visions. In this context, the three dream-visions serve as a direct command from Jesus, which Saul and Ananias obey. Jesus' involvement through the dream-visions thus serve multiple purposes: it causes Saul's conversion from Judaism to Christianity; it describes Saul's obedience to Jesus' command and another dream-vision of Ananias visiting; it demonstrates Ananias' piety through his obedience to the Lord Jesus; and it also provides divine sanction for the calling of Saul to carry Jesus' name to the gentiles.

This narrative represents the activity of a divine character described in historical writing. The divine character, Jesus, is involved in human affairs from heaven, but communicates with earthly humankind in a divine testimony like a dream-vision in this narrative. Jesus' direct calling of Saul demonstrates that he is acting providentially. And then the story providentially leads and is fulfilled by a divine (Jesus) command. Jesus is now involved in his disciples' space for the execution of the providential divine plan. It is almost exclusively dominated by the story of Paul's missionary journey to the end of the earth, as Jesus commanded and promised (Acts 1:8).

4.3.6. Jesus in encouragement of his people (Acts 18:9-11; 23:11)

In Acts 18:9-11, Jesus also plays a significant role in the narrative, by appearing in a dream-vision in order to encourage Paul for the evangelisation of people in Corinth.[160] The context

---

[160] This narrative consists of typical features of a dream-vision (Parsons 2008:253): "(1) *Scene-setting*: one night… the Lord said to Paul (Acts 18:9a). (2) *Dream-vision terminology*: in a vision (Acts 18:9a). (3) *Dream-*

is provided by Luke in the previous verses: "Paul…testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus when they opposed and reviled him" (Acts 18:5b-6a NRSV). Although Luke does not provide an account of how Paul felt about the antagonism of the people, Paul was presumably terrified of being attacked. This brief inference would explain why Jesus had to appear to Paul in a dream-vision.

The Lord appearing to Paul in a dream-vision (Acts 18:9-10) is the risen Lord Jesus (Fitzmyer 1998:628; Peterson 2009:513) who called him for the mission to the gentiles (Acts 9:15). The purpose of Jesus' appearance in a dream-vision involves reassuring Paul with "Do not be afraid; no man shall attack you to harm you" (Parsons 2008:253).[161] What the Lord Jesus says to Paul is not an instruction (cf. Acts 9:6-18; 10:3-8; 16:6-10), but rather encouragement confirmed by the promise of the Lord Jesus' presence and protection. After the dream-vision, Luke narrates that Paul remains in Corinth for a year and six months, teaching people the Word of God (18:11).[162] Thus the reader/audience learns that Jesus' appearance through a dream-vision enables Paul to remain and establish the evangelisation of the Corinthians more extensively.

A second example of Jesus' active encouragement of his people is briefly narrated in Acts 23:11: "That night the Lord stood near him and said, 'Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome'" (Acts 23:11 NRSV). The identity of the Lord encouraging Paul is that of Jesus in heaven (Fitzmyer 1998:720; Parsons 2008:317). "As you have testified for me (Jesus)" is evidence for identifying who "the Lord" is. Although there is no clear dream-vision language, the means by which Jesus is involved in his disciples' affairs is by a dream-vision (Fitzmyer 1998:720; Parsons 2008:317). As in Acts 18, the context is also related to Paul's safety. Paul's preaching about his conversion from Judaism to Christianity moves the crowd in Jerusalem to

---

vision proper: Do not be afraid but speak and do not keep silent. For I am with you and no one will attack you or harm you, because I have many people in this city (Acts 18:9b–10). (4) *Reaction/response*: So he stayed and taught the word of God among them for one year and six months (Acts 18:11)".

[161] Jesus' active encouragement is similar to activity reported as Yahweh's presence and protection illustrated in the Old Testament (Jer. 1:5-19; 15:19-21). And Fitzmyer (1998:628) suggests that it also echoes Yahweh's assistance or involvement in battle (Gen. 21:22; 26:3; 31:3, 5; Ex. 3:12; Josh. 1:5; cf. Josh. 1:9; Isa. 41:10; Matt. 28:20).

[162] Staying in Corinth for a year and half year is quite a long period. Except for the more than two years' stay in Ephesus (19:8-10), this is the second-longest stay in a city during Paul's journey.

become violent. Even Roman soldiers become involved in this situation. The Lord Jesus needed to encourage Paul at night to keep up his courage in his present situation. The emphasis is not only on encouragement, but also on the divine necessity for Paul to go to Rome. The point of this verse would then be its fulfillment (Parsons 2008:317), which is narrated at the end of the Acts narrative (Acts 28:11-31). Squires (1993:25) insists that the phrases "the thing concerning Jesus" and "the thing that God has done" in Acts 28:31 indicate the divine providential dimension of the Acts narrative.[163] Thus, Jesus' activity in encouraging Paul serves as divine guidance for narrative development (Squires 1993:119).

Both instances of Jesus' encouragement of Paul through dream-visions seem to concern Paul's anxiety. These accounts do not include any new command or task, but instead focus on the personal relationship between Jesus and his agent, Paul, which reveals a more vivid and intimate aspect of Jesus' characterisation.

However, Jesus' encouragement of Paul is closely linked to the divine necessity for Paul to evangelise in Rome, which is then successful. The emphasis in its context lies not on encouragement regarding Paul's suffering, but the divine necessity for Paul to evangelise in Rome. Thus, Jesus must be viewed as the Lord who is involved in the ministry of his church; who guides history.

4.3.7. Jesus in guiding the people to the gentiles (Acts 26:23)

The portrayal of Jesus' involvement in the ministry to the gentiles is not provided in this narrative, but the role of Jesus is firmly stated in Paul's speech in Acts 26:23. Ben Witherington III (1998:747-8) insists that Acts 26:23 is the summary of Paul's entire preaching. If he is right, it can be said that this verse provides the summary of Jesus' primary role from heaven.

The assertion that "Jesus would proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles (NRSV)" does not mean that Paul thought that Jesus himself would proclaim the message of the resurrection to the gentiles on earth. It should rather be related to ancient historians' style

---

[163] For a more detailed discussion on how the phrases indicate the providential plan of God, see Squires (1993:55-62).

of describing divine involvement in human affairs, hence indicating that Jesus would be involved in the proclamation of the message from heaven.

The heavenly activity of Jesus was possible because of his suffering and resurrection. Jesus' suffering and resurrection, in using δεῖ (must), are described as realizing the providence of God or the divine necessity of what has been foretold (cf. Crabbe 2016:165-72; Luke 9:22; 17:25) that Jesus must be suffered and resurrected. As divine providence or necessity determined Jesus' suffering and resurrection for the universe, so Paul relies on it, and thereby facilitates the mission to Israel and the gentiles in concord with divine providence.[164] Here progress is made through Jesus' disciples, including Paul, by Jesus' providential guidance.

Despite inevitable opposition and persecution (cf. Acts 14:22), Paul must testify in Rome (Acts 23:11; 27:24). In this regard, Luke incorporates all the descriptions of the involvement of the heavenly Jesus in Acts 26:23 (cf. Acts 1:8; 13:47) to indicate that the sanctified Jesus is involved in extending the church to the gentiles by sending Paul as an agent.

4.4. **The ascended Jesus in other New Testament texts**

Except in Acts, there is no portrayal of the ascended Jesus in other New Testament texts, but the belief in Jesus' ascension to heaven is apparent in them. They accept it theologically, consequently, and historically in the context of ancient cosmology (Keener 2012:724; cf. Aune 1990:17-9; e.g. 1 Tim. 3:16; Eph. 4:8-10; Heb. 4:14-16; 7:26; 8:1; 9:24; 10:12; 12:2; and 1 Pet. 3:22). These texts confirm the exaltation of Jesus in terms of his suffering, death, resurrection and ascension to the most holy place, heaven, specifically at the right hand of God. This concept frequently and explicitly appears in the Acts narrative. These texts link Jesus' heavenly enthronement with his highest and greatest present status, which addresses the worth of Jesus, which should be praised.

Some other texts not only place Jesus in heaven, but also describe Jesus' current activity and reign. For instance, Jesus in heaven plays the role of intercessor in Rom. 8:34. Eph. 1:20-22 speaks about Jesus' distinctiveness over others and his reign over the world, including the

---

[164] This emphasises the inclusiveness of Jesus' activity, involving all social ranks of society (Tannehill 1990: 326).

church. Jesus sitting at the right hand of God upholds the universe by his word and power and facilitates purification from sin (Heb. 1:3). Some parts of Revelation also depict Jesus' activity in his current reign (Rev. 5:6-14; 6:16), salvation (Rev. 6:9; 7:9-10; cf. Acts 26:23), and the role of the shepherd (Rev. 7:17). Another aspect of the heavenly Jesus described in other New Testaments texts concerns his *parousia* from heaven (cf. Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:16; 2 Thess. 1:7). Other New Testament texts referred to above confirm that Jesus did not ascend to wait in heaven but ascended to play a divine role. It was presumably impossible for the ancient reader/audience to accept a heavenly Jesus and his activity from heaven without Jesus' ascension.

4.5. **Characterisation**

4.5.1. **Character analysis and classification.**[165]

The results of the character analysis can be aggregated in Bennema's (2016a:370) table:

Character	Complexity	Development	Inner Life	Degree of Characterisation
Trait1	0	0	0	Agent
Trait2	–	0	0	Type
Trait3	–/+	0	–	Personality
Trait4	+	+	–	Personality
Trait5	++	+	+	Towards individual
Trait6	++	++	+	Individual

Key: 0 = none, – = little, + = some, ++ = much

(i) **Complexity:** The Acts narrative does not display a single trait of Jesus. Jesus is a complicated divine character in Acts with multiple and a mixture of traits. He is active (4.3.1-2), practical(4.3.1-2, 4-7), powerful (4.3.4), merciful (4.3.5), dynamic, encouraging (4.3.6), guiding (4.3.5-7), and authoritative, acts according to a plan (4.2.3.2), dwells at the right hand of God (4.3.3), and is accorded honorable titles (the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Lord, Christ) (4.2.3.2). Thus, Jesus' characterisation includes more than five traits so that the degree of complexity of Jesus's character is very complex.

---

[165] For Bennema's comprehensive theory of character in terms of character analysis and classification, see Bennema (2014:72-90).

(ii)   **Development**: Development is both the reader's becoming aware of "additional traits of a character" in the ensuing story and "the character's ability to surprise the reader" (Bennema 2016a:369), for example, the reader's understanding of Jesus. Acts provides a number of newly found traits which can replace others or cannot fit into the existing set of traits of Jesus, which implies that the character has changed. First, the development begins with his ascension to heaven, an event that made the readers/audiences aware of the extraordinary end of Jesus' earthly ministry and his highest present status (4.2.2). Second, although Jesus ascended to heaven, the reader/audience immediately knows that Jesus is involved in his disciples' affairs in the narrative of the choosing of Matthias as a new apostle (Acts 1:21-26), thus the role of Jesus has changed (4.3.1). Third, the reader/audience would understand that the active heavenly Jesus works for the growth of the church (Acts 2:47) (4.3.2). Fourth, Luke describes a number of titles for Jesus. The Son of Man only appears once in Acts 7:56 (4.3.3). Some other passages confirm Jesus as the Saviour (Acts 5:31; 13:23) and as the Son of God (Acts 9:20). And Peter's speech makes it clear that Jesus becomes the Lord and Christ, as ordained by God (Acts 2:31-35), making the reader/audience aware of his distinctive identity and status (4.2.3.2). Fifth**,** Jesus is involved from heaven in the healing of the disabled beggar (Acts 3:1-11) and in the healing of Aeneas, a paralytic (Acts 9:32-35). Contemporary readers would have recognised Jesus' divine activity in these healing narratives (4.3.4). Sixth, the portrayal of Stephen's visionary experience is the sole visual description of the heavenly Jesus standing at right hand of God in Acts (Acts 7:55-59), affirming the reader/audience's belief regarding Jesus' distinctive location, at the right hand of God, which can be considered a trait (4.3.3). Seventh, Jesus in heaven speaks to his disciples/apostles a number of times through dream-visions (Acts 9:3-18; Acts 18:9-11; 23:11) (4.3.5-6). Acts provides at least seven distinctive traits of Jesus. Thus, the character of Jesus shows full development describing multiple changing traits of Jesus.

(iii)   **Penetration into the inner life**: Regarding the continuum of penetration into the

inner life of character in Acts, the Acts narrative represents only one of Jesus' inner thoughts (4.2.1). However, his inner life (thought) is largely relevant to the whole Acts story. As we have seen, his thoughts are clearly presented in Acts 1:8 – the commission to be witness of Jesus "to the ends of the earth", and this missionary commandment continues to dominate in the ensuing story of Acts, as recurrently confirmed by Jesus himself (Acts 9:15; 23:11) (4.3.5-6). Finally, Luke narrates the fulfillment of the disciples/apostles' vocation to be witnesses of Jesus "to the ends of the earth" when Paul arrives in Rome to preach the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:11-31). In this sense the Jesus' inner thought is the important subject of the Acts narrative and repeatedly reaffirmed. Jesus' mind does not remain opaque, but this consciousness, the spread of the gospel, is presented. Thus, little is shown of Jesus' inner life (thoughts).

The traits of Jesus presented in Acts are an intricate web with varying degrees of complexity. In terms of development, seven newly developed traits of Jesus are presented, so the character of Jesus is fully developed. However, only one consciousness is presented. As a result, according to the character analysis through Bennema's table, the degree of characterisation of Jesus can be classified under "personality" or "toward individual" rather than "agent" or "type".[166]

4.5.2. Character evaluation[167] and significance

If we consider Jesus' presence in the narrative following the ascension, I contend that Jesus interconnects with his disciples/apostles and he significantly contributes to the growth of the early church in the following ways: Firstly, Jesus' characterisation in the prologue introduces and shapes the plan of God's salvific purpose to extend the ministry of Jesus' disciples/apostles to the gentiles with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1-8) (4.2.1). Secondly, choosing

---

[166] This classification for the degree of characterisation is suggested by Bennema; the categories are "agent" (practically no characterisation), "type", "personality", "toward individuality", and "individuality" (extensive characterisation). Bennema (2014:72-3) claims that both Forster's and Harvey's classification of characters are not suitable for the characters in New Testament narratives, as they do not fall in fixed categories, but on a continuum or multiple continua. For the classification in the form of the given table in terms of collected information of character, see Bennema (2014:86). He (2014:86; 2016a:370) avoids "quantifying the terms 'little', 'some', and 'much', but positions a character on each continuum in relation to other characters".

[167] This section is for the reader to evaluate the character in the light of the author's point of view (Bennema 2014:91).

a new apostle to fill the vacancy among the apostles establishes the mission to the gentiles in accordance with the providence of God (Acts 1:15-26) (4.3.1). As Israel consisted of twelve tribes and everyone belonged to one of the tribes, the number of the apostles had to be twelve so that those who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ could symbolically belong to one of the twelve apostles. Thirdly, Luke narrates Peter calling the name of Jesus to heal the crippled beggar and the paralysed person, leading to an increase in the number of believers (Acts 3:1-10; 9:32-35) (4.3.2, 4). Fourthly, in keeping with the programmatic statement by Jesus in Acts 1:8, Jesus' appearance through multiple dream-visions to call Saul for the mission to the gentiles, is vital for the rest of the story (Acts 9:1-18) as Saul, renamed Paul, becomes the protagonist of the story (4.3.5). Fifthly, Jesus is described as appearing at the time of the stoning of Stephen, who speaks of Jesus as the coming of the righteous one (Acts 6:8-7:60) (4.3.3), and encourages Paul to carry on his ministry to the ends of the earth (Acts 18:9-11; 23:11) (4.3.6). The heavenly Jesus thus develops the plot when activity is attributed to him or described in the narrative.

4.6. Concluding remarks

In line with the survey of the characterisation of both the earthly Jesus and the heavenly Jesus in Acts, some conclusions can be made concerning how the ascended Jesus should be understood in Acts. The study of Graeco-Roman ascension and Jewish ascension reports indicated that a person's ascension into heaven is not merely a report of the end of a career, but rather denotes immortality as a god believed to be involved in human affairs. This is frequently described in Graeco-Roman historiography (in the Graeco-Roman world). In the Jewish world, ascension implies an eschatological role and return at an appointed time.

The Graeco-Roman and Jewish allusions imply Jesus' divine identity in heaven and guide the reader/audience to have an expectation that his role in heaven will include involvement in the apostles/disciples' affairs for the sake of the providence of God. Likewise, Acts recurrently confirms Jesus' divine identity, especially in relation to ascension, and portrays Jesus' active role from heaven as discussed in this chapter. When characterising the divine character of Jesus in terms of Bennema's comprehensive character theory, it is clear that Jesus is a complex character with various traits which Luke describes. In the narrative, additional traits

118

are added, including abilities that may surprise the reader. For this reason, the degree of characterisation ascribed to Jesus can be categorized as "personality" or "toward individual", which implies that the heavenly Jesus is indeed actively present and significant in the narrative. The plot is developed when activities are attributed to him and described in relation to other main characters such as Peter and Paul in order to achieve Luke's strategy, which is to portray the extension of the early church to the gentile world. In doing so, Luke has structured the narrative concerning Jesus' providential guidance and involvement into human affairs from the beginning to the end. This demonstrates the effect of Jesus' involvement with his disciples/apostles on Luke's shaping of his history of the early Christian church. Thus, although Jesus is taken up into heaven, we can say that Jesus' characterisation makes him active and present rather than silent and absent in the Acts narrative.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 1 is the introduction of this study. In the Chapter 2, Graeco-Roman ascension accounts were compared to the ascension accounts in the Old Testament and other Jewish texts in order to identify the characteristics of the ascension portrayals in the various literature sources, and to examine whether or not post-ascension characters are also engaged in human affairs. Chapter 3 explored historians' use of divine involvement and divine characters' involvement in Graeco-Roman historical narratives to identify their literary and theological function by undertaking a genre analysis. Chapter 4 explored the function of the ascension narrative in the Acts narrative, and the portrayal of the ascended Jesus, to ascertain if he plays an active role in the selected stories. Chapter 5 contains the summary and conclusion of this dissertation.

5.2. Reconsideration of Jesus' characterisation in the Acts of the Apostles

Luke's account of Jesus' ascension is a significant event in/for the Acts narrative. While Lk. 24:50-51 narrates a short description of Jesus' ascension, Luke provides a longer second narrative in Acts1:9-11 which also includes more literary techniques. In doing so, Luke provides the reader/audience with a more vivid and detailed picture of Jesus' ascension.

I will now respond to the research questions formulated in 1.2.

(1) How would the theme of the ascension of a character to heaven have been understood by its original audience within the Graeco-Roman world and the Jewish world?

As I argued in the study of Graeco-Roman ascension traditions and Jewish tradition, interpreting Luke's ascension narrative in Acts and the reports about Jesus' appearances or the divine testimonies assuming his activity in the ensuing story of Acts, requires understanding

120

of the meaning of ascension/rapture in Luke's cultural and social context (2.2, 3). The ascension/rapture was considered as a person's deification and achievement of immortality, and in the Graeco-Roman world activity from heaven as a god was thus expected. For the Graeco-Roman reader/audience, the ascension narrative in Acts, therefore, indicated Jesus' divine identity and his future activity from heaven.

Likewise, allusions to the previous Jewish ascension/rapture traditions highlight the significance of Jesus' ascension narrative. Whether or not it was Luke's intention, in the light of Jewish traditions, ascension/rapture sometimes related to succession narratives such as the Elijah-Elisha narrative. The connection between rapture and the eschatological in Mal. 4 was preserved in Jewish literature in the link between Elijah's rapture and his return with the eschaton. It inferred the eschatological time in which God's judgment would take place. Until then, those taken up to heaven were preserved to return at the last day to play an eschatological role, that is reconciliation between the father and the sons. Ancient Jewish reader/audiences would have found similarities between Elijah and Jesus, and would also presumably have understood the ascended Jesus in anticipation of his eschatological role. The study of both Graeco-Roman and Jewish ascension/rapture traditions therefore demonstrates that the ascended Jesus would then no longer be seen as a mere human, but rather as a deity or like Elijah.

(2) How does references to divine actions in human affairs function in Graeco-Roman historiographies?

To answer this question, this study began by investigating how Graeco-Roman historians understood divine involvement in history. The role of someone identified as divine, like the ascended Jesus in heaven, is an integral part in Graeco-Roman historiography. Most Graeco-Roman historians, even the two sceptical historians Thucydides and Polybius, include divine activity in their historical writings; divine involvement is a common and significant part of their histories, although it is critically included in their works. Most of these historians however are not fully convinced of the activity of gods and their involvement in human affairs. A tension is, however, evident among historians between a strong conviction and a sceptical stance concerning the role of the divine. Some historians reluctantly report divine

intervention. This critical use in historiography of divine involvement relates to causality, of the gods being used to explain the cause of an event. Despite this critical attitude to the use of the gods in the works of historians, the narratives serve to strengthen the religious faith which illuminates Graeco-Roman historiographies.

This study demonstrates that historians' use of divine providence is understood as an essential part of the role of divine involvement in historical events. It is also a key aspect found in the course of Graeco-Roman historiographies. Providence is about divine intention which appears to describe "god at work in human history" (Squires 1993:37), which is portrayed by using any of the characteristic terms or related concepts. In doing so, historians' use of divine providence serves to explain the cause of an event and to verify that the event was fulfilled according to the divine wish. Thus, whether apparently disastrous events or not, all results of the events in the narratives may be accepted as divine providence.

In respect of the divine plan or wish, this study further demonstrates other important forms of divine involvement. Some examples are miracles and dream-vision scenes which are similar in function in that they illustrate Jesus' appearances. Texts testifying to his activity in the heavenly space portrayed in the course of the Acts narrative are a primary concern of this study. Both the miracle and dream-vision scenes are regarded as caused by the god for the sake of the divine wish. Miracles, especially healings, are regarded in the narrative as being caused by a god. Dream-visions in the historical genre that originate from the divine, serve to guide characters. Dream-visions are given to guide humans and accepted as divine involvement.

This answers the question: divine involvement in human affairs described in Graeco-Roman historiography functions to guide the historical narrative and serves to explain the cause of an event and to verify that the event occurred according to a divine plan. Ancient historians use divine activity in their works for this purpose.

(3) What is the function of Luke's portrayal of the involvement of divine characters, and especially that of the ascended Jesus in the narration of the mission of the early church in Acts?

In the light of the survey of Graeco-Roman and Jewish ascension/rapture traditions, and the theme of divine involvement in ancient historiography, Chapter 4 examined the portrayal and testimonies of the post-ascension Jesus, in order to illuminate how the heavenly Jesus would have been understood in Acts. The Lukan audience or readers were fairly familiar with a number of traditions about ascensions/raptures, which is essential background for interpreting the Lukan ascension narrative in Acts1:9-11. The reader probably considered Jesus' ascension as an indication of his divine identity and him assuming a beneficial role from heaven. The divine involvement in the Graeco-Roman historiographical genre can also provide context for the texts about Jesus' appearances or the divine testimonies of his activities in the ensuing story of Acts.

Luke's historical writing, Acts, likewise embraces providential divine involvement and history. The Book of Acts recurrently confirms Jesus' divine identity, especially in relation to ascension (Acts 1:21; 2:31-35; 7:56; cf. Lk. 22:69), and portrays Jesus' active role from heaven, which was examined in Chapter 4. In doing so, Luke structured the narrative from the beginning to its end in view of Jesus' providential guidance and involvement in human affairs. This demonstrates the influence of Jesus' involvement on his disciples/apostles in Luke's shaping of his history of the early Christian church.

The study of characterisation by applying Bennema's character theory to Jesus demonstrated that the traits of the post-ascension Jesus are complex. He is a developing character, rather than a type or simple character. This role is also very important in the course of the Acts narrative for developing its plot. Although the body of Jesus disappeared by being taken up to heaven, the portrayal of the post-ascension Jesus contributes to shaping Luke's understanding of history in terms of divine involvement.

Considered together, all these features point to the significance of the ascension of Jesus in Acts for establishing him as an important character within the narrative. The ascension narrative in Acts does not merely report the absence of Jesus and his exaltation (Acts 2:33). It also enables the ascended Jesus' active involvement in the Acts narrative as a whole. As argued in Chapter 4, the essential role that the ascended Jesus actively plays in Acts is

producing new faith communities, comforting the persecuted early churches, healing the sick, and the widespread proclamation of the gospel in terms of divine providence. Jesus as character thus continues to participate in God's plan for the world in explicit and implicit ways. Thus, we can conclude that Jesus' characterisation after his ascension is active and present, rather than silent and absent in the Acts narrative. My hypothesis in 1.5, that "the ascension narrative in Acts does not merely report the absence of Jesus and his exaltation (Acts 2:33) in that it also enables the ascended Jesus' active involvement in the Acts narrative as a whole. Jesus as character thus continues to participate in God's plan for the church in explicit and implicit ways", is thus confirmed.

Bibliography

I. Texts and translations of primary sources

Abegg, M.G., 1997. Who ascended to heaven? 4Q491, 4Q427, and the teacher of righteousness, in: Evans, C.A., P.W. Flint, (Eds.), *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 61–73.

Adelman, R., 2009. *The return of the repressed: Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer and the Pseudepigrapha*. Brill, Leiden.

Apollodorus,1921. *The library* Vol. I: Book 1-3.9, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. J.G. Frazer, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Chadwick, H., 1980. *Origen: Contra Celsum*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Collins,J.J., 2006. What was distinctive about Messianic expectation at Qumran, in: Charlesworth, J.H. (ed.), *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls* Vol. 2: The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Qumran Community. Bayler University Press, Waco, 71–92.

Dio Cassius, 1924-1925. *Roman history* Vols. 2-3: Books 61-70, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. E. Cary, and H.B. Foster, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Diodorus Siculus, 1933-1957. *Library of history* Vols. 1-11, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. C.H. Oldfather, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Diodorus Siculus, 2010. *The Persian wars to the fall of Athens* Books 11-14.34 (480-401 BCE). Trans. P. Green, University of Texas Press, Austin.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 1937-1950. *Roman antiquities* Vols. 1-7, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. E. Cary, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Edelstein, E.J., Edelstein, L., 1945. *Asclepius: A collection and interpretation of the testimonies*. 2 vols. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Grene, D., 1987. *Herodotus: The history*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Gurtner, D.M., 2009. *Second Baruch:* a critical edition of the Syriac text with Greek and Latin fragments, English translation, introduction, and concordances. T & T Clark, New York.

Hammer, R., Sifre, A., 1986. Sifre Tannaitic commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy, *Yale Judaica Series* 24. Yale University Press, London.

Herodotus, 1920-1925. *The Persian wars* Vols. 1-4, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. A.D. Godley, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Homer, 1924. *Iliad* Vol. I: Books 1-12, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. A.T. Murray, Harvard

University Press, Cambridge.

Homer, 1919. *The Odyssey* Vol. II: Books 13-24, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. A.T. Murray, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Josephus, F., 2004. *Judean antiquities* 1–4. Trans. L.H. Feldman, Brill, Boston.

Josephus, F., 1937. *Jewish antiquities* Vol. 242: Books 9-11, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Mynott, J., 2013. *Thucydides: The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Livy, 1919. *History of Rome* Vol. I: Books 1-2, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. B.O. Foster, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Long, A.A., 2002. *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic guide to life*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Lumpkin, J., 2010. *The books of Enoch*: a complete volume containing: 1 Enoch (The Ethiopic book of Enoch), 2 Enoch (The Slavonic book of Enoch), 3 Enoch (The Hebrew book of Enoch). Fifth Estate, Blountsville.

Martínez, F.G., 1996. *The Dead Sea Scrolls translated*, 2nd ed. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Martínez, F.G. (ed.), 1992. *Qumran and apocalyptic: Studies on the Aramaic texts from Qumran.* Brill, Leiden.

Plutarch, 1914. *Lives:* Theseus and Romulus, Lycurgus and Numa, Solon and Publicola. Vol. I, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. B. Perrin, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Polybius, 1980. *The rise of the Roman Empire*, reprinted ed. Trans. I. Skott-Kilvert, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.

Polybius, 1922-1992. *The histories* Vols. 1-7, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. W.R. Paton, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Suetonius, 1914. *Suetonius* Vol. II The lives of the Caesars: Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. J.C Rolfe, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Tacitus, 1931. *Histories* Books 4-5. *Annals* Books 1-3, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. C.H. Moore, and J. Jackson, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Tamási, B., 2013. *Baruch as a prophet in 2 Baruch, in Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: reconstruction after the fall*. Brill, Leiden.

Virgil, 1918. *Aeneid* Books 7-12, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. H.R. Fairclough and Revised. G.P. Goold, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is used for biblical texts, including the key texts of the study: Sirach, 1 Maccabees, and Wisdom.

Rabbinic literatures: *Mo'ed Qatan* 26a, *Pirkei Avot* 1.1, and *Yalkut Sim'oni III* 958,

II. Commentaries, Monographs, Essays, Dissertations, Reference Works

Adams, S.A., 2013. The genre of Acts and collected biography, *Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Alexander, L., Moessner, D.P., 1999. Formal elements and genre: Which Greco-Roman prologues most closely parallel the Lukan prologues?, in: *Jesus and the heritage of Israel: Luke's narrative claim upon Israel's legacy.* Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, 9–26.

Asheri, D. et. al., 2007. *A commentary on Herodotus.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Asiss, E., 2011. Moses, Elijah, and the Messianic hope. A new reading of Malachi 3:22-24. *Zeitschriftfür die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 123, 207–20.

Aune, D.E., 2008. *Apocalypticism, prophecy, and magic in early Christianity: Collected essays.* Baker Academic, Grand Rapids.

Aune, D.E., 1998. Revelation 6 - 16, *World Biblical commentary*. Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville.

Aune, D.E., 1990. Heracles and Christ: Heracles imagery in the Christology of early Christianity, in: *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in honor of Abraham J. Malherbe.* Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 3–19.

Aune, D.E., 1987. *The New Testament in its literary environment.* Westminster John Knox, Philadelphia.

Aune, D.E., 1983. *Prophecy in early Christianity and the ancient Mediterranean world.* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Balch, D.L., 2015. *Contested ethnicities and images: studies in Acts and arts*. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.

Balch, D.L., 2003. Metabolh Politeiwn – Jesus as founder of the church in Luke-Acts: Form and Function, in: Penner, T., Stichele, C.V. (eds.), *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan narrative and Greco-Roman discourse.* Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 139–88.

Bale, A.J., 2015. *Genre and Narrative Coherence in the Acts of the Apostles.* T&T Clark, London.

Barrett, C.K., 1994. *Acts*: Volume 1: 1-14. T&T Clark, Edinburgh.

Barton, S.C., 2001. The transfiguration of Christ according to Mark and Matthew: Christology and anthropology, in Avemarie, F., Lichtenberger, H. (eds.), *Auferstehung-Resurrection*. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 231–246.

Batten, A., 2004. God in the letter of James: Patron or benefactor? *New Testament Studies* 50(2), 257–62.

Beard, M., Henderson, J., 1998. The emperor's new body: Ascension from Rome, in: Wyke, M. (ed.), *Parchments of gender: Deciphering the bodies of antiquity*. Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York, 191–219.

Beck, M., 2014. *A companion to Plutarch*. Blackwell Publishing Limited, Chichester; Oxford.

Bennema, C., 2016a. Character reconstruction in the New Testament (1): the theory, *The Expository Times* 127, 365–74.

Bennema, C., 2016b. Character reconstruction in the New Testament (2): the practice, *The Expository Times* 127, 417–29.

Bennema, C., 2014. *A theory of character in New Testament narrative.* Fortress, Minneapolis.

Bennema, C., 2013. A comprehensive approach to understanding character in the Gospel of John, in: Skinner, C.W. (ed.), *Characters and characterization in the Gospel of John.* Bloomsbury, London, 36–58.

Bernstein, A.E., 1993. *The formation of hell: death and retribution in the ancient and early Christian worlds.* Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

Bonz, M. P., 2000. *The past as legacy: Luke-Acts and ancient epic.* Fortress, Minneapolis.

Brodie, T.L., 2000. *The crucial bridge: The Elijah-Elisha narrative as an interpretive synthesis of Genesis-Kings and a literary model for the gospels.* Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.

Brodie, T.L., 1990. Luke-Acts as an imitation and emulation of the Elijah-Elisha narrative, in: Richard, E. (ed.), *New views on Luke and Acts.* The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 78–85.

Brown, W.P., 1996. *Obadiah through Malachi.* Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.

Brueggemann, W., 2000. *1 & 2 Kings, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary*. Smyth & Helwys, Macon.

Bultmann, R., 1951. *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. 1. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

Burridge, R.A., 2011. The genre of Acts – revisited, in: Walton, S. et. al. (eds.), *Reading Acts today: Essays in honour of Loveday C.A. Alexander.* T & T Clark, London, 9–28.

Burridge, R.A., 2004. *What are the gospels?: A comparison with Graeco-Roman biography.*

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Burrow, J.W., 2007. *A history of histories: epics, chronicles, romances and inquiries from Herodotus and Thucydides to the twentieth century.* Allen Lane, London.

Carroll, R.P., 1969. The Elijah-Elisha sagas: Some remarks on prophetic succession in ancient Israel, *Vetus Testamentum* 19, 400–415.

Carter, W., 1999a. Contested claims: Roman imperial theology and Matthew's gospel, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 29, 56–67.

Cohn, R.L., 2000. *2 Kings: Berit Olam studies in Hebrew narrative and poetry*. Liturgical Press, Collegeville.

Collins, J.J., 2013. *Enoch and Ezra in Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: reconstruction after the fall.* Brill, Leiden.

Collins, J.J., 1994. The works of the Messiah. *Dead Sea discoveries* 1, 98–112.

Conzelmann, H., 1987. Acts of the Apostles, *Hermeneia: A critical and historical commentary on the Bible*. Fortress, Minneapolis.

Conzelmann, H., 1961. *The theology of St Luke* (trans. G. Buswell). Fortress, Philadelphia.

Cosgrove, C.H., 1984. The Divine Δεῖ in Luke-Acts: Investigations into the Lukan understanding of God's providence, *Novum Testamentum* 26, 168–90.

Cotter, W., 1999. *Miracles in Greco-Roman antiquity: A sourcebook for the study of New Testament miracle stories.* Routledge, London; New York.

Crabbe, K., 2016. *Luke/Acts and the end of history*. Oxford University, Oxford.

Culianu, I.P., 1983. *Psychanodia: A survey of the evidence concerning the ascension of the soul and its relevance.* Brill, Leiden.

Culy, M.M., Parsons, M.C., 2003. *Acts: a handbook on the Greek text.* Bayler University Press, Waco.

Danker, F.W., 1982. *Benefactor: epigraphic study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament semantic field.* Clayton, St. Louis.

Davies, J.P., 2004. *Rome's religious history: Livy, Tacitus and Ammianus on their gods.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Delling, 1967. Lambano, in: Kittel, G., Friedrich, G. (eds.), Bromiley, G.W. (tran.), *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 4–9.

Driediger-Murphy, L.G., 2014. Theology as a historiographic tool in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Phoenix* 68, 330–49.

Dunn, J.D.G., 1996. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Evans, C.A., 2011. King Jesus and his ambassadors: Empire and Luke-Acts, in: Porter, S.E., Westfall, C.L. (eds.), *Empire in the New Testament*. McMaster Divinity College Press, Ontario, 120–39.

Evans, C.A., Porter S.E.Jr., 2000. *Dictionary of New Testament background: a compendium of contemporary biblical scholarship.* Inter Varsity, Downers Grove.

Evans, J.D., 1992. *The art of persuasion: Political propaganda from Aeneas to Brutus.* University of Michigan Press, Michigan.

Eve, E., 2008. Spit in your eye: The blind man of Bethsaida and the blind man of Alexandria, *New Testament Studies* 54, 1–17.

Fitzmyer, J.A., 1998. *The Acts of the Apostles.* Doubleday, New York.

Fornara, C.W., 1988. *The nature of history in ancient Greece and Rome.* University of California Press, Berkeley; Los Angeles et. al.

Fowler, R.L., 2010. Gods in early Greek historiography, in: Bremmer, J.N., Erskine, A. (eds.), *The gods of ancient Greece: Identities and transformations.* Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 318–34.

Franklin, E., 1975. *Christ the Lord: A study in the purpose and theology of Luke-Acts.* Westminster, Philadelphia.

Franklin, E., 1970. The ascension and the eschatology of Luke-Acts, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23, 191–200.

Fretheim, T.E., 1999. *First and Second Kings.* Westminster John Knox, Louisville, Kentucky.

Friedrich, G., 1973. *Lk 9, 51 und die Entrückungschristologie des Lukas*, in: Schmid, F.J., Hoffmann, P., et. al. (eds.), *Orientierung an Jesus, Festschrift Für Josef Schmid*. Herder, Freiburg, 48–77.

Frow, J., 2005. *Genre.* Routledge, New York.

Gaventa, B.R., 2003. *Abingdon New Testament commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles*. Abingdon, Nashville.

Gehrke, H.J., 2011. Myth, history, politics – ancient and modern, in: Marincola, J. (ed.), Beck, J. (tran.), *Greek and Roman Historiography*. Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York, 40–71.

Gempf, C., 1994. *The Book of Acts in its first century setting*, Vol. 2: Graeco-Roman Setting. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Gertel, E.B., 2002. Moses, Elisha and transferred spirit, *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 30, 73–9.

Gilbert, G., Penner, T., 2003. Roman propaganda and Christian identity in the worldview of Luke-Acts, in: *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan narrative and Greco-Roman discourse*. Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 233–56.

Gnuse, R.K., 1996. *Dreams and dream reports in the writings of Josephus: a traditio-historical analysis.* Brill, Leiden.

Grant, R.M., 1986. *Gods and the one God.* Westminster John Knox, Philadelphia.

Greenberg, M., 1972. Herem, in: Cohn, H.H. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica* Vol. 8. Keter, Jerusalem, 344–55.

Greenwood, E., 2015. *Thucydides and the shaping of history*. Bloomsbury, London; New York.

Gregory, S., 1992. *Historiography and self-definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts and apologetic historiography.* Brill, Leiden.

Grethlein, J., 2009. How not to do history: Xerxes in Herodotus' Histories, *The American Journal of Philology* 130, 195–218.

Gulley, N.R., 1992. Ascension of Christ, in: Freedman, D.N. (ed.), *The Anchor Bible dictionary*. Doubleday, New York, 472–4.

Haenchen, E., 1971. *The Acts of the Apostles: A commentary.* Westminster John Knox, Philadelphia.

Hanson, J.S., 1980. Dreams and visions in the Greco-Roman world of early Christianity, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II. 23.1. de Gruyter, Berlin.

Hill, A.E., 1998. *Malachi.* Yale University Press, New Haven.

Himmelfarb, M., 1993. *Ascent to heaven in Jewish and Christian apocalypses.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Hobbs, T.R., 1985. *Word biblical commentary: 2 Kings* Vol. 13. Word Books, Texas, USA.

Hobbs, T.R., 1984. 2 Kings 1 and 2: Their unity and purpose, *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 13, 327–34.

Horsley, R.A., 2014. *Jesus and magic: freeing the gospel stories from modern misconceptions.* James Clarke, Cambridge.

Hur, J., 2004. *Dynamic reading of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts.* T & T Clark, London.

Hurtado, L.W., 1999. First-century Jewish monotheism, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 21, 3–26.

Jeremias, J., 1967. Moses, in: Kittel, G., Friedrich, G. (eds.), Bromiley, G.W. (tran.), *Theological*

dictionary of the New Testament. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 848–73.

Johnson, L.T., 1992. *The Acts of the Apostles.* Liturgical Press, Collegeville.

Just, A.A., 1993. *The ongoing feast: Table fellowship and eschatology at Emmaus.* The Liturgical Press, Collegeville.

Kaiser, W.C., 1988. *Malachi: God's unchanging love.* Baker Book House, Grand Rapids.

Kee, H.C., 1986. Medicine, miracle and magic in New Testament times, *Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series* 55. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Keener, C.S., 2013. *Acts: An exegetical commentary* Vol. 2: 3:1-14:28. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids.

Keener, C.S., 2012. *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* Vol. 1: Introduction and 1:1-2:47. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids.

Keener, C.S., 2011. *Miracles* Vol.1: The credibility of the New Testament accounts. Baker Books, Grand Rapids.

Kennedy, G.A., 1984. *New Testament interpretation through rhetorical criticism.* University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.

Kim, S., 2008. *Christ and Caesar: The gospel and the Roman Empire in the writings of Paul and Luke.* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Kim, S., 2001. *Paul and the new perspective: Second thoughts on the origin of Paul's gospel.* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids; Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.

Kim, S., 1984. *The origin of Paul's gospel.* Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.

Kreiswirth, Martin., 1984.Centers, openings, and endings: Some Faulknerian constants, *American Literature* 56, 38–50.

Kreitzer, L., 1990. Apotheosis of the Roman emperor, *The Biblical Archaeologist* 53, 210–7.

Lee, D., 2013. *Luke-Acts and "tragic history": Communicating gospel with the world.* Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.

Leim, J.E., 2015. *Matthew's theological grammar: The Father and the Son*. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.

Licona, M.R., Van der Watt, J.G., 2009. Historians and miracles: The principle of analogy and antecedent probability reconsidered, *HTS Theological Studies* 65, 1–6.

Linderborg, O.H., 2018. *Herodotus and the origins of political philosophy: The beginnings of Western thought from the viewpoint of its impending end.* Ph.D. dissertation, Uppsala University.

Litwa, M.D., 2014. *Iesus Deus: The early Christian depiction of Jesus as a Mediterranean god.* Fortress, Minneapolis.

Lohfink, G., 1971. *Die Himmelfahrt Jesu: Untersuchungenzu den Himmelfahrts-und Erhöhungstextenbei Lukas.* Kösel, München.

Long, B.O., 1991. *2 Kings.* Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Loraux, N., 2011. Thucydides is not a colleague, in: Marincola, J. (ed.), *Greek and Roman historiography*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 19–39.

Maddox, R., 1982. *The purpose of Luke-Acts.* T & T Clark, Edinburgh.

Maile, J.F., 1986. The ascension in Luke-Acts, *Tyndale bulletin* 37, 29–59.

Malina, B.J., Pilch, J.J., 2008. *Social-science commentary on the book of Acts.* Fortress, Minneapolis.

Marguerat, D., 2002. The first Christian historian: writing the "Acts of the Apostles", *Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Marincola, J., 2001. *Greek historians.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Martin, R., 1978. *New Testament foundations.* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

McCarter, P.K. Jr., 1981. "Plots, True or False": The succession narrative as court apologetic. *Union Seminary Review* 35, 355–67.

McConnell, J.R., 2014. *The topos of divine testimony in Luke-Acts*. Pickwick, Eugene.

Meeks, W.A., 1967. *The prophet king: Moses traditions and the Johannine Christology.* Brill, Boston.

Miller, J.B.F., 2007. *Convinced that God had called ss: Dreams, visions, and the perception of God's will in Luke-Acts.* Brill, Leiden; Boston.

Minear, P.S., 1970. Some glimpses of Luke's sacramental theology, *Worship* 44, 322–31.

Momigliano, A., 1978. Greek historiography, *History and Theory* 17, 1–28.

Moule, C.F.D., 1966. The Christology of Acts, in: Keck, L., Martyn, J.L. (eds.), *Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays presented in honor of Paul Schubert.* Abingdon, Nashville.

Neufeld, D., 1997. "And when that one comes": Aspects of Johannine messianism, in: Evans, C.A., Flint, P.W. (eds.), *Eschatology, messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. William B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids; Cambridge, 120–40.

Neyrey, J.H., 2004. *Render to God: New Testament understandings of the divine.* Fortress, Minneapolis.

Nice, A., 1999. Divination and Roman historiography. Ph. D dissertation, University of Exeter.

Nilsson, M.P., 1969. *Greek piety.* Norton, New York.

O'Brien, J.M., 2004. *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries.* Abingdon, Nashville.

Oepke, A., 1967. Nepos, in: Kittel, G., Friedrich, G. (eds.), Bromiley, G.W. (tran.), *Theological dictionary of the New Testament.* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 902–11.

O'Neill, J.C., 1955. The use of *kyrios* in the Book of Acts, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 8, 155–74.

O'Toole, R.F., 1981. Activity of the risen Jesus in Luke-Acts, *Biblica* 62, 471–98.

Papaioannou, S., 2018. Omens and miracles: Interpreting miraculous narratives in Roman historiography, in: Gerolemou, M. (ed.), *Recognizing miracles in antiquity and beyond.* de Gruyter, Berlin, 85–110.

Park, H.D., 2007. *Finding Herem?: a study of Luke-Acts in the light of Herem.* T&T Clark, London.

Parsons, M.C., 2015. *Luke*, Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids.

Parsons, M.C., 2008. *Acts.* Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Parsons, M.C., 1987. The departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts: The ascension narratives in context, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* supplement. JSOT Press, Sheffield.

Pennington, J.T., 2008. *Cosmology and New Testament theology.* T & T Clark, London.

Pervo, R.I., 2009. Acts. Fortress Press, Minneapolis.

Pervo, R.I., 1989. Must Luke and Acts belong to the same genre?, in: Lull, D.J. (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature* Seminar Paper 1989. Scholars Press, Atlanta, 309–16.

Peterson, D.G., 2009. The Acts of the Apostles, in: *The Pillar New Testament commentary.* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Pownall, F.A., 2004. *Lessons from the past: the moral use of history in fourth-century prose.* University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

Rofé, A., 1988. *The prophetical stories: the narratives about the prophets in the Hebrew Bible, their literary types and history.* The Magne Press, Jerusalem.

Roloff, D., 1970. *Gottähnlichkeit, Vergöttlichung und Erhöhungzuseligem Leben: Untersuchungenzur Herkunft der platonischen Angleichung an Gott.* de Gruyter, Berlin.

Rothschild, C.K., 2015. *Paul in Athens: the popular religious context of Acts 17.* Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.

Rothschild, C.K., 2004. *Luke-Acts and the rhetoric of history: An investigation of early Christian*

historiography. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.

Rowe, C.K., 2007. Acts 2.36 and the continuity of Lukan Christology, *New Testament Studies* 53, 37–56.

Rowe, C.K., 2006. *Early narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke.* de Gruyter, Berlin.

Schuller, E.M., 2015. Malachi, in: Keck, L.E. (ed.), *The new interpreter's Bible commentary* Vol. V: Ezekiel, The twelve prophets. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 965–7.

Scott, J.M., 2000. Heavenly ascent in Jewish and pagan traditions, in: Evans, C.A., Porter, S.E. (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament background.* Inter Varsity, Downers Grove, 447–52.

Shauf, S., 2015. *The divine in Acts and in ancient historiography.* Fortress, Minneapolis.

Sicker, M., 2004. *A Passover* S*eder companion and analytic introduction to the Haggadah.* Universe, Lincoln.

Singer, T., 2000. *The vision thing: Myth, politics, and psyche in the world.* Routledge, London; New York.

Skinner, M.L., 2003. *Locating Paul: Places of custody as narrative settings in Acts 21-28.* Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta.

Sleeman, M., 2009. Geography the ascension narrative in Acts, *Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Smit, P.B., 2017. Negotiating a new world view in Acts 1.8? A note on the expression ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς, *New Testament Studies* 63, 1–22.

Smith, M., 1990. Ascent to the heavens and deification in 4QMa, in: Schiffman, L.H. (ed.), *Archaeology and history in the Dead Sea Scrolls: The New York University conference in memory of Yigael Yadin.* JSOT Press, Sheffield, 181–8.

Snyman, S.D., 2015. *Malachi.* Peeters, Leuven.

Soja, E.W., 1996. *Third space: journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places.* Blackwell, Oxford.

Spencer, S., 1997. *Acts.* Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield.

Squires, J.T., 1993. The plan of God in Luke-Acts*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Stone, M.E., 1983. Coherence and inconsistency in the apocalypses: The case of "The End" in 4 Ezra, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102, 229–43.

Strelan, R., 2004. *Strange acts: studies in the cultural world of the Acts of the Apostles.* de Gruyter,

Berlin.

Tabor, J.D., 1986. *Things unutterable: Paul's ascent to paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and early Christian contexts.* University Press of America, Lanham.

Talbert, C.H., 2005. *Reading Acts: A literary and theological commentary on the Acts of the Apostles.* Smyth & Helwys, Macon.

Talbert, C.H., 2003. *Reading Luke-Acts in its Mediterranean milieu*. Brill, Leiden.

Talbert, C.H., 1976. The myth of a descending-ascending redeemer in Mediterranean antiquity, *New Testament Studies* 22, 418–40.

Talbert, C.H., 1975. The concept of immortals in Mediterranean antiquity, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94, 419–36.

Talbert, C.H., 1974. *Literary patterns, theological themes, and the genre of Luke-Acts.* Scholars Press, Cambridge.

Talbert, C.H., Stepp, P., 1998a. Succession in Mediterranean antiquity Part 1: The Lukan milieu, in: Shields, M.E., Kutsko, J.F., Callender, D. (eds.), *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 1998*. Scholars Press, Atlanta, 148–68.

Talbert, C.H., Stepp, P., 1998b. Succession in Mediterranean antiquity Part 2: Luke-Acts, in: Shields, M.E., Kutsko, J.F., Callender, D. (eds.), *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 1998*. Scholars Press, Atlanta, 169–79.

Tannehill, R.C., 1990. *The narrative unity of Luke-Acts. A literary interpretation.* Fortress, Minneapolis.

Townsend, J.T., 1998. Acts 9:1–29 and early church tradition, in: Thompson, R.P., Philips, T.E. (eds.), *Literary studies in Luke-Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson.* Mercer University Press, Macon,87–98.

Trompf, G.W., 2000. *Early Christian historiography: Narratives of retribution.* Continuum, London; New York.

Tuckett, C.M., 2001. *Christology and the New Testament: Jesus and his earliest followers.* Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

Uytanlet, S., 2014. *Luke-Acts and Jewish historiography: A study on the theology, literature, and ideology of Luke-Acts.* Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.

Van Seters, J., 2002. Is there any historiography in the Hebrew bible? A Hebrew-Greek comparison, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 28, 1–25.

Van Stempvoort, P.A., 1958. The interpretation of the ascension in Luke and Acts, *New Testament*

Studies 5, 30–42.

Verhoef, P.A., 1987. *The books of Haggai and Malachi.* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Viljoen, F.P., 2008. Jesus as intercessor in Luke-Acts, *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 19, 329–49.

Vinson, R.B., 2014. The God of Luke-Acts, *Interpretation* 68, 376–88.

Walbank, F.W., 2007. Fortune (*tyche*) in Polybius, in: Marincola, J. (ed.), *A companion to Greek and Roman historiography.* Blackwell, Oxford, 349–55.

Walbank, F.W., 1957. *A historical commentary on Polybius* Vol. 1. Clarendon, Oxford.

Walsh, P.G., 1961. *Livy: His historical aims and methods.* Cambridge University Press, New York.

Walton, S., 2008a. The heavens opened: Cosmological and theological transformation in Luke and Acts, in: Pennington, J.T., McDonough, S.M. (eds.), *Cosmology and New Testament theology.* T & T Clark, London; New York, 60–73.

Walton, S., 2008b. The Acts – of God?: What is the "Acts of the Apostles" all about?, *Evangelical Quarterly* 80, 291–306.

Warrior, V.M., Livy, 2006. *The History of Rome* Books 1-5. Hackett, Indianapolis.

White, P., 1988. Julius Caesar in Augustan Rome, *Phoenix* 42, 334–56.

Wiener, A., 1978. *The prophet Elijah in the development of Judaism: a depth-psychological study.* Routledge & Kegan, London.

Wiese, C. (ed.), 2016. *Quintilian on the teaching of speaking and writing: translations from books 1, 2, and 10 of the "Institutio Oratoria".* Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale.

Witherington III, B., 1998. *The Acts of the Apostles: a socio-rhetorical commentary.* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Wrede, W., 1971. *The Messianic secret.* James Clarke, Cambridge.

Wright, J.E., 2000. *The early history of heaven.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Zwiep, A., 2001. *Assumptus est in caelum:* Rapture and heavenly exaltation in early Judaism and Luke-Acts, in: Avemarie, F., Lichtenberger, H. (eds.), Auferstehung –Resurrection. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 323–49.

Zwiep, A.W., 1997. *The ascension of the Messiah in Lukan christology*. Brill, Leiden.