

# Witnesses of the Resurrected Messiah. Luke's Presentation of the Main Theological Theme of the Acts of the Apostles

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**ABSTRACT:** The dominant classification of Acts as the history of the early Christian Church whose main aim is to present the spread of the nascent movement from a less important part of the Roman Empire (Judea) to the very heart of the Empire (Rome), seems to be supported by Acts 1:8 which is often taken as a kind of very general a table of contents. However, the rather unexpected end of Acts (a short and laconic account regarding Paul's period in Rome), and Luke's approach to and use of his sources, allow us to assume that Luke was aiming rather at a great story involving some main hearos and many other participants than are involved in just one thematic story. Following this assumption, based on the content of Acts, it is possible to individuate two main heroes (Peter and Paul) whose fate is somehow connected with many other persons that are also involved in giving witness to Jesus the Resurrected Messiah. In this study we look at Acts as the story concerning the two the most important witnesses, Peter and Paul, in order to determine their contribution to establishing the structural and doctrinal foundation of the New Israel.

**KEYWORDS:** witness; Resurrected Messiah; Peter; Paul; Gentiles; Jews

The Acts of the Apostles is one continuous account regarding the witnesses of the Resurrected Messiah. Luke, in his summaries, indicates clearly that the communities of Jesus' believers gave witness to the world, not only by proclaiming the kerygma (Acts 4:19-20; 8:4) but also by their daily lives (Acts 2:42-47), their faithfulness to the Lord (Acts 4:23-31); by miracles (Acts 5:12-16; 9:36-43); by the baptism of blood (Acts 7:54-60; 12:1-5); and by mission activities (Acts 13-21). They overcame the prejudice separating Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10:1-11:18; 15:1-35); they survived persecution (Acts 8:1-3; 12:1-5; 14:19-20; 16:25-40; 21:27-26:32); they confronted the challenges of the polytheistic religious and social systems (Acts 17:16-33; 19:11-40). This first generation of Christians was the generation of the witnesses. Every good story, however, needs its particular hero, and the narrator, rather than giving a general account of the events, builds the narrative around one or more characters. The structure of the narrative in Acts is presented in Acts 1:8, and it concerns the spreading of the kerygma, beginning from Jerusalem, continuing through Judea and Samaria, and spreading to the ends of the

earth<sup>1</sup>. This gives the narrative in Acts a triptych structure, but despite this Luke presents only two main heroes, around whom the whole narrative is focused, as the best examples of witnesses to Jesus, the Resurrected Messiah. Although these are not the only heroes of Luke's narrative, since John, Barnabas, Stephen, Philip, James and still other co-workers in the mission are included, but Peter and Paul get the most credit, and this has been treasured by the Church's tradition. The Acts seems to attest the Church's perspective on Peter and Paul, with the first being given the title Apostle to the Jews, and the second being called the Apostle to the Gentiles. Although Luke's second volume is called the Acts of the Apostles, which suggests the twelve apostles, the narrative is restricted to Peter and Paul, with a few mentions of John as the co-worker of Peter, and some occasional references to James in the narrative regarding Paul. Other apostles are included only in the general expression "the apostles" without mention of their names, which makes "the earliest history of the Christianity" – a name that is sometimes given to Acts – an account that is limited to the mission in Palestine and in the north-east part of the Mediterranean world<sup>2</sup>. Although this approach of Luke, and the introduction of the addressee of Acts, presents the author's purpose in writing the Acts of the Apostles, the special concern shown for the activities of Peter and Paul indicates the author wishes to present these two personalities in his own very specific way, in which the main point is probably his intention to show the complementary character of their missions, rather than to dwell on the diversity. Reading the Acts in a manner in which the activities of both apostles are viewed as two separate accounts, only occasionally related to each other (e.g. Acts 15), is open to a misunderstanding of Luke's intention when he chose these two apostles and ignored the rest<sup>3</sup>. The main hypothesis of this study regards Luke's perspective on two different missions (that of Peter and of Paul) as two ways to realize the one command by Jesus (Acts 1:8), where

- 1 D.R. Schwarz (*Reading the First Century* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2013] 172-174) argues that the phrase "to ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) should be interpreted as "to the Gentiles" in light of Acts 13:47.
- 2 Although Acts is generally recognized as the being earliest Christian history, however it must be remembered that it is only a part of the much larger mission activities undertaken by the first generation of Christians, and lack of accounts regarding missions in Africa and elsewhere in Asia must be attributed to a reductionistic approach by Luke, which was not caused by the author's neglect of his duty as the writer of history, but rather by the particular interest of Luke's patron, Theophilus, whether this be a reference to an individual or to a particular group. E.J. Schnabel, *Acts* (ECNT 5; Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2012) 28-41.
- 3 D. Marguerat (*The First Christian History: Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles'* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002] 84) maintains that Luke, in order to present in his historiographical work a theological program of integration, used the persons of Peter and Paul in order to show the coherence of the Christian movement. In our opinion, Luke used both apostles to present the universal character (to both Jews and Gentiles) of the messianic movement, which addressed the kerygma to all who were ready to listen.

both ways are intimately related to each other<sup>4</sup>. Each mission has its own specification (the Jewish world; the Gentiles' world), but neither is limited to such specifications. In order to establish this claim, we will use the narrative method, in which the author's approach to presentation of these two heros, will be analyzed in terms of their contribution to the realization of the command of Jesus. The way in which they gave the witness to Jesus the Messiah, and the kerygma they proclaimed during their missions, may allow us to confirm or reject the merit of calling Peter the Apostle to the Jews and Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles. Is this simplification made by Church tradition, justified by the narrative of Acts? That is a question to which the narrative method should give the answer.

## 1. Peter

Although Church tradition speaks about Peter's mission in Rome, in Acts his mission activity is restricted to the region of Judea and Samaria, which at first sight seems to justify our calling him the Apostle of the Jews. This, however, is far from being self-evident<sup>5</sup>. This approach by Luke strongly connects Peter with Palestine Jews and makes Peter to be the initiator of all the missions that begin *de facto* with the event of Pentecost and were then undertaken by many of Jesus' followers in many different places. However, the contribution of Peter goes more far than that, since he not only shaped the very core of the Christian faith, but he also enabled the Way to cross over the confines of Judaism and progressively develop into a universal religion.

### 1.1. The Mission in Jerusalem

Peter is the central hero in the Lukan narrative regarding the first two stages of spreading the kerygma to the world, namely the mission in Jerusalem and mission in Judea and Samaria. He always acts as the head of the community (Acts 1:15-25;

4 Marguerat (*The First Christian History*, 66-68) suggests that in Acts, the agents connected with the Diaspora Jews (Paul, Barnabas and Timothy) are presented by Luke in a way that serves Luke's theological concept, namely, linking Judaism (Jerusalem) with paganism (Rome). The suggestion may be true in the case of Paul, but it is hardly so in the cases of Barnabas and Timothy, who receive less attention than Peter.

5 The simple fact that the very first speech of Peter at Pentecost is given in Jerusalem to Jews from many different counties and also to proselytes (Gentiles who accepted Judaism), shows that Peter's kerygma is addressed not exclusively to Jews but also to those Gentiles who accepted Judaism. On this point, we disagree with the opinion of O. Padilla (*The Acts of the Apostles. Interpretation, History and Theology* [Dovners Grove, IL: InterVarsity 2016] 161).

2:14-36; 5:1-11; 5:29-42; 12:1-19; 15:7-12) or at least as the head of the mission team (Acts 3:1-4:22; 8:14-25; 9:32-43; 10:1-11:18)<sup>6</sup>. Although, he is not the only hero in the narrative, since activities of Stephan (Acts 7:1-60), Philip (8:4-40), Barnabas (Acts 11:19-30) and Saul (Acts 9:20-31) are also mentioned, however the most critical decisions for the progress of the community are made by Peter (Acts 2:38-39; 4:19-20; 11:17; 15:11). He is the protagonist of the narrative regarding proclaiming the kerygma in Jerusalem and organizing the structures of the community (Acts 1:12-4:22). His first speech during the Pentecost proclaims the inauguration of the eschatological times, marked by God's gift, the power of the Holy Spirit given to those who believe in the Resurrected Messiah. The Lukan Peter, using traditional Jewish eschatological thought, introduces a new element, the resurrection of Jesus, that is presented not as being contrary to the tradition but as being the fulfillment of God's promise<sup>7</sup>. The miracle in the Temple (Acts 3:1-10) offers the immediate opportunity for Peter's second speech which contains well elaborated Christological teaching that presents Jesus' death and resurrection, his ascension to heaven, as well as his second coming (Acts 4:12-26)<sup>8</sup>. This kerygma is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition but by presenting Jesus of Nazareth as the Resurrected Messiah it is met with strong opposition from the Temple authorities, who demand that this teaching be discontinued (Acts 4:17). Peter's indirect disobedience to the Sanhedrin's prohibition (Acts 4:19-20) causes open conflict between them, and it puts the relationship between them on a level of open hostility. The dispute between Peter and the Twelve on the one side, and the Sanhedrin on the other, results in Peter's direct proclamation in disobedience to the Sanhedrin's prohibition (Acts 5:17-32)<sup>9</sup>. The strong hostility of the Temple authorities (Acts 5:33) would lead to certain death if Gamaliel did not restrain their emotion by presenting a logical and less perilous solution to the problem (Acts 5:35-42)<sup>10</sup>. At the time of

<sup>6</sup> C.R. Holladay (*Acts. A Commentary* [NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 2016] 82) is of the opinion that in Acts 1:16-22 Luke rehabilitates Peter. However, considering the fact that Luke in the narrative regarding the mission in Judea and Samaria constantly presents Peter as the head of the Twelve and the main agent of all mission activities, the presentation of Peter in Acts 1:16-22 should be recognized as an example (one of many) of Luke's general perception of Peter rather than an account with any more specific purpose.

<sup>7</sup> B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic* (London: SCM 1961) 46.

<sup>8</sup> There are similarities and differences between the speeches of Acts 2:14-40 and Acts 3:12-26, which some scholars explain as deriving from primitive sources that served Luke as the base for creating the speeches. Cf. R.F. Zehnle, *Peter's Pentecost Discourse: Tradition and Lukan Reinterpretation in Peter's Speech of Acts 2 and 3* (SBLMS 15; New York: Abingdon 1971) 71-94. However, the reason for the similarities and differences in both speeches lies in Luke's narrative concept, by which some speeches are arranged in groups of three topic speeches in which the same topic is gradually developed.

<sup>9</sup> J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New Heaven – London: Yale University Press 2010) 304.

<sup>10</sup> Gamaliel's speech, according to Luke (Acts 5:33-39), seems to be pro-Christian, with a forceful presentation of the possibility that the movement might be of divine origin (Acts 5:38-39). Although Gamaliel's speech helps Peter and John to avoid a severe punishment, it is difficult to accept that

the conflict Peter is the steadfast witness to the Resurrected Messiah, who shows the direct contradiction between the will of God and will of the Sanhedrin. The crucial point concerns acceptance (shown by Peter) or rejection (shown by the Sanhedrin) of Jesus' death and resurrection as the fulfillment of God's promise. In this way, Luke's Peter, with this particular perspective on Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 5:30-31), created the first and most important foundation for the doctrinal system that will be called "Christian Christology" throughout subsequent history. This made Peter to be founder of a doctrine (in an embryonic stage of development) characteristic of the so-called Palestinian Judeo-Christian community, where the event of Jesus is strictly and strongly connected to the tradition of Judaism and seen as the fulfillment of the promises included in this tradition (the Scriptures). His leading role as the head of the Twelve and the witness to the Resurrected Messiah is sufficiently attested in Luke's narrative. Peter specifies distinctly the doctrine of the Way, in a manner that allows no compromise with mainstream Judaism, and in this way initiates a rift between tradition (Judaism) and the fulfillment of the tradition (the Way). His importance is underlined by Luke in the narrative concerning Peter's persecution and God's assistance to him in time of distress, that strengthens his determination to lead the community according to his convictions, even when it puts his and their lives in danger.

Summing up: the narrative presents the indispensable contribution of Peter in establishing the Jerusalem community (the mother of all communities) and in shaping the doctrinal foundation that will determine the fate of the movement.

## 1.2. The Missions in Judea and Samaria

In the narrative of the mission in Judea and Samaria, Peter continues to be the main protagonist in the problem concerning the acceptance of Gentiles among the Jewish Christians (Acts 10:1–11:18)<sup>11</sup>. The topic of the Gentiles and their entry into the Judeo-Christian group is one that is carefully elaborated by Luke,

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Gamaliel's intention was to protect the apostles; rather his action resulted from his wish to prevent the Sanhedrin from acting out of ill-will (Acts 5:35). O. Padilla, *The Speeches of Outsiders in Acts* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008) 121. Despite the true intention of Gamaliel, Luke uses the conditional to amplify (Acts 5:39) the truth of the statement, which was most probably intended to suggest to the reader that Gamaliel recognized the divine origin of the movement.

<sup>11</sup> Luke puts into vivid focus the activities of Philip in Samaria (Acts 8:13), which led to the involvement of Peter and John in the mission (Acts 8:14-25). He is also mentioned as the one involved in conversion of the Ethiopian and work in Gaza and Azotus. In this context Luke's choice of Peter as the hero in the narrative concerning the mission in Samaria and Judea may have a theological intent. The mention of Philip shows that Peter (and John) were not the only persons involved in the mission, and the focus on Peter was caused by Luke narrative's purpose. R.N. Longenecker, "Acts", *Luke – Acts* (ed. T. Longman III – D.E. Garland) (EBC 10; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2007) 837-841.

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and in his account, it is connected entirely with the person of Peter. Himself a Jewish Christian, Peter answers God's enigmatic message, even without fully comprehending. This is the first step leading to his breaking through a wall of prejudice (Acts 10:9-23)<sup>12</sup>. Though not fully convinced of the propriety of visiting a Gentile's house (Acts 10:28-29), Peter, in obedience to God, responded to an initiative of Gentiles that was inspired by God (10:1-8). The conversation with Cornelius convinced him that it is God's will to include the "fearers of God" within the Jewish Christian community (Acts 10:34-35)<sup>13</sup>. Luke makes it clear that Peter did not for a moment think of converting Cornelius and his household to Judaism, but he proclaims directly to them the kerygma about Jesus, the Resurrected Messiah (Acts 10:36-43)<sup>14</sup>. Their acceptance of the kerygma is attested by their receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is presented here as the sign of their belonging to the New Israel. Indirectly this shows that it is not baptism, but the gift of the Holy Spirit that is the sign of true faith in Jesus, the Resurrected Messiah (Acts 10:47-48)<sup>15</sup>. This reversal of the normal order, in which the gift of the Holy Spirit was preceded by baptism in the name of Jesus (Acts 8:14-17), was for Peter the conclusive factor in his decision to baptize Gentiles, and in this way to include them within the community of Jesus' believers without prior conversion to Judaism<sup>16</sup>. Luke's narrative gives the impression that Peter's decision

12 In Luke's account Peter honestly confesses the Jewish prejudice regarding association with Gentiles (Acts 10:28), indirectly implying his agreement with this obligation of the Law. This negative presentation serves in Luke's narrative to underline the divine origin of Peter's action (overcoming this prejudice) and underscoring in this way the "giant step" taken in putting Jewish-Gentile relations on a new and promising level. The narrative regarding the conversion of Cornelius house is probably one of the most epic among the narratives of Acts. S.G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1973) 177.

13 B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 1998) 356.

14 The narrative concerning the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48) contains two problematic accounts: the first concerns the presentation of Cornelius, and second the content of the kerygma proclaimed to the household of Cornelius. Luke presents Cornelius as an extreme fervent God-fearer (Acts 10:1-2,22), which raises some suspicion when we consider his social position as a centurion of *Cohors II Italica civium Romanorum voluntariorum miliaria*. His military duties and his sympathetic attitude toward Jews and their religion could be in conflict, due to the nature of the Roman presence in Judea. For this reason, Luke's presentation should be taken with considerable degree of caution, and it should not be taken simply as a sign of Cornelius' sympathy to Judaism. The account of Peter's speech (Acts 10:34-43) suggests that the whole household of Cornelius is familiar not only with Judaism but also with matters regarding Jesus' ministry (Acts 10:37) – this latter is not mentioned until Acts 10:38-43. Peter makes an assumption that is not attested by the previous narrative, which may be understood as Luke's schematic approach to the topic (H. Conzelmann), or as the generalized introduction to the account concerning the kerygma that is elaborated by him in the following narrative (Acts 10:38-43). We prefer the second explanation. H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress 1987) 83-84.

15 I.C. O'Neil, "The Connection Between Baptism and the Gift of the Spirit in Acts", *JSNT* 63 (1996) 93-94.

16 In Luke's narrative the gift of the Holy Spirit is the sign of the true faith, which is given to those who are going to join the community of those believing in Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah. This is

was made on the spur of the moment and based on the only factor that Peter holds to be the most important. However, against the storm of criticism from the side of members of the Jerusalem community, who accused him of association with the Gentiles, Peter firmly re-affirmed the decision that was made in the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:1-17)<sup>17</sup>. He not only defended himself successfully, but also convinced the members of the community to accept among themselves the Gentiles, namely the “God fearers” dwelling in land of the Jews (Acts 11:19)<sup>18</sup>. This makes Peter to be the protagonist of the mission to the Gentiles, although limited here to those Gentiles who, while having some association with Judaism, were not converts to Judaism, but referred to as “God fearers”<sup>19</sup>. Consequently, it was the Jerusalem community that was the first to accept the Gentile “God fearers” among themselves<sup>20</sup>. While Peter is given all the credit for spreading the kerygma to the Gentiles, this concerns only those Gentiles who were dwelling among the Jews in Judea. Nevertheless, the process is initiated with Peter and will develop progressively to become a proclamation of the kerygma in Syrian Antioch, and then to Paul’s mission among the Gentiles. Despite its limitation, Peter’s decision established a new relationship between Jews and Gentiles, at least on the level of association between both groups, which by every standard must be considered revolutionary. This new relationship is based on their shared faith in Jesus, the Resurrected Messiah, not on any community of customs, thought or culture. This presentation of Peter’s contribution to the acceptance of Gentiles among the Jewish Christians shows that it is hardly justified to call Peter the “apostle of the Jews only”.

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not limited to the Pentecost event, but it frequently occurs in narratives of the conversion of specific group (Acts 2:1-4 – the apostles; Acts 8:14-17 – Samaritans; Acts 10:44 – Cornelius’ household; Acts 19:1-6 – the John’s disciples).

- 17 The narrative of the opposition of some members of the Jerusalem community to Peter’s association with Gentiles (Acts 11:1-18) may serve not only to show acceptance of Peter’s decision by the Jerusalem community, but it also may indicate a group of some Judeo-Christians in the community who were not fully convinced by Peter’s apology, as the narrative of Acts 15:1-3 suggests. This is possibly also the case in the narrative in Acts 21:20-21.
- 18 L.T. Johnson, *Decision Making in the Church. A Bible Model* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress 1983) 74-77.
- 19 Luke makes it clear that, although in very different way to the case of Saul, Peter was also prepared by God (Acts 10:9-16) to perform the task of spreading the kerygma among the Gentiles. In both cases God prepares not only Peter and Saul, but also those who initiated the meetings (Ananias and Cornelius). It may indicate Luke’s theological conviction that God is the initiator of peace between peoples, however the people must obey the will of God in order to obtain this peace. It is striking that in both cases the aim of God’s action was the mission to the Gentiles.
- 20 The community of Syrian Antioch was the first community that accepted Gentiles who were not even familiar with Judaism (Acts 11:19-21). However, it was still the Jerusalem community that supervised and accepted this mission by sending Barnabas (Acts 11:22-26).
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### 1.3. Peter and the Jerusalem Council

Peter's solution to the problem of the relationship between Gentile and Jewish Christians did not bring a conclusion to the issue, since the narrative regarding so-called Jerusalem Council reveals that the issue became again the reason for controversy within the community in Syrian Antioch, but this time it concerned a theological topic (Acts 15:1-3)<sup>21</sup>. The impasse in the controversy between Paul, Barnabas and their supporters on the one side, and the (Judaizing) brothers from Jerusalem, and their supporters on the other side, that occurred in the community in Antioch, was the direct reason for so-called the Jerusalem Council. It was *de facto* a judicial process in which two opposing parties of the same community seek help from the mother church (the Jerusalem community) that was also the supervisor of the community in Antioch (Acts 11:19-30)<sup>22</sup>. The controverted issue, the necessity of circumcision for salvation for Gentile Christians, was, on the level of relationship, an attempt to convert to Judaism those Gentiles who were already members of the Christian community<sup>23</sup>. In Luke's narrative, the issue takes on a theological dimension, that concerns the problem of salvation, namely, can Gentiles who believe in Jesus be saved outside of Judaism, on the sole basis of their faith in Jesus? (Acts 15:1.5)<sup>24</sup>. The first and the most important contribution towards solving the problem, according to Luke's narrative, was given by Peter (Acts 15:7-12), but not by Paul, Barnabas, James or any other apostle<sup>25</sup>. Peter at the beginning of his speech refers to the case of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:1-48). Peter declared (Acts 15:7) that as the head of the

21 The problem in Antioch community raised questions about the effects of the mission in Antioch, the mission of Barnabas and Paul, as well as Peter's baptism of the household of Cornelius. C.S. Keener, *Acts. An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2014) III, 2210-2211.

22 Luke's narrative makes the community in Jerusalem to be a kind of "mother church" for the Antioch community (directly – Acts 11:22-24; 15:1-2) and probably for all communities in Palestine and the neighboring regions (indirectly – Acts 15:23; 16:4). In this context, the supervision by the Syrian Antioch community of the mission on Cyprus may show considerable liberty in undertaking mission activities by communities supervised by Jerusalem community. Cf. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1988) 245-246.

23 T.L. Donaldson (*Paul and the Gentiles. Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1997] 275) thinks that some Jews accepted the possibility that righteous Gentiles could be saved even without conversion to Judaism.

24 Some scholars think that the requirement means that for the Gentiles who believe in Jesus as the Messiah, it is necessary to acknowledge and follow the Jewish tradition. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 286-287; Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 115. Some scholars interpret the requirement in the light of Paul's thought (in the Letter to the Romans and the Letter to the Galatians). See L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press 1992) 258-259; Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 450-451.

25 Peter, in an authoritative manner, and with the arguments he used in his speech, brought a conclusion to the discussion. D.G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 2009) 330.



apostles he was chosen by God to proclaim the kerygma to the Gentiles in general. Those who accepted his proclaiming and became followers of Jesus were thus led to faith in Jesus<sup>26</sup>. This statement refers to something that was common knowledge among members of the Jerusalem community (Acts 11:4-18). This knowledge included also the recognition that God Himself confirmed the faith of the Gentiles who believed in the Resurrected Messiah by giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit, the same gift that was given to the Twelve (Acts 15:8)<sup>27</sup>. This gift is the main argument for Peter's shocking statement that before God there is full equality between Jews and Gentiles, an equality that is based on their shared faith in Jesus, the Resurrected Messiah<sup>28</sup>. This equality does not concern customs or traditions, but is based on the same faith, which removes the impurity (sins) of the Gentiles by faith and saves the Jews through faith. Since the faith is the same, the way is irrelevant. This critical statement is the basis for a rhetorical question that is in effect an accusation directed at those members of the Jerusalem community who, using the issue of salvation, tried to force Gentile Christians to convert to Judaism, but in fact are acting against God (Acts 15:10)<sup>29</sup>. This accusation means that it is against the will of God to put Gentiles under the burden of the Mosaic Law<sup>30</sup>. Peter also indirectly states that salvation by the Law is questionable even for Jews, since no one can fully fulfil the Mosaic Law<sup>31</sup>. This leads Peter to make the conclusive and strongly authoritative statement regarding salvation by the grace of Jesus (Acts 15:11)<sup>32</sup>. The statement is, on the one hand,

26 This verse refers to Acts 10:9-43, and it presents God as being the agent in Peter's action. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentiles Mission*, 171-195.

27 Verse 8 contains the idea that had been presented in Acts 11:15-17.

28 Peter (in Luke's presentation) concentrates on equality based on the faith (Acts 15:7-8) without distinction of priority in the faith, which is something underlined by Paul in his presentation of the teaching regarding justification (Rom 1:16; 2:9-10; 3:2), in which equality based on the same faith is also expressed (Rom 3:22-24). T.R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2018) 186-187.

29 The phrase *πειράζετε τὸν θεὸν* – *put God to the test* indicates that resistance to God is the main issue. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 262-263

30 Conzelmann (*Acts of the Apostles*, 117) points out that the usage of the term in Acts 15:10 reflects a strictly Christian evaluation of the Law (Gal 5:1). Note also the use of the aorist active form of the verb *ισχύω* – *be able* suggesting that Lukan Peter sees the problem as something that has already been resolved.

31 The Jews were aware of the fact that it is impossible to fully obey the Law, just as they also acknowledged that salvation is always due to the grace of God.

32 I.C. O'Neil (*The Acts of the Apostles*, 171) rightly points out that the last statement in Peter's speech has a strong Pauline character. Does Luke really "Paulinize" Peter's teaching about salvation by the grace of Jesus? Although the phrase (Acts 15:11) is unusual in Luke's presentation of Peter, the idea of grace being given to the Gentiles is found in the narrative concerning the house of Cornelius. In Acts 10:34-35 Peter expresses the conviction that all people are treated equally by God. In Acts 10:47 Peter shows his recognition of the equality with which God gives the same gift to both Jews and Gentiles (also Acts 11:15.17). The closest phrase to that found in Acts 15:11 is the statement of the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 11:18) where salvation by grace is mentioned indirectly. Luke would certainly

a direct answer to the “brothers from Jerusalem” (Acts 15:1), and on the other hand, the most crucial declaration that will shape the specific Christian concept of salvation: salvation is grace, and this grace comes through faith in Jesus, the Resurrected Messiah<sup>33</sup>.

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Luke in this narrative (Acts 15:7-12), clearly presents Peter as the protagonist of the teaching concerning salvation by faith, which here, due to the context of the controversy concerning the position of Jews and Gentiles, in a direct way is limited to the Gentiles<sup>34</sup>. Peter not only solved the problem of the association between Jews and Gentiles (who feared God), but he also solved the doctrinal problem of salvation<sup>35</sup>. Salvation is possible only by the grace of Jesus, which here means “by the faith” (for the Gentiles), and “through the faith” (for Jews). The phrase “Peter the Apostle of the Jews” then, is true only insofar as it concerns the geographical extent of his mission activities that were mainly confined to Judaea and Samaria regions. It hardly be used to characterize or delimit his teaching and activities. As presented by Luke, it was Peter who brought the community of believers in the Resurrected Messiah beyond the boundaries of Jew and Gentile.

## 2. Paul

The narrative of Acts after Acts 13 almost exclusively concerns Saul, who was also called Paul (Acts 13:9). This information itself makes Paul to be the second hero chosen by Luke to present the account of the witnesses to Jesus the Resurrected Messiah, that is the main aim of Acts. Luke reserves for Peter the role of

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probably wish to present the teaching of Peter regarding salvation by grace to be in accordance with the teaching of Paul, however this is not proof that Luke “Paulinized” Peter. It shows rather that Luke looks on both apostles in a complementary perspective, rather than their being in conflict, as some scholars would conclude. Paul’s own presentation in Ga 2:11-14 concerns questions of custom, not of teaching. Concerning the teaching itself, Paul in general shows agreement between himself and the apostles in Jerusalem, including Peter (Acts 2:6-9). Concerning the incident in Antioch see the very interesting analysis M.F. Bird, *An Anomalous Jew: Paul among Jews, Greeks, and Romans*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans 2016) 170-204.

<sup>33</sup> O’Neill, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 171-172.

<sup>34</sup> J.B. Lightfoot, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (eds. B. Witherington III, T.D. Still) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity 2014) 157-158.

<sup>35</sup> Hanges rightly points to the fact that Luke’s narrative of the conversion of Cornelius’ house, while presenting Peter as the agent, nevertheless underlines the divine intervention in Peter’s life that brought about this new reality. J.C. Hanges, *Paul, Founder of Churches* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck 2012) 443.

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being the most influential witness in Palestine, but Paul's witness extends to the rest of the world. In both cases this distinction is symbolical and repeats in its character the structure of the command of Jesus (Acts 1:8). Paul's extraordinary case shows in the most effective way the dynamic of spreading the messianic movement to "the ends of the earth".

For his presentation of Peter, Luke used the topic key as the main structure of the narrative, where each topic explains, in a progressive way, one step further in the direction of creating the foundation of the Christian teaching that would distinguish the members of the Way from the Jews. The first topic concerns teaching, which was not recognized by Sanhedrin and caused conflict between these two groups. The second topic concerns association with and acceptance of Gentiles (the fearers of God) among the mostly Jewish community of Jesus's disciples, which was a direct violation of the Mosaic Law and hence an abandonment of the social consensus. The third topic concerns the dogmatic issue of salvation, where in general terms the idea of salvation by faith is introduced, and the necessity of the Mosaic Law for Gentiles is rejected. When presenting Paul, however, Luke did not use the topic key, probably due to his knowledge of Paul's letters<sup>36</sup>. In the case of Paul, Luke shows the progressive character of Paul's growth in status as a witness to the Resurrected Messiah<sup>37</sup>. To achieve this aim, Luke divides the presentation of Paul into three groups, in which first concerns his conversion and his first activities (Acts 9:1-31), the second concerns his mission journeys, including the activities in Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:25-30; 12:24-21:16), the third concerns his imprisonment (21:17-28:31)<sup>38</sup>.

## 2.1. The Activities of Saul

Luke introduces Saul/Paul in a short, schematic way, but in doing so he also gives all the basic information necessary for evaluating Paul as a determined

<sup>36</sup> D.B. Capes – R. Reeves – E.R. Richards, *Rediscovering Paul. An Introduction to His World, Letters, and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity 2017) 65. There are many places in Acts where Luke's theology shows considerable influence of Paul's teaching as it is found in his letters. It must also be kept in mind that Luke spent a long time with Paul during which time he would assimilate Paul's teaching.

<sup>37</sup> Contrary to some scholars, who prefer to present Paul as initiating the great missionary endeavour immediately after his conversion to faith in Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah, we are of the opinion that it took Paul several years and required the help of many people to grow into the status of missionary. This may be attested by Luke's presentation of the relationship between Barnabas and Paul. The discussion by Plevnik is very interesting: J. Plevnik, *What are They Saying about Paul?* (New York: Paulist Press 1986) 22-27.

<sup>38</sup> For a brief introduction to each period see F.F. Bruce, *Paul. Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Paternoster 1977) 69-94, 126-133, 169-172, 212-263, 286-299, 339-367.

and successful opponent of the Way (Acts 8:1-3)<sup>39</sup>. This presentation of Paul as the persecutor will be complemented by Paul's self-evaluation included in his apologetically speeches (Acts 22:4-5; 26:10-11), however for the purpose of the narrative regarding his conversion, this short introduction is sufficient to show that the event at Damascus was purely divine intervention that overcame the hostility of Paul, and at the same time saved Jesus's followers (Acts 9:1-5)<sup>40</sup>. Luke also chooses to show another aspect of this intervention that concerns the conversion of the persecutor to becoming the servant of Jesus (Acts 9:1-19)<sup>41</sup>. The powerful man who left Jerusalem, entered Damascus as a powerless man, as the result of a new experience that changed his convictions entirely (Acts 9:7-9)<sup>42</sup>. This temporary weakness was the beginning of a process that finally led Paul to his baptism (Acts 9:18), in which by the initiative of Jesus, Ananias played the role of the Lord's messenger (Acts 9:10-17). Defeated on the road to Damascus, Paul, by the mediation of Ananias in Damascus, was chosen as the agent to fulfill the will of his new Lord<sup>43</sup>. According to Luke's narrative, however, Paul was not yet aware of this (Acts 9:15-16)<sup>44</sup>. Acts 9:19 suggests that Paul very soon began independently to proclaim the kerygma in the Synagogues of Damascus, and that this continued for three years (Acts 9:19-25), which should be taken as his semi-independence from the Damascus community<sup>45</sup>. His kerygma that Jesus

- <sup>39</sup> Paul (in Luke's account) offers his hatred of the Way as a reason for Saul's activity in persecution (Acts 26:11). M. Zetterholm (*Approaches to Paul. A Student's Guide to Recent Scholarship* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2009] 16-17.) shows that there was also a political reason for Saul's hostility.
- <sup>40</sup> W.M. Ramsay, *St. Paul. The Traveler and Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications 2001) 42-46. J.D.G. Dunn (*The New Perspective on Paul* [Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 2005] 356-347) presents many different aspects of Saul's conversion (1. From a troubled conscience to peace with God; 2. From denial to affirmation of Jesus as Messiah; 3. From the Law to the Gospel; 4. From his own righteousness to God's righteousness), all of which relate to inner conversion..
- <sup>41</sup> J.C. Hanges (*Paul, Founder of Churches*, 442-445) recognizes the narrative regarding Paul's conversion as a "validating story".
- <sup>42</sup> The differences in the narrative regarding the event ad Damascus in all three accounts found in Acts (Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-21; 26:2-29) is interpreted by some scholars as indicating the historical unreliability of the sources. However, Luke's approach to his presentation of the event is of a narrative nature (without neglecting its historicity), where a complementary approach to presentation of particular events is preferred. A different explanation of this issue is presented by E.P. Sanders (*Paul. The Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2015] 98): "Luke, like every other ancient author, liked variety and did not regard inconsistency or even contradiction as a terrible fault".
- <sup>43</sup> For a very interesting interpretation of Saul's conversion according to Acts see J.D.G. Dunn's analysis (*The New Perspective on Paul*, 194-211) regarding the teaching about justification and its reception by M. Luther.
- <sup>44</sup> Luke skillfully informs the reader about the plans concerning Paul that were the reason for his conversion, without its being revealed to Paul himself, who will discover the plan in the long process of his mission activities. The reader is prepared in this way to accept the unexpected development in the account.
- <sup>45</sup> It can also can be interpreted as kind of necessity in order to protect the community due to the controversy Paul's teaching created among the Jews in Damascus.

is the Resurrected Messiah, confused Jews who expected him to act against the members of the new sect, rather than proclaim the teaching of this sect<sup>46</sup>. Then their confusion turned into open hostility that would have resulted in his assassination had he not saved himself by fleeing to Jerusalem (Acts 9:24-26). These three years were Paul's first witness to his new Lord, whom he accepted as the Messiah, and although it is not explicitly mentioned by Luke, it is clear from the context that Paul here means the Resurrected Messiah. It is also the very first time that Paul "tasted" the hardship of being a witness to the Resurrected Messiah and of being "hunted" because of this religious conviction (Acts 9:22-23). Mention of the persecution of Paul indirectly points to some Jews who rejected his kerygma, which is yet another aspect of being a witness to the Lord, and something which he now experienced for the first time. Although Acts 9:25 mentions the disciples helping Paul, Luke does not indicate directly any one success, or one positive result of Paul's activities<sup>47</sup>. This is an indication of Luke's strategy in his presentation of Paul rather than a reflection of the real state of things. This approach gives the impression that Paul's activities in Damascus were nothing more than the ineffective mission attempts of a neophyte.

Paul left Jerusalem as a persecutor of the Way, but after three years returned to Jerusalem as a member of the Way<sup>48</sup>. Luke focuses exclusively on Paul's relation with the community of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-28) and his mission activities among Jews from the diaspora, overlooking completely his relationship with the Sanhedrin and the Pharisees<sup>49</sup>. It makes the topic of the relationship between Paul after his conversion with Jesus' disciple in Jerusalem to be the main concern for Luke. This relationship was marked by suspicion on the part of the disciples in Jerusalem regarding Paul's real conversion (Acts 9:26)<sup>50</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> J. Murohy-O'Connor, *Paul. A Critical Life* (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press 1996) 85. This part of the kerygma was probably sufficient reason for opposition from the Jews, but by further proclaiming Jesus to be "the son of God" seems to be the much more serious reason for which the Jews decided to execute Paul. However, the main aim of this narrative is to show the results of Paul's activities in Damascus, that caused confusion among the Jews who were expecting a very different attitude on the part of Paul.

<sup>47</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 454-455.

<sup>48</sup> It is difficult to imagine that Paul was not aware of the danger involved in his return to Jerusalem, and so his decision may have been the due more to a lack of other possibilities than by a direct intent to meet the disciples. The brevity of the account results in its being schematic, with the time span and social setting being clouded over. Keener, *Acts. An Exegetical Commentary*, III, 1688-1689.

<sup>49</sup> The topic of the relation with these Jews in Jerusalem will be elaborated by Luke in the narrative concerning Paul's imprisonment (Acts 21:17–26:32), but it is totally omitted here, showing that Luke is concerned with presenting the facts from Paul's life.

<sup>50</sup> The narrative regarding Paul's rather passive attendance at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:4-12) and his meeting with James (Acts 21:17-26) suggests that these suspicions were never completely overcome, at least by some of the members. On James' position in the Jerusalem community, cf. R. Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church", *Palestinian Setting* (ed. R. Bauckham) (BAFCS 4; Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster 1995) 427-441.

Strangely, for three years the community in Jerusalem had not confirmed the news about the Paul's conversion, which may suggest that despite the information about Paul's conversion, the community may not have been ready to forgive his past as a persecutor<sup>51</sup>. Despite Paul's will to join the community, they did not reach out to him, until Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37), the man who became Paul's main mentor in becoming the apostle to the Gentiles, gave him a second chance and acted as Paul's guarantor before the apostles (Acts 9:27-28)<sup>52</sup>. It was only thanks to Barnabas that Paul was accepted by the disciples in Jerusalem<sup>53</sup>. However, his proclaiming of the kerygma and his interactions with Hellenists, i.e., Greek-speaking Jews who lived in Jerusalem, brought no positive effects, on the contrary, it again became a reason for hostility towards Paul, leading to his opponents' attempt to assassinate him (Acts 9:29)<sup>54</sup>. It forced the disciples in Jerusalem to send Paul out of the city and back to his hometown, Tarsus (Acts 9:30)<sup>55</sup>. This kind of solution, together with the strange summary given in Acts 9:31, as well as the disciples suspicions, gives a clear impression that Paul's presence in Jerusalem was problematic and controversial. The person of Paul was controversial to the disciples in Jerusalem due to their suspicion regarding his conversion and was problematic due to his method of proclaiming the kerygma, which caused unrest also among the Hellenists who did not accept his teaching.

Paul, who had been a zealous Pharisee persecuting Jesus' believer in Jerusalem, now became an equally zealous witness to Jesus the Resurrected Messiah in the same place, however contrary to results of his activity as a persecutor, his activity as witness to Jesus brought little positive result, and even many problems. After his conversion Paul proclaimed the kerygma to Jews dwelling in Damascus, and to Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem, but in both cases his eagerness generated problems for him and the community, rather than positive results, in Luke's presentation.

51 Does this information have something in common with the laconic information that Paul spent only a few days with the disciples in Damascus (Acts 9:19)?

52 J.D. Tabor (*Paul and Jesus. How the Apostle Transformed Christianity* [New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks 2012] 18) points to the fact that in general terms the relation between Paul and the apostles was "sporadic and minimal".

53 This is the event which signals the beginning of the relationship between Barnabas and Paul, that in Luke's presentation of Paul is of crucial importance, since it shows Barnabas to be the main mentor in Paul's growth towards gaining the status of being the apostles to the Gentiles. W.S. Kurz, *Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2013) 160-161.

54 This may indicate Luke's intention to present Paul as one who was not yet prepared to fulfill the task for which he was chosen. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 194-195.

55 The information regarding the opposition to Paul and his escape from Jerusalem is essentially the same as that given in the account at the time in Damascus. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 440.

## 2.2. The Missionary Journeys

Several years after Paul was sent to Tarsus, Barnabas his mentor again gave him assistance and invited him to cooperate in the mission work in Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:25)<sup>56</sup>. Without doubt, Barnabas' status in the community in Antioch helped Paul to rise in a very short time to a position of respect within the community (Acts 11:30; 12:24). Although no particular description of his activities in Antioch is given by Luke, we see Paul as being counted as one of the prophets and teachers in the local community, showing that his education was finally put at the service of the believers<sup>57</sup>. It is possible that his skill, together with his cooperation with Barnabas, were the reasons for his being chosen by the Antioch community for the mission to Cyprus (Acts 13:2-4)<sup>58</sup>. When reading the narrative regarding all the mission journeys of Paul, it must be kept in mind that Luke mentions in detail only these points of the mission journeys that contribute to develop the narrative structure determined by the author<sup>59</sup>. For this reason, the mission to Cyprus is only referred to in passing (Acts 13:4-5) in order to present the meeting with the proconsul Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6-12), which for some reason takes on an important role in the narrative of this mission journey<sup>60</sup>. We assume that the conversion of the proconsul gave the impulse to extend the mission to the region of Pamphylia and Pisidia (Acts 13:13-14)<sup>61</sup>. The narrative jumps directly to Paul's speech given in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch and addressed solely to diaspora Jews (Acts 13:16-41). This speech is but an example of Paul's teaching addressed to Diaspora Jews; in Luke's narrative there is

<sup>56</sup> Also, in this case the narrative is schematic and reduced to four simple statements, without giving detailed information that seems to be required for a more precise presentation of Saul. However, according to Luke's narrative strategy he shows little interest in any direct and detailed presentation of Saul. This attitude will change when Luke turns to a presentation of Paul, that is much more detailed than in the case of Saul. We are not informed about Barnabas' reason for seeking out Paul in Tarsus, a decision that is not self-evidential if we consider the narrative of Acts 11:19-21. Also, the content of their teaching in Antioch is left on general terms. It is also not clear if the distinction between Jews and Christian Jews was a direct result of the contribution of Barnabas and Saul. Concerning the city of Antioch, cf. I. Levinskaya, *Diaspora Setting* (BAFCS 5; Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster 1996) 127-135.

<sup>57</sup> Kurz, *Acts of the Apostles*, 189.

<sup>58</sup> Luke, naturally, gives the decision a divine origin, excluding in this way human factors, and so underlines the way in which Jesus' plan for Saul was realized.

<sup>59</sup> The fact that Luke almost neglects the mission on Cyprus shows his narrative intent in which all events regarding Saul that are not useful for a presentation of Paul are minimized. Paul, according to narrative of Acts, never returned to Cyprus, probably due to the conflict narrated in Acts 15:36-41. Concerning the mission on Cyprus, cf. A. Nobbs, "Cyprus", *The Book of Acts in Graeco-Roman Setting* (eds. D.W.J. Gill – C. Gempf) (BAFSC 2; Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster 1994) 280-289.

<sup>60</sup> Some scholars point to the change of name from Saul to Paul (Acts 9:9,13). Some point to Paul's assumption of a leading role in the mission group (Acts 9:9-12). Others point to the conversion of Sergius Paulus, the first Roman of a high social standing to join the believers (Acts 13:12). Concerning the change of name, cf. Keener, *Acts. An Exegetical Commentary*, III, 2017-2022.

<sup>61</sup> This thesis was presented by B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 403.

no other speech addressed to this group that contains the kerygma about Jesus, the Resurrected Messiah (Acts 13:26-32)<sup>62</sup>. The speech was well-received by the audience (Acts 13:42), who requested that it be continued. However, Paul's success met with opposition from some Jews who out of jealousy contradicted him (Acts 13:45). This was a direct reason for Paul's presentation of his *modus operandi* regarding the mission activity (Acts 13:46). Paul, as a witness to Resurrected Messiah, proclaims the kerygma first to Jews (of the Diaspora). In Luke's account of Paul's mission journeys this pattern is followed without exception<sup>63</sup>. The opposition to the kerygma by the Jews is a reason for addressing it also to Gentiles, however it does not mean that he ceased from proclaiming the kerygma to the Jews (Acts 13:48)<sup>64</sup>. The opposition toward Paul's kerygma (Acts 13:50-52; 14:1-7.19-20) that occurred also in other places of the region, led gradually to his constant persecution (Acts 14:5) and finally to his stoning (Acts 14:19-20), forcing the mission team to end this mission journey (Acts 14:24-28)<sup>65</sup>. During this mission Paul for the very first-time encountered Gentiles in rural areas, deeply rooted in polytheism and having little or no contact with a monotheistic religion such as Judaism (Acts 14:8-18)<sup>66</sup>. In such cases, Paul in his speech went no further than to introduce the monotheistic concept of God (Acts 14:15-17).

62 This speech, like the other speeches, contains a narrative regarding the second and the third mission journey. Although placed in a particular context, they serve a general function as a kind of representative teaching to each group of addressees who approached Paul during each mission. The speech at Pisidian Antioch shows Paul's teaching to Diaspora Jews. Paul's speeches are examples of "missional hermeneutic", as N.T. Wright ("Paul and Missional Hermeneutics", *The Apostle Paul and the Christian Life* [eds. S. McKnight – J.B. Modica] [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2016] 179-192) calls it, which concerns interpretation of the Scripture in a way that attests the apostle's statement.

63 This pattern of Luke's presentation of Saul/Paul shows Luke conviction that Paul was a missionary first to the Jews (as the primary target) and then to Gentiles (as the conclusive effect). The conclusive effect was planned by Jesus from the beginning of Paul's calling, however until the account of Paul's imprisonment, Luke does not present Jesus' direct order regarding Paul's mission to the Gentiles. This order is presented in Paul's speeches in a retrospective manner, and, from narrative point of view, it serves as the apologetic argument confirming the divine origin of Paul's mission to the Gentiles. Concerning the on-going Jewishness of Paul after his conversion cf. I.W. Oliver, "The 'Historical Paul' and the Paul of Acts", *Paul the Jew: Rereading the Apostle as a Figure of Second Temple Judaism* (eds. G. Boccaccini – C.A. Segovia) (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2016) 51-80.

64 Luke also presents the *modus operandi* of Jews contradicting Paul, who always use their social influence, or simply rely on their position of power in their conflicts with Paul.

65 The information regarding the role of Jews from Antioch and Iconium in initiating Paul's stoning shows another pattern in Luke's narrative where opposition to Paul has a consolidated and permanent character, rather than being spontaneous and occasional. Conzelmann (*Acts of the Apostles*, 111) interprets it as a fulfilment of Acts 9:16.

66 The speech at Lystra seems to be preparatory in character, and it introduces the topic that will be further developed in Paul's speech on the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-32) concerning the monotheistic concept of God. The following are some similarities between the speech at Lystra and the speech on the Areopagus: Acts 14:15=Acts 17:24; Acts 14:16=Acts 17:26-27; Acts 14:17=Acts 17:28.



Concerning Paul's involvement in the Jerusalem Council, Luke's account is very limited, and the most important point he underlines is the apostles' recognition of Paul's teaching (Acts 15:25)<sup>67</sup>. However, Paul is presented by Luke as being the main agent involved in the problem that occurred in the community in Antioch: Paul emerges as being an uncompromising witness to the teaching that salvation is only attained by faith (Acts 15:1)<sup>68</sup>. In this way, Luke on the one hand presents Paul as the main agent in an ongoing discussion within Jewish-Christian communities regarding the relation between the Mosaic Law and salvation, although his role is minimalized during the council, in favors of Peter's role<sup>69</sup>. On the other hand, Luke makes Paul the main beneficiary of the decision made by Peter (a doctrinal aspect) as well as the decisions contained in the decree (a socio-missionary aspect)<sup>70</sup>.

In the narrative of the second mission journey, Luke presents Paul as a fully independent agent who together with his co-workers explored new mission territories<sup>71</sup>. This, according to Luke, is done in obedience to divine leadership rather than in implementing his own mission strategy (Acts 16:1-10)<sup>72</sup>. Luke gives more detail than earlier regarding the persecutions of Paul (Acts 16:6-40; 17:1-15) by Jews opposing him (Acts 17:5.13), as well as Gentiles who suffered some loss due to Paul's activities (Acts 16:19-24)<sup>73</sup>. However, the main focus of Luke is Paul's speech on the Areopagus, which is an example of teaching addressed to Gentiles of the upper class, who, however, we know little about new religious movements within Judaism (Acts 17:16-21)<sup>74</sup>. Similar to the speech at Lystra, Paul underlines

67 Luke hardly mentions the opposition to Paul and Barnabas in Jerusalem (Acts 9:5) and their testimony regarding the mission among the Gentiles (Acts 9:12). Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission*, 185.

68 Concerning Paul's opinion in his letters regarding circumcision, cf. J.M.B. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2011) 68-78.

69 In the narrative of Acts, the so-called Jerusalem Council is placed between the first and the second mission journeys, which may result from Luke's narrative concept (acceptance of the Gentiles before the beginning of the second mission journey) rather than from a real chronology of these events. W. Rakocy (*Paweł Apostoł, Chronologia życia i pism* [Częstochowa: Święty Paweł 2003] 149-166) offers an accurate account of the chronology of the Council.

70 Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 117.

71 Paul not only has separated from Barnabas, but also the initiative for another mission came from his side.

72 Schnabel, *Acts*, 668-669.

73 The narratives regarding the second and the third mission journey contain many details regarding Paul, which shows a change in Luke's approach when compared with the narrative of the first mission journey. Based on this observation, the suggestion can be made that Luke was less interested in Saul and his concern was focus on Paul.

74 Luke mentions the Synagogue in Athens (Acts 17:17), which made Judaism known to the elite of the city, however, it does not mean that they were already familiar with the Way. Paul approaches first the Jews, then the God-fearers, who probably introduced him to some philosophers, with the result that Paul presented his teaching to the assembly on the Areopagus. The nature of the "invitation" is disputed. Should it be taken as a request for presentation of the new ideas, or should it be interpreted

monotheism as the preparation for his kerygma (Acts 17:22-30)<sup>75</sup>. This was rejected at the most crucial point when the subject of the resurrection of the Jesus was introduced (Acts 17:31)<sup>76</sup>. Paul's testimony at Athens was almost entirely rejected (Acts 17:34), but his kerygma was accepted well in Corinth where Paul spent most of his time during the second mission journey. His *modus operandi* there was similar to that at Pisidian Antioch (18:5-8)<sup>77</sup>. The divine intervention (Acts 18:9-11) giving assistance to Paul, suggests an encounter with distress, and this is made explicit in the following narrative (Acts 18:12-17). The narrative of the second mission journey contains few, but laconic, examples of proclaiming the kerygma about the Resurrected Messiah, however it contains one clear statement given by Paul that his being persecuted because of the proclamation of the kerygma (Acts 18:12-13)<sup>78</sup>. It is the main purpose of this account, namely, to give witness to the Lord by suffering because of faith in His name.

The narrative of the third mission journey (Acts 18:23–21:16) is made up of two parts: the first concerns Paul's mission activities in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-40); and in the second Paul visits the region of Achaëa on his way back to Jerusalem (Acts 20:1–21:16). In the first part, Paul converts the followers of John the Baptist (Acts 20:1-7), and proclaimed the kerygma to Jews of the city, following the same *modus operandi*, and with the same effects as during the first and second mission journeys (Acts 19:8-10)<sup>79</sup>. Luke shows also that Paul's successful mis-

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as some kind of interrogation aimed at recognition or rejection of the teaching prior to receiving a permit to preach in the city. The end of the narrative concerning Paul's speech suggests the second possibility. F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles. Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans – Leicester: Apollos 1990) 330-331.

75 S.G. Wilson (*The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission*, 206-209) thinks it impossible that Luke would use Stoic language (Acts 9:27-28) in a pantheistic rather than in a monotheistic manner.

76 The way in which Luke ends Paul's speech (with an abrupt interruption) and the point at which it took place (mention of judgment by the resurrected man) expresses Luke's general presentation regarding the kerygma proclaimed by Paul, which was difficult to accept even by some Jews, and was absolutely impossible in terms of Greek philosophy. After a presentation of the Gentiles' idolatry as being a problem for the mission, now Luke presents the second obstacle in the mission, namely, Greek philosophy. Tabor, *Paul and Jesus*, 48-67.

77 Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 323-324. The narrative shows that the mission to the Gentiles is a direct result of the rejection of Paul's mission to the Jews (Acts 18:6). This makes the mission to the Gentiles to be indirect or secondary but does not cause any discontinuity of his mission to the Jews. There was no choice for Paul between the mission to Jews and the mission to Gentiles; both missions were always correlated.

78 Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 517-518. This is the first case. Then Jews opposing Paul made an attempt to put him on trial with strictly religious accusations, which served as an excuse for the proconsul to overrule the case. It is the first time in which Luke presents the Roman socio-judicial system as being a benefit to Paul's mission.

79 The narrative of the conversion of John's disciples probably holds a very significant meaning in the narrative not only regarding the missions but also concerning the relations between the disciples of Jesus and the disciples of John, something that thus far has been omitted in Luke's account. Both groups for a considerable time were continuing to give witness to their respective masters, and Ephesus was chosen by Luke to show that Jesus' disciples approached John's disciples in order to convert

sion brought significant social changes within the city (Acts 19:11-20), which resulted in large-scale opposition from those whose livelihood depended on businesses relating to the local cult (Acts 19:21-40)<sup>80</sup>. In the second part Luke mentions, but without giving details, Paul's visit to Achaia (Acts 20:1-6) and his voyage back to Jerusalem, where the main event was his meeting with the elders of Ephesus in Miletus (Acts 20:17-38)<sup>81</sup>. During this Paul gave the didactic speech that is an example of how he taught the Christian communities<sup>82</sup>. In this his own position witness to the resurrected Messiah is presented as being the model to be followed by the leaders (Acts 20:18). There are three aspects to giving witness to the Lord: the first involves proclaiming the kerygma with readiness to suffer for it (Acts 20:18-24); the second concerns responsibility for the community, and this is shown by constantly seeking the development of members, instead of seeking private reward (Acts 20:25-32); the third refers to the way of using material resources, with financial self-support and assistance to the poor being presented as indispensable to the community (Acts 20:33-25)<sup>83</sup>. In fact, this speech is the Lukan definition of the phrase "*the witness to the Resurrected Messiah*", where Paul's attitude is used in the sense of "definition by example".

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them. In the case of Apollo, the narrative concentrates on teaching that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 18:24-26), but in the case of John's disciples in Ephesus Paul not only taught them but also baptized them in the name of Jesus. This was followed by their baptism with the Holy Spirit. The narrative suggests that the group of Jesus' disciples incorporated the group of the John's disciples. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 569-572.

- <sup>80</sup> Padilla, *The Speeches of Outsiders*, 163-164. Although the narrative presents Paul activities among John's disciples (Acts 19:1-10), magicians (Acts 19:11-20) and craftworkers involved in religious business (Acts 19:19-40), Luke puts considerable focus on the negative economic impact of Paul's mission activities on local society. This presentation shows a significant change in the society of Ephesus, and indirectly attests the great success of Paul's mission. This success met with strong opposition based this time on economic rather than on religious reasons, which in the end led to disturbances in the city. Luke's narrative suggests that the conversions in Ephesus resulted in a kind of economic crisis for the local cults and businesses related to it. Ramsay, *St. Paul*, 214-217.
- <sup>81</sup> Luke writes little about the reason for the trip and Paul's stay in Macedonia and Greece (Acts 20:1-3), which was probably caused by his conscious omission of the issue known to us from the Epistles to the Corinthians, rather than by a lack of information on his part. The narrative refers also the opposition towards Paul (Acts 20:3-6), his miracle in Troas (Acts 20:7-12) and the voyage to Miletus, where he gave the only speech found in the narrative of the third mission journey. This speech is of crucial importance since for the first time it is addressed to the developed Christian community in Ephesus. Several aspects of Paul's character, including his care for the communities, are presented by S.C. Barton, "Paul as Missionary and Pastor", *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul* (red. J.D.G. Dunn) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004) 34-48.
- <sup>82</sup> As in the speeches in the narratives of the first and the second mission journeys, this speech also, although has its particular context and meaning, is a kind of representative speech showing the way in which Paul approached the Christian communities he established or visited.
- <sup>83</sup> S. Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle: The Portrait of Paul in the Miletus Speech and 1 Thessalonians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000) 82-84.
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### 2.3. The Period of Paul's Imprisonment

The end of the narrative concerning the third mission journey is dominated by the theme of persecution that Paul will experience in Jerusalem (Acts 20:22-24; 21:11-15), and it should be taken as structural preparation for the third and the final stage of the presentation of Paul, where the main topic is Paul's imprisonment (Acts 21:17-28:31)<sup>84</sup>. The account of Paul's imprisonment is the context in which Luke for the first time offers an elaborated account of Paul proclaiming the kerygma to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Acts 22:1-21), to the Temple authorities (Acts 23:1-11), and to the king of the Jews (Acts 26:1-32)<sup>85</sup>. Paradoxically, none of these testimonies would be possible without this imprisonment, which makes this to be another way to fulfill Jesus' command (Acts 9:15)<sup>86</sup>. Something that was impossible to realize immediately after his conversion, and even during his mission activities, when he was forced to live as a man frequently on the run from dangers, now became possible, when he finally by the power of the Holy Spirit became capable of undertaking this risk (Acts 21:22-23). During his imprisonment in Jerusalem and Caesarea, Paul gave testimony before the most important people of Jewish society, as well as to the zealous people of Jerusalem. In all cases, despite the different contexts, and varied shapes of the speeches, the testimony contains Paul's witness to Jesus the Resurrected Messiah (Acts 22:8.14-15; 23:6; 26:8.22-23)<sup>87</sup>. In all cases this witness was rejected. This seems to justify the common presentation of Paul as being the apostle of Gentiles, but only in terms of the effect of his mission activities. From the point of view of his mission strategy, Paul from the beginning to the very end stayed faithful to his *modus operandi* of putting the Jews first<sup>88</sup>. However, his mission successes are connec-

<sup>84</sup> B. Witherington III (*The Acts of the Apostles*, 643-645) finds the socio-political background of Jerusalem as presented by Luke to be in accordance with other non-biblical sources, where the careless attitude of the Roman officials, unrest in an oppressed Jewish society, and political involvement of the religious authorities are clearly presented. This socio-political context explains, in the opinion of Witherington, "the mixed reception of Paul in Jerusalem".

<sup>85</sup> Although the narrative in Acts contains information on Paul's mission attempts in Jerusalem shortly after his conversion (Acts 9:28-30), an account of the results is missing. In regard to the Temple authority (Acts 23:1-11) and the king of the Jews (Acts 26:1-32), they are the first accounts attesting Paul's addresses to these two groups. Concerning Paul's mission in Jerusalem and Judea (in general), M.F. Bird (*An Anomalous Jew*, 90.) points to the fact that "Luke still regards the Gentiles component of Paul's apostolate as something subsequent to his period of ministry in Damascus and Jerusalem". This statement if shaped in a more general manner (Jews) and not in particular (Damascus and Jerusalem), would describe accurately Luke's approach to the presentation of Paul in Acts.

<sup>86</sup> Soards, *The Speeches in Acts*, 122. P.W. Walaskay (*And So We Came to Rome. The Political Perspective of St Luke* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983], 58) thinks that the whole narrative concerning Paul's trial before the Romans officials shows the realisation of God's plan. The Roman judicial system itself is one of God's devices.

<sup>87</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 1020.

<sup>88</sup> S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1981) 62.

ted to the mission to Gentiles in general and are only partly connected with the mission to the Jews of the Diaspora. In connection with his mission to Palestine Jews, Luke recorded no success on the part of Paul<sup>89</sup>. Another aspect of the narrative concerns Paul's struggle to save his own life due to uncompromising hostility of his opponents (Acts 21:27–23:11) and the unjust attitude of the Romans procurators of Judea (Acts 23:23–25:12). Although Luke wrote in Acts 24:23 that Paul was allowed to receive assistance from his friends, none of that is recorded by Luke, who, on the contrary, presents Paul as a person left to himself, whom no one can help or would like to help, who must stand up alone for his life against the hatred of his opponents and the political pragmatism of the judges<sup>90</sup>. The only one who assisted Paul was, according to Luke's narrative (Acts 23:11) Jesus, who gives him the hope for surviving in order to reach Rome. Due to this promise, Luke's narrative regarding Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea and the trials before Felix and Festus, is shaped in sort of dramatic convention, where Paul's appeal to Cesar is a culminate moment that saves Paul's life and at the same time makes realization of the promise be possible.

### 3. Conclusions

Luke presents Peter and Paul in a complementary manner in which the two leaders make a significant contribution during the process of crystallization of the structure and doctrine of the Messianic movement that would be called Christianity. The skillfully created presentation of these two personages would be uncomplete if either was omitted from the Lukan story. Both of them are indispensable agents in Luke's narrative regarding the witnesses of the Resurrected Messiah. However, each of them testified to Jesus the Resurrected Messiah in his own way, according to his skills, predispositions, socio-political circumstances, and the needs of the moment; but the most important of all was that it was according

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<sup>89</sup> E.P. Sanders (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1977] 543-556), in the conclusion of his book "Paul and Palestinian Judaism," writes that "Paul presents an essentially different type of religiousness from any found in Palestinian Jewish literature," which may explain why his mission did not succeed among the Palestinian Jews, on the one hand, and why Palestinian Jews were unable to accept Paul's kerygma regarding Jesus of Nazareth as the Resurrected Messiah, and his theological interpretation of the Scriptures, on the other hand. K. Haacker, "Paul's Life", *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul* (red. J.D.G. Dunn) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004) 27-28.

<sup>90</sup> Acts 27:2 informs us that during the voyage to Rome, Paul was accompanied by Luke and Aristarchus. It is not clear, however, if this assistance was planned by the Jerusalem community or if it was a private initiative of Paul's companions. Both possibilities can be countenanced by Roman regulation allowing relatives to accompany prisoners, after the favor was granted by the competent official. B. Rapske, *Paul in Roman Custody* (BAFSC 3; Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster 1994) 374.

to will of God and the will of the Lord. Despite differences in the way they witnessed to Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah, both of them were acting under the power of the Holy Spirit, who always led them to overcome their limitations and to challenge the present reality. For each of them it meant something different. Peter's activities as the witness of Jesus are restricted to regions of Judea and Samaria, with a strong focus on Jerusalem. These geographical limitations naturally determined the targets of his activities, who were mainly Jews (Judea), and those who once were Jews by religion (Samaria), and only occasionally Gentiles dwelling in the Jewish lands (Acts 10–11). Approaching Jews, Peter gave uncompromised witness before Jews of Jerusalem, Jews from Diasporas and the most powerful Jews of the Sanhedrin, about Jesus the Resurrected Messiah, even if it was met with hostility, persecution and imprisonment. His work among Palestinian Jews brought great results, but first of all it shaped the structure of the Way, where the community in Jerusalem became "the mother Church" for other communities in the region. Mission activities of the members of the Jerusalem community (Barnabas) and Peter's activities reached also Gentiles dwelling in Judea and Samaria, which was a milestone in opening the messianic movement also to those who were not included in the covenant with God. In the process of accepting Gentiles among the Jewish Christians, Peter played the most significant role both in the recognition of God's will towards the Gentiles (Acts 10:34-35) and in understanding the doctrinal implication of the acceptance of the Gentiles by God (Acts 15:7-12). Luke presents Peter as the *de facto* protagonist of "the Gentile issue", who prepared the way (in its social and doctrinal aspects) for Paul's teaching concerning justification by faith. In this way Luke makes a clear connection between Peter, who laid the necessary foundation for the development of the Way, and Paul who developed the belief of the Way into a coherent and systematic teaching. This means that Paul did not start from nothing, but he built on Peter's work and Churches' achievements in Judea and Syria. To indicate this aspect of his perspective on Paul, Luke includes the relationship between Paul and Barnabas, where the critical importance of Barnabas for Paul's development as a missionary is presented as the most important contribution in the process of Paul's attaining the status of the apostle of the Gentiles. Paul's mission career is connected with Diaspora Jews and Gentiles rather than with Palestinian Jews. Considering the narrative of Acts, Paul after his conversion achieved no spectacular successes among the Jews in Palestine; even his mission attempts addressed to the most important people among the Jews during the time of his imprisonment brought no results. The success of Paul's mission is usually connected by Luke with his mission to Gentiles, and outside Palestine. Despite the fact that in terms of success, Paul's mission to the Gentiles is indisputably his greatest achievement, Paul's *modus operandi* of going first to the Jews remained unchanged from the beginning to the end. In every place that Paul visited he first addressed the

kerygma about the Resurrected Messiah to the Jews, and never gave precedence to the Gentiles before the Jews. Despite this attitude, there were Jews who often rejected his kerygma, and there were Gentiles who more eagerly accepted his kerygma. Although Paul was entirely devoted to giving testimony and to bear witness about the Resurrected Messiah to the Jews, his place in history was to become the apostle of the Gentiles, which according to Acts 9:15 was something decided for him rather than something decided by him<sup>91</sup>. This statement brings us to the conclusion that the Lord chooses witnesses in order that His will can be fulfilled. Luke's account shows that the first generation of Christians, represented in Acts by Peter and Paul, played their part to the full in a model way.

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91 Haacker, "Paul's Life", 24.

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