

Justification as the New Exodus:
Luke's "justification" language in Acts
13:38-39

A PAPER PRESENTED TO THE WESTERN FELLOWSHIP OF
PROFESSORS AND SCHOLARS

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Introduction:

Since the advent of E.P. Sanders' 1977 ground breaking monograph *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Pauline studies has undergone nothing less than a Copernican revolution in which virtually every area of Paul's theology has been up for reexamination. The so-called "New Perspective" has birthed its own publishing industry with luminous figures such as James D.G. Dunn, N.T. Wright and Richard Hays weighing in.¹ Scholars of a more conservative stripe (D.A. Carson, John Piper, P.T. O'Brien)² have also contributed and thus, at least in North American circles, the debate has become fairly entrenched between two those who seek to move Paul's theology beyond its "Lutheran" roots and those who see this hermeneutical move endangering the very nature of the gospel itself.³

One of the primary battlegrounds between these "perspectives" is Paul's Justification (δικαίω) language.⁴ As any student of Paul's writings will soon discover, grasping the Apostle's theological semantics requires one to travel "behind the letters" and situate themselves in the historical locale of the early Christian movement. This exercise leads to a host of other questions relating to how Paul understood his Pharisaical background, the role of Israel in God's salvific plan, and what kind of role the Hebrew Scriptures should play in a predominately Gentile church.

¹Note that these "New Perspective" writers are not uniform in their approach to Paul. However, each of these writers share the same supposition that Luther's view of justification needs to be re-thought. See Wright, N.T. *Justification: God's plan and Paul's vision* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity 2009); Dunn, James D.G. *The New Perspective on Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2006); Hays, Richard *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2004)

² Carson, D.A., O'Brien, Peter, Seifrid, Mark *Justification and Variegated Nomism 2 vol.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2006)

³ Westerholm, Stephen *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2004)

⁴ The primary letters of contention are Galatians and Romans where the majority of δικαίω occurrences are to be found.

The proposal of this essay is that Pauline studies, and “justification” language in particular, would greatly benefit from a new and different vantage point. More specifically, as an alternative to the almost endless historical speculation surrounding Paul’s background and primary theological influences we suggest that the time is ripe for a fresh appraisal of the Apostle’s thought through the pen of his sometime companion and biographer, Luke. One might call this a “backdoor approach” to Pauline theology. However, reading Paul through Luke is a road not often taken due to an unwarranted historical skepticism.⁵ We believe this is a critical error that has yet to be fully redressed in the current debates surrounding Paul. Therefore in our short time together we will fire the first shot in what it is a hoped for reexamination of the Pauline influence on the Lucan account and the legitimacy of the Lucan account for interpreting the Pauline mission.

This paper, admittedly modest in scope despite the importance of the topic, will investigate Luke’s δικαίω language in Paul’s sermon at Antioch of Psidia in Acts 13:38. It will be argued that Luke casts the Jesus-mission⁶ within the Isaianic framework of a “new exodus” (cf. Luke 2:32; 3:1-4; 4:16-30), which in turn shapes the preaching and theology of the early church as recorded in Acts. While Luke’s usage of δικαίω carries the forensic emphasis commonly found in Paul’s letters (cf. Rom. 1:16, 3:21-26, ff.), he uniquely broadens the

⁵ The advent of F.C. Bauer’s initial proposal of a division between the apostolate’s of Peter and Paul combined with skeptic mood of the Enlightenment toward historiography as a legitimate methodology inaugurated intense debates and theories of how to relate the Paul of Acts to the Paul of the epistles. In more recent years, a flurry of studies emerged in response to P. Vielhauer’s assertion that Luke’s portrait of Paul is the work of a later historian whose theology is divergent from the Apostle of the letters. Given the differences in crucial areas such as Christology, views of the law, natural revelation and eschatology, Vielhauer concludes there can be hardly any credible connection between the two. See his “The Paulinism of Acts” in *Studies in Luke-Acts* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966) pgs. 33-50.

⁶ I refer to the overall mission of the early church inaugurated by Jesus as the “Jesus-mission”, in which forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed throughout the nations (cf. Luke 24:44-47). For more on the Lucan perspective of God’s mission to the world, see Bosch, David *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis 1991)

terminology to include the thematic elements of spiritual liberation as found in Isaiah 40-55. Therefore, the term “justification” for Luke is both a *declarative status* and a *liberating action* by which God sets His people free from the curse of the law and the bondage of sin.

Our brief survey will proceed in the following manner: first, we will define the theme of “new exodus” as the primary leitmotif of Is. 40-55 which promises the renewal of God’s covenantal people; second, we will argue that Luke draws on this Isaianic theme for his understanding of the Jesus-mission in three passages from Luke 2-4 followed by the thematic application found in Luke 18:9-14; third, will bring these insights into Paul’s speech and use of *δικαίω* in Acts 13. Fourth and finally, we will establish a historical and theological link between Luke and Paul which will hopefully stimulate fresh thinking and further study for the debates over the “New Perspective.”

The “New Exodus” as the Isaianic Leitmotif

Luke’s canonical status as a biographer of Jesus and the mission of the early church is a reflection of not only the Spirit’s inspiration working through him but also his preeminence in the eyes of the early Christians who looked to him as a reliable, theological guide. The status and influence he enjoyed was in large part due to his first-hand experience of apostolic life through working alongside Paul coupled with his rich, theological understanding of the Jesus-mission (cf. Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16; see also Paul’s own commendation of Luke in Col. 4:12; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phil. 24). Given this, our first task in discerning Luke’s usage of *δικαίω* will be unearthing his conception of the Jesus-mission and the theological grid by which he framed it.

David Pao, in his helpful study *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, argues that the Lucan narrative is shaped around the “new exodus” themes of Is. 40-55. He suggests that Isaiah was considered the “fifth” gospel within the early church and played a major role in shaping Luke’s theological agenda. Pao contends, following Richard Hays, that Paul and Luke used Isaiah in a similar fashion to justify their mission of bringing together Jews and Gentiles in the same worshipping assembly.⁷ In summarizing the key themes of this “fifth gospel,” Pao suggests that the corpus of Is. 40-55 is laid out in the opening prologue of 40:1-11:⁸

- a) Restoration of the People of God (Is. 40:1-2; 9-11)
- b) Universal Revelation of the Glory/Salvation of God (Is. 40:3-5)
- c) The Power of the Word of God and the Fragility of the People (Is. 40:6-8)

These three foci constitute Pao’s “new exodus” reading of Luke. As insightful as Pao’s work is, we believe it would be helpful to further clarify Isaiah’s “new exodus” by defining these foci around the biblical theme of *covenant renewal*. In other words, the “new exodus” of Is. 40-55 does not simply foretell the reorganizing or renaming of the people of God, but is rather an eschatological *renewing* of God’s people *through* their liberation from the powers of sin, evil and death. These twin themes of *identification* and *liberation* help provide thematic shape to what the Exodus was intended to *do* for God’s people.

The Hebrew Scriptures inform us that the flight from Egypt during the first exodus was the defining *experience* for the nation of Israel (cf. Exodus 14-15). However, the defining *covenantal promise* by their identity as *God’s people* was formed is found in Deut. 30:1-4. Following the great speeches in Deut. 28-29 in which he clearly laid out the blessings of

⁷ See *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2002), pg. 31. Here Pao follows John Sayer’s convincing thesis *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For an excellent survey of Paul’s usage of Isaiah for ecclesiastical formation see Hays, Richard *Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2002)

⁸ Pao, pg. 47-49

obedience and consequences of disobedience, Moses predicts a great apostasy in which the people would abandon their covenant obligations and, in turn, experience God's judgment in the form of yet *another* exile (Deut. 30:1; 2 Kings 17:6; 25).

Yet just as God did not forget His people in Egypt, so He would not forget them after dispersing them into foreign lands (cf. Is. 54; Hab. 2:1-4; Hag. 1:1-11). But this time the "exodus" would be primarily *internal* as opposed to *external* (Is. 43:25). For the second exodus would surpass the first one in that God "renew" His covenant with Israel by changing them from the inside out: "I will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (Deut. 30:6). This promise distinctly echoes the great *confession* and great *commandment* by which Israel was to order their communal life (cf. Deut. 6:4-9). Though their own hearts would eventually harden towards God in rebellion and apathy, God would keep His covenant promises by forgiving them of their sin, putting a *new heart* (i.e. His own Spirit) within them and hence enable them to walk in accordance with His ways (cf. Is. 48:12-22; see also Jer. 31; Ez. 36).

Understanding the "new exodus" as the renewal of God's covenant people finds a natural foothold in the both the Abrahamic (Gen. 12:3; 15:6) and Davidic (cf. 2 Sam. 7) covenants. These themes can also be traced through Isaiah 40-55 (cf. 40:1-5; 27-31; 41:17-20; 42:10-17; 43:16-21; 44:1-5; 44:21-28; 45:8; 22-25; 49:8-15; 51:1-3; 54-55; 58; 61; 62:1-5; 64-66).⁹ Additionally, N.T. Wright, drawing from the "new exodus" themes of the Old Testament, has helpfully shown how the eschatological hope for the Jews of the Second Temple period is shaped

⁹ For a persuasive analysis of tying the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants together under the term "seed", see Collins, C. John, "Galatians 3:16: What kind of exegete was Paul?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 54:1 (2003), 75-86

by a longing for “covenant renewal” in which God would finally vindicate Israel, relieve the people of Roman (i.e. Gentile) oppression and consummate His promised reign on earth.¹⁰

In all of this, we suggest that Luke’s theology operates within this Isaianic framework of a “new exodus” which gives way to the renewing of God’s people. It is from within this understanding of salvation-history that he then in turn frames the Jesus-mission.

Luke’s Isaianic framework of the Jesus-mission

Time and space do not permit a careful exegesis of all the relevant passages of Luke’s writings which evidence the scriptural themes found in Isaiah.¹¹ However, three passages from his gospel will suffice to demonstrate his reliance upon Isaiah’s “new exodus” (Luke 2:22-38; Luke 3:1-6; Luke 4:16-30). We will briefly examine each:

Luke 2:22-38

Luke’s account of the dedication of Jesus by Mary and Joseph provides a clear and distinct echo of one of the key “Servant Songs” of Isaiah (cf. 49:1-6).¹² Simeon, whom Luke refers to as “righteous” (δίκαιος) and “godly” (εὐλαβής), was given a vision by the Holy Spirit that he would “not see death until he saw the Lord’s Messiah” (τὸν χριστὸν). Upon seeing Jesus, Simeon claims to have at last seen “the Lord’s salvation” (τὸ σωτήριόν) which is soon to be revealed to all peoples (cf. Luke 2:29-31). Simeon describes this revelation in Isaianic terms:

φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἐθνῶν καὶ δόξαν λαοῦ σου Ἰσραήλ

“A light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:32

ESV)

¹⁰ See Wright, N.T. *New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 1992)

¹¹ For a helpful overview see David Secombe’s essay “Luke and Isaiah” *NTS* 27 1981: 252-59

¹² Scholars maintain that there are four distinct “Servant Songs” found in the Deutero-Isaiah which foretell the future work of God’s anointed servant (Is. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-6; 52:13-54:12). For the significance of Isaiah’s 40-55 in the early Christological formulations of the church, see Richard Bauckham’s *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1999)

Compare the LXX rendering of Isaiah 49:6:

καὶ τὴν διασπορὰν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἐπιστρέψαι; ἰδοὺ τέθεικά σε εἰς διαθήκην γένους εἰς
φῶς ἐθνῶν τοῦ εἶναί σε εἰς σωτηρίαν ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς

“And to turn the dispersed of Israel; behold I have placed you as a kind of covenant that you might be a light [to the] nations as far as the end of the earth” (Is. 49:6 - my translation)

Immediately following Simeon’s prophecy, Luke tells us that Joseph and Mary encounter a prophetess named Anna who was “awaiting the redemption [λύτρωσιν] of Jerusalem” (cf. Luke 2:38). Upon seeing the infant Jesus, she praises God and prophecies over Him. Joel Green writes that, “Through the prophecies of both Simeon and Anna, Luke crafts a portrait of the Isaianic vision of the advent of God’s consolation and the mission of the Servant in Isaiah 40-55.”¹³ By recounting these events, Luke suggests that the redefinition of God’s people through spiritual renewal lays at the heart of Isaiah’s “new exodus.” The Servant’s task, in accordance with Isaiah and the prophecy of Simeon, would be to renew God’s people and the nations, hence *both* Israelites and Gentiles.

Luke 3:1-6

Luke quickly moves his narrative forward several years by re-introducing Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist at the dawn of his preaching ministry. After emerging from the wilderness, John “went into all the region preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν” - cf. Luke 3:3). Luke then informs his readers that John’s ministerial activities were in accordance with “the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet” (Luke 3:4) by citing Is. 40:3-5.

¹³ Green, Joel *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1997), pg. 144

John's formulaic preaching of repentance (μετανοίας), baptism and the offer of forgiveness (ἄφεσιν) of sins would later become both Jesus' and the Apostle's trademark message. This simple preaching format became the primary means by which God's people experienced their "exodus" from the enslaving powers of sin. Henceforth, God's people would no longer be defined solely by geographical, ethnic and socio-religious boundaries. Instead, anyone who called upon the name of the Lord in genuine faith and repentance would be a worthy recipient for baptism into the renewed people of God.¹⁴ Pao suggests that this passage "becomes a phrase that points to the coming salvation of God. Significantly, in the context of Isaiah 40-55(66), Is. 40:3-5 stands as a promise for the arrival of the new era yet to take place."¹⁵ And with the advent of the John's ministry, the preparation for God's renewal upon the earth was now taking place.

Luke 4:16-30

After being baptized by John and enduring Satan's temptations in the wilderness, Jesus begins His public ministry by returning to His hometown of Nazareth (cf. Luke 4:1-13). According to custom, Jesus first enters a synagogue upon which he reads Is. 61:1-2/58:6 from a scroll given to Him (cf. Luke 4:17). The text itself, though not part of the traditional "renewal" corpus of Is. 40-55, is in keeping with the Isaianic themes already identified above. Luke records it with some important modifications from the dominant LXX form¹⁶:

¹⁴ One of Luke's key themes throughout his gospel is the constant "inversion" of who's in and who's out. He portrays Jesus as continually defying religious norms and conventions by rejecting the Pharisees and embracing "un-religious" folks like beggars, prostitutes and tax collectors. See Joel Green's helpful introduction to the study of Luke: *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge, Cambridge University: NTT 1995).

¹⁵ Pao, pg. 41

¹⁶ Though most scholars count Is. 40-55 as the most significant block of Deutero-Isaiah because of its outline the Servant's ministry and God's promises of eschatological salvation, it is important to keep in mind that this is a modern construct and that Luke and the other New Testament authors made no such distinctions. Therefore, it is our conviction that Is. 61, though not a Servant song per se, is in full keeping with the traditional Servant themes.

πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμὲ οὐ εἶνεκεν ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς, ἀπέσταλκέν με, κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεςιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν, ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει, κηρύξαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19 - ESV)

πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμὲ οὐ εἶνεκεν ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς ἀπέσταλκέν με ἰάσασθαι τοὺς συντετριμμένους τῇ καρδίᾳ κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεςιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν, ἀπόστελλε τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει καλέσαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν;

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to send the oppressed away in freedom, naming/calling out the year of the LORD's favor (Isa 61:1-2; 58:6 – my translation)

Note that Luke’s version emphasizes the task of “proclaiming” or “preaching” (κηρύξαι)

the good news of *liberation* and *renewal* to the “the poor, captives, the blind and oppressed.”

This emphasis on preaching links Jesus and John’s ministry as one of *anticipation* and *fulfillment*. For immediately after reading the scroll, Jesus claims that this text has now been “fulfilled” (πεπλήρωται) in His arrival (cf. Luke 4:21). The congregation, assuming *they* were the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed whom Isaiah was referring to, marveled at the words spoken by Jesus.

However, Jesus puts a surprising twist on His textual application. Rather than affirming their excitement over His pronouncement as the long-awaited anointed servant of God, Jesus refers back to two incidents in which God’s anointed ones, Elijah and Elisha, ministered not to their own people but to *Gentiles* in need (cf. Luke 4:23-27; 1 Kings 17:1-9; 2 Kings 5:1-14). In one swift hermeneutical move, Jesus makes the audacious claim that *His* Isaianic renewal ministry would have *salvific implications* for those outside of Israel’s ethnic and geographical

borders. The homiletical point was not lost upon his audience as their initial excitement quickly was quickly replaced by rage. Consequently they try to have Jesus thrown off a cliff (cf. Luke 4:28-29).¹⁷

Pao argues that by evoking this Isaianic theme in the reading of Is. 61 “Luke introduces the framework in which his writings should be understood.”¹⁸ In other words, the mission of God’s anointed Servant was to bring renewal to *all* nations not just ethnic Israel. Yet in doing so, He would invariably face rejection from His own people.

The New Exodus applied: Luke 18:9-14

Towards the conclusion of his account of Jesus’ life, Luke gives a snapshot of what Jesus’ covenant renewal program looks like pragmatically. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus tells a series of parables concerning the nature of the kingdom of God. Beginning in Luke 18:9, He shares a story contrasting two types of religious professors: the *Pharisee* (who represents the “righteous ones”) congratulates himself before God for all of his righteous deeds while the *tax collector* (representing those spiritually far from God) berates himself for all his unworthiness before God. Underwritten in this parable is the question of whose prayer is God more inclined to answer: the religiously upright Pharisee or the aloof, sin-stricken tax collector?

Jesus pulls a surprise move on the audience by inverting the socio-religious paradigms of Second Temple Judaism in announcing that it is the tax collector, *not* the Pharisee, who goes home “justified” (δεδικαιωμένος). How could this be so? For the simple yet profound reason that whosoever “exalts himself will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (cf. Luke 9:14). By contrasting the Pharisee and the tax collector, Luke demonstrates

¹⁷ Though this would technically be considered “mob activity” by the Roman governance who controlled Palestine (under Roman law only Roman officials could carry out the death penalty), this was most likely their conditioned response in accordance with Dt. 21:22-23 and later Jewish tradition which called for stoning of false prophets.

¹⁸ Pao, pg. 74

that “the attitude of the heart is ultimately what matters, and *justification* depends on the mercy of God to the penitent rather than upon works which might be thought to earn God’s favor.”¹⁹

The internal renewal of the heart toward God, in accordance with what Moses promised in Deut. 30, is the defining characteristic of God’s people in this present age. One shall be declared “justified” no longer in accordance with the Mosaic law and its binding traditions but rather by responding in *faith* and *repentance* to Jesus’ “new exodus” message (cf. Luke 3:3; 4:42-44). In shifting the focus away from the traditional ethnic, social and religious boundary-markers of Second Temple Judaism, and placing it squarely on ones heart-attitude toward God, Luke paves the way for a vision of a renewed Israel made up of both Jews and Gentiles.

The full maturation of the Jesus-mission in Acts 13:13-43

Having now argued that Luke’s Justification language belongs within the Isaianic framework of a “new exodus” by which God’s covenantal people are redefined and renewed through Jesus Christ, we are now poised to examine Paul’s speech in Antioch of Psidia (Acts 13:16-41).

Overview of Acts 13:1-35

Prior to the sending of Paul and Barnabas from Antioch into the western regions of Asia Minor, intentional outreach to Gentiles was still primarily haphazard and incidental.²⁰ However, the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas not only represents a radical shift in the missionary policy of the church but also the *fulfillment* of Jesus’ mandate in Luke 24:44-49 and Acts 1:8.

¹⁹ Marshall, I.H. *Gospel according to Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1978), pg. 681

²⁰ Gentile outreach began with Philip’s evangelistic work in Samaria, which occurred largely due to his escaping the outbreak of persecution in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 8:4-8). Following this, the Spirit transported him to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). Following this we have the Cornelius incident in which God literally brought Cornelius to Peter’s doorstep (cf. Acts 10:1-11:18). It is only through the preaching of unnamed men from Cyrene and Cyprus that a genuine Gentile “outreach” began.

Put another way, the Pauline mission brings the Jesus-mission to full maturity by fulfilling its Isaianic, “new exodus” shape.

After being sent out by the church at Antioch (13:1-3), Paul and Barnabas make their way to the influential city of Antioch of Pisidia.²¹ Following their missionary custom, they enter the local synagogue and are invited to give a word of “encouragement” (παρακλήσεως) to the congregation. Addressing both the “brothers of Israel” (ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλῖται) and the “those fearing God” (οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν), Paul gives a three-point sermon which follows the basic outline of Stephen’s address in Acts 7:

- a) Overview of Israel’s history (13:16b-25)
- b) God’s ultimate provision in Jesus Christ (13:26-37)
- c) An invitation to respond (13:38-41).

However, while Stephen’s historical overview was focused primarily on the people’s rejection of their own prophets, Paul’s account highlights God’s gracious provision in rising up such prophetic leadership. The purpose for prophetic leadership is to preserve the family line or the “seed” (σπέρματο; cf. Gen. 12:1-3) of Abraham down through David (2 Sam. 7:14-17).

God’s promises find their apex in the Davidic covenant which promised an anointed Son of God, an Isaianic “savior” (σωτήρα) who would bring about the *renewal* and *liberation* of His covenant people (cf. Is. 42:1-6; 43:11; 49:1-9; 50:3-4; 52:13-53:12).

While it is unclear how much of the events surrounding the life of Jesus the Jewish residents of Pisidia would actually have been aware of, by concluding his account of Israel’s history with John the Baptist Paul seems confident that his hearers were at least somewhat

²¹ James Dunn has an excellent overview of the social and historical background of the significance of Antioch of Pisidia in the Roman Empire. See his *Beginning from Jerusalem: Christianity in the Making Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2008), pgs. 424-27

familiar with the baptizer's ministry (cf. Acts 18:24-19:4). However the point which Paul drives home is this: Jesus of Nazareth, whom God raised from the dead, is the *fulfillment* of the messianic promises anticipated by Isaiah (cf. Acts 13:32-33).

In other words, Jesus is God's prophet *par excellence*. Even more so, Jesus is God's anointed Son who completes the scriptural storyline found in texts such as Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 15:10 by rising from the dead. Paul asserts that the implications of the resurrection are massive! For it is only by turning one's life over to this Jesus can salvation be found.

Luke's usage of δικαιόω

In 13:38a Paul follows his apostolic predecessors in preaching the "forgiveness of sins" (ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν) as the form and shape of the "new exodus" (cf. Luke 24:45-48; Acts 2:38-39; 3:19-21; 4:12; 5:30; 6:60; 8:22; 8:36; 10:43). However, he adds a unique caveat by using "justification" (δικαιόω) language to contrast two ways of life: one under Moses and the other under Jesus. "In" the law of Moses (ἐν νόμῳ Μωϋσέως), no one is able to be "justified" (δικαιωθῆναι). However, "in" Jesus Christ (ἐν τούτῳ - referring to Jesus) there is a "new exodus" which brings a liberation for the people of God that was impossible under the Sinai legislation: *freedom from the powers of sin!* Even more so, Jesus' "exodus" is not just for Israel but for "everyone who believes" (πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων).

The use of the ἐν in contrasting Moses and Jesus can be taken in a *locative* sense meaning "in the arena marked out by the law" or *instrumentally* meaning "by obedience to the law."²² We suggest the *locative* sense works better as it seems Luke to fit with the two-age contrast Luke suggests concerning the eschaton. In other words, the previous age demarcated

²² See discussion in Peterson, David G. *Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2009), pg. 394 n.88

and identified the people of God by the law of Moses and the ethnic heritage of Israel. This previous age was characterized by God's "first exodus" people failing in their covenant obligations through sin and idolatry. This results in their being exiled from the Promised Land.

However, the "new exodus," inaugurated by the risen Christ, *now* identifies God's people by faith, repentance and the reception of God's Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:38-41). Paul's δικαίω language, with its contrasts to the Law of Moses, brings the Jesus-mission to a new epoch in salvation history.²³ From this point on in the Acts narrative, not only does Paul's law-free gospel become the most controversial doctrine of the early Christian movement but the Jesus-mission moves out of the theological borders of Judaism and begins flourishing amidst non-Jewish, paganized Gentile culture.

Translating Luke's δικαίω language: Parallels with Isaiah and Paul

The question which we must now turn our attention is how to best translate Luke's usage of δικαίω and see if it comports with what we have seen thus far in Isaiah 40-55. The major English translations available today are almost split between rendering δικαίω as "justification" (NIV, KJV, NKJV, ASV) or "freedom" (NAS, ESV, NRSV, RSV). While neither option is more lexically or linguistically appropriate,²⁴ translating δικαίω as simply "freedom" downplays the watershed moment this speech was for the early church. For while subtle hints had been made throughout Luke's account concerning the diminishing role of the law for God's renewed people (cf. Acts 6:11; 7:5; 8:26-40; 10:34-43; 11:20-22), Paul's sermon at Antioch of Psidia is the first recorded, full-orbed critique of the law of Moses in light of the advent of Jesus

²³ "This paragraph marks a major departure for Luke's story." Barrett, C.K. *Acts of the Apostles vol. 1* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1998), pg. 598

²⁴ BADG 197 & 3a; BADG 249 & 3) offers lexical evidence for both options in both the Greek versions of the Bible as well as places in Hellenistic literature.

Christ.²⁵ On the other hand however, translating δικαιόω in the strictly Pauline fashion of “justification” creates an awkward rendering of the sentence in English:

“and by him everyone who believes is *justified* from everything from which you could not be *justified* by the law of Moses” (my translation)

Some translations have taken a middle road by highlighting both aspects of the verb. The TNIV, for example, translates it as: “Through Him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.” David Peterson suggests Luke’s usage parallels Rom. 6:7 in that “justification sets people free from the service of sin so that they can offer themselves to God as ‘instruments of righteousness’...in Acts 13:38-39 Paul proclaims that faith in Jesus Christ sets people free from the penalty and control of all those things from which it was impossible to find release in or by the law of Moses.”²⁶ However, other scholars such as C.K. Barrett downplay the connection by arguing Luke’s usage of δικαιόω does not carry the forensic overtones of its Pauline cognate.²⁷

The question to ask of course is which rendering did *Luke* have in mind? It is here that we must put our understanding of Luke’s Isaianic framework to the test. Does Isaiah’s “justification” language align with what we have seen thus far in Luke? Unfortunately, the verb δικαιόω occurs only three times in the LXX between Is. 40-55 (Is. 5:23; 45:24-25; 50:8; 53:11), so our sampling is limited. However, close examination of each citation read within the wider backdrop of the “new exodus” will help confirm our thesis. We will look at each in turn.

²⁵ It is quite possible that Paul’s critique of the law was common place at Antioch and among the Hellenists and Luke simply chose not to bring it to the fore until Acts 13. However, given the account that follows Acts 13 (expanding Gentile mission, the necessity of the Jerusalem council, Jewish antagonism against Paul, etc.), it seems that Paul’s missionary theology posed a new development (or, what I am terming as the “full maturity” of the Jesus-mission) and a key turning point for the early church.

²⁶ Peterson, pg. 394

²⁷ Barrett, pg. 650-51

Is. 45:25 declares that God's offspring shall be "justified" (δικαιωθήσονται) in contrast to those who will be "ashamed" because they were rebellious against Him. The text points to the final vindication of God's people from their ungodly oppressors. In a similar vein, Is. 50:8 assures the people of God that "the one who vindicates me is near" (ὁ δικαιώσας με). Again, the emphasis is on God's eschatological judgment of the ungodly and final salvation for those who remained faithful to Him. Finally in Is. 53:11, one of the four Servant Songs, God's anointed Servant (δίκαιον) makes many "righteous/justified" (δικαιῶσαι) by bearing their sins.

In each case we find God pronouncing an *eschatological* status upon His people ("justified"), which comports well with traditional Pauline usage (cf. Rom. 1:16; 3:26; 4:25; 5:1; Gal. 2:15-16). However, at the same time there is a sense in which God's declarative status actually *does something* to those whom He makes the pronouncement. Therefore to be declared "justified" is not just simply a willy-nilly verdict arbitrarily given by God, but a *revelation* to the watching world of who actually *belongs* to Him. Put another way, Justification defines God's people by marking them out as being in a unique and saving relationship with Him around the marks of repentance, faith and the reception of the Holy Spirit. How does one enter into this unique and saving relationship with God and hence receive the status of "justified"? By partaking in the "covenant renewal" which Isaiah foretold through the Lucan mode of faith and repentance.

Conclusion: Wither Paul and Luke?

This essay has attempted to demonstrate the reliability of Luke as a witness to the Pauline gospel by examining the way in which he uses Justification language in Acts. We have suggested that Luke's usage is shaped by his reading of Isaiah in which he finds a "new exodus" for the people of God in which they are renewed by His covenantal promise to indwell them

through the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Deut. 30). This was made possible by the mission of Jesus, whose life, death and resurrection ushered in the fulfillment of God's end-time covenantal promises into the present time.

We can at last turn to the key question asked at the beginning of this paper: does Luke's Isaianic framework shed any light on Paul's own usage of Justification? Is there any historical grounds for developing a theological link between the two, particularly of Paul's influence on Luke by which we may read him as a credible theological commentator on the Apostle himself? In conclusion, we briefly suggest two areas of overlap in need of further study which this essay generates: *eschatology* and *pneumatology*.

In terms of eschatology, both Luke and Paul's "justification" terminology share a similar outlook on how the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has brought Isaiah's vision of a *future* vindication of the people of God into the *present* time (Acts 13:32-39; 1 Cor. 15:20-28). To borrow N.T. Wright's terminology, what God "promised to do at the end of the story, He has now done in the middle of the story through Jesus Christ."²⁸ Through Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit, God's people are now being redefined by faith, not the Mosaic Law (cf. Gal. 2:20; 6:15). This makes possible the inclusion of non-circumcised Gentiles into the fellowship of the church (cf. Acts 15; Rom. 15:1-13; Col 1:27). To receive the covenantal promise of being forgiven is to experience the "new exodus" of being liberated from the tyranny of the power of sin and the condemnation of the law of Moses (cf. Acts 13:38-39; Rom. 6:14). Thomas Schreiner, in commenting on Paul's conception of justification, writes: "God's declaration about

²⁸ See Wright, N.T. *New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 1992). For more on the eschatological framework of Paul's thought see Ridderbos, Herman *Paul: Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1975); Vos, Geerhardus *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing 1930); Beker, J. Christian *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 1980).

sinner is an end-time verdict that has been announced before the end has arrived. The verdict is effective in the sense that every verdict announced by God constitutes reality.”²⁹ This is a sentiment which Luke’s theology readily affirms.

In terms of pneumatology, both Paul and Luke insist that forgiveness of sins and the power to live in accordance with God’s law will no longer come from outward formalities (temple worship, kosher food laws and the like) but through experiencing the renewing power of the *Spirit* (cf. Acts 17:22-31; Rom. 8:1-4; 14:17; Gal. 3:1-14; 5:16-25). Additionally, for both Luke and Paul, Justification is also the sign of the renewed covenant promised to Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 15:6), prophesied by Moses (Deut. 30), foretold to David (2 Sam. 7), anticipated by the prophets (Is. 40:1-11; Jer. 31:31; Ez. 36) and, finally, realized in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:24; Rom. 1:1-5). This means that those whom God has objectively declared “justified” on Christ’s account will express their covenantal identity through living out of a heart made new by the Spirit (cf. Jer. 31:31; Ez. 36; Acts 2:14-21; Rom. 2:12-29; Gal. 5:1-5; Eph. 5:17).

In short, Justification for both Luke and Paul is both a *declarative status* (eschatology) and a *liberating action* (pneumatology) by which God sets His people free from the curse of the law and the bondage of sin.³⁰ It is a verdict, a pronouncement and identification of those who are in right relationship with God, as demarcated by faith, repentance and the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39; Rom. 3:21-25; 5:1-12). Darrel Bock, in commenting on Acts 13:38-39, argues that: “The forgiveness Jesus gives sets believers free from legal obligations that sin

²⁹ Schreiner, Thomas *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2008), pg. 361

³⁰ There has been an ongoing debate over the last century concerning whether or not Paul’s use of *δικαίωω* can be both forensic and/or transformative. We follow Doug Moo’s assertion that justification provides the basis for which sanctification takes place. He specifically says: *Justification is the act by which God makes sinners right with Himself*. See his *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1996). See also Thomas Schreiner’s discussion of the background to the debate in *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2008), pp. 351-62.

brought against them and leads them into fellowship with God by giving them the Holy Spirit.”³¹

The new reality that Justification creates for the people of God through Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Deut. 30 and the heart of Isaiah’s message.

Having travelled extensively in mission and ministry with the Apostle himself, is it any wonder that his theology rubbed off on Luke at many points? While Luke certainly remains his own man in many respects, his two-volume work on the life of Jesus and the early shed helpful light on the life and theology of Paul, not least of which concerning “justification” terminology. It is our hope that this essay will encourage those caught up in the torrents of controversy within Pauline studies will, in the future, give Luke more than just a passing glance.

³¹ Bock, Darrell *Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2007), pg. 459

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