

“TO THE END OF THE EARTH”:  
THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND ETHNIC UNIVERSALISM  
OF ACTS 1:8 IN LIGHT OF ISAIANIC INFLUENCE ON LUKE

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The purpose of this study is to show how the Isaianic background of *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* in Acts 1:8, together with its location in the Lucan narrative, is decisive in determining the significance Luke attributed to the phrase.<sup>1</sup> Its possible geographical and ethnic significance has been much discussed. In asking whether for Luke the phrase carried only geographical significance or also ethnic significance, and in asking what constituted “the end of the earth” with respect to geography, one is confronted with the need to consider clues to background influences that can be shown to have shaped Luke’s understanding as well as to consider the Lucan narrative presentation itself. We begin with a representative survey of recent discussion.

I. GEOGRAPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

E. Haenchen argues that *heōs eschatou tēs gēs*, derived from Isa 49:6, has a geographical sense. He points to Rome—that is, “in Acts the farthest place perceptible and attained by the mission.”<sup>2</sup> Thus the program of Acts 1:8 precribes the content of Acts: the progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. Support for this view is allegedly found in the use of the phrase in *Pss. Sol.* 8:15 describing Pompey’s coming to Jerusalem from “the end of the

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this essay “Luke” is used to denote both the narrator of Acts (the voice telling the story) and the implied author (the author implied by the narrative who possesses a set of beliefs, values and judgments). With R. C. Tannehill, in the case of Luke-Acts we see no major distinction between the narrator and the implied author (*The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986, 1990] 1.7). Also the risen Jesus, who speaks in Acts 1:8, is understood to be a reliable spokesman for the narrator/implied author. For identification of Luke with the traditional Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul, see J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX* (AB 28; Garden City: Doubleday, 1981) 47–53; *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York: Paulist, 1989) 1–26; C. J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989) 308–364.

<sup>2</sup> E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 144 n. 9. See also J. Roloff, who notes that Rome was significant as the capital of the empire comprising the then-known world (*Die Apostelgeschichte* [NTD 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1981] 23).

earth,” which for Haenchen means Rome.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand W. C. van Unnik has argued that Rome is not a suitable referent for “the end of the earth” in Acts. He feels (1) that this would deprive the phrase of the eschatological force it has in the OT prophets, (2) that Acts shows no special interest in the capital of the Roman empire, and (3) that Luke focuses on Paul’s imprisonments and speeches in the final chapters and notes that a church already exists in Rome when Paul arrives. This means that “the end of the earth” looks beyond Rome and what is narrated in Acts.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere van Unnik has investigated Biblical occurrences of *eschatou tēs gēs* and concluded that it refers to the end of the earth in a general sense, paralleling texts that refer to the preaching of the gospel throughout the inhabited world (Luke 24:47; Mark 13:10; 14:9; Matt 24:14; 26:13; 28:19).<sup>5</sup> I. H. Marshall follows van Unnik and suggests that Rome does not mark the completion of the task encompassed in Acts 1:8 but “simply the completion of the first phase.”<sup>6</sup> C. K. Barrett has critiqued van Unnik’s second argument above and suggested the mediating position that the phrase does refer to Rome—yet not as an end in itself, but as representative of the whole world.<sup>7</sup>

In a different direction T. C. G. Thornton suggests that the phrase might refer to Ethiopia, in the first century a large and legendary territory of indeterminate shape and size occupying all of Africa south and southwest of Egypt. The Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 would be the one Luke intended to portray as fulfilling Acts 1:8.<sup>8</sup> Thornton’s suggestion, however, has been soundly critiqued by E. E. Ellis: (1) Luke pictures only the prospect of evangelizing Ethiopia by an otherwise insignificant figure. (2) The prospective Ethiopian mission occurs within the “Judea and Samaria” section. (3) The latter half of Acts shows the movement of Christianity to be westward, not southward.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Haenchen, *Acts* 144; cf. also H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 7. W. C. van Unnik, however, has argued that the reference to Pompey coming from “the end of the earth” refers not to Rome but to Spain, the site of Pompey’s previous campaign (“Der Ausdruck ‘ΕΩΣ ἘΞΧΑΤΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΓΗΣ [Apostelgeschichte 1:8] und sein alttestamentlicher Hintergrund,” *Studia Biblica et Semitica: Festschrift Theodoro Christiano Vriezen* [Wageningen: Veenman and Zonen, 1966] 347).

<sup>4</sup> W. C. van Unnik, “The ‘Book of Acts’ The Confirmation of the Gospel,” *NovT* 4 (1960) 39–40. G. Schneider, also favoring a wider reference for the phrase beyond Rome and Acts 28, has argued that Rome is not meant since the conclusion of Acts (28:31) emphasizes a continuing, ongoing witness (*Die Apostelgeschichte* [HTKNT 5; Freiburg: Herder, 1980] 1.203 n. 38).

<sup>5</sup> Van Unnik, “Ausdruck” 335–349. He concludes that for ancient peoples the limits of the world would lie near the Atlantic, Germany, Scythia, India and Ethiopia (pp. 347–348). See also Tannehill, *Narrative* 2.17; L. T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina 5; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992) 27. R. Pesch argues that “the end of the earth” means the same as “to all nations” in Luke 24:47, as the citations of Isa 49:6 in Luke 2:32; Acts 13:37 (cf. also 26:23) show (*Die Apostelgeschichte* [EKKNT 5; Zurich: Benziger/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1986] 1.70).

<sup>6</sup> I. H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 61; cf. also R. Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982) 77; R. Brawley, *Centering on God: Method and Message in Luke-Acts* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990) 105.

<sup>7</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994) 1.80. Cf. already S. G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* (SNTSMS 23; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1973) 94.

<sup>8</sup> T. C. G. Thornton, “To the end of the earth: Acts 1:8,” *ExpTim* 89 (1977–78) 374–375.

<sup>9</sup> E. E. Ellis, “The End of the Earth’ (Acts 1:8),” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1 (1991) 128.

For his part Ellis argues that *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* should be understood to refer to Spain, specifically to the city of Gades west of Gibraltar. He cites Strabo (Gades is “situated at the *eschatē tēs gēs*”) and Diodorus Siculus (“the city of Gadeira [Gades] is situated at the *eschata tēs oikoumenēs*”). Possible support for this view may also derive from the historical Luke’s relationship with the apostle Paul and knowledge of his desire to go to Spain (Rom 15:28; cf. *1 Clem.* 5:7).<sup>10</sup>

A different conclusion altogether has been reached by D. R. Schwartz, who has argued that the cumulative evidence of Luke-Acts suggests that *eschatou tēs gēs* refers only to the land of Palestine and that the program of Acts 1:8 refers only to the first phase of the apostolic mission in Acts 1–7. Supporting arguments include the following: (1) The context of Acts 1:6 shows that the issue is the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. (2) In 1:8 the progression of Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria suggests Palestinian categories. (3) Lucan word usage shows that *oikoumenē* always denotes unambiguously the inhabited earth (Luke 2:1; 4:5; 21:26; Acts 11:28; 17:6, 31; 19:27; 24:5), while *gē* can denote the land of Palestine (Luke 4:25; 21:23; 23:44). (4) The larger narrative of Acts never portrays the eleven as going outside Israel.<sup>11</sup>

When Luke used *eschatou tēs gēs*, did he intend to refer to Rome? To Rome as representative of the whole world, or as a milestone—the end of the first stage of the mission? To the end of the earth in a general sense without reference to Rome? To Spain? Or to the limits of Palestine, the beginning of the Christian mission?

## II. ETHNIC SIGNIFICANCE

Along with the geographical expansion indicated by *heōs eschatou tēs gēs*, many feel that Luke intended to depict an ethnic expansion as well. On any view that understands the phrase to go beyond the limits of Palestine it is possible that the “end of the earth” is designed to anticipate the gospel’s penetration specifically into the Gentile world and therefore to Gentile inclusion within messianic salvation. For example, J. Dupont has noted the parallels between Acts 1:8 and 13:47, where (quoting Isa 49:6) *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* is connected with *eis phōs ethnōn*. For Dupont the explicit connection with the Gentiles in Acts 13:47 shows that “the end of the earth,” even in 1:8, carries more than a geographical sense.<sup>12</sup> Similarly S. G. Wilson, E. Best, R. Tannehill and others have understood the phrase in 1:8 to carry an ethnic significance, denoting Gentiles.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 127; Strabo *Geography* 3.1.8; Diodorus Siculus *History* 25.10.1.

<sup>11</sup> D. R. Schwartz, “The End of the ΓΗ (Acts 1:8): Beginning or End of the Christian Vision?”, *JBL* 105 (1986) 669–676.

<sup>12</sup> J. Dupont, *The Salvation of the Gentiles: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 18–19; “La portée christologique de l’évangélisation des nations d’après Luc 24, 47,” *Neues Testament und Kirche: Für Rudolf Schnackenburg* (ed. J. Gnilka; Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 136.

<sup>13</sup> Wilson, *Gentiles* 94 n. 1; E. Best, “The Revelation to Evangelize the Gentiles,” *JTS* 35 (1984) 3; Tannehill, *Narrative* 2.17.

Others have disagreed. Both Schwartz and Ellis have pointed out that the reference to the Gentiles (from Isa 49:6) present in Acts 13:47 is lacking in 1:8 and argued that the latter therefore has only geographical connotations.<sup>14</sup> K. H. Rengstorf suggested that Luke intentionally left open as a possibility the interpretation that those included within the phrase are diaspora Jews.<sup>15</sup> R. Brawley has stated that it is only in 8:17 with the Samaritans' reception of the Spirit that the reader of the Acts narrative would understand 1:8 not merely geographically but also ethnically.<sup>16</sup>

Are those at "the end of the earth" Palestinian Jews? Diaspora Jews? Gentiles? Or Gentiles and Jews in the diaspora? Should we attach ethnic significance to the phrase at all? Or does it carry only geographical significance? Our goal is to examine the contribution of the Isaianic background to the Lucan understanding of the phrase. We are proposing that it is primarily a consideration of this background, together with sensitivity to Lucan narrative concerns, that points the way toward Luke's understanding of its significance.

### III. LUKE'S INTEREST IN AND USE OF ISAIAH

The importance of Isaiah for Luke-Acts has often been noted.<sup>17</sup> Joel and Isaiah are the only prophets named by Luke as writers or speakers of Scripture, and while Joel is mentioned once (Acts 2:16) Isaiah is mentioned five times (Luke 3:4; 4:17; Acts 8:28, 30; 28:25). The record of Jesus' public ministry begins with an explicit quotation of Isaiah (Luke 4:17–19), while the record of Paul's ministry ends with an explicit quotation of Isaiah (Acts 28:25–27). For the Jewish-rejection/Gentile-mission theme alone, quotations of, allusions to, or conceptual influence from Isaianic texts occur at key places in the Lucan narrative (Luke 1:17, 76–79; 2:30–34; 3:4–6; 4:18–19; 8:10; 13:29; 14:15, 21; 20:9–16; 24:47–49; Acts 1:8; 2:39; 7:49–50; 8:32–33; 13:47; 26:16–18; 28:25–27). An examination of the evidence suggests that Luke did not merely utilize Isaiah as a source for prooftexts to support his own point of view. Rather, Luke had investigated Isaiah extensively and had a deep appreciation for Isaianic themes. His mind was saturated with Isaianic texts and concepts, which shaped his views.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Schwartz, "End" 672; Ellis, "The End of the Earth" 124.

<sup>15</sup> K. H. Rengstorf, "Die Zuwahl des Matthias (Apg 1, 15ff)," *ST* 15 (1961) 53–56.

<sup>16</sup> Brawley, *Centering* 55.

<sup>17</sup> See L. C. Crockett, *The Old Testament in the Gospel of Luke with Emphasis on the Interpretation of Isaiah 61:1–2* (dissertation; Brown University, 1966) 17; T. Holtz, *Untersuchungen über die alttestamentlichen Zitate bei Lukas* (TU 104; Berlin: Akademie, 1968) 41, 170; D. Seccombe, "Luke and Isaiah," *NTS* 27 (1981) 259; J. A. Sanders, "Isaiah in Luke," *Int* 36 (1982) 144; B. J. Koet, *Five Studies on Interpretation of Scripture in Luke-Acts* (Studiorum Novi Testamenti Auxilia 14; Leuven: University of Leuven, 1989) 143; J. T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 252. Appendix 3 in Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*<sup>26</sup>, lists 119 citations of or allusions to Isaiah in Luke-Acts.

<sup>18</sup> This is one of the conclusions of my previous study, *Luke's Use of Isaiah for the Gentile Mission and Jewish Rejection Theme in the Third Gospel* (dissertation; Dallas Theological Seminary, 1995) 222.

This is important for the interpretation of Acts 1:8. Verbal and conceptual influence from Isaiah is already apparent in *epelthontos tou hagiou pneumatos eph' hymas* (LXX Isa 32:15; 43:3; 61:1) and *esesthe mou martyres* (LXX Isa 43:10, 12; 44:8).<sup>19</sup> This leads us to consider a possible Isaianic background for the phrase *heōs eschatou tēs gēs*.

#### IV. *ESCHATOU TĒS GĒS*: THE LXX BACKGROUND

The phrase *eschatou tēs gēs* occurs in several LXX texts that relate conceptually to Acts 1:8. It is found in texts denoting the universal extension of salvation (Isa 45:22; 49:6), the universal joyous announcement of salvation (48:20; 62:10–11), the coming of the nations to salvation (Jer 16:19), or the regathering of the dispersed remnant of Israel (38[31]:8).<sup>20</sup> But the explicit quotation of Isa 49:6 in Acts 13:47, in which *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* occurs, suggests that this Isaianic text provides the primary background for the identical phrase in Acts 1:8.<sup>21</sup>

What is the geographical significance of the phrase in Isa 49:6 and other LXX texts? There is little evidence to support a limitation of the significance of *eschatou tēs gēs* to any particular geographical sphere. Rather, the phrase denotes the end of the earth in a general sense. Van Unnik was right to understand the LXX usage of the phrase in the eschatological contexts above to denote the announcement and/or extension of salvation to the limit of the inhabited world.<sup>22</sup>

With regard to the ethnic significance of the phrase in Isa 49:6 and other LXX texts, the evidence varies. An explicit mention of *ta ethnē* occurs with *eschatou tēs gēs* in the contexts of Isa 45:22 (cf. vv. 1, 20; cf. also v. 14) and Jer 16:19, so that the phrase there is clearly associated with Gentile participation in salvation. Isaiah 49:6 is most explicit, for in parallel *eis* phrases *sōtērian heōs eschatou tēs gēs* is a conceptual equivalent of *phōs ethnōn*.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand the phrase can occur in contexts in which Gentile participation in salvation is not apparently in view. Isaiah 48:20; 62:10–11 contain announcements to the end of the earth (throughout the inhabited world) that salvation is coming specifically to Israel. Jeremiah 38[31]:8 depicts the remnant of Israel being gathered from the end of the earth. The LXX usage,

<sup>19</sup> See D. E. Johnson, "Jesus Against the Idols: The Use of Isaianic Servant Songs in the Missiology of Acts," *WTJ* 52 (1990) 343–353; Moore, *Luke's Use* 191–209.

<sup>20</sup> See also *eschatou tēs gēs* in the LXX in the contexts of God's bringing judgment upon Israel (Deut 28:49; *Pss. Sol.* 8:15; Isa 8:9; Jer 6:22; 27:41), to express the sovereignty and power of God (Ps 134:6; Jer 10:13; 28:16), and to denote the extension of the glory of Israel (*Pss. Sol.* 1:4) or the fame of Judas Maccabaeus (1 Macc 3:9).

<sup>21</sup> The Isa 49:6 quotation in Acts 13:47 follows the LXX<sup>A</sup> text (cf. also MT) in omitting *eis diathēkēn genous*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. nn. 4–5 *supra*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ethnē* and *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* are also conceptual equivalents in Isa 8:9, as are *pantōn tōn ethnōn* and *panta ta akra tēs gēs* (N\* reads *panta ta ethnē ta akra tēs gēs*) in 52:10. We wonder whether even Luke's literary variation evidenced in the conceptually and verbally parallel passages Luke 24:47 (*eis panta ta ethnē*) and Acts 1:8 (*heōs eschatou tēs gēs*) drew its inspiration from Isaiah.

then, in contexts describing eschatological salvation can speak of “the end of the earth” without necessarily implying Gentile salvation. It must be noted, however, that Isa 49:6, the primary verbal and conceptual background text for Acts 1:8, does associate “the end of the earth” with Gentile participation in salvation.

V. ADDITIONAL LXX BACKGROUND: *PANTA TA ETHNĒ; EIS PHŌS ETHNŌN*

Extensive parallels between Acts 1:3–12 and Luke 24:36–52 are widely recognized.<sup>24</sup> Our interest centers on the parallel statements of the disciples’ mission in Luke 24:47–49 and Acts 1:8. Conceptual and verbal parallels include the coming of the promise/Holy Spirit upon the disciples, the designation of the disciples as witnesses, and—most notably for this study—the parallel expressions of the extent of the mission. Specifically *en te Ierousalēm kai en pasē tē Ioudaia kai Samareia kai heōs eschatou tēs gēs* (Acts 1:8) is parallel to *eis panta ta ethnē arxamenoi apo Ierousalēm* (Luke 24:47).<sup>25</sup> This suggests the need to consider also the geographical and ethnic significance of the phrase *panta ta ethnē* in the LXX (which provides verbal and conceptual background for Luke 24:47) to determine more fully the significance of *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* in Acts 1:8.

*Panta ta ethnē* is used in statements denoting universal participation in eschatological salvation in Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; Tob 14:6; Pss 71[72]:11, 17; 85[86]:9; 116[117]:1; Amos 9:12; Hag 2:7; Jer 3:17; Dan 7:14. Still, it may be noted that the Isaianic background for the phrase is more extensive than that of any other OT or intertestamental writing. The Isaianic vision of “all the nations” participating in eschatological salvation is explicit in Isa 2:2; 25:6–7; 52:10; 56:7; 61:11; 66:18, 20. Isaiah pictured those from all the nations streaming into Jerusalem in the last days (2:2; 66:18–20), participating in the eschatological banquet (25:6–7), enjoying the worship of God (56:7), righteousness and praise (61:11).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Cf. e.g. R. L. Zehnle, *Peter’s Pentecostal Discourse: Tradition and Lukan Reinterpretation in Peter’s Speeches of Acts 2 and 3* (SBLMS 15; Nashville: Abingdon, 1971) 98–99; C. H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (SBLMS 20; Missoula: Scholars, 1974) 58–61; R. P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology, with special reference to Luke-Acts* (JSNTSup 54; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991) 98–99; M. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994) 196–197. On the chronological tension between Luke 24:44–53 (assuming the longer reading of Luke 24:51; see *TCGNT* 189–190) in which the ascension and preceding commission appear to occur on Easter, and Acts 1:4–9 in which they occur forty days after Easter, see M. C. Parsons (*The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts: The Ascension Narratives in Context* [JSNTSup 21; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987] 194–195), who offers plausible literary reasons for Luke’s compressing the ending in Luke 24.

<sup>25</sup> We are slightly inclined to take *arxamenoi apo Ierousalēm* with the preceding clause in Luke 24:47 rather than with the following clause in 24:48. Yet note that with either connection the apostolic mission has its starting point in Jerusalem and so is conceptually parallel to Acts 1:8.

<sup>26</sup> Isaiah also uses “all the nations” terminology in different contexts: in warnings of the destruction of Jerusalem’s enemies (29:8; 34:2), in statements of the power of Israel’s enemies (14:12; 36:20), in statements concerning Yahweh’s superiority over the nations (40:17) or idols (43:9).

We should also note briefly the Isaianic “light for the Gentiles” texts. *Eis phōs ethnōn* (42:6; 49:6; 51:4) is used in contexts denoting the mission of the Servant and reflects the Servant’s task of bringing eschatological salvation to the Gentiles. Isaiah 49:6 provides the immediate Scriptural background for the phrase *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* in Acts 1:8; 13:47 and connects that phrase with *eis phōs ethnōn*.<sup>27</sup>

Cumulatively the Isaianic phrases *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* (Isa 45:22; 48:20; 49:6; 62:10–11), *panta ta ethnē* (2:2; 25:6–7; 52:10; 56:7; 61:11; 66:18, 20) and *eis phōs ethnōn* (42:6; 49:6; 51:4) provide the background for the extent of the apostolic mission reflected in Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 13:47. This conclusion finds support not only from the explicit quotation of Isaiah in Acts 13:47 but also from the extensive allusions to and conceptual influence from Isaiah evident in the other phrases of Luke 24:47–49; Acts 1:8. If this is valid, the Isaianic conceptual background will be influential in determining the significance attached by Luke to the phrase *heōs eschatou tēs gēs*.

#### VI. ACTS 1:8 IN THE FLOW OF THE LUCAN NARRATIVE

It is important first to note the literary unity of Luke and Acts. R. Brawley has recently argued strongly for the literary unity of Luke-Acts based on

<sup>27</sup> Luke’s use of the Isaianic Servant concept for his Gentile mission theme is readily apparent. Simeon’s oracle casts Jesus’ future ministry in terms of the Isaianic Servant who was commissioned to be a light for the Gentiles (Luke 2:32). The Lucan Jesus, by quoting Isa 61:1–2/58:6 (Luke 4:18–19), identifies himself with the Isaianic anointed prophet, a figure fused with the Servant certainly in Luke and possibly already in Isaiah. See J. A. Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” in C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders, *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 46–48; W. Beuken, “The Main Theme of Trito-Isaiah: ‘The Servants of Yahweh,’” *JSOT* 47 (1990) 71–73; J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993) 13–16. As the anointed prophet/Servant, Jesus warns unbelieving Jews that, as happened in the days of Elijah and Elisha, they are about to miss God’s blessing while others (Gentiles) will experience it (Luke 4:23–30). The disciples are to take up the ministry of the Servant, as seen by the influence of Servant language and concepts on the commissions of Luke 24:47–49 and Acts 1:8. The content of their proclamation, *aphesin* (Luke 24:47), takes up the proclamation of Jesus the Servant (Luke 4:18). The scope of their ministry, *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* (Acts 1:8), is drawn from the Isaianic Servant portrait (Isa 49:6). The disciples are commissioned to be *martyres* (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8), as was God’s servant Israel (Isa 43:10, 12; 44:8). As Yahweh promised to pour out his Spirit on Jacob his servant (Isa 44:2–3), so Jesus promises to send the Spirit upon his disciples (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5, 8). Perhaps more than any of the disciples, Paul is portrayed by Luke as taking up the ministry of the Servant. Acts 13:47 is the clearest text, yet the three accounts of Paul’s conversion and commission also employ Servant language and concepts. Paul is a *martys* (Acts 22:15; 26:16; cf. Isa 43:10, 12; 44:8). He is chosen (Acts 9:15; cf. Isa 41:8–9; 42:1; 43:10, 20; 44:1–2; 45:4; 49:7) to open the eyes of both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17–18, 23; cf. Isa 42:6; 49:5–6) and to lead them from darkness to light (Acts 26:18, 23; cf. Isa 42:7, 16). He will suffer (Acts 9:16; cf. Isa 41:11–12; 49:7; 50:6; 52:14; 53:3, 5, 7–10, 12), and his testimony will be rejected (Acts 22:18; cf. Isa 53:1). Even his initial blindness and being led by the hand (Acts 9:8–9; 22:11) may reflect the portrait of God’s servant Israel (Isa 42:6, 16, 19; 43:8). See also Johnson, “Jesus” 350–351. Luke’s appreciation for and application of the Isaianic Servant portrait to the ministries of Jesus, the disciples, and Paul further strengthens the need to read Acts 1:8 against its Isaianic background.

the facts that (1) both works are dedicated to Theophilus, (2) the prologue of Acts 1:1–2 refers back to Luke and offers a summary of it, (3) Acts reiterates themes and literary patterns found in Luke, and (4) narrative schema originating in Luke bridge over into Acts.<sup>28</sup> All these factors provide for the literary linking of the two volumes. The importance of these observations, especially the second one, for the interpretation of Acts 1:8 is that they suggest Acts 1:8 should be read in light of Luke 24:47. When Luke explicitly refers his readers to his previous volume he invites them to recall what he has already said about what Jesus said and did until he was taken up to heaven, including his commission to the disciples. We have already noted the often-observed parallels between Acts 1:3–12 and Luke 24:36–52, in particular the parallels between Acts 1:8 and Luke 24:47. What we are arguing at this point is that from a literary perspective Acts 1:8 presupposes Luke 24:47. In other words, the phrase *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* (Acts 1:8) in the progress of the narrative alludes back to Luke 24:47 and serves as a functional equivalent, conceptually speaking, and as a stylistic variant of *eis panta ta ethnē* (Luke 24:47). This means that the geographical and ethnic significance of Acts 1:8 should be determined with input from Luke 24:47.

1. *Geographical significance.* Our understanding of the Lucan significance of *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* in Acts 1:8 hinges on two points: (1) that the Isaianic background of the phrase played a large role in shaping the significance given to it by Luke, and (2) that from the narrative-critical perspective Acts 1:8 should be read in light of Luke 24:47. This means that with respect to geographical significance *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* refers to all nations—that is, the end of the earth in a general sense. It extends beyond the limits of Palestine, as the Isaianic background and Luke 24:47 parallel show. Neither the immediate context of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6) nor the Palestinian categories of Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria (1:8) suggest a Palestinian limit to the phrase, for both Isaiah's eschatological vision and the previous commission in Luke 24:46–49 have established a worldwide context for the restoration of the kingdom.<sup>29</sup> The phrase also should not be taken narrowly to refer to Spain (Gades), for despite the usage of Greek historians there is no Isaianic or Lucan evidence for such a reference. The Isaianic usage, because it clearly forms the background for Acts 1:8, must be given more weight than parallels from Strabo or Diodorus Siculus. Finally it is probable that Rome occupies a significant place for Luke, viewed as the end of the first stage of the apostolic mission and/or as representing (pointing forward to) the end of the earth. But it must be emphasized that while this is probably right, Rome is not itself actually the end of the

<sup>28</sup> Brawley, *Centering* 86–106.

<sup>29</sup> Isaiah's eschatological vision of Gentile participation within messianic salvation consists of the centripetal aspect of the Gentiles streaming to Zion (Isa 2:2–4; 25:6–8; 45:20–25; 60:4–22; 66:18–20) as well as the centrifugal aspect of salvation going to the end of the earth (42:1–4; 49:6; 52:10).

earth. It only points to the end of the earth. From the perspective of the starting point of the mission in Jerusalem, Paul's preaching in Rome (Acts 28) not only marks a milestone in the spread of the gospel but also anticipates the continued spread of the gospel to the limits of the inhabited world.

2. *Ethnic significance.* The Isaianic background of Acts 1:8, together with its Luke 24:47 parallel, suggests that *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* carries an ethnic significance, denoting the movement of the witness to the Gentile world. Even without the explicit inclusion of the phrase *eis phōs ethnōn* (from Isa 49:6) the thought is implicit in Acts 1:8, as the parallel *eis panta ta ethnē* (Luke 24:47) shows. Jesus' words (*heōs eschatou tēs gēs*) convey the thought of the apostles fulfilling the Servant function of being a light to the Gentiles—that is, of proclaiming repentance and forgiveness to all nations. Acts 13:47, then, does not add a completely new thought to 1:8—that of ethnic significance being added to geographical significance—but rather states explicitly the ethnic significance already implicit in 1:8.

At this point an additional consideration is crucial for determining the ethnic significance attached to the phrase by Luke. Ellis, along with many contemporary scholars, has argued that the Acts narrative does not describe the final and definitive transition of the gospel from Jew to Gentile, since the Jews are recipients of the preaching of the gospel throughout the book.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ellis, "The End of the Earth" 124. The question of whether Acts describes a final and definitive turning from the Jews to the Gentiles so that Luke viewed the Jews as finally rejected is a matter of lively debate. Especially the pattern of repeated turnings from the Jews to the Gentiles in the latter half of Acts (13:46–47; 18:6; 19:8–10; 28:25–28) has been subjected to two opposing interpretations. (1) On the one hand, Tannehill has argued that the pattern cannot suggest a definitive turning from the Jews, for Luke shows (Acts 14:1; 19:8) that Paul keeps coming back to the Jews after turning to the Gentiles ("Rejection by Jews and Turning to Gentiles: The Pattern of Paul's Mission in Acts," *Luke-Acts and the Jewish People: Eight Critical Perspectives* [ed. J. B. Tyson; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988] 83, 98–99). Even the climactic turning in Acts 28:25–28 allows for a renewed Jewish mission as pictured in 28:30–31. See also R. Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews: Conflict, Apology, and Conciliation* (SBLMS 33; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987) 75–77; J. B. Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age in Luke-Acts* (Macon: Mercer University, 1988) 129–130; J. A. Weatherly, *Jewish Responsibility for the Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts* (JSNTSup 106; Sheffield: JSOT, 1994) 150–155. Soards has argued that it is precisely through the pattern of returning to the Jews after turning from them that Luke has created for the reader an expectation that the Jewish mission will continue beyond the end of Acts (*Speeches* 206–207). (2) On the other hand, Maddox has detected a progressive intensification in the pattern—from reluctance on Paul's part (13:46), to frustration (18:6), to a solemn note of finality (28:25–28)—so that at the end of Acts there is no longer any hope that the Jews as a whole will accept the gospel (*Purpose* 44, 184–185). Thus Acts pictures a definitive transition from Jew to Gentile through the literary pattern. Several scholars have argued that Luke's depiction of the Jews is in fact a literary device used to emphasize their rejection. L. Wills has isolated repeated scenes in Acts 13–28 in which the Jews reject the gospel and has discerned an intent on Luke's part to depict the Jews in a stylized way as "scurrilous and seditious citizens" ("The Depiction of the Jews in Acts," *JBL* 110 [1991] 631–654). J. B. Tyson feels that the pattern builds through Luke-Acts and that the Jewish rejection emphasized at the end of the narrative (Acts 28) suggests the termination of the Jewish mission for good ("The Jewish Public in Luke-Acts," *NTS* 30 [1984] 574–583; *The Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts* [Columbia: University of

We agree with this position. The latter half of Acts portrays the preaching of the gospel to Gentiles and Jews in the diaspora, with both acceptance and rejection within each group. At the end of the narrative an open-ended conclusion with Paul welcoming all (presumably Jews and Gentiles) who come to see him suggests that the concept implicit in *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* is not one of a definitive, final transition of the gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles. Rather, what Acts 1:8 anticipates and what the Acts narrative describes is a broadening of the scope of salvation. Luke does not narrate a replacement of the Jews with Gentiles. He narrates a mission to Jews and Gentiles in the diaspora that meets with partial success among both groups. This means that *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* from an ethnic standpoint does not signify Gentiles only to the exclusion of the Jewish people. It signifies the expansion of the gospel into the Gentile world without implying a final withdrawal of the gospel from the Jews. The ethnic significance is one of widening the scope of salvation, not of ethnic replacement. “To the end of the earth” denotes both geographical and ethnic universalism. In this sense Acts 1:8 carries programmatic significance and not only suggests the plan of the Acts narrative—that of universal geographical and ethnic expansion of the

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South Carolina, 1986] 29–47). M. J. Cook understands Paul’s repeated returns to the Jews after turning from them to be merely a literary device Luke uses to keep the pattern going so that he can emphasize that they stand rejected (“The Mission to the Jews in Acts: Unraveling Luke’s ‘Myth of the Myriads,’” *Luke-Acts* [ed. Tyson] 108). The evidence of Luke-Acts as a whole suggests that the first interpretation above is more true to the Lucan perspective. The repeated reports of turning from the Jews to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46–47; 18:6; 19:8–10; 28:25–28) are not a literary device so much as Luke’s report of what actually happened in fulfillment of Simeon’s earlier programmatic statement of a division to come to Israel (Luke 2:34). Israel has become divided over the Messiah. The crucial “turning to the Gentiles” texts in Acts 13 and 28 make it clear that the Jewish response was divided. Acts 13:43 pictures some of the Jews of Pisidian Antioch following Paul and Barnabas and implies a division there (see further Koet, *Five* 115–117). Acts 28:24 states that some of the Jews in Rome were persuaded (*epeithonto*) by what Paul had said, indicating that Paul’s attempt to persuade them (*peithon*, 28:23) was bearing fruit. The imperfect *epeithonto* should probably be understood as indicating a genuine conversion to Christ on the part of some of the Jews. See also Koet (*Five* 127) and especially Weatherly (*Jewish* 138–140), who has examined Luke’s use of the imperfect tense in connection with response to the gospel elsewhere in Acts. Alternately H. J. Hauser (*Strukturen der Abschlusserzählung der Apostelgeschichte [Apg 28, 16–31]* [AnBib 86; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1979] 64–66) followed by Tannehill (“Rejection” 97) argues that *epeithonto* refers not to actual saving faith but only to a merely theoretical inclination, so that the Jews’ reaction is positive but ambiguous. Yet even if this is a correct view of *epeithonto* it still points to positive movement on the part of some Jews, and the picture is still one of division within Israel. The open-ended conclusion of Acts 28:30–31, together with the pattern of Paul’s returning to the Jews already established (14:1 following 13:46–47; 19:8 following 18:6), suggest that Acts 28 does not mark the end of the Jewish mission, even if in the near future the Gentiles are more responsive to the gospel (28:28). Further, Lucan texts suggesting that a hope remains for the eschatological restoration of the Jews and Jerusalem (Luke 13:35; 20:24, 28; Acts 1:6, 7, 11; 3:21) mean that for Luke salvation has not decisively left the Jews behind (so also Chance, *Jerusalem* 129). In viewing *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* in Acts 1:8 as carrying ethnic significance there is no thought, therefore, of a Gentile replacement of the Jews but only of an ethnic broadening of the scope of salvation to include Jews and Gentiles.

gospel—but also looks beyond Acts 28 to the continued spread of the gospel and proclamation of salvation to Jews and Gentiles.

#### VII. CONCLUSION

“To the end of the earth” signifies Luke’s universalistic perspective regarding the expansion of the gospel by means of the apostolic mission. It is not limited to only one aspect of the expansion (geography) but rather carries ethnic significance as well. Geographically the phrase denotes the end of the world in a general sense. In its ethnic significance *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* denotes the movement of the gospel into the Gentile world, without however implying a final turning from the Jewish people. Luke has not “written the Jews off.”<sup>31</sup> The determinative factors in deciding the geographical and

<sup>31</sup> Cf. E. Haenchen, “The Book of Acts as Source Material for the History of Early Christianity,” *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 278.