

2

‘The witnessed one’: Jesus in Acts

Whatever one’s reason for so doing, the task of engaging with the book of Acts is fraught with interpretative questions. The discourse has two distinct textual traditions – the so-called Western and Alexandrian versions, with not insignificant variants between them – and consideration of the integrity of Acts as a historical account is also not without its own problems. The difference, for example, between Paul’s own recounting of his visits to Jerusalem potentially stands in tension with their depiction in Acts,¹ while Gamaliel’s reference to Theudas and Judas the Galilean (Acts 5.36) is also chronologically problematic; according to the Jewish historian Josephus, Theudas operated around 45–6 CE, with Judas leading a revolt around 6 CE. Luke therefore differs from Josephus in terms of their respective chronological ordering (he places Theudas temporally first), and he also accords to Gamaliel a ‘historical example’ of which he could not have been aware (assuming that the events of Acts 5 date to the mid-30s CE).² When wanting to consider historical Jesus questions within the text, therefore, we can easily get distracted by these other matters and lose sight of what is actually the topic under discussion.

¹ Paul’s visit to Jerusalem as outlined in Gal. 2.1–10 appears to be for the so-called Council of Jerusalem, as outlined in Acts 15. Paul describes it as his second visit to Jerusalem post-Damascus Road, but it is the third one as narrated by Acts. There are ways of resolving the discrepancy, and Gal. 2.1–10 need not equate to Acts 15, but the question still presents itself.

² Cf. therefore Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, SP 5 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992): ‘Whatever historical basis there is to his account must be found at the level of substance and pattern rather than at the level of detail of specific incident’ (4). For a defence of Luke’s integrity as a historian, see Paul Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity: The First Twenty Years, After Jesus 1* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005) 187–205.

But even setting aside such matters, trying to tease out the 'Jesus of Acts' is a far from straightforward task, as several further complicating factors present themselves. Particularly in view of our interest in historical questions, the diversity of opinion as to the dating of Acts is an important question.³ While specific matters of its date need not bother us too unduly, the insights of Acts into the earthly Jesus would probably be more nuanced or developed if it were a second- rather than a first-century text. Second, and more significantly perhaps, assuming that Luke–Acts share a common author (as Acts 1.1 seems to aver), one might well expect the second volume generally to mirror its predecessor's interest in the figure of Jesus. But as we shall see, that is not the case, and Acts does not yield an embarrassment of riches in terms of historical Jesus testimony.⁴ Although following on canonically from the Gospel accounts, Acts takes a different track or focus; it presents itself primarily as a narrative of the *Church* rather than as a narrative of *Jesus* – its focus appears to be on the eponymous apostles, with information about Jesus gleaned on a more second-hand, indirect basis. Put simply, 'Acts is not about what *Jesus* did, but what his followers did';⁵ and the portrait of Jesus in the text is therefore very much mediated through the portrait of other protagonists within the overall discourse.

We may, of course, surmise that Acts and Luke do not share the same author, therefore releasing Acts from any accusation that it ignores the Jesus tradition with which it is familiar, but that would seem to counteract the other, more persuasive evidence that they are in some sense connected narratives (cf. Acts 1.1–2). We will assume, with the consensus, that Luke and Acts (or Luke–Acts) are to be read in some way sequentially, and perhaps as two

³ Richard I. Pervo, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 2006), puts Acts well into the second century; Barnett, *Birth* 65–6, takes seriously Luke's testimony as Paul's travelling companion, thereby giving Acts a relatively early dating.

⁴ Cf. W. A. Strange, 'The Jesus-Tradition in Acts', *NTS* 46 (2000) 59–74 (59): 'The author of Acts is as reluctant as Paul to make use of traditions about Jesus.' See Ch. 3 for further discussion of the apparent Pauline reluctance.

⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, NTG (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992) 43.

parts of one overall discourse. But at the same time, one can actually overlay the (apparent) limitations of Acts in respect of Jesus testimony. Jesus (as a named figure, at least) is found in both the first and the last verses of the canonical text (1.1; 28.31),⁶ and therefore 'bookends' the whole account. As the second volume of a narrative commenced in the Lucan Gospel, Acts may be seen as resolving, clarifying or expanding issues raised by the Gospel as to the nature of Jesus' identity. The promise to Mary, for example, that her offspring would exert an eternal kingship over the house of Israel (Luke 1.32–33), is left unresolved by the Gospel,⁷ and it is only really in the first major speech of Acts, that of Peter at Pentecost, that the implications of the angelic prophecy are fully explained (Acts 2.22–36). Acts is notable for the volume of speeches found within its narrative, and as we shall see, much of the information about Jesus, or the portrayal of him in Acts, comes from these orations. As such, and as with the Pauline literature perhaps, one witnesses the emergence of a narrative of Jesus, a story by which the early Church was beginning to understand the particularity of Jesus as the resurrected, ascended and exalted Messiah.

In some, albeit limited ways, Acts also supplements our understanding of Jesus tradition, expanding on the Gospel's material and also providing information relating to Jesus that the Gospels themselves do not necessarily yield. This may include teaching of Jesus not found in the Gospel accounts (Acts 20.35, perhaps even 1.4–5), or it fleshes out incidents that are only minimally expressed within the Gospels (one thinks of the Ascension primarily in this regard). Acts may also utilize sources that are not specifically 'Jesus' tradition, but which can shed light on the impact of Jesus and how he was remembered (one thinks of the 'we' passages of the narratives – 16.10–16; 20.5—21.18; 27.1—28.16, or the tradition material that features in the kerygmatic speeches). Other background information also comes to the fore. We find out about

⁶ Keith Warrington, *Discovering Jesus in the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009) 58.

⁷ Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999) 64.

aspects of Jesus' family – the emergence, for instance, of James, the brother of Jesus, as a primary leader in the Jesus movement (though, admittedly, we only have the fraternal identification in Gal. 1.19). We have noted already that James may have been following Jesus earlier than the Gospels suggest, and will say more on that subject when considering the letter that bears his name; Acts does note, though, that Jesus' brothers were gathered with the Eleven post-Ascension (Acts 1.14), even if James is not specifically named therein. It is notable, then, that James is not taken in as the replacement for Judas (1.15–26); one would think him an obvious candidate if part of the broader pre-Easter Jesus movement. Acts also has other potential sources for Jesus tradition, with Manen/Menachem (13.1) possibly offering a window onto the Herodian court, and a source for Jesus of Nazareth testimony thereby.

More generally, Acts attends to how Jesus tradition is utilized within preaching (be that the simple fact that Jesus forms *part* of the content of such preaching – cf. 10.37–43) and the way in which the ongoing presence of Jesus in the community is acknowledged and enacted. Most importantly, perhaps, Acts ties key events within the life of the early Church to *Jesus*, and specifically to the work of Jesus of *Nazareth*, not Jesus Christ (2.22); within his Pentecost sermon, Peter recalls Jesus as one who had performed mighty deeds (2.22) and who had been crucified by the Romans (2.23), but who had been raised from the dead (2.32) and exalted as Lord at the right hand of God (2.33–36). It is this (now exalted) Jesus who has poured out the gift of the Spirit (2.32). From the outset, therefore, Acts serves to reduce the (potentially) false dichotomy drawn between 'Jesus of Nazareth' and the 'Christ of faith'; according to Peter, the one whom God has made Lord and Messiah is the same Jesus who has been crucified (2.36). As we have already noted in the Introduction, and as we will find with Paul and even Revelation, in the view of those who followed after him at least, the earthly Jesus and the risen Christ are portrayed as one.

In Acts, Jesus departs from his apostles, leaving them with the command to be his witnesses unto Jerusalem, all Judea and

Samaria, and eventually to the ends of the earth (1.8). The geographical demarcation is important here, and probably shapes how Luke recounts the spreading of the gospel from Jerusalem unto Rome, with the book being structured accordingly.⁸ But the exhortation to be Jesus' *witnesses* is surely also significant for the text's overall *narrative* purpose, namely that one should expect witness or testimony to Jesus to form a core feature of the narrative to come. Now whether witness means proselytization (unlikely) or, more likely, the apostles acting as confirmatory 'eye-witnesses' to what Jesus had done, we would expect some reference to Jesus and his achievements to feature in the text, however indirectly. For being 'witnesses' to what Jesus had done seems to be an integral part of the apostolic standing – note the importance of Judas' replacement being someone who had accompanied the earthly Jesus (1.21–23) – and it would seem likely that the 'content' of what had been witnessed would feature at different points in the account (2.32; 3.15; 5.32; 10.40–41).

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that those who follow after Jesus are found doing things similar to him, and thereby generating hints and associations to the Gospel tradition. When addressing the Jewish council as to the healing at the Beautiful Gate, Peter claims that they healed the man in the name of Jesus (4.10; cf. also 3.6 – 'in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth'). Not only does this label their activity as done in the name of Jesus, narrative-wise, they are also presented as acting *as* Jesus, healing as he healed. When recounting the Damascus Road episode, Saul/Paul is said to be persecuting Jesus of Nazareth – not Jesus Christ (22.8); the implication is that Saul's pursuit of the followers of the Way is vicariously a persecution of their (human) leader, that is, the earthly Jesus. Paul subsequently receives the accusation that he is a member or ringleader of a Nazarene sect or group (24.5); as the Nazarene/Nazareth label is applied to Jesus elsewhere in Acts (2.22;

⁸ The expansion of the Church is reflected in the narrative flow of the book: Jerusalem (1.1–8.1); Judea/Samaria (8.1–13.1); the ends of the earth, ultimately Rome (13.1–28.31).

3.6; 22.8; 26.9), the suggestion once more is that Paul is part of a group associated with a figure from the Nazareth region, and with Jesus himself (there is little benefit, otherwise, in placing the appellation on the lips of Tertullus).⁹

The 'earthly Jesus' as character in Acts

On a cursory reading, Jesus can seem to depart from the narrative scene of Acts relatively quickly, as the Ascension brings a closure to his 'earthly' encounters until the promised Parousia (Acts 1.11). The text continues (at much greater length) to address the development of the group who seek to follow after him (the so-called followers of the Way), rather than focusing in on Jesus himself. We can therefore easily forget the role or character that Jesus assumes within the overall narrative, or overlook the significance of Jesus' ongoing presence in the retelling in Acts, but to do so is to miss Jesus' ongoing, continuing contribution. Peter claims that Jesus remains with them 'to this day' – that is, that of Pentecost (2.29), while Jesus meets with Saul on the Damascus Road or is seen by Stephen at the climax of his speech (7.55–56). Jesus even addresses Paul in the Temple, advising him to leave Jerusalem because some of his fellow Jews will not accept his witness/testimony about him (22.18). Thus, while he may be in some sense physically 'absent', Jesus remains very much 'present' in Luke's retelling, and the whole text (and not just 1.1–11) contributes to the book's articulation of Jesus' identity.

That said, the testimony of 1.1–11 is a good place to focus our analysis, as it is the only place where Acts presents Jesus in some form of extended earthly interaction. Jesus appears in Acts as a character and/or participant from the very outset of the book (1.1–9). The accounts of the resurrection appearances

⁹ As an aside, we might observe that Tertullus' allegation suggests that the movement following after Jesus was conceived as an essentially Jewish movement, a 'sect' with Judaism, rather than a distinct group in its own right (cf. also Acts 18.12–16). See Carsten Claussen, 'Early Christianity and the Synagogue: A Parting of the Ways', in *Who Was Jesus? A Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, ed. Paul Copan and Craig A. Evans (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 97–110 (102).

and Ascension found in Acts 1.3–9 parallel similar material in Luke 24.36–53, notably the exhortation to wait for the promise of the Father (Luke 24.49; Acts 1.4 – cf. Acts 2.33), though there are some points of tension or 'dissonance'¹⁰ between the respective accounts. While both do (implicitly at least) restrict the appearances to Jerusalem (as opposed to the Galilean discourse of Matt. 28.16–20), Acts tells of forty days of resurrection appearances (1.3), whereas the Gospel suggests, implicitly at least, that the primary resurrection appearance and Ascension occur fairly quickly, possibly on the same day (Luke 24.50–51). In Acts, Jesus appears only to the apostles (the Twelve, one assumes); in Luke there are more general/widespread appearances (24.13–32). Such differences are not insignificant, and are difficult to harmonize historically, but they may reflect the particular narrative purposes of Acts at this point; the forty-day period is surely rhetorically significant and could be seen as paralleling the forty days of testing in the Gospel (4.2). If so, it is interesting that it is succeeded by a promise of baptism (in the Spirit – Acts 1.4–5), whereas in the Gospel account, the baptism (Luke 3.21–22) precedes the testing (4.1–13).

Narrative-wise, the post-Easter chronological discrepancies should not deflect from the picture Acts wishes to paint of Jesus.¹¹ From the outset of the Gospel account, Luke characterizes, or rather *continues* to characterize, Jesus as a teacher (Luke 4.15; 7.40; 19.39; 20.21); Acts summarizes the evangelistic discourse as comprising what Jesus did and taught (Acts 1.1), and then continues to depict Jesus doing such things for the forty days of post-resurrection appearances (1.3–5). Jesus is specified as instructing or commanding them (1.2), again akin to the teacher–pupil relationship established within the Gospel account. The content of Jesus' teaching is the kingdom of God (1.3), commensurate with the Gospel portrayal (Luke 4.43; 8.10; 9.2), and we therefore

¹⁰ Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009) 37.

¹¹ On the questions of the resurrection appearance chronology, see James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, Christianity in the Making 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 138–42.

encounter a strong sense of continuity across Luke–Acts in terms of this aspect of its portrayal of the earthly Jesus. As the Jesus of the Gospel preaches about the kingdom of God, it should be no surprise that questions as to the coming – or restoration – of that kingdom should re-emerge in the light of the resurrection event, even if the apostles still think that it is the kingdom of Israel, rather than of God, that is coming (Acts 1.6). There is continuity, then, between the pre-resurrection Jesus and the Jesus of the post-resurrection; the two men who exegete the account of Jesus ascending (1.10–11) may even be the same two men (however, figuratively) who are present on resurrection Sunday (Luke 24.4–6). The testimony of Acts concurs with the evangelical datum that the kingdom of Jesus comprised a core element of Jesus' proclamation and teaching. The fact, therefore, that Acts closes with Paul preaching on the kingdom of God (Acts 28.30–31) may equally be stressing the continuity of the ministry of the apostles with that commenced by Jesus.

There are further suggestions of continuity in Acts 1.1–11. The Greek word translated by the NRSV as 'staying' (1.4) commonly has overtones of table fellowship, and therefore Jesus' gathering with the apostles (1.4) probably has implications of sharing food together, reminiscent of the Upper Room discourse (Luke 22.13–20). Jesus is also shown to be instructing the apostles via the Holy Spirit (Acts 1.8); the very agent that empowered him at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4.1, 14) is the same figure used to instruct those who follow after him and continue on with his ministry. Similarly, the fact that Jesus' directives to the apostles are Spirit-enabled (Acts 1.2) suggests a continuum, or association of sorts, between Jesus' mode of instruction to the apostles and the work they carried on by the enabling of the Spirit.

Jesus' declaration regarding the *origin* of the promise of the Spirit also warrants further enquiry. Acts recalls Jesus' prior baptism by John (1.22), and the text speaks frequently of John's baptismal practice (10.37; 13.24; 18.25; 19.3–4). In 1.4–5, Jesus declares that they will be baptized in (or by) the Spirit, but uses language akin to that accorded to John's promise of Luke 3.16 (John has the

additional 'and fire' – one might have expected Acts to include that, bearing in mind the imagery of Acts 2.3). The same text is used in Acts 11.16 as the evidence of the coming of Spirit, but the Lucan Peter remembers this to be *Jesus'* words, rather than those of John the Baptist. Within the Greek text of 1.4, the shift from Jesus' indirect to direct speech is awkward, and it is not clear as to exactly what comprises 'what you have heard from me' – that is, whether it is the exhortation to await the promise of the Father (1.4) or whether it is the 'baptismal' quotation of 1.5. If it were the former, the previous (Jesus) utterance could be Luke 11.13 or possibly Luke 24.49,¹² but might equally be a more specific appeal to the promise of the Spirit unattested within the Gospel account. If it were the latter, then it may suggest that the John tradition is well attested, and that it was permissible to (re)place it in the mouth of Jesus, thereby giving it some kind of dominical ratification. Alternatively, it is perfectly possible that Jesus is quoting himself, and that Acts 1.4–5 actually reiterates a prior prediction that he would baptize with the Spirit – that is, both he *and* John foretold the event, and in broadly similar terms. Again, this would represent 'new' testimony about the earthly Jesus that is not found in the Gospel record.

The earthly Jesus disappears from the scene in Acts 1.9, in a mysterious experience whose 'historical' reference point is hard to determine.¹³ Appeal to such experience can serve to make Luke seem less than historical. Did the disciples actually see Jesus ascend into the sky – a visual theophany¹⁴ – or is the language of 'seeing' implying that something 'happened' (i.e. akin to other events of the incarnation), but which is in essence still supernatural?¹⁵ Or is the event (essentially) theological in its nature – an experience

¹² Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts: A Literary Interpretation* 2 vols, FF (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 12.

¹³ See the helpful discussion in Rick Strelan, *Strange Acts: Studies in the Cultural World of the Acts of the Apostles*, BZNTW 126 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004) 33–7.

¹⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd rev. and enl. edn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 38.

¹⁵ Charles K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) 1.61–4, 81–2.

whose 'historicity' cannot be put into words?¹⁶ Questions as to the historical actuality of such an event are impossible to resolve, of course, but we have already suggested the strategy of considering historical concerns in the context of narrative retelling. Taking this narrative approach seriously, and taking account of inter-textual allusions, it is possible that Acts here intends to reveal Jesus as Lord – or heavenly Lord.¹⁷ Building perhaps on other 'Ascension' traditions, such as those involving Elijah or Moses, Jesus is shown to be God's (hu)man, the one vindicated by God. To put it another way, within the narrative of Luke–Acts as a whole, '(s)omething was disclosed to them [i.e. the disciples] about Jesus that previously had been hidden . . . They see, in an ecstatic, visionary state, Jesus for who he really is.'¹⁸ Jesus' identity has been further disclosed and he is now *in Heaven* (cf. Acts 3.20–21). The Ascension therefore culminates in the picture of Jesus in Luke–Acts, the full identity of the figure now revealed, and, as such, the apostles are to be witnesses to this – and not just to the event of the resurrection (cf. 1.21).

Indeed, it is only in Acts that we have a clear distinction between Jesus' resurrection and Ascension. This may raise practical historical questions, such as where the resurrected Jesus was when not with his disciples,¹⁹ but it is beyond the scope of this book to assess such theological conundrums! What Acts does illustrate is the 'cessation' of sightings at some point – an important datum, often forgotten. There is an 'end' to Jesus' *earthly* existence in a very marked way. By comparison, the Gospels do hold back on this. Matthew and John leave Jesus on earth (for good reasons, no doubt), and Mark, assuming the ending at 16.8, leaves the situation in some ambiguity. Luke's Gospel does have Jesus mysteriously drawn heavenward (Luke 24.51), but on its own it is left somewhat underdeveloped or unexplained, lacking the finality to the sightings that the Ascension according to Acts conveys. That does not mean that Jesus is

¹⁶ Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem* 145–9.

¹⁷ Strelan, *Strange Acts* 48–9.

¹⁸ Strelan, *Strange Acts* 35, 39.

¹⁹ Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem* 147.

absent from the rest of the account, as we shall shortly discuss; it just demarks an end to a particular phase of the Jesus story, that his earthly work is in some sense completed.

The life of Jesus in Acts

Acts also knows of a number of details from Jesus' life. While these are obviously far less than the Gospels include, they are not insignificant, and can (occasionally) enhance the portrait given by the evangelists, and particularly by Luke's own Gospel account. But laying aside the Gospels for the moment, and setting aside the connections with Luke, if we only had Acts as our historical record, what would we know of the earthly Jesus?

Acts includes little information about Jesus' birth or upbringing, except that he had brothers (1.14), that his mother was named Mary (1.14) and that he was part of the Davidic line (13.22–23). Within Acts, the brothers are now part of the community with the apostles (1.13–14), suggesting that Jesus' family had overcome any initial apprehension or tension towards him. In effect, Acts becomes interested in Jesus' life from the point of John's baptism, with the latter acting as the inception point for Jesus' ministry (1.22); this ministry is portrayed as having a public dimension to it – Peter points out that his audience already know, or have seen, what Jesus has done (2.22), but not much more is made of it. Little is said explicitly as to what the ministry comprised, other than that it happened (1.17) and that it extended across Judea (10.39); Jesus is said to have done good things (10.38) and healed those oppressed by the devil (10.38), along with other signs and wonders (2.22), but Acts has little interest in the details of such miracles or in Jesus' parables and debates with the scribes and Pharisees. It does say that Jesus chose apostles to follow after him (1.2), and there is the suggestion that Jesus may have predicted the end of the temple (6.14), something that Luke omits from his Gospel,²⁰ but that is really all in terms of biographical detail.

²⁰ Acts 6.14 perhaps represents Mark 14.58 (so Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM Press, 1990) 63n1).

Acts knows of Jesus' death in Jerusalem, and that he was buried there (13.29). It ascribes responsibility for Jesus' death to the Romans, with both Pilate and Herod involved in it (4.27; cf. 3.13); Pilate is portrayed both as the one who effectively signs Jesus' death warrant (13.28), and also as the one who wished to release him (3.13). But particularly notable is the way in which Acts attributes Jewish responsibility for it too (2.23; 5.30; 13.27); Jesus' death at the hands of his own people is a key feature of the Acts testimony and, in places, becomes the dominant strand, notably Acts 3.15, where the Jews are explicitly accused of murder, even if acting in ignorance (3.17). Jesus himself is portrayed as an innocent party (13.28). Acts also includes the tradition that a figure was released when Jesus was condemned; the figure is not named (he is called Barabbas in the Gospel – Luke 23.18), but is described by Acts as a murderer (3.14).

While not explicitly tied to Jesus, Acts does, of course, also pick up on tradition relating to him in the case of Judas (1.16–19). Judas is recognized as one of Jesus' core followers (1.17), and is cast as assisting those who would arrest him (1.16). He is supposed to have purchased a field with the fruits of his efforts, the Hakeldama or Field of Blood (1.19), but is then said to have been engulfed by the field, with all his bowels flowing out (1.18). Luke does not include Judas' death in his Gospel account, and of the evangelists, only Matthew does so (Matt. 27.3–10), with Acts therefore serving to supplement the evangelical testimony within the Lucan tradition. Historically speaking, the Matthean and Acts accounts do stand in tension – in Matthew, the chief priests buy the field and bury Judas there as he has already hanged himself (27.9–10); in Acts, Judas is said to buy the field himself (Acts 1.18). Who can say what is the 'correct' historical scenario, but the episode attests the way that narrative and history combine, when seeking to extract significance through narrative retelling.²¹

²¹ On the value of Luke's Judas tradition, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012) 107–8.

The use of Jesus' teaching in Acts

It is true to say that direct appeal to Jesus' teaching in Acts remains somewhat limited, especially when one considers the putative common authorship with the Lucan Gospel.²² In short, direct appeals to Jesus' teaching in Acts are minimal to say the least. Where you would expect Acts to appeal to Jesus' teaching to endorse a particular position adopted by the apostolic community, we actually find a veritable reluctance so to do. When the early Church is shown to be formulating its socio-ethical practice, such as in the sharing of possessions (2.44–45; 4.32–35), Luke offers no appeal to Jesus' teaching on, say, the Beatitudes to justify the approach taken (or even to vindicate Jesus for 'proving' that the poor and hungry would be blessed – Luke 6.20–21).²³ We might think, likewise, of the so-called Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15.6–29), arguably the centrepiece of the whole book. Its decision not to impose restrictions on Gentile believers would surely have been bolstered by appeal to Jesus' teaching on such matters (cf. Mark 7.15, 19), and such an appeal is doubly absent, as Luke lacks any corresponding Mark 7 content in his Gospel account. Indeed, it is striking how little mention the Council makes of Jesus and instead, as is common throughout the account, it appeals to Scripture to vindicate the point being made, with Amos 9, rather than Jesus' prior teaching, being the corroborating testimony (cf. Joel 2 in Acts 2).²⁴ Positively, this does portray Luke (as with

²² Cf. Strange, 'Jesus-Tradition' 71: 'For Luke, it seems to have been unnecessary to refer to the historic Jesus in order to establish the practice of the church or to confer authority on its beliefs or actions, and his gospel is certainly not a manual of instruction on mission for his own church.'

²³ Charles K. Barrett, 'Imitatio Christi in Acts', in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 251–62. He notes: 'Luke never even points back to his former treatise as supplying a model, or represents the Christian character that he describes as recalling the story of Jesus, the story being an example of Christian behaviour' (252).

²⁴ On the use of Scripture in Acts to support/endorse its arguments, see Steve Moyise, *The Later New Testament Writers and Scripture* (London: SPCK, 2012) 6–41.