Disciples, Exorcists, and the Power of God: Reading Acts 19:1-20 as a Literary Unit

Matthew R. Anderson
Abilene Christian University, mra07a@acu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/etd
Part of the Biblical Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
ABSTRACT

Scholars have read Acts 19:1-20 as a combination of stories serving different thematic interests. This has led to much confusion over several details in the text, and readings that follow this pattern miss the larger point Luke is making in this section. Acts 19:1-20 serves as the final scene in a three-part contest between believers and magicians (Acts 8:4-25; 13:4-12; 19:1-20). When one takes Acts 19:1-7 as a part of the larger narrative structure in 19:1-20, one can read the Ephesian disciples as the literary foils of the sons of Sceva. This reading highlights Luke’s overall message about magic in Acts. He does not simply use these scenes to argue that the believers are not magicians. Rather, he shows that the Way is a fundamentally different approach to divine power, characterized by submission and focus on the glory of God.

This study surveys the connection of magic in Acts to ancient understandings of magic. I argue that Luke does not include magic in his narrative for a purely apologetic reason. Luke’s concept of magic simply does not fit into the life of the believers. The theme of magic is also closely tied to Judaism in the narrative, showing a concern for the proper understanding of the divine.

I then turn my attention to the literary features of Luke’s style, specifically his reliance on parallelism to make comparisons and contrasts between characters in order to convey meaning. He employs this method throughout the narrative. This feature figures prominently in the first two scenes of the contest with magic, but most scholars have not
seen its vital role in the third scene. Luke creates parallels between the Ephesian disciples and the sons of Sceva to highlight their disparate approaches to divine power.

By highlighting the parallels between the two groups in Acts 19:1-20, I argue that this final scene ultimately shows two examples of approaching power from God, one positive and one negative. This theme relates to the larger Lucan theme of confronting and overturning the power structures of this world in favor of the power structure that relies on God.
Disciples, Exorcists, and the Power of God:

Reading Acts 19:1-20 as a Literary Unit

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Theology

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in New Testament

By

Matthew Robert Anderson

December 2015
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................................................ iv

INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................................................... v

A Brief Overview of Scholarship on the Passage .......................................................... v

The Literary Context of the Ephesian Disciples ......................................................... v

The Identity of the Ephesian Disciples ................................................................. vi

The Identity of Sceva and His Sons ................................................................. vii

The Significance of Numbers ........................................................................... viii

Synopsis of the Project ......................................................................................... ix

I. MAGIC ACCORDING TO LUKE ......................................................................................... 1

   Luke’s Concept of Magic ......................................................................................... 2

   Terminological Relativism: One Man’s Trash… ................................................ 2

   Magical Accusations: Luke as Inept Apologist ........................................... 4

   Distinguishing Miracle from Magic in Luke’s Writings ................................ 7

   The Three-Part Contest: Magic vs. the Power of the Believers............... 15

   The Magicians: Those Who Should Know Better? ........................................ 21

   Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 24

II. LUKE AND THE USE OF PARALLELISM ......................................................................... 26


   Parallelism and Complexity ........................................................................... 28

   Parallelism and Textual Distance .................................................................. 31
Moving Forward ........................................................................................................... 84

More than Apology: Highlighting the Misunderstanding of Divine Power .......................................................................................................................... 84

Judaism and Magic ........................................................................................................ 85

Power to the People ....................................................................................................... 86

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................ 87
LIST OF TABLES

1.1. δύναμις in Acts .........................................................................................................................10
1.2. The Name of Jesus in Acts ........................................................................................................12
2.1. The Ends of Two Ministries ......................................................................................................32
2.2. Two Angelic Visitations .........................................................................................................33
2.3. Two Miracles and the Cornelius Conversion ............................................................................35
2.4. Parallels between Philip and Simon .......................................................................................38
2.5. Parallels between Paul/Saul and Bar-Jesus/Elymas ..............................................................40
3.4. Parallels and Reversals between the Ephesian Disciples and the Sons of Sceva ......70
INTRODUCTION

Acts 19:1-20 has been the source of much consternation to interpreters, who usually read the text as two distinct episodes: 1) Paul’s interaction with the twelve disciples in Ephesus (19:1-7) and 2) the failure of the seven Jewish exorcists (19:13-16). However, questions about the meaning of each episode taken individually have served mostly to obscure the message of the pericope as a whole. These episodes ought to be interpreted in light of each other. When taken together, these two episodes show the power of the Spirit that comes through proper belief in Jesus.

A Brief Overview of Scholarship on the Passage

Generally, interpreters of this passage have focused on the historical details in the passage and the implications of certain details if one reads them as factually accurate. While the historical details of any given passage merit consideration in the process of interpretation, the details of Acts 19:1-20 have led many scholars to read the passage without finding the deeper meaning of the literary creation contained in these verses.

The Literary Context of the Ephesian Disciples

The proximity of the first episode to the previous account of Apollos leads many to read the story as connected in meaning to Apollos (i.e., another believer who needed correction with respect to the Spirit).1 The passages also share several verbal connections

---

(the mention of Apollos and the city of Ephesus [18:24; 19:1] and references to the baptism of John [18:25; 19:3]). Hedlun’s rereading of Apollos’s connection to the Ephesian disciples is an interesting case. According to his hypothesis, Apollos himself is responsible for the Ephesians’ lack of the Spirit. While many rightly connect the Apollos scene and the Ephesian disciples scene, none see the story playing any other role in connection with another story. I shall argue, however, that the story also plays a vital role in the subsequent material concerning Paul’s continuing mission in Ephesus and the sons of Sceva.

The Identity of the Ephesian Disciples

The primary importance of the question of the identity of the Ephesian disciples has been historical inquiry into the spread of John the Baptist’s message. Those who read these men as disciples of John the Baptist or simply as believers in Jesus who began as followers of John view these men as evidence of a mission inspired by the teachings of John the Baptist that has reached Ephesus from Galilee. Without names or origins for any of them, their ethnic identity remains unclear despite scholars’ assertions to the contrary in both camps.

The disciples’ ignorance of the existence of the Holy Spirit seems unlikely whether one sees them as followers of John the Baptist or of Jesus. This argument is

---


only effective, however, if one is viewing the situation as an historically accurate
depiction of factual events. Perhaps the significance of the disciples’ ignorance is not in
its historicity, but in its literary value for comparison with subsequent events. Regardless,
the author is not overly concerned with their ignorance, as evidenced by the pace at
which the story continues. Paul quickly supplies what the disciples lack and baptizes them.

Certainly, the debates revolving around the Ephesian disciples leave questions in
the mind of the reader. More satisfying treatments of this passage deal with its connection
to the immediate literary context. As we have seen, commentators tend to connect the
Ephesian disciples only with Apollos. Given the thematic ties through the phrase “the
name of Jesus” and Luke’s portrayal of the power of the Holy Spirit, which will be
explored in more detail in Chapter 2, one can see a connection between the accounts of
the Ephesian disciples and the sons of Sceva. While this narrative critique of the passage
may not provide answers to all of the issues above, it will establish the importance of the
details in the text that stand out more clearly in comparison with the sons of Sceva.

The Identity of Sceva and His Sons
The various details of the account about the sons of Sceva have led commentators to
disregard the account as a legend and draw meaning only from the comparison with
Paul's wonder-working immediately preceding the account. Any discussion of the details
of the account is primarily to discredit its historicity. The name Sceva and his designation
as high priest is a problem since the name is not mentioned in any documentation of the

high priests in the first century.⁵ Also, the name is clearly not Jewish. One popular theory is that the connection to a high priest would imply special knowledge of powerful names for use in magical practices as evidenced in magical texts of the day.⁶ Another idea is that Sceva is a member of the high priestly class, not actually a high priest. This, however, moves back into the realm of speculation without a means of verification.

Despite the focus on disproving the historicity of many details of the account, commentators are quick to point out the prevalence of Jewish exorcists in the ancient world.⁷ This fact does not shed much light on the text, but simply serves to connect what appears to be (most likely) a narrative constructed for Acts by the author to the historical situation in which he was writing. The author of Luke-Acts does concern himself with magical practices, and so this passage is another in the author’s dealings with magic.

The Significance of Numbers

The numbers mentioned in both accounts do not figure into the interpretations of commentators. The significance of the number twelve for the disciples is generally dismissed because of the approximate nature of the number (ὡσεὶ δώδεκα).⁸ Those who comment on the number of the sons of Sceva generally focus on the problem of


reconciling the number seven (ἑπτά) with the use of ἀμφότερος in verse 16.9 Jackson and Lake tie this instance to the use of ἀμφότερος as “all” in papyri from as early as the 2nd century.10 Notably, Pervo reads a minor significance to the number, suggesting that the number serves to heighten the humiliation of the sons since the seven of them were overpowered by only one demon-possessed man.11 These arguments seem incomplete, especially considering the uses of seven and twelve in the rest of Luke-Acts. The inclusion of numbers for both groups of people, if the stories are read as complementary, must be of some significance to the author.

**Synopsis of the Project**

Clearly, Acts 19:1-20 contains several interpretive issues. The present study attempts to solve these issues by reading this section of Acts as one literary unit intended to convey a message about the power of both the Holy Spirit and belief in the name of Jesus. To understand this clearly, one must first have an understanding of the function of magic in the ancient world. Second, one must read the Ephesian disciples as a foil for the sons of Sceva. Third, the entire passage must be employed to discover another instance of Luke’s thematic overturning of powers. Ultimately, Acts 19:1-20 proclaims the power of both the name of Jesus and the Holy Spirit who fills those who believe.

In Chapter 1, I shall explore the motif of magic in Acts and the historical backgrounds to that material. This will provide a foundation for assessing the magical

9. Thus the textual variants associated with the numbering of the sons in this passage. See Metzger, 417-8.

10. Jackson and Lake, *Acts*, 242. This would resolve the issue without resorting to source criticism and analyzing multiple traditions in the passage. However, since this would be the earliest example of that particular usage, one needs a stronger argument to find Jackson and Lake persuasive on this point.

aspects of the pericope in Acts 19. Surveying this motif will reveal a motivation that is deeper than merely discrediting the magic-using community. Magic, as a source of power in the ancient world, connects with a larger theme in Acts: the Spirit as the source of Christian power.

In Chapter 2, I shall analyze Luke’s literary style. Specifically, I shall focus on the use of parallelism and comparison in Luke-Acts. This analysis will bring certain Lukan tendencies to light that can then be brought to bear on the two episodes in Acts 19:1-20. This will show that the two episodes serve as complementary scenes in order to convey a single message, with an interlude about Paul’s ministry that serves to heighten the contrast between the two groups.

In Chapter 3, I shall discuss the role of numerology in Luke-Acts with special reference to the role of the numbers twelve and seven as literary devices in Acts 19:1-20. Then, I shall bring the foundation of Luke’s interaction with magic and his use of parallel accounts to draw comparisons between people and groups in order to show the significance of the two stories when read together. I will then expand the scope of the discussion to show how these stories work together with the surrounding material to further Luke’s vision of the power of the Holy Spirit and the reversal of worldly expectations of authority.
CHAPTER I
MAGIC ACCORDING TO LUKE

“Magic is a word with as many definitions as there have been studies of it,” cautions John Middleton.1 And Michael Becker warns against forcing interpretations of ancient texts into any “unified system of modern concepts associated with the word ‘magic’,” because, “modern dichotomous differentiations rest in the reduction of a very complex development of ideas and concepts.”2 I am inclined, therefore, toward the phrase “conceptual framework,” since it is not my present goal to establish an absolute definition of magic *qua* magic. Rather, what matters is the significance of magic for the author of Acts and its function in the text. For the present study, then, issues of phenomenology do not matter so much as the author’s conception of the phenomena of magic and miracle. Since Luke makes a fairly clear distinction between magic and miracle,3 readers ought to accept that distinction when attempting to interpret the narrative. To do so properly, we must first ascertain what that distinction is and why it matters for Luke.

---


3. While Luke never specifically states, “What the believers were doing was by no means magic,” he clearly shows the failure of magicians to comprehend and use the power of the Holy Spirit and the name of Jesus.
Luke’s Concept of Magic

Luke’s negative portrayal of magicians is neither unique nor surprising. The general attitude toward magicians in philosophical treatises, legal writings, and literature is one of distrust and ridicule. Given this, it seems unlikely that Luke would present Jesus or the Apostles as magicians, nor would he describe them performing supernatural feats without indicating how they were distinct from the common magicians. Whether one believes Jesus and his followers were magicians or were distinct from that group, one must realize that Luke is using encounters with magicians in Acts to distinguish the reputation of the believers from that of those who practice magic. Modern categorization of Jesus and his followers as magicians does not mesh with their presentation in the narrative of Acts.

Terminological Relativism: One Man’s Trash…

One of the most popular modern conceptions of magic in the ancient world is “terminological relativism.” Essentially this position states that what is considered a


miracle in one’s own community is considered magic in the community of the other. This view, however, is not so much a conception of magic, as it is a collapse of the distinction between miracle and magic. In fact, once one collapses the distinction between miracle and magic, it is not difficult to continue the same line of argumentation to say that there is no longer a distinction between magic and religion. It is simply a matter of perspective. Thus, Graf argued that proper study of magic ought to focus on the "ancient meanings of the terminology as part of a discourse on the relationship between humans and gods." Graf considers magic alongside other aspects of human interaction with the gods. This is not to say that magic and religion exist on the same levels of importance or piety, but that they both deal with human interaction with the divine. Ancient discourse about magic implies (or often explicitly states) that true religion (as defined by the particular group making the argument) far outstrips magic in power and piety. Indeed, Christians made such claims in the early centuries of Christianity. Justin claims the triumph of Christianity over magic because “those who used magical arts have dedicated themselves to the good and unbegotten God” (Apol. 14). Origen claims that all other religion is truly just service paid to demons: “It seemed good to us, therefore, to avoid service paid


10. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine.
to the demons as a plague. And we say that every religious ritual at the altars and statues and temples supposed by the Greeks [to be] of the gods is of demons” (Cels. 7.69). Justin contrasts devotion to God with the practice of magic. This contrast does not constitute a direct attack on any other religion as magic, but it does imply that magic is fundamentally separate from Christian faith in Justin’s mind. Origen claims that the entire Greek pantheon is merely composed of demons. This alone does not necessarily seem an accusation of magic, but he claims previously in the same paragraph that demons are summoned and petitioned by means of spells (ἐπιφανείων) and magical trickery (μαγγανείων). Surely these same pagans whose literature also disparages the use of magic would not have considered their own religion to be such.

Magical Accusations: Luke as Inept Apologist

Given certain beliefs about magic in the ancient world, accusations of magic aimed at Christians ought not to surprise the modern reader. For example, since Jesus died in such a public manner, some scholars argue that the pagan and Jewish contemporaries of the believers would have taken their use of the name of Jesus as necromancy.\footnote{Garrett, Demise, 3; David E. Aune, “Magic,” 1545.} \textit{PGM IV.1928-2005} provides a prime example of such necromancy. According to this spell, a magician can use a "skull cup" (σκύφος) in conjunction with a prayer to Helios in order to gain control over a "spirit that died a violent death" (βιοθάνατον πνεῦμα). This spirit then becomes the assistant (πάρεδρος) of the magician, helping the magician perform magical rituals and spells.\footnote{\textit{PGM IV.1950-2}, 1971, 2034.} According to some early Christians, Simon Magus practiced this very form of necromancy, taking the soul of a child whom he murdered as his
assistant. If outsiders knew of this type of necromancy, they would have more than enough ammunition from the Christian use of the name of Jesus when performing miracles to level serious accusations of magic use at them.

While there is merit to the concept of terminological relativism in the magic/miracle discussion, it is not enough to say, then, that one of Luke’s main reasons for dealing with magic in Acts is to refute allegations concerning Christians and magic. If Luke intended to deny Christian involvement in magical practices, he could easily have omitted some of the incriminating details from the narrative or simply stated them in a different way. Indeed, the fact that Czachesz can argue that the “practices of Philip, Peter, John, and Paul are phenomenologically not different from the practices of their adversaries,” suggests that the relationship between magic and the miracles in the text remains shrouded in some ambiguity. For example, a reader could easily interpret the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, in Acts 5:1-11, as the result of a magical curse from Peter. He is the only character who speaks in the narrative, and Luke does not specify the source of Ananias’s and Sapphira’s sudden demises.

In one episode, Peter heals by power transferred from his shadow (5:15), and in another Paul’s sweat cloths and aprons provide healing (19:12). These passages seem to show power flowing directly from these men to imbue inanimate objects (if one considers

---


a shadow an object) with magical properties.\footnote{16} In Paul’s case, God is explicitly mentioned as the source of the miracles (19:11), but the details seem fairly like charms and enchantments. In Peter’s case, God is not mentioned in the immediate context. Indeed, the very fact that Christianity began as a Jewish movement would have already connected it with magic in the minds of many pagan critics, since Jews were often accused of practicing magic.\footnote{17}

If Luke were truly concerned with refuting charges of magic, a clear statement that God is the one accomplishing these things and a choice to leave out details that come too close to various magical practices and ideas of the day would certainly benefit his case. Instead of downplaying the supernatural deeds of the believers, however, Luke focuses more on the miracles of the early Christians than do most other New Testament writers, and he does so in an “unambiguously positive” light.\footnote{18} This is not to say that Luke had no concern about magic or wanted Christian missionaries to be seen as magicians. Throughout the narrative, those who believe in Christ and are filled with the Holy Spirit consistently perform greater and more powerful acts than the magicians. But this is not simply because they had tapped into a more powerful magic.\footnote{19} As I will discuss below, the key distinction between magic and the power of the believers is the ultimate source of the power: do the believers use magical rites and equipment to control


\footnotetext{17}{Strabo, \textit{Geog.} 16.2.39; 16.2.43; Pliny, \textit{Nat. Hist.} 30.2.11; Apuleius, \textit{Apologia} 90; Johnson, \textit{Acts}, 222.}


\footnotetext{19}{Cf. Czachesz, “Magic and Mind,” 302-4.}
the power of the divine or does the divine bestow power upon them according to the divine will.

Distinguishing Miracle from Magic in Luke’s Writings

Perhaps the closest parallel to Luke’s approach to magic in Acts is Philo of Alexandria’s interpretation of the story of Balaam (Mos. 1.268-300). After Balaam tells the king to build seven altars while he goes off to ask God what to do, “a prophetic spirit invaded (προφητικοῦ πνεύματος ἐπιφοιτήσαντος) him” and “drove out every faculty of outlandish divination from his soul” (πᾶσαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἑντεχνὸν μαντικὴν ὑπερόριον τῆς ψυχῆς ἠλάσε, Mos. 1.277). Subsequently, Balaam delivered a prophetic word from God (Mos. 1.278). Certainly, divination could have given him a message for Balak, since diviners practiced throughout the ancient world quite successfully. Philo makes it plain, however, that the Spirit completely rids Balaam of any sort of divining power. Clearly something different has happened in this case. Balaam’s normal methods have been stripped away by a far more powerful and wholly other force. This is the relationship between magic and the power of the believers in Acts. They are not portrayed as the same phenomenon. The activity of the believers is the activity of God in the world, and other authorities cannot stand in its way.

Simply Miraculous: Eschewing Magical Accoutrements

The methods of the believers do not always appear to be associated with magical practices. Jesus and his followers expel demons and heal without the incantations, hymns, and the various accessories of the Jewish and Hellenistic exorcisms of antiquity.20 Even

physicians employed incantations in conjunction with amulets as late as the 2nd century CE.\textsuperscript{21} According to the sixth-century physician Alexander of Tralles, “the most divine Galen and many other ancients” employed copper rings imbued with healing properties in many of their cures.\textsuperscript{22} Rings with magical properties figure prominently in some Jewish practices as well. Josephus describes the actions of a Jewish exorcist, Eleazar, who served Vespasian (\textit{Ant}. 8.42-49). Eleazar employed a “ring having a root under the seal of the kinds Solomon indicated” along with the name of Solomon and incantations composed by Solomon (\textit{Ant}. 8.47). Jewish exorcisms often involved the singing of psalms, as evidenced in the collection of such psalms commonly called the Song of the Sages (4Q510-11).\textsuperscript{23} Tobit 6:8 presents a recipe for an incense-like smoke that an exorcist ought to create in the presence of a possessed person by burning a fish’s heart and liver.

Aside from the scenes in Acts that seem closer to ancient concepts of magical activity discussed above, the miracles performed by the believers in Acts are almost effortless. Often, all that is needed is a command in the name of Jesus. Luke offers a picture of a power that surpasses any magic. The main difference between this power and the power of magicians lies in the gift of the Holy Spirit. What the believers do in the


\textsuperscript{22} Alex. Trall. \textit{Ther}. 2.475.

\textsuperscript{23} The collection of psalms is generally dated to the late 1\textsuperscript{st} century BCE, placing these practices fairly close to the time of Jesus and his followers. For more on the dating of the scroll, see Johann Maier, “Songs of the Sage,” in \textit{The Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls}, ed., Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2:891.
narrative, they do through the power of the Holy Spirit. Magicians, the ancients supposed, worked their magic through other spiritual forces.

**The Source of Power: The Ends Do Not Justify the Means**

In the thought-world of first-century Judaism, the source of power carried more weight than the deeds performed with it. The Beelzebul controversy (Luke 11:14-23) displays this concern among the Jewish authorities. It seems to the modern reader that driving out demons would be a positive activity regardless of the exorcist’s motivation or the source of his power. The Jewish authorities, however, assumed a demonic source for Jesus’s power and so condemned his activities. Likewise, in the Talmud, sorcerers work magic by the power of demons (שדים) while rabbis who are able to produce a calf from nothing do so by contemplating the Laws of Creation.\(^\text{24}\) The nature of the power at work determines whether or not the one performing miraculous deeds does so for good or evil. Thus, Luke clarifies throughout the narrative that the Holy Spirit is the source of the believers’ power.

**Power and the Believers: Filled with the Holy Spirit**

Power and its source play a vital role in the believers’ work and confrontations with opposition. Table 1.1 shows every occurrence of δύναμις throughout Acts. God, through the Holy Spirit, empowers the disciples to work wonders in the service of the gospel. Luke's use of the word δύναμις throughout the narrative serves to highlight the distinction between God's power and other spiritual sources.\(^\text{25}\) Five of these references deal specifically with the source of power (1:8; 3:12; 4:7; 10:38; 19:11). Luke describes a

---

\(^{24}\) b. Sanh 67b: כל מעלי שבתא הוו עסקיו בהלכות יצירה, ויבריו להו עיגלא תלתא ואכלי ליה.

power that is completely under the control of God, who chooses those upon whom to bestow it. The first instance in which Luke mentions power centers on the coming of the Holy Spirit (1:8). The Holy Spirit’s coming results in the power that the apostles and other believers will use to spread the gospel by word and deed.

Table 1.1: δύναμις in Acts

| 1:8 | But you will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit comes upon you... |
| 2:22 | Jesus of Nazareth, a man made known among you by God through **powers** and wonders and signs... |
| 3:12 | Why do you stare at us as if we had made him walk by our own **power** or piety? |
| 4:7 | By what kind of **power** or in what kind of name did you do this? |
| 4:33 | And with great **power** the apostles were giving their witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus... |
| 6:8 | And Stephen, full of grace and **power**, began to work great wonders and signs among the people. |
| 8:10 | Everyone, from the small to the great, took heed of him saying, "This man is the **power** of God that is called great." |
| 8:13 | [Simon] was amazed when he saw great signs and **powers** happening. |
| 10:38 | ...God anointed [Jesus] with the Holy Spirit and **power**... |
| 19:11 | God began to do no ordinary **powers** through the hands of Paul. |

Two other occurrences in Acts link the Holy Spirit closely with δύναμις. In Acts 10:38, Peter tells Cornelius and his household that God anointed Jesus with both the Holy Spirit and power. As a result of this, Jesus accomplished many miracles. In this context, the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in the empowering of Jesus. In Acts 6:8, Luke does not actually mention the Spirit. Rather, Stephen works miracles because he is “full of grace and power.” Luke lists this same Stephen first among the deacons selected in 6:1-7, who
are “filled with faith and the Holy Spirit” (6:5). The reader can infer, then, that the power Stephen displays comes from the Holy Spirit.

Luke refers to the Holy Spirit fifty-six times in Acts. That the Spirit should play such a dominant role in the activity of the apostles and the rest of the believers throughout Acts should come as no surprise. Shortly after telling the apostles that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes, Jesus says that they will be his witnesses “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (1:8). Thus, the Holy Spirit and the Spirit’s power provide what is necessary for the believers to witness to the world about Jesus. The power, however, resides not with the Spirit alone. The very name of Jesus carries its own power.

The Name of Jesus: No Magical Incantation

The Holy Spirit certainly dominates the landscape of Acts. The name of Jesus, in various forms, plays a substantial role as well. While the phrasing may vary, the concept of the name of Jesus occurs twenty-six times throughout the narrative (see Table 1.2). Thrice the name of Jesus receives specific focus, almost as if it were a character in the story. The name itself heals a crippled man (3:16b). The name of Jesus is magnified (19:17). Paul used to oppose the name of Jesus (26:9). In these passages, focus is specifically on the name and not on the activity of a believer. The name of Jesus seems to have life on its own.

---

Table 1.2: The Name of Jesus in Acts

| Acts 2:38 | Peter tells the crowd at Pentecost to be baptized ἐπὶ τῷ ὄνοματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ |
| Acts 3:6  | Peter heals a crippled man ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου |
| Acts 3:16a| The crippled man was healed ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει τοῦ ὄνοματος αὐτοῦ (Jesus) |
| Acts 3:16b| τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ (Jesus) healed the crippled man |
| Acts 4:10 | Peter tells Jewish authorities that he healed ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου |
| Acts 4:18 | Jewish authorities order Peter and John not to speak or teach ἐπὶ τῷ ὄνοματι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ |
| Acts 4:30 | Believers praying to God: “Signs and wonders happen διὰ τοῦ ὄνοματος τοῦ ἁγίου παιδός σου Ἰησοῦ |
| Acts 5:40 | Sanhedrin orders the apostles not to speak ἐπὶ τῷ ὄνοματι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ |
| Acts 8:12 | Philip proclaims the kingdom of God and τοῦ ὄνοματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ |
| Acts 8:16 | The Samaritans had not received the Holy Spirit but had only been baptized εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ |
| Acts 9:14 | Ananias to the Lord: Saul has the authority to bind all who call upon τὸ ὄνομά σου |
| Acts 9:15 | The Lord to Ananias: Saul will bring τὸ ὄνομά μου to the Gentiles |
| Acts 9:16 | The Lord about Saul: I will show him how much it is necessary for him to suffer ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὄνοματός μου |
| Acts 9:21 | Paul described by hearers as the one who destroyed those who called upon τὸ ὄνομα τοῦτο (Jesus) |
| Acts 9:27 | Paul spoke boldly ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι Ἰησοῦ |
| Acts 9:28 | Paul spoke boldly ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι τοῦ κυρίου |
| Acts 10:43| Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness διὰ τοῦ ὄνοματος αὐτοῦ |
| Acts 10:48| Peter commands that Cornelius’ household be baptized ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ |
| Acts 15:26| Paul and Barnabas have risked their lives ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὄνοματος τοῦ κυρίου ἴμων Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ |
Acts 16:18  Paul drives out a spirit ἐν ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

Acts 19:5  The Ephesian disciples are baptized ἐν ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

Acts 19:13 The Jewish exorcists name τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ over those possessed by evil spirits

Acts 19:17 τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ was magnified

Acts 21:13 Paul is prepared to die ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ

Acts 22:16 Ananias to Paul: Be baptized, calling upon τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ (Jesus)

Acts 26:9 Paul used to do many things against τὸ ὄνομα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου

Ten of these references deal with believers submitting themselves in some way to Jesus’s name. People are baptized in the name of Jesus (2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; cf. 22:16). Believers offer (or are prepared to offer) their lives for the name of Jesus (15:26; 21:13). According to the Lord, Saul will suffer for the name of Jesus (9:16). The believers receive forgiveness through the name of Jesus (10:43). A crippled man receives healing because he trusts in the name of Jesus (3:16a). Eight of the references deal with the believers’ speech. They teach about the name of Jesus (4:18; 5:40; 8:12; 9:15, 27, 28). Twice characters identify the believers as those who call upon the name of Jesus (9:14, 21). The name of Jesus, then, functioned as a key component of the preaching of the Way.

Luke links the name of Jesus directly to miraculous deeds only four times in the narrative. Peter tells the Jewish authorities that he healed the crippled man in the name of Jesus (3:6), and the believers proclaim that signs and wonders happen through the name of Jesus (4:30). This leaves the only two instances in which believers directly apply the name of Jesus to effect some sort of miraculous outcome. Peter tells the crippled man to
stand up \textit{in the name of Jesus} (3:6), and Paul drives out a spirit \textit{in the name of Jesus} (16:18).

If one takes these two instances and reads them against the account of the sons of Sceva (and the larger group of Jewish exorcists), then one might be tempted to draw close comparisons between their applications of the name of Jesus.\textsuperscript{27} Luke says that Jewish exorcists “named the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits” (19:13) in order to drive out those spirits. As we shall see below, the phrasing used by these Jewish exorcists aligns much more closely with magical formulae than do the words of either Peter or Paul. This, however, does not constitute the main body of evidence against reading similarities between their applications of the name of Jesus. The majority of the references to the name of Jesus in Acts do not deal specifically with miraculous deeds. Rather, most of the references deal with the content of the teaching of the Way and the faith of those who believe. The relationship of the believers to the name of Jesus consists primarily of belief in that name, not in the use of the name to accomplish something. Thus, when the reader encounters some Jewish exorcists, who have not been baptized into the name and who do not have faith in the name, attempting to drive out evil spirits with the name of Jesus, she expects them to fail. Luke has demonstrated throughout the narrative that the name of Jesus is not a tool to be employed at one’s whim.\textsuperscript{28}


\textsuperscript{28} Garrett, \textit{Demise}, 95. Garrett focuses on the narrative in Acts 19:11-20 as the evidence of this message in Acts. I think that this episode is actually the expected result after Luke has already laid out the function and power of the name of Jesus through the course of the narrative. The sons of Sceva do not paint
The Three-Part Contest: Magic vs. the Power of the Believers

Luke plays out the contest between the power of magic and the power of the Holy Spirit in three scenes: 8:4-25, 13:4-12, and 19:1-20. In each case, practitioners of some sort of magic fail to out-perform the followers of Jesus. Scholars have noticed this theme in the narrative, but they do not include a key detail. Each practitioner makes some sort of claim to religious authority and power.

Perhaps the interpretation of these scenes in Acts as a contest stems in part from later Christian tradition about dealings with magic, especially Simon Magus. The Acts of Peter focuses mainly on public contests of miraculous deeds between Peter and Simon. In fact, Peter bestows a human voice on a dog and sends it to challenge Simon to a public contest (3.9). Peter then amazes the people who demand a sign to prove that he serves God by bringing a smoked herring back to life (3.11). Simon kills a man by speaking in his ear, but fails to resurrect a widow’s son (3.28). Peter, on the other hand, exposes Simon's false resurrection (apparently some sort of puppetry with the cadaver) and raises the boy easily. Certainly such a contest makes for an exciting story, but the scenes in Luke's narrative hardly qualify as the same sort of story.

---

29. Certainly one could argue that Acts 16:16-18, the encounter between Paul and the slave-girl with the Python spirit ought to be considered in any account of the theme of magic in Acts. I, like Parsons (Acts, 114), see the three scenes above as distinct from the encounter with the slave-girl. As we will see through the course of this project, the three scenes in 8:4-25, 13:4-12, and 19:1-20 all share common themes concerning the misappropriation of the Jewish religion for personal gain. This is not to say that these scenes do not play other roles in the structure of the overall narrative. As we will see in Chapter 2, Luke is capable of complex literary constructions and so is capable of employing scenes for multiple purposes in the text.
**Simon Magus: The Misappropriation of the Spirit**

The first major encounter with magic in Acts (8:9-13) centers on Simon Magus. Parsons argues that one of the primary reasons Luke includes this material is to draw a clear distinction between magic and the miraculous deeds of the believers.\(^{30}\) Simon and Philip, however, both perform miraculous deeds, both attract the attention of a large crowd, and both amaze with their deeds. If Luke sought to distance the work of the believers from that of magicians like Simon, he could easily have drawn fewer parallels between the two men in this story. Simon becomes one of Philip's admirers as the people had once admired him. He even joins the crowds in baptism.

Simon’s baptism ought to give the reader pause. Many, like Garrett, have denied the sincerity of Simon’s conversion, arguing that he is simply seeking more power.\(^{31}\) Likewise, when Simon attempts to purchase the ability to impart the Holy Spirit, modern commentators tend to attribute this to the avarice commonly associated with magicians of the day.\(^{32}\) To arrive at such interpretations, however, one must import details into the story that are not clear in the text. Regardless, Simon clearly poses no threat to Philip as one of his many followers and converts. Neither does Simon truly oppose Peter and John. Simon sins when he treats the power to give the Holy Spirit as if it were a commodity. Clearly Simon assumes that the power lies within Peter and John themselves. The very idea that a human would hold sway over the Spirit is so abhorrent to Peter that he curses Simon.

---

Simon represents the misappropriation of the Spirit, or rather the attempted misappropriation of the Spirit. In Acts, the Spirit cannot be appropriated by a human being, but comes on those who have submitted themselves appropriately to the Way. This argument does not depart greatly from the standard readings of Simon’s story. He wants power for himself, and he assumes that the Spirit can be purchased and sold as some sort of magical commodity. This theme of misappropriation will carry through the subsequent scenes of the contest with magic. Luke does not present these scenes merely to paint a picture of a power superior to magic, but to show that the believers display a fundamentally distinct relationship with divine power in which the true locus of power resides in God and God’s will rather than in the human.

Simon’s scene, then, represents the first element of the divine power of the believers: the Holy Spirit. As seen above, Luke closely links the concept of power with the Holy Spirit in the narrative. The direct result of the Spirit’s coming is power for the believers. The power leads to the spread of the word of God, the object of misappropriation in the next scene.

**Bar-Jesus/Elymas: Misappropriation of the Word**

Bar-Jesus’s name presents an interesting possibility. He could be capitalizing on the fame already attached to the name of Jesus, as evidenced throughout the narrative of Acts. Certainly, the name Jesus (or, more appropriately, Joshua) was common in Jewish circles. 33 Paul’s indictment of Bar-Jesus as “son of the devil” (13:10), however, constitutes a re-naming (or, perhaps, a true naming) of the man called Son of Jesus. The

---

reader certainly hears the intended punch of this claim: rather than a servant of righteousness and Jesus, this man is a servant of unrighteousness and the devil. Thus, the true etymology of Bar-Jesus’s name matters little. In the context it serves to heighten the disparity between the man's claims of prophetic authority or power and the reality of the situation.  

Again, the reader does not encounter a dramatic contest of miraculous deeds. Instead, Luke simply tells the reader that Elymas “opposed them.” If Luke intended to show that magic was futile or that Paul’s abilities were far greater, he could easily have expounded upon the futility of Elymas’s magic to hinder the spread of the gospel or even described a battle like the kind found in the Acts of Peter. Instead, Luke focuses more intently on the identity of Bar-Jesus as a false prophet than on his identity as a magician. Not only does Luke inform the reader directly that Elymas attempted to turn Sergius Paulus from the faith (13:8), but he draws fairly clear parallels between Elymas and pre-conversion Saul. Both Paul and Elymas are struck blind and need to be "led by the hand" (9:8 and 13:11, respectively). Elymas makes "crooked the straight paths of the Lord" (13:10) while Saul proceeds to a "street called straight" in order to be taught the way of Lord by Ananias (9:11-16). Thus, the reader can see in these two men the fate that befalls those who attempt to close the eyes of others to the light of the Lord. Once again, magic recedes into the background while faith in God and God’s power rises to the surface as the key issue.

Luke stresses the idea of preaching/teaching in this scene. In the previous scene, Simon does nothing to hinder the preaching of Philip, being persuaded by Philip’s ministry himself. In the next scene, the sons of Sceva do not appear until after Paul has preached so that “all those dwelling in Asia heard the word of the Lord” (19:10). Bar-Jesus/Elymas appears when Sergius Paulus invites Paul and Barnabas to preach the word of God to him (13:7). The first description of Bar-Jesus labels him “ἄνδρα τινὰ μάγον ψευδοπροφήτην Ἰουδαίον” (13:6). If he is a Jewish false prophet, then the reader assumes he claims to have a word from God. Otherwise, his identity as a Jewish prophet would certainly seem suspect to the proconsul who employs him. This is a man, then, who claims to speak the word of the Lord. He then opposes Paul and Barnabas when they attempt to proclaim the word of God to Sergius Paulus (13:8). Bar-Jesus/Elymas has misappropriated the word of God, or at least he has attempted to do so. The true word of God cannot be subjected to human tampering. Thus, Luke calls him “false prophet.” The Holy Spirit’s coming and its power in the believers leads to the proclamation of the word of God, the news about Jesus. Bar-Jesus/Elymas serves as an example of those who would claim to participate in the spread of the word of God for their own benefit. Like Simon, his attempted misappropriation leads to his defeat and denial of access to the true power from God.

The Sons of Sceva: The Misappropriation of the Name

The majority of material associated with exorcism shows Jewish influence. The clearest connection between Judaism and magic in the ancient world is in protective spells and

---
incantations used to ward off evil, especially demons.\(^{37}\) Thus, the reputation for the prowess of Jewish exorcists became widely known. At first, the sons of Sceva appear to be heirs of that tradition.

The sons of Sceva utilize a formula common in the magical papyri. A clear example and close parallel comes from \textit{PGM IV.3019-20}: “I adjure you by the god of the Hebrews, Jesus.” The sons of Sceva use the same word (ὁρκίζω) to begin and also employ Jesus’ name in an attempt to drive out the demons. Though these men claim to be from an important Jewish family, their spell sounds more like the general magic of the Hellenistic world than the exorcism techniques attributed to Jewish tradition and practiced in the Qumran community.\(^{38}\) Jubilees 10.1-7 depicts Noah praying at length to God that God might rid his sons of the demons. The examples of materials for exorcism from Qumran (4Q510-11, 560; 11Q11) include lengthy songs or psalms extolling the virtues and mighty deeds of God, which the exorcist would supposedly sing or chant in order to effect the exorcism. Josephus (\textit{Ant. 8.45-49}) describes the exorcism tradition of Solomon, which involves not only incantations (invoking the name of Solomon himself) but also the use of a ring to aid in the exorcism. Luke claims that the sons of Sceva were attempting to drive out evil spirits by means of a simple formulaic statement employing the power of the name of Jesus, not calling upon or praising God at all. Certainly this does not prove that these characters are not Jewish. This detail serves simply to highlight the connection to magical practices, not simply exorcism as a tradition in Judaism.

\(^{37}\) A fairly well known example of this is Tob 8:1-3. Here Tobias, following the instructions of the angel Raphael, drives a demon out of his new bride. Raphael then pursues and binds the demon.

This scene poses the greatest difficulty to the interpretation of the magical vignettes in Acts as a contest. The sons of Sceva do not even cross paths with Paul or any other believer in the text. Paul does not rebuke the men, nor does he curse them. The other magicians who figure prominently in the narrative receive proper punishment and rebuke from the believers. These men simply wade too deeply into the waters of spiritual combat without the proper understanding of the power of the name of Jesus. The sons of Sceva represent the attempt to misappropriate the name of Jesus. As we have observed and will see in the example of the Ephesian disciples, the believers first submit to the name of Jesus and devote themselves to the praise and spread of that name. Very rarely does the name itself appear in the process of a miraculous event. The sons of Sceva do not submit to the name. Rather, they attempt to subject the name to their own will and thus gain power for themselves.

It is fitting for the name of Jesus to serve as the focus for the final scene in the contest with magic. The first scene dealt with the source of the believers’ power, the Holy Spirit. The second scene dealt with the believers’ message, the word of God. The final scene deals with the combination of these two ideas. As we have seen, the name of Jesus serves as both the content of the believers’ preaching as well as the power by which they accomplish miraculous deeds. Luke demonstrates that there are those who misunderstand the source of true power from God, there are those who misunderstand the content of the true word of God, and there are those who misunderstand both.

The Magicians: Those Who Should Know Better?

In each case, the believers do not confront the magicians simply because they are practicing magic. Rather, the magicians featured in the narrative only figure in the story
because of their opposition to the spread of the gospel or the misappropriation of the power of the Holy Spirit, or they fail in both areas and misappropriate the very name of Jesus. This is the key to understanding magic in the narrative of Acts. Those who believe that they are in control of the power quickly discover that God maintains control of the true power.

There remains one key feature of the magicians, which has been left largely unaddressed by scholars. Each magician has some connection to Judaism. The relationship between the Samaritans and the Jews at the time of Jesus remains a topic of debate among scholars. Some have argued that Samaritans had access to the temple during the reign of Herod.\(^39\) By the time of Jesus’s ministry and subsequent mission of the believers, tensions had certainly risen. There remains, however, compelling evidence that the Samaritans were Jews.\(^40\) Josephus includes an account of the Samaritans defending their religious practices as being the same as the Jews (AJ 12.256-260).\(^41\) At other times, Josephus makes it plain that the Samaritans are not Jews, but are foreigners.\(^42\) The rabbinic literature reaches no consensus on the matter. Some rabbis considered Samaritans to be Jewish and associations with them to be kosher\(^43\) while others referred to them as foreigners.\(^44\) Luke gives special attention to the Samaritans and


\(^40\) For more on the following information, see Samkutty, *Samaritan Mission*, 78-82.

\(^41\) Also, in AJ 9.290, Josephus claims that the Samaritans continued in Jewish practices until his day.

\(^42\) *AJ* 11.290, 346-347.

\(^43\) b. Ber. 47b; b. Git. 10a-b; b. Hul. 4a; m. Ned. 3.10.
Samaria throughout both works.\textsuperscript{45} One might argue that, because Jesus refers to a Samaritan as a foreigner in Luke 17:18, Luke considers the Samaritans to be foreigners. This, however, does not take into consideration the geographic and ideological spread of the gospel in Acts. The believers are to be witnesses “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Samaria is not considered with the rest of the world. Rather, Jesus places it with Judea. Likewise, the mission of the believers does not move directly from the Samaritans to the Gentiles. Philip teaches the Ethiopian eunuch (a godfearer) and Jesus appears to Saul (a Jew opposing the Way). Thus, the Samaritans appear as one example among a group of those who do not fully understand Judaism but are not fully outside of its boundaries. These details and the fact that Luke portrays the Samaritans as accepted into the Way in Acts 8 without the need for the same deliberation as the acceptance of the Gentiles in Acts 15, one can assume that Luke views the Samaritans as closely connected to Judaism. Thus, Simon Magus also shares a close connection with Judaism.

Bar-Jesus/Elymas has a clearer connection, since he is specifically called Ἰουδαῖον (13:6). Likewise, Luke tells the reader that the sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, form part of a larger group of Jewish exorcists (19:13-14). Thus, each of the magicians in this three-part drama that plays out in the narrative of Acts has some connection to the God of Israel. Each magician ought to know better than to engage in the practices in which he is involved.

\textsuperscript{44} m. Hul. 2.7; b. Hul. 6a. b. Yoma 69a refers to the Samaritans as idolaters.

There is, however, another way to read the connection between these magicians and Judaism. We have already seen that they are engaged in the attempted misappropriation of the divine power of the believers. Perhaps this is not a unique occurrence in the lives of these magicians. The magicians all seem to be making their living by misappropriating Jewish beliefs and teachings in an attempt to gain power and prestige for themselves. The power of the followers of the Way is simply one more option for these men who fundamentally misunderstand the relationship of God to humanity and the role of God’s power in the world.

**Conclusion**

Luke’s three magicians all have access to knowledge of the one true God to some extent. Each one has religious knowledge above that of the pagan world around them. They should understand that God alone is the one true God, and they should be able to understand that human beings do not control divine power. Each of them has utterly failed in this. Luke does not include and rework the tales of these magicians simply in order to refute charges of Christian magic use or to claim that magic has lost its power. There is no indication that Simon’s former feats no longer function. Luke does not claim that Bar-Jesus/Elymas never accomplished anything wonderful with magic, nor does he tell the reader that he did not return to his practices after his encounter with Paul. The reader knows nothing of the previous exorcisms of the sons of Sceva, nor does the reader know anything about their continued business. If Luke were proclaiming the end of magic, he could have done so more effectively.

Luke reveals slowly through the narrative that the contest between believers and magicians really does not exist. Magicians do not have the capacity to receive true power
from the one true God because they cannot approach that power in the appropriate way. They seek their own glory. They want to be the ones in power. They want to dominate the spiritual world. The believers, on the other hand, submit themselves to the power of God through the Holy Spirit and the name of Jesus. Because of this disposition, this submissive approach, they become the conduits of true power on the earth.
CHAPTER II

LUKE AND THE USE OF PARALLELISM

Interpreters have long been fascinated by parallelism as a literary technique in both the Hebrew Bible and Greek literature.\(^1\) Parallelism provides a lens through which to see the deeper messages below the surface of the text. Luke not only often makes use of parallelism, but he also employs this technique to convey several of the most important messages throughout Luke-Acts. Before discussing Lucan literary tendencies, however, we must first address the question of the unity of the two volumes.


Most modern, Western scholars have assumed the unity of Luke-Acts since Cadbury’s seminal work on the subject.\(^2\) A few have since taken up the unity of the two narratives as a central thesis,\(^3\) but most simply assumed the unity of the two volumes in their interpretations.\(^4\) Green summarizes his take on the traditional view in this way: “the

---

1. J.-N. Aletti, *Quand Luc raconte: le récit comme théologie* (Paris: Cerf, 1998), 70: “Comme technique littéraire, le parallélisme remonte à la plus haute antiquité. Il a un rôle dominant dans la poésie biblique, chacun le sait, et son extension va des micro-unités à des ensembles qui peuvent atteindre la dimension d'un livre.” This possibility of varied scope for parallelism will be explored further in the following discussion.


Gospel of Luke is incomplete in itself, for it opens up possibilities in the narrative cycle that go unrealized in the Gospel but do materialize in the Acts of the Apostles. Thus, it is the connection of a continuing story that makes unity the preferred reading. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit in the first volume (Luke 24:29), and that promise is fulfilled in the second (Acts 2:4). Jesus warns that his followers will face persecution at the hands of the authorities (Luke 21:12), and they face that reality throughout Acts. These volumes, then, comprise one continuous narrative. This is not, however, the only way to read the connections between the two volumes.

Parsons and Pervo identify six major categories of unity between Luke and Acts: authorial, compositional, narrative, generic, theological, and thematic. Their work raises questions against the assumed unity in most of the categories. They accept authorial unity most readily, but in the other areas they call for closer examination. There is no need to


rehearse their arguments here. There are certainly differences between the two works in various themes and stylistic choices. The concern of the present study lies in the particular preference of the author to use parallel stories and characters to convey messages. Given the number of studies that accept the unity of the two volumes before and after the arguments of Parsons, Pervo, Rowe, and others, one can readily see that a bond exists between the two works. Certainly, one can read one without the other (evident in the very least by the separation of the two volumes in the canon of the New Testament). Yet, when analyzing the specific tendencies of one author, one must take into account the examples that exist throughout that particular author’s work. With this in mind, we can begin a survey of Luke’s use of parallelism in his narratives.

**Parallelism and Complexity**

Luke makes ample use of hendiadys as a rhetorical trope throughout Luke-Acts. That is, more than just expressing an idea or concept with two words instead of one, Luke employs two stories closely related in the text to convey one common idea or moral. Often Luke uses parallel accounts that link directly to one another in sequence. These parallels allow the reader to draw certain conclusions from the text that the author does not necessarily spell out plainly. As Byrne points out, “[a] favorite device of Luke, particularly prominent in Acts, is to bring together two individuals, both of whom have had a religious experience that they only partly understand. When they share their experience, individual experience becomes community experience and in the process

---


finds full meaning." Byrne’s assessment of one type of parallelism in Luke’s writing indicates the usefulness of such structures for understanding the underlying messages guiding the narrative. Luke’s use of these patterns guides the reader toward his thematic interests. From the outset of the first volume of his work, Luke relies on this literary feature.

Luke presents Zechariah and Mary and their responses to the angelic proclamation of an unexpected and highly improbable birth (Luke 1:5-38). These stories serve to set up the parallelism between John and Jesus, but they also highlight the distinction between the two protagonists and their responses. Zechariah is a priest and receives his visit as he is offering an incense sacrifice, while Mary is simply a young woman who receives her angelic visit in Nazareth, presumably nowhere special or sacred. Zechariah wants assurance of the deed (“How will I know this?” [1:18]), so Gabriel renders him mute. Mary, on the other hand, is simply wondering how her pregnancy will come to pass (1:34). Thus, Luke presents through these two stories differing approaches to the announcement of God’s promises.

This parallel lies fairly close to the surface, given the similarity in structure of the annunciation accounts and the disparate outcomes of the accounts (muteness; no

---

8. Brendan J. Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke’s Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 24. Byrne directs the reader to four passages to illustrate this point. The first, Acts 8:26-40, does not quite fit the proposed model since Philip does not lack any understanding of which the reader is aware. The second, 9:1-19, serves as a perfect example for his assertion. Jesus confronts Saul and leaves him blind, clearly awaiting some resolution of his situation. Ananias receives instructions to help a man who has been persecuting believers and, understandably, has reservations. They meet, and God’s plan is fulfilled, and Saul becomes a champion for the Way. The Peter/Cornelius narrative (10:1-11:18) likewise provides a clear example. Both men receive visions and need to encounter the other to reach the fulfillment of God’s plan. The Jerusalem council (15:1-35) provides a murky example. Byrne does not explain who has had a partially understood religious experience in this case. It’s clear, however, that community experience leads to deeper understanding.

punishment). The reader can readily recognize the parallels between the accounts and explore what the author is doing with the juxtaposition of the stories. Other parallels, however, are structured more complexly and subtly. Much like his ability to write in varied registers in terms of vocabulary and syntax (like the difference between the higher grammatical makeup of the Prologue [Luke 1:1-4] and the LXX-mimicry of the annunciations [Luke 1:5-38]), Luke crafts parallel narratives with varying levels of complexity.

This feature of Lukan narrative has led recent interpreters to reconsider at least one significant pair of oft remarked upon texts: the Good Samaritan and Mary and Martha. If one reads Luke 10:25-42 as a hendiadys, then both the parable of the Samaritan and the anecdote about Mary and Martha serve to highlight the two aspects of the Torah scholar’s answer to his own question: “By doing what shall I inherit eternal life?” (10:25). Thus, the story of the Samaritan shows how one can allow the focus on God to lead to neglect of the neighbor, while the story of Mary and Martha shows how focus on serving the physical needs of the neighbor can cause someone to disdain those who would focus on studying and praising God.10

This parallel is subtle, because the stories take different forms. One is a parable told by a character in the story, and the other is an account of activities of characters by the narrator. Nonetheless, the stories share thematic interest in hospitality and center on the response of Jesus to a question posed by characters wishing to be justified in their own actions. Luke, then, appears capable of creating more complex parallels that serve

the same thematic purpose even though they do not necessarily share a great number of
formal/structural elements. The stories in Luke 10:25-42, however, still appear adjacent
to one another, inviting comparison. In other cases, Luke creates parallels between stories
that are separated by intervening pericopes.

**Parallelism and Textual Distance**

Scholars often cite parallels between Jesus, Peter, and Paul. Most of these parallels
consist of similar stories that do not necessarily share the common language that would
indicate either deliberate parallelism on the author’s part or the use of a common source
for constructing each story. Luke may simply craft such stories following a general
outline for the way in which such stories of miraculous deeds ought to be told. There are certain parallels, however, that share too many details to be merely a set
literary form for storytelling. For example, Jesus’s and Paul’s final activities in their
respective accounts contain many similar elements. Luke intends the reader of the two
volumes to see in Paul the same kinds of trials faced by Jesus. These parallels (see Table
2.1) span the two works, but the sheer number of points of contact makes it highly
unlikely that these details appear in the text by accident of literature or history.

---


12. So Parsons and Pervo, *Rethinking*, 57; Susan M. Praeder, “Jesus-Paul, Peter-Paul, and Jesus-

Table 2.1: The Ends of Two Ministries\textsuperscript{14}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jesus</th>
<th>Paul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receives a good reception and the people praise God (Luke 19:37)</td>
<td>Receives a good reception and God is glorified (Acts 21:17-20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At a meal, takes bread, gives thanks, and breaks it. (22:10)</td>
<td>At a meal, takes bread, gives thanks, and breaks it. (27:35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mob seizes him. (22:54)</td>
<td>A mob seizes him. (21:30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaten by high priest’s men. (22:63-64)</td>
<td>Struck on the mouth by high priest’s man. (23:2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four trials: Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, Pilate (22-23)</td>
<td>Four trials: Sanhedrin, Felix, Festus, Herod Agrippa (23-26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declared innocent three times (23:4, 14, 22)</td>
<td>Declared innocent three times (23:9; 25:25; 26:31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilate says he will release him (23:16, 22)</td>
<td>Herod says he could have been released (26:32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews cry, “Away with this man” (23:18)</td>
<td>Jews cry, “Away with him” (21:36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A centurion has a favorable opinion of him. (23:47)</td>
<td>A centurion has a favorable opinion of him. (27:3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some find even more subtle parallels across the two volumes. For example, Green reads parallels between Zechariah and Cornelius as an emphasis on the acceptance of the Gentile by God.\textsuperscript{15} These accounts do share several common details (see Table 2.2). These

---

\textsuperscript{14} The contents of this table are taken from Talbert, \textit{Reading Luke}, 218-9.

seem to be more indicative of a simple angelic epiphany form, but that does not exclude the possibility of significance in the shared details.

Table 2.2: Two Angelic Visitations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Zechariah</th>
<th>Cornelius</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pious Action</td>
<td>ἦσαν δὲ δίκαιοι ἄμφοτεροι ἐναντίον τοῦ θεοῦ (1:6)</td>
<td>εὐσεβῆς καὶ φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν σὺν παντὶ τῷ οἶκῳ αὐτοῦ (Acts 10:2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance of Angel</td>
<td>ὄφθη δὲ αὐτῷ ἄγγελος κυρίου (1:11)</td>
<td>ἄγγελον τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσελθόντα πρὸς αὐτὸν (10:3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction</td>
<td>φόβος ἐπέπεσεν ἐπ’ αὐτόν (1:12)</td>
<td>ἐμφοβος γενόμενος (10:4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the distance between these accounts (they do not even appear in the same book), Green argues that the two accounts interact to highlight something about Cornelius. Even if both stories represent a generic angelic epiphany form, the fact that a priest and a Gentile centurion receive the same treatment in the narrative conveys Luke’s concern that the Gentiles be seen as accepted into the Way. Similarly in terms of textual distance, Darr argues that Joseph of Arimathea and Gamaliel serve as literary foils for one another, showing the difference between a faithful member of the Sanhedrin and one who is guilty of participation in the plot against Jesus and his followers.16

The goal of the present discussion is not to evaluate the arguments of those who have identified parallels between the volumes but to show that textual distance between

---

stories does not preclude the possibility of intentional parallelism. Rather, Luke appears capable of crafting complex parallels across stories and between volumes. This will serve as an important observation as we move toward a reading of the three scenes in Acts concerning magic and, especially, the function of Acts 19:1-20 in that series of stories. Distance, however, is not the only form in which one encounters complexity in the parallels of Luke.

Parallelism and Layering

Another aspect of Lucan parallelism pertinent to the present study consists of parallel stories that together relate to a third story with a similar theme. Thus, story A and story B form the parallel unit (PU) A/B. This unit then forms another PU with story C that can be conceptualized as A/B/C. Generally, two components share a closer bond thematically than either story does with the third. Let us examine two passages as examples of this literary technique.

A Triple Parallel: Aeneas, Tabitha, and Cornelius

Acts 9:32-43 contains two healing stories, the first featuring a man, the second a woman. Luke follows these stories with the story of Cornelius' conversion. There are several significant parallels between these three stories (see Table 2.3). Malick reads these two healing stories in conjunction with the story of Cornelius. The healing of physical ailments (which would have been considered by Peter's contemporaries as having a likely


18. The third story may or may not include the same characters. What matters is the thematic interest of the three stories.
spiritual origin) leads up to the “healing” of a spiritual ailment, the lack of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{19} Thus, the parallel healing stories constitute a PU by themselves. These are the $A//B$ of the series of three stories. Both describe Peter healing individuals who suffer from bodily, physical ailments. The language used in these stories matches more closely.

Table 2.3: Two Miracles and the Cornelius Conversion\textsuperscript{20}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>Lydda (9:32)</td>
<td>Joppa (9:36)</td>
<td>Caesarea (10:1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>ἄνθρωπον τινα ὀνόματι Αἰνέαν (9:33)</td>
<td>τις μαθήτρια ὀνόματι Ταβιθᾶ (9:36)</td>
<td>Ἀνὴρ τις ὀνόματι Κορνήλιος (10:1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>Paralyzed (9:33)</td>
<td>Dead (9:40)</td>
<td>Gentile (Not a member of the Way) (10:28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter’s Words</td>
<td>ἀνάστηθι (9:34)</td>
<td>ἀνάστηθι (9:40)</td>
<td>ἀνάστηθι (10:26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>ἀνέστη (9:34)</td>
<td>ἀνεκάθισεν (9:40)</td>
<td>ἐπέπεσε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀγιον (10:44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>ἐπέστρεψαν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον (9:35)</td>
<td>ἐπίστευσαν πολλοὶ ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον (9:42)</td>
<td>λαλοῦντων γλώσσαις καὶ μεγαλυνόντων τὸν θεόν (10:46)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Luke links these two stories with the account of Cornelius, forming a larger PU $A//B//C$. Thematically, all three stories concern the ministry of Peter, and all three scenes end with the successful spread of the gospel to many (9:35, 42; 10:48). The scenes differ in the type of malady, either physical or spiritual. All serve to highlight the success of Peter’s mission work and the power of God to make people whole, physically and spiritually.

\textsuperscript{19} Malick, “Narrative Parallels,” 19-21.

Parallels as Positive and Negative Examples: Ananias, Sapphira, and Barnabas

In Acts 4:32-5:11, Luke employs two parallel stories as positive and negative examples of a theme introduced by another pericope. Barnabas provides an example of the appropriate use of wealth (4:36-37), while the pair of Ananias and Sapphira displays the inappropriate use of wealth (5:1-11). These two stories follow a summary statement about community life (4:32-35) and serve to highlight the quality of that life by positive and negative examples. In this series of stories, the summary (A) provides the thematic consideration: the proper use of wealth in the Way. The PU of Barnabas (B) and Ananias and Sapphira (C) displays the working out of this theme through a positive and a negative example. Instead of three parallels, Luke employs a series A(B/C), since B/C constitutes encouragement to continue the behavior demonstrated in A.

Though not exhaustive, the analysis of this feature of Lucan parallelism here indicates the ability of the author to construct complex parallels on varying levels in order to string together multiple stories in the service of one major theme. This will inform our consideration of the literary features of Acts 19:1-20 in the following chapter. For now, we turn to the other two accounts involving magicians for evidence of parallelism.

Parallelism and the Theme of Magic

As discussed in the previous chapter, Acts contains more material on magic than any other text in the New Testament. Since Acts has no parallel in the New Testament canon, modern readers may approach stories in Acts in three different ways. A story could be a reproduction of one of Luke’s sources, bearing little or none of Luke’s own writing. Or Luke could have crafted a story on his own with little or no material from an outside

source. A third option seems much more likely, especially given Luke’s own admission to using outside sources (Luke 1:1-4). Luke probably adapted the sources he had with his own material to craft a continuous narrative. This is the reason so many parallels occur in the narratives of Luke-Acts, as we have seen. If Luke has a specific message about magic that he conveys through the three scenes dealing with magicians (Acts 8:4-25; 13:4-12; 19:1-20), then one would expect him to apply his standard literary techniques in editing these scenes to convey a message.

In Acts 8:4-25 and 13:4-12, the first two scenes in this three-fold tale of the superiority of the Way to magical practices, Luke employs many comparisons between characters to drive home his point. The subtlety of parallelism and the textual distance involved in understanding the parallel varies in each case. Since Luke employs these scenes as pieces in a larger series of stories concerning magic, the marks of his penchant for parallelism show clearly in his construction of the scenes.

Philip in Samaria

Philip encounters the first and most clearly successful magician in the narrative.22 This scene is unique in that the magician involved actually receives baptism into the Way. Luke likely includes this detail to heighten the failure of Simon to truly comprehend the purpose of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Simon’s scene, as we noted in Chapter 1, serves to highlight the misappropriation of the Spirit. Luke successfully conveys this message in part through comparison between Philip and Simon (see Table 2.4).

---
22. While one could argue that Bar-Jesus/Elymas position in the court of a proconsul indicates greater socio-economic success, Simon actually accomplishes wonders in the text. Luke tells the reader that he won the attention of the crowds with his magic. The other magicians in the text do not actually accomplish any magical feat in the text.
Luke compares Simon and Philip in the descriptions of the crowds in Samaria who follow Simon and the crowds who follow Philip by employing the same language to describe their attention to these wonder-workers. They “were clinging to (προσεήχουν)” Simon (8:10, 11) and then Philip (8:6). While one may interpret this to indicate a degree of fickleness in the Samaritans, Luke uses this connection to heighten the confrontation between Simon and the believers. The reader already understands the believers as powerful people who tend to amaze, but Simon appears on the scene with a similar level of power (or so it would seem at the beginning of the story).

Luke also connects Simon to the crowds who used to follow him because “he had amazed them (ἐξεστακέναι αὐτούς)” with magic (8:11), and Simon, having seen the miracles of Philip, “was amazed (ἐξίστατο)” (8:13). This comparison highlights Simon’s focus on the miraculous deeds of Philip. The crowds, on the other hand, were clinging not simply to Philip, but “to the things being said by Philip” (8:6).23

The reader, already having cause to distrust Simon since he was “practicing magic (μαγεύων),” discovers that he was proclaiming nothing other than his own glory, “saying...

---

that he himself was someone great” (8:9). He was so convincing that the people begin to call him “The Power of God that is called Great (ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ καλομένη μεγάλη)” (8:10). All of this stands in stark contrast with Philip who came to the Samaritans and “preached the Messiah to them” (8:5). Philip, then, provides the positive example of human interaction with divine power. Simon provides the negative.

Structural-Functional Reversalism: A Different Kind of Parallel

The whole account of the mission to Samaria parallels the Pentecost account. This parallelism is accomplished not by a one-to-one sequential comparison, but by “structural-functional reversalism.”24 In the Pentecost account, there are three major events: 1) the Spirit comes upon the believers (2:1-4), 2) the believers (especially Peter) begin to proclaim the good news about Jesus (2:14-3:26), and 3) persecution arises against the believers (4:1-22). The Samaritan mission in Acts follows these three steps in the opposite order: 1) persecution arises against the believers (8:1), 2) the believers (especially Philip) begin to proclaim the good news about Jesus (8:4-8), and 3) the Spirit comes upon the believers (8:15-17). Luke deliberately employs this reversal in order to show the legitimation of the Samaritan people as the people of God.25

This could be considered another application of a PU linked to a third scene sharing thematic interests. This could be conceptualized as $A \backslash (B//C)$. The Pentecost account (A) mirrors the sequence of certain events in the preaching of Philip and Simon, reversing the order of details to compare and contrast the scenes. The larger unit $A \backslash (B//C)$ deals with the reception of the Holy Spirit by two groups of believers.


Thematically, all three scenes (A, B, and C) serve to show the importance of the Holy Spirit for participation in the Way.

Paul in Paphos

Saul/Paul’s encounter with Bar-Jesus/Elymas contains a far more subtle comparison. As we have seen above, Luke crafts parallels with varying levels of subtlety and complexity. While this comparison is not as clear as the connections between Simon and Philip, it still provides additional insight into the point being made by the author. The comparison requires that the reader recall the story of Saul’s encounter with Jesus (see Table 2.5).

Table 2.5: Parallels between Paul/Saul and Bar-Jesus/Elymas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blinded</th>
<th>Paul/Saul</th>
<th>Bar-Jesus/Elymas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Led by the hand</td>
<td>9:8 (\chiειραγωγο\omicron\nuτες \alphaυτόν)</td>
<td>13:11 (\epsilon\zeta\eta\tau\iota \ \chiειραγωγο\omicron\omicron\varsigma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crooked/Straight</td>
<td>9:11 Paul found on street called Straight (\tauή\nu \rho\omicron\mu\nu \tauή\nu \ \eta\nu\lambda\omicron\mu\omicron\nu\nu\epsilon\omicron\iota\alpha\nu\theta\iota\nu\alpha\nu) after looking to arrest those (\tauής \ \omicron\delta\omicron\ οντας) (9:1)</td>
<td>13:10 Elymas makes crooked the straight paths (\tau\alphaς \ \omicron\delta\omicron\upsilon\varsigma \ \tau\alphaς \ \epsilon\omicron\thetaε\iota\alpha\varsigma) of the Lord</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both men are blinded as they attempt to stop the spread of the Way. Both men need others to lead them by the hand once they are blind. The final detail in Table 2.5 requires more effort on the part of the reader to see a parallel. Luke only uses the adjective straight one other time. In Acts 8:21, Peter rebukes Simon Magus and tells him that his heart is not \(\epsilon\omicron\thetaε\iota\alpha\) before God. Two of the three references to something or someone being \(\epsilon\omicron\thetaε\iota\alpha\) refer to a proper approach to God. The detail about the street

called εὐθείαν seems superfluous to the narrative in Acts 9. Luke could easily have inserted that detail to suggest subtly that Saul is on the path toward the proper relationship with God. Even without this detail, however, the two men share enough in common to be read as foils for one another. The very fact that both men have two names ties them together in the text. Luke does not just happen to include the detail that Saul is also called Paul (13:9), but introduces that detail in the midst of a confrontation with another double-named man.

Through this series of parallels between the two men, Luke creates an opportunity for the reader to draw an important conclusion. Luke identifies Bar-Jesus/Elymas as a “false-prophet” (13:6). Can there be any doubt at the end of the passage that Paul is a true prophet? Thus, without needing to say so explicitly, Luke paints a picture of Paul, as the true prophet of God. These parallels also provide another connection between Paul and Jesus. Just as Jesus blinds one who opposes the Way (Saul), so Paul also blinds one who opposes it (Elymas).

Like the positive/negative pair in the PU Barnabas//Ananias and Sapphira, Paul/Saul and Bar-Jesus/Elymas provide another positive/negative pair exemplifying the proper response to rebuke from the Way. In Paul we see the transformation that ought to take place, while we are left to assume that Elymas continued on in darkness.

Parallels between the Scenes Dealing with Magic

In addition the parallels used in constructing the individual scenes dealing with magic in Acts, Luke also includes parallel details in the three accounts to link them together to a common theme. These shared details help the reader to connect the stories, thus forming a larger literary unit.
The first two scenes in the three-part contest with magic share a focus on the Holy Spirit. In 8:15-19, Luke employs *antistrophe*, the repetition of a final word or phrase in successive phrases for emphasis, in order to highlight the Holy Spirit (πνεῦμα ἅγιον at the end of phrases in 8:15, 16, and 19). The Holy Spirit speaks to the believers, requesting that Paul and Barnabas be set aside to the Holy Spirit before the second scene (13:2). Then, as Paul and Barnabas begin their journey, Luke reminds the reader that they have been sent by the Holy Spirit (13:4). Finally, just before Paul rebukes the magician Elymas, Luke reminds the audience that Paul is “filled with the Holy Spirit” (13:9). The Spirit, then, figures prominently in both scenes as the support and cause of most of the actions therein.

The third scene, if restricted solely to the sons of Sceva episode (19:11-20), does not include a single reference to the Holy Spirit. As I shall argue in the Chapter 3, the sons of Sceva constitute the second in a pair of parallel stories. The Ephesian disciples (19:1-7) serve as the positive counter-example to the sons of Sceva in a positive-negative pair. The Ephesian disciples scene refers to the Holy Spirit three times (19:2 [2x], 6). Thus, if the reader sees all of Acts 19:1-20 as the third scene in the contest with magic instead of only Acts 19:11-20, then the final scene also shares a focus on the Holy Spirit.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, these three scenes all center on some misunderstanding and attempted misappropriation of the power of God. This thematic interest links the three stories in an attempt to demonstrate the appropriate way that

---


believers ought to approach power from God. When one considers the Ephesian disciples as a part of this series, each part of the three-part contest contains a positive and a negative example. Philip performed signs and wonders for the glory of God, while Simon did so for his own glory. Saul/Paul brought the word of the Lord to Sergius Paulus for the glory of God, and Bar-Jesus/Elymas brought false word of God for his own glory. The Ephesian disciples submit themselves to the name of Jesus for the glory of God, while the sons of Sceva attempt to appropriate the name of Jesus for their own glory.

Conclusion

Luke makes use of various kinds of parallelism throughout his narratives. These vary in complexity and can apply both to texts that occupy sequential space in the story and to texts that do not appear close together in the narrative. Luke makes these connections in order to serve thematic interests in the narrative. Stories that share parallel details generally serve the same theme in the overall structure of the narrative. At times these parallels can be applied to different stories, summaries, and other material in order to either to serve the same theme on a larger scale or to serve a related but slightly different theme.

Luke deals with the interactions between believers and magicians in three scenes throughout the narrative (Acts 8:4-25; 13:4-12; 19:1-20). Each scene highlights a specific aspect of the difference between true power from God and the power the magicians seek. Since Luke tends to rely on parallelism to convey messages in the narrative, the parallelism present in each individual scene does not surprise the reader. These scenes also serve together to present the appropriate response to true power from God by the believers. Because of this, the reader also expects parallelism between the three scenes
overall. If these parallels are to be complete, one must read the Ephesian disciples as the literary foils to the sons of Sceva. This allows the reader to see the parallels that function to convey the message about magic in Acts 19:1-20.
CHAPTER III
READING ACTS 19:1-20 AS A LITERARY UNIT

Acts 19:1-20 includes three short scenes about activities in Ephesus during Paul’s ministry there. Historically, these scenes have not been read together as one single literary unit. I maintain that these scenes are linked both structurally and thematically to form the final scene in the three-part contest with magic that we have observed in Acts. The parallelism that exists between the first scene, the Ephesian disciples (19:1-7), and the final scene, the sons of Sceva (19:11-20), relies upon numerology and comparisons achieved by structural-functional reversalism. When read together, these scenes provide the conclusion to the larger body of material in Acts concerning magic. These episodes show what it means for a believer to receive true power from God.


Numerology thrived in both the Jewish and Greco-Roman mind. Both pagan and Jewish sources thought of both seven and twelve as significant numbers in the universe.¹ As Parsons points out, the number seven occurs eighty-eight times within the New Testament. ¹

¹. Gellius (Noctes Atticae 3.10) quotes the Neo-Pythagorean Varro, who discusses how the number seven plays a significant role in astronomy, biology, medicine, legend, geography, etc. Philo (Creation 114-125) makes many of the same observations about the number. Jewish apocalyptic texts often employ variations on seven as a unit of time until the next eschatological event. This leads to the “weeks of years” language prominent in such documents (e.g., 4 Ezra 7:43; Dan 9:24-27; Jub 50:4). 4 Ezra 11-12 features a vision of an eagle with twelve wings, and, according to 14:11-12, the age is divided into twelve parts. In 2 Baruch 27, the time leading up to the coming of the messiah will be divided into twelve parts. Ancient writers saw the number twelve in the hours of the day and the months of the year and so extrapolated that such divisions would figure prominently in the cosmic order. For more on this and other numerical concerns of Jewish and early Christian apocalypticism, see Adela Yarbro Collins, “Numerical Symbolism in Jewish and Early Christian Apocalyptic Literature,” ANRW 21.2:1221-287.
Testament. The numbers seven and twelve figure prominently in both volumes of Luke’s work. First, let us examine the use of the number seven across both texts.

The Number Seven in Luke-Acts: Demons, Brothers, Deacons, and More

The repeated use of this number (see Table 3.1) could simply derive from the sources used by Luke and/or from actual details. Thus, Anna truly lived with her husband for seven years; Mary Magdalene had exactly seven demons; Peter suggested seven men for no meaningful reason shared in the text, and a certain Sceva had seven sons. This would certainly make sense in the cases where the detail does not seem likely to bear much significance (e.g., distance from Jerusalem, number of days spent in a place). Indeed in such mundane cases the interpreter would likely be making much of nothing if she attempted to read great significance into the number of days that characters were spending in each location.


4. It is possible, however, that a culture that views 7 as significant might round off numbers to 7s the way we tend to round off with 5s and 10s.
Table 3.1: Seven in Luke-Acts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luke 2:36</td>
<td>Anna lived with her husband seven years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 8:2</td>
<td>Mary Magdalene had seven demons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 11:26</td>
<td>Seven other demons take up residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 17:4</td>
<td>Brother sins against you seven times and you forgive seven times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 20:29, 31, 33</td>
<td>Seven brothers in Sadducee question about marriage in heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 24:13</td>
<td>Seven miles from Jerusalem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 6:3-7</td>
<td>Seven men selected to serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 13:19</td>
<td>God destroyed seven nations of Canaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 19:14</td>
<td>Seven sons of Sceva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 21:8</td>
<td>Philip, one of the Seven</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is, however, another possibility for cases where the detail seems to add nothing to the context unless it is symbolic. The number seven often symbolizes completeness or perfection.\(^5\) This explains the use of seven in situations where the exact number seems not to matter. In Luke 17:4, Jesus tells his listeners that they are to forgive even if someone sins against them and then asks for forgiveness seven times in one day. This does not mean that on the eighth repetition one could refuse forgiveness. Jesus uses the symbolic wholeness of the number seven to indicate that believers are to forgive as often as it is asked of them. Likewise, when the Sadducees question Jesus about marriage

---

\(^5\) See the extensive use in Revelation: seven churches (1:4), seven letters (chap. 5), seven seals (chaps. 5-8), seven trumpets (chaps. 8-11), seven cups and seven angels (chaps. 15-17). The seven baskets at the feeding of the 4,000 in Mark 8:8//Matt 15:7 symbolize the wholeness of the Gentile church. For more on this reading see François Bovon, “Names and Numbers in Early Christianity,” *NTS* 47 (2001): 284-85.
in the resurrection, they say there are seven brothers who end up marrying the same woman sequentially (Luke 20:27-33). The story and the question would have been the same had there been only two brothers, but the Sadducees employ a number emphasizing the completeness of the group, every single brother. This may be reading a bit too much into the number, but it is significant that the number for even exaggeration is seven and not some other relatively high number of brothers. The number takes on greater significance in other stories.

The story of Anna provides some interesting numerological information. The reader discovers that she lived with her husband for seven years before he died. Then, Luke informs the reader, “αὕτη χήρα ἐως ἑτῶν ὀγδοηκοντα τεσσάρων” (2:37). Generally, modern English translations render ἑως ἑτῶν ὀγδοηκοντα τεσσάρων as an indication of her current age. This reading confirms that she is an old woman as indicated in the text (αὕτη προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ἡμέραις πολλαῖς [2:36]), but of a reasonable age. Reasonable, that is, to the modern reader. If one reads this statement about 84 years as the duration of her widowhood, then her total age would likely surpass 100 years. It certainly seems fantastic to claim that a woman in the first century CE could reach an age over 100 years (assuming, conservatively, she was at least nine years old when she married). It does not, however, seem utterly impossible in the realm of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Luke crafts the beginning of his gospel following characteristics of stories from the Hebrew Bible. The angelic visitations and the desire of an aged couple to bear children transport the reader to familiar stories from sacred texts. Extreme old age

---

6. CEB: “84-year-old”; ESV: “until she was eighty-four”; NASB: “to the age of eighty-four”; NIV: “until she was eighty-four”; NRSV: “to the age of eighty-four.”
abounded in the stories of the Hebrew Bible. Thus, the likelihood of Anna’s age does not necessarily trump the symbolic meaning of her age, should she be over 100 years old. Taking this into consideration, one might render the description of Anna thus: “And there was a prophet, Anna, daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in many days. She lived with her husband seven years after her virginity, and she was a widow for eighty-four years” (2:36-37a).

If her age conveys symbolic meaning, could not the duration of her widowhood bear meaning as well? Eighty-four could be simply the number reported to Luke. It could bear no significance. It is worth noting, however, that eighty-four is seven multiplied by twelve. Thus, Anna’s time spent in widowhood is a combination of two highly symbolic numbers. Serrano takes this to mean that Anna’s marriage was perfect, but her widowhood (spent fasting and praying at the temple night and day [2:37b]) was perfect to an even greater degree. Luke employs both seven and twelve combined to convey an intensification of the significance of both numbers.

In Acts 6:1-7, the believers select seven men to serve as deacons at the request of The Twelve. Given the discussion up to this point of the importance of the number seven, one ought not to simply gloss over this detail in the story. For now, we ought simply to note that the use of seven in Acts 6 plays a role in a larger numerological framework in

---

7. The list of all those who reached 100+ years according to the Hebrew Bible is fairly long and unnecessary to reproduce here. Two important members of that list are Abraham and Sarah. Not only were Abraham and Sarah already well advanced in years (100 and 90, respectively [Gen. 17:17]) when they received the promise of a child, but Abraham and Sarah lived well over 100 years (175 and 127, respectively).


the works of Luke. We will further explore the specific meaning of the use of the number seven in 6:1-7 after we have discussed the significance of another important number: twelve.


Twelve also plays a significant role in Luke-Acts. Overwhelmingly, the number twelve refers to the disciples/apostles of Jesus, who symbolize the tribes of Israel. Elsewhere, the number refers to lengths of years, which one can read as indicating the completeness of the time (e.g., Jesus going to the temple) or signaling a comparison between two equal lengths of time (e.g., Jairus’s daughter and the woman with the issue of blood).

Of the seventeen instances of the number (see Table 3.2), eight refer to the apostles of Jesus. Three times Luke refers to the twelve tribes of Israel. In the case of the disciples of Jesus, Luke invites the reader to see connections between them and the tribes of Israel. The complete number matters a great deal as the narrative of Acts cannot move forward after the Ascension until Judas is replaced and the disciples number twelve again.\textsuperscript{10} For Luke, twelve comes to indicate the completeness of the body of believers, the Way in its wholeness.\textsuperscript{11} This remains true until the dissention among the Hebrews and Hellenists begins to threaten the unity of the group. At this point, another number indicating wholeness must be added to maintain the completeness of the Way.

\textsuperscript{10} Parsons, “Exegesis,” 41.

\textsuperscript{11} Parsons, “Exegesis,” 41.
**Table 3.2: Twelve in Luke-Acts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luke 2:42</td>
<td>Jesus was 12 years old when they went to Jerusalem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 6:13</td>
<td>Jesus called disciples together and chose 12 to be apostles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 8:1; 9:1, 12; 18:31; 22:3, 47</td>
<td>The Twelve (used as title without disciples/apostles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 8:42</td>
<td>Jairus’ daughter is 12 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 8:43</td>
<td>Woman has been bleeding for 12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 9:17</td>
<td>Twelve baskets of leftover food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 22:30</td>
<td>Disciples will judge the 12 tribes of Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 6:2</td>
<td>The Twelve (used as title without disciples/apostles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 7:8</td>
<td>Twelve tribes of Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 19:7</td>
<td>Twelve Ephesian disciples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 24:11</td>
<td>Paul went to the temple 12 days ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 26:7</td>
<td>Twelve tribes of Israel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Completion Put Another Way: the Twelve Create the Seven

Luke refers to the apostles as “the Twelve,” without any other identifier, six times throughout the narrative of the Gospel. In Acts, on the other hand, Luke refers to “the Twelve” only once. One would expect the number and frequency of references to decrease, since the narrative focuses on the activities other protagonists outside the circle of the Twelve. Nevertheless, the drop to a solitary reference is puzzling. The only reference to the Twelve in Acts accompanies the use of the number seven: the ordination of the deacons.
Luke sets up two groups to symbolize the wholeness of the Way: the Twelve, who represent the tribes of Israel, and the Seven, who represent the Gentiles.\(^{12}\) The number seven is often applied to the Gentiles in Jewish tradition.\(^{13}\) While the “Hellenists” of Acts 6 most likely consist of Jews from the Diaspora, the line between Hebrews and Hellenists sets the stage for the future tensions between Jews and Gentiles in the narrative of Acts.\(^{14}\) Thus, the Twelve maintain their status as the apostolic leaders of the Way, while the Seven enter the scene as representatives of the expansion of the Way into the Gentile world. Shortly after this scene, Stephen dies at the hands of the Jews after accusing them of persecuting the prophets, killing Jesus, and not keeping the law that they received (Acts 7:51-60). Philip will be the first to preach and baptize outside of Jerusalem, not to pure Gentiles, but those who are on the margins of the “true” Israel: Samaritans and a eunuch (8:4-40). Although Peter and John come down to Samaria in order that the new believers there might receive the Holy Spirit (8:14-17), they do not lead the mission away from Jerusalem toward the Gentile world. The Seven represent the completion of the Way by the addition of those outside the bounds of the people of Israel.

Luke employs these numbers in significant ways throughout the narratives of Luke and Acts. When the reader encounters these numbers in the text, she ought to reflect


\(^{13}\) This number is expanded to 70 for the shepherds (i.e. the rulers of the Gentiles) in 1 Enoch 83-90. The seven Noachide commandments were binding on the Gentiles according to ‘Abod. Zar. 8.4 and b. Sanh. 56ab. Also see the reference to the “seven peoples of futility” in 1QM 11.8-9. For more on these sources and their connection to the symbolism of the 7 baskets in Mark 8, see Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Hearing Mark: A Listener’s Guide* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 50-1; cf. Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, AB 27 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 488-9.

upon the possible symbolism conveyed by the numbers and assess whether or not the author is attempting to communicate through the numbers. While the significance of these numbers in Luke’s writing has been noted often, most scholars deny any symbolic meaning in these numbers in Acts 19:1-20.

**Acts 19:1-20 as a Literary Unit**

Johnson acknowledges certain striking details about the series of short scenes (e.g., the recurrence of the phrase τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ [19:5,13,17]), but he maintains that the three stories are not connected in any significant way except to fill a narrative gap until the next major event and to remind the reader of Paul’s authority.¹⁵ According to Witherington, the Apollos account and the Ephesian disciple account both serve to relate the Jesus movement to the Baptist movement.¹⁶ He does not see 19:1-7 as connected to the sons of Sceva. Fitzmeyer concedes that the first two stories share mention of the baptism of John, but he does not believe the two stories serve one thematic interest.¹⁷ For Fitzmeyer, the account of the Ephesian disciples stands alone without any particular thematic connection to surrounding material. I argue that the numbers seven and twelve provide the starting point for observing the connections between 19:1-7 and the subsequent account of the sons of Sceva.

**Modern Treatments of Twelve in Acts 19 vs. Acts 1**

Given the previous discussion of the symbolic importance of the numbers seven and twelve in Luke-Acts, we should pause to consider the significance of these two specific

---

numbers in Acts 19. Many scholars have dismissed the symbolic use of the number twelve for the Ephesian disciples (19:7), in part because Luke prefaces the number with ὡσεὶ. Others see it as a symbol of the disciples or of the tribes of Israel. Though Parsons’s call to take Christian numerology more seriously appeared earlier the same year as his commentary on Acts, he merely acknowledges that scholars debate whether or not the number twelve is significant in 19:7 without weighing in on the matter himself, and then makes no comment on the number seven in 19:14.

As discussed above, Luke employs the number twelve deliberately to convey a sense of the completeness of the Way. The ὡσεὶ does not necessarily rule out a symbolic meaning for the number. For instance, Parsons reads 120 (or 12 x 10) in Acts 1:15 as symbolic for the wholeness of the community. But there it is not simply 120 in the text but ὡς ἐκατὼν ἐκκοσι. Thus, the use of ὡς or ὡσεὶ by Luke does not negate the symbolic value of a number. The context of the beginning of Acts provides further details for reflection on the numbering of the Ephesian disciples.

At the opening of the narrative of Acts, the Twelve do not exist. Eleven disciples remain from the original group; however, the narrative cannot proceed until the Twelve

24. Parsons, “Exegesis,” 41; Acts, 32. Perhaps Luke employs this number here because the disciples have lost their completeness (being only eleven at the time). Thus, the community exhibits wholeness even before the official replacement of Judas among the disciples.
has been reconstituted. Following the ascension of Jesus (1:6-11), the believers gather and select a replacement for Judas (1:12-26) so that the Twelve might be complete again. Finally, “the stage is set for Pentecost.” The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (2:1-13) provides the impetus for the entire mission of spreading the Gospel that drives the narrative of Acts. That this passage immediately follows the selection of Matthias and the restoration of the Twelve is no mere accident. The Spirit does not come until the believers are prepared, until they are whole. That, in addition to the connection to the tribes of Israel, is the significance of the number twelve at the beginning of the narrative.

The use of the number twelve when applied to a group of people throughout the narratives of Luke-Acts has signified an important connection to the people of Israel and thus to the plan of God for God’s people. Up until Acts 19 Luke has reserved the number twelve for application to a group of Jesus’ apostles. The fact that he chooses to break this pattern ought to merit a closer reading. To appreciate fully the function of the number twelve in the Ephesian disciples scene, one must first understand its function as one piece of a larger comparison at work in the text. Specifically, Luke compares the Ephesian disciples and the sons of Sceva in Acts 19:1-20. Interpreters have not recognized this comparison, however, because they focus mainly on the connection between the Ephesian disciples and Apollos and because the two episodes are separated by a short scene describing Paul’s ministry in Ephesus. The next section will demonstrate how Luke

25. The best support for reading the replacement of Judas, aside from Peter’s citations from the Psalms, stems from the complete absence of Matthias (and most of the disciples) from the rest of the narrative. Certainly, the Twelve receive further attention and comprise a portion of the body of believers whenever mentioned in Acts concerning the Jerusalem church, but most remain unnamed for the remainder of the narrative.

connects these two stories and compares the Ephesian disciples and the sons of Sceva and why the intervening scene focusing on Paul was necessary to the narrative flow of the passage as a whole. Ultimately, the parallels in between the Ephesian disciples and the sons of Sceva serve to contrast appropriate and inappropriate responses to the Holy Spirit and the name of Jesus.

Six Criteria for Establishing Comparison

In his study of Luke’s comparison of Paul to the Apostles, Clark provides six criteria for establishing comparison in a text: sequence, theme, disruptions in the text, content, literary form, and literary context. Clark developed these categories from the work of Praeder, who distilled her own version of the criteria by surveying the assessment of parallels in Luke-Acts by Baur, Schneckenburger, Schwegler, Zeller, Bauer, Morgenthaler, Goulder, Talbert, Mattill, O’Toole, Radl, and Muhlack. By applying these six criteria to Acts 19:1-20, we can determine whether Luke intended a comparison between the Ephesian disciples and the sons of Sceva.

Sequence

Clark admits that the absence of strict sequential patterns does not disqualify a set of passages from consideration as a comparison. These two short scenes do not display a strict sequential parallelism. They do, however, share common features in their sequences. Both stories resolve with spiritual activity that leads to immediate response.

27. Andrew C. Clark, Parallel Lives: The Relation of Paul to the Apostles in the Lucan Perspective (Waynesboro: Paternoster Press, 2001), 75-77. For another study of synkrisis in Acts using this model, see Tripp, “A Tale of Two Riots,” 86-111 (esp. 90-99). I have changed the name of the criterion “structure” to “literary context.” As I will discuss below, Clark means the role of the passage in the overall structure of the narrative. The title literary context helps to differentiate this criterion from literary form.

28. Clark, Parallel Lives, 76.
from the subject group of the scene. As seen in Table 5, the two accounts share many of the same elements, but they do not appear in the same sequence. These two stories could represent traditions that came to Luke separately and that he then edited to form the comparison found in the final form. Thus, he may not have completely rearranged the details of the stories to line up with one another. Rather, he relied on more subtle details in the accounts to make the parallelism evident.

**Theme**

The two accounts focus on the interaction between these groups and the spiritual realm. Paul immediately questions whether the Ephesian disciples have received the Holy Spirit. The scene begins with this inquiry and resolves with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the men. Similarly, Luke introduces the itinerant Jewish exorcists who try to drive out evil spirits. This leads into the specific example of the sons of Sceva. Their scene culminates in the man “in whom was the evil spirit” (19:16) leaping upon the men. The spiritual response in both scenes revolves around the relationship of each group to the name of the Lord Jesus. The group that hears the preaching of Paul and submits themselves to the name of the Lord Jesus receives the Holy Spirit and is empowered by that Spirit. On the other hand, the group that hears Paul’s preaching and attempts to submit the name of the Lord Jesus to the group’s will is overpowered by an evil spirit.

**Disruptions in the Text**

For an author to make a comparison more evident, he/she deliberately inserts certain details into the story. These details do not necessarily fit perfectly with the base narrative, and so they create disruptions. That is, a close reader can tell that such details have been added artificially. At times, perhaps, the insertion of such disruptive details is deliberate.
The Number Twelve as Disruption: Massaging and Mimicking Markan Style

Consider Mark 5:21-43. Here, in one of his intercalations, Mark relates the story of the healing/raising\(^\text{29}\) of Jairus’s daughter and the healing of a woman with a flow of blood. Mark informs his readers that Jairus’s daughter is terribly ill (5:23) and then introduces a woman who has been bleeding for twelve years (5:25). After Jesus heals this woman, the news arrives that Jairus’s daughter has died (5:35). Jesus, however, goes on to heal/raise her (5:41-42), and then, precisely at the moment of the miraculous resolution of this narrative, Mark awkwardly adds that the girl is twelve years old (5:42).

The text reads: καὶ ἑυθὺς ἀνέστη τὸ κοράσιον καὶ περιπάτει, ἥν γὰρ ἔτων δώδεκα. What is the significance of γὰρ here? She did not get up and walk around because she was twelve. This statement hardly fits the context of the surrounding material. This is a clear example of a disruption in the text. When Luke retells the same account (Luke 8:40-56), he moves this detail to the beginning of the story to explain the sincerity and severity of Jairus’s request, “ὅτι θυγάτηρ μονογενῆς ἦν αὐτῷ ὡς ἔτων δώδεκα καὶ αὐτῇ ἀπέθνησκεν” (8:40). This reads much more smoothly, since the detail does not disrupt the action of the story. The Markan account, however, thrusts the detail forward to ensure the connection between the girl of twelve and the woman whose illness had lasted twelve years.\(^\text{30}\)

Luke displays the ability, then, to make smooth the rough place in a narrative. In Acts 19:6, Luke has finished the account of these Ephesian disciples; the Holy Spirit has come and the disciples have begun to speak in tongues and prophesy. Then, in 19:7, Luke

---

\(^{29}\) The nature of the miracle depends on how seriously one takes Jesus’s assertion that the child is merely sleeping (5:39).

tacks on this detail: ἦσαν δὲ οἱ πάντες ἰνδρεῖς ὅσεὶ δώδεκα, which, if not symbolic, adds nothing to the account. Once the account is completed, the audience expects the story to move on to the next scene, but Luke disrupts the flow with this detail. Not only does this contrast with his treatment of the Markan account of Jairus’s daughter but also with the report of the number of those who came to the Way on Pentecost. After Peter’s speech to the crowd, Luke tells of the success of that speech: οἱ μὲν οὖν ἀποδεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθησαν, καὶ προσετέθησαν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ψυχαὶ ὅσεὶ τρισχίλιαι (Acts 2:41). This flows much better than the report of the number of the Ephesian disciples. In fact, the account does not end with this detail in Acts 2. Luke goes on to say that these new believers “devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayers” (Acts 2:42).

The examples of Luke’s redaction of a Markan narrative and his account of the number of the converts at Pentecost show Luke’s ability to provide details like relevant numbers without disrupting his story. Luke’s redaction of Mark shows that, even if an awkward insertion of a detail can be attributed to source material, Luke felt no compunction about editing his sources to improve the flow of the narrative. Since the number does not add any significant information to the account and appears in the text as a disruption of the smooth narrative flow, we might well ask whether Luke inserted the detail purposefully to catch the reader’s attention.

31. Unlike the Pentecost account where the report of 3,000 new believers would serve as a shocking and compelling detail that would add legitimacy to the beginning of the movement and the persuasive power of Peter’s speech.
The Number Seven as Disruption: Counting the Naked, Wounded Men

Those who comment on the number of the sons of Sceva generally focus on the problem of reconciling the number seven (ἑπτά) with the use of ἀμφότερον in verse 16. Jackson and Lake tie this instance to the use of ἀμφότερος as “all” in papyri from as early as the second century. Notably, Pervo reads a minor significance to the number. The number serves to heighten the humiliation of the sons since there were seven of them and only one demon-possessed man, who proceeds to overpower them all.

Each of these options has merit but seem inconsistent with Luke’s treatment of numbers that we have seen thus far. First, Luke uses ἀμφότερος quite clearly and normally throughout both works (see Table 4). When Luke refers to two people or things, with two possible exceptions, he uses the term ἀμφότερος (see Table 3.3). The only exception other than the use in 19:16 concerns a discussion of the difference between the beliefs of the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Literally, the text reads: “For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection nor angel nor spirit, while the Pharisees confess both things” (Acts 23:8). This could be another example of the use of ἀμφότερος as “all” as Jackson

---

32. Thus the textual variants associated with the numbering of the sons in this passage. See Metzger, 417-8. The main suggestion to reconcile these seemingly disparate numbers is that there are separate accounts that use different numbers. See Bruce, Acts, 411. Torrey put forth an interpretation based upon a possible confusion of a well-attested form of the letter β, which bears a striking resemblance to occurrences of the letter ζ. He argues that the text originally spoke of only two sons, and it was later use of the shorthand numbers that led to the confusion. While possible, there is simply not enough hard evidence to found this claim, which is most probably why his hypothesis did not gain much traction among later interpreters. See Charles Torrey, “‘Two Sons’ in Acts 19:14,’” AThR 26 (1944): 253-5.

33. Jackson and Lake, Acts, 242. This would resolve the issue without resorting to source criticism and analyzing multiple traditions in the passage. However, since this would be the earliest example of that particular usage, one needs a stronger argument to find Jackson and Lake persuasive on this point. Don’t see Jackson and Lake on References page

34. Pervo, Acts, 164.
and Lake assert for the use in Acts 19:16. Another option, however, is that angel and spirit together constitute one category: spiritual beings. Thus, ἀμφότερος would refer to two concepts: resurrection and spiritual beings.

Table 3.3: ἀμφότερος in Luke-Acts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Referent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luke 1:6</td>
<td>Zechariah and Elizabeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 1:7</td>
<td>Zechariah and Elizabeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 5:7</td>
<td>Two boats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 6:39</td>
<td>Two blind men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 7:42</td>
<td>Two debtors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 8:38</td>
<td>Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 19:16</td>
<td>Seven sons of Sceva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 23:8</td>
<td>Resurrection, angels, and spirit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The LSJ lists only two examples for ἀμφότερος as “all”: Acts 19:16 and P.Lond. 2.336.13.35 P.Lond. 2.336.13 is a loan contract “by one person to five others (two of whom are priests of Socnopaeus).”36 However, the note in this particular line claims that five is a natural number for the priests of Socnopaeus, citing P.Lond. 2.335. This document mentions the ἡγούμενοι πενταφιλίας Σοκνοπαίον,37 which the editor offers as reason for taking the five men as priests instead of just the two preceding ἀμφότεροι.38 The editor fails to mention in the note on P.Lond. 2.336 that P.Lond. 2.335 refers to the

35. LSJ, 95.
37. A note on this papyrus suggests that ἡγούμενοι was used interchangeably with ἱερεῖς. Kenyon, *Greek Papyri*, 191.
group of priests representing the temple of Socnopaeus as *six* men.\textsuperscript{39} Additionally, Kenyon cites Bury’s article\textsuperscript{40} dealing with the use of the word in later Greek as evidence for the claim: “ἀμφότεροι=πάντες in late Byzantine Greek.”\textsuperscript{41} Unfortunately for Kenyon’s argument, Bury’s article criticizes this view, goes through the argument of Reiske,\textsuperscript{42} and refutes every claim he makes that ἀμφότεροι was used in this way. Bury does acknowledge that he believes the use of ἀμφότεροι for πάντες does occur in one tenth-century work of poetry, *Digenês Akritas*.\textsuperscript{43} Thus, the argument that Luke would employ ἀμφότερος to mean “all” would require that Luke be about nine centuries ahead of his time.

As we have seen, Luke edits sources for clarity and narrative flow and employs numbers (especially twelve and seven) deliberately, so using the multiple source theory to explain the discrepancy between the numbers does not seem as likely. A reading that assumes no discrepancy between the numbers would require much more incontrovertible evidence of such usage the word ἀμφότεροι before the late Byzantine period. The most likely option, then, is that Luke inserted the number seven, disrupting the text, to draw a comparison between the Ephesian disciples and the sons of Sceva.

\textsuperscript{39} Kenyon, *Greek Papyri*, 191.

\textsuperscript{40} J. B. Bury, “ἀμφότεροι in Later Greek,” *Classical Review* 11 (1897): 393-5.

\textsuperscript{41} Kenyon, *Greek Papyri*, 221.


\textsuperscript{43} Bury, “ἀμφότεροι,” 395.
The Twelve and the Seven: Representing Ethnic Tension

The only other place in Luke-Acts where Luke sets twelve and seven opposite one another is in the selection of the seven deacons. As we have seen in Table 2, Luke refers to the apostles as “the Twelve” six times in the Gospel but only once in Acts. One should also note that Luke employs the title the Seven for the group of deacons once in the narrative of Acts as well (21:8). In Acts 6, as previously discussed, the Twelve represent Israel and the Seven represent the Gentile world. What, then, is the significance of the numbers in Acts 19?

Both groups exhibit connection to Jewish authority. Someone baptized the Ephesian disciples with the baptism of John (19:3). Although Luke does not bother to tell us who exactly baptized these men, due to the proximity of the accounts, some maintain that Apollos baptized these men.⁴⁴ Hedlun argues for a Gentile identification based on his reading of the legitimation program he traces throughout the text, and he suggests that Apollos was their teacher and baptizer.⁴⁵ Essentially, he argues that Apollos, in an attempt to maintain some of the purity boundaries connected with his Jewish identity, did not teach baptism other than that of John, so that the Gentile believers would not have access to the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶ Few scholars agree with Hedlun’s assessment of the content.

---


⁴⁶ Hedlun, *Glossolalia*, 135-41; “New Reading,” 44: “Another indicator of a purity conflict catalyst behind Luke’s narration of this event is the designation of Apollos as a Ἰουδαῖος (Judean). Luke’s detailed attention to labelling individuals and groups within his narrative strongly suggests that Apollos is labeled a Judean intentionally to characterize his role in the account. The Judean label conditions readers to expect a Judean orientation of Apollos’ worldview, including his purity map biases. The demonstrated emphasis on purity conflict as a key issue of Luke’s legitimating program leads us to expect that a character labeled Judean will exhibit Israelite purity orientations and social boundary biases.”
of Apollos’s teaching, but more accept the idea that Apollos was the teacher of the
Ephesian disciples.⁴⁷ Hedlun’s argument hinges on the association of glossolalia with
Gentile conversion and the emphasis on Apollos’s Jewish identification.⁴⁸

Since Luke only mentions glossolalia at Pentecost (Acts 2:4), at the conversion of
Cornelius’s household (10:46), and with the correction of the Ephesian disciples (19:6),
Hedlun argues that for Luke glossolalia is the purity marker that legitimates the Gentile
converts. After Acts 2, Luke mentions no glossolalia in the cases when a circumcised
person (or persons) joins the Way (e.g., the Samaritans [8:11], Paul [9:18]).

Hedlun also argues that the stress on Apollos’s identification as Jewish sets up the
identification of the Ephesian disciples as Gentiles by contrast.⁴⁹ The reader assumes that
the subsequent group whose ethnicity remains unspecified in the text would not be
members of this same stressed group as Apollos, whose ethnicity Luke emphasized in
18:24.

Hedlun’s argument, while intriguing, leaves some questions unanswered. How
does the stress of one individual’s identity necessarily guide the reader to assume
anything about the identity of a subsequent group in the text? While I lean toward
Hedlun’s conclusion that the Ephesian disciples were gentiles, in my opinion, Luke
implies their ethnicity not so much in contrast with Apollos as in terms of the dichotomy
between the twelve Ephesian disciples and the seven sons of Sceva. But here we
encounter a structural-functional reversal of the significance of the numbers twelve and


⁴⁸ Hedlun, Glossolalia, 118-26.

⁴⁹ Hedlun, “New Reading,” 44.
seven as markers of ethnic identity, a point discussed below under the criterion of Literary Context.

Hedlun’s assertion that the emphasis on Apollos’s Judean identification contrasts with the lack of specific identification certainly has merit but feels incomplete. The reader encounters this strong Judean identification and then moves on the Ephesian men. Stopping with the Ephesian disciples leaves Hedlun’s assertion weak. Soon enough, however, the reader encounters another strong connection to Jewish identity: the sons of Sceva. Luke describes a larger group of which the sons of Sceva form a part. He describes some travelling Jewish exorcists (τῶν περιερχομένων Ἰουδαίων ἐξορκιστῶν [19:13]). He then describes a particular subset of this group: τινος Σκευᾶ Ἰουδαίου ἀρχιερέως ἑπτὰ υἱοί. Not only are these men Jewish, but they are the sons of a Jewish chief priest.

Some scholars have attempted to read some other significance into the title ἀρχιερεύς, either because there is no Sceva listed among the high priests of the time\(^{50}\) or because the title could have been a marketing ploy on the part of the exorcists (playing on the mystique surrounding the knowledge of Jewish priests).\(^ {51}\) While historically interesting, these readings miss the literary function of this characterization. As discussed in Chapter 1, the magicians whom the believers encounter are connected to Judaism. Not only does Luke connect the magicians with Judaism, but he does so in increasing degrees. Simon, the first magician, is a Samaritan, so his connection to Judaism is marginalized, even though the Samaritans worshipped the same God as the Jews. Bar-Jesus/Elymas is

\(^ {50}\) Bock, _Acts_, 604; Oster, _Acts_, 93; Johnson, _Acts_, 340; Kistemaker, _Exposition_, 688.

\(^ {51}\) Jackson and Lake, _Acts_, 241; Bock, _Acts_, 604; Bruce, _Acts_, 411; Witherington, _Acts_, 581; Marshall, _Acts_, 311.
depicted as a Jew, and he has marketed himself as a prophet (13:6).\textsuperscript{52} And in the third scene in the three-part contest with magic, the connection to Judaism has grown even stronger involving the sons of a chief priest. So within the narrative structure of Acts, the seductive power of magic appeared first on the margins of Judaism, then in the mainstream, and now has infiltrated the priesthood.

Thus, the designation of these men as sons of a Jewish ἀρχιερεύς serves to emphasize their connection to Judaism. Taking both Apollos and the sons of Sceva into account, the Ephesian disciples with their imperfect understanding of Jesus appear in the text between two stories about Jewish followers who have imperfect understanding. In the immediate context it seems strange that Luke provides no information whatsoever about the ethnicity of the Ephesian disciples. It is possible, however, that in the absence of any Jewish identification, Luke expects the reader to assume that they were Gentiles. The absence of clearer identification surprises the reader not only in the immediate context but also when one considers Luke’s general pattern for Paul’s ministry in a new city.

Paul meets these men upon arriving in Ephesus, but not in the synagogue. Up to this point, Paul’s standard procedure on his journeys was to find the local synagogue and begin to preach the word of the Lord there.\textsuperscript{53} Twice before he encounters the disciples in Ephesus, Paul meets people before going to the synagogue. In Lystra, he meets μαθητής τις ἦν ἐκεῖ ὀνόματι Τιμόθεος, υἱὸς γυναικὸς Ἰουδαίας πιστῆς, πατρὸς δὲ Ἕλληνος (16:1), and in Corinth he meets τινα Ἰουδαίον ὀνόματι Ἀκύλαν (18:2). In both accounts the

\textsuperscript{52} Hence Luke’s description of him as a ἰταμοπροφήτης.

\textsuperscript{53} Acts 9:20; 13:5, 14; 14:1; 16:13 (here a “place of prayer”); 17:2, 10, 17; 18:4, 19.
ethnic identity of the character features prominently in his characterization. Aquila is a Jew, and Timothy is of mixed ethnicity. Luke reminds the reader of the tension between Jews and Greeks by immediately relating Timothy’s circumcision, which is presented as an attempt by Paul to avoid conflict with the Jews (16:3). The third time Paul breaks the pattern, Luke gives no indication of the ethnicity of the group Paul meets before entering the synagogue. Perhaps Luke expects the audience to draw a conclusion based on the subsequent details: the lack of the Holy Spirit after believing and glossolalia after receiving the Spirit.

These disruptions in Luke’s general pattern for Paul’s ministry and the awkward insertion of the numbers into the text prepare the reader to see further details drawing comparison between the Ephesian disciples and the sons of Sceva. This criterion alone certainly does not prove deliberate parallelism. Rather, these details that disrupt the expected pattern and the narrative flow invite the reader to examine the structure more closely to understand what Luke conveys.

**Content**

Another criterion for recognizing parallels according to Clark is content. Clark argues that “similarity in language in terms of lexical repetitions or synonyms is an important criterion.” The phrase τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ occurs in each scene. Likewise, the use of the word πνεῦμα in reference to the Holy Spirit and evil spirit(s) links the content of the scenes. The language involving hands and their function in miraculous deeds also links the passages. Both scenes refer to spirits coming upon characters (19:6, 16). The

two scenes employ different verbs (ἦλθε [19:6] and ἐφαλόμενος [19:16]), but both describe the action as ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ.

The Evil Spirit and the Spirit of the Lord

Johnson points out that ἐφάλλομαι occurs only here in Luke’s writings and only three times in the Septuagint: 1 Sam 10:6; 11:6; 16:13.55 These uses all apply to the Spirit of the Lord. In 10:6, Samuel tells Saul, “ἐφαλεῖται ἐπὶ σε πνεῦμα κυρίου.” The result of this, Samuel claims, will be that Saul will prophesy (10:6). In 11:6, ἐφήλατο πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπὶ Σαούλ when Saul hears the words of messengers. He proceeds to send a strong message to the people of Israel to rouse them to battle by slaughtering cows and sending out the pieces (11:7). In 16:13, the narrator informs the reader that ἐφήλατο πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπὶ Δαυίδ from the time of his anointing forward. The first of these uses of ἐφάλλομαι is of special interest for the discussion of the usage in Acts 19:16.

In 1 Sam 10:6, Samuel makes a clear connection between the Spirit of the Lord and prophecy. In the context, Samuel mentions only one result of the Spirit’s coming—Saul will prophesy. Johnson, commenting on the use of ἐφάλλομαι in Acts 19:16, simply says that “[t]he irony involved in the choice of verbs should be obvious.”56 Johnson seems to be referring to the use of a verb reserved in the LXX for the Spirit of the Lord in a context describing the actions of a man possessed by an evil spirit. This, however, constitutes only a portion of the irony involved in Luke’s word choice. If Luke drew his vocabulary from 1 Sam 10:6, then the connection of the coming of the Spirit to prophecy has a parallel in the Ephesian disciples account. When the Spirit comes upon them, the


immediate result is speaking in tongues and *prophesying* (19:6). Thus, the irony in the sons of Sceva scene rests not only in the contrast between the evil spirit and the Spirit of the Lord that the verb choice implies, but also in the result of the activity of that spirit. The “leaping” of this spirit does not bring about any prophecy. The coming of the Holy Spirit does.

**Literary Form**

In terms of technical literary form, the two scenes do not share many features. Some have seen a chiastic structure to the Ephesian disciples scene.⁵⁷ Neither Parsons nor Talbert comments on the significance of this structure for the interpretation of the passage. The sons of Sceva scene is generally regarded as a popular story that Luke incorporated into his work for its humorous qualities.⁵⁸ Given that Acts 19:13-16 most likely represents a previously constructed story, the two scenes do not conform to one single literary style. Rather, the formal elements that tie these scenes together are those elements that constitute a structural-functional reversalism between the two accounts.

Not only does Luke set this twelve-seven pair up against the previous pair in Acts 6, but he also sets the twelve against the seven through a series of parallels and reversals (see Table 3.4). The numbers, as we have seen, serve as the most obvious marker to the

---

⁵⁷. The structure generally argued is:

```
“A Paul finds ‘some’ disciples
B Question and answer regarding Holy Spirit
C Question and answer regarding baptism
D Paul teaches about John’s baptism and John’s relationship to Jesus
C’ Disciples are baptized into Jesus’ name
B’ Disciples receive Holy Spirit and concomitant gifts
A’ There are twelve disciples” (Parsons, *Acts*, 265).
```

Talbert (Reading, 167) supports a slightly different chiastic structure.

reader to look for connections between these two groups. In Chapter 1, we saw that Luke connects the magicians in the text to Jewish authority. Here, if both stories comprise together the final word in the three-part contest with magic, the twelve disciples’ connection to John as a Jewish authority helps to fit them into the framework as the literary foils of magicians. The two groups also differ primarily in their interactions with the spiritual realm.

Table 3.4: Parallels and Reversals between the Ephesian Disciples and the Sons of Sceva

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ephesian Disciples</th>
<th>Sons of Sceva</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of the group</td>
<td>ἥσαν δὲ ὁι πάντες ἁνδρεῖς ὑσεὶ δοθέκα (19:7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to Jewish authority</td>
<td>εἰς τὸ Ἰοάννου βάπτισμα (19:3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on spiritual realm</td>
<td>πνεῦμα ἁγιον 3x (19:2 [2x], 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and the spiritual realm</td>
<td>ἀλλα ὁυδεὶς ἐπὶ πνεῦμα ἁγιον ἑστὶν ἢκούσαμεν (19:2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of hands</td>
<td>ἐπιθέντος αὐτῶν τοῦ Παύλου χεῖρας (19:6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to Paul’s preaching</td>
<td>ἀκούσαντες (19:5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to belief in Paul’s preaching</td>
<td>ἐβαπτίσθησαν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (19:5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual response to the situation</td>
<td>ἠλθε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἁγιον ἐπ恁 αὐτῶς (19:6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences of the spiritual response</td>
<td>ἐλάλουν τε γλώσσασι καὶ ἐπροφήτησαν (19:6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

59. The Sons of Sceva and the other Jewish exorcists mentioned certainly miss the point of Paul’s preaching, but they do believe in the power of the name of Jesus. Thus, I render their activities as a response to belief in the preaching of Paul, albeit a misguided belief.
We have also noted an emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the previous two scenes concerning magic. In Acts 19, there is no mention of the Holy Spirit after 19:6 until 19:21, after the conclusion of the episode dealing with magic. This would break the pattern Luke has been using in dealing with magic in the narrative. If, however, one takes 19:1-7 as part of the episode, then one can see that Luke has balanced the two scenes by referencing the Holy Spirit three times in the Ephesian disciple scene and evil spirit(s) three times in the sons of Sceva scene. I have excluded the reference to evil spirits in 19:12 because this occurs in the intervening scene about Paul and so does not affect the balance between the two scenes on either side.

The knowledge, or lack thereof, of certain characters plays an important role in both scenes. The Ephesian disciples lack knowledge of the Spirit (and so they lack the Spirit) because they “have not heard that there is a Holy Spirit” (19:2). This answer given by the men to Paul’s question about their reception of the Holy Spirit leads to the subsequent question, preaching, and baptism by Paul that ultimately leads to the Spirit’s coming upon the men. In the sons of Sceva scene, it is the evil spirit’s knowledge that plays a key role. When the sons attempt to exorcise the spirit “by Jesus whom Paul preaches” (19:13), the spirit responds, “Jesus I know and with Paul I am acquainted, but you—who are you?” (19:15). After expressing this lack of knowledge, the man with the evil spirit in him attacks the seven sons.
Contrasting Actions: Switching from Initiator to Responder and Vice Versa

The two groups are opposed in their action throughout the two scenes as well. The twelve disciples remain passive (except when engaging in dialogue) until the Holy Spirit acts. They listen while Paul speaks, they are baptized, Paul lays his hands upon them, and the Holy Spirit comes upon them (19:5-6a). At this point, they become active participants, speaking in tongues and prophesying (19:6b). The sons of Sceva, on the other hand, begin as initiators of action and remain so until the evil spirit acts. They place their hands on people, they name the name of Jesus, and they speak (as opposed to the listening of the disciples) (19:13-14). When the evil spirit acts, they become reactionary. The man with the evil spirit masters and overpowers them (19:16a). Then they flee, naked and wounded (19:16b). Their action is a direct result of the spirit’s action through its host. Even the descriptions of them fleeing imply action on the spirit’s part. Being naked implies someone removing their clothing, and being wounded implies someone harming them. Thus, Luke contrasts the actions of the two groups and the effects of the spiritual influences on both.

The two groups also exhibit a different relationship to “the name of the Lord Jesus” (19:6, 13). The disciples hear Paul’s preaching and respond by submitting themselves to the name of the Lord Jesus in baptism. The sons of Sceva hear Paul’s preaching and attempt to employ the name of Jesus to cause spirits to submit to their

60. Even in the dialogue, however, the activities Paul and the men discuss are passive. Paul asks, “Did you receive?” The men respond, “We have not heard.” Paul asks, “Into what were you baptized?” Receiving implies someone giving, hearing implies someone speaking, and being baptized implies someone baptizing. While the men actively speak in the dialogue, the discussion concerns their passive participation in events.

61. Either this, or they at least heard enough about the preaching to know that Jesus played an important and powerful role in miraculous deeds.
will. The name of the Lord Jesus prepares the way for the Spirit to come upon the disciples. The name of the Lord Jesus cannot be applied by those who do not believe and have not been baptized into it to affect the spiritual world.

**Literary Context**

Clark considers literary context in his set of criteria, but under the name structure. By structure, Clark refers to the role the text plays in its literary context and in the structure of the narrative overall. One must examine the connection of the parallel scenes to their immediate context and their connection to other material throughout the narrative. At this point, we must revisit the question of the numbers in the two scenes and their significance when compared to the role of the pairing of those numbers in the narrative up to this point.

*The Twelves and the Sevens: Another Case of Structural-Functional Reversalism*

Regardless of the ethnicity of the disciples, the insertion of the number at the end of the scene signals the reader to look for a symbolic meaning. As we have seen, the only other pair of twelve and seven in the text represented Israel and the Gentiles (or at least a trajectory leading toward the Gentile world). I propose that the use of the numbers in Acts 19 represents another instance of structural-functional reversalism (discussed in the previous chapter). Thus, the second seven-twelve pair would symbolize the same categories, only reversed. The twelve Ephesian disciples, if understood as Gentiles, symbolically represent the wholeness of the Gentile believers, the completion of their inclusion. The seven sons of Sceva, on the other hand, represent the wholeness of

---

corrupted Judaism. The switching of the numbers, then, serves to emphasize this point. The Gentiles have taken on the number of Israel; they have come into the people of God. The pseudo-Jewish magicians have gone fully over to the pagan world; they have traded their identity as the people of God for association with the Gentile world.

The symbolism of the number seven for the sons of Sceva stands whether or not one agrees that the Ephesian disciples are Gentiles. The number twelve would then represent the completion of the identity of these men as members of the people of God by their acceptance of baptism in the name of Jesus and their reception of the Holy Spirit. This helps to explain Luke’s choice to insert the number of the men at the end of the episode. The men first receive the Holy Spirit, and then they truly number among the Way. Thus, they were twelve; they were whole. They were now a part of the Way, a part of the people of Israel. What they lacked was not specified as circumcision or ethnicity. What they lacked was the Holy Spirit. Other Jews, like the magicians throughout the narrative, find themselves moving outside of the bounds of the true Israel, despite having the proper ethnic identity.

This constitutes the first piece of the structural-functional reversalism between the twelve apostles/seven deacons and the twelve disciples/seven sons. The twelve apostles completed their number before they received the Holy Spirit. The twelve Ephesian disciples first receive the Holy Spirit, and then their number is revealed to be twelve.

63. It is important to note here that I am not arguing that Luke sees all of Judaism as corrupt. The three scenes dealing with magic have specifically dealt with characters who both practice magic and have some tie to the Jewish religion. Thus, it is this section of the Jewish population being symbolized, not Israel as a whole. The apostles and Paul, the main heroes of the story, still maintain many Jewish customs and observances and receive no criticism from the author for doing so.
The second reversal concerns the identities of the groups of seven. The seven deacons come from the population called Hellenists in the text. As discussed above, this early division among the believers foreshadows future tension between the Jews and the Gentiles. Thus, the seven deacons represent the movement toward the Gentile world. Their names reflect this identity since they all bear Greek names. The seven sons, on the other hand, represent Jewish identity as the sons of a Jewish high priest. Luke does not supply their names, but he does give the name of the father, Σκευᾶ. This name does not match the ethnicity given as it appears to be a Greek version of a Latin name. Perhaps this name symbolizes the movement away from the true Israel. Though he is a high priest, his actions have led him away from his identity as a member of the people of God.

Another, preferable option is that the name signals a true identity, a man named Σκευᾶ, who has taken on a false identity, Jewish chief priest, in an attempt to appropriate the power and mystique associated with religious authority. This would also help make sense of the double-named Bar-Jesus/Elymas. Perhaps Elymas is the true identity of the man and he takes on the name Bar-Jesus when he takes on the identity of the Jewish prophet. These men, who attempt to appropriate the power of God, begin doing so with the Jewish structures already in place. Once the believers begin working miracles through the Holy Spirit and the name of Jesus, the magicians see yet another opportunity to exploit a source of power for their own gain. Simon, Bar-Jesus/Elymas, and the sons of Sceva have been misappropriating the Jewish faith for their magical practices and attempt to do with the Jesus movement as it gains popularity. These men, then, do not represent Judaism but an approach to religion that views its power as available for use in magical practices for personal gain. This understanding of the identity of the sons of Sceva and
their relationship to Judaism highlights the difference between the approaches to divine power exhibited by the magicians and the believers in the text.

Finally, in Acts 6:6, the Twelve lay hands on the Seven (ἐπέθηκαν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας). In Acts 19, the Twelve receive the laying on of hands by Paul (ἐπιθέντος αὐτοῖς τοῦ Παύλου χεῖρας [19:6]) while the Seven put their hands on others (ἐπεχείρησαν [19:13]). We have seen Luke use the activity and passivity of characters and the switching of those roles in constructing a comparison between the Ephesian disciples and the sons of Sceva. Here, he switches the activity/passivity dynamic between two groups of twelve and seven.

Luke reimagines the events of Acts 6 in a different context. By doing so, he draws the reader’s attention to the two groups in Acts 19:1-20. Whereas the first pair of the Twelve and the Seven represented tensions in the Way that were ultimately resolved, the new pair he introduces represents the tension between two approaches to the name of Jesus and the spiritual realm that cannot be resolved. Paul connects both groups to the name of the Lord Jesus and the spiritual realm. Both groups hear Paul preach about Jesus, and Paul, a man the reader knows to be filled with the Holy Spirit, drives out many evil spirits. Paul also provides further connection between the two groups: time.

---

64. While Luke does not specifically say that the Hellenists widows were no longer neglected, he does not bring up the issue again. The reader can assume, then, that Luke considers the matter closed.

65. The disciples/sons pairing represents this much at least. If one accepts the argument that the Ephesian disciples are Gentiles, then the pairing in Acts 19 represents the continuing tensions between the Jewish believers and the Gentiles.
A Pauline Interlude: Providing Necessary Elapsed Time

A scene depicting Paul’s work in Ephesus stands in between the two parallel scenes. Generally, the three scenes are delineated as the Ephesian disciples scene (19:1-7), Paul’s ministry in Ephesus (19:8-10), and the conquest over magic in the city (19:11-20). I propose, instead, reading all of the material that focuses on Paul’s ministry, both preaching and miracles, as one coherent unit. I delineate the scenes as the Ephesian disciples scene (19:1-7), Paul’s ministry in Ephesus (19:8-12), and the sons of Sceva scene (19:13-16). The remaining material (19:17-20) constitutes the resolution to the theme set up by all three scenes taken together.

If Acts 19:8-12 did not intervene between the two other scenes, others might have more readily seen the parallels between the disciples and the sons of Sceva. As it stands, the intervening scene shares similar content and thematic interest with the surrounding scenes. Luke describes the miracles God performs in Ephesus as taking place διὰ τῶν χειρῶν Παύλου, so the connection with the hands of key players carries through the intervening scene. Like the surrounding scenes, the scene dealing with Paul’s ministry reaches its resolution with activity of spirits (τα τε πνεύματα τα πονηρά ἐκπορεύεσθαι [19:12]). These details alone, however, do not explain the need for the intervening material to appear where it does.

If Luke received an account of Paul finding the Ephesian disciples upon arrival in Ephesus, then he could recount that episode before Paul begins his ministry in earnest. To keep the two stories joined, however, would require the sons of Sceva to have knowledge

---

66. Johnson, *Acts*, 342; Parsons (*Acts*, 258) applies a similar structuring except he extends the beginning of the first scene back to 18:24, calling it “Apollos and certain disciples.” This also explains the paragraph breaks in the NRSV.
of Paul’s preaching and miraculous deeds before he actually did either of those things in Ephesus that the narrative describes. If Luke had relocated the story of the Ephesian disciples to after the account of Paul’s ministry in order to make it adjacent to the sons of Sceva narrative, then their ignorance of the Holy Spirit and lack of baptism in the name of Jesus would make no sense in the aftermath of Paul’s preaching in the area. The intervening episode allows the two accounts to stand in close proximity without the reader questioning why the disciples had not heard of the Spirit or been baptized in the name of Jesus. It also allows the appropriate time for word of Paul’s preaching and the miraculous power of the name of Jesus to spread throughout the area. The narrative account of the passage of time and the success of Paul’s ministry in the area are necessary to allow for the existence of these two groups in Ephesus.

In addition to the temporal role of the intervening material, Acts 19:8-12 could be the third panel in an A//B//C construction. All three scenes (19:1-7, 8-12, 13-16) deal with the use of hands and the interaction of human beings with the spiritual world. Paul, as one who has already received the Holy Spirit and submitted himself to the name of Jesus (Acts 9:17-18), demonstrates the proper use of the power that comes from the name and the Spirit. The other two scenes, the Ephesian disciples and the sons of Sceva, demonstrate the proper and improper ways to approach the reception of that same power. The material that follows these three scenes in Acts 19 is not simply a conclusion to the material in the immediate context, but to the entire contest with magic in Acts.

_A Victorious Summary: The Final Defeat of Magic_

The summary section (19:17-20) contains the resolution not only of the series of scenes in Ephesus but also of the series of encounters with magicians throughout the narrative.
The burning of the magical documents constitutes the final blow to magic in Acts. The summary begins with τοῦτο δὲ ἐγένετο γνωστὸν πᾶσιν (19:17). Many commentators read τοῦτο as referring back to the incident with the sons of Sceva. Grammatically, this reading makes perfect sense. It seems strange, however, that the failure of some exorcists to drive out a demon by naming the name of the Lord Jesus over them would be cause to praise the name of the Lord Jesus. Parsons argues that the failure of the sons of Sceva makes Paul’s accomplishments appear even greater. Assuming that the people in the area know about Paul’s success does not require any great leap of the imagination, so this reading is distinctly plausible.

The issue with this reading lies in the absence of any mention of the name of the Lord Jesus in Paul’s miraculous ministry. Luke claims that God performed many miracles through the hands of Paul, but he gives no specific examples of anything Paul directly did. Instead, he offers examples of miracles that took place through objects that touched Paul (19:12). The only function that the name of the Lord Jesus has in the context before the sons of Sceva episode is at the baptism of the Ephesian disciples. Since this leads to immediate action in the spiritual world (i.e., the coming of the Holy Spirit), the sons of Sceva could assume that the name of the Lord Jesus has direct power over the spiritual realm (i.e., driving out evil spirits). Thus, they attempt to use the power of the name for their own benefit and to improve their business.


68. Parsons, Acts, 271.
Conclusion

The Ephesian disciples, likely a group of Gentile believers, represent the appropriate response to the power of the name of Jesus and to the Holy Spirit. The text describes them as attentive and submissive. They believe Paul’s preaching about Jesus and do what is required of those who believe in him (Acts 2:38). Because of this, they receive the Holy Spirit, perform miracles of their own (speaking in tongues and prophesying), and become completely incorporated into the Way. They become whole; they are twelve.

The sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, represent the inappropriate response to the power of the name of Jesus and to the Holy Spirit. They hear enough of Paul’s preaching to appropriate the name of Jesus as a powerful being, but they do not truly listen to the message. Instead of submitting themselves to the name, they try to submit it to their own use. Because of this, not only do they lack the Holy Spirit, but they also have no authority over evil spirits.

When the consequences of these two responses to the gospel become known to everyone in the area, the people who have been relying on magic realize that they cannot manipulate the power associated with the Way. They burn their materials and confess their practices. Thus ends the reign of magic in Acts. Luke shows that the Holy Spirit overpowers evil spirits and that the name of the Lord Jesus cannot be used as a magician’s tool. God reserves the Spirit for those who submit themselves to the name of the Lord Jesus. This is true power.
CONCLUSION

Acts 19:1-20 serves as the conclusion to Luke’s treatment of magic in Acts. His view of magic is more than just a negative attitude toward miraculous feats accomplished by the help of a power other than God. Rather, Luke considers magic to be a misunderstanding of the way in which a human being ought to receive power from the divine. Luke uses the scenes involving believers and magicians to show that the believers approach God in a fundamentally different way by submitting themselves to the power of the Spirit and the name of Jesus. The magicians attempt to appropriate these sources of power, but fail to do so because they rely on a different system of interaction with divine power.

Luke’s deliberate parallelism between the Ephesian disciples and the sons of Sceva serves to highlight the difference in these approaches to divine power. If one does not read the Ephesian disciples as literary foils for the sons of Sceva, one does not see the full meaning intended in the passage. Luke is not concerned with showing Paul as powerful and victorious again in the story. Rather, he expands the view of the theme of magic to include all believers. It is not only the leaders who receive power from their belief in and submission to God, but all believers. In this way, the theme of magic relates to the larger theme in Luke of the believers living in a way that contradicts the world’s understanding of power.
Magic as a Power Structure

Rowe has surveyed the narrative of Acts as demonstrating a “new cultural reality.”¹ He expands on this idea, claiming that Luke narrates “the construction of an alternative total way of life—a comprehensive pattern of being.”² Essentially, Luke describes a community operating within the rules of a new world. Rowe participates in a tradition of reading the counter-cultural themes woven into the fabric of Acts. As Thomas states,

In Luke's narrative we read that both civil and religious authorities have in their arsenal of enforcement, destructive weapons of pain and imprisonment such as swords, spears, chains, whips, prisons, stones, and, in certain situations, fists; these instruments of power guarantee their continued rule and enforce their authority. By contrast, Luke describes the divine powers unleashed by God to save humanity and assert his supreme authority: transforming fire from heaven, dramatic healings, exorcisms, an earthquake (which harms no one), angelic apparitions, and Christophanies.³

This contrast between the powers upon which people rely drives Thomas’s reading of the “overturnings” throughout Acts.⁴ These “overturnings” show the new way of life that the members of the Way espouse, surviving and thriving in the face of opposition from the former power structures.

---

2. Rowe, World Upside Down, 4.
4. Thomas, “World Turned Upside-Down,” 456: “In order to facilitate the analysis of the structure and meaning of Acts, I have chosen six events in which I perceive a satiric tone and/or the techniques of carnival:
   1. Mocking the Sanhédrin (eh. 5)
   2. Reversing Saul of Tarsus (ch. 9)
   3. Inverting Cornelius the Centurion (ch. 10)
   4. The “Uncrowning” of Herod (ch. 12)
   5. Overturning a Prison (ch. 16)
   6. The Prisoner Running the Show (ch. 27)
   These undeniably key moments in the narrative center on major events in early church history and dramatically illustrate power/authority conflicts and questions.”
Along with Rowe, I count the overturning of magic among these scenes depicting the ways in which the believers’ way of life comes into conflict with and triumphs over the old orders of power. The burning of the magical documents in Acts 19:19 shows that the “mere existence of magic […] is antithetical to the Christian way of life. Hence not only does the public action prevent the books from being used by others who are not similarly persuaded, it also visibly and dramatically enacts the irreversibility of the practitioners’ divulgence and confession.”⁵ Rowe’s discussion of this passage is one piece of larger discussion about the interaction of Christian and pagan conceptions of the divine. As we have seen, however, the magicians in Acts do not represent the pagan world. The magicians in Acts represent those who have fundamentally misunderstood the relationship between humans and divine power.

Luke engages with magic as a part of his larger concern for showing the ways in which the new way of life that began with Jesus contrasts with and overcomes the other power structures upon which humanity tends to rely. Magic in Acts constitutes a power structure influential enough to merit overturning. This theme of overturning powers does not stem from a desire to refute charges about the believers. The powers need to be challenged because a new way of life has begun that no longer accepts the rules by which those powers function.

The theme of magic in Acts shows not only the overturning of the power structure upon which magic relies but also the downfall of those who choose that approach to divine power over true power from God. Jews who read and understood the Hebrew Scriptures would have encountered many reminders that magic was not acceptable for

---

⁵ Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 46.
God’s people. The magicians in Acts have forsaken what they know about the human relationship to the divine in favor of a system of power by which they themselves can control the powers of the spiritual realm. They seek to gain prestige and worldly wealth and power through the control of spiritual forces. The believers of the Way, on the other hand, practice the renunciation of such prestige in service to God (Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37). Those who knew the Hebrew Scriptures should have known better than to pursue magic. They should have joined in the believers who had devoted themselves to the new reality God began with Jesus.

**Moving Forward**

While much of the material presented in this study has been thoroughly researched and argued by others, there are a few key points raised that bear consideration by those who have examined Acts before and those who will in the future. Reading the Ephesian disciples as foils for the sons of Sceva opens the text to new interpretations and consideration among other larger treatments of certain themes in Luke-Acts. The significance of this study for future research in Acts stems mainly from two of my arguments: 1) Luke does not simply present the defeat of magic in the text to refute claims that Christians practiced magic, and 2) the magicians in the text are closely tied to Judaism.

**More than Apology: Highlighting the Misunderstanding of Divine Power**

Luke does accomplish the distancing of Christians from magic in his three-part contest with magic in Acts. This, however, is not the main goal of these passages. Rather, Luke includes magic in a larger project concerning believers and the powers of this world.

---

Magic does not fit with Christianity because it is a participation in the exploitative, prideful system of power among humans in the world. Reading the Ephesian disciples as foils for the sons of Sceva contrasts submission to Jesus with appropriation of Jesus and reception of spiritual power with control over spiritual power. This more clearly presents the message Luke conveys about magic. In the new way of life, approaching the divine with humility and understanding that God controls the power is the only way that true power comes into the world.

Judaism and Magic

The relationship between Jews and magic in Acts remains relatively unexplored. Most treatments deal with the Jews who incite riots throughout the narrative and the specific, positive examples of Jewish characters in the text, but they do not mention the connection between Judaism and magic in the narrative. Luke’s portrayal of the Jews remains a debated topic, some seeing his work as anti-semitic, and others seeing it as favorable toward the Jews. Levine argues that this “debate is not going to be settled.” The addition of the theme of magic to these considerations of Luke’s portrayal of the Jews may help to illuminate more about his attitude toward them in the narrative. It may also serve simply to further muddy the waters. Regardless, this dimension of Luke’s characterization of the Jews should be included in those studies dealing with the topic. In addition to this, any treatment of the sons of Sceva as part of the theme of magic or the mission in Ephesus.


ought to include their literary relationship to the Ephesian disciples. The literary
connection between these stories opens the passage to renewed scrutiny in the study of
Acts.

Power to the People

The most significant shift that reading Acts 19:1-20 as a literary unit highlights is the
focus on the Ephesian disciples as the “heroes” of the story. If one assumes Paul to be the
one contrasted with the sons of Sceva, then this pericope serves as another example of
Paul’s success in ministry and miracle working. If, however, one reads the Ephesian
disciples as the foil for the sons of Sceva, then one sees a broader message Luke has for
believers about magic and power from God. Luke shows that it is not only the elite of the
Way (The Twelve, The Seven, and Paul) who receive divine power in the new order of
the world. Even those who have just received baptism and the Holy Spirit have power
from God, because they have submitted to the name of Jesus. Ultimately, Luke is
concerned not with the refutation of magic but with the demonstration of the path to true
power from God: submission and humility.
REFERENCES

Primary Sources


**Secondary Sources**


