

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY – CHARLOTTE

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me”:  
Luke 4:18-19 as the Mission Statement of Jesus

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In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus's visit to Nazareth is found in the middle of Jesus's public ministry and given only five and six verses of space respectively (Mt. 13:54-58; Mk. 6:1-6). But in the Gospel of Luke, this pericope not only has 15 verses, but also starts Christ's public ministry, right after the temptation. The pericope's length and prominence points to its importance in the Gospel of Luke. Central to the pericope is Jesus's citation of Isaiah 61:1-2a in the Nazareth synagogue, which is described by one scholar as "one of the most difficult and complex text forms of all the OT quotations in the NT."<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I will argue that Christ's use of Isaiah 61 in his Nazareth sermon acts as a 'mission statement' for Christ's public Messianic ministry in the Gospel of Luke.

## Isaiah 61:1-3a before the Gospel of Luke

### *Isaiah 61:1-3a in the Book of Isaiah*

In order to understand Luke 4:18-19, the function of Isaiah 61:1-3a<sup>2</sup> should be first understood in the Book of Isaiah. Although most critical scholars understand this passage to be written by a post-exilic Trito-Isaiah,<sup>3</sup> there is good reason to believe that the book of Isaiah was written by the one pre-exilic prophet Isaiah.<sup>4</sup> Yet this does not negate the inherent unity of Isaiah 56-66, for there is a clear chiasmic structure to this passage.<sup>5</sup> The outlying chapters on both sides

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<sup>1</sup> Charles A. Kimball, *Jesus' Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke's Gospel*, JSNTSup 94 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 99. All series and publication abbreviations are in accord with IATG<sup>3</sup>; Siegfried M. Schwertner, ed., *IATG<sup>3</sup>. Internationales Abkürzungsverzeichnis für Theologie und Grenzgebiete: Zeitschriften, Serien, Lexika, Quellenwerke mit bibliographischen Angaben* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> I am taking the last line of verse 3 ("And they shall be called oaks of righteousness; / The planting-place of Yahweh, to glorify himself.") as the start of a new yet related prophecy that runs into verse 4. This is indicated by an indicative verb instead of the infinitives used in this section.

<sup>3</sup> Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1922); John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Rev. ed., WBC 24 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), xlv; Ulrich F. Berges, *The Book of Isaiah: Its Composition and Final Form* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 35. Niskanen, who accepts the division, still admits that "the very recognition of Trito-Isaiah as a distinct unit within the book of Isaiah was not evident to anyone until the publication of Bernhard Duhm's commentary in 1892." Paul V. Niskanen, *Isaiah 56-66*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), iv.

<sup>4</sup> Oswald Thompson Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah: A Study in Prophecy* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1950), 48ff., 103; G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 123ff.; Richard L. Shultz, "How Many Isaiahs Were There and What Does It Matter?: Prophetic Inspiration in Recent Evangelical Scholarship," in *Evangelicals & Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent E. Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 150-70; John N. Oswalt, "The Implications of an Evangelical View of Scripture for the Authorship of the Book of Isaiah," in *Bind up the Testimony: Explorations in the Genesis of the Book of Isaiah*, ed. Daniel I. Block and Richard L. Shultz (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2015), 273-91.

<sup>5</sup> Berges, *The Book of Isaiah*, 394; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AncB 19B (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 38ff.; Andrew Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 85.

(56-59; 63-66) wrestle with the question of who exactly will be in the consummate Israel. Then, between the outlying chapters are two visions of God as a warrior king (59:15-21; 63:1-6). In the middle of the chiasmus is a vision of Zion's restoration and God's Messiah in chapters 60-62. And at the very center of this vision is the climactic first-person prophecy, Isaiah 61:1-3a.

The speaker of this prophecy is not named, but he shares characteristics with previous Isaianic prophecies. He resembles the Servant in being given the Spirit of God, in releasing people from prison, as well as in his purpose "to bring about the deliverance of his people ... so that they will be righteous, just as the Servant is said to have done."<sup>6</sup> The speaker also resembles a Davidic kingly Messiah in the theme of "righteousness" and "justice" in the pericope, in his anointing with the Spirit,<sup>7</sup> in his proclamation of good news,<sup>8</sup> and in his proclamation of the year of Jubilee.<sup>9</sup> It is clear then that this future figure gathers up all the Messianic prophecies earlier in Isaiah into this one singular Isaianic culmination of Messianic hope and expectation. This is the climactic mission statement of Isaiah's Messiah.

Perhaps the most pervasive element of this prophecy is the use of concrete terminology to communicate spiritual redemption, as seen in the table below. When the speaker says that "Yahweh anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor," *good news* is the coming of a divine redemption through God's reign (cf. 52:7 "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'").<sup>10</sup> And "the poor"—in light of its parallel terms "prisoner," "broken-hearted," "captives," "mourners," and "faint spirit,"—denote not just the legally or physically poor, but the spiritually poor (humble, afflicted). Even the category of

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<sup>6</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 563. Thus, it is no surprise that some even speak of this passage as "The Fifth Servant Song." R. Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 56–66*, ConCom (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 258.

<sup>7</sup> The only places in the Old Testament where the Spirit and anointing are together are in the anointing of Saul and David (1 Sam. 10:1, 6–7; 1 Sam. 16:13). Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, 564. Cf. Lessing, *Isaiah 56–66*, 259.

<sup>8</sup> See discussion in following paragraph.

<sup>9</sup> Only a king has the power to proclaim a Jubilee year that releases captives (cf. Jer. 34). Block argues rightly that "it is as the anointed king that he is endowed with the Spirit, which authorizes him to release captives." Daniel I. Block, "The View from the Top: The Holy Spirit in the Prophets," in *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament*, ed. David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 189.

<sup>10</sup> Four out of five uses of בשר regard "good news" as God's coming as king to bring redemption of his people have this meaning in Isaiah (40:9, 41:27, 52:7, 61:1; the exception is 60:6). This is clearest in 52:7.

“repentant” is not out of bounds within the prophecy, given verse 3’s phrase “mourners of/for Zion,” implying a religious mourning for Zion’s sins.

Hebrew	Concrete meaning	Spiritual meaning (in Isaiah 61)
בשר	To proclaim good news (triumph in battle)	To proclaim good news (spiritual redemption) <sup>11</sup>
עני	The legally poor	The spiritually poor <sup>12</sup>
קבש	To bind up wounds	To bind up <sup>13</sup> “the broken-hearted”
קרא דרור	To proclaim liberty from debt-servitude on the day of Jubilee <sup>14</sup>	To proclaim liberty from spiritual exile/forgiveness of sins <sup>15</sup>
אבל	Mourning (for the dead)	Mourning (of and for Zion) <sup>16</sup>
פֶּהָה	Something colorless, dull	A faint “spirit”

Another important element of the prophecy is its focus upon proclamation. Both בשר and קרא denote an act of proclamation by word of mouth. Although there are active verbs too (“bind up,” “grant,” and “give”), the dominant idea of the prophecy is proclamation. This is especially true if one takes “Yahweh anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor” as the general mission statement that is then extrapolated in the rest of the prophecy, which runs as a longer parallel to the general statement. Yet this proclamation is powerful—it produces change. He “brings and does not merely herald salvation.”<sup>17</sup> It even seems like the proclamation itself will set free prisoners and given new spiritual life to those who were “poor.”

### ***Isaiah 61:1-3a in the Dead Sea Scrolls***

Although the extrabiblical documents from the Qumran community are not inspired, they can give us a better understanding of how other Jews in Jesus’s day interpreted the Old Testament. A brief survey will show that the Dead Sea Scrolls community interpreted Isaiah 61:1-3a in the same spiritual sense as above, and as the New Testament will.

<sup>11</sup> בשר takes upon a theological meaning in the prophets. O. Schilling, “בשר,” *TDOT* 2:315–16.

<sup>12</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 224; Bradley C. Gregory, “The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah: Isaiah 61:1-3 in Light of Second Temple Hermeneutics,” *JBL* 126.3 (2007): 482; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, 565.

<sup>13</sup> BDB, s.v. “קבש.” This spiritual rendering fits exactly with the object of this verb, because it is not literal physical wounds that need healing, but wounds of the heart. Cf. Ps. 147:3.

<sup>14</sup> The two words only appear together in Lev. 25, here, and Jer. 34, all having to do with the Jubilee year.

<sup>15</sup> This prophecy is not primarily concerned with a release from physical captivity. See the theological expositon on liberty/release below.

<sup>16</sup> The people that Yahweh redeems have experienced judgment, and they would continue to experience “God’s vengeance” if not for the mercy of God “to comfort.” Therefore, “the poor” who are spiritual “mourners” are those who have been sobered by God’s judgment; they are repentant of the sin that brought forth God’s judgment. God will comfort those who mourn over their sin.

<sup>17</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, WBC 35A (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 196.

Isaiah 61:1-3a is employed in at least three surviving extrabiblical documents: the Messianic Apocalypse (4Q521), the Melchizedek Document (11Q13 or 11QMelchizedek), and the Thanksgiving Scroll (1QH). In 11Q13, an eschatological Melchizedek seems to be the anointed messenger to bring good news and to comfort the afflicted. This Melchizedek will proclaim an ultimate jubilee, who will free the people from “all their iniquities.”<sup>18</sup> In 4Q521, the Lord seems to be the one who “proclaims good news to the poor,” as well as “setting prisoners free” and “opening the eyes of the blind.”<sup>19</sup> In both apocalypses, the agent is unclear: is there a separate character proclaiming good news, distinct from the main deliverer (Melchizedek in 11Q13 and the Lord in 4Q521)? Although there has been much discussion for both characters, it seems unnecessary to posit a second character in 11Q13 and 4Q521.<sup>20</sup> The original prophecy in Isaiah already suggests that the Spirit will be permanently and uniquely upon the anointed one through its predicate nominative construction.<sup>21</sup> What is notable in both of these texts is the assimilation of Isaiah 61 with other notable messianic-eschatological texts (Isa. 52:7; Ps. 147; Dan. 9:25) to denote a spiritual redemption, even one that includes liberty, or remission, of “all their iniquities.”<sup>22</sup>

## Textual and Contextual Issues

### *The Nazareth pericope in Matthew and Mark*

In Mark and Matthew, Jesus visits Nazareth in the middle of his public ministry. In Mark, Christ has been ministering around the Sea of Galilee starting at 1:14, and finally goes 25 miles inland to his hometown of Nazareth at the start of chapter 6. The pericope in Mark thus marks a

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<sup>18</sup> All references to the Dead Sea Scrolls are from Donald W. Parry and Emanuel Tov, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> My own translation. See Psalm 146:7-8.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. John J. Collins, “A Herald of Good Tidings: Isaiah 61:1-3 and Its Actualization in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Quest for Context and Meaning* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 230, 36. Collins seems to be especially hesitant in ascribing the Isaiah 61 prophecy to anyone but a separate herald in 11Q13 and 4Q521; through similar reasoning, many scholars attempt to understand Jesus’s use of the prophecy as only “prophetic,” not “Messianic” or indicative of “God.” This not only runs against the text of Luke and Qumran, but also Isaiah’s prophecy. Cf. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 137.

<sup>21</sup> Jan L. Koole, *Isaiah III*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2001), 269.

<sup>22</sup> 1QH<sup>a</sup> XXIII:15 is the exception, where “good news” is merely intellectual, aligning with the scroll’s link with the Teacher of Righteousness, who imparts wisdom to the elect. James H. Charlesworth, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Thanksgiving Hymns and Related Documents* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2022), 5A:22ff. However, Collins is right to see that the Teacher in 1QH is distinct from the eschatological prophet in 11Q13 and 4Q521. Collins, “A Herald of Good Tidings,” 232. For more minor uses of the prophecy in Qumran, see the discussion in James Sanders A., “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” in *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts*, by Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 55.

turn in the public ministry of Christ—while Christ has authority (ἐξουσία) over the waves, demons, and disease, Christ does not have the power (δύναμις) to heal those who do not believe (ἀπιστία).<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in Matthew, Jesus arrives in Nazareth in chapter 13, the middle of his public ministry, and the pericope “develop[s] further the theme of hostility to Jesus” that had already been introduced in Matthew.<sup>24</sup>

In the Gospel of Luke, the pericope is moved for theological purposes to the start of Christ’s public ministry.<sup>25</sup> 4:26’s offhand comment “What we have heard you did at Capernaum” shows that Luke is not trying to hide that he moved this pericope earlier into Christ’s narrative.<sup>26</sup> Its presence at the start of Christ’s public ministry, with a lengthy quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2a (and 58:6), shows Christ as the fulfillment of Isaianic Messianic expectation. The quotation picks up upon the themes of Spirit empowerment, proclaiming good news, the poor, liberty/remission, and recovery of sight, all important Lukan themes for Christ’s public ministry, many of which are already introduced in Luke’s nativity prologue.

### ***Omissions from Isaiah 61:1-3a***

It is notable that Luke 4:18-19, ostensibly a quotation from Isaiah 61:1-3a, omits half of the Isaianic prophecy. Commentators mainly focus upon the omission of 1b’s “to bind up/heal the brokenhearted” and 2b’s “and the day of our God’s vengeance.” However, verses 2c-3a is tied to verses 1-2b syntactically, completing a chain of infinitives that explain what “proclaiming good news to the poor” means. Thus, the omission of 2c-3a must also be explained, in addition with the omission of 1b and 2b.

The most popular explanation for the omission of 2b is that Christ purposely stopped before 2b because he was not bringing the ultimate “day of vengeance.” In this view, Christ’s mission is a message of mercy and “favor” before the “day of vengeance” that will come at the

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<sup>23</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 241, 44.

<sup>24</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 547.

<sup>25</sup> Contra to Lane, who argues that the two accounts are two different visits. It is possible, but the passages are best explained by the same account explained in a different way. Just because the two accounts do not share immediate parallels does not mean that they are two different events. Cf. William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 201n2.

<sup>26</sup> This was already noticed by Augustine, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. S. D. F. Salmon, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series 6 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888), Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, II.42.89-90, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1602.htm>.

end of the ages.<sup>27</sup> However, this view has to provide a completely different theory for why 1b and 2c-3a is omitted, given that they both are about God's redemption. In addition, Christ's own explanation of his mission statement, given only 4 verses later in 4:23-27, clearly include a theme of judgment, which led the synagogue to be "filled with wrath" (4:28).<sup>28</sup> The view also ignores the statements of judgment against those opposed to him (6:24-26; 10:13-15; 11:39-52; 13:1-9, 31-35; cf. Matt. 10:34-36), including 21:22's "and these are the days of vengeance."<sup>29</sup> And lastly, Hays notes that "the day of vengeance" in all likelihood had a positive meaning ("joyful restitution") in the LXX, so there was no need for it to be omitted for this reason.<sup>30</sup>

Monshouwer helpfully explains why Christ was able to have omissions (and additions) in a synagogue service. Although most think that 4:18-19 is the reading of the Prophets (the *haftarah*) in a regular synagogue service, Monshouwer argues persuasively that Luke 4:18-19 is not actually the *haftarah*.<sup>31</sup> Instead, Luke 4:18-19 is the start of the sermon that occurs after the reading of the *haftarah*. In this view, verse 16b-17 should be translated as "He stood up to read the lesson. And after that He was handed the scroll of Isaiah and opening the scroll, found the

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<sup>27</sup> Fitzmyer says that 2b "is scarcely suited to the salvific period now being inaugurated." Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AncB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1982), 533.

<sup>28</sup> Christ brings the year of the Lord's δεκτος, but he himself is not δεκτος in his hometown (4:24). Jeremias argues that the people's anger to Christ at Nazareth was due to his omitting of "the day of vengeance," which was understood to be for the Gentiles. However, this cannot serve to resolve the problem of the omission, because Jesus still brought "the day of vengeance" to the Jews that would not believe in him. Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, trans. S. H. Hooke, SBT (London: SCM Press, 1958), 44-46, <http://archive.org/details/jesuspromisetona0000jere>; H. J. B. Combrink, "The Structure and Significance of Luke 4:16-30," *Neotest.* 7 (1973): 37.

<sup>29</sup> Bede cites Matt. 16:27 and argues that Jesus "also preaches the day of final retribution." Bede, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, trans. Faith Wallis and Calvin B. Kendall, Translated Texts for Historians 85 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2024), 225. Cf. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (New York: The Newman Press, 2015), 17.13.

<sup>30</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 227-28.

<sup>31</sup> He gives six very good reasons: (a) there is no reading from the Torah described before the Prophets; (b) you cannot skip or go backwards when reading the *haftarah*; (c) the citation is too short; (d) it is unclear where the sermon begins and ends after the *haftarah*; (e) Luke's account employs theological verbiage; (f) "Isa 61,1 is nowhere known as a *haftarah*." D. Monshouwer, "The Reading of the Prophet in the Synagogue at Nazareth," *Biblica* 72.1 (1991): 92-93. Contra John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 3:71-72, <http://archive.org/details/commentaryonnewt0003ligh>.

Another option for explaining this passage is to say that there was no set lectionary during Jesus's day, so this was Jesus's choice of *haftarah*. Paul Billerbeck, "Ein Synagogengottesdienst in Jesu Tagen," *ZNW* 55.2 (1964): 155, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zntw.1964.55.2.143>. This may be true, but it does not explain Christ's addition of Isaiah 58:6 in the middle of his reading of Isaiah 61. A combination of Monshouwer's and Hay's views seems best able to explain the data.

passage...<sup>32</sup> If this is the start of Christ's sermon, then there is no problem for Christ to have omissions and additions into the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-3a.<sup>33</sup>

This explains how Jesus was able to add and omit, but this does not explain *why*. Hays argues that we should see this text as “a classic instance of *metalepsis*,” where biblical authors cite only a small portion of Scripture yet expect the reader to fill in a fuller meaning from the original text.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the text is purposefully shortened so that the reader can fill in the theological gaps from the original text. This seems to be the best approach.

### ***Insertion from Isaiah 58:6?***

Not only are there omissions, there is also an addition from Isaiah 58:6: “to send away the oppressed in liberty.” In the Greek, the quotation shares with Isaiah 61 the words ἀποστελλω and ἄφεσις, the latter of which is a key theological phrase that denotes a spiritual remission (forgiveness of sins) in Luke.<sup>35</sup> In the Hebrew, Isaiah 61:2 and 58:5-6 share the Hebrew words שָׁלַח and רָצוֹן.<sup>36</sup> Whether Christ had Hebrew, Greek, or both in mind, the technique used here is called the *gezera shawa*, a Jewish midrashic technique where two passages that use the same words are linked together theologically.<sup>37</sup> Since this insertion is highly theological, I will deal with it further in the theological exposition of liberty/remission below.

### ***Luke's Old Testament hermeneutic***

In *According to the Scriptures*, C. H. Dodd argued that New Testament authors had the context of an Old Testament passage in mind when they quoted them.<sup>38</sup> Although it can be stretched beyond its limit, the idea is correct in principle. Multiple authors have pointed out that Luke 4:18-19 is a programmatic statement for the rest of the Gospel.<sup>39</sup> The prophecy is not only

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<sup>32</sup> Monshouwer, “Reading of the Prophet,” 93–94.

<sup>33</sup> Kimball, *Jesus' Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke's Gospel*, 108.

<sup>34</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 227, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. David Andrew Smith, “Beholding the Salvation of God in Greek Isaiah and Luke-Acts,” *CBQ* 86.1 (2024): 73–74, 77, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cbq.2024.a918370>.

<sup>36</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology*, JSNTSup 12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 106.

<sup>37</sup> Kimball argues persuasively that 4:18-19 is likely original to Jesus himself, since “the insertion of one text between another is not paralleled elsewhere in the Gospels or Acts,” and “the linking of these verses does not appear in other Jewish expository literature.” Kimball, *Jesus' Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke's Gospel*, 109. Jesus likely would have also been able to speak Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, so he could have drawn the verbal links from the LXX or the MT.

<sup>38</sup> C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: James Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1961), 18, cf. 52–53, <http://archive.org/details/accordingtoscrip0000dodd>.

<sup>39</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, “The Mission of Jesus according to Luke IV(16-30),” in *Jesus in Nazareth*, ed. Erich Gräßer, August Strobel, and Robert C. Tannehill, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche



relevant for Luke 4:18-19, but throughout the book of Luke. The two main examples are from Luke 6:20-21 and 7:22:

Blessed are you who are poor, for  
yours is the kingdom of God.  
Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you shall be satisfied.  
Blessed are you who weep now, for  
you shall laugh. (6:20-21)

And he answered them, “Go and tell  
John what you have seen and heard: the  
blind receive their sight, the lame walk,  
lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the  
dead are raised up, the poor have good  
news preached to them. (7:22)

Luke 6:20-21 picks up upon Isaiah 61:1’s prophecy for the poor; indeed, here, Jesus is literally preaching good news to the poor. But it also picks up on Isaiah 61:3’s prophecy that the Messiah will “comfort all the mourners” by giving them “oil of gladness instead of mourning.” Jesus literally fulfills this prophecy in 7:13, as he tells the widow of Nain, “do not weep.” It is no surprise that the people immediately recognized Jesus as “a great prophet” (7:16). Although the “mourning” prophecy is not included in Luke 4:18-19, the omissions are not theological, but the quotation merely serves as a summary of the whole Isaianic prophecy, which is all fulfilled in the ministry of Christ.

Once again, in Luke 7:22, Isaiah 61’s emphasis on good news preached to the poor is taken up, but now with other Isaianic prophecies: 29:18 “In that day the deaf shall hear... the eyes of the blind shall see”; 35:5-6 “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy”; 26:19 “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.”<sup>40</sup> It has already been shown that Isaiah 61:1-3a is the culmination of Isaianic Messianic hope, which gathers up the earlier prophecies. It is clear that Jesus, and Luke following him, also understood Isaiah 61:1-3a to function in this capacity, and used it in 4:18-19 to communicate much more than a literal dictionary definition of “good news to the poor.”

It is debated whether or not the quotation depicts Jesus as the Messiah, or only as a prophet, because many do not see the original Isaianic citation as a kingly-Messianic prophecy. However, it has already been shown that both that Isaiah 61:1-3a is originally Messianic and kingly. The Qumran community interpreted the prophecy in a Messianic way. It is no surprise,

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Wissenschaft 40 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972), 51–75, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110836578.51>; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGCT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 177–78; David Seccombe, “Luke and Isaiah,” *NTS* 27.2 (1981): 253, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500006196>; Peter Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation of Isaiah in Luke-Acts*, LNTS 367 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 73ff.

<sup>40</sup> See also Siker’s analysis of the reverse parallelism of 4:18-30 with 7:1-23. Jeffrey S. Siker, “‘First to the Gentiles’: A Literary Analysis of Luke 4:16-30,” *JBL* 111.1 (1992): 88–89, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3267510>.

then, that Luke similarly uses this text to portray Jesus as the Messiah; indeed, his use of *χρῖεν* in verse 18 poignantly points to Christ being the *Χριστός*.<sup>41</sup>

### **Theological exposition of Luke 4:18-19**

Luke 4:18-19 introduces many important themes that will be relevant for the rest of Luke: Spirit empowerment, proclaiming good news, the poor, liberty/remission, and sight to the blind. Below I will provide a theological exposition of the two verses, highlighting its fully developed meaning as found throughout the rest of the Gospel of Luke.

#### ***Spirit empowerment***

In the original Isaianic prophecy, “the Spirit of the Lord” (רוּחַ יְהוָה) shows that the source of the Messianic figure’s calling is from God. Luke’s prologue, even before 4:18, has already set Jesus apart from others by his close association with the Holy Spirit. Mary was to be overshadowed by “the Holy Spirit” in order to conceive Jesus (1:35). If John the Baptist was to come “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (1:17), Jesus came “in the power of the Spirit” (4:14). If Elizabeth and Zechariah were “filled (*ἐπλήσθη*) with the Holy Spirit” (1:41, 67), Jesus was “full (*πλήρης*) of the Holy Spirit” (4:1). John the Baptizer prophesied of Christ’s baptism with the Holy Spirit, and in Christ’s baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove, which functions as Christ’s public anointing for his ministry.

After all these things, Christ enters into the temple, unrolls the scroll of Isaiah, and reads: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” Early church authors noted this passage’s interest in Christ’s humanity,<sup>42</sup> but this also hints at Christ’s divinity. As said before, the nominal clause may indicate the permanence of God’s Spirit upon this individual, since Old Testament Spirit-anointing usually employs a verb.<sup>43</sup> This also reflected by the use of the adjective *πλήρης* instead of the participle *ἐπλήσθη*, denoting permanence to Christ’s Spirit empowerment.

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<sup>41</sup> Willem Cornelis van Unnik, “Jesus the Christ,” *NTS* 8.2 (1962): 114. Cf. Robert F. O’Toole, “Does Luke Also Portray Jesus As the Christ in Luke 4,16-30?,” *Biblica* 76.4 (1995): 498–522; Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern*, 108ff.; Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke*, Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 81.

<sup>42</sup> As one example, see Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, in *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. John Henry Newman, NPNF 2–04 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 12.47, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Koole, *Isaiah III*, 269.

The Holy Spirit is rarely mentioned in Luke after this pericope; yet it is assumed that everything that Christ does in his public ministry is being empowered by the Spirit. This is especially true of his casting out of unclean spirits (τὸ ἀκάθαρτον πνεῦμα), which is clearly in the power of the clean, or Holy, Spirit (τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα).<sup>44</sup> At Pentecost, the Spirit-anointed will pour out his Spirit upon his followers (Acts 2). And so, just as the Spirit commissions Jesus's ministry in Luke, the Spirit of Christ will commission Christ-followers' ministry in Acts and gifts of faith and service in the New Testament epistles.<sup>45</sup>

### ***Proclaiming good news***

The main infinitive of Luke 4:18-19 is εὐαγγελίσασθαι. In Isaiah, the good news is God's coming as king to bring redemption of his people.<sup>46</sup> In the Epistle to Barnabas, the good news is "about grace (χάρις)."<sup>47</sup> And yet, the prophecy shows not only that God is coming as king, but that God *has* come as king through his Messiah. Luke 2:10 already uses the verb to describe the good news that the Davidic Messiah has come.

For the rest of Luke, ἡ βασιλεία του θεοῦ εὐαγγελίζεται is the preferred summary of Jesus' ministry (4:43; 8:1; 16:16).<sup>48</sup> Christ's proclaiming the good news of the arrival of the year of the Lord's favor is the Old Testament equivalent of the coming of the kingdom of God. And so just as "the figure in Isa 61 brings and does not merely herald salvation,"<sup>49</sup> Christ is not merely proclaiming salvation (like John the Baptist); he is bringing and effecting salvation. If Christ's first public words in Mark was "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (1:15; cf. Matt. 4:17), in Luke Christ begins with Old Testament version of the same statement: "He anointed me to proclaim good news ... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."<sup>50</sup> Christ then caps the prophecy with "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21).

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. 11:24ff., and the below discussion on unclean spirits.

<sup>45</sup> Mary Jerome Obiorah and Favour Chukwuemeka Uroko, "'The Spirit of the Lord God Is upon Me' (Is 61:1): The Use of Isaiah 61:1-2 in Luke 4:18-19," *HTS* 74.1 (2018): 156, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.5038>.

<sup>46</sup> See especially 52:7 – "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'"

<sup>47</sup> Michael W. Holmes, ed., "The Epistle of Barnabas," in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, trans. Michael W. Holmes, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 14.9.

<sup>48</sup> Tannehill, "The Mission of Jesus according to Luke IV(16-30)," 70.

<sup>49</sup> Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, 196.

<sup>50</sup> Asher Finkel, "Jesus' Sermon at Nazareth (Luk 4, 16-30)," in *Abraham unser Vater: Juden und Christen im Gespräch über die Bibel: Festschrift für Otto Michel zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Otto Betz, Martin Hengel, and Peter Schmidt (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 111, <http://archive.org/details/abrahamunservate0000unse>. Geldenhuys says likewise: Jesus came "to announce the Messianic age." Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 168.

As Jesus speaks, the reader understands that the prophecy is not consummately fulfilled. Jesus will eventually accomplish the prophecy throughout the Gospel of Luke, but even at the end of the Gospel, Isaiah 61:2's "day of the Lord's vengeance" had not fully come. Instead, Christ has inaugurated a new era of history at the start of his public ministry; so the Lutheran reformer Johannes Brenz wrote that "This 'spiritual' Jubilee began first when Christ started preaching the gospel and continued not for a year only but forever."<sup>51</sup> This passage then is an example of the common Synoptic theme of the kingdom which has already arrived, yet not in full. As Jerome wrote about 4:18-20, "it was partly fulfilled then, it is to be fulfilled more fully when all the people of God shall be just."<sup>52</sup>

Theologically, the prophecy is about the redemptive nature of Christ's work of proclamation and miracles, the majority of his public ministry. Thus, Christ's "death and resurrection of Jesus do not stand alone as the saving event";<sup>53</sup> the whole ministry of Christ, from start to finish, is "for us and for our salvation." On the other hand, Christ's redemptive work does not preclude his work on the cross, as theological liberalism states. Our redemption was effected by both Christ's active obedience and his passive obedience. And so, Cyril of Alexandria states that the year of the Lord's favor is the year "in which Christ was crucified in our behalf, because we then were made acceptable unto God the Father, as the fruit borne by Him."<sup>54</sup>

### ***The poor***

Perhaps the most debated part of this prophecy is just one word: πτωχοῖς. Many studies have been done on the meaning of "the poor" in Luke.<sup>55</sup> 4:18 is particularly challenging because of the variety of contexts that it contains. The word can be viewed from the vantage point of its own pericope, Luke 1-2, Isaiah 61, the whole OT, or later stories in Luke or Luke-Acts. It can also be analyzed only in its lexical appearances, or also inclusive of concepts of poor and rich.

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<sup>51</sup> Johannes Brenz, *An Ecclesiasticall Exposition upon Saint Luke 4*, qtd. in Beth Kreitzer, ed., *Luke*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 3 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 101. So also Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Int. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 62.

<sup>52</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 17.13.

<sup>53</sup> Tannehill, "The Mission of Jesus according to Luke IV(16-30)," 75.

<sup>54</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to S. Luke*, ed. Roger Pearse, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859), Homily 12, [https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/index.htm#Cyril\\_on\\_Luke](https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/index.htm#Cyril_on_Luke). So also David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), 70.

<sup>55</sup> For a survey of views, see David Peter Secombe, *The Poor and Their Possessions: Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts*, SNTU.B 6 (Linz, Austria: Prof. DDr. A. Fuchs, 1983), 24ff.; S. John Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor: Character Types in Luke-Acts*, JSNTSup 144 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 28ff.

All of these options give a slightly different shade to what Luke might mean, and they will be considered in turn below.

For some, Mary's Magnificat is the starting point of to understand πτωχοῖς. Mary's song in 1:46-55 can be interpreted as God's lifting up of the poor and putting down of the rich, especially in light of verse 53: "he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty." However, it must be noted that πτωχος is not used here, or anywhere in Luke before 4:18; Mary describes herself as humble (ταπεινωσιν).<sup>56</sup> Additionally, Mary's poem is dependent on Hannah's poem in 1 Samuel 2, and Hannah was not materially poor. What is not often mentioned is Luke 2:10, where εὐαγγελίζομαι is "for all the people" (παντὶ τῷ λαῷ). Whatever πτωχοῖς denotes, it must be able to capture the universality of παντὶ τῷ λαῷ.

In the Nazareth pericope itself, verses 20-30 are a kind of commentary upon what verses 18-19 mean. Christ explains that just as Elijah and Elisha ministered to non-Israelites (Syrian and Sidonian), he will minister to Gentiles also. Thus, in the pericope itself, Christ seems to be suggesting that πτωχοῖς are Gentiles. So Origen says plainly, "the 'poor' stand for the Gentiles,"<sup>57</sup> and Bammel argues that πτωχοί "refers primarily to the Gentile world."<sup>58</sup> However, this neither captures the universality of 2:10, nor accounts for the word's usage in passages later in Luke, as we shall see below.

Sanders argues that Jesus's interpretation of Isaiah 61 is inclusive (or universal), in comparison to 11Q13 which saw "the poor" and "the captives" as exclusively their own community. Thus, 4:18's πτωχοῖς "do not apply to any in-group but to those to whom God wishes them to apply."<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, he argues that the early church interpreted this prophecy "as acceptance of Gentiles and rejection of Jews," making the prophecy exclusive, which is "the opposite of what Jesus intended."<sup>60</sup> Although Sanders is right in seeing a universality to Christ's message, it does not mean that there is no exclusivity; Sanders even acknowledges that the prophecy is only "to those to whom God wishes them to apply."<sup>61</sup> It is quite hard, in the context both of the pericope itself (Sidonian and Syrian) and of Luke-Acts, to argue that Christ is not

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<sup>56</sup> "Rich" is used here, but the word and its cognate "riches" are used much more metaphorically in Luke than "poor," which is used literally usually.

<sup>57</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke*, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard, FaCh 94 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 32.4, <http://archive.org/details/homiliesonlukefr0000orig>.

<sup>58</sup> Ernst Bammel, s.v. "Πτωχός, Κτλ.," *TDNT*, 906.

<sup>59</sup> Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4," 62.

<sup>60</sup> Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4," 63.

<sup>61</sup> Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4," 63.

referring to Gentiles in some way in 4:18. Sanders ends up divorcing the historical Jesus from the early church, and divorcing 4:18-19 from the rest of Luke-Acts.<sup>62</sup>

Neither the early church nor Christ himself rejected Jews as a whole (Nicodemus, Mary and Martha, Zaccheus, Paul), but they did reject the Jews (and the Gentiles) who opposed Christ and refused to believe. Gentile inclusion is at least a “*part* of the gospel message” that is proclaimed in 4:18-19,<sup>63</sup> so Cyril of Alexandria is right in saying that “the poor” in 4:18 refers to the Israelites, but also to the Gentiles.<sup>64</sup> Christ’s message was not that Christ was going only to the Gentiles and not at all to the Jews, but that he is including the Gentiles into the Jewish Messianic mission, and rejecting many Jews even in his hometown.<sup>65</sup> This is why “the parochially-minded Jews of Nazareth were filled with anger and murderous intent and attacked Jesus in a manner which (in Luke’s description) recalls in advance the final rejection of Jesus and also the death of Stephen.”<sup>66</sup>

So perhaps πτωχοῖς means some Jews but also some Gentiles, but this seems to run against another problem: Evans argues that πτωχος, in all other instances in Luke, refers to those who are literally poor.<sup>67</sup> This is the evidence that is used by some feminist and liberation scholars who argue that πτωχοῖς “refers primarily to those who are economically impoverished.”<sup>68</sup> The main passages are Christ’s commands to sell your possessions (12:33; 18:22), rich-poor parables (12:13ff.; 14:13; 16:1ff.; 16:19ff.), passages about poor women (7:36ff.; 21:1ff.), and Christ’s beatitude “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God,” which may purposefully omit “in spirit” from Matthew to refer to the literal poor (6:20).

It is not within the scope of this paper to analyze every single passage, but some general counterarguments can be given. (a) Christ’s commands to sell possessions are linked with a call to gather spiritual wealth (“treasure in the heavens” in 12:33; “true riches” in 16:11), and are not

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<sup>62</sup> Also, Acts 10:36-39 also alludes to Isaiah 61:1-3a to speak of Christ’s ministry with an exclusive bent; does this not help us better interpret Luke 4:18-19?

<sup>63</sup> Siker, “First to the Gentiles,” 74.

<sup>64</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to S. Luke*, Homily 12. “Thus πτωχός in Luke 4,18 is not an exclusive reference to Israel in need but a soteriological generalization.” Marius Z. Rosik and V. Onwukeme, “Function of Isa 61:1-2 and 58:6 in Luke’s Programmatic Passage (Luke 4:16-30),” *PJBiR* 3 (2002): 67–81. So also Robert A. Stein, *Luke: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1993), 125.

<sup>65</sup> This is supported by 2:32: “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

<sup>66</sup> David Hill, “Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30),” *NovT* 13.3 (1971): 169.

<sup>67</sup> C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, 2nd ed., TPINTC (London: Trinity Press International, 1990), 270.

<sup>68</sup> Barbara E. Reid O.P. and Shelly Matthews, *Luke 1–9*, Wisdom Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021), 132; James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 69, 72.

a generic call to be materially “poor.” (b) The rich-poor parables “always contain a spiritual dimension relating to Christian discipleship, forgiveness of sins, salvation by grace, and the like, as the primary foci of God’s kingdom or dynamic reign.”<sup>69</sup> (c) Passages about poor women should also be paired with the many rich women that supported Christ’s ministry (8:2-3).<sup>70</sup> (d) Liberation theologians are forced to pit a Lukan Christ against a Matthean Christ; in light of the rest of the evidence, 6:20 should be understood as “poor in spirit.” (e) The story of Zaccheus, a rich person who is converted, is often overlooked; he is the example of God doing the impossible: letting a rich man enter the kingdom of God. (f) DeYoung helpfully points out that both the recipient (Theophilus) and the writer (Luke) would have been people with means.<sup>71</sup> (g) Other character-types in the prophecy, like the “captive” and the “oppressed,” have trouble being interpreted literally.<sup>72</sup>

Because of this, only a ‘cherry-picking’ of texts can lead one to say with feminist and liberation theologians that Luke’s understanding of the poor is primarily socio-economical. Additionally, the evidences above should rule out an expansion of the definition that *πτωχοῖς* denotes “all those who are marginal or excluded from human fellowship.”<sup>73</sup> Although this understands that *πτωχοῖς* denotes something larger than its literal sense, it does not account for the spiritual aspect of *πτωχοῖς*.

This is not to say that physical poverty is never in mind when the word is used, but that physical poverty is used as a metaphor for spiritual poverty. Already in the Old Testament the

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<sup>69</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions*, NSBT 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 126. The most difficult passage in my opinion, the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, is ably explained by Blomberg: “Abraham himself had been rich but did not end up in Hades. After the rich man dies and finds himself in torment, he appeals to Abraham for someone to go and warn his brothers who are still alive, so that they can avoid this place of agony (16:27-28). When he repeats his request, the rich man says, ‘If someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent’ (16:30). All this strongly suggests that the rich man realized that his problem was that he had never truly repented and become right with God.” Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 123.

<sup>70</sup> The story of the poor woman in 7:36-50 is clearly more concerned about her sin than her economical status.

<sup>71</sup> “Luke was not a poor man writing to poor people that together they might denounce the rich.” Kevin DeYoung, “Luke: Evangelist to the Rich,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 9 October 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/luke-evangelist-rich/>.

<sup>72</sup> Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor*, 164; Seccombe, *The Poor and Their Possessions*, 58. Mainly because it is hard to say that Jesus set free any captives or liberated any oppressed in his ministry, though some commentators will still point to Barrabas or the Acts 16 Philippian jail incident.

<sup>73</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, SaPaSe (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 79. Cf. also John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 112–13; Dr Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 91–92.

word was used to denote spiritual poverty, i.e. humility.<sup>74</sup> And in Isaiah 61, its meaning almost certainly implies a spiritual poverty, especially in light of other omitted parts of the prophecy: “broken-hearted,” “mourners for Zion,” and “faint in spirit.”<sup>75</sup> So, in Luke, the word “does not denote people who are only economically poor but people who have little or nothing to expect from the circumstances which determine their life and are therefore dependent upon God.”<sup>76</sup> So the Epistle to Barnabas, when quoting Isaiah 61:1-3, says “he has anointed me to preach good news about grace *to the humble* (ταπεινοῖς).”<sup>77</sup>

In Luke 5:31-32, Christ says, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Just like πτωχοῖς, “sick” and “sinners” are broad terms that designate who Christ came to minister to. He came to minister to those who need to be healed spiritually, referring to those who acknowledge that they are sinful, i.e. those who are humble.<sup>78</sup>

In removing socio-economic poverty from the primary focus of Jesus’s mission, we are also able to see its true place in the Lukan narrative as a “test-case of one’s profession of discipleship.”<sup>79</sup> Worldly riches is not inherently evil, but it is a stumbling block for committed discipleship to Christ, which is why Christ called the rich ruler to give away his possessions, and why Zaccheus’s repentance included generosity and restitution. Poverty, on the other hand, often led people to be dependent upon God for provision—material poverty often leads to spiritual poverty. And yet poverty is not necessarily good, for, as Calvin put it, “there were many who, amidst their poverty, blindness, slavery, and death, flattered themselves, or were insensible to their condition.”<sup>80</sup> Christ came to preach good news to those who were spiritually poor, with a poverty of heart, a repentant heart.

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<sup>74</sup> Evans, *Saint Luke*, 270; Bammel, s.v. “Πτωχός, Κτλ.” Contra Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor*, 112ff.

<sup>75</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, 565; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 224; Gregory, “The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah,” 482.

<sup>76</sup> J. Reiling and J. L. Swellengrebel, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Luke*, UBS Handbook Series 10 (London: United Bible Societies, 1993), 200. Green wants to take a middling stance that the word should be taken “in the holistic sense of those who are for any of a number of socio-religious reasons relegated to positions outside the boundaries of God’s people.” Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 211. It seems to amount to the same thing, since the spiritual is included.

<sup>77</sup> Holmes, “The Epistle of Barnabas,” 14.9.

<sup>78</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle, 3 vols. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 1:404.

<sup>79</sup> Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 126–27.

<sup>80</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 1:229.



In summary, πτωχοῖς denotes the spiritually poor, which includes both Jew and Gentile, materially rich or materially poor. Being a Gentile, or being materially poor, often led to humility and dependence upon God, yet Christ came not exclusively for Gentiles, nor for the materially impoverished, but for those of any ‘category’ who were spiritually poor.

### ***Liberty/Remission***

As noted earlier, Christ inserted a line from Isaiah 58:6 into his citation of Isaiah 61:1-2a. It is no coincidence that the insertion shares the highly theological term ἄφεσις. The term translates two different Hebrew words, yet both “To proclaim to the captives liberty” and “To send away the oppressed in liberty” communicate very similar ideas. The two recipients of liberty are both *hapax*: Captive, αἰχμάλωτος, is lit. a prisoner of war,<sup>81</sup> and oppressed, is from θραύω, lit. to break or shatter, or fig. to oppress.<sup>82</sup> To both, liberation is offered. Yet it would not be lost on the Greek reader that Luke uses the term ἄφεσις in a more theological sense, as “remission” or “forgiveness” of sins. It already was used in 1:77 and 3:3, its cognate ἀφῆμι will be the subject of contention with the Pharisees over forgiveness of sins in 5:20-24 (cf. 7:47-49) and the term in the Lukan Lord’s Prayer (11:4). More pericopes can be noted, but this is what leads Bultmann to claim, concerning 4:18, that “even where ἄφεσις is meant in the sense of ‘liberation’ ..., this at least includes the thought of forgiveness.”<sup>83</sup>

As noted earlier, it is hard to interpret αἰχμάλωτος and θραύω in any other way than metaphorical in the prophecy, because Christ never literally set a prisoner of war free, nor liberated the oppressed. In many ways, Christ reinforced the position of the Romans when he said “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s” (20:25). However, if the semantic range of the two terms are enlarged, there are many different ways Christ did indeed liberate the captive and oppressed.

Firstly, on a still material plane, in 13:16, Christ notes that healing a woman from a disabling spirit is loosening someone from Satan’s bonds.<sup>84</sup> We see this also with Christ’s healing of the epileptic boy in 9:39 as well.<sup>85</sup> In these pericopes, Luke is interested with showing how

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<sup>81</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 55.25.

<sup>82</sup> BDAG, s.v. “θραύω.”

<sup>83</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, s.v. “Ἀφῆμι, Κτλ,” *TDNT*, 511.

<sup>84</sup> Finkel, “Jesus’ Sermon at Nazareth (Luk 4, 16–30),” 109.

<sup>85</sup> Many commentators are puzzled as to why Luke, a physician, would describe physical conditions like epilepsy in 9:39 and a bent back in 13:16 as an unclean “spirit.” Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 286–87. However, Luke learned from Christ to not only be interested with the physical symptoms, but also with the spiritual causes that underlay such symptoms.

Christ fulfilled the liberation prophecy by releasing them from oppression and captivity from the Devil. Thus, even the Gerasene demoniac who was already released from physical chains in 8:29 needed to be freed from his spiritual bondage to the Devil.

In 11:14ff., Christ elaborates on how he has bound the Devil. He states that “when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil” (11:22). The armor and spoil are a metaphor for those things that the Devil has under his control, namely, the people on earth. Christ, in his casting out of demons, shows that the kingdom of the Devil has been defeated, and “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (11:20). Thus Cyril of Alexander says, “He proclaimed also deliverance to captives, which also He accomplished by having bound the strong one, Satan, who in tyrant fashion lorded it over our race, and having torn away from Him us his goods.”<sup>86</sup>

Yet the primary way that Christ fulfills this prophecy is not merely that he healed many diseases and infirmities, but that he forgave sin. Those who are captive “may be taken here as referring to all people who are in some form of slavery, including that of sin.”<sup>87</sup> Christ often healed physical infirmities by saying, “your sins are forgiven” (5:20; 7:48). He shows that the main problem with the Satan is not captivity to physical infirmities, but captivity to spiritual infirmities. When Christ says, “your faith has made you well” (8:48; 17:19; 18:42), this is inclusive of redemption/salvation, for “made you well” is the same word for “to save,” σωζω. Christ’s primary liberation is remission, or forgiveness, of sins. So Eusebius of Caesarea writes, “He proclaimed forgiveness to those who were hampered by evil spirits and bound for a long time like slaves by demons.”<sup>88</sup>

There remains one important subject under this heading: the Year of Jubilee. The Year of Jubilee is clearly implied in Isa. 61:1 in the Hebrew words קרא and דָּרוֹר, only shared with Lev. 25 and Jer. 34, both referring to the Jubilee Year. Lev. 25:10 commands Israel to “proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants” in the fiftieth year (the year of Jubilee). In Isaiah 61, the coming Messianic prophet is to proclaim a year of Jubilee, a year of the Lord’s favor. Yet Plummer notes that release of prisoners of war and recovering of sight to the blind are not

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<sup>86</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to S. Luke*, Homily 12.

<sup>87</sup> Reiling and Swellengrebel, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Luke*, 200.

<sup>88</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Proof of the Gospel*, ed. Roger Pearse, trans. W. J. Ferrar, 2 vols., *TCLG* (London: SPCK, 1920), 3.1, [https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/index.htm#Demonstratio\\_Evangelica\\_\(The\\_Proof\\_of\\_the\\_Gospel\)](https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/index.htm#Demonstratio_Evangelica_(The_Proof_of_the_Gospel)).

metaphors that “harmonizes very well with the year of jubilee” in a literal sense.<sup>89</sup> What Plummer may not realize is that Jubilee, in Isa. 61 as well as in Luke 4, has taken on a spiritual meaning.<sup>90</sup> The word דָּרֹר now refers to spiritual “emancipation” or “remission,”<sup>91</sup> which can be called *forgiveness*; God will remit/forgive sins of former days.<sup>92</sup>

The inclusion of 58:6 only adds to the Jubilee imagery, since many scholars have noted that 58:6 has its own hints of the Jubilee.<sup>93</sup> Some scholars have thought that this Jubilee theme may indicate Christ’s own call to implement Jubilee legislation, and other scholars claim that Jubilee language indicates a difference between 4:18’s ἄφεσις with “forgiveness of sins.”<sup>94</sup> However, even originally in Leviticus 25, the Jubilee year was proclaimed on the Day of Atonement, showing the link between physical remission and spiritual remission of sins. 11Q13 also directly links the Jubilee year with freedom from “all their iniquities.” With the spiritual use of ἄφεσις in the rest of Luke, as well as the atonement undertones even in this passage, Christ surely had in mind a spiritual Jubilee for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>95</sup>

### ***“Recovering of sight to the blind”***

The last theme that is introduced by Luke 4:18-19 is the “recovering of sight to the blind.” The LXX renders τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν the Hebrew פָּקַח-קוֹרִים וְלְאַסְוִיָּהּ. פָּקַח-קוֹרִים is a *hapax*, likely a reduplicated form of פָּקַח, “to open.” Thus, it could just mean the opening of the prison, but the verb in Isaiah almost always refers “the opening of blind eyes,” which is likely why the LXX translators opted for τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν. Even if literal “blind” people are not in 61:1, Koole points out rightly that the prisoners are still going from the darkness of the prison cell to

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<sup>89</sup> Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1922), 121.

<sup>90</sup> The primary meaning in Isaiah 61 is not a release from physical captivity (at the end of the exile), for many choose to stay in Babylon, and those who came back from the exile still felt as if they were in slavery (Ezra 9:8; Neh. 9:36). Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 250.

<sup>91</sup> R. North, “דָּרֹר,” *TDOT* 3:265, 67.

<sup>92</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary on Isaiah*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, trans. Jonathan J. Armstrong, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 380.

<sup>93</sup> Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, 197; Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 212.

<sup>94</sup> Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, 197.

<sup>95</sup> This does not mean that material restitution is not important for Christ or Luke. Material liberation seems to be an implication, outflowing, of the main sense of forgiveness of sins. If you have been forgiven by God, then the implication is that you should be able to forgive others of debts. It thus seems sensible to say with Wright that Jesus was expecting his followers “to live ‘as if’ the Jubilee were being enacted,” in forgiving “one another not only ‘sins’ but also debts.” N. T. Wright, ed., *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 295. This would explain some of the sharing of material possessions in Acts.

the light of the outside world.<sup>96</sup> If this is right, then this opens up a whole avenue of spiritual interpretation of darkness to light, from blindness to sight, that is present from the very start of Isaiah's call in 6:9-10. This is clear also from the link to 42:6-7 "I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." Here, once again, the Isaianic Messiah is called in relation to those in darkness and in prison.

Out of the four Gospels, Luke may be the most muted when it comes to using sight metaphorically, but it is clear that this is still his intention as the Gospel progresses. The key passage is a chain of stories from 18:18-19:10, on the rich ruler, healing of a blind man, and then Zaccheus. The healing of the blind man is used as a metaphor for spiritual sight. Two rich people, the rich ruler and Zaccheus, surround this pericope, and show that being materially "rich" does not disqualify you from the kingdom of God. The rich ruler is blind to his own spiritual need and is the only person in the Gospels to leave Jesus sorrowful (περιλυπος). And though "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (18:25), Zaccheus shows that God is able to do the impossible: open the eyes of the spiritually blind.<sup>97</sup> A similar physical-spiritual sight is seen in Paul's conversion in Acts 9-10.

And although τυφλος is always referring to literal blind people in Luke, the broader concepts of eyes, light, and darkness is often metaphorical for spiritual sight. Christ is already called "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" in 2:32. The Parable of the Sower picks up on the same passage in Isa. 6 that Isa. 61 seems to have in its background: "seeing they may not see" (8:10). Christ then alludes to himself and his teaching as a "lamp" which will make the secret things "come to light" (8:16-17). The most clearly metaphorical passage is Luke 11:33-36, a parable about the eye as spiritual sight. Christ says that "Your eye is the lamp of your body," and warns against having an "unhealthy" eye that will cause your whole body to be "full of darkness." The eye here thus stands not for physical sight, but spiritual sight, which affects the rest of your life accordingly. In the context of the crowd's search for signs, Christ shows that what they need is not external signs, but internal spiritual sight.<sup>98</sup> Thus, on the Emmaus road, the

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<sup>96</sup> As well as the opening of deaf ears and mute mouths! Koole, *Isaiah III*, 273. Cf. Shalom Paul, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, ECCo (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 539; John Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 286n6-7.

<sup>97</sup> Dennis Hamm, "Sight to the Blind: Vision as Metaphor in Luke," *Biblica* 67.4 (1986): 461ff.

<sup>98</sup> See Hamm, "Sight to the Blind," for a full analysis of this theme in Luke.

disciples' "eyes were opened" by Christ, showing them the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures (24:32). Therefore, Ambrose is willing to say that Christ "receives the anointing to free our soul from captivity and to give sight to those blind in spirit."<sup>99</sup>

## Conclusion

Luke 4:18-19 may be one of the most complex Old Testament citations in the Gospels due to its depth and reach in the Old Testament and New Testament corpuses. However, it is clear that Christ's citation of Isaiah 61 reveals his understanding of his Messianic mission. Christ was anointed by the Holy Spirit in order that he might preach good news to all kinds of people, both Jew and Gentile, anyone who was poor in spirit, with a humble and repentant heart. He was sent to proclaim the forgiveness of sins and freedom from bondage to the Devil, which he showed by his miraculous healings. He was also sent to open the eyes of the spiritually blind, so that "seeing, they may see." And his proclamation of the year of the Lord's favor marked the inauguration of a new Messianic age, which continues to this day.

In Christ's passion, the one who opened the eyes of the spiritually blind was physically blinded (22:64). The one who released the captives was bound up (22:54). The one who set free the oppressed was oppressed by the world (22:63). The one who was anointed to preach good news to the poor, "was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth" (22:67; 23:9; Isa. 53:7). The one who was anointed with the Spirit of the Lord, gave up his own human spirit (23:46). Christ's own mission in 4:18-19 already anticipated and included his death. And yet he was resurrected from the grave. And when he ascended, he poured out his Spirit upon his followers. Acts 2:17ff.'s citation of Joel 2 thus functions in a similar way to 4:18-19; it is an Old Testament elucidation of the mission of Christ, this time through the instruments of his followers.

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<sup>99</sup> Ambrose, *Commentary of Saint Ambrose on the Gospel According to Saint Luke*, trans. Íde M. Ní Riain (Dublin: Halcyon, 2001), 4.45.

## Appendix A: Translation and justification

<sup>18</sup> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me;	<sup>18</sup> πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμέ
Because <sup>100</sup> he anointed me	οὗ εἵνεκεν ἔχρισέν με
To proclaim good news <sup>101</sup> to the poor;	εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς,
He sent <sup>102</sup> me <sup>103</sup>	ἀπέσταλκέν με,
To proclaim to the captives <sup>104</sup> liberty; <sup>105</sup>	κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν
And to the blind recovery of sight;	καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεπιν,
To send away the oppressed <sup>106</sup> in liberty,	ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει,
<sup>19</sup> To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.	<sup>19</sup> κηρύξαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν.

<sup>100</sup> Εἵνεκεν, used only here and in 2 Cor. 3:10, is an Epic/Ionic form of ἐνεκεν, which is used another 24 times in the New Testament. Martin M. Culy, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Joshua J. Stigall, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 133. It functions as a preposition that takes a genitive, denoting the cause or reason for something. Danker et al., *BDAG*. *BDAG*, s.v. “εἵνεκεν,” “ἐνεκα.” This is only one of two times it appears in the postpositive position; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th Ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1923), 641.

<sup>101</sup> This infinitive, in addition to its parallel infinitives κηρύξαι (x2) and ἀποστεῖλαι, are infinitives of purpose. Cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1997), 590ff. According to Eberhard Nestle, “Luc 4, 18. 19,” *ZNW* 2 (1901): 153–57, there is good reason to take this infinitive as actually modifying ἀπέσταλκέν. This is the view of the LXX and MT. However, there is redundancy to say that “the Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me because Yahweh anointed me.” The more straightforward reading of the word order better understands the importance of “to proclaim good news to the poor,” which seems to be the main infinitive, with the other infinitives as explanatory of the first. This is the view of Reiling and Swellengrebel, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Luke*, 200; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1 of *BECNT* 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 405; Evans, *Saint Luke*, 265.

<sup>102</sup> This verb is a verb of propulsion, and is in a perfect tense-form with a past-referring context, so its *Aktionsart* is likely a historical perfect. A historical perfect “highlight[s] the transition that is conveyed” by the verb of propulsion. Here, Christ appropriates this verb to himself to highlight to transition to an active, public ministry. Cf. Constantine R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek*, 2nd ed., Zondervan Language Basics (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 111–12. Cf. also Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 902.

<sup>103</sup> A major textual tradition that includes Codex Alexandrinus, *f*<sup>1</sup>, the Majority Text, and some later languages add the phrase “to heal the broken-hearted.” However, the phrase’s omission is supported by the weighty Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, as well as early church testimony (Didache, Origen, and Eusebius). It is also more plausible as an accidental or intentional scribal insertion from the LXX version of Isaiah 61:1, than as a scribal omission. Cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 114.

<sup>104</sup> *Hapax*, literally a prisoner of war, or captive, for short. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 55.25.

<sup>105</sup> I translate ἄφεσις here as “liberty” twice, in conformity to its Old Testament counterpart דָּרֹר and חֲפְזִי. However, this translation unfortunately misses the religious-spiritual meaning of “remission” that is not only assumed in the Old Testament prophecy, but also present as an important theological word throughout Luke-Acts.

<sup>106</sup> *Hapax* meaning oppressed, literally can mean to break or shatter. *BDAG*, s.v. “θραύω.”

## Appendix B: Text Comparison of MT, LXX, and Luke 4:18-19

MT <sup>107</sup>	LXX <sup>108</sup>	Luke 4:18-19 <sup>109</sup>
<sup>1</sup> רוּחַ אֲדֹנָי יְהוֹה עָלַי	<sup>1</sup> Πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ' ἐμέ,	<sup>18</sup> πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ' ἐμέ
יַעַן מָשַׁח יְהוֹה אֹתִי לְבַשֵּׁר עֲנָוִים	οὗ εἵνεκεν ἔχρισέν με, εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς	οὗ εἵνεκεν ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς,
שְׁלַחְנִי לְחִבְשׁ לְגִשְׁבְּרֵי-לֵב	ἀπέσταλκέν με, ἰάσασθαι τοὺς συντετριμμένους τῇ καρδίᾳ,	ἀπέσταλκέν με,
לְקַרְא לְשִׁבּוּיִם דְּרוּר וּלְאַסּוּרִים פְּקַח-קוֹיָם:	κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν,	κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν,
[Is. 58:6] וְשָׁלַח רְצוּצִים חֲפָשִׁים	[Is. 58:6 ἀποστελλε τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει]	ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει,
<sup>2</sup> לְקַרְא שְׁנַת-רִצּוֹן לַיהוָה וַיּוֹם נָקַם לְאַלְהֵינוּ לְנַחֵם כָּל-אֲבֹלִים:	<sup>2</sup> καλέσαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτὸν καὶ ἡμέραν ἀνταποδόσεως, παρακαλέσαι πάντας τοὺς πενθοῦντας	<sup>19</sup> κηρύξαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν.

<sup>107</sup> All references to the MT are from K. Elliger, W. Rudolph, and Gérard E. Weil, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006).

<sup>108</sup> All references to the Septuagint are from Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta: With Morphology*, Electronic ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979). This is also the view of David W. Baker, *Isaiah*, ZIBBCOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2013).

<sup>109</sup> All references to the Greek New Testament are from Kurt Aland et al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

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