

## THE ASCENSION AND EXALTATION OF JESUS IN LUKAN THEOLOGY

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### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the theological significance of the event most often designated as the *ascension*, which Luke narrates in Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:2, 9-11, and 22.<sup>1</sup> This event is also sometimes referred to as the *assumption* of Jesus. The latter term, while utilized far less frequently in the literature, may well be a more apt designation for the event, at least for the purposes of the present study. First, the term *assumption* signifies “the taking up of a person into heaven,”<sup>2</sup> and thus well captures the idea conveyed by the passive verbal forms employed in the Lukan narrative to describe Jesus’ being taken up into heaven. Second, this term also provides a suitable alternative designation for the event delineated in the above cited passages vis-à-vis the passages that refer to Jesus’ exaltation on resurrection day in terms of ascension. While this point in regard to the need for clear terminological demarcation of these respective events, together with the theological ramifications of distinguishing between the events, will receive further elucidation in later sections of this essay, what needs clarified from the outset is my use of terminology throughout the foundational exegetical sections of the paper: for reasons that will become far more clear later in the essay, the event

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<sup>1</sup>The present study began as a paper written in 2013 for Martin W. Mittelstadt’s Ph.D. seminar on Luke-Acts at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, USA. It was later revised and presented in January 2016 during an afternoon session at the 24<sup>th</sup> William W. Menzies Annual Lectureship Series at Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio, Philippines. I gratefully acknowledge both the theologically stimulating interaction during the AGTS seminar on Luke-Acts, and the feedback received from Donald Hagner, Bob Menzies, Marlene Yap, and others after the paper was read at APTS, which proved to be of great assistance in identifying points in need of further revision in preparation for publication.

<sup>2</sup>*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Assumption.” <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/assumption> (accessed May 24, 2016).

described in Luke 24:51 and Acts 1 will *not* be designated as the *ascension* but rather as the *taking up* of Jesus or the somewhat-less-cumbersome *assumption*.<sup>3</sup>

Of special interest for the present enquiry is the question of what relationship these assumption narratives bear to the concept of Jesus' exaltation (Acts 2:33-35), or, his entrance into glory (Luke 24:26). The paper will first exegete relevant texts outside of the taking-up narratives, and then these narratives themselves. Finally, I will offer an analysis of the Lukan conceptualization of the assumption of Jesus.

### Assumption and Exaltation Outside of the Taking-Up Narratives

Aside from the Lukan assumption narratives found at Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:2-11, 22 there are several texts within Luke-Acts that significantly contribute to a Lukan theology of the taking up and/or exaltation of Jesus. This section will exegetically probe Luke 9:31, 51; 24:26; and Acts 2:33-35 in order to determine their significance in this connection.

#### Luke 9:31

Whether or not Luke 9:31 contains a reference to the "ascension" (i.e., the assumption or taking up of Jesus) remains a disputed matter. The question revolves around the meaning of τὴν ἔξοδον αὐτοῦ ἣν ἔμελλεν πληροῦν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ ("his exodus, which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem"). The word ἔξοδος (lit., "a going out, departure") occurs just three times in the NT. In Hebrews 11:22 it signifies the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. At 2 Peter 1:15, Peter uses the word euphemistically in reference to his own impending death (cf. v. 14).<sup>4</sup> This latter usage also occurs in the LXX (cf. Wis. 3:2; 7:6).<sup>5</sup> Suggested interpretations of the significance of Luke's utilization of ἔξοδος include the following: (1) It simply refers to the death of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> (2) It

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<sup>3</sup>The exception to this will be when the views of others, who themselves use the term *ascension*, are being interacted with. In such cases, when the term is retained, I will place it within quotation marks.

<sup>4</sup>Interestingly, Peter's statement occurs in a context that alludes to the transfiguration (vv. 16-18). Cf. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 384.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>6</sup>Wilhelm Michaelis, "ἐξοδος, ἔξοδος, διέξοδος," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967 [hereafter abbreviated as *TDNT*]), 5:103-9, here at 107; J. Reiling and J. L. Swellengrebel, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Luke*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 382; Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary*

refers to the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>7</sup> (3) It refers to the complex event of Jesus' departure to heaven in death, resurrection, and "ascension" (i.e., assumption).<sup>8</sup> (4) It points to the events surrounding Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection, and "ascension" (assumption) as part of a New Exodus in repetition of the Exodus accomplished under Moses.<sup>9</sup> (5) It has reference to the whole life of Jesus, from his coming or εἰσοδος to the conclusion of his life in Jerusalem (Acts 13:24-31).<sup>10</sup> As Bock notes, however, Luke's use of ἐμελλεν ("was about to") militates against this view.<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to imagine how Luke could say Jesus' ἔξοδος was *about to be* fulfilled in Jerusalem if he conceptualized the term as signifying the entirety of Jesus' life. Rather, his ἔξοδος is something that remains future—although now imminent—at this point in the narrative. (6) Bock posits the Exodus imagery "refers to the entire death-parousia career of Jesus."<sup>12</sup> But it seems

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*on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 283.

John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, Word Biblical Commentary 35B (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 500, believes "Jesus' exodus is his death as departure from this world in the context of his understanding that his journey to glory at God's right hand has its beginning in an ignoble death in Jerusalem." Leon Morris, *Luke*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 188, interprets the term as a reference to Jesus' death, but he goes on to say, "The use of the word *exodus* for death is unusual and we should probably discern some exodus typology. The exodus had delivered Israel from bondage. Jesus by his 'exodus' would deliver his people from a far worse bondage" (ibid., 188-89).

<sup>7</sup>Mark C. Black, *Luke*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), 194. Black affirms the inclusion of both death and resurrection as probable, but he is uncertain whether to include the "ascension" here as well.

<sup>8</sup>Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacrina Pagina 3 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 153; Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, 5th ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1922), 251; Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary 24 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 285; Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 164; Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 426; Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 161; David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 394. John Bond, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (London: Macmillan, 1890), 114, states the meaning is "departure from life" with the idea of "ascension" included.

<sup>9</sup>Jindřich Mánek, "The New Exodus in the Books of Luke," *Novum Testamentum* 2, no. 1 (1957): 8-23. G. H. P. Thompson, *The Gospel According to Luke in the Revised Standard Version, with Introduction and Commentary*, New Clarendon Bible (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 32, also postulates New Exodus imagery at Luke 9:31.

<sup>10</sup>See Marshall, *Luke*, 384; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 870.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

problematic for this view that one can hardly refer to the parousia as a “departure.” In conclusion, while the inclusion of the assumption within the idea of “departure” certainly seems possible here, the fact Luke nowhere else speaks of the taking up of Christ as part of a complex event (see below on Luke 9:51) may vitiate this interpretation somewhat. Tentatively, therefore, I. Howard Marshall is probably correct to conclude Jesus’ death, resurrection, and the saving significance of these are in view.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps, one should not rule out the inclusion of Jesus’ entrance into glory or ascension-exaltation (see below on Luke 24:26) as well.

### Luke 9:51

With regard to the subject of the present paper, Luke 9:51 presents three interrelated exegetical issues, which may be articulated in the form of questions. First, what does Luke mean by the phrase τῆς ἀναλήψεως αὐτοῦ? Second, why does Luke utilize the plural τὰς ἡμέρας rather than the singular τὴν ἡμέραν? Finally, what is the precise significance of the infinitival clause ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι τὰς ἡμέρας?

Scholars have proposed no less than seven interpretive options for the meaning of Jesus’ ἀνάληψις. A. W. Zwiep enumerates the following suggestions: (1) Jesus’ death; (2) Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection; (3) Jesus’ departure from earth to heaven by way of his death, resurrection, and “ascension”; (4) same as the previous option with the journey to Jerusalem added; (5) Jesus’ “ascension”; (6) Jesus’ acceptance by the people; (7) Jesus’ pilgrimage.<sup>14</sup> The sixth and seventh options may be quickly eliminated because they do not comport with the wider Lukan context.<sup>15</sup> This leaves two broad categories: views that interpret the ἀνάληψις in terms of a complex event fulfilled over a period of time (views 2-4), and those that interpret it as a single, “more or less punctiliar action” (views 1 and 5).<sup>16</sup>

The noun ἀνάληψις is a NT *hapax legomenon*, which literally means “taking up, receiving.”<sup>17</sup> It also occurs in Ps. Sol. 4:18, where the meaning is removal from life, that is, “death.” BDAG states ἀνάληψις is usually understood to mean “*ascension* (into heaven).”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Marshall, *Luke*, 384-85.

<sup>14</sup>A. W. Zwiep, *The Ascension of the Messiah in Lukan Christology*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum LXXXVII (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 82-83.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>Marshall, *Luke*, 405.

<sup>18</sup>W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, F. W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. F. W.

Fitzmyer prefers here the translation, “assumption.”<sup>19</sup> After surveying early usage of the noun, Zwiep observes, “There is no unambiguous pre-NT attestation of ἀνάληψις in the technical sense of ‘rapture.’”<sup>20</sup> Conversely, he finds post-NT utilization of the noun with the meaning “ascension” to be common, as a result of “canonical influence.”<sup>21</sup> The strongest indication that Luke intended to attach such meaning to the term here is found in his usage of the cognate verb ἀναλαμβάνω in reference to the assumption (Acts 1:2, 11, 22; cf. also Mark 16:19; 1 Tim. 3:16). Contra those who attempt to limit the referent of the noun here to death, Fitzmyer is no doubt correct to state “the Lukan references in Acts almost certainly give it a larger connotation. . . . The only question is whether one should restrict it merely to the ascension [i.e., the taking up] or understand it in the still broader sense of Jesus’ entire transit to the Father (via death, burial, and exaltation).”<sup>22</sup> Significantly, within the Lukan assumption narratives (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:2, 9-11, 22), Luke consistently conceptualizes the taking up as a simple, punctiliar event. In fact, he explicitly states the assumption occurred on a single day<sup>23</sup> (vv. 2, 22), and nowhere speaks of it as a complex event.<sup>24</sup> Consequent to Luke’s usage of the cognate verb and his consistent portrayal of the event described thereby, it seems most probable that ἀνάληψις simply refers to the assumption<sup>25</sup> rather than to a complex cluster of events,<sup>26</sup> or to the death of Jesus.

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Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000 [hereafter abbreviated as BDAG]), 67, s.v. “ἀνάληψις” (italics original).

<sup>19</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible 28 (Garden City, NY, 1981), 827-28.

<sup>20</sup>Zwiep, *Ascension of the Messiah*, 81.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 81 n. 3.

<sup>22</sup>Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 828 (brackets mine).

<sup>23</sup>Robert D. Kaylor, “The Ascension Motif in Luke-Acts, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Fourth Gospel” (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1964), 32, argues to the contrary but fails to convince.

<sup>24</sup>Zwiep, *Ascension of the Messiah*, 84.

<sup>25</sup>Also in support of viewing the term as a reference to the “ascension,” see J. G. Davies, *He Ascended into Heaven: A Study in the History of Doctrine* (New York: Association Press, 1958), 40. Davies leans heavily upon the connection between Luke 9:51 and 54, and the “underlying Elijah typology” in the passage (ibid.). See also Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 402-3; Geldenhuys, *Luke*, 291; William Hendricksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 557; Black, *Luke*, 200 n. 29; Thompson, *Luke*, 157.

<sup>26</sup>E.g., Mikeal C. Parsons, *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts: The Ascension Narratives in Context*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 21 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield JSOT Press, 1987), 110, who includes death, resurrection, and “ascension.” Cf. also Kaylor, “Ascension Motif,” 31-32, who includes Jesus’ passion, death, resurrection, and “ascension.” Similarly, Johnson, *Luke*, 162, says the noun refers to “the whole sequence of events, climaxing in his ascension.” Cf. also Just, *Luke 9:51-*

The chief difficulty with this view appears to be the plural τὰς ἡμέρας. In fact, J. Kremer avers the ἀνάληψις includes Jesus' death, resurrection, "ascension," and exaltation, for "it is only with reference to them that the plural 'days' is appropriate."<sup>27</sup> The argument is overstated, however. Luke's utilization of the plural "days" must be considered together with the entire infinitival clause in which it occurs, namely, ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι τὰς ἡμέρας, and the clause's possible underlying OT expression.

The accusative τὰς ἡμέρας serves as the subject of the infinitive συμπληροῦσθαι,<sup>28</sup> which is passive because no agency is implied—the days simply "were being fulfilled."<sup>29</sup> The use of ἐν τῷ plus the infinitive here clearly expresses contemporaneous time.<sup>30</sup> In other words, it temporally specifies the point at which the action of the main clause occurred: it was "while"<sup>31</sup> the days of his ἀνάληψις were being filled up" that "he fixed his face to go to Jerusalem" (αὐτὸς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐστήριξεν τοῦ πορεύεσθαι εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ).

Zwier registers two possible ways of reconciling the Lukan conception of the "ascension" as a single event transpiring on a single day (Acts 1:2, 22), on the one hand, and the clause presently under analysis, on the other. Firstly, he notes the plural "days" in OT idiom is sometimes utilized in reference to death, which, of course, occurs at a specific point in time rather than over a period of days (cf. Gen. 47:29; Deut. 31:14; 1 Kings 2:1). Thus, the plural τὰς ἡμέρας "does not necessarily imply that the ἀνάληψις took place over a longer period of time."<sup>32</sup> Secondly, and more convincingly,<sup>33</sup> he suggests the OT expression "the days . . . are/were fulfilled . . ." constitutes "the closer parallel to Lk 9:51," as opposed to "the days of . . . are/were

24:53, 426; Tannehill, *Luke*, 168. Morris, *Luke*, 195, goes so far as to include crucifixion, resurrection, "ascension," and session at the right hand of God.

<sup>27</sup>J. Kremer, "ἀνάληψις," in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 1:83-84, here at 84.

<sup>28</sup>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), 333.

<sup>29</sup>See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 436: "The nature of some passive verbs is such that *no agency is to be implied* (e.g., συντελεσθεισῶν αὐτῶν [when (those days) were completed] in Luke 4:2" (italics and brackets original).

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Culy, Parsons, and Stigall, *Luke*, 333.

<sup>31</sup>According to Wallace, 595, "while" is the preferred translation when the present infinitive is used in such a construction, whereas "as" or "when" is preferable when the aorist occurs.

<sup>32</sup>Zwier, *Ascension of the Messiah*, 84 (italics original).

<sup>33</sup>It should be noted that this is Zwier's preferred explanation as well.

approaching.”<sup>34</sup> There are two ways of further qualifying such a construction. The first is to add either an adjective or a qualitative genitive. A Lukan example of this type is found at Luke 1:23: Καὶ ἐγένετο ὡς ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τῆς λειτουργίας αὐτοῦ, “and it happened when the days of his service were fulfilled” (cf. Esther 1:5; Isa. 60:20).<sup>35</sup> The second way to qualify this construction is to add the preposition ἅ plus the infinitive, or, in Greek, τοῦ plus a substantival infinitive, thus expressing the purpose for the period under consideration. Lukan examples include Luke 2:6 and 21: Ἐγένετο δὲ . . . ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν, “Now it happened . . . the days were fulfilled for her to give birth”; Καὶ ὅτε ἐπλήσθησαν ἡμέραι ὀκτῶ τοῦ περιτεμεῖν αὐτόν, “and when the eight days were fulfilled to circumcise him” (cf. Gen. 25:24).<sup>36</sup> While Luke 9:51 may appear at first glance to be an example of the first type of qualified construction, in which case τῆς ἀναλήψεως αὐτοῦ is a qualitative genitive that specifies the days as constituting his ἀνάλημψις, Zwiep posits Luke has modified the second type. In this case, the only irregular feature of the clause is its use of a noun (τῆς ἀναλήψεως αὐτοῦ) where one would have expected an articular infinitive (τοῦ ἀναληφθῆναι αὐτόν).<sup>37</sup> The unexpected substitution of the noun for the more regular infinitival clause may have resulted from Luke’s desire to “strengthen the parallelising [*sic*] of v. 51 to v. 31,” by creating “a noun-allusion to both the biblical Moses (ἔξοδος) and the Elijah tradition (ἀνάλημψις).”<sup>38</sup> This, of course, also resulted in the possible ambiguity of the verse as it is written. Zwiep concludes that this alteration to the expected idiom caused the syntax to become “hopelessly ambiguous.” He explains, “What [Luke] *says* is that ‘the days of the ἀνάλημψις’ are being filled up (that is, strictly speaking from 9:51 onwards); what he *intends* to say (if our hypothesis is correct) is that the period leading up to the ascension is being (completely) filled up and that this period finds its completion in the ascension.”<sup>39</sup> Zwiep’s explication with regard to the underlying idiom and the possible reason for Luke’s unusual expression

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 84-85.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>38</sup>Zwiep, *Ascension of the Messiah*, 85. On the Elijah typology, see also A. R. C. Leaney, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), 172. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 828, notes, “The OT background to the ‘assumption’ of Jesus is to be seen in that of Enoch (Gen 5:24b) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2:11; 1 Macc 2:58; Sir 48:9). In the intertestamental literature there is also the *Assumption of Moses*.” This background will be further explored below under Acts 1:2-11, 22.

<sup>39</sup>Zwiep, *Ascension of the Messiah*, 85-86.

of it appears quite plausible; however, his statement that the syntax is “hopelessly ambiguous” seems unnecessary and overstated.

Conversely, Marshall finds the expression “perfectly possible,” and interprets the present infinitive with the plural “days” as indicative of “the completion of the period before the decisive event<sup>40</sup> takes place.”<sup>41</sup> Marshall translates the clause, “While the days leading to his ‘taking up’ were being fulfilled.”<sup>42</sup> Moreover, he states the verb συμπληρώω signifies the arrival of the time for fulfillment in the divine plan.<sup>43</sup> Thus, while Marshall gives far less attention to discussing the idiom utilized, he interprets the meaning of the clause similarly to Zwiep. Yet Marshall clearly has a higher estimation of the acceptability of the Lukan expression as it is written.

#### Luke 24:26

At Luke 24:26, one finds a significant clue to the Lukan conceptualization of the assumption narratives (i.e., Luke 24:51; Acts 1:2, 9-11, 22) and the relationship they bear to the idea of exaltation. In this verse, which consists of the reported speech of Jesus, the Lord asks a rhetorical question that anticipates an affirmative answer. He says, οὐχὶ ταῦτα ἔδει παθεῖν τὸν χριστόν, καὶ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ; The interrogative use of οὐχὶ indicates the expectation of an affirmative answer to the question.<sup>44</sup> The verb ἔδει (“it was necessary”)

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<sup>40</sup>Marshall, *Luke*, 405, states, “The primary reference here is probably to the death of Jesus, but it is hard to resist the impression that there is also an allusion to Jesus being ‘taken up’ or ‘taken back’ to God in the ascension, especially in view of the presence of Elijah typology in the context.” Marshall does not elucidate why he believes the death of Jesus is the primary referent. To the contrary, both Lukan usage of the cognate verb in reference to the assumption and the Elijah connection within the context favor the assumption as the sole referent of ἀνάληψις.

Similarly, David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 251-414, here at 315, state the phrase “the days of his being taken up” may refer to Christ’s death, “but the use of the verbal cognate *analambanō* (“take up”) in Acts 1:11, 22 points to the inclusion of the resurrection/ascension events in the expression.” It is better, however, to take the way Luke employs the cognate verb as indicative of the *identification* of the ἀνάληψις with the assumption event of Acts 1:11, 22, rather than indicative of its *inclusion* together with several other closely related events such as death and resurrection.

<sup>41</sup>Marshall, *Luke*, 405.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid. Similarly, Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 827, states, “the filling up of the days has to be understood of God’s plan beginning to move to a new stage of its realization.”

<sup>44</sup>Reiling and Swellengrebel, *Handbook on the Gospel of Luke*, 204. See also Culy, Parsons, and Stigall, *Luke*, 749: “The negativizer indicates that a positive answer is expected to this question.”

is indicative of divine necessity,<sup>45</sup> that is to say, it indicates the suffering of Christ and his entrance into glory constitute necessary aspects of salvation history.<sup>46</sup> The use of the imperfect tense probably indicates both suffering and entrance into glory are—from the perspective of this conversation on the Emmaus road—already accomplished.<sup>47</sup> In support of this conclusion, Luke 24:46 reports Jesus to have said, ἕδει παθεῖν τὸν χριστόν, καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν τῆ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ (“it was necessary [for] the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead on the third day”). So too, in Acts 17:3 Luke summarizes the Pauline kerygma using the words τὸν χριστόν ἕδει παθεῖν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν (“it was necessary [for] the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead”).<sup>48</sup> With the exception of slight word order variation,<sup>49</sup> the first part of the statement is identical in all three examples: “it was necessary [for] the Christ to suffer.” The difference occurs in the second part of the construction, where the infinitival phrase ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν occurs in place of εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ. The implication appears to be that resurrection and entrance into glory are so closely related that they may be used interchangeably in such kerygmatic formulae without any great change in meaning. This need not imply, however, that the two concepts are actually synonymous—only that they are very closely related (theologically and temporally) ideas.<sup>50</sup> In fact, Nolland argues Lukan usage of “glory” (see Luke 9:31-32; cf. also 9:26; 21:27; Acts 22:11) does not support the identification of resurrection as entrance into glory; the latter, he claims, “can only be the glory of exaltation to the right hand of God.”<sup>51</sup> Yet, contra Nolland,<sup>52</sup> the implication of the text seems to be that Jesus has already entered into his heavenly glory and appears to the disciples from heaven.

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<sup>45</sup>Reiling and Swellengrebel, *Handbook on the Gospel of Luke*, 754; Stein, *Luke*, 612.

<sup>46</sup>See Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 179-80, and idem, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible 28a (Garden City, NY, 1985), 1566.

<sup>47</sup>Stein, *Luke*, 612. Zwiep, *Ascension of the Messiah*, 152 n. 1, hesitates to lean too heavily on the imperfect tense here: “*Stricto sensu* only the (divine) necessity of the impending passion and vindication is described as a past event. The imperfect ἕδει does not automatically make the following verbs events of the past as well. That the passion is considered as a past event is clear from the context, but only by implication” (italics original).

<sup>48</sup>I am indebted to Zwiep, *Ascension of the Messiah*, 152, for the observation of the similarities between Luke 24:26, 46; and Acts 17:3.

<sup>49</sup>That is, the fronting of the accusative subject τὸν χριστόν at Acts 17:3.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. also 1 Pet. 1:21, which states God resurrected Jesus and gave him glory.

<sup>51</sup>John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary 35C (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 1204.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 1204-5.

Moreover, while both the infinitives (παθεῖν and εἰσελθεῖν) are syntactically dependent upon ἕδει, εἰσελθεῖν bears a distant sense. With regard to the meaning of the second infinitive, there are three possibilities: (1) it could bear a temporal sense: Christ suffered “before entering his glory;” (2) it could indicate purpose (final sense): he suffered “in order to enter his glory;” (3) it could indicate result (consecutive sense): he suffered “and so entered his glory.”<sup>53</sup> Most probably, result is the intended sense.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, the verse can be translated, “Was it not necessary [for] the Christ to suffer these things, and so to enter his glory?”

To sum up, Christ entered into his glory as a result of his suffering, and this entrance into glory had already occurred when Christ spoke to the disciples on the Emmaus road.<sup>55</sup> Fitzmyer concurs, stating:

Luke never depicts the resurrection of Jesus as if it were a mere resuscitation or return to natural, terrestrial existence (like the resuscitated son of the widow of Nain, 7:15; or Jairus’ daughter, 8:54-55). Rather he is aware that Christ has entered “his glory” (24:26). It is from ‘glory’ (the presence of the Father) that Jesus’ appearances to his disciples take place. From there he clearly appears to Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6; 22:6-10; 26:13-18); and the only real difference between that appearance and the others (to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, to the Eleven and others in Jerusalem, and the many instances referred to in Acts 1:3) is that it was postpentecostal.<sup>56</sup>

#### Acts 2:33-35

Acts 2:33-35 is one of the most important Lukan texts touching on the exaltation of Jesus. Consequently, determining the meaning of these verses is a vital step in correctly understanding the assumption narratives found in Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:2-11, 22.

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<sup>53</sup>Reiling and Swellengrebel, *Handbook on the Gospel of Luke*, 754.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup>In agreement with this, Pierre Benoit, *Jesus and the Gospel*, vol. 1, chap. 11 (209-53), “The Ascension,” trans. Benet Weatherhead (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 249 n. 2, explicates Luke 24:26 as meaning “that the Lord has already ‘entered into his glory’ by the time that he is speaking to the disciples, that is, that he ascended to his Father, immediately after the Resurrection.”

<sup>56</sup>Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 193-94. For an expanded delineation of Fitzmyer’s understanding, see also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Ascension of Christ and Pentecost,” *Theological Studies* 45, no. 3 (1984): 409-440, here at 422-23. Cf. also Zwiep, *Ascension of the Messiah*, 151-53.

In Acts 2:32, Peter's Pentecost speech references the resurrection of Jesus (cf. also vv. 24-31). Now, at verse 33, Peter introduces the exaltation of Christ with the inferential conjunction οὖν ("Therefore"). BDAG explicates the inferential use of οὖν as "denoting that what it introduces is the result of or an inference fr. what precedes."<sup>57</sup> Zwiep opines that if οὖν is assigned its full illative force here, then the exaltation of Christ (Τῆ δεξιᾷ . . . τοῦ θεοῦ ὑψωθείς,) is synonymous to his resurrection (Τοῦτον τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀνέστησεν ὁ θεός, v. 32).<sup>58</sup> In a similar direction, Marshall affirms, "The resurrection is to be understood as the exaltation of Jesus. It was not simply a revivification but an ascension to be with God. Peter regards this as self-evident."<sup>59</sup> To the contrary, Peter may have regarded the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God as closely connected (both theologically and temporally) to, and a natural inference to be drawn from, the resurrection without necessarily equating the two events (cf. also 5:30-31, where the two are again mentioned together).<sup>60</sup> If the resurrection from the dead fulfilled Scripture (e.g., Ps. 16) and vindicated Jesus as the Messiah who was to come (vv. 24-32), it stands to reason God would also exalt him at his right hand in fulfillment of Scripture (vv. 33-35; Ps. 110:1)—in this way, his exaltation is an inference naturally drawn from the resurrection.<sup>61</sup> What is more, it is probably best to understand the resurrection as the first movement toward the ascension-exaltation, which closely followed it on the same day—in this way, too, Jesus' exaltation is a logical inference and in a real sense the result of the resurrection. Peter articulates ascending to heaven—not simply resurrection—as the means of attaining the exaltation of v.33 (cf. v. 34).

Some scholars identify the dative Τῆ δεξιᾷ as instrumental, thus meaning, Jesus was exalted "by" the right hand of God.<sup>62</sup> In favor of

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<sup>57</sup>BDAG, 736, s.v. "οὖν."

<sup>58</sup>Zwiep, *Ascension of the Messiah*, 155.

<sup>59</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 78. Similarly, W. Michaelis, "ἄρα . . .," *TDNT*, 5:356, opines, "As may be seen from 5:30f., the τῆ δεξιᾷ οὖν τοῦ θεοῦ ὑψωθείς of Ac. 2:33 refers, not to the ascension, but to the resurrection mentioned in 2:32. As compared with the resurrection, the ascension is not a further alteration in the mode of existence of the risen Lord. We are thus to think of the appearances between Easter and the ascension . . . as appearances of the risen Lord from heaven."

<sup>60</sup>From a broader canonical perspective, the resurrection and ascension-exaltation simply cannot be collapsed into a single event; cf. John 20:17, which portrays Jesus as resurrected but not yet ascended.

<sup>61</sup>Somewhat similarly, in Acts 17:31 Paul points to the resurrection of Christ as divinely furnished proof that God has appointed Jesus as future Judge of all.

<sup>62</sup>E.g., Thomas Ethelbert Page, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (London: Macmillan, 1897), 93; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the*

this interpretation, the Septuagintal text of Psalm 117:16 (Eng. 118:16) reads, δεξιὰ κυρίου ὑψώσεν με δεξιὰ κυρίου ἐποίησεν δύναμιν (“The right hand of the Lord has lifted me up; the right hand of the Lord has worked powerfully”). The locative sense is preferable,<sup>63</sup> however, because the contextual focus (cf. vv. 34-35) is on Psalm 110:1 (LXX 109:1), not 118:16 (117:16 LXX). Since Psalm 110:1 is concerned with locale, not means, that is the meaning here as well.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, the verse points to Jesus’ exaltation “at” the right hand of God.

The action expressed by the aorist passive participle ὑψωθεὶς (“having been exalted”) is clearly temporally antecedent to the action expressed by the main verb ἐξέχεεν (“he poured out”). It would be a mistake, however, to identify the participle as simply temporal, as Schnabel does.<sup>65</sup> To be sure, Jesus poured out the Spirit “after he was exalted,” but there is more. The participle also expresses the *ground* of the act of outpouring the Spirit and, therefore, a causal nuance is also present. The concern of Peter’s argument at this point in his Pentecost sermon is to demonstrate that Jesus is the resurrected and exalted Messiah. At the present juncture, he argues that Jesus pours out the Spirit only because he was exalted and received the promise of the Spirit from the Father. The emphasis appears to fall upon the causal rather than the temporal element. Consequently, the participle should be regarded as causal.<sup>66</sup>

The genitive τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος (“of the Holy Spirit”), which modifies τὴν . . . ἐπαγγελίαν (“the promise”), is exegetical.<sup>67</sup> “the promise, that is, the Holy Spirit” (cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5). Like

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*Acts*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 66.

<sup>63</sup>Martin M. Culy, and Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 42.

<sup>64</sup>Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 132. See also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 259; David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 150 n. 72.

<sup>65</sup>Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 147. Culy and Parsons, *Acts*, 42, also identify the participle as temporal.

<sup>66</sup>Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 624, cautions against too quickly identifying a participle as temporal. He states a temporal element is almost always present, but this must be the *primary* element in order to identify the participle as temporal. Here, the causal element seems to be primary, and the temporal secondary.

<sup>67</sup>Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 52; Bock, *Acts*, 133; Schnabel, *Acts*, 148 n. 89; Culy and Parsons, *Acts*, 42.

ὑψωθείς, the participle λαβῶν is causal.<sup>68</sup> The idea is, “*Because* he was exalted to the right hand of God and *because* he received the promise, that is, the Spirit, he poured out” the gift of the Spirit. The prepositional phrase παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς simply states the Source from whom Jesus received the promised Spirit to bestow. As a result of Christ’s exaltation and his reception of the promise, ἐξέχεεν τοῦτο ὃ νῦν ὑμεῖς βλέπετε καὶ ἀκούετε (“he has poured out this that you now see and hear”).

In verses 34-35, Peter further explains his statement about Christ’s exaltation—the verse begins with the explanatory γὰρ (“For”). He explicates, Οὐ . . . Δαυὶδ ἀνέβη εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς (“[it was] not David<sup>69</sup> [who] ascended into the heavens”). Rather, David said (λέγει δὲ αὐτός), “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’” (Ἐἶπεν ὁ κύριος τῷ κυρίῳ μου, Κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου, ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου). Hence, Christ’s exaltation to the right hand of God was inextricably linked to his ascending to heaven. It is interesting that the verb ἀνέβη is active, whereas the verbs Luke uses to describe the assumption of Jesus in Luke 24 and Acts 1 are consistently passive. I will return to this point below.

### **The Lukan Assumption Narratives**

#### **Luke 24:51**

At the conclusion of Luke (24:51), the author briefly describes Jesus’ being taken up with the words, διέστη ἀπ’ αὐτῶν,<sup>70</sup> καὶ ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν<sup>71</sup> (“he parted from them, and was being carried up into heaven”). The verb διέστημι is used only by Luke in the NT (cf. Luke 22:59; Acts 27:28). It is characteristically Lukan, moreover, to describe the departure of supernatural messengers or visitors (cf. Luke 1:38; 2:15; 9:33; 24:31; Acts 10:7; 12:10); this departure motif is commonplace in such visitation stories (e.g., Gen. 17:22; 35:13; Judg. 6:21; 13:20; Tob. 12:20-21; 2 Macc. 3:34).<sup>72</sup> Here, Luke proceeds to describe the manner of the resurrected Jesus’

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<sup>68</sup>Culy and Parsons, *Acts*, 42, again (as with ὑψωθείς) identify the participle as temporal.

<sup>69</sup>Bock, *Acts*, 134, suggests the word order indicates οὐ negates the noun Δαυὶδ rather than the verb ἀνέβη.

<sup>70</sup>The prepositional phrase, ἀπ’ αὐτῶν, here indicates separation. Cf. Culy, Parsons, and Stigall, *Luke*, 762.

<sup>71</sup>The prepositional phrase, εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, here bears a locative sense. Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup>Marshall, *Luke*, 909.

departure. The use of the imperfect ἀνεφέρετο here indicates the gradual nature of Jesus' departure as he "was being carried up,"<sup>73</sup> which dovetails nicely with the more detailed description found in Acts 1:9-10.<sup>74</sup> The entire statement (καὶ ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν) is omitted in some manuscripts.<sup>75</sup> But the external support for the clause is much stronger.<sup>76</sup> What is more, the removal of the words is much more readily explained than is their addition.<sup>77</sup> A scribe with harmonizing tendencies may have *intentionally* omitted the words in an attempt to remove a perceived contradiction vis-à-vis the forty days of Acts 1:3, 9-11.<sup>78</sup> Alternatively, a copyist may have *unintentionally* omitted the words due to homoeoarcton<sup>79</sup>—both v. 51b and v. 52a begin with KAIA.<sup>80</sup>

With regard to the perceived contradiction regarding the time of the assumption, Luke does not affirm at Luke 24:51 that Jesus' taking up occurred on Resurrection Day, though his compressed and abbreviated narration does leave the possibility for the reader to arrive at such a misconstrued chronology. Yet the author more fully and carefully details the chronological particulars in his second volume<sup>81</sup>—thus alleviating any possible misunderstanding on this point. This explanation gives a plausible defense of the non-contradictory nature of the Lukan assumption narratives.

What is intriguing on the literary level, however, is Luke's inclusion of both the promise of Spirit-empowered witness (vv. 47-49)

<sup>73</sup>I do not mean to imply that the imperfect tense-form alone indicates this, but rather that this *Aktionsart* is the clear pragmatic implicature of this particular imperfect verb as Luke here employs it. Cf. Constantine R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 21-23.

<sup>74</sup>Marshall, *Luke*, 909.

<sup>75</sup>Namely, κ\*<sup>a</sup>, D it<sup>a, b, d, e, ffz, j, l</sup> syr<sup>s</sup> geo<sup>1</sup> Augustine<sup>1/3</sup>.

<sup>76</sup>Namely, Ϝ<sup>75</sup> κ<sup>2</sup> A B C L W Δ Θ Ψ f<sup>1</sup> f<sup>2</sup> 28 33 157 180 205 565 579 597 700 892 1006 1010 1071 1241 1243 1292 1342 1424 1505 Bz.

<sup>77</sup>See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 162-63; Marshall, *Luke*, 909. Plummer, *St. Luke*, 565, disagrees, stating, "No motive for their omission, if they were in the original document, can be suggested. They look like a gloss on διέστη; but it is conceivable that Lk. himself (or Theophilus) may have added them in a second edition of the Gospel, in order to make it quite clear what διέστη ἂπ' αὐτῶν meant."

<sup>78</sup>Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 1590.

<sup>79</sup>Alternatively, a copyist may have *unintentionally* omitted the words due to homoeoarcton, an error whereby a scribe omits words as a result of skipping from one phrase to another that begins similarly—here, both v. 51b and v. 52a begin with KAIA.

<sup>80</sup>Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 163; cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 1590.

<sup>81</sup>With regard to Luke 24, Kaylor, "Ascension Motif," 27, states, "Luke had no intention to indicate the chronology of the events; if we are correct in assuming that he had in mind the sequel in Acts, it seems that his purpose at the close of the Gospel is to give a summary of the final appearance of Jesus to his disciples, while intending to give a more extended account at the beginning of Acts."

and the taking up of Jesus (vv. 50-51) in close succession. The same two elements are similarly juxtaposed in Acts 1:4-5, 8 (Spirit-empowered witness) and 9-11 (assumption). It seems Luke regarded the assumption as an event that was in some way closely related to the bestowal of Spirit empowerment. One could perhaps argue that the connection is found in that the assumption of Luke 24:51; Acts 1:2, 9-11, 22 constitutes the prerequisite exaltation that made possible the bestowal of the Spirit (cf. Acts 2:33). This remains unlikely, however, due to Luke's indication that Jesus "entered into his glory" on the day of his resurrection, not forty days later (cf. discussion on Luke 24:26), as well as his failure to indicate the assumption (Luke 24; Acts 1) as the point of Jesus' exaltation. It seems Acts 2:33 speaks of the same reality as Luke 24:26, rather than that described in 24:51 and Acts 1:9-11. A more plausible connection is found in the Elijah typology to be explored shortly.

Acts 1:2, 9-11, 22

A much fuller treatment of Jesus' being taken up into heaven is found in the assumption narrative that introduces the Book of Acts (1:2-11; cf. v. 22). Before introducing the assumption, Luke makes the intriguing statement in verse 1 that his first treatise (that is, the Gospel of Luke) detailed "all that Jesus began to do and to teach" (περὶ πάντων, . . . ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν.). F. F. Bruce notes the verb ἤρξατο ("began") is no mere "semitizing auxiliary," but rather "carries a certain emphasis."<sup>82</sup> In other words, Luke implies his second volume will recount what the exalted and departed Jesus *continued* to do and teach through his Spirit-empowered followers.<sup>83</sup> This, of course, implies a transference of the Spirit-empowered prophetic ministry from Jesus to his disciples.

Immediately subsequent to this significant statement, Luke introduces the taking-up motif in verse 2 with the aorist passive ἀνελήφθη ("he was taken up"). This is the first of three occurrences of the verb ἀναλαμβάνω in the present chapter, all in reference to Jesus' assumption (cf. vv. 11, 22). The verb, moreover, occurs in the passive voice in each instance (ἀνελήφθη in vv. 2 and 22; ὁ ἀναληφθεὶς in v. 11). In the present context, this utilization of the passive constitutes a clear example of the so-called divine passive, or, theological passive,<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Bruce, *Acts*, 30 n. 10.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>84</sup>On which see Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 437-38.

meaning the implication is that God took Jesus;<sup>85</sup> he did not actively ascend. Most probably, Luke employed the passive rather than explicitly stating God as the subject of the action in order not to detract from the strong focus upon Jesus and his assumption.<sup>86</sup> Also, while Luke does not here explicitly state that this “taking up” was εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν (“into heaven”), this is clearly assumed. It is clearly articulated in verse 11, and again assumed in verse 22.

What is more, when Luke chose to use the verb ἀνελήφθη, he employed the same form of the same verb that the LXX utilizes in reference to Elijah’s translation in 2 Kings 2:11 (ἀνελήμφθη Ἡλίου . . . εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν).<sup>87</sup> In addition, verses 9-10 of this passage in 2 Kings use alternate forms of the same verb in the same connection (the aorist passive infinitive ἀναλημφθῆναί in v. 9; the present passive participle ἀναλαμβάνόμενον in v. 10). In extra-canonical literature, the form ἀνελήμφθη also occurs at 1 Maccabees 2:58 and Sirach 49:14 in reference to the assumptions of Elijah and Enoch,<sup>88</sup> respectively. The substantival participial form, ὁ ἀναλημφθεὶς, is used in reference to Elijah in Sirach 48:9. There can be little doubt that Luke very intentionally echoed the language of Elijah’s assumption.<sup>89</sup> The significance of this fact will be discussed more fully below. Elsewhere within the NT, ἀνελήφθη refers to Jesus’ assumption in Mark 16:19,<sup>90</sup> and 1 Timothy 3:16, as it clearly does here.

P. A. van Stempvoort, conversely, concludes the “normal meaning” attached to both the noun ἀνάληψις and the cognate verb ἀναλαμβάνω in Luke’s time and “the first centuries” was “to die, to be

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<sup>85</sup>Cf. Schnabel, *Acts*, 71. Peterson, *Acts*, 114, notes the passive verb implies a “supernatural act of God.”

<sup>86</sup>Cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 436. One could argue the subject is easily perceived due to the assumed preunderstanding of the author and his audience, thus making the naming of God as subject superfluous (cf. *ibid.*, 435-36 for discussion of such usage of the passive). Wallace’s second category, that which stresses focus upon the subject as the reason for the author’s use of the passive voice, seems exegetically stronger here, however.

<sup>87</sup>Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 195-96; Schnabel, *Acts*, 71.

<sup>88</sup>The more usual verb for Enoch’s translation is μετατίθημι (cf. Gen. 5:24, LXX; Wis. 4:10 [see also 4:11, where ἀρπάζω is used in the same connection]; Sir. 44:16. The author of Hebrews follows suit in 11:5, which employs both the verb μετατίθημι and the noun μετάθεσις.

<sup>89</sup>See Johnson, *Acts*, 24: “The use of the verb *analambanō* echoes the account of the ascension of Elijah in LXX 2 Kgs 2:9-11.” Conversely, Benoit, “Ascension,” 248-49, rejects any such allusion.

<sup>90</sup>On the authenticity of the so-called Long Ending, or Mark 16:9-20, see now Nicholas P. Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark: A New Case for the Authenticity of Mark 16:9-20* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014).

taken up in the sense of to pass away, removal out of this world.”<sup>91</sup> Van Stempvoort argues Luke’s usage of the noun in Luke 9:51 tips the scales in favor of the “normal” meaning of the verb in Acts 1:2; and so, he interprets both verses as speaking of “the whole process of his passing away and being taken up in the wide sense.”<sup>92</sup> Several points militate against this interpretation, however. First, the Lukan text utilizes ἀναλαμβάνω not only in verse 2 but also in verses 11 and 22, and the latter verses plainly refer to the assumption. Van Stempvoort fails to explain why Luke would employ the same verb in the same context to convey such disparate meanings.<sup>93</sup> Second, Luke states the event spoken of in verse 2 occurred on a single day (ἄχρι ἧς ἡμέρας . . . ἀνελήθη, “until the day he was taken up”), and the reported speech of Peter in verse 22 makes a similar claim (ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ἧς ἀνελήθη ἀφ’ ἡμῶν, “until the day on which he was taken up from us”). This similarity of description further supports interpreting both verses as referring to the same event—the assumption. Third, van Stempvoort bases his interpretation of Acts 1:2 on a quite questionable understanding of Luke 9:51; his reading does not give due consideration to apparent allusions to Elijah’s assumption conveyed by both the noun ἀνάληψις and the verb ἀναλαμβάνω.

In verse 9, Luke introduces his narration of the assumption with the words Καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν. The aorist participle is plainly temporal,<sup>94</sup> thus, “And after he said these things.” By introducing the verse in this way, Luke closely links Jesus’ mission mandate (v. 8) with the assumption.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, the genitive absolute βλέπόντων αὐτῶν is also to be construed temporally.<sup>96</sup> The present participle here conveys that the apostles were watching as Jesus was taken up: “while they were watching.” Both temporal participial clauses modify the verb ἐπήρθη (“he was lifted up”), which, as noted above, is a divine passive.<sup>97</sup> Then,

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<sup>91</sup>P. A. van Stempvoort, “The Interpretation of the Ascension in Luke and Acts,” *New Testament Studies* 5, no. 1 (1958): 30-42, here at 32.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 33. Similarly, Kaylor, “Ascension Motif,” 31-32, unconvincingly argues the verb refers to Jesus’ passion, death, resurrection, and “ascension.” To the contrary, the context clearly specifies the taking up as that which is intended.

<sup>93</sup>Cf. Matthew Sleeman, *Geography and the Ascension Narrative in Acts*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 146 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 65.

<sup>94</sup>Cf. Culy and Parsons, *Acts*, 9.

<sup>95</sup>Peterson, *Acts*, 114.

<sup>96</sup>As is usually the case with the genitive absolute construction. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 655. See also Culy and Parsons, *Acts*, 9, who state, “While the events expressed by the aorist participle, εἰπὼν, precede the event of the main verb, the event expressed by the present participle is contemporaneous with the event of the main verb.”

<sup>97</sup>See also Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 210, who identifies the verb as a theological passive.

“a cloud took him up from their eyes” (καὶ νεφέλη ὑπέλαβεν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν).

In addition to Luke’s usage of the verb ἀναλαμβάνω (cf. discussion above on v. 2), another literary allusion to the assumption of Elijah possibly occurs here. Luke states Jesus’ assumption occurred βλέπόντων αὐτῶν, that is, “while they were watching” (cf. v. 10: ὡς ἀτενίζοντες ἦσαν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν πορευομένου αὐτοῦ). While the emphasis placed upon “seeing” no doubt underscores the eyewitness testimony that constitutes such an indispensable part of their apostolic role as witnesses, there appears to be another implication here as well. Luke Timothy Johnson posits a literary allusion to Elijah’s departure.<sup>98</sup> In 2 Kings 2:9, Elisha requests a “double portion” of Elijah’s “spirit,” or, his prophetic anointing. While Elijah said this was a difficult request, he assured Elisha he would receive it *but only if he saw Elijah departing* (v. 10). He did see him as he was taken up, and he did receive the double portion of his prophetic anointing (vv. 11-15). Luke’s emphasis upon the disciples seeing Jesus as he is taken up, according to Johnson, “picks up this literary motif.”<sup>99</sup> The two messengers both confirm that the disciples have indeed seen Jesus’ assumption, and that they must return to Jerusalem to await their prophetic anointing with the Spirit rather than stand staring into the sky (v. 11).<sup>100</sup> The assumption thus indicates the transference of the prophetic mantle to the disciples,<sup>101</sup> although they do not receive the prophetic empowerment that actualizes this ministry for several more days.

In regard to the cloud mentioned by Luke, there has been some disagreement about the significance one should assign to it. Many scholars attach symbolic import to the cloud. For example, Marshall states the cloud is both the *vehicle* that “envelopes” and “transports” Jesus to heaven, and a *sign* of God’s heavenly glory (cf. Luke 9:34f.; Rev. 11:12).<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Bock, who notes the biblical and Jewish

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<sup>98</sup>Johnson, *Acts*, 31-32. Cf. Green, *Luke*, 403, who notices this connection when commenting on Luke 9:51. See also Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 713. On the transfer motif, see further Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 20-21.

<sup>99</sup>Johnson, *Acts*, 31.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>101</sup>Cf. Keener, *Acts*, 1:713: “Jesus is passing on his prophetic ministry and empowerment to his disciples”; and 1:720: “the backdrop in the succession narrative of Elijah and Elisha indicates that, for Luke, Jesus is passing his mission to the church as exemplified in its leading representatives.”

<sup>102</sup>Marshall, *Acts*, 61.

precedents for the Lukan description of Jesus' "ascension," concludes the cloud acts not only as vehicle but also as sign of God's glory (Exod. 16:10; Ps. 104:3; Luke 9:34-35) or his presence (1 Thess. 4:17; 1 En. 39:3).<sup>103</sup> Larkin posits the cloud points to the Shekinah glory and, perhaps, the second coming.<sup>104</sup> So too, Fitzmyer avers the cloud is employed as "an apocalyptic stage prop" indicating "God's presence, power, or glory" (Exod. 16:10; 19:9; 24:15-18; Ezek. 10:3-4; Ps. 18:11; Dan. 7:13; Luke 9:34-35; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 11:12).<sup>105</sup> Conversely, Schnabel flatly denies such symbolic implications:

The cloud is not simply an "apocalyptic stage prop," nor the "vehicle" that transported Jesus into heaven, nor a literary device borrowed from Old Testament passages about the presence of God. As Luke reports a historical event, the cloud should be interpreted as a natural phenomenon that signaled to the apostles that Jesus has just left them—not as he left them during the last forty days, only to appear again for further instruction and fellowship, but in a permanent fashion. This was Jesus' last appearance after the resurrection before his return sometime in the future (v. 11).<sup>106</sup>

Schnabel is surely correct to stress the historical nature of the assumption, as well as the note of permanence communicated by Jesus' dramatic departure. Contra Schnabel, however, it seems difficult to argue that the cloud does not convey any connotations of God's glory or presence.<sup>107</sup> In any case, Benoit is certainly correct to claim the cloud foreshadows Christ's eschatological coming (cf. v. 11).<sup>108</sup>

Verse 10 begins with *Καὶ ὡς ἀτενίζοντες ἦσαν* ("And as they were staring intently"), an imperfect periphrastic construction.<sup>109</sup> Wallace claims that in classical Greek this construction stressed aspectual force but such usage had waned by the Hellenistic period, especially within NT usage.<sup>110</sup> If this is correct, it is just possible Luke wished to stress internal aspectual force; yet it is perhaps more probable that he simply

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<sup>103</sup>Bock, *Acts*, 67.

<sup>104</sup>William J. Larkin, Jr., *Acts*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 43.

<sup>105</sup>Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 210.

<sup>106</sup>Schnabel, *Acts*, 80-81.

<sup>107</sup>Cf. also Bruce, *Acts*, 37-38.

<sup>108</sup>Benoit, "Ascension," 249.

<sup>109</sup>On which construction see Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 648. Peterson, *Acts*, 115 n. 52, also notes the imperfect periphrastic construction here.

<sup>110</sup>Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 647.

intended the equivalent of the imperfect tense.<sup>111</sup> The prepositional phrase εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν simply indicates the direction of their gaze. Additionally, Luke again (cf. v. 9) utilizes a temporal genitive absolute: πορευομένου αὐτοῦ<sup>112</sup> (“while he was going”).<sup>113</sup> The author fronts all of this temporal information (ὡς ἀπενίζοντες ἦσαν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν πορευομένου αὐτοῦ)—or, in other words, he moves it to a position before the main verb—and in this way creates a temporal frame of reference for what follows.<sup>114</sup>

Having thus established the scene, Luke uses the phrase καὶ ἰδοὺ (“and, behold”), a common example of an attention-getter,<sup>115</sup> to sharpen the focus upon the two new characters he is about to introduce into the story. He states, ἄνδρες δύο παρειστήκεισαν αὐτοῖς ἐν ἐσθῆτι λευκῇ (“two men in white clothing stood<sup>116</sup> beside them”). Some suggest the “two men” are to be identified as Moses and Elijah,<sup>117</sup> but this seems quite unlikely. It is more probable Luke simply meant to indicate the appearance of two angels.<sup>118</sup> The simple fact that the messengers appear in white garments, similar to the glorious appearance of Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration (Luke 9:30) and the two messengers at the tomb (24:4), is insufficient and quite tenuous grounds for identifying the three pairs.<sup>119</sup>

At verse 11, the angels ask (οἱ καὶ εἶπον), “Ἄνδρες Γαλιλαῖοι, τί ἐσθήκατε ἐμβλέποντες εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν; (“Men, Galileans, why<sup>120</sup> do you stand looking into heaven?”). The question constitutes a “mild rebuke,”<sup>121</sup> implying they should not be doing so. Just prior to his departure, Jesus gave them orders (v. 8), and they must engage the

<sup>111</sup>Culy and Parsons, *Acts*, 10, explain the imperfect periphrastic here as “analogous to a simple imperfect verb.”

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Cf. Peterson, *Acts*, 115 n. 52, who also notes the genitive absolute.

<sup>114</sup>For the identification of the temporal frame, see Steven E. Runge, *The Lexham Discourse Greek New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), *ad loc.*

<sup>115</sup>Runge identifies ἰδοὺ as an attention-getter. See *ibid.*, *ad loc.* Culy and Parsons, *Acts*, 10, state ἰδοὺ “is used to seize the listener’s/reader’s attention and/or emphasize the following statement.”

<sup>116</sup>The pluperfect παρειστήκεισαν is equivalent in meaning to the imperfect. Cf. Peterson, *Acts*, 115 n. 53.

<sup>117</sup>E.g., Johnson, *Acts*, 31.

<sup>118</sup>Schnabel, *Acts*, 81; John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 87.

<sup>119</sup>As Johnson, *Acts*, 31, does.

<sup>120</sup>The interrogative particle τί functions as an adverb here, asking “why?” See Bock, *Acts*, 69. It also receives main clause emphasis. See Runge, *Discourse Greek New Testament*, *ad loc.*

<sup>121</sup>Bock, *Acts*, 69.

work committed to them rather than gaze idly into the sky, awaiting his return<sup>122</sup> or wishing for their Lord to remain with them.<sup>123</sup>

Next, the angels proceed to explicate the significance of what the apostles have just seen. Their explanation begins with the words οὗτος ὁ Ἰησοῦς (“this Jesus”), which are followed by the substantival participle ὁ ἀναληφθεὶς standing in apposition to ὁ Ἰησοῦς (thus, “the one who was taken”).<sup>124</sup> As in verse 2, the divine passive is again utilized. The participle, in turn, is modified by two prepositional phrases (ἀφ’ ὑμῶν [“from you”] and εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν [“into heaven”]). The latter phrase (εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν) occurs three times in the verse—in reference to the disciples’ gazing into heaven (ἐμβλέποντες εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν; cf. also v. 10: ἀτενίζοντες ἦσαν εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν), and in reference both to where Jesus was taken (ὁ ἀναληφθεὶς . . . εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν) and to where he went (πορευόμενον εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν). In contrast, the phrase does not occur at verses 2 and 22; but, it is clearly assumed in both instances. The phrase also occurs in Luke 24:51, where it modifies the verb ἀνεφέρτετο.

The entire statement ὁ ἀναληφθεὶς ἀφ’ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν is an example of overspecification.<sup>125</sup> There would have been no referential ambiguity regarding which Jesus was intended had the angels not further specified who the intended referent was. Thus, the words do not serve to disambiguate who the referent is, but rather serve the function of highlighting important thematic material.<sup>126</sup> In this case, Jesus is characterized as the one who was taken up into heaven, so as to cause him to be conceptualized in this manner, because the thematically related idea of his return from heaven is about to be explicated.

The angels explain, οὕτως ἐλεύσεται ὃν τρόπον ἐθεάσασθε αὐτὸν πορευόμενον εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν (Jesus “will come thus, in the manner in which<sup>127</sup> you saw him going into heaven”). That is, he will come visibly, in a cloud, even returning to the very spot from whence he departed (cf. Zech. 14:4). In contradistinction, however, the second

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

<sup>123</sup>Schnabel, *Acts*, 81.

<sup>124</sup>Bock, *Acts*, 70. Culy and Parsons, *Acts*, 11, identify the participle as attributive.

<sup>125</sup>Runge, *Discourse Greek New Testament*, ad loc.

<sup>126</sup>Steven E. Runge, *The Lexham Discourse Greek New Testament: Introduction* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2008), s.v. “Overspecification.” Runge explains overspecification as follows: “The description of individuals or ideas that is more specific than required to identify the intended referent. This extra information is often ‘thematically-loaded’, [sic] connected to the theme of the context in some way. The overspecification prompts the reader conceptualize [sic] the referent in a specific way.”

<sup>127</sup>With regard to οὕτως . . . ὃν τρόπον, Culy and Parsons, *Acts*, 11, note “The combination of the adverb and the relative expression makes the statement particularly emphatic.” They translate, “will come (back) in the very same manner . . .” (ibid., 1).

coming will not be a private matter, but rather visible to all (cf. Rev. 1:7).<sup>128</sup> Bock aptly remarks, “Taken up in a cloud, he will return in a cloud to render judgment (Dan. 7:9-14; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27; Rev. 1:7).”<sup>129</sup> As Bock further observes, the promise of Christ’s return expressed by the verb ἐλεύσεται is a classic example of the predictive use of the future tense.<sup>130</sup> Polhill refers to the statement of the angels as “a strong affirmation,” which he explains as, “not just a promise but a reality concretized and affirmed by the ascension they had just witnessed.”<sup>131</sup> Thus, Jesus’ being taken up into heaven serves as both an affirmation of and a powerful visible illustration of his second coming—from heaven, in the clouds, to the Mount of Olives. This explanation, of course, also tacitly communicates that the assumption of Jesus constitutes his final resurrection appearance to his disciples—they clearly are not to expect another appearance like those experienced during the forty days of verse 3.

The final reference to the taking up in Acts 1 occurs in verse 22, which—together with verse 21—states the criteria according to which a qualified apostolic replacement for Judas must be chosen. The candidate must be a man who witnessed Jesus’ earthly ministry and his resurrection appearances in their entirety (v. 21), “beginning from the baptism of John, until the day in which he was taken up from us” (ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τοῦ βαπτίσματος Ἰωάννου, ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ἧς ἀνελήφθη ἀφ’ ἡμῶν). As at verse 2, ἀνελήφθη occurs; the phrase ἀφ’ ἡμῶν, moreover, articulates the same idea as ἀφ’ ὑμῶν in verse 11. The assumption is regarded as occurring on a specific day (τῆς ἡμέρας ἧς ἀνελήφθη). Perhaps more significantly, the assumption is regarded as the *terminus ad quem* of the period regarded as essential for an apostolic witness of the resurrection to have observed. This is probably because the taking up of Jesus is thought of as the last of the resurrection appearances by which Christ convincingly proved his resurrection to his followers (cf. v. 3).

### **The Significance of the Assumption Narratives in Lukan Theology**

Luke Timothy Johnson posits, “Luke clearly understands [the “ascension”] to be Jesus’ enthronement as King, and therefore as

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<sup>128</sup>Peterson, *Acts*, 116.

<sup>129</sup>Bock, *Acts*, 70.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>Polhill, *Acts*, 88.

Messiah.”<sup>132</sup> Such an explanation is not uncommon, but it remains questionable. As the present study has argued, Luke not only supports viewing Jesus’ entrance into his glory (that is, his exaltation) as occurring on Resurrection Day (Luke 24:26), but he also fails explicitly to make the connection between the final departure of Jesus and his exaltation.<sup>133</sup> Consequently, a more adequate evaluation of the theological significance of the event described in Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:2, 9-11, 22 is needed.

Before proceeding to proffer my own explanation of the significance of Jesus’ being taken up into heaven, I would like to return to the matter of terminology employed in this discussion. This study has suggested that the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God, which includes the idea of Jesus’ actively “ascending”<sup>134</sup> to God (cf. Acts 2:33-35), occurred on the day of his resurrection (Luke 24:26<sup>135</sup>); and, moreover, that the event spoken of in Luke 9:51; 24:50-51; Acts 1:2, 9-11, 22 (cf. also Mark 16:19; 1 Tim. 3:16), which occurred some forty days later, was an event in which Luke could describe Jesus as playing a passive role as God took him up into heaven.<sup>136</sup> Due to

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<sup>132</sup>Johnson, *Acts*, 30. Similarly, Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke’s Charismatic Theology* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 115, speaks of the time when “Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1.9-11) to receive his royal enthronement (Acts 2.32-35).” Cf. also *ibid.*, 114, which cites the same scriptures and refers to Jesus’ “victorious ascension and enthronement.” See also Keener, *Acts*, 1:720-21.

<sup>133</sup>Kaylor, “Ascension Motif,” 56, avers, “From the time of the ascension, Jesus has clearly entered a new mode of sovereignty; he has been taken into heaven (Acts 1:10f), he is exalted at the right hand of God as Lord and Christ (2:32-36).” He goes on to suggest, “By his method of narration, Luke emphatically maintains that Jesus is now Lord in heaven” (underlining original). Kaylor then concedes the point, however, that “in the narrative of the ascension Luke makes no explicit connection between the ascension and Lordship of Jesus” (*ibid.*). In light of this, Kaylor concludes the “ascension” narrative is not *primarily* meant to affirm Jesus’ lordship (*ibid.*, 57). One wonders how Kaylor can maintain that Luke “emphatically” affirms Jesus’ lordship and heavenly exaltation by way of his narration of the “ascension,” while admitting Luke does not explicitly make this connection.

<sup>134</sup>Note again the active voice verb ἀνέβη in Acts 2:34, which implies Jesus actively ascended.

<sup>135</sup>This is also strongly implied in John 20:17. First Peter 3:21-22 also comports well with the idea that Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of God occurred in quick succession, though it does not require this reading (see also Rom. 8:34; but cf. also Heb. 1:3; 10:12, where no interval is implied between Jesus’ *death* and exaltation either).

<sup>136</sup>Note again the passive voice verbs used (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:2, 9-11, 22), which imply Jesus was taken up by God. Fitzmyer, “Ascension of Christ and Pentecost,” 417, notes the use of both active and passive verbs in relation to both the resurrection and the “ascension” of Christ; Fitzmyer concludes, “The apparently more primitive expressions of the ascension, as of the resurrection, were couched in the passive; with the gradual development of a higher Christology in the early Christian communities, the use of the active intransitive forms for both the resurrection and the ascension became more

Scripture's usage of both the verb ἀναβαίνω and the active voice in reference to the former event (Acts 2:34; also John 20:17), it is most properly referred to as Jesus' *ascension*, or, perhaps better, *ascension-exaltation*.<sup>137</sup> On the other hand, due to the consistency with which Scripture uses the passive voice—of the verbs ἀναφέρω (Luke 24:51) and ἀναλαμβάνω (Acts 1)—in depicting the latter event, it is perhaps more fitting to designate it the *assumption*, the *taking up*, or the like.<sup>138</sup> (There is, of course, also a degree of terminological overlap in that the verb πορεύομαι is utilized in the NT with respect to both the ascension-exaltation [1 Pet. 3:22] and the assumption [Acts 1:10, 11]; see also the Johannine usage, which employs this verb in reference to the complex cluster of events also called Jesus' glorification, that is, his death-resurrection-ascension [John 14:2, 3, 12, 28; 16:7, 28]). Thus, while the foregoing terms are generally used interchangeably within the secondary literature, this paper has employed *ascension* and *assumption* as distinct terms. A clear grasp of this distinction in terminology is needed in order to comprehend the theological significance of these events, as delineated below. But, again, the point of real importance is not terminological distinctions but rather the differentiation between two separate events with disparate theological significance, which have

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common." The present study suggests, rather, that Jesus is said to have actively ascended on Resurrection Day, and to have been passively taken up some forty days later. It is not a matter of historical development toward a higher Christology causing distinct articulations of the same doctrine, but rather distinct descriptions of two different events.

It should perhaps be emphasized at this point that my overall argument rests far more heavily on the evidence supporting Jesus' exaltation, that is, his entrance into glory (Luke 24:26; Acts 2:33-34) as having occurred on Resurrection Day, on the one hand, and the narrative of the taking up that describes an event transpiring some forty days later and that lacks any clear implication of exaltation occurring at that time, on the other hand. The above observations in regard to the lexemes used and the active or passive verbal forms chosen simply supplements the main line of the argument.

<sup>137</sup>The term *ascension-exaltation* has the added benefit of articulating the inextricable connection between Jesus' ascending to the Father and the Father's exalting him at his own right hand. In other words, Jesus' ascension culminated with the Father's exalting him at his own right hand.

<sup>138</sup>Conversely, Benoit, "Ascension," 250-51, agrees with the distinction in the two events adhered to here but nonetheless concludes, "In brief, it appears to be wholly legitimate, and in better agreement with the complex data of tradition, to distinguish two moments and two modes in the mystery of the Ascension: (1) a heavenly Exaltation, invisible but real, by which the risen Christ returned to his Father, on the day of his Resurrection; (2) a visible manifestation of this Exaltation which he condescended to give, and which accompanied his final departure, on the Mount of Olives. *It is fitting to reserve the proper term 'Ascension' for the latter and thus to respect the usage established in the Church, notably in her liturgy*" (italics added). In any case, the distinction between the two events and their distinctive theological significance, not the terminology used, is the important point, as Benoit agrees (ibid., 251).

all too often been conflated within theological discussions of the “ascension.”

Regarding the theological meaning of the assumption, several observations are in order. First of all, the event demarcates the *terminus ad quem* of the resurrection appearances. Alternatively stated, the assumption is indicative of the reality that the transitional period of resurrection appearances has now run its course.<sup>139</sup> In line with this interpretation, the Lukan narrative supports the idea that the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples *from heaven* throughout the forty-day transitional period.<sup>140</sup> In Acts 1:3, Luke states Jesus was “appearing” (ὀπτανόμενος) to the disciples during a forty-day period (δι’ ἡμερῶν τεσσαράκοντα). The next verse mentions Jesus’ “gathering [the disciples] together” (συναλιζόμενος). As Burge correctly observes, such language implies Jesus appeared (presumably from heaven) to the apostles in a “fleeting” and “occasional” manner, rather than dwelling

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<sup>139</sup>Fitzmyer, “Ascension of Christ and Pentecost,” 424, asserts, “his ‘ascension’ is nothing more than *the* appearance from glory in which Christ took his final leave from the community of his followers—his last visible leave-taking from the assembled followers” (italics his). See Bruce M. Metzger, *Historical and Literary Studies: Pagan, Jewish, and Christian* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 85-6; John F. Maile, “The Ascension in Luke-Acts,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 37 (1986), 57-58. Cf. also John A. T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1979), 134-36, who cites P. Benoit, “L’Ascension,” *Revue Biblique* LVI (1949), 198-200. Robinson summarizes Benoit as follows: “the departure of Jesus from the disciple’s sight is not depicted by Luke as the real moment of his glorification” (134); instead, “the Lukan Ascension narrative” marks “the moment rather of adieu than of glorification” (136 n. 2). Gary M. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 136, concurs: “Whenever Jesus appeared as the Resurrected One, he necessarily appeared from heaven. . . . Therefore it is best to view the ascension of Acts 1:9 as simply a dramatic terminus of the type of relation Jesus had been enjoying with the disciples after the resurrection.”

<sup>140</sup>Contra Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 2000), 616, who states unequivocally, “After Jesus’ resurrection, he was on *earth for forty days* (Acts 1:3)” (italics added). Fitzmyer, “Ascension of Christ and Pentecost,” 422, demurs, rightly asserting, “Jesus is never depicted in the NT inhabiting the earth for forty days or appearing to people as someone who has been ensconced behind an arras;” rather, “on the day of the resurrection itself Luke [in Luke 24:26] refers to Jesus as having entered ‘his glory,’ i.e., the glory (*doxa*) of the Father’s presence. The implication, then, is that the crucified and risen Christ appears to his disciples from glory, i.e., from the glorious presence of his heavenly Father, on whose right hand he has already been installed.” Offering further clarification, Peter Toon, *The Ascension of Our Lord* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson: 1984), 9-10, observes the forty-day interval of Acts 1:3 was “solidified in the ecclesiastical year in terms of the forty days from Easter to Ascension-Day,” and has “dominated the understanding of the Church for centuries” with regard to the temporal question of when Jesus ascended into heaven. “Therefore, it is commonly assumed that Jesus was raised from the dead early Easter Sunday and then spent forty days in and around Palestine before leaving this earth on what we now call Ascension-Day” (ibid., 10). Cf. Bruce, *Acts*, 37.

with them consistently for the duration of the period.<sup>141</sup> Metzger concurs, stating, “The post-resurrection accounts suggest that the risen Lord was not living at any one place in Jerusalem or Galilee. Instead they imply that he had passed into a mode of being out of which he ‘appeared’ . . . and into which he disappeared again.”<sup>142</sup> One wonders from whence Jesus “appeared” if not from heaven.

Second, the assumption served as a graphic illustration of the second coming of the Messiah (Acts 1:9-11).<sup>143</sup> He will return from heaven, in the clouds, and to the Mount of Olives, just as he departed.

Third, the assumption provided a graphic and symbolic display of Jesus’ exaltation to God’s right hand.<sup>144</sup> At this juncture, it is important to distinguish between the *ontological reality* of Jesus’ exaltation to the right hand of the Father, which occurred on the day of his resurrection, and the *outward demonstration* thereof, which occurred some forty days later. With regard to the respective value of the invisible ascent and exaltation of Jesus on Resurrection Day, on the one hand, and its visible display at the assumption, on the other, Benoit remarks that the latter is “the imperfect and inessential manifestation” of the former

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<sup>141</sup>Burge, *Anointed Community*, 136. So too, Toon, *Ascension of Our Lord*, 11-12, affirms Jesus ascended into heaven during the early morning of Resurrection Day, and then appeared to his disciples for brief periods of time throughout the subsequent forty days. This, he rightly affirms, “deals effectively with the problem of the whereabouts of Jesus in the forty days. He was in heaven, and from there, in a variety of ways and at different times, he localized himself in space and time in order to encounter his disciples.”

This, of course, comports well with the Johannine narrative, which can span as many as eight days between resurrection appearances (John 20:19 with v. 26); and the Pauline record, which also speaks in terms of fleeting and occasional appearances (1 Cor. 15:5-8). Burge, *op. cit.*, also mentions 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 in this connection.

<sup>142</sup>Metzger, *Historical and Literary Studies*, 83. Cf. Bruce, *Acts*, 37.

<sup>143</sup>Maile, “Ascension,” 58-59, refers to the event as the “certain pledge” of Christ’s parousia. Cf. also Benoit, “Ascension,” 249.

<sup>144</sup>Toon, *Ascension of Our Lord*, 11-12, 125; Maile, “Ascension,” 55-56. Cf. Metzger, *Historical and Literary Studies*, 86-87; A. M. Ramsey, “What Was the Ascension?” in D.E. Nineham et al., *Historicity and Chronology in the New Testament*, SPCK Theological Collections 6 (London: SPCK., 1965), 136. F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd and enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 103, explains, “In the primitive preaching the resurrection and ascension of Jesus represent one continuous movement and together constitute his exaltation. It is not implied that his enthronement at God’s right hand . . . was deferred for 40 days after his triumph over death. The fortieth day was not the first occasion when he disappeared from his companions’ sight after his resurrection (cf. Lk. 24:31). Nor is it suggested that the intervals between his resurrection appearances were spent in some earth-bound state. These appearances, in which he condescended to his disciples’ temporal conditions of life, were visitations from the eternal order to which his ‘body of glory’ now belonged. What happened on the fortieth day was that this series of intermittent visitations came to an end, with a scene which brought home to the disciples the heavenly glory of their risen Lord.” Cf. also Bruce, *Acts*, 37-38.

event that was “granted to a few witnesses.”<sup>145</sup> He further argues that exaltation to the right hand of the Father “cannot be connected in any inevitable way with the illustration of it with which Christ in his mercy furnished the disciples. Here again, the spiritual fact could very well have preceded in time the exterior manifestation.”<sup>146</sup>

Fourth, and closely related to the first point, Luke’s literary description of the assumption seems to indicate he attached further theological importance to the event. As noted throughout this paper, Luke consistently uses language that alludes to Elijah’s assumption. He employs the verb ἀναλαμβάνω (Acts 1:2, 11, 22) and the cognate noun ἀνάληψις (Luke 9:51) in reference to the assumption—the same language utilized (but only in verbal form) in the LXX in reference to Elijah’s assumption. Together with the terminology used, the emphasis placed upon the disciples seeing Jesus’ departure (1:9-11) strengthens this Elijah typology. Apparently, Luke conceptualized the assumption of Jesus as bearing theological ramifications similar to those attached to the assumption of Elijah.<sup>147</sup> More specifically, Jesus’ assumption marks the moment of his final departure and the decisive end to his physical interactions with the disciples on the earth. As such, it points to transference with regard to the prophetic ministry that Jesus began and that the disciples must continue (cf. vv. 2, 8). The responsibility to carry out the prophetic ministry in the world is now theirs. The similarities with the transference of the prophetic mantle from Elijah to Elisha are obvious.<sup>148</sup> Yet an important distinction remains: Elisha received prophetic empowerment immediately when Elijah departed (cf. 2 Kings 2:14), whereas the disciples received the gift of the Spirit of prophecy on the day of Pentecost after a short interval of waiting in prayer. This gift of the witness-empowering Spirit constituted the church as prophetic community,<sup>149</sup> thus enabling them to fulfill the

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<sup>145</sup>Cf. Benoit, “Ascension,” 244-45, quote from 245.

<sup>146</sup>Benoit, “Ascension,” 246.

<sup>147</sup>Cf. Peterson, *Acts*, 113. My own explanation differs from his, however.

<sup>148</sup>Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers*, 47-48, traces within the Lukan narrative the motif of Jesus as the prophet like Elijah and Elisha; he believes this pattern climaxes in the “ascension” and subsequent transference of prophetic anointing for ministry: “Just as the Spirit, which had empowered Elijah, was transferred from him to his disciple, Elisha, when he ascended to heaven . . . , so the Spirit was similarly transferred to the disciples after Jesus ascended to heaven. Further, just as Elisha as heir and successor to Elijah performed the same kind of miracles that Elijah had earlier performed, so in Acts the disciples, as heirs and successors to Jesus’ prophet [*sic*] ministry, will perform the same kinds of miracles that Jesus had earlier performed” (ibid., 48).

<sup>149</sup>Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers*, 65-66: “on the day of Pentecost Jesus pours out the same Spirit, who had earlier anointed him and empowered his ministry, upon his disciples to baptize them and empower their ministry as his successors.

ministry handed on to them. So, then, Pentecost remains the constitutive event; nevertheless, the assumption points to the transference of the prophetic ministry from Jesus to the disciples, which was actualized on the day of Pentecost.

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In this way, just as Jesus was the Spirit-anointed prophet, so the disciples, as heirs and successors to his prophetic ministry, become a community of Spirit-baptized prophets, the prophethood of all believers.”