

Women Vis-À-Vis Prophecy in Luke-Acts: Part 1

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Introduction

A recent storm in Lucan scholarship is the polar discussion on Luke's view of women in prophetic ministry. The scholars on one side of the debate posit that Luke validated the prophethood of women, while their polar opposites assert that Luke purposely distanced women from the prophetic ministry. The minorities who don't accede to either side prefer to identify Luke's stance as ambiguous. In light of this quandary, this paper, which is divided into two parts, aims at identifying Luke's stance on women vis-à-vis prophecy with the use of a biblical theological method. This first part will summarize the current discussions on said topic then deal with specific Lucan Gospel passages that demonstrate his treatment of women in prophetic ministry.

Discussions on Luke's treatment of "women and prophecy" have been variegated in the last decades. Prior to the 1980s, Luke's writings were prominently viewed as supporting the emancipation and inclusion of women in church and society.¹ Commentators like Alfred Plummer even considered the Gospel of Luke as the Gospel for women.² However, with the rise of feminist hermeneutics, this assumption has been critically confronted. A wide divergence has emerged, where one

¹This paper will deal with Luke-Acts as a single work. Three reasons support this position: (1) both volumes were dedicated to Theophilus (Luke 1:3), with a recapitulation in the preface of Acts 1:1; (2) Acts 1 ties back to Luke 24, showing an interlocking connection; and (3) in many instances, there is a continuity of theological and literary elements, which effectively shows a fundamental unity in the two volumes. Maddox even concludes that the unity of Luke-Acts is a settled issue. Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark Ltd., 1982), 3-5; cf. Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Act* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 55-61. Operating on this premise, it is better to study Luke's motif on women and prophecy with both volumes in hand.

²Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke*, eds. C. A. Briggs, S. R. Driver, and A. Plummer, ICC series (New York, N Y: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 528.

side posits that Luke positively includes women in the prophetic ministry, while the other argues for his suppression of the female prophetic voice. The brief survey below will inform us on some elements of the debate.

Brief Survey on the Current Debate

Luke-Acts: Validating the Prophethood of Women

A major reason why Luke is viewed as favorable to women is the fact that his Gospel has more material on women than the other Synoptic Gospels. He has at least forty-two passages concerned with women, of which twenty-three are unique to his work.³ He mentions thirteen women that are not found elsewhere in the New Testament;⁴ and although most of the stories with a female motif were retained from Mark's Gospel, Luke added many episodes from his own sources.⁵ The man-woman parallels in Luke's Gospel and the couple-group descriptions in the Book of Acts have also been argued as being his way of establishing a favorable image of women and of their significant role in the community.⁶ Turid Seim points out that these narrative pairs and couple-group descriptions have the effect of making the women visible in the narrative.⁷

³Women passages unique to Luke's gospel include 1-2; 7:11-17, 36-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 11:27-28; 13:10-17; 15:8-10; 18:1-8; and 23:27-31. Cf. Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Women* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1979), 254-255.

⁴Women mentioned only in Luke's gospel are the following: Elizabeth (ch. 1); Anna (2:36-38); the widow of Zarephath (4:25,26); the widow of Nain (7:11-17); the woman who was a sinner (7:36-50); the ministering women that include Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna (8:2,3); the woman in the crowd who blesses Mary's womb (11:27,28); the woman bowed down with infirmity (13:10-17); the parable of the woman who loses a coin (15:8-10); Lot's wife (17:32); the parable of the widow who continually pleaded with the unjust judge (18:1-8); and the daughters of Jerusalem (23:28).

⁵The Markan source theory for the Gospel of Luke is the most common view among scholars. It is mostly agreed that Luke used Mark and Q (the material he shares with Matthew), as well as other non-extant sources unique to Luke. The sources of Acts, on the other hand, are hard to reconstruct, the most probable theory being that Luke used oral sources as well as his own personal experience (as a companion of Paul in the "we" narratives). Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1-2:47* vol. 1 (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 178-180.

⁶Turid Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke and Acts* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, Ltd., 1994), 12-20; cf. Elizabeth Dowling, *Taking Away the Pound: Women, Theology, and the Parable of Pounds in the Gospel of Luke* (New York, NY: T & T Clark, Intl., 2007), 60-61.

⁷Seim lists the Man-Woman Parallels in Luke's presentation as follows: Zechariah and Mary (1:11-20, 26-38, 46-55, 61-79), Simeon and Anna (2:25-35, 36-38), Naaman and the widow in Zarephath (4:25-27), Jairus' daughter and the widow's son (7:11-17; 8:40-56), Jairus and the woman with blood (8:40-41, 43-56), the men of Nineveh and the Queen of

In addition to these gender parallels, there is a recurrent stress in the Gospel that those who followed Jesus were “both men and women” (Lk. 8:1-3; 23:49; 24:9-11). The phrase “both men and women” also appears five times in the Book of Acts (2:18; 5:14; 8:3, 12; 22:4). Most scholars consider the increase in passages with female motifs as Luke’s way of conveying the kingdom vision of Jesus’ ministry.⁸ Others, like Ben Witherington, suggest that Luke did this to justify women’s participation in the ministry of the believers’ community,⁹ saying that the early community obeyed the teachings of Jesus, who raised the status of women amid the restrictive and devaluing ideologies of Judaism.¹⁰

Craig Keener, however, goes further by noting that Luke does not just justify women’s inclusion, but also normatively involves them in end-time prophetic ministry (see Acts 2:17-18).¹¹ He comments that Luke obviously expects women to speak God’s message as prophets of the last days (e.g., Anna in Luke 2:36-38 and Philip’s four daughters in Acts 21:9).¹² Gill and Cavaness agree with this by pointing out that, in the new era of the Spirit, everyone can minister regardless of gender, status, or age.¹³ For them, Pentecost has inaugurated the time when everyone can preach about Christ, because the Holy Spirit chooses and

the South (11:31-32), the man and the woman healed on the Sabbath (14:1-6; 13:10-17), Abraham’s son and daughter (19:9; 13:16), the man who sowed seed and woman who hid yeast (13:18-19, 20-21), the shepherd with sheep and the woman with coins (15:3-7, 8-10), the men sleeping and the women grinding (17:34-35), Peter at Tomb and women at Tomb (24: 1-11), and Aeneas and Tabitha (Acts 9:32-35, 36-42). On the other hand, in Acts, narrative pairs are virtually non-existent. Instead, Luke makes use of couple-group descriptions, which include Priscilla and Aquilla (18:2, 18, 26), Felix and Drusilla (24:25), and Agrippa and Bernice (25:13, 23). Seim, 15-18.

⁸A few of those who have this view include: Eugene H. Maly, “Women and the Gospel of Luke,” *BTB* 10 (1980), 99-104; Neal M. Flanagan, “The Position of Women in the Writings of St. Luke,” *Marianum* 40 (1978), 288-304; Mark Allan Powell, *What Are They Saying about Luke?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 93-97; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. I. The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), 132-139; idem, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. II. The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 208-281.

⁹Ben Witherington III, “Women in the Ministry of Jesus,” *Society for New Testament Studies Monograph*, Series 51 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 127.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹For Keener, Acts 2:17-18 gives us a programmatic principle that can be normative for present-day ministry, saying “The same Spirit that breaks down ethnic and cultural barriers is the same Spirit that breaks gender barriers for speaking God’s message.” Keener, *Acts*, vol. I, 638.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Deborah M. Gill and Barbara Cavaness, *God’s Women Then and Now* (Springfield, MO: Grace and Truth, 2004), 84-86; cf. Ambrose Edebe, *Your Women Did Prophecy* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2012), 61.

equips people (regardless of gender) for ministry.¹⁴ This sentiment is echoed by Seim, who succinctly writes:

The promise of the gift of the Spirit [in Joel 2:28-32a, as quoted in Acts 2:17-21] including and equipping people across boundaries established by traditional patterns of authority is realized. The Holy Spirit is poured out over all flesh expressing itself in the gift of prophecy, so that the young see visions just as much as the old have dreams, so that women speak prophetically just as well as men.¹⁵

These views have been positively accepted by women who promote inclusiveness and equality in the Church. Asian theologian Kwok Pui-lan even points to the important ministries of women today as an emulation of the early church in Acts.¹⁶ However, not all scholars agree that Luke has a positive message for women. Some, in fact, suggest that Luke wrote to intentionally distance women from the prophetic ministry.

Luke-Acts: Restricting the Prophethood of Women

The purview that Luke was “antifeminist” has been progressing since the late 1980s.¹⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza was one of those who started the ball rolling when, in an unpublished address to the General Meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association of America, she expressed her position that Luke had a restrictive theology and attitude towards women in Luke-Acts.¹⁸ In agreement with Fiorenza, Elisabeth Meier Tetlow writes:

¹⁴Gill and Cavaness, 86. Other scholars who agree include: Allen Black, “Women in the Gospel of Luke” in *Essays on Women in Early Christianity*, ed. Carroll Osburn (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1993), 445-468; Greg W. Forbes and Scott D. Harrower, *Raised from Obscurity: A Narrativ and Theological Study of the Characterization of Women in Luke- Acts* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 153-155; Loren Cunningham, “Women Prophets, Evangelists, and Teachers” in *Why Not Women? A Fresh Look at Scripture on Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership*, Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton, eds. (Edmonds, WA: YWAM Publishing, 2000), 58-59.

¹⁵Seim, 164.

¹⁶Kwok Pui-lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology (Introductions in Feminist Theology)*, Series 4 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 103-104.

¹⁷Concise discussion of the debate can be read in Rober Karris, “Women and Discipleship in Luke” in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (New York, NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 23-27.

¹⁸Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Feminist Theology” (presidential address, General Meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association of America, San Francisco, CA, August 24, 1978, as noted by Elisabeth Meier Tetlow, *Women and Ministry in the New Testament: Called to Serve* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980), 132.

It would seem that women had an important and active role in Luke's own late first-century community. This was such that he could not ignore the importance of women altogether, but, reacting negatively to their present active role, he could through the theology of his gospel attempt to argue for the restriction of women's role in the Church of his day.¹⁹

Mary D'Angelo sees this antifeminist tendency in Luke's writings as the latter's catechetical way of inviting women to respond to the Gospel in a discreet manner, of offering a limited and conventional scope for their activity, and of taming the phenomena of prophecy amongst them.²⁰ Her conjecture has something to do with a proposed tension between the necessity to educate women converts in the church of Luke's time and the anxieties that may arise if women's roles were expanded.²¹ D'Angelo writes:

I would suggest that the reduction of the role of women as prophets and leaders in the community corresponds to Luke's choice of prophecy as a means of showing the *ἀσφάλειαν* (surety, safety) of the Christian teaching—that, like the portrayals of Jews and Semites as magicians in Acts, the distancing of women from Christian prophecy and ministry serves to distinguish Christianity from threatening oriental cults.²²

As an example, she observes that, in the book of Acts, women are neither explicitly named as prophets nor are there prophetic speeches attributed to them.²³ Also, even if Luke gave a rationale for women as prophets in Acts 2:17-18 (cf. Joel 2:28-29), he does not record a female prophetic

¹⁹Tetlow accedes to Conzelmann's scheme of salvation history and studied the discipleship of women in the Lucan corpus according to the three eras—the period of Israel, the period of Jesus' ministry, and the period of the church. She concludes that "The status and role of women are greatest in the period of Israel, much less during the ministry of Jesus, and quite restricted in the period of the Church." Tetlow, 101.

²⁰D'Angelo builds on Constance Parvev's suggestion that the education of women was a concern in Luke-Acts. Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Women in Luke Acts: A Redactional View." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109/3 (1990) 441-461; cf. Constance Parvev, "The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament," in *Religion and Sexism*, ed. Rosemary Bradford Ruether (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 139-146.

²¹D'Angelo posits that Luke may have been protecting Christianity from being identified as un-Roman, magically inclined, cultic, or promotive of social disorder. In Luke's time, women prophets, priests, and leaders were usually identified as members of oriental cults. She suggests that, in Luke's mind, allowing women to liberally operate in the prophetic may be seen as socially disruptive. D'Angelo, 456-460.

²²*Ibid.*, 457.

²³*Ibid.*, 453.

speech in the narrative.²⁴ The only time Luke attributed prophetic speech to a woman was when he wrote about the servant girl with a “python” or “mantic” spirit (Acts 16:16-18).²⁵

About this story, F. Scott Spencer writes, “We are left with one disturbing fact: for whatever reason, a prophetic slave-girl proclaiming the Good News of God’s salvation—as envisioned in the Joel citation at Pentecost—is ultimately silenced and forgotten.”²⁶ This distancing of women from prophetic ministry can be assumed as Luke’s way of preventing Christianity from being identified as another eastern superstitious religion where women are out of order.²⁷ These surmises led Spencer to conclude that the prophetic promise of Joel in Acts 2:17-18 was never fully realized in the early church.²⁸ Luke-Acts, “despite its more inclusive and receptive ideals, ultimately more mirrors than challenges conventional first century Mediterranean society in its suppression of the lower-class female voice.”²⁹ Thus, for some scholars, Luke was intentional in steering women away from the prophetic ministry in an effort to present Christianity as a socially acceptable movement.

Luke-Acts: Ambiguous on the Prophethood of Women

Scholarly debate on Luke’s treatment of women and prophecy is more nuanced than just the two sides surveyed above. Some scholars have opted to conclude that Luke’s view on women and prophecy is ambiguous. For instance, Graham Twelftree, who considers Luke as generally favorable to women, still writes: “Over against this positive role and the place for women we need to take into account what can be detected as Luke’s hesitation in relation to women and prophecy.”³⁰ Seim, in considering this ambiguity, notes:

The tension in Luke’s narrative has indeed shown itself to be its ambivalent evidence both of strong traditions about women on

²⁴He names Philip’s four daughters as prophesying (Acts 21:9) but does not attribute prophetic utterances to them. In fact, immediately after they were mentioned, he highlights Agabus, who foretells Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-12). Ibid.

²⁵For D’Angelo, this is somewhat denigrating for women in prophetic ministry, because the only example Luke gives of a woman actively prophesying was a negative one. D’Angelo, 453.

²⁶F. Scott Spencer, “Out of Mind, Out of Voice: Slave-Girls and Prophetic Daughters in Luke-Acts,” *Biblical Interpretation* 7, 2 (1999), 150.

²⁷D’Angelo, 453-460.

²⁸Spencer, 136.

²⁹Ibid., 151.

³⁰Graham Twelftree, *People of the Spirit: Exploring Luke’s View of the Church* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 122.

the one hand, and of the social and ideological controls that brought women to silence and promoted male dominance in positions of leadership on the other . . . The Lukan construction contains a double, mixed message.³¹

Hypothesis and Methodology of the Current Study

The brief survey above now leaves us in a quandary. How did Luke relate women to prophecy in Luke-Acts? Was he for, against, or unsure about women vis-à-vis the prophetic ministry? Though this paper does not plan to deal with every facet of this debate, it does aim to understand Luke's perspective on the relationship of women and prophecy. At the onset, there are two research questions—(1) What is Luke's perspective on women in relation to prophecy? and (2) What is the significance of his perspective for the church today?

As an initial hypothesis, this paper posits that amid the silencing structures of his day, Luke did not seek to distance women from the prophetic ministry. Instead, he demonstrated that the prophetic activity of women is an eschatological act of God that is both significant and vocational. To ascertain if this hypothesis is correct, this paper will employ a biblical theological method. Biblical theology is a historical-theological discipline that begins with a discovery of the meaning of the text for its original audiences and ends with a discovery of the meaning of the text for the audience today.³² This approach is most appropriate because it will help us draw out the author's theological perspective from within the scriptural data.

Thus, the first task in this study is to exegete key passages that clearly indicate Luke's treatment on women vis-à-vis prophecy within its historical setting and literary dimensions.³³ The exegeted data are analyzed to draw out the theological message of the author.³⁴ Finally, a synthesis that aims to articulate Luke's overall theological perspective on women and prophecy will be presented.

³¹Seim, 249.

³²Gerhard Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 204.

³³Kostenberger and Patterson talk about the hermeneutical triad—(theology, history, and literature). In this framework, the interpreter draws out the author's theological message by first analyzing the book's historical setting and literary dimensions. For detailed explanation, read Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutic Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011), 65-66. The hermeneutical triad will be used as the interpretative framework of this paper.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 693-720; cf. Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 281-283.

Prophesying Women in Luke-Acts

In Luke-Acts, seven women were explicitly recorded to have operated in the prophetic anointing—Elizabeth, Mary, Anna, and the four daughters of Philip. In this section, we will try to draw out Luke’s intention for these prophesying women.

Prophesying Women in the Gospel of Luke (1:5-2:52)

Elizabeth and Mary

a. Character Analysis of Elizabeth

⁵ Ἐγένετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἱερεὺς τις ὀνόματι Ζαχαρίας ἐξ ἡμερίας Ἀβιά, καὶ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν θυγατέρων Ἀαρὼν καὶ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῆς Ἐλισάβετ. ⁶ ἦσαν δὲ δίκαιοι ἀμόφτεροι ἐναντίον τοῦ θεοῦ, πορευόμενοι ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐντολαῖς καὶ δικαιώμασιν τοῦ κυρίου ἄμεμπτοι. ⁷ καὶ οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τέκνον, καθότι ἦν ἡ Ἐλισάβετ στεῖρα, καὶ ἀμόφτεροι προβεβηκότες ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αὐτῶν ἦσαν (1:5-7 GNT).

⁵In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years (1:5-7 RSV).

The first prophetess in the Gospel of Luke is Elizabeth. In 1:5-7, we note that: (1) she was married to a priest and was also a daughter of a priest; (2) with her husband, she was recognized as righteous and blameless before God; and (3) she was barren and advanced in years.

As Zechariah’s wife, she was identified as ἐκ τῶν θυγατέρων Ἀαρὼν (*ek tōn thugaterōn Aarōn*, the female descendant of Aaron). This is an adjectival phrase that semantically emphasized her as a daughter of a priest. According to Jewish tradition, a priest’s marriage to a woman with priestly blood was highly encouraged for the propagation of ancestral purity.³⁵ In fact, the son of priestly descended parents could

³⁵Priests were also allowed to marry Israelite women of non-priest parents as long as they had unblemished ancestry. Joel Green, “The Gospel of Luke” *The New International Commentary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 64.

inherit the office of the father.³⁶ Thus, Elizabeth was considered an honorable wife for Zechariah since she had the right heritage.

To this ancestral purity Luke adds Elizabeth’s “righteousness and blamelessness.” Both she and her husband were recognized as pious Jews. Luke described them as δίκαιοι (*dikaioi*, righteous). For this context, though, their righteousness referred to their conformity to the will of God as expressed in His Law.³⁷ God himself is the judge of their righteousness, as the phrase ἐναντίον τοῦ θεοῦ (*enantion tou theou*, in the sight of God) indicates. Their moral excellence was further explicated in the next clause, “walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” The adjective πάσαις (*pasais*, all) points to the couple’s obedience to the entire Law. Luke was emphatic in describing both Zechariah and Elizabeth as morally excellent and spiritually commendable. They were faithful Jews who led an upright life before God.³⁸ However, the couple had a tragic problem—Elizabeth was barren.

In a Jewish honor-and-shame society, a woman’s barrenness was considered a disgrace and a sign of divine punishment,³⁹ which is why, given the preceding positive affirmations, v.7 is a huge let-down. Thus, we can sum up Zechariah and Elizabeth’s social standing as follows:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| a. Ancestral Purity | (+)Honor-Shame |
| b. Righteousness and blamelessness | (+)Honor-Shame |
| c. Childlessness/Barrenness | (-)Dishonored-Shameless ⁴⁰ |

³⁶Ibid.; cf. Leonie J. Archer, “Her Price Is Beyond Rubies: The Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 60* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 137-139.

³⁷This fits a pre-cross righteousness, a righteousness from the perspective of God’s law. Bock, *Luke*, 75.

³⁸OT parallels: Genesis 6:8; 7:1; and Ezekiel 4:14).

³⁹Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 65; cf. Malina and Neyrey explain that first century Mediterranean society has a pivotal value of honor and shame. Honor means a person’s (or group’s) feelings of self-worth and the public, social acknowledgment of that worth. In a male and female context, honor is attributed to males, while shame to females. Shame is a woman’s honor—i.e., a positive symbol meaning sensitivity for one’s own reputation and sensitivity to the opinion of others. People acquire honor aspiring to a certain status and having that status socially validated. Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, “Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models of Interpretation*, (ed.) Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 41-46.

⁴⁰Women are shameless (not have shame) when they aspire to a certain status which is denied them. Here, Elizabeth is shameless and Zechariah dishonored in the eyes of the community due to childlessness. Ibid., 44-46.

In the Old Testament, the absence of children was generally seen as a reproach and the source of dishonor in the community.⁴¹ The fact that the couple were both advanced in years implies the hopelessness of their situation. However, Luke's emphatic affirmations prior to v. 7 signify that Elizabeth's barrenness was neither due to sin nor divine judgment. Instead, with a mind immersed in the Old Testament, Luke uses a well-known type-scene, known as the barren-wife type-scene. He parallels Elizabeth with other Old Testament women whose childlessness was used by God to do something extraordinary. These barren-wife types include Sarah (Gen. 18:11), Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), Rachel (Gen. 29:31), Manoah's wife (Judg. 13:2, 5), and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:1-2). Readers familiar with these Old Testament figures could anticipate a divine unfolding—a reversal that would cause great joy and wonder.⁴²

Resolution of Elizabeth's 'hopeless situation' was presented through the announcement of John's birth (1:8-23). Luke writes this episode in a chiasm:

- A Service, sanctuary, people (vv. 8-10)
- B Angel's appearance and Zechariah's response (vv. 11-12)
- C Announcement of Good News (vv. 13-17; cf. v. 19)**
- B' Zechariah's objection and Angel's response (vv. 18-20)
- A' People, sanctuary, service (vv. 21-23)⁴³

The crux of the narrative unit is Angel Gabriel's Good News about the birth of John, who is proclaimed as one who would bring joy not only to the formerly barren parents, but also to many who will turn to the Lord. In v. 14, Gabriel declares, "And you will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth." Bock suggests that the verb *χαρήσονται* (*charēsontai*, will rejoice) points to eschatological joy for John's entire ministry (summarized in vv. 13-17).⁴⁴ Zechariah's response, however, was not of joy but of doubt and unbelief, which resulted in his judgment—he was rendered mute by the angel.⁴⁵ Here we read an obvious parallel between Zechariah and Elizabeth's response to the news. If Zechariah responded with doubt, Elizabeth responded with

⁴¹Lev. 20:20-21; Jer. 22:30; 1 Sam. 1:5-4; and 2 Sam. 6:23.

⁴²The barren-wife type-scenes contain common features: (1) recognition of a woman's barrenness, (2) announcement of her impending conception, and (3) conception and birth of a child. In narrating vv. 5-7, Luke deliberately echoes this type-scene, especially in the Abrahamic material (Gen. 11:30; 16:1) and the story of Hannah (1 Sam. 1:1-2). Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 66.

⁴³Green, 67.

⁴⁴Bock, *Luke*, 83.

⁴⁵Zechariah's muteness, though, was not entirely a judgment. It also functioned as a sign given to guarantee the promise and guard the message until its proper time. Bock 93; cf. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 89-90.

open acceptance and praise. In vv. 24-25, Luke writes: “After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she hid herself, saying, ‘Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.’”

Elizabeth’s relief and acceptance of the news contrast with Zechariah’s doubt. Green observes that in this passage, “A woman was put forward as a recipient of God’s favor and as a model of faithfulness to God’s purpose.”⁴⁶ Hence, we see Elizabeth’s character here as one of commendable piety and faithfulness to God, receiving His favor with praise and belief. She is paralleled to Hannah (1 Sam. 1:19-20), to Sarah (Gen. 21:6), and especially to Rachel, who once declared, “God has taken away my reproach” (Gen. 30:22-23).⁴⁷

Her story alerts readers that God is up to something, that is, He is inaugurating a new era. This era is a continuation of His dealings with Israel and is earmarked by status reversal and eschatological joy. It is also a period when one decides how to respond to the Good News. Will the readers be like Zechariah and respond with doubt? Or will they be like Elizabeth and respond with joyful acceptance and faith?

b. Character Analysis of Mary

The second prophesying woman in this narrative is Mary, the mother of Jesus. We know little about her ancestry. All that Luke reveals is that, at the time of the Annunciation, she lived in Nazareth, was a virgin, and was betrothed to Joseph, a descendant of David. The story goes:

²⁶Ἐν δὲ τῷ μηνὶ τῷ ἕκτῳ ἀπεστάλη ὁ ἄγγελος Γαβριὴλ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς πόλιν τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἣ ὄνομα Ναζαρέθ ²⁷πρὸς παρθένον ἐμνηστευμένην ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὄνομα Ἰωσήφ ἐξ οἴκου Δαυὶδ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς παρθένου Μαριάμ (1:26-27 GNT).

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary (1:26-27 RSV).

The repetitive mention of *παρθένος* (*parthenos*, virgin) in v. 27 reflects Luke’s intent to emphasize Mary’s chaste state. Although the word could refer to “girl” or “maiden,” the context of the annunciation narrative makes it clear that *parthenos* meant a state of being sexually

⁴⁶Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 81.

⁴⁷For a complete discussion on barren-wife type scenes, read John Petersen, *Reading Women’s Stories: Female Characters in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 36-37.

untouched. Mary herself confirms this in v. 34, when she replied to the Angel: “Πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο, ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω” (*pōs estai touto epei andra ou ginōskō*). The word γινώσκω here denotes sexual knowledge (cf. Hebrew usage in Gen. 4:1, 17), such that Mary’s response can be literally translated as: “How can this be since I have no sexual knowledge with any man?” The TEV simply translates it: “How can this be since I am a virgin?” Luke’s emphasis on Mary’s virginity is founded on his motivation to present Jesus’ conception as unparalleled and unique. There had been no reports of virgin conception either in pre-Christian Judaism or in Paganism.⁴⁸ Unlike Elizabeth, Mary has no Old Testament typology. Her virgin conception is an unheard-of wonder.

The idea of a virgin conception, though, was quite astounding to Mary. Initially, she could not grasp the possibility of such phenomenon (cf. 1:34). But the Angel Gabriel’s words to her were convincing and comforting. He assures that: (1) Mary is a favored one who is and will be accompanied by God (1:30); (2) she will conceive a son, destined to be the promised Davidic Messiah (1:31-33); (3) since she is a virgin (v.34), her son will be the Spirit-conceived Son of God, a creative role of the Spirit unique and unparalleled (1:35); (4) a confirmatory sign of this announcement is Elizabeth’s pregnancy (1:36); and (5) nothing is impossible with God (1:37).

Gabriel affirms at the onset that Mary is a recipient of grace. In his initial address, he declares: “Χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ” (Rejoice, favored one; the Lord is with you). The word κεχαριτωμένη (*kecharitōmenē*, favored one) connotes God’s favor or grace given to a person. This address is reminiscent of Gideon’s call in Judges 6:12.⁴⁹ Somehow Luke parallels Gabriel’s address to Mary with the Angel of the Lord’s address to Gideon. Hence, the annunciation to Mary is unlike that to Zechariah. In Mary’s case, Luke modified the birth oracle form so that it reflects a call/commissioning narrative.⁵⁰ The Lucan idea is that Mary isn’t just hearing a birth announcement, but also receiving a call to be the vessel for the conception and birth of the Messiah. There are risks if she accepts this. She may get into trouble with Joseph (Matt. 1:18-19); she may be identified as either shameless or without honor if she is suspected of adultery; and/or if convicted, she may be stoned to death. However, the Angel’s statement — “The Lord is with you!” (v.28)—and

⁴⁸Some consider the young woman in Isa. 7:14 as a precursor to Mary, but Nolland asserts that the Jews never read Isaiah 7:14 in this way. The idea of virgin conception was also not borrowed from Paganism. The fact that Jesus was born without a human father (a true parthogenesis) is unprecedented. John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1:1-9:20*, 35A (Colombia: Word, Inc., 1989), 58.

⁴⁹J. Reiling and J. L. Swellengrebel, *A Translator’s Handbook of the Gospel of Luke*, Helps for Translators Series, (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1971), 51.

⁵⁰Nolland, 40-41.

his comforting words—“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” (v. 30)—assures her (and the readers) that this is divinely initiated.

In fact, the phrase, “for you have found favor with God,” is a well-known Old Testament one.⁵¹ Usually it is used to refer to a favor received because of a request made or a reward for good deeds.⁵² However, in Mary’s case, the *χάριν* (*charin*, grace or favor) was given freely out of God’s good pleasure. The use of *χάρις* as favor freely given, is repetitive in Luke-Acts (cf. Lk. 2:40; Acts 7:10, 46; 11:23; 13:43; 14:3). In this context, then, Mary’s character exemplifies a person who received God’s special favor, not because of her deeds or of an earnest for it, but because of God’s initiative. She is an object of His initiative and grace.

Furthermore, Mary’s attitude was that of a model saint. She replied to Gabriel, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (v. 38). Mary demonstrated her readiness (Ἰδοῦ, behold)⁵³ and her humility by declaring her status as ἡ δούλη κυρίου (*hē doulē kuriou*, the bondmaid or female servant of the Lord).⁵⁴ With willingness she declares: γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου (*genoito moi kata to rēma sou*—i.e., let it happen to me or let this be whenever he pleases, according to your word).⁵⁵

Thus, we see Mary’s character transforming from perplexity to humble acceptance. Her acceptance is significant, taken at a possible personal loss. There is risk in submitting to God’s plan; but as the δούλη of God, she willingly accepts her call. Luke’s portrayal of Mary is as a round character. She was portrayed first as perplexed with the sudden announcement, but later received God’s message and bravely accepted a call that is unique in human history. She submitted herself to the plan of God at the risk of socio-religious stigma. She is a model believer, an object of God’s initiative and grace, and a pattern of faith.

⁵¹Reilling and Swellengrebel, 53-54.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³The word Ἰδοῦ (*idou*, behold) is a Hebraism that expresses readiness to serve or listen (cf. 1 Sam. 3:5, 6, 8). Reilling and Swellengrebel, 63.

⁵⁴The word δούλη (*doulē*, like *doulos*) is used when someone of high rank is addressed by somebody of lower rank. Walter Bauer, William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 205; cf. Acts 2:18 from the Joel 2 citation; cf. 1 Samuel 1:11 (Hannah’s response).

⁵⁵The optative mood of γένοιτό (*genoito*, let this be) connotes her acceptance of the announcement and call.

c. Elizabeth and Mary's Prophesying (1:39-56)

Lastly, these two meet when, with haste (μετὰ σπουδῆς, *meta spoudēs*), Mary travels to Elizabeth's hometown.⁵⁶ Some have commented that this hasty action would be out of character for the chaste woman,⁵⁷ especially since the journey to the hill country of Judea would take three to five days.⁵⁸ But in the narrative context, Luke impresses a sense of eagerness to confirm that which Gabriel announced to Mary. Her haste is better understood as an eagerness to visit Elizabeth, with whom she shares a miraculous motherhood. Mary's departure reflected instant obedience to God's leading. Luke frames this episode in a travel motif:

- A. Mary travels to Elizabeth's town (v. 39)
- B. Mary's greeting (v. 40)
- C. The Baby's response and Elizabeth's infilling (v. 41)
- C'. Elizabeth's explanation and prophetic utterance (vv. 42-45)
- B'. Mary's *Magnificat* (vv. 46-55)
- A'. After three months, Mary travels back to Nazareth (v. 56)

Within this frame, Luke highlights the interaction between the two women, as well as the phenomena of their prophesying. The story goes:

<p>⁴¹καὶ ἐγένετο ὡς ἤκουσεν τὸν ἀσπασμὸν τῆς Μαρίας ἡ Ἐλισάβετ, ἐσκίρτησεν τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐπλήσθη πνεύματος ἁγίου ἡ Ἐλισάβετ, (1:41 GNT)</p>	<p>⁴¹And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (1:41 RSV)</p>
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⁵⁶Unique in the Gospels, this account has no parallel stories. It is also significant because it not only links the two birth oracles, but also the two birth events. However, the source of this account is disputed. Many argue that Luke created the scene to parallel John and Jesus, while others say that the account came to Luke in its present form. Bock asserts that the closest possibility is that Luke arranged the materials together with the other infancy traditions. His parallelism does not necessarily mean he composed the scene, especially since some details are unnecessary if parallelism was Luke's main concern. These details cannot be explained by a theory of Lucan creation. For further explanation, see Bock, *Luke*, 101, 132-133.

⁵⁷Blaise Hospodar, "Meta Spoudes in Lk. 1:39," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 18 (1956), 14-18.

⁵⁸Elizabeth's hometown would be in the hill country of Judea just outside Jerusalem. It is estimated to be 70-80 miles from Nazareth and would take 3-5 days of travel. Mark L. Strauss, "Luke" in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. Clinton Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 334.

At Mary's greeting, the babe in Elizabeth's womb "leaped" (v. 41a). In the Old Testament, leaping was an expression of joy (Mal. 4:2)—e.g., David leaped and danced before the Lord (2 Sam. 6:16). Jewish tradition also accepts the idea of unborn children anticipating prenatally their later positions in life (cf. Gen. 25:22-23).⁵⁹ Thus, when the Spirit-filled baby in Elizabeth's womb (cf. Lk. 1:15) reacted to the presence of the Baby in Mary's womb, the former was attesting to the Lordship of the latter.

Luke uses this to testify to the superiority of Jesus, but at the same time to give a prolepsis of John the Baptist's ministry as the prophetic forerunner of the Messiah. This prenatal activity is confirmed by Elizabeth's explanation of the baby's joyful recognition of his Lord (v. 44).⁶⁰ The fact that Luke did not narrate how Elizabeth knew about Mary's pregnancy strongly impresses upon readers that her perception came from the Spirit's revelation. Elizabeth, who felt the baby's movement, had been ἐπλήσθη πνεύματος ἁγίου (*eplēsthē pneumatos hagiou*), filled with the Holy Spirit, v. 41b) at that same moment. In the Old Testament, the term "filled with the Spirit" was often associated with the Spirit's charismatic/prophetic activity.⁶¹

Luke follows this association by characterizing the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts as the Spirit of prophecy.⁶² The phrase "filled with the Holy Spirit" appears three times in the Lucan Gospel, while it appears six

⁵⁹However, it is doubtful that the struggle between Jacob and Esau is in view here. David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Luke" in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 260.

⁶⁰Nolland, 66.

⁶¹It occurs five times in LXX (Exod. 28:3; 31:3; 35:31; Deut. 34:9; Isa. 11:3). In all five occurrences, the term "filled with the Spirit" invariably describes a charismatic activity of the Holy Spirit. Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke's Charismatic Theology* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 2003), 66. cf. Strauss, 334.

⁶²Discussions on Luke's pneumatology and view on prophecy can be read from the works of the following scholars: P. S. Minear, *To Heal and to Reveal: Prophetic Vocation According to Luke* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1976); D. Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (London, UK: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1979); Youngmo Cho, *Spirit and Kingdom in the Writings of Luke and Paul: An Attempt to Reconcile these Concepts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005); Robert P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology with Special Reference to Luke-Acts*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 54 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1991); *idem.*, "The Distinctive Character of Luke's Pneumatology", *Paraclete* 25 (1991), 17-30; *idem.*, "The Spirit of Prophecy, Luke-Acts and Pentecostal Theology: A Response to Max Turner," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 15 (1999), 49-74; Roger Stronstad, "Prophethood of All Believers: A Study of Luke's Charismatic Theology," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Sup Series 16 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); *idem.*, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012); Craig Keener, *The Spirit in the Gospel and Acts: Divine Purity and Power* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997).

times in the Book of Acts.⁶³ In both, Luke uses the phrase to identify the source of prophetic enabling.⁶⁴ For instance, in the Gospel, having been filled with the Spirit, Elizabeth uttered an inspired speech (1:41). Zechariah, too, after being filled, prophesied about the Messiah and the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation through Him (1:67-79). John the Baptist, who had been filled from the womb, grew in wisdom and ministered as a prophet. For Luke, then, being “filled with the Spirit” is being enabled by the Spirit to function in the prophetic anointing.

This proposition is demonstrated in 1:41-45, where a Spirit-filled Elizabeth witnessed to the unborn Messiah. Through charismatic inspiration she cried out:⁶⁵

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord (1:42-45 RSV).

Here we read Elizabeth’s prophetic speech/praise. She witnesses to the Lordship of the unborn Jesus and reaffirms the favored status of Mary, in congruence with Gabriel’s prior declaration. She explicitly identifies Mary as “the mother of my Lord” and interprets the supernatural recognition of the unborn John as a leap for joy (*ἀγαλλιᾶσαι, agalliasai*)—a joy which looks back to 1:14 and proleptically looks forward to 1:47, where rejoicing is related to God’s redemptive action. Lastly, she addresses Mary as blessed, happy, or fortunate (*μακαρία, makaria*) because of her faith. Elizabeth, too, expresses certainty that God’s promises will be fulfilled. Overall, her prophetic speech/praise can only come from a charismatic revelation of God’s activity and plan in the life of Mary and the unborn Messiah. Her humility and joy at being part of this divine unfolding are also evident in her speech. Clearly, Luke identified her here as a prophetess who uttered inspired speech/praise, received charismatic revelation, and experienced eschatological joy and wonder in the redemptive act of God.

⁶³Lk. 1:15, 41, 67; Acts 2: 4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9, 52.

⁶⁴This prophetic enabling in Luke-Acts consisted of inspired utterance (Lk. 1:67; Acts 2:4; 4:8), charismatic revelation (Lk. 1:41), accompanying signs (Acts 9:17; 13:9), and eschatological joy (Acts 13:52).

⁶⁵Ἀνεφώνησεν (*anaphōnein*, to cry out) is used in Koine Greek for solemn or significant announcements. Bock, 136.

Mary responded to Elizabeth's prophetic speech by bursting out with a Spirit-inspired hymn.⁶⁶ Her *Magnificat* may be considered as a prophetic hymn/song.⁶⁷ First, she identifies God as the origin of her rejoicing. The phrase, καὶ ἠγαλλίασεν τὸ πνεῦμά μου (*kai ēgalliasen to pneuma mou*, and my spirit rejoices) in v. 47 connotes a rejoicing due to the Spirit's revelation of God's acts. She rejoices in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation and in the favorable role she has been given in that plan. Second, she exalts God's gracious dealings with Israel and with those who fear him from generation to generation (v. 50). The entire hymn is ripe with the theme of eschatological reversal—i.e., those considered lowly, powerless, and underprivileged will be raised up, while the proud, powerful, and oppressive will be brought down (vv. 52-53).⁶⁸

Lastly, the hymn declares the certainty of the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel (vv. 55a-55b). Hence, her *Magnificat* is a prophetic hymn which proclaims that the miraculous conception of the Messiah has set into motion God's eschatological work. The advent of God's kingdom has occurred and salvation has come. In this narrative unit, Elizabeth and Mary are both characterized as pious women, models of faith, and operating in prophecy as the Spirit inspired them. Their prophetic utterances are verbal (either as speech or song), charismatically inspired, and filled with eschatological joy and wonder. Their miraculous motherhood, although not linked to the prophetic ministry, plays a role in God's plan of salvation and sets in motion the eschatological in-breaking of God's kingdom.

Anna, the Prophetess

a. Character Analysis of Anna

³⁶Καὶ ἦν Ἄννα προφῆτις, ³⁶And there was a
 θυγάτηρ Φανουήλ, ἐκ φυλῆς prophetess, Anna, the daughter of
 Ἀσήρ· αὕτη προβεβηκυῖα ἐν Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she

⁶⁶Cho asserts that Mary's *Magnificat* is derived from the inspiration of the Spirit, contra Dunn who argues that the Spirit only functions soteriologically in relation to Mary. Cho, *Spirit and Kingdom*, 139; cf. J. D. G. Dunn, "Baptism in the Spirit: A Response to Pentecostal Scholarship on Luke-Acts," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 3 (1993), 3-27.

⁶⁷Mary's *Magnificat* has the features of Jewish poetry as well as of prophetic hymns, which contains a forth-telling and foreshadowing of God's salvific act, rooted in His covenantal promises. For further discussion on prophetic hymns, read Köstenberger and Patterson, 326, 339-340.

⁶⁸The contrasting fates of the rich and the poor illustrate "eschatological reversal," where God's peaceful and just kingdom is declared as in-breaking or coming in his actions. There is a certainty to God's fulfillment of his promises to his people Israel. Bock, *Luke*, 147.

ἡμέραις πολλαῖς, ζήσασα μετὰ ἀνδρὸς ἕτη ἑπτὰ ἀπὸ τῆς παρθενίας αὐτῆς ³⁷καὶ αὐτὴ χήρα ἕως ἐτῶν ὀγδοήκοντα τεσσάρων, ἢ οὐκ ἀφίστατο τοῦ ἱεροῦ νηστεύουσα καὶ δεήσασιν λατρεύουσα νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν. (2:36-37 GNT)

was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, ³⁷and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. (2:36-37 RSV)

After Jesus' birth, his parents brought him to the temple in Jerusalem (2:22). There the baby Jesus was first seen by Simeon (2:23-35) and then by Anna (2:36-38). Luke presents these two characters in a gender doublet or man-woman pair,⁶⁹ both being prophets of Jewish piety. As a counterpart to Simeon, Anna is immediately introduced as a prophetess from the tribe of Asher. As such, Luke places her in a category with Old Testament prophetesses like Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), and Isaiah's wife (Isa. 8:3).⁷⁰ The explicit designation of her prophetic office identifies Anna as a revelatory agent of God. By implication, she is a woman endowed with the Spirit (cf. 1:67; 2:25). In verses 36-37, Luke adds to her prophetic activity a lifestyle of piety and devotion. Her biographical data are as follows:

Description	Significance
1. She was a daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher.	-- She is a faithful Jew; an Israelite descendant.
2. She was of great age.	-- She is a symbol of respectful status in her world. ⁷¹
3. She was a widow for a long time.	-- She is an ascetic figure, marrying only once and then devoting herself to God in widowhood. ⁷²
4. She did not depart from the temple but worshipped	

⁶⁹The use of gender doublets or man-woman parallel is plentiful in Luke-Acts. A comprehensive list can be read in: Seim, *Double Message*, 15.

⁷⁰In the Talmud, seven Old Testament women are identified as prophetesses—Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther. Strauss, 347; cf. Bock, *Luke*, 251.

⁷¹The redundant phrase αὐτὴ προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ἡμέραις πολλαῖς (*hautē probebēkua en hēmerais pollais*) is a Hebraism that translates literally as “she was very old in her many days” (cf. Gen. 18:11; Josh. 13:1; 23:1). Bock, 251. This advanced age is a symbol of respectful status. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 151.

⁷²Luke shares features with Judaism, since in the latter, widowhood served as models. A paradigmatic example is Judith, the pious heroine of Israel (Jdt. 16:23). Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 151; cf. Seim, *Double Message*, 185-248.

with fasting and prayer night and day.	-- She demonstrated extraordinary devotion to the worship of God and to prayer.
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Overall, Anna is a perfect example of female piety. Her piety and devotion serve as the background and justification for her primary narrative role as a prophetess.

b. Anna’s Prophesying (2:38)

³⁸ καὶ αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἐπιστᾶσα ἀνθωμολογεῖτο τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλάλει περὶ αὐτοῦ πᾶσιν τοῖς προσδεχομένοις λύτρωσιν Ἰερουσαλήμ. (2:38 GNT)	³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (2:38 RSV)
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The phrase “καὶ αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἐπιστᾶσα” (*kai autē tē hōra epistasa*, and coming up at that very hour) indicates that Anna came up to the temple at the exact hour Jesus was presented by his parents. Here we read a strong connotation of divine orchestration, because her coming to the temple at that moment couldn’t have been a coincidence. Given the charismatic insight that is characteristic of the prophetic vocation, the Holy Spirit most likely led her to the baby at that exact moment. Recognizing the child and his significance to Israel, she immediately offers praise (ἀνθωμολογεῖτο, *anthōmologeito*) to God.⁷³ Her instant response comes from an acknowledgement that her “praying and fasting night and day” has not been in vain. In the Messiah she sees the answer to her prayers and the fulfillment of Israel’s hope of redemption. She goes on to proclaim about Jesus to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. The word “Jerusalem” here represents all of Israel, especially those who await the Messianic redemption (cf. Zeph. 3:14-20; Isa. 40:2; Zech. 9:9f).

Anna’s prophesying, although not recorded word for word, (1) contains the Good News of God’s redemption through the birth of Jesus, (2) declares that fulfilment of God’s promise has come, and (3) overall reflects the same content and mood of Mary’s *Magnificat* and Zechariah’s *Benedictus*.⁷⁴ Unlike Simeon, her prophesying was not only addressed to the parents, but also was far-reaching and enduring. The word ἐλάλει, in “καὶ ἐλάλει περὶ αὐτοῦ” (*kai elalei peri autou*, and she

⁷³*Anthōmologeito* is a hapax legomena that refers to giving of praise in exchange for God’s act. Bock, *Luke*, 252-253.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 253.

spoke about him) is an imperfect tense with a durative meaning. This strongly suggests that she spoke about the child-Messiah till long afterwards. Her action affirms that her primary function in the narrative is prophetic proclamation. In summary then, Anna is a prophetess who is portrayed as a model of female Jewish piety. Her function in the infancy narrative is prophetic proclamation of the redemptive act of God through the Messiah.

Synthesis—Implication of Prophesying Women in the Infancy Narratives

These texts in the Lucan Gospel demonstrate that God uses women as agents of his revelation. This phenomenon has, as its precedence, Old Testament models like Sarah, Deborah, Miriam, and Huldah. In salvation history, Elizabeth, Mary, and Anna are not the first women to operate in the prophetic anointing. In fact, there is no biblical evidence for the claim that women are distanced from the prophetic ministry because prophetesses are traditionally accepted. Also, there is no evidence that prophetesses have a gender-restricted audience. The case of Anna in Luke 2:38 is a specific example of a wide audience that a prophetess could reach with her message. More importantly, we see in Luke's infancy narrative a tension between a continuation of Old Testament prophecy and an early expression of the in-breaking eschatological era. Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna stand as both signposts to the dawning of a new age and as preliminary examples of the coming general outpouring of the Spirit of prophecy.