

The Hebraic Gospels Series

Luke:
Illuminating the Sage of Galilee

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Luke:
Illuminating the Sage of Galilee

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To Nikol—
freshly minted American citizen

Advanced Endorsements

Traditional Christian teaching on the Gospel of Luke instructs that the life, teaching, and death of Jesus is a central message of universal salvation addressed to all people. Though written in Greek, this volume suggests that Hebrew terms and biblical passages were carefully translated and transmitted from a primary Hebrew *ur-text*. To suggest that Luke's distinctive emphasis and interpretation on the Holy Spirit, Roles of Women and Gentiles, and so on are actually grounded in an original Hebrew text underscores a strong claim of Jewishness to Jesus (Rabbi, King, Messiah). How and why this might be the case is creatively displayed in Dr. Kenneth Hanson's informative commentary on Luke. Ideal for Christian-Jewish dialogue, this volume is highly recommended as an academic study of the Synoptics for teachers, students, and lay readers alike.

–Prof. Zev Garber,
Emeritus Professor and Chair of Jewish Studies,
Los Angeles Valley College

Groundbreaking, revolutionary, and innovative. Dr. Hanson's meticulous study of the Synoptic Gospels through the lens of the Hebrew language could change everything scholars have come to believe about the earliest literary depictions of Jesus' life. His Hebraic Gospels Series is a real game changer for Historical Jesus and New Testament Studies, potentially igniting a significant paradigm shift in how academics and religious specialists view the original Evangelists.

–Darren M. Slade, PhD
President, Global Center for Religious Research

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A Selection of Publications by Kenneth L. Hanson

The Annotated Passover Haggadah (co-editor and contributor with Zev Garber) (Denver: GCRR Press, 2021)

Whose Holy Land? Archaeology Meets Geopolitics in Today's Middle East (Nashville: New English Review Press, 2020)

Judaism and Jesus (with Zev Garber) (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020)

The Eagle and the Bible (Nashville: New English Review Press, 2013)

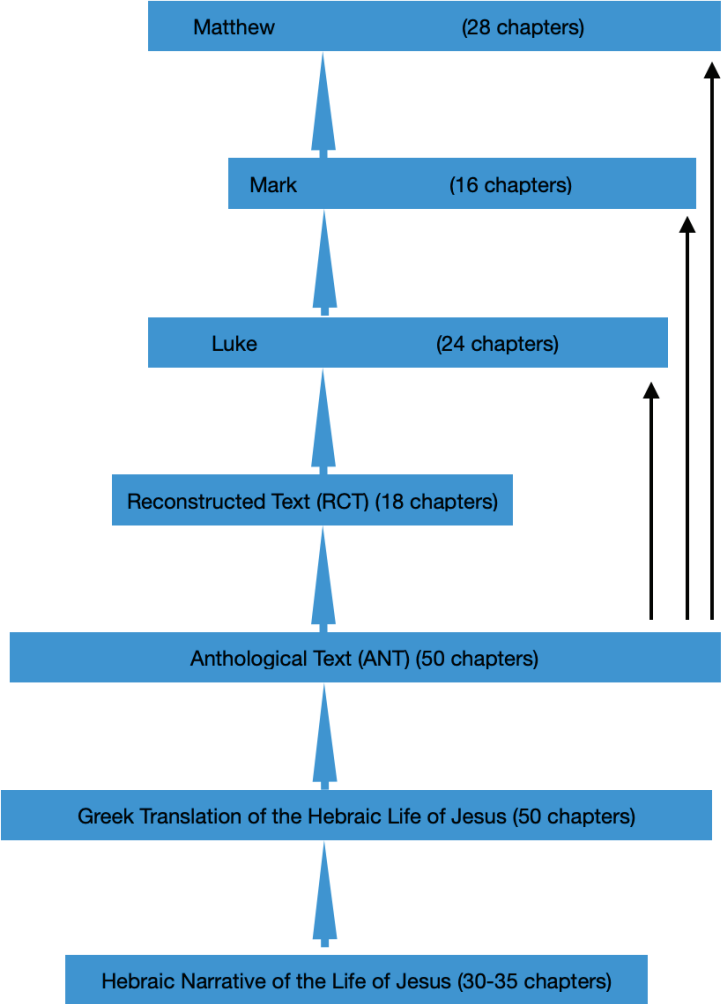
Blood Kin of Jesus (San Francisco: Council Oak Books, October, 2009)

Secrets from the Lost Bible (San Francisco: Council Oak Books, 2004)

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Hypothetical Evolution of the Synoptic Gospels



Introduction: The Synoptic Gospels and a Hypothetical *Grundschrift*

Several decades ago, a collaborative group of Jewish and Christian scholars based in Israel advanced what was then, and still is, considered a radical theory regarding the birth, growth, and development of the Synoptic Gospels. What began as a joint effort between two Jerusalem-based scholars, American Robert L. Lindsey (a Southern Baptist minister) and Professor David Flusser (director of the Department of Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem), blossomed into a fledgling “movement” and spawned what came to be known as the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research.

Lindsey had originally noticed that the Gospel of Luke, though said to lack Aramaisms, can be translated into a Hebrew text much more easily than Mark, which is almost universally assumed to have been the first of the four Gospels. For example, Mark frequently interjects the Greek expression *καὶ εὐθὺς* (“and immediately”). He does this a total of forty-one times; yet, the phrase has no Hebrew equivalent. Luke, by contrast, employs this expression only once, and not in a story unit shared with Mark. Lindsey’s question was that if Luke were copying Mark, who supposedly wrote first, why did he not reproduce Mark’s wording: *καὶ εὐθὺς*? He concluded that Luke did not copy Mark’s text because he did not see it.¹ Matthew, in a number of instances, reproduces *καὶ εὐθὺς*, but only in passages which parallel Mark. A

¹ See Robert Lindsey, *Jesus Rabbi and Lord* (Oak Creek, WI: Cornerstone, 1990), 20.

2 *The Hebraic Gospel of Luke*

test of other expressions and phrases yielded similar results. Moreover, Lindsey discovered that in places where Matthew most closely follows Mark, his text does not translate well into Hebrew. However, when Matthew follows Luke as opposed to Mark, it is relatively easy to render a Hebrew version of the narrative. Lindsey was forced to conclude that Luke indeed wrote first. When he met David Flusser, who had independently become convinced of the strong editorial redaction in Mark's Gospel, a healthy working relationship began.

They suggested that beneath the Greek texts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke lay a long-vanished Semitic, indeed a Hebrew subtext, or "undertext" (*grundschrift*), the haunting tones of which may be imperfectly glimpsed through the occasionally awkward syntax of the traditional Gospel narratives. As a literary product the Gospels betray their origins, not as a collection of oral compositions, slapped together by Greek-speaking redactors decades after the life and death of their principal subject, but as a multi-layered translation project, dissecting, rearranging, reassembling, and parroting what theoretically began as a single Hebraic document—a hypothetical life of Jesus of Nazareth.²

The evidence for such an Ur-text is hiding in plain sight, in the multiple Hebraisms (Greek words and phrases which almost certainly represent translations of Hebrew idioms) scattered across the Synoptic narratives. Syntactical evidence in the form of sentence structure that appears to mimic biblical Hebrew is equally abundant. Indeed, the Greek of the Synoptic Gospels is said to resemble what might be called "translation Greek," similar to the ancient Greek rendering of the Hebrew Scriptures, known as the Septuagint. Language of composition being the fundamental element of any literary work, the implications of this avant-garde theory are astounding. They suggest that the Christian Gospels are inherently the product of "homegrown" Jewish thought during the

² See Pinchas Lapide, "The Missing Hebrew Gospel," *Christian News From Israel*, XXIV (1974): 167–70.

days of the Second Temple. Moreover, they present us with the serious prospect that the language in which the words of the historical Jesus were recorded, and by extension the “mother tongue” in which he taught, was not, as long supposed, Aramaic, but Hebrew. Hardly a dead or dormant language, this was the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and subsequently the Mishnah. In a real sense, the Jesus of history becomes Jesus the Jewish Sage.

Some have argued that Aramaic source material of some kind lay behind the Synoptic Gospels, while others have argued just as convincingly that the Aramaic theory is without merit. The case presented here is that looking to proposed Aramaic sources behind the Synoptics is, in fact, seriously flawed. There are certainly several Aramaisms peppering the Gospel narratives, including *ταλιθά*, *κοῦμι* (“*talita cumi*,” Mark 5:41), *ἐφφαθά* (“*ephphata*,” Mark 7:34), *ῥαββουνί* (“*rabboni*,” Mark 10:51) and most notably *Ἐλωϊ Ἐλωϊ, λιμᾶ σαβαχθανί*; (“*Eloí, Eloí, lima savachthani?*” Mark 15:34). It is significant, however, that most Hebrew literature from the Second Temple and Tannaitic periods, including the Mishnah, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Bar Kokhba letters, also contain Aramaisms that had filtered into common use. It is equally notable that multiple Hebrew words are also represented in the Greek Gospels. These include:

λίβανον (לְבוֹנָה) (“frankincense,” Matt 2:11),
 Ἴρακά (רֵיקָא “empty,” Matt 5:22),
 ζιζάνια (זֵרַיִם “tares,” Matt 13:25),
 Ῥαββί (רַבִּי “Rabbi,” Matt 23:7–8),
 κύμινον (כַּמּוֹן “cummin,” Matt 23:23),
 Βοανεργές (בוֹאנֶגֶרֶס Boanerges, Mark 3:17),
 κορβᾶν (קֶרְבַּן “sacrifice,” Mark 7:11),
 μύρου (מוֹר “myrrh,” Luke 7:37),
 σατανᾶν (שָׂטָן “Satan,” Luke 10:18),
 Βεελζεβούλ (בַּעַל זְבוּב “Beelzebub,” Luke 11:15),
 βάτους (בַּת “bath” as a measure, Luke 16:6),
 κόρους (כּוֹר “kor” as a measure, (Luke 16:7),

4 *The Hebraic Gospel of Luke*

μαμωνᾶ (מָמוֹן “mammon,” Luke 16:9),
συκομορέαν (שִׁקְמוֹרָה “sycamore,” Luke 19:4),
Οὐαὶ (אֵי “Woe!”) and
ἀμήν (אָמֵן *amen*), appearing hundreds of times in Gospels.³

In the early twentieth century, the renowned Jewish scholar, M. H. Segal wrote:

...what was the language of ordinary life of educated native Jews in Jerusalem and Judea from 40 B.C. to 150 A.D.? The evidence presented by Mishnaic Hebrew and its literature leaves no doubt that that language was Mishnaic Hebrew. Of course those educated Judeans also understood Aramaic, and used it even in writing, but only occasionally...⁴

As recently observed by Michael Wise in his study of language patterns in Roman Judea, “Most scholars today would agree that Judeans in the first century C.E. and the first third of the second century were a trilingual society, using Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.”⁵ He also notes that prior to the discoveries of the manuscripts of the Judean Desert (between 1945 and 1965) it was commonly assumed that the dominant language for daily life in Judea was Aramaic. However, “It was the discoveries associated with the later period—the contracts and documents of the Bar Kokhba period—that provided the more direct argument for Hebrew as a vernacular; and it was the letters that advance this view.”⁶

In the final analysis, those who insist that the Greek of the Synoptics does not rely on Hebrew source material of any kind are

³ See David Bivin and Roy Blizzard, *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus* (Arcadia, CA: Makor Foundation, 1983), 32–34.

⁴ M. H. Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 13.

⁵ Michael Wise, *Language and Literacy in Roman Judaea: A Study of the Bar Kokhba Documents* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

forced to conclude that in the many instances in which the Greek seems to betray a Hebraic flavor (“and it came to pass” being an example) the writers were deliberately attempting to mimic biblical Hebrew (something not done with such regularity in John’s Gospel or other Greek compositions of the New Testament). The other logical option is they were, in fact, relying on authentically Hebraic source texts, subsequently translated to Greek. Indeed, those who cannot hear the rich resonance of Hebrew coursing through the printed words of the Greek text are arguably not sufficiently trained in Hebrew to appreciate the phenomenon.

The burden of this research is to “read through” the Greek of the Synoptic Gospels to the vestigial remnants of this underlying Hebraic source. It is a monumental undertaking of scholarly sleuthing, which seeks to reconstruct this most elusive of all Ur-texts, vaguely akin to a Dead Sea Scroll, some thirty to thirty-five Hebrew chapters in length and likely reduced to writing within just a few years of the events it describes. According to the Jerusalem School, this text, which was subsequently lost, was translated to Greek, for consumption in the Hellenistic communities to the west, where the apostle Paul was busily casting his own theological net over this uniquely Jewish messianic sect. For the sake of scholarship, it may be referred to as a “Proto-Narrative” (PN). The obvious question is how this single *grundschrift* became three separate Synoptic accounts.

On a literary level, it is a Darwinian endeavor, positing The Origin of Gospel Species. It amounts to what might be called “evolutionary textology.” The operating theory advanced by the Jerusalem School is that PN was taken in hand by a Greek-speaking redactor and cleverly subdivided into three separate topical sections. It likely consisted of a narrative of the life of Jesus (including the multiple miracle stories linked to him, his death and resurrection), a “sayings” section (recording the words and teachings/*ipsissima verba* of Jesus), and a compilation of Jesus’ parables. It may be referred to as the “Anthological Text” (ANT), approximately fifty Greek chapters in length. It is the “sayings”

section of the ANT that presents an intriguing alternative to what is normally supposed to be an entirely separate collection of the words of Jesus, referred to as the “Q” source.

To be sure, the application of Occam’s razor is most helpful in deciphering this textual puzzle: “Entities [in this case texts] should not be multiplied without necessity.” Nonetheless, any understanding of the “Synoptic problem” requires at least some such multiplication. It is theorized that at some point the Anthological Text (ANT) was taken in hand by another redactor, who, according to the theory of the Jerusalem School, attempted to reconstruct a fresh narrative of Jesus according to the supposed original order, weaving together stories, parables, and sayings as they might have originally appeared. The result was a hypothetical “Short Gospel” or “Reconstructed Text” (RCT, approximately eighteen chapters in length), by its description less developed and more concise than its predecessor. It might well be titled “Condensed Gospel,” which, along with PN, became the source material for the three Synoptics to follow. In essence, it is a radical variation of the “two source” hypothesis, and it does much to reconcile many of the conundrums involved in Synoptic research.⁷

It is at this point that the Jerusalem School offers the sweeping suggestion that Luke was composed first, relying on both the ANT and the RCT. The fatal flaw in the conventional reasoning, it is argued, is that the length of a book as a whole is the most compelling evidence for its primacy. Following a curiously Darwinian logic, it is assumed that all texts evolve from primitive to complex states and that the “evolutionary development” of the Synoptic Gospels must therefore have begun with Mark. It is a serious mistake, however, to consider overall length as the “holy grail” of textual primacy. It is much more appropriate to consider the inner workings of the texts, their “genetic code,” as it were. On that level, the conventional wisdom is upended, as we lay specific

⁷ See Robert Lindsey, “A Modified Two-Document Theory of the Synoptic Dependence and Interdependence,” *Novum Testamentum* 6 (1963): 239–63.

passages side by side to observe over and over again that Mark appears to be expanding on Luke as if to explain to a Greek-speaking audience what Lucan idioms actually signify.

A case in point, among myriad examples, is when Jesus is reported by Luke (18:29–30) as saying:

There is no one who has left house, or parents, or brothers, or wife, or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come eternal life.

Mark (10:29–30) appears to explain what Luke means by the word “house” (in Hebrew בית). His account reads:

There is no one who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the Gospel’s, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and land, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

The word “parents” in Luke has been elaborated in Mark as “father or mother.” Mark also adds “sisters” and “lands,” as well as a reference to the “Gospel” and the words “with persecutions.” The promise of future land is inconsistent with the Jesus of Luke, who is not in the habit of promising physical rewards for dedication to his movement. Indeed, while Mark on the whole is considerably shorter than Luke, the Markan redactor is in the habit of supplementing the Lucan account on a verse-by-verse basis. As another example, the pericope regarding the healing of a demon-possessed boy contains 124 words as recorded in Luke (9:37–43) and 270 words in Mark (9:14–29).

To employ Hebraic terminology, Mark might well be called a kind of “targumist,” who went well beyond the task of translating one language to another, clarifying the presumed intent of idioms,

phrases, and sundry expressions, as conveyed from text to text. A separate case, involving a theological interpretation, is the statement in the mouth of the Roman centurion at the crucifixion of Jesus. Luke records him as saying, "Surely, this was a righteous man." Mark, however, has him say, "Surely, this was the son of God." It is much easier to recognize Luke as reproducing an earlier and more "authentic" text, which was later embellished by Mark so as to extol Jesus to a level of near divinity. It was later writers who had every reason to elevate Jesus, in line with an evolving theology. Mark, it is argued, relied on the ANT and Luke, but did not know the RCT directly. Instead, he essentially "lifted" the RCT out of Luke, adapting it as he saw fit.

Finally, we have Matthew's Gospel, which also relies on two sources: the ANT and Mark, without knowing Luke. Matthew ordered his story units (pericopes) after Mark while taking other material (such as minor corrections of Mark's wording) from the ANT. For the discriminating mind, Matthew presents a whole gamut of challenges in its own right. It is in Matthew's narrative that we find, at the trial of Jesus before Pilate, a boisterous Jewish mob demanding his crucifixion with the libelous chant, "His blood be upon us and on our children." It is a charge absent in Luke and Mark. Given the use of such language across the centuries for the accusation that the Jewish people are history's quintessential "Christ killers," it is by no means difficult to understand why Matthew, and by extension all the Gospels, would be viewed by Jews as beyond the pale of serious consideration, even on a purely literary level. However, if we can wrestle with Matthew as part of the larger Synoptic Problem, we might catch a glimpse of a tertiary writer, theorized to have been part of an Aramaic-speaking, Judeo-Christian group, with an exclusivist mindset that conceived of itself as the "new Israel," the "true Israel." Such a mentality would go a long way toward explaining the writer's occasionally vicious rhetoric directed against what became traditional Judaism.

On a textual level, though Matthew did not know Luke, the common source material is responsible for many passages and

pericopes common to both (the so-called “double tradition”), with minor variations. In other instances, the same or similar pericope is repeated across all three Synoptics: the “triple tradition.” It is precisely in these cases where Matthew appears conflicted between Mark and the ANT. Often he seems to “pick up” Mark’s elaborations to suit his own exegetical and theological purposes. Robert Lindsey, in seeking a new approach to the Synoptic Problem, examined a phenomenon he called the “Marcan cross-factor.” He noted that in the triple tradition Matthew and Luke evince high agreement in pericope order and low verbal agreement in the narrative. In the double tradition, however, Matthew and Luke evince low agreement in pericope order and high agreement in verbal identity. This is quite consistent with the theory of Lucan priority.

Another contention of Lindsey and the Jerusalem School is that Jesus may well have spent a good deal of his time (“ministry”) to the south of his native Galilee, in Judea. Certain aspects of his teaching seem particularly suited to an environment that included Jerusalem and points south, rather than the Galilean environment with which he is almost exclusively associated, save for the last week of his life. It is clear from the Gospels themselves that Jesus’ family was wealthy enough to afford trips to Jerusalem, as recorded in the narratives surrounding his childhood. Later we are told (Luke 5:17) that he encountered “Pharisees and teachers of the Law ... who had come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem.” It should hardly be surprising if Jesus had in fact returned to Judea regularly during his adult life, and it would indeed be unusual if he had not ventured into this region to his immediate south.

An important value of this admittedly avant-garde approach to the Synoptic problem is that it mitigates what often appears as a troublesome, anti-Jewish tone in many New Testament passages, even as it forces us to consider, not Mark, but Luke as the earliest Synoptic record. The potential of such an understanding is of huge consequence in the realm of interfaith relations. For Christians,

there is considerable value in reading through the Greek Gospels to uncover, at least potentially, the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus himself, unadorned by layers of subsequent theological overlay. For Jews the prospect of vivisectioning the Gospels to encounter, not the progenitor of another faith, but an ancient Israelite sage, perhaps an ancient Hasid, or perhaps harboring serious sympathies for the Zealot freedom fighters of his day, opens a door to appreciating the great Nazarene in a manner not thought possible since the inception of Christianity, nearly two millennia ago. It is in that spirit and with that aspiration that the following annotated version of the Synoptic Gospels is presented. It is sincerely hoped that it will add to the discussion of the Jewish Jesus, in all his color and first-century flavor.

A Note to the Reader

This volume is designed for those who are familiar to some extent with New Testament scholarship. However, it “bridges the gap” between material considered “accessible” and high scholarship. A knowledge of Hebrew and Greek is certainly helpful, though not required, as important terms and quotations appear in English as well as in the original languages.

One important textual note is that Lindsey himself wrote relatively little in his lifetime, and perhaps his most important work, *Jesus, Rabbi and Lord*, was written not in an academic style, but in his role as a Baptist minister. Nevertheless, its contents represent the sum of his decades long partnership with David Flusser. Many of his insights, virtually unattested in New Testament scholarship, deserve serious scholarly treatment and consideration. His suggested pericope order carries profound implications for synoptic research, and the text presented here represents a serious attempt to re-order the complete Gospel of Luke in accordance with Lindsey and Flusser’s proposed schema, albeit purely hypothetical.

It is not the purpose of this modest volume to make a conclusive or exhaustive argument for Lucan priority. I have therefore made only a brief summary of the evidence for the theory while pointing to others who have defended it in greater detail. The Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research, along with its publications and related website (jerusalemerspective.com/696/) continue to advance important scholarly arguments with respect to the primacy of Luke. The Jerusalem School is currently compiling an exhaustive online resource, attempting to reconstruct this Proto-Narrative, admittedly from an evangelical Christian perspective. As of this writing, it remains only partially complete. Rather than restating these arguments or belaboring their fine points, the value of the current work is to get a glimpse of what the Gospel may have resembled, hypothetically, if the primacy of Luke were accepted. It may provide a sense of what the narrative of the life of Jesus may have resembled in its earliest compilation. The work presented here is intended to provide a much-needed overview, from a non-sectarian vantage point, of the entirety of this research. As with any academic debate, the important thing is not to arrive at conclusive proof, which every serious scholar knows is unattainable, but to glean insights that greatly enhance the understanding of all.

Moreover, whatever the validity of the theory, the abundant parallels to the Lucan narrative in multiple ancient sources, from the Dead Sea Scrolls to rabbinic literature (cited in the original Hebrew and/or Aramaic wherever possible), should serve as an important reference for those seeking a better understanding of the Jewish Jesus movement and its earliest historical milieu, prior to the imposition of multiple layers of subsequent religious and theological dogma. In the final analysis, the approach presented here is by no means the “last word” on contemporary Jesus research, but admittedly a work in progress, as enlightened scholarship grapples with the Sage of Galilee. It is therefore with a considerable dose of humility that Hebraic Luke is set forth as follows. Let the learning begin...

Introduction to Luke

The author of Luke begins by acknowledging that other accounts of the life of Jesus have preceded him. The operating theory espoused here is that two of the prior sources available to him were: a hypothetical “Anthological Text” (ANT) and a “Reconstructed Text” (RCT), which we may also refer to as a “Short Gospel.” Following the introductory narratives of the first two chapters, it is argued that Chapter 3 through the middle of Chapter 9, as well as Chapters 19 to 24, are taken from RCT. The Reconstructed Text is known only to Luke. (Purple-colored font is used to highlight RCT.) The Anthological Text (ANT) is reproduced by Luke from the middle of Chapter 9 through Chapter 18. One textual conundrum potentially resolved by this theory is the fact that many of the Lucan sayings of Jesus are repeated later in the Gospel, as “doublets.” The “two-source hypothesis” presented here explains this phenomenon. Additionally, the theory that Jesus embarked on a Judean sojourn is emphasized. The relevant passages appear in a separate section. Other passages have been rearranged from their order in the traditional Lucan text. This corresponds with the theorized notion that in the earliest “Proto-Narrative,” a typical Gospel story unit (pericope) would have been built of an incident and a teaching, followed by two parables. Consequently, the flow of original chapters and verses is often interrupted, and explanatory notes have been placed in the text to indicate the transposition of certain sections. The text has therefore been rearranged according to hypothetical “Acts” and “Scenes.” These include:

1. Luke's "Prelude"
2. The Baptist, the Genealogy, the Temptation and Galilee
3. The Judean Sojourn
4. The Return to Galilee
5. Up to Jerusalem
6. Temple to Tomb
7. Post-Resurrection

Some of the sayings and teachings of Jesus are also theorized to belong to a final, "post-resurrection" section of the Luke-Acts, originally appearing after Luke 24:50 or Acts 1:3. Such sayings have been transposed to the end. Occasional imports from the Gospels of Matthew and John are in red font. It should be noted that the first two chapters of Luke (excluding Luke's dedication to Theophilus in the first four verses) also betray a Hebraic syntax, likely stemming from an earlier Hebrew "nativity" source.

It is worth noting that beginning with the first two chapters of Luke, there has been much source-critical discussion of "aberrations" in the Greek. M. Wilcox noted the influence of "Aramaic and/or Hebrew traditional material" on New Testament Greek. He argued that there is something more going on than mere imitation of the Greek of the Septuagint. It is arguably the case, however, that a Hebrew *Vorlage* explains such aberrations better than a supposed Aramaic source or sources.¹

In any case, such an unknown Hebrew source is distinct from either the ANT or the RCT. This section is color-coded in brown. Throughout the text, the words and phrases in bold font are notable for their Hebraic significance, and the extensive footnotes at the bottom of each page explain their meaning and importance.

¹ See Max Wilcox, "Semitisms in the New Testament," *ANRW* II.25.1 (1984): 978-1029. See also Albert L. A. Hogeterp and Adelbert Denaux, *Semitisms in Luke's Greek: A Descriptive Analysis of Lexical and Syntactical Domains of Semitic Language Influence in Luke's Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 29.

A brief outline of Luke's sources is as follows:

Chapters 1–3: Unknown “Nativity” source

Chapters 3–9: RCT (Reconstructed Text)—known only to Luke

Chapters 9–18: ANT (Anthological Text)

Chapters 19–24: RCT (Reconstructed Text)—known only to Luke

A note on the text: I have chosen the King James version of the Gospels since it slavishly preserves, often in an awkward fashion, much of the original syntax of the Greek, which itself awkwardly renders a hypothetical Hebrew Ur-text. I have, however, made extensive edits to the KJV, consulting the original Greek text, in order to conform it to modern idiomatic English.

Luke's Prelude

Beginning with the story of the birth of John the Baptist, we find a thoroughly Hebraic cadence, with the word “and” being employed multiple times to preserve the flow of the narrative. This mirrors the “*vav* consecutive” verb form, which, while stylistically common in Hebrew, sounds monotonously repetitive when reproduced in Greek (and English translation).¹

While it has been pointed out that there is in general a lack of Aramaisms in Luke, the case can be made (notwithstanding a cadre of scholarly detractors) that there are abundant Hebraisms.² Reading “beneath” the Greek, we may imagine a Hebrew subtext, in which the word “and” is a perfectly common literary device, the “*vav* consecutive.” Other Hebraisms begin to appear, such as the statement, “And it came to pass.” While the first two chapters of Luke (seen by some as second century additions) are not theorized to derive from either RCT or ANT, the author/redactor likely relied on Hebraic source material of some kind. Luke’s account of the virgin birth is often considered part of a hypothetical oral tradition, known as “L,” but it can easily be argued that the Greek of these passages suggests a written Hebrew *grundschrift*. Such an argument is considered avant-garde in the context of the majority of contemporary scholarship, but it is entirely reasonable, given the universal recognition of the text’s Semitic characteristics and overall “flair.”

¹ The same phenomenon is frequently found in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. See R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, I (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), 641.

² See R. Steven Notley, “Non-Septuagintal Hebraisms in the Third Gospel: An Inconvenient Truth,” in *The Language Environment of First Century Judaea*, eds. Randall Buth and R. Steven Notley (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 320–46.

Dedication to Theophilus

Writing to Theophilus (“friend of God”), likely a non-Jew, Luke’s author/redactor declares his objective as setting forth a narrative “in order.” This is consistent with the “two-source hypothesis.” Although the consensus of critical scholarship places the Gospel’s composition later in the first century, it is theorized that Luke’s first recension may date to as early as 58–60 CE.³

Luke 1:1 Inasmuch as **many have attempted to set forth in order a narrative⁴** of the things that have been accomplished among us, **2** Even as they delivered them to us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and servants of the word; **3** It seemed good to me also, having been acquainted with all things from the very first, to write to you in order, most excellent Theophilus, **4** so that you might know the certainty of the things in which you have been instructed.

Scene 1: John the Baptist’s Birth Announced

The focus of Chapter 1 is on the priestly service in the temple. The narrative betrays Hebraic syntactical features, with abundant references to the Hebrew Scriptures, rabbinic literature, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. As in the Hebrew Bible, there is an emphasis on the motif of a child born to a barren woman. Interestingly, the term “Holy Spirit,” long considered uniquely Christian in usage, also finds a parallel in the Dead Sea Scrolls, indicating its adoption at

³ See Robert Lindsey, *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark*, (Jerusalem: Dugith Publishers, 1973), 44–45; Bivin and Blizzard, 93–98; Dan Barag and David Flusser, “The Ossuary of Yehohanah Granddaughter of the High Priest Theophilus,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 36, no. 1–2 (1986): 39–44.

⁴ The “many” who have attempted to produce an orderly narrative might have included the editors/redactors of both ANT (the hypothetical “anthological text”) and RCT (the “short Gospel,”) representing an attempt to restore the Greek text to its proper chronological sequence.

least by sectarian movements of the Second Jewish Commonwealth.

Luke 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zechariah, of the **order of Abijah: and his wife was among the daughters of Aaron,**⁵ and her name was Elizabeth. **6** And they were both **righteous before God,**⁶ walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. **7** **And they had no child,**⁷ because Elizabeth was barren, and they both were now well **advanced in years.**⁸ **8** **And it came to pass,**⁹ that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his division, **9** According to the custom of the priest's office, the lot fell to him to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. **10** And the whole multitude of the people were **praying**¹⁰ outside at the time of incense. **11** And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord **standing on the right side of the altar of**

⁵ See 1 Chr 24:1. The list of priestly divisions is dated to the fifth century, BCE, but no mention is made of the fixed order of service. This is a post-Biblical tradition. Priests lived in other settlements, aside from Jerusalem (*m. Ta'an.* 4:2), leaving their homes and traveling to Jerusalem for a week at a time: "When the time arrived [for the members of a certain] priestly watch to ascend, the priests and Levites of that watch would ascend to Jerusalem" (הגיע זמן המשמר לעלות, כהנים ולוים עולים לירושלים). Abijah was the eighth division, serving in *Iyar* (Apr.–May) and again in *Marcheshvan* (Oct.–Nov.). The Abijah division was named after one of the priests returning with Zerubbabel (Neh 12:4). The phrase "among the daughters of Aaron" was an idiom of the period, meaning that she was a daughter of a priest.

⁶ "Righteous" suggests that their childlessness was not the result of wickedness or unworthiness. "Before God" (ἐναντίον τοῦ Θεοῦ) translates the Hebrew לפני אלהים, meaning "in the opinion of God."

⁷ As in Gen 16:1, which relates that Sarah was barren. Note: *Pesiq. Rab.* 32: "R' Levi said anywhere that it says she does not have [a child], she has" (רבי לוי בכל מקום שהיא לא ילדה, היא ילדה). (אומר אין לה ילד).

⁸ Sixty years was considered the beginning of agedness; note *m. Avot* 5:21: "At sixty old age" (בן ששים לזקנה). See Luke 18:16.

⁹ The Greek ἐγένετο δὲ translates the Hebrew וַיְהִי, which is used idiomatically throughout the Hebrew Bible, beginning with Gen 1:5: "And there was evening and there was morning, one day" (וַיְהִי-עֶרְבַּ וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד).

¹⁰ It is charged that people did not pray at the time of sacrifice or incense, and that Luke (the L source) is unfamiliar with the temple practices.

incense.¹¹ **12** And when Zechariah saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. **13** But the angel said to him: Do not fear, Zechariah; for your prayer has been heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, **and you will call his name**¹² John. **14** And you will have joy and gladness; and many will rejoice at his birth. **15** For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, **and will drink neither wine nor strong drink;**¹³ and he will be filled with the **Holy Spirit,**¹⁴ even from his mother's womb. **16** And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. **17** And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, **to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,**¹⁵ and the disobedient to the

¹¹ See Num 28:3–4. The *Tamid*, the daily offering, was determined by casting lots. The culmination was the burning of incense (*m. Tam.* 3:1; 5:2). The most striking example of a vision at the time of incense was at the time of Simon the Just (c. 200 BCE). Note *b. Yom.* 39b: “On every Yom Kippur [upon entering the Holy of Holies], I was met by an old man who was dressed in white, and his head was wrapped up in white, and he would enter with me, and he would leave with me. But today, I was met by an old man who was dressed in black, and wrapped up in black, and he entered with me, but he did not leave with me. After the festival of *Sukkot*, he was ill for seven days and died” (בְּכֵל יוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים הָיָה מִזְדַּמֵּן לִי זָמֵן אֶחָד לְבוּשׁ לְבָנִים וְעִטּוֹף לְבָנִים, נִכְנַס עִמִּי וְנִצָּא עִמִּי, וְהָיָה נִזְדַּמֵּן לִי זָמֵן אֶחָד (לְבוּשׁ שְׁחוּרִים וְעִטּוֹף שְׁחוּרִים, נִכְנַס עִמִּי וְלֹא יָצָא עִמִּי. אַחֵר הִרְגֵּל הָלָה שֶׁבַע יָמִים וְמָת). There are other instances of visions at the time of incense, e.g. John Hyrcanus—that his sons had defeated Antiochus (Josephus, *Ant.* 13:282); and again, that Caligula was dead (*Tos. Sot.* 13:6). Therefore, a vision at this time was not unheard of. However, visions always came to a high priest, never to an ordinary priest. The right side could indicate favorable circumstances. Note *b. Yom.* 33b: “And when he enters the Sanctuary it is the **altar** that he encounters first” (וְכִי עֵייל לְהִיבֵל בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ פָּגַע בְּרִישָׁא); *Targ. Cant.* 4:16: “... and on the **altar** the priests offered the sacrifice and on it sent up the spice incense” (וְעַל מִזְבְּחָא הָוּוּ) (כִּהְנִיחַ מִסְקִין קְטוֹרֶת בּוֹסְמִין). On the *Tamid*, see Exod 29:38–43.

¹² The Greek καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ translates the perfectly idiomatic Hebrew ותקרא את שמו, as in Gen 17:15: “And God said unto Abraham: ‘As for Sarai your wife, you shall not **call her name** Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name’” (אֶל-אַבְרָהָם שָׂרַי אִשְׁתְּךָ לֹא-תִקְרָא אֶת-שְׁמָהּ שָׂרַי: כִּי שָׂרָה שְׁמָהּ).

¹³ That is, a Nazirite vow, thus unshorn; see Num 6:5.

¹⁴ The Greek Πνεύματος Ἁγίου/“Holy Spirit” translates the Hebrew קודש רוח. The Hebrew Bible refers to God’s “holy spirit” only three times, in Isa 63:10–11, and Ps 51:13. Note Jubilees 1:33: “and I shall create in them a **holy spirit**, and I shall cleanse them so that they shall not turn away from Me from that day unto eternity” (וּבְרַאתִי לֵהֶם (רוּחַ קְדוֹשׁ וְטִיהַרְתִּים לְמַעַן לֹא יִסְרוּ עוֹד מִמֶּנִּי מִיּוֹם הַהוּא עַד עוֹלָם “holy spirit” at least four times, and on several more instances refer to an angel or spirit of truth. Note 1QS4:21: “... cleansing from every wicked deed by a **holy spirit**” (וּלְטַהַר) (בְּרוּחַ קְדוֹשׁ מְכוּל עֲלִילוֹת רִשְׁעָה). The term falls out of use in the rabbinic period, though the concept is carried on in the idea of the *shekhinah*, referring to the divine presence, or “dwelling.”

¹⁵ See Mal 3:24: “And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (וְהִשִּׁיב לֵב אֲבוֹת עַל בְּנֵים, וְלֵב בְּנֵים עַל אֲבוֹתָם).

wisdom of the righteous; **to make ready a people prepared**¹⁶ for the Lord. **18** And Zechariah said to the angel: How will I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years. **19** And the angel answering said to him: I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and am sent to speak to you, and to show you these **glad tidings**.¹⁷ **20** And, **behold**,¹⁸ you will become mute, and unable to speak, until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their season. **21** And the people waited for Zechariah, **and marveled that he remained so long in the temple**.¹⁹ **22** And when he came out, **he could not speak to them**;²⁰ and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he gestured to them, and remained speechless. **23** **And it came to pass**,²¹ that, as soon as the days of his service were accomplished, he departed to his own house. **24** And after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and secluded herself for five months, saying: **25** Thus has the Lord dealt with me in the days in which he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.

¹⁶ Note Ben Sira 48:10: "... you who are *ready* at the appointed time."

¹⁷ The Greek εὐαγγελίσασθαι translates the Hebrew לְבַשֵּׁר. Note Isa 61:1: "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD has anointed me *to bring good tidings* to the humble ..." (רוּחַ אֱדֹנָי יְהוָה עָלַי יָעַן מָשַׁח יְהוָה אֹתִי לְבַשֵּׁר עֲנָוִים).

¹⁸ The Greek καὶ ἰδοὺ translates the Hebrew וְהִנֵּה. In the Septuagint ἰδοὺ is the most common translation of the Hebrew demonstrative particle הִנֵּה. Either the Greek is deliberately mimicking the LXX or there is an underlying Hebraic source on which the Gospel writer is relying. M. Wilcox ("Semitisms in the New Testament") argued that such features are not simply the imitation of Septuagint Greek.

¹⁹ People were always concerned when a priest entered the temple, lest something go amiss. Note *m. Yom. 5:1* (regarding the high priest on the Day of Atonement): "And he would not extend his prayer there so as not to alarm the Jewish people [who would otherwise conclude that something happened and that he died in the Holy of Holies]" (וְלֹא הָיָה מְאַרְיֵד בְּתַפְלֹתוֹ, שֶׁלֹּא לְהַבְעִית אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל). It is charged, however, that several priests regularly entered the temple to offer incense, and that Luke is unfamiliar with these practices.

²⁰ He was *expected* to offer the priestly benediction (Num 6:24–26): "The Lord bless you and keep you ..." (יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ ...).

²¹ The Greek καὶ ἐγένετο translates the Hebrew וַיְהִי. Note the repetition throughout the narrative of the word "and" (καὶ), preserved in the King James version, and consistent with the concept of an underlying Hebrew text, where "and" (ו) is a common literary feature.

Scene 2: Jesus' Birth Announced

The announcement of Jesus' birth is profoundly Hebraic in style and flavor. It bears syntactical features (including poetic parallelism and the equivalent of the "vav consecutive") that are rooted in the Hebrew language.

Luke 1:26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee,²² called Nazareth,²³ **27** To a virgin²⁴ espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. **28** And the angel came to her, and said: Greetings, you who are highly favored, **the Lord is with you: blessed are you among women. 29** And when she saw him, **she was troubled**²⁵ at his saying, and pondered what kind of salutation this might be. **30** And the angel said to her: Do not fear, Mary: for you have found favor with God. **31** And, behold,²⁶ you will conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, **and you will call his name**²⁷ Jesus. **32** He will be great, and will be called the

²² Galilean Jews regarded themselves as very devout and more pious than their compatriots in Jerusalem and Judea. In the Tannaitic age many most famous rabbis were from Galilee. See Richard A. Gabriel, *Gods of Our Fathers: The Memory of Egypt in Judaism and Christianity* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 145.

²³ Nazareth is mentioned *only* in the New Testament, and not in Jewish sources until the seventh century. While it was an obscure town, this could also indicate a systematic expunging of the name by later rabbis in response to a *large* messianic movement among the Jews.

²⁴ The Hebrew of Isa 7:14 reads: "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: behold, **the young woman** shall conceive ..." (לְכוּ וְיִתֶּן אֲדֹנָי הוּא לָכֶם אֹתוֹ: הַנְּהַה הַעַלְמָה) (הַרְרָה). However, the Septuagint translates הַעַלְמָה as παρθένος ("virgin") because it is hardly a "sign" for a young woman to bear a child.

²⁵ In the Biblical period, the Divine Name was used in greetings, but substitutes were used in the Second Temple period, such as המקום/*ha-Makom* ("the Place") and הגבורה/*ha-G'yurah* ("the Power"). That "the Lord" is invoked here is what "troubles" Mary. Later, the Jews returned to using the Divine Name in greetings, to distinguish themselves from the *Minim*, i.e. Nazarenes. Note *m. Ber.* 9:5: "The Sages also instituted that one should greet another in the name of God" (וְהַתְקִינוּ, שְׂיִהְיֶה אֶת שְׁלוֹם חֲבֵרוֹ) (בְּשֵׁם).

²⁶ The Greek καὶ ἰδοὺ translates the Hebrew וְהִנֵּה. See Luke 1:20 n.

²⁷ The Greek καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ translates the perfectly idiomatic Hebrew וְתִקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ; see Luke 1:13.

Son of the Most High:²⁸ And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David: **33** And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and there will be no end of his kingdom. **34** Then Mary said to the angel: How will this be, since I have not known a man? **35** And the angel answered and said to her: The **Holy Spirit**²⁹ will come upon you/and the **power of the Most High will overshadow you;**³⁰ therefore also the holy one born to you will be called the **Son of God.**³¹ **36** And, behold,³² your relative **Elizabeth**³³ has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. **37** For with God nothing will be impossible. **38** And Mary said: **Behold**³⁴ the handmaid of the Lord; may it be to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her.

Scene 3: Mary Visits Elizabeth

The text goes on to recount Mary's song of praise, where we find allusion not only to biblical literature but to the Dead Sea Scrolls. The "Magnificat" (Luke 1:47–55) likely originated as a

²⁸ See Wisdom of Solomon 2:18; 2:13–16. The righteous will be called "God's son." Note the Dead Sea "Son of God" text (4Q246 f1i:9–f1ii:1), regarding some unidentified person: "[... his son] will be called The Great, and be designated by his name. He will be called the *Son of God*, they will call him the *son of the Most High*" (... יתקרא ובשמה יתכנה. ברה די אל יתאמר ובר עליון יקרונה).

²⁹ See Luke 1:15. Note Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS4:21: "... cleansing from every wicked deed by a *holy spirit*" (ולטהרו ברוח קודש מכול עלילות רשעה).

³⁰ See Ruth 3:9: "Spread therefore your wing over your handmaiden..." (וּפְרֹשֶׁתְךָ וְכָנְפְךָ עַל-אִמְתְּךָ). Ruth, like Sarah and Rebecca, is said to have had *no womb*; see *Ruth R.* 4:13. Note the Hebraic parallelism: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you/the power of the Most High will overshadow you."

³¹ See Luke 1:32; Note the Dead Sea "Son of God" text.

³² The Greek και ἰδοὺ translates the Hebrew והנה. See Luke 1:20 n.

³³ According to Luke both Elizabeth and Zechariah her husband were of priestly descent, confirming the connection between Mary's Davidic roots and the tribe of Levi. Mary was therefore likely of mixed lineage. See James Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 56.

³⁴ The Greek ἰδοὺ translates the Hebrew והנה. See Luke 1:20 n.

*Maccabean hymn, during the reign of the Hasmonean king, Simon (142–135 BCE).*³⁵

Luke 1:39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city³⁶ of Judea;³⁷ **40** And entered into the house of Zechariah,³⁸ and greeted Elizabeth. **41** And it came to pass,³⁹ that, when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the **Holy Spirit**:⁴⁰ **42** And she cried out with a loud voice, and said: Blessed are you among women, and **blessed is the fruit of your womb**.⁴¹ **43** And how is it to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? **44** For, **Behold**,⁴² as soon as the **voice**⁴³ of your greeting came to my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. **45** And blessed is she who believed; for there will be a fulfillment of those things that were spoken to her from the Lord. **46** And Mary said: **My soul magnifies the Lord**,⁴⁴ **47** And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. **48** For he has regarded the **low estate**⁴⁵ of his handmaiden;

³⁵ See Randall Buth, “Hebrew Poetic Tenses and the Magnificat,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 21 (1984): 67–83; Paul Haupt, “Magnificat and Benedictus,” *American Journal of Philology* 40 1 (1919): 64–75; David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), 289.

³⁶ The Greek πόλις translates the Hebrew word מדינה (“city”/“town”), which additionally came to mean: country, land or region.

³⁷ Unlike the stories of Isaac, Samson, and *Samuel* (after whom the nativity story is modeled), there is no mention that Mary *conceived*. This could be an error in transmission of the Semitic original, the Hebrew ותהר (“and she conceived”) being mistaken for ותמהר (“and she hurried”). Hypothetical Hebrew Reconstruction: בימים ההם ותמהר (ותמהר) מרים ותלך ההרה למדינת יהודה (“In those days Mary *conceived* and went to the hill country in the region of Judea”).

³⁸ Followers of John the Baptist may have claimed that *he* was born in Bethlehem, linking him with David. The followers of Jesus may have felt compelled to do the same.

³⁹ The Greek και ἐγένετο translates the Hebrew וַיְהִי; see Luke 1:23.

⁴⁰ See Luke 1:15. Note Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS4:21: “... cleansing from every wicked deed by a *holy spirit*” (ולטהרו ברוח קודש מכול עלילות רשעה).

⁴¹ Note *PRK* (supplement 6): “Blessed is the house in which the Messiah was created. Blessed is the womb whence he came.”

⁴² The Greek ἰδοὺ translates the Hebrew הִנֵּה. See Luke 1:20 n.

⁴³ A messianic proclamation; the Greek φωνή translates the Hebrew קול, as in בת קול (“daughter of the voice”). See Luke 9:35.

⁴⁴ Note 1 Sam 2:1: “My heart exults in the LORD ...” (עָלַץ לִבִּי בַיהוָה). Mary’s words are patterned on Hannah’s.

⁴⁵ The Greek ταπεινώσις translates the Hebrew עֲוֹנֵי.

for, **behold**,⁴⁶ from henceforth **all generations shall call me blessed**.⁴⁷ **49** For the Mighty One has done to me great things; and holy is his name. **50** And his mercy is on those who fear him from **generation to generation**.⁴⁸ **51** He has shown strength with his **arm**;⁴⁹ he has scattered **the proud**⁵⁰ in the imagination of their hearts. **52** He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, **and exalted the humble**.⁵¹ **53** He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he has sent empty away. **54** He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy. **55** As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever. **56** And Mary dwelt with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

Scene 4: The Birth and Circumcision of John the Baptist

The details regarding John the Baptist align well with Jewish tradition, which required circumcision on the eighth day, along with the naming of the child.

Luke 1:57 Now Elizabeth's full time came that she should give birth; and she brought forth a son. **58** And her neighbors and her relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy upon her; and

⁴⁶ The Greek ἰδοὺ translates the Hebrew הִנֵּה. See Luke 1:20 n.

⁴⁷ Note *Pesiq. Rab.* 37: "Blessed is the generation whose eyes behold him" (אשרי הדור שעניו רואות אותו). Regarding previous generations, note Luke 10:23–24: "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that you see ... Many prophets and kings have desired to see the things which you see, and have not seen them; and to hear the things which you hear, and have not heard them." See also Matt 13:6.

⁴⁸ The Greek γενεάς καὶ γενεάς translates a common Hebrew idiom: מדור לדור.

⁴⁹ This references the victories of the Maccabees.

⁵⁰ "The proud" were the Greeks/Seleucids.

⁵¹ The "mighty" who were brought down were the Seleucid kings (Antiochus V Eupator and Demetrius I Soter). See note on Luke 2:38; Dead Sea Scrolls, 1QM 14:4–7, 11: "Blessed be the God of Israel" (ברוך אל ישראל). "He has called those who stumble unto wondrous accomplishments" (ויקרא כושלים לגבורות פלא). "He gives those whose knees shake strength to stand" (ונותן לנמוגי ברכים חזוק מעמד). "... by those whose way is perfect shall all wicked nations come to an end (ובתמימי דרך יתמו כול גויי רשעה). "Those who are great in height You will cut down to humble them" (ורמי קומה תגדע להשפילם).

they rejoiced with her. **59 And it came to pass,**⁵² **that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zechariah, after the name of his father.**⁵³ **60** And his mother answered and said: No; but he shall be called John. **61** And they said to her: **There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name.**⁵⁴ **62** And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. **63** And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying: His name is John. And they all marveled. **64** And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, and praised God. **65** And fear came on all who dwelt round around them: and all these sayings were talked about throughout all the hill country of Judea. **66** And all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child will this be? And the **hand of the Lord**⁵⁵ was with him.

Scene 5: Zechariah's Prophecy

The prophecy of Zechariah (the “Benedictus”) is also Hebraic in syntax, containing linguistic nuances that can only be appreciated in Hebrew. It is thought by some to have been composed during the Babylonian captivity, being one of the earliest Hebrew psalms.⁵⁶ Of particular note are the expressions “son of the Most High” (v. 32) and “son of God” (v. 35), which, far from being exclusively Christian formulations, have been found among the fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls. We also see the concept of “salvation” for an exclusive group among the Israelites, elsewhere referenced as

⁵² The Greek καὶ ἐγένετο translates the Hebrew וַיְהִי; see Luke 1:23.

⁵³ Note *PRE* (ch. 48): Moses was named יְקוֹתִיאֵל (Yekutiel) on eighth day (from יקח + אק: suggesting “obedience to God”). Note also *Eccles. Rab.* 7:3: “A man is given three names: the one given by his father and mother, the one giving him by other people (his nickname), and the one which has been predestined for him” (שְׁלֹשָׁה שְׁמוֹת נִקְרָא לְאָדָם) (הַזֶּה, אֶתֵּד שְׁקָרָאוּ לוֹ אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ, וְאֶתֵּד שְׁקָרָאוּ לוֹ אֲתֵרִים, וְאֶתֵּד שְׁקָרָאוּ לוֹ בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹלְדוֹת בְּרִיּוֹתוֹ).

⁵⁴ Note the Jewish practice of naming a child in honor of a family member, either deceased or living.

⁵⁵ Note Dead Sea Scrolls 1QM 1:14 “In the seventh lot the great **hand of God** shall overcome ...” (ובגורל השביעי יד אל הגדולה מכנעת ...).

⁵⁶ See Flusser, *Judaism*, 134–35.

the “elect.” How many of such ideas were shared by Jesus and his followers is up for debate.

Luke 1:67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the **Holy Spirit**,⁵⁷ and prophesied, saying: **68 Blessed is the Lord God of Israel**; for he has **visited**⁵⁸ and **redeemed his people**,⁵⁹ **69 And has raised up a horn of salvation**⁶⁰ for us in the house of his servant David; **70 As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets**,⁶¹ of old: **71** That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; **72** To fulfill mercy toward our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; **73** The oath which he swore to **our father Abraham**,⁶² **74** That he would grant to us, deliverance from the hand of our enemies, being saved to serve him without fear, **75** In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. **76** And you, child, shall be called **the prophet of the Most High**:⁶³ for you shall go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; **77** To give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins, **78** Through the tender mercy of

⁵⁷ See Luke 1:15. Note Dead Sea Scrolls IQS4:21: “... cleansing from every wicked deed by a *holy spirit*” (ולטהרו ברוח קודש מכול עלילות רשעה).

⁵⁸ See Luke 19:44.

⁵⁹ See Luke 1:52; note Dead Sea Scrolls IQM 14:4–15: “*Blessed is the God of Israel*, who guards lovingkindness for His covenant and the appointed times of *salvation* (*yeshuah*) for the *people He redeems*. He has called those who stumble unto wondrous accomplishments ...” (כושלים לגבורות פלא).
 ברוך אל ישראל השומר חסד לבריתו ותעודות ישועה לעם פדותו. ויקרא (...)

⁶⁰ The Greek Ἰησοῦς (“Jesus”) transliterates the Hebrew ישועה (“Salvation”). Note the fifteenth benediction of the *Amidah* prayer: “Blessed are you, O Lord, who causes the *horn of salvation* (*yeshuah*) to flourish” (ברוך אתה יי מצמיח קרן ישועה).

⁶¹ Not found in the Masoretic Text, but similar language appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls IQS 1:3: “He commanded through the hand of Moses and the hand of all His servants the prophets” (צוה ביד מושה וביד כול עבדיו הנביאים).

⁶² The “plebeian” class had derived the principle of the “merit of the fathers” (זכות אבות), which implied the pre-determination of one’s fate. Shemaiah claimed that the Red Sea opened in reward for the faith of Abraham. Avtalion (the “patrician”) said that it was due to the faith/merit of the Israelites themselves; see *Mekh.* 2:3, Luke 3:8. See Dead Sea Scrolls IQM 14:8: “But we are the remnant of Your people. Blessed is Your name, O God of lovingkindness, the One who kept the *covenant for our forefathers*” (ואנו שארית) (עמכה. ברוך שמכה אל החסדים השומר ברית לאבותינו).

⁶³ Note *Test. Levi* 8:15; possibly a messianic title: “And his presence is beloved, *as a prophet of the Most High*, of the seed of Abraham our father” (ועליון מזרע אברהם אבינו).

our God; whereby the **dayspring from on high**⁶⁴ has visited us, **79** To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into **the way of peace**.⁶⁵ **80** And the child continued to grow strong in spirit, and was in the deserts until the day of his appearance to Israel.

Scene 6: The Birth of Jesus

Luke's special "nativity" narrative continues (and concludes) in Chapter 2. Jesus is linked in this account with the city of Bethlehem (whether or not he was actually born there). The link with David is obviously messianic, but does this suggest (in addition to a messianic identification) militancy and insurrection against Roman domination?

Luke 2:1 And it came to pass⁶⁶ in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus to register all the world. **2** This first registration took place when Quirinius⁶⁷ was governor of Syria. **3** And all went to be registered, each one to his own city. **4** Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth,⁶⁸ into Judea, to the city of David, which is called **Bethlehem**;⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Note Mal 3:20: "But to you that fear My name shall the *sun of righteousness* arise with healing in its wings" (וְזָרְחָה לָכֶם יְרֵאֵי שְׁמִי שֶׁמֶשׁ צְדָקָה וּמְרַפָּא בְּכַנְפָּיהָ).

⁶⁵ *PRK* 18:6 interprets Ps 72:7 messianically: "In his days let the righteous flourish, and abundance of *peace*" (יִפְרַח בְּיָמָיו צְדִיק וְרַב שְׁלוֹם).

⁶⁶ The Greek ἐγένετο δὲ translates the Hebrew וַיְהִי.

⁶⁷ Quirinius did not become governor until 6 CE. The census he conducted in Syria has been confirmed by an inscription purchased in Beirut in 1674, but it dates too late to match the account in Luke. It has been argued that Quirinius had been governor on a previous occasion (3 BCE–2 BCE), at which time an earlier census may have been conducted. Luke may have alluded to this when he mentions "this first registration." While theoretically possible, such a solution would require post-dating Herod's death to 1 BCE, as opposed to the accepted date, 4 BCE.

⁶⁸ See Luke 1:26; Nazareth is mentioned *only* in the New Testament ...

⁶⁹ Note Mic 5:1: "But you, *Bethlehem* Ephrathah, too little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of you shall one come forth to Me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from ancient days" (וְאַתָּה בֵּית-לְחֶם אֶפְרַתָּה צְעִיר) (להקיות בְּאַלְפֵי יְהוּדָה מִמֶּדֶד לִי יֵצֵא לְהִיּוֹת מוֹשֵׁל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל; וּמוֹצְאָתוֹ מִקְדָּם, מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם). Some speculate that Jesus was born in Nazareth and that the Bethlehem story is intended as a messianic link. There is also archaeological evidence of another town in Galilee called Bethlehem.

because he was of the house and lineage of David; **5** To be registered with Mary who was betrothed to him, being with child. **6 And it came to pass**⁷⁰ that, while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she should deliver. **7** And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger;⁷¹ **because there was no room for them in the inn.**⁷²

Scene 7: The Shepherds

The reference to “peace” in this passage refers to the Messiah, who is sent to the “saved” people of God. The implication is that messianic peace is for an exclusive group of Israelites: the “elect.”

Luke 2:8 And there were in the same region shepherds lodging in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were greatly afraid. **10** And the angel said to them: Do not fear; for, **behold,**⁷³ I bring you **good news**⁷⁴ of great joy,

⁷⁰ The Greek ἐγένετο δὲ translates the Hebrew וַיְהִי.

⁷¹ The Hebrew term for a feeding trough (“manger”) occurs only three times in the Hebrew Bible, most notably Isa 1:3: “The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s **feeding trough**; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider” (דַע שׁוֹר יָדַע שׁוֹר) (קָנָהוּ, וְחִמּוֹר אָבוֹס בְּעֵלָיו; יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַע, עַמִּי לֹא הִתְבּוֹנֵן). This detail in Luke is possibly a prophetic rebuke, though others suggest it associates Jesus with a feeding trough, prefiguring the Last Supper.

⁷² The lack of room at the inn was possibly an excuse. There may indeed have been room, given that a man was allowed to share a room with more than one woman as long as one was his wife. Moreover, people slept in their clothes, only removing the outer garment. The real reason may have involved Mary’s pregnancy since people would be inconvenienced if she had to leave the room. Nor would there be privacy for giving birth. Note *m. Kid.* 4:12: “A man may not be secluded with two women lest he sin with them, but one woman may be secluded with two men. Rabbi Shimon says: Even one man may be secluded with two women when his wife is with him” (לֹא יִתְיַחַד אָדָם עִם שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים, אֲכָל) (אִשָּׁה אַחַת מִתְיַחֵדָת עִם שְׁנֵי אֲנָשִׁים. רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן אוֹמֵר, אִם אִישׁ אֶחָד מִתְיַחֵד עִם שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים בְּיָמֵן שְׂאִשְׁתּוֹ עִמּוֹ).

⁷³ The Greek ἰδοὺ translates the Hebrew הִנֵּה. See Luke 1:20 n.

⁷⁴ Note Dead Sea Scrolls 1QHa 23:15: “to raise up according to Your truth the **herald of good news**” (לְהָרִים כְּאִמְתַּכָּה מִבְּשָׂר).

which shall be for **all people**.⁷⁵ **11** For to you has been born today in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. **12** And this shall be a sign to you; You shall find the babe wrapped in **swaddling clothes**,⁷⁶ lying in a **manger**.⁷⁷ **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying: **14** Glory to God in the highest, and **on earth peace among men of goodwill**.⁷⁸ **15** And it came to pass⁷⁹ as the angels were going away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another: Let us now go indeed to Bethlehem, and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. **16** And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the baby lying in a **manger**.⁸⁰ **17** And when they had seen it, they proclaimed abroad the saying that was told them concerning this child. **18** And all those who heard it marveled at the things that were told to them by the shepherds. **19** But Mary treasured all these things, and pondered them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told to them.

⁷⁵ Reflecting the universalism of the Hebrew prophets, as in Isa 2:2: “And it shall come to pass in the end of days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established as the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and *all nations* shall flow unto it.” (וְהָרַר אֱלֹהֵי כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם וְהָיָה בְּאֶחָדֵי הַיָּמִים נִכּוֹן יְהִיֶה הַר בְּיַת-יְהוָה בְּרֹאשׁ הַהָרִים וְנִשְׂאָ מִגְּבֻעוֹת;).

⁷⁶ Note Wis. Sol. 7:4: “I was nursed with care *in swaddling cloths*” (אֲמַנְתִּי בְּאֶחָדֵי רִבָּה בְּסֻדְיָנִים בְּדֹאגָה רַבָּה).

⁷⁷ See v. 7.

⁷⁸ “Of goodwill” (εὐδοκίας) is preferred, being the most difficult reading. The verse should read, “on earth peace for men of [God’s] favor.” Hypothetical Hebrew reconstruction: וּבְאֶרֶץ שְׁלוֹם בְּבִנֵי רִצּוֹנוֹ. Note Dead Sea Scrolls 1QHa 12:33–34: “... to perfect a way for humankind so that they may know all His works by His mighty power and the abundance of His mercies upon all the *sons of His will*” (לְהַתֵּם דֶּרֶךְ לְבִנֵי אָדָם לְמַעַן). The Coptic translation of Luke 2:14 contains “his.” See Luke 19:38; Isa 6:3; Ezek 3:12; Deut 33:23.

⁷⁹ The Greek καὶ ἐγένετο translates the Hebrew וַיְהִי; see Luke 1:23.

⁸⁰ See v. 7.

Scene 8: Circumcision and Presentation of Jesus

The Hebrew name for Jesus, Yeshua (ישועה), derives from the root yashah (ישע), meaning “salvation” and indicating that God “saves”/“delivers”/“redeems.” The idea is not eschatological but suggests present tense deliverance from malady or calamity.

Luke 2:21 And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, **his name was called Jesus**,⁸¹ who was so named by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. **22** And when the days of their [her] **purification**⁸² according to the law of Moses were fulfilled, they **brought him to Jerusalem**.⁸³ to present him to the Lord; **23 As it is written**⁸⁴ in the law of the Lord: Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord; **24** And to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, **A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons**.⁸⁵

Scene 9: Simeon's Prophecy

The suggestion that ancient, militant hymns lie beneath the text is underscored by the prophecy of Simeon, who is waiting for the

⁸¹ In Jewish tradition the name is not revealed until the circumcision.

⁸² Possibly a mistake in the Greek. It is better to read “her purification” (καθαρισμοῦ αὐτῆς), rather than “their purification” (καθαρισμοῦ αὐτῶν).

⁸³ The redemption of the firstborn (פדיון הבן/pidiyon ha-ben) could be accomplished anywhere; traveling to Jerusalem was not required. The parallel is to the presentation of Samuel in the temple by Hannah.

⁸⁴ The Greek καθὼς γέγραπται mimics Hebrew syntax, as in Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 8:14: “... **as it is written**, ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD’” (כאשר) (כתוב במדבר פנו דרך יי).

⁸⁵ The sacrifice was for purification. Birds could be offered instead of a lamb, for those who were not wealthy. Note Lev 5:7: “And if his means do not suffice for a lamb, then he shall bring for his trespass which he has committed, **two turtle-doves, or two young pigeons**” (בני-יונה או-שני תרים או-שני) (בני-יונה); Lev. R. 3:5: “... in order that the altar be adorned with the **sacrifice of the poor**” (כדי שיהא המזבח מהדר בקרבנו של עני).

“consolation of Israel.” Commonly overlooked in such language is the possibility of militant redemption being referenced and a serious link to the Zealot faction.

Luke 2:25 And, **behold**,⁸⁶ there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, **waiting for the consolation of Israel**;⁸⁷ and the **Holy Spirit** was upon him. **26** And it was revealed to him by the **Holy Spirit**,⁸⁸ that he would not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. **27** And he came by the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, **28** Then he took him in his arms, and blessed God, and said: **29** Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; **30** For my eyes have seen your salvation, **31** Which you have prepared before the face of **all people**;⁸⁹ **32** A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel. **33** And his father and his mother marveled at the things that were spoken of him. **34** **And Simeon blessed them, and said**⁹⁰ to Mary his mother: **Behold**,⁹¹ this child is appointed for the fall and rising up of many in Israel; and for a sign which will be spoken against;

⁸⁶ The Greek ἰδοὺ translates the Hebrew הִנֵּה. See Luke 1:20 n.

⁸⁷ Note Qumran Apostrophe to Zion (11Q5 22:3–4): “Generations of the pious will adorn you: they who long for the *day of your salvation*” (דור ודור ידורו בך ודורות) (חסידים תפארתך המתאוים ליום ישעך). This could refer to messianic deliverance from Rome. John the Baptist’s followers (and background) may have been even more nationalistic than John himself.

⁸⁸ See Luke 1:15. Note Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS4:21: “... cleansing from every wicked deed by a *holy spirit*” (ולטהרו ברוח קודש מכול עלילות רשעה).

⁸⁹ See Luke 2:10; reflecting the universalism of the Hebrew prophets, as in Isa 2:2.

⁹⁰ “Bless and say” is not found in the Hebrew Bible; rather, a blessing involved a “prophecy.” Reconstruction: “Simeon spoke a prophecy over the parents, which had special meaning for Mary.”

⁹¹ The Greek ἰδοὺ translates the Hebrew הִנֵּה. See Luke 1:20 n.

35 And, a sword will pierce through your own soul also,⁹² that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

**Scene 10:
Anna the Prophetess**

The words attributed to Anna regarding “redemption in Jerusalem” betray (like Simeon’s prophecy) a militant/Zealot tone.

Luke 2:36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was advanced in years, and had lived with a husband seven years from her marriage; **37** And she was a widow of about eighty-four years, who had not departed from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day. **38** And having come up at that hour, she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of him to all those who looked for the **redemption of Jerusalem.**⁹³

**Scene 11:
The Family Returns to Nazareth**

“Wisdom” (חכמה) and “grace”/“favor” (חסד) are important terms and concepts in rabbinic thought and were especially prominent among ancient Hasidim.

Luke 2:39 And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city **Nazareth.**⁹⁴ **40** And the child continued to grow, and become

⁹² D. Flusser argued (*Judaism*, 128) that the Magnificat and Benedictus appear to draw from two militant hymns known among the circles of John the Baptist, and that Luke changed only one word: “a sword will pierce *its* (Israel’s) soul ...” Verse 35 helps explain Heb 4:12: “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword.” Note *y. Ned.* 9, 41b (48): “As if he takes a sword and pierces it through his heart.”

⁹³ See v. 25; this may indicate possible Zealot sympathies.

⁹⁴ See Luke 1:26.

strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.

Scene 12: The Boy Jesus Amazes the Scholars

One pilgrimage in a lifetime fulfilled the obligation, indicating that Jesus' parents were very observant, going to Jerusalem every year. This also indicates a level of affluence, notwithstanding that they offered, at Jesus' birth, turtledoves or pigeons since presumably they could not afford a lamb (Luke 2:24). Perhaps the text was written so as to make them appear less affluent than they were. The amazement of the teachers is similar to what Josephus wrote about his own precociousness. Jesus displays a special familiarity with God, whom he calls "my Father" (אב), in a manner similar to the "Pious" (Hasidim).

Luke 2:41 And his parents went to Jerusalem every year⁹⁵ at the feast of the Passover. **42** And when he was **twelve years old**,⁹⁶ they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. **43** And when they had **fulfilled the days**,⁹⁷ as they returned, the child Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother did not know of it. **44** But, supposing him to be in their company, they went a day's journey; and they sought him among their relatives and acquaintances. **45** And when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him. **46** And it came to **pass**,⁹⁸ that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them, and asking them questions. **47** And all who heard him were **astonished at his**

⁹⁵ A yearly pilgrimage was not necessary; once in a lifetime was sufficient.

⁹⁶ Note Josephus *Ant.* V, 10.4, stating that Samuel began his prophetic activity at age twelve.

⁹⁷ See Deut 16:8: "Six days you shall eat unleavened bread; and on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD your God" (שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מַצּוֹת; וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי) (עֲצֵרֶת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ).

⁹⁸ The Greek καὶ ἐγένετο translates the Hebrew וַיְהִי; see Luke 1:23.

understanding and answers.⁹⁹ **48** And when they saw him, they were amazed; and his mother said to him: Son, why have you done this to us? **Behold,**¹⁰⁰ your father and I have been distressed seeking you. **49** And he said to them: How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about **my Father's business?**¹⁰¹ **50** And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.

Scene 13: Jesus Advances in Wisdom and Favor

Throughout his youth, Jesus is said to have “increased in wisdom,” presumably devoting himself to Torah study, so as to amaze the scholars at the temple. This is hardly consistent with the general stereotype of an illiterate, unlearned population.

Luke 2:51 And he went down with them, and came to **Nazareth,**¹⁰² and was subject to them; but his mother treasured all these sayings in her heart. **52** And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

⁹⁹ Note Josephus, *Life* 9: “When I was a child, about fourteen years of age, I was commended by all for the love I had of learning; on which account the high priest and principal men of the city frequently came to me together, to know my opinion about the accurate understanding of points of the law.”

¹⁰⁰ The Greek ἰδοὺ translates the Hebrew הִנֵּה. See Luke 1:20 n.

¹⁰¹ See note on Luke 8:44; Ps 89:27, regarding the Messiah to come: “He shall call to Me: You are *my Father*, my God, and the rock of my salvation” (הוּא יִקְרָאֵנִי, אֱלֹהֵי, אֲבִי) (אֶתְהָא; אֵלֵי, וְצוּר לְשׁוּעָתִי). See Shmuel Safrai, “Mishnat Ḥasidim in the Literature of the Tannaim,” in *In Times of Temple and Mishnah: Studies in Jewish History* (Heb.) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996), 2:501–17; “The Pharisees and the Ḥasidim (Heb.),” *Sidic* 10 (1977): 12–16; “The Teaching of Pietists in Mishnaic Literature,” *JJS* 16 (1965): 27–31. Note the Greek phrase ἐν τοῖς τοῦ Πατρὸς μου (“in the [business] of my father...”). The word τοῖς (rendered “business” in the KJV) is a special idiom. It should read “my fathers house.” The Hebrew בית (“house”) may be understood as “temple.” By saying “my father,” Jesus may be saying to Joseph, “You are not my real father.”

¹⁰² See Luke 1:26.

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