

A WORD IN ADVANCE

It is with great pleasure that I present this collection of studies on the Gospel of Luke. This Gospel is a book of the Bible that has become very dear to me over the past twenty-five years. The research that I have done on this gospel during that period leads me to the conviction that the Gospel of Luke is an absolute masterpiece. Many agree that we are dealing in him, with an extraordinarily gifted writer. My supervisor Prof. Dr. Adelbert Denaux, a great expert on Luke-Acts, speaks of ‘a masterful storyteller and a refined stylist’, who has ‘a very agile style’ as evidenced by his ability to write a beautiful sentence in refined Hellenistic Greek, as can be seen in the prologue (Luke 1,1-4), and immediately afterwards, in the overture of the Gospel of Luke (1,5-2,52), to pass into semitizing Greek, which is so very reminiscent of the Old Testament.¹

Luke’s extraordinary stylistic skills excite a lot of discussion among exegetes and commentators about many things, because one researcher believes that the solution of a problem should be sought in one direction, while the other researcher claims that the solution lies in a different direction. However, both researchers might be right. Thanks to his stylistic skill, Lucas knows how to evoke both the one and the other image. One of the big issues of Lucas research is that of genre. What are we dealing with in Luke’s Gospel? Is it a description of Jesus’ life (*vita*) or is it historiography, a record of the beginning of the Jesus movement (*historia*)? If the latter is the case, what kind of historiography is involved? Finally, you can also make a distinction between the kinds of historiography. The scholars would like to make a definite choice, but that is not possible with Luke. He is the master of many genres: also that of the *vitae parallelae*, in order to be able to position John and Jesus in relation to each other, and at the same time to show the reader that Jesus is the greater of the two, by devoting the second part to the end of the *vitae parallelae* entirely to Jesus, which is not strange when you consider their relationship: John as messenger of the Lord, Jesus. If you have an eye for the constant travelling, in the Gospel of Luke, but also and certainly no less, in Acts, you will not be surprised to hear that people speak of the Gospel of Luke as a travelogue, as one of my teachers Prof. Dr. Niek Schuman (1936-2018) does.² In short, Lucas has mastered so many genres, that you cannot hope to pin him down by means of genre.

He is a great writer. You can see this in his beautiful, scenic storytelling, but especially in the way in which he manages to connect scenes to each other, and especially how he does so over great distances, as can be seen in the John pericopes. It is this way of telling stories that has fascinated me more and more. Consider the way in which his Luke-Acts ‘plays’ with the Old Testament in all kinds of ways, you could almost say. But he also shows that he knows the Hellenistic-Roman world well. This is apparent in the travel stories that he tells, but also in the way he gives shape to the symposia in his story.

I suspect that the reader will not be surprised if I say that I fully endorse Renan’s statement about the Gospel of Luke, which is often said to be ‘the most beautiful gospel’.

When I cast a backward look on my way in the Lukan research, the germ of that love for this gospel lies in the liturgy, in which no more beautiful stories are discussed than those of :

- the meeting between the two expectant mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, who speak hymnically to each other, and do so with a keen eye for the social contradictions that prevail (1,39-56);
- the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple who speaks such enigmatic words to his parents, indicating that he is the son of another father (2,40-52);
- the story of what may be called ‘Jesus’ baptism’, but this is minimal, since most of the narrative is about the Spirit with which he is baptized (3,21-22);
- the three temptations by the devil, in which he, as the son of God, is tempted to choose another way, in contrast to a life of obedience to Scripture (4,1b-14a);
- the centurion from Capernaum as the prototype of one who has heard the Sermon on the Plain and is practising what the speaker called for (7,1-10);
- the raising of a widow’s son in Nain as a metaphor for the people in which prophecy has come to life (7,11-17);

¹ A. Denaux, ‘Het Evangelie volgens Lucas: Een kleine inleiding’, *Vrienden van Bijbelhuis Zevenkerken* 23/1 (2016), 13-21, esp. 13: ‘een meesterlijk verteller en een verfijnde stilist’ met ‘een zeer wendbare stijl’.

² N.A. Schuman, *Een reisverhaal: Leesoefeningen in Lucas*, ’s-Gravenhage 1981.

- John's question in 7,18-23, with which he hoped to gain clarity regarding his own earlier announcement at the beginning of his public ministry (3,16-17).

To show the type of research that I have always been interested in, I can identify the most with the classical definition of 'exegesis', which another teacher of mine, Prof. Henk Leene (1937-2014), presented to me. 'Exegesis is the bringing home of the parts of a text into the whole. How to understand this word in such a way that it fits into the sentence, how to interpret this sentence in such a way that it fits into the pericope, the pericope so that it fits into ever broader contexts, etc.'³ It is a definition that has always appealed to me, because the exegete must have both an eye for and pay unrelenting attention to the detail, which can often be so important for understanding the text, as well as for the bigger picture: the macrostructure of the gospel, and also for structures of smaller story units, allowing the reader to discover the larger connections, but also come to an understanding of individual, difficult passages.

For me, the exegetical method best suited to this is that of 'close reading'. Close reading – in which every element, small or large, of the text matters – yields a lot: it leads the reader to a deeper understanding of the text. In addition to precise reading at the level of word and sentence, I consider the structure of the text, both of the pericope and of larger story units, and carefully map out the structure of each story and its coherence. When small or larger problems of interpretation arise, I am particularly challenged as an exegete, especially when many in the Lukan research have struggled with the text and all manner of possible solution have already been put forward. The literary structure of the text, I have discovered, often turns out to be an excellent tool for finding a solution.

The reader of this volume of collected essays will find four articles in which I focus on a detail – a word or a phrase: *καθεξῆς* in 1,3 (chapter 2), *ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρός μου* in 2,49 (chapter 6), *ἐγέρθητι* in 7,14 (chapter 10) and *ὁ ἐρχόμενος* in 7,19.20 (chapter 12).

But I also like to explore the larger connections and structures, as can be seen from chapters 3 and 4. And perhaps the last three, more thematic chapters 13, 14 and 15 should also be included. Because of the request to give a lecture on 'Luke as a historiographer' at the *Didachè Studiedagen Bijbel 2018* at Leuven, Belgium the prologue had to be shown on a screen. This led me to understand that in Luke-Acts we are dealing with a form of apologetic historiography. I thought it would be good to open this collection with that lecture.

I haven't abandoned the tradition of writing articles about specific scenes. Above I mentioned a number of stories that touched me. The reader will find them in chapters 5 (1,39-56) and 6 (2,40-52) and in chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12, in which I discuss three consecutive scenes (7,1-10; 7,11-17; 7,18-23).

Most of the chapters in this book are edited versions of the first twelve chapters of *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Structuur, stijl en theologie* (Middelburg: Skandalon 2018). Even earlier they have appeared in various Dutch theological journals. At the end of the book, the reader will find the account in a complete overview. Chapter 2 'The meaning of *καθεξῆς* in Luke 1,3' is new, in that this chapter has not been previously published. Chapters 11 on the raising of the dead as a metaphor, and 15 on the five journeys of Jesus are a combination of two chapters from the book mentioned above, and a combination of a chapter from it and a lecture, respectively. Both chapters contain new conclusions. Personally, I count them among the new chapters.

My wish for this book? That the reader may receive a deeper understanding of Luke's Gospel through this study.

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³ I borrow this definition from Henk Leene, 'רוח ו שמיעה in Jesaja 37,7: Een kwestie van vertaalhorizon', *ACEBT* 4 (1983), 49-62, esp. 49: 'Een eenvoudige maar bruikbare definitie van exegese is: het thuisbrengen van de delen van een tekst in het geheel. Hoe versta ik dit woord zo dat het past in de zin, hoe vat ik deze zin zo op dat hij zich voegt in de pericope, de pericope in nog weer wijdere verbanden, enzovoort'.

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