

Isaiah 6:9–10 in Luke-Acts and Witness Motif

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<Abstract>

This study explores the intertextual use of Isaiah 6:9–10 in the theological framework of Luke–Acts, with particular attention to Acts 28:26–28. While this citation has traditionally been interpreted as a divine pronouncement of judgment on Jewish unbelief—anti-Jewish readings—this paper argues for a more nuanced understanding of its function within Luke’s rhetorical and narrative strategy. Rather than signaling a permanent rejection of Israel, the Isaianic citation is examined within the broader context of Luke’s witness motif and his theological vision of Israel’s partial but not total unbelief. This study critiques longstanding interpretations that reduce the Lukan narrative to a binary between Jewish rejection and Gentile inclusion. It proposes instead that Acts 26 and 28 should be read in continuity with Luke 24, wherein divine revelation enables recognition and response. Paul’s commission to “open eyes” (Acts 26:18) signals not condemnation, but hope and the continuation of God’s salvific plan,

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echoing Isaiah 42 and reversing the non-recognition of Isaiah 6. Ultimately, the study suggests that Luke's invocation of Isaiah functions not as a terminal judgment but as a prophetic challenge, retaining space for Israel's future restoration. The paper thus repositions the Isaianic quotation in Acts as a theological fulcrum for understanding the inclusive and restorative aims of Luke's witness theology.

***Keywords**

Intertextuality; Gospel of Luke; Acts of the Apostles; Isaiah 6 Anti-Judaism.

1. A Hermeneutical Debate on Acts 28:26–28

It is well established that the book of Isaiah occupies a pivotal role in the theological framework of Luke-Acts. Among the various Isaianic texts cited, Isaiah 6:9–10 has long been at the center of scholarly hermeneutical debates, particularly with respect to its appropriation in Acts 28:26–28. This passage has frequently been interpreted as a divine pronouncement of judgment against the Jewish people and, consequently, has served to undergird anti-Jewish theologies throughout Christian history. In response to such interpretive trajectories, the present study seeks to offer a revised reading of Acts 28:26–27, contending that the passage has been widely misunderstood and misappropriated. Rather than functioning as a blanket condemnation of Jewish unbelief, Luke's use of Isaiah 6 may instead reflect a more nuanced theological and rhetorical strategy.

In Rosemary Radford Ruether¹ monumental work *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*, she poses a critical question: “Is it possible to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah and at the same time not condemn the Jews?” Before evaluating how the Lukan narrative addresses this question, it is imperative to first examine the longstanding issue of anti-Judaism within Lukan theology—a subject that has elicited considerable scholarly attention and debate.

The modern scholarly debate concerning the theological orientation of Luke-Acts was significantly shaped by the Tübingen School in Germany.

¹ Rosemary R. Ruether, *Faith and fratricide: the theological roots of anti-semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1979).

Ferdinand Christian Baur, one of its leading figures, portrayed the early history of Christianity as a site of theological and ideological conflict.² According to Baur, the early church was marked by a fundamental division between Jewish Christianity, represented by Peter, and Gentile Christianity, represented by Paul. He further argued that Acts was composed by Luke as a conciliatory narrative, designed to harmonize these opposing factions.

Joseph B. Tyson notes that Baur's Hegelian framework—according to which early Catholicism emerged as a synthesis that resolved the dialectical tension between Jewish and Hellenistic Christianity—subsequently influenced a wide array of scholars. Among those who developed or adapted Baur's model were Adolf Harnack, Albert Schweitzer, Rudolf Bultmann, Ernst Käsemann, Hans Conzelmann, and Helmut Koester. In more recent decades, this interpretive trajectory has been taken up by scholars such as Burton Mack and John Dominic Crossan.

Among those who have most significantly contributed to shaping the scholarly consensus on Lukan theology, Ernst Haenchen and Hans Conzelmann are particularly noteworthy. Many scholars today regard their work as foundational in institutionalizing a dominant interpretive paradigm concerning Luke-Acts.³ Conzelmann and Haenchen jointly maintained that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, as portrayed in the Gospels, provided the theological justification for the Gentile mission. Implicit in their reading is the assertion that the Christian proclamation to the Gentiles

² Joseph B. Tyson, *Luke, Judaism, and the scholars: critical approaches to Luke-Acts* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 14.

³ Tyson, *Luke, Judaism, and the scholars*, 66–90.

emerged not as a parallel initiative but as a consequence of Jewish unbelief; had the Jewish people accepted the Christian message, the Gentile mission may not have been necessitated.

Haenchen interpreted the Acts of the Apostles as a sustained effort to legitimate the Gentile mission apart from adherence to the Jewish law. For Luke, the continuity between Judaism and Christianity held fundamental theological significance across a variety of contexts. According to Haenchen, Judaism as portrayed in Luke's writings is best understood as "Resurrectionist Pharisaism." This characterization enables Haenchen to argue that, at least from Luke's perspective, Judaism and Christianity were essentially unified.⁴

Luke's narrative suggests that many Jews embraced the Christian message and responded positively to apostolic teaching. Nevertheless, this was not a universal response. Luke presents Jewish rejection of the gospel as a providential means by which God opened the path for the apostles to turn to the Gentiles.

One of the most decisive factors distinguishing nineteenth- and twentieth-century New Testament scholarship was the impact of the Holocaust. In the aftermath of the systematic extermination of Jews fueled by centuries of anti-Semitism, twentieth-century scholars began to reevaluate earlier interpretive traditions and paid increased attention to positive representations of Jews in the New Testament. By contrast, nineteenth-century scholars often emphasized negative portrayals of

⁴ E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, Trans, Bernard Noble et al. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971).

Judaism and Jewish characters. Although Haenchen and Hans Conzelmann challenged certain assumptions within the historical-critical tradition, their work continued to underscore its more critical perspectives on Judaism.

A significant turning point in Lukan scholarship emerged with the work of Jacob Jervell.⁵ Jervell argued that the Gospel of Luke should be understood as a fundamentally pro-Jewish text. In his view, the early Christian movement achieved a degree of legitimacy precisely because of its theological and historical continuity with Judaism.

As Tyson has observed, scholars such as Adolf Harnack and Adolf Schlatter investigated the relationship between Judaism and Christianity without adequately accounting for the historical and socio-political realities of the context. In contrast, contemporary New Testament scholarship has increasingly emphasized a more historically grounded and realistic approach to this issue. Among the most prominent figures in this trajectory is Robert Tannehill. He underscores the ambivalence in Luke-Acts regarding the problem of Judaism, offering a nuanced reading of the text. Furthermore, Tannehill argues that the tension between promise and fulfillment runs throughout Luke-Acts and remains unresolved even at its conclusion.⁶

Within this ongoing debate, the citation of Isaiah 6:9–10 in Acts 28 functions as a pivotal theological moment. Craig A. Evans contends that

⁵ Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing house, 1972).

⁶ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1994).

this quotation reflects the early Church's experience of Jewish rejection and unbelief.⁷ Conversely, scholars such as J. T. Sanders argue that Isaiah 6:9–10 constitutes the most strongly anti-Jewish passage in all of Luke–Acts. Tyson explains that Luke begins his narrative by portraying the Jews as devoutly faithful to God, but ends by depicting them as spiritually blind and resistant to God's will. According to Tyson, Acts 28 offers a conclusion that is unambiguous and definitive, presenting Jewish rejection as how the gospel is ultimately directed toward the Gentiles.⁸ Some scholars have challenged readings of Luke and Acts as anti-Jewish. Robert F. O'Toole,⁹ for instance, argues that the portrayal of Jews in Luke–Acts is complex, and that it is erroneous to equate negative statements about some Jews with anti-Judaism. According to O'Toole, Luke addresses Jews with theological and pastoral intent and does not incite anti-Jewish hostility. The term *hoi Ioudaioi* (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) does not always refer to the Jewish people as a whole, and Paul is instead depicted as the legitimate heir of Pharisaic resurrection faith (Acts 23–26). O'Toole emphasizes that Luke's negative depictions reflect specific historical conflicts, rather than a general antagonism toward all Jews. He critiques the tendency to generate anti-Judaism not from the text itself, but from its misinterpretation. Darrell Bock, likewise, sees the

⁷ Craig A. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive: Isaiah 6:9–10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 64 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 127.

⁸ J. T. Sanders. "The Parable of the Pounds and Lucan Anti-Semitism", *TS* 42(1981), 660–68.

⁹ Robert F. O'Toole, "Reflections on Luke's Treatment of Jews in Luke–Acts," *Biblica* 74, no. 4 (1993): 529–55.

need to reassess the dynamics of Jewish–Roman relations in Luke–Acts. He reexamines the role that Jewish opposition and Roman involvement played in the expansion of the gospel and in the broader theological and ethnic tensions of the period. Bock stresses that Luke neither denies nor is hostile to Jewish tradition, but rather seeks to historically reconstruct the resistance of the Jewish leadership.¹⁰ Nonetheless, there are limits to viewing the complexity of Luke’s portrayal as a mere reflection of historical conflict. Luke’s theology does not merely mirror historical realities but actively interprets and reshapes them. Accordingly, this study contends that the complexity of Luke’s statements about Jews derives not solely from historical circumstances but from a theological dialectic of judgment and salvation rooted in Isaiah’s theology that undergirds Luke’s narrative.¹¹ Thus far, scholarly analyses of Acts 28 have primarily focused on its historical context, the socio-religious reality it reflects, and its literary function within the narrative framework of Acts.¹² This study proposes a

¹⁰ Darrell L. Bock, “The Jewish Opposition to the Gospel,” in *A Theology of Luke and Acts: God’s Promised Program, Realized for All Nations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 369–89.

¹¹ In recent studies, Armstrong approaches the open ending of Acts from a historical perspective, with a particular focus on the issue of dating. The abrupt ending of Acts, with Paul under house arrest and no mention of his death, is interpreted as indicative of the author’s limited knowledge of subsequent events, supporting an early date of composition. Karl Leslie Armstrong, *Dating Acts in Its Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts*, The Library of New Testament Studies 637 (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2021).

¹² Based on Hartog’s analysis, the ending of Acts 28 serves two key purposes: it invites readers to continue the apostles’ mission beyond the narrative, and it presents the Way as an eschatological movement open to both Jews and Gentiles within the Roman imperial

different approach by examining Acts 28 through the lens of intertextuality, specifically exploring the theological relationship between Luke-Acts and the book of Isaiah.

A proper understanding of the intertextual matrix between these texts necessitates several foundational premises. First and foremost, the citation of Isaiah 6:9–10 in Acts 28 must be interpreted within the broader framework of Isaiah's theology of judgment and salvation. The Old Testament is not cited in the New Testament in a vacuum or apart from its original literary and theological context.¹³ In Isaiah 6:9–10, the motif of non-recognition (or spiritual blindness) functions as a pronouncement of

context. While the conclusion of this article similarly affirms the dual pattern of response in Acts, it reaches this conclusion through a comparative analysis with *Philostratus' Life of Apollonius of Tyana* in the cultural framework of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, the open-ended conclusion of Acts—characterized by this dual response—should not be understood as a literary product of political circumstances or Greco-Roman narrative conventions. Rather, it is a theological outcome of Luke's Isaianic framework, which consistently operates through the dual motifs of divine judgment and salvation. Pieter B. Hartog, "Journeys without End: Narrative Endings and Implied Readers in *Acts of the Apostles* and *Philostratus' Life of Apollonius of Tyana*," *Religions* 15, no. 5 (2024): 606, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15050606>.

¹³ In their commentary on Acts, Joseph Shulam and Hilary Le Cornu place primary emphasis on the Jewish context of the narrative over its Roman political and cultural setting. They contend that Acts fundamentally depicts the early Jesus movement as an intra-Jewish phenomenon. Accordingly, the early church should be understood as a movement within first-century Judaism, and they underscore the importance of recovering the text's lost Jewish framework. Joseph Shulam and Hilary Le Cornu, *A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Acts*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Jerusalem, Israel: Academ, 2012).

judgment. By contrast, Isaiah 43 employs the motif of witness to proclaim salvation. These two motifs—non-recognition and witness—together articulate Isaiah’s theological vision of human destiny in the face of divine revelation.

Building upon these Isaianic themes, Luke-Acts reconfigures the judgment and salvation schema of Isaiah around the Christ-event. Jesus Christ becomes the interpretive and theological center through which Isaiah’s dual motifs are reappropriated. Accordingly, Acts 28 should be re-examined within the conceptual framework of Isaiah’s judgment and salvation system, particularly as expressed through the non-recognition motif in Isaiah 6:9–10.

2. A reversal of Isaiah 6:9–10 and Luke 24¹⁴

2.1. The Use of ἀνοίγειν and the Apocalyptic Shift from Judgment to Recognition

In Isaiah 6:9–10, divine judgment is portrayed through a condition of epistemic incapacity—people who cannot see, hear, or comprehend. Conversely, Isaiah 43:9–10 proclaims a salvific reversal of this condition: the previously blind and deaf are summoned and transformed into witnesses who see, hear, and understand. The revelatory agent thus resolves

¹⁴ Research on this topic was preceded based on the relationship between Luke and Isaiah, focusing on intertextuality. For details, see this paper. Suyeon Kim, “The Recognition Motif in the Gospel of Luke” (Th.D. Diss. Presbyterian University & Theological Seminary, 2014).

the existential dilemma of non-recognition. Luke 24 activates this Isaianic paradigm of salvation. On the road to Emmaus, the disciples initially exhibit the symptoms of Isaiah 6's judgment: they see without perceiving and hear without understanding. However, upon encountering the resurrected Jesus, a series of transformative events occurs. First, their eyes begin ἀνοίγειν (to open) (Lk 24:31), signifying the restoration of perceptual faculties essential for witness. Insight is gained through the symbolic action of Jesus breaking bread. Second, the mind (νοῦς)¹⁵ of the gathered disciples in Jerusalem begin διανοίγειν (to open) (Lk 24:45). The Greek terms νοῦς (mind, understanding) and διανοίγειν (to open) are critical here. The use of διανοίγειν—a verb distinctive to Luke—underscores divine agency, particularly through its passive form. This cognitive restoration is consistent with apocalyptic motifs. The verb ἀνοίγειν (to open), common in apocalyptic literature and used by Luke (e.g., Lk 24:31), also appears in 1 Enoch 89:44 and 106:2 to denote the opening of eyes in relation to recognition.¹⁶ In this way, Luke presents the reversal of judgment through divine intervention, aligning with Isaiah 43's vision. The Greek verb

¹⁵ The word is rare in the LXX, since καρδιά is there the main organ of understanding. In Greek Philosophy and Religion, νοῦς refers to 'reason' or 'spirit' with a more theoretical orientation. Philo uses this word for a reason as distinct from πνεῦμα as spirit. νοῦς is the best in us; it is earthly and can attain truth only as divinely instructed. J. Behm, "νοῦς," in *TDNT*, vol. IV, 948–80.

¹⁶ In Enoch 1, the blinding of the sheep symbolizes judgment in 1 Enoch (the Dream vision: chaps. 83–90), and the opening of the sheep's eyes symbolizes salvation. For a more detailed discussion, refer to II.D.1 "The recognition motif of the 1st Book of Enoch," in Kim, "The Recognition Motif of the Gospel of Luke."

ἀνοίγειν is predominantly employed in apocalyptic literature to describe the dramatic unveiling of the heavens (the sky is opened).¹⁷ Luke similarly adopts this term in apocalyptic scenes involving either the heavens being opened or the metaphorical opening of eyes in relation to recognition (e.g., Lk 3:21; Ac 10:11; 26:18). In Lukan usage, διανοίγειν and ἀνοίγειν exhibit no substantial semantic distinction. Within Isaiah's theological framework, the paradigm of judgment is expressed through non-recognition of divine revelation, whereas the paradigm of salvation consists in the recognition of that revelation. The alternating proclamation of judgment and salvation thus accentuates the cognitive dimension of salvation. In Luke 24, the motif of judgment via non-recognition comes to an end, and a new salvific era begins wherein the disciples' eyes, ears, and hearts are opened—a conceptual echo of Isaiah 43. Luke implies that salvation involves the restoration of epistemic faculties, thereby reorienting human cognition toward divine truth.

2.2. Moses and the Prophets as Epistemological Precursors to Christological Recognition

Through the opening of their minds, the disciples come to a deeper understanding of the biblical texts. Luke uses the term συνιέναι (to understand) to articulate the moment of their cognitive awakening. This

¹⁷ 1 Enoch 104:2; The Testament of Levi 2:6; 18:6; The Testament of Judah 24:2; The Testament of Abraham 7:3; 12:17, 18; The Testament of Adam 1:11; Apocalypse of Moses 18:3; 3 Maccabees: 6:18

implicitly references the judgment motif of Isaiah 6:9–10, wherein lack of understanding is a sign of divine judgment. Before the passion and resurrection proclamations, the disciples fall under Isaiah’s category of non-recognition; Luke repeatedly emphasizes their incomprehension.

However, in their encounter with the risen Christ, the disciples ultimately *συνιέναι* (come to understand) the Scriptures. Significantly, their recognition of Jesus’ identity and mission emerges through engagement with the written Scriptures. Luke suggests that recognition of Christ’s suffering and resurrection is contingent upon first *συνιέναι* “Moses and the Prophets.” In this sense, Moses and the Prophets function not only as theological antecedents but as hermeneutical gateways. For Luke, they are the necessary epistemological framework through which recognition of the crucified and risen Christ becomes possible.

2.3. Perceiving Witnesses

Luke introduces the term witness (*μάρτυς*) in Luke 24—a lexical choice distinctive to his narrative, as it does not appear in the other canonical Gospels. This introduction signals the theological transition from divine judgment, as epitomized in Isaiah 6, to the inauguration of salvation, which Luke progressively develops throughout Acts. The witness motif in Luke 24 is conceptually and theologically grounded in Isaiah 43, a chapter that functions as a literary and theological counterpoint to Isaiah 6.

The Greek term *μάρτυς* (witness) appears 53 times in the Septuagint, including seven instances in the book of Isaiah. While the term is generally employed in legal contexts (e.g., Num 5:13), its use in Isaiah 43:9 and 44:7

signifies a shift toward a religious or theological usage.¹⁸ Isaiah 43, which proclaims the reversal of the judgment found in Isaiah 6, introduces the concept of witnesses who are blind and deaf, yet summoned before the nations. This paradoxical identification highlights a transformative salvific event: those once judged for their non-recognition are now called to bear witness to divine revelation.

Luke 24 appropriates and extends this Isaianic witness motif. The intertextual relationship between Luke 24 and Isaiah 43 is marked by two key elements. First, both texts emphasize a reversal of epistemological status. In Isaiah 43, the judgment of ignorance, unbelief, and incomprehension (cf. Isa 6) is overturned, resulting in the triadic affirmation of knowing (γινώσκειν), believing (πιστεύειν), and perceiving (συνιέναι) the true identity of God (Isa 43:10). Luke 24 mirrors this transformation: the disciples, who initially fail to recognize the resurrected Jesus, are granted understanding through divine intervention (Lk 24:45). The term συνιέναι, used exclusively concerning God in the Septuagint, provides a lexical bridge linking Isaiah 6, Isaiah 43, and Luke 24. In the New Testament, συνιέναι predominantly appears in contexts where Isaiah 6 is cited (e.g., Matt 13:13–15, 19, 23), reinforcing its association with the recognition of divine revelation. Second, both texts uniquely present perceiving witnesses—an innovative concept within biblical literature. Isaiah 43 identifies the blind and the deaf as God’s witnesses, thereby transforming them from objects of judgment into agents of proclamation. Likewise, in Luke 24, the disciples—whose cognitive faculties were

¹⁸ H. Strathmann, “μάρτυς,” in *TDNT*, vol. IV, 474–514.

previously impaired—have their eyes and minds opened by God, and are then commissioned as witnesses. Notably, the conjunction of the terms μάρτυς and συνιέναι appears only in Isaiah 43 and Luke 24, further evidencing their intertextual affinity. Both passages, therefore, articulate a new paradigm of witness: not merely those who have seen, but those who have come to perceive, through divine agency, the revelatory truth of God.

2.4. A Vision for the Nations and the Role of Witness

Isaiah 43 and Luke 24 converge on a universal vision that encompasses all nations. In Isaiah 43:9, individuals previously characterized as blind and deaf are summoned to serve as witnesses before all nations. Similarly, in Luke 24:47, the disciples are commissioned as witnesses to proclaim the message of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (all the nations). The recurring phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in both Isaiah and Luke underscores a shared theological emphasis on the global scope of divine revelation and salvation. This intertextual parallel not only affirms the continuity between the prophetic vision of Isaiah and the Lukan account but also redefines the role of witness as extending beyond the boundaries of Israel. Both texts present a transformative witness who, having undergone divine illumination, is entrusted with the proclamation of God's redemptive work to all peoples. Thus, Luke 24, echoing Isaiah 43, envisions a missionary movement in which the formerly unseeing are empowered to bear testimony—not only to their people but to the entire world—about the eschatological significance of Jesus' death and resurrection.

2.5. Conclusion: Reversing Judgment through Witness and Recognition

In summary, Luke 24 both echoes and extends the theological vision articulated in Isaiah 43. Whereas Isaiah 43 prophesies that the blind and deaf shall become witnesses, Luke 24 elucidates what it is they ultimately come to see and hear: the events of the crucifixion and resurrection. By fusing Isaiah's motif of recognition with the narrative of Jesus' Passion and resurrection, Luke investigates the epistemological function of these events—how they facilitate human recognition of divine revelation.

The salvific cognition presented in Isaiah 43, which overturns the curse of non-recognition pronounced in Isaiah 6, is now realized and made manifest in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, Luke reframes Isaiah's abstract prophetic categories in the concrete historical events of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Moreover, Luke's portrayal of discipleship significantly diverges from that of Mark and Matthew. Rather than remaining within the bounds of traditional discipleship, Luke redefines the disciples as witnesses—those who have come to understand and interpret the Passion and resurrection of Christ. This concept of witness transcends the forensic or juridical framework and aligns with the theological vision in Isaiah 43: witnesses are those who see, hear, comprehend, and believe.

Luke 24 highlights the cognitive dimension of resurrection, portraying it as a reversal of the disciples' previous inability to recognize. Isaiah 43 thereby functions intertextually to undergird and amplify this theme, contributing to Luke's articulation of salvation as the restoration of human

perceptual faculties. The paradoxical paradigm—wherein the blind and deaf are transformed into perceptive witnesses—becomes embodied in Luke’s resurrection narrative. This motif continues to develop in Acts, where the recognition of divine revelation is further linked with the witness-bearing mission of the church.

In conclusion, Luke 24 offers a theological resolution to the judgment of Isaiah 6 by implicitly reinterpreting it through the lens of Isaiah 43. The divine judgment that rendered Israel blind and deaf has reached its terminus; now, those who perceive God’s self-disclosure are summoned to testify to the salvific reality inaugurated in Jesus Christ.

3. A Reversal of Isaiah 6:9–10 and Acts 22

3.1. Transformation on the Road through Divine Intervention (Acts 22:1–11)

Ben Witherington¹⁹ points out that scholars widely agree that the final quarter of Acts offers clear insight into the author’s theological concerns and intentions. He argues that, rather than functioning primarily as an apologetic directed toward Rome, the narrative gives greater weight to substantive and constructive debates with Judaism. This observation is well-founded. Just as Paul appeals to Jewish Scripture in his arguments, so too does Luke draw extensively on the Law and the Prophets—particularly Isaianic theology—to frame his theological engagement with Judaism.

¹⁹ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 660.

Similar to Luke 24, Acts 22 reflects and simultaneously reverses the theological paradigm of Isaiah 6. While Darrell Bock²⁰ has identified echoes of Deuteronomy 28:28–29 in this passage, the dominant theological framework involves the motif of seeing and hearing in relation to witness, as well as Isaiah’s theology of judgment and salvation. More specifically, the narrative portrays a liberation from the curse of non-recognition pronounced in Isaiah 6, effected through the divine intervention of the resurrected Jesus. Luke’s theological trajectory, deeply influenced by Isaiah’s “recognition-reversal” agenda, finds concrete expression in Acts 22.

This section examines the episode of Acts 22 in which Saul, journeying to Damascus, is symbolically positioned under the judgment of Isaiah’s non-recognition. The scene is marked by apocalyptic overtones, with terminology typically reserved for supernatural phenomena.²¹ As Saul falls to the ground, he hears a voice from heaven but loses his physical sight. Although a light is seen, the sound is reportedly unheard by his companions. However, as Bock rightly notes, the statement in Acts 22:9 that they “did not hear the voice” should not be interpreted literally.²² Rather, the phrase suggests a lack of comprehension. This aligns with the motif of hearing without understanding, reminiscent of Isaiah 6:9–10. Saul’s companions thus embody the condition of non-recognition: hearing yet failing to comprehend, seeing yet failing to perceive. Although they were physically

²⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

²¹ Mk 13:36; Lk 2:13; 9:39; Ac 9:3; 22:6

²² Bock, *Acts*, 660.

present during the revelatory moment, they did not encounter the risen Lord in a transformative way.

In contrast, Saul himself was partially engaged in the process of recognition. Though rendered blind by the divine light, he alone heard and understood the heavenly voice. His question—“What shall I do, Lord?”—reveals a radical shift from confident persecutor to humbled inquirer. The one who had previously acted with certainty against the followers of Jesus now confesses epistemic ignorance. This divine encounter on the road becomes a formative moment, preparing him for the mission that lies ahead.

Having been led into Damascus by others, Saul subsequently encounters Ananias, through whom his sight is restored (Ac 22:13). The verb employed here is ἀναβλέπειν (“to look up” or “to regain sight”). In the Acts of the Apostles, this verb appears only in 9:17–18 and 22:13. Elsewhere in the New Testament, ἀναβλέπειν typically occurs in two distinct contexts: the healing of the blind (cf. Matt 11:5; 20:34; Mk 10:51–52; Lk 7:22; 18:41–43), and Jesus’ action of looking up to heaven (cf. Matt 14:19; Mk 6:41; 7:34; Lk 9:16; 19:5). Accordingly, the restoration of Saul’s sight is not merely a physical phenomenon but functions symbolically as the reconstitution of spiritual perception—the reactivation of cognitive faculties necessary for his vocational identity as a witness to divine revelation.

A corresponding use of the term in the Septuagint, pertinent to the Lukan narrative, appears in Tobit 11:8. Tobit, an exile and a figure emblematic of Israel under divine judgment, has his sight restored through the intervention of an angel. This episode strongly parallels Saul’s experience. The removal of a white film (λευκώμα) from Tobit’s eyes mirrors the falling of scales

from Saul's eyes. In both accounts, the elimination of an ocular obstruction results in the restoration of vision and the reception of light. Saul and Tobit—both positioned as subjects of divine judgment—undergo the recovery of sight through divine intervention. This restoration marks the beginning of a reversal of judgment by addressing the foundational issue: the epistemological incapacity to perceive (συνιέναι) revelation, which itself is both a symptom and a consequence of judgment.

Through the transformation of his perceptual faculties, Saul assumes a new identity as a witness. This shift is integral to the construction of the identity of God's chosen witness. The witness described in Acts 22 is appointed, knows, sees, and hears. The witness motif here is informed by intertextual echoes from Isaiah 6, Isaiah 43, and Luke 24. Intertextual analysis enables the uncovering of recurring theological themes within this complex literary matrix. Just as the disciples encountered the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24), Saul encounters the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Ac 22). All those who met Jesus on the road in these narratives are subsequently summoned as witnesses. In Acts 22, Paul is designated as such a witness. The Greek verb used here is *προχειρίζεσθαι*,²³ which may be rendered “to designate,” “to appoint,” “to prepare,” or “to assign.” This verb appears twice in the context of Paul's call (Ac 22:14; 26:16), and its semantic emphasis lies more on being appointed to a task than on the notion of divine election or foreordination. Notably, *προχειρίζεσθαι* is used exclusively by Luke in the New Testament (cf. Ac

²³ W. Michaelis, “*προχειρίζομαι*” in *TDNT*, vol. IV, 862–63.

3:20; 22:14; 26:16), and as Gerhard Michaelis notes, it is employed specifically in connection with the witness role.

Saul, formerly an adversary of God due to his state of *μὴ συνιέναι* (not perceiving), is transformed through the opening of his eyes and is subsequently *προχειρίζεσθαι* (appointed) as both a servant and a witness. The divine appointment is articulated through a triadic infinitive construction, mirroring the structure of Isaiah 43:10. In that passage, the blind and the deaf are summoned as witnesses, and the reason for their election is expressed using a purpose clause (*ἵνα*) followed by three infinitives: *γινῶναι* (to know), *πιστεῦσαι* (to believe), and *συνιέναι* (to understand). In Acts 22, the verb *προχειρίζεσθαι* is used in place of *ἐκλέγεσθαι* (to choose), the verb employed in Isaiah 43:10 LXX, indicating Luke's literary preference. By employing *προχειρίζεσθαι*, Luke stresses that witnesshood is not self-assumed but divinely appointed.

Isaiah 43:9–10 thus stands in contrastive relation to Isaiah 6:9–10, reversing the motifs of spiritual blindness and deafness. These Isaianic themes are recontextualized and extended in Luke 24 and Acts 22. The disciples who encounter the resurrected Christ experience what may be termed cognitive salvation—an epistemological awakening that marks the end of exile. This theological trajectory, first articulated in Luke 24, reappears in Acts 22, now centered on the recognition triad: knowing, seeing, and hearing.

3.2. A Vision for the Nations and a Witness

Despite the theological significance of Acts 22 within the Lukan narrative, few, if any, scholars have recognized the continuity between the witness motif presented in this chapter and the paradigm of witness found in the book of Isaiah. This section aims to demonstrate that Luke's interest in the motifs of the nations and witness (*ethnē* and *martyrs*) reflects a deliberate intertextual engagement with Isaiah, particularly in his theological framing of Paul's call and mission. Among the three accounts of the Damascus event recorded in Acts, chapter 22 is uniquely directed to a Jewish audience. In contrast, Acts 9, written from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, lacks explicit audience designation, while chapter 26 is addressed before a Gentile audience, including King Agrippa, thereby making it difficult to categorize its hearers as exclusively Jewish. In Acts 22, however, the audience is clearly Jewish. The detailed characterization of Ananias in this account appears to be a conscious literary strategy intended to resonate with Jewish sensibilities. Ananias is described as a devout man κατὰ τὸν νόμον (according to the law), who μαρτυρεῖσθαι (to be well spoken of) by all the Jews living in Damascus.

Nonetheless, Paul's mission to the Gentiles is not absent from this chapter. Although not an integral component of the Damascus road narrative per se, Paul's commission to the Gentiles follows immediately in the subsequent pericope. While in a trance in Jerusalem, Paul receives his calling to evangelize the Gentiles (Ac 22:17), in a manner analogous to Peter, who also received divine instruction in a trance to ἀπελθεῖν (go) to the Gentiles (Ac 10:10; 11:5). In both cases, divine initiative, rather than

human planning, precipitated the Gentile mission. The Greek term *ὄραμα* (vision) is explicitly used in Peter's calling narrative to describe the revelatory experience. This term appears eleven times in the New Testament, and—with the sole exception of Mark 9:9—is used exclusively by Luke. Notable occurrences include Stephen's speech (Ac 7:31), Paul's Damascus experience (Ac 9:10), Peter's encounter with the Gentile mission (Ac 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5), Paul's Macedonian vision (Ac 16:9–10), and his vision in Corinth (Ac 18:9).

Luke employs *ὄραμα* to signal pivotal moments where the evangelistic trajectory shifts from a Jewish to a Gentile audience. These transitions were not organically derived from internal church strategy but were catalyzed through divine intervention. The legitimacy and necessity of the Gentile mission, therefore, are theologically grounded in God's revelatory initiative and are validated within a Jewish context.

4. A Reversal of Isaiah 6:9–10 and Acts 26

In this section, Witherington rightly underscores Luke's literary and theological aim to portray the Gospel's advance into the highest levels of Greco-Roman society, particularly through Paul's witness before political and social elites.²⁴ He argues that the transition from a Jewish audience in Acts 22 to a Gentile audience in Acts 26 marks a significant narrative progression, one that illustrates the widening scope of the Gospel's reach. This assessment is partially correct. While the shift in audience is indeed

²⁴ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 684–5.

evident and narratively intentional, it does not indicate a fundamental alteration in the theological core of Paul's message. The content of Paul's defense remains deeply rooted in Jewish theological traditions, even if the rhetorical framing may be adapted to accommodate a Gentile audience. Although certain terminological adjustments may reflect sensitivity to Gentile hearers, Paul's apologetic continues to affirm the promises made to the patriarchs and maintains a consistent focus on the forgiveness of sins—concerns thoroughly grounded in Jewish covenantal theology. In this respect, while the audience of the Gospel expands, its theological foundation remains unchanged. A change in audience does not necessitate a shift in theology; the universality of the Gospel's address does not imply a revision of its content. This study therefore argues that Paul's conversion narrative in Acts 26 is best understood through the lens of Isaianic reversal theology, particularly in dialogue with Isaiah 6. While Luke's literary composition may reflect features of contemporary rhetorical conventions—such as judicial speech forms and Greco-Roman epideictic patterns²⁵—the theological substance remains distinctively Old Testament-based and unwaveringly Christocentric. To understand the mission of a witness as articulated in Acts 26, one must examine Paul's self-defense before King

²⁵ The aphorism "It hurts you to kick against the goads" in Acts 26:14 is best understood as a Greek proverb with clear parallels in classical literature (e.g., Euripides, *Bacchae* 794–95; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1624; Terence, *Phormio* 1.2.27). Suggested Jewish parallels (e.g., *Psalms of Solomon* 16:4; Philo, *De Decalogo* 87) are comparatively unconvincing and lack the proverbial structure of the Greek idiom. The expression reflects Luke's use of Hellenistic rhetorical conventions to emphasize the futility of resisting divine will. Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles* 743.

Agrippa. In this address, Paul refers to “the hope of the promise.” Within the Lukan corpus, the term “promise” (ἐπαγγελία) almost invariably denotes God’s covenantal promise, with only a single exception. In Acts 26:6, this promise is explicitly linked to ἐλπίς (hope), a term which Luke employs exclusively in Acts. Apart from its occurrence in Acts 16:19—where it pertains to economic loss—ἐλπίς is always associated with the resurrection (cf. Ac 2:26; 23:6; 24:15; 26:6, 7). Accordingly, Paul frames his witness mission around the hope of resurrection, which he identifies as the ultimate realization of God’s promise to Israel.

The text underscores that Israel had not yet received the fulfillment of this eschatological promise; rather, it remained a community in anticipation of redemption. Notably, the passage establishes a theological link between the fulfillment of divine promise and Israel’s hope in the resurrection. However, not all Jewish sects uniformly embraced resurrection as central to their eschatological expectation. Diverse views existed among the various factions within Second Temple Judaism. The Sadducees, for instance—representatives of the priestly and aristocratic elite—rejected belief in resurrection altogether. Nevertheless, as N. T. Wright has persuasively argued, numerous apocalyptic writings from the late Second Temple period affirm belief in the resurrection as a widespread and potent hope within apocalyptic Judaism.²⁶ The crucial theological question that looms large is: When will Israel’s exile end? When will God’s promised hope be fulfilled? From Luke’s perspective, the resurrection constitutes the

²⁶ Nicholas T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 329.

decisive answer to both. It is the climactic fulfillment of prophetic expectation and marks the inauguration of God's redemptive plan—a reversal of judgment and a vindication of hope. Thus, in Acts 26, Paul's witness to the resurrection not only defends the gospel but also redefines Israel's national and theological identity in continuity with prophetic Scripture.

4.1. Transformation on the Road Through Divine Intervention

Among the three accounts of the Damascus event in the Book of Acts, chapter 26 offers the final and most theologically developed version. In this narrative, Saul encounters the risen Jesus on the road and undergoes a transformation of his cognitive faculties. As he traveled toward Damascus, Saul states that he “saw” (εἶδον) a light from heaven shining around him and that he “heard” (ἤκουσα) a voice. He expresses confidence that he both saw and heard the glorified Jesus.

Particularly noteworthy is the use of the verb ὁράω (to see) in Acts 26:16, which appears in a different voice and tense compared to earlier accounts. This verbal variation emphasizes the revelatory and transformative nature of the encounter. It suggests that Saul's experience was not merely physical or sensory but involved a divine unveiling that initiated his reorientation as a commissioned witness. In the broader context of Lukan theology, Acts 26 continues the theme of cognitive transformation through divine intervention—an interpretive thread that links the Damascus event with Isaiah's prophetic tradition and the recognition motif central to Luke-Acts.

Jesus was seen by Saul, he saw Jesus himself, and he will see what Jesus appoints him to see. In the dynamic between the risen Jesus and Saul, the cognitive act of “seeing” is presented as both a completed experience and an ongoing expectation. Acts 26, more explicitly than chapters 9 and 22, underscores that Saul truly saw and heard Jesus. The narrative places strong emphasis on the fullness of divine revelation granted to Saul, marking both the culmination and continuation of his perceptual transformation.

4.1.1. The Mission of Opening (Acts 26:18)

In Acts 26:16, Saul is commissioned as a servant and witness to both the Jewish people and the Gentiles. This commissioning culminates in Acts 26:18,²⁷ which both reverses the judgment motif of Isaiah 6:9–10 and echoes the recognition motif of Luke 24. Within the broader Lukan narrative, Acts 26 represents the climax of the witness motif. In Luke 24, the witnesses come to recognize the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus; in Acts 22, a witness is divinely appointed; and in Acts 26, the appointed witness is entrusted with a specific mission.

That mission is articulated in Acts 26:18 as the opening of the eyes of both Jews and Gentiles. The Greek verb employed here is ἀνοίγειν (to open), which also appears in Isaiah 35:5 and 42:7²⁸—texts that serve to

²⁷ Tannehill observes that the imagery of turning to God and the opening of blind eyes, often associated with Gentile conversion, is also applied to Jews in Luke–Acts. Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts, 2:324.

²⁸ Haenchen notes the connection between Acts 26:18 and Isaiah 42:7, but he fails to recognize that Isaiah 42:7 itself functions as a theological reversal of Isaiah 6. Ernst

reverse the non-recognition judgment of Isaiah 6:9–10 through the promise of restored sight. In this theological trajectory, a witness is defined not only as one whose perceptual faculties have been divinely opened, but also as one tasked with opening the eyes of others. The mission of the witness thus involves extending the gift of recognition—vision, understanding, and spiritual insight—to those still under the judgment of non-recognition.

4.1.2. The Mission of Turning (Acts 26:18)

In Isaiah 6:10, the people's eyes are closed, preventing them from turning (ἐπιστρέφειν) back to God. In contrast, Acts 26:18 depicts a reversal of this condition: people are to turn from darkness to light. Paul's mission is precisely to facilitate this transformation. It is particularly significant that both texts employ the same verb, ἐπιστρέφειν (to turn). In the Septuagint (LXX), this verb encompasses a variety of turning actions and often functions as a technical term for religious conversion or apostasy.

The prerequisite for such a return to God is the restoration of cognitive faculties. Only when eyes, ears, and hearts are opened can one ἐπιστρέφειν—turn—to God.²⁹ The same missional concept appears in Isaiah 49:6, where the servant of the Lord is appointed to bring back

Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn, ed. Robert McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 402.

²⁹ 1. Man Returns to God: Isa 6:10; 19:22; 31:6; 44:22; 45:13; 45:22; 46:8; 49:6; 55:7.

2. God returns to man: Isa 63:15; 63:17.

(ἐπιστρέφειν) the diaspora (διασπορά) of Israel. This servant is described as a “light to the nations” and as the bearer of divine salvation (σωτηρία).³⁰

In Acts 26:18, Luke once again draws upon the theological framework of Isaiah—especially Isaiah 6, 42, and 49—to situate Saul’s mission as a reversal of Isaiah’s. Whereas Isaiah was commanded to render the people blind and prevent them from returning, Saul is commissioned to open their eyes so that they might ἐπιστρέφειν to God. His calling is, in essence, the mirror image of Isaiah’s original prophetic role. This narrative development functions as a theological proclamation that the exile is now over and a new era of restoration has begun.

4.1.3. The Contrast Between Darkness and Light: Cognitive Salvation and Deliverance from Satan

A significant theological element in Acts 26:18 is the contrast between darkness and light, expressed through the Greek terms σκότος (darkness) and φῶς (light). This duality echoes a well-established biblical motif that denotes the transition from ignorance or judgment to understanding and salvation. In the Septuagint, this contrast is prominently featured in the Book of Tobit. In Tobit 5:10, the protagonist laments his blindness, stating that he cannot βλέπειν (see) the φῶς of heaven and dwells in σκότος like the dead. In Tobit 14:10, the destinies of Ahikar and Nodal are contrasted: the former is said to have gone to the light, the latter to the darkness.

³⁰ Ac 13:47; Isa 49:6.

The Book of Tobit narrates the life of a man taken into captivity during the reign of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria. Having been rendered blind, Tobit lives in darkness until his son, Tobias—assisted by an angel—is able to ἀναβλέπειν (regain sight) for his father.³¹ The book culminates in Tobit's prophecy concerning the return of Israel from exile and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.³² As Evans observes, Tobit reflects the persistent Jewish conviction that Israel remained in a state of exile (Tobit 14:5).³³ The motif of blindness and the restoration of sight thus becomes a symbolic framework for understanding cognitive salvation: just as Tobit's physical sight was restored, so too will Israel experience spiritual awakening and recognition of divine truth.

The Isaianic vision in Isaiah 42:16 most closely parallels Acts 26:18. There, the Lord declares that He will ὁδηγεῖν (guide) the blind along

³¹ Joseph Zimmermann, ed., *Tobit: Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis Editum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958).

³² The Book of Tobit, insofar as it articulates the eschatological aspirations of Second Temple Judaism, lends itself to a meaningful analogy with the theological framework of the Book of Acts. In Tobit's narrative, the restoration of Israel is portrayed as an expectation that has yet to be fulfilled. The following scholars contend that the Book of Tobit articulates not merely the historical return from the Babylonian exile, but more fundamentally the theological hope for eschatological restoration and the full redemption of Israel. John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983). Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003).

³³ Craig A. Evans, "Jesus and the Continuing Exile of Israel," in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A critical Assessment of N.T. Wright's Jesus and the Victory of God*, ed. Carey C. Newman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 77–100.

unfamiliar paths and μεταστρέφειν (transform) σκότος into φῶς. Luke draws upon this prophetic tradition to frame Paul’s mission in apocalyptic terms. The contrast between darkness and light is not merely ethical or epistemological but cosmic in scale, as it becomes intertwined with the opposition between Satan and God.

While Matthew and Mark refer to Satan mainly in the context of Jesus’ temptation (Matt 4:10; Mk 1:13), the Beelzebul controversy (Matt 12:26; Mk 3:23), and the rebuke of Peter (Matt 16:23; Mk 8:33), the Lukan depiction is far more developed. In Luke-Acts, Satan is an active and powerful adversary: he ἐξαιτῆν (demands) to sift the disciples like wheat (Lk 22:31), δέειν (binds) a woman for eighteen years (Lk 13:16), and εἰσέρχεσθαι (enters) Judas to instigate betrayal (Lk 22:3). In Acts, Satan is explicitly described as possessing ἐξουσία (authority or power) from which individuals must be liberated (Ac 26:18). Moreover, he is portrayed as attempting to ψεύδεσθαι (deceive) the Holy Spirit (Ac 5:2).

Interestingly, the name “Satan” does not appear in the Septuagint, yet it is preferred in the New Testament, particularly in Luke-Acts, where it functions as a personified cosmic force opposed to God’s salvific plan. In this framework, the act of ἐπιστρέφειν (turning) to God simultaneously implies deliverance from Satan’s dominion—a movement from darkness to light that represents not merely moral transformation, but cognitive and theological enlightenment on a cosmic scale.

4.1.4. Mission to the Forgiveness of Sins and Inheritance (Acts 26:18)

The theme of the forgiveness of sins (ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν) is central to the theological framework of Luke-Acts, and its roots may be traced back to the embryonic expression in Isaiah 6. In the call narrative, Isaiah—upon encountering the divine presence—becomes acutely aware of his own impurity, confessing that he dwells among a people of unclean lips. His guilt is then removed and his sin atoned through a coal taken from the altar (Isa 6:7), symbolizing divine cleansing. This foundational moment in Isaiah provides an interpretive lens through which the Lukan motif of forgiveness is to be understood: it is both a divine initiative and a prerequisite for prophetic commissioning.

In Luke-Acts, the mission of proclaiming the forgiveness of sins is transmitted progressively through three stages: the ministry of John the Baptist, the commissioning of the disciples, and the apostolic mission of Paul.

First, the forgiveness of sins is integral to the mission of John the Baptist. In the Benedictus, the prophetic song of Zechariah, forgiveness is linked with salvific knowledge: “to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins” (Lk 1:77). This connection reflects Luke’s distinctive emphasis on the cognitive dimensions of salvation. Forgiveness is not merely juridical but epistemological—it enables recognition of the salvific work of God. Furthermore, in Luke 3:3, John’s proclamation of a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” aligns with the parallel statement in Mark 1:4. Here, repentance (μετάνοια) serves as the essential posture through which forgiveness is actualized, suggesting

that such repentance is preparatory for entering the salvific economy inaugurated by God.

Second, the theme is continued in the commission of the disciples. In Luke 24:47, the proclamation of “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” acquires a new Christocentric orientation: it is now to be preached “in his name,” that is, in the name of the risen Christ. The resurrection, as the climactic event in Luke’s narrative, reconfigures the forgiveness of sins with explicit Christological content. What had been a prophetic and preparatory act in John’s ministry is now redefined as a post-resurrectional apostolic mandate. The epistemological motif persists: the disciples, having been made to understand the Scriptures (Lk 24:45), are now charged to proclaim repentance and forgiveness, beginning from Jerusalem and extending to all nations.

The Acts of the Apostles inherits and amplifies this Lukan theology of forgiveness. The phrase “forgiveness of sins” appears prominently in apostolic preaching (cf. Ac 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38), forming a theological bridge between the Gospel and its sequel. It is particularly notable in Acts 26:18, where Paul’s divine commission includes opening the eyes of both Jews and Gentiles so that they “may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” Here, the forgiveness of sins is not only the reversal of judgment and alienation but also the entry point into the eschatological inheritance promised to the sanctified—those set apart through faith in Christ. Thus, Acts 26:18 serves as a theological culmination of Luke’s conception of forgiveness: it is tied to divine initiative, cognitive transformation, repentance, Christological fulfillment,

and eschatological inheritance. It is through this multi-faceted lens that the mission to proclaim forgiveness must be understood.

4.2. A Vision for Nations and Witnesses (Acts 26:17)

In Acts 26:17, the risen Jesus declares that He is delivering Saul from both the people (ὁ λαός) and the Gentiles (τὰ ἔθνη), and commissioning him to be sent back to them. The term λαός—typically referring to Israel—occupies a complex and ambivalent role throughout Luke-Acts. On one hand, the people are the intended recipients of Jesus’ teaching and the apostolic proclamation; on the other hand, they can be misled, complicit in Jesus’ crucifixion, or passive bystanders in moments of divine revelation. Despite this tension, Israel remains the first audience of the Gospel proclamation.

However, Saul’s apostolic commission is not restricted to λαός. He is also explicitly sent to the Gentiles. This dual designation represents the universal scope of his calling and the theological expansion of the witness motif. Whereas λαός may represent those with historical covenantal ties, τὰ ἔθνη signifies the expansion of God’s salvific plan to all nations. This universal horizon corresponds to the eschatological vision found in Isaiah and is consistently echoed in Luke’s broader narrative arc.

4.3. Moses and the Prophets as Precursors of Recognition (Acts 26:22–23)

In the Lukan theological framework, Moses and the Prophets constitute the foundational corpus for recognizing divine revelation, particularly in relation to Christ's passion and resurrection. This scriptural base serves not merely as a source of testimony but also as the criterion by which individuals are judged regarding their cognitive responsiveness to the Gospel.

When Paul testifies before Governor Festus, he appeals to Moses and the Prophets as the basis for his proclamation (Ac 26:22–23). This hermeneutical method mirrors the post-resurrection teaching of Jesus in Luke 24, where He interprets His suffering and resurrection in light of the Law and the Prophets (Lk 24:27, 44–47). This interpretive approach becomes a hallmark of apostolic witness: understanding Christ through the lens of Scripture is integral to the role of the witness (Lk 24:48). Paul continues this scriptural persuasion before King Agrippa, aiming to demonstrate the legitimacy of his message by anchoring it in prophetic tradition (Ac 26:27–28). Yet Agrippa resists persuasion. The Greek verb *πείθειν* (to persuade) used here is significant. In Luke's Gospel, *πείθειν* is the key verb in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, where Abraham declares that those who do not listen to Moses and the Prophets will not be persuaded (*πεισθήσονται*) even if someone rises from the dead (Lk 16:31). This intertextual allusion underscores the theological continuity between Luke and Acts: recognition of the risen Christ is inseparable from recognition of the prophetic Scriptures.

Agrippa's refusal to be persuaded despite hearing the Gospel parallels the rich man's brothers who would remain unconvinced even by resurrection. This narrative convergence reinforces Luke's assertion that true recognition—cognitive salvation—requires receptivity to both Scripture and resurrection, and that resistance to one implies resistance to the other.

5. Isaiah 6:9–10 and Acts 28: The Return of the Judgment Paradigm

In Luke–Acts, the apostles are commissioned as witnesses with the explicit purpose of reversing the judgment of non-recognition pronounced in Isaiah 6:9–10. Ironically, however, this same judgment resurfaces at the conclusion of Acts. In Acts 28:26–28, Paul cites Isaiah 6 directly, signifying the reactivation of Isaiah's judgment paradigm. Whereas Luke 24 signaled the inauguration of a restorative project based on the reversal of non-recognition, Acts 28 reveals a tragic regression: the judgment of spiritual blindness and deafness is once again operative—this time, against the unbelieving Jews in Rome.

To fully appreciate this narrative shift, it is essential to interpret it against the theological backdrop of exile. N. T. Wright has emphasized that, although the Jewish people had physically returned to the land, they were still existentially and theologically in exile—subject to Roman rule and awaiting true deliverance.³⁴ Wright's reading finds support in the

³⁴ Similarly, *Damascus Document* speaks of an exile continuing until the establishment of the sect. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and The People of God* (London: Society for

scholarship of Craig A. Evans³⁵ and David W. Pao,³⁶ who similarly argue that first-century Jews understood themselves as living in a continued state of exile.

This broader interpretive framework lends crucial insight into the events of Acts 28. The citation of Isaiah 6 at the climax of Paul's ministry to the Jews in Rome is not incidental but theologically loaded. It demonstrates that, for those who reject the apostolic witness to Christ, the curse of non-recognition remains in force. Thus, while Luke–Acts portrays the inauguration of cognitive salvation among some (e.g., Lk 24, Ac 26), Acts 28 confirms that Isaiah's sentence of judgment still holds for those who persist in unbelief.

5.1. Precursors of Recognition: Moses and the Prophets (Acts 28:23)

Throughout Luke–Acts, Isaiah 6:9–10 is repeatedly reversed through allusive and echoic strategies. However, in Acts 28:26–28, the judgment motif reemerges definitively with a direct citation of Isaiah's oracle, signaling the return of divine condemnation. Up to this point, Luke has developed the motif of witness progressively: as eyes and ears are opened, the witnesses to the resurrection come to recognize divine revelation through the writings of Moses and the prophets. These cognitive

Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992), 268–69.

³⁵ Evans, "Jesus and the Continuing Exile of Israel." 100.

³⁶ David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Eugene: Wipe and Stock Publishers, 2016), 143.

awakenings lead not only to understanding but also to a commission from heaven.

Yet, at this climactic juncture, the narrative takes an abrupt turn—suggesting a reversal of spiritual progress. The Jewish audience, rather than moving toward recognition, reenters a state of spiritual imprisonment. To appreciate the force of Isaiah’s reappearance in this context, one must closely examine the preceding scene in Acts 28:23, where Paul attempts to persuade the Jewish audience by appealing to the Law of Moses and the Prophets. This mirrors the typical preparatory stage that precedes recognition in Luke’s theological schema. Just as the disciples in Luke 24 came to perceive the meaning of Jesus’ suffering and resurrection through the interpretive framework of Moses and the Prophets, so too here, Paul employs these scriptures as the anticipated precursors to cognitive salvation.

In Luke’s theology, the Law and the Prophets serve not only as foundational texts but as divinely sanctioned conduits for revelation. This idea is prefigured in Luke 16:28–31, where Moses and the Prophets are identified as sufficient witnesses for repentance and salvation. Thus, in Acts 28, their failure to lead the people to recognition underscores the tragic persistence of unbelief and validates the renewed application of Isaiah’s judgment oracle.

5.2. The Dual Response to Witness and the Criterion of Moses and the Prophets (Acts 28:23–24)

Acts 28:23 exhibits a clear intertextual connection with Luke 16:28–31. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man implores Abraham

to send a witness to warn his brothers. The verb used for “to testify” in both Luke 16:28 and Acts 28:23 is διαμαρτύρομαι—a preferred term in Luke-Acts, where it appears ten out of the fifteen times it occurs in the New Testament. Abraham’s response underscores a theological principle foundational to Lukan theology: if one does not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will one be persuaded—even if someone rises from the dead. Thus, faith in the testimony of Moses and the prophets is presented as a necessary preliminary stage to faith in Christ.

This motif is revisited in Acts 26, where Paul testifies concerning the resurrection of Christ on the basis of Moses and the prophets. Despite the compelling nature of his argument, his audience remains unpersuaded. Importantly, Paul’s audience in Acts 26 includes not only Jews but also Gentiles, specifically Festus and Agrippa. Their rejection of the prophetic testimony aligns them with those in Acts 28 who failed to respond. Consequently, the rejection depicted in Acts 28:24 should not be understood as a categorical rejection of the Jewish people as a whole. Rather, it reflects a broader pattern of rejection determined not by ethnicity but by one’s reception of the revelatory foundation found in Moses and the prophets. In Luke-Acts, refusal to respond to divine revelation is a universal human phenomenon, transcending ethnic distinctions.

Luke-Acts consistently emphasizes separation in response to revelation. In the *Nunc Dimittis*, Simeon prophesies that Jesus will be the cause of “the falling and rising (πτῶσις καὶ ἀνάστασις) of many in Israel” (Lk 2:34). Similarly, in Luke 7:29–30, people are divided based on their response to John’s baptism—those who were baptized (βαπτισθέντες) versus those who were not (μὴ βαπτισθέντες). In the parable of the sower, Luke distinguishes

between those who have been granted to “know the mysteries of the kingdom of God” (γινῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας) and those who “seeing do not see, and hearing do not understand” (ἵνα βλέποντες μὴ βλέπωσιν καὶ ἀκούοντες μὴ συνιῶσιν, Lk 8:10).

Likewise, Acts 28:24 explicitly delineates two responses to Paul’s proclamation. Some were persuaded (πείθειν), while others disbelieved (ἀπιστεῖν). In Lukan theology, Jesus’s proclamation invariably generates division—between those who believe and are saved and those who reject and are judged.

Whereas in Isaiah the judgment and salvation are often applied corporately to nations or generations, in Luke-Acts the scope of divine response is more individuated. Within the same ethnic group or generation, individuals may experience divergent destinies based on specific criteria such as faith in Moses and the prophets, reception of baptism, or acceptance of the knowledge of salvation. Thus, even within Israel, salvation and judgment do not fall collectively but rather differentiate among individuals based on their response to divine revelation.

5.3. Isaiah’s Judgment System Reactivated

Acts 28:26–27 directly cites Isaiah 6:9–10, which had previously been referenced and echoed throughout Luke-Acts, and thereby definitively reactivates Isaiah’s judgment oracle. While Luke 8:10 contains a condensed citation of the Septuagintal version of Isaiah, the quotation in Acts 28:26–27 closely adheres to the LXX and approximates a verbatim rendering. Although the severe tone of judgment characteristic of the

Hebrew text is somewhat softened in its Septuagintal form, the invocation of Isaiah's prophecy in Acts nonetheless signals an irrevocable divine judgment upon Israel. With this citation, the motif of exile, long dormant, reemerges, indicating that the judgment of blindness and deafness has not been rescinded.

Despite this, adopting Tannehill's assessment of Acts as a tragic narrative would be an overstatement. Acts 28:24 reports that "some were persuaded" (οἱ δὲ ἐπείθοντο) by Paul's proclamation concerning the kingdom of God. This phrase parallels the positive reception of the "mystery of the kingdom" by select individuals in Luke 8:10. As Luke consistently emphasizes, the Isaianic judgment remains in effect, yet the dawn of salvation has broken. Though some among Israel reject the message, salvation (τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ) is now directed toward the Gentiles, and Luke confidently asserts, "they will listen" (Ac 28:28).

Luke thus concludes not with divine abandonment of Israel, but with a thematic shift: the narrative turns to the inclusion of the nations. The reactivation of Isaiah's judgment oracle is not the terminal point; rather, it serves to underscore the theological transition to a new missional horizon. The closing of Acts affirms the continuation of God's salvific plan through the Gentiles—not as a replacement of Israel, but as the outworking of a divine economy in which separation leads to wider inclusion.

6. Conclusion

Scholarly consensus on the ending of Luke-Acts remains elusive. The concluding narrative of Luke-Acts has been interpreted by some as

potentially contributing to anti-Semitic readings, particularly in light of the quotation of Isaiah 6:9–10 and its function as a judgment oracle. In Acts 28, Luke reintroduces the Isaianic judgment motif. Just as Israel's rejection of prophetic revelation in Isaiah's time led to exile, so too does the rejection of Paul's gospel message signify the continuation of Israel's exilic condition.

Nevertheless, Luke does not end with judgment alone. Rather, he appropriates and advances the theology of restoration and reversal found in Isaiah. Throughout Luke 24 and Acts 22 and 26, the witness motif—drawn from Isaiah 43—functions as a narrative and theological counterpoint to the curse of non-recognition in Isaiah 6. The proper understanding of Isaiah 6:9–10 in Acts 28, therefore, requires attention to the broader literary and theological arc of Luke-Acts, which steadily develops the motif of reversal. Some characters experience the undoing of cognitive incapacity and come to recognize divine revelation through the resurrection and divine intervention, while others persist in their blindness and deafness.

For Luke, judgment is not a verdict against an entire nation or generation. Rather, judgment and salvation coexist within both. The decisive criterion is not ethnicity or chronology, but the individual and communal response to Jesus the Messiah. This nuanced perspective guards against essentialist or ethnically charged readings of Acts 28.

For scholars sensitive to the theological implications of Christian texts in light of the Holocaust, the question of latent anti-Semitism in Luke-Acts remains pressing. Yet, such retrospective concerns should not be projected onto Luke's intentions. Luke's theological focus is not the ultimate fate of the Jewish people, but the unfolding of God's salvific purpose. The witness

motif, employed so centrally in Luke 24 and Acts 22 and 26, exemplifies Luke's vision of a world in which the judgment of Isaiah 6:9–10 is actively reversed and salvation is inaugurated.

Those who accept the proclamation of the witnesses—whether Jew or Gentile—are welcomed into this salvific reality. Conversely, those who reject the witness reject the salvation of God. The citation of Isaiah 6:9–10 in Acts 28, therefore, must be interpreted in continuity with the broader theological framework developed in Luke 24, Acts 22, and Acts 26, all of which are rooted in Isaiah's own theology of judgment and restoration.

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<한글초록>

누가-행전 안에 나타난 이사야 6:9-10 과 증인 모티프

김수연 *

본 연구는 누가-사도행전의 신학적 구조 안에서 이사야 6:9-10 의 상호본문적 사용을 고찰하며, 특히 사도행전 28:26-28 에 주목한다. 해당 본문은 전통적으로 유대인의 불신앙에 대한 신적 심판 선언으로 해석되어 왔으며, 결과적으로 반유대주의적 해석을 뒷받침하는 본문으로 기능해 왔다. 그러나 본 논문은 이러한 해석에 대해 이견을 제시하며, 누가의 수사학적·서사적 전략 안에서 이사야 본문의 기능을 보다 정교하고 신학적인 관점에서 재해석한다. 이사야 인용은 이스라엘의 영구적 폐기를 의미하는 것이 아니라, 이스라엘의 부분적 불신앙 속에서도 여전히 작동하는 하나님의 구원 계획과 증인 모티프 속에 위치한다. 본 논문은 누가의 내러티브를 유대인의 배척과 이방인의 수용이라는 이분법으로 환원하는 해석을 비판한다. 오히려 사도행전 26 장과 28 장은 누가복음 24 장과의 연속선상에서 읽혀야 하며, 이사야 42 장의 회복 약속과 함께 6 장의 ‘깨닫지 못함’을 반전시키는 계시적 전환의 서사로 이해되어야 한다. 이에 따라 이사야 인용은 종결적 심판이

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아니라 선지자적 도전으로 기능하며, 이스라엘의 회복 가능성을 여전히 포함하는 누가의 포괄적이고 회복적인 증언 신학의 중심축으로 제시된다.

***주제어**

상호본문성; 누가복음 24; 사도행전; 이사야 6 장; 반유대주의.