

The Proclamation of Release in Luke 4:16-30

There is general consensus that Luke 4:16-30 is of programmatic significance in Luke-Acts.¹ This pericope has attracted a great deal of attention because of the major themes Luke encapsulates in the story and repeats elsewhere.² Thus Luke 4:16-30 has been seen as a "preface"³ a "condensed version"⁴ and "an implicit reference to the future Gentile mission."⁵

The feast of Jubilee (Lev 25:8-17) shares the underlying theme of release with Luke 4:16-30. According to this legislation, "liberty" (LXX *aphesis*) was to be proclaimed throughout the land (25:1-10) every seventh Sabbatical. The Jubilee was of special good news to the poor who could return to their own property (25:12) and receive forgiveness for their debts (25:41).⁶ In one of the few extended studies of the Jubilee theology in the Gospel of Luke, Robert Sloan has noted that "though not universally noticed, or, at best, not often pointed out by commentators of recent years, the jubiliary background of this passage was widely recognized by commentators of bygone years."⁷

¹J. Verheyden, "The Unity of Luke-Acts. What are we up to?" in *The Unity of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. Verheyden (Lueven-Louvain, Belgium: Lueven University Press, 1999), 55. Verheyden reports disagreement over the exact nature of the programmatic discourse by scholars in the late 1980s has resulted in "skepticism about the programmatic status of the discourse."

²F. Neiryneck, "Luke 4:16-30 and the Unity of Luke-Acts." in Verheyden, ed. *The Unity of Luke-Acts*. In a major article Neiryneck states that "there are a number of good reasons to justify the choice of Lk 4:16-30, widely held to be programmatic for Luke-Acts" p. 357. The major reason given by Neiryneck is that a number of themes introduced in Luke 4:16-30 reappear a number of times throughout Acts.

³Hugh Anderson, "Broadening Horizons. The Rejection of Nazareth Pericope of Luke 4:16-30 in Light of Recent Critical Trends," *Interpretation* 18 (1964) : 260.

⁴Jacques Dupont, *The Salvation of the Gentiles: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1979), 20.

⁵David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), 89.

⁶The Jubilee itself was tied to the seventh-day Sabbath upon which both its timeframe and theology of rest or release was founded.

⁷Robert E. Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord* (Abilene, TX: Hardin-Simmons University Library), 19. He cites a number works which have noted the connection between Luke 4:16ff with the Jubilee including Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to S. Luke*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896); George B. Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke*, The Pelican Gospel Commentaries (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963); John Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1972).

More recently, others have joined Sloan in the investigation of this possible Jubiliary theme in Luke 4:16-30, emphasizing aspects such as the theology of the Sabbath,⁸ Jesus' ministry for the poor⁹ and His role as a Liberator.¹⁰ There has also been some ambivalence expressed about connecting Luke 4:16-30 with the Jubilee.¹¹

Both Michael Prior and Paul Hertig have attempted to show the central themes of the Nazareth pericope by discerning the chiasmic structure of Luke 4:16-22. The study of this chiasm is important because it helps us to understand how Luke used this structure in order to amplify the meaning of the important elements within the story. Prior's appears to be based on the English translation:

A And he came to Nazareth . . . and went to the *synagogue*
B He *stood up* to read;
C there *was given to him* the book of the prophet Isaiah
D He *opened the book and found the place* . . .
E *The Spirit of the Lord* is upon me, because he has anointed me
F to *proclaim* good news to the poor.
G He has sent me to proclaim *release to the captives*
H and recovering of sight to the blind
G' to set *at liberty* those who are oppressed.
F' to *proclaim*
E' the acceptable *year of the Lord*
D' He *closed the book*,
C' and *gave it back* to the attendant,
B' and *sat down*;
A' And the eyes of all *in the synagogue* were fixed on him.¹²

⁸Samuele Bacchiochi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Berrien Springs, MI: self published, 1980). S. Bacchiochi incorporates and broadens Sloan's research by including a more foundational OT understanding of the Jubilee's relationship with the Sabbath.

⁹Paul Hertig, "The Mission of the Messiah and the Year of Jubilee: A Comparison of Luke 4 and Isaiah 61" (Th.M. thesis, Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1989). Hertig builds on a portion of Sloan's research, especially as it relates to Jesus' ministry to the poor.

¹⁰Michael Prior, *Jesus the Liberator* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). Prior devotes an insightful section to the Jubiliary aspect of Jesus' proclamation and ministry in Luke 4, p 139-140.

¹¹Robert F. O'Toole, "Jesus as the Christ in Luke 4,16-30," *Biblica* 76 (1995): 512-513. He notes that although not many have been convinced that Luke was speaking literally of the Jubilee, "most would grant that themes associated with the Jubilee appear in Luke 4:16-30." Cf. Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1986), 67-68.

¹²Prior, 153 (emphasis his).

While the center of the chiasm (**H**), bracketed by the two release phrase (**G-G'**), appears to clear, the other components taken from Isa 61:1-2 and 58:6 need further analysis. Another solution to the possible chiastic structure is offered by Hertig who uses the Greek text itself in constructing the various components.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up,
and on the Sabbath day he went into the *synagogue*,
as was his custom

A And he *stood up* to read.

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was *given to him*.

Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he’s anointed me to *preach good news* to the poor.

He has *sent me to proclaim for the prisoners release*

B and recovery of sight for the blind,

to *send away the oppressed into release*

to *proclaim* the year of the *Lord’s* favor.”

Then he *rolled up* the scroll,

gave it back to the attendant

A’ And *sat down*

The eyes of everyone in the *synagogue* were fastened on him,
and he began by saying to them . . . ¹³

Like Prior, Hertig sees the expression, “recovery of sight for the blind,” bracketed by the two “release” phrases from Isa. 61:1 and 58:6 as the center of the chiasm. In order to understand the fuller meaning of this passage and how it relates to the mission of the Messiah and His disciples, the theological richness of the main words and phrases of the passage need to be briefly discussed.

¹³Hertig, 72, emphasis his. For a slightly modified version of both Hertig’s and Prior’s chiasm see David L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 43; O’Toole, 508; and Tannehill, 61-62, whose discussion of the chiasm affirms the importance of *aphesis* as a structuring factor.

The Reality of Release

Probably the most important term in the whole pericope is the catchword *aphesis* (release). Luke has underscored by the insertion of Isa. 58:6 into Isa. 61:1-2 and presenting them as one quotation as shown here:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, *to release the oppressed* [inserted from Isa 58:6], to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.¹⁴

This insertion has been discussed in several places.¹⁵ Robert C. Tannehill observes that it could not have come from an accidental reading of the LXX.¹⁶ Hertig maintains that the insertion is clearly intentional and is placed here to highlight the significant OT theological meaning of *aphesis* and make it “an important theme in the book of Luke.”¹⁷ The term is used seventeen times in the Gospels, primarily by Luke for the concept of forgiveness.¹⁸ According to Sloan, *aphesis* is the key word that “ties together the quotation of Isa. 61:1-2a and Isa. 58:6 in Luke 4:18-19 . . . the programmatic Lukan rendering of the ministry of release”¹⁹ Patrick D. Miller concurs with this idea when he writes: “The tie that binds Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6 together in Luke 4 is the small word *aphesis*, the word translated ‘release’ for the captives and ‘liberty’ for the oppressed. . . . It is the catchword binding the two quotations together”²⁰

This forgiveness or “release” was an integral part of the mission of Jesus as well as His disciples.²¹ Just as Jesus predicted that the repentance and forgiveness (*aphesis*) of sins will be

¹⁴Luke further modifies the verse by leaving out the phrase “to bind up the brokenhearted” which appears in Isa 61 after the phrase “to preach good news to the poor.”

¹⁵See Bacchiocchi, 142; Hertig, 73-77; Sloan, 36-38; 177-194 and Tannehill, 66-71.

¹⁶Tannehill, 67.

¹⁷Hertig, 73. Of the approximately fifty times *aphesis* appears in the LXX, twenty-two are found in Leviticus 25 and 27 where it translates in most cases “year of Jubilee” and in other cases it translates “release” (cf. Lev. 25:10, Isa. 61:1). *Aphesis* also translates the complex of Sabbath-year passages (Exod. 23:11; Deut. 15:1ff; 31:10). In a unique sense, it is used in the “sending away” of Azazel on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:22).

¹⁸See Matt. 26:28; Mark 1:4; 3:29; Luke 1:77; 4:18 (2x); 7:47; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Heb 9:22; and 10:18.

¹⁹Sloan, 178.

²⁰Patrick D. Miller, “Luke 4:16-21” *Interpretation* 29 (1975): 419.

²¹Hertig, 73-74.

preached in His name to all nations (Luke 24:47), Peter stood up in front of the nations on the day of Pentecost and proclaims, “repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness (*aphesis*) of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).²² As Paul begins his ministry, he echoes Peter’s first sermon by saying, “that through Jesus the forgiveness (*aphesis*) of sins is proclaimed” (Acts 13:38).

This forgiveness, this release is clearly accomplished only through the power of the Holy Spirit which is constantly mentioned alongside this theme in almost every instance in Luke-Acts (cf. Luke 4:18-19; 24:47-49; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43 and 26:17). In the last instance, the release from sin through the power of the Holy Spirit is then directly connected to the incorporation of the newly converted believers into the discipleship community.

I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness (*aphesis*) of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26-17-18).²³

Tannehill summarizes correctly: “All this material demonstrates the fulfillment of the commission which Jesus announced in Nazareth, the commission to preach good news to the poor and proclaim release to the captives and oppressed.”²⁴ It is through the release of their sins that individuals would be redeemed and incorporated into the community of disciples. Hence, the proclamation of salvation and the forgiveness of sins could be seen as a central gateway through which Jew and Gentile would enter into the new covenant promise as blessed by the Holy Spirit.

According to Sloan, this central concept of *aphesis* is itself rooted in the Sabbath and Jubilee and represents “in the Old Testament virtually every aspect of that particular

²²All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the NIV.

²³The motif of “darkness to light” is echoed in Luke’s first mention of forgiveness in Luke 1:77-79 and Jesus’ address in Nazareth in Luke 4:18-19.

²⁴Tannehill, 139. It is most important to note that once “released” individuals did not go their separate ways but were “released” from their sins and old ways of life in order to follow Jesus in the way of discipleship.

legislation.”²⁵ It was in harmony with this Sabbath/Jubilee theme, that Jesus went forth on His mission proclaiming release to those afflicted by physical, spiritual and social imprisonment.

It could then be posited that through the theologically rich word *aphesis*, Luke attempts to tie the Old Testament Sabbath/Jubilee time of release to the announcement and subsequent ministry of the Messiah and the community of His disciples. This redemption not only applies to the chosen people but must be extended to everyone who has need, including the poor and oppressed in society.

The Proclamation of Release

Sloan notes that the verb *kerruso*, “to proclaim,” which is repeated twice in Luke 4:18-19 also has clear jubilar connections.”²⁶ This verb strongly links the heralding concept of the Jubilee Year in Luke 4:19²⁷ with the proclamation to the “prisoners” and the “oppressed” that they have been released from their bondage.²⁸ The proclamation of the Messiah’s intent to release the poor in Luke 4:18-19 outlines both the primary means God is going to employ to bring about His redemption and the condition of the recipients of that salvation. The proclamation of the good news to the most needy and marginalized in society is often repeated in the ministry of Jesus and becomes the pattern which Luke’s community of disciples are to

²⁵Sloan, 177.

²⁶Sloan, 35.

²⁷Cf. Leviticus 25:10, “proclaim throughout the land.” Sloan, 36, further notes that although three different Greek words underlie the word “proclaim” in the LXX of Lev. 25:10 and Isa. 61:1-2a, all translate the same basic Hebrew root *qr’*.

²⁸While the word for prisoner (*aichmalotos*), taken from Isa 61:1, literally means “prisoners of war” it can also have a broader meaning such as “those shackled by pauperizing economic and social condition” Ibid. 38. (cf. 2 Cor. 10:5; 2 Tim. 3:6). The parallel expression in Luke 4:18, taken from Isa. 58:6, is “oppressed” (*tethrausmenous*). Although Sloan notes that Isa. 58:6 has both a jubilar history of interpretation in Judaism and a thematic connection with Isaiah 61, its particular character is manifested in “the jubilee charged term *aphesis*.” Ibid., 40.

follow.²⁹ Thus the theologically rich term “release” is closely linked with the mission of Jesus and His disciples. The good news of salvation just *must* be proclaimed.³⁰

The Agent of Release

The Anointed One of 4:18 is clearly a messianic term. Derived from the verbal form *msh* (to anoint), the noun is translated, “Messiah.” The Greek form is *Christos*, from which we get Christ. From the very beginning of his gospel Luke highlights the theme that Jesus is the Christ. The first time the word “Christ” is used Luke connects it with the announcement of the angel to the poor shepherds, “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).³¹

This attestation that Jesus is indeed the Christ is immediately challenged by the devil in the wilderness of temptation (Luke 4:3). Christ’s conquering of the devil in the wilderness invests his preaching and ministry with authority. These divine testimonies and events are clearly connected with the Spirit (Luke 1:17,35; 2:27; 3:16; 3:22; 4:1,14) and the jubilar themes of the good news of redemption (Luke 1:68; 1:77; 2:10,14; 2:30-32; 2:38; 3:6). The proclamation of the Spirit-filled Messiah is thus woven into the very fabric of Luke until it rises to a wonderful crescendo in Luke 4:18-19. Sloan’s description is quite appropriate here:

Since the time of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi the Holy Spirit was believed to have departed from Israel, silencing the prophetic voice. Not until the Messianic time of the end, when the eschatological prophet would appear with the anointing of the Spirit, would Scripture again be fulfilled, the voice of revelation once more speak, and the Spirit return to Israel. Therefore, when Luke writes that Jesus ‘returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee’ (4:14), and then immediately proceeds to the incident in which ‘he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up’ the crescendo of Messianic anticipation has by Luke’s skillful hand reached its finest swell.³²

²⁹Examples of this in Luke-Acts are the proclamation to Zechariah by the angel that his son would prepare the way for the Messiah (1:19), Jesus’ proclamation of the good news to “other towns” (4:43) and Paul’s desire to go and preach the good news to the Macedonians, after receiving a call to do so via a vision (Acts 16:10).

³⁰A good case in point is given in Acts 3 where Peter not only heals the beggar but then uses the occasion to proclaim the good news of Christ’s resurrection.

³¹It may be that the terms “today” and “Christ” are echoed again in Luke 4:18, 21.

³²Sloan, 53.

From this brief survey we may say that the important terms in Luke 4:16-22 reveal that this programmatic pericope contains the essential elements for this mission of Christ and His disciples. Through the catchword *aphesis* Luke envisions the ministry of the “Anointed One” to “proclaim” the “favorable year” of the release of the “poor” and those on the margins of society. Responding by faith to this proclamation of release would become the essential gateway through which people would be incorporated into the community of disciples (cf. Acts 2:38). This divine message of release does not occur in a historical vacuum but is closely linked in Luke 4:16-22 to a very specific time.

The Time of Release

While Jesus ends his reading of Isa. 61:2 by announcing “the year of the Lord’s favor,” the OT text actually ends with the negative phrase, “the day of vengeance of our God.” The fact that Jesus ends the reading from Isaiah proclaiming the Lord’s favor instead of His wrath has “evoked varied explanations from the scholarly community.”³³ The main focus of the closing part of Christ’s citation of the text focuses on announcing the apparent sudden and immediate historical reality of God’s favor. This positive and climatic nature of Luke 4:19 is defined by the terms “favorable”³⁴ and “year” the latter capturing, “the desired verbal flavor of a celebrative era, season, or anniversary, and thereby indicates a time of special note.”³⁵

The proclamation of “release” or forgiveness on the Day of Pentecost by the apostles (cf. Acts 2:38) also has clear jubiliary connotations. Pentecost, which is also called the Feast of Weeks (Exod. 23:16; 34:22; Deut. 16:9-10,16; 2 Chron. 8:13), occurred fifty days after the Passover and was associated with the end of the harvest. It was significant because “on it the

³³Sloan, 32. Sloan reports that Bo Reicke “puts forward the two elements of significance relative to the omission: (1) the reference in 61:2b to God’s wrath was not in keeping with the primary theme of the reading (i.e., the year of God’s grace) as applied by Jesus and hence was abandoned; and, (2) it was out of his sense of prophetic authority—that Jesus was free to effect both the omission of 61:2b and the addition of 58:6” (Bo Reicke, “Jesus in Nazareth” In *Das Wort und die Worter*, A Festschrift in honor of Gerhard Friedrich (Stuttgart, 1973). as quoted in Sloan, 93). See also Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations* (London: SCM Press, 1958), 44-46.

³⁴This term is again repeated in Christ’s important rejoinder in 4:24: “no prophet is accepted in his hometown.”

³⁵Sloan, 34.

Jews celebrated the gifts of the grain harvest, thanking God for the blessings so received.”³⁶ With the very name Pentecost meaning “fifty” it could also be said to carry a jubiliary motif as well.

It appears that Luke intentionally constructed this closely knit pericope in order to highlight time as a major component in Christ’s and the disciple’s mission of release. Although it might be said that the opportunity for God to bring about redemption is always present, these verses seem to point to a specific time when the Messiah’s salvation will especially be exercised.³⁷ In short, the Messiah’s action of release go hand in hand. We now turn our attention to this.

The Anointed One Proclaims Sabbath Release

In order to further clarify the meaning of Luke 4:16-22, another investigation into its possible chiastic structure is need. The chiastic framework builds upon the insights of Prior and Hertig and seeks to understand the apparent anomaly in Luke 4:18-19 and the boundary elements in Luke 4:16, 21-22 as they relate to who Jesus is and the timing of the redemptive release.

³⁶Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 233.

³⁷ This apparent emphasis of time in Luke 4:16-22 gives added support to the hypothesis that the divinely appointed times of the Sabbath and Jubilee are an integral part of the Messiah’s mission.

A He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up,
B and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.
C And he stood up to read.
D The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.
E Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:
F “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
F’ Because he has anointed me
G to preach good news to the poor.
H He has sent me to proclaim release for
prisoners
I and recovery of sight for the blind,
H’ to release the oppressed,
G’ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
E’ Then he rolled up the scroll,
D’ gave it back to the attendant
C’ and sat down.
B The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying
to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”
A All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t
this Joseph’s son?” they asked.

We have noted the proclamation of the acceptable year of the Lord in Luke 4:19 is climactic in nature. By stripping the phrase which mentions the retribution of God from the pericope, Luke enhances its role in the linear structure of the verse but provides no complementary element to follow it in order to balance the structure.

In order to maintain the climactic nature of proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord, the complementary expression “Because he has anointed me” (**F’**) has been placed immediately after “the Spirit of the Lord has anointed me” (**F**). By placing the two Spirit-filled/Anointed phrases together, Luke underlines both the pneumatological and Christological aspects in the ministry of release which is about to be proclaimed. As such, the apparent anomalies in the chiasmic structure, rather than weakening, strongly promote the two main themes of the Nazareth pericope, namely, that *Jesus is the Christ* and *now is the time*. The amplification of these two

important elements are further brought out in the boundaries of the chiasm in Luke 4:16,22. The opening and closing verses of the chiasm clearly bring to the fore the whole question of just who Jesus is. The people of Nazareth have not only witnessed the humble life of Jesus, but have just heard the Messianic scripture of Isaiah 61:1-2 applied at that very moment to the son of Joseph. Thus, Luke highlights the very important element of Christ's identity in the introduction (**A**), center (**F** and **F'**), and concluding elements (**A'**) of Luke 4:16-22.

Further, the definite jubiliary time proclaimed in Luke 4:19 is echoed in the "Sabbath day" of v. 16 and the related term "Today" of v. 21 as reflected in **B** and **B'**:

B and on the *Sabbath day* he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.

B' Their eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "*Today* this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Christ's announcement of messianic fulfillment through the reading of the text of Isaiah echoed both the contemporary sectarian and mainstream Jewish expectation that such an event would soon take place.³⁸ By applying the words of the prophet to Himself, Jesus brought the prophetic future of the messianic ministry of release into the immediate present on Sabbath. Through the structuring of the key time elements of the pericope, Christ's proclamation is not only grounded in "the year of the Lord's favor" but even more specifically on "the Sabbath day." "Today," that is, "the Sabbath day," the reality of jubiliary rest and redemption was fulfilled.

The Continuing Proclamation of Release

At the very heart of the Messianic proclamation by Jesus is the promise that the blind would recover their sight (**I**). Although His own kinsfolk would be blind and reject Him as they

³⁸David E. Aune, "A Note on Jesus' Messianic Consciousness and 11Q Melchizedek." *The Evangelical Quarterly* 45 (1973): 165, states that an early first century fragment from Qumran called 11Q Melchizedek, "provides the first piece of conclusive evidence before A.D. 70 that the proclamation of glad tidings could be considered a significant aspect of the messianic task." August Strobel also argues that behind Christ's proclamation lay an actual historical jubilee year which is dated in A.D. 26-27. August Strobel, *Kerygma und Apokalyptic* (Gottingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) pp. 105-111, argues that behind Christ's proclamation lay an actual historical jubilee year which is dated about 26-27 C.E. Quoted in Sloan. Prior, 141, rejects this viewpoint and regards any literal reckoning of the Jubilee as "indulging in interesting speculation." While a chronological reckoning of the years more be somewhat tentative, I believe that linking of the Jubilee with the Nazareth pericope is sound, despite the remarks of Tannehill 68, who asserts that "this remains a possibility but has not been proved."

had rejected Elijah and Elisha, Jesus went forth to heal the sight of others and incorporate a faithful remnant into the community of disciples. This same ministry of redemption announced in the synagogue in Nazareth would then be entrusted to His faithful followers who would also go forth and proclaim release to the nations (Acts 2:38-39).

The book of Isaiah itself had promised that the Messiah would become a “light to the nations” (49:6). This universal proclamation of God’s redemption is then entrusted by Jesus to the disciples who would follow Him in the Way. Like Christ, Paul confirms in his own ministry on another Sabbath day that he had been made a light for the nations: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47).³⁹

Just as the elements of Luke 4:16-22 are embedded at the beginning of Paul’s ministry they are reconfirmed in his last major and climactic speech where both his own (Acts 26:18) and Christ’s mission are described as bringing the light of God’s salvation to the nations (Acts 26:23).

More strikingly, Paul summarizes his mission in words that seem to paraphrase Jesus’ description of his mission in Luke 4:18. In Acts 26:17-18 Paul presents his commission from the risen Christ in these terms: “. . . the people and the nations, to whom I send you” [cf. Luke 4:18: “He has sent me”] to open their eyes, [cf. Luke 4:18: “to proclaim . . . to the blind new sight”] so as to turn from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan [cf. the “prisoners” who need “release” in Luke 4:18] to God so that they might receive release of sins” (cf. “release” in Luke 4:18).⁴⁰

Thus, the proclamation of release which was originally enunciated on the Sabbath day in the synagogue at Nazareth provided important elements for the mission of the church. The Nazareth pericope contributed to the ongoing mission of the disciples as they went forth to proclaim that indeed *Jesus is the Christ* and *now is the time* of release. This then became one of the hallmarks of their mission and fellowship together.

³⁹Tannehill further delineates the meaning of sight for the blind by discussing how Luke might have encapsulated the extended references of light in Isaiah to this and other references in Luke/Acts (Tannehill, 64-65). The healing of the blind may refer both to physical healing (cf. Luke 7:22) and spiritual illumination as well in both Isaiah and Luke.

⁴⁰Ibid., 67.

Conclusion

We have noted the central importance Luke gives to Christ's proclamation of release on the Sabbath day in the synagogue in Nazareth. While it is true that the catchword *aphesis* (release) is often translated "forgiveness" in Luke, the term is also deeply connected to the Old Testament jubilee legislation of release, which itself, rests on the seventh-day Sabbath. Further, the concept of release forms a nexus with the Jubiliary material found in Leviticus 25:10; Isaiah 58:6, 61:1-2 and Luke 4:18-19. The central theme in all cases is *release*.

It is clear that Luke wanted to provide a strong Christological framework to surround the Nazareth pericope by carefully constructing a number of witnesses and events which all testify that Jesus is indeed the Anointed One. This is denoted by the chiasmic structure of Luke 4:16-22 which highlights two critical elements in the pericope, namely, *Jesus is the Christ* and *now is the time* of release. Furthermore, the importance of a definitive time for the ministry of the "Sabbath day" and the proclamation of the jubiliary "today" was also underlined. Finally, the significance of the central phrase of the chiasm, "and recovery of sight for the blind" also infused the ministries of Jesus and Paul.

As such, Luke 4:16-30 provides a number of important themes for Luke's understanding of the disciples and their mission. The Nazareth pericope shows both the profound Christological and universal character of their community. Their ministry was to be imbued with the same Spirit which prompted Christ to proclaim the release of the prisoners of all nations and ages. The theological themes of the Sabbath and Jubilee informed and directed the understanding and practice of redemptive release and forgiveness in the life and ministry of the discipleship community.

Thus it could be argued that the highly recognized programmatic discourse in Luke 4:16-30 not only has strong prospective elements but retrospective ones as well. As such, the Nazareth pericope may well be grounded not only in the Jubilee of Lev. 25 but more foundationally in the Sabbath commandments of Deut. 5:12-15; Exod. 20:8-11, the story of the

manna in Exod. 16 and ultimately back to the creation story itself in Gen. 1-2. This may provide fertile ground for further investigation.