

Atonement at the Right Hand: The Sacrificial Significance of Jesus' Exaltation in Acts*

DAVID M. MOFFITT

University of St Andrews, St Mary's College, South Street, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9JU, United Kingdom. Email: dm206@st-andrews.ac.uk

Luke-Acts is strangely silent regarding the sacrificial significance of Jesus' crucifixion. Curiously, too, Acts more closely links the salvific benefits that Jesus provides with his resurrection and exaltation than with his death. Luke, many conclude, is not concerned with explaining Jesus' atoning work in terms of Jewish sacrificial categories. By way of contrast, this article argues that Luke's connecting of forgiveness and purification (i.e. key elements of sacrificial atonement) with Jesus' exaltation indicates that he is aware of the sacrificial aspects of Jesus' work. Jewish sacrifice consists of a hierarchically structured ritual process that cannot be reduced to the slaughter of the victim. In Leviticus, the culminating elements of this process occur as the priests convey the materials of the sacrifice into God's presence (i.e. offer the sacrifice) by approaching and serving at the various altars. Such a perspective on sacrifice is suggestive for interpreting Luke's emphasis on Jesus' exaltation in Acts. Luke has not stressed the sacrificial aspects of Jesus' death, but has highlighted the atoning benefits of Jesus' exaltation because he understands Jesus to have offered his atoning sacrifice as part of his exaltation to the right hand of God.

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1. Introduction

Nowhere is Luke's presumed lack of interest in the sacrificial dimensions of the salvation Jesus accomplished more apparently obvious than in his largely non-sacrificial reflection on the crucifixion, either in his Gospel or in Acts. Luke's reticence to explain how Jesus' death effected salvation, particularly in terms of sacrificial categories, seems especially obvious in his telling choice not to include Mark 10.45's ransom saying in his parallel rendering (cf. Luke 22.27). Luke does little to associate Jesus' death with concepts often correlated with Jewish sacrificial practice: forgiveness of sins, repentance and purification.

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The variety of explanations for and interpretations of Luke's soteriology in modern secondary literature illustrates the extent to which scholars have puzzled over this phenomenon in Luke's writings.¹ Several interpreters argue that Luke simply has little or no sense of the cross as a salvific event.² Others suggest that while the crucifixion is salvific for Luke, he does not conceive of either that salvation or of the cross in sacrificial terms.³ Some do detect hints in Luke-Acts of the sacrificial implications of Jesus' suffering, but still recognise that Luke's portrayal of the sacrificial significance of these events is at best underdeveloped.⁴ A few have challenged the view that Luke systematically downplays

- 1 See the excellent survey of views in F. Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Fifty-five Years of Research (1950-2005)* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006²) 183-90.
- 2 J. M. Creed's claim that Luke has 'no *theologia crucis* beyond the affirmation that the Christ must suffer, since so the prophetic scriptures had foretold' (*The Gospel According to St Luke: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices* (London: Macmillan, 1930) lxxii) is often cited. Similarly, see H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (trans. G. Buswell; London: Faber and Faber, 1961) 201; C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development* (London: 1936) 25; M. C. Parsons and R. I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 113; P. Vielhauer, 'On the "Paulinism" of Acts', *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1966) 33-50, at 36-7, 42-3, 45 (originally published as 'Zum "Paulinismus" der Apostelgeschichte', *EvTh* 10 (1950/1) 1-15).
- 3 R. J. Karris, for example, argues that Luke does not depict Jesus' death as an expiation for sins because he wants to show instead how Jesus' total faithfulness and obedience to God reveals God's commitment not to abandon creation even in experiences such as the unjust killing of the innocent (*Luke: Artist and Theologian. Luke's Passion Account as Literature* (New York: Paulist, 1985) 80, 115). In Luke, in other words, Jesus shows that God does not separate himself from things that are polluted and unclean (as a sacrificial logic might imply), but determines instead to forgive and to remain with creation (*ibid.*, esp. 121-2). In the context of Luke's larger narrative, the resurrection/exaltation of Jesus signifies the full extent to which God was with Jesus even through death, and to which God affirms and vindicates the outcasts and those who faithfully suffer injustice as Jesus did (*ibid.*, 98-9, 101, 108-9, 115). Similarly, J. Neyrey argues that Jesus' death is shown to be salvific by being depicted as the primary act of Jesus' exemplary faith in and obedience to the God who saves. Thus, although Luke 'does not favor sacrificial metaphors' when he reflects on Jesus' death (J. Neyrey, *The Passion According to Luke: A Redaction Study of Luke's Soteriology* (New York: Paulist, 1985) 158), by highlighting Jesus' exemplary faith in the God who can raise the dead, Luke portrays Jesus as the 'Saved Savior' on the cross who has become the example and source of salvation, even a new Adam, for others (*ibid.*, 129-92). Cf. R. Zehnle, 'The Salvific Character of Jesus' Death in Lucan Soteriology', *TS* 30 (1969) 420-44.
- 4 The longer reading of both Luke 22.19-20 and Acts 20.28 appears to invoke sacrificial categories. The language of 'blood' in these texts is usually assumed to be a metonymy for Jesus' death. Here, then, Luke at least hints at the sacrificial implications of Jesus' death (so e.g. C. K. Barrett, who finds 'the barest hint (Acts 20:28) of an atoning death' in Luke's theology (*Luke the Historian in Recent Study* (London: Epworth, 1961) 47, cf. 23, 59); R. H. Fuller, 'Luke and the Theologia Crucis', *Sin, Salvation, and the Spirit: Commemorating the Fiftieth Year of The Liturgical Press* (ed. Daniel Durken; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1979)

the sacrificial significance of the cross at all.⁵ In general, however, Luke's relative silence on these matters has baffled modern interpreters. Vernon Robbins, noting that 'there is no direct statement that Jesus died a sacrificial death to save humans from their sins', allows that Luke 22.20 may gesture towards Jesus' sacrificial death but adds: 'The presence of this verse in Luke makes it all the more remarkable that there is no sacrificial language in the preaching in Acts.'⁶ Jacob Jervell summarises the modern consensus well when he comments that Luke has thrust sacrificial ideas about Jesus' death 'into the background for some inscrutable reason'.⁷

In light of these observations, Luke's widely recognised tendency to emphasise the salvific importance of Jesus' exaltation over that of the crucifixion is all the more intriguing.⁸ While this is clearest in Acts, even in his Gospel Luke appears

214–20; J. Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 98; C. F. D. Moule, 'The Christology of Acts', *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1966) 159–85, at 171, 173). Some argue, however, that these two texts are so liturgical and even Pauline in flavour that they are unlikely to represent Luke's own perspective (e.g. J. Kodell, 'Luke's Theology of the Death of Jesus', *Sin, Salvation, and the Spirit*, 221–30, at 223; Zehnle, 'Salvific Character of Jesus' Death', 439–40).

5 U. Mittman-Richert argues that the role of the 'servant' in the so-called fourth servant song of Isa 52–3 underlies the soteriological significance of Jesus' death and exaltation in Luke. This, she thinks, allows one to recognise the sacrificial dimensions of Jesus' death, particularly as this initiates a new covenant as stated in the Eucharist pericope of Luke 22.14–38 (*Der Sühnetod des Gottesknechts: Jesaja 53 im Lukasevangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) esp. 54–85).

6 V. K. Robbins, 'Priestly Discourse in Luke and Acts', *Jesus and Mary Reimagined in Early Christian Literature* (ed. V. K. Robbins and J. M. Potter; Atlanta: SBL, 2015) 13–40, at 33, cf. 38–9.

7 J. Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 98. Similarly, I. H. Marshall explains that in Acts '[t]he atoning significance of the death of Jesus is not altogether absent ..., but it is not the aspect which Luke has chosen to stress. His presentation of the saving work of Jesus is consequently one-sided. But it is going too far to say that he has no rationale of salvation. He demonstrates quite clearly that salvation is bestowed by Jesus in virtue of His position as the Lord and Messiah. What is lacking is rather a full understanding of the significance of the cross as the means of salvation' (*Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971) 175). J. A. Fitzmyer argues that Luke does have a *theologia crucis*, but that its logic can only be fully understood in light of Jesus' transferal to the glory of paradise, which is closely collocated with the crucifixion in the earliest traditions. According to Fitzmyer's understanding of Luke 24.43, Jesus' entry into paradise/his glory – his exaltation – on the day of his death is what brings the soteriological benefits of the Christ event to humanity (*Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York: Paulist, 1989) 210–22).

8 So e.g. Marshall, *Luke*, 169–75, esp. 174. J. B. Tyson, *The Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986) 170 writes that Luke 'seems uninterested in piercing through to an understanding of the theological reason for the death [of Jesus] or in analysing what it was intended to accomplish. The benefits of forgiveness of sins and the Spirit are more closely connected with the resurrection than the death.'

to direct the reader's gaze beyond the cross to Jesus' ascension. Thus, Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah during the transfiguration focuses on his 'exodus' (τὴν ἔξοδον) or departure, which he is about to fulfil 'in Jerusalem' (ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ) (Luke 9.31). Jesus' pivotal decision in Luke 9.51 to set his face towards Jerusalem is described as a choice primarily oriented towards the days of his being 'taken up' (ἀνάληψις, cf. Acts 1.2), rather than one oriented towards either his crucifixion or resurrection per se. Luke locates Jesus' suffering as a prerequisite for his entering his glory (Luke 24.26). Luke's account of Jesus' ascension into heaven at the end of the Gospel (Luke 24.51) and particularly at the beginning of Acts (1.9–10) also seems to confirm this focus.⁹ One even wonders if his curiously cropped quotation of Isa 53.8 in Acts 8.33 might allude to Jesus' ascension – the moment when 'his life was lifted up (ἀίρεται)¹⁰ from the earth'.

Given this (and other Lukan emphases), Ernst Käsemann argued that Luke's peculiar account and location of the cross in the history of salvation he develops indicates his attempt to shift the salvific emphasis away from Jesus' death to the outpouring of the Spirit and the creation of the church as an institution. Luke, Käsemann famously suggested, has replaced an earlier, apocalyptic *theologia crucis* with a more Hellenistic *theologia gloriae*.¹¹ Be that as it may, Luke plainly does connect the salvific benefits of repentance, the forgiveness of sins and purification with Jesus' heavenly ascension and elevation to God's right hand more clearly and consistently than he ever does with the crucifixion.

This article explores a fresh rationale for Luke's emphasis on Jesus' exaltation and his apparently 'inscrutable reasons' for not vesting Jesus' death with more overt sacrificial significance. Luke, I argue, probably knew that Jewish blood sacrifice did not directly connect the slaughter of the victim with the atoning benefits of the sacrifice. Sacrifice is a process, the culminating elements of which are the priest's approach to God and the corresponding conveyance of the material of the sacrifice into God's presence. These aspects within the process are most closely linked with securing the goals of forgiveness and purification.

Such an understanding of sacrifice allows the inference that Luke, were he interested in thinking about the Christ event from the standpoint of Jewish sacrifice, might have emphasised the salvific benefits of Jesus' heavenly exaltation over those of Jesus' death. Luke, that is, could have understood Jesus' exaltation in

9 I assume the longer, 'non-Western' form of these texts as printed in NA²⁸. Obviously Luke's emphasis on the ascension of Jesus is blunted if one adopts the shorter 'Western' readings, which are among the so-called 'Western non-interpolations'. Even if, however, one accepts the shorter form of these passages in Luke-Acts, this would not greatly impact the larger claims of the argument advanced here.

10 Cf. the use of the cognate ἔπιρρω in Acts 1.9.

11 E. Käsemann, 'Ministry and Community in the New Testament', *Essays on New Testament Themes* (trans. W. J. Montague; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 63–94, at 92–3.

sacrificial terms: as the conveyance of the material of the sacrifice – Jesus himself – into God’s heavenly presence.¹² That Luke does think this way is, I argue, suggested by his clear linking of Jesus’ departure from the earth and elevation to God’s right hand with the accomplishment of forgiveness and purification (i.e. key elements of sacrificial atonement), and the correlated outpouring of the Spirit. That Luke identifies Jesus’ exaltation to God’s right hand as the culmination of Jesus’ salvific work implies a sacrificial logic, of which Luke himself was probably aware, underlying the larger story he tells about Jesus and Israel’s redemption.

To make this case I first examine some key assumptions about Jewish sacrifice and atonement. This digression will provide a useful lens for re-evaluating Luke’s connections in Acts between Jesus’ heavenly exaltation and the notions of repentance, forgiveness of sins, purification and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

2. Sacrifice and Sacrificial Atonement

This section of the article explores two central points that provide necessary background for the subsequent exegesis of Acts: first, a brief exploration of the ways in which Jewish blood sacrifice seems to work; and second, some reflections on the relationship between purity and proximity to God.

2.1 *The Process and Logic of Sacrifice*

While Leviticus both speaks at length about what to do for particular sacrifices and offers assurance that these sacrifices are effective, the text provides little explicit reflection on why or how they work. A number of recent studies of Israelite and later Jewish blood sacrifice have nevertheless shed fresh light on the inner logic of these matters.¹³

¹² It is possible that Luke did not recognise the sacrificial nuances present in the traditional conception of Jesus’ exaltation that he had received. Thus he could be unwittingly passing on an account that suggests links between Jesus’ heavenly position and sacrificial categories. This might explain why these categories are not more explicitly developed. M. Wolter’s argument, however, that Luke has not highlighted sacrificial concepts because of his missional or outsider orientation seems more plausible (‘Jesu Tod und Sündenvergebung bei Lukas und Paulus’, *Reception of Paulinism in Acts* (ed. D. Marguerat; Leuven: Peeters, 2009) 15–35). Wolter’s understanding of sacrifice differs from the one presented here, but the possibility that Luke knew that his Gentile readers would not grasp the particulars of Jewish sacrificial rituals, especially insofar as these differed in significant ways from those of their own socio-religious context, still applies.

¹³ So e.g. C. A. Eberhart, *Studien zur Bedeutung der Opfer im Alten Testament: Die Signifikanz von Blut- und Verbrennungsriten im kultischen Rahmen* (WMANT 94; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002); id., *The Sacrifice of Jesus: Understanding Atonement Biblically* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011); R. E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005); J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16:*

Among the more important conclusions highlighted in some of these works is the recognition that Levitical sacrifice is an irreducible, hierarchically structured process.¹⁴ That is to say, within the sequence of rituals that constitute the process of a particular sacrifice, the atoning benefits of forgiveness of sins and/or purification are more closely associated with the acts of blood manipulation and the burning of parts or all of the body of the victim than with any other elements of the process.¹⁵ The culminating events in this process – the ones with which the removal of sin and/or impurity are most closely linked – are typically those activities that involve the priests drawing nearer to God’s presence by moving through the progressively more sacred spaces of the temple complex and/or conveying the sacrificial elements into the divine presence.¹⁶ This suggests that the use and conveyance of the blood and parts of the body of the victim, actions performed only by the priests at the various altars, stand at the centre of the process of blood sacrifice.

One of the central goals orienting this larger process was effecting ‘atonement’ (כַּפֵּר, MT; ἐξιλάσκομαι, LXX). Frequently this goal shows up in summarising statements that speak of the purpose of a given sacrifice and/or of the whole process of the sacrifice.¹⁷ Throughout Leviticus, atonement is directly linked with the activities of the priests at the altars, especially applying blood to parts of them and burning various elements of the sacrifices on the outer one.¹⁸ These last points are worth emphasising since the act of slaughtering the victim was neither done exclusively by the priests¹⁹ nor was it ever done on any of the altars.²⁰ The close link between atonement and the priestly activities at the altars indicates, therefore, that the slaughter was not the central moment in the

A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), esp. 133–489.

14 See esp. Gane’s detailed discussion and explanation of this larger point (*Cult and Character*, 3–24).

15 E.g. Eberhart, *Sacrifice of Jesus*, 85; Gane, *Cult and Character*, esp. 67.

16 Gane defines ‘sacrifice’ as ‘a religious ritual in which something of value is ritually transferred to the sacred realm for utilization by the deity’ (*Cult and Character*, 16).

17 See e.g. Lev 1.4; 5.6, 10, 16, 18; 6.7; 7.7; 9.7; 12.7–8; 14.18–20, 30–1; 15.15, 30; 16.6, 11, 24, 30–4; 19.22; 23.28. Cf. Milgrom (*Leviticus 1–16*, 925), who notes that the verb often used to denote the act of offering (עָרַף) refers at times to the entire process of sacrifice.

18 See e.g. Lev 4.20, 26, 31, 35; 5.13; 6.30; 8.15; 17.11.

19 See esp. the discussions in Gane, *Cult and Character*, 60; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 154. According to Josephus (*Ant.* 3.226) the practice of male worshipers slaughtering at least some of their sacrifices was still in place in the late Second Temple period. See the discussion of this practice and the opposing evidence in Philo in E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* 63 BCE–66 CE (London: SCM, 1992) 106–7, 109.

20 The only animals slaughtered at the altar are birds. Even these, though, are not killed on the altar. Their necks are wrung by the priest as he stands at the altar and, unlike animals from the

sacrifice while also explaining why it was not the element in the process that effected the atoning goals of the sacrificial process.

A brief discussion of the central Yom Kippur sacrifices illustrates these matters well. In Lev 16.6 and 11a Aaron offers a bull in order to atone for himself and his house. These are summary statements. The detailed process for performing this offering and thus for accomplishing atonement is then spelled out in Lev 16.11b–14, 17. Similarly, in Lev 16.7–10 the sin-offering of the two goats is summarised. The performance of these rituals is then described in Lev 16.15–22, where certain constitutive elements of the sacrificial process are specifically identified as effecting atonement for the high priest, for his house and for the people. These are: (1) applying the blood of the bull and one of the goats in the Holy of Holies (Lev 16.15–17; cf. 16.27); (2) sending the live goat away laden with sin (Lev 16.20–2);²¹ and (3) burning the appropriate offerings on the outer altar (Lev 16.24–5). The sanctuary and the altar of incense also require atonement, which is done by applying blood to the mercy seat and then to that inner altar (Lev 16.16, 18–20). With the exception of the living goat (the so-called ‘scape-goat’), the details of Lev 16 largely fit the larger pattern noted above in which the priestly activities at the various altars are identified as the elements within the sacrificial process that achieve atonement.

In sum, in the case of atoning sacrifice a number of elements constitute a sacrifice, but the accomplishment of the atoning goals of the constitutive rituals is most closely linked with those elements performed by the priests at the altars – specifically, the application of blood and the burning of various parts of the victim. The fact that these elements of the process are linked with the various altars and performed only by the priests (and on Yom Kippur only by the high priest) suggests that the centre of blood sacrifice is drawing near to God and conveying the material of the sacrifice into his presence. This is probably the reason why forms of the root קרב are so central in the biblical accounts of sacrifice.²²

flock and herd, their blood is applied directly to the altar rather than being first collected in a bowl and then manipulated and poured out by the priest (cf. Sanders, *Judaism*, 110).

21 While the goat is not said here to make atonement, a comparison of the summary statement in Lev 16.10 with the detailed description of the ritual in 16.20–2 suggests this conclusion (cf. N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function* (JSOTSS 56; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987) 149–51; B. Schwartz, ‘The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature’, *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. D. P. Wright, et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995) 3–21; J. Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (HBM 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005) 96–7).

22 Gane puts the point well stating: ‘In Hebrew, the idea of “sacrifice” in general is conveyed by the noun *qorban* ... The meaning of *qorban* is associated with that of the Hiphil verb from the same root *qrb* (lit. “cause to come near”), which can refer not only to preliminary conveyance

2.2 *Sacrifice, Purity and Proximity to God*

The emphasis just noted on drawing near to God dovetails with another important aspect of sacrifice and, in particular, atonement. Several modern studies have shown that within the realm of Jewish ritual purity, one's state of purity was a major factor when considering both how close one could come to God's presence and God's willingness to dwell among his people.²³

Some of the work of Jonathan Klawans provides useful heuristic categories for thinking about the complex issues of Jewish purity. Klawans argues that two different and parallel systems of purity exist in the Levitical system: ritual purity and moral purity/sin.²⁴ Ritual purity is primarily a matter of one's external condition. This kind of defilement is contagious and usually spread by contact. At its core, ritual impurity appears to be about matters of mortality.²⁵ Further, ritual impurity is a major obstacle when one tries to come close to God's presence. God does not permit ritually impure persons or items to come close to his presence. To bring impure mortality into God's sacred space is to be guilty of sin. The need for people to be in a ritually pure state therefore appears to be primarily about rendering mortal humanity fit to draw near to God's presence. In cases of major ritual impurities (e.g. skin diseases, giving birth) sacrifice – especially the *קטאת* – is necessary to remove the impurity (e.g. Lev 12.6–8).²⁶

Moral purity has to do with obeying God's commands. The violation of divine directives results in moral defilement. A person's moral impurity is not external and is not contagious. Nevertheless, while ritual and moral purity are distinct, both problematise the relationship between God and his people in similar ways. Ritual impurity prevents the people from approaching God. Moral impurity threatens their ability to dwell in the land, which becomes defiled by some sins, and it threatens them with God's punitive response.²⁷ Both kinds of impurity further stand in the way of God and his people dwelling together because both

of offering material to the ritual location (e.g., [Lev] 1:3), but also to formal ritual presentation to the Lord (e.g., [Lev] 1:5, 13). This formal presentation *transfers something to the holy God for his utilization*. So a *qorban* ("sacrifice, sacrificial offering") makes something *holy* by giving it over to the holy domain of God' (R. E. Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004) 78, emphasis original). Cf. Eberhart, *Sacrifice of Jesus*, 71; J. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 69.

23 E.g. H. Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 1, 11, 27, 47, 170.

24 J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); cf. Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*.

25 See Maccoby's critique of Milgrom (*Ritual and Morality*, esp. 32, 49–50, 207–8).

26 Gane, *Cult and Character*, 112–23; Kuichi, *Purification Offering*, 53–9.

27 Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 26–7; Sklar, *Sin*, esp. 42–3.

convey defilement to the sanctuary.²⁸ The sanctuary needs regular purification if God's presence is to remain there. The people need regular purification in order to dwell in relative safety near to God's presence and to approach that presence.

It further appears to be the case that sacrificial atonement in the fullest sense – that is, the state that results from solving the problems of both moral and ritual impurity so that God and humanity can dwell together – requires the removal of the threat of divine punishment by way of redemption or ransom *and* the purification of the people, the land and the sanctuary from the problems created by both mortality and sin.²⁹ Sacrificial atonement, in other words, is effected when the defilement from both moral and ritual impurities is purged by sacrificial offerings. All of this is essential to enable and maintain the dwelling of God's presence in the midst of his people and of God's people near to God's presence.³⁰

Once again Yom Kippur nicely illustrates this dual atoning action and its importance for enabling and maintaining God's presence among his people. As noted above, in addition to atoning for himself and for the people, Lev 16.15–20 states that the sin-offerings presented by the high priest on this day also atone for the holy place, the tent of meeting and the altars by way of blood application. Further, Lev 16.16 identifies both the uncleanness (i.e. ritual impurity) and the sins of the people as the sources of defilement that make the annual purification necessary.³¹ The clear implication is that both the people's ritual impurities and their moral failures/sins have defiled them and the sacred precincts, all of which are consequently in need of atonement.³² Sacrifice, because it atones for sin and impurity, is therefore an essential part of maintaining the covenant relationship.

2.3 Summary

The preceding discussion implies some important points for the arguments about Acts that follow. First, a reduction or conflation of blood sacrifice with the act of slaughtering the victim for the sake of dealing with sin is a conceptual mistake. Leviticus simply does not support either the inference that the act of slaughter achieved the atoning goals of the sacrifice, or that atonement can be reduced merely to the forgiveness of sins. Rather, the process of sacrifice was an important element for achieving both ritual and moral purity. Second, the slaughter of the victim, while a necessary step in the sacrificial process

28 See esp. Sklar, *Sin*, 154–9.

29 Sklar, *Sin*, 181–7.

30 Esp. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 68–72. Cf. Exod 29.37–46.

31 Schwartz, 'Bearing Sin', 6–7, 17.

32 This is not at all to diminish the importance of the people's need to rest from work and to afflict themselves (Lev 16.31) as vital elements of the process. See esp. Schwarz, 'Bearing Sin', 20–1.

(when such a sacrifice involved an animal victim),³³ never occurred on any of the Jewish altars, and was never by itself sufficient to procure the atoning benefits that the entire process aimed to obtain.³⁴ Third, the hierarchical structure of the process suggests that the atoning benefits of sacrifice are primarily connected with the priestly activities that occurred at the altars as the priests drew near to God and conveyed the sacrificial materials into his presence.³⁵ Priestly acts at the altars achieved atonement. Fourth, sacrificial atonement, which resolves the problem of sin (moral impurity) or the problem of mortality (ritual impurity) – or, as on Yom Kippur, both of these problems – was essential for enabling God and his people to dwell together.

With these points in mind, I turn to examining a few key texts in Acts. Luke nowhere gives plain expression to the assumptions just outlined about sacrifice as a hierarchically structured ritual or the logic of purity. Nevertheless, he does identify Jesus' elevation to God's right hand as the primary mechanism that accomplishes forgiveness of sins, purification and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which suggests that a sacrificial logic informs his understanding of the significance of Jesus' exaltation.

3. Purification, Forgiveness and the Outpouring of the Spirit in Acts

Space does not allow either a full assessment of forgiveness and purification in Luke-Acts or a thorough exegetical engagement with all the potentially relevant details. The next two sections of this article aim instead to show that Luke's emphasis on Jesus' exaltation and the atoning benefits it affords corresponds well with the conception of sacrifice and sacrificial atonement (i.e. forgiveness and purity) just discussed. To this end, three aspects of Acts are particularly noteworthy: (1) the logic used by Peter and others to make sense of Cornelius' purification; (2) the ways in which this logic parallels Luke's connection between Jesus' exaltation and the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of

33 That grain sacrifices could be used to effect purification and forgiveness in some cases further suggests that slaughter is not the definitive event in Jewish purification/sin sacrifices (cf. Eberhart, *Sacrifice of Jesus*, 99–101).

34 The same logic holds for all the other elements of the process as well – none of them, that is, can stand alone. To cite Gane again, 'Like systems in general, rituals are structured hierarchically, with smaller systems constituting wholes embedded in larger systems. At each level, a "whole possesses distinctive emergent properties – properties not possessed by the parts comprising the whole." In the Israelite system of rituals the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts. A ritual or ritual complex achieves its goal only if it is performed in its entirety, with its activities in the proper order' (*Cult and Character*, 19–20).

35 See in this regard the clear emphasis on the priests approaching God and offering him blood and fat in Ezek 44.15–16.

Pentecost; and (3) Luke's linking of forgiveness and purification with Jesus' exalted position at God's right hand. I turn first, then, to the Cornelius narrative.

The well-known story of the Gentile Cornelius receiving the Holy Spirit and its connection with Peter's vision of God instructing him to kill and eat impure animals has been the object of substantial study from a variety of angles in the secondary literature.³⁶ What has, at least to my knowledge, garnered less attention is the way in which the logic of the account of Cornelius' purification correlates with the sacrificial understanding of atonement detailed above. Indeed, this recognition suggests that God's purifying work is not simply a matter of divine declaration, but is rather the direct result of Jesus' exaltation.

In Acts 10 Luke provides the meaning of Peter's vision by way of Peter's own explanation of what God has shown him. In the vision God tells Peter to do something contrary to the purity laws given by Moses: to kill and eat animals declared impure by the Mosaic Law. Peter declines the offer, highlighting his compliance with Mosaic legislation. The animals, he says, are common (κοινός) and impure (ἀκάθαρτος).³⁷ He has never violated the Law of Moses on this point. God then tells him not to call common (κοινός) what he has purified (ἐκαθάρισεν, vv. 15–16). This happens three times.

Whatever the vision's meaning for the actual status of animals, Peter later concludes that its implications extend beyond the realm of *kashrut* regulations. Thus, in Acts 10.28 he states that whereas it is common knowledge that a Jew like himself was not to fraternise too closely with a Gentile like Cornelius, God has shown him 'to call no one common (κοινός) or impure (ἀκάθαρτος)' (cf. Acts 11.3). The logic of Peter's self-realisation appears to be that in his vision God was telling him that certain things that he once knew to be impure have now been made pure.

Precisely this implication is vividly and powerfully demonstrated to Peter and the other Jews with him when, as Peter is speaking at Cornelius' home about Jesus' death, resurrection and the coming judgement, the gift of the Holy Spirit is poured out 'even upon the Gentiles' (Acts 10.45).

36 See, for a few examples, M. Dibelius, 'The Conversion of Cornelius', *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. H. Greeven; trans. M. Ling and P. Schubert; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1956) 109–22; G. D. Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts* (SBLAB 4; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002) 208–17; M. L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994) 70–9; S. G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* (SNTSMS 23; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) 172–8, 191–4; R. D. Witherup, 'Cornelius Over and Over and Over Again: "Functional Redundancy" in the Acts of the Apostles', *JSNT* 49 (1993) 45–66.

37 To call something 'common' is another way to speak of impurity. Thus there seems to be no real distinction between the terms here (e.g. C. S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012–15) II.1772.

Luke does not in Acts 10 plainly affirm that the Gentiles have been purified. Yet this conclusion follows not only from Peter's comment in 10.28, but ultimately, and more explicitly, from the fact that the Gentiles have become receptacles fit for the Spirit. Gentiles are also among those *to whom the Holy Spirit can be given*. Some argue that the inclusion of Gentiles without requiring them first to become Jewish converts is essentially driven by divine fiat.³⁸ The visions of Cornelius and Peter, as well as the manifestation of the Spirit, force the early church to accept God's decision even though it cuts against their understanding of the Law and purity. This does not, however, fully explain the logic of the account.

Without question, Luke uses the story to illustrate God's leading in the matter of Gentile inclusion. Yet this inclusion, particularly insofar as the account of Cornelius' conversion echoes the events of Acts 2 (see below), points to the conclusion that the forgiveness and purification Jesus made available to Jews is also available to Gentiles. To put the matter differently, the logic that drives the narrative works as follows: the outpouring of the gift of the Spirit upon Gentiles implies that these Gentiles have been purified and are therefore able to be recipients of this gift. Given this logic, one suspects that concepts of Jewish sacrifice, and in particular the importance of such sacrifices for making purification and forgiveness, are near to hand for Luke.

Two related lines of evidence substantiate this suspicion. First, the summary conclusions that Luke draws in Acts 11.16–18 and 15.8–9 regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his house make the connections between repentance/forgiveness, purification and the reception of the Spirit more explicit than does the Acts 10 account itself.

In Acts 11 Peter defends his actions at Cornelius' house to some who take offense at his associating with Gentiles. He explains that as he was speaking to Cornelius God sent the Holy Spirit to him and to his house. On the basis of the Spirit's presence Peter goes on to say in 11.17, 'If God gave the same gift to them [i.e. Gentiles] as also to us who believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I should be able to hinder God?' The ramifications of Gentiles being recipients of the Spirit are immediately clear to those challenging Peter: God, they conclude, must have granted repentance unto life even to the Gentiles (Acts 11.18). Importantly, this 'Gentile Pentecost'³⁹ prompts them to reason retrospectively from the presence of the Spirit to the conclusion that the Gentiles have been given repentance unto life – a conclusion that plainly implies that the Gentiles' sins have been forgiven (cf. Luke 24.47; Acts 2.38; 5.31).

38 E.g. E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1971) 362–3. Cf. J. B. Tyson, 'The Gentile Mission and the Authority of Scripture in Acts', *NTS* 33 (1987) 619–31, esp. 629–30.

39 Wilson, *Gentiles*, 177.

In Acts 15:8–9 Peter similarly declares that God who knows the heart gave testimony to the Gentiles that they had heard and believed the word about Jesus by ‘giving them the Holy Spirit just as [it was given] to us and making no distinction between us and them, purifying (καθαρίζαζ) their hearts by faith’. Again, God’s act of giving the Spirit is retrospective and irrefutable proof that those who receive the Spirit have been purified.

When viewed together, these summaries of the significance of the Cornelius account suggest two corresponding points: (1) the language of ‘the repentance unto life’ and ‘the purification of the heart’ are closely related ways of referring to the same reality – specifically, both phrases describe a state in which one is able to receive the Holy Spirit; and (2) the reception of the Spirit is the proof that allows one to deduce, retrospectively, that someone has been granted the necessary forgiveness and corresponding state of purification.

The relationship between the state of forgiveness and purification and the ability to receive the Spirit correlates remarkably well with the basic logic of the atonement effected by blood sacrifice and the corresponding presence of God with his people detailed in section 2 above. As was shown, one of the central concerns of the sacrificial system was to bring about and maintain the states of forgiveness and purity necessary for the presence of God to remain among the people by dwelling in the Holy of Holies. God’s presence at the temple and the people’s ability to draw near to God were predicated on the performance of the sacrificial rituals prescribed by the Law. From this perspective, Luke’s language of repentance and purification, and in particular the connection of these with the outpouring of God’s Spirit, points towards the conclusion that sacrificial categories are in fact informing his argument.

A second line of evidence further confirms the suspicion that cultic categories underlie the logic of Luke’s narrative. Some point out that one of the images invoked by the rushing wind and the tongues of fire that come to rest upon the apostles’ heads on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit is first poured out is the appearance of the glory of the Lord as described in Jewish Scripture.⁴⁰ Of particular note are the descriptions in Exod 40.34–8 and Lev 9.23–4 (cf. Num 9.15–23) of the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle and resting upon it as a cloud by day and a fire by night after Moses had consecrated the priests and completed setting up and purifying all the tabernacle’s spaces and accoutrements (Exod 40.1–15, 29–32; Lev 8.10–9.21). Here, after the consecration and inauguration of the tabernacle, God’s glory takes up residence in the sanctuary in the form of fire and cloud. In accord with the logic of sacrifice, a close relationship exists in these texts between the inaugurating sacrifices, the installation of the priests and the fiery manifestation of God’s presence in the sanctuary (cf. 2 Chr 5.1–7.7).

40 E.g. Keener, *Acts*, 1.801–4. Cf. J. B. Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age in Luke-Acts* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988) 42–3.

Along these lines, it may be significant that one pre-Lukan text that uses the language of ‘tongues of fire’ is *1 Enoch*. In *1 Enoch* 14 Enoch ascends into heaven and sees that portions of the heavenly temple, and perhaps most conspicuously the heavenly Holy of Holies, are made up of ‘tongues of fire’. Glen Menzies insightfully comments that in *1 Enoch* 14 the function of these ‘tongues of fire’ in heaven appears to be ‘to delimit spheres of holiness as one approaches closer and closer to the presence of God’.⁴¹

Thus, the likely allusion in Acts 2 to the fiery glory of God’s presence filling the tabernacle and dwelling among the people in the Holy of Holies further implies an underlying logic of sacrificial atonement, since the glory of God did not take up residence in the tabernacle until everything had been purified by Moses. To put the point differently, these accounts imply that, before one could come into such close proximity with the divine that the Spirit would actually be given and the sign of the divine presence would rest upon him or her, something would have had to happen that made that person pure. From the standpoint of Second Temple Judaism, one of the most natural contexts for that kind of purification would be the sacrificial system.

In light of this evidence, the narrative of Acts suggests that the experience of the gift of the Spirit’s outpouring led Jesus’ early followers to assume that he had done something to make them pure in some new and amazing way, and their logic worked the same way with respect to Cornelius. If this is right, then the inference seems to follow that Jesus actually made some kind of sacrifice that purified people to the point that they could be recipients of God’s own Holy Spirit. Moreover, when the Spirit is given to Cornelius and his household, Peter and his fellow Jewish believers appear to infer that this sacrifice allowed even the Gentiles to be purified. This further suggests that the logic of Acts 10 does not cut against the sacrificial logic of forgiveness and purification; rather, it extends the reach of Jesus’ sacrifice and the forgiveness and purification he effects even to Gentiles. The atoning effects of Jesus’ work underlie the extension of forgiveness and purification to Cornelius and his house. The question, however, remains: if this is the correct logic for understanding the narrative here, when and where did Jesus offer this sacrifice?

One might assume that the answer to the preceding question would have to be that Jesus made this offering when he gave himself up to death on the cross. As noted above, however, exactly this assumption has led scholars to puzzle over the problem of Luke’s lack of overt interest in the sacrificial significance of Jesus’ crucifixion and surprising emphasis instead on his ascension and exaltation. The logic of sacrifice and sacrificial atonement detailed in section 2 suggests that this ‘problem’ may be due more to a misunderstanding of how the process of

41 G. Menzies, ‘Pre-Lukan Occurrences of the Phrase “Tongues of Fire”’, *Pneuma* 22 (2000) 27–60, at 41.

Jewish blood sacrifice actually worked than to some inscrutable Lukan agenda. In the next section of this article, I argue that texts such as Acts 2.33 and 5.31 provide answers, albeit implicitly, to the questions of when, where and how Jesus offered the sacrifice that resulted in forgiveness and purification.

4. Acts and the Sacrificial Significance of Jesus' Place at God's Right Hand

Joel Green notes that '[p]erhaps the clearest affirmation in Acts of the soteriological meaning of the Jesus' exaltation comes in 5:30-31.⁴² Here, he continues, one finds 'a straightforward affirmation that Jesus' confirmation as Saviour, as the one who "gives" repentance and forgiveness, is grounded in his resurrection and ascension'.⁴³ This seems to me to be exactly right. In fact, the syntax of the verse virtually demands this conclusion.

The main clause of Acts 5.31 reads: τοῦτον ὁ θεὸς ἀρχηγὸν καὶ σωτῆρα ὑψώσεν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, 'God exalted this one [i.e. Jesus] to his right hand as Prince and Saviour.' The infinitival phrase that modifies this main clause gives the purpose of this exaltation: δοῦναι μετάνοιαν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, 'in order to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins'. Taken at face value, the verse presents a clear rationale for Jesus' exaltation: so that Israel would be able to repent and have their sins forgiven. The sacrificial overtones of repentance and forgiveness of sins go almost without saying; indeed, these are two of the major themes of Yom Kippur. Here, though, the cross is not identified as the element in the larger narrative of the Christ event that produces these atoning results. Rather, it is the exaltation of Jesus to God's right hand that provides these benefits.

That Luke really means to identify the exaltation of Jesus as the event that effects atonement can also be inferred from Acts 2.33. Peter states in this verse that Jesus' pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon his followers comes as the result of his being exalted to the Father's right hand and receiving the gift of the Spirit.⁴⁴ Moreover, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 is taken to be a sign that now, after Jesus' ascension, the day of salvation has arrived (cf. Acts 2.21, 38).⁴⁵ If, as argued earlier, the implication here is that purification and forgiveness precede the reception of the Spirit, then the logical and temporal sequence in this passage correlates well with the statement in 5.31 that Jesus'

42 J. Green, "Salvation to the End of the Earth" (Acts 13:47): God as Saviour in the Acts of the Apostles', *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (ed. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 83-106, at 97.

43 Green, 'Salvation', 97.

44 Cf. John 16.7.

45 Cf. Marshall, *Luke*, 178.

exaltation occurred for the very purpose of achieving the forgiveness of Israel's sins. More simply put, both Acts 2.33 and 5.31 suggest that Jesus' exaltation to God's right hand accomplished the kind of atoning benefits that the sacrificial system was designed to achieve and maintain. If this is correct, then it is plausible to conclude that Jesus' presence at God's right hand is a constitutive element of his atoning sacrifice. That is to say, Luke predicates the benefits of forgiveness and purification upon Jesus' exaltation, which coheres well with the process of Jewish sacrifice and conception of atonement described in section 2 above.

One additional piece of evidence lends support to this conclusion. A number of biblical, Second Temple and early Christian texts correlate the Holy of Holies with the divine throne room and the divine throne with the mercy seat/cover on the Ark of the Covenant.⁴⁶ If Luke is aware of such conceptions, then Jesus' location at the right hand of God in heaven would also imply his presence at the heavenly mercy seat, the place on earth where the high priest ministered by presenting blood once a year on Yom Kippur to obtain forgiveness and purification.

Hints in the account of Stephen's heavenly vision in Acts 7 suggest that Luke is aware of this conception. As Stephen looks into the heavens, which he has just referred to in juxtaposition with the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 7.47–50), he sees God's glory and Jesus as the Son of Man standing at God's right hand (Acts 7.55–6). That Stephen looks into the heavenly Holy of Holies may be inferred from his seeing the glory of God, which is often associated with God's presence in the Holy of Holies in Jewish Scripture.⁴⁷ Moreover, Stephen closely links heaven with God's true sanctuary (cf. Acts 7.44, 48–9). But why does Jesus stand?⁴⁸ If Stephen is viewing the heavenly sanctuary, then Jesus' posture is remarkably similar to that of a high priest in the Holy of Holies who stood before the mercy seat to offer the blood on Yom Kippur.⁴⁹ The fact that Stephen has this vision while on trial before the Jewish high priest (Acts 7.1) for

46 See e.g. Lev 16.2; Pss 80.1; 99.1; 2 Kgs 19.15; Isa 6.1–4; 37.16; Ezek 10.1–5; 43.6–7; Heb 8.1–2 (cf. 4.16 and 10.19–22); 1 En. 14.8–20; *T. Levi* 3.4–5; 5.1.

47 E.g. Exod 40.34–5; 1 Kgs 8.11; 2 Chr 5.14; 7.1–2; Ezek 10.4.

48 L. T. Johnson is one of the few to include the suggestion that Jesus adopts a cultic posture, though he does not definitively endorse this view or develop it (*The Acts of the Apostles* (SP 5; Colleville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992) 139). C. P. M. Jones is more confident ('The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Lucan Writings', *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R.H. Lightfoot* (ed. D. E. Nineham; Oxford: Blackwell, 1955) 113–43, esp. 128). The argument of this article suggests one more member among the 'family resemblances' between Luke-Acts and Hebrews that Jones attempts to identify. For discussions of other possible explanations, see e.g. D. L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 311–12; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev. edn 1988) 155–6.

49 Other early Christians conceptualised Jesus' presence at God's right hand in high-priestly terms. This is suggested by the allusions to Ps 110.1 in Rom 8.34 and Hebrews, esp. Heb 1.3; 7.25; 8.1–2; 9.11–12, 24; 10.12–13 (cf. also 1 John 1.8–2.2; Rev 1.12–13; 5.6–7).

speaking against the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 6.13–14) further implies an intentional contrast between the heavenly temple and its high priest, who serves at God's heavenly throne/altar, and their earthly counterparts.⁵⁰ Luke, in other words, here associates God's heavenly throne with the heavenly sanctuary where Jesus ministers. These observations lend support to the view that the links in Luke-Acts between forgiveness, purification and Jesus' exaltation are conceptualised in terms of the conveyance and presentation of an atoning sacrificial offering into God's presence.

In sum, Luke's predication of the new manifestation of the Spirit at Pentecost upon Jesus' exaltation to God's right hand (Acts 2.33) as well as the links he makes between Jesus' present location, repentance, forgiveness of sins, purification and the ability to receive the Spirit (Acts 2.38; 5.31; 10.15, 28, 43; 11.18; 15.7–9) implies the influence of a sacrificial concept of atonement below the surface of his narrative. Once one grasps that Jewish sacrifice is a process whose central atoning elements consist of the priests' activities at the altars as they draw near to God and convey the sacrifice into God's presence, it becomes clear that the underlying logic of Luke's general emphasis throughout Acts on the salvific effects of Jesus' exalted position is consistent with these aspects of Jewish sacrificial practice.⁵¹

5. The Cross and Early Christians, in Retrospect

If this preceding analysis is more or less correct, it follows that Luke is not likely to have thought that Jesus' death by itself could bear the full weight of procuring purification and forgiveness. Moreover, if he understood the culmination of sacrifice in terms of a priest, perhaps especially the high priest, approaching God and conveying offerings into the divine presence, then a new interpretive option for understanding his emphasis on the salvific significance of Jesus' exaltation becomes clear. Jesus' ascension and exaltation to God's right hand are the culmination of his sacrificial and atoning work. That is why Luke especially highlights these elements of the Christ event as achieving forgiveness and purification.

Such a conclusion invites further reflection. Luke clearly describes the outpouring of the Spirit as an event that occurred *after* Jesus' ascension to the Father. Historical-temporal realities are likely to underlie Luke's claim here: the earliest followers of Jesus did not experience the ecstatic presence of the Spirit

50 Keener also notes the possibility that this imagery might imply Jesus' status as the heavenly high priest but deems the idea 'more conspicuous in Luke-Acts by its absence' (*Acts*, II.1441 n. 1408). The larger argument advanced here, however, greatly increases the plausibility of such an interpretation.

51 It may be objected that Luke also links these benefits with the resurrection of Jesus (e.g. Luke 24.46–9; Acts 13.26–39). Limitations of space preclude a full discussion of these texts. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that while Luke distinguishes between Jesus' resurrection and exaltation, they are closely linked (esp. Chance, *Jerusalem*, 64–5).

until some time had passed after Jesus' crucifixion.⁵² In historical terms, Luke's account coheres with the fact that Jesus' crucifixion did not directly produce the experience of the outpouring of the Spirit. If the earliest Christians thought that Jesus' crucifixion alone was a sacrifice fully sufficient for obtaining their forgiveness and purification, this temporal gap would be difficult to explain.

The thesis outlined above suggests, however, that early Christians who reflected on this historical sequence might have recognised more fully something profound about the crucifixion and ascension elements of the Christ event. Specifically, I propose that the fact of their experience of the outpouring of the Spirit at some point after the crucifixion enabled them to see in retrospect that Jesus' death was an essential *part* of the larger process of his atoning sacrifice. In light of their conviction that they had received the Spirit, which is presented in Acts as the proof that they had been purified and forgiven, early Christians could have understood Jesus' death as one element in the process of his sacrifice. On this account, it is unlikely that they would confuse or conflate the idea of Jesus' sacrificial death with the notion that his death was the sum total of his sacrifice.⁵³

The experience of the Spirit, as well as the temporal space between the crucifixion and that experience, might be partly rendered intelligible as a salvific event by way of appeal to Jewish sacrificial practice. If, as I have argued that Acts implies, the experience of the Spirit's presence among Jesus' followers led them to infer that Jesus had somehow purified them and forgiven their sins, it is plausible to imagine that they would conclude that Jesus must have done something that effected sacrificial atonement on their behalf. In view of the process of sacrifice described above, it hardly seems a stretch to imagine that they would particularly link this atonement with Jesus' present location at God's right hand in heaven.⁵⁴ The entire *process* of Jewish blood sacrifice, in other words, may have provided them with critical elements for filling out the script or narrative to explain how the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus resulted in purification and the outpouring of the Spirit.

To press the point a bit further, if they conceived of sacrifice as a process, early Christians could plausibly be imagined as having needed something more than Jesus' death to understand how Jesus had made their experience of purification

52 A similar pattern occurs in John's Gospel (cf. John 16.7 and 20.17–23). Here, too, Jesus' resurrection and ascension precede the disciples' reception of the Spirit.

53 To speak about a sacrificial death is not necessarily the same thing as to speak about death *as* a sacrifice. When an animal is slaughtered as a sin-offering that death is clearly sacrificial (unlike, say, slaughtering an animal in an agricultural setting). As demonstrated in section 2 above, however, the slaughter/death of the animal is not the definition or sum total of sacrifice. Indeed, what is actually offered as the sacrifice is not the death of the animal, but its blood/life and bodily material.

54 That Ps 110.4 already informed their understanding and application of Ps 110.1 to Jesus also seems highly likely.

and forgiveness possible. It seems highly unlikely that a first-century Jew would link the bare fact of Jesus' death with the atoning results of the sacrificial system. Historically, one suspects that something more was necessary. That 'something more', I suggest, was the connection between Jesus' absence and the experience of the presence of the Spirit.⁵⁵

6. Conclusions

As noted at the beginning of this article, many scholars have rightly highlighted Luke's 'failure' to unpack the sacrificial meaning of the crucifixion. The preceding argument suggests that they have wrongly assumed that Luke has therefore thrust a sacrificial model of Jesus' atoning work into the background of his narrative. Texts such as Acts 2.33 and 5.31, especially when viewed together with the other aspects of Acts that connect forgiveness and purification with Jesus' heavenly exaltation, imply instead that Luke's linking of repentance, purification, forgiveness of sins, Jesus' elevation to God's right hand and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit owe much to an underlying Jewish sacrificial model of atonement.

That the sacrificial logic inherent within these connections has so often gone unrecognised in modern scholarship appears to stem from an overly-reductive conception of sacrifice and how it works. Sacrificial slaughter, rather than being the focal point of the ritual, is one among a number of constitutive elements. Given the hierarchical structure of the process of sacrifice, approaching the divine presence and conveying or presenting the sacrifice to God are the foci of the ritual, the elements most closely linked with the accomplishment of sacrificial atonement. That Luke does not identify Jesus' death *per se* with the atoning results of forgiveness and purification can be partly explained, then, by appeal to this kind of Jewish sacrificial logic. Thus, a sacrificial logic probably does inform Luke's understanding of the Christ event. This explanation provides a plausible rationale for why he directly connects the risen Jesus' exaltation to God's right hand with the atoning benefits that Jesus has achieved.

In conclusion, a few thoughts about the possible significance of this thesis for larger approaches to the study of Luke-Acts are in order. First, the argument pursued in this article goes some way towards explaining why Acts, more so than the Gospel of Luke, emphasises the proclamation of the resurrected and

⁵⁵ This explanation does not intend to reduce early Christian thinking about Jesus' death only to retrospective reflection. A confluence of other factors must also be considered (e.g., Jesus' ransom saying, martyr traditions, etc.). Rather, I am here suggesting that the fact of Jesus' absence and the correlated experience of the Spirit were crucial for clarifying and helping to develop and clarify sacrificial conceptions of Jesus' work precisely because they allow for a strong analogy between key elements in the Christ event and the larger logic and practice of sacrifice.

reigning Christ as enabling the new reality of the offer of the forgiveness of sins, purification and the outpouring of the Spirit. The sacrificially atoning effects of Jesus' salvific work (forgiveness of sins and purification) do not follow for Luke from a non-sacrificial logic that connects these directly with or deduces them exclusively from the event of Jesus' death. More important for achieving these sacrificial benefits is his exaltation to God's right hand. This is the time and place at which he presented and offered his sacrifice to God. Second, while there is no doubt that a great deal can be and has been learned about Luke-Acts by locating the text in a variety of Greco-Roman contexts, the findings of this article suggest in fresh ways the essential importance of the larger Jewish religious context for interpreting Luke's work, as well as ways in which his understanding of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done respect and cohere with that context.