

## 1

## THE PLAN OF GOD IN LUKE–ACTS

## 1.1 The plan of God as a central theme in Luke–Acts

The plan of God is a distinctively Lukan theme which undergirds the whole of Luke–Acts,<sup>1</sup> becoming especially prominent in the speeches of Acts. A variety of thematic strands are woven together to emphasize the certainty and consistency of the plan of God as it is worked out in the life of Jesus and the history of the early church. This theme serves as a multifaceted means by which Luke strives to explain, strengthen and expand the faith of the readers of his two-volume work.

Luke first presents this distinctive theme<sup>2</sup> in his Gospel, where he links this plan of God (ἡ βουλή τοῦ θεοῦ) with accepting the baptism of John, which the people and the tax collectors did (Luke 7.29), thereby ‘justifying God’, in contrast to the Pharisees and lawyers, who rejected such a baptism (Luke 7.30). In the first major speech reported in Acts, Peter claims that Jesus’ crucifixion occurred as part of God’s ‘definite plan and foreknowledge’ (τῆ ὀρισμένη βουλή καὶ προγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ, Acts 2.23), and the early believers acknowledged to God that the plot against Jesus which led to his death was ‘whatever thy hand and thy plan (βουλή) had predestined to take place’ (Acts 4.28). When the apostles come before the Sanhedrin, the Pharisee Gamaliel asks a rhetorical question whether this plan (ἡ βουλή αὐτῆ) is really of men (Acts 5.38) or of God

<sup>1</sup> The unity of authorship and purpose of the two volumes is assumed; see the recent discussion of R. J. Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke–Acts* (FRLANT 126; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1982) 3–6, 24 n. 14. The author is referred to as ‘Luke’ without equating him with the companion of Paul of ecclesiastical tradition.

<sup>2</sup> The term βουλή appears five times in Acts and once in Luke with reference to the plan of God. It is used also at Luke 23.51 and Acts 27.12,42 (and Acts 19.1 in some MSS) to refer to human plans. The word appears elsewhere in the New Testament only at 1 Cor 4.5, Eph 1.11 and Heb 6.17.

2 *The plan of God in Luke-Acts*

(5.39), implying the latter. Paul also knew of the overarching plan of God. In his first reported sermon, he says that David carried out the plan of God (τῆ τοῦ θεοῦ βουλῆ) in his life (Acts 13.36). In his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders, Paul declares, 'I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole plan of God' (πᾶσαν τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ θεοῦ, Acts 20.27).

Alongside this primary strand, other indications of the plan of God are to be found throughout Luke-Acts. God is portrayed as being well pleased with Jesus,<sup>3</sup> and references to the obedience to the will of God shown by Jesus<sup>4</sup> and Paul<sup>5</sup> reinforce the ongoing outworking of the plan of God. Luke frequently uses the term 'it is necessary'<sup>6</sup> and occasionally 'is about to'<sup>7</sup> to depict the unfolding of the plan of God throughout his story. The history of Jesus and the early church can be understood as fulfilling the scriptures,<sup>8</sup> and thereby being in complete accord with the plan of God. In addition, a cluster of προ- compounds and related verbs<sup>9</sup> describes the intentions of God and the execution of the plan of God, as do a sequence of epiphanies in which God or divine messengers are manifested.<sup>10</sup>

For purposes of analysis, these various expressions of the primary theme of the plan of God can be grouped in five broad areas. (1) God is the primary actor throughout Luke-Acts, for the actions of God extend throughout the whole span of history, from creation to final judgement. (2) God directs the life of Jesus and the mission of the church, performing signs and wonders and enabling healings and exorcisms to take place. (3) Epiphanies of God occur in the life of Jesus and throughout the Gentile mission, declaring God's will

<sup>3</sup> εὐδοκία at Luke 10.21; εὐδοκέω at Luke 3.17; 12.32.

<sup>4</sup> See Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives at Luke 22.42, πλὴν μὴ τὸ θέλημα μου ἀλλὰ τὸ σὸν γινέσθω.

<sup>5</sup> God appointed Paul to know his will (γνῶναι τὸ θέλημα), Acts 22.14, and see also Acts 21.14, where Paul submits to the will of God.

<sup>6</sup> δεῖ is used 18 times in Luke and 24 times in Acts, 42 times in all out of a total of 102 times in the entire New Testament. Significant for our purposes are Luke 2.49; 4.43; 9.22; 13.33; 17.25; 21.9; 22.37; 24.7,26,44; Acts 1.6,21; 3.21; 4.12; 5.29; 9.6,16; 14.22; 16.30; 17.3; 19.21; 20.35; 23.11; 24.19; 25.10; 26.9; 27.24.

<sup>7</sup> μέλλω, Luke 9.31,44; 22.23; 24.21; Acts 17.31; 26.22,23.

<sup>8</sup> πληρῶω, Luke 4.21; 9.31; 21.24; 22.16; 24.44; Acts 1.16; 2.28; 3.18; 12.25; 13.25,27,52; 14.26; 19.21; and τελέω, Luke 12.50; 18.31; 22.37.

<sup>9</sup> προορίζω (Acts 4.28); προκαταγγέλλω (Acts 3.18; 7.52); προγνώσις (Acts 2.23); προχειρίζομαι (Acts 3.20; 22.14; 26.16); προχειροτονέω (Acts 10.41); ὀρίζω (Luke 22.22; Acts 2.23; 10.42; 17.26,31); τάσσω (Acts 13.48; 22.10); and τίθημι (most notably Acts 1.7; 13.47,48; 19.21; 20.28).

<sup>10</sup> See Luke 1.11–22,26–38; 2.9–15; 3.22; 9.30–2; 22.43; 24.4–7,15–31,36–49; Acts 1.3,9–11; 2.3; 5.19–20; 9.3–6; 10.3–7,10–16,30–2; 11.5–10,13–14; 12.7–11,23; 16.9–10; 18.9; 22.6–8,17–21; 23.11; 26.13–18; 27.23–4.

and guiding the events of history. (4) The life of Jesus, especially his passion, and the mission to the Gentiles, fulfil what had been prophesied. (5) Inherent in the life and passion of Jesus and in the missionary deeds of the apostles, there is a necessity which had been foreordained by Jesus. Juxtaposed alongside this theme of necessity is the role of human agents in carrying out the plan of God; some may oppose this plan, but those who are obedient to the will of God play key roles in God's plan.

Such an analysis of the strands we have identified, whilst to a degree artificial, is useful for heuristic purposes. These indicators of the plan of God are woven together throughout the two volumes of Luke's work in a variety of combinations. The interweaving of such strands was, as we shall see, part of a standard complex of ideas in hellenistic culture. By separating and examining each strand in turn, we shall note the role each part plays in the development of the overall argument that everything narrated by Luke comes under God's providence.

## 1.2 Previous scholarship on the plan of God in Luke-Acts

In the scholarly literature on Luke-Acts, numerous references to the plan of God can be found. Many of these are made in passing, and contribute little to an understanding of the role played by the theme in the overall work. Some studies pay more attention to the theme and its constituent strands, outlining major aspects or examining particular features in more detail. Differences of opinion are to be found when scholars address the cultural context within which the theme is best understood, or the theological significance of the theme.

### 1.2.1 Cluster of thematic strands

Some studies have noted the cluster of thematic strands associated with the plan of God. In discussing the purpose of Luke-Acts, H. J. Cadbury<sup>11</sup> refers to 'the evidence of divine guidance and control that pervades it'.<sup>12</sup> As he briefly discusses the evidence, he notes the presence of themes related to this divine guidance<sup>13</sup> and suggests

<sup>11</sup> *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York: Macmillan, 1927) 303-6.

<sup>12</sup> *Making* 303.

<sup>13</sup> Fulfilment, necessity, the guiding hand of God, the  $\pi\rho\omicron$ -verbs, miracles (including the work of the Holy Spirit) and visions.

4 *The plan of God in Luke-Acts*

that such a conjunction of motifs serves an apologetic purpose. He does not investigate why these pieces of evidence cohere around the central theme.

Subsequently, a number of scholars have noted the combination of these themes. The most detailed examination of the evidence is made by S. Schulz,<sup>14</sup> who interprets the presence of a number of themes<sup>15</sup> as indicating the pervasive nature of providence in Luke's writings. Yet his overriding concern at all times is to argue for an exclusively deterministic understanding of providence which he sees Luke as holding. H. Flender<sup>16</sup> treats Luke's concept of 'the divine plan of salvation' more briefly under the heading of the Holy Spirit as the presence of salvation. He lists a number of the strands we have identified<sup>17</sup> as evidence for Luke's presentation of divine providence, although his primary concern is to deny that Luke merely depicts a past-tense 'redemption history'.

J. Navone<sup>18</sup> considers that 'the way of the Lord' is the fundamental theme for Luke's portrayal of history, and he relates this to various of the themes already noted.<sup>19</sup> Although he claims an interrelationship of these themes through 'the way of the Lord', he does not explore the reasons Luke may have had for so doing. D. Adams<sup>20</sup> pays attention to Luke's emphasis on necessity, divine protection in adversity, and the overt guidance of God in his exploration of the literary framework of Luke-Acts. Whilst he provides a most useful and detailed discussion of these features in Luke's presentation of Paul,<sup>21</sup> especially as they relate to his central concern, the theme of suffering, he does not pursue the relation of these themes to others we have noted, nor does he place Luke's use of these themes in any wide context beyond this one document.

<sup>14</sup> 'Gottes Vorsehung bei Lukas', *ZNW* 54 (1963) 104–16, and 'Der Heilsplan Gottes', *Die Stunde der Botschaft* (Hamburg: Furche, 1967) 275–83.

<sup>15</sup>  $\pi\rho\omicron$ - compounds, nouns indicating the will of God, verbs indicating the carrying out of that will in history, the prominence of  $\delta\epsilon\iota$ , and the use of the hellenistic theologoumenon of Acts 26.14. Schulz also notes aspects of Luke-Acts which are to be interpreted providentially, namely the kerygma, epiphanies, visions, scripture proofs and apologies.

<sup>16</sup> *St Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History* (London: SPCK, 1967) 142–6.

<sup>17</sup> The plan of God,  $\pi\rho\omicron$ - compounds, necessity and predestination.

<sup>18</sup> 'The Way of the Lord', *Scripture* 20 (1968) 24–30, reprinted in *Themes of St Luke* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1976) 188–98.

<sup>19</sup> Necessity, predestination, the plan of God, fulfilment of prophecy, God's universal acts and the Holy Spirit.

<sup>20</sup> 'The Suffering of Paul and the Dynamics of Luke-Acts' (Yale Ph.D. diss., 1979).

<sup>21</sup> 'Suffering' 37–46, 55–69.

*The plan of God in Luke-Acts*

5

In the introduction to his recent commentary, J. Fitzmyer<sup>22</sup> collects the evidence for ‘the author’s conception of salvation-history’ under five headings.<sup>23</sup> However, he does little more than simply provide a handy concordance for these themes in Luke-Acts, for his main interest is to debate the thesis of Conzelmann with regard to salvation history. A similarly comprehensive list is provided by R. F. O’Toole<sup>24</sup> as he explicates his claim that the primary theological theme of Luke-Acts is that ‘God who brought salvation to his people in the Old Testament continues to do this, especially through Jesus Christ’.<sup>25</sup> O’Toole incorporates each of the elements we have already noted<sup>26</sup> and relates them to divine salvation, but explicitly excludes any analysis of these themes in the wider context.<sup>27</sup>

Deliberately limited is the discussion by E. Richard<sup>28</sup> in his examination of ‘the divine purpose’ in Acts 15, for although he notes various aspects of that divine purpose,<sup>29</sup> he considers them only in so far as they appear within Acts 15. None of these studies have addressed the issues of how these various themes relate to one another, or what function is served by the weaving together of such a range of elements within Luke’s writings.

## 1.2.2 Individual strands

Other studies have explored one or another of these themes in more detail. W. Grundmann<sup>30</sup> explored the term *δεῖ* throughout the New Testament, noting that ‘the usage of Luke has the widest

<sup>22</sup> *The Gospel According to Luke* (Anchor Bible 28, 28A; New York: Doubleday, 1981); see ‘Salvation History’ 1.179–81.

<sup>23</sup> Necessity, predestination, the plan of God, fulfilment of prophecy, God’s universal acts and the Holy Spirit.

<sup>24</sup> *The Unity of Luke’s Theology: An Analysis of Luke-Acts* (Good News Studies 9; Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> *Unity* 17.

<sup>26</sup> The first chapter includes sections on the scriptures, God’s foreknowledge, ‘certain verbs’ (do, determine, set, destine, must), the Holy Spirit, angels and visions.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Any effort to interpret Luke’s double work primarily in terms of Hellenistic literature is mistaken’ (*Unity* 12). O’Toole regards the Septuagint as the primary background to Luke-Acts, but his detailed analysis fails to substantiate this claim adequately.

<sup>28</sup> ‘The Divine Purpose: The Jews and the Gentile Mission (Acts 15)’, *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar* (ed. C. H. Talbert; New York: Crossroads, 1984) 188–209.

<sup>29</sup> Necessity, supernatural intervention, temporal expressions and interpretation of the Old Testament.

<sup>30</sup> ‘*δεῖ*’, *TDNT* 2 (1964) 21–5.

6 *The plan of God in Luke-Acts*

implications'.<sup>31</sup> Grundmann interpreted this Lukan usage in a most restrictive manner, however, viewing the evidence solely through the lens of 'the necessity of the eschatological event'. E. Fascher<sup>32</sup> explored *δεῖ* in the New Testament in more detail, noting that Luke links it with fulfilling the scriptures and the Holy Spirit, and equating it with the will of God. Yet because his study ranges widely across so much material, he does not probe the Lukan reasons for its prominence, and concludes rather lamely that in Acts *δεῖ* is used in the same way as in the LXX and in Paul.<sup>33</sup>

The will of God in Luke has been studied only in passing, usually in the context of the synoptic tradition and the words of Jesus,<sup>34</sup> rather than in the context of Luke-Acts as a literary entity in itself. The importance of the phrase designating the plan of God (*βουλή τοῦ θεοῦ*) in the overall structure of Luke-Acts was recognized by P. Schubert<sup>35</sup> but he failed to relate this theme explicitly to the wider linguistic evidence noted by others. A significant comment in his earlier study on proof by prophecy in Luke 24, that 'in most cases Luke's *δεῖ* had fully technical, theological denotations and connotations', remains undeveloped in his later writings.<sup>36</sup>

G. Stählin<sup>37</sup> takes a thematic approach to Fate (*Schicksal*) in the whole of the New Testament and in Josephus. Discussing the conjunction of certain key terms, he notes that this complex of terms occupies a central position in the theology of Luke; but again,

<sup>31</sup> Grundmann, 'δεῖ' 23.

<sup>32</sup> 'Theologische Beobachtungen zu δεῖ', *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann*, (ed. W. Eltester; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1954) 228–54.

<sup>33</sup> See also Fascher's article, 'Theologische Beobachtungen zu δεῖ im A.T.', *ZNW* 45 (1954) 244–52.

<sup>34</sup> G. Segalla, 'Gesù rivelatore della volontà del Padre nella Tradizione Sinnotica', *Rivista biblica italiana* 14 (1966) 467–508; and C. L. Mitton, 'The Will of God in the Synoptic Tradition of the Words of Jesus', *ExpTim* 72 (1960–1) 68–71.

<sup>35</sup> 'The Place of the Areopagus Speech in the Composition of Acts', *Transitions in Biblical Scholarship* (Essays in Divinity 6, ed. J. C. Rylaarsdam; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 235–61, and 'The Final Cycle of Speeches in the Book of Acts', *JBL* 87 (1968) 1–16. In this latter article he declares that 'the theology of Luke is a many-sided development of the theme of the ὀρισμένη βουλή τοῦ θεοῦ' (p. 2).

<sup>36</sup> 'The Structure and Significance of Luke 24', *Studien* (ed. Eltester) 165–86. In similar fashion, R. C. Tannehill ('Israel in Luke-Acts: A Tragic Story', *JBL* 104 (1985) 69–85) considers that the various episodes of Luke-Acts 'are part of a unitary story because they are related to a unifying purpose, the βουλή τοῦ θεοῦ, to which the writing refers with some frequency'; but he limits his development of this statement to the 'tragic story' of Israel.

<sup>37</sup> 'Das Schicksal im Neuen Testament und bei Josephus', *Josephus-Studien: Untersuchungen zu Josephus, dem antiken Judentum und dem Neuen Testament. Otto Michel zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet* (ed. O. Betz, K. Haacker and M. Hengel; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1974) 319–43.

because of the scope of his study, he fails to provide a distinctively Lukan profile regarding the theme. None of these studies, then, attempt to relate their conclusions to other dimensions of the plan of God, nor do they offer any comprehensive reason as to why Luke uses these particular aspects of the plan of God in his work.

### 1.2.3 The cultural context

The precise cultural context within which to view the theme has been interpreted in radically different ways. Fascher argues that Luke-Acts reflects a Jewish understanding of the divine control of history, mediated particularly through Old Testament texts, where for Schulz a hellenistic understanding of providence shapes the story of Luke-Acts. Both Schulz and Fascher assume that a heavily deterministic understanding of Fate as an impersonal entity was held consistently throughout the hellenistic world, and contrast this sharply with the Old Testament view in which God is involved with Israel in a personal struggle of wills. Each of these studies thus relies on a false dichotomy between Jewish and hellenistic environments, and overlooks much evidence to suggest that Judaism was substantially hellenized well before the first century.<sup>38</sup>

Fascher's effort to distance Luke's  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  entirely from an impersonal entity is insensitive to the processes of adaptation which were at work amongst the Jews from early in the hellenistic period, and thus to the range of opinions concerning Fate which existed anywhere in a hellenistic Jewish environment. Schulz's effort to prove the presence of a hellenistic 'blind Fate' in Luke-Acts is itself blind to the differences, both sharp and subtle, in the understandings of Fate and necessity within the hellenistic world. The result of this polemical treatment of the context within which to understand the plan of God in Luke-Acts is that we must explore in more detail, and with greater openness to the evidence, the understandings of providence which existed in Luke's time.

<sup>38</sup> One need only cite the pioneering studies of S. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Life and Manner of Jewish Palestine in the II-IV Centuries CE* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1942) and *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Literary Transmission, Beliefs and Manners of Palestine in the I Century BCE - I Century CE* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), and the comprehensive treatment by M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974).



8 *The plan of God in Luke-Acts*

E. Plümacher,<sup>39</sup> in his careful treatment of Acts in the context of hellenistic historiography, shows how certain dramatic episodes in Acts function in a manner similar to such episodes in hellenistic literature. In discussing those episodes related to the gentile mission,<sup>40</sup> he makes frequent reference to the direct intervention and ongoing providence of God, but the only texts he uses with which to compare the content (rather than the function) of the material are later Christian apologetic writings, not earlier non-Christian historiographical works.

## 1.2.4 Theological interpretations

A variety of theological interpretations of the plan of God in Luke-Acts have been proposed. In his epochal study on Lukan theology, H. Conzelmann<sup>41</sup> saw the theme of 'the role of God in redemptive history'<sup>42</sup> as a pivotal point in his overall schema of the three epochs of salvation history. Recognizing the importance of the plan of God in Luke's work, Conzelmann related it to Luke's characteristic theological perspective: 'the delay [of the parousia] has to be explained, and this is done by means of the idea of God's plan which underlies the whole structure of Luke's account'.<sup>43</sup> Conzelmann refuted the false eschatological interpretation of δέι offered by Grundmann,<sup>44</sup> but continued to uphold the misleading dichotomy between Jewish and hellenistic environments, and injected other inaccuracies into his discussion, notably his treatment of 'election'.<sup>45</sup>

I. H. Marshall<sup>46</sup> continued the dichotomy by concluding 'that Luke's idea of God is drawn from the Old Testament tradition, and that hellenistic influences are peripheral',<sup>47</sup> but certain theological objections that he raised against Conzelmann<sup>48</sup> alert one to the

<sup>39</sup> *Lukas als hellenistischer Schriftsteller: Studien zur Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1972).

<sup>40</sup> *Lukas* 86–91, 105.

<sup>41</sup> *The Theology of St Luke* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960).

<sup>42</sup> *Theology* 149–57.

<sup>43</sup> *Theology* 131–2.

<sup>44</sup> *Theology* 153 n. 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Theology* 154–6.

<sup>46</sup> 'God My Saviour', *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970) 103–15.

<sup>47</sup> *Historian* 115.

<sup>48</sup> See also the critical (but sympathetic) evaluation of Conzelmann by U. Wilckens, 'Interpreting Luke-Acts in a Period of Existentialist Theology', *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966) 60–83; the more direct repudiation of Conzelmann's interpretation by W. G. Kümmel, 'Luc en accusation dans la théologie contemporaine', *ETL* 46 (1970)



dogmatic presuppositions inherent in Conzelmann's work which interfere with his reading of the text. Necessity, both eschatological and historical, is related to the scriptures even before Luke writes (for we see this in Mark), especially to the Spirit in the book of Acts.<sup>49</sup> The concept of election has not been replaced by a hellenistic notion of predetermination, for election words are not as rare in Luke-Acts as Conzelmann claimed.<sup>50</sup> Marshall accordingly refutes this aspect of Conzelmann's construction of a Lukan *Heilsgeschichte*.

More recent treatments of the theme are to be found in three further studies. The thesis of D. L. Tiede<sup>51</sup> is that Luke-Acts is an indication of the widespread soul-searching in late first-century Judaism, seeking to assert God's providence even in the wake of the destruction of the Temple. Tiede does not arbitrarily separate Jewish and hellenistic contexts, but locates key passages of Luke-Acts within ongoing Jewish midrashic debates, offering helpful suggestions as to the function of this theme in hermeneutic, theological and pastoral contexts. Whilst he acknowledges the hellenistic influences on Luke, Tiede pays much more attention to analysing Luke's midrashic techniques as a means of dealing with the crucifixion of Jesus, the fall of Jerusalem and the rejection of the Jews in favour of the Gentiles.

C. H. Cosgrove<sup>52</sup> addresses the question of the relation of divine necessity to human free-will in Luke-Acts and outlines the shape of providence as Luke understands it. Although he provides a larger framework for Luke's expression of providence, Cosgrove does not seek to relate his exegesis to philosophical concerns in other literature of the time, nor to the occurrence of the theme in contemporary historiography, nor does he directly address the broader theological implications of this theme.

T. Radcliffe<sup>53</sup> analyses the Emmaus story of Luke 24 with particular reference to the problem of necessity and freedom, and provides a philosophically oriented discussion in which he concludes that Luke used this theme to undergird the identity of his

265–81; and the survey of other reactions to Conzelmann's view by F. Bovon, *Luc le théologien: vingt-cinq ans de recherches (1950–75)* (Neuchâtel et Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1978) 21–84.

<sup>49</sup> Marshall, *Historian* 107–11.

<sup>50</sup> Marshall, *Historian* 111–13.

<sup>51</sup> *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

<sup>52</sup> 'The Divine  $\Delta$ EI in Luke-Acts', *NovT* 26 (1984) 168–90.

<sup>53</sup> 'The Emmaus Story: Necessity and Freedom', *New Blackfriars* 64 (1983) 483–93.

10 *The plan of God in Luke-Acts*

community by affirming its links with its Jewish roots. This is a useful contribution which again is limited in its scope.<sup>54</sup>

### 1.3 A comparative approach to the theme of providence

Our survey of these interpretations, many of which have contributed useful items of information, demonstrates that we lack a comprehensive statement of the understanding which Luke had of the plan of God, and the role that it played in his two-volume work. In particular, three questions need to be addressed in order to make such a statement:

- (i) What logic holds together the various strands of the plan of God?
- (ii) What understanding of providence and Fate lies behind and informs Luke's use of this theme?
- (iii) What is the function of the plan of God, in all its various strands, within Luke-Acts?

We will proceed towards answers to each of these questions by treating five strands of the primary theme which we have distinguished, namely the primary strand of providence, how God is at work in history; divine interventions through portentous events; epiphanies in which God is manifested; prophecies which are given and whose fulfilment is later noted; and the divine necessity of certain key events. In considering this last strand, the question of the freedom of the human will to exercise its own intentions will be explored in its relation to the plan of God.

Two related approaches will be taken to each of these strands. After a brief survey of each of the strands in Luke-Acts, noting where specific terms or themes are to be found, a comparative analysis will be made of each strand in turn, in order to shed light on the ways in which Luke's readers might have understood the theme and the interrelations of the various strands. This comparative analysis will explore works of the same general period in order to discover the function of these themes and their interrelationship one with another. Then, in a more theological and exegetical vein, we shall explore the use of each strand by Luke in his writings. Throughout this exploration, specific passages will be dealt with in

<sup>54</sup> E. Richard gives further bibliographical references to studies in which the theme appears in passing, in 'Luke - Writer, Theologian, Historian: Research and Orientation of the 1970s', *BTB* 13 (1983) 3-15.