

# **Exodus in the Book of Acts**

## **A Prophetic Reversal of Israel's History**

### **1. Exodus in Acts: Preliminary remarks**

This study will illustrate the use made of the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt in the book of Acts. For clarity, 'Exodus' will be used to refer to the book of that name, and lower case 'exodus' will be used to speak of the event recorded in Exodus 12 and commemorated annually at Passover as a reminder of God's action to liberate his people from slavery. While Exodus 12 remains the foundation text, or paradigm, the biblical account is not confined to that record, for it was developed in later writings of the Jewish Scriptures,<sup>1</sup> notably the prophets, as well as in oral tradition. In the analysis of passages in the book of Acts presented here, it will be seen that the narrator interprets what had been happening among the early followers of Jesus by drawing on a range of accounts of the exodus and setting it in the context of this paradigmatic event in Israel's history. He does so in such a way as dramatically to transform its parameters. References to the exodus are not commonly identified in Acts<sup>2</sup> despite its traditional connection with Luke's Gospel, where exodus allusions are indeed recognized. There is only one explicit mention of Passover in Acts (Acts 12:4), associated with the miraculous deliverance of Peter from the threat of execution by Herod. While some specialist studies identify the presence of key exodus motifs in this account of Peter's escape from prison (e.g., Strobel 1957; Dupont 1984, 336-41; Garrett 1990; Christopher, 2018, 178),<sup>3</sup> it is usual to find that Jesus' passion is nevertheless seen as the foundational event that is being re-enacted.<sup>4</sup> In other words, Christian rather than Jewish history is seen as the touchstone for understanding Peter's rescue. Occasionally, features of the exodus are noted, too, in Paul's rescue from the shipwreck in Acts

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Jewish Scriptures' is preferred to 'Old Testament' in speaking of the book of Acts since, whether dated at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> or the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, it was written at a time when the concept of 'Old' and 'New' testaments had not been formulated. Furthermore, it will be contended here that the writer was composing his narrative within a Jewish context, in which the Scriptures he was drawing on, in whatever language, were the sacred texts of the Jews first and foremost.

<sup>2</sup> Commentators are generally reluctant to accept that Luke drew purposeful parallels with the exodus (see, e.g., Barrett 1994, 577-578).

<sup>3</sup> Keener 2013, in commenting on Acts 12.3, is dismissive of a possible evocation of the exodus, on the grounds that the plan to execute Peter *after* the Passover 'ruins an exact correspondence'.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Parry 1995, 159-61; cf. Witherington 1998, 382 who believes that the parallels with the death of Jesus rather than the exodus would have been more accessible and more obvious to Theophilus.

27 (see Christopher, 2018), but their primary function is once more understood as being to create a parallel with the suffering of Jesus.

### **1.1 The author of Acts**

One of the reasons for giving more weight to the resemblances of the Acts incidents to Jesus' experiences than to those of the ancient event of the exodus may well be that the author of Acts, traditionally known as Luke, has until relatively recently almost universally been understood to be a Gentile; moreover, he was addressing his work to Theophilus as a recent Gentile convert. In line with that view, the book of Acts is read more as a historical account (with whatever particular purpose) rather than a theological one. Despite the weighty tradition behind it, however, the grounds on which it rests are being increasingly challenged, and a growing number of scholars argue that, on the contrary, Luke was Jewish – highly educated, with an excellent level of Greek, which suggests a Hellenistic background but Jewish nevertheless.<sup>5</sup> His Jewish identity tends to be confirmed in this study, which reveals a sophisticated knowledge of Jewish teaching, derived from both Scriptural and oral traditions. His education allowed him to propose complex and novel interpretations of some of those traditions and to speak with an authority that indicates a certain level of standing with his addressee.

What is of especial importance is not to approach Acts with the preconceived notion that it represents a Gentile perspective, for that thinking is liable to control the conclusions and preclude the facts from speaking for themselves.

### **1.2 Acts in a Jewish context**

Underlying the use made of the exodus paradigm within a Jewish setting is a basic principle concerning the Jewish understanding of the life of Israel, namely that all of history is contained in the Torah (Neusner 1990, 131-132). Within this framework, the work of the Jewish historian seeking to interpret contemporary events thus consists in bringing to light the ancient models that lie behind what has taken place and that give the events coherence and meaning.<sup>6</sup> This is quite different from 'typology'; in fact, it is the reverse of it, so to speak. As a Christian reading

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<sup>5</sup> A scholar who challenged the Gentile identity of Luke already 50 years ago, proposing instead a Jewish perspective for the author of Acts, was Jervell 1972. Among studies published in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, see van 't Riet 2009, who comments: 'He [Luke] is a Jew rooted in the Judaism of his days' (9).

<sup>6</sup> 'Chaque épisode doit faire écho à un événement biblique qui le préfigure. C'est paradoxalement la conformité au modèle qui sert de critère à la vérité historique. N'a de portée historique qu'un événement dont on peut lire l'annonce dans l'Écriture' (Barc 2000, 9).

of Old Testament characters and events, typology views them as prefiguring characters, notably Christ, and events in the New Testament; a typological interpretation of scriptural references considers Christ to embody the fulfilment of the earlier, inferior events in this history of Israel and the Church to embody that fulfilment. Among those who recognize allusions to the exodus in Acts, 'typology' is the frequent framework in which they are understood (see, e.g., Marshall 1987; Weaver 2004, 155-159; Christopher 2018, 179-181). A Jewish understanding, in contrast, sees the Torah events and characters as the model *par excellence*, which is constantly being re-enacted as Israel continues to live out its calling as the chosen people of God. The biblical writings that follow the Torah serve as to expand and comment on the foundational models, and the oral teachings continue that activity (Fishbane 1987; Tardieu 1987; Instone Brewer 1992; Kugel 1994). It is thus possible, even likely, that the form of the exodus story alluded to in a 1<sup>st</sup> century document such as the book of Acts is, compared with the written Torah account, a version or even a compilation of versions that is modified by tradition. Seen from a Jewish point of view, the function of parallels between Jesus or his followers and the Torah narrative is not to say that in Christianity Judaism had been superseded, but rather to demonstrate that the recent happenings were in continuity with God's actions with Israel throughout her history: Jesus was not some new and foreign God, his followers were not usurpers, but all were renewing the ancient, sacred paradigms laid down by the God of Israel.

### **1.3 The addressee of Acts**

The counterpart to the use that the author of Acts makes of Jewish tradition is that he could presume that the person or people for whom he was writing would understand it. Much of what will be presented here in terms of reference to the exodus would have little purpose if they did not. For example, in the case of a Jewish audience, the writer could suppose that they were familiar not only with the biblical stories but also with their interpretation and development in tradition. In order, therefore, for reference to be made to a paradigm from Israel's history, it could be sufficient to slip in a simple word or phrase for the allusion to be clear; and to bring in cross-references to other texts by their customary association. Such use of 'hooks' serving as keys to the biblical paradigm was already a well-used technique among Jewish exegetes as a means to connect scriptural texts (see Mann 1940; Perrot 1963). Finding evidence of its application in the book of Acts is one pointer that it was written within a Jewish context where writer and addressee shared common ways of thinking and understood each other well. Theophilus is the name given by Luke to the addressee of both his volumes, evidently a person of high standing (κράτιστος, Lk 1:3). Research into the names of Jewish people in the

centuries around the turn of the era (Ilan 2002) reveals that extant records preserve the name of only one Jew named Theophilus in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the High Priest of 37–42CE, third son of Annas, brother-in-law of Caiaphas. When Acts is read through his eyes, then the allusions to the exodus take on a profound significance, with dramatic consequences.

#### **1.4 Textual issues**

Not only did the Hebrew Scriptures undergo transformation but so did the writings that were gathered together at some point as the Scriptures of the Christian Church. The story of when the changes happened, how and why is a topic of debate among scholars of textual criticism, which will not be engaged with directly here.<sup>7</sup> What will be seen, however, is that among the earliest copies of Acts there are important differences precisely in passages where it appears that the exodus is being referred to as a means to interpret events in the life of the Church. In one particular Greek manuscript, the references are clearer and more numerous than in any other; what is more, they are made from a Jewish perspective. The document is known as Codex Bezae (D05), a bilingual Greek-Latin manuscript of the Gospels and Acts unlike any other that has been preserved. Copied around 400CE, its text has support for many of its readings from much earlier documents – fragments of papyri, citations of the Church Fathers, the first translations into languages all around the Mediterranean. Because its readings are frequently singular among Greek manuscripts, they have generally been viewed as the whimsical inventions of a scribe, without any claim to authenticity. This study challenges that view, arguing that the Bezan presentation of the exodus in Acts reflects a Jewish perspective that is in keeping with the character of the earliest days of the Church. Understanding its text depends on identifying the Jewish nature of many of its readings, which has generally gone unrecognized.

In what follows, the familiar text of Nestle-Aland (N-A<sup>28</sup>) will be compared with that of D05. Two passages will be examined where references to the exodus are located, considering their effect on the message of the narrative: Peter's prison escape in 12:1-17 as already mentioned and an earlier prison escape in 5:17-33, where explicit parallels with the exodus are all but invisible except in D05 (see Rius-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger 2004, 358-363; Read-Heimerdinger, 2003). Specific variant readings in D05 with respect to N-A<sup>28</sup> will be given; the continuous Greek text of that manuscript can be accessed alongside a parallel English

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<sup>7</sup> The text of D05 Acts is compared in detail with the text represented by N-A<sup>28</sup> in Rius-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger, 2004-2009.

translation in Read-Heimerdinger and Rius-Camps 2013. Acts 27 will not be included in this study because the latter chapters of Acts are missing in D05.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Acts 5:17-33

In the first five chapters of Acts, the focus of the Church's activity under the leadership of the apostles is Jerusalem, as the seat of Jewish authority and the locus of the Temple. Luke's use of the dual spelling of Jerusalem (Ἱερουσαλήμ/ Ἱεροσόλυμα), more consistent in the D05 text (Read-Heimerdinger 2002, 311-344),<sup>9</sup> makes it clear that in the early days the followers of Jesus remained attached to traditional Jewish practices and sought to bring about change from within. Thus, the form Ἱερουσαλήμ is used throughout Acts up to the beginning of ch. 8,<sup>10</sup> and it is in that context that the Church grows and develops.

The attachment of the Jesus-followers to Jerusalem begins to change when the Peter and John come into conflict with the authority of the Jewish leaders, following the healing of a lame man whom they had taken into the Temple against Jewish law (3:1-10). Unable to find any justification for punishing them, the leaders let them go while forbidding them to speak about the name of Jesus. As the apostles disregard their orders, the dismantling of their authority is represented by an earthquake that shook 'the place' (ὁ τόπος, 4.31)<sup>11</sup> where the apostles had gathered with fellow believers to ask God to enable them 'to speak with all boldness as you stretch out your hand to heal and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus' (4.30). The intensity and success of the apostles' activity (5:12-16) arouses the jealousy (5:17; or zeal: ζήλος) of the high priestly circle (including Theophilus as a son of Annas, brother-in-law of Caiaphas, among them) who imprison them (5:18). The concise account that follows of the apostles' release by divine intervention (5:19-20) employs vocabulary typically associated with the exodus:

- The apostles are led out (ἐξαγαγών) from prison, the characteristic verb repeated throughout Exodus

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<sup>8</sup> For commentary on Acts 27, see Rius-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger 2009, 364-391.

<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew-derived spelling Ἱερουσαλήμ is used by Luke to signify Jerusalem as the holy city, the seat of authority, while the Hellenistic spelling Ἱεροσόλυμα refers to Jerusalem as a neutral, geographical location. Luke is not alone in making use of the two spellings: cf. Paul's letters, which read Ἱεροσόλυμα at Gal 1:17, 18; 2:1 to refer to the geographical location and Ἱερουσαλήμ at Rom 15:25, 26, 31; 1 Cor 16:3; Gal 4:25, 26 in referring to the spiritual significance of Jerusalem.

<sup>10</sup> The Hellenistic form is only introduced once mention is made of the church in Ἱεροσόλυμα that was persecuted and dispersed following the challenge issued by the leader of the Hellenists, Stephen (8:1a). D05 then compares this group with the apostles who, for their part, remained in Ἱερουσαλήμ (8:1b D05).

<sup>11</sup> In biblical language, ὁ τόπος is frequently a LXX term used to refer to the Tabernacle or Temple as a place of worship (cf. Lev 6:9, 19; 8:31; 2 Sam 6:17; I Chron 15:1; Ps 41:5).

- During the night (διὰ νυκτόν), the time of the exodus (Exod 12:12, 29-31, 42)
- By an angel of the Lord (ἄγγελος κυρίου), the agent of the exodus Num 20:16, cf. Exod 14:19<sup>12</sup>
- The angel instructs them to ‘stand in the Temple and speak to the people all the words of this life’, echoing the order given by God to Moses after leaving Egypt (Deut 5:28-33LXX)<sup>13</sup>

If, by using exodus terms, the narrator is creating a parallel between the deliverance of the apostles and the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, the scene acts as a statement about the changed identity of the People of God. It is the Jesus-believers who are identified with the oppressed Jews in Egypt, with Moses their leader; correspondingly, the oppressors have become the Jewish leaders – the Sadducees, the Pharisees and the High Priests.

Lest it be thought that the vocabulary associated with the apostles’ deliverance is too commonplace for any intended reference to the exodus to be read into them (see Christopher 2018, 181), D05 offers two further comments<sup>14</sup> that not only reinforce the parallel but, moreover, highlight the irony of the shift in the paradigm:

- After putting the apostles in prison, the members of the high priestly circle each went to his own house (ἐπορεύθη εἰς ἕκατος εἰς τὰ ἴδια, 5:18D05)
- They got up early the next morning (ἐγερθέντες τὸ πρωί, 5:21D05)

Far from being mere vivid touches of colour or circumstantial detail (contra Metzger 1994, 288, 290), these two observations are reminiscent of the command Moses gave to the people of Israel as they prepared for the night when the Lord would pass through Egypt to kill the firstborn: ‘none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning’ (οὐκ ἐξελεύσεσθε ἕκαστος τὴν θύραν τοῦ οἴκου αὐτοῦ ἕως πρωί, Exod 12: 22LXX). The comments would indeed be superfluous were it not that by their presence the leaders of high priestly circle are identified with the people of God, those who are obedient to God's commands and protected by him. Their role is reinforced in the statement read by all texts at Acts 5:21: ‘they called together the Sanhedrin, that is, all the senate of the sons of Israel’ (συνεκάλεσαν τὸ συνέδριον

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<sup>12</sup> At the start of the exodus account, it is the Lord himself who performs the deliverance of the people of Israel (Exod 12:23, 29, 50) but in later accounts the angel of the Lord is mentioned (Num 20:16, cf. Exod 14:19).

<sup>13</sup> Other echoes of the exodus can be heard in the text surrounding Acts 5:19-20, e.g., the many signs and wonders performed among the people (5:12) reminiscent of the numerous miracles that Moses accomplished during the exodus (Exod 7:3LXX; cf. Acts 7:36); the sick of Jerusalem who sought to be covered by the shadow of Peter (ἡ σκία ἐπισκίαση, lit. ‘overshadow’, Acts 5:15) just as the cloud that preceded the Israelites in the desert overshadowed the tent of meeting (ἐπεσκίαζεν, e.g. Exod 40:35; cf. Isa 4:6, where God is depicted as creating a cloud by day as a shade (εἰς σκιάν, LXX) for the protection of the people of Jerusalem).

<sup>14</sup> Both comments are supported by the Middle Egyptian version, and the second by Ephrem.

καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γερουσίαν τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ). Their action echoes that which Moses took when he transmitted the instructions concerning the Passover to the people of Israel: ‘Moses called all the senate of the sons of Israel’ (ἐκάλεσεν δὲ Μωϋσῆς πᾶσαν γερουσίαν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ, Exod 12:21LXX). As leaders of Israel, the Jewish authorities walk in the footsteps of Moses but the narrative has established in the preceding scene (Acts 5:12-17) that it is the apostles, those who believe in and follow Jesus as Messiah, who have been given the divine power to teach, heal and lead the people of God. In other words, the Jewish authorities, who are initially presented as representing the faithful People of God, turn out to be the oppressors.

The narrative of Acts 5 portrays the High Priest and the Sanhedrin as quite out of control while all the time the narrator has let his audience know exactly what was going on, providing they were able to pick up the clues that he gave. The narrator is doing more here than showing how the apostles suffered the same opposition from the Jewish authorities as Jesus. He is also doing more than taking up the exodus event to show that God continues to protect those faithful to him. He is setting up a re-enactment of the exodus, but one that, as it evolves, turns upside down the original paradigm. And yet, this is no Gentile Christian looking at the Jews from a position of superiority, claiming the spiritual high ground. Rather it is an observer who knows the situation and the Jewish mentality so well from an internal perspective that he can be both focused and innovative in his use of the Scriptures to target quite precisely his criticism of the leaders: this is not point scoring but tragedy. The tragedy lies in the fact that the Jewish leaders are shown to have rejected not only their Messiah but also the testimony borne to him by his chosen envoys and have become like the Egyptians, the enemies of the people of God. This first re-enactment of the exodus prepares for a second one related in Acts 12, which will affect Peter personally.

### **3. Acts 12:1-17**

#### **3.1 From Acts 6 to Acts 12**

From Acts 6, the mission of the Church starts to move away from Jerusalem under the impulse of the Hellenist Jewish believers, even though they had been relegated by the Hebrew apostles to menial tasks (6:1-6). The apostles themselves are slow to change their Jewish mentality, allowing them to remain in the holy city of Jerusalem even after persecution of the Church had been instigated, as noted above with reference to the mention of Jerusalem at 8:1D05. Peter’s outlook gradually begins to open out beyond the confines of Judaea (from 9:32 onwards) and traditional concepts of purity when he goes to the house of a tanner in Joppa (9:43). It is from

there that he is called by divine intervention to speak for the first time to a Gentile in the Roman city of Caesarea and, against his own judgement (10:28), to enter a Gentile's house. Finally, through the manifestation of the Holy Spirit while he is talking, he understands that the Gentiles are regarded by God as equal to Jews and that they had already been accepted by him. D05 seals this new-found awareness with the observation that it was at this point (and only now) that Peter fulfilled Jesus' command to him before his denial: to turn and strengthen the brethren (σύ δὲ ἐπιστρέψον καὶ [ποτε ἐπιστρέψας, N-A<sup>28</sup>] στήρισον τοὺς ἀδελφούς σου (Lk 22:32 D05). On his way to explain the events to the church in Judaea, as he journeyed he 'called the brethren and strengthened them' (προσφωνήσας τοὺς ἀδελφούς καὶ ἐπιστηρίξας αὐτούς, 11:2 D05, with support from a range of early versions). The implication is that the essence of Peter's denial of Jesus had to do with his desire to defend the privileged position of Israel as the chosen people of God, which he has finally renounced (see Read-Heimerdinger 2012).

Meanwhile, the Hellenist believers had been announcing the gospel to people who were not of Jewish origin (11:20, where the N-A<sup>28</sup> reading of Ἑλληνιστάς requires the sense of Ἕλληνας given in D05). Gentiles were admitted to the church in Antioch (11:19-26), and a collection was organised for the famine relief of the church in Judaea, still predominantly of Jewish origin. Barnabas and Saul are entrusted with bringing that money from the Antioch church to the elders in Judaea (11:30), and will leave Jerusalem again at the end of this episode (12:25).<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that their action of bringing money from Antioch, the Roman capital of the province of Syria, is the time setting for the incidents that follow in Jerusalem in Acts 12: κατ' ἐκεῖνον δὲ τὸν καιρὸν (12:1), because the visit of Barnabas and Saul is the framework, and supplies the cause, for the persecution of the Judaeian church that takes place while they are there (see Rius-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger 2006, 332-336 *passim*, 389-391).

### **3.2 Exodus as a model for Peter's deliverance from prison**

In Acts 12, traces of the exodus model can be detected for a second time in Peter's escape from prison, now with a different focus than in Acts 5 but building on the earlier miraculous deliverance. The paradigm is drawn on in order to show, at least in the D05 narrative, how Peter is finally freed from the limitations of traditional Jewish Messianic expectations.

Acts 12 has a story of persecution of the believers similar to that of Acts 5. However, here it is motivated by the desire for popularity on the part of Herod Agrippa I, the Roman client king

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<sup>15</sup> Textual critics are divided as to how to explain the reading adopted by N-A<sup>28</sup> for 12:25: ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 350-352. D05 reads ἀπέστρεψαν ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ, with wide support for the preposition ἀπὸ.



of Judaea. Being of Jewish descent himself (see Goodman 2007, 82, cf. Daube 1981, 23-25),<sup>16</sup> Herod sought generally to gain favour with his Jewish subjects. This was his aim, according to Acts (12:3), in even killing James the brother of John and going on to arrest Peter. D05 spells out that what the Jews liked was his attack on the ‘faithful’: ἡ ἐπιχείρησας αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς πιστοὺς (12:3D05).

The circumstances of the arrest are carefully recorded. D05 firmly sets the scene ‘in Judaea’ (12:1D05), still the centre of the Church at this stage in the story. Peter is imprisoned during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (12:3) and remains there until he is freed, again by divine intervention, during the last night of the Passover celebrations. The very timing of the release suggests the exodus model and a series of further clues follows. The allusions are more forceful in the D05 text where it becomes apparent that not only the exodus paradigm but also later responses to it from among the biblical prophets are drawn on in order to communicate a revolutionary theological message. The N-A<sup>28</sup> account of the story tends, in comparison, to read more as a historical report. The following pointers to the exodus story, some of them already present in Acts 5, are likely to have been recognized by Jewish recipients of Acts:<sup>17</sup>

- The release happens at night (τῇ νυκτὶ ἐκείνῃ, 12:6), the time of the exodus (Ex. 12:12, 29-31, 42)
- It is a night of watching: the church is engaged in prayer for Peter (Acts 12:5, 12) just as the night of Passover was a ‘night of watching’ (Exod 12:42). The Bezan text of Acts 12:5 underlines the importance of the prayer in two ways: with the adjective ‘much’ (πολλή), and with the adverbial phrase ἐν ἐκτενείᾳ (against N-A<sup>28</sup> ἐκτενῶς) to express the earnestness of the prayer. While ἐκτενῶς is used in a variety of contexts elsewhere in the Scriptures, ἐν ἐκτενείᾳ is a phrase used only in association with the 12 tribes longing for the attainment of God’s promise to Israel (Acts 26:7) or of Israel pleading for deliverance (Jud 4:9LXX). The Jewish salvation resonance of the latter detail concords well with the extensive development in Jewish tradition of the night of watching into a time of Messianic expectation (Le Déaut 1963, 292; 296, esp. n. 116). It suggests that the people praying were aware that more than Peter’s physical deliverance was at stake.

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<sup>16</sup> Whether or not Luke meant Herod of Acts 12 to be literally Agrippa 1 (see Dicken 2014) is, to some extent, irrelevant to the role he plays in the story as the Jewish client king.

<sup>17</sup> The evidence of Christian communities such as the Quartodecimans of Asia Minor in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, for whom the celebration of Passover in accordance with ancient Jewish tradition was especially important, indicates that when the story of Acts was read within a Jewish framework, the parallels would have been readily recognized. See Le Déaut 1963, 292.

- The angel of the Lord (Acts 12:7) delivers Peter from the prison, just as the Israelites spoke of an angel sent by the Lord to bring them out of Egypt (Num 20:16).
- A light shines in the building (Acts 12:7), seemingly emanating from the angel. Light is associated with the exodus because of the image of the pillar of fire that accompanied the Israelites to give them light at night (Exod 13:21). In the targums to Exodus the theme is considerably expanded and the light becomes synonymous with the presence of God. Acts 12:7D05 uses a rare compound of the verb read by N-A<sup>28</sup> (ἐπιλάμπω in place of λάμπω), found only occasionally in the LXX and then only in a figurative sense, notably in Is 4:2 to refer to God shining forth in the last days from the sanctified city of Jerusalem when there will again be a cloud by day and the light of fire by night.
- The first task of the angel is to waken Peter as he sleeps chained between two guards (Acts 12:6) by nudging his side (12:7). The verb πατάσσω chosen by all Greek MSS except D05 can mean not only to give a light push, as presumably here, but also a heavy blow and even to kill. It is used repeatedly in the narrative of Exod 12LXX (e.g. Exod 12:12, 23 x 2, 27) to refer to the killing of the first-born; it will be used in this sense of the angel killing Herod later in Acts 12 (12:23). In D05, a more neutral verb, νύσσω, is used in 12:7 so avoiding any misplaced comparison of Peter with either the Egyptians or Herod
- Peter is told to act in haste (ἐν τάχει, Acts 12:7), reminiscent of the manner in which the Israelites were ordered to eat the Passover (Exod 12:11) or the Egyptians sent them out of their land (Exod 12:33), although in the LXX a different expression (μετὰ σπουδῆς/σπουδῆ) is used.
- He is also told to gird himself and put on his sandals (ζῶσαι καὶ ὑπόδησαι τὰ σανδάλια σου, Acts 12:8), instructions given to the Israelites for the eating of the Passover (αἰ ὀσφύες ὑμῶν περιεζωσμέναι, καὶ τὰ ὑποδήματα ἐν τοῖς ποσὶν ὑμῶν, Exod 12:11); furthermore, he is to wrap his cloak around himself (τὸ ἱμάτιόν, Acts 12:8), reflecting the gesture of the Israelites who carried their kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks (ἐν τοῖς ἱματίοις αὐτῶν, Exod 12:34).
- The door leading out of the prison opens of its own accord (αὐτομάτη, Acts 12:10), echoing a tradition recorded by the Jewish Egyptian historian Artapanus in his rewriting

of the exodus story in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE: when Moses was imprisoned by Pharaoh, he was able to escape because the doors opened spontaneously (αὐτομάτως).<sup>18</sup>

- Peter's words (12:11) on finding himself outside the prison and realizing that what had happened was real (νῦν οἶδα ὅτι ἀληθῶς ἐξαπέστειλεν κύριος τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξείλατό με ἐκ χειρὸς Ἡρώδου)<sup>19</sup> are reminiscent, first, of the words of Moses's son Eliezer: ἐξείλατό με ἐκ χειρὸς Φαραώ, Exod 18:4LXX); and secondly, those of his father-in-law, Jethro, on hearing from Moses about the deliverance of the Israelites: Εὐλογητὸς κύριος, ὅτι ἐξείλατο τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ χειρὸς Αἰγυπτίων καὶ ἐκ ἐκ χειρὸς Φαραώ· νῦν ἔγνω ὅτι μέγας κύριος παρὰ πάντας τοὺς θεούς..., Exod 18:10-11LXX
- On realizing what had happened, Peter goes to Mary's house where a section of the Jerusalem church had gathered and he 'declared to them how the Lord brought him out (ἐξήγαγεν) of prison' (12:17), using the same verb as is used repeatedly throughout Exodus
- On the association of the prison with the exodus may be noted a Rabbinic Midrash on Exodus 12 which speaks of the Feast of Passover as comparable to the celebration of the day on which 'a king set free his son from prison'.<sup>20</sup>

So from what exactly is Peter delivered and in what way does the exodus motif contribute to the message of the narrative? Several levels of interpretation are possible. On the most obvious, Peter is freed from the political power of Herod and the threat of death; the intervention of the angel of the Lord is a demonstration of how the Lord protects his Church. This literal interpretation takes the historical dimension of the narrative at face value. It is the one proposed by most commentators who acknowledge echoes of the exodus story, viewing Peter's escape as typological imitation, of Israel in the past and Jesus in more recent times, an example of God's providence (cf. Weaver 2004, 156). It would be possible to be more precise, still on a literal level, and set the attack on Peter in its wider narrative context so as to take account of the fact that Herod was acting in order to please his Jewish subjects; the release of Peter from prison then represents the way in which the Church is able to withstand Jewish hostility.

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<sup>18</sup> Artapanus, *De Judaeis*, cited by Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* 9.27.23; see also Josephus, *Ant.* 2.254-55. Several scholars argue that the detail of the doors opening, among other non-biblical motifs, is material that Artapanus took from Euripides' *Bacchae*; see Friesen 2015, 141-147. Be that as it may, similarities in miraculous escapes between Greek sources and Jewish ones by no means exclude the likelihood that the Jewish authors situate their accounts primarily with reference to the exodus, a point well made by Christopher 2018, 180-181. Furthermore, stories about Moses such as those of Artapanus could well have been circulating as oral, if not written, tradition among Jewish communities in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.

<sup>19</sup> N-A<sup>28</sup> has νῦν οἶδα ἀληθῶς ὅτι ...

<sup>20</sup> *Exod R.* 12:42, cited by Le Déaut (*La Nuit Pascale*, p. 235) who notes that the tradition is likely to date from a much earlier time than the Rabbinic period.

Recognizing the use of the exodus model makes evident the powerfully ironic comparison between the liberation of the Israelites from the oppression of the Egyptians under Pharaoh and the deliverance of the Peter from the oppression of the Jews under Herod (noted by Christopher, 2018, 178).

### 3.3 Allusions to Ezekiel

Another level of interpretation, a symbolic one that involves a more radical theological message, is pointed to by the presence of an enigmatic comment in Acts 12:17 and confirmed by a reading present in D05 at 12:10.

Once Peter has related his miraculous escape to the church at Mary's house (12:12-17), and after leaving instructions that the news be passed on to James and the brethren, the narrative states that he thereupon 'went out and travelled to another place' (ἐξελθὼν ἐπορεύθη εἰς ἕτερον τόπον, 12:17). The vagueness of the comment is uncharacteristic of Acts and the phrase is not used elsewhere by Luke or, indeed, anywhere in the New Testament. It does occur once, however, in Ezek 12:3LXX, where its use sheds light on its meaning in Acts 12.<sup>21</sup> In the course of the early part of the book of Ezekiel, the prophet is instructed to perform a series of symbolic actions to illustrate to the people of Israel that because of their wickedness in Jerusalem, they are going to be brought out of the city and scattered among the nations. He is to equip himself like an exile leaving a town, dig through the walls of Jerusalem and 'go like an exile from your place to another place' (εἰς ἕτερον τόπον, 12:3). When the people ask what he is doing, he is to tell them that his action is a sign that concerns 'the ruler and the one guiding in Jerusalem and in all the house of Israel (Ὁ ἄρχων καὶ ὁ ἀφηγούμενος ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ παντὶ οἴκῳ Ἰσραήλ, Ezek 12:10).

The implication of taking up this phrase with reference to Peter is that at this point he left Jerusalem (Ἱερουσαλήμ), not the city as a geographical location but Jerusalem as the spiritual centre of the Church. Whether he went immediately or whether he even went at all in the literal sense, are questions that are irrelevant to Luke's narrative intention. For the effect of evoking Ezekiel's prophecy is to bring to the fore the serious and tragic consequences of the assimilation of the Jews with the Egyptians as enemies of God's people: as leader of the apostles, Peter goes away from Jerusalem as the centre of authority for God's people.

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<sup>21</sup> The allusion to Ezek 12:3 is recognised by Thiede 1987, 221-229). However, he identifies 'the other place' as Babylon/Rome.

The symbolic nature of this interpretation is endorsed by the D05 text of Acts 12:10, at the end of the events describing the escape from the prison. As Peter follows the angel through the prison, they come first to the iron gate which they go through then out and along one street before the angel disappears. D05<sup>22</sup> specifies that as they go out of the prison, they ‘went down seven steps’ (κατέβησαν τοὺς ἑπτὰ βαθμούς), apparently leading from the prison to the street. In both texts, some care is given to marking the stages of the exit from the prison, specifying that Peter followed the angel through a first and a second prison, although the information is not strictly necessary; in this context, the additional detail of the seven steps is all the more curious. Textual critics commonly allow that a scribe may have had accurate local knowledge about the prison in Jerusalem and they see its inclusion simply as a means to make the report more colourful (see Metzger 1994, 347-348). That it has quite another significance can be deduced from the extensive use made of the book of Ezekiel in this episode.

The allusion to Ezek 12:3 has been noted above and I have suggested elsewhere (see Read-Heimerdinger 1996, 301-312; Rius-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger 2006, 381-396) that in the Bezan text of Acts 12, Herod, whilst being a Jew, is assimilated with the Prince of Tyre, Israel’s chief enemy in the last days of Israel’s exile according to the prophecy of Ezek 26–28.<sup>23</sup> The latter part of Ezekiel’s prophecy is devoted to his vision of the new Temple to be built when Israel returns from exile to Jerusalem and which the Messiah will enter (Ezek 40–46). A great number of exact measurements and numbers concerning the dimensions of the Temple are given, including the number of steps at the gates on each of the four sides of the building, between the inner and the outer courts and at the entrance to the outer court from the city (Ezek 40). At the latter, and only there, there are to be seven steps going up into the Temple (ἐν ἑπτὰ κλιμακτῆρσιν ἀνέβαινον ἐπ’ αὐτήν, Ezek 40:22 cf. vv. 26, 32).<sup>24</sup> At the east gate, these seven steps are the point of entry of the God of Israel into the restored Temple, his dwelling place (43:1-5).

Ezekiel’s reference is the only mention of seven steps in the whole of the Scriptures. In the light of this single reference, the ‘seven steps’ of Acts 12 can be understood as a clue that Luke is evoking the prophet’s vision of the eschatological Temple, represented by the prison. The understanding of the prison as a metaphor for the new Temple makes sense of the odd mention

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<sup>22</sup> The Old Latin p and the Middle Egyptian manuscript give support to D05 here.

<sup>23</sup> The parallel is developed in detail by Garrett 1990 who, however, interprets the assimilation of Herod with the Prince of Tyre as a reference to the spiritual battle with Satan, in which Jesus, and now Peter, is victorious..

<sup>24</sup> Ropes (*The Text of Acts, ad loc.*) claims that the reference to seven steps in Ezekiel's temple ‘furnishes no satisfactory explanation’ for their mention in Acts 12: The explanation becomes satisfactory once the other pointers to Ezekiel in Acts 12 are taken into account and once the symbolic nature of the episode is recognized.

of two 'prisons', the first and the second, that Peter and the angel go through in Acts before the iron gate (12:10), for they correspond to the two Temple courts, outer and inner, that figure repeatedly in Ezekiel's vision.

The exodus parallel is again relevant to this aspect of the theological message. In some Jewish traditions (recorded notably in *Exod R.* 18.81a), Passover was anticipated as the time when the Messiah would arrive in glory and splendour at the Temple in Jerusalem (see Le Déaut 1963, 279-83). He would arrive through the east gate of the Temple which, in the time of the Second Temple, was kept shut except on the night of the Passover when it was opened in case that was the year that the Messiah arrived. The practice tallies with the command given to Ezekiel to keep the east gate shut because it was the way that God had entered the Temple to go into the inner court (Ezek 43:4; cf. 44:1-3).

Peter's departure from Jerusalem at the end of the episode (12:17) follows on from his exit from the prison. In so far as the prison represents the hope of a new Temple and the presence of God with Israel in permanence, the allusions to both Israel's history and prophesied future cause Peter's deliverance and departure to be interpreted as an event more momentous by far than an example of God's ongoing protection of his faithful servants. In a reversal of the promised future of Israel, instead of the Messiah entering the house of God in triumph, acclaimed by the people of Israel, the Lord has led the 'faithful' (cf. Acts 12:3 D05) out of the Temple and away from the city where it was to be erected, for the reason that the leaders of Israel have rejected the disciples' proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah. From a Jewish point of view, it is a profoundly tragic event for it signifies an exit from the hopes of a restored and renewed Israel.

It has taken the re-enactment of the exodus, through Peter's imprisonment and miraculous escape, for him to realise and accept that Jerusalem and the Temple no longer have a part in God's plan. The time is now right for the expansion of the Church's mission, and from Acts 13 the focus of the narrative will be on the Gentiles as the Antioch church sends out Barnabas and Saul. Even so, not all of the Church will follow Peter's understanding, for in Jerusalem (Ἱερουσαλήμ) there are brethren, led by James the brother of Jesus, who were not among those praying for Peter or hearing his story (see Acts 12:17), and they will remain attached to the Temple, to Ἱερουσαλήμ and to Jewish regulations (cf. Acts 21:18-26).

#### **4. Implications of the exodus allusions for interpreting the reception of Acts and its textual history**

In the preceding analysis of Acts 5 and Acts 12, it has been observed that, in comparison with the N-A<sup>28</sup> text, the D05 form of Acts not only displays more complete and more complex allusions to the exodus but furthermore uses the ancient event in a typically Jewish way, as a model to interpret the recent developments in the history of Israel. It is not that the exodus model is absent from the N-A<sup>28</sup> text – the acknowledgement of it by a number of studies already mentioned testifies to that – but that some of the keys to activating it are missing.

It is commonplace for exegetes to view the Bezan readings as additions, ‘simple explanatory information’ (see Barrett 1994, 574). That assessment is based on the presupposition that the text of the manuscripts behind the familiar text pre-d, the text transmitted by Codex Bezae. It fails to take account of the support for a large number of otherwise singular D05 readings in the earliest translations in Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Middle Egyptian, Aramaic, before the text was standardized in the respective vulgates. Furthermore, it fails to see the function of the Bezan readings as connecting the account of contemporary history with the ancient history and the future expectations of the Jewish people. It should be pointed out here that the nature of the D05 readings in the two passages examined in this study is not exceptional; on the contrary, words, phrases, sentences with a similar function occur as alternative readings to the familiar text on almost every page of Acts. Given the significance of many of these readings in and for a Jewish context, questions have to be asked (and answered) as to why they would have been inserted at a later date, and how, and by whom. Without any presupposition that the quality of the text that has been transmitted by alternative manuscripts is better, the logical explanation is that the Bezan text of Acts was earlier and was updated in a variety of ways to make it more accessible to a Church that gradually moved away from its Jewish roots.

According to the text of D05, in setting out the history of the early days of the Church, the author is placing it within the well-known and well-loved history of Israel. By activating the exodus model, the Bezan text accords the story of the Church a layer of meaning that goes deeper than a merely historical one: it is a theological meaning, derived from the place the Church is seen as occupying in the history of Israel. It is communicated through readings that, far from being embellishments dictated by a scribe’s fancy, can be seen to be references to traditions associated with the exodus found either in the Bible or in oral Jewish interpretation. The narrator of this text is not a lowly copyist: he has the skill to be innovative and creative in his application of a scriptural paradigm; he has the boldness to apply it such a way as to address a message of prophetic dimensions concerning the tragedy of what has happened to the leaders of the people of God.

Since the publication of Epp 1966, there has existed the widespread belief that D05 is the work of a Gentile reviser who sought to present Christianity as ‘anti-Judaic’, superior to Judaism which it had replaced. The verdict hinges on first, the identification and, secondly, the interpretation of the numerous places in Acts D05 where criticism of the Jews is more pointed and more severe than in other early manuscripts. A detailed analysis of the Bezan text reveals that this criticism, which is even more forceful in places than Epp recognized, is made from an internal Jewish perspective. This outcome should not be surprising, for the writings of the Jewish prophets are already testimony to the fact that ferocity of criticism against the people of Israel has no need of Gentiles to deliver it. It is contended here that the presence of a dense and intricate accumulation of Jewish sources, interpreted to make theological comment on events in the early Church, is evidence precisely of an author of Jewish origin writing within a Jewish context to a Jewish recipient.

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