
TRANSFORMING TABLES:

Meals as Encounters with the Kingdom in Luke

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
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| AB | The Anchor Bible |
| ABRL | The Anchor Bible Reference Library |
| ANTC | Abingdon New Testament Commentary |
| BDAG | Bauer, Walter. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Revised and edited by Frederick W. Danker. 3 rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. |
| JBL | Journal of Biblical Literature |
| JTS | Journal of Theological Studies |
| LCL | Loeb Classical Library |
| NIB | The New Interpreter's Bible |
| NTL | New Testament Library |
| OTL | Old Testament Library |
| SBLMS | Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series |
| SNTSMS | Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series |
| WBC | Word Biblical Commentary |

ABSTRACT

This discussion explores Lukan meal scenes as encounters with the kingdom of God. Addressing the limitations of some other approaches, the thesis argues that the meals create a liminal space which brings to life the challenge and opportunity of responding to Jesus' proclamation. Initially, the study outlines background material on meal traditions Luke inherited – both those derived from Greco-Roman symposia and from traditions within Judaism. It then describes Jesus' proclamation of release and acceptance, and the kingdom of God as presented in Luke, in order to demonstrate the ways in which meals embody this proclamation. Finally, the study considers two meal scenes in detail, Luke 7:36-50 and 14:1-24, and draws conclusions about the challenge to transformation which takes place in Lukan meals.

UNCOVERING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MEALS IN LUKE

To his opponents, Jesus is a 'drunkard and glutton.' He is a 'friend of tax collectors and sinners' (Luke 7:34), and one whose disciples do not fast (5:33). But to the reader of Luke's Gospel, the stories of meals with Jesus invert the scandal of these criticisms. Friend of tax collectors and sinners indeed, the Lukan Jesus shares table fellowship with the full spectrum of characters in the Gospel, and with great frequency. And in these meals his proclamation is brought to life.

There is now widespread agreement that meal scenes are significant for interpreting Luke. Even a cursory examination of the Gospel reveals that Luke's Jesus is often at meal tables, describing as it does seven explicit meals (5:27-32; 7:36-50; 9:10-17; 11:37-52; 14:1-24; 22:14-38; 24:28-32), and two implied (10:38-42; 19:1-10), over the course of the narrative.¹

On the function of meal scenes, however, there is less consensus. While Robert Karris famously highlighted the escalating conflict at meals to postulate that the Lukan Jesus is put to death because of the way in which he eats,² others, such

¹ The meal scenes in chapters 10, 11, 14, 19 and 24 are unique to Luke. The feeding of the 5000 (Luke 9:10-17) and the last supper (22:14-38) appear in some form in all four Gospels. The meals in Luke 5:27-32 and 7:36-50 have some parallels, but particularly that in chapter 7 may be derived from different source traditions.

² Robert J. Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian, Luke's Passion Account as Literature*, Theological Inquiries (New York: Paulist, 1985), 47.

as Jerome Neyrey,³ approach the meal text through the lens of socio-cultural analysis, to make claims about the social function of meals. Still others, such as Dennis Smith⁴ and E. Springs Steele,⁵ note the similarities between Luke's meals and Greco-Roman symposium literature, to conclude that Luke places Jesus at meal tables in order to employ a literary genre familiar to his audience.

In this exploration, however, I argue that Luke has indeed employed inherited literary conventions, but he has also done much more. For instance, although elements of symposium literature are evident in Lukan meal scenes, such a connection does not then exhaust the meaning of these scenes in the unfolding Gospel. In the context of commentary on Lukan meals it is therefore helpful to address the limitations of these approaches, before going on to describe the approach I will take in the remainder of this study.

Beyond the meal as literary convention

Analysis of Lukan meal scenes frequently focuses on evidence of symposium traditions. As I will discuss more fully below, meals were a central social institution in the Greco-Roman world. Not only did this inspire set practices in

³ Jerome H. Neyrey, 'Ceremonies in Luke-Acts: The Case of Meals and Table-Fellowship,' in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 361-387.

⁴ Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 253.

⁵ E. Springs Steele, 'Luke 11:37-54: A Modified Hellenistic Symposium?,' *JBL* 103 (1984): 379-394.

terms of the conduct of meals; it also gave rise to a popular literary genre. Thus, philosophical writers from Plato to Plutarch narrated hypothetical banquets in which the dilemmas raised by meals were used as a catalyst for moral instruction.

Lukan meals clearly exhibit many symposium features, both in terms of the meal practices described and the literary conventions followed in the narration. Smith helpfully summarises themes shared by Lukan meals and some symposium texts, focussing particularly on the topics covered in the tabletalk after the meal.⁶ Similarly, Springs Steele identifies a number of symposium literary conventions in arguing that the meals in Luke 7:36-50, 11:37-54 and 14:1-24 are modified versions of the Hellenistic symposium form. Both Smith and Springs Steele essentially argue that Luke places discussion during meal scenes in order to present the gospel message in a genre familiar to his implied audience.⁷

However, such analysis stops short of the full significance of Lukan meals.

Luke's many influences, including but not limited to Greco-Roman traditions, do provide essential background for interpreting the meaning he attributes to meals.

But, in the context of Luke's Gospel, the significance of these meal scenes

⁶ Smith divides meal themes into texts which comment on: social stratification (Luke 14:7-11; 22:24 [Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 255-256]); eating and drinking as a symbol of luxury – both negatively in the sense of amoral decadence (6:24-25; 12:16-21, 42-46; 16:19-31; 17:26-29; 21:34, pp. 259-261) and positively as reflecting God's abundance (13:27-30; 14:15, 21; 15:1-2; 22:30, p. 261); and table service as a symbol of community service (12:42-46; 22:24-27, p. 264); and of community fellowship (5:32; 19:1-9, p. 267-271).

⁷ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 256-7, and Springs Steele, 'Luke 11:37-54,' 394.

cannot be reduced to conformity to Greco-Roman influences. Rather, as I seek to demonstrate in this thesis, the meals themselves are crucial events in the unfolding Gospel narrative. Beyond simply a literary convention, these meals function as transformative encounters, embodying the challenge and opportunity of Jesus' proclamation for those who are present.

Beyond the social science of meals

Another key perspective considers Lukan meals from a socio-cultural angle. In this approach, the biblical text is interpreted in light of understandings of the social function of meals in ancient society. For instance, Neyrey's contribution to a compilation of essays on *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, starkly contrasts meals, which he considers ceremonies, with rituals (the subject of a companion article by Mark McVann in the same volume).⁸ Neyrey summarises his argument as:

Meals are not *rituals*, rites of status change and transformation.

Rather they are *ceremonies*, which:

- (a) are predictable and occur regularly, and
- (b) are determined, called for, and presided over by officials, and
- (c) function to confirm roles and statuses within the chief institutions of a given group.⁹

Thus, Neyrey argues that meals are ordered traditions which function to confirm the status quo. He suggests that the emphasis in meals is on strengthening a

⁸ Mark McVann, 'Rituals of Status Transformation in Luke-Acts: The Case of Jesus the Prophet,' in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. Neyrey (see note 3), 333-360.

⁹ Neyrey, 'Ceremonies in Luke-Acts,' 362, emphasis original.

given social group. The focus lies, therefore, on the group's centre not its periphery.¹⁰

However, it is immediately obvious that the meals in Luke do not conform to this shape. Aside from the Passover meal in chapter 22, Lukan meals are not part of an ordered observance, such as the regular annual or daily meals to which Neyrey refers;¹¹ rather they are ad hoc meals. Those who gather for these meals are rarely Jesus' key disciples, but an array of characters who make once-off appearances at the table, or indeed, up to 5000 people who have simply followed Jesus until the time of the evening meal (9:12-14). Further, at times it is an intruder or interruption to the meal which prompts the central action of the story, thereby shifting attention to the periphery (7:37-38; 14:2-4).

The central difficulty with Neyrey's approach lies in his assumption that meals cannot be transformative. He does eventually note that "at times Luke confirms the accepted order pertaining to meals, but at other times he reports that it is upset."¹² But his focus remains on the 'rules' around ceremonies, which he has

¹⁰ Neyrey claims: "Ceremonies, moreover, do not focus on the crossing of lines and boundaries that define and structure a group, because that is the function of rituals. Nor are ceremonies concerned with status reversal or transformation... Unlike rituals, which are concerned with the perimeter, ceremonies focus on the inside... They attend, not to change, but to stability; they are concerned, not with newness, but with continuity" (Neyrey, 'Ceremonies in Luke-Acts,' 363). Whether or not this is a valid claim about meals in general, Lukan meals cannot be used as support for such a view.

¹¹ Neyrey, 'Ceremonies in Luke-Acts,' 363.

¹² Neyrey, 'Ceremonies in Luke-Acts,' 375. Note also that Neyrey's examples of Jesus upholding a traditional rule for meals are almost exclusively from Jesus' sayings

derived from social science rather than Luke's text. In his attempt to fit Lukan meals within this framework, Neyrey overlooks not only the key themes developed in Lukan meal scenes, but also the function these meals perform across the Gospel.¹³ By contrast, I argue in this thesis that the key to transformation in Lukan meals is not so much the 'rules' that Jesus uses or in some cases inverts, but the transformation made possible for other characters as they are invited to accept Jesus' new way of operating.

Much more could be said about previous studies on Lukan meals. There are many substantial works on the theme, which I will draw upon throughout this discussion.¹⁴ Two studies of particular note, an article by Paul Minear,¹⁵ and a

about meals or meal metaphors, rather than his own practice in an actual meal scene (eg. Luke 12:37; 17:7-10, pp. 378-379).

¹³ In another similar example of a problematic social science emphasis, Neyrey identifies 'patron-client' relations in meals. In light of this theory, he casts Jesus as "the founder of a faction" who gains something in return for sharing meals. That is, Jesus uses the meal to confirm his leadership role (Neyrey, 'Ceremonies in Luke-Acts,' 374). This claim also seems to focus on a particular social science hypothesis about meals, rather than flowing from the meaning of meals in the context of Luke's Gospel.

¹⁴ In addition to those studies I have already noted, some reference to David Moessner's very detailed analysis of meals entitled *Lord of the Banquet* may be useful (David P. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989). Although valuable in highlighting the significance of Lukan meals for the way the narrative unfolds, I did not find his study particularly helpful for this discussion. Moessner often limits his analysis by emphasising the travel narrative and its relationship to Deuteronomy, which diverts his attention from the many meals which fall outside this section.

¹⁵ Paul Minear, 'Some Glimpses of Luke's Sacramental Theology,' *Worship* 44 (1970): 322-331.

major work by Arthur Just,¹⁶ draw out the eschatological elements of Lukan meals. Such insights support my emphasis on the eschatological quality of Lukan meal scenes. Into this context of significant previous study of Luke's meals, however, I seek to provide a distinctive perspective.

Lukan meals as encounters

This study is an attempt to explore meals in Luke as encounters with the kingdom of God. Using a literary approach, I discuss the meals as they appear in the final form of Luke's text, and their relationship to themes as they develop across the Gospel narrative. Although I take the influence of historical and earlier literary conventions seriously, I only refer to such detail as it helps to uncover the meaning Luke attributes to these meal scenes. I argue that Luke employs various inherited traditions as tools for telling his story, but that the story itself cannot be explained simply by identifying the tools. Similarly, I make use of synoptic comparison where this sheds light on Luke's particular emphases, but do not make any systematic attempt to uncover earlier stages in the development of Luke's text.

Importantly, this discussion focuses specifically on meal scenes, although Luke also makes many further references to food and meals. For instance, as the Lukan Jesus makes use of everyday imagery in his descriptions of discipleship

¹⁶ Arthur A. Just Jr., *The Ongoing Feast: Table Fellowship and Eschatology at Emmaus* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993).

and the kingdom of God, he frequently incorporates imagery from food and meals (cf. 5:33-35, 37-39; 6:1; 11:3, 5-6; 13:20-21; 17:27-28).¹⁷ Although the relationship between this imagery in Jesus' teaching and meal scenes could no doubt be fruitfully explored, there is not scope for such analysis within the present study.

Rather, I focus on the way in which Luke presents the experiences of an array of characters in the context of meals. In fact, Luke's many meals seem to follow a similar pattern. Drawing on Robert Alter's understanding of 'type-scenes,' Robert Tannehill identifies meals as a type-scene in Luke, whereby subsequent scenes contain elements which are intended to remind the reader of earlier scenes. Thus Tannehill argues that the meal scenes are linked by their similarities and seem designed to allude to and further develop themes from earlier meals.¹⁸ I suggest these meal scenes, however, not only build on each other, but also develop a particular 'meal encounter' pattern. Overlapping connections between these scenes suggest the following common elements for meal encounters: Jesus' presence at a meal; a crowd or chorus; an action which prompts discussion; an opponent; and an unexpected revelation (cf. 5:27-32; 7:36-50; 9:10-17; 10:38-42; 11:37-52; 14:1-24; 19:1-10).

¹⁷ Karris, provides a comprehensive list of the texts which pertain to this theme (Karris, *Luke*, 49-51). Note that Just deals with both meals and food metaphors in the same way (see Just, *The Ongoing Feast*, 128-129).

¹⁸ See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). And Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1: *The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 105.

However, again, this creates more than a new literary convention. As encounters, the meals create a different kind of space in the narrative. Luke Timothy Johnson observes that Luke's Gospel moves between sayings and events which then embody those sayings.¹⁹ In this sense, meal scenes become events which embody Jesus' proclamation. Indeed, Karris describes meals as "acted parables."²⁰

Further, as events, these scenes become liminal moments in which characters hover as though on the threshold between two different places. Liminality describes a stage in the experience of profound transition, during which a person is separated from his or her familiar context but has not yet moved into the new context.²¹ Such experience is inevitably transformative but, as the meals reveal, also costly. In Lukan meal scenes, I suggest, the threshold moment places characters in the doorway to a proleptic experience of the kingdom, made available through meal fellowship with Jesus. In so doing, the meals highlight the tension at the heart of Jesus' proclamation and the invitation before all who encounter Jesus. They bring to life the challenge present in Jesus' proclamation of the year of the Lord's acceptance (4:19), inviting

¹⁹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina 3 (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 16-17.

²⁰ Karris, *Luke*, 58.

²¹ The concept of liminality is often used in relation to rites of passage. Etymologically, the term 'liminal' stems from the Latin word for threshold: *limen*, which accurately communicates the sense of transition involved. (See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, [New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1969], 94).

characters to step forward into whole-hearted participation in a new order of things, and in so doing bring characters to the cusp of transformation.

As they bring to life Jesus' proclamation, the meals also shed light on the *character* of the kingdom. This is a kingdom not only described in the central themes of abundance and feasting, but also in reversal (14:11, 23-24; 22:24-27). Its unconventional priorities, demonstrated at table with Jesus, cause some characters to verge on rejecting the acceptance which they have been offered. Indeed, as they embody the broader themes from across the Gospel, meals also underline the developing tragedy that the one who has proclaimed the Lord's acceptance is himself ultimately rejected.

Finally, these meals become proleptic experiences of the kingdom by their nature as intimate encounters at table with the one who is messianically anointed and empowered by the Spirit (4:1, 18). As Smith acknowledges, in these meals, Jesus "somehow symbolized in his person the presence of the Kingdom."²² The question before fellow diners, foreshadowed in Jesus' sayings and drawn out by meal scenes, is who can respond to such an encounter with unreserved participation?

This discussion therefore focuses on Lukan meals as encounters which embody the central themes of Jesus' proclamation: acceptance, release and participation in the kingdom. I explore these themes in the exegetical chapters below.

²² Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 234.

However, to better understand the meaning which Luke attributes to meals, it is necessary first to survey ancient meal traditions which may have some bearing on interpretation.

MEAL BACKGROUND

Meals are a central part of any culture's ordering. And as a first-century writer Luke inherited a variety of images of, and assumptions about, meals. His cultural and religious context provided not only a structured model for the way meals were conducted, but a wealth of philosophical discourse about meal ethics and religious imagery about an eschatological meal. Such influences may be discussed under two broad categories: Greco-Roman influences, and traditions from within Judaism.

Before addressing each of these areas, however, one important qualification should be noted. Although one may distinguish between Greco-Roman and Old Testament-derived Jewish influences, the distinction between Greco-Roman and Jewish *practices* in Luke's historical context should not be drawn too starkly. Even Jewish banquets, including Passover traditions, reflect elements of the ubiquitous symposium.²³ The Greek practices of dining, to which I now turn, were taken up across the Mediterranean, and continued under the Roman Empire.²⁴ These practices set a pervasive standard across the Ancient world, from which Judaism and its various groups were not immune.

²³ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 48.

²⁴ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 14.

Greco-Roman Influences

The ancient practice of symposia

By strict definition, the Greek term symposium (συμπόσιον) refers to the second part of a formal meal, after the eating (the δείπνον), during which the drinking and entertainment took place. A similarly narrow definition, although one based less on etymology, delineates between various types of ancient meals. By such a definition a symposium is a banquet whose object is pleasure, as distinct from the types of meals held among religious, military or political groups.²⁵

However, the word symposium is often used more broadly. In discussing the overlap between different types of ancient meals, Schmitt-Pantel argues against rigid demarcations between symposia and sacrificial religious meals. In light of such studies and considering the sweeping influence of these banquet traditions, in this discussion I do not restrict symposium to only one part or one type of ancient meal. Rather, to understand the possible influences of ancient meal practices on Luke's depiction of meals, symposium here refers to these dining traditions across the entire meal and their diverse forms.

Thus, a reference to symposia takes on not only the bi-partite meal structure of δείπνον and συμπόσιον but related social practices, such as reclining at meals.

These practices in turn cultivated further meal traditions. For instance, the practice of reclining spawned particular architectural features to facilitate

²⁵ Oswyn Murray, 'Symptotic History,' in *Symptotica: A Symposium on the Symposium*, ed. Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 3-13, see p. 5.

socialising while reclining. It also inspired etiquette regarding the appropriate number of guests to allow adequate space for each to recline and converse.²⁶

Indeed, the practice of reclining can be used to trace the influence of sympotic traditions. Smith identifies symposia as the major meal practice of the region from 300BCE to 300CE.²⁷ Considerable variety may be found across this geography and time span,²⁸ although symposia also demonstrate other consistent features. For instance, symposia were predominantly open only to men, although some Greek texts' disdain for cultures which admit women reveals that this was not unheard of.²⁹ Under the characteristic bi-partite structure, the drinking party section was marked by some form of entertainment, whether conversation, music or games. And the entire process, including such considerations as the pace of drinking, was often presided over by a master of ceremonies.³⁰

²⁶ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 31.

²⁷ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 18-19. Others give an even longer period, dating the practice back to the 5th century BCE (Springs Steele, 'Luke 11:37-54,' 393) or even the 8th century BCE (Murray, 'Sympotic History,' 6).

²⁸ Pauline Schmitt-Pantel emphasises diversity among sympotic traditions when discussing the difficulties of using symposium literature to draw conclusions about practices. She concludes: "Like that of vases, the interpretation of literary texts of the Archaic age does not permit us to reconstruct a single form of the aristocratic banquet" (Pauline Schmitt-Pantel, 'Sacrificial Meal and *Symposion*: Two Models of Civic Institutions in the Archaic City?,' in *Sympotica*, ed. Murray [see note 25], 14-33, see p. 23).

²⁹ Murray, 'Sympotic History,' 6. For further discussion about developments as some women began attending symposia during the Hellenistic period see also Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 43.

³⁰ Anne Lill, 'The Social Meaning of Greek Symposium,' in *Studien zu Ritual und Sozialgeschichte im Alten Orient: Tartuer Symposien 1998-2004*, ed. Thomas Richard Kämmerer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 171-186, see p. 171.

Interpreting the evidence on Symposia

Sympotic traditions are evidenced by extensive archaeological material.

Archaeologists point to surviving fragments of written invitations,³¹ the architecture of ancient dining halls³² and paintings of banquet scenes on vases.³³

Another significant source is found in the literary traditions which emerged alongside the actual meals. Key early texts by Plato and Xenophon establish the symposium as a setting and topic for philosophical writing. Among other works, both wrote pieces called *Symposium* which situate philosophical discussion at meals where Socrates was a guest.³⁴

These banquet texts demonstrate the Greco-Roman interest in moral questions; indeed such interest positioned philosophical texts by writers such as Plato among the popular literature of the time.³⁵ Symposium literature also took other forms, such as satire, employing humour to critique sympotic behaviour. By Luke's time, writers such as Plutarch and Philo continued to write on sympotic

³¹ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 23.

³² Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 15-17.

³³ Schmitt-Pantel, 'Sacrificial Meal and *Symposion*,' 16-20.

³⁴ See Plato *Symposium* 174A, and Xenophon *Symposium* 1.7. Manuela Tecusan notes that sympotic themes are a significant element in many of Plato's works, even those not expressly situated at symposia (Manuela Tecusan, '*Logos Symptikos*: Patterns of the Irrational in Philosophical Drinking: Plato Outside the *Symposium*,' in *Sympotica*, ed. Murray [see note 25], 238-260, see p. 238).

³⁵ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 62.

themes to discuss the principles and philosophy of symposia and their broader social implications.³⁶

In this way a whole body of symposium-related literature accumulated.

However, using these texts to understand sympotic practice is not straightforward. The relationship between actual meals and texts is difficult to determine, even where the text claims to narrate an actual meal. In extreme cases, a text may be told in first person though it cannot be historical. For instance, Plutarch narrates his banquet of the seven sages as though he were an eye witness but dates the event centuries earlier.³⁷ In more subtle examples, even a text which appears to describe an historical meal may tend to idealise or to conform to literary convention, obscuring the historical information.³⁸

In this respect, the anthropologist's distinction between the *emic* and *etic* supplies a helpful interpretive model. J. Patrick Mullen defines the emic as the way a culture describes its own behaviour and motivations, and the etic as a culture's actual behaviour as observed by a perceptive outsider.³⁹ As meals are idealised in literary texts, they reflect the emic. That is, such texts describe a culture's sense of the way in which it would like to behave, or the writer's instruction to readers about behaviour they ought to exhibit. The difficulty of

³⁶ Dennis E. Smith, 'Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,' *JBL* 106 (1987): 613-638, see p. 615.

³⁷ Plutarch *Septem Sapientium Convivium*.

³⁸ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 47.

³⁹ J. Patrick Mullen, *Dining with Pharisees*, Interfaces (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2004), 35-37.

identifying the etic is represented by the problem of isolating the historical practices behind literary texts.

Satire provides an alternate literary style which is helpful for identifying symposium practice behind the text. Satirists highlight various sympotic practices, but also use exaggeration to critique the behaviour. For instance, Aristophanes' *Wasps* is a satire in which the protagonist, Philokleon, is instructed on 'appropriate' symposium behaviour, and as a result becomes drunken and unruly.⁴⁰ However, wild drinking parties represent only a portion of symposia. Although criticism in satire may uncover home truths about some symposia, the broader literature retains a strong sense of the symposium's social significance, and does not depict the symposium as immoral by its nature.⁴¹

Thus, the relationship between symposium literature and historical practice is complex; in fact, it reflects an interdependence. The symposium's cultural centrality sparked a literary tradition, but the literature itself then played a role in shaping sympotic practice. Symposium literature not only critiqued inappropriate behaviour, but explored dilemmas of etiquette, such as ranking,

⁴⁰ Aristophanes *Wasps* 1122-1537. For further comment on this text, see Oswyn Murray, 'The Affair of the Mysteries: Democracy and the Drinking Group,' in *Sympotica*, ed. Murray (see note 25), 149-161, see p. 150.

⁴¹ Andrew McGowan notes that even though Philo, for instance, could criticise banquets for debauched drinking party practices, "there was substantial concern for moderation and self-control in the philosophical tradition which he had inherited" (Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals*, Oxford Early Christian Studies [Oxford: Clarendon, 1999], 69).

assigning food portions and deciding on the entertainment for the evening.⁴² In all these ways, the literature provides evidence about what was considered important in symposia, although it also cautions against extrapolating to make assumptions about historical practice.

Despite such ambiguities, the symposium was clearly a central social institution. Murray observes that in many ways, with its own space, as required for reclining, its particular rules, and its “metasympotic discourse” the symposium became a place separate from the normal rules of society.⁴³ Both what may be deduced about actual meal practice, and the emphases in sympotic literature, indicate that symposia created an important kind of commensality in Greco-Roman society. The emphasis on eating and drinking together, according to the somewhat separate laws of symposia, consolidated community values and identity.⁴⁴

Greco-Roman Symposium Literature

Symposium literature offers a number of insights for interpreting Lukan meals. In particular I will consider common motifs in the symposium literary form, the underlying symposium ethics and, finally, the symposium as literary symbol.

⁴² Cf. Plato *Symposium* 177A, or many of the sections in Plutarch *Quaestiones Convivales*, including 612E and 620A.

⁴³ Murray, ‘Symptotic History,’ 7.

⁴⁴ Dennis E. Smith and Hal E. Taussig, *Many Tables: The Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today* (London: SCM, 1990), 31.

Stock characters and literary motifs

In his analysis of symposium literature, Smith identifies a number of stock characters which are commonly used in the form. For instance, he suggests texts frequently include an ‘uninvited guest,’ citing Plato’s *Symposium* as an example.⁴⁵ Plato’s text contains three separate ‘uninvited guest’ incidents. In the first, a character is not invited but brought by another guest (174E), while later, a second character who has not been invited, interrupts good-naturedly to ask if he may join the diners (212E-213A). In both these situations, the host promptly extends an invitation to the uninvited guest and the banquet proceeds. Later, however, a group sneaks in when the door is open and its influence causes the party to degenerate (223B).⁴⁶

Overall, Smith identifies the following stock characters: “the host, the jester, the uninvited guest, the physician, the late-arriving guest, the whiner, the insulted guest, the heavy drinker, and the pair of lovers.”⁴⁷ Springs Steele suggests an additional stock character, the chief guest, who he argues is characterised by wisdom and shapes the narrative by winning any dispute.⁴⁸

In addition to stock characters, the symposium genre often follows standard motifs in terms of the plot. For instance, Smith suggests a “quarrel or contest”

⁴⁵ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 22-23.

⁴⁶ Plato *Symposium* 174E, 212E-213A, 223B.

⁴⁷ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 49.

⁴⁸ Springs Steele, ‘Luke 11:37-54,’ 381.

often provides “a topos on which to build the narrative.”⁴⁹ Another motif, tabletalk, uses the structure of ancient meals to focus the narrative on philosophical discussion. In philosophical works such as those of Plato, the motif of tabletalk provides the setting for the discourse which is the central purpose of the text, attributing dialogue to the famed philosophers who appear as characters.⁵⁰

Themes and ethical categories

Beyond these elements of the literary form, symposium literature developed a number of consistent themes drawn from the ethics associated with symposia. Thus symposium literature evaluated behaviour as appropriate in terms of whether it facilitated the achievement of these ethical aims.

Smith identifies three key themes which form the “theoretical basis for meal ethics”: *koinônia*, friendship and pleasure.⁵¹

Koinônia describes the deep sharing which is understood to take place among diners at symposia. Smith argues that sharing was considered an essential element of the symposium. For instance, Plutarch criticises symposia which fail

⁴⁹ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 49.

⁵⁰ Cf. Plato *Symposium* 178A-212C.

⁵¹ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 54-55.

in this regard, such as where individual portions of food have been served, thus creating multiple separate meals and therefore separate diners.⁵²

Likewise, sharing in conversation reflects the symposium's *koinônia*. Anne Lill argues that the Greek regard for freedom of speech was reflected in the emphasis on allowing each diner to speak and be listened to, which she claims gave rise to an understanding of sympotic unity.⁵³ As Plutarch himself asserts: "Indeed, just as the wine must be common to all, so too the conversation must be one in which we will all share."⁵⁴ Plutarch considers *koinônia* a central aim of the symposium, and that therefore any practice which hinders sharing at a practical level, confounds the symposium's purpose at a deeper level.

That said, there are elements of symposium tradition which appear to conflict with the ethic of *koinônia*, of which writers were obviously aware. The clearest example is ranking the guests at table. This became a common topic for tabletalk. Characters are depicted teasing out the problems of ranking, and the different problems which may be caused by removing this system.⁵⁵ They are also found criticising practices which create further distinction among diners,

⁵² Plutarch *Quaestiones Convivales* 644C. Lill notes that in these texts, those at the symposium refer to themselves in first person plural, indicating the strong sense of unity among them (Lill, 'The Social Meaning of Greek Symposium,' 180-181).

⁵³ Lill, 'The Social Meaning of Greek Symposium,' 179.

⁵⁴ Plutarch *Quaestiones Convivales* 614D-E. Here Plutarch also emphasises that the topic must not be too difficult for any less academically-minded diners.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Plutarch *Quaestiones Convivales* 615B-619A.

such as varying the quality of food and portion size according to a guest's rank.⁵⁶

More subtle challenges to *koinônia* are not explicitly referenced in the literature's own critique however. For example, Pauline Schmitt-Pantel observes that the sense of hospitality at symposia was open, but inevitably restricted to the party dining, namely "men of the same rank."⁵⁷ It is this tension which enables Lill to observe that the symposium institution was "aristocratic and egalitarian at the same time."⁵⁸

Despite this tension, clearly the philosophical tradition understood the symposium as a context which created *koinônia*, and was uncomfortable with practices that hindered it. Indeed, the properly executed symposium is understood as an event which creates a special tie among diners. Perhaps this deep sharing is best articulated by the Roman, Cicero: "For our fathers did well in calling the reclining of friends at feasts a *convivium*, because it implies a communion of life."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ McGowan refers to examples at both extremes. In some situations, different amounts and quality of food were provided to people based on status. Others made conscious efforts at equality, even to the extent of drawing lots to demonstrate that food was distributed fairly (McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 48).

⁵⁷ Schmitt-Pantel, 'Sacrificial Meal and *Symposion*,' 23.

⁵⁸ Lill, 'The Social Meaning of Greek Symposium,' 171.

⁵⁹ Cicero *De Senectute* 13:45. Note that the symposium dining practices which were instituted under Greek influence continued under the Roman Empire, during which the equivalent term for pleasurable banquet was *convivium* (Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 27).

Friendship is an important topic for Greek philosophy more broadly, so it is unsurprising that it becomes an important aspect of symposium ethics. Within some of the earliest sources of symposium literature, Plato identifies a purpose of symposia as creating friends and not enemies,⁶⁰ thus applying a valued ethical category from other contexts. Later Plutarch would continue to refer to the value of making friends at symposia.⁶¹

Plato's *Nomoi* suggests friendship as a purpose particularly of tabletalk.

Although Manuela Tecusan argues that Plato considers education its central function, she notes that Plato provides for friendship in the way tabletalk is to be conducted;⁶² the Symposiarch is designated as a 'guardian of friendship.'⁶³

Therefore, in the way the symposium is conducted and, again, in the sharing of food, wine and conversation, the symposium is understood to create friendship among diners. And, further, to deepen friendships among those who are already friends.⁶⁴

Pleasure hardly needs further discussion as an important ethic for a meal often described as a pleasure banquet. Much of the discussion about appropriate behaviour at symposia relates to ensuring that the event may be pleasurable to

⁶⁰ Plato *Nomoi* 672a.

⁶¹ Plutarch *Quaestiones Convivales* 660A-B.

⁶² Tecusan, 'Logos Symptotikos,' 256.

⁶³ See Plato *Nomoi* 640D.

⁶⁴ Plato *Nomoi* 640D.

all present.⁶⁵ Inappropriate behaviour is therefore anything which impinges on the other diners' pleasure.

Naturally, philosophical conversation then turned to the nuances of balancing pleasure with the other ethics. For instance, the emphasis on togetherness in symposia requires diners to “look beyond the pleasure principle.”⁶⁶ Therefore, in the example of ranking guests, should pleasure be prioritised by continuing this established convention, or *koinônia*, by creating greater equality but also potentially unpleasurable conflict?⁶⁷ Such tensions between the ethical categories may have remained largely unresolved, but the way the philosophical discourse continued underlines the cultural interest in these questions.

Symposia as symbol

Finally, the symposium became not only an actual meal, or a literary form, but also a cultural symbol. As Alessandra Lukinovich observes, “The close relation of the *symposion* with literature has created a literature which turns the *symposion* itself (enlarged to include the *deipnon*) into a metaphor.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Cf. Plutarch *Quaestiones Convivales* 620D.

⁶⁶ Lill, ‘The Social Meaning of Greek Symposium,’ 174.

⁶⁷ Cf. Plutarch *Quaestiones Convivales* 615C-619A.

⁶⁸ Alessandra Lukinovich, ‘The Play of Reflections between Literary Form and the Symptotic Theme in the *Deipnosophistae* of Athenaeus,’ in *Symptotica*, ed. Murray (see note 25), 263-271, see p. 271. When describing the symbolism of meals, however, McGowan offers a helpful qualification. He reminds readers that food and meals cannot simply be reduced to a symbol of something other than food, as

In this way, the symposium became a representation of broader social ethics, often employed as a symbol even in texts of other genres.⁶⁹ Thus, where a text may touch particularly on, for example, matters of *koinônia*, friendship or pleasure, or more specific themes consistently associated with symposia, such as ranking and social status, a writer may employ the central social institution of the symposium as a symbol.

Thus Greco-Roman practices of symposia, the literary form which emerged alongside these traditions and associated ethical themes provide important insights into the way in which meals were understood in Luke's context. Such influences will be significant considerations in interpreting Lukan meals. However, Luke also inherited influences which are derived from Old Testament understandings of an eschatological meal. To these I now turn.

“where some eat and others do not, food does more than merely *symbolize* power” (McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 33, emphasis original).

⁶⁹ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 49. See also Schmitt-Pantel for the use of the symposium as a symbol in archaic poetry (Schmitt-Pantel, ‘Sacrificial Meal and *Symposion*,’ 22-23).

Traditions from within Judaism

Food and meals frequently feature in Old Testament texts. Often this is as imagery which becomes a vehicle for describing YHWH's character, or relationship with Israel. In one clear instance, Isa 25:6-8 uses a meal to illustrate eschatological expectation.

In the section below I survey texts in which food and meals provide a picture of YHWH's character and relationships, before moving to discuss Isa 25:6-8 in more detail. Having considered these Old Testament references, I then comment briefly on some material from the Dead Sea Scrolls which gives an insight into the way in which another distinct community described a meal as part of its eschatological expectation.

Food, Meals and Faith in the Old Testament

Food and meal imagery in the Old Testament commonly serves to express an element of the writer's faith. In particular, these texts communicate something about YHWH's character and relationship with his people. YHWH is variously presented as benevolent provider and host, and as seeking an intimate presence with his people.

YHWH as Provider is a common theme in psalmody and Old Testament narratives. YHWH satisfies the needs of the created world, nurturing the land

that food may grow, and that animals and humans may be fed (cf. Ps 65:9-13; 104:10-30; 145:15-16; 146:6-7; 147:8-9). In many cases this is over against human capacities to provide, or the claims of other deities. Thus, food becomes not merely an everyday experience, but a miraculous means by which YHWH demonstrates power and fidelity. In the archetypal example, Israel experiences YHWH's provision in the miraculous daily gift of manna in the wilderness (Exod 16:13-21).

Similarly, in the prophetic stories of Elijah and Elisha, food miracles exhibit YHWH's superiority (eg. 1 Kings 17:1-16; 2 Kings 4:38-44). For instance, in 1 Kings 17, Elijah announces that YHWH has brought a drought. Choon-Leong Seow suggests that the narrative is a criticism of King Ahab for marrying Jezebel, who worshipped Baal.⁷⁰ Seow notes that Baal's devotees attributed naturally occurring phenomena to his power. For instance, they worshipped him for providing rain but then feared he was dead during times of drought. Therefore, Elijah's polemical announcement affirms that YHWH is not only alive, but in control of both rain and drought.⁷¹

Two food stories are told of Elijah during this drought. In the first (vv. 1-7) Elijah is provided with water from a wadi, and bread and meat from ravens, until the wadi dries up. In the second (vv. 8-16) he goes into Sidon and is fed

⁷⁰ Choon-Leong Seow, 'The First and Second Books of Kings: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,' in *NIB*, ed. Leander Keck et al, (12 vols, Nashville: Abingdon, [1994-2004] 3 [1999]), 1-295, see p. 126.

⁷¹ Seow, 'First and Second Book of Kings,' 126.

miraculously by a widow, whose meagre supplies are not depleted as she cooks for him. In both situations, YHWH's action is emphasised. Not only do the humans passively perform YHWH's will, but Baal is also made powerless; the natural water in the wadi is inadequate.⁷² By contrast, YHWH provides for Elijah by miracles: ravens, normally considered unclean, unexpectedly provide meat, the rich food of celebration. And a widow, most likely destitute and also from a Baal-worshipping region, is made able to feed Elijah and her family by YHWH's miraculous provision.⁷³

Thus, these texts emphasise that YHWH is a superior provider. This is true not only in capacity to provide, but also in his generosity. In Isa 55:1-3, the promise of homecoming from exile is articulated in the form of food which satisfies and is freely given, unlike the stingy provisions of Babylon.⁷⁴ The images of YHWH as provider are not only of satisfaction, but of abundance.

YHWH as Host introduces the image of roles at a meal to describe the relationship between YHWH and his people. This is perhaps most clearly articulated in Psalm 23. Here the psalmist describes a profound dependence

⁷² Seow, 'First and Second Book of Kings,' 127.

⁷³ Volkmar Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, trans. Anselm Hagedorn, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 183.

⁷⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, vol 2, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 158-159.

upon YHWH, relying on YHWH to sustain his life.⁷⁵ Verses 1-4 depict this relationship through the image of YHWH as shepherd. The shepherd provides for every need of the sheep – food, drink and shelter or protection. At verse 5, the metaphor shifts to YHWH as host. However, the different metaphor describes the same relationship: as the shepherd provides for the sheep, YHWH as host provides food, drink and lifelong shelter to the psalmist. Both images describe a relationship of dependence, in which YHWH provides for every aspect of the psalmist's life. Although the elements of food, drink and shelter may seem basic, they are provided in abundance and satisfy in every way – the psalmist shall 'not lack' (v. 1), indeed, his 'cup overflows' (v. 5).

Further, in identifying YHWH as his shepherd the psalmist also employs a common image for allegiance and kingship.⁷⁶ The 'staff' becomes both shepherd's crook and royal sceptre. Here the psalmist affirms that his ultimate allegiance is to YHWH. Thus the meal which is introduced in verse 5 also takes on these overtones. Rather than an enthronement feast, however, Psalm 23 describes a meal which celebrates the relationship which already exists between

⁷⁵ J. Clinton McCann, Jr., 'The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,' in *NIB*, ed. Leander Keck et al, (12 vols, Nashville: Abingdon, [1994-2004] 4 [1996]), 639-1280, see p. 767.

⁷⁶ James L. Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 117. Various settings have been suggested for meal imagery in psalms. For Psalm 23 this includes the meal as a part of a ritual of thanksgiving (Mays, *Psalms*, 118), through to the meal as a celebration following an acquittal (Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988], 306). Whether or not such a setting may be implied, as McCann observes about similar interpretative difficulties in Psalm 65, the central point is: "God is the gracious host who invites people to live and to eat at God's table (see Pss 22:26; 23:5-6; 36:8; 63:5)" (McCann, 'The Book of Psalms,' 933).

the psalmist and YHWH. YHWH is the psalmist's gracious king, who provides in abundance for every need.

In some texts, this relationship goes beyond traditional boundaries. In Psalm 36 YHWH also provides shelter (v. 7b), food (8a) and drink (8b), but here the recipients are explicitly 'all people,' beyond the boundaries of Israel.⁷⁷ In Psalm 22, where the afflicted one is finally delivered and gives thanks that the poor will be satisfied by a meal (Ps 22:22-28, cf. Ps 65:2, 5), all the nations are included.⁷⁸ Likewise, the call to sustenance in Isa 55:1-3 echoes Wisdom's invitation to the simple to her banquet (Prov 9:1-6).⁷⁹ Thus, this special relationship with YHWH, who is provider and host, is not restricted to Israel.

YHWH as intimately present also emerges as a theme from food and meal imagery in the Old Testament. Although at one level food and meals suggest everyday domesticity, even where they are provided through the miraculous intervention of YHWH, at another level, participation in a meal signifies something greater. For instance, Peter Craigie suggests that the satisfaction of hunger described at the end of Psalm 22 indicates a return to fellowship with

⁷⁷ Mays, *Psalms*, 157.

⁷⁸ Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 234.

⁷⁹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19A (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 369. Note also that, beyond these instances of universalism, meal imagery is used to describe a sense of communal responsibility in social justice in the Old Testament (cf. Amos 6:4-7). Space restrictions preclude further consideration of this aspect of Old Testament meal imagery.

God for one who had been previously scorned.⁸⁰ And when Abraham and Sarah offer hospitality to the three strangers in Genesis 18:1-15, their hospitality and its intimacy becomes a context for receiving the all-important divine promise.

The meal in Exod 24:9-11 particularly illustrates this intimate presence. Here Moses and 70 key leaders ascend Mount Sinai for a meal and covenant ceremony in YHWH's presence. This comes after a conflict, and before the giving of the commandments.⁸¹ Walter Brueggemann suggests that this passage holds together the elements of "awesome presence" and "covenantal demand," and in so doing it asserts that "community is finally constituted not forensically but sacramentally."⁸² The story retains a certain mystery, and inexplicable elements, such as the people 'seeing' YHWH, or whether YHWH himself eats, are not clarified.⁸³ However, the central theme is divine presence,⁸⁴ and an intimacy of relationship communicated by table fellowship.

⁸⁰ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, WBC 19 (Waco, Tx.: Word Books, 1983), 201.

⁸¹ Terrence Fretheim argues that what takes place on the mountain confirms the covenant, and commissions the people as a whole in a way similar to Aaron's ordination (Exod 29:19-21). In this way, blood is sprinkled, and a meal is shared (Terrence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation [Louisville: John Knox, 1991], 258).

⁸² Walter Brueggemann, 'The Book of Exodus: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,' in *NIB*, ed. Leander Keck et al, (12 vols, Nashville: Abingdon, [1994-2004] 1 [1994]), 675-981, see p. 882.

⁸³ Brueggemann, 'The Book of Exodus,' 881. John Durham argues that Moses and the elders do not, in fact, see God, because they are looking down, which is why the text contains a detailed description of what God is standing on (John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 [Waco, Tx.: Word Books, 1987], 344).

⁸⁴ Durham, *Exodus*, 348.

Eschatological elements

Exploring Old Testament texts which may be relevant background to eschatological banquet traditions suggests not only that texts involve food and meal imagery, but an eschatological element. Within the range of texts above, however, eschatology is not explicit. There are at times hints to which a reader may be attuned. For instance, Ps 22:27-31 describes an eternal celebration of the deliverance of the afflicted one⁸⁵ in the prayer for hearts to ‘live forever.’ Alternatively, Ps 23:5-6 alludes to ongoing feasting and dwelling with YHWH. And yet, even here, the timeframe is לֵארוֹךְ יָמַי, literally ‘for length of days.’ What Craigie describes as a reference to “present and future banquets of thanksgiving,”⁸⁶ may simply refer to the earthly life of the psalmist.

Whether or not these texts offer any implicit sense of eschatology, that they employ food and meal imagery to describe YHWH’s character and relationships forms important background for later texts which do add an explicitly eschatological element to meal imagery. The picture presented of YHWH is of the provider, who sustains creation, and host. Food and meal imagery is used to describe YHWH’s special relationship with humanity, depicting intimate presence and kingship. Such imagery is significant for understanding the meaning given to an image of this God as not only provider and host, but host of an eternal feast, celebrating an eschatological kingdom.

⁸⁵ Mays, *Psalms*, 112-113.

⁸⁶ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 207.

The eschatological banquet in Isaiah 25:6-8

New Testament references to a great banquet, such as the parables in Matt 22:1-14 and Luke 14:15-24, imply an established tradition of a heavenly meal. However, aside from the allusions outlined above, the Old Testament contains little reference to such a tradition. Joseph Blenkinsopp argues that the tradition developed more strongly in the second temple period, evidenced in intertestamental material, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament.⁸⁷ Isaiah 25:6-8, however, does provide one clear Old Testament reference.⁸⁸

Isaiah 25:6-8 forms part of what has traditionally been called the 'Isaian apocalypse' (chapters 24-27). Although many commentators are now uncomfortable with this title, given not all of the material is apocalyptic,⁸⁹ the meal described in Isa 25:6-8 is clearly eschatological. It describes a time when all the nations will come together on 'this' mountain and share a rich feast provided by the Lord. In this time the Lord will also destroy the shroud of mourning which has covered all peoples, wiping every tear and removing the disgrace of Israel.

⁸⁷ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 358.

⁸⁸ Hans Wildberger argues that Isa 25:6-8 must be considered a new and unique idea at the time of writing, drawing on earlier themes (Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, Continental Commentary [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997], 525).

⁸⁹ Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary*, trans. R. A. Wilson, OTL (London: SCM, 1974), 173.

This early reference to an eschatological feast contains a number of themes which are relevant to the development of the eschatological banquet motif and, in turn, to the interpretation of Lukan meals. Such themes include: pilgrimage of the nations; establishment of YHWH's rule; communion and reconciliation; removal of suffering; and, throughout all of these, universality. I will discuss each of these below.

As Israel suffered at the hands of other nations, it developed an end-times vision in which all nations would come in pilgrimage to Zion (Isa 2:1-4, 45:14, 60:3ff; Pss 96:7f; 72:10; Zeph 3:9f),⁹⁰ even bringing gifts (Ps 68:29ff; Isa 66:12).⁹¹ In such a vision, the nations which had scorned Israel would finally see Israel's God, YHWH, as their centre. Isaiah 25:6 presumes that this pilgrimage has indeed taken place. The gathering on 'this' mountain is clearly meant to recall Isa 24:23 when Zion was last mentioned, and to maintain the same site.⁹² It is on Mount Zion, Israel's heartland, that the Lord prepares the feast for all nations.

Such a pilgrimage of the nations indicates also the ultimate establishment of YHWH's rule. This section of Isaiah has been concerned with the fate of the city referred to by the pseudonym 'city of chaos,' as opposed to the 'city of

⁹⁰ R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 208.

⁹¹ Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, 199.

⁹² The text here simply refers to 'this' mountain, but there is general consensus that Mount Zion is indicated. Despite the sense in which the scene is reminiscent of elders meeting on Mt Sinai in Exodus 24:9-11, here the text continues to refer to Zion as earlier in Isaiah (Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, 208).

righteousness.⁹³ Whether or not Isaiah intended to indicate the fall of an actual city at the time, the vision is of the ruin of the worldly powers which have oppressed Israel, and the dawn of a new era in which YHWH reigns as king. Other Ancient Near Eastern texts also refer to meals which celebrate a god's enthronement.⁹⁴ An important contrast, however, lies in the absence of violence in the Old Testament account. Here the feast which has been located at an end time brings disparate groups together, and depicts YHWH as the benevolent host at his own enthronement.

That this feast is depicted on a mountain immediately indicates to the ancient Israelite that something of a sacred quality is taking place. Since Moses' experience at Sinai, mountains represent places of divine communion and communication. Indeed, this text is reminiscent of at least one trip up the mountain, the mountain-top ritual meal in the presence of YHWH in Exod 24:9-11 described above. Given the preceding conflict, Gene Tucker suggests that the Exodus meal symbolises "reconciliation and communion."⁹⁵ So, too, in Isaiah 25, where all the nations are brought together to share a mountain-top

⁹³ For discussion of attempts to identify a particular city as Isaiah's 'oppressive city,' see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 348.

⁹⁴ For discussion of other Ancient Near Eastern texts, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 358. Note also that both some Old Testament texts (cf. Jer 25:15; 51:39; Ps 75:9), refer to an eschatological banquet which involves eternal drunkenness (see Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, 531), while Greco-Roman traditions also include an understanding of an eschatological "symposium of the blessed" (John J. Collins, 'Eschatologies of Late Antiquity, in *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter [Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 2000], 330-337, see p. 334).

⁹⁵ Gene M. Tucker, 'The Book of Isaiah 1-39: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections, in *NIB*, ed. Leander Keck et al, (12 vols, Nashville: Abingdon, [1994-2004] 4 [1994]), 25-305, see p. 216.

meal through the generous hospitality of YHWH. Communion and reconciliation become possible, indeed inevitable, in this new era of YHWH's reign.

In addition to the great feast which YHWH will prepare on that day, however, Isaiah announces a further promise to mark the establishment of YHWH's kingdom. YHWH will also destroy the veil and bring an end to suffering. Unlike the veil which inhibits understanding mysteries in 2 Cor 3:15-16, in this context, where there is talk of wiping away every tear and swallowing up death, the veil is understood as that worn in mourning.⁹⁶ This new era, celebrated in feasting, will bring suffering to an end, and even put an end to death.

Wildberger draws out the nuances of the Hebrew word מות. Although translated 'death,' he argues מות is broader than physical death, rather indicating anything which causes trouble in life. As an example, he notes that a person suffering from a serious illness was considered to have already entered into מות.⁹⁷ Here, then, Isaiah indicates that with YHWH's enthronement, celebrated by feasting, all which inhibits human life will be swallowed up by YHWH.⁹⁸

Finally, this picture of an eschatological feast is universal in scope, although it also has a particular relevance for Israel. The initial picture is of YHWH

⁹⁶ Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, 209.

⁹⁷ Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, 533.

⁹⁸ The strange terminology to 'swallow up death,' most likely provides an allusion to Baal and Mot mythology, in which Mot swallows Baal as his final victory. And yet, here, it is YHWH who will swallow Mot (Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 359).

preparing a feast for all, and then wiping away tears from every face. There is no distinction between the nations in this compassion. And yet in doing so, YHWH also removes the disgrace of Israel as, if all are ruled by YHWH, there is no scope for foreign oppression.⁹⁹ Indeed, Israel goes from the periphery to centre within this new kingdom, as it is Israel's God who reigns for all.

As argued above, a range of Old Testament texts demonstrates that food and meal imagery was associated with descriptions of YHWH's character and intimate relationship with his people. Such imagery is extended particularly in the Old Testament example of an eschatological banquet found in Isa 25:6-8. This text offers an image of an end time in which YHWH's gracious provision finds expression in hosting a feast to celebrate the eternal establishment of the kingdom of God. Within this kingdom, suffering is ended, all life flourishes and YHWH's superiority is acknowledged as all nations come to worship YHWH.

The image of an eschatological banquet was further developed in the intertestamental period. It is not possible to consider all relevant texts from this time within the scope of this study. However, it is interesting to note the ways in

⁹⁹ As Blenkinsopp observes: "It is also consoling, and perhaps remarkable, that *all peoples* are invited to the banquet, the mantle of mourning will be removed from *all nations*, and the tears will be wiped from *every face*, unconditionally, with no restrictions or reservations. Only then do we hear that the reproach of Israel, which in the context we assume to be subjection to foreign rule, will be removed." (Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 359-360, emphasis original).

which this theme was taken up by the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls, to which I now turn.

Eschatology and Meals in the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) give a picture of a community with an intensely eschatological outlook. However, the eschatology is diverse¹⁰⁰ and its interpretation fraught. The nature of the collection itself inhibits cohesion between texts and themes, as the scrolls are essentially a library maintained by the community, including biblical and other texts which originated elsewhere. However, focussing on the texts which appear to have been written by the community itself uncovers greater continuity and reveals the distinctive emphases of the DSS community.¹⁰¹ And it is in these texts that regulations for messianic banquets are found.

The *Rule of the Congregation in the end of days* (1QSa) describes the messianic banquet. This is one of two appendices to the *Rule of the Community* (1QS).¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint, 'Introduction,' in *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint, Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 1-9, see p. 5.

¹⁰¹ John J. Collins, 'Jesus, Messianism and the Dead Sea Scrolls,' in *Qumran-Messianism: Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Gerbern S. Oegema (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 100-119, see p. 103.

¹⁰² At times this text is referred to by an early title assigned by translators: *The Manual for Discipline*. The preferred title, however, is derived from the first line of the text.

The text is fragmentary¹⁰³ and difficult to date, but palaeographic evidence places the latest redaction between 150-75 BCE, during the Maccabean or Hasmonean period.¹⁰⁴

The text itself comprises instructions for the community to follow 'at the end of days' (1QSa 1:1). After an introduction about discipleship in that time (1:1b-5), it outlines how children are to be instructed and stages of development for the male community members (1:6-22a), moving into directions for the 'sons of Levi' specifically (1:22b-27a). The text then describes the council of the congregation (1:27b-2:10) and, finally, regulations for council feasts to be held in the Messiah's presence (2:11-22).

Interestingly, these descriptions parallel those in the *Rule of the Community* (1QS); communal life takes essentially the same shape in each. 1QSa differs from the everyday descriptions in 1QS, however, in the eschatological setting indicated by 'at the end of days' (1:1) and the presence of the Messiah (2:12). Before I discuss the meal itself, the somewhat ambiguous meanings of both the phrase 'end of days' and משיח require further explanation.

¹⁰³ James H. Charlesworth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, 'Rule of the Congregation (1QSa)' in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol 1: *Rule of the Community and Related Documents* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 108-117, see p. 108.

¹⁰⁴ Gerbern S. Oegema, 'Messianic Expectations in the Qumran Writings: Theses on their Development,' in *Qumran-Messianism*: ed. Charlesworth, Lichtenberger and Oegema (see note 101), 53-82, see p. 55.

The 'end of days' is ambiguous not least because the text which follows presumes that this period extends for some time. Children must still be educated, and regulation of communal life continues. Drawing comparisons to Ezekiel 38 and Daniel 2, John Collins suggests that the DSS community understood the end times in a broad way, including the period leading up to the end, directly before the time of salvation.¹⁰⁵ Other texts, such as the War Scroll, suggest the community also believed this period may include an eschatological war. They may even have believed that this time of testing had already begun, although the holy angels (2:9) and messiah (2:12) were not yet present.¹⁰⁶

Whilst this chronology makes sense and enjoys a general consensus,¹⁰⁷ the timing of the messianic banquet remains confusing. The sudden temporal clause '*when God leads forth*¹⁰⁸ the messiah' in 2:11-12 seems to indicate a new era, different from that described at 1:1. Lawrence Schiffman even places the messianic banquet after the eschatological war, although 1QSa does not

¹⁰⁵ John J. Collins, 'The Expectation of the End in the Dead Sea Scrolls,' in *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Evans and Flint (see note 100), 74-90, see pp. 75, 82.

¹⁰⁶ Charlesworth and Stuckenbruck, 'Rule of Congregation,' 108. Collins also notes various views on whether the community believed that the end times had come, but argues the text is ambiguous (Collins, 'The Expectation of the End,' 80).

¹⁰⁷ Charlesworth and Stuckenbruck, 'Rule of Congregation,' 108.

¹⁰⁸ There is a difficulty with the text here, resulting in differing translations. Charlesworth and Stuckenbruck translate 'leads forth,' (Charlesworth and Stuckenbruck, 'Rule of the Congregation,' 117) but many translate 'when God begets the Messiah' (see Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 127).

mention a war.¹⁰⁹ Whenever it was expected to begin, the text also suggests that the period of the messianic banquet will be protracted. The community will continue to celebrate such feasts whenever ten men are present (2:22).¹¹⁰ Whether this represents a vision of the time of salvation in which community life and messianic feasts continue, or another period within the time leading up to the time of salvation is unclear.

Despite these ambiguities, some limited conclusions about the meaning of 'end of days' can be drawn. The text's regulations for community life in this time indicate the phrase refers to an eschatological period, before the time of salvation. Further, although the messianic banquet is also depicted as eschatological, it is unclear exactly how the banquet fits within the community's timeline of various periods before the end. However, even if the community believed that some aspects of the 'end of days' had already begun, plainly the texts do not suggest that the time of the messianic banquet had arrived.

The use of *מָשַׁח* in the DSS is also ambiguous. Literally 'anointed,' possible meanings range from ordination like that of a priest, through to an eschatological

¹⁰⁹ Lawrence Schiffman, *The Eschatological Community of the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Study of the Rule of the Congregation*, SBLMS 38 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 68. By contrast, Collins argues that the DSS never use the phrase 'end of days' to refer to the period after the eschatological war (Collins, 'The Expectation of the End,' 81-82). However, ambiguity remains in whether 'end of days' (1:1) still governs the period of the messianic banquet.

¹¹⁰ As John Priest argues, however, this does not undermine the eschatological nature of the feast, but rather emphasise that the messianic era is "prolonged" (John F Priest, 'The Messiah and the Meal in 1QSa,' *JBL* 82 [1963]: 95-100, see p. 97).

messianic title. Given that the various priests mentioned are not also given this title (1QSa 2:12-13), and the text's eschatological overtones, here משיח does seem to have greater messianic meaning.

However, the relationship between the priest figure and the Messiah warns against presuming later messianic understandings such as those from Christian tradition. Notably, the text implies that the priest takes precedence over the Messiah. For instance, the priest enters first, followed by the other priests and then the Messiah, before the remainder of the council (1QSa 2:12b-15).

Likewise, the priest presides at the meal, blessing the first portion and then stretching out his hand to the bread, before the Messiah then stretches out for the bread, and so on down the ranks of those present (2:19-21).

Therefore the meaning of משיח raises questions about the priest's status.

Elsewhere some DSS texts refer to a twofold Messiah of Aaron and Israel (cf. CD 12:23-13:1; 14:18-19; 19:10-11; 20:1; 1QS 9:11; 4Q252 5:1-4).¹¹¹ Such texts have prompted debate as to whether the DSS community expected one messiah with both priestly and royal functions, or two separate messiahs.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Evans and Flint, 'Introduction,' p. 6.

¹¹² This dual messianic expectation is perhaps as a result of the community's opposition to the melding of these roles in the Hasmonean era. Evans and Flint argue that texts which refer to the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel, and the reference in 1QSa, reveals the community held a 'diarchic' expectation (Evans and Flint, 'Introduction,' p. 7. See also Hermann Lichtenberger, 'Messianic Expectations and Messianic Figures in the Second Temple Period,' in *Qumran-Messianism*, ed. Charlesworth, Lichtenberger and Oegema [see note 101], 9-20, see p. 13).

Indeed, in 1QS 9:11 Messiah is used in the plural.¹¹³ In 1QSa, however, although the priest takes precedence over the Messiah, he is never referred to as משיח.¹¹⁴

Thus משיח in 1QSa clearly denotes an eschatological role in some sense. But the text also reveals expectations about a great priestly leader, in addition to a messiah in the mold, possibly, of a royal, military leader.¹¹⁵

The Messianic meal in 1QSa 2:11-22

It is important to note that it is extremely unlikely that Jesus or the Gospel writers would have been familiar with the DSS community or its texts. However, the DSS do contain some interesting parallels to Lukan meals, reflecting the different ways the communities developed imagery like that of an eschatological banquet from within their inherited tradition.

Community texts reveal that meals were central to the DSS community. They were important for ordering communal life, and expressing eschatological expectation and emphases within the community's piety.

¹¹³ Evans and Flint, 'Introduction,' p. 6.

¹¹⁴ Despite the absence of a Messianic title, Priest argues that the priest should still be understood as an eschatological figure (Priest, 'The Messiah and the Meal,' 98). Conversely, Joseph Fitzmyer argues that it is "far from clear" that the priest here refers to the Messiah of Aaron (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Responses to 101 Questions on the Dead Sea Scrolls* [New York: Paulist, 1992], p. 74).

¹¹⁵ Priest, 'The Messiah and the Meal,' 97.

Both 1QS and 1QSa underline the significance of meals for the DSS community's life. Induction into the community involved a staged process for participating in meals, whereby new members were first allowed to share in the communal food, and then a year later also in the communal drink (1QS 6:13-23).¹¹⁶ Similarly, when the community disciplined a member, the punishment could involve exclusion from the communal meal or a reduced portion of food (1QS 6:25).

The community also expressed its internal structure through meal practices. Regulations around meals in both texts stipulate that the members be seated according to rank. Although Smith and Taussig note the similarity here to Greco-Roman symposium traditions,¹¹⁷ the other trappings of symposium etiquette are not evident. For instance, the diners are described as sitting, not reclining.¹¹⁸ Indeed, if symposium practices have influenced seating arrangements here, they have effectively complemented other practices in this highly ordered and hierarchical community (cf. 1QS 2:22, 5:23-4; 6:2). Not only at meals, but also in meetings of the council, people sit in order. Leadership and community roles are strictly prescribed. Thus ranking at table is in keeping with the community's broader tendencies.

¹¹⁶ McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 81. Although a similarity may be drawn between the bread and wine of Christian meals and of the DSS community, Fitzmyer's observation that bread and wine are "staples of the Palestinian diet" encourages caution (Fitzmyer, *101 Questions*, p. 74). Note also Schiffman's observation that 1QS:6:2-5 has bread or wine, whilst 1QSa has both (Schiffman, *The Eschatological Community*, 56).

¹¹⁷ Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 33.

¹¹⁸ Schiffman, *The Eschatological Community*, 56.

Given the Old Testament traditions above, and in light of the community's own emphases, it is unsurprising that the community also expressed its eschatological expectation in the form of a meal. The striking similarities between the daily meals described in 1QS and the messianic meal in 1QSa also suggest that the community understood its daily communal meals as an anticipation of the eschatological meal for which they were preparing. As James Charlesworth and Loren Stuckenbruck observe, the community's "liturgy and concept of time allowed them to live proleptically as if the Messiah had already come. Each feast was an enactment of what the messianic banquet would be like."¹¹⁹

Finally, meals in the DSS community reflect its distinctive piety. Inspired by Levitical tradition, and in protest at practices in the Jerusalem temple at the time, the DSS community sought absolute ritual purity.¹²⁰ This emphasis is illustrated by the list of those excluded from the community council, which also forms the group dining at the messianic feast. No one with any of the following conditions may take up a place in the congregation:

afflicted in his flesh, crippled in the legs or the hands, lame or blind or deaf or dumb, or if he is stricken with a blemish in his flesh

¹¹⁹ Charlesworth and Stuckenbruck, 'Rule of the Congregation,' 108. James Dunn, who problematically equates the Essenes with the DSS community, does however argue in reference to the DSS "As with Jesus, so also with the Essenes, the current practice of table-fellowship seems to have been seen as an expression and a foretaste of the fellowship of the future age" (James D. G. Dunn, 'Jesus, Table-Fellowship, and Qumran,' in *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, ABRL [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 254-272, see p. 263).

¹²⁰ John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls (London: Routledge, 1997), 74.

visible to the eyes; or a (tottering) old man who cannot maintain himself within the congregation (1QSa 2:5-7).

Schiffman suggests that the attempt at purity is in part an attempt to enter into the eschatological age. He concludes: "Therefore, total ritual purity may be seen as a catalyst which turns the ordinary communal meal into a foretaste of the great messianic banquet at the end of days."¹²¹

In 1QSa therefore, the DSS community describes an eschatological meal under the leadership of a great priest and in the presence of a messianic figure. In so doing, the community expresses its longing for purity and eschatological hope in the form of a meal. The similarity to regulations for daily meals in 1QS indicates that such meals were celebrated as an anticipation of the eschatological banquet which the community expected.

Thus Luke inherited a number of traditions about meals which may be important background for interpreting Lukan meals. There is a range of ways in which Greco-Roman symposium traditions are relevant – including an understanding of symposium practices, and related literary traditions and symbolism. And in light of Old Testament traditions, meals communicate something of the character of God, and provide a picture of intimacy, reconciliation and establishment of the kingdom of God. I now turn to consider Jesus' proclamation and the kingdom of

¹²¹ Schiffman, *The Eschatological Community*, 10.

God, as articulated in Luke, before exploring the way in which Lukan meal scenes express this proclamation.

JESUS' PROCLAMATION AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN LUKE

In Luke, the good news emerges from Jesus' proclamation and the ways his proclamation takes shape in the events of his ministry; this also draws out the meaning of the kingdom of God in this Gospel. Luke introduces Jesus' proclamation with his account of Jesus at the Nazareth synagogue in 4:16-30. Both the content of Jesus' declaration and the response it prompts prove paradigmatic for the remainder of the Gospel.¹²² Thus the passage provides the best starting point for considering Jesus' proclamation in Luke.

While I deliberately limit the discussion of this crucial scene in the following summary, Luke 4:16-30 is significant for understanding Luke from many perspectives and much more could be said than space affords in this study. However, I focus on elements which are particularly relevant to Jesus' proclamation and therefore for understanding Lukan meal scenes. That is: the declaration of release and acceptance, the response to Jesus and the sense of eschatological significance in the event. Finally, I then briefly survey ways in which Luke presents the kingdom of God.

¹²² Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 81.

Release and acceptance

Jesus' declaration at Nazareth, the first detailed event in his public ministry in Luke's Gospel,¹²³ is divided into two movements. In the first (vv. 16-22), Jesus is invited to read from Isaiah in the synagogue. All those gathered are amazed by his words of grace, although they plainly do not understand the announcement's significance. In the second (vv. 23-30), Jesus introduces his mission to the outsider more explicitly, and the crowd's wonderment turns to rage and threatened violence.

The Isaiah quotation establishes release and acceptance as the central themes of Jesus' proclamation.¹²⁴ With significant but minimal alterations, this quotation (vv. 18-19) is grafted together from two Isaian passages in the Septuagint (Isa 61:1-2; 58:6).¹²⁵ By connecting these verses Luke emphasises the words which appear in both passages.¹²⁶ Both Isaiah passages use ἄφεσις ('release') and Luke repeats the word in his final composite text (v 18b, d). And δεκτός ('acceptance' or 'favour'), although only used once in the quotation from Isaiah

¹²³ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity: Luke*, 61. The Nazareth account appears as a controversy story in other synoptics (Matt 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6a), but Luke moves the account forward and uses it as an opportunity to outline the core themes of Jesus' proclamation.

¹²⁴ Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2000), 49.

¹²⁵ In a key change, Luke replaces καλέσαι ('to call for,' Isa 61:2 [LXX]) with the more authoritative κηρύξαι ('to proclaim,' Luke 4:18) (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB 28 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981], 532). He also omits 'binding up the broken hearted' (Isa 61:1 [LXX]), which Brendan Byrne observes enables the quotation to move straight into the central theme of release (Byrne, *Hospitality*, 48).

¹²⁶ Byrne, *Hospitality*, 49.

61, also appears in an adjacent verse to that quoted from Isaiah 58. Luke reiterates the importance of δεκτός by also repeating the term in the narrative at verse 24.

Luke uses ἄφεσις as a technical term, representing definitive liberation from powerful forces. 4:16-30 associates ἄφεσις with the release of those held in captivity and oppression. But as he enacts this proclamation throughout the narrative, Jesus will bring release from all that holds humans captive. The terminology also connects to Jubilee traditions, in which ἄφεσις denotes release from debt.¹²⁷ Importantly, although there are many ways in which the general theme of release is significant for Jesus' ministry, Luke frequently makes a direct lexical connection in relation to forgiveness – as divine release (ἄφεσις) from sin¹²⁸ (cf. 1:77; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18).¹²⁹

The repetition of δεκτός in the Isaian verses and in Luke's narrative emphasises acceptance; but further aspects of Luke's selection of the quotation also accentuate the theme. For instance, Luke quotes the pronouncement of the year of the Lord's acceptance from Isa 61:2 in full but omits the line which follows, namely a parallel announcement of a day of the Lord's vengeance. Thus Jesus here announces an open-ended time of divine acceptance. The groups of people specifically mentioned in this announcement also emphasise

¹²⁷ Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 532.

¹²⁸ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity: Luke*, 103.

¹²⁹ Note that John the Baptist's proclamation also includes ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν in both Luke 3:3 and Mark 1:4.

acceptance – the poor, imprisoned, blind and oppressed. In this way Luke describes the character of the new era which Jesus is announcing: this acceptance comes with an inevitable priority for the outsider.

The Isaiah passage also serves Luke's presentation of Jesus as anointed prophet.¹³⁰ Whether Luke intends to allude here to expectations of an eschatological prophet, drawn from Jubilee traditions,¹³¹ he clearly does intend to play on Jesus' status as prophet. This important presentation of Jesus relates not only to the good news he declares, but also to the ways in which others respond to this prophet who declares divine acceptance but is himself ultimately rejected.

Response to Jesus

As the passage turns to its second section (vv. 23-30), controversy emerges. Continuing Luke's presentation of Jesus as prophet, Jesus speaks using the language of "prophetic self-consciousness," such as confirming his own speech with 'Amen.'¹³² And he confronts the Nazarenes, until now distracted by his beautiful speaking and local family ties, with the claim that no prophet is accepted in his hometown – another play on δεκτός (v. 24). By implication, the

¹³⁰ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 81.

¹³¹ The reference may also allude to expectations of an eschatological prophet. Although the main sources of this expectation, identified in the figure of Melchizedek, come from DSS material, it is possible that this represents a broader expectation within first century Judaism (See Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 530, 533).

¹³² Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 80.

Nazarenes will not be able to 'accept' his ministry of release and acceptance as those in Capernaum have done.

Jesus goes on to reiterate his controversial claims by identifying with Elijah and Elisha (vv. 25-27). Not only does he suggest a prophetic ministry in the shape of that of these great prophets, but he explicitly associates with their mission to outsiders. As Elijah and Elisha ministered to widows and gentiles,¹³³ Jesus' proclamation will be rejected at Nazareth, but he has ministered in power in the rival town Capernaum.¹³⁴

Thus the essential tension, in this scene and throughout the Gospel, stems from insiders and outsiders' varying responses to Jesus. Although the text often compares Jewish and gentile characters, the meaning cannot be reduced to ethnicity. Rather, as James Sanders argues, this emphasis reflects Jesus' original challenge to insiders, who in his context were often Jewish peers.¹³⁵ Hence, the conflict introduced archetypically here at Nazareth but present

¹³³ See the stories about Elijah and meals above under Old Testament meal background.

¹³⁴ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 81-82.

¹³⁵ In a helpful model for reading texts, Sanders emphasises that the meaning in Jesus' context as he addressed Jewish peers may be inverted when the same sayings are addressed to a later audience, such as groups within the Gospel writers' communities then in conflict with Jewish groups. (See James A. Sanders, 'The Ethic of Election in Luke's Great Banquet Parable,' in *Essays in Old Testament Ethics [J. Phillip Hyatt, In Memoriam]*, ed. James L. Crenshaw and John T. Willis [New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1974], 245-271, see pp. 25-252). Reading Luke from the perspective of Jewish and gentile responses to Jesus is so common, however, that Johnson even attempts to overlay this dynamic onto the Nazareth-Capernaum comparison, although ethnicity is not mentioned here (see Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 82).

throughout Luke-Acts arises when insiders are challenged to accept outsiders or risk an unexpected reversal of fortune.

The reader has already been made aware of the reversal which Jesus' ministry will bring about. His conception caused Mary to praise the God who fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty (1:53). As an infant, Simeon prophesied he was destined for the rising and falling of many within Israel (2:34). And John the Baptist's quotation in 3:6 foreshadowed that Jesus' ministry will extend beyond the bounds of Israel. But the Nazareth scene informs an ingroup audience for the first time.¹³⁶

Further, the Nazareth scene describes reversal as a consequence of characters' own response to Jesus' proclamation. The unfavourable comparison to Capernaum enrages the crowd in Jesus' hometown. But this comparison itself stems from Jesus' observation about the way various groups respond to his announcement of acceptance. Importantly, Jesus proclaims acceptance and release to all. But particular groups are more able to hear and respond positively to this proclamation. As this scene makes clear, those who are currently insiders are apparently unable to hear the proclamation of release and acceptance as good news because they struggle to accept the acceptance of others.

¹³⁶ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 82.

Tragically, therefore, those who refuse to participate bring a reversal upon themselves. They do themselves out of all that flows from responding positively to Jesus' proclamation, including participation in the unfolding relationships of the kingdom of God. And they contribute to the ironic development within the plot – that the prophet who proclaims acceptance will be rejected, regrettably by those in his own 'group.'

An experience of eschatological significance

Importantly, Jesus' program of salvation erupts into the narrative as he declares: 'today this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears' (v. 21). Without overstating the significance of the perfect verb *πεπλήρωται* ('has been fulfilled'), it is nonetheless evident that something of importance has taken place here, or has begun to take place. A new era has been inaugurated – the time of the Lord's acceptance, the great Today,¹³⁷ has been declared and is already being made real in the ministry of Jesus.

Luke's depiction of the inauguration of Jesus' ministry taps into existing eschatological expectations. Jeremias argues that the images such as sight for the blind are "age-old phrases in the east for the time of salvation, when there will be no more sorrow, no more crying and no more grief."¹³⁸ Likewise Tannehill

¹³⁷ Byrne, *Hospitality*, 46.

¹³⁸ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: Part One The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden, NTL (London: SCM, 1971), 104.

suggests these are all signs of God's kingly rule emerging.¹³⁹ The eschatological character is further highlighted by Jesus' parallel announcement in 4:43 that he must also proclaim the kingdom of God in other cities, suggesting that proclaiming acceptance and release maybe be equated with proclaiming the kingdom of God.¹⁴⁰

And yet, although something of an eschatological nature is at hand, God's saving work is still in process. Jesus' declaration of a time of acceptance but not of vengeance suggests judgement has been "postponed to an indefinite future."¹⁴¹ Although Jesus' proclamation and its reception imply negative consequences for those who do not respond positively, the scenes which challenge characters to participate frequently end with the question of their response still in the air.

This is exemplified at Nazareth. The crowd's chilling turn to violence is halted by Jesus' calm movement through their midst, and the crowd is left murderous but perhaps also confused and uncertain by the cliff top. As elsewhere in the Gospel, the insiders remain on the cusp; they are confronted by both the opportunities, but also the perceived costs, of participation. And in this today of acceptance, the delay of judgement leaves the question hanging, challenging the reader also to a moment of crisis and response.

¹³⁹ Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 98.

¹⁴⁰ Tannehill suggests the text implies the two are "closely related, if not synonymous" (Tannehill, *Narrative Unity: Luke*, 68, cf also p. 78).

¹⁴¹ Byrne, *Hospitality*, 50.

Thus, in this scene at Nazareth, Luke deftly summarises Jesus' proclamation. However, unlike the other synoptics, he does not include explicit reference to the kingdom of God in Jesus' ministry until 4:43, after his ministry has been inaugurated.¹⁴² I turn now briefly to discuss the kingdom of God in Luke, to identify ways in which the kingdom relates to Jesus' proclamation in this Gospel.

The kingdom of God

Derived from Old Testament understandings, in turn inspired by emphases in other parts of the Ancient Near East, the kingdom of God draws on the "myth of the activity of God as king on behalf of his people."¹⁴³ Norman Perrin argues that by Jesus' time the kingdom was understood eschatologically, as the definitive, final action of God as king on behalf of God's people.¹⁴⁴ Despite disagreements about when Jesus anticipated the kingdom's arrival, most agree

¹⁴² The only earlier reference to 'kingdom' appears in Luke 1:33, during the annunciation.

¹⁴³ Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 33. Perrin also traces the history of the development of the myth of God as King in ancient Israel (pp. 15-32). For an excellent summary of scholarly writing on the kingdom of God in the historical Jesus' teaching, see also Bruce Chilton, 'Introduction,' in *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton, *Issues in Religion and Theology* 5 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). His introduction covers many key views and how they relate to each other. The remainder of the volume reproduces key articles on the theme.

¹⁴⁴ Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 40.

that the essential meaning focuses on God's sovereignty, and the relationships which become possible between God and the world under this rule.¹⁴⁵

Significantly, the character of the kingdom then becomes tied to the *character of the God who rules*. And particular texts feature in discussions of the character of the kingdom of God in the historical Jesus' teaching, such as: the beatitudes (6:20-22); the Lord's prayer, in which the petitions following 'your kingdom come' are understood to expand on attributes of that kingdom (11:2-4);¹⁴⁶ and the sayings C. H. Dodd labels the 'parables of crisis' (eg. 12:35-38; 12:39-40; 12:42-46; 13:25-27).¹⁴⁷

Further, exorcisms are clear examples of narratives which demonstrate God's kingly rule over other powers, for liberation and healing (cf. 8:26-39; 9:37-43; 11:14-23).¹⁴⁸ In a cultural context in which forces opposing God were understood to exist in a quite tangible way, the kingdom of God was conceived of as in opposition to a rival kingdom of satan.¹⁴⁹ Thus, exorcisms signify God's action to displace satan's rule.

¹⁴⁵ See Chilton, 'Introduction,' 25, and Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 98.

¹⁴⁶ Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 47.

¹⁴⁷ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, rev ed. (London: Nisbet, 1936), 154-174.

¹⁴⁸ Perrin argues that Jesus' sayings about the kingdom alongside exorcisms identify these exorcisms as a present experience of the power of God as king for his hearers (Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 43).

¹⁴⁹ Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 94.

Although informed by the broader conversation about the meaning of the kingdom of God in the first century, this discussion focuses on the way in which Luke presents the kingdom of God, rather than possible emphases in the preaching of the historical Jesus. Despite the different language used in the inauguration of Jesus' ministry,¹⁵⁰ Luke does retain kingdom language from synoptic sources in some contexts and, most importantly, use kingdom language in some distinctive Lukan texts.

Firstly, Luke parallels kingdom language with Jesus' proclamation from elsewhere. Luke 4:43 provides the most obvious example, where Jesus states that he must proclaim the kingdom of God also in other cities. As noted above, the statement implies that the proclamation of release and acceptance at Nazareth (4:16-21) is analogous to proclamation of the kingdom. In addition to this uniquely Lukan verse, Luke retains other sayings from shared sources which indicate that the kingdom is proclaimed in the ministries of both Jesus and his disciples (cf. 8:1; 9:2; Matt 4:23; 10:7).

Secondly, Luke uses additional sayings to indicate the ways in which the kingdom is already present, or not yet fulfilled. For instance, in Luke Jesus tells the parable of the talents because the disciples were supposing that the kingdom of God was about to appear immediately – a view which apparently needed correction (19:11).

¹⁵⁰ Unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke does not introduce the proclamation of John the Baptist (cf. Matt 3:2) or of Jesus (cf. Matt 4:17; Mark 1:15) with a summary statement about the kingdom.

Conversely, some unique Lukan sayings indicate the kingdom of God is already present in some way in Jesus' ministry. The affirmation that the kingdom is "among you" (17:21), often quoted in debate about Jesus' understanding of the kingdom's timing,¹⁵¹ suggests that in Luke the kingdom is at least partly present. However, the saying's context illustrates the more crucial point: the Pharisees Jesus addresses have not recognised the signs of the kingdom which are around them.¹⁵² Without presenting the kingdom as fully realised,¹⁵³ Luke further develops the tragedy that the insider group, unable to recognise elements of the kingdom which is in their very midst, do not understand the significance of that which they reject.

Similarly in Luke 11:20, a text also shared with Matthew, Jesus declares in relation to exorcisms that "the kingdom of God has come to you" (cf. Matt 12:28). As Jesus' saying associates the kingdom of God with Beelzebul being cast out, it reiterates that God's kingly rule is in some way present, supplanting the kingdom of satan.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ See Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 43-46.

¹⁵² See Tannehill, *Luke*, 259. Tannehill notes that a key issue relates to the translation of ἐν τῶν ὑμῶν – possibly 'among you,' 'within you' or 'will come suddenly among you' (see p. 259).

¹⁵³ Jesus does go on to teach his disciples the further events which will take place when the Son of Man is revealed (17:22-37).

¹⁵⁴ In reflecting on Luke 17:21, and also 11:20, Byrne argues: "The kingdom is principally about reclaiming human beings from the grip of Satan for a life-giving relationship with God – something that in his own preaching and healing is already going on" (Byrne, *Hospitality*, 141).

And, finally, Luke uses kingdom language in a distinctive way – by associating the language with meals. For instance, in Luke 14:15, while Jesus dines in the house of a leader of the Pharisees, a fellow diner interjects: “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” I discuss this meal at greater length below, but the macarism demonstrates the salience of kingdom imagery in meal scenes. Given the background traditions outlined above, Luke’s presentation of a character reflecting on the kingdom in light of his experience at table with Jesus underscores the connection for the reader.

Luke’s last supper account also incorporates unique sayings regarding the kingdom and eating. All the synoptics include Jesus’ declaration that he will not drink again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom; however, Luke inserts a parallel statement about not eating until it is fulfilled in the kingdom (22:16). He also moves some material which appears elsewhere in the synoptic tradition into his last supper account. For instance, he imports the dispute about greatness into the meal scene, where perhaps Greco-Roman understandings of seating positions and hierarchy may further the image (22:24; cf. Mark 9:34).¹⁵⁵ And he includes the promise that the disciples will judge the twelve tribes of Israel here – but with a unique inclusion, “so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom” (22:30; cf. Matt 19:28).

Finally, the saying at Luke 13:28-29, although also included in Matt 8:11-12, suits Luke’s understanding of the kingdom and desire to connect meal and

¹⁵⁵ Smith, ‘Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif,’ 620.

kingdom language. Here the kingdom involves unexpected reversal; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be cast out, but “all will come from east and west to eat in the kingdom of God.” Seemingly drawing on the image of an eschatological meal in Isa 25:6-8, Luke and Matthew here not only depict the kingdom as a meal, at which all the nations will be present, but they incorporate judgement and reversal such that Israel itself, or the insider group, will no longer be included.

In summary, Jesus’ proclamation in Luke is a declaration of release from all that holds human life captive, and of acceptance without vengeance. It announces a new time, the today of acceptance, and ushers in something of eschatological significance. As he makes use of kingdom language, Luke implies that such declaration of release and acceptance parallels the proclamation of the kingdom, and also indicates that the kingdom of God is in some way present in Jesus’ ministry, although not yet completely fulfilled. Importantly, unique Lukan references to the kingdom of God associate kingdom language with meals. Thus, in his use of the kingdom of God, like his inherited Old Testament traditions described above, Luke presents a picture of an eschatological meal. The many meal scenes in his Gospel, therefore, are embedded in this imagery.

MEALS EMBODY THE PROCLAMATION AND CRISIS

Luke's Gospel narrates many meals. In addition to retaining, and at times expanding, meals shared with other synoptic Gospels, Luke includes numerous meal scenes from his own sources. As noted above, he develops a type-scene in which later meal scenes recall earlier scenes for the reader and build on the themes they introduced. Indeed, I suggest that Luke connects the meals in part by following a consistent pattern. Most Lukan meals include the elements: Jesus' presence at a meal; a crowd or chorus; an action which prompts discussion; an opponent; and an unexpected revelation (cf. 5:27-32; 7:36-50; 9:10-17; 10:38-42; 11:37-52; 14:1-24; 19:1-10).

Further, these meal scenes must be appreciated as holistic *encounters*. In a Gospel which alternates between sayings and events, the frequent meals are significant precisely as events. They take on the sense of a profound moment, strengthened by Greco-Roman understandings of the significance of that which takes place at symposia. Something does indeed take place when characters encounter Jesus and each other at table.¹⁵⁶ Emerging more clearly from my discussion of particular passages below, I argue that the meals and the pattern they follow create liminal moments in which characters are challenged to transformation. The conflict which arises between the opponent and Jesus in

¹⁵⁶ See above for my response on this issue to Neyrey, 'Ceremonies in Luke-Acts,' 361-387.

these scenes is thus, as Minear asserts, “a redemptive controversy, for out of it comes an opportunity for fuller understanding of the gospel itself.”¹⁵⁷

The meal imagery therefore communicates something important which Luke deliberately seeks to highlight in his Gospel narrative.¹⁵⁸ Certainly the meals presume sympotic practices and thus reflect cultural assumptions.¹⁵⁹ But they also draw on deeper symbolism. In emphasising meal scenes throughout his Gospel, Luke benefits from a convergence of both Greco-Roman and Old Testament background in which meals are significant. Before first century readers took up Luke’s Gospel they knew of meals as a symbol of intimacy and a vehicle for the expression of eschatological hopes. They also knew the meal as an image which came with a whole lexicon for talking about relationships, social ranking and etiquette. Into this context, each of Luke’s meals contributes meaning about the way in which the events of Jesus’ ministry embody his proclamation.

¹⁵⁷ Minear, ‘Some Glimpses of Luke’s Sacramental Theology,’ 324. The end result is not the same in all meal scenes, but the encounter does bring this challenge to the opponent and require a decision.

¹⁵⁸ Smith observes that Lukan meal scenes create considerable historical difficulty, particularly in relation to the mixed tablefellowship of Pharisees and ‘sinners.’ However, he asserts: “It is not the picture of Jesus at table that can be defined as historical; that picture is derived from a storytelling motif. But it is the picture of Jesus that is characterised by such a story that qualifies for historical query.” (Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 277).

¹⁵⁹ Luke inserts distinctive sympotic language into his meal scenes. For instance, in Luke Levi hosts (5:29-32) not just a meal, but a great banquet (δοχὴν μεγάλην) at which guests recline (κατακείμενοι).

Turning now to particular meal scenes, I focus on 7:36-50 and 14:1-24. Due to space limitations I am only able to refer to other meals briefly, when establishing the literary context, demonstrating the type-scene development across the Gospel and noting patterns across the scenes where possible. In my treatment of these two key scenes, I also concentrate on those aspects which relate to the significance of each meal as an encounter with the realities which Jesus proclaims throughout Luke. At times this means that some matters which a commentary may note are not included, in the interests of focussing the discussion.

Luke 7:36-50: Challenge to transformation at Simon's table

In Luke 7:36-50 Jesus accepts the invitation of a Pharisee, Simon, to a meal in his house. The meal which follows, however, is interrupted by the tears and devotion of a sinful woman, and comparisons between each character's response to Jesus draw out the challenge which the meal encounter presents.

The tensions in the encounter are heightened by the sayings which immediately precede the meal. Indeed, the meal becomes an "immediate exemplification"¹⁶⁰ of their message. Beginning by outlining the ways in which these sayings establish the themes of the meal encounter, I will then describe the meal scene's structure and form, and identify relevant allusions from Greco-Roman and Old Testament backgrounds. Finally I will consider the key themes emerging from the meal.

The blind see, but who will join in the dancing?

In 7:18-35 Luke uses sayings to set up many of the themes which will be important in the meal at Simon the Pharisee's house. Johnson observes that in

¹⁶⁰ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 125. Likewise, see R. Alan Culpepper, 'The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,' in *NIB*, ed. Leander Keck et al, (12 vols, Nashville: Abingdon, [1994-2004] 9 [1995]), 1-490, see 169. By contrast, Fitzmyer argues that 7:36-50 "is unrelated to the three preceding passages, and it is not easy to discern the reason why it has been added just at this point" (Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 684).

Luke “*where* something is said is as significant as *what* is said,”¹⁶¹ and this is particularly true here. In the sayings and the following meal encounter, Luke has incorporated unique material with text shared with Matthew, thereby deliberately creating thematic and narrative connections.

This passage, in which John the Baptist briefly re-enters the account (cf. Matt 11:2-19), divides into three sections.¹⁶² The first confirms that Jesus is ‘the one coming,’ despite John’s hesitations (vv. 18-23). The second both acknowledges John’s importance and declares that the new era of the kingdom also radically qualifies his importance (vv. 24-30). And the third characterises ‘this generation’s’ resistance to the message of both Jesus and John (vv. 31-35). Each section contributes important background for interpreting 7:36-50.

The first section (vv. 18-23) confirms Jesus’ identity and the enormity of that which his ministry has unleashed. In sending his disciples to question whether Jesus is ‘the one coming,’ John seemingly attempts to test Jesus. Indeed, Jesus’ blessing of ‘anyone who takes no offense at me’ (v. 23) reveals that he has interpreted John’s question as something of a challenge.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 124, emphasis original.

¹⁶² Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, 160.

¹⁶³ François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50*, trans. Christine M. Thomas, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 281-282. Byrne rightly observes that Luke’s addition of ‘blessed is anyone who takes no offense in me’ (v. 23) indicates that Jesus interprets the question as a sign that John has been offended by the unexpected nature of Jesus’ ministry (see Byrne, *Hospitality*, 71).

John's disciples, however, find Jesus' identity instantly confirmed. The list of healings Jesus had just performed (v. 21) recalls Jesus' own declaration of his mission at Nazareth (4:18), demonstrating he is doing exactly what he declared he would. This does more than simply prove Jesus' prediction, however. As argued above, as Jesus is associated with the Isaian images of giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf and good news to the poor, his ministry ties into expectations of an eschatological prophet and the new era which such a prophet would inaugurate.

Building on this confirmation, the second section (vv. 24-30) introduces kingdom language, and emphasises the division between the old and new era. As Johnson rightly observes, the language 'greatest' and 'least' in verse 28 relates not to Jesus and John the Baptist, but to the members of the old and this emerging new era with Jesus.¹⁶⁴ Although Jesus acknowledges John's importance, he gives priority to those who participate in this new kingdom era. This represents a significant challenge: that the crowd be able to recognise, or 'come out to see,' that which is really of this new order.

Participation thus becomes the crucial theme for these sayings and the meal which follows. The narrator's aside at verses 29-30,¹⁶⁵ which is peculiar to Luke, makes the Lukan distinction between the response of 'tax collectors' and

¹⁶⁴ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 123.

¹⁶⁵ Verses 29 and 30 contain slightly confusing language, and are not paralleled in Matthew. They could be translated as a continuation of Jesus' sayings, but are best understood as a narrative aside (Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 670-671, 675-676).

‘Pharisees and lawyers.’ The tax collectors ‘justified God’ because they had become participants in this movement (although at this point only through John’s baptism), while the Pharisees and lawyers ‘rejected God’s purpose for themselves’ by refusing to be baptised.¹⁶⁶

The third section (vv. 31-35) emphasises participation through the children’s rhyme in verse 32. Here unwillingness to participate in either dancing or weeping is likened to the criticisms made of John the Baptist and of Jesus, despite their very different approaches.¹⁶⁷ The surrounding narrative insinuates that the ‘people of this generation’ are impossible to please and will not participate.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Talbert perhaps equates the repenting, being baptised, and being forgiven too strongly with ‘God’s purposes for their lives’ (vv. 29-30, see R. C. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* [New York: Cross Road, 1982], 85). A more helpful reading suggests that this lack of repentance and participation is illustrative of how these characters cut themselves out of God’s purposes – *by not participating*. This will then be shown clearly in the story that follows.

¹⁶⁷ Notably, Luke appears to have adjusted this text to read that John came eating no bread and drinking no wine (v. 33). Although Culpepper suggests that this is merely “idiomatic” (Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, 166), it is interesting that John’s asceticism is presented as taking the form of abstaining from those things that are not only important in Jesus’ ministry, but become key terms in the Acts community for describing the shape of Christian life (cf. Acts 2:42, 46; 27:35, cf. also Luke 24:30, 35). In Luke 7:33-34, however, the point is not Jesus’ superiority over John, but the great differences between them, and that neither have pleased the crowd.

¹⁶⁸ Matthew 11:17 uses the liturgical lament verb κόπτω (appearing in the form of ἐκόψασθε in Matthew), which Bovon suggests is more likely original (Bovon, *Luke 1*, 280). But Luke uses κλαίω (‘weep,’ which is in the form of ἐκλάυσατε in Luke 7:32), thus connecting this rhyme to the woman’s crying in verse 38, where the same verb is used. This emphasises that her weeping reflects an appropriate response of ‘participation.’

The sayings in 7:18-35 thus emphasise different groups' responses to Jesus. In particular they describe polarised attitudes to participation, aligning groups like tax collectors and sinners with transformative participation, and Pharisees, lawyers and 'the people of this generation' with a refusal to participate (cf. vv. 29-32). This language prepares for the story which follows. The reader is made to wonder: how will this *particular* Pharisee and sinner respond? Who will join in the dancing or the weeping? And, as the sayings foreshadow, will this Pharisee reject the call to participate and in so doing cut himself off from God's purposes?

Structure, source and form

As the meal scene in 7:36-50 opens, Jesus accepts a Pharisee's dinner invitation. In the next verse 'a woman in the city, who was a sinner,' arrives with a jar of ointment. And the scene is set. The presence of a 'sinner' and a 'Pharisee,' in light of the previous sayings, is deliberately emphatic.¹⁶⁹ Both Simon and the narrator describe the woman as a sinner (vv. 37, 39), and the word 'Pharisee' is used four times in the first four verses,¹⁷⁰ delaying the name 'Simon' until Jesus addresses him directly in verse 40.¹⁷¹ As the story unfolds, comparisons between these characters drive the structure of the passage.

¹⁶⁹ Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, 170.

¹⁷⁰ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 126.

¹⁷¹ The woman is not named at any stage, although she is eventually referred to as the woman, rather than sinner (v. 44).

Although this passage reflects Luke's particular emphases, it does contain striking similarities to texts in other Gospels. Matthew, Mark and John each recount a story of Jesus being anointed in Bethany, toward the end of his ministry (Matt 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8). The synoptic versions share some distinctive language (eg. ἀλάβαστρον μύρον; and Σίμων as host),¹⁷² and all four accounts contain similarities which are difficult to overlook (an anointing, at a meal, creates controversy). However, while the accounts in other Gospels are very similar to each other, the characters, timing, and overall themes of the story in Luke are quite different.

Without debating Luke's source(s) for this story, I suggest that his decision to include this story here and, presuming he had access to Mark's Gospel, to omit the similar story of an anointing at Bethany has a number of implications.¹⁷³ For instance, he clearly preferred a version of the story in which Simon, the host, was a Pharisee, rather than a leper,¹⁷⁴ enabling the contrast with the 'sinful' woman who anoints Jesus. Further, the woman's devotion is not expressed in terms of the value of the ointment, but her heartfelt behaviour. Indeed, Luke's story mentions money only as part of an analogy about forgiven debt. Finally, Luke also preferred to tell the story as part of Jesus' public ministry – not an anointing for his death, but a celebration of that which takes place as people

¹⁷² Bovon, *Luke 1*, 292.

¹⁷³ These stories could come from two different sources, or the same source which Luke has edited for his purposes. Regardless of whether he has edited the story into this form, or simply selected this version from two different sources, he does seem to have chosen this version over that in Mark.

¹⁷⁴ Note that this is how the host, Simon, is described in Mark 14:3. The Johannine tradition has the host as Lazarus, a particular friend of Jesus' (John 12:1).

encounter Jesus. Thus, despite other similar stories, in 7:36-50 Luke presents a story structured for his particular themes and carefully positioned within his unfolding Gospel narrative.

The form of the story also generates difficulties. Commentators have variously understood the meal as a pronouncement story,¹⁷⁵ a quest story,¹⁷⁶ symposium literature,¹⁷⁷ a “Socratic interrogation”¹⁷⁸ and, by emphasising Jesus’ words at verse 48 (‘your faith has saved you’), even a healing story.¹⁷⁹ The relative merit of these perspectives depends upon certain decisions about the story’s central purposes.

Fitzmyer, who understands the narrative as a pronouncement story with a parable inserted,¹⁸⁰ focuses on the words which Jesus speaks to the woman, and their implications for Simon. However, this risks reducing the sense of encounter to a verbal element. Conversely, Tannehill’s view of the story as a ‘quest’¹⁸¹ places too much emphasis on the woman seeking out Jesus to ‘get’ forgiveness, when the dynamic is rather one of the woman expressing devotion.

¹⁷⁵ Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 687.

¹⁷⁶ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity: Luke*, 116.

¹⁷⁷ Bovon, *Luke 1*, 293.

¹⁷⁸ E. Earle Ellis, ed, *The Gospel of Luke*, New Century Bible (London: Nelson, 1966), 123-124.

¹⁷⁹ See the discussion given in Tannehill, *Narrative Unity: Luke*, 94-96.

¹⁸⁰ Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 687.

¹⁸¹ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity: Luke*, 116.

As argued above, I suggest Luke has created a stylised pattern in these meal scenes. Given the model of alternating sayings and events in Luke's narrative, and given this is such a clear pattern in this chapter (cf. 7:18-35, 36-50),¹⁸² the meal scene must be approached as an *encounter*. Although the scene certainly incorporates elements of other forms, such as symposium literary conventions, it does not follow any form strictly. Rather, Luke seems to employ such traditions in order to make thematic allusions, but following his own type-scene pattern.

This pattern, first introduced at Levi's banquet (5:29-32), emerges through the meal encounters throughout Luke's Gospel. As in other Lukan meal scenes, in 7:36-50 the setting is clearly identified as a meal (v. 36), in the presence of a larger group (although other characters do not appear until verse 49). There is an action which prompts discussion, here the woman interrupting to anoint Jesus' feet (vv. 37-38) and an opponent, Simon. And, in the unfolding comparisons between Simon and the woman, and Jesus' declarations regarding forgiveness, faith and salvation (vv. 48, 50), the story also provides an unexpected revelation. In light of these elements which are shared by many meals across Luke's Gospel, rather than categorising Luke's meal scenes as a particular form, in this discussion I consider the text in relation to the elements of this meal encounter type-scene.

Finally, Luke structures the text by continuing to use parallels, building on the initial parallel between a 'Pharisee' and a 'sinner.' Most obviously, the text

¹⁸² Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 125, and Bovon, *Luke 1*, 277.

compares the behaviour of the woman and Simon.¹⁸³ This comparison takes the triangular shape identified by Brendan Byrne, in which different characters' positive and negative responses to Jesus are held in tension.¹⁸⁴ Luke also intensifies the comparison by initially withholding some details.¹⁸⁵ For instance, verses 37-38 describe the woman's extravagant response to Jesus, but it is not until Jesus directly compares her response to that of Simon (vv. 44-46) that the reader learns about the inadequacy of Simon's response to Jesus.¹⁸⁶

Thus, in 7:36-50 Luke tells the story of an encounter at Simon the Pharisee's house by making use of a 'meal encounter' pattern he uses often throughout his gospel account, but which is not a distinct genre outside his writing. He structures the story in order to assist in the comparison between characters and to demonstrate a challenging reversal within the text.

¹⁸³ Talbert identifies a chiasmic structure within the text. He suggests: A - woman's action of unusual affection towards Jesus (vv. 37-38); B - Pharisee's negative judgement of Jesus (v. 39); B' - Jesus' response to Simon (vv. 40-47); A' - Jesus' response to the woman (vv. 48, 50, Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 86). However, although there are some chiasmic and parallel elements, the text does not fit this structure so clearly.

¹⁸⁴ Byrne, *Hospitality*, 4-5.

¹⁸⁵ Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, 172.

¹⁸⁶ As Bovon suggests, Simon initially makes a series of judgements, namely that the woman is a sinner and that Jesus is not a prophet. Having made these judgements, however, a shift takes place in the narrative, in which the character who was powerful, as Pharisee and host, becomes the reluctant student. Continuing his role as teacher, Jesus then makes his own comparison between the behaviour of the woman and of Simon (Bovon, *Luke 1*, 291). Johnson notes a series of other occasions when Jesus is addressed as teacher (διδάσκαλε) without the title necessarily being positive (cf. 11:45; 20:21, 28, Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 127).

Motifs and allusions from background traditions

Some particular Greco-Roman and Old Testament influences provide noteworthy background for the meaning of this meal at Simon's house. For instance, the two main characters represent two 'stock characters' from symposium literature – the host and the uninvited guest. And yet, both characters are presented in ways which challenge the traditional motif.

As an uninvited guest, the woman may be expected to cause the meal to degenerate. Uninvited guests, especially where the host did not immediately extend an invitation based on a relationship with another guest (as in the case of the first uninvited guest in Plato's *Symposium* noted above), were understood to behave badly. The tradition presumed that attending an event uninvited naturally led to other lapses of etiquette such as unruly behaviour, which could destroy the party (as in the case of the late uninvited revellers in Plato). Yet here in Luke, Jesus praises the uninvited guest's behaviour; although uninvited, she offers extravagant hospitality which sorely shows up the behaviour of the actual host.

Simon's failures of hospitality are highlighted not only by the woman's behaviour, but also the cultural expectations of a host. Judged against the stock character of host, Simon fails in nearly every account – as is reinforced by Jesus' criticism of his failure to provide water for his guest's feet or a kiss, or to anoint his head with oil (vv. 44-46). While Simon does not meet these expectations, the woman takes each further: she washes Jesus' feet with her

own tears, dries them with her hair and repeatedly kisses, and then anoints, his feet (vv. 44-46).¹⁸⁷ Indeed, the passage questions who the true host is.¹⁸⁸ Simon has clearly failed, and the woman provides superior hospitality.¹⁸⁹

However, a further question emerges about Jesus' role. Springs-Steele argues that Jesus fits the stock character of chief guest,¹⁹⁰ but I suggest the text implies something further. The tears, kisses and anointing the woman provides are welcome signs of her hospitality to Jesus. But Jesus himself recognises that her sins have been forgiven and sends her out with a blessing of peace. As Zacchaeus later discovers when he hosts Jesus in his home, but Jesus restores him to community (19:1-10), hosting Jesus prompts a more profound exchange of hospitality.¹⁹¹ Even as guest, Jesus addresses the needs of other characters beyond the provision of the most exceptional host.

This passage also relies on a number of broader sympotic themes. The preceding sayings reiterate the complaint about Jesus' friendship with 'tax

¹⁸⁷ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity: Luke*, 117.

¹⁸⁸ Smith claims, in a literal way, that Jesus must be host for an experience of the messianic banquet to take place (Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 234). By contrast, I suggest that at times the point raised by the text is precisely this question of who is the real host.

¹⁸⁹ Mullen argues that the text does not indicate that Simon has failed or provided inadequate hospitality, simply that his response demonstrates his lesser gratitude (Mullen, *Dining with Pharisees*, 117-120). However, I suggest this lesser gratitude does indeed demonstrate his inadequate response, as he has not appreciated the magnitude of what he has been offered, or taken up the opportunity to participate in what Jesus offers.

¹⁹⁰ Springs Steele, 'Luke 11:37-54,' 383.

¹⁹¹ Byrne, *Hospitality*, 152.

collectors and sinners' (v. 34). This leads appropriately into a meal encounter at which a 'sinner' is present, given the cultural understanding that meals create friendship. Indeed, Jesus' tablefellowship with sinners seems to be the original inspiration for the jibe.¹⁹² Unlike the inherited tradition though, he does not simply participate in meals to deepen existing friendships or friendships with those of the same social rank. Rather, Jesus produces boundary-crossing friendships by his selection of dining partners. This challenges not only Simon the Pharisee's sense of propriety, but also the first-century reader's cultural and religious assumptions.

In keeping with another aspect of symposium ethics, the meal also creates *koinônia*. Such sympotic unity offers an opportunity for intimacy and connection between characters. However, the unity developed among diners becomes even more significant when one of the characters is Jesus, the one anointed by the Spirit to declare release and acceptance (4:18-19). Thus the woman's connection with Jesus leads into a transforming, liminal moment – she has recognised the enormity of her forgiven debt and receives a blessing. Meanwhile, however, Simon hesitates, reluctant to enter into *koinônia*, particularly with this 'sinner.'

Finally, Old Testament sources, which I outlined above, are also important allusions for Lukan meal scenes, including this passage. Such imagery contributes to the reader's emerging sense of Jesus' identity. Having declared

¹⁹² Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 31.

release from captivity, Jesus at table becomes reminiscent of a meal which celebrates an eternal banquet in which there will be no more mourning, under the kingly rule of God (cf. Isa 25:6-8). As he exchanges hospitality with the woman, he evokes the divine hospitality of the provider. And as Simon inadvertently affirms Jesus' identity as a prophet (v. 39), the reader recalls that Jesus' identity has been connected to expectations of an eschatological prophet (4:18-19) and even the messiah (2:26, 29-32). Thus the meal contributes to the developing association of a messianic banquet with meals with Jesus.

Therefore, for the first-century reader this meal scene is layered with cultural and religious images which affect the text's meaning. The sayings before the meal scene prime the reader to look for particular themes. The structure of the passage highlights the comparisons which emphasise the story's themes and connect to other meal type-scenes. And Greco-Roman and Old Testament allusions both critique the characters' responses to Jesus and underline the significance of that which takes place in this encounter with Jesus at table.

Thematic Considerations for Luke 7:36-50

The meal in Simon the Pharisee's house incorporates the key themes of Luke's Gospel. Indeed, these themes are evident in many meals, but this discussion does not allow the space to systematically outline each meal scene. Most importantly for interpreting 7:36-50, many of these themes have already been

introduced in the account of the great banquet Levi hosts in response to Jesus' call (5:27-32).

In 5:27-32 Luke edits a controversy story about Levi's call and banquet to particularly highlight his themes. In 7:36-50 he develops these themes even more strongly. This scene builds on the earlier pattern: a great banquet hosted by a tax collector and in the presence of sinners, leads here into a meal in the presence of a sinner, but now hosted by a Pharisee. Here the key themes of the text can be divided into: forgiveness and showing love; the cost of participation; and invitation and postponed judgement.

Forgiveness and showing love:

This passage's meaning rests in part on the interpretation of the relationship between forgiveness and the woman's extravagant expression of love.¹⁹³ In contrast to some traditional interpretations, I argue the text indicates that the woman has already experienced forgiveness, and that her behaviour demonstrates her gratitude.¹⁹⁴ Luke's initial description of the woman's

¹⁹³ This is an interpretative difficulty akin to that in chapter 19, where the question arises as to whether Zacchaeus' practice of sharing his wealth honestly commences at the time of his encounter with Jesus, or whether this is an existing practice (19:8). For discussion of this question about Zacchaeus' behaviour, see note 252.

¹⁹⁴ This is the view presented by: Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, 172; Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 127; Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 87; and Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 687. Tannehill acknowledges that the parable does require that the passage be read as an expression of love in response to forgiveness, but suggests that Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness at verse 48 complicates the view (Tannehill, *Narrative*

behaviour establishes the context for the parable of forgiven debts. This parable in turn provides the logic of the passage: the woman shows this great love because she has been forgiven much.

Some traditional interpretation has, however, inverted this. Based on a particular understanding of verses 47-48, such interpretation presumes that the woman's behaviour prompts Jesus to grant forgiveness.¹⁹⁵ I suggest, however, that verse 47 must be seen as an application of the parable, and in that light the logic is necessarily one of observation, not a causal link. That is, the woman's sins 'have been forgiven' (and note the perfect passive verb), 'and, see'¹⁹⁶ she shows her love. The second half of verse 47, where little forgiveness leads to little love, confirms this ordering. Following the logic of verse 47, Jesus' announcement in verse 48 that the woman's sins are forgiven is also best understood as an acknowledgement of that which the woman has already rightly sensed. In the language of Jesus' proclamation at Nazareth, she has encountered the Lord's acceptance.¹⁹⁷

Unity: Luke, 117-118). Tannehill thus gives a more circular perspective. He argues that by believing forgiveness is possible, the woman shows love, and then experiences 'full' forgiveness. This is essentially an attempt to reconcile verses 47 and 48, which can be achieved more helpfully as demonstrated below.

¹⁹⁵ Fitzmyer notes in particular patristic and some more recent interpreters who have taken this reading (see Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 686-687).

¹⁹⁶ It is difficult to achieve the correct sense when translating ὅτι here. Bovon attempts by using 'in recognition that' (Bovon, *Luke 1*, 297).

¹⁹⁷ Byrne explains the pronouncement at verse 48 as "simply an explicit and public assurance of the forgiveness already imparted without words" (Byrne, *Hospitality*, 75). Tannehill also rightly emphasises that the pronouncements to the woman at verses 48 and 50 indicate that the woman is not simply a foil in the story, but that there is a genuine concern in the text for what happens to her (Tannehill, *Narrative Unity: Luke*, 116).

Indeed, this meal encounter is presented as a further sign of the fulfilment of this proclamation in 4:18-21. The woman's response to Jesus is portrayed as a response to an experience of acceptance. And the passage describes the release she has discovered – here release from sin, which is also analogously presented as cancelled debt.¹⁹⁸ The salience of the Nazareth event is further heightened by the declaration in the preceding sayings that the blind are receiving their sight and the poor Good News (7:22, cf. 4:18). Much like the incident at Nazareth, however, the interaction between Jesus and this outsider provokes questions in the hearts of the insiders, the fellow diners.

The cost of real participation in kingdom unity:

The text therefore raises important questions about response. If receiving forgiveness cannot simply be equated with transformation at this meal scene, then what does prompt transformation here? Further, given his apparent hesitation at full participation and lack of loving hospitality, what does this all mean for Simon?

¹⁹⁸ Here Luke uses ἀφεώνται to describe the woman's forgiveness, or release from sin. This verb comes from ἀφίημι. Although the passage does not use the noun ἄφεσις, which I have already noted Luke uses as a technical term for release throughout Luke-Acts, the words are connected. Both the verb ἀφίημι and the noun ἄφεσις offer meanings of pardon and, significantly for this context here, can be used in relation to release from debt: cf. BDAG 155 (ἄφεσις); 156-157 (ἀφίημι). Thus here the parable about cancelled debt, and the analogous description of the woman's response to her cancelled sin, calls to mind the release and acceptance introduced in 4:18-19.

Alongside the traditional assumptions I argued against above, commentators have at times also assumed that the absence of love from Simon must indicate that he has not been forgiven.¹⁹⁹ However, again this interpretation overturns the logic of the parable and broader narrative. Rather, Simon's inadequate response indicates an inadequate appreciation of, and gratitude for, his own forgiveness.

Not only does Simon fail to provide extravagant hospitality, but without appreciating his shared status as 'forgiven' he also fails to share in the intimacy of tablefellowship with such as this 'sinner.' The parable highlights the significance of that which Simon is also offered, through the moneylender's extraordinary behaviour. As François Bovon affirms, this grounds the entire encounter in unexpected graciousness²⁰⁰ – when the debts could not be paid they were graciously cancelled. Contrary to R. Alan Culpepper, the importance of the parable lies not in the relative sizes of the debts,²⁰¹ but in the acknowledgement that both debts were substantial²⁰² and the moneylender has cancelled all of each. Simon, however, has not understood the significance of his own cancelled debt.

¹⁹⁹ For the view that Simon is not forgiven, see Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 127. For the view that Simon is forgiven less because he is less aware of his need for forgiveness, see Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, 172.

²⁰⁰ Bovon, *Luke 1*, 296.

²⁰¹ Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, 170.

²⁰² Given that texts in Matthew indicate that one denarius is the equivalent of a day's wage (Matt 18:28; 20:2), it is important to recognise that both debts here, 500 and 50 denarii, are considerable (Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 127).

The passage's conclusion confirms that a change in status has taken place. Although it serves Luke's purpose to refer to the woman as a 'sinner' in setting up the narrative, here 'the woman' (v. 50) is no longer defined by her sin. Having been transformed, she becomes one who has encountered Jesus and is sent off to travel into "messianic peace."²⁰³

Thus the transformation which the meal encounter makes possible involves being utterly reshaped by participating with gratitude in an experience of *koinônia* at table with Jesus and others. As foreshadowed by the earlier sayings, what varies between characters is not Jesus' acceptance of them but rather their response to this acceptance. Further, the story asserts that this transformation is actually saving. In allowing herself to participate fully in this encounter, the woman makes herself open to the kind of faith which brings salvation (v. 50). Conversely, Simon's reluctance to participate does not indicate an initial lack of forgiveness, but does hold him back from this opportunity to experience salvation and to receive a blessing to travel into peace.

In the language of Jesus' proclamation at Nazareth, the new time of acceptance has been declared to all. But a reluctance to respond emerges for some, particularly after the open-ended boundaries to this acceptance are revealed. If there is a consistent difference in Luke between 'sinners' and 'Pharisees' (or 'outsiders' and 'insiders') in this respect, it is not that insiders are any less dependent upon the gracious forgiveness of a significant 'debt.' But Luke

²⁰³ Byrne, *Hospitality*, 76.

suggests that by making judgements about others, insiders have insulated themselves against the significance of their own cancelled debt, creating a barrier from others, and thus making participation in the *koinônia* of such kingdom-experiences seem too costly. Here lies their tragedy.

Invitation and postponed judgement

Importantly, however, the passage ends short of any direct condemnation of Simon. It is not so much that Simon is rendered speechless by this encounter,²⁰⁴ as that Luke deliberately leaves the conclusion of the story open. Jesus' blessing to the woman (v. 50) is not equalled by a pronouncement of judgement to Simon.

This absence of judgement may seem surprising. The context implies a general judgement. The preceding sayings have highlighted what is at stake in such encounters: responding to Jesus is weighted with the possibility of being cut off from God's purposes in their lives (v. 30). The meal encounter brings these hesitations about participating to light. Further, the woman's behaviour draws out the types of thoughts in others that also attract Jesus' judgement.²⁰⁵

And yet, when it comes to the actual encounter, something about this kingdom-experience ensures that the possibilities are determined by grace. In the spirit of

²⁰⁴ See Bovon for such a view of Simon's silence (Bovon, *Luke 1*, 291).

²⁰⁵ See Byrne, *Hospitality*, 74.

Jesus' declaration of a 'year of the Lord's acceptance' (4:19), the judgement which seems to follow is postponed, so that the invitation to participate may continue to challenge Simon to transformation.

By briefly drawing a chorus of characters into the drama at the end (v. 49) Luke extends the invitation. Readers are left wondering not only what Simon will do, but also what this group (which Jesus does not even answer at this point) will do. Further, readers are invited to wonder how they themselves will respond²⁰⁶ to this challenge to be transformed by participating in the costly unity of such a meal of the kingdom.

Therefore, in this distinctive narrative Luke presents themes which are central to his Gospel in the form of a transforming encounter. Questions of participation raised in the preceding passage are embodied and the meal brings to life the choices which face those who encounter Jesus.

This is a threshold moment for the characters. In light of her tremendous consciousness of the meaning of Jesus' acceptance, the woman chooses the path of extravagant participation, and is sent out transformed. For Simon, the liminal experience continues beyond the close of the narrative. He is left at the table, with the challenge to transformation still before him.

²⁰⁶ Byrne, *Hospitality*, 76.

Luke 14:1-24: Renouncing all to take up one's place at the table

Luke's final story of Jesus dining in a Pharisee's house in 14:1-24 continues the participation theme. Tabletalk focussed on meal imagery challenges characters who, although dining with Jesus, have not been transformed by the experience. Here the Lukan Jesus presents participation in a world which prioritises maintaining one's wealth and social position as a distraction from the call to participate in the kingdom of God. Indeed the failure to renounce such priorities becomes a catalyst for a great reversal. The passage provides both eschatological imagery, which is good news for some and costly for others, and very concrete instruction to members of the discipleship community.

After a brief comment on the general structure, sources and literary context of the meal, in the discussion below I will consider this passage under the story's major sections – healing of a person with dropsy (vv. 1-6), sayings addressed to guests and hosts (vv. 7-14), and the parable of the great banquet (vv. 15-24).

Structure, source and literary context

Luke 14:1-24 forms part of a larger thematic unit.²⁰⁷ I focus on these verses in particular because they are explicitly set at or on the way to a meal and because the scene changes at verse 25. However, as will become evident from the thematic discussion below, there are good reasons to see the discipleship

²⁰⁷ For treatment of 14:1-35 as a thematic unit, see Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 231.

sayings in verses 25-35 as a continuation of the meal scene's themes, although not of the scene itself. Luke makes this connection more obvious by returning to comments on Jesus' tablefellowship at 15:1-2, before launching into the parables of lost sheep, coin and son, thus loosely drawing this material together.

The meal scene comprises a healing and a series of sayings recorded as tabletalk. Similarly to many of Plutarch's topics, the tabletalk topics themselves relate to meal etiquette. As suggested by Willi Braun, the meal account may follow the Greco-Roman *chreia* structure for expounding an argument.²⁰⁸ Whether or not Luke follows this genre here, the meal scene clearly includes similar elements to others in Luke's Gospel. As with the other meals, therefore, it functions as a type-scene, reiterating and further developing themes introduced in earlier scenes.

Indeed, the meal scene exhibits the characteristics of the meal encounter pattern I identified above. Jesus attends a meal, having been invited by a leader of the Pharisees (v. 1). The fellow diners are the chorus, fulfilling a role at various points, such as by attempting to commandeer the best places at the banquet; in turn supplying an action which prompts discussion. In this scene, in fact, there are three interjections which spark discussion: the appearance of the man with dropsy (v. 2); the jockeying for seating positions (v. 7); and the macarism from a diner about eating bread in the kingdom of God (v. 15).

²⁰⁸ See Braun for fuller discussion of the formal aspects of this pattern in Greco-Roman texts (Willi Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14*, SNTSMS 85 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 145-175, especially pp. 162-164).

Again, opponents are present. Indeed, the opposition to Jesus now appears in the setting of the scene; as he narrates the meal invitation Luke describes the hostile observation to which Jesus is immediately subjected (v. 1). This reflects the escalating tension by this stage of the Gospel, and builds on the previous meal scene in particular, which concluded with Pharisees and lawyers waiting for a chance to catch Jesus out (11:53-54).²⁰⁹ Finally, the reversal Jesus describes (vv. 11, 14, 24) provides an unexpected revelation for those expecting a milder-mannered discussion of meal etiquette.

As a unit, this passage is unique to Luke. The healing story and advice to guests and hosts (vv. 1-6, 7-14) are found only in Luke. However, the parable of the great banquet (vv. 15-24) has parallels in Matthew and in the Gospel of Thomas (Matt 22:1-14; Thom 64:1-12). While Matthew gives a highly allegorised version and takes a quite different direction in the second half,²¹⁰ the Thomas version is more similar to that in Luke. This has led many to argue that Luke and Thomas share a common source, but the Matthean version more likely reflects a separate source.²¹¹ Without attempting, in general, to trace sources behind finished texts, some notable comparisons to Thomas' text confirm Luke's particular emphases. For instance, it is only in Luke that new invitations are

²⁰⁹ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity: Luke*, 182-183.

²¹⁰ For instance, in Matthew's version the host is a king, and the parable ends with the king casting out a guest for not wearing appropriate clothing.

²¹¹ Paul H. Ballard, 'Reasons for Refusing the Great Supper,' *JTS* 23 (1972), 341-350, see p. 341.

extended specifically to the poor, crippled, blind and lame (v. 22). This clearly displays Lukan language.

Finally, it is helpful to note the placement of 14:1-24 in Luke's overall narrative. Luke has related a number of meals since 7:36-50, and although there is not space to discuss all here, surveying these meals offers a reminder that the meal type-scene has been further developed in the interim.

At the feeding of the 5000 (9:10-17), a meal which, like the last supper, appears in all four Gospels, Luke describes an event which challenges Greco-Roman etiquette in profound ways. As in all accounts, the number of people present would alarm Hellenistic sensibilities which, as noted above, emphasise rules around invitations and appropriate guest numbers. Indeed, Luke adds sympotic language to underline the point; only in Luke do the guests recline (κατέκλιναν, v. 15). This mixed group, reclining wherever they like, dining as equals and being fed to satisfaction would understandably deepen the disciples' hesitations about the meal (cf. vv. 12-13).²¹²

The other meals in the lead up to chapter 14 appear in Luke's central section, which describes Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27). Themes of participation or distraction emerge from tabletalk in Mary and Martha's home

²¹² As in other Gospels, this passage offers many more allusions, most obviously eucharistic overtones, but there is not space to do justice to it here. The passage also connects to the Last Supper and Emmaus accounts as these three meals come at the end of each of the major sections of Luke (Just, *The Ongoing Feast*, 156-157).

(10:38-42). And in the home of yet another Pharisee, the meal in 11:37-52 sparks great controversy, resulting in Jesus' angry criticism of Pharisees and lawyers for their failure to recognise and respond to the humanity of others. Here in 14:1-24, Luke describes a meal in a Pharisee's house for the last time, concluding with a host who is a 'leader' of the Pharisees.²¹³ Throughout this meal scene, to which I now turn, Jesus offers a challenge to renounce all which distracts from discipleship and find solidarity with outsiders, or be subject to a reversal which will leave the previous insider as an outsider.

The dropsy episode (vv. 1-6)

At first, it seems strange that the meal scene begins with this brief healing account. It appears to interrupt the narrative – Jesus is on the way to a meal (v. 1), but suddenly someone needing healing presents himself (v. 2).

It could be that Luke uses the healing to establish the sense of controversy.

Johnson observes that the healing ties the scene into two forms of controversy stories – meals and Sabbath.²¹⁴ Although functioning this way, interestingly, no

²¹³ I suggest these meals in Pharisees' houses, ending with a leader of the Pharisees, offer a similar parallel to that between the meals in tax collectors' houses in 5:27-32 and 19:1-10. Just notes that the meals in Levi and Zacchaeus' homes are parallel, and that, as Zacchaeus' is a *chief* tax collector, the pattern culminates in story in which the host "represents the response of all tax collectors and sinners" (Just, *The Ongoing Feast*, 187). Of further significance, that this is Jesus' last meal in a Pharisee's home indicates that Jesus also follows his own advice (cf. 14:12-13), and dines now only with those who cannot repay, not peers (Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric*, 175).

²¹⁴ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 223.

further story is really needed to create controversy by this stage in the Gospel. Rather, opposition is so palpable that, as Fitzmyer observes, when Jesus speaks Luke says he is replying (ἀποκριθεὶς, v. 3) although nothing has yet been said.²¹⁵ When Jesus encounters Pharisees now, unspoken controversy hangs in the air.

Alternatively, it could be that the man with dropsy represents the uninvited guest stock character. His healing does prompt discussion, in some ways parallel to the woman in 7:36-50, but overall his role is quite different. He does not fulfil other features of the motif, nor does he feature sufficiently to challenge the motif. Rather Jesus simply heals him and then he disappears.

The most compelling explanation I have found comes from Braun.²¹⁶ His analysis of Greco-Roman philosophical texts uncovers a number of instances in which dropsy appears as a metaphor. Dropsy refers to swelling caused by retaining fluid – in contemporary terminology, edema.²¹⁷ Braun, however, discovered texts in which dropsy was used as an image of insatiable desire, inspired by the ancient observation that dropsy sufferers craved water although their bodies retained water. Therefore, acting on the desire for water was seen as perpetuating a thirst which could not be sated and would eventually lead to death. Braun observes that Greco-Roman philosophers used dropsy as a

²¹⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB 28A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1041.

²¹⁶ Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric*, 30-42. Braun gives a number of textual examples, ranging in date over this period.

²¹⁷ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 223.

metaphor for avarice. Most importantly, these texts often specifically named the excesses of symposia as analogous ‘insatiable desires.’

Without overstating his argument by suggesting Luke’s story follows any particular formula, Braun helpfully suggests that this connection between dropsy and moral comment on a meal may well have been familiar to Luke’s original audience.²¹⁸ In this light, the opening healing story sets the themes for the remainder of the dinner.²¹⁹ Having healed the man with the physical dropsy, Jesus turns to identify the insatiable desires which constrain the diners and distract them from full participation. No less than the man with dropsy, those captive to the deathly distraction of things which will not satisfy are in need of the healing which Jesus brings. In the language of his proclamation at Nazareth, Jesus recognises their need for release.²²⁰

To guests and hosts (vv. 7-14)

Immediately after the healing story Luke reiterates the meal setting by describing Jesus noticing guests competing for good dining places. This introduces a structured section of sayings, directed first to guests (vv. 8-11) and then hosts (vv. 12-14).²²¹ In each section, advice couched in rhetoric reminiscent of

²¹⁸ Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric*, 38.

²¹⁹ Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric*, 42.

²²⁰ I suggest that Luke does make this thematic connection here, although the word for release in verse 4 comes from λύω, not ἄφεσις or ἀφίημι.

²²¹ Minear, ‘Some Glimpses of Luke’s Sacramental Theology,’ 325.

symposium literature precedes an unexpected announcement. The sayings presuppose an awareness of symposium traditions, but also forcefully challenge these traditions.

At first, the advice to guests about sitting below one's station appears very practical. People immersed in the first-century honour and shame system would easily agree that it would be preferable to be invited to take a better position. But as Byrne observes, having connected to the reader's appreciation of the significance of honour, the Lukan Jesus demonstrates the enormity of the reversal he proclaims.²²² The humble and the self-exalted will change places; those who seek honour will be shamed, and the lowly will be raised (cf. 1:52; 2:34; 6:20-26; 13:30; 18:14; 22:26).

The advice to hosts (vv. 12-14) then undermines the established systems of social accounting. Here Jesus no longer starts with reasonable-sounding advice. He instructs hosts to invite not peers, but the poor, crippled, lame and blind.²²³ This reminds the reader of other Lukan texts which mention such groups (cf. 4:18; 7:22), and provides a setting for the following parable. In a world of balanced reciprocity it also offends social convention. Not only challenging to the host, but as Braun notes, even guests would falter before

²²² Byrne, *Hospitality*, 123.

²²³ This list comes from Lev 21:17-21 (Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 225). Note that groups such as the blind and poor also appear in the Isaiah passage quoted in Luke 4:18-19, creating a connection to that tradition here also.

accepting an invitation due to the debt which may be incurred by the inability to reciprocate.²²⁴

The final statements in each saying (vv. 11, 14) demonstrate the priorities and power of God. Each describes reversal in divine passives.²²⁵ In this way the social accounting methods are utterly brought undone. No longer tallied according to human priorities, the sayings assert that God will determine whose turn it is to receive a reward, and it will not go well for those who have been consistently receiving human rewards until that time.²²⁶

The liberation and cost of participation (vv. 15-24)

The advice to guests and hosts then flows into the parable of the great banquet – an instant demonstration of the dilemmas of living according to the values in the sayings. Importantly, the parable holds together both concrete implications for Christian life and eschatological claims.

Tannehill describes this dual focus as the two frames of the parable. He suggests that in the immediate frame (vv. 15, 24), the parable becomes an eschatological statement about the nature of the kingdom of God and one's response to it. With this focus, "God is the host of this banquet, and the crucial

²²⁴ Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric*, 88-97.

²²⁵ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 227.

²²⁶ Tannehill, *Luke*, 230.

question is who will participate in it?”²²⁷ In the context of the broader frame (vv. 12-14, 25-33), he suggests the parable becomes a story about what happens when a human host *does* invite the poor, crippled, blind and lame to his banquet, as Jesus instructed at verse 13.²²⁸

In the following, I address the parable first from the perspective of its everyday, and then its eschatological elements. I then consider ways in which the meal holds the two perspectives together as an invitation to live according to the relationships of the kingdom now, in light of an eschatological promise.

Concrete instruction to well-to-do hosts

In this parable, a wealthy host invites peers to dinner. However, when all is ready they suddenly make excuses, and the host turns to two further rounds of invitations in order to fill his banquet. This brief story taps into an array of social conventions, particularly in relation to the excuses offered and the later invitations.

The excuses provide information about the original invitees: they are of considerable means. Richard Rohrbaugh calculates the size of property which five pairs of oxen could work, suggesting this excuse indicates very large land

²²⁷ Tannehill, *Luke*, 232.

²²⁸ Tannehill, *Luke*, 232.

ownership.²²⁹ In fact, as Braun argues, each of the excuses reflects economic interests, including the recent marriage.²³⁰ Such excuses fit with Luke's treatment of wealth elsewhere. He frequently presents wealth negatively, primarily as a powerful distraction from discipleship (cf. 12:13-21, 33-34; 16:19-31; 18:22-25).²³¹

Further, however, the excuses indicate that the original invitees are socially elite – and that they act to protect this status.²³² In some ways the excuses are ridiculous. Rohrbaugh observes that no one would have bought a field without inspecting it.²³³ But as outlandish excuses they indicate the underlying problem, namely distraction and self-interest. The invitees all, as one, reject the host, acting to avoid the shame of attending a banquet peers have shunned.²³⁴

The further rounds of invitations then underscore the scandal of this host's response and connect back to Jesus' instruction at verse 13. The later

²²⁹ Richard L. Rohrbaugh, 'The Pre-Industrial City in Luke-Acts: Urban Social Relationship,' in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. Neyrey (see note 3), 125-149, see p. 143.

²³⁰ Braun outlines the financial arrangements accompanying marriage (See Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric*, 76-79).

²³¹ Robert J. Karris, 'Poor and Rich: The Lukan *Sitz im Leben*,' in *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, ed. R. C. Talbert (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978), 112-125, see p. 124.

²³² Some commentators have seen a connection to Deuteronomy 20:5-7, where similar excuses are given as a reason not to participate in a war (Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 229). However, it seems very unlikely that Luke intended a connection to laws about war. And certainly, contrary to Sanders, any allusions to Deuteronomy are not to associate the eschatological banquet with holy war (see Sanders, 'The Ethic of Election,' 257-258).

²³³ Rohrbaugh, 'The Pre-Industrial City,' 143.

²³⁴ Rohrbaugh, 'The Pre-Industrial City,' 142-143.

invitations go out to inappropriate guests for the meal of a socially elite host. As Rohrbaugh's description of the physical layout of ancient cities demonstrates, the host directs the slave to those outside the city's elite area, and finally to those outside the city walls, where people excluded due to profession or health status congregated.²³⁵

Thus the parable describes an elite person not only choosing tablefellowship with outcasts, but inviting those lowest on the social ladder into the city's elite area.²³⁶ Such an invitation would potentially compromise the social purity of all those in the elite area. That the final group must be 'compelled' confirms the dilemma this poses for the newly invited also; under normal circumstances these guests could not afford to attend such a banquet.²³⁷

One traditional interpretation allegorises the stages of the invitations, suggesting they follow a threefold mission paradigm which unfolds across Luke-Acts. That is, that at Israel's rejection, the gospel goes out to the outcasts of Israel, and then to the gentiles.²³⁸ Commentators who reject this model, however, note that ethnicity does not feature in the parable, which rather emphasises the social distance between the host and those who eventually attend.²³⁹

²³⁵ Rohrbaugh, 'The Pre-Industrial City,' 145.

²³⁶ Rohrbaugh, 'The Pre-Industrial City,' 144.

²³⁷ Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric*, 96.

²³⁸ For this view, see Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 232, Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 197-198, or Just, *The Ongoing Feast*, 179.

²³⁹ See Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric*, 97.

While I agree that the story cannot be allegorised to the gentile mission, I suggest that the themes of Luke's overall narrative remain relevant. This story, like so many others, reflects the central concerns of Jesus' proclamation and the responses of insiders and outsiders. The challenge of the parable cannot be reduced to a conflict between Jews and gentiles; but then again, as I have argued above, neither can the rest of Luke-Acts. Rather, the dilemmas, at table and elsewhere in Luke, relate to participation. This challenge takes root particularly with insiders who struggle to participate with outsiders.

Reflecting on the possible *Sitz im Leben*, Braun identifies a challenge to wealthy members of Luke's community in the story.²⁴⁰ He suggests the parable is primarily about the conversion of a wealthy householder. Originally shunned by peers (perhaps an experience familiar to socially elite people who began associating with the Christian community), a householder then responds by rejecting his former peers and throwing in his lot with outsiders.²⁴¹ In this way, the parable warns readers against attempting to live in two social worlds; the desire to maintain one's place in elite circles will inhibit full participation in the Christian community. Thus the sayings on the cost of discipleship which follow (vv. 25-35) become very real for those being asked to give up this world.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric*, 177.

²⁴¹ Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric*, 97-99.

²⁴² Johnson argues: "The parable of the banquet and the demands of discipleship together make the same point: the call of God issued by the prophet must relativize all other claims on life" (Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 233).

Eschatological themes

The parable offers not only a concrete challenge, but also a powerful eschatological image. The macarism in verse 15 demonstrates that the sayings and meal setting have brought the kingdom of God to mind for a fellow diner.²⁴³ And although Jesus corrects the diner, he focuses on remedying assumptions about the character of the kingdom, not rejecting the observation that the sayings have eschatological implications.

A number of further elements accentuate the eschatological themes. The divine passives of the preceding sayings stress the ultimate action of God. The meal setting itself, in light of earlier type-scenes and the background material discussed above, is primed with eschatological imagery – clearly informing the macarism of verse 15. And other symbolic language, such as the poor, blind, crippled and lame, again contributes to the salience of eschatology.

As throughout Luke’s Gospel, this proclamation is both good and bad news.

Recognising the struggle for some does not overshadow the profound acceptance which the story details. As Tannehill asserts, a very real part of the story lies in the joy for outcasts who unexpectedly find themselves at the banquet.²⁴⁴ The dining hall’s generous proportion underscores the point – the

²⁴³ Marshall makes this observation in support of the view that Lukan meals are “an anticipation of the messianic banquet,” but claims that other clear signs are missing from Luke (I. H. Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 3rd ed. [London: Paternoster, 1988], 139).

²⁴⁴ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity: Luke*, 185.

host is benevolent, invitations are out and anyone prepared to participate may take them up.²⁴⁵

However, a difficult reversal confronts those who are too distracted by wealth and social status to participate. Non-participation again is associated with judgement, although this is still postponed.²⁴⁶ Whilst the parable's characters have already rejected the invitation and been excluded, the silent dining partners at the meal with Jesus still have the choice before them. The parable is told to convert those at table. As Fitzmyer asserts, it "seeks to elicit from them acceptance, not refusal; they are addressed with an insistent invitation."²⁴⁷

Community meal as imitation of the eschatological

Whether this parable describes an eschatological meal or instructions to Luke's community may seem like a primary interpretive decision. However, like Tannehill, I suggest that the parable in context contributes both. Understanding the community meal as in some sense anticipation of the eschatological bridges potential gaps between these perspectives.

²⁴⁵ Byrne, *Hospitality*, 124.

²⁴⁶ The shift to plural 'you' (ὁμῶν) in verse 24 raises a potential question here. Does this continue the parable (in which case, why has the host begun addressing the slave in the plural?), or has Jesus finished the story and begun addressing the fellow guests at dinner? I suggest the plural is best understood as an aside by the host in the parable to the absent original invitees who will not attend. That Jesus would be excluding the diners from 'his' banquet is not in keeping with the broader themes of acceptance and invitation to participation, and is not necessary to explain the grammatical difficulty.

²⁴⁷ Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 1053.

The Dead Sea Scrolls texts discussed above provide relevant insights for Luke 14:1-24. Although not direct sources for Luke, 1QS and 1QSa indicate that the DSS community understood its meals to anticipate an eschatological meal. As Wainwright observes, this “would certainly demonstrate that the notion of an anticipation of the messianic banquet was conceivable in contemporary Jewish thought.”²⁴⁸

However, Luke and the DSS differ markedly in their understanding of this eschatological experience. A particular point of contrast emerges from those who participate in the meals each describes. Strikingly, those people excluded from both regular communal and eschatological meals in the DSS (cf. 1QSa 2:5-7) include the groups explicitly *included* in Luke 14:21. As both lists are taken from Lev 21:17-21,²⁴⁹ where those who are unfit to be priests are listed, this is not entirely coincidence. But, it does show that Luke’s image of the kingdom deliberately overturns the purity elements of some parts of Old Testament tradition. As I argued above, DSS texts stress ritual purity even to the extent that achieving purity may be understood to prompt the eschatological age’s arrival. By contrast, Luke emphasises themes such as those found in Isa 25:6-8, when all nations will come to eat a meal graciously prepared by God (cf. Luke 13:29).

²⁴⁸ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (London: Epworth, 1971), 25.

²⁴⁹ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 225.

Thus, the everyday and eschatological elements in this meal suggest that Luke presents the community meal as anticipation of an eschatological experience, although with very different emphases to those in DSS texts. As suggested above, as Jesus' messianic identity builds, the significance of meals as a proleptic experience of a messianic banquet also develops. I would also argue that Luke contains an important transition between the Last Supper (22:14-38) and the meal at Emmaus (24:28-32). As Jesus prepares his disciples, he associates his presence with the food of the meal (22:19). And then, at Emmaus, the transforming experience is prompted by the action of breaking bread at table (24:30-31).²⁵⁰

Thus the catalyst for this eschatological experience in meals shifts from Jesus' physical presence to the communal meal. In this way, by the end of his Gospel, Luke has prepared his audience for the sense in Acts that the transformative, kingdom experience discovered at table with Jesus is continued in the life of the discipleship community which is centred around the breaking of the bread. Although there is not space to explore this transition here, this represents a significant area for further study.

Finally, unlike the sense that human effort to achieve purity will prompt the eschatological experience in the DSS, in Luke the eschatological time is already breaking in. As Jesus announced in Nazareth, the time of acceptance is present

²⁵⁰ Smith touches briefly on a transition between the meals in chapters 22 and 24 in Smith, 'Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif,' 629.

in Jesus' ministry (4:21), regardless of how others will respond. And so, yet again, the question before characters and the reader is whether they will take up the opportunity to participate.

The meal narrated in Luke 14:1-24 thus emphasises the call to renounce all in order to participate fully in that which Jesus offers. The dropsy healing asserts Jesus' power to release people not only from physical illness, but also from other forms of captivity. The sayings to guests and hosts overturn social conventions, which the parable of the great banquet then extends, presenting an image of communal life and the kingdom of God in which all are invited to participate.

As Jesus continues on his way after this meal, he speaks about the cost of discipleship (vv. 25-33). For those at the meal, the question remains about whether they are prepared to risk all for their faith, and to break with ultimately unsatisfying practices which perpetuate a desire for wealth and social status. They are left with the challenge to participate in the relationships of the kingdom now: to host dinners under quite different social rules, and in so doing to emulate, and ready themselves for, an eschatological banquet.

CONCLUSIONS: MEALS AS ENCOUNTERS WITH THE KINGDOM

Meals, therefore, are scenes of intentional significance in the Gospel of Luke.

The evangelist expands on those he retains from synoptic sources, and includes many more. And in so doing, he develops a meal encounter type-scene in which later meals allude to and build on the themes of earlier meals. However, more than a literary technique or an opportunity to identify ancient social conventions, Lukan meals are significant as *events*. They embody sayings in the Gospel and bring to life the tensions in Jesus' proclamation.

As I have argued, however, interpreting Lukan meals requires an understanding of the meaning of meals in Luke's cultural and religious context. Meals were a central social institution in Greco-Roman culture, which was hugely influential across the region. Lukan meals not only reflect the practices of symposia, but employ stock characters from symposium literature, at times in ways which challenge the traditional motifs. Further, sympotic themes attune the reader to the significance of that which takes place in meals, as *koinônia* and friendship are established among diners and Jesus. These meals therefore also indicate the priorities of Jesus' ministry: they create boundary-crossing friendships, and provide a challenging opportunity for *koinônia* with all.

Similarly, allusions to Old Testament traditions draw out the significance of meals. Luke inherited imagery of meals as a sign of divine provision and intimacy between God and people, and of a meal as a celebration of God's

universal reign in which all that inhibits human life will be removed. Such themes support the development of Jesus' identity across the Gospel. Although rarely the actual host in meal scenes, Jesus takes on attributes of the divine provider. Further, as Luke brings together 'kingdom' language and the image-laden setting of meals, he deepens the sense of meals as proleptic experiences of the kingdom.

This eschatological element of Lukan meals shares similarities with the presentation of meals in the DSS; texts in the DSS indicate the community understood its meals as an anticipation of an eschatological meal. However, meals in Luke and the DSS display important differences. Luke's meals stress the inclusion of outsiders, while DSS texts exclude those with imperfections. Indeed, the list of those excluded from the messianic banquet in the DSS comprises those explicitly *included* in Luke: the crippled, blind and lame. Thus, as Lukan meals become an anticipation of the kingdom, they emphasise the character of that kingdom and challenge insiders and outsiders alike to participate in its unconventional priorities.

Indeed, these meals are transformative. The woman in 7:36-50 understands the acceptance Jesus proclaims; she responds positively, and is sent out transformed. In other meals, which there has not been space to discuss in detail, some characters are able to grasp what Jesus has offered and are also transformed. Levi responds to Jesus' call with a great banquet (5:27-32). Mary chooses the better portion without being distracted by many things (10:41-42).

And Zacchaeus' hospitality in response to Jesus' request prompts a transforming exchange of hospitality (19:5-10).²⁵¹ At table with Jesus, Zacchaeus defends his existing practices of sharing his wealth, and fulfils the pattern of Jesus' tablefellowship with tax collectors.²⁵² The meal encounter creates a boundary-crossing friendship as Jesus proclaims that salvation has come to Zacchaeus' house, for 'he too is a son of Abraham' (19:9).

For some, however, this transformation seems too costly. As at Nazareth (4:23-30), meals confront many insiders who struggle to accept the acceptance of outsiders. Pharisees grumble that Jesus eats with sinners and tax collectors in the home of Levi (5:30) and Simon (7:39). Even those who see Jesus going to stay with Zacchaeus grumble from a distance, no longer at the meal table themselves (19:7).

As they grumble about others, these characters fail to understand the acceptance they too have been offered, and risk a great reversal in which the outsider and insider will exchange places. Likewise, in 14:1-24 Jesus advocates different dining practices which will invert current social accounting methods. The tabletalk sayings and parable provide both advice for the discipleship

²⁵¹ Byrne, *Hospitality*, 152.

²⁵² Contrary to some traditional translations, Zacchaeus uses present verbs (δίδωμι and ἀποδίδωμι, v. 8) to describe his financial commitments, which indicates that the statement is best interpreted as an existing practice (Byrne, *Hospitality*, 150-151). See note 213 regarding the pattern of tax collector hosts which Zacchaeus completes.

community and an eschatological image of unexpected reversal; the scene leaves Jesus' fellow diners silent and challenged.

Yet, as foreshadowed in Jesus' declaration of a year of acceptance, but not of vengeance (4:19), hesitant characters are left with the challenge to participation before them. They continue in the liminal experience, while the implied judgement is not yet made real. Outsiders understand Jesus' priorities throughout the Gospel; insiders seem not to. But at Emmaus (24:31), the disciples finally understand.²⁵³ And so, as Luke readies the reader for Acts, the challenge to respond is brought home also for the reader.

Many aspects of this study warrant further exploration. More detailed discussion of meals other than 7:36-50 and 14:1-24, and the Emmaus meal in particular (24:28-32), would be valuable. Likewise, it would be helpful to address the transition from meals with Jesus to the community meal centred around the breaking of the bread, to which I briefly alluded above. Such exploration should include consideration of meals in Acts. Finally, it would be useful to further consider Luke's *Sitz im Leben* in light of this treatment of meals, particularly given early church controversies over shared tablefellowship.

²⁵³ Just argues that Lukan characters do not understand the significance of meals until the meal in Emmaus (Just, *The Ongoing Feast*, 139). Whilst this may be true for Jesus' disciples, I suggest that outsiders consistently respond at Lukan meals in ways which indicate that they have understood the encounter's importance.

As I have argued, meals offer important insights for understanding Luke's Gospel. Embodying Jesus' proclamation of release and acceptance, Lukan meals are significant encounters. They become liminal moments, proleptic experiences of the kingdom of God and an invitation to live with unreserved participation in the new priorities which Jesus has proclaimed in light of an eschatological promise. The characters' encounter therefore becomes a challenge to the reader and an opportunity for transformation. As Minear asserts, Jesus' action in meals:

destroys the barriers between the honorable and the disreputable, between the poor and the rich. But the action also brings intense controversy... The table becomes a place where human need meets divine grace, where the presence of Jesus transforms the sad remembrance of things past into the glorious promise of things to come. One might with confidence assert that every major component of the good news of salvation is disclosed in the action of Jesus at table.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Minear, 'Some Glimpses of Luke's Sacramental Theology,' 325.

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