THE USE OF PSALM 2 IN LUKE-ACTS
Presented at the 2011 ETS Midwest Regional Conference
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Introduction
Psalm 2 plays a central role in Luke-Acts as different parts of the psalm are quoted and alluded to at various points in this two-volume work. There are, however, problems with the current state of research on Psalm 2 in Luke-Acts. First, the meaning Luke draws from Ps 2:7 in Acts 13:33 is debated. Second, the focus on Luke’s use of the Psalms for Christology has led to an underemphasis on Luke’s use of the Psalms for ecclesiology. The goal of this paper is to demonstrate how Luke uses Psalm 2 both christologically and ecclesiologically. In doing so I will also argue for a specific interpretation of Ps 2:7 in Acts 13:33. We will start, however, with the first direct quotation of Psalm 2, which is found in Acts 4.

Psalm 2:1-2 in Acts 4
In Acts 4, Peter and John are threatened to not speak anymore in the name of Christ. Their response to this is to pray for God to give them boldness and to do more wonders through them. As they begin to pray for boldness, they allude to Psalm 146, which encourages the reader to trust in God, “who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that are in them,” rather than in rulers, “in whom there is no salvation.” Then the disciples quote Psalm 2 to demonstrate that what has happened is part of the sovereign Lord’s plan – he foretold that the Messiah would be plotted against, and he promised that ultimately the Messiah would shatter the rebellious rulers and inherit the nations.

It is noteworthy that the first place in Acts where the church faces opposition, the reader is pointed to Psalm 2, a text that Acts 4:27 explains to be about the opposition to the Messiah. In some way the opposition to the church and the opposition to the Messiah are related in Luke’s mind. This is clear also in Acts 4:5, where we already find an allusion to Ps 2:2 in the statement that rulers (ἄρχοντες) gathered together (συνάγω) in Jerusalem to try Peter and John. In other words there are two gatherings of the rulers: one against Jesus (Acts 4:27) and one against Peter and John (Acts 4:5). Luke alludes to and quotes Psalm 2 as he does to highlight the two referents he has in view for the psalm.

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1 The phrase, “You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that are in them,” could be seen as an allusion to a number of LXX texts, including Gen 1:26; Exod 20:11; 2 Esd 19:6; Ps 145[146]:6; Isa 42:5; and Dan 4:37; but of all these texts the wording most closely matches Exod 20:11 and Ps 145[146]:6. The only differences from Exod 20:11 are that the word θεός is not present and that ποιήσας is in the nominative case rather than the accusative, and that καί appears between τὴν γῆν and τὴν θάλασσαν. That Ps 145:6 LXX rather than Exod 20:11 is alluded to here is suggested by the fact that ποιήσας occurs as a participle, the fact that elsewhere in this chapter (especially in the next verse) Psalms is being alluded to, and by the high number of intertextual and conceptual links between Acts 4 and Psalm 146.

2 These are the only two places in the NT where the words ἄρχων and συνάγω occur together.
– Christ and the church. This becomes all the more clear as we survey Luke’s references to the ἄρχοντες throughout his two volumes.


Of the 37 occurrences of ἄρχων in the New Testament, 19 (51%) are found in Luke-Acts. The only times Luke uses the word in a positive or neutral sense are when he is relating material from the double or triple tradition (Luke 8:41; 12:58) or quoting or alluding to the Old Testament (Acts 7:27, 35; 23:5). In each of these cases the singular (ἄρχων) is used. Every time the plural (ἄρχοντες) is used, the rulers are viewed negatively (Luke 14:1; 23:13, 35; 24:20; Acts 3:17; 4:5, 8, 26; 13:27; 14:5; 16:19). Of these eleven plural, negative, independent uses, six refer to the rulers who initiated the passion of Christ (Luke 23:13, 35; 24:20; Acts 3:17; 4:26; 13:27), two to those who persecuted Peter and John (Acts 4:5, 8), one to those who persecuted Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:15), and one to those who persecuted Paul and Silas (Acts 16:19). In other words Luke, who of all the evangelists is the most concerned to depict Jesus’ life as a model for the church to follow, shows in each stage of his narrative the rulers in opposition to Jesus and to those who are in Jesus.

Luke also shows at each stage that this plotting is in vain. The passion merely leads to Jesus’ resurrection. Their efforts to silence Peter and John lead to the disciples being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking the word of God freely (Acts 4:31). Their efforts to silence Paul and Barnabas in Iconium lead to them preaching the gospel in “the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region” (14:5-7). Their efforts to silence Paul and Silas at Philippi result in the conversion of the jailer and his household and their honorable release from prison (16:19-40). Repeatedly Luke depicts the rulers as plotting against the Lord and his Anointed, which includes both Christ and those in Christ, and each time the Lord gets the last laugh (cf. Ps 2:4). God’s king has been set on Zion and no one can dethrone him (cf. Ps 2:6).

Luke is not alone in applying Psalm 2 to both Christ and the church. In Rev 12:5 and 19:15 John says Jesus will “shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron,” alluding to Ps 2:9. In Rev 2:26-27 Jesus says to the church in Thyatira, “The one who conquers and the one who keeps my works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations, and he will shepherd them with a rod of iron, as earthen vessels are shattered, as I also have received from my Father.” Similarly Midrash Psalms 2 alternates between reading the פֶּןָשִׁי of Psalm 2 as a reference to the Messiah and reading it as a reference to the

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3 The singular is also used in a negative sense in Luke 11:15 (of Satan; cf. Matt 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and in Luke 18:18 (cf. Matt 19:16 and Mark 10:17, which use the word εἷς; Luke specifies that the εἷς here is an ἄρχων in line with his negative portrayal of the rulers).

4 The only other occurrence of the plural ἄρχοντες in Luke-Acts is at Luke 14:1, where “one of the rulers of the Pharisees” invites Jesus to dine at his house. As Jesus moves the conversation to “the resurrection of the righteous” (14:14) and the eschatological banquet, he suggests that none of the rulers of the Pharisees – those whom we would have expected to enjoy the banquet – will ever taste God’s banquet (14:24).


6 Dietrich Rusam, Das Alte Testament bei Lukas (BZNW 112; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 393-394, also observes the resounding echo of Psalm 2 in Luke’s use of ἄρχοντες but does not note the use of the term in parallel contexts related to the persecution of the early church.
nation of Israel. And among the various interpretations of Psalm 2 in Second Temple Judaism we find it read messianically in some cases (*Psalms of Solomon* 17-18; *1 Enoch* 48) and corporately in others (*Wisdom of Solomon* 1:1-5:11; 4Q174, Florilegium). Perhaps it is not too far-fetched then to see both happening in Luke-Acts.

**Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33**

A more thorny issue is the interpretation of Ps 2:7 in Acts 13:33. This quotation is heavily debated because it is unclear whether Luke quotes Ps 2:7 in support of the resurrection or as a text to demonstrate the promise of a Messiah and his relationship to God. Typically this debate centers on the meaning of ἀνίστημι in verse 33. Is Luke saying that God fulfilled the promise by “raising” Jesus onto the scene of history or by “raising” Jesus from the dead? Those who would argue the latter often argue that Luke understands the phrase, “Today I have *begotten* you,” to refer to a *begetting* that happens at the resurrection.

First, when the word ἀνίστημι is used of Jesus in Luke-Acts, it typically refers to rising from the dead. This is true whether the word is followed by ἐκ νεκρῶν (Luke 24:46; Acts 10:41; 13:34; 17:3, 31; 26:23) or not (Luke 18:33; 24:7; Acts 2:24, 32; cf. ἀνάστασις in Acts 1:22; 2:31; 4:33; 17:18). The only exceptions are in Luke 4:16, 38; 22:45, where Jesus “stands up,” and possibly in Acts 3:22, 26; 7:37, where God “raises” Jesus in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18. Bruce takes these latter passages as evidence that ἀνίστημι does not refer to resurrection in Acts 13:33,\(^7\) but one should note that in

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\(^9\) See esp. Lövestam, *Son and Saviour*.

\(^{10}\) Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 259 n. 79. He also notes that ἐγείρω is used in a similar way in Acts 5:30 and 13:22, but it is more likely that 5:30 refers to Jesus’ resurrection in light of its parallel to the other passages where God’s “raising up” is contrasted with the leaders’ “killing” (3:15; 4:10; 10:39-40), and 13:22 refers to the raising up of David, whereas I am arguing that the use of the word with Jesus is likely to conjure up the idea of the resurrection. I would argue that every time either ἀνίστημι or ἐγείρω is used of Jesus in Acts it refers to the resurrection, whether it is followed by ἐκ νεκρῶν (for ἐγείρω see Acts 3:15; 4:10; 13:30) or not (for ἐγείρω see Acts 5:30; 10:40; 13:37). One could strengthen Bruce’s argument by adding that *Ps. Sol.* 17:21 uses ἀνίστημι in this sense of the Messiah (Lövestam, *Son and Saviour*, 9), but this possible parallel text does not override our observation for Luke’s use of ἀνίστημι in regard to Jesus in Acts.
each of these references Luke is either quoting or explaining Deut 18:15 LXX, and even in his explanation of it it is possible that Luke understands the word even here to refer to Jesus’ resurrection. Peter says, “God, having raised his servant [ἀναστήσας ὁ θεὸς τὸν παῖδα αὐτοῦ] sent him to you first, blessing you by turning each of you from your wickedness” (Acts 3:26). The fact that Jesus is sent to those in Jerusalem first, suggests that he is sent to someone else later. We see this in Acts 13:46, one of the places in Acts where the shift from Jew to Gentile happens most clearly, where Paul says it was necessary that the word of God be spoken “to you first” (ὑμῖν . . . πρῶτον), and then go to the Gentiles.\(^\text{11}\) Just as in Acts 13:46 Jesus is sent ὑμῖν (i.e. Paul’s Jewish audience) πρῶτον and then to the Gentiles, so in Acts 3:26 ὑμῖν refers to Peter’s audience (note the emphatic ὑμεῖς in verse 26), and the sending of Jesus is what is happening in Peter’s speech, following the rising of Jesus from the dead.\(^\text{12}\) The likelihood that ἀνίστημι in 3:26 is a reference to the resurrection is strengthened by the fact that Peter’s speech ends with the Sadducees “annoyed because . . . they were proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead [τὴν ἀνάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν]” (4:2). In the Acts 3 speech, as throughout Luke-Acts, it is the resurrection that is the basis for the promise to the fathers being fulfilled. Therefore, Bruce’s argument that Acts 3:22, 26; 7:37; give a precedent for understanding ἀνίστημι as a raising of Jesus onto the scene of history is weakened, and the data for the use of ἀνίστημι in reference to Jesus in Luke-Acts strongly suggests that the phrase ἀναστήσας Ἰησοῦν in Acts 13:33 should be taken as a reference to the resurrection.

Second, the surrounding context makes it clear that the resurrection is in view in Acts 13:33. As Kuruvilla has noted, “This verse is bounded by two specific statements of God’s raising Christ from the dead (ἐκ νεκρῶν in 13:30 and 34).”\(^\text{13}\) Once Jesus’ resurrection is announced in verse 30, it hard to imagine that the reader would understand ἀνίστημι in verse 33 to refer to anything but the resurrection. Rusam tries to counter this by arguing for a break in Paul’s thought after verse 31:

Erkennt man, dass die Paulusrede eine Einschnitt nach V. 31 aufweist – signalisiert durch ein adversatives καί und einen Subjektwechsel – und dass mit V. 32 die exegetische Argumentation beginnt, so zeigt sich die Struktur der Argumentation des Paulus: In V. 23 ging es um das geschichtliche Auftreten Jesu; dies wird mit V. 33 exegetisch begründet. In V. 30 f. ging es um die Auferstehung Jesu; diese wiederum wird in den Versen 34-37 exegetisch begründet.\(^\text{14}\)

The structure of the sermon, however, is better indicated by the use of the vocatives in verses 16, 26, and 38.\(^\text{15}\) In verses 16-25 Paul gives the historical recap; in verses 26-37

\(^\text{11}\) See also the Jew-first-and-then-Gentile language elsewhere in Acts (18:5-6; 26:20, 23; 28:25-28; etc.).


he gives “the message of this salvation”; and in verses 38-41 he gives the call to repentance. Rusam’s suggestion links the Psalm 2 quotation with the defense of an element from a different portion of Paul’s sermon and makes the verse rather out of place. Rusam also makes too much of the break between verses 31 and 32. Paul intentionally parallels the “witnesses” of verse 31 with the “we” of verse 32, suggesting that the promise that is being proclaimed in verse 32 is the very thing that “those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem” had “witnessed,” namely the resurrection (cf. Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32, where “witness” is used in reference specifically to the resurrection). Therefore verses 30-37 are all about the resurrection.

Third, we have another example in the New Testament of Paul’s use of Ps 2:7. In Rom 1:4, Paul says that Jesus “was appointed Son of God in power . . . by the resurrection of the dead.” If Paul there understands the resurrection as the moment of Jesus’ appointment to Sonship in power, is it not likely that in Acts Paul would also understand Ps 2:7 in the same way?16 Similarly in Heb 1:5 and 5:5, Ps 2:7 is applied to Jesus at the moment of his accession to the heavenly throne, an event that depends upon the resurrection.17

Fourth, there is likely another allusion to Psalm 2:1-2 in Acts 13:27.18 Clearly Luke’s mention of Scripture being fulfilled would lead the reader to think of specific passages. The fact that it was “rulers” who were fulfilling Scripture suggests in particular Psalm 2, since this passage has already been given in Acts as a prophecy about the rulers that oppose Christ and the church. The flow of Paul’s thought with regard to Psalm 2 seems to be that rulers opposed the Messiah at the crucifixion, and the resurrection is God’s answer to the opposition. In other words the sequence of events in Psalm 2 is followed in Luke-Acts, opposition (which in the case of Jesus leads to death), followed by God’s answer, begetting the Messiah (through resurrection).19

16 Romans commentators widely agree that Paul alludes to Ps 2:7 in Rom 1:4 (James D. G. Dunn, Romans [2 vols.; WBC 38; Dallas: Word, 1988], 14; Douglas J. Moo, The Epistle to the Romans [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 47-49; Thomas R. Schreiner, Romans [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 42; Robert Jewett, Romans: A Commentary [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006], 104). Schreiner and Jewett further mention that Ps 2:7 is understood the same way in Acts 13:33.

17 See Lövestam, Son and Saviour, 40-42. As Lövestam notes, we should not make too hard of a distinction between the resurrection and the exaltation, because “in Luke’s writings the suffering of death and the exaltation are time and again contrasted with one another, by which the difference between the resurrection and the ascension is played down” (p. 40; cf. Luke 22:26; 24:26; Acts 2:36; 5:30-31; Matt 28:18; note also the link between resurrection and accession to the right hand of God in the discussion of Psalm 16 at Acts 2:29-33). So Aquila H. I. Lee, From Messiah to Preexistent Son: Jesus’ Self-Consciousness and Early Christian Exegesis of Messianic Psalms (WUNT 2/192; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 259; contra Darrell L. Bock, Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology (JSNTSup 12; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 246.

18 So Lövestam, Son and Saviour, 38.

19 Lövestam, Son and Saviour, 38-39. Lee, Preexistent Son, 255-261, argues that the early church read Ps 2:6 as a reference to Jesus’ exaltation to the heavenly Zion and that Ps 2:7 would thus naturally be connected with Jesus ascension/exaltation. This is quite possible, but the lack of evidence for how the early church interpreted Ps 2:6 should caution us against making a dogmatic affirmation here. Furthermore, Lee’s argument that this is specifically how Ps 2:7 became connected to the resurrection is weak, and his conclusion that Ps 2:7 is quoted here as a defense of Jesus’ sonship is puzzling. This may be the reason Ps 2:7 is alluded to in Luke 3, but by Acts 13 the sonship of Jesus has been long since proven. Far more likely is that Ps 2:7 is quoted here to give the resurrection (seen as the divine begetting there) as the basis for the faithful mercies of David being given to whoever believes in Jesus. This will be explained shortly.
Fifth, in Luke’s theology Jesus is not the only one in a sonship relationship with God, though his sonship is unique. In Luke 20:36 Jesus says those who experience the resurrection “are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.” We have already demonstrated that Luke sees the disciples experiencing Ps 2:1-2 just as Jesus experienced it. Here we can see that Luke sees the disciples experiencing sonship through resurrection, strengthening our case that Jesus is begotten as God’s Son in power according to Ps 2:7 through the resurrection.

This agrees with Lövestam’s argument that the resurrection is viewed by the early church as a new birth. Lövestam supports this with three basic points. First, Peter speaks in Acts 2:24 (alluding to Pss 17:5 LXX and 114:3 LXX) of τὰς ὠδῖνας τοῦ θανάτου (“the birth-pangs of death”) in reference to Jesus as he awaited the resurrection. Second, 4 Ezra 4:40-43 compares the chambers of the righteous dead to a womb and speaks of the haste with which these places desire “to escape the anguish of the travail.” Third, in Col 1:18 and Rev 1:5 Jesus is referred to as πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν (cf. Heb 1:6). Bock’s attempt to refute each of these points is unsuccessful. First, Bock’s claim that “[i]n every other case where the term ὠδῖνας [sic] appears in the NT or where its verb form appears, the context and not the term itself makes it clear that travail is meant” is puzzling. In two of the three other occurrences of ὠδίν (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8) there are no contextual indicators “that travail is meant.” Nevertheless, the general use of the word in reference to labor leads to this association. Second, Bock argues that 4 Ezra 4:40-43 is speaking of “the unborn righteous . . . who are like the dead in the underworld” and that “[o]nly their birth will bring the number of righteous to completion,” at which point the end may come, but this makes too much of the word “like” in verse 36. When the archangel Jeremiel says to the righteous dead, “those like yourself,” there is no indication that he is speaking of the unborn. Instead, “the underworld and the chambers of souls” in verse 41 is a reference to the “chambers” in verse 35, namely the chambers of the righteous dead. Bock’s reading here is too creative. Third, Bock argues that πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν speaks to Christ’s rank rather than the birth order, but there is no reason to limit the term in this way other than to prove the point that Bock is trying to make. His argument is circular here. Therefore, Lövestam’s argument that the early church thought of resurrection in terms of a new birth stands and is the sixth reason for seeing ἀνίστημι in Acts 13:33 as a reference to the resurrection.

Finally it is important that we notice the central role the resurrection plays in Paul’s argument. It is not in the fact that God brought Jesus to earth that the promise to the fathers was fulfilled. It is in the fact that God raised him from the dead that finally the promise is fulfilled. This is why Jesus is contrasted to David in verses 36-37. David was not raised up in the way Jesus is and so the promise to the fathers is not fulfilled in David as it is in Jesus. The “today” moment when God fulfilled the promise to the fathers was the day of the resurrection of Jesus. In Luke’s view, Jesus’ resurrection is

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21 Bock, *Proclamation*, 376 n. 121.
“for us” (Acts 13:34), because it is “in Jesus” – that is, in his resurrection – that resurrection extends to all (Acts 4:2) and that Jesus becomes “the first to rise from the dead” (Acts 26:23).

For these seven reasons it is best to see ἀνίστημι in verse 33 as a reference to the resurrection and Ps 2:7 as a text given in support of the begetting of Jesus into a new life that does not lead to corruption. We have already addressed a number of the arguments against this view, but a few more demand a response. First, Zahn argues that the phrase ὅπως εὐαγγελιζόμεθα denotes “die Verkündigung des ganzen λόγος τῆς σωτηρίας (V. 26),” and therefore it would be unthinkable to limit it to the resurrection here. But Paul is not saying that the resurrection is “the entire word of salvation.” Instead he is saying that through the resurrection, which was prophesied in Ps 2:7, the promise is finally fulfilled.

Second, Pesch argues that the use of ἀνίστημι here is an allusion to 2 Sam 7:12 (ἀναστήσω τὸ σπέρμα σου μετὰ σέ), where the word speaks not to resurrection but to the bringing of the seed into the world. Pesch himself goes on to argue for a double meaning based on the connection between Acts 13:33 and 13:34a, but Rusam uses Pesch’s argument in support of his view that ἀνίστημι does not refer to the resurrection at all in 13:33. It is possible that Luke and/or Paul has 2 Sam 7:12 in mind, especially considering that the historical summary of Acts 13:17-23 has repeated echoes of and allusions to 2 Samuel 7, but the arguments we have given for seeing in ἀνίστημι a reference to the resurrection still stand. If ἀνίστημι is alluding to 2 Samuel 7 here it is doing so in a way that suggests that gives ἀνίστημι a deeper meaning than it had in 2 Sam 7:12 itself.

Third, Rese argues that the two ὅτι clauses in verses 33-34 express two different ways in which God fulfilled the promise to David – by bringing the Messiah (33) and by resurrecting him (34-35). The problem with this view is that the first ὅτι clause does not describe the promise but instead indicates what about the promise is proclaimed. This is clear from the word ταύτην, referring back to ἐπαγγελίαν and making ἐπαγγελίαν the

25 The meaning of καταγγέλλειν ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ τὴν ἀνάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν is not entirely clear, but it is likely that the thought here is the same as elsewhere, that in Jesus’ resurrection the promise of resurrection extends to those who are in him (cf. Acts 13:34; 26:23; 1 Cor 15:20, 23; Col 1:18; Rev 1:5).

26 The fact that the resurrection is “for us” makes Barrett’s argument against the resurrection view unconvincing. Barrett, Acts, 1:645, argues that ἡμῖν in Acts 13:32 is likely to be read with ἀνάστησις Ἰησοῦν rather than with ταύτην ὁ θεὸς ἐκπεπλήρωκεν τοῖς τέκνοις [αὐτῶν]. In his view, this makes the raising of Jesus more likely to be a reference to the initial bringing of Jesus to us, but if the resurrection is also ἡμῖν, then adopting Barrett’s translation would not change the likelihood that one view is to be accepted over the other.

27 Theodor Zahn, Die Apostelgeschichte des Lucas (2 vols.; 4th ed.; KNT 5; Leipzig: Deichert, 1927), 2:442. Rusam, Alte Testament, 400, adds that the content of εὐαγγελιζομεν is never the resurrection by itself. It should be noted, however, that in Acts 13:32 it is not merely the resurrection of Jesus that is being proclaimed but the fulfillment of the promise, which is accomplished through Jesus’ resurrection.


29 Rusam, Alte Testament, 401.


31 Rese, Motive, 83-84.
object of the clause’s verb. The clause cannot, therefore, modify ἐπαγγελίαν but must modify εὐαγγελιζόμεθα. If the two ὅτι clauses are parallel to one another as Rese argues, then they give two aspects of Paul and Barnabas’ proclamation: 1) that God fulfilled the promise to the fathers and 2) that God raised him from the dead. In this case, raising Jesus from the dead would be parallel to the promise, not part of it. Approximately forty times in the New Testament do we find a verb followed by a direct object with more specificity given in a ὅτι clause that follows. Never is there a second ὅτι clause, and one can imagine that if one would structure a sentence in this way the second ὅτι clause would relate the verb more specifically to the first object given as is the case in every instance where a ὅτι clause follows an object in this way.32

It seems more likely that the ὅτι clause in verse 34a is not directly introducing the Isa 55:3 citation (against most scholars) nor giving a second aspect of the promise of verse 33 (against Rese) but is instead causal.33 Paul has just argued that God raised Jesus. Now he is saying, “Since he raised him from the dead [which means he is] no longer to return to corruption, he has spoken [i.e. is able to speak] in this way, ‘I will give to you the faithful mercies of David.’” The advantage of this rendering is that it does not press Isa 55:3 to make it specifically about the resurrection (a problem many scholars wrestle with). Instead it sees Jesus as able to fulfill Isa 55:3 because of the fact that he now lives eternally. This relationship between Psalm 2 and Isaiah 55 is demonstrated in the argument that follows the Psalm 16 quotation. The faithful mercies of David include forgiveness of sins and justification “from all the things from which you were not able to be justified in the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38). These are available “in him” to “everyone who believes” (13:39) because he was resurrected and therefore has been exalted to a position from which he can pour out the faithful mercies (cf. Acts 2:31-33). Notably this same movement can be detected in Isaiah. It is because the Servant “bears our sins” (Isa 53:11; cf. 53:4 LXX, 5, 6, 10, 12) through his death (53:8-10, 12) and resurrection/exaltation (52:13; 53:10-12) that the forgiveness of sins, which is mentioned as one of τὰ ὅσια Δαυὶδ τὰ πιστά in Isa 55:7, can be extended to “you” (Isa 55:3).

32 This data was collected from a Logos syntax search of the Cascadia Syntax Graphs of the New Testament. Forty-nine results were returned. Nine times the direct object was merely οὗτος, looking forward to the ὅτι clause (Acts 24:14-15; 1 Cor 1:12; 7:26; 2 Cor 5:14; Phil 1:6; 1 Tim 1:9-11; 2 Tim 1:15; 2 Pet 3:5-6, 8), but thirty-one times the direct object was specific and the ὅτι clause gave more specificity (Mark 7:2; 10:32-34; 12:34; Luke 5:36; 12:24; 24:7, 39; John 4:35; 5:42; 7:35; 11:31; 16:4; Acts 3:10; 4:13; 9:20; 13:32-33; 20:35; Rom 5:8; 7:21; 1 Cor 1:26; 3:20; 11:2; 2 Cor 8:9; 13:5; Gal 1:13-14; Phil 1:27-28; 1 Thess 2:1-2; 2 Thess 2:4; Rev 3:1, 15; 17:8). The other nine results were not really parallel examples (Mark 8:31; John 16:21; 20:9; Acts 15:1; 1 Cor 10:1-4; 11:14-15; 2 Cor 1:8; 1 John 3:16, 19-20). Adding another ὅτι clause after Clause 3 produces zero results.

33 Syntax searches on the three options are not very telling in this case. In footnote Error: Reference source not found we saw that a double ὅτι clause following a verb with a direct object is unattested in the New Testament, though it is possible. It is also very rare that a ὅτι clause precedes the clause it modifies. A Logos syntax search of the Cascadia Syntax Graphs of the New Testament reveals only eleven instances of this in the New Testament. Of these eleven passages, in nine of them the ὅτι clearly functions causally (Luke 19:17; John 1:50; 8:45; 15:19; 16:6; 20:29; Gal 4:6; Rev 3:16, 17-18). In Luke 20:37 the ὅτι clause functions in the way most scholars assume it functions here (“that the dead are raised even Moses showed”). Either option is possible syntactically but it seems that the causal function is to be preferred. It also found Phil 3:12 and Jude 5-7, but these are not really cases where the ὅτι clause precedes the clause it modifies.
The only problems with reading ὅτι causally in verse 34a are that we tend to not see the resurrection of Christ when we read Ps 2:7 and that the clause it introduces alludes to the passage that is cited in verse 35. We have already defended the idea that Luke and Paul see a reference to the resurrection in Ps 2:7, and it can be demonstrated that Luke has a tendency to allude to a passage before he quotes it (we saw this with Ps 2:2 in Acts 4:5 and with Ps 2:7 in Acts 13:27). The fact that an allusion to Psalm 16 occurs in Acts 13:34a does not mean that Acts 13:34a is a citation formula for the two passages that follow (in which case Isa 55:3 would seem strangely out of place). Instead it makes more sense to see 13:34a as a summary of Ps 2:7 that forms the basis for Isa 55:3 to become the reality.

The final argument against the interpretation of Acts 13:32-33 advanced here is that of Bock, who accepts that ἀνίστημι in verse 33 likely refers to Jesus’ resurrection, but still holds that Ps 2:7 is not given as a defense of the resurrection. For him, the three scriptures quoted in Acts 13:33-35 address three components of the good news given in Acts 13:32-33: the promise to the Fathers (= Ps 2:7), the fulfillment to their children (= Isa 55:3), and the raising up of Jesus (= Ps 16:10), but there are a number of problems with this view. First, nowhere else in Scripture do we have this kind of multi-part citation formula, introducing three distinct messages in three different texts. Second, verse 34a is problematic for Bock’s view. He argues that it should be understood as “a parenthetical explanation . . . that the incorruptibility of Jesus is the ground upon which the promise of Ps. 2.7 can be seen to be fulfilled,” but this is quite puzzling if Ps 2:7 merely promises that the Messiah would come or declares him to be the Son of God, as Bock holds. It makes perfect sense, however, if the resurrection mentioned in verse 34a is an inference of the Ps 2:7 quotation. Third, many of the seven reasons given above for seeing a reference to the resurrection in the Ps 2:7 quotation work against Bock’s view. Thus the evidence supports the view that Ps 2:7 is given as a text that speaks of the resurrection of Christ. None of the arguments against this view are strong enough to refute it. It seems that the greater reasons for refuting the resurrection view are: 1) that Ps 2:7 is already applied to Christ in the Gospel before the resurrection and 2) that a straightforward reading of Psalm 2 does not normally lead a person to conclude that the Messiah must die and be resurrected. We will address the first of these concerns in the next section, and the second concern will be addressed at the end of this paper.


At both Jesus’ baptism and his transfiguration a voice from heaven addresses him as Son. The fact that it is the divine voice speaking these words and that, at least in the baptism scene, they so closely match the wording of Ps 2:7 LXX makes the allusion

34 Bock, Proclamation, 244-245.
35 Bock, Proclamation, 248-249.
certain. What is the function of the Ps 2:7 allusion in Luke 3:22? Luke has been building a case for Jesus as the Davidic Messiah. Jesus is associated with “the house of David” (Luke 1:27, 69; 2:4; cf. 2 Sam 7:11, 16) and “the city of David” (Luke 2:4, 11; cf. 2 Sam 5:7). The angel Gabriel has spoken over him, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). Hannah’s prayer is echoed in the Magnificat and the Benedictus. The angel who speaks to the shepherds calls Jesus “a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). Simeon and John the Baptist also proclaim Jesus as the Messiah (Luke 2:25-35; 3:15-17). Yet the testimony of Jesus’ messiahship and his sonship is not complete until it is spoken by God. This is the expectation Psalm 2 gives – that God himself would testify, “You are my Son,” and so Luke’s narrative is not complete unless he includes the testimony from heaven. At Jesus’ baptism God gives the decree that in Psalm 2 he had promised he would give.

We see this same purpose – strengthening the testimony that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah – in the transfiguration narrative. Here Jesus’ sonship is declared in the third person because God is not again proclaiming the decree but is reiterating the truth of the decree to Peter, James, and John. Of course, Peter had already acknowledged the messiahship of Jesus (9:20); why did God need to say it to him? In the previous narrative Jesus had announced for the first time that he would be killed (9:22) and that his disciples would need to lose their lives for his sake (9:24). It was important at this point in the unfolding of Jesus’ identity for the disciples to see the end result (glorification) and have the reminder that Jesus is worth following. By highlighting Jesus as the Messianic Son of God, the Isaianic Servant, and the Prophet Like Moses who would lead God’s people through the New Exodus, and having Moses and Elijah there as witnesses, God has given Peter, James, and John the testimony they need to lead the early church through a time of uncertainty and struggle. Hence Ps 2:7 is alluded to in the baptism and transfiguration narratives to confirm Jesus’ identity as the fulfillment of the eschatological hopes that surrounded the house of David.

There is more to be observed regarding the allusion to Ps 2:7 at Jesus’ baptism. Most scholars believe that Psalm 2 was originally a coronation psalm related to the anointing and enthronement of the king. Luke clearly views Jesus’ baptism as an “anointing” with the Spirit, as can be see in the use of Isa 61:1 in Luke 4:18-19 and in the words of Peter in Acts 10:37-38. Moreover, there is a king in the OT who is anointed more than once: David. In 1 Sam 16:13 David is anointed by the prophet Samuel, and the Holy Spirit rushes upon him. In Luke 3:22 Jesus is baptized by John, and an anointing occurs through the Holy Spirit coming upon him. Unlike later kings, however, David was not immediately made king upon his anointing. He had the Spirit – in some

majority rightly see the more widely attested reading as being original (Bock, Proclamation, 100-101; Pao and Schnabel, “Luke,” 280).

Luke 9:35 alludes to Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1; and Deut 18:15 together to show that they are one and the same person. For a similar argument, see Strauss, Davidic Messiah, 285-298, and Bock, Luke, 1:30.

sense he had a father-son relationship with God – but he was not yet on the throne. A later anointing comes in 2 Sam 2:4, where David is finally enthroned over Judah, and then a third in 2 Sam 5:3, where David is enthroned over all Israel. Is there one moment at which David becomes God’s son? Even if one were to mark the moment as the anointing by Samuel in 1 Sam 16:13, the objection could be made that already in 1 Sam 15:28, Samuel says to Saul, “Today Yahweh tore the kingdom of Israel away from you and gave it to your companion, who is better than you.” In fact there are many points in David’s life at which one could identify him being begotten of God for sonship. Before he ever shepherds the flock of Israel he shepherds his own sheep and then Saul’s army. Before he ever advances Israel’s worship he plays at his own home and then in Saul’s court. God works repeatedly in the life of David to anoint him and bring him to a higher level of kingship and sonship. So too with Jesus. In fact, most scholars who hold that the decree of Ps 2:7 applies to Jesus’ baptism would not argue that Jesus then became the Son of God or was only then begotten as God’s Son. But it seems that what we have in Luke-Acts is an application of Ps 2:7 to Jesus at multiple levels and at various times. At birth he was conceived without a human father through the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary and could therefore already call God his Father (cf. Luke 2:52); at his baptism he was begotten anew with a fresh anointing of the Spirit; and at his resurrection he was begotten yet again with an incorruptible body, enabling him to fulfill the role of the Messiah (cf. Heb 7:16). Ps 2:7 is repeatedly fulfilled in Jesus and each time at a deeper level than before. As a parallel we could consider the “perfecting” of Jesus in Hebrews.

39 The father-son relationship between God and king flows out of the corporate solidarity between Israel – God’s Son – and the king. Once David had been anointed by Samuel, that hope of the nation was no longer linked with Saul, though he is still called the “anointed,” but with David, as can be seen in the remainder of the narrative of 1 Samuel.

40 Many have suggested that this complex, multivalent view reflects a development in early Christian thought. So the earliest Christians preached that Jesus became Messiah and Son of God through the death and resurrection, but later reflection led the church to teach that Jesus was already Messiah and Son of God during his ministry. This later development is then expressed in Mark’s account of the baptism, though there the truth is not understood by those who witnessed it. Finally Matthew and Luke press Jesus’ sonship back to the conception and John to his preexistence before creation (Barnabas Lindars, New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961], 138-144; B. M. F. van Iersel, ‘Der Sohn’ in den synoptischen Jesusworten: Christusbezeichnung der Gemeinde oder Sibst-Bezeichnung Jesu? [2d ed.; NovTSup; Leiden: Brill, 1964], 66-73, 83, 174-175; Raymond E. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977], 29-32, 136; James D. G. Dunn, Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation [2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 12-64; Schweizer, “υἱός,” TDNT 8.367). One wonders, however, if it is only the modern mind that makes such a sharp distinction between the various anointings. Luke has no problem speaking of Jesus being begotten at various stages, not because he is carelessly integrating conflicting traditions, but because he understands that Jesus fulfilled the expectations of the Old Testament at deeper and deeper levels as the plan of God unfolded.
Psalm 2:8 in Luke 4

One last passage to consider is the allusion to Ps 2:8 in the temptation narrative. Following on the declaration that Jesus is God’s Son at the baptism, Satan challenges this identity (εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, Luke 4:3, 9) on three different levels. Part of the Psalm 2 promise is that the Son would be given the nations (Ps 2:8). Satan offers Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world” (4:5-6) if Jesus would worship him. Of course Jesus refuses and thereby does not bypass the suffering of Ps 2:1-2 nor the resurrection / heavenly enthronement of Ps 2:7 as the means of getting to Ps 2:8. Once he is resurrected, the expectation is that the gospel would spread to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8, alluding to Isa 49:6, which is likely connected with Ps 2:8 in Luke’s understanding).

The Referents of Psalm 2

It has become clear through this study that Luke sees the rejection of Jesus and subsequent resurrection as the ultimate fulfillment of Psalm 2. At the same time it is clear that Luke applies the same components of the psalm to the Christian community. Just as the rulers gather together against the Messiah (Luke 22:66; Acts 4:27), they gather together against his people (Acts 4:5). Just as the Messiah is begotten again in the resurrection and therefore the “Son of God” (Acts 13:33), those who believe will experience the resurrection and be “sons of God” (Luke 20:36). One could extend the connections further: Just as Jesus was the Son of the Most High before the resurrection (Luke 1:32; etc.), so those who imitate the Father are “sons of the Most High” (Luke 6:35). Just as the Messiah is told, “Ask [αἰτήσατε] of me, and I will give [δώσω] the nations” (Ps 2:8), so the disciples are told, “Ask [αἰτεῖτε], and it will be given [δοθῆσεται] to you” (Luke 11:9). This is the case because the relationship between God and the disciples is a father-son relationship (11:11-13). Indeed the giving of “the end of the earth” to Jesus in Acts is a giving of “the end of the earth” to the disciples. Psalm 2 is the experience of Jesus and of the church.

This is not to say that Psalm 2 called for no greater fulfillment than that experienced by the disciples. Indeed, the only reason Psalm 2 is fulfilled by the disciples at all is because it was first fulfilled in a greater way by the Messiah. In him God gives to the disciples the faithful mercies of David (Isa 55:3; Acts 13:34). The disciples’ experience is never on par with Christ’s experience (note that even when the rulers gather together against them they speak more clearly about how Jesus fulfills the psalm than about how they fulfill the psalm). Luke highlights in various ways how Jesus fulfills this psalm so that it is clear that finally the mercies of David have proven to be πιστά and can now be given to those who are in Jesus.

Sensus Plenior in Psalm 2:7?

We still must deal with the objection that a straightforward reading of Ps 2:7 does not normally lead us to think about resurrection. Here it is important for us to consider

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that Luke portrays Ps 2:7 as repeatedly fulfilled in Jesus and the church, and in some cases it is fulfilled in a different way than in others. Jesus was begotten through the virgin birth, through his anointing at baptism, and through the resurrection. Therefore we cannot say that in Luke’s view the meaning of Ps 2:7 is that the Messiah would be resurrected. The meaning is broader than that, and the resurrection is one application of that meaning. It seems that in Luke’s view the meaning of Ps 2:7 is that God’s anointed is begotten by him so that they are in a special father-son relationship and plots against him will fail. Only this meaning accounts for all the applications Luke gives to the passage. It is noteworthy that nowhere does Luke turn to Psalm 2 as proof of the resurrection, or even of the passion. In Acts 4 the events of the passion correspond exactly to the words of Ps 2:1-2, and in Acts 13 the resurrection corresponds to the words of Ps 2:7, but Luke does not argue that the events had to happen that way they because of Psalm 2. Clearly he believed that Scripture necessitates that the Christ must be handed over, suffer, die, and on the third day rise, but nowhere does he indicate that this necessity flows out of Psalm 2 itself. Psalm 2 only necessitates opposition, divine begetting, enthronement, and victory. These elements correspond to a straightforward reading of the psalm and are the meaning that Luke sees in the psalm, and therefore this is not a sensus plenior reading.

At the same time it may be that Luke saw in Psalm 2 and the broader messianic promise a need for a Messiah who was incorruptible. This is suggested by Acts 13:34, especially if the ὅτι there is causal, as I have argued. In light of this broader canonical concept, Luke may have understood that the begetting of Ps 2:7 had to include the begetting of a resurrection life. If so, this would come not from Psalm 2 by itself but from reading Psalm 2 along with the whole of Scripture. Nevertheless, this awareness of an application of Ps 2:7 that the author of the psalm may not have been aware of is not eisegesis but is awareness that comes from an understanding of Scripture as a whole. And it is not a sensus plenior but a significatio plenior, so to speak – it is a deeper significance of the passage, the meaning still being that God’s anointed is opposed vainly, for God begets him in a special father-son relationship that means he will inherit the ends of the earth.

In conclusion, Luke reads Psalm 2 both messianically and corporately. Jesus is the ultimate ἀριστοκρατικός, but the church also is anointed. Jesus’ suffering is exactly what we would have expected from Psalm 2 and so is the church’s suffering. But all plots against us are in vain. God begets Jesus and enthrones him so that he may inherit the nations. The church also reigns with Jesus and will inherit the end of the earth. This fits in with the imitation motif in Luke-Acts and gives us a fuller understanding of how Luke reads Psalm 2 and relates it to both Christ and the church.