

## THE JEWS IN LUKE-ACTS

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The question of New Testament antisemitism generally revolves around two issues: the unhistorical portrayal of the Jews<sup>1</sup> and the religious negation of Judaism.<sup>2</sup> However, the recent book by J. T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (London, SC 1987) is different. According to Sanders, neither unhistorical calumnies nor religious triumphalism is the crux of Lukan antisemitism. Rather, Luke is an antisemite because his narrative evinces a 'fundamental and systematic hostility

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<sup>1</sup> J. Isaac, *Jesus and Israel* (New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston 1971); *idem*, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York, McGraw-Hill 1965). A number of writers have followed Isaac in insisting that the portrayal of Jewish involvement in the crucifixion is unhistorical and anti-semitic; e.g. S. Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?* (Philadelphia, Fortress 1978) 44, 66, 136-7; L. Polaidov, *The History of Anti-Semitism I*, (London, Routledge 1974-5) 17-18; J. Koenig, *Jews and Christians in Dialogue. New Testament Foundations* (Philadelphia, Westminster 1979) 19-20. Others have developed his assertion that the New Testament vilifies Judaism tendentiously and unhistorically; e.g. C. Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia, Fortress 1978) 39, 67; Koenig 21-5; note also M. Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425)* (ET, Oxford, OUP 1986) 395, who identifies 'an incomplete, tendentious representation of Judaism that falsifies the truth about it' as characteristic of what he identifies as 'anti-semitism' in Chrysostom.

<sup>2</sup> R. R. Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York, Seabury 1974). Works following Reuther's lead include L. Gaston, 'Paul and the Torah', in A. Davies (ed.), *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York, Paulist Press 1979) 51; J. Townsend, 'The Gospel of John and the Jews: The Story of a Religious Divorce', in *ibid.* 72-4; Sandmel 17, 127, 140-1; L. Polaikov, 'Antisemitism: The Early Christian Period,' *Encyclopædia Judaica* (Jerusalem, Keter 1972) 95; N. A. Beck, *Mature Christianity. The Recognition and Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the New Testament* (London, Associated University Presses 1985) 86, 131, 217-18, 284. A predecessor of Reuther who takes a similar line is N. Lohfink, 'Das heutige Verständnis der Schriftinspiration in der katholischen Theologie', in W. P. Eckert, N. P. Levinson, and M. Stöhr (edd.), *Antijudaismus im Neuen Testament? Exegetische und systematische Beiträge* (Abhandlung zum christlich-jüdischen Dialog 2, Munich, Kaiser 1967) 16. Critiques of this position can be found in B. Vawter, 'Are the Gospels Anti-Semitic?', *JES* 5 (1968) 480-5; J. D. Levenson, 'Is There a Counterpart in the Hebrew Bible to New Testament Antisemitism?', *JES* 22 (1985) 242-60; T. L. Donaldson, 'Moses Typology and the Sectarian Nature of Early Christian Anti-Judaism', *JSNT* 12 (1981) 33-9; P. Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (SNTSMS 10, CUP 1969) 227-8; and Simon, 400.

toward Jews' (p. xvi). Luke-Acts is antisemitic because it never relents in its hateful portrayal of Jewish people.

Though at first sight appearing quite radical, Sanders' approach to Luke-Acts has precedents. It is largely the thorough working-out of positions found in the seminal works on Luke-Acts by Conzelmann,<sup>3</sup> Haenchen,<sup>4</sup> and Wilckens.<sup>5</sup> Where Sanders goes beyond his precursors is in giving primary attention to the place of Judaism in Luke-Acts and in considering every component of Luke's portrayal of Jews and Judaism.

Sanders recognizes that many elements of Luke-Acts appear quite positive toward Jewish people and institutions: the Jewish crowds are largely supportive of Jesus; Jerusalem is the site of mass conversions of Jews; Jesus, the apostles, and Paul are all scrupulously observant Jews; and the Pharisees are treated with at least a measure of sympathy. How can these elements of the text be reconciled with a thesis of a thorough-going antisemitism? To deal with those positive elements, Sanders follows a variety of methods. Some are innovative; others have antecedents. In the end, none prove satisfactory.

What follows here is a brief summary and critique of the primary means by which Sanders reconciles elements of the Lukan text which appear to be positive to Jews with his hypothesis of Luke's utter hatred for all of that race.

### **The Distinction Between Speech and Narrative**

Sanders explicitly rejects the notion that Luke follows a theory of a 'divided Israel,' insisting that for Luke all Jews obstinantly refuse the gospel and are condemned for it (pp. 38-9). But he is not unaware of the elements of the text which appear to contradict such a homogeneous view. He notes carefully the distinctions Luke draws among Jews: leaders and people, Pharisees and people, Pharisees and Sadducees, converted and un-

<sup>3</sup> H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (ET; New York, Harper & Bros. 1960) 78, 85, 87f., 90-3, 132-5, 139-40, 145-9, 162-7, 190, 212.

<sup>4</sup> E. Haenchen, 'Judentum and Christentum in der Apostelgeschichte', *ZNW* 54 (1963) 155-89.

<sup>5</sup> U. Wilckens, *Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte* (WMANT 5, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchner Verlag, <sup>3</sup>1973) 119f., 205, 221.

converted (p. 47). And he readily admits that some Jews receive positive treatment in certain portions of Luke-Acts (pp. 48-50). To solve his dilemma, Sanders appeals to a method which he says is justified by M. Bachmann's study of the two spellings for 'Jerusalem': the separation of speech from narrative (pp. 36, 50).<sup>6</sup> The speeches, Sanders says, are uniformly negative toward all Jews. The narrative, with a few exceptions which foreshadow the conclusion, begins with a positive outlook on the Jewish people but is gradually transformed so that the Jews 'become what they are,' people who by their very nature always oppose the divine will. The separation of speech and narrative thus becomes the primary means by which negative remarks about Jewish people overcome the positive.

Sanders' use of the distinction between speech and narrative goes well beyond Bachmann's. For Bachmann it explains one curious feature of Luke's style; for Sanders it is the hermeneutical key to Luke's approach to Judaism. Such a radical expansion of Bachmann's conclusions may well be justified, but only if it adequately accounts for the evidence of the text.

But in fact the speeches do not appear as uniformly condemnatory toward Jews and Judaism as Sanders claims. Most notable are the speeches which occur near the end of Luke-Acts, Paul's trial speeches. These indicate a positive regard for his Jewish heritage and an assertion of his ongoing faithfulness to Judaism (e.g. 22:1, 3; 23:1, 6; 26:4, 6, 7; 28:19). These statements stand side by side *within the speeches and near the end of the narrative* with Paul's statements about Jewish opposition to the gospel (22:5; 25:24; 26:2, 21; 28:19). Sanders' distinction between speech and narrative therefore hardly solves the paradox.

In the final scene of Acts (28:23-8) the transformation of narrative to accord with speech must be complete, according to Sanders' paradigm. But certain details of this text raise problems for Sanders. One is the fact that some Jews are 'persuaded' by Paul (v. 24). Sanders maintains that 'persuasion' for Luke does not indicate conversion, so that no Jews are converted here (pp. 273-5, 279, 298). But a careful check of other references in

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<sup>6</sup> M. Bachmann, *Jerusalem und der Tempel* (BWANT Stuttgart, Kohlhammer 1980).

Luke-Acts suggests otherwise. In the gospel, Luke uses the perfect passive of  $\pi\rho\acute{\iota}\theta\omega$  to indicate belief in something (Luke 18:9; 20:6). In Acts the active form refers to the process of Christian preaching (18:4; 19:8, 26), the result of which is 'to make a Christian' (26:28). In this context as well, the process of Paul's preaching is 'persuading' (28:23), which yields those who are 'persuaded' (28:24). Furthermore, in at least one instance in Acts, those who are 'persuaded' undoubtedly refers to believers. In Acts 17:4, some in the Thessalonian synagogue are 'persuaded' and attach themselves to Paul and Silas. Later, the text refers to those 'brothers' who assist Paul and Silas on their way to Berea following their persecution in Thessalonica. Clearly the 'brothers' are the ones who were persuaded in 17:4 and are regarded by Luke as genuine believers. Furthermore, in Acts 28:24, persuasion is contrasted with unbelief. The opposite is true in Acts 14:1-2, where belief is contrasted with failure to be persuaded. Luke thus appears comfortable using either  $\pi\rho\sigma\tau\epsilon\upsilon\tilde{\omega}$  in the active or  $\pi\rho\acute{\iota}\theta\omega$  in the passive to indicate conversion.<sup>7</sup> Sanders considers none of this evidence, all of which undermines his contention that the Jews have become universally hardened in Acts 28. In fact, they appear in Acts 28 to be divided between the believing and the unbelieving, just as they have been throughout Luke's narrative, and speech, heretofore.

### **Ecclesiastical Continuity and Ethnic Hatred**

Another means by which Sanders subsumes positive factors about Jews to negative ones is by assigning them to different motives of the author. On the one hand, Luke seeks to vilify

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<sup>7</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles. The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1951), says that the imperfect form here implies the meaning 'take heed', a response short of actual conversion. But the identical imperfect form occurs in Acts 25:36, 37, where it signifies 'conversion' to the movements of the messianic pretenders Theudas and Judas the Galilean. At most, the imperfect for both the 'persuasion' and the 'unbelief' of Paul's audience may signify that their opinions are in the process of being formed; cf. BDF §327. It appears significant that Luke uses the imperfect of  $\pi\rho\acute{\iota}\theta\omega$  in the context of the two other episodes of turning to the Gentiles, Acts 13:43; 18:4, so that the imperfect suggests ongoing conflict between the believers and unbelievers. The use of the present stem may, however, be a Lukan characteristic in narrating conversion and salvation  $\acute{o}\ \sigma\omega\zeta\acute{o}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ . in Acts 2:47.

all Jews including Jewish Christians who continue to observe *Torah*. On the other hand, Luke wishes to establish the church's continuity with biblical Israel. Negative remarks serve the former motive; positive remarks, the latter.

Sanders uses this method in his study of Luke's Pharisees. He notes the positive aspects of Luke's portrayal of the Pharisees (pp. 85-9): Paul's Pharisaism (Acts 23:6; 26:5), the appearance of other Christian Pharisees (Acts 15:5), the friendliness of non-Christian Pharisees toward Jesus and the church (Luke 7:36; 11:37; 13:31; 14:1; Acts 5:34-9; 23:10), and the Pharisees' absence from the passion narrative after an appearance in the triumphal entry (Luke 19:39). These positive aspects stand together with the scenes of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, in which Sanders attempts to find a common thread. Those passages with synoptic parallels all involve the way *Torah* is or is not followed; that is, they concern *halakah*, especially the matter of associating with sinners. Two of the five scenes unique to Luke are also about *halakah* (103; 15:2). Of the other three, two concern Jesus' divinity or are, instances of the Pharisees' friendliness toward Jesus (5:21, 26; 19:39). The last (16:14) is merely 'Luke's slander' (*sic.*, p. 93) which indicates that he does not like the Pharisees. But even this example is followed by a saying against self-justification, which links it to other conflicts over *halakah* (pp. 89-93).

Sanders says that Luke's condemnation of the Pharisees centres on their hypocrisy, which he identifies as self-justification manifested especially in resentment against the unobservant who associate with Jesus. Because, according to Sanders, associating with Jesus in the Gospel is the equivalent of becoming part of the church, the conflict with the Pharisees centres on church membership (pp. 94-103). Sanders supports this contention with two observations. One is that the 'leaven of the Pharisees' of Luke 12:1 must refer to something within the church (pp. 103, 187). The figure of leaven working in dough demands as much, and, according to Sanders, Luke's readers would not have been concerned about something outside the church. The second observation is that the non-Christian Pharisees of Acts are consistently friendly to the church. Luke would therefore not characterize them as 'hypocrites.' Hypocritical Pharisees must be those who are unfriendly to the

church. And the only unfriendly Pharisees in Acts are the Christian Pharisees of 15:5 who demand Torah observance for Gentiles as a condition of their membership in the church (pp. 110-11). Luke's presentation of the Pharisees is therefore a condemnation of the Jewish Christian insistence that Gentiles observe *Torah*. All *Torah* observance is self-justification or 'hypocrisy,' according to Sanders' Luke (Luke 16:15; 18:14; pp. 110-11). Though Jewish Christians may believe (Acts 15:5), they have not truly repented because every element of Luke's presentation indicates that they are self-exalting hypocrites. That Luke lumps together all Jewish Christians in this denunciation is clear from Acts 15:1, which indicates Jewish believers generally, and 21:20, which shows Jewish believers to be overly zealous for the Law (pp. 123-4).

The other side of this argument is that the friendly Pharisees of Acts serve to establish the continuity between Christianity and Judaism. They are 'the very best party of Judaism' (Acts 26:5) and show by their belief in the resurrection that the church is in line with the religion of the Old Testament. They indicate that Christianity is the true Judaism (pp. 97, 99).

Despite certain unexplained details (such as the significance of Luke 11:43 and 16:14), Sanders appears to be largely correct in seeing Luke's primary objection to Pharisaism as its insistence on a certain kind of *Torah* observance which seeks self-justification and neglects inward virtues. We may further grant that Luke connects such attitudes to those who would require Gentile Christians to observe *Torah*. But it is another matter to move from those conclusions to a denunciation of all Jewish Christianity as self-justifying and hypocritical. In particular, it is difficult to square that characterization with Luke's portrayal of Paul, especially in the trial scenes at the end of Acts. As has been argued before, Luke's concern there appears to be to defend Paul against the charge of antinomianism.<sup>8</sup> If Luke in fact regards the Law as entirely a thing of the past and Christianity as a Gentile religion, the attention he gives to that defence is difficult to explain. Luke is at pains at

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<sup>8</sup> J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God. A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, Augsburg 1972) 153-83.

the end of Acts to show Paul as a devout Jew who has not violated the Law but has found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Sanders himself notes one aspect of this difficulty. He acknowledges in a note that the 'zealots for the Law' of Acts 21:20 object not to his preaching of a Law-free gospel to 'Gentiles' but to the false allegation that Paul instructs the Jews not to obey the Law (p. 378 n. 129). But, curiously, Sanders then goes on to assert that this episode is intended to show that the Jewish Christians have so much power as to compel Paul to 'humbly submit to a public display of *Torah* fidelity' [*ibid.*]. However, Luke nowhere suggests that Paul's assumption of a Jewish vow was in any way inconsistent with his life as a (Jewish) Christian. According to Luke, Paul is a habitual synagogue goer (Acts 17:2) who defends himself forcefully against charges that he subverts Judaism (22:3ff.; 23:1, 6; 24:11ff.; 26:5ff.).<sup>9</sup> Sanders may protest that such Jewish Christians belong to the past, but he offers no evidence for that assertion beyond his assumptions about the character and limited contacts of Luke's church. In fact, nearly all the heroes of Luke-Acts are Jews, and their Jewishness is never far from the forefront of the narrative. Luke's story ends with Paul the Jewish Christian alive and active; Jewish Christians show no sign of having disappeared.

Beyond these difficulties of detail stands the difficulty of method. According to Sanders, Luke's 'bad' Pharisees depict the self-justification of all Jews, while the 'good' Pharisees indicate not that some Jews are good but that Christianity is in line with the best of Judaism. Thus, no amount of positive material about the Pharisees (or any other Jewish group or institution) would be permitted to disprove his thesis. Did Luke expect his readers to grasp such markedly different meanings of his portrayal of Jews, or must Sanders' estimate of Luke-Acts be revised to balance the divergent data?

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<sup>9</sup> K. Haacker, 'Das Bekenntnis des Paulus zur Hoffnung Israels nach der Apostelgeschichte des Lukas', *NTS* 31 (1985) 439-43, draws attention to Paul's affirmation of his Jewishness, especially his commitment to 'the hope of Israel.'

### Exegetical Methodology

Where the differentiation between speech and narrative or between ecclesiastical continuity and Luke's hatred for Jews breaks down, Sanders employs a variety of *ad hoc* methods to account for problematic data. One such example concerns Luke's presentation of Jesus' crucifiers. Sanders argues that Luke holds all the Jewish people responsible for the crucifixion and entirely exonerates all others. Insofar as the text concerns the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem, Sanders' understanding appears to be correct. Luke's emphasis on their responsibility is unmistakable. But to find an indictment of all Jews and an acquittal of Pilate and his Roman underlings is inconsistent with a number of Lukan texts. To maintain his argument, therefore, Sanders must interpret these texts in harmony with his conclusions. The result of his exegesis is that implications which violate his model seem simply to disappear.

Such is the case in his treatment of the third Lukan passion prediction, Luke 18:31-4, which appears to implicate the Gentiles in the crucifixion. Sanders says that Luke included τοῖς ἔθνεσιν in this passage because it was a 'recognizedly necessary saying' [p. 13], apparently meaning that Luke has taken up τοῖς ἔθνεσιν as traditional. Elsewhere he rejects such critical appeals to tradition (e.g., pp. 89-90), but the thrust of Sanders' argument on this passage is not based on source criticism. He argues further that Luke has rendered Mark's active verbs into passives and then shifted back to active to obscure the reference to the agent. Thus, when the pericope closes with the reference to the disciples' inability to understand, Sanders claims that Luke has deliberately rendered the saying impossible for the reader to understand. In this way, the passage does not assert Gentile complicity; instead, it asserts nothing. Thus, Sanders writes, '[Luke] has told us how he wants his muddled form of the saying understood—that is, not understood. He does *not* intend to have Jesus prophesy his death at the hands of Gentiles' [p. 13].

Sanders' analysis of this text has a number of weaknesses. These can be enumerated as follows:

1. Luke has passive verbs where the other synoptics have actives not only in the case of the verbs of which τοῖς ἔθνεσιν

might be construed as the subject or agent but also with παραδοθήσεται, (cf. παραδώσουσιν in Mt. 20:19//Mk. 10:33), of which τοῖς ἔθνεσιν is an indirect object. This passive verb does, nothing to obscure Gentile involvement and suggests that the other passives likewise are for another purpose. In fact, they all put 'the Son of Man' in the centre of the syntactical stage by making him the subject of a series of polysyllabic future passive verbs. Furthermore, in his shift back to active, Luke renders μαστιγῶ as a participle before ἀποκείνουσιν, thus focusing attention on the latter verb in climactic fashion. Emphasis on the death of the Son of Man is more clearly at work in the syntax here than the obfuscation Sanders alleges.

2. The reference to the disciples' ignorance, though absent in the immediate parallels, is present in a different form in Luke 9:45 (/Mk. 9:32). If Sanders is correct that Luke attempts to obscure an element of the third passion prediction by introducing the disciples' ignorance, then the disciples' ignorance could be expected to have the same purpose in the second prediction. But since the second includes no troubling note of Gentile involvement, one must ask what other element Luke intends to obscure. If the disciples' ignorance is not intended to obscure something in the second prediction, then it is odd that Luke should employ the motif of ignorance in such strikingly different ways.

3. Sanders fails to observe that among the differences between Luke and the other synoptics in this third passion prediction is his apparent omission of the clear note about the Jewish leaders' involvement found in the parallels (Mt. 20:18//Mk. 10:33). If elsewhere in the passage Luke was attempting to obscure Gentile involvement, his reasons for completely omitting Jewish involvement are a mystery. Likewise, one wonders why the constraints of tradition which impelled him to include τοῖς ἔθνεσιν did not likewise protect the reference to the Jews whom, according to Sanders, he sought to vilify above all else.

Yet another example of such exegesis is Sanders' treatment of Acts 13:27-9. Against the apparent suggestion of the text that Pilate participated in Jesus' execution, Sanders makes two points. One is that the text never says that Pilate gave in to the request of the Jews for Jesus' execution. The other is that

'they,' that is, 'those dwelling in Jerusalem and their leaders,' are the ones who do the deed and so are the ones who are guilty (pp. 14-15).

Certainly the people of Jerusalem and their leaders occupy centre stage here. Nevertheless, they are not the only actors in the scene. Luke does not indicate explicitly that Pilate accedes to their request for execution. But unless the text assumes that Pilate fulfilled the request to do away with Jesus, then Jesus' death is nowhere indicated, although his removal from the cross, burial and resurrection are. To assume, therefore, that Pilate did not acquiesce in the request for death renders this text absurd. Apart from redundant verbosity, the writer could not have made clearer that Pilate had Jesus killed at the request of those dwelling in Jerusalem and their leaders. The text betrays no interest in protecting Pilate from a share of the responsibility, though clearly it is primarily concerned with the responsibility of Jerusalem.

Indeed, this text points out the other significant difficulty in Sanders' argument about who is responsible for the cross in Luke's narrative. It shows most clearly that for Luke not Jews generally but the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their leaders are responsible for crucifying Jesus, since here before a Diaspora audience Paul specifies only the Jerusalemites as accountable. Elsewhere in Acts, those accused of crucifying Jesus are always the people of Jerusalem (Acts 2:23, 36; 3:13-15; 13:27-9) or the religious leaders of Jerusalem (Acts 3:17; 4:5-6, 10-11; 5:28, 30; 13:27). In Acts 4:25-8 Luke no more implicates all the λαοὶ Ἰσραήλ than he implicates all the ἔθνη. Only in Acts 10:39 could the circle be wider, embracing all Judaea, though the implied subject of ἀνεῖλαν may be the collective Ἱερουσαλήμ instead of Ἰουδαίων.<sup>10</sup> Similarly in the Gospel, though Jesus meets opposition outside Jerusalem (e.g. Luke 4:28-30), he can be killed only in and by Jerusalem (Luke 9:22, 31, 51; 13:31-5; 18:31-34; 19:41-4). This evidence suggests that Sanders has falsely read into the text of Luke-Acts the later anti-semitic calumny 'Christ-killers' wherever Luke implicates a more limited circle of Jewish people in the crucifixion.

<sup>10</sup> Luke often refers to collective nouns in the plural: Luke 1:21; 6:17-19; 21:23-4; Acts 2:6; 3:9-10; 8:5; 13:17; 19:4; 21:30; 22:5, 18-19.

## Conclusions

This article has aimed at identifying the flawed means by which Sanders deals with elements of Luke-Acts which are positive toward Jews or Judaism. The analysis suggests constructively that an accurate understanding of Luke's view of the Jews must balance both the positive and negative elements of their portrayal. Luke clearly is concerned to depict the widespread rejection of Jesus and the gospel by Jews. However he is just as interested in the Jewish orientation of the church, both in its salvation-historical relationship to biblical Israel and in the Jewish ethnicity of many of its members. Though the Jewish as a nation do not accept the Christian gospel, many individual Jews--numbering even in the tens of thousands (Acts 21:20)—do accept it. The gospel is not invalidated by Jewish rejection; indeed, Jewish rejection vindicates Jesus as a true prophet. Only those who accept Jesus as the eschatological prophet both Jews and Gentiles, receive the promises of Israel. According to Luke there is no future for Judaism apart from belief in Jesus.

Is such a scheme antisemitic? Answers will necessarily depend on prior philosophical commitments. Certainly modern notions of 'tolerance' are offended by any claims which negate the validity of a religion. But such religious negation can be entirely independent of the ethnic prejudice which Sanders alleges. Absolute, even exclusivistic, religious conviction is not, and need not produce, racial bigotry.