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June 15th: Joshua 22 & Luke 24:13-53

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The altar of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe at the Jordan. On the road to Emmaus.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Joshua 22. At that time Joshua summoned the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and said to them, You have kept all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I have commanded you. You have not forsaken your brothers these many days down to this day, but have been careful to keep the charge of the Lord your God.

And now the Lord your God has given rest to your brothers, as he promised them. Therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan. Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cling to him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.

So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents. Now to the one half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession in Bashan, but to the other half Joshua had given a possession beside their brothers in the land west of the Jordan. And when Joshua sent them away to their homes and blessed them, he said to them, Go back to your tents with much wealth, and with very much livestock, with silver, gold, bronze, and iron, and with much clothing.

Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brothers. So the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned home, parting from the people of Israel at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the land of Gilead, their own land, of which they had possessed themselves by command of the Lord through Moses. And when they came to the region of the Jordan that is in the land of Canaan, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar of imposing size.

And the people of Israel heard it said, Behold, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built the altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the people of Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, the whole assembly of the people of Israel gathered at Shiloh to make war against them. Then the people of Israel sent the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and with him ten chiefs, one from each of the tribal families of Israel, every one of them the head of a family among the clans of Israel.

And they came to the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead, and they said to them, Thus says the whole congregation of the Lord, What is this breach of faith that you have committed against the God of Israel, in turning away this day from following the Lord, by building yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the Lord? Have we not had enough of the sin at Peor, from which even yet we have not cleansed ourselves, and for which there came a plague upon the congregation of the Lord, that you too must turn away this day from following the Lord? And if you too rebel against the Lord today, then tomorrow He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel. But now, if the land of your possession is unclean, pass over into the Lord's land where the Lord's tabernacle stands, and take for yourselves a possession among us. Only do not rebel against the Lord, or make us as rebels, by building for yourselves an altar other than the altar of the Lord our God.

Did not Achan the son of Zerah break faith in the matter of the devoted things, and wrath fall upon all the congregation of Israel? And he did not perish alone for his iniquity. Then the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh said in answer to the heads of the families of Israel, The Mighty One, God the Lord, the Mighty One, God the Lord, He knows. And let Israel itself know, if it was in rebellion or in breach of faith against the Lord, do not spare us today for building an altar to turn away from

following the Lord.

Or if we did so to offer burnt offerings, or grain offerings, or peace offerings on it, may the Lord Himself take vengeance. No, but we did it from fear that in time to come your children might say to our children, What have you to do with the Lord, the God of Israel? For the Lord has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you, you people of Reuben and people of Gad. You have no portion in the Lord.

So your children might make our children cease to worship the Lord. Therefore we said, let us now build an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you, and between our generations after us, that we do perform the service of the Lord in His presence with our burnt offerings and sacrifices and peace offerings, so your children will not say to our children in time to come, You have no portion in the Lord. And so we thought, if this should be said to us or to our descendants in time to come, we should say, Behold, the copy of the altar of the Lord which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you, far be it from us that we should rebel against the Lord and turn away this day from following the Lord by building an altar for burnt offering, grain offering, or sacrifice, other than the altar of the Lord our God that stands before His tabernacle.

When Phinehas the priest and the chiefs of the congregation, the heads of the families of Israel who were with him, heard the words that the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh spoke, it was good in their eyes. And Phinehas the son of Eleazer the priest said to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh, Today we know that the Lord is in our midst, because you have not committed this breach of faith against the Lord. Now you have delivered the people of Israel from the hand of the Lord.

Then Phinehas the son of Eleazer the priest and the chiefs returned from the people of Reuben and the people of Gad in the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan to the people of Israel and brought back word to them. And the report was good in the eyes of the people of Israel. And the people of Israel blessed God and spoke no more of making war against them to destroy the land where the people of Reuben and the people of Gad were settled.

The people of Reuben and the people of Gad called the altar witness. For, they said, it is a witness between us that the Lord is God. The land has been apportioned and now in Joshua chapter 22 it is time for the Transjordanian tribes to return to their land.

The book of Joshua and indeed the entire story of the Hexajuke has entered its long drawn out stage of resolution and now various remaining issues are being settled. One of these is the two and a half tribes completion of their mission. They had sent over about 40,000 fighting men with the rest of the nation in fulfilment of the vow that they had made back in Numbers chapter 32 verses 16 to 19.

Then they came near to him and said, Joshua summons the two and a half tribes and commends them for their faithfulness. The Lord has now given rest to their brothers in the land. They have been fighting alongside their brothers, taking their territory for them for a period of about seven years.

Their full participation in the common task of taking the promised land was extremely important. It expressed and strengthened the unity of the people as a single nation beyond their tribal divisions. It was also important as the two and a half tribes didn't receive territory in the promised land that they should fully participate in the conquest of it.

The danger was always that the two and a half tribes would drift away from the tribes that settled in the promised land proper and fighting with them for that land was one way in which that danger could be mitigated. Joshua charges them to remain faithful in the future. They would settle, as it were, in the sunrise land, the territory of Gilead in the east, but the rest of the nation would settle in the sunset land in the west, the promised land on the western side of the Jordan.

As Peter Lighthouse has observed, the occasional description of the different parts of the land in terms of sunrise and sunset presents them in terms of a temporal movement and a movement from protology to eschatology, from beginnings to consummation. The Lord's people first ascended in the sunrise land and then they come to rest in the sunset land. On their return to Gilead, the two and a half tribes erect a huge altar in the region of the Jordan.

This action leads to the nine and a half tribes preparing to go to war against them. They are here following the instructions of Deuteronomy chapter 13 verses 12 to 18, including the part about carefully investigating the charge first. If you hear someone in one of your cities, which the Lord your God gives you to dwell in, saying, Corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their cities, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which you have not known.

Then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock, with the edge of the sword. And you shall gather all its plunder into the middle of the street, and completely burn with fire the city and all its plunder, for the Lord your God.

It shall be a heap for ever. It shall not be built again. So none of the accursed things shall remain in your hand, that the Lord may turn from the fierceness of his anger and show you mercy, have compassion on you, and multiply you, just as he swore to your fathers.

Because you have listened to the voice of the Lord your God, to keep all his

commandments which I command you today, to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord your God. If one part of Israel breaches the covenant, the entire nation is implicated. The nine and a half tribes can't just write off the two and a half tribes as lost to idolatry.

They are all in the covenant together, and they are their brother's keepers. If the Transjordanian tribes have apostatised, everyone will be judged with them. Why was the establishment of an altar such a serious breach of the covenant? The commandment that Israel should have a single sanctuary, and the ordering of their worship around that one sanctuary for the entire nation, had been one of the central messages of Moses' teaching to the nation in the plains of Moab in the book of Deuteronomy.

This is unpacked in Deuteronomy 12, verse 14. These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land, which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess serve their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree.

And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire. And you shall cut down the carved images of their gods, and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship the Lord your God with such things.

But you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put his name for his dwelling place. And there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks.

And there you shall eat before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the Lord your God has blessed you. You shall not at all do as we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes. For as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God has given you.

But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the Lord your God has given you to inherit, and he gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, then there will be the place where the Lord your God chooses to make his name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you, your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the Lord. And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you.

Take heed to yourself, that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see, but in the place which the Lord chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you. This instruction in

the part of the book concerned with the second commandment, against idolatry and false forms of worship, was incredibly important. Upon the observance of this commandment hung the unity of the nation in faithfulness.

If this commandment were breached, Israel could easily drift off into various local cults, each with their own regional flavour of the worship of the Lord, syncretising the worship of the Lord with the worship of local deities and the gods of surrounding nations. Unity and faithfulness went hand in hand. Unity would serve as a spur to faithfulness, and faithfulness would serve as a spur to unity.

For instance, when the nation was divided in the time of Jeroboam, Jeroboam felt the need to establish new cultic sites at Bethel and Dan, with his two golden calves, precisely in order to avoid the pull to unity with the southern kingdom that worship in Jerusalem would encourage. This can be seen in 1 Kings 12, verses 25-33. The Nine and a Half Tribes send a delegation to investigate the claims and to confront Reuben Gad and the Half-Tribe of Manasseh.

This delegation is led by Phineas, a man of zeal who acted to stop the plague when Israel joined itself with Baal of Peel in Numbers chapter 25. He is accompanied by ten chiefs, one for each of the tribes with territory in the Promised Land. Manasseh, of course, has territory on both sides.

It seems that they are taking this with the utmost seriousness and aren't going to allow a compromise, which is itself a promising sign. They challenge the Two and a Half Tribes for their apparent breach of the covenant. They compare this to the sin of that at Peel, where direct intervention had to occur to save the people, and to the sin of Achan, where the entire people suffered on account of the sin of one man.

They encourage them to join them on the other side of the Jordan if they will struggle to remain faithful in the Transjordan. The Reubenites, Gadites and Half-Tribe of Manasseh protest their innocence in response. Their erection of the altar, they argue, had been for very different purposes.

Indeed, its design was to serve as a spur to faithfulness and to true worship. The altar, they insisted, is not for worship, but as a witness to ensure that the tribes in the Promised Land itself recognize the part that the Transjordanian tribes have in the worship of God and don't deny their stake in the covenant. The altar is a replica of the One True Altar, not a copy of it or substitute for it for the purposes of worship.

Phineas and the elders are satisfied with the response. We are told that it was good in their eyes. They return to the land with the report, which satisfies the people, and the plans for war against the two and a half tribes are called off.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad then call the altar witness, claiming that it was a witness

between the tribes on the two sides of the Jordan that the Lord is God. Perhaps the big question at the end of this is whether Phineas and the elders were right in their decision, and things aren't entirely clear cut on that front. On the one hand, a surface reading of the text might lead us to share the delegation's assessment of the situation after their investigation, being satisfied with the explanation that's provided.

If they were apostatizing and starting worship on their own terms, then it might seem strange for them to have erected the altar in the Promised Land rather than in their own territory. This would make it very difficult for them to use it. But then we look a bit closer and we recognize that the actual location of the altar is ambiguous.

The text could be read in ways that present it as being on either side of the Jordan. We could consider the size of the altar. If they're going to secretly go away from the worship of God, this is not the way to do it.

It seems to be a very open way to apostatize. But that, of course, might be what's taking place. Common sense would raise some further questions.

Why erect an altar for some purpose other than sacrifice? Why not erect one of the various other kinds of memorial or witness pillars that we read of elsewhere? For that matter, why erect an altar as a witness between the nation on the two sides of the Jordan and not inform the tribes within the land about the fact? Surely that greatly undermines the purpose. Indeed, the very altar that was supposedly built to testify to the unity of the two sides nearly becomes a cause for tearing the nation apart. Things don't seem to quite add up here.

James Bajon has identified a number of further intertextual reasons for wariness. The words, It was good in their eyes, concerning the judgment of Phinehas and the delegation, might sow a seed of uncertainty too. These words have negative connotations elsewhere.

There has already been a case of deception in the book of Joshua, where the Israelites failed to consult the Lord in the case of the Gibeonites. They do not seem to consult the Lord here either. Then there is the fact of another occasion when another witness was erected in Gilead, back in Genesis chapter 31, verses 44 to 52.

Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me. So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar, and Jacob said to his kinsmen, Gather stones. And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap.

Laban called it Jegar-sahaduthah, but Jacob called it Gilead. Laban said, This heap is a witness between you and me today. Therefore he named it Gilead, and Mispah.

For he said, The Lord watch between you and me when we are out of one another's sight, if you oppress my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters. Although

no one is with us, see, God is witness between you and me. Then Laban said to Jacob, See this heap and the pillar which I have set between you and me? This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm.

The witness in that case manifests lingering distrust between the two parties of Jacob and Laban, and it seems that much the same is the case here. The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh put words in the mouths of hypothetical descendants of the nine and a half tribes, to the effect that the Transjordanian tribes are not truly members of Israel. However, while this may be rhetorically designed to encourage peace with the delegation, it seems likely to me that they are identifying a tension that is already present, albeit in a largely unspoken form.

Indeed, the close of the chapter speaks of the nine and a half tribes as the people of Israel, over against the people of Reuben and the people of Gad. Are the people of Reuben and the people of Gad really members of Israel? We might also think of the connection with the story of Judges chapter 20 and 21, where Phinehas is again engaged in an investigation over whether a particular tribe has been grossly unfaithful, and in that investigation a very misleading picture is given of what actually took place. I'm not convinced that we are expected to settle the question of the intent of the two and a half tribes in erecting the altar.

However, I do think we are supposed to feel suspicion, and to sense the fracture and distrust that exists within the nation, where neither side is at ease with the other, and where the true state of relations is unclear. The explanation that satisfies the nine and a half tribes seems pious, but it doesn't adequately address many of the reader's questions. Establishing unity between the tribes will be a great and an ongoing task.

The Jordan is a powerful natural barrier between the nine and a half tribes and the two and a half tribes. Preventing the tribes on either side of this natural barrier from drifting apart would be difficult. We should note that it was Reuben and Gad who requested the Transjordan.

The half tribe of Manasseh seems to have been joined to them by Moses. Having a tribe whose territory straddled the Jordan would serve to hold the two sides together that bit more. The tribe of the Levites, scattered throughout the various other tribes, would also be a means of binding the tribes together.

And of course unity in worship was the great way in which the nation would be held together. Reuben and Gad are in an ambiguous place. Are they insiders or are they outsiders? What marks the identity of Israel? Is it presence in the Promised Land? Is it a single shared site of worship? Is it the unity of brotherhood? The altar, while it ostensibly testifies to the unity of Israel in common worship, it starts to represent mutual doubt and distrust.

All of this is important because if the unity of the tribes is unsettled, rivalries within the people may push people away from the Lord. A question to consider. The connection between unity and faithfulness is crucial in this chapter.

The unity must be a faithful unity, lest judgment come upon all. However faithfulness is spurred by unity, and a neglect or forgetfulness of brotherhood can lead to people drifting away from the Lord. How can such an interplay between unity and faithfulness help us to understand some of our challenges in the life of the Church? Luke 24, verses 13-53 And he said to them, What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk? And they stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days? And he said to them, What things? And they said to him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him, that we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us.

They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see. And he said to them, O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther. Stay with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent.

So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight.

They said to each other, Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures? And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven, and those who were with them gathered together, saying, The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon. Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, Peace to you. But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.

And he said to them, Why are you troubled? and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.

Touch me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have. And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, Have you anything here to eat? They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.

Then he said to them, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sin should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high. And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.

While he blessed them he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, blessing God. In Luke chapter 24 we encounter two people travelling from Jerusalem, returning from the feast, having lost Jesus three days ago, not realising that Jesus had to be about his father's business.

Of course, we've heard a version of this story before, back in chapter 2 verses 41-50. Jesus feigns complete ignorance of the events that have just occurred. As this prompts them to share the events, he will reveal that they are the ones who are unaware of what has happened.

The restraining of their eyes is associated with their slowness to believe, much as the restraining of Zachariah's mouth. Jesus declares himself in all of the scriptures, from the Pentateuch to the prophets, and they still don't recognise him. Jesus finally reveals himself in the act of taking, blessing, breaking and distributing the bread, in the ritual of the supper.

The story of the road to Emmaus takes a liturgical shape then. The word is opened up, and then Christ is recognised in the sacrament. The pattern here is the pattern of Christian worship.

Christ draws near to us on the first day of the week. He opens the scripture to us, he makes himself known in the breaking of bread, and then sends us forth with joyful tidings. The moment that their eyes are opened to him, he disappears from their sight.

The eyes of the disciples open upon his absence. But now it's an absence filled with life,

hope and promise. Their hearts burned within them upon the road, and the fire in their hearts might be in anticipation of the fire of Pentecost.

The opening of the eyes of the disciples is reminiscent of the opening of the eyes of Adam and Eve at the fall, but on this occasion it's blessed. There is a three-fold opening in this chapter, the opening of the tomb, the opening of the scriptures and the opening of the eyes, and all of these are related. Before the risen Christ revealed himself, the scriptures were a closed letter, and the perception of the disciples was limited.

As Christ opened the tomb, he also opened closed eyes to perceive his presence and his purpose throughout the events that had occurred. He opened the Old Testament scriptures, revealing his presence on every page. The resurrection transforms our reading of the Old Testament.

Luke has been enacting this fact throughout his gospel. Texts whose meaning appeared closed are suddenly opened up to reveal a greater person within them. As our eyes are opened to see the risen Christ, we suddenly recognize the identity of the one who has been travelling and speaking to us all along in the words of the Old Testament, words concerning himself.

Jesus, the Lord, is the mysterious traveller who has been with Israel all the way throughout its journey. He is the one who appeared in the burning bush. He is the one who appeared to Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre.

He is the one who appeared to Moses on the mountain. He is the one who appeared to Isaiah in the temple vision. As Christ opens up the scriptures, the story of the Exodus is seen to be about him.

The story of the creation is seen to be about him. The story of David is seen to be about him. The whole of the Old Testament is Christian scripture.

The story of Emmaus follows a pattern seen in two other Lukan stories, the story of Saul the persecutor on the road to Damascus and the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. In both of these stories we have the movement of a journey. We have the opening of understanding in an encounter with Christ.

And then we have a movement to the celebration of a sacrament, in those cases baptism. Jesus' body is glorified and it's not like a normal body. It can move from place to place, it can evade recognition, it masters both space and other people's perception.

But it's still very much a body. It can be handled and it can eat. Much of the Gospel of Luke has been about meals, about eating practices, about dinner companions, about who belongs at the table.

And it's thoroughly appropriate that the fact of the resurrection should be made known

through a food ritual and through an act of eating. Following 1 Corinthians 11, our understanding of the Lord's Supper is often focused narrowly upon the context of the Last Supper and the relationship with Jesus' death. However, the Lord's Supper is also based on the events in which the risen Christ revealed himself to his disciples in the very breaking of bread that we celebrate.

As we celebrate the Supper, we are enjoying the reality of the joyful resurrection meals as we perform the breaking bread ritual through which Jesus made known his presence to his disciples. The fact that Jesus eats fish when he appears to his disciples demonstrates his resurrection body, but it also might have some symbolic import. Animals symbolise people.

God only ate five animals for most of the Old Testament. Cattle, sheep, goats, turtle doves and pigeons. Perhaps we could see some symbol of the inclusion of Gentiles here, although I wouldn't put much weight on it.

Jesus declares to his disciples, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you. He's there, but he's no longer there in the same way. He is about to depart and speaks as if that departure had already been accomplished.

He explains how the entire scriptures, the law, the prophets and the psalms, or the writings, had to be fulfilled in his suffering and resurrection from the dead. But it's not just in Christ's death and resurrection that these things are fulfilled. They're also fulfilled in the ministry of the church that follows.

The Old Testament narrative crackles with anticipation of Christ, and Christ opens our eyes to understand the Old Testament text. There is an event of illumination going in both directions. The scripture enables us truly to see the Christ, and the Christ enables us truly to see the scriptures.

Christ brings light to the entire preceding narrative, while also being in direct continuity with it. Jesus is the key to understanding the Old Testament. However, the Old Testament is also the key to understanding Jesus.

Jesus is like the match, and the Old Testament is like the striking surface. Bring the two together and light and fire results. Without the Old Testament, we would not truly recognize Jesus.

And without Jesus, we cannot truly recognize the meaning of the Old Testament. We should consider the way that Luke is using the scripture. He isn't primarily presenting us with direct prediction and fulfillment, but rather with the way that Christ both clarifies and brings to resolution the themes of the Old Testament.

The whole world of the scripture comes into focus in Christ. Once we see Christ, the rest makes new sense. He is David's greater son, who must suffer like his father.

This is one of the reasons why the Psalms are especially prominent in Luke's understanding. The Psalms present us with the voice of the suffering Davidic king. Luke is also drawing heavily upon the background of Isaiah, especially chapters 40-66.

The suffering Messiah of the Psalms is also the suffering servant of Isaiah's prophecy. He is also the Spirit-anointed one who brings the acceptable year of the Lord, and brings ministry to the Gentiles. The Church and its ministry also figure into the picture.

Its witness to all nations beginning with Jerusalem is an essential part of the picture anticipated by the Old Testament. The second volume of Luke's writings, the Book of Acts, is also a book that fulfills Old Testament prophecy. Such themes of fulfillment are very important in the ministry of the early Church, not least in places like Peter's sermon in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost.

Christ is the one who will send the Spirit, the promise of the Father. We should note the explicit presence of all of the persons of the Trinity here. The Spirit is the one sent, the Spirit is the promise of the Father, and the Spirit is sent by the Son.

The Spirit is power from on high, power for ministry and mission. It is a power that is the power of Christ himself. They are instructed that they must wait in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the place from which the word of the Lord will go out. We could perhaps think of Jesus as a new Elijah here. His ascension and there being clothed with power from on high are two sides of the same coin.

Just as Elijah's ascension was Elisha's Pentecost, so it is for Jesus and his disciples. This might also be the third of three instructions that Jesus gives to his disciples towards the end of his ministry. The first being to find the cult that's tied up and to bring it to Jesus for his triumphal entry.

The second to find the man carrying the water picture in the town. And then this as the third, to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit comes upon them from on high. These might be related to the three signs that are given to Saul at the beginning of the kingdom.

A message concerning his father's donkeys that they have been found, encountering men bearing goats, bread and wine, and then meeting with prophets coming down from the high place at which time the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon him and he will become a new man. This is what happens with the disciples. As the story of the signs given to Saul were at the beginning of the first kingdom of Israel, these signs are the beginning of a new kingdom.

And just as Saul was prepared by the Spirit coming upon him, so they will be prepared for rule as the Spirit comes upon them. Jesus leads his disciples out of the city to Bethany and there he blesses them. Bethany was the site where Christ's triumphal entry had originated and he departs then as he is blessing them.

His blessing of his disciples might make us think of Jesus as a priest at this point as well. He is taken up into heaven to God's right hand to act and to intercede on their behalf. Luke has already alluded to Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 to 14, the Son of Man coming on the clouds.

This is the Son of Man ascending into heaven on the cloud where he will rule at God's right hand until all his enemies are put under his feet. The ascension is a departure but it is also a new arrival. It is a new triumphal entry.

Furthermore it returns us to the themes at the beginning of the book. The book began with people praying at the temple as Zachariah went in at the time of incense. Jesus ascends to God's presence like the incense and blesses his disciples as the priest would bless the crowd outside.

We might also recall the shepherds. The shepherds are described having seen the sign of the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes laid in a manger. And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them.

Luke chapter 2 verse 20. The disciples might also be compared to Anna who was constantly in prayer in the temple. So a book that began with rejoicing, with the temple, with prayer and blessing and with the theme of the Spirit ends where it began.

But as it arrives at the point where it started once more we notice that everything has changed. This sets things up for the book of Acts. In the book of Acts the story of the ascension is largely repeated.

The story of the ascension both closes the story of Christ's earthly ministry and it also bursts out into the ministry of the church as it leads into the story of Pentecost. A question to consider. Can you think of some examples in the Gospel of Luke where Luke exemplifies the form of reading scripture that Jesus here teaches?