

# The Jailing Of John And The Baptism Of Jesus: Luke 3:19–21

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Luke's sympathies clearly lie with John the Baptist in John's encounter with Herod Antipas (Luke 3:19–20). He tells us that because of John's reproof of Herod for all the evil things the tetrarch had done, Herod "added this to them all, that he shut up John in prison." From a literary point of view, however, the same thing might be said of Luke himself: that he shut up John in prison.

If we assume that Luke used Mark's gospel in the process of compiling his own,<sup>1</sup> then one of the more striking peculiarities of his editorial activity is his treatment of this very encounter. In the first place he moves it from where it occurs in Mark, well into the story of Jesus' Galilean ministry (Mark 6:14–29), to a position preceding the beginning of that ministry. This in itself would not be entirely unexpected, for Mark's own description of John's run-in with Herod is actually a flashback<sup>2</sup> and is not intended to be taken as having occurred in sequence with the events narrated just ahead of it. Mark 1:14 in fact implies that John's arrest did not postdate the baptism of Jesus by very long. On traditional reckoning it could have been by as little as "forty days," though perhaps that is not likely (cf. Matt 4:12). Nor does John vanish altogether from Luke's gospel after 3:20. He shows up again—in prison—to express his doubts about Jesus' identity (7:18–23), and, in spite of that (or because of it?), he is roundly praised by Jesus (7:24–35). The fact remains nonetheless that in Luke, the Baptist's imprisonment, somewhat like the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth,<sup>3</sup> is moved to a position preceding the commencement of Jesus' ministry in Galilee.

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Yet that is not all—and here is the notable thing: The jailing of John is moved to a position that precedes even the baptism of Jesus by John. The officiant at this significant event is thus snatched from the scene. That this is no accidental oversight nor a mere foreshadowing of John's fate, a narrative sequence that readers are supposed to ignore, is strongly suggested by the fact that in the very next verse Luke has carefully extracted all mention of John from Mark 1:9. Mark's wording—"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan"—becomes in Luke 3:21: "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized... " John is out of the picture. Luke has, in a sense, shut him up in prison.

Thus one of John's primary claims to fame, one of his foremost roles in the gospel story—his baptism of the Lamb of God—has been stripped away from him. But of course we the readers are not fooled. We know that hidden behind the agentless passive verbs of Luke 3:21 is John himself, free and unshackled. When we read Luke's version we usually miss the discrepancy. We unconsciously fill in the missing baptizer from a trove of information gathered out of the other gospels and sacred traditions, and we read happily on our way. Nonspecialists to whom I have pointed out this Lukan sleight-of-hand have invariably been surprised, as was I when I first noticed it.

But were Luke's first readers surprised too? If they had only Luke's account, and no access to the other three (at least one of which surely was not even written yet), would they have just as unthinkingly filled in the missing baptizer as we do? Perhaps. There were more sources of traditional information on the life of Jesus available to very early believers than the gospels as we know them. Whoever Theophilus is or symbolizes or represents, the prologue to Luke's gospel (1:1–4) seems to assume that "he" (Theophilus) is aware of the various narrative compilations that Luke intends to improve. On the other hand, if for some of his early readers Luke's gospel was their very first exposure to the "things that have been accomplished among us," those readers would undoubtedly have received the impression that John did not baptize Jesus—indeed, was not even available to do so—because he had been shut up in prison.

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<sup>1</sup> 1. It is not necessary to make this assumption, of course. For a recent summary of alternative attitudes toward source criticism see W. R. Farmer, "Source Criticism: Some Comments on the Present Situation," *USQR* 42 (1988) 49–57. Since Farmer's article appeared, M. D. Goulder has proposed a "new paradigm" in which Luke compiles his work from both Matthew and Mark (*Luke: A New Paradigm* [JSNTSup 20; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989]). See the criticism of Goulder's reconstruction in F. G. Downing, "A Paradigm Perplex: Luke, Matthew, and Mark," *NTS* 38 (1992) 15–36. If Luke used Matthew instead of Mark, however, the effect of his editorial activity here would be no less surprising. Nevertheless the present essay proceeds from the assumption that Luke worked from Mark's gospel.

<sup>2</sup> 2. Cf. R. L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* (JSNTSup 62; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991) 374 n. 57.

<sup>3</sup> 3. Actually the Nazareth incident comes immediately after Luke has initiated the Galilean teaching activity of Jesus. But Luke's dislocation of the narrative is almost as dramatic as that of John's arrest.

Is that the impression Luke wished to convey? Did he himself have that opinion?<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly he was thoroughly acquainted with the idea that John had baptized Jesus. Mark's gospel alone, not to mention the other sources—written or oral—that he had at his disposal, was enough to provide him with that information. Is this subtle but amazing alteration in the story a part of what Luke means when he says he intends to write an “orderly” account? Possibly so, though it does not seem very likely. Matthew leaves Mark's version intact (assuming he too used Mark) and actually places heavy stress on John's role by introducing John's reluctance (Matt 3:13–17). Thus even if Luke expected his readers to understand John as the unexpressed agent of the baptism of Jesus we are still justified in asking why Luke goes to the trouble of retelling the story in precisely this way. It is a question that has been asked before.<sup>5</sup>

What solutions have been offered as explanations of Luke's handling of the text at 3:19–20? Among the better known is the one that Hans Conzelmann proposed in connection with his theory of the “middle of time.”<sup>6</sup> According to his scheme, history falls into clearly defined compartments, the relevant division in this case being that between the era of the old covenant with its prophetic tradition on the one hand and the new era of the ministry of Jesus on the other. Luke states the dichotomy explicitly at 16:16: “The law and the prophets were until John [i.e., according to Conzelmann, “to and including” John]; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached.” The principle is carried out literally by, for example, Luke's complete omission of Mark 9:11–13, where Elijah is said to have already come as the paver of the way. By contrast Matthew improves on Mark by actually interpreting Elijah as John the Baptist (Matt 17:13). More to the present point, Conzelmann finds the Luke 16:16 principle exemplified in the way Luke purposefully extracts John from the baptism of Jesus. The maneuver neatly places John in the closing moments of the age of the old covenant and lets the new begin cleanly without him, even though on the surface the reader may be left to wonder who in fact baptized Jesus.

Attractive and persuasive as this explanation is, it has not stood up to scrutiny. Walter Wink, in particular, showed how taking the Lukan birth narrative into consideration (something Conzelmann refused to do) makes all the difference. From the very beginning of the book of Luke, John is seen as participating in the initiation of the age of the gospel. He is even said to “preach the gospel” to the people (3:18), which does not square with Conzelmann's exclusivistic interpretation of 16:16.<sup>7</sup> The powerful creativity of this theory is evident, however, in that it continues to be engaged, though rejected, even today.<sup>8</sup>

If we dismiss the idea that Luke removes John from 3:21 because he wishes to send him back to the old era of the Law and the Prophets, how else can we solve the puzzle? Noting the carefully structured parallels between John and Jesus in the first chapters of the gospel, Robert Tannehill proposes, as one of two reasons for John's early imprisonment, that Luke does not end the parallelism with chap. 2. He instead continues it by anticipating at 3:19–20 the way Jesus and his disciples share the fate of the rejected prophets (cf. 4:24; 6:22–23; 11:49–51; 13:33–34; Acts 7:52). John's ministry, which begins with a lengthy quotation of Scripture, ends in arrest—an arrest that of course leads to his death. Jesus' ministry begins (with the Nazareth incident) and ends the same way.<sup>9</sup> C. F. Evans is unhappy with this idea, since John is merely imprisoned in Luke 3:20. No mention is made there of his death.<sup>10</sup> Still it is conceivable that Luke felt that the arrest alone was a sufficient symbol of John's prophetic suffering.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. C. F. Evans, *St Luke* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990) 246: “Luke appears to envisage Jesus' baptism as taking place separately, and after John's baptising had ceased, since *all the people* . . . had been baptised” (italics his). On the other hand J. Nolland believes that John is no more separated from the baptism of Jesus than he is from that of “all the people” (*Luke 1–9:20* [WBC 34A; Dallas: Word, 1989] 158–159). But again, that is true only for those who know another version of the story before reading Luke's. Evans' suggestion that Luke wants us to think that “all the people” were baptized by John but that Jesus was not (3:21) is difficult to accept given the structure of the text—at least without further explanation. Either both parties were baptized by John or neither one was.

<sup>5</sup> But not by everyone. Some commentators note the problem only briefly (e.g. F. L. Godet, A. R. C. Leaney, M. O. Tolbert, W. Hendriksen, L. Morris). Others do not mention it at all (e.g. J. Calvin, A. Plummer, J. M. Creed, W. Manson, N. Geldenhuys). In a recent essay devoted to the relationship of Luke's writings to the gospel of Mark, W. Übelacker passes it by altogether (“Lukasskrifternas förhållande till Markusevangeliet,” *SEÅ* 56 [1991] 45–77).

<sup>6</sup> H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (New York: Harper, 1960) 18–27.

<sup>7</sup> W. Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (SNTSMS 7; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1968) 42–86. See also E. Bammel, “The Baptist in Early Christian Tradition,” *NTS* 18 (1971–72) 107 and n. 2. J. D. G. Dunn feels that both Conzelmann and Wink overstate their respective cases, though he inclines toward Conzelmann's view (*Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970] 25). I. H. Marshall approves of Wink's critique and suggests viewing John as a bridge between the two eras and belonging to both (*Luke: Historian and Theologian* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970] 146). Nor is Luke thoroughgoing in the downplay of the John=Elijah motif; cf. 1:17, 76 and Marshall's explanation (p. 147).

<sup>8</sup> E.g. by A. J. Mattill, Jr., *Luke and the Last Things: A Perspective for the Understanding of Lukan Thought* (Dillsboro: Western North Carolina, 1979) 13–25; J. Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer: Interpretation—Geschichte—Wirkungsgeschichte* (BZNW 53; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1989) 100–102; J. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 1989) 102–110; Nolland, *Luke* 156; Evans, *St Luke* 244.

<sup>9</sup> R. C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 1.53.

<sup>10</sup> Evans, *St Luke* 244; cf. similarly O. Böcher, “Lukas und Johannes der Täufer,” *SNTU* A4 (1979) 36.

Tannehill's other suggestion regarding the extraction of John from 3:21 is that Luke thereby gives John greater importance as a prophetic figure in his own right. His career is not used simply to introduce Jesus' baptism.<sup>11</sup> This novel approach is directly opposite to one taken by Fred Craddock, according to whom Luke is attempting to "get John offstage in order to make room for the entrance of Jesus." Though the early Church may well have found it difficult or embarrassing that Jesus was baptized, and so Luke minimized the attention he gave to the event, more likely, says Craddock, Luke only wished to highlight the post-baptismal ministry of Jesus.<sup>12</sup> François Bovon believes Luke neither wanted nor needed to say anything more about John's fate. All interest is now directed toward the one whom John preached as "mightier than I" (3:16).<sup>13</sup> But it hardly seems necessary to go to Luke's extreme measures simply to clear the way for Jesus' appearance. Neither does one get a sense from 3:20–21 of an enhancement of John's importance as a prophetic figure. The treatment he receives in the first two chapters is surely enhancement enough.

Josef Ernst does not consider Luke's literary maneuver at 3:20–21 as particularly unusual. He finds it easier to explain the phenomenon as a "current narrative technique" than to follow Conzelmann. The first infinitival clause of 3:21 harks back to 3:7, and the reference to the descent of the dove in 3:22 recalls John's sermon at 3:16–17. So there is no attempt to separate John from Jesus. Nonetheless Ernst feels sufficiently uneasy about this "technique" to suggest that the absence of the Baptist at the baptism is possibly owing to Luke's sensitivity about otherwise seeming to subordinate Jesus to John.<sup>14</sup> Nolland calls this literary technique "chronological anticipation" and tells us that it was common in antiquity. By using it Luke wishes to carry through to a literary level a stress on the separate careers of the two figures. Nolland points to the fact that Mark himself concludes John's work before commencing with that of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> Evans, too, sees the matter as the use of a literary device for "rounding off" the section on John.<sup>16</sup> But Michael Goulder, like Ernst, insists that the motive is not just neatness. Luke wants to "keep John in a clear secondary place" and thus puts him in prison as early as possible.<sup>17</sup>

Recently Robert L. Webb has proposed that John's rebuke of Herod Antipas at 3:19 is inserted as an example of John's "other exhortations" mentioned in 3:18. Further, Herod's response serves as a contrast to the people's response in 3:10–15. Taken separately, each of these two suggestions is plausible. But together they clash, since the "other exhortations" are made in the process of evangelizing the people. The message delivered to Herod in 3:19 hardly seems a case of "evangelization." Webb goes on to say that Luke places the whole episode at this point in order to create a thematic separation between the ministries of John and Jesus. That is, thematically John's preparatory ministry comes to an end before Jesus' ministry begins, even though they belong to the same epoch. Wink's theory—that according to 3:21 Jesus baptized himself—Webb rejects with the warning: "Thematic placement should not be confused with chronological order."<sup>18</sup>

As explanations of Luke's editorial activity at 3:20–21, each of these approaches has a certain appeal. But none of them is entirely satisfying. The reappearance of John at 7:18–23 makes it difficult to see 3:20 as a rounding off or a neat disposal. And even if that were Luke's intention, it seems strange that he would do it by pulling John out of his most noteworthy role. It would be a case of redactional overkill. Tannehill's proposal, that the mention of John's imprisonment at this point enables Luke to parallel the sufferings of the two prophets, attractive a proposal as it is, suffers itself from the same deficiency as the rounding-off theory: It does not explain why John is not permitted at least to perform the baptism of Jesus, which he could easily have done without undermining his other (literary) role of foreshadowing Jesus' own rejection. The same may be said of Webb's "thematic separation": It does not give an adequate explanation of John's absence from the baptism.

The most plausible of the suggested motives for the redaction at Luke 3:19–21 is that of Luke's reluctance to give the impression that John is somehow superior to Jesus. If John baptizes, is that not evidence that John stands in some degree of power and authority over those who seek to be baptized by him? In most cases, yes. But certainly not in the case of Jesus. Nor is Luke the only gospel writer to struggle with this possible cause of misunderstanding. All four of them do.

The synoptics take care to make clear that John's chronological precedence does not mean superior status over Jesus, a concern in eastern antiquity if not in contemporary western culture.<sup>19</sup> Thus they all quote Isa 40:3 (Luke cites 40:3–5) and Mal 3:1 to underline the (merely?) preparatory nature of John's mission (Mark 1:2–3; Matt 3:2; 11:10; Luke 3:4–6; 7:27). John himself willingly acknowledges that Jesus comes after him and yet is "mightier" than he—so much mightier

<sup>11</sup> 11. Tannehill, *Narrative* 1.53.

<sup>12</sup> 12. F. B. Craddock, *Luke* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1990) 50–51.

<sup>13</sup> 13. F. Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Zurich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1989) 1.178; cf. similarly Evans, *St Luke* 246.

<sup>14</sup> 14. Ernst, *Johannes* 100–101. Mattill (*Last Things* 16) is of the same opinion, although he notes that Acts 1:21–22 shows it is not clear that Luke has omitted all mention of John's baptism of Jesus. See also Böcher, "Lukas" 37.

<sup>15</sup> 15. Nolland, *Luke* 156.

<sup>16</sup> 16. Evans, *St Luke* 244.

<sup>17</sup> 17. Goulder, *Luke* 1.279.

<sup>18</sup> 18. Webb, *Baptizer* 64–65. He follows Fitzmyer (*Luke* 105–106). The other reference is to Wink, *John* 83 n. 1.

<sup>19</sup> 19. On this see O. Cullmann, *The Early Church* (London: SCM, 1956) 177–182.

that John may not even untie Jesus' sandals (Mark 1:7; Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16).<sup>20</sup> In fact John insists that his own water baptism is inferior to the baptism of the Spirit that Jesus brings (Mark 1:8; Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16). Matthew takes the issue one step further (3:13–15) by having John protest his unworthiness not only to untie Jesus' sandals, but also to baptize him. He needs instead to be baptized by Jesus. Only when Jesus himself insists on the ceremony does John obediently comply.

The fourth gospel is nearly—though not quite—comic in its frantic efforts to disabuse readers of any tendency to view John as ascendant over Christ. Some of the techniques just enumerated for the synoptics reappear in the fourth gospel with heightened intensity. Three times in succession, almost apologetically, the Baptist refers to the fact that he baptizes with mere water (John 1:26, 31, 33), but the Lamb of God baptizes with the Holy Spirit (v. 33). Again we hear of John's unworthiness to untie Jesus' sandals, even though Jesus "comes after" John (1:26–27). In fact John goes so far as to state explicitly: "After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me" (1:30; cf. 3:28). The principle of precedence holds after all, at least in the fourth gospel. Jesus, the Son of God, the divine Logos, was preexistent with God in the beginning.

Further, the fourth gospel is anxious to deflect assertions that John is the light coming into the world (1:8, 15), that he is the Messiah (1:20, 25; 3:28; cf. Luke 3:15), or Elijah or the Prophet (John 1:20–21, 25), or that he worked miracles (10:40–42). The concerns with Elijah and the Prophet surface implicitly in Mark (6:14–16) and Luke (9:8),<sup>21</sup> although Matthew tells those who are willing and able to accept it that John "is Elijah-who-is-to-come" (11:14–15).<sup>22</sup> In the end, the Baptist of the fourth gospel takes a cheerfully philosophical view when certain of his own disciples desert him to follow Jesus. In fact he encourages them to go (1:35–38; 3:23–36).

But the really astounding thing about the story, as told in the fourth gospel, is this: Although John does not baptize Jesus, we gather that he had seen the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus (1:32), and we may infer from this that Jesus was at least "baptized" in the Spirit. But the author does not put it that way. Thus not only does John not baptize Jesus, as is also the case in Luke, but also in the fourth gospel Jesus is not baptized with water at all.

The Q tradition sums up the four gospels' ambivalent attitude toward John the Baptist with the words of Jesus: "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt 11:11; cf. Luke 7:28). Why this evident veneration of the man on the one hand, and on the other a nearly paranoid scramble to keep him in his place? What had he done to deserve this hot and cold treatment in the gospels? Very likely nothing at all. Probably it was not John himself who was the trouble, but rather his faithful followers, the ones who would not desert him to follow Jesus.

For many years it has been taken as historical fact not only that some of the Baptist's original disciples did not pass over into the circle of Jesus' followers (Luke 3:22–26; 7:18–23//Matt 11:2–6; cf. Mark 6:29//Matt 14:12) but also that an actual baptist sect or sects existed long beyond the end of the first century. J. B. Lightfoot argues for the case as early as 1879 and can refer to his own predecessors in the theory. He does not actually identify the baptist sect with the Hemerobaptists, of whom we hear in early Christian antiheretical works, but he believes that the gospels testify at least to a widespread presence of Hemerobaptist principles in the Roman world at midcentury.<sup>23</sup>

Charles Scobie examines Acts 18 and 19, the Lukan infancy narrative, the fourth gospel, the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* and *Homilies*, and the work of Ephraem the Syrian as evidence for the continued existence of the baptist movement. *Recognitions* 2.23–24, for instance, identifies John as a Hemerobaptist and Simon Magus as one of his chief disciples, thus indirectly testifying to ongoing polemic against baptistic people in the second or third century. Scobie concludes that a baptist sect flourished in the first century, diverging sharply from Christianity after AD 60 and fading into obscurity during the second and third centuries as a Syrian backwater. The later forms of the movement revered John as a martyred prophet and even as the Messiah (obviously, since Jesus himself said that John was the greatest man born of women).<sup>24</sup> Raymond E. Brown not only notes the energetic way in which the fourth gospel combats misinterpretation of John's message and a false aggrandizement of his role but also detects in this very effort to correct

<sup>20</sup> 20. Webb (*Baptizer* 265) notes how Luke omits the phrase *opiso mou* from Mark 1:7, and probably from Q (= Matt 3:11), to avoid giving the impression that Jesus comes spatially after John (i.e. as his disciple). He cites H. Fleddermann (in n. 9), who points out Luke's use of temporal *meta* for *opiso* in Acts 13:25; 19:4.

<sup>21</sup> 21. Mark and Luke, unlike the fourth gospel, do not think of the Prophet-like-Moses whom God would raise up (Deut 18:15) but of "one of the prophets of old."

<sup>22</sup> 22. Most likely this difference between Matthew and the other gospels on the issue of whether or not John is Elijah (*redivivus*?) is to be explained in that whereas Matthew affirms that John's appearance is indeed the fulfillment of the predicted return of Elijah, the second, third and fourth gospels deny the exaggerated interpretation placed on this fulfillment by baptist sects. Marshall (*Luke* 147) in fact shows that Mark's and Luke's suppression of the John-Elijah parallel is not absolute. See also Webb, *Baptizer* 62 n. 42.

<sup>23</sup> 23. J. B. Lightfoot, *St Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon: A Revised Text with Introductions, Notes and Dissertations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959 [1879]). The discussion occurs in his "dissertation" on Essenism, esp. pp. 400–407. Cf. p. 403 n. 3.

<sup>24</sup> 24. C. H. H. Scobie, *John the Baptist* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964) 187–202.

(rather than to attack directly) that the Johannine Christian community held out a hope for the conversion of wayward baptist sectarians.<sup>25</sup>

While not everyone has been convinced that such a sect existed,<sup>26</sup> the long-prevailing opinion has been that by the middle 50s John the Baptist's following had moved at least as far abroad as proconsular Asia, if not farther. With the passing of time it came into sharp conflict with orthodox Christian communities before finally fading away in the second or third century.<sup>27</sup>

Acts 18:24–19:7 is one of the most obvious indicators of the ongoing activity of a baptist sect. But it cannot be taken at face value without further ado since it presents both historical and hermeneutical difficulties. Moreover adducing Acts 18:24–19:7 in order to illuminate Luke 3:19–21 runs the risk of stringing together passages that, with respect to context, are too far removed from one another to be mutually relevant. But the third gospel and the book of Acts do form a larger unity and, while they treat separate main themes, still as the related works of a single individual they share a number of overarching concerns. Thus we may feel justified in investigating the possibility that these two texts are thematically related, that Acts 18:24–19:7 helps to solve the puzzle of Luke's premature jailing of John.

The text tells the story of how Apollos comes from Alexandria to Ephesus, knowing only John's baptism, but "in the Spirit" teaching the way of Jesus eloquently and accurately, at least as far as he is able. Priscilla and Aquila take him under care and teach him to preach even more accurately. They then send him on to Achaia, where he has a powerfully effective ministry. Meanwhile Paul arrives in Ephesus, but too late to meet Apollos. Instead he encounters there a band of twelve "disciples," baptized into John's baptism but unacquainted with the Holy Spirit. They are teachable, however, and Paul explains to them the difference between John's baptism and baptism in the name of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> They submit to the latter and receive the gift of the Spirit by the laying on of Paul's hands.

This stretch of narrative poses a variety of problems. Historians, for instance, may wonder how reliable it is. Was there really such a group of baptists whom Paul met in Ephesus? Did Paul really not cross paths with Apollos there? Did Priscilla and Aquila really reeducate Apollos in Ephesus and send him on to Corinth? And so on.<sup>29</sup> The assumption often seems to be, in cases like this, that if Luke or some other author used a narrative with any other motive than the pure desire to report the facts, then obviously the facts have been distorted or the entire story contrived. This conclusion is far from necessary, however. Apropos of this text G. C. Darton states simply that Luke uses this incident as representative of many such encounters that Paul experienced. Luke wished to convey the "large momentous lesson by the small particular story about real people."<sup>30</sup> The issue can be framed as one of selection, omission, and placement just as legitimately as one of fabrication. But whether or not the incident took place as Luke records it, in Ephesus or anywhere else, is actually immaterial to the point of the present paper, though certainly not to other considerations Bible students have. The important issue here is simply what Luke meant by inserting these pericopes where he did and in the form in which we have them.

Assuming a certain level of historical authenticity, nonetheless we face yet another problem posed by this text. Were or were not Apollos and the twelve Ephesians already Christians when they enter the story? Even if historicity is denied, one can still ask whether Luke intended them to be understood as Christians. The question has long been debated and remains undecided.<sup>31</sup> Again, however, the matter has little bearing on the present subject. Christian or not, Apollos and the twelve are clearly considered

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<sup>25</sup> 25. R. E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 29, 69–71.

<sup>26</sup> 26. J. A. T. Robinson (*Twelve New Testament Studies* [SBT 34; Naperville: Allenson, 1962] 49–51 and n. 49) seems to find it inconceivable that there could have been rapport between Jesus and John themselves, on the one hand, and strife between the early Church and the later followers of the baptist sect, on the other. He therefore discounts the literary evidences for such a movement.

<sup>27</sup> 27. Suggestions that it persists in the Mandaean community of modern Iraq have not survived critical examination. Cf. e.g. Scobie, *John* 23–31. E. Käsemann ("The Disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus," *Essays on New Testament Themes* [SBT 41; London: SCM, 1964] 148) denies that the movement ever reached as far as Ephesus. Webb is of the opposite opinion (*Baptizer* 69).

<sup>28</sup> 28. That Luke meant Paul made a two-sided comparison of the two baptisms is clear but is only implicit in the text (Acts 19:4–5).

<sup>29</sup> 29. E.g. Käsemann ("Disciples"), G. Schille (*Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas* [THKNT ns 5; Berlin: Evangelische, 1983] 375), and G. Lüdemann (*Early Christianity according to the Traditions in Acts: A Commentary* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989] 211) regard Acts 19 as artificially assembled and providing no grounds for concluding there was such an historical situation in Ephesus. Käsemann's lively, crusty exposé of Luke's "fabrications" is framed in rigid categories ("Disciples" 136–141). G. R. Beasley-Murray (*Baptism in the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962] 109–112) and Dunn (*Baptism* 84–85) broaden the historical possibilities by suggesting a wide spectrum of responses to the messages of John and Jesus, of the baptist sects, and of the Church. There is no compelling reason to discard the basic historicity of these accounts. Käsemann's article performs the useful service of laying out clearly the problems of the passages, but his scorn for sympathetic and imaginative attempts to solve them is unnecessary.

<sup>30</sup> 30. G. C. Darton, *St John the Baptist and the Kingdom of Heaven* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1961) 39–40.

<sup>31</sup> 31. Most scholars regard Apollos as already a Christian when he first meets Priscilla and Aquila, or at least they regard Luke as regarding him so. Schille (*Apostelgeschichte* 374–375), however, understands Luke's description of Apollos as *zeōn tō pneumatī* (Acts 18:25) in the merely psychological sense of "burning in spirit" and cites Rom 12:11 in support. Ironically Käsemann ("Disciples" 143) uses the same Romans passage

somehow deficient in regard to orthodox Christianity, and their deficiencies are made good by the intervention of Paul and his friends. The pertinent question here is rather that of the function of these two pericopes in Luke's narrative.

Generally, answers to the question of function revolve around the theme of restoring or maintaining unity and orthodoxy within the universal Church, certainly a theme dear to Luke's heart in the book of Acts (as e.g. with the Council of Jerusalem, Paul's vow at the temple, etc.). Käsemann, for example, sees Luke's treatment of the Ephesian disciples as parallel to his handling of the Samaritan converts in Acts 8: Just as John and Peter appear on the scene to sanction the freelance evangelism of Philip, so Paul must instruct the Ephesian baptists and even rebaptize them. Thus the unity of the Church is assured, at least from Luke's point of view.<sup>32</sup> I. H. Marshall, on the other hand, points out that Philip's freelancing goes unchecked in the case of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:38). Still, Marshall acknowledges Luke's concern to insure that all legitimate baptisms involve administration in the name of Jesus.<sup>33</sup> Anton Dauer and Otto Böcher focus on the relationship between the orthodox Christian communities and the baptist movement. Dauer sees Luke as demonstrating that Paul and John both called on their hearers to believe in Jesus as the Coming One.<sup>34</sup> Böcher portrays Luke's purpose as to show that the Church has now supplanted the followers of John. In fact the number twelve (Acts 19:7) suggests a symbolic conversion of the entire baptist movement.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, Wink finds that these passages have more to do with Luke's desire to establish order within the Church—in the bestowal of the Spirit, for instance—than with baptist sects in Ephesus.<sup>36</sup>

Taking the same issue in a different direction, M. Wolter believes that for Luke the Ephesian twelve reflect on the character of Apollos. If Paul had met Apollos in Ephesus, as he did the twelve, he would have rebaptized him and conveyed the Spirit to him. The fact that Luke does not bring them together reflects the rivalry between them at Corinth, an unfortunate circumstance that Luke wishes to suppress in order to avoid giving the impression of serious Church controversy during Paul's lifetime.<sup>37</sup> Similarly Lüdemann takes the position that Luke inserts Acts 19:1–7 in order to make Apollos parallel to the twelve and thereby to demonstrate Apollos' inferiority to Paul. Otherwise Luke has no interest either in these disciples or in John.<sup>38</sup> In another connection, however, Michael Goulder defends the existence of a sharp dichotomy between Peter and Paul at Corinth by arguing a lack of competitiveness between Paul and Apollos, as Luke makes clear in Acts 18.<sup>39</sup>

According to J. Roloff and G. Schille, these two stories function as a model of the conflict between the orthodox Church and the baptist sects and as an archetypal formulation of what the Church must do: It must recognize and uncover these movements and bring them within the Church's tradition, just as Paul's example demonstrates.<sup>40</sup> Webb sums up his own discussion of the passage thus: "The pericope [19:1–7] suggests that John's ministry and baptism continued to have an influence in the early church, even as far away as Ephesus, and that the assimilation of John's disciples was a matter of concern in the early church."<sup>41</sup>

One solid result emerging from these discussions of Luke's purpose in Acts 18:24–19:7 is that John's latter-day disciples presented difficulties for the Christian communities of Luke's day or, better, for Luke's own Christian community. Whether his intention in Acts is to impugn Apollos' status or to defend it, to demonstrate ecclesiastical unity or to call for it, whether there were disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus or not, Luke probably would never have told these stories at all, or would not have told them in this particular way, unless there had been trouble at the time between followers of John and the Christians Luke knew. In addition to false interpretations of John's personal significance there were certainly false understandings of the meaning of his baptism, understandings that raised unsettling questions in the minds of Christians, questions disturbing enough to motivate Luke (and the other gospel writers) to expend considerable

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(erroneously cited as 12:21) in support of taking *pneuma* to refer to the Holy Spirit. Böcher ("Lukas" 40, 43–44), balking at what he takes as Luke's shoddy treatment of the Ephesians twelve vis-à-vis Apollos, concludes that Luke was himself a disciple of Apollos, perhaps one of the twelve. The status of the Ephesian disciples is even less clear. Earlier writers tended to take them as Christians, though "imperfectly formed," etc.; cf. e.g. Lightfoot (*Colossians* 402 and n. 5) and E. Lohmeyer (*Johannes der Täufer* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1932] 26). Later writers tend to see them (or Luke's opinion of them) as unconverted when they meet Paul; cf. e.g. Beasley-Murray (*Baptism* 111–112), Scobie (*John* 188–189; cf. 73 n. 1), and Dunn (*Baptism* 84–85). More recently Webb reverts to the earlier attitude (*Baptizer* 69). The disciples' ignorance of the Holy Spirit (19:2) is an ignorance not of his existence but of the fact of his already having come (ibid. 273–274).

<sup>32</sup> 32. Käsemann, "Disciples" 144–145. Lüdemann (*Early* 211) echoes this opinion.

<sup>33</sup> 33. Marshall, *Luke* 213.

<sup>34</sup> 34. A. Dauer, *Beobachtungen zur literarischen Arbeitstechnik des Lukas* (BBB 79; Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1990) 101–102.

<sup>35</sup> 35. Böcher, "Lukas" 41–42.

<sup>36</sup> 36. Wink, *John* 82–86.

<sup>37</sup> 37. M. Wolter, "Apollos und die ephesinischen Johannesjünger (Act 18, 24–19, 7)," *ZNW* 78 (1987) 49–73.

<sup>38</sup> 38. Lüdemann, *Early* 211. Tannehill (*Narrative* 2.234), on the other hand, does not see Apollos as parallel to the twelve with their degenerate form of John's heritage.

<sup>39</sup> 39. M. D. Goulder, "SOPHIA in 1 Corinthians," *NTS* 37 (1991) 516–534, esp. 518.

<sup>40</sup> 40. J. Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas* (NTD 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1981) 281; Schille, *Apostelgeschichte* 375.

<sup>41</sup> 41. Webb, *Baptizer* 69.

literary effort in addressing them.<sup>42</sup> Even though Luke calls the twelve Ephesians “disciples” and refers to their “believing,” they are apparently not true Christians<sup>43</sup> (cf. Rom 8:9). Yet they are confused with Christians and may even have considered themselves Christians (or may symbolize those who did). Luke’s deliberate incorporation of these stories here implies that for himself and for his own people there was confusion that he desired to clarify.

How then does all of this illuminate Luke 3:19–21? Five points, well recognized and widely discussed, have been enumerated: (1) that Luke edits the arrest of John and the baptism of Jesus in a startling way; (2) that this redaction is no accident and begs for an explanation; (3) that all the gospels testify to problems with the relationship of John the Baptist to Jesus; (4) that there was ongoing conflict between the Church and the baptist sects throughout the first century; and (5) that the book of Acts testifies to this ongoing conflict. We can now relate these five points to each other in a way that may explain Luke’s premature jailing of John.

John Nolland believes that the Ananias and Sapphira story (Acts 5:1–11) is to be understood as an example of the purging work of the Holy Spirit—that is, as a fulfillment of John the Baptist’s message in Luke 3:17.<sup>44</sup> Given the narrative unity of Luke-Acts, to use Tannehill’s phrase, this is an entirely reasonable suggestion. In the same way Acts 18:24–19:7 can be seen as an explicit, narrative assertion of what lies implicit in Luke’s redaction of Mark’s (or even Matthew’s) version of the arrest and imprisonment of John and of the baptism of Jesus. While Luke and his people revered the memory of John the Baptist and valued his ministry highly, Luke wished to do what he could in his gospel and his apostolic history to suppress the confusing, aberrant interpretations that the later baptist sects were placing upon their hero and his baptism.

Doubtless, the displacement of the narration of John’s imprisonment to a point preceding Jesus’ baptism serves to round off the material on John and to get him offstage in preparation for the appearance of Jesus fully grown and ready to embark on his ministry. But the puzzling further removal of John from the baptism itself must be explained as part of Luke’s antibaptistic polemic. Rather than to give false impressions or to provide grounds for attacks from unfriendly sectarians, Luke discreetly omits to mention the fact—well known to him—that Jesus was baptized by John. Even when he comes close to conceding the fact in Acts 1:21–22 he chooses his words very carefully: He neither denies nor admits there that John baptized Jesus.

But Luke’s treatment is not only a cautious avoidance of material open to dangerous misinterpretation. It functions also as a warning to the faithful not to be misled by false claims on the part of baptist sectarians. Further, it speaks proactively to the sectarians themselves: O. Böcher observes that at Luke 9:8–9, Luke absolves Herod from the superstitious fear that the Baptist has been raised from the dead (cf. Matt 14:1–2; Mark 6:14–16). Thus, from those in the baptist circles who had not been able to come to terms with John’s death and who hoped for his return as Elijah *redivivus*, Luke removes all grounds for such a hope and instead offers only the possibility of a wondrous return of Jesus.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> 42. See *ibid.* 171–172, and esp. n. 22, in which he lists other passages in Acts where Luke distinguishes John’s baptism from a Christian interpretation of baptism: 1:5; 2:38; 11:16.

<sup>43</sup> 43. Cf. J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1975; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979) 153.

<sup>44</sup> 44. Nolland, *Luke* 153, 155.

<sup>45</sup> 45. Böcher, “Lukas” 36.

<sup>1</sup>The Evangelical Theological Society. (1993; 2002). *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Volume 36* (36:455). The Evangelical Theological Society.

