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Introduction

The pioneering work of Martin Dibelius on the speeches in the Acts of the Apostles secured the concept of the kerygma as the center of first century Christian discourse in 20th century scholarship.1 According to a widespread view in which the term “kerygma” stands at the center of Christian preaching, the key to the first century message of followers of Jesus was a focus on the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.2 A sociorhetorical reassessment of the results of Dibelius’ approach calls for a reconfiguration of this view of the emerging Christian message during the first century CE. The thesis we will demonstrate is that an interwoven set of argumentative story-lines provided an emergent structure for an ever-expanding argumentative belief-story about Christianity at work in the world. This emergent structure provided an environment of reasoning and argumentation so deeply embedded in biblical-Jewish-Hellenistic-Roman modes of religious belief that highly different sets of story-lines could be used to evoke an interwoven network of meanings and beliefs that were the key to emergent Christian discourse.

The broader nature of the emergent Christian message has come into view as a result of a reintroduction of rhetorical analysis and interpretation into New Testament study. This chapter begins with a review of emphases during the last half of the 20th century that have gradually been...

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modified through rhetorical analysis and interpretation. As the chapter continues, we will show how the present state of interpretation provides the context for us to see the interwoven network of argumentative belief-stories that create the story-lines that are the key to Christian discourse to the present day.

The Speeches in Acts and the Concept of a Central Christological Kerygma

Martin Dibelius’ groundbreaking essays on the speeches in Acts give the impression that narration of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus occurs repetitively throughout all the speeches. In his study Dibelius makes the following assertion:

Regularly an introduction showing the situation at the time is followed by the kerygma of Jesus’ life, passion and resurrection (2.22-24; 3.13-15; 5.30, 31; 10.36-42; 13.23-25), mostly with emphasis upon the fact that the disciples were witnesses (2.32; 3.15; 5:32; 10.39, 41; 13.31); to this is added evidence from the scriptures (2.25-31; 3.22-26; 10.43; 13.32-37) and an exhortation to repentance (2.38f.; 3.17-20; 5.31; 10.42f.; 13.38-41).

The harmony not only of outline but also of content is so striking as to require explanation.  

In this statement Dibelius is observing very important information. Unfortunately, however, the information he cites is present in only five (2, 3, 5, 10, 13) of the twenty-four speeches he identified in Acts.  

Indeed, the data Dibelius was discussing is only a partial selection of speeches in the first thirteen chapters of Acts. These five speeches occur in the midst of other speeches in the first half of Acts that set the stage for the speeches that occur in the last fifteen chapters. While Dibelius’ observation is true for the five speeches to which he refers, it is misleading concerning the inner rhetorical nature of Christian preaching as it emerges in the unfolding story of Acts. We will see in detail below that statements about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection in Acts 14—28 regularly occur in sections of speeches presenting proofs concerning narration related to the setting of the speech, rather than in the primary narration portion of the speech. This means that statements about Jesus regularly are not the central message of the

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4 Ibid., 150, where he asserts that there are “about twenty-four” speeches in Acts, admitting that interpreters may disagree “as to what can be called ‘speeches’. ”
speech but are a means for authorizing the actions of God, the coming of the Holy Spirit, or the actions and speech of followers of Jesus. When statements about Jesus do occur, then, they are enabling or authorizing assertions in a gospel message in which God, the Holy Spirit, or the actions and speech of a follower of Jesus regularly stands at the center of the argumentative gospel story. In a candid moment Dibelius himself saw this when he asserted: “…the proclamation of Jesus’ words and deeds did not set forth all there was to ‘the gospel’ – for to this belonged likewise the message of the apostles – though it was its foundation.”\(^5\) Unfortunately, the lack of rhetorical tools in Dibelius’ approach, along with his prioritization of “the earliest tradition,” kept him from pursuing a mode of analysis and interpretation that would show how this worked in emergent Christian discourse.

Eduard Schweizer’s “Concerning the Speeches in Acts” provides an excellent place to see how Martin Dibelius’ approach produced a consensus about “the christological kerygma” by the middle of the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century. After Schweizer’s essay was published in German in 1957, an English translation appeared in 1966 in a widely circulated volume called Studies in Luke-Acts.\(^6\) Referring to Martin Dibelius’ earlier essays on the speeches in Acts, Schweizer observes “a far-reaching identity of structure” in the five speeches of Peter in Acts 2; 3; 4; 5; 10:\(^7\)

\begin{itemize}
\item[a)] direct address (1, 2, 3, 6);
\item[b)] appeal for attention (1, 3, 7; 5);
\item[c)] pointing out a misunderstanding among the audience (1, 2, 3);
\item[d)] frequently starting with a quotation from Scripture (1, 2, 4, 5, 6);
\item[e)] the christological kerygma (with typical agreements in all the speeches);
\item[f)] scriptural proof proper (1, 2, 3, 5, 6);
\item[g)] pointing out a misunderstanding in conjunction with the Christ-kerygma (1, 2, 3);
\item[h)] the proclamation of salvation (also a call to repentance in 1, 2, 4);
\item[i)] focusing of the message on the specific audience (1, 2, 5, 6).
\end{itemize}


\(^7\) Ibid., 210.
Of particular importance for our analysis is the use of the phrases “the christological kerygma” and “the Christ-kerygma.” This language was especially promoted by form critics during the beginning of the 20th century, and it has become so central to New Testament study that interpreters regularly abbreviate it simply to “kerygma.” Instead of citing the verses in the speeches that contain the “kerygma,” Schweizer asserts that there are “typical agreements in all the speeches” and includes a footnote to portions of two of his published works. Careful analysis of the pages he cites, however, shows a discussion of various verses in the New Testament referring to Jesus’ death, resurrection, and exaltation that do not support his assertion about “typical agreements.”

In the context of Schweizer’s discussion of five of the speeches attributed to Peter in Acts, he briefly discusses Paul’s speeches in Antioch in Pisidia (13:16-41), Lystra (14:15-17), and Athens (17:22-31). He appropriately observes that Paul’s speech in Acts 13 “is far more complicated,” containing “a sort of parallel” to the speech of Stephen in the first half and a rather different sequence of topics from the other speeches. He observes that Paul’s speech at Lystra is “unusually short and in a sense fragmentary,” and he labels 14:16-17 as “the theological kerygma” even though there is no reference or even allusion to Jesus Christ in them. Schweizer considers Paul’s speech in Acts 17 to be “more interesting and more conclusive” about “a largely parallel structure.” He supports this assertion, however, by labeling Paul’s assertion about God’s creation of the world (17:24) as “passages from Scripture” and Paul’s recitation of lines from Greek poets (17:28) as “proof from ‘Scripture’, taken from Greek poets.” In this instance, knowing there is no recitation of the kerygma he points to “the reference to Christ as judge and to his resurrection as proof” in the final verse of the speech (17:31).

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8 Ibid., 216, n. 16: Eduard Schweizer, Erneidrigung und Erhöhung bei Jesus und seinen Nachfolgern (2d ed.; ATANT 28; Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1962) 53-54, sec. 4a; idem, Lordship and Discipleship (SBT 28; Naperville: Allenson, 1960) 32-33.
9 Ibid., 210.
10 Ibid., 212. Acts 14:16-17 contain the following story-line about God: “In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good – giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy.” The witness here is not Jesus, but rain, fruitful seasons, which produce food and joyful hearts.
11 Ibid., 213.
Overall, it becomes clear that Schweizer’s interest in asserting the presence of similarities not only leads him away from productive analysis and interpretation of the differences, but it encourages him to mislabel some verses to make them look more similar than they are. The result, then, is a blend of astute observations and significantly misleading assertions about typical agreements. The solution, we suggest, lies in following both the agreements and the differences with an analytical-interpretive approach that displays the importance of both in emerging Christian discourse during the first century CE.

Applying Oratorical Rhetoric to the Speeches in Acts

By the 1990s, significant interest had emerged in the relation of the speeches in Acts to the three main types of classical oratorical speeches: forensic (judicial); deliberative; and epideictic. In this context, a new set of terminology took center stage. Philip E. Satterthwaite has summarized well the view of the three types of classical oratorical speeches that began to guide analysis by many New Testament scholars of the speeches in Acts. Forensic oratory takes the form:

a) proem (*exordium*);

b) a narration of the facts of the case (*narratio*);

c) the division of the argument of the speech into a series of propositions to be demonstrated (*partitio*);

d) the demonstration itself (*confirmatio*);

e) refutation of opposing viewpoints (*reprehensio*);

f) epilogue (*conclusio*).

Deliberative oratory omits the refutation, giving the form:

a) proem;

b) narration;

   c) division;

   d) demonstration;

   e) epilogue.

Epideictic oratory has a yet simpler form:

a) proem;
b) amplified topics (e.g., a setting forth of the life of the person commemorated under various heads);

c) epilogue.\(^{12}\)

Here it looks as though there is a shift away from language about some of the content of the speeches, like scripture and kerygma, to language that simply describes the rhetorical nature of the sequential parts of oratorical speeches. The effect of this shift, however, is quite different. Rhetorical analysis and interpretation of the speeches in Acts created a context where interpreters began to give more equal attention to each part of every speech. For example, when Philip Satterthwaite summarizes C. Clifton Black’s classical oratorical analysis of Paul’s speech in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-41) to establish an overarching template for speeches in Acts, he includes parentheses that open the door to story-lines and arguments about God, Holy Spirit, Israel, Jews, God-fearers, and Gentiles in addition to argumentation and story-lines about Jesus. Satterthwaite summarizes Black’s presentation of Paul’s speech in Acts 13 as follows:

a) narration (vv. 17-25, a review of Israelite history, leading up to the coming of Jesus as savior);

b) division (v. 26, in this case simply a single proposition, that the message of salvation is now being proclaimed to Jews and God-fearers);

c) demonstration of the proposition (vv. 27-37, arguing that God has vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead, and that therefore salvation can be preached to Israel);

d) conclusion (vv. 38-41, urging acceptance of this salvation on his hearers).\(^{13}\)

Once interpreters began to use classical oratorical categories to interpret the speeches in Acts, they noticed significant variations in the contexts that were related to the remarkable flexibility in the speeches. This gave rise to exigence as an important feature of rhetorical interpretation.\(^{14}\) Lloyd F. Bitzer emphasized the importance of the context with the following conclusion: “A rhetorical situation may be defined as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations which

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presents an exigence that can be completely or partially removed if discourse – introduced into the situation – can influence audience thought or action so as to bring about positive modification of the exigence.”15 Satterthwaite observes that Acts 3:12-26 is “a somewhat anomalous composition in which the constituent parts can all be classified according to classical rhetorical categories, but the structure is unusual.”16 Satterthwaite was observing, of course, that something beyond oratorical structure was necessary to interpret the sequence of the speech, even though each constituent part had a clear relation to conventional parts of oratorical speeches. He decided to use the narrative context Luke had created for the speech as a major way to interpret the variation. Therefore, he reminded the reader that in the mind of Luke the setting of the speech was “an impromptu sermon given in the aftermath of a spectacular healing” and presented the constituent oratorical parts in the following manner:

a) proem (v. 12);

b) proposition (God has glorified his Son, v. 13a);

c) demonstration (vv. 13b-16);

d) peroration (vv. 17-21), of which the concluding words form another proposition (the reference in vv. 20b-21 to Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy);

e) which leads into a further demonstration (vv. 22-24);

f) and a further peroration (vv. 25-26).17

Referring to this as “a loose structure,” Satterthwaite suggests that Luke “may have intended this speech to give an impression of something exuberant, spontaneous, and impassioned, which would naturally tend towards a loose structure.”18

After this, Satterthwaite displays Paul’s speech in Acts 17:22-31 as “a textbook example of a deliberative speech”:19

a) proem (v. 22, seeking to secure audience goodwill);

b) narration (v. 23a, giving background);

\[15\] Ibid., 24.
\[16\] Ibid., 359.
\[17\] Ibid., 359-60.
\[18\] Ibid., 359.
\[19\] Ibid., 360.
c) division (again a single proposition: I will tell you of this God you worship as unknown, v. 23b);

d) demonstration (God as incomparably greater than idols, vv. 24-29);

e) peroration (vv. 30-31).

Then Satterthwaite points to Bruce Winter’s chapter on forensic oratory in Acts 24—26 and to Duane Watson’s analysis of epideictic oratory in Paul’s Miletus address in Acts 20:17-38.20 When the interest turned to rhetorical interpretation of the speeches in Acts, then, interpreters used overall observations about oratorical speeches to guide their analysis and interpretation. In the context of this change in approach, one notices a move away from an emphasis on “kerygma” in the speeches in Acts to a wide range of topics and issues. When rhetorical interpreters have encountered significant variations from conventional oratorical structures in the speeches, they regularly have pointed to the context the narrator created for the speech to account for the flexibility in the inner components in the context of their function as deliberative, forensic, or epideictic oratory.

**Correlating Oratorical and Progymnastic Rhetoric in the Speeches in Acts**

When interpreters of early Christian literature use classical oratorical guidelines to interpret writings that function like speeches, whether those writings be letters, discourses like the Sermon on the Mount, or impromptu speeches like one encounters in Acts, there regularly is disagreement among interpreters whether the overall function of the writing is deliberative, forensic, or epideictic. One way to deal with this challenge is to argue that a particular writing somehow combines two or more oratorical functions. But another tool that has become available to interpreters is progymnastic rhetoric, namely the textbooks rhetoricians wrote to guide grammarians as they created “writing-speaking” exercises that would give students initial practice in composition-performance that would prepare them for their oratorical training in the

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next phase of their education. When George A. Kennedy presented a brief rhetorical analysis of twenty-five speeches in Acts in his *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, oratorical rhetoric was heavily influential on his approach as he presented a conclusion about the oratorical function, sometimes mixed, of each speech. In addition, however, he opened the door for progymnastic analysis and interpretation in the speeches as he identified enthymemes, emphasized a special kind of judicial stasis of quality he named “metastasis,” namely transference of responsibility to God, and emphasized the presence of ethos and pathos. Kennedy identified and briefly interpreted twenty-five speeches in Acts:

1) Speech of Peter, 1:16-22: deliberative;
2) Speech of Peter, 2:14-36: deliberative; 2:38-39, 40b: judicial (stasis: fact);
3) Speech of Peter, 3:12-18: judicial (metastasis); 3:19-26: deliberative;
4) Speech of Peter, 4:8-11: judicial (stasis: quality – “good deed”); 4:12: deliberative;
5) The Apostles’ Prayer, 4:24-26 epideictic; 27-30: deliberative;
6) Speech of Peter and the Apostles before the Council, 5:29-32: judicial (metastasis);
7) Speech of Gamaliel to the Council, 5:35-39: deliberative;
8) Speech of Stephen before the Council, 7:2-53: incomplete structure (stasis: *antengklema*, counteraccusation, with jurisdiction effect). Needs either an explicit rejection of the right of the Council to try him (judicial), or a deliberative epilogue calling for repentance;
9) Speech of Peter, 10:34-43: epideictic;
10) Speech of Peter, 11:4-18: judicial (metastasis);
11) Speech of Paul, 13:16-41: epideictic;
12) Speech of Peter, 15:7-11: deliberative;

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13) The Compromise of James, 15:12-21: deliberative(?). Verse 21 is not actually a reason why these four requirements are the essential ones. Luke seems to have overlooked a necessary part of James’ speech or to have omitted a reference to previous discussion of these four laws.

14) Paul’s Areopagus Speech, 17:22-31: a judicial situation (no mention of stasis) with an ultimate deliberative goal;

15) Speech of the Town Clerk of Ephesus, 19:35-40: deliberative;

16) Paul’s Farewell Address at Miletus to the Elders of Ephesus, 20:18-35: deliberative;


18) Paul’s Speech to the Jews of Jerusalem, 22:3-22: judicial (metastasis);

19) Speech of Tertullus to Felix, 24:2-8: judicial (presentation of charges);

20) Paul’s Defense before Felix, 24:10-21: judicial (stasis: fact);

21) Address of Festus to Agrippa, 25:14-21: judicial (clarification of charges);

22) Address of Festus to Agrippa, 25:24-27: judicial (clarification of charges);

23) Paul’s Defense before Agrippa, 26:2-23: judicial (metastasis);

24) Paul’s Prophecy on Shipboard, 27:21-26: epideictic;

25) Paul’s Address to the Jewish Leaders of Rome, 28:17-20: anticipation of charges against him; proem for subsequent preaching.23

Among these twenty-five speeches, eight are attributed to Peter (including “Peter and the apostles” in 5:29-32) and eight are attributed to Paul. This means, first of all, that Schweizer’s selection of five speeches to create a model of early Christian preaching excludes at least three speeches attributed to Peter, and it significantly skews the nature of the speeches attributed to Paul by looking at only three out of eight. Even Kennedy does not include Paul’s speech in Acts 28:25-28, but we will include it, bringing the total of Paul’s speeches to nine. Beyond the analysis of all the speeches attributed to Peter and Paul, Kennedy’s analysis reminds us of the importance of the well-known speeches of Stephen in Acts 7:2-53 and James in Acts 15:12-21, and of seven additional speeches in Acts attributed to various other people: (1) the Twelve apostles: 4:24-30; (2) the Pharisee Gamaliel: 5:35-39; (3) the town clerk of Ephesus: 19:35-40; (4) the Brethren of Paul in Jerusalem: 21:20-25; (5) the “rhetor” Tertullus, representing high

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23 Ibid., 116-39.
priest Ananias and the elders before Felix: 24:2-8; and (6) (7) two speeches of Festus to Agrippa: 25:14-21, 24-27. We will focus our attention on twenty speeches in Acts: eight speeches attributed to Peter (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 15), ten speeches attributed to Paul (13, 14, 17, 20, 22, 24, 26, 17, 28(2), and the two speeches attributed to Stephen (7) and James (15). The goal of this analysis and interpretation will be to show the network of interwoven argumentative story-lines that create an emergent structure for Christian discourse that has been perpetuated throughout the centuries to the present day.

As a transition to the next step in our thesis about the speeches in Acts, it will be helpful to observe two special features of Kennedy’s analysis and interpretation. First, Kennedy’s analysis and interpretation identifies five enthymemes in speeches in Acts. Although he does not emphasize the nature of their content, in each instance the subject of the argumentation is God. Second, among the twenty-five speeches Kennedy discusses, he identifies five judicial speeches as having a stasis of metastasis, transference of responsibility to God (Peter: 3:12-18; 5:29-32; 11:4-18; Paul: 22:3-22; 26:2-23). Such repetitive reference to God in judicial situations points to an attribute of emerging Christian discourse that rhetorical analysis and interpretation must bring into the foreground of interpretation. Our answer will be to blend analysis and interpretation of rhetorolects with oratorical and progymnastic rhetorical analysis in the speeches in Acts. To begin our sociorhetorical approach to the speeches in Acts, however, it is important that we attend to a specific rhetorical phenomenon that occurs in the context of the speeches of Peter and Stephen in Acts 1—15.

God, the Holy Spirit, Peter, and the Hebrew Bible in Acts 1—15

One of the noticeable aspects of the speeches in Acts is the large number that present an argumentative story-line about God. In emergent Christian discourse, the gospel is first and foremost “God’s story.” Either the word God or the word Lord referring to God occurs twice

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24 Acts 2:15 (117); 4:12 (119); 5:38-39 (120); 10:38 (123); 17:25 (130); 20:28 (133).
as often as words for Jesus in the speeches in Acts. We will briefly analyze these in the context of the statements about God and the Holy Spirit in the speeches of Peter and Stephen in Acts 1—15 to set the stage for our overview of all the speeches in Acts.

Either the word God or the word Lord referring to God occurs forty times in seven speeches attributed to Peter. A large number of these references to God’s actions do not refer either implicitly or explicitly to Jesus. Five of the references concern God’s pouring out of Holy Spirit on all flesh. This action in God’s story-line begins in the story of Pentecost, where Peter recites words of the prophet Joel to introduce a promise by God from the past that during the last days God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh (2:17). Peter introduces God’s words in the context of an enthymematic argument that the devout Jews speaking in native languages in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost “are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning” (2:15). This is an argument from the contrary that creates the context for Peter to introduce an alternative, namely that God has poured out his Spirit on these devout people (2:17). The promise of God’s pouring out of his Spirit points beyond the devout Jews gathered in Jerusalem, of course, because it asserts that God will pour out his Spirit on “all” flesh. In the mode of prophetic rhetorolect, this promise introduces the “emergent structure” for a story-line in Acts where God will pour out his Spirit on people of all “nations” (translated “Gentiles” in most English Bibles). The story of Pentecost in Acts 2 enacts God’s pouring out of his Spirit on about three thousand devout Jews from many nations (2:5, 41). Then Peter introduces priestly ritual guidelines for devout Jews to receive the benefits of this promise:

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26 A word for God occurs approximately one hundred times and words for Jesus approximately fifty times in the twenty speeches.
29 Kennedy, NT Interpretation, 117.
30 For “nations/Gentiles” in the NT, see Davina C. Lopez, Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul’s Mission (Paul in Critical Contexts; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).
a) Repent,

b) And be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ,

c) So that your sins may be forgiven;

d) And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

e) For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him. (2:38-39).

These guidelines exhibit one of the most important characteristics of emergent Christian discourse, namely the dynamic, integral way it blends rhetorolects together. In an environment where prophetic rhetorolect is in the foreground with an emphasis on God’s selection of certain people to receive special benefits through a promise that requires response to a call to repentance and action, it blends an important ritual action into the argumentation, namely an argument internal to priestly rhetorolect. One of the most interesting aspects of emergent Christian priestly rhetorolect is an absence of focus on the people who lead or administer the ritual, namely the people who perform the “priestly” function. Emergent Christian priestly rhetorolect regularly uses passive voice verbs that put the “priestly” people in the background. This creates a detailed focus on the participants, in this instance those who repent, who are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, who have their sins forgiven, who receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and who have this promise for themselves, for their children, and for all people far away whom the Lord God calls. The call of the Lord keeps a central feature of prophetic rhetorolect in the foreground as the priestly rhetorolect focuses on the recipients and the benefits they will receive, rather than on the “priestly” leaders who oversee the ritual.

We will see as we proceed how those who are called become the bodily agents for moving the story-line forward. In other words, these newly called people become the emergent structure for the continuation of the story-line until the end of time. Peter’s discourse clarifies the end point of the story-line as it recites Joel’s words that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved at the time of the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day (2:20-21). In the context of the foregrounding of prophetic and priestly rhetorolect in the Pentecost story,
apocalyptic rhetorolect creates a background frame for the salvation of all who receive God’s Spirit at the end of time by calling on the name of the Lord. As the prophetic-apocalyptic storyline pushes forward, the priestly rhetorolect directs people toward community action that creates the forward movement of a large community of people unified and directed by an overall emergent structure of thought and action, even though the people themselves have very different identities on the basis of geography, language, and racial and ethnic heritage.

Peter reemphasizes the prophetic story-line of God when he speaks to the people gathered in Solomon’s Portico in the Jerusalem temple, telling them that they are “the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (Acts 3:25). When miracle rhetorolect moves into the foreground in Acts 4—5, more generalized mantic and ritual modes characteristic of widespread Mediterranean religious discourse blend with the ritual and prophetic rhetorolect in the story that have a deep relation to scripture and fulfillment of scripture. When Ananias and Sapphira hold back from the community some of the proceeds from sale of their possessions, the issue lies with their relation to God and the Holy Spirit. As Peter puts it, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? … You did not lie to us but to God” (Acts 5:4). After God’s power brings death both to Ananias and Sapphira, God’s power brings signs and wonders through the apostles (5:12), with a focus on Peter whereby even his shadow brings healing to people who are brought out into the streets (5:15-16). When the high priest arrests and imprisons Peter and the apostles, an angel of the Lord opens the doors of the prison and brings them out, telling them, “Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life” (5:20). Already in Acts 5, then, emergent Christian discourse is moving beyond modes of healing, killing, and divine communication in the Hebrew Bible to modes of miracle and mantic divine communication well-known in the broader Mediterranean world. In this context, the Pharisee Gamaliel introduces enthymematic reasoning about God and the apostles that any person in the Mediterranean world could understand:

Exhortative thesis: In the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone,
Rationale: because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them – in that case you may even be found fighting against God!” (5:38-39)\(^3\)

The issue here is that the gospel of the followers of Jesus is first and foremost a story about the Lord God “who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them” (4:24). The apostles themselves know this, and the Pharisee Gamaliel introduces reasoning that the ongoing story will confirm, namely that the spreading of the gospel is God’s will at work among the nations of the world.

The prophetic promise of God’s story for the world in Acts receives detailed presentation in the speech of Stephen in Acts 7:2-53. The narration in Acts 6 emphasizes that the activities of the followers of Jesus are “the word of God” at work in the world (6:2, 4, 7). When internal dispute arises between Stephen and members of the synagogue of the Freedman, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and some people from Cilicia and Asia (6:9), “false witnesses” accuse Stephen before the Jerusalem temple council of asserting that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the temple and change the customs that Moses handed down (6:13-14). Stephen’s response presents a fifty verse prophetic story-line about God that ends with a prophetic pronouncement that “the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands” (7:48) followed by an accusation that “your ancestors” persecuted the prophets, killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and received the law but did not keep it (7:53). When Stephen gazes into heaven, he receives an apocalyptic vision of the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (7:55). When he cries out that he has seen the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, the people drag him out of the city and stone him. Praying “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” Stephen cries out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them,” and dies. The “gospel” story-line in Luke-Acts, then, is first and foremost a story about God. God’s story-line moves through the story-line of Jesus’ life, deeds, teaching, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven into the story-lines of followers of Jesus who carry out God’s will for salvation in the world. In Acts, God’s story-line creates the basis for all the other story-lines. Indeed, God’s story-line creates the potential for every person in the Mediterranean world and in every region.

\(^3\) See Kennedy’s identification of this as a disjunctive hypothetical enthymeme, NT Interpretation, 121. See James Squires for Fate in the Mediterranean world and Luke-Acts.
of God’s world in the future to enter into the benefits of the gospel story. Internal to the argumentative belief-story about God in Acts, then, is an argument that this story has the potential to move into all nations everywhere before the end of time. If analysis and interpretation misses this emergent structure in the rhetoric of Acts, it misses a primary rhetorical phenomenon that accompanied emergent Christian discourse as it worked its way into multiple sectors of the Mediterranean world.

After the story of Stephen’s death, Philip’s work with people in Samaria creates a context where Peter and John are sent to work in Samaria for a while before they return again to Jerusalem (8:4-25). After the commissioning of Saul/Paul in Acts 9:1-30, Peter again becomes central to the story as he works in Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa in the coastal region northwest of Jerusalem (9:32-42). Then in Acts 10—11 a dramatic sequence of events makes Peter central to God’s mission to the Gentiles. Through a vision to Peter when he is praying in Joppa, he is commissioned to the mission by seeing the heavens open, seeing a large sheet coming down from heaven with all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds on it, and hearing a voice speaking to him, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane” (10:10-16). This vision creates the context in which people who have been directed by an angel of God come to Peter and lead him to the house of the Roman Gentile Cornelius in Caesarea (10:17-29). After Cornelius tells Peter how an angel had directed him to send for him, he explains that they had been directed by the angel “in the presence of God” to “listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say” (10:29).

When Peter preaches to them, he opens with a thesis that not only introduces an argumentative story-line about God’s promise to all nations but also presupposes the story-line that brought him to his present understanding. As he puts it at the beginning of his sermon: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (10:34-35). This focus on Peter’s understanding comes into greater prominence when Peter explains to circumcised believers in Jerusalem that his mission to uncircumcised people and his eating with them was not something he himself chose to do. As the narrator says, Peter explained to them “step by step” how God had caused it to happen (11:4). In the speech that follows, Peter preaches the gospel by telling “his own” story.

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33 NRSV translation of *kathexēs*, often translated “in order” or “in sequence.”
This is a key turning point in the story in Acts. In an overall context where there is emphasis on people being “witnesses” to what God has done and what happened in the time of Jesus, for the first time an apostle preaches the gospel by telling “his own story.” Peter begins the sermon with the word “I” (ἐγώ), and as he tells the story he himself is the focus of attention. In 11:5-8, Peter speaks in first person singular: I was; I saw; I looked; I saw; I also heard; I replied. In 11:11-14 first person singular “me” intermingles with first person plural “we” and “us” as Peter presents the specific naming of himself by an angel: sent to me; where we were; told me; not to make a distinction between them and us; accompanied me; we entered; he told us; bring Simon who is called Peter; he will give you a message. Then in 11:15-17 Peter returns to first person singular: I began to speak; I remembered; who was I that I could hinder God? Grounded in Peter’s own story, his assertion at the end has the rhetorical force of an enthymeme, namely a thesis supported by a rationale:

Thesis: I could not hinder God, could I?

Rationale: Because God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The narrator of Acts presents Peter’s argument as entirely successful: And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles (nations) the repentance that leads to life” (11:18). Peter successfully preached the gospel of God’s giving of salvation to the nations by embedding “his own story” in “God’s story,” which includes God’s actions with the Lord Jesus Christ. At this point, many readers will be thinking ahead to the contexts in later chapters in Acts where Paul tells his own story. In order to see the importance of this in the overall network of story-lines in Acts, we must stay with Peter’s preaching through his last sermon in Acts 15:7-11 before turning to Paul’s preaching.

After Peter tells his own story in Jerusalem to preach the gospel about God’s extension of his word to Gentiles (11:4-18), Peter’s next and final speech in Acts (15:7-11) occurs after he is imprisoned by Herod, released from prison by an angel of the Lord, and flees from Herod to


35 See Kennedy, NT Interpretation, 123-24.
Caesarea (12:3-19). In addition to this, Barnabas and Paul have worked together in Syrian Antioch (11:22-30), traveled together throughout Cyprus, Pamphylia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia (13:1—14:28), and they have disputed with individuals from Judea who came to Syrian Antioch teaching that believers should be circumcised according to the custom of Moses (15:1-2). When Paul, Barnabas, and some others are sent to Jerusalem to discuss the question with the apostles and elders (15:2-5), Peter is there and presents an argument for allowing Gentiles to become believers without requiring that they follow the laws of the ancestors (15:7-11). Peter grounds his argument in a story-line that features God as the subject of the action. But there is also another part to the story. He embeds “his own story” in God’s story, blending them so that his own story is part of God’s story of taking the good news to the Gentiles. Peter makes this move explicit, calling attention to his story with the use of first person singular reference: “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers” (15:7). After this opening statement, Peter immediately blends the activity of God and the Holy Spirit with “us”: “And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us” (15:8-9). Then Peter ends with an argument from the contrary: “Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (15:10-11). The rhetorical effect of this story-argument is to make Peter’s story an internal part of the gospel story. Indeed, Peter’s story flows naturally out of the prophetic promise in God’s story-line and the story-line of the Holy Spirit that salvation will be brought to all the nations through the gospel. As mentioned above, this rhetorical move creates an emergent structure that has a potential for extending down through the story-line of any number of believers who may be called by God in the future to preach the gospel in any region of the world before the end of time. But the story-line of Acts does not leave this emergent structure unelaborated. Rather, Acts 16—28 exhibits how the story-line of a person who was not a witness to the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, namely Saul/Paul, could be brought into the movement in such a way that his story also becomes an internal part of God’s story-line of bringing salvation to all the nations of the world.
All readers of the thesis I have just set forth will recognize that up to this point my foregrounding of God’s story, the story of the Holy Spirit, and the story of Peter has momentarily kept certain other important parts of the gospel story in Acts in the background. It is now possible to clarify the reasons for leaving these parts of the story in the background until this point in this chapter. Overall, it is important to explain a remarkable aspect of the story-line of the Acts of the Apostles that has not been brought into the foreground of New Testament analysis and interpretation. There is a sequence of presence and absence in Acts of reference to Hebrew Bible people and to scripture in the context of reference to divine communications from God that is very important for understanding emerging Christian discourse in the Mediterranean world. Our thesis is that in contexts where reference to scripture and Hebrew Bible people are absent, the story-lines of followers of Jesus are taking over the roles of scripture and Hebrew Bible people. In other words, the followers of Jesus themselves become the location for authoritative speech from God and authoritative action that shows the will to God to people who resist the ways of God in the world as a natural part of their own interests. One of the characteristics of emergent Christian discourse as it moved dynamically into the contexts of the Roman empire, then, was the authorizing of the bodies and voices of the followers of Jesus as people who carried the powers and benefits of God’s salvation in their bodies.

**Emerging Christian Discourse in Acts 16—28**

The participation of emerging Christian discourse in the widespread environment of the Roman empire is vividly evident in the emerging argumentative belief-story in the Acts of the Apostles. A major clue to the nature of this emerging discourse lies in the presence and absence of references to biblical people and recitations of words from Hebrew scripture in the chapters in Acts. In Acts 1—8 there is extensive recitation of Hebrew scripture and reference to Hebrew Bible people. In Acts 9—12, where both Saul/Paul and Peter become apostles to the Gentiles, there is no reference either to people in the Hebrew Bible or to words from God in the Hebrew Bible for four complete chapters. In these chapters, the bodies and stories of Saul/Paul and Peter, rather than the bodies and stories of Hebrew Bible people, are the site, agency, and source of persuasive speech and deeds internal to the emerging Christian argumentative belief-story. In this context, the actions of God and the Holy Spirit occur without reference to or assistance from
scripture or precedent in the actions of Hebrew Bible people. In the context of this absence of reference to scripture and Hebrew Bible people in the stories of Saul/Paul and Peter, Paul reintroduces Hebrew scripture, Hebrew Bible people, and Hebrew Bible story-lines when he preaches in Acts 13 at Antioch in Pisidia. This intertwines Paul’s story retroactively with scripture and the story of Israel as he preaches the gospel in Antioch in Pisidia. Overall, this means that the story-lines of both Peter and Saul/Paul are embedded both in the story-lines of scripture and Hebrew Bible people and in their own story-lines without the assistance of scripture and Hebrew Bible people.

After Paul’s sermon in Acts 13, there is no reference to scripture or a Hebrew Bible person throughout the travels of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14. In Acts 15, after Peter defends the inclusion of Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation on the basis of “his own story” in Acts 15:7-11, James argues the case for their inclusion by reciting a significant portion from “the words of the prophets” to ground his argument in God’s story-line (15:13-21). After this, however, Paul’s story-line becomes the internal medium for the gospel story without reference to scripture or Hebrew Bible people from Acts 15:36 to 21:21, where there is a reference to Moses, and from Acts 21:22 to 26:22, where there is a reference to “the prophets and Moses.” In other words, the “agency” of the gospel story throughout Acts 16—27 is argumentative belief-story about Paul and all the people who become involved in his story, which is grounded in the story of God and the Holy Spirit, rather than the agency of Hebrew Bible people and all the events that occurred in God’s story with Israel. This means that Acts blends God’s divine communication through scripture and the stories of Hebrew Bible people with God’s divine communication through the Holy Spirit, angels, various kinds of visions and voices without reference to the Hebrew Bible in ways that allow the gospel story either to include or exclude Hebrew Bible scripture and people. This potential for the presence or absence of Hebrew Bible wording and people creates a discourse that can be adapted to virtually any kind of setting in any culture. Acts ends with a chapter that contains one reference to the law of Moses and the prophets (28:23), one specific reference to the prophet Isaiah (28:25), and a substantive recitation of Isaiah (6:9-10 in Acts 28:26-27). There can be no question but what Hebrew Bible scripture and people can always be brought into the gospel story. But Acts also shows how the gospel story can move to new and
unknown regions of the world through story-lines of “followers of Jesus” without reference to Hebrew Bible scripture or people.

Conclusion

This chapter calls for a reconfiguration of the concept of kerygma in early Christianity. Rather than being proclamation that continually puts the story-line of Christ’s death, burial, resurrection, and appearance in the foreground, early Christian proclamation blended together an emergent network of story-lines focused on God, the Holy Spirit, Israelite prophets, Jesus Christ, Peter, Stephen, Philip, James, Paul, and other participants in the early Christian movement. This versatile emergent network contained the potential for adapting the Christian message to multiple contexts in the Mediterranean world during the first centuries of the existence of the Jesus movement and for participating in a manifold number of cultures during the succeeding centuries to the present.

Beginning with the observation that only five of the twenty-four (or twenty-five) speeches in Acts put “the Christ kerygma” in the foreground, the chapter explores how God’s story-line creates an environment for emerging story-lines about the Holy Spirit, Israel’s prophets, God’s Messiah, Peter, Stephen, Philip, James, Paul, and various other antagonists and protagonists that become participants in the emerging story-line that functions as the context for proclaiming the gospel.