

# Boekbesprekings / Book Reviews

Van Tilborg, Sj & Chatelion C, P 2000 – Jesus' appearances and disappearances in Luke 24

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This exegetical study of Luke 24 is the collaborative project of two Nijmegen colleagues, whose individual accents are nevertheless apparent in the chapters written by each. The book is comprised of two parts.

Part I, an exercise in experimental exegesis, analyses text-internal relations in Luke 24 by using a psychological model derived from cognitive linguistics. By creating their own "model of mental imagination" from existing approaches in cognitive psychology, the authors dissect the text in three phases. Firstly, a "deictic" analysis shows the ways in which we structure in our mind images of space and time. It is against this background that we place characters, objects and events, and only within these frames of reference that we can understand the contents of texts. The deictic analysis of Luke 24 is here limited to "the deictic functions of prepositions and of temporal and spatial markers" (p 11). Secondly, an analysis of "perspective" reveals the different perspectives in a text. The "base" or "first mental space" is the narrator's perspective through which other mental spaces (e.g. embedded "parent space" or "child space") in the text are accessible. In the analysis of perspective in Luke 24, "viewpoint" is examined to determine who creates a perspective (narrator or character?), on what level it happens (base space or embedded space?), and how it is done (i.e. in direct, indirect, or free indirect speech, in direct or indirect narrative?) (p 16). Lastly, an analysis of "the relationship between figure and ground" presupposes the conclusions of the previous two phases in examining "how the reader's attention is shifted by the text from the foreground to the background and vice versa" (p 20). The authors here note the similarities and differences with Iser's method of determining foreground and background shifts. They are simultaneously of the opinion that their analysis of perspective suggested by cognitive psychology is "much more precise and much more nuanced than the perspective analyses which we learned via Mieke Bal and Scholomith Rimmon-Kenan" (p 14).

The application of the model to Luke 23:54-24:12 (divided into three episodes, viz. Luke 23:54-24:12, Luke 24:13-24:35, and Luke 24:36-53) yields *inter alia* the following results. The deictic analysis reveals similar patterns of movement: on the Sabbath the women follow down (κατα-) towards the tomb and then go back to (υπ-) a place somewhere in Jerusalem (23:54-56); on the first day of the week they go to (επι) the tomb, into (εις) it, and then away from (απο) it (24:1, 3, 9); Peter runs to (επι) the tomb, peers into (παρα-) it, and then goes away (απο-) to his home (24:12); the two travellers go from (απο) Jerusalem to (εις) a village called Emmaus (24:13), and eventually go back to (υπ-, εις) Jerusalem (24:33); Jesus leads the disciples out (εξ) as far as (εως προς) Bethany, and after his assumption the disciples go back to (υπ-) Jerusalem (24:50-53). The last scene also contains, in addition to this horizontal movement, a vertical movement: as Jesus is taken upwards (αν-) into (εις) heaven, the disciples bow down in worship (προσκυνω) – a movement again comparable to that of the women in 24:4-5 (when they see the two men standing upright [επι-], they bow their faces down to [εις] the ground).

The analysis of perspective in the first episode shows that the women, left ἄ-τροποι (cf 24:4) at the discovery of the disappearance of Jesus' body, are assisted by the two men to move on: since Jesus is not

dead, but lives, the women should not be searching in the tomb. Since they have understood that, they leave the tomb and report this to the disciples. Thus, “the women – and via them also the readers –, are being asked to change their Viewpoint” (p 51).

In the second episode, the Emmaus story, an analysis of perspectives and changes of perspectives reveals the irony and paradoxes in the story: when Jesus appears, the two travellers do not recognize him; when they do recognize him, he disappears. By penetrating the perspective of the characters, the narrator manipulates the reader. The reader who shares the viewpoint of the narrator (both know from the beginning that Jesus is walking with the travellers), which is different from that of the two travellers (who are engaged in such intimate discussion that they do not recognize Jesus), nevertheless has the possibility of looking with the two, of listening to the words of Jesus from the perspective of the two. From 24:31 onwards then the travellers are converted to the perspective of the narrator, culminating in their insight that Jesus indeed lives when he breaks the bread.

The third episode contains two scenes, each with a tripartite structure. In the first scene (Lk 24:36-49), Jesus' final appearance, Jesus climactically restores contact with his disciples, which presumably serves as a model for the readers: “The gradual change from amazement to understanding is intended to help the reader to accept the truth of the story” (p 115). In sub-scene 1, Jesus appears to the eleven and those with them, wishing them peace, but they instead react with fear (24:37 πτοηθέντες, ἔμφοβοι γεγόμενοι thinking that they are seeing a spirit. Jesus, knowing what is going on in their hearts, verbalizes their psychological state (24:38 τετραραγμένοι, διαλογισμοί), and by showing them his hands and feet tries to convince them of his bodily presence. In sub-scene 2, this action of Jesus causes a mixed reaction of unbelief, joy and wonder amongst the group (24:41 ἀπιστούντων, χαρᾶς, θαυμαζόντων) Jesus then eats a piece of broiled fish to again prove his bodily presence to them. Finally, in sub-scene 3, Jesus changes their minds irreversibly (the preposition in δι-ήνοιξεν emphasises this) by means of the Scriptures so that now they may understand perfectly. This sub-scene too has a tripartite structure: 24:46b-47a not only repeats passion and resurrection from earlier in the narrative, but also now adds the preaching of forgiveness of sins to all the nations which is still to be fulfilled in the future; in 24:47b-48 the eleven and those with them are appointed witnesses, whose future role will start from Jerusalem; and in 24:49b-d Jesus makes a promise, still to be fulfilled in the future, with him mediating with the Father in the heavens and them being down below in the city.

The second scene (Lk 24:50-53), Jesus' final disappearance, consists of two sub-scenes. It is clear from sub-scene 1 (24:51c-d) that Jesus is not the initiator of the action. He does not ascend to heaven, but is carried upwards into heaven (ἀνεφέρτεο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν). When, in sub-scene 2, great joy (24:52b μετὰ χαρᾶς μεγάλης) characterizes the return of the apostles to Jerusalem where they continually praise God in the Temple, their joy and praise of God in the Temple refer back to Jesus' birth at the beginning of Luke's story. The story thus comes full circle.

The first part of the study concludes with an analysis of “the relationship between figure and ground”, of “the manner in which the reader's attention is shifted by the text from the foreground to the background and vice versa” (p 116). Just how Luke manipulates the figure-ground possibilities of stories is particularly evident in the third episode (24:36-53), where the figure Jesus becomes the ground: “Jesus' presence as figure changes ... into his presence in the minds of the disciples” (p 124), the experienced presence becomes narrated presence, or – in older dialectic terms – “material fact” is transferred to “revealed truth” (pp 126-127).

The second part of the book uses the results of the preceding text-internal analysis, but now investigates Luke's story of Jesus' death, burial and existence after death from a more conventional point of view. Not only is the Lukan text related specifically to its Hellenistic (rather than Jewish) context in order

to imagine how Luke's Greek recipients might have understood these stories, but the whole discussion is structured in terms of categories adapted from social-anthropological studies of death rituals (the successive chapters are entitled "The corpse and the burial", "The soul and the body" and "The living and the mourners"). Throughout the figurative/mythological aspect of the texts is kept at the centre of attention in order to highlight the selections that Luke made.

In "The corpse and the burial" the scale of burial rituals is explained as dependent on the status of the deceased: if an important person died, the pomp would be grander and more people would be involved in the burial rites than in the case of a less important person. A comparison between Luke's story of Jesus' burial and Dio's report of Augustus' burial is intended to measure the level of pomp in Luke's story and to get an idea of how the Lukan story might have sounded to Greek recipients. The conclusion is that, compared to Dio's presentation of Augustus' burial, Luke 23:26ff portrays Jesus' burial as a solemn, public, and official event, in which everyone and everything are involved: not only the women whose lamentation starts the burial rites (cf ἐκόπτοντο and ἐθρήνουν in Lk 23:27), the whole city (ὁ λαός), the authorities (οἱ ἄρχοντες) and a member of the council (ἀνὴρ βουλευτής= Joseph of Arimathea), but also the Temple and even the whole cosmos. The importance of the deceased Jesus is indeed underlined in several ways. In Luke's story, just before Jesus dies, two ominous signs are related to indicate the great importance of Luke's hero. The eclipse announced that "the world was about to suffer a great loss", that "someone extremely important was about to leave us" (p 167), and the tearing of the Temple curtain indicated that the future destruction of the Temple as the result of Jesus' death would once again make the world aware of Jesus' importance. Furthermore, a close reading of Luke 23:35-43 makes clear how Jesus' shame is changed into his honour: from the ridicule of the authorities and the soldiers, through the improper remark of the one wrongdoer, up to the climactic, most personal address of the "good" wrongdoer ("Jesus, remember me when you arrive in your kingdom") and Jesus' equally personal reaction ("today you will be with me in paradise"). Jesus' burial, then, is presented by Luke as a burial in which he "was given the honour which was his due as messiah-king" (p 168).

The next chapter, "The soul and the body", develops the social-anthropological insight that the treatment of a corpse is related to myths/beliefs about the corpse and the soul in a culture: "Every corpse evokes fear and anxiety and demands special rites" (p 132). At this level of the analysis, however, it becomes clear that the expected rites begin to be frustrated in the Lukan narrative: the expected rites are not followed, but are in fact reversed. Thus the women start their lamentations, but Jesus forbids them to mourn him and instructs them to weep instead for the terrible fate that awaits Jerusalem (the notion that an unjust death would cause divine retribution and threaten religious or political continuity would have been familiar to Greek readers from the death of Socrates, Demosthenes and Phocion). Or one expects family and friends to bury Jesus, but instead a totally new character enters the story and buries Jesus on his own initiative in order to right a wrong and give Jesus his due honour. Or, again, the women from Galilee plan to anoint Jesus' body out of respect, but their plans come to nothing. Finally, according to Luke's mythological images of what happened to Jesus after his death, a separation and reuniting of Jesus' body (σῶμα = σάρξ in Lk) and spirit (πνεῦμα = ψυχή in Lk) can be envisaged. When Jesus dies, his spirit and body are separated: the former goes up to heaven, where it is accepted by the Father; the latter goes down to Hades, where it is preserved awaiting the bodily resurrection. God, however, does not keep Jesus' body for long in Hades, but raises it from Hades so that Jesus then appears bodily to the two Emmaus travellers and the group of disciples. Jesus' bodily assumption (he is carried by God to heaven: ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν – Lk 24:51) then follows, which according to Luke sets Jesus' elevation/exaltation (*Erhöhung*) "into motion" (p 187). It is from this new exalted position that Jesus appears to Stephen and Paul in Acts,

but his appearances are now different from the previous bodily ones: He “showed himself in his *doxa* to Stephen and let himself be heard by Paul while Paul (and those with him) were immersed in light” (p 187).

The concluding chapter, “The living and the mourners”, takes as its point of departure the social-anthropological claim that, as the social person of the deceased is slowly extinguished, the mourners are gradually reintegrated into society. It is in this phase of the analysis, however, that the differences between the expected reality (the gradual extinction of the social person and concomitant restoration of the community) and the Lukan narrative are the most pronounced, since in Luke’s story, instead of social extinction, “wondrous things happen to the body of Jesus. It is lost, it appears and disappears in various settings and, finally, it disappears definitively” (p 189). In order to understand how Luke’s Greek recipients would have understood those mythological images (i.e., how they would have judged Jesus’ person within the existing polytheistic pantheon), one should compare the Lukan images with stories of Greco-Roman heroes whose lives ended with an ascension. The following strategy is used to determine which of the numerous comparable Greco-Roman stories would be the most appropriate ones for a comparative analysis: first the reception of the Lukan text by writers between 150-200 CE is considered; then the mythical parallels which feature in these second-century CE writings are contextualised within first-century CE Asia-Minor. It thus becomes clear from Justin, Celsus, Minucius Felix and Theophilus that, between 150-200 CE, the most often mentioned Greco-Roman parallels of ascensions related to the ascensions/deifications of Asclepius, Dionysus, Heracles and the Dioscuri (less often the ascensions/deifications of Perseus, Bellerophon, Theseus, Ariadne, Orpheus, the Roman emperors, and several historical figures like Pythagoras, Zalmoxis, Protesilaus, Rampsinitus, Erigone and others). To determine just how well known these hero-gods were in first-century CE Asia-Minor (where Luke was presumably composed and originally read), the relevant archaeological, epigraphical, and literary evidence is considered.

A comparison of all the Greco-Roman hero-gods mentioned above reveals three crucial similarities: they are all taken up into heaven, are all of divine descent, and are all honoured by society in hero-cults. The four hero-gods quoted most often as parallels by writers between 150-200 CE (i.e., Asclepius, Dionysus, Heracles and the Dioscuri) share in addition two further characteristics: they not only suffer unjustly as a consequence of divine intervention, but also act as saviours of people. It is precisely within the framework of these similarities that Greek recipients would probably have understood Luke’s hero: the divine descent of Jesus (born as “Son of God”), the formation of a cult group around Jesus (the disciples worship [προσκυνησαντες – Lk 24:52] Jesus after his assumption), the divine necessity of Jesus’ suffering (δὲι πάθειν) which is always linked to some kind of restoration (resurrection, assumption, exaltation), and Jesus as saviour of people in every situation of need.

From the above cursory survey of Part I, it should be clear that a reading of Luke 24 by means of the proposed model from cognitive psychology definitely offers another helpful tool to analyse text-internal relations closely. It is, however, a pity that Brill – especially for such an expensive book – did not take care to have the English and Greek edited properly (in Chapter 3, for example, I counted 14 errors in the Greek). It is also clear that the comparison of hero-gods with Jesus in Part 2 deserves more extensive research. In the introduction the authors, for example, promise to conclude their study with some reflections on ethical aspects (p 6). One is, however, disappointed in this respect. Although it is said that the assumptions of the heroes cannot be separated from their lives and deeds (p 235), no sufficient reflection or criticism follows in this regard. What I am proposing here is a comparison of the social-political functions of these Greco-Roman myths (the kind of research initiated by classicists from the Paris School, and taken further now by many other classicists) with the social-political function of the myth in Luke. Such an endeavour would in my view take us to the heart of the matter, not only to explicate the ethical contents of the Lukan vision in

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comparison with those of Greco-Roman parallels, but also to seriously reflect in a critical manner on the applicability of these morals in our postmodern society.

