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Luke's Framing of the Feeding of the Five Thousand and an Evaluation of Possible Old Testament Allusions

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Summary:

This article seeks to understand the role of the feeding of the five thousand miracle in Luke's narrative. Commencing with an evaluation of the allusion claims, it is determined that the character representation in 2 Kings 4:42-44 has more parallels than the feeding narrative in Exodus 16 or Numbers 11. Following this, the article evaluates Luke's narrative framing of the feeding discourse in comparison to the other synoptics and determines that Luke intentionally framed this miracle to address the christological question of Jesus' identity.

1. Introduction

Jesus' miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is one of the most well known of his ministry and is found in all four of the gospels. When interpreting this episode in general and specifically in Luke 9:10-17, some have suggested that there are allusions to the provision of manna in the desert found in Exodus 16 and Numbers 11 and/or to Elisha's feeding of the one hundred people in 2 Kings 4:42-44.

After a brief review of the means by which an allusion is identified within the New Testament, this paper will evaluate the feeding of the five thousand narrative and the two allusion opinions, confirming that Luke had both Moses and Elijah in view, although the Elijah allusion is primary. Following this, the method of framing that Luke utilizes to emphasize the Old Testament allusion will be compared to that of the other synoptic gospels. Overall, this paper suggests that the allusion to Elisha in 2 Kings 4:42-44 is the primary allusion within Luke's feeding episode and that Luke's framing of the feeding is pivotal for understanding his narrative and christological representation of the character of Jesus within his gospel in contrast to the other gospels. Similarly, although intertextual references are

identified it is unfair to Luke to express a complete and un-nuanced appropriation of Moses and Elisha. Rather the narrative contexts that they come from shaped the reader's understanding of Jesus.

This understanding comes to light by identifying how the feeding narrative is intentionally framed by Luke through the introduction of Elijah and Old Testament prophets (9:7-9), Jesus' performing of a miracle greater than that of Elisha (9:10-17), his identification as the Christ by Peter (9:18-22) and ultimately his confirmation by God on the mountain (9:28-36); all of which center on the question of Jesus' identity.

2. *Intertextual Definitions*

One of the most challenging aspects of the study of intertextuality is the defining of terms. Many scholars have proposed an assortment of words to describe the relationships that a New Testament passage might have with the Old Testament. Porter is one of the most recent to embark on this endeavour in his article "Further Comments on the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament".¹ In this article, Porter attempts to delineate the subtle divisions between the terms: formulaic quotation, direct quotation, paraphrase, allusion and echo.² Although Porter does an admirable job at attempting to define these terms, more work needs to be done in order to develop a consensus within the guild of New Testament scholarship.

In Luke 9:10-17 there is no explicit Old Testament quotation or paraphrase of any kind. In fact, the feeding of the five thousand has received only minor attention in its relationship to the Old Testament; no doubt due to the

¹ S.E. Porter, "Further Comments on the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament", in Thomas L. Brodie, Dennis R. MacDonald and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *The Intertextuality of the Epistles: Explorations of Theory and Practice* (NTM 16; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 98-110.

² Porter, "Further Comments on the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament", 107-109. See also his "The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament: A Brief Comment on Method and Terminology", in C.A. Evans and J.A. Sanders (eds.), *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (JSNTSup 14; SSEJC 5; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 79-96.

ease of other New Testament passages that contain explicit or direct quotations.³ As there is no explicit Old Testament citation within the episode, Luke 9:10-17 is more closely related to the category of allusion.

Coming to a nuanced understanding of the nature of an allusion is also a difficult task. Porter describes an allusion as “the invoking of a person, place or literary work”, which is further distinguished from a paraphrase in the precision of language use.⁴ Hayes, does not adequately define the nature of allusion, however, he focuses on the discussion of an “allusive echo”, which “functions to suggest to the reader that text B should be understood in light of a broad interplay with text A”.⁵ Although the terminology of “allusive echo” muddies the interpretational waters, the underlying principle, along with Porter’s definition, provides a solid foundation for the understanding of allusion.

In addition to developing a proper definition of allusion, there needs to be some understanding of the nature of echo and how it is distinguished from an allusion. This differentiation is important as a number of scholars who focus on intertextuality between the testaments use these terms interchangeably.⁶ Part of the issue is the fact that many of the criteria that

³ Most of the work regarding the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament focuses on formulaic and explicit quotations utilized by New Testament authors. For a more detailed analysis of the various fulfillment formulaic introductions of Old Testament verses, along with a few examples from non-biblical Hellenistic Greek writers, see C.F.D. Moule, “Fulfilment-words in the New Testament: Use and Abuse”, *NTS* 14 (1968): 293-320. A good description of quotations in Luke can be found in H.J. Cadbury, “Lexical Notes on Luke-Acts. IV. On Direct Quotation, with Some Uses of ὄτι and εἰ”, *JBL* 48 (1929): 412-25; Charles A. Kimball, *Jesus’ Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke’s Gospel* (JSNTSup 94; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 49-54 and appendices C and D.

⁴ Porter, “Further Comments on the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament”, 109.

⁵ R.B. Hayes, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 20.

⁶ A good example of this is Hayes, who discusses allusions and echoes within the same section of his introduction, although he does give larger attention to the seven criteria for identifying an echo later in his book. Hayes, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 18-21, 29-32.

are used to determine if an echo is present within a text are also employed for identification of allusions. Criteria, such as availability, volume, recurrence, thematic coherence, historical plausibility, history of interpretation, and satisfaction, help to provide boundaries for the discussion of echoes;⁷ however, these criteria can also be used when delineating possible allusions. As a result, the major differentiating factor between allusion and echo is the concept of explicitness. An allusion is a more explicit invoking of a particular person, place or literary work, whereas an echo is evoked through the use of thematically related language and more general concepts.⁸ In addition to this, it is much more difficult to express the origin of an echo or tie a particular New Testament echo to a specific verse or scene in the Old Testament. On the other hand, an allusion is more easily associated with a specific Old Testament passage, person, or episode.

3. *Overview of Luke 9:10-17 in Light of the Other Gospels*

Luke 9:10-17 focuses on the miraculous feeding of the five thousand with only five loaves of bread and two fish. The episode commences with Jesus healing the sick and proclaiming the kingdom of God, when his disciples come to him and advise him to send the crowd home so that they would not have to feed them. Jesus, however, was not convinced and had the crowd gather in groups of fifty, after which he gave thanks, broke the bread and fish, and had them distributed by the disciples. At the end, not only were the people satisfied, but there were twelve baskets of leftovers.

⁷ These criteria are taken from Hayes, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 28-32. However, there are other authors who have utilized them, such as K.D. Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture in Luke-Acts: Telling the History of God's People Intertextually* (JSNTSup 282; New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 61-65.

This is not to say that there are no issues with these criteria, but rather to state that there are some scholars who attempt to find tangible and identifiable features within the text that would indicate a relationship to the Old Testament.

⁸ Porter, "Further Comments on the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament", 109.

In all of the miracles stories of Jesus' ministry this is the only one that occurs within all four of the gospels.⁹ Furthermore, there are a number of similarities between Luke's account and that of the other gospels regarding the narrative details.¹⁰ First, all four of the gospels mention that there were five loaves of bread and two fish to feed the crowd of five thousand.¹¹ Likewise, all four have the disciples at first questioning whether there will be enough food for the crowd and then gathering twelve baskets of leftovers after everyone had been satisfied.

One of the similarities between Luke's gospel and that of John that is not reflected in the other synoptics is the response at the conclusion of the miracle, although the responses do come from different groups.¹² In John's

⁹ There has been much discussion regarding the various sources for each of these narratives and the relationship between the synoptics and John. This is not the focus of this paper, for various opinions regarding this issue see F. Neiryck, "Response to the Multiple Stage Hypothesis, I: The Introduction to the Feeding Story", in D.L. Dungan (ed.), *The Interrelation of the Gospels: A Symposium Led by M.E. Boismard, W.R. Framer, F. Neiryck, Jerusalem 1984* (BETL 94; Louvain: Louvain University Press, 1990), 81-93; W.R. Stegner, "Lukan Priority in the Feeding of the Five Thousand", *BR* 21 (1976): 19-28; E.E. Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 338. See also the bibliographies in J. Nolland, *Luke 1-9.20* (WBC 35A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 433-34 and J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 586-87, 1372-74.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the similarities between the synoptic gospel accounts of the feeding, see I. Buse "The Gospel Accounts of the Feeding of the Multitudes", *ExpTim* 74 (1962-63): 167-69.

¹¹ Although this number is just the men that were in attendance the remainder of this paper will use the five thousand number as the size of the crowd with the understanding that the women and children that were present would certainly make the number more substantial. In addition, Mark's feeding of the four thousand (8:1-10) will not be discussed here, not only because there is insufficient space, but also as there is the general consensus that both the feeding episodes share a founding narrative. *Contra* J. Knackstedt, "Die bieten Brotvermehrungen im Evangelium", *NTS* 10 (1964): 309-35.

¹² Marshall expresses that there is only a reaction from the crowd in John's gospel and that the synoptics are more focused on a lesson for the disciples. Marshall, *Luke*, 363. Although this is true for Luke, the other gospels almost fail to have any immediate response to the miracle. As a result, both Luke and John should be viewed as having a response to the miracle that identifies Jesus as the Messiah, which is pivotal for the understanding of Jesus within their respective gospels.

gospel the crowd realizes that Jesus is the expected prophet, stating: “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world” (John 6:14). Similarly in Luke, Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Christ of God (Luke 9:20). There is no such realization mentioned in either Mark or Matthew. It is interesting to see that in both of these separate traditions there is an underlying realization that this miracle was special; this was not an ordinary miracle, but was particularly important for John and Luke’s narratives and the identification of Jesus’ character, possibly due to an Old Testament allusion.¹³ The ramifications of this understanding in Luke’s gospel and its corresponding framing will be further discussed below.

There are, however, a few minor differences between Luke and the other gospels, but ones that do not greatly affect the various readings of the text.¹⁴ In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus does not question the disciples regarding how much food there is to feed the crowd, whereas in Mark he does. Nolland suggests that this was intentional in order to avoid any impression that Jesus was “feeling his way” through the situation.¹⁵ This, however, is not important for the development of the narrative for this paper and should not be pushed too far.

Another difference among the synoptics is the method of transportation for Jesus and the disciples before and after the miracle. In Matthew, Mark and John, Jesus and his disciples travel by boat to the place and then later, after the feeding, they all leave by boat (although at different times). Luke, on the other hand, eliminates all boating references and situates this event within a larger traveling section. For Luke, Jesus remains in the area for eight days after the feeding (9:28) before taking Peter, James, and John up the mountain for the transfiguration. This change in transportation is not particularly important for the feeding miracle itself, but does have a larger effect on the framing of the passage as a whole. This will be discussed in detail in section five.

¹³ Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 669.

¹⁴ Marshall, *Luke*, 358.

¹⁵ Nolland, *Matthew*, 590-91.

4. Possible Allusions in Luke 9:10-17

The scholars who see this episode in light of the Old Testament often state that it is an allusion to either Moses and the provision of manna in the desert (Exodus 16 and Numbers 11), or to 2 Kings 4:42-44 and Elisha's feeding of the one hundred people. Within this section these two views will be evaluated with a case being made for 2 Kings as the primary allusion, although acknowledging the fact that a secondary allusion to Moses is also within the purview of the feeding miracle due to the appearance of Moses on the mount of transfiguration.

When attempting to relate Luke 9:10-17 to the Old Testament, a large number of commentators mention that there is a connection between Luke's feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the Israelite people.¹⁶ Unfortunately, most of them do not go into detail about the nature of the relationship, but rather state that Exodus 16 and Numbers 11 influence the feeding narrative. Although both of these passages report a similar incident, the actual storyline and the development of its characters are very different. This suggests that they might have come from disparate sources.¹⁷ Although there is much to say regarding the various source critical evaluations of this passage and the Pentateuch, a detailed analysis is not feasible within the confines of this paper.¹⁸ Suffice it to say, the two narratives, although they are usually paired together, portray Moses and the other characters differently. In Exodus, both Moses and Aaron are portrayed as God's mediators; however, it is God who hears the people cry, God who is moved to action, and God that provides. Moses and Aaron are really only there to repeat what God has said to the Israelites. The feeding

¹⁶ For examples, see I.H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1978); D.L. Bock, *Luke Vol. 1 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books 1994); J.B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1997); Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 435.

¹⁷ B.S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 280-81. For an outline of the various source-critical divisions, see 274-76.

¹⁸ For an outline of the history of tradition problems for this passage, see Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 280-83.

narrative in Numbers, however, makes no reference to Aaron, and presents Moses in a particularly negative light. It is primarily the episode in Numbers 11 that will be discussed below.

One of the original proponents of highlighting the Moses narrative behind the gospel feeding texts is Austin Farrer, who suggested that the fish in the feeding miracle is analogous to the quail and the bread is analogous to the manna in Exodus 16 and Numbers 11.¹⁹ Moses, like the disciples, asked God where he would get all the meat to feed all the Israelite people and suggested that all the fish in the sea would not be enough (Num 11:13, 22). This is not a problem for God, who in turn states that there will be enough quail not for one or two days, but for an entire month, until the people are sick of quail. In the end, both the Israelites and the crowd around Jesus are satisfied, but how the main characters are portrayed is much different.

The importance for Farrer in identifying the Exodus 16 and Numbers 11 as parallels to the feeding narrative is that it builds a relationship between Jesus and Moses.²⁰ By associating Jesus with the provision of food in the desert, Jesus is connected to some of the foundational stories in Jewish history and, consequently, is paired with Israel's first great leader. There are, however, some drawbacks to this allusion to the feeding of the Israelites in the wilderness. These will be discussed after the evaluation of 2 Kings.

In addition to seeing strong Mosaic parallels within Luke 9:10-17, a number of commentaries also acknowledge that there is a notable correspondence between the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of one hundred men by Elisha in 2 Kings 4:42-44.²¹ In this story, a man brought some of

¹⁹ A. Farrer, *A Study in St. Mark* (Westminster, PA: Dacre Press, 1951), 291. This view is also taken by A. Richardson, "The Feeding of the Five Thousand: Mark 6:33-44", *Interpretation* 9 (1955): 144-49.

²⁰ Farrer, *A Study in St. Mark*, 291.

²¹ Nolland, *Luke 1-9.20*, 435; J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX): Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 38A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 766-67; Marshall, *Luke*, 357; T.R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (WBC 13; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 55. It is surprising that Brodie, who attempts to trace the Elijah-Elisha narratives in proto-Luke, only gives this connection a couple of lines in his whole book even though he admits that this is one of the clearest references back to that narrative in the Gospels. T.L. Brodie, *The Birthing of the New*

his first fruits (twenty barley loaves) to Elisha the man of God. Elisha expresses that they should be given to the people, which is met with resistance and confusion by his servant who expresses, “how can I set this before a hundred people?” Elisha repeats his statement and follows it with a declaration from the Lord that there will be food left over. The scene closes with the event taking place as Elisha had spoken.

When comparing the Elisha feeding with that of Jesus’ a number of parallels emerge. First, both of the crowds surrounding Elisha and Jesus were hungry, whereas in Num 11, the Israelites are not hungry but are dissatisfied with the manna and wanted meat.²² Admittedly they were hungry for different reasons; the crowd with Elisha was hungry due to a famine in the land and the crowd with Jesus was hungry because they had followed him all day.²³ Even though there were different reasons for the hunger, the hunger of the crowd afforded an opportunity for both Elisha and Jesus to express their compassion by meeting the needs of the crowd through a miraculous act.²⁴

A Second parallel is the command that both Jesus and Elisha give to their aids. Jesus tells his disciples “you give them something to eat” and Elisha tells his servant to “give to the people so they might eat”.²⁵ This is

Testament: The Intertextual Developments of the New Testament Writings (NTM 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2004), 151.

²² Fitzmyer, *Luke (I-IX)*, 764.

²³ Brodie discusses the importance of the famine background for Elisha and how his actions indicate to the reader that he is part of the prophetic tradition. Brodie, *The Birthing of the New Testament*, 442.

²⁴ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 54. Hobbs expresses that 2 Kings 4 revolves around the theme of Elisha meeting the needs of the people through miraculous deeds. Although he does not express it this way, I see 2 Kings 4 as God meeting the needs of his people through the prophet Elisha. This might appear at first glance to be a case of semantics, however, the specific use of the word of the Lord at the conclusion of this chapter expresses that God was communicating with Elisha throughout the entire narrative and was using him to perform amazing feats. God’s agency is also seen in the feed of the five thousand by Jesus. By raising his eyes to heaven and praying, Jesus acknowledges that it is through God that this miracle takes place, not through his own power.

²⁵ Fitzmyer, *Luke (I-IX)*, 766-67.

immediately followed with amazement in the servants and a question regarding the availability of food.

The third similarity is the medium through which the miracle is performed. Both Jesus' and Elisha's miracles involve the multiplication of bread to the crowd, whereas Exodus 16 and Numbers 11 involve manna and quail. Although this might seem insignificant, it is a fundamental difference between these two groups of stories. Both Elisha and Jesus are faced with an insignificant amount of food for their crowd, yet somehow God multiplied it. This is not the case in the Moses narratives where God simply provides sufficient manna to the people and does not multiply it through the use of a direct agent. In addition to this, the manner in which the food is distributed is also different. The people in the feeding narratives were given the food, whereas the Israelites were sent to gather the manna. Although Moses does inform the Israelites regarding God's plan to provide food, the miracle is directly attributed to God, whereas the other feeding miracles are ascribed to Elisha and Jesus by the observers in the narrative.

This leads to a fourth similarity and that is the reader's perspective of the leader following the miracle. At the conclusion of both the feeding miracles Elisha and Jesus are shown to be in right standing with God, who affirmed them through the multiplication of food. Both of them are seen to have authority and unwavering faith in God.²⁶ Overall, the reader's disposition towards both Elisha and Jesus is more positive and they are seen as true instruments of God's power.

This indication of faith and authority is intensified through the actions of the respective servants and disciples, which act as a foil for the protagonist. Both Elisha's servant and the disciples question their master's faith and authority by reminding them that there is insufficient food to feed all the people. At the end of the narrative both Elisha and Jesus are shown to be men of faith and their disciples look foolish and weak because of their lack of faith, both in God and in their respective masters. This is intensified by the abundance of leftover food. In both the two feeding miracles Jesus' disciples and Elisha's servant have to collect the leftovers so that it would

²⁶ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 49.

not be wasted. The fact that there was abundance of food, and more that what was had originally, increases the shame of the servants and increases the honour of Jesus and Elisha.

When evaluating the Moses narrative it is clear that Moses is more akin to the role of the disciples than that of Jesus, especially in Number 11. In this narrative, Moses, because of the grumbling of the people, went to God and complained about how he was being treated and that there was no meat for the people. The Lord responded by stating that he would give quail, not just for one day, but for a whole month. Moses, however, continues to question God:

“Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, ‘I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!’ Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?”²³ The LORD answered Moses, “Is the LORD’s arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you” (Num 11:21-23, NIV).

Moses, in contrast to Elisha and Jesus, is portrayed as whining and lacking faith due to his questioning of God. This response parallels that of the disciples and their lack of faith rather than the response of their masters, Jesus and Elisha. As a result, at the conclusion of this narrative Moses is portrayed in a poor light for his lack of faith and disagreement with God.²⁷ This is confirmed when the spirit of the Lord descends on two of the elders and not Moses, challenging Moses’ position as leader of the community. Joshua, Moses’ aid, attempts to fix the situation by having Moses command them to stop; however, Moses allows it to continue as he realises that it is from the Lord.

In light of this comparison and the portrayal of the respective characters, it is apparent that more nuanced exegesis is needed when making allusion claims for a New Testament passage. This comparison does not claim that

²⁷ G.B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers* (ICC; New York: Scribner’s, 1903), 112-13.

the feeding of the five thousand narrative in the gospels does not allude to Num 11 or Exod 16, in fact, there might be an argument for it being the primary reference in the Johannine text.²⁸ Rather, the parallel features found within 2 Kings 4 lend primary consideration to that passage being the dominant allusion.²⁹ The relationship with Moses in Num 11 and Exod 16 is triggered by the feeding episode; however, on closer inspection, a number of the parallels fall down. As a result, I would suggest that there is only a minor allusion (but more than an echo) to the Moses narrative, with 2 Kings 4 acting as the primary reference.

5. *Luke's Framing of the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Luke 9:7-36)*

One of the most important features of the feeding of the five thousand narrative in Luke's gospel is how it is framed. Although all three synoptic gospels preface the feeding with a scene of Herod and his interaction with John the Baptist (though Luke's interaction is different), both Matthew (14:22) and Mark (6:45) conclude by having the disciples (and later Jesus) immediately leave the location of the feeding by boat.

Luke's choice of framing material provides a particular lens through which he intended this episode to be understood, which provides a substantially different effect on the reader's interpretation than that of Matthew and Mark. Luke's framing of the feeding of the five thousand discourse is therefore unique and creates a strong emphasis regarding his understanding of this event in light of Jesus' christological and narrative identity.³⁰

²⁸ The allusion to Moses and the manna in the desert is particularly strong in John, especially due to the reference of God providing manna in the desert in 6:31. David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 517.

²⁹ Fitzmyer, *Luke (I-IX)*, 766-67. E.E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 138-39. *Contra* R.F. O'Toole, *Luke's Presentation of Jesus: A Christology* (Subsidia Biblica 25; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2004), 36. Although I agree with O'Toole that the explicit location of "a desert place" does have stronger ties to the Moses narratives than 2 Kings 4 to the Lukan feeding discourse.

³⁰ It is interesting to note that a number of commentaries on Luke make strong textual divisions in Luke 9:7-36. For example, Green (*Luke*, 366) divides Luke 9 at

In evaluating Mark's gospel the feeding discourse is preceded by the death of John the Baptist.³¹ In this passage, Herod asks those who were with him who Jesus is. After hearing all of the options—John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets from old—he states that he beheaded John the Baptist.³² With this reference the narrative is sidetracked by a brief recounting of how Herod's wife Herodias had asked her daughter to petition for John the Baptist's head on a platter and how the request was granted because of a promise that Herod had made. The second major difference occurs after the feeding miracle as Mark recalls Jesus walking on the water in front of his disciples and a series of healings in Gennesaret.

Matthew, in his gospel, retains a similar order to that found in Mark. Prior to the feeding of the five thousand, Matthew has people in Herod's court inform him that Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead which is followed by a brief retelling, for the sake of the reader, of the entire event of how Herod beheaded John. Likewise, after the feeding miracle, Matthew reports how Jesus walked on the water, but adds Peter's declaration.

Luke's gospel presents a different series of events, but still commences with the question by Herod regarding the person of Jesus.³³ This is followed by Mark's series of answers: John the Baptist raised from the dead, Elijah, or one of the prophets from old. Herod responds to this stating that he had beheaded John.

Luke then completely omits the retelling of the beheading of John, juxtaposing the feeding of the five thousand event with the question of

v. 17, associating the feeding narrative with "the mission of the Twelve". While I agree that the activities of the Twelve are a primary focus of this section, it is difficult to divide the text at this point due to the lexical cohesion developed through the questions on Jesus' identity.

³¹ Fitzmyer, *Luke (I-IX)*, 762-63.

³² For a solid introductory discussion on the first century AD expectations of Elijah, see M. Öhler, "The Expectation of Elijah and the Kingdom of God", *JBL* 118 (1999): 461-76, esp. 461-64.

³³ Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 434. I disagree with Marshall's (*Luke*, 357) classification of Luke 9:7-9 as a "brief interlude" as it implies that it is an intrusion from the discussion of the twelve and not fundamentally important to the narrative. See also, Green, *Luke*, 360.

Jesus' identity. By not providing a satisfactory answer to the question, Luke's readers are continuing to look for resolution to that open-ended question. In fact, this is not the first time that the question regarding the nature of Jesus has been raised. In Luke 8:25, after Jesus had calmed the storm, the disciples asked themselves "who is this that even the wind and waves obey him?" The query of Herod brings this question back to the forefront and sets the stage for Luke to answer it through the use of a miraculous feeding.³⁴

Second, in contrast to Mark and Matthew, Luke directly follows this miracle with Jesus posing the same question to his disciples: "who do the crowds say that I am?"³⁵ The disciples give the same response as Herod's servants, John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets of old. Jesus, however, is not satisfied with this answer and pushes them to come to a decision themselves.³⁶ Peter responds with his famous christological saying by claiming that Jesus is the Christ of God.

That Luke desires his audience to come to a similar conclusion is apparent from the text. Luke in his gospel poses the question of who Jesus is³⁷ to his readers through Herod and provides three possible options: John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets of old. Luke the narrator and Herod the character inform the reader that Jesus is not John the Baptist because of the fact that both of them have distinct (and also interacting) roles within the narrative.³⁸ This leaves the reader with two other options, Elijah or one of

³⁴ Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 434-35.

³⁵ Marshall, *Luke*, 363.

³⁶ See the contrast of Luke 7:16 where the crowd calls Jesus "a great prophet".

³⁷ Tannehill agrees that Luke frames the feeding episode with the question of Jesus' identity. At the same time, he is unsure why the feeding of the people would result in a messianic claim from Peter, stating: "However, it is not immediately clear why feeding the crowd with a few loaves of bread and a few fish should lead anyone to regard Jesus as the Messiah". R.C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, Volume 1: The Gospel According to Luke (Minneapolis, MN, 1991), 218.

³⁸ Marshall, *Luke*, 356; W.L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 212; W. Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 8-10. Although I agree that the reader should

the prophets. This is where the feeding of the five thousand miracle plays an important role for eliminating other options for the reader.

As mentioned above, there are a number of connections between Luke 9:10-17 and two narratives within the Old Testament, 2 Kings 4:42-44 and Exodus 16 and Numbers 11. Elisha is considered to be one of the primary prophets of the Old Testament who did miraculous signs for Israel, especially because he was the protégé of Elijah.³⁹ By making a parallel of Jesus and Elisha, and especially by have Jesus perform a similar miracle, but on a greater order of magnitude, Luke illustrates to his readers that Jesus is much more powerful than Elisha. Seeing that Elisha was considered one of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament, having Jesus perform a miracle that is so much beyond what he did expresses that Jesus is greater than Elisha and the prophets of old.

Although Marshall agrees with this understanding, he questions whether Luke saw specific messianic traits in this narrative that would lead to the christological declaration by Peter in the following section.⁴⁰ To address this concern Marshall proposes that connections to the last supper and the breaking of the bread would be known to the reader and that the reader would view the feeding miracle in that light.⁴¹ This view, however, is not consistent with the surrounding context in which Luke forces the reader to look back and compare Jesus to the great figures in Israel's recent and ancient history. By showing that Jesus far exceeds the miracles of the ancient prophets the reader is forced to conclude that none of those

know that Jesus and John the Baptist are distinct people due to the prior narrative, Marshall also suggests that equating Jesus and John is "a very ill-informed piece of popular superstition" because there is no understanding of reincarnation in ancient Judaism. The statement regarding John the Baptist is not about reincarnation, but about him being raised from the dead. As a result, the use of the term reincarnation is questionable, even if the understanding by the masses regarding the situation is ill-informed.

³⁹ D.L. Bock, "Elijah and Elisha", in J.B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 203-206, 205-206.

⁴⁰ Marshall, *Luke*, 357.

⁴¹ Marshall, *Luke*, 357-58; Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1.218.

characters provide an adequate understanding of Jesus and that he must be something more, namely the messiah.⁴²

Beasley-Murray also addresses this question in his commentary and posits that it would not be a large jump in the minds of first-century Jews, who were eager for the messiah, to connect the miraculous feeding of Jesus and the miracles of the prophets of old and to determine that he could be the messiah.⁴³ Keener suggests that the crowd viewed Jesus in light of the coming of a “prophet like Moses” in Deut 18:18 and that it would have been natural for the people to want to set Jesus up as king because that is one of the roles that the Jewish tradition bestowed on Moses.⁴⁴

The Moses and Elijah references in Luke are again immediately picked up after Peter’s christological confession on the mount of transfiguration and act as a confirmation that Jesus is the messiah and the son of God.⁴⁵ Recently, Adams has discussed the use of Elijah and Moses characters on the mount of transfiguration and determined that the placement of these two characters in this passage indicates that Jesus is the culmination of God’s redemptive plan for Israel and that he is, in fact, greater than both Moses and Elijah.⁴⁶

⁴² Childs proposes that through the act of feeding the five thousand Jesus becomes the “new Moses” and signals the coming of the messianic age. Childs, *Exodus*, 295-96.

⁴³ G.R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Waco: Word, 1999), 88.

⁴⁴ Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 670.

⁴⁵ Nolland in his commentary has a thorough list of the different roles and ways of understanding the Elijah and Moses characters. These concepts range from the proximity to the eschaton to people who stand in contrast to Jesus indicating that he would have to die and not be taken directly to heaven. Nolland, *Matthew*, 701 n. 54; Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 498-99.

⁴⁶ S.A. Adams, “Would the Real Elijah Please Stand Up: Malachi 4:5-6 as the Hermeneutical Key for the use of Elijah within the Synoptics”, presented at McMaster Divinity College, September 28, 2006. *Contra* Evans who states that “Only Jesus, not the great prophet Elijah or the great lawgiver Moses, can accomplish God’s redemptive plan”. C.A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* (WBC 34B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 38. Evans is not the only one to posit that Moses represents the law and that Elijah represents the prophets and that this passage indicates that Jesus is greater than both of them. See also, D.A. Hagner, *Matthew*

The placement of the transfiguration directly after Peter's confession and the questions regarding Jesus' identity is not accidental.⁴⁷ Rather, it reinforces the narrative's claim that Jesus is the messiah, the son of God.⁴⁸ That Jesus is explicitly emphasised as God's son, elevates him above Moses and Elijah.⁴⁹ Similarly, the appearance of Elijah and Moses with Jesus and as distinct entities completely removes any doubt in the reader's mind that Jesus might be Elijah returned.⁵⁰

Through the strategic placement and framing of the feeding of the five thousand narrative between the two questions regarding the nature of Jesus in his gospel, Luke conveys through this event that Jesus is not Elijah, Moses, John the Baptist, or one of the great prophets of old, but is, in fact, the messiah.

6. Conclusion

In evaluating the two possible allusions to the Old Testament in the feeding of the five thousand narrative, there are a number of supporting arguments that would indicate that the feeding of the one hundred people by Elisha in 2

14-28 (WBC 33B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 493. Pamment suggests that Moses and Elijah are not primarily symbols of the law and the prophets respectively, but are models of suffering on behalf of God. It is this modeling that should be understood in terms of Jesus and his future suffering. M. Pamment, "Moses and Elijah in the Story of the Transfiguration", *ExpTim* 92 (1981): 338-39.

⁴⁷ B. Reid, *The Transfiguration: A Source- and Redaction-Critical Study of Luke 9:28-36* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1993). In addition to the placement, Luke also makes a number of minor changes within the transfiguration story itself. For a list of these changes and their significance, see S.S. Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration and the Believers' Transformation: A Study of the Transfiguration and Its Development in Early Christian Writings* (WUNT II 265; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 109-20.

⁴⁸ Reid (*The Transfiguration*, 139) claims that the message for the disciples is both a conformation of Peter's declaration Jesus messiahship (9:20), but also a needed corrective of his misunderstanding of what that entails. For another recent proposal that the transfiguration provides a corrective to triumphalism, see T.W. Martin, "What Makes Glory Glorious? Reading Luke's Account of the Transfiguration Over Against Triumphalism", *JSNT* 29 (2006): 3-26.

⁴⁹ J.P. Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mark 9:2-8, Matt 17:1-8 and Luke 9:28-36* (Analecta Biblica 144; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), 278-79.

⁵⁰ Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 122.

Kings 4:42-44 is the primary allusion. The similarities between the two feeding miracles beginning with the hunger of the people, the lack of bread for the size of the crowd, the questioning of the master by the servants, the command to give the crowd something to eat, the gathering of leftovers at the conclusion, and the increased prestige of the master, all create strong ties that support the claim that the feeding of the five thousand alludes to 2 Kings 4.

Beyond these storyline details, one of the most important similarities is the reader's perspective of the leader at the conclusion of the miracle. In both of the feeding miracles, Jesus and Elisha are affirmed in their role as leader and both are portrayed positively with strong faith and authority. Moses, on the other hand, is portrayed as weak and lacking faith because of his questioning of God. In addition, Moses' position as leader of the community is challenge at the end of the Numbers narrative with the spirit of God resting on two of the elders.

Luke's framing of the feeding account is also a unique aspect of his narrative and forces the reader to come to grips with Jesus' christological identity. By sandwiching this passage between the questions posed by Herod and Jesus regarding Jesus' identity, Luke indicates to the reader the particular message that should be drawn from this episode. The fact that Jesus performed a similar miracle to one of the great prophets from old, but on such a larger scale, indicates that Jesus is more than one of the great prophets. Furthermore, this conclusion is endorsed by God himself on the mountain when he states that Jesus is his son. While the other synoptics agree that Jesus is the messiah, Luke's particular arrangement and placement of the feeding miracle explicitly informs the reader about Jesus' identity. This understanding forms the foundation of the reader's perspective for the remainder of the narrative in a way that is missing from both Mark and Matthew.⁵¹

⁵¹ For an interesting, if not totally convincing, theory on how Luke 9:1-50 "provides a 'window preview' of the journey that follows in 9:51-19:44", see D.P. Moessner, "Luke 9:1-50: Luke's Preview of the Journey of the Prophet like Moses of Deuteronomy", *JBL* 102 (1983): 575-605, quote from 582.