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Pentecostals the world over celebrate the present-ness of the kingdom of God. God's awesome presence in our midst, his gracious willingness to bestow spiritual gifts, his desire to heal, liberate, and transform lives – all of these themes, so central to Pentecostal piety, highlight the fact that God's reign is now present. Pentecostals proclaim a God who is near, a God whose power can and should be experienced here and now. This element of Pentecostal praxis has, for the most part, served as a much-needed corrective to traditional church life, which has far too often lost sight of the manifest presence of God. In a deeply moving essay, Ulrich Luz acknowledges this fact when he declares, "Now we worry about the fact that living religion has to a large extent emigrated from the mainstream churches and flourishes elsewhere...in living communities of neocharismatic groups, in colourful open-air meetings, and so on...the future belongs to religion and not to the traditional Christian churches."¹

As traditional churches in the West have increasingly lost touch with the supernatural elements of the Christian faith, Pentecostals have reveled in their worship of an immanent God, a God who speaks to us, a God who is truly with us. Although many in an increasingly secular West struggle to understand this kind of faith, Pentecostal churches around the world are growing with such rapidity that one scholar has suggested that the Pentecostal movement should be identified as "the most successful social movement of the past century."² Like it or not, the Pentecostal

¹ Ulrich Luz, "Paul as Mystic" in Graham N. Stanton, Bruce W. Longenecker, and Stephen C. Barton, eds., *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honor of James D.G. Dunn* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), p. 131.

² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 8. Of course, in the midst of this growth and exuberance, Pentecostals face a very present danger. The emphases that have enabled Pentecostals to

movement is shaping the contours of Christian faith and praxis throughout the world.

In the following essay I would like to examine a text that speaks of this “present-ness of the kingdom of God” that Pentecostals celebrate.³ However, the force of this text is often blunted by what I believe to be a mistranslation of Luke’s language. The text in question, Luke 17:20-21, reads:

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”

The key words that we wish to consider are found in vs. 21, “the kingdom of God is within you (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν).” In particular, we shall question the way in which the NIV translates ἐντὸς ὑμῶν with the phrase “within you.” This translation is found in various other English translations, including the KJV, the TEV, and the

make a unique contribution, also render us susceptible to an unbalanced triumphalism. Our vision can (and often has) become so fixated on God’s power and triumph that we lose the ability to see his hand in the midst of suffering, rejection, and opposition. Our emphasis on the present-ness of the kingdom is easily twisted into an arrogant and unbiblical over-realized eschatology, where there is little room for weakness. Luther named it well: a ‘theology of glory’ that had little room for a ‘theology of the cross’. See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Theology of the Cross: A Stumbling Block to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality?” in Wonsuk Ma and Robert Menzies, eds., *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Russell P. Spittler* (JPTSS 24; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), pp. 150-63. Martin Mittelstadt offers an antidote for this danger in his fine study, *The Spirit and Suffering in Luke-Acts: Implications for a Pentecostal Pneumatology* (JPTSS 26; London: T&T Clark International, 2004),

³ This essay is an adapted version of Chapter Four in Robert Menzies, *The Language of the Spirit: Interpreting and Translating Charismatic Terms* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010). A Chinese translation of this book, which deals with translation issues in the *Chinese Union Version* of the New Testament, is available from the Synergy Institute of Leadership (www.silhk.org; info@silhk.org).

translations of J.B. Phillips and William Barclay.⁴ The translators of the *Chinese Union Version* also follow this approach and thus render ἐντὸς ὑμῶν with the phrase, *zai nimen xin li*,⁵ which also means “within you” or “in your hearts.”

This translation suggests that, according to Jesus, the kingdom of God is something that is not visible, something that is purely internal or spiritual. The kingdom of God, according to this reading, “works in men’s hearts.”⁶ But is this quiet, invisible, ethereal, and unobtrusive kingdom really the kingdom that Jesus proclaimed and inaugurated? Are Pentecostals wrong to highlight the powerful presence of God now at work in our midst through healings, exorcisms, prophecy, and other visible manifestations? Or perhaps, at the very least, Pentecostals should look elsewhere for support for their exuberant practices.

However, before we rush too quickly to this conclusion, we need to acknowledge that this reading of Luke 17:21 has not gone unchallenged. Numerous other English translations follow a different line of interpretation. They translate ἐντὸς ὑμῶν with the words, “among you.”⁷ This translation represents a significant shift in meaning from that of the NIV and *The Chinese Union Version* and, as we shall argue, for contextual reasons is to be preferred.

We shall begin our study by examining the larger context of Luke-Acts, and then focus on the immediate context of Luke 17:21. We shall also note the significant implications that flow from our suggested

⁴ See *The New Testament in Modern English*, translated by J.B. Phillips (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1958). Phillips’ translation reads: “for the kingdom of God is inside you” (p. 163). Note also William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (The Daily Study Bible Series, revised ed.; Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1975), p. 219: “the kingdom of God is within you.”

⁵ 在你们心里。

⁶ Barclay, *Luke*, p. 220.

⁷ See for example the *New Revised Standard Version*, the *Revised English Bible*, the *New American Bible*, and the *New Jerusalem Bible*. So also Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, whose translation reads, “God’s kingdom is already among you.”

translation.

1. The Larger Context: The Kingdom of God in Luke-Acts

1.1 Continuity in Luke-Acts

It has been increasingly recognized that in the New Testament the kingdom of God is understood to be both a present and a future reality.⁸ George Ladd correctly notes that the most distinctive aspect of Jesus' preaching recorded in the synoptic gospels "was its present in-breaking in history in his own person and mission."⁹ This is undoubtedly the case in Luke's gospel. The kingdom is both a present realm of redemptive blessing (Luke 4:21; 10:18; 11:20; 16:16; 22:29) and a future eschatological reality (Luke 13:28-29; 19:11).¹⁰

In Luke's gospel the terms most commonly used to describe this realm of redemptive blessing are "salvation" (σωτήριον, σωτηρία, σώζω) and "forgiveness" (ἄφεσις).¹¹ That Jesus is the source of this salvation is clear from the very outset of the gospel (Luke 1:69, 71, 77; 2:30). Entrance into this realm of redemptive blessing is contingent on a response of "faith" (πίστις) to Jesus' message. This is clear from the way Luke connects the verb "to save" (σώζω) with "faith" (πίστις), indicating that

⁸ See the works by W.G. Kummel, *Promise and Fulfillment* (1957); O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (1950); H.N. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (1963); R. Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom*; G.E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (revised edition; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993) and *The Presence of the Future*.

⁹ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p.70.

¹⁰ I agree with G.E. Ladd when he declares, "God's rule" is "the best point of departure for understanding" the Kingdom of God in the gospels (Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 60-61; see also Ladd, "The Kingdom of God – Reign or Realm?," *JBL* 81 [1962], pp. 230-38). However, "God's rule" implies a realm or sphere of existence where his authority is exercised and recognized. Thus, Jesus speaks of "entering into" the kingdom of God (Luke 16:16; 18:24; cf. Acts 14:22) and in terms that suggest that the Kingdom is a realm (Luke 7:28; 13:28).

¹¹ σωτήριον: Lk 2:30; 3:6; σωτηρία: Lk 1: 69, 71, 77; 19:9; σώζω: Lk 6:9; 7:50; 8:12, 36, 48; 9:24; 13:23; 17:19; 18:26; 19:10; ἄφεσις: Lk 1:77; 3:3; 4:18; 24:47.

salvation is contingent on a response of faith (Luke 7:50; 8:12, 50; 17:19; 18:42). That this redemption is experienced, at least in part, in the present is evident by Luke's use of *σώζω* in the perfect tense (Luke 7:50; 17:18; 18:42). Although salvation has a future referent, it is experienced in the present.

Acts shows direct continuity with these characteristics of the kingdom of God emphasized in Luke's gospel. It is true that in Acts kingdom terminology is increasingly replaced by other ways of expressing the salvation provided by Jesus. But this is the result of the realization that Jesus is the exalted Lord, not an abandonment of the kingdom as a present or future realm of blessing.¹² Certainly in Acts preaching the kingdom of God means to preach the gospel, the redemptive intervention of God in history in Jesus (Acts 8:12; 28:31). That the kingdom, as a realm of redemptive blessing, has a present dimension is indicated by the present experience of "salvation" and "forgiveness" for those who believe (Acts 2:47; 4:12; 11:14; 15:11; 16:31). In Acts, as in Luke's gospel, "salvation" (*σωτήριον*, *σωτηρία*, *σώζω*) and "forgiveness" (*ἄφεσις*) are terms frequently used to describe redemptive blessings.¹³ These terms are again associated with faith (*πίστις*).¹⁴

Thus, throughout Luke's two-volume work, the kingdom, as a realm of redemptive blessing, can be experienced in the present through faith in the proclamation of Jesus. Certainly a significant difference between Luke's gospel and Acts is that in the former Jesus proclaims the message, whereas in the later the disciples proclaim a message concerning Jesus. Yet this difference should not be over emphasized. In Acts, the mission

¹² Contra W.G. Kummel and Otto Merk who maintain that the kingdom is not present during the church period (Kummel, *Promise and Fulfillment*; O. Merk, "Das Reich Gottes").

¹³ *σωτήριον*: Acts 28:28; *σωτηρία*: Acts 4:12; 7:25; 13:26, 47; 16:17; 27:34; *σώζω*: Acts 2:21, 40, 47; 4:9, 12; 11:14; 14:9; 15:1, 11; 16:30, 31; 27:20, 31; *ἄφεσις*: Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18.

¹⁴ Acts 10:43; 13:38-9; 14:9; 16:30, 31; 26:18.

that Jesus inaugurated and carried out in the power of the Spirit, is still the mission of Jesus (Acts 16:7), but it is now carried out by the church in the power of the Spirit. The preaching in Acts is still the preaching of the kingdom of the God (Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).¹⁵ In both Luke and Acts entrance into the realm of God's redemptive blessings is contingent on a response of faith to Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke Jesus is present, calling for a response of faith. In Acts Jesus is still present, in the work of the Spirit through the disciples, calling for a similar response.

In terms of the believers' experience of the kingdom, there is no difference between Luke and Acts. In both Luke's gospel and the book of Acts entrance into this realm of God's rule constitutes salvation and is contingent on a response of faith to the proclamation of Jesus.

1.2 The Kingdom of God and the Content of Salvation

In Acts, as in the Synoptic gospels, the term, "the kingdom of God" (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ), can refer to a future eschatological realm of divine blessing (e.g., Acts 14:22). For Luke, this future realm is closely linked with the future resurrection (Luke 14:14; 20:35). In Acts 4:2 Luke writes that the apostles "were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead (ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ τὴν ἀνάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν)." The force of the dative case ("in Jesus") is uncertain. It is possible to interpret ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ ("in Jesus") as a dative of reference, indicating that the content of the apostles' preaching included the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus was central to the preaching of the early church (Acts 2:32; 4: 9, 33: 26:23). However, it is also possible to interpret this phrase as an instrumental dative, with the apostles speaking of a future

¹⁵ Youngmo Cho correctly notes that "for Luke, to be a witness of Jesus means to bear witness to the kingdom of God" (Cho, *Spirit and Kingdom in the Writings of Luke and Paul: An Attempt to Reconcile these Concepts* [Paternoster Biblical Monographs: Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005]), p. 184.).

resurrection through faith in Jesus. This is most probable since the future hope of the early church clearly included the resurrection of the dead (Luke 14:14, 20:35; Acts 24:15, 21). Luke 20:35 specifically connects the resurrection of the dead with the age to come. Acts 26:23 also indicates that the resurrection of Jesus is only the beginning, one that anticipates the resurrection of his followers as well. In light of these considerations it is evident that participation in the future resurrection of the righteous comprised part of the content of salvation, part of the future realm of divine blessings.

Although the actual resurrection of the body is a future event for Luke, entrance into the realm of divine blessing associated with this resurrection takes place in the present. This is vividly demonstrated by Luke's use of σώζω ("to save") in the perfect and present tenses throughout Luke-Acts. In Luke 7:50 Jesus declares to the sinful woman, "Your faith has saved (σέσωκέν) you." The perfect tense indicates that the woman experienced salvation at that point in time, although there were dimensions of her salvation that would be realized in the future. In Acts 2:47 Luke describes the growth of the early church in Jerusalem, "The Lord added to their number daily those being saved (τοὺς σωζομένους)." The present tense of σώζω again indicates a present reception of salvation. For Luke, the present experience of salvation is preparatory for the future resurrection and the life of the age to come.

This is demonstrated further in the ethical content associated with entrance into the kingdom of God. Concern for the poor and the helpless will be rewarded at the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14:14). To be worthy of the kingdom involves making a radical, uncompromising decision to follow Jesus (Luke 9:57-62; 14:26-35). In Acts, although the ethical implications of life in the kingdom are not a high priority, they are not altogether absent. In Acts 26:18 Luke records Paul's own account of his commissioning. He was commanded to go to the gentiles "so that they might receive forgiveness of sins (ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν) and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." Here, sanctification

(i.e., the act of being set apart) is paralleled with forgiveness of sins and attributed to faith. Preparation for life in the age to come involves ethical transformation.

The present experience of salvation involves more than simply preparation for the future resurrection and life in the age to come. Through faith one actually enters into the realm of God's rule and blessings. For Luke, a result of faith in the message of Jesus is restored fellowship with God. Fellowship with God is an eschatological blessing associated with the future kingdom (Luke 13:29; 14:16-24); yet, it is also a present experience for the disciples of Jesus (Luke 22:27-30). The restoration of fellowship with God is the result of the divine ἄφεσις, a present experience (Luke 7:48; Acts 10:43). In Acts 5:31 Luke records the testimony of Peter and the apostles concerning Jesus, "God exalted him to his right hand as Prince (ἀρχηγόν) and Savior (σωτήρα) that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins (ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν) to Israel." The thought is this: Jesus is now in a position of authority, reigning at the right hand of God as Lord and Savior. By virtue of this authority Jesus is able to forgive sins. The preaching of the early church centered on the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus because this was so vitally linked to Jesus' present lordship and position of authority (Acts 2:33). This is why entrance into the future kingdom is contingent on a response of faith, for faith in the proclamation of Jesus involves the recognition of his present lordship by virtue of his resurrection and exaltation.

1.3 The Kingdom of God and Visible Signs

The salvation that is associated with the proclamation of the kingdom of God in Luke-Acts involves more than restored fellowship with God and ethical transformation. It is holistic in nature and impacts every aspect of our lives, both as individuals and as members of new "kingdom" communities. Pedrito U. Maynard-Reid correctly notes, "Luke shows that salvation is not limited to the personal, internal, spiritual realm....Healing,

deliverance, and dramatic social change accompany” the proclamation of the kingdom throughout Luke-Acts.¹⁶

This was certainly the case in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus’ healings and exorcisms, as well as transformed relationships, serve as dramatic evidence of God’s decisive intervention and authority (e.g., Luke 7:21-23; 19:7-9). They are signs that in Jesus God’s rule is now being exercised. This is nowhere more clearly stated than in Luke 11:20, where Jesus declares, “But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.”

It is important to note that Luke sees these visible and physical aspects of salvation also at work in the ministry of Jesus’ disciples. First the Twelve and then the Seventy are commissioned to “heal the sick” and proclaim that “the kingdom of God is near” (Luke 9:1-2; 10:9). This later commissioning of the Seventy echoes Moses’ wish that “all the Lord’s people were prophets” (Numbers 11:29) and thus points forward to Pentecost, when this wish begins to be fulfilled. It would appear that Luke sees the command to “heal the sick” and “proclaim the kingdom of God” as relevant for his church as well as the apostles. This conclusion is confirmed by the contours of Luke’s narrative in Acts.

In order to assess the role of healing and visible signs in the narrative of Acts, we must begin with Peter’s quotation of Joel’s prophecy. Peter, quoting Joel 2:30–31, declares: “I will show wonders in the heaven above, and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord” (Acts 2:19–20). Joel’s text only refers to “wonders in the heavens and on the earth” (Joel 2:30). Yet Luke’s skillful editorial work enables him to produce the collocation of “signs and wonders” found in Acts 2:19. By simply adding a few words, Luke transforms Joel’s text so that it reads: “I will show wonders in the heaven

¹⁶ Pedrito U. Maynard-Reid, *Complete Evangelism: The Luke-Acts Model* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997), p. 106.

above, and *signs* on the earth *below*” (Acts 2:19, added words in italics).

The significance of this editorial work becomes apparent when we read the verses that immediately follow the Joel quotation. Peter declares, “Jesus...was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs” (Acts 2:22). The significance of Luke’s editorial work is magnified further when we remember that Luke also associates “signs and wonders” with the ministry of the early church. In fact, nine of the 16 occurrences of the collocation of “signs and wonders” (σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα) in the New Testament appear in the book of Acts.¹⁷ Early in the narrative of Acts, the disciples ask the Lord to stretch out his “hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders” through the name of Jesus (Acts 4:31). This prayer is answered in dramatic fashion. A few verses later we read that, “the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people” (Acts 5:12). Similarly, Luke describes how Stephen, one outside the apostolic circle, “did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people” (Acts 6:8). The Lord also enables Paul and Barnabas “to do miraculous signs and wonders” (Acts 14:3; cf. 15:12).

All of this demonstrates that by skillfully reshaping Joel’s prophecy, Luke links the miracles of Jesus and those of the early church together with the cosmic signs listed by Joel (Acts 2:19–20). Each of these miraculous events are “signs and wonders” that mark these “last days,” that decisive period when God’s rule begins to be realized on the earth. Luke, then, is not only conscious of the significant role that miracles played in the ministry of Jesus, he also anticipates that these “signs and wonders” will continue to characterize the ministry of Jesus’ followers, including those in his day.¹⁸ According to Luke, healing and other visible manifestations of God’s authority represent an integral and ongoing aspect of the ministry

¹⁷ Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12.

¹⁸ For a fuller discussion of “signs and wonders,” see William and Robert Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), pp. 145-58. Note also Robert Menzies, *Pentecost: This Story is Our Story* (Springfield, MO: GPH, 2013), pp. 103-112.

of Jesus and his disciples. They are signs that the kingdom of God is invading this present age.

In short, Luke declares that the kingdom of God is inextricably linked to Jesus, who is Lord and Savior. The kingdom of God is none other than that realm of redemptive blessing where God's rule is exercised and acknowledged. As such, it represents salvation in all of its various aspects. This salvation has a future dimension, but it also can be experienced, in part, in the present through faith in the proclamation of Jesus. Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom included dramatic and visible signs of divine authority, such as healings, exorcisms, and radically altered relationships. Jesus commissioned his disciples to follow his example by healing the sick and proclaiming the kingdom of God as well. Jesus promised his disciples power to accomplish this task. The book of Acts narrates the fulfillment of this promise. Luke envisions that as his church proclaims the good news of the kingdom, which now centers on the death and resurrection of Jesus, visible manifestations of divine authority and liberation will also mark their ministry.

This brief survey of the kingdom concept in Luke-Acts raises significant questions concerning the attempt to translate ἐντὸς ὑμῶν with the phrase "within you." As we have noted, Luke nowhere describes the kingdom of God as something that is simply internal and spiritual. Quite the contrary, the kingdom of God is manifest in dramatic acts of healing and deliverance. It results in a radical reorienting of one's life that has visible and tangible results. Far from being an invisible and inner spiritual impulse, the kingdom of God is pictured as that realm where God's authority is exercised and acknowledged. I. Howard Marshall states the problem succinctly, "Jesus speaks of men entering the kingdom, not of the kingdom entering men."¹⁹

¹⁹ . I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 655.

The evidence from the broader context of Luke-Acts (and, indeed, the entire synoptic tradition) suggests that the translation, “within you,” should be discarded. A better option is easily found. With a plural noun, as is the case in Luke 17:21, ἐντός can mean “among” or “in the midst of.”²⁰ Thus, the phrase in question would read, “the kingdom of God is among you” or “the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:21).²¹ This reading fits nicely into the teaching of Jesus as recorded in Luke-Acts. It is entirely compatible with Jesus’ presentation of the kingdom of God as a realm in which God’s rule is exercised, often in dramatic and visible fashion. As we have already noted above, a number of translations follow this line of interpretation.

However, the question must be asked, does this reading do justice to the immediate context of this saying in Luke’s gospel? To this question we now turn.

2. The Immediate Context: the Saying in Luke’s Narrative

In Luke 17:20-21 the Pharisees initiate the conversation by raising a question: when will the kingdom of God come? Jesus responds, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is among you.”²² How are we to understand Jesus’ response? At first glance it appears that Jesus is now denying what elsewhere is specifically affirmed in Luke-Acts: that the miracles of Jesus and the early church are signs of the presence of God’s reign (Luke 7:21-23; 11:20; Acts 2:19-22; cf. 2:43). However, in view of this larger context, we should probably understand Jesus’ response in light of the prevailing messianic expectations current

²⁰ See Marshall, *Luke*, p. 655 and the studies cited there.

²¹ In Chinese, *zhong jian* (中间). This reading is presented as a secondary option in the margin of the *Chinese Union Version*.

²² I have altered the NIV by inserting “among you” in the place of “within you.”

within Judaism. As Darrell Bock notes, although Judaism did not have a monolithic picture of the messiah's coming, "in most conceptions it was a powerful and glorious arrival...the arrival of Messiah would be clear and obvious to all."²³ By way of example, Bock cites Psalms of Solomon 17-18, where a powerful Messiah "rules in Israel and rescues it from the nations."²⁴ Clearly Jesus did not fulfill these expectations of a powerful, nationalistic leader who would bring political liberation to Israel. The recognition that Jesus does not fit conventional expectations is very likely reflected in Luke 7:23, where Jesus responds to John the Baptist's question, "Are you the one who was to come?" After speaking of the blind receiving their sight, the lame walking, and lepers being healed, Jesus declares, "Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me" (Luke 7:23). There were indeed dramatic signs, but not the signs that many were seeking.

In Luke 17:20-21 Jesus does not deny that visible signs accompany the coming of the kingdom; rather, he declares to the Pharisees that they are looking for the wrong signs. With his response, Jesus issues a warning: your attempts to calculate the correct time of the kingdom's arrival have failed, for the kingdom has already arrived – it is already in your midst and its source is standing before you – and yet you have failed to recognize it. Certainly here Jesus places the accent on the present-ness of the kingdom of God. The kingdom has already arrived in his person and thus it is now present in their midst.

This focus on the present-ness of the kingdom raises another crucial question: How then do we reconcile this saying with the future-oriented announcement that follows in Luke 17:22-37? Surely the reference to the "days of the Son of Man" (Luke 17:23) refers to the consummation of the kingdom and the end of this present age. It would appear that Luke here has placed the twin emphases in Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of

²³ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (IVP NT Commentary Series; Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 286.

²⁴ Bock, *Luke*, p. 286.

God, its surprising presence and its future fulfillment, in juxtaposition. Earle Ellis suggests that this alternating present/future perspective on the kingdom is characteristic of Luke and found repeatedly in his gospel.²⁵ In Luke's record of John the Baptist's prophecy the promise of a messiah who will baptize in the Holy Spirit finds a present fulfillment (Luke 3:16), while the promise of fiery judgment refers to a still future event (Luke 3:17). Jesus' warning of future rejection for those who are ashamed of him (Luke 9:26) is followed by the promise that those standing before him will "see the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:27). Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer begins with the petition, "your kingdom come" (Luke 11:2), which is followed by the request for daily bread (Luke 11:3; cf. 11: 13, 20). In Luke 12:37-46 references to future judgment are followed by sayings about immediate judgment. Finally, in Luke 16:16 a saying concerning the present proclamation of the kingdom is followed by a parable that speaks of future rewards and punishment (Luke 16:19-31).

All of this indicates that we should not find it strange that Luke highlights the present-ness of the kingdom of God in a saying of Jesus that immediately precedes a prophetic oracle concerning the future coming of the Son of Man. This tension is common to Luke and appears to reflect his concern to provide an accurate and balanced perspective on Jesus' teaching concerning the coming of the kingdom of God. It is possible that Luke in this way seeks to encourage his readers, some of whom may have been discouraged by persecution. Luke reminds them that "God's way of working in the world requires suffering from God's servants" and that those "hopes which ignore this necessity are premature."²⁶ An emphasis on the powerful presence of the kingdom of the God coupled with a sober assessment of the challenges that will necessarily precede the consummation of God's redemptive plan would serve to encourage those in Luke's missionary communities as they seek to bear witness to Jesus in

²⁵ E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (revised ed, New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 210.

²⁶ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Volume 1: The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 257.

the face of opposition.

It is by now apparent that the translation “among you” does justice to the immediate context of the saying as well as to the larger context of Luke-Acts. It also accords well with what we know about the actual historical setting of Jesus’ ministry. This cannot be said for the alternative translation, “within you.”

Conclusion

Although the NIV translates ἐντὸς ὑμῶν in Luke 17:21 with the phrase “within you” and the *Chinese Union Version* follows a similar approach, I have argued that this translation misses the mark. In Luke-Acts and the entire synoptic tradition Jesus never refers to the kingdom of God as an inner, invisible, and purely spiritual impulse. The notion that the kingdom of God is “within you” runs counter to the way that the kingdom of God is presented throughout Luke’s two-volume work. In Luke-Acts the kingdom of God is the dynamic realm of God’s redemptive blessing where his rule is exercised and acknowledged. As such, the kingdom is manifest in dramatic acts of healing and deliverance; and it results in a radical reorienting of one’s life that has visible and tangible results. Jesus, as Lord and Savior, is the agent who brings the kingdom of God. Thus, the kingdom, as a realm of redemptive blessing, can be experienced in the present through faith in the proclamation of Jesus. “Salvation” and “forgiveness” are terms frequently used to describe these redemptive blessings. These blessings include restored fellowship with God and ethical transformation. However, the salvation that is associated with the proclamation of the kingdom of God in Luke-Acts involves more than this. It is holistic in nature and impacts every aspect of the disciple’s life, both as an individual and as a member of a kingdom community. No wonder, then, that, “Jesus speaks of men entering the kingdom, not of the

kingdom entering men.”²⁷

In the light of these considerations, I have suggested that we translate ἐντὸς ὑμῶν in Luke 17:21 with the phrase, “among you” or “in your midst.” If we employ this translation, the text in question would read, “the kingdom of God is among you” or “the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:21).²⁸ This reading resonates nicely with the teaching of Jesus as recorded in Luke-Acts. It is entirely compatible with Jesus’ presentation of the kingdom of God as a realm in which God’s rule is exercised, often in dramatic and visible ways. Additionally, this reading fits well into the immediate context of Luke 17:20-21. It serves to challenge the Pharisees’ nationalistic and political understanding of the kingdom of God and it highlights the present-ness of the kingdom in a manner consistent with Luke’s usage elsewhere.

It would appear that Pentecostals have read Luke 17:20-21 rather well. Perhaps we should all follow their lead and joyfully celebrate God’s awesome presence in our midst, his desire to heal, deliver, and transform lives. After all, the kingdom of God is in our midst.

²⁷ Marshall, *Luke*, p. 655.

²⁸ In Chinese, *zhong jian* (中间).