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Abstract

Previous studies of repentance in Luke-Acts have not adequately accounted for the various elements that the narrative repeatedly includes in its presentation of this theme. Drawing on the tools of cognitive science, this essay argues that Luke-Acts displays varying configurations of repentance that consistently include elements from four frames (prophetic, apocalyptic, priestly, and wisdom) into a problem-solution structure. These configurations combine recognizable elements in flexible ways from various frames, resulting in a thematization of repentance across the two volumes that is both ideologically coherent and rhetorically effective. The blending of these elements reveals how Luke connects repentance with forgiveness, baptism, and the Holy Spirit.

Keywords

repentance – frames – conceptual blending – forgiveness – baptism – sociorhetorical interpretation

1 Introduction and Problem

The call to repent is rooted in the earliest preaching of John the Baptist (Mark 1:4; Matt 3:2; Luke 3:8) and Jesus (Mark 1:15; Matt 4:17; Luke 5:32), but Luke alone among the Gospels develops repentance into a major theme. Luke uses the μετάνοια word family 14 times in his Gospel and 11 times in Acts,1 and

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1 Mark only has three uses. Matthew has seven as well as three uses of the related term μεταμελέμασθαι. It occurs only five times across all the letters attributed to Paul. Revelation uses the word family twelve times, the second largest cluster next to Luke-Acts.
it plays a key role as the human response to God’s saving actions in Christ and the Spirit. What can account for Luke’s notion of repentance across the two volumes? An early explanation, which still carries weight, is that Luke draws his notion of repentance primarily from Israel’s prophets, who called the people to “turn/return (שׁוּב)” to God (Isa 31:6; Jer 36:3; Ezek 33:14; Joel 2:12; etc.).

However, others have noted that in the LXX the μετάνοια word family infrequently translates שׁוּב. Instead, ἐπιστρέφω is used, a verb that Luke employs in conjunction with repentance (Luke 1:16–17; Acts 3:19). Yet in the LXX, μετανοέω more commonly translates the niphal form of שׁוּב with its affective connotations of regret or pity (e.g., 1 Sam 15:29; Amos 7:3; Jer 18:8–10). Furthermore, these LXX uses of the μετάνοια word family often refer to God “relenting” rather than people “repenting” – a usage never found in the New Testament. In light of these problems, Nave undertook an extensive study of the μετάνοια word family in Luke’s milieu. He concluded that the μετάνοια word family contained four available connotations: repentance as a change of thinking, repentance as a sense of remorse, repentance as a change of behavior, and repentance as a way to avoid punishment. However, Luke rarely associates repentance with a change of thinking (the prodigal son in 15:17–18 may be the one clear instance) or with the emotional reaction of remorse. Additionally, Nave’s study leaves some of Luke’s distinctive emphases unexplained. Why would Luke associate

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5 Navé, Repentance, 69–70.

repentance with baptism (e.g., Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38) or with generous giving toward other people (e.g., Luke 3:10–14; Acts 2:43–45)?

Already in 1999, Green argued that the study of repentance in Luke-Acts had stalled “on methodological grounds.” Later, drawing from the insights of cognitive science and conceptual metaphor theory, Green would argue that Luke conceptualizes conversion and repentance in terms of the metaphor *life is a journey.* Green is onto something in Luke's presentation of repentance, anchored in the linkage of μετάνοια and ἐπιστέφω and the latter's connotation of movement. The two verbs appear together in Acts 26:18–20, but this is no normal journey. Rather, Luke casts conversion as an apocalyptic transposition from the domain of darkness/Satan to the domain of light/God (cf. Eph 6:12; 1 Thess 2:3; Rev 12:9). The eye-opening knowledge and concomitant apocalyptic transposition does not end in a destination as a journey would (v. 18). Rather, the result is “forgiveness of sins” and an inheritance among the “sanctified,” language that calls to mind the purity of the priestly cult (e.g., Exod 29:33–37; Lev 8:11–15; Heb 10:10–14). Performing deeds in accordance with repentance (v. 20; cf. Luke 3:8) brings up an emphasis on ethical action common to wisdom literature (e.g., Ps 15; Prov 20:11; Sir 37:22–23; Jas 3:13). Green has taken a step in the right direction, but further developments in cognitive science can help explain the combination of elements just outlined.

While these studies each offer some insight, none of them offers a sufficient explanation for the configurations of elements that appear when repentance is unpacked across Luke-Acts. This study will seek to remedy this by employing a suite of tools from cognitive science and sociorhetorical interpretation to analyze Luke's configurations of repentance. The next section will explain the operation of vital relations, frames, and blending and show how together they illuminate the dynamics of a complex concept like repentance in preparation for the analysis of repentance in Luke-Acts. After this, the investigation turns to examining three key passages in Luke (3:1–20, 5:27–39, 15:1–31) and in Acts (2:14–47, 3:17–26, 26:12–23) where the μετάνοια word family is employed.

and the concept of repentance is developed at length. This will show how Luke-Acts varyingly employs elements from prophetic, wisdom, priestly, and apocalyptic frames in each component of a problem-solution structure in its configurations of repentance. This provides Luke with a recognizable and flexible set of resources that he can combine and recombine in various configurations. These diverse but structured and identifiable configurations provide both a recurring motif that can be connected across the narrative as well as the variation needed to make each presentation adaptable to particular narrative and rhetorical aims. The final section will explore some of the denser blends, interesting connections and disconnections, and rhetorical implications that arise from these configurations of repentance in Luke-Acts.

2 Vital Relations, Frames, and Blending in an Intentional Narrative Mode

Vital relations are the basic embodied mental patterns that show up repeatedly in the operation of our minds. These thought structures offer links for the blending of various concepts and dynamics that can be compressed into conceptual packages.11 The following is a sample of vital relations identified by cognitive linguists: change, time, space, role, identity, analogy, disanalogy, cause-effect, part-whole, and representation.12 The very notion of μετάνοια entails change, but it is also change that involves cause and effect.13 In Christian discourse, repentance is a change tied up with causes and effects that seeks to address problems like sin and judgment through specific means, such as proclaiming a message to be believed. Furthermore, key figures, like John the Baptist and Jesus, play important roles. Such combinations of vital relations are

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10 Several investigations treat repentance under the larger umbrella of “conversion,” which has no clear label in Luke-Acts. See Dupont, “La conversion”; R. Michiels, “La conception lucani enne de la conversion,” Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses 41 (1965) 42–78; Witherup, Conversion; Méndez-Moratalla, Paradigm; and Green, Conversion. This study will focus on the concept of repentance in particular, which bears significance for the broader notion of conversion.
common in the formulation of more complex concepts and storylines. The combined elements of vital relationships around the notion of repentance in Luke-Acts follow a problem-solution structure that involves a problem (cause), an agent filling a role, a means for the cause to lead to the effect, the change itself, and the resolution (effect).

Next, cognitive science has posited that large-scale “frames” or “cognitive models” provide the background for specific elements, clusters of elements in topics, and thinking in general. Frames are comprehensive cultural cognitive constructs that continuously operate in our thinking processes. Such frames are not novel to contemporary cognitive science. The three species of rhetoric in the ancient world (epideictic, forensic, and deliberative) work like conceptual frames with expectations about audiences, purposes, and relevant topics (Aristotle, *Rhét.* 1.3.3–6; Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.21.23; Cicero, *De or.* 1.31). Such framing can also be seen in Varro’s delineation of three types of theology in Roman culture. Sociorehtorical interpretation has identified six religious discourses, termed “rhetorolects” (a fusion of “rhetorical dialects”), that operated as conceptual frames in the ancient Mediterranean world and provided rhetorical and ideological resources for Christian communication: wisdom, prophetic, apocalyptic, precreation, miracle, and priestly. Each of these religious textures has a natural spatial setting (e.g., apocalyptic in the empire, miracle

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in the body), familiar personages/roles (e.g., the sage in wisdom, the eternal father in precreation), storylines (e.g., the prophet called by God and rejected by the people, the priest sanctified by God and offering sacrifices), images (e.g., plants and agriculture in wisdom, judgment seat in apocalyptic), and goals (e.g., healed and whole bodies in miracle, eternal life in precreation). As we will see, Luke-Acts consistently employs four of these textures (prophetic, wisdom, priestly, and apocalyptic) in its various configurations of repentance.

How can one identify the presence of one of these frames in the narrative of Luke-Acts? Specific elements (key terms, common phrases, recognizable images, etc.) used in discourse often belong to conceptual clusters called *topoi*/*loci* in the ancient world (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.2; Quintilian, *Inst.* 5.10; Cicero, *Inv.* 1.7).19 Keeping the topographical language, contemporary cognitive linguists label these smaller conceptual packets as “spaces.”20 A specific phrase like “to open their eyes” (Acts 26:18) falls within a *topos* that connects sight and knowledge. It is complemented by the role of the *topos* of light later in v. 18, and together they fit into the larger frame of wisdom. Identifying the frame is helpful and can be crucial because a *topos* like “light” may fall into a wisdom frame (e.g., Prov 6:23; Eph 5:13–15) or it can operate in an apocalyptic frame (e.g., Zech 14:5–6; 1 Thess 5:4–5). Exactly how a key word or phrase operates will depend on the frame in which it is set. The six religious textures/frames identified by sociorhetorical interpretation provide heuristic access to encyclopedias of background cultural knowledge that can be activated by the mention of a selected word or the description of a particular image.21

Given the cognitive geography of specific elements within *topoi* and their framing by religious textures, how does one formulate new insights? The ancients proposed that this was the very process of reasoning in rhetorical invention: developing something new from established concepts.22 Contemporary cognitive science has labelled this process “conceptual blending.” Blending is a powerful and often subliminal creative process that projects elements of two (or more) *topoi* and/or frames into a third generic space, and

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out of this arises completing components and novel “emergent structures” that offer new insight.\textsuperscript{23} Cognitive linguists typically analyze blending as a largely unconscious process that formulates dense but fruitful notions.\textsuperscript{24} However, we are dealing with configurations of repentance in Luke-Acts that are on a more conscious and purposeful level. Luke has rhetorical and instructive purposes for his narrative (Luke 1:1–4) that serve the aims of “intentional history,” which forms and reinforces social identity and ideology.\textsuperscript{25} Thus, what we see in the configurations of repentance in Luke-Acts are slower, more explicit, and less compressed forms of invention that employ elements from various frames/textures often by juxtaposing, associating, and connecting them rather than fully blending them into a \textit{tertium quid}. Yet, there are a few places where Luke’s rhetorical and narrative combinations around repentance move into true blending as well, and these (along with some other implications) will be examined in the final part of this study. With this understanding of vital relations, frames, and blending established, we can turn to the investigation of exemplar passages on repentance in both Luke and Acts.


Luke’s presentation of John the Baptist features him preaching repentance as the brief retrospectives in Acts attest (13:24, 19:4), and his ministry sets the stage for understanding baptism and repentance in Luke-Acts.\textsuperscript{26} John’s ministry opens in Luke 3 with a synchronism that locates John within the reigns of regional and imperial rulers, assigning him a role like other Hebrew prophets (e.g., Isa 1:1; Amos 1:1; Jer 1:1–3). However, Luke’s synchronism is unusual for incorporating high priests (3:2). This blend of prophetic and priestly roles continues in v. 3, for John is named as the son of Zechariah, a pattern seen in prophetic writings (Hos 11; Joel 1; Zech 1), but the audience knows that Zechariah is a priest in a culture where children would have followed in their

\textsuperscript{24} Fauconnier and Turner, \textit{The Way We Think}, 11–22.
\textsuperscript{26} Green, “From John’s Baptism,” 162.
father’s (cultic) footsteps.\textsuperscript{27} Blended with that priestly heredity, Luke emphasizes that John is a prophet (1:76), not only in the tradition of Elijah (1:17), but now also in the line of Isaiah (3:4–6). This priestly prophet comes proclaiming (a mostly prophetic activity) a baptism (a mostly priestly action) “of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (3:3), highlighting the real and metaphorical implications of water as a cleansing agent with moral overtones.\textsuperscript{28} This denser blend around baptism will be considered in the final section, but it will suffice here to note that it continues the combination of priestly and prophetic elements seen thus far.

After this mix of priestly and prophetic elements, John begins to speak with apocalyptic fury.\textsuperscript{29} John opens with a warning to “flee from the coming wrath” (3:7), identifying eschatological judgment as a primary problem/cause that needs to be addressed by repentance. John uses the frightening imagery of trees being cut down and thrown into the fire (3:9) and chaff being separated from the wheat and burnt with “unquenchable fire” (3:17).\textsuperscript{30} When the people wonder about John’s eschatological significance (3:15), he answers that a greater one “is coming” – that one’s baptism will not be with water for repentance and forgiveness but with the eschatological power of the Holy Spirit and apocalyptically purgative fire (3:16).\textsuperscript{31} Yet, John’s apocalyptic discourse is salted with images from wisdom discourse. John admonishes the people to “bear fruits” in keeping with their repentance (3:8 and Matt 3:8; see fruit in wisdom discourse at Ps 1:3 and Prov 10:16). The plural “fruits” (as opposed to the singular in Matthew) may emphasize a panoply of possible ethical responses,\textsuperscript{32} which Luke goes on to exemplify in the right use of wealth and possessions, a recurring Lukan emphasis.\textsuperscript{33} A similar mixing of wisdom images occurs


\textsuperscript{28} Compare Green, “From ‘John’s Baptism’,” 162–63.


\textsuperscript{30} Fire is a common image in apocalyptic judgment: 1 En. 217; Sib. Or. 11.01–103; T. Ab. 13.11–14; Rev 14:10.

\textsuperscript{31} Water, fire, and the Holy Spirit blend well because they are all ways that God transforms people (Méndez-Moratalla, \textit{Paradigm}, 86).

\textsuperscript{32} Neumann, “Μετάνοια,” 33.

\textsuperscript{33} For a survey of the literature on this emphasis on wealth and possessions, see R.L. Coleman, \textit{The Lukan Lens on Wealth and Possessions: A Perspective Shaped by the Themes of Reversal and Right Response} (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 1–16, 43–44.
when eschatological judgment is cast in agricultural terms as the separation of wheat and chaff (3:17; cf. Matt 3:12). This inherited apocalyptic-wisdom blend around repentance may have prompted Luke to add the ethical exhortations in vv. 10–14, which draw on a wisdom frame.\(^{34}\) John’s directives sound like commands from wisdom literature, giving practical advice concerning work, wealth, and possessions.\(^{35}\) This part of Luke’s portrayal of John resonates with Josephus who says that John “commanded the Judeans to practice virtue both as righteousness toward one another and piety toward God” (\textit{Ant.} 18.117). In an apocalyptic frame, these wise “fruits” of repentance are the human act of change that facilitate the final resolution, which includes both receiving the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit (3:16) and being rescued from judgment as gathered wheat (3:17).\(^{36}\) Thus, Luke’s presentation of John and his message blends prophetic, priestly, apocalyptic, and wisdom inputs to generate a configuration where a prophetic call to repentance operates with the priestly means of baptism providing purity and pardon that must be realized through wise behavior in order to enjoy the benefits and escape the dangers of judgment.

The next major example occurs early in Jesus’s ministry around his encounter with Levi (5:27–39). The narrative links this episode with the preaching of John by identifying Levi as a “toll collector” (5:27), just like the toll collectors that heard John’s call to repent (3:12). The story quickly moves into what should be understood as one of the “fruits of repentance” – Levi leaves everything and follows Jesus (5:28). This is probably driven by Jesus’s prophetic authority, an authority that can call people to leave their livelihood behind and follow (cf. 1 Kgdms 19:20–21 and the use of ἀκολουθέω there). In approval of this act, Jesus joins Levi and a crowd of his toll-collecting friends for a banquet in Levi’s home (5:29). At this point, the “Pharisees and their scribes” raise purity concerns about Jesus’s table fellowship: Jesus should not share food and drink with unclean toll collectors and sinners (5:30).\(^{37}\) This presents the (priestly)

\(^{34}\) Navé, \textit{Repentance}, 152–59; Michiels, “La conception,” 64.


\(^{37}\) While the categories of ritual and moral impurity are not coterminous, toll collectors were both. See J. Nolland, \textit{Luke 11:1–52:20} (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1989), 246. They were habitually deceitful (Sanh. 25b; Bek. 31a) and ritually polluted (y. Hag. 3:6, 21a; Tehar. 76). See J. Klawans, \textit{Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 75–76, 109.
problem that they see as needing resolution. Jesus answers like a sage with a proverb – it is the sick/sinful who need a doctor (5:31; cf. Plutarch, [Apoph. lac.] 59 and Dio Chrysostom, 3 Regn. 100). Jesus is the doctor and repentance is the medicine that he has come to dispense by “calling” people to change from unjust to just ways like a prophet.38 Repentance is the change needed to deal with the impure status of being a “sinner” (5:32). The wisdom saying about Jesus dispensing repentance like a doctor makes it clear that Jesus understands repentance (as already shown by Levi) to generate the moral and ritual purity that makes his table fellowship with them appropriate. The Pharisees object, claiming that the proper rituals for repentance are fasting and prayer, not the opposite behavior of feasting (v. 33; cf. Neh 1:4; Joel 2:12; Isa 58:5). Jesus responds by citing the current apocalyptic moment of the presence of the bridegroom (that is, himself).39 When the bridegroom is present, joy and feasting are in order, but when the bridegroom is gone then there will be fasting (v. 34). Having already demonstrated repentance by leaving his toll collecting behind and welcoming Jesus into his home, Levi can participate proleptically in the eschatological joy that will belong to those who have repented on the day of judgment (Luke 6:23, 10:20). Luke has Jesus continue in a wisdom mode by telling parallel parables about garments and wine (5:36–38) that turn on the apocalyptic contrast of the new and the old – the two are incompatible and trying to mix them will result in their destruction (v. 37; see more on the use of ἀπόλλυμι below). Thus, Jesus’s encounter with Levi rests on a prophetic call to change that runs into a priestly framed problem of impurity that is reframed through apocalyptic concepts delivered in wisdom forms of speech.

The next substantive discourse related to repentance is in Jesus’s parables about “lost things” in ch. 15. All three parables are framed by vv. 1–2, which re-introduce the (ritual and moral) purity problems raised by the Pharisees when Jesus eats with sinners (and toll collectors).40 Thus, all three parables in this chapter present repentance as the change needed to resolve purity problems, a key topos in a priestly frame. A wisdom frame emerges in the mode of speech that Jesus adopts: parables, with their analogous reasoning. Similar to ch. 5, Jesus acts like a sage using parables to explain the need for and nature of repentance. The parables themselves employ characters and settings common to wisdom: a woman diligently working in her house (Prov 31:10–31) as well as

38 Also see Luke 1:17; Jer 7:33; Zech 1:3–4; and Robbins, Invention: Vol. 1, 230–32.
40 It is a “Frage nach der kultischen Reinheit” (Kim-Rauchholz, Umkehr, 116).
fathers and sons involved in farming (Prov 17:25). The use of μετάνοια in 15:7, 10 also works in a prophetic frame because of the confrontational nature of the narrative scene: The Pharisees “grumble” and challenge Jesus, and Jesus confronts them with these parables – replaying the classic storyline of prophetic rhetorolect. This section also displays elements of apocalyptic rhetorolect. First, the sheep, coin, and son are all “lost” (15:4, 8, 32), translating ἀπόλλυμι, which commonly has more ominous tones of destruction in apocalyptic contexts (Luke 13:3–5, 21:18–21; 2 Thess 2:10; 2 Pet 3:6–9). Second, not only are the lost found, but the dead have come back to life (15:32), a foreshadowing of resurrection in the apocalyptic storyline. Third is the apocalyptic joy that occurs in heaven in the presence of the angels of God as the ultimate result/resolution that comes from repentance (vv. 7, 10). Jesus is cast as an apocalyptic seer who can perceive such heavenly events. The image of this joy occurring “in the presence of the angels [ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων]” comports with similar descriptions in other apocalyptic texts (Rev 8:2–4; 1 En. 99:3; Jub. 22; Apoc. Mos. 38:2) and metonymically activates connections to an apocalyptic frame.

Luke links the three parables of “lost things” in ch. 15 around the notion of repentance. The verb form appears in vv. 7 and 10, and the third parable of the lost son continues this same theme. The parable of the prodigal son has received special attention in investigations of Luke’s concept of conversion because of its extended narrative development and its insight into

41 Robbins, Invention: Vol. 1, 132–33.
42 This echoes how the Israelites “grumbled [διαγόγγυζω]” against Moses the prophet in the wilderness (Exod 15:24; Num 14:2). Moses serves as a paradigmatic prophet who confronts the people of God (Acts 3:22–24; Robbins, Invention: Vol. 1, 222–23).
43 Robbins, Invention: Vol. 1, 345–46. Nave notes the importance of ἀπόλλυμι and its connection to 13:1–5 but does not draw out its apocalyptic connotations (Repentance, 179).
47 Méndez-Moratalla, Paradigm, 139; Green, Conversion, 11–12.
the psychology of repentance. The narrative continues the confrontational scene with the Pharisees (appropriate to prophetic texture) and the analogical reasoning of a parable (appropriate to wisdom texture) from vv. 1–3. It capitalizes on the paradigmatic household setting of wisdom: a home with a father and sons, issues of inheritance, contrasting ways of life, and domestic economy. In line with John’s preaching, Luke usually focuses on the concrete “fruits appropriate to repentance” (3:8, 5:28, 19:8), but here Luke opens up the mind of the wayward son. After his dissolute living and once he has fallen to the shameful nadir of feeding pigs, Luke writes that the son “came to himself” (15:17) – the moment of the son’s “change of thinking” or μετάνοια. This is a moment of illumination that fits best in a wisdom frame. The son remembers the abundance of his father’s resources (v. 17) and this realization is the means by which he decides to return to his father. His return narratively displays the prophetic call of שׁוּב/ἐπιστρέφω. Upon returning, he plans to confess both the vertical (“against heaven”) and horizontal (“against you”) dimensions of his sin and to take the lowest place of a servant in the household. While he does not get to finish his planned speech before the father interrupts, he does make the critical confession of sin and his action of returning demonstrates his repentance (much like Levi’s actions did in 5:27).

Again, as with Levi and the “lost things” earlier in this chapter, the change of repentance results in a celebration that echoes apocalyptic joy. The parable provides an earthly manifestation of the joy that occurs in heaven (cf. vv. 7, 10) by portraying an extravagant, celebratory feast called by the father at the son’s return. Thus the problem of “lost things” (i.e., impure toll collectors and sinners from 15:1–2) is answered in prophetic rebuttal with wise forms of speech that in the final case recounts the illumination of a main character as the means that facilitates his change/return that results in joyful celebration on earth and in heaven.


49 While Dinkler may be right that the pendulum has swung too far against introspective dialogue, internal thoughts/emotions about repentance are featured only here and Acts 2:37 (“Thoughts,” 373–74).

50 Diodorus Siculus sets the phrase εἰς ἑαυτοῖς ἐρχόμενοι and μετάνοια side by side (Hist. 13.95.2–3). See similar uses in T. Jos. 3:9 and Xenophon, Anab. 1.5.17. Equivalent phrases also appear in rabbinic writings (b. Šabb. 104a; b. Sanh. 102a).

51 Green, Conversion, 111 n.37.

52 Luke uses the verb εὐφραίνω four times in this story (vv. 23, 24, 29, and 32; cf. Rev 12:12, 18:20).
Luke continues to display these prophetic-priestly-apocalyptic-wisdom configurations in Acts. Repentance appears early in Acts at the conclusion of Peter’s inaugural Pentecost sermon, setting a fresh stage for repentance in the second volume.\(^{53}\) The Holy Spirit comes with fire and wind (cf. Luke 3:16), which generates questions, which prompts Peter’s sermon, which concludes with a call to repentance. The sermon addresses a prophetically configured problem (disobedience to God and rejection of Jesus; 2:22–23) with the prophetic means of confrontational proclamation (“whom you crucified” in 2:36), opening with a quotation from the prophet Joel. The initial response of the people follows in this prophetic frame. They are “cut to the heart [κατενύγησαν τὴν καρδίαν]” (2:37; a NT hapax) by Peter’s speech. This probably speaks to a deep emotional response (see the exact phrase in T. Job 24:8 and the use of κατανύσσομαι in Ps 4:5 and Isa 6:5). This is in line with the regular configuration of the “heart” topos within a prophetic frame in Acts,\(^ {54}\) but it is the only place in Luke-Acts where such emotion is associated with repentance.\(^ {55}\)

The appropriate response to this prophetically configured problem is to “repent and be baptized” (2:38) – that is the needed change. As already established by John’s preaching, repentance and baptism are tightly bound together – the prophetic element of repentance blended with the priestly element of baptism. This baptism is no longer a “baptism of repentance” (Luke 3:3) but baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ [ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ].” The meaning of this phrase is not immediately clear,\(^ {56}\) and its dense blend will be explored in the next section. The priestly frame still posits the resolution of sins being forgiven, and it is emphasized performatively when the ritual washing in water is narrated in v. 41. The combination of the Holy Spirit with baptism and forgiveness builds on priestly elements already sounded in Luke.\(^ {57}\)

Repentance/baptism in the name of Jesus is also associated with the reception of the Holy Spirit. Jesus received the Spirit at his baptism in an apocalyptic moment as the heavens opened and the voice of God spoke (Luke 3:21–22). And for Luke, the coming of the Spirit is an apocalyptic sign of the new age.\(^ {58}\) The apocalyptic blending continues with the end of v. 40. Peter must warn the crowd that the urgent moment has now come to be saved from this “crooked

\(^{53}\) Dunn, *Baptism*, 90.

\(^{54}\) Robbins, *Invention: Vol. 1*, 311–12.

\(^{55}\) Contrast Nave, *Repentance*, 48–49.


\(^{57}\) Robbins, “Priestly Discourse,” 34.

generation” (cf. Luke 11:29–32, 11:50–51, 17:25–30, 21:32). Wisdom elements appear briefly with the mention of children in v. 39 but come to the fore in vv. 42–47, which conclude the episode by setting the fruitful life of the community within a wisdom frame as the final resolution. The believers act as a new family breaking bread together in their homes (vv. 42 and 46). They attend to the “teaching” of the apostles (v. 42). John advised those who submitted to baptism to use their possessions fairly and charitably (Luke 3:10–14), and the earliest Christians follow this sage advice by sharing and giving generously to anyone in need.\(^59\) This kind of community was recognizable as an expression of the ideals of friendship, a topos that appeared in the wisdom traditions of Jewish (Prov 17:17; Sir 20:20–25), Greek (Plato, Resp. 449C; Aristotle, Eth. nic. 1168B), Hellenistic (Plutarch, Adul. amic. 2–5; Epictetus, Diatr. 2.22), and Roman (Cicero, Amic.) provenances.\(^60\) Thus, with this initial and programmatic portrayal of repentance in Acts, Luke has repeated the blending of prophetic, priestly, apocalyptic, and wisdom elements.

Another supernatural event, the healing of the man born lame, gathers another crowd to hear another sermon by Peter. After commenting on the significance of the healing and recapitulating some of the Pentecost sermon (3:11–16), Luke adduces a section that features repentance in 3:17–26. Peter opens with a wisdom topos, citing the peoples’ “ignorance [ἄγνοια]” as the problematic cause of their violent rejection of Jesus (cf. Sir 2:3; T. Gad 5:7; Let. Aris. 1130). The wisdom frame reappears at the end of the passage where God sends Christ to turn people from their “wickedness [πονηρία],” that is, changing their behavior for good (cf. Wis 4:14; Sir 19:22; T. Iss. 4:6). However, the most prominent frame is prophetic: predictions by the prophets (v. 18), repent and turn (v. 19), the restoration announced by the prophets (v. 21), Jesus as the prophet like Moses (vv. 22–23), and “all the prophets” (v. 24). Instead of attaching the priestly elements of “baptism” and “forgiveness” to repentance in this case, Luke varies the expression by having Peter explain the effect of this change as “so that your sins may be wiped out” (3:19). The priestly resolution is still the elimination of sins, but it is phrased here using an unusual and vivid metaphor with priestly precedents (cf. Ps 50:9–10; 1 En. 10:20; 2 Macc 12:42). The setting of the speech in the temple itself (3:11) supplies another connection to priestly frame as does the double mention of blessing near the end of the speech (vv. 25–26), with Jesus taking on the role of a priest.\(^61\) Apocalyptic elements are introduced as the results of repentance in vv. 20–21 (δεινος δεν ...):

\(^{59}\) Green, “From John’s Baptism,” 165.

\(^{60}\) Nave, Repentance, 202; Green, Conversion, 129–30.

seasons of refreshing, the sending of the messiah, and the restoration of all things.62 Here, prophetic threads serve as the warp and woof of the texture of the text with the other three frames/rhetorolects contributing now familiar colors to the configuration of repentance.

This brings us to the final passage, Acts 26:12–23, which was mentioned in the introduction. Luke uses some familiar elements and some fresh ones in this configuration of repentance around the ministry of Paul. Like the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel, Paul is told to stand up on his feet after falling down (Ezek 2:1; Dan 10:11). Like Moses, Paul is “appointed [προσχειρίζομαι]” (26:16; cf. Exod 4:13), and he is “sent [ἀποστέλλω]” like many prophets before him (26:17; cf. 2 Chron 24:19; Jer 7:25; Luke 11:49). Paul will be “rescued [ἐξαιρέω]” from his opponents just as Jeremiah was (Jer 1:8, 19). Thus, Paul’s agency is cast in a prophetic mold.63 From this focus on Paul as an agent of repentance, the speech turns to the problems faced by the Gentiles: their eyes need to be opened and they are caught in darkness/Satan’s power and must turn to light/God. The combination elicits a wisdom frame where “giving light to the eyes” is a metaphor for God’s gift of wisdom (Prov 15:30; Ps 19:8).64 However, “light” is one of those topoi that works in more than one frame, and here it serves as a link to introduce an apocalyptically framed problem as well. Not only do Gentiles need wisdom (light for the eyes), they also need to escape darkness, which is the place of Satan’s power, into God’s domain of light—a cosmic conflict in an apocalyptic frame (cf. Eph 6:12; 2 Cor 4:5–6).65 This act of “turning” (with ἐπιστρέφω indicating repentance) has two results that both evoke a priestly frame: “forgiveness” and “sanctification” (Lev 8:10; Ezek 46:20; Heb 9:13).66 The rest of Paul’s speech (before being cut off) serves to reiterate the configuration. He connects “turning” and “repentance” (the prophetic call to change) and echoes John’s call to act in ways “worthy of repentance” (the wise results of the change) (v. 20; cf. Luke 3:8). He testifies like a prophet about what the prophets said (v. 21), and he proclaims the message of light (with its dual wisdom-apocalyptic framing) to the Gentiles (v. 22).

66 The language of “inheritance [κλῆρος]” among the sanctified may blend in another “eschatologische Komponente” (Neumann, “Μετάνοια,” 37).
Table 1 provides an overview of the five elements of the problem-solution relationship mapped to the four frames as displayed in the configurations of repentance explored above.

Luke configures elements from various frames in various ways across these examples. For instance, not all presentations of repentance open with a problem set in a prophetic frame or describe the actual change of repentance in priestly terms. Rather, while consistently including something from each of the four frames, Luke mixes the functions and expressions in each of the passages. This provides for variegation within the coherence. The only element that is missing from these major configurations is the use of a prophetic element in the final resolution. This is because the prophetic story-line in Acts reaches its

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internal resolution with the resurrection of Jesus. However, the two do touch because it is as resurrected messiah that Jesus can bestow the opportunity of repentance on Jews and Gentiles alike (Luke 24:46–47; Acts 5:31). What then is repentance for Luke? Set generically in a problem-solution relationship, it is a divinely provided means that calls humans to change in response to specifically framed religious problems that takes advantage of solutions offered by Jesus and results in divinely appointed resolutions. Luke tends to use some elements or topoi from each frame/rhetorolect in each developed presentation of repentance. These recurring but flexible configurations of repentance produce some interesting blends, connections, and implications.

4 Blends, Dis/Connections, and Implications

While the intentional and rhetorical narrative of Luke-Acts mostly operates by configuring repentance through rougher combinations and juxtapositions of elements drawn from the priestly, prophetic, wisdom, and apocalyptic frames, there are places where the blends are denser. For instance, Luke seamlessly adds two high priests to the typical prophetic synchronism of the rulers of the day (Luke 3:1–2). In Acts 26:18, light functions simultaneously but differently in both wisdom and apocalyptic frames. Luke’s multiple uses of generous giving are also interesting as an enactment of repentance (the “fruit”) in an apocalyptic frame and the end result in a wisdom frame. Curiously, generous giving may also serve as the cause/problem in the case of Cornelius, since his almsgiving lacks explicit attachment to the message of the gospel (Acts 10:1–2). God grants “repentance unto life” (11:18) for this exemplary Gentile to resolve this tension. Yet, it is around the central point of baptism that some of the most creative and important blending occurs.

John proclaims a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins [βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν]” (3:3). While this blend was not coined by Luke (see Mark 1:4), it may have been the inspiration for the configurations of repentance that we see across the two volumes. “Baptism [βάπτισμα]” does not occur in the LXX, but it fits culturally into other ritual ablutions in the Second

Temple period, whose primary function was to restore a person to purity.68 John’s baptism somehow draws on the priestly notion of washing/purification, but to what end? The phrase “baptism of repentance” is a priestly-prophetic blend, but the genitive relationship is unclear.69 This may be an unusual combination that could be labelled a “ritualized genitive,” where the term in the genitive case (“of repentance”) is ritually manifested in the concrete activity of the head noun (“baptism”), like the “kiss of love” in 1 Pet 5:14.70 Of course, a kiss is not love itself, no more than immersing in water is repentance, but the act both symbolizes and enacts the internal disposition. Luke does not probe the relationship of internal decision and external act or carefully differentiate their order.71 Rather, it is the mutually informing nature of the blend that is critical. The blend allows baptism to have both a depictive (that is, more metaphorical) and a performative (that is, more actual) function: baptism both symbolizes the cleansing of the human person (inside and outside) and helps enact that cleansing in the action itself.72 This combination blends priestly activity (ritual washing) with its metonymic connections to purification and the prophetic notion of repentance and return to God as also seen in contemporaneous writings with Jewish influence (Ps. Sol. 9:6–7; Sib. Or. 43:62–68; 1QS 3.4–9; Yom. 8:8).73 This leads to (εἰς) “the forgiveness of sins” by God (Acts 2:38, 10:43). Similarly, the exact phrase “forgiveness of sins [ἀφεσις ἁμαρτίων]” does not


69 Wolter (Lukasevangelium, 157) labels this a qualitative genitive, citing F. Blass and A. Debrunner, Grammatik des neuer testamentlichen Griechisch, 14th ed., ed. F. Rekhopf (Göttingen: Vendenhoek & Ruprecht), §165. This would result in a translation like “repentant/repening baptism” and for Wolter stresses the uniqueness of the event, even though that aspect is not in view in this passage. This would be an “attributive” genitive according to D.B. Wallace, Greek Grammar beyond the Basics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 89–91. Even if these broader categories are applicable, the notion of a “ritualized” genitive offers a more precise identification that does seem to capture a handful of genitive uses in the New Testament.

70 Other examples could include the “covenant of peace” (Sir 45:25), the “prayer of faith” (Jas 5:15), and the “confession of hope” (Heb 10:23).

71 This distinction and its proper order (internal first) have become a concern in (Protestant) scholarship (Dunn, Baptism, 93–95).


occur in the LXX. However, the combination of the verb ἀφίημι with ἁμαρτία does occur in priestly contexts (Lev 4:20, 19:22; Num 15:25) and in cases of God forgiving the people (Exod 32:13; Ps 84:3; Isa 55:7). Philo uses a very similar phrase (ἄφεσις ἁμαρτημάτων) to describe the effect of sacrifices (Moses 2.147; Spec. Laws 1.190), and the exact phrase does occur in the New Testament as part of the cultic language describing the establishment of a new covenant through the sacrificial death of Jesus (Matt 26:28). Thus, the phrase “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” blends the prophetic change of repentance into the priestly means of ritual washing and the priestly end of forgiveness. This blend in the tradition that comes to Luke is followed by John’s apocalyptic preaching (3:7–9; cf. Matt 3:7–10; Mark 1:7–8). Luke then adds the aspect of John’s wise teaching around work and wealth (3:10–14), a central Lukan theme. Luke has taken the three traditional inputs of priestly (baptism), prophetic (John’s role), and apocalyptic (John’s warning), and added wisdom (John’s exhortation). This may have formed the basis for the configurations around repentance seen throughout Luke–Acts.

Various inputs and blends may also help account for the transition into Acts where baptism is into (εἰς; 8:16, 19:5), in (ἐν; 10:48), or upon (ἐπί; 2:38) the name of Jesus. This phrasing is distinctively Lukan, especially since again there is no precedent in the LXX or broader Greek. The phrase does serve to distinguish Christian baptism from John’s baptism, as seems to be needed from Acts 19:1–6. The first (and paradigmatic) usage of this phrase appears in 2:38 where it blends in the conclusion of the Joel quotation from the beginning of the sermon where everyone who “calls upon the name of the Lord [ἐπικαλέσηται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου]” will be saved (Acts 2:21). The only act that the audience takes with reference to Jesus’s name after the sermon is to be baptized “upon [ἐπί]” the name of Jesus. Baptism now performatively symbolizes


Neumann recognizes both Luke’s reliance on and development of the foundational traditions about John the Baptist (“Μετάνοια,” 31).

L. Hartman, ‘Into the Name of the Lord Jesus’: Baptism in the Early Church (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 38–42. The phrase, always using εἰς, is found in Matt 28:19; 1 Cor 1:3–15; Did. 9:5; and Herm. Vis. 3.7.3.

and enacts both repentance and calling upon Jesus. While Luke can speak of faith, repentance, or forgiveness apart from baptism (Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31), baptism is a powerful experiential nexus for blending these elements. It also calls up the image of Jesus’s own baptism in water and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him (3:21–22) as well as John’s promise of a coming baptism with the Holy Spirit (3:16). Again, the Joel quotation plays a key role in the blend since the opening of the quotation declares that God will “pour out [ἐκχέω]” the Spirit on all people (Acts 2:17–18). Thus, the Spirit is like a liquid that is poured out on people (cf. the use of ἐκχέω in Exod 4:9; Eccl 11:3; Amos 5:8) – something one can be immersed in just as in water baptism. Like a liquid, the Spirit later “fills [πίμπλημι]” people in Acts (2:4, 4:8, 9:17, 13:9). Thus, baptism “upon/in/into the name of Jesus Christ” accompanied by the reception of the Spirit makes very good sense because of the blending links between the Joel quotation, water, repentance, Jesus, baptism, and the Spirit.

These configurations posit interesting connections and disconnections around repentance. Based on the criterion of this four-part configuration, it may be possible to connect repentance to passages where the μετάνοια word family is not employed. For instance, at the very beginning of Luke’s Gospel we find the familiar configuration in the prediction of John’s birth (1:15–17): priestly (parents, no alcohol, Holy Spirit), prophetic (turning, Elijah), wisdom (parents, children, wisdom), and apocalyptic (prepared for the coming of the Lord). Similarly, we find the same four inputs in the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10): priestly (sinner status), wisdom (generous sharing of wealth), prophetic (Jesus’s declaration of salvation), and apocalyptic (saving the lost). The stable but flexible use of elements from prophetic, priestly, apocalyptic, and wisdom frames would provide a criterion for identifying other places in Luke-Acts where repentance is being portrayed but not explicitly labelled.

A couple of curious disconnections also emerge in light of these configurations. Luke uses four of the six frames/rhetorolecs suggested by Robbins in most presentations of repentance. The absence of precreation elements is not surprising since Luke makes little use of that frame. However, the absence of elements from a miracle frame is more surprising given its prominence across the two volumes. Supernatural events provide the crowds that hear the call

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78 This connection is mentioned but not developed by B. Witherington, Troubled Waters: The Real New Testament Theology of Baptism (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007), 36.
79 Witherington, Troubled Waters, 34.
80 Holladay, Acts, 102.
to repent in Acts 2 and 3, but elements from a miracle frame do not appear in the presentation of repentance that follows. The only place that miracles prompt repentance is a hypothetical case in Luke 10:13–15, and one could read this as saying that miracles do not commonly lead to repentance. The lack of connection between repentance and salvation in Luke-Acts is also striking, especially since both serve as key themes in Luke-Acts. Luke never says that repentance leads to salvation (cf. 2 Cor 7:10). The σωτηρία language family does not appear in any of the major passages surveyed above, but there are a few thin associations. Perhaps, the link of repentance to Zacchaeus makes a connection to salvation (Luke 19:9–10). People are saved by calling on the Lord (Acts 2:21, 47), but the call to “save yourselves” (2:40; a passive imperative) indicates human action rather than the divine gift of salvation. Also, it is Jesus as “Savior” who gives repentance to Israel (Acts 5:31). Peter mentions the salvation of Cornelius’s household (Acts 11:14) before other Jewish Christians declare that God has given the Gentiles “repentance to life” (v. 18), but the two do not inform each other directly. Thus, it seems that Luke has developed repentance and salvation as separate themes that infrequently connect to one another.

These consistent but flexible configurations offer Luke three rhetorical resources. First, it provides Luke a way to maintain valuable and respected elements of tradition even while combining them in novel ways. Second, it offers recognizable thematic unity without reducing repentance to stale redundancy across the two volumes. Luke can use this consistent configuration of elements from four frames to signal to his audience when the theme of repentance is in play, but the flexibility of various elements in the different components of the problem-solution vital relation allow him to write an interesting and skillful narrative. Third, such an approach provides a wide range of tools, expressions, and images to Luke as he seeks to write a rhetorically persuasive narrative to a diverse audience. Paul’s speech to the Areopagus reveals how the four familiar frames can blend in another cultural context. The concluding exhortation of the speech is to “repent” (17:31), a call that is supported by priestly (idols and worship), prophetic (an oracle from Paul about an unknown God), wisdom (quotations of poets and the problem of ignorance), and apocalyptic (a day for the world to be judged by a resurrected man). Luke can draw on these various frames for different elements and then combine them in creative ways in order

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81 See Theon, Prog. 5. Thus, this analysis accounts “for the apparent variety of data” and its “provocative, contemporary relevance” (Green, “From John’s Baptism,” 159).
to move his audience intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally. These configurations in the hand of a skilled writer like Luke made the theme of and call to repentance intelligible, interesting, and inspiring.

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82 Cicero Inv. 1.7; S. Coulson and T. Oakley, Purple Persuasion: Deliberative Rhetoric and Conceptual Blending (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2006); Robbins, “Conceptual Blending,” 170–72.
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