
According to Luke, God has made his plan known to deliver his people from of old “by mouth of his holy prophets” (1:70). Among these prophets, Isaiah is for him without doubt the most important one. The quotations indicate that, for Luke, the book of Isaiah is a kind of charter in which God has stated in writing in advance his purpose to save Israel and the nations. In this respect it is remarkable that Luke at the beginning of the preaching of John the Baptist and also at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry explicitly states that he quotes from the book of the prophet Isaiah (3:4; 4:17). These quotations stand out because their origin is explicitly mentioned and also because they are introduced at such important moments. The similar introductory formula and the comparable exposed position at the beginning of the ministry of the two protagonists also connect them with each other. Therefore, in this article I intend to answer the following two questions: how do these quotations relate to each other and what function do they fulfil in the layout of Luke’s story.

---


2 In this respect also the quotation from Joel 3:1–5 in Acts 2:17–20 is significant.

Comparison

The Similarities

The two quotations from Isaiah in Luke 3:4–6 and 4:18–19 show many similarities. Therefore, they may easily be compared. The following survey gives evidence of this.

The Presentation of the Quotation

The origin of both quotations is stated in the same terms:

“as it is written in the sayings of the book of the prophet Isaiah” (3:4)
“the book of the prophet Isaiah…where it is written” (4:17)

The Structure of the Quotation

Each of the two quotations consists of three similar parts:

• First the messenger is presented:

“A voice cries in the wilderness” (3:4)
“The spirit of the Lord has been given to me” (4:19)

• Then follows his message:

“Prepare a way for the Lord etc.” (3:4–5)
“to bring the good news to the poor etc.” (4:18)

• Finally the aim of the message is stated:

“and all mankind shall see the salvation of God” (3:6)
“to proclaim the Lord’s year of favour” (4:19)

The Structure of the Message

In both quotations the message consists of a threefold, synthetic parallelism. The first part has the character of a summary. It is elaborated in the two following parts:

“Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight” (3:4)

is elaborated in Luke 3:5.