That prayer, especially petitionary prayer, was a subject of great interest to the writer of Luke-Acts 1), is obvious to the most cursory reader. The verb προσεύχομαι (meaning “to offer petition”) is used, for example, 19 times in the Gospel of Luke alone; including Acts, 35 of the 86 New Testament occurrences of the word appear in the Lucan writings. If cognates are included, the figure rises to 57.

More important than these statistics is the way that Luke relates the subject of prayer to the material in his sources. In the third Gospel, as Dr. ALFRED PLUMMER reminds us, prayer features more largely than in the other Gospels, and is brought to our attention in two ways—by the example of Christ, and by direct instruction 2). Thus, only Luke tells us that Jesus was praying when he was baptised (iii 21); that he prayed before choosing the Twelve (vi 12, “all night”); that he encouraged his disciples to pray in preparation for the future (xxi 36) 3); and that he prayed twice over on the cross (xxiii 34, 46). Furthermore, it is only Luke who gives us the extended teaching of Jesus on this subject, illustrated by parables and following the request of one of the disciples, “teach us to pray” (xi 1-13; xviii 1-14) 4).

The same interest in petitionary prayer is carried over by Luke into Acts. The new disciples in Samaria, for example, received the Spirit after baptism in answer to the prayers of Peter and John (viii 15, 17); the brethren prayed before choosing Matthias to succeed Judas (i 24-6); the church prayed in the context of opposition and indeed persecution (iv 24-31); and Stephen the prototype

1) For purposes of this essay, the writer is assumed to be Luke.


3) NACL al. add xxii προσεύχοσθε to Mk. xiii 33.

4) It is possible that these two passages originally belonged together.

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martyr prayed at his death in words echoing those of Jesus on the cross (vii 59 f.).

It is possible to discover the reason for this Lucan interest, by examining the use to which it is put in Luke-Acts. We are well aware these days that Luke is neither historian alone nor theologian alone, but both 1); and we can therefore expect to find in the Lucan writings theological emphases which are the result of the author's own understanding and redaction. Nor are we disappointed in this case, although the interpretations of Luke's intention differ. Wilhelm Ott, for example, in his book Gebet und Heil, finds a didactic purpose in Luke-Acts which accounts for an emphasis on the exemplary character of prayer in the life of Jesus and of the early church 2). Concentrating on the paraenetic material of Lk. xviii 1-8, Ott regards the editorial phrase of Lk. xviii 1 (men “ought always to pray and not lose heart”) as the key to Luke's understanding and use of this topic. This is true as far as it goes. O. G. Harris, in an unpublished thesis 3), draws out the significance of the prayer motif in Luke-Acts for salvation history, and usefully advances on Ott's work by showing how prayer in Luke-Acts is related closely to important moments in the Heilsgeschichte. The theological implication is that by prayer God guides the course of redemption history, through its three stages (as Luke presents them) of Israel, the period of Jesus and the period of the church. So prayer features, for example, at the time of the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus (Lk. i 10), at the baptism of Jesus (iii 21), at the confession of Peter in Caesarea Philippi (ix 18), at the transfiguration of Jesus (ix 28), in Gethsemane and on the cross 4). These are all L additions. It also features in Acts, during the period of the church's expansion, at such significant moments as the commissioning of the seven at the virtual start of the hellenist mission (vi 6; cf. xi 19 f., al.) and the beginning of Paul's missionary

4) All the synoptists report the fact that Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane; but Luke's account suggests a greater intensity to the prayer (xxii 39-46). Similarly all the Gospel writers mention words of Jesus from the cross; but only Luke records actual petitions (xxiii 34, 46).