THE PLACE OF ISRAEL IN LUKE’S GOSPEL

BY

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Hilversum

IGNAZ MAYBAUM in his book The Face of God after Auschwitz (Polak en Van Gennep, Amsterdam 1965) has shown that we cannot study theology anymore without trying to realise what happened in what he called the third “churban”, the monstruosity of killing six millions of Jews and so many other people. Therefore in this article we will bear in mind the tragic conflict between Christians and Jews in the twentieth century, and from this memory we will take a retrospective and creative view on the origin of the messianic movement at the beginning of our era.

The present author chooses Luke’s attitude towards Israel, especially in his gospel. Luke writing his gospel after 70 C.E. must have seen that the larger part of the Jews could not and would not accept the messianic movement which would uproot the existence of Israel, in a very time that this existence was menaced from outside by the Roman Empire. This schism between Israel and the messianic movement was not yet so clearly visible during Paul’s life.

The scheme of the Acts

When Luke wrote his Gospel he had the composition of the Acts in his mind. This supposition is at least reasonable. The composition of the Acts, so typical of Luke, is quite clear in itself: It starts with Jerusalem ¹) and ends with Rome; it starts with Peter and ends with Paul; it starts with Israel and ends in the midst of the nations. The point half-way Jerusalem-Rome seems to be Antiochia. There, for the first time, the Gospel is preached both to Jews and Gentiles; in Antiochia Jesus’ disciples were first called christia-noi ²), which may be translated by “messianic people”, meaning people who are willing to build a messianic fellowship both for

Jews and Gentiles. At the end of his Book of Acts Luke mentions Paul's words to the Jews, "Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen’ 1). Luke has put these words on purpose at the end of Acts. For us twentieth century readers the end of Acts is rather the beginning of our church history.

But Luke must have written the Acts in order to give a history of the messianic movement, and the end of this book points in a way to the goal of the messianic movement: Gods word shall reach the end of the earth and come to Rome, the centre of the oikoumene.

Israel has to know this, whether it will listen or not.

The end of the Acts gives a perspective to the future, just as the end of the Book of Deuteronomy concludes the Thora, seeing forward to the Entry into the Promised Land. Such an end gives a description of not yet realised eschatology.

Bearing this in mind we read in Acts Chapter xxviii 26-28:

"Go to this people, and say,
You shall indeed hear but never understand,
and you shall indeed see but never perceive.
For this people’s heart has grown dull,
and their ears are heavy of hearing,
and their eyes they have closed;
lest they should perceive with their eyes,
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart,
and turn for me to heal them."

The whole book of Acts bears witness to the fact that God has sent his salvation to the nations. Everybody can see and hear it, at least in Luke’s opinion. And the Jews could read it in their Thora and Prophets. If still they do not recognize these facts then Isaiah is right. This is a prophetical and therefore hypothetical truth. From this messianic perspective a light falls back on the Gospel and the life of Jesus. This Gospel seems to be a prelude to the messianic movement.