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Satan’s Fall and the Mission of the Seventy-two

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Introduction
This is a close reading of the cryptic reference to Satan’s fall in Luke 10:18, one of the more important verses relating to the devil in the New Testament. This verse is found only in Luke, and my goal in this paper is to interpret it in the context of that gospel. My primary interests are not in ascertaining whether this is an authentic logion of Jesus, whether it can be used to reconstruct the historical Jesus, or what its original Sitz im Leben might have been.¹ For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to the author of Luke’s Gospel as Luke. My interpretation does not rest on identifying the author of this gospel with the person(s?) referred to in Col 4:14, 2 Tim 4:11, and Phm 24.

In an earlier study of the references to “the ruler of this world” in John’s Gospel I concluded that, according to that gospel, Satan has been cast down from the heavenly council but remains a force to be reckoned with on earth.² In this article I will argue that the report of Satan’s fall in Luke assumes a similar series of events, with the difference that Luke’s account seems to imply that Satan’s fall is realized each time individuals – beginning with the seventy-two – respond in obedience to Jesus and are empowered by him.

Defining the passage
Luke does not offer a complete narrative of Satan’s fall, but only a brief vision report. This report should be interpreted in its context. Luke structures his gospel in narrative units, and the reference to Satan’s fall belongs to one such unit. Presumably because Luke 10:17–20, unlike the verses

² Löfstedt 2009.
that follow it, does not have parallels in the other Synoptic Gospels, many translations, as well as UBS 3, mark Luke 10:17–20 off as a separate paragraph, sometimes with its own caption (as in UBS 3: “The Return of the Seventy-two”). Luke 10:17–20 is understood better if read in the light of verses 21–24, which bring this narrative unit to an end. Luke 10:25 marks the beginning of a new narrative sequence, which continues through the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37). Luke 10:17–20 should likewise not be strictly separated from the verses preceding it. Jesus’ reference to seeing Satan’s fall is placed in connection with the sending and especially the return of the seventy-two disciples, a narrative that is unique to Luke (10:1ff).

It is especially important to study the larger context of Luke 10:17–20 because these four verses taken by themselves come across as fragmentary. The fragmentary nature of this passage has given rise to scholarly speculation. Garrett rightly asks, “If this story is so important for Luke, why has the evangelist nowhere made it more plain?” One possibility is that Luke took it for granted that his readers already knew the story. “Luke regularly expected his readers to be able to read the story of Satan between the lines.” I suggest that it is more likely that Luke did not wish to add anything to what in his mind were particularly significant words of Jesus. Luke’s source may have only recalled fragments of what Jesus said on this momentous occasion, and Luke considered these words so significant that he did not wish to embellish on them. In general, Luke takes greater liberties in retelling events than in retelling words of Jesus. For example, Luke’s account of the Lord’s Prayer (11:2–4), also a key text, is considerably shorter than Matthew’s (6:9–13). While Luke may have avoided adding his own words to this vision report, his positioning of the report in the larger narrative helps us understand how he intended for it to be interpreted.

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3 E.g., NEB, NRSV, RSV.
4 So also Bibel 2000; Raamattu (1992).
6 Garrett 1989, 60.
7 Nolland 1989, xxxi: Luke “tends … to be more conservative in the reproduction of the words of Jesus than in the rendering of the narrative.”
8 In other contexts, such as the eschatological discourse, Luke seems to take greater freedom in reworking Mark’s text. I hope to turn to this text at a later date; for the time being I suggest, as does Gathercole 2003, 159, that the differences are to be accounted for not by Luke’s own creativity, but by a difference in oral tradition.
Vision report or metaphor?

On the face of it this passage is a report of a vision. Several commentators have questioned whether Jesus actually saw Satan falling, however, or if he was just using metaphorical language. Several scholars find literal interpretations implausible. Ladd writes, “there is no need to postulate a vision in which Jesus saw Satan cast out of heaven”; in his opinion this is “metaphorical language.”

We cannot deny the possibility that Jesus is hinting at a real vision unrelated in the tradition. But in my opinion it is more reasonable to understand the words symbolically, as a dramatic, illustrative way of expressing the certainty of the ruin of Satan.

Leivestad is nevertheless willing to grant that Jesus saw Satan fall, but only in his imagination: “The enthusiastic report of the disciples’ success … called forth in the imagination of Jesus the picture of Satan falling from heaven.” And Fitzmyer writes, “Jesus’ ‘watching’ is a symbolic way of summing up the effect of the disciples’ mission; his contemplation revealed how their activity expressed victory over Satan’s power or influence.” In favour of interpreting this as metaphorical language, we may ask, if Luke intended for the reader to understand that Jesus was telling his disciples that a few minutes earlier he witnessed one of the most momentous happenings in the history of heaven, that is, that for the first time in eternity, Satan was dislodged from his place in the heavenly court, would he not have said a little more? Now it may seem that Jesus mentions it as an aside.

It is of course impossible to determine whether Jesus had a vision or not, or for that matter whether his disciples interpreted his words literally or metaphorically, but I am inclined to believe that Luke intended for these words to be taken at face value: Jesus is reporting a vision. In Luke’s writings visions are important. He also writes of Stephen (Acts 7:55–56), Paul (Acts 9:3–7; Acts 16:9; Acts 22:17–21, Acts 26:12–18), Ananias (Acts 9:10–16), Cornelius (Acts 10:3–6); and Peter (Acts 10:9–

10 Leivestad 1954, 49.
11 Leivestad 1954, 49.
12 Fitzmyer 1985, 860.
16) having visions, and if we can designate encounters with angels as visions, Zechariah (Luke 1:11–20), the shepherds (Luke 2:9–15) and Mary from Magdala, Johanna, and Mary, Jacob’s mother (Luke 24:4–7, 23) too. The verb form used in Luke 10:18 also gives us reason to interpret this as a vision report. In using this verb, Luke is making a conscious allusion to Daniel. As Garrett notes, the same verb form (ἐσοπονοῦν) is used to introduce Daniel’s visions in the Septuagint (e.g. Dan 4:10, 7:2, 4,7,9,11,13 LXX). The present tense of the same verb is used when Luke has Stephen describe the vision he had while dying (“I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” – Acts 7:56), and in describing Peter seeing a vision of heaven opened (Acts 10:11). There is therefore good reason to believe that Luke intended this passage as a vision report, on a parallel with the visions reported in Daniel. It would seem the ecclesiastical traditions of some researchers have hindered them from accepting a simple reading of Luke’s account.

A verse that follows this quote offers further evidence that Luke intended for this to be interpreted as a vision report: “At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was

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15 This encounter is identified as a vision (ὁπτασία) in Luke 1:22.
16 The women’s encounter with the angels is understood as a vision by the two disciples walking to Emmaus (Luke 24:23). But see Peter’s encounter with an angel (Acts 12:7–10), which is explicitly identified as not having been a vision. It is possible that Luke thinks of Jesus’ encounter with Satan in terms of a vision (Luke 4:1–13), and Peter’s, John’s and James’ experience of seeing Jesus transfigured and Moses and Elijah speaking with him as a vision (Luke 9:28–36). Curiously, while Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels includes an article on dreams (which focuses on Matthew’s Gospel), it does not have any article on visions.
17 Garrett 1989, 49, 53. See also Bird 2004, 122. This view assumes that Luke and at least some of his intended readers had access to Daniel. It is not likely that the average congregation in Luke’s time had in its possession all the books that are included in the Old Testament today, but Luke’s was not the average congregation. He certainly had the support of a larger organization, such as the group of churches founded by or associated with Paul. Luke had a profound interest in the Scriptures, both regarding their contents and their (Greek) language. Is there reason to believe that Daniel was important to Luke? The index of quotations in UBS 3 (p. 898) lists but a single verse from Daniel that is directly quoted in Luke, namely the Son of Man passage in Dan 7:13. According to the same listing this is also the only verse from Daniel that is quoted directly in the NT. But the editors of the Greek New Testament also identify a number of verbal parallels to the book (see Aland et al., 1983, 909), many of which I take to be conscious allusions to Daniel. See further Collins 1993.
18 Unless otherwise specified, Biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV.
your gracious will.” (Luke 10:21). Read in conjunction with what immediately preceded, namely the vision of Satan’s fall and the affirmation that the disciples’ names are written in heaven, this verse underscores the significance of these revelations. Jesus responds to his vision by thanking God, and in so doing he follows the example of Daniel the prophet:

Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night, and Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel said: “Blessed be the name of God from age to age, for wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons, deposes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with him. To you, O God of my ancestors, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and power, and have revealed to me what we asked of you, for you have revealed to us what the king ordered.” (Dan 2:19–23)

Both Jesus and Daniel thank God for their vision, for having revealed what had been hidden (Luke 10:21), both affirm that true wisdom is only given by God (Dan 2:30; compare also Dan 12:4), and both reveal the content of the vision to others. This is not the only instance where Luke has people respond to a divine revelation by praising God; in response to the revelation of the Spirit regarding the infant Jesus, Simeon praises God (Luke 2:28) as does Anna (2:38). But in this context an intertextual connection to Daniel is likely.

Jesus further underscores the significance of the vision he has just related to his disciples by saying, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you than many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.” (Luke 10:23–24). A significant change had occurred, which the Old Testament prophets had not witnessed, but which they had looked forward to.

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19 I therefore prefer Fitzmyer’s translation of the introductory phrase “at that moment,” instead of the rendering in the NRSV “At that same hour” (Fitzmyer 1985, 864). This phrase is also used in Luke 2:38 where it is rendered “at that moment” by the NRSV. Compare Green 1997, 420: “‘At that same hour’ allows for no chronological disjunction between the words of Jesus to the seventy-two in the prior section and the onset of Jesus’ prayer in the present.”

20 Garrett 1989, 49, also makes this connection: “Luke appears to regard Jesus’ response to the seventy (-two) as the content of the revelation for which he subsequently gives thanks; a vision report analogous to those given by the earlier prophet Daniel would admirably fit this revelatory context.”

21 As was mentioned, in Matt 11:25–27 this quote is found in a different context.
What did Jesus see?

“I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.” This is one of a very few instances in the Scriptures where someone is actually said to see Satan, the other examples being in Revelation and Zechariah (3:1). Jesus’ comparison of Satan’s fall with a flash of lightning has been interpreted in various ways. Is he saying that Satan’s fall was readily visible, just as the return of the Son of Man will be apparent to all (Matt 24:27), or does he mean that the fall happened suddenly? Does the phrase “as a flash of lightning” describe Satan (who according to Paul could appear as an angel of light – 2 Cor 11:14) or the manner in which he fell? Marshall takes the phrase to refer to the manner in which he fell; it refers “not so much to the brightness of lightning as to its sudden and swift fall from heaven to earth.” A sudden change had occurred; the old order had been shaken. Twelftree has the opposite explanation: “For Satan to fall like lightning would not necessarily mean that his fall had been speedy or complete, but that it was both manifestly obvious and stunning.” These attempts at isolating a single key characteristic of a lightning strike that this vision would refer to are not convincing. A flash of lightning is both sudden and readily visible. Jesus sees Satan fall; there is no reason not to assume that this fall was both speedy and complete. Whether Luke means that Satan had actually fallen by the time Jesus saw this vision is another question.

Why is Satan’s fall mentioned in this context?

It is when the disciples returned from their successful mission that Jesus said he saw Satan fall. The question is why it is mentioned in this context. One possibility is that Luke chose to place this quote here because it nicely echoed Jesus’ condemnation of Capernaum (10:15), using the words of Isaiah 14:13–15, a passage which theologians have interpreted as also referring to Satan’s fall. Many commentators are confident that such

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22 The temptation narratives in Matthew and Luke depict Jesus engaging in dialogue with the devil; it is easy to imagine that the devil was visible to him although the authors do not specify this. In the temptation narrative, (Luke 4:2–13) as well as in Luke 8:12) Luke used the term διαβόλος, while here the term Σατανᾶς is used. The two terms are interchangeable in Matthew (compare Matt 4:5,10) and certainly also in Luke, διαβόλος being a translation of the Hebrew term satan. Luke may have used the name “Satan” here because he did not wish to alter that which he took to be Jesus’ own words.


24 Twelftree 1993, 127.
an echo was intended by Luke. Humphrey speaks of “intertextual echoes of Jesus’ vision, such as Isaiah 14:12–15 and Ezekiel 28:2–10…” and Garrett, also writing about our passage, is confident that “the Septuagint passage after which Satan’s fall has ultimately been modelled is Isa 14:1–27,” while Green writes, “The deployment of the Isaianic imagery is important for Luke, who thus correlates the positions of Capernaum and Satan over against God.” But while it must be admitted that these two falls are mentioned very close to each other, Luke does not make any clear coupling between them. Further, it has not been shown that the passage in Isaiah had been interpreted as referring to Satan’s fall by the time Luke wrote his gospel. It is possible that Luke did not intend for any connection between Capernaum’s fall to Hades and Satan’s fall from heaven, but that later interpreters were influenced by the close proximity of these two verses in Luke 10 and came to see Isa 14 as referring to Satan’s fall.

Another possibility is that Luke has Jesus mention the fall when he did, because he wants to suggest Jesus had just witnessed it. Satan’s fall had not been mentioned previously, so it is reasonable to assume that a change has occurred. In this interpretation, which seems plausible to me, Jesus is relating a vision he had just experienced. Leivestad, on the other hand, notes that the imperfect of ἔωρέω was used, instead of the aorist, and suggests that this vision may not have been a unique event. Jesus “may many times … have had the same ‘vision’,” this just happened to be the only one that was recorded. Leivestad overanalyses the significance of the imperfect, however. Marshall writes, “it is more likely that the imperfect is used because the aorist of ἔωρέω was not in common use.”

26 Garrett 1989, 50. She writes: “It is likely that the interpretation of the laments from Isaiah and Ezekiel as references to the devil was conventional in some circles by the time Luke wrote his Gospel” (Garrett 1989, 135, note 54).
27 Green 1997, 418. Similarly, in his commentary on Revelation, Beale assumes that Isa 14 was interpreted as referring to Satan’s fall when Revelation was written. He writes regarding Isa 14:12–15: “There the judgment of the king of Babylon and his nation is said to occur because its guardian angel, ‘the star of the morning,’ has ‘fallen from heaven, … thrust down to Sheol … to the recesses of the pit’” (Beale 1999, 479).
28 Nolland 1993, 563: “Despite the long history of linking this verse with Isa 14:12 as applied to the fall of Satan … there is finally no adequate basis for such a connection, or for an early Jewish interpretation of the text from Isaiah as referring to the primordial fall of Satan from heaven. The closest parallel to the imagery here is provided by T. Sol 20:16–17: ‘We [demons]… fall… like flashes of lightning to the earth.’” So also Fitzmyer 1985, 862.
29 Leivestad 1954, 49.
may also have chosen to the use of the imperfect to make the aforementioned allusion to Daniel clearer.

Supposing that Jesus has just had a vision of Satan’s fall, this does not tell us when Satan fell. Visions do not have to be interpreted as live broadcasts from heaven. The event seen may be understood as having occurred at the same time as its seeing, but it may equally well antedate or postdate it. In the world of divine visions, the seer may be assured of the trustworthiness of what he is seeing. Its timing is another question. We cannot on the basis of the aorist participle determine whether Satan had already fallen, Jesus’ words affirm only that his fall was certain. Pulp literature offers a parallel. If a mafia boss says to his betrayer, “You’re dead!” no one would question the truthfulness of the utterance, even if the betrayer happens to be alive at the time this is said. His death is so certain that it can be spoken of as a present fact.

It is thus not possible to fix the relative chronology of Satan’s fall, Jesus’ vision, and the return of the seventy-two with any certainty on the basis of the tenses of the verbs used, and any attempts at identifying the cause of Satan’s fall in Luke’s thought-world must therefore be speculative. Humphrey responsibly refuses to speculate about the cause, but others have not been able to resist the temptation.

Is there any particular event that causes Satan to be cast down?

Jerome’s suggestion that Jesus is speaking here of seeing Satan fall shortly after the creation of the world, after he caused Adam and Eve to sin does not fit Luke’s narrative – or his theology – at all. While both passages may deal with a fall, the reasons for the fall are different. “The context demands a reference to a fall that is the result of being defeated, not a fall that is the result of sinning.” Furthermore, this interpretation

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31 Gathercole 2003, 153, suggests, however, that the use of the imperfect here in conscious echo of Daniel may signify that the event seen would take place in the future, as was the case with Daniel’s prophecies.

32 Humphrey 2007, 112: “those of a speculative mind may wonder exactly when this vanquishing of the enemy took place and how: the evangelist leaves this discussion, so to speak, to the seer John (Rev. 12).”

33 Gathercole 2003, 146, points out that Origen is not responsible for this interpretation, despite frequent scholarly claims to the contrary. While Origen in Princ. I .5.5 sees in Isa 14 a reference to Satan’s fall, it is Jerome who argues that it was the pre-existent Jesus who witnessed this fall.

requires us to interpret Luke’s Jesus in the light of John, for, as Leivestad writes, “The pre-existence of Jesus has no place within the perspective of Luke and the other synoptics.”

Luke could not plausibly expect his reader to understand this as referring to the paradise narrative, as he does not refer to that narrative anywhere else. Page’s hesitant suggestion that the occasion of Satan’s fall was when he failed to tempt Jesus to obey him in the desert also lacks basis in the text. Garrett suggests that Jesus’ vision is finally fulfilled when he is raised from the dead and ascends to the right hand of the Father – to the place that Satan had occupied. Crump similarly connects this passage with Luke 22:31–32, and to Jesus’ telling the disciples that their names were written in heaven (10:20), and argues that it is Jesus’ installation as heavenly intercessor that causes Satan’s downfall. This is an interesting theory, but it fits John’s Gospel better than this passage in Luke.

If any event is especially significant in NT theology, it would be the crucifixion and resurrection; is this the series of events that brought Satan down? In support of this interpretation, compare Luke 9:51, a verse which precedes this passage: “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, [Jesus] set his face to go to Jerusalem.” In other words, Jesus was already anticipating his crucifixion and ascension when he sent the seventy-two out on their mission. In John’s Gospel, Jesus also speaks of Satan being cast down, while he is anticipating the crucifixion (John 12:31–33). But on the whole, Luke’s Gospel does not clearly connect Satan’s defeat with the crucifixion. If anything, the time of the crucifixion is when Satan’s power is at its peak; compare Luke 22:53.

What many of these interpreters have in common is an assumption that the role of the disciples cannot be more significant than that of Jesus. For example, Crump writes, “It seems strange that this group of disciples, who are never heard of again, should be presented as bringing about a downfall which was not already performed by either Jesus or the Twelve.” But

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35 Leivestad 1954, 49.  
37 Garrett 1989, 53. See also Heb 2:14. Green 1997, 419, disagrees with Garrett: “Nor is it likely that the fall of Satan is occasioned by Jesus’ resurrection and ascension … since Satan remains proactive in the narrative of Acts (e.g. Acts 13:4–12; 26:18).”  
38 Compare my interpretation of John 12:31 (Löfstedt 2009).  
40 Crump 1992, 56–57. Müller 1977, 418, goes a step further and claims that Jesus did not cause Satan’s fall either; rather, God cast Satan out of heaven and thereby made Jesus’
Luke’s estimation of the disciples’ work should not be undervalued; after all, the second volume of his work focuses on the ministry of the disciples. Nor should we exaggerate the differences between the earthly Jesus and the disciples in Luke’s account. It is on Jesus’ command, with his authority and in his name that the disciples carry out their ministry, and as they minister they follow the example given them by Jesus. Thus, Jesus prays in order to communicate with the heavenly Father (e.g. Luke 5:16), and teaches his disciples to do the same (e.g. Luke 11:1–13); both are filled with the same Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 4:1 and Acts 2:4) and work miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit (compare Luke 11:20, Acts 10:38), and both experience divine visions, as was already mentioned. The disciples are extensions of Jesus, as is made clear in the immediate context of this vision report: “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me” (Luke 10:16).

While Luke might agree that the defining moment in Jesus’ mission as a whole is the crucifixion and resurrection, there is a reason that Luke placed this saying where he did, after the return of the seventy-two. As was mentioned, the mission of the seventy(two) disciples, like the vision of Satan’s fall, is unique to Luke. The earliest manuscripts differ on whether seventy (א, א, כ) or seventy-two (ס75, ב, ד) disciples were sent out (Luke 10:1), and it is not possible to determine with confidence which reading is original. Both numbers echo the narrative about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit recorded in Numbers. According to this narrative, Moses summoned 70 elders to share in his authority. The Lord took of the Spirit that was on Moses and distributed it to these seventy. In addition to the seventy, Edad and Medad, two elders who had remained at the camp, were also filled with the Spirit (Num 11:24–29), making a total of 72 spirit-filled elders, according to one reading of the text. This is described as a one-time occurrence (Num 11:25). Luke’s reference to the sending of 70 or 72 disciples is surely intended to bring this Old Testament narrative to mind. Indeed, Luke elsewhere sees Jesus as a typological counterpoint to Moses; this is most clear in Acts (3:22) where Peter identifies Jesus as the prophet like Moses mentioned in Deut 18:15.41 In the context of

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41 Cf. Garrett 1989, 48, Johnson 1991, 170. The suggestion that the 70 or 72 disciples echo the number of nations listed in Gen 10:2–31 is less likely, as the disciples are not sent to the nations but to towns in the Holy Land. Cf. Garrett 1989, 47.
Luke’s writings, the sending of the seventy-two foreshadows the worldwide mission of the Church inaugurated by the outpouring of the Spirit at the first Christian Pentecost (Luke 24:47–49; Acts 1:8). Like the members of the Christian communities in Acts, and like Luke’s intended readers, the seventy-two are agents of the Holy Spirit (which Luke also refers to as “the Spirit of Jesus” – Acts 16:7), and participate in inaugurating the rule of God.42

What is the significance of the exorcisms?

Jesus’ disciples rejoiced in that in Jesus’ name, even the demons submitted to them; they were successful in casting demons out of people. Exorcism was an important part of Jesus’ work according to Luke (7:21, 13:32), it was also one of the tasks he gave his disciples (Luke 9:1; see also Mark 3:14–15; 6:7, 12–13). Jesus even allowed people who were not known to be his followers to continue casting out demons in his name (Luke 9:49), and orders his disciples not to stop them, “for whoever is not against you is for you.” According to Luke’s account, the ministry of these “anonymous Christians” is a good thing.43 For Luke liberating people from demons is an important part of the disciples’ mission. But casting out demons was not an end in itself. The disciples were to cast out demons in connection with preparing people to accept the rule of God. The main task of the seventy-two was to announce, “The Kingdom of God has come near to you” (Luke 10:9), to prepare people for Jesus’ arrival.44

The disciples’ success in using Jesus’ name to drive out demons showed that a change of regime had begun to take place, the messianic reign was drawing near. As they were freed from demons and disease, people were leaving the dominion of Satan, and coming under the influ-

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42 Cf. Bird 2004. While Luke does not specify that the seventy-two were filled with the Spirit, they are agents of the Holy Spirit inasmuch as they worked under Jesus’ command and with the authority of his name.

43 While Matthew (7:21–23) records Jesus’ words to the effect that successfully driving out demons in his name does not imply you have a part in the kingdom of heaven, we find no parallel to this in Luke.

44 Jesus sent the seventy-two “To every town and place where he himself intended to go” (Luke 10:1), and he assured them, “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me” (Luke 10:16).
ence of the reign of God.\textsuperscript{45} In the same way Jesus’ own exorcisms witnessed to the coming of God’s reign:

But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder. (Luke 11:20–22)

Jesus’ successful exorcisms show that through the power of God he has overpowered Satan. Satan’s rule over these people has been replaced by the rule of God. The deeds of power Jesus performed confirmed that God the Father endorsed his message – the Kingdom of God had come in his person.\textsuperscript{46}

In Luke’s theology, the Messianic kingdom is not only a future reality, but something which is present already in Jesus’ earthly ministry: “If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Luke 11:20).\textsuperscript{47} Jesus’ messianic authority was most evident to outsiders when they saw him heal people from sickness and demonic oppression. In Luke’s worldview Satan is a tormentor and enslaver of mankind, and demons are among the weapons Satan uses, together with all manner of illnesses and ailments.\textsuperscript{48} Jesus and his disciples disarm Satan when they free people from the illnesses that Satan had used to enslave them. Thus, when Jesus cured a woman “who had a spirit of weakness” (as Nolland translates the phrase), he set her free from bondage to Satan (Luke 13:16; no parallel in other gospels).\textsuperscript{49} Exorcisms portray Jesus’ messianic attack on the devil in the most dramatic fashion. Luke repeatedly portrays Jesus as successfully driving demons out of people (e.g. 4:33–37; 6:18; 13:32); as Twelftree points out, in contrast to Mark’s portrayal, in Luke Jesus’ authority over demons is absolute.\textsuperscript{50} Jesus’ exorcisms are evidence of his successful assault on Satan’s rule; they show

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{45} The completed regime change is foreseen in Rev 11:15: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah.”
    \item \textsuperscript{46} Compare Jesus’ response to John the Baptist, Luke 7:21–23.
    \item \textsuperscript{47} Compare also Luke 19:38, where Jesus’ disciples hail him as king.
    \item \textsuperscript{48} This is of course also the case in one of the central OT texts regarding Satan, Job 1–2.
    \item \textsuperscript{49} Nolland 1993, 724, is of the opinion that this account sounds more like a healing than an exorcism. He does not think that Luke intends by the expression πνεῦμα ἀσθενείας (Luke 13:11) that the weakness was caused by a spirit, on the lines of “the spirit of divination” (Acts 16:16) (contrary to the NRSV: “a spirit that had crippled her”). See also Acts 10:38.
    \item \textsuperscript{50} Twelftree 1992, 170.
\end{itemize}
that he has overpowered the devil (Luke 11:22). In the same way, when the 72 disciples reported that in Jesus’ name that the evil spirits left people, it proved that Jesus had successfully transferred his authority to them, and it showed that they could continue carrying on his assault against Satan, even when he was no longer physically with them. This was the first successful mass-transfer of charismatic authority since the time of Moses; it signified that a new era had come.

As is clear from their enthusiastic words to Jesus, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us,” the disciples were surprised at their success. But their success may have come as a pleasant surprise to Jesus as well. He had after all just condemned the Galilean towns for not having welcomed his message (Luke 10:13–15), and he had prepared them for what they should do in the event that a town would not welcome them (Luke 10:10; cf. 9:5).\footnote{Humphrey 2007, 107, speaks of the “unlikely success” of the disciples.} Jesus himself is encouraged by the vision he sees (indeed, he rejoices in the Holy Spirit; Luke 10:21), and he in turn relates his vision to encourage his disciples and to confirm them in their mission. Jesus’ disciples are participating in the defeat of Satan, and as Bird suggests, Luke is encouraging his readers to see their own missionary work in this light.\footnote{Bird 2004, 125. See also Bird 2004, 124: “the future demise of Satan earnestly hoped for by Jewish apocalypticism, has been reinterpreted by Jesus to be occurring in and through his own ministry, and now also that of his disciples.”}

In relation to whom did Satan fall?

The question “When did Satan fall from heaven?” may be misleading, as it interprets the vision report as a witness to a historical event. It may be more appropriate in the context of this gospel to ask in relation to whom Satan is said to have fallen from heaven. Did Satan fall from heaven in relation to all people? Or is it in relation to those from whom demons were driven out that he fell? Or is it in relation to the seventy-two that he could be said to have fallen? The first interpretation does not seem consistent with the gospel as a whole. In the Beelzebul pericope Jesus proves that he cannot be in Satan’s service, by asking “If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?” (Luke 11:18), implying that Satan’s kingdom is obviously still standing strong.\footnote{Marcus 1999, 249.} Nor is it likely that Luke means that Satan had fallen in respect to all from whom demons
had been cast out – after all, the demons just might return with even more
demons, and “the last state of that person [would be] worse than the first”
(Luke 11:26). Most likely, Jesus means that it is in respect to the seventy-
two themselves that Satan had fallen. It is to them that he reports his vi-
sion, and it is their names that are written in heaven, meaning Satan could
no longer accuse them before the Father. The success the seventy-two had
in casting out demons in Jesus’ name proved that Jesus had successfully
empowered them with his Spirit, which in turn meant that Satan had no
hold on them. (In Luke’s world view, not everyone could successfully cast
out demons in Jesus’ name, but only those that in some way belonged to
Jesus; compare the account of the failure of the seven sons of Sceva to
cast out an evil spirit in Jesus’ name; Acts 19:13–16.\(^{54}\))

I suggest that in Luke’s theology, whenever a person receives Jesus’
Spirit, in relation to that person Satan has fallen from heaven. Luke does
not explain why that should be. As was mentioned, this passage comes
across as fragmentary, and there is a risk we take too many liberties in
filling in the gaps. His thought may have been that Satan is not in a posi-
tion to successfully accuse a person for whom Jesus intercedes both in this
life, as he assures Peter he has done (Luke 22:31–32), and on Judgment
day (Luke 12:8).\(^{55}\) This interpretation is not entirely persuasive, however,
as Luke does not mention Jesus’ intercession in the present passage. More
likely Luke means that Satan cannot accuse those who are closely identi-
ﬁed with Jesus, as the seventy-two are in the present context; it is as Je-
sus’ representatives they went out, and in his name they cast out demons

Some NT texts speak of Satan being cast down on Judgment Day.\(^{56}\)
Luke may have had this conviction as well, but it is not evidenced in his
writings. His aim in the present passage, however, is to assure those who
have been ﬁlled with the Spirit of Jesus, those who are identiﬁed with his
name, that they can be certain of their salvation and Satan’s defeat already
in this life. There are other examples of the “immediacy of salvation” in
Luke’s writings. Most notable are the accounts of two people who, having
borne witness to Jesus, are welcomed into the joyous life in Jesus’ king-
dom immediately upon dying – the robber on the cross (Luke 23:43) and

\(^{54}\) Even those who were not followers of Jesus could cast out demons (see Luke 11:19), but
they could not do so in Jesus’ name.

\(^{55}\) Cf. Crump 1992, 60.

\(^{56}\) This conviction is attested among other NT authors; compare Matt 25:41 and Rev 20:2–3.
See also 11QM13:11 “You made Belial for the pit…”
Stephen (Acts 7:56).\textsuperscript{57} Whether Luke means to imply that these people somehow bypass Judgment Day and are welcomed into eternity\textsuperscript{58} or whether they now experience “an interim residence for the righteous dead”\textsuperscript{59} in anticipation of Judgment Day is debated, but the point remains the same, their eternal salvation is certain.\textsuperscript{60}

Just as in Luke’s theology salvation is experienced the very instant a person welcomes Jesus, (cf. Luke 19:9) so too Satan’s fall is instantaneous in respect to each person. In the case of the seventy-two it occurred when they went out in obedience to Jesus’ mandate and experienced the ability to work miracles through the authority of Jesus’ name. This does not mean that Luke portrays Jesus as seeing Satan fall repeatedly, as some have incorrectly argued on the basis of the verb form. But the implication of Jesus’ vision in its Lucan context is that Satan’s fall is not a single event, but that beginning with the seventy-two, Satan falls as individuals respond to Jesus in obedience and are empowered by him.

Why does Jesus qualify the disciples’ joy?

Although he does not say this outright in this pericope, Jesus implies that the disciples’ initial experience of success would be challenged. This is implied by the use of the adversative conjunction πλὴρον “nevertheless” in Luke 10:20: “Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” Jesus may either be interpreted as telling his disciples that the present joy is nothing compared to the greater joy that is to come,\textsuperscript{61} or he may be warning them that

\textsuperscript{57} Compare also Luke 20:37–38: “And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.” This passage is paralleled in Mark (12:26–27) and Matthew (22:31–32), but the addition “for to him all of them are alive” is specific to Luke. Note also that in Luke’s account of the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah already share in God’s glory (Luke 9:31).

\textsuperscript{58} Cf. Barrett 1964.

\textsuperscript{59} Carroll 1988, 69.


\textsuperscript{61} Cf. Ling 1961, 18: “Jesus directs their attention away from the fact of successful exorcisms, which in any case could be paralleled in the activity of other Jewish exorcists … to the fact of immeasurably greater importance – the fact that the kingdom of evil in its entirety was being conquered in the exercise of the authority which was theirs in his name.”
the present success they enjoy is only temporary. I find the latter interpretation more likely.\(^{62}\)

The implication may be this: though he was losing his heavenly status as prosecutor of mankind, Satan still posed a threat in this world. Jesus is implying that the battle with Satan would intensify, along the lines of Rev 12:12 (“Woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”).\(^{63}\) It is because he anticipates Satanic opposition to the worldwide mission that Jesus gives the seventy-two, and by implication later generations of missionaries as well, his own authority and divine protection: “See, I have given you authority (\(\varepsilon\xi\omega\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha\)) to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you” (Luke 10:19).\(^{64}\)

Jesus immediately qualifies this promise when he assures his disciples that their names are written in heaven, that is to say, that they would ultimately be delivered, and raised to eternal life on judgment day.\(^{65}\) This is the implication of the allusion to the book of Daniel:

At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never existed since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Dan 12:1–2)

Luke could expect his readers to recognize this allusion to Daniel. This passage was probably especially well known, as it is one of very few in the OT that speaks of the resurrection of the dead, which was a central

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\(^{62}\) Though we do not have to take as pessimistic a view as Hoffmann, referred to in Humphrey 2007, 112: “Hoffmann argued that a major part of the Lukan discourse was to address a church that no longer performed mighty deeds but that could still rejoice in Jesus’ main bequest – names written in heaven.”

\(^{63}\) Compare also the interpretation of John 12:31 and 14:30 given in Löfstedt 2009, 65–67. There are a few striking similarities between the Gospels of Luke and John (compare also Satan’s “entering” Judas – Luke 22:3, John 13:27), but they are not sufficient to prove dependence of one on the other. They do suggest, however, that the early Christian community to which the authors of Luke and John’s Gospel belonged was more closely knit than has often been assumed.

\(^{64}\) Taken at face value, the use of the future tense (\(\alpha\delta\iota\κι\acute{\iota}\sigma\eta\ “nothing will hurt you”) is curious; the seventy-two have after all just returned from their mission. But as Bird 2004, 125, suggests, Luke intends his readers to understand that this promise applies to the greater Christian mission, in which his intended readers were to take part. See also Garrett 1989, 56–57.

\(^{65}\) Garrett 1989, 57.
tenet of Jesus’ and the apostles’ teaching according to Luke.\textsuperscript{66} This promise of Jesus puts another slant on the disciples’ success. Despite their initial success in casting out demons, the disciples were to expect a time of anguish like the one foretold in Dan 12:1, but like Michael would protect Israel, so Jesus would protect those who belonged to him.\textsuperscript{67} Jesus assures his disciples they need not fear Satan, because he is powerless to change their status before God. These two promises can be compared to Jesus’ promising his disciples in a later chapter, “Not a hair of your head will perish” (Luke 21:18), right after telling them that they would “be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death” (Luke 21:16). In other words, from the perspective of eternity, nothing Satan does will be able to hurt the disciples. But as long as they are on Jesus’ mission, they should be prepared to encounter opposition.\textsuperscript{68}

Gathercole assumes that Jesus’ promise of protection assumes an intensification of Satan’s onslaught characterized by worldwide tribulation, as described in Luke 21:25–27, and echoed in Rev 12:4. Since this worldwide tribulation is not evidenced in Acts, he, in contrast to Garrett, places the fall of Satan in the future, at the time of Christ’s second coming. At the second coming Satan will be cast down from heaven, and at that point the most awful tribulation will take place.\textsuperscript{69} I believe Gathercole separates the return of Jesus and the continuing mission of the disciples too strongly.\textsuperscript{70} In Luke’s theology this period of tribulation coincides with the period of the church’s worldwide mission, and all who participate in that mission need the supernatural protection Jesus offers. Jesus was not overly hasty in offering the 72 disciples his divine protection. In comparison with Mark’s account of the eschatological dialogue, in Luke the period of tribulation is indefinitely extended. Whereas in Mark’s account the desecration of the temple seems to immediately precede the day of universal judgment (Mark 13:24), in Luke’s account the destruction of Jerusalem and the second coming are clearly separated (cf. Luke 21:23–24). A

\textsuperscript{67} It is perhaps significant that Michael seems to be referred to as the Son of Man. Compare Dan 10:13 and Dan 10:18ff; it is said of both Michael and the Son of Man that he fights the prince of Persia, which suggests that they are one and the same.  
\textsuperscript{68} Contra Boismard 1953, 58.  
\textsuperscript{69} Gathercole 2003, 158, 161.  
\textsuperscript{70} Gathercole 2003, 161, does however put forward an alternative interpretation (which is closer to the one I advocate) in a footnote.
period of persecution precedes the dramatic signs in heaven and on earth that mark the end (Luke 21:12); there is no suggestion that this period of persecution would be of short duration. Instead, the whole period between the resurrection and Jesus’ return is a period when the disciples will both witness to Jesus to the ends of the earth and experience persecution. Thus in describing the tribulations that his disciples would face before the end, Jesus says that “You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers” (Luke 21:16). But this persecution is not characteristic only of the very end; he had earlier told his disciples that households would be divided on account of him “from now on” (Luke 12:52). In Acts, Luke records the beginning of the disciples’ worldwide mission, which is to continue until the time of Jesus’ return. And as that mission grows, so too will Satanic opposition to it, and Jesus’ disciples will continue to have to rely on his protection. In Acts, Luke recounts some instances when the disciples encountered Satanic opposition; he does not suggest that these attacks would cease.

Luke’s understanding of Satan’s continuing power is similar to that of John. In John’s Gospel too Jesus prays that the Father protect the disciples from the evil one (John 17:15), although he had just said that the ruler of the world had been driven out (John 12:31). This shows that in John’s understanding the devil, though defeated, was far from powerless. The ruler of the world was very much in the world, and still a threat that needed to be faced. Van der Watt characterizes John’s eschatology as a “progressively realizing eschatology”;\(^71\) this term would be appropriate for Luke as well. Jesus’ disciples participate in the ongoing defeat of Satan. By telling people the good news about Jesus, and giving them the opportunity to repent of their sins and to welcome the rule of God over their lives, by healing them from various diseases and freeing them from demonic oppression, the disciples contribute to Satan’s defeat – and increase his wrath.

**Bibliography**


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\(^{71}\) van der Watt 2007, 75.


